

A psychoanalysis of *La mujer más fea del mundo* (1999).

To my friend Céline Bel.

According to the film critic José Luis Martínez Montalbán (2000), *La mujer más fea del mundo* (1999), scripted by Nacho Baerna and directed by Miguel Bardem, “can be taken as the prototype of contemporary Spanish cinema” (p. 398). Produced with significant financial backing,ⁱ it counted on prestigious names in both technical and artistic areas,ⁱⁱ and was released on the wave of a major publicity campaign addressed specifically to a youth audience: the film was promoted as a ‘science-fiction *noir* thriller’.

In spite of its alleged ‘prototypical’ Spanish qualities, the film bears the hallmarks of a 1990s Hollywood production. Bearing in mind that Hollywood cinema is part of the Spanish cinematic context, and not a “foreign cinematic tradition”, as argued in nationalist readings of Spanish films,ⁱⁱⁱ *La mujer más fea del mundo* can be seen as ‘a *science-fictional* prototype’ in which the circuit of symbolic exchange between cinemas^{iv} is restored on the basis of an antagonistic reciprocity (Baudrillard, 1985: 102). Contrary to 1990s multinational *noir* films, but similar to both 1940s Hollywood romantic *noir* films^v and many science fiction films that “present us with potentially terrifying elements of dystopia” but that finally reassert “the qualities of humanity” (King and Krzywinska, 2000: 18), this Hollywood film *made in Spain* displays a happy ending scenario of love. It could be argued that the *classical* happy ending scenario of love -in which “the miracle of the Other stretching his or her hand out to me” (Zizek, 1997: 192) is displayed– functions in *La mujer más fea del mundo* as a means to establish an inter-textual dialogue not only with similar endings in 1940s Hollywood *noir* films but also with different endings in other 1990s *noir* thrillers with ‘female avenger’.^{vi}

1. *La mujer más fea del mundo* announces from the outset (before the film’s title credits appear on screen) that it is going to deal with the Real dimension of the body, that is, with the body as ‘living flesh’ *driven* to death. The film opens with the steadily increasing sound of boiling. A fade in introduces the spectator to a formless, organic, and yellowish image that resembles a ‘volcanic brain’. The words *Madrid. 1 de enero de 1982. Clínica La Milagrosa. 1:00 AM* (Madrid. 1st of January of 1982. The Miraculous clinic. 1:00 am) superimposed on screen inform us of the location, the date, and the hour of the birth of Lola Otero, the female character that is to occupy the position of the movie’s protagonist.

Trailer: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_Y2CXKKd0Oo

Following the cinematic conventions of 1970s horror movies, which often shape the science-fiction genre (see Creed, 1993), the film leads the spectator, by identification with the character of the nurse that initiates the action of an unsettling camera, to witness ‘the horror’ that the sight of the female body provokes in the (female) other. The construction of ‘sexual difference’ (girl = pink

blanket, “prettiness”, the mythical name of ‘the beautiful Otero’)^{vii} does not integrate *the sight* of the (off-screen) Real body: the sequence ends with a low-angled medium close-up of the nurse screaming while covering up her ears. The camera approaches her face and finally ‘enters’ her open mouth. Fade out to black.

The fade out to black that ends the film’s pre-title sequence, can be seen to constitute the narrative, traumatic *originary* point (‘lethal’ *jouissance*) which “cannot be positively *signified*” but only “*shown*”, in a negative gesture, as the inherent failure of symbolization” (Zizek, 1997: 217; see also Copjec, 1994: 123). For the fade out to black not only functions as an internal textual limit (the Real of the body is excluded from the field of vision) but also as a sign of violent textual rupture^{viii} from which meaning originates (Zizek, 1997: 161): there is a fade in to a full-screen ‘volcanic brain’ from which the film’s title emerges, like silvered mercury. The camera approaches the word ‘ugly’ (*fea*), and the word disappears like silvered dust.

Ugliness, then, is not only the film’s initial missing representation (fade out to black) but also the film’s ‘originally repressed’ representation (Zizek, 1989: 159).

After the film’s title, the spectator is introduced to a science-fiction *noir* scenario. This scenario opens with a long shot of a *Blade Runner*-type (Ridley Scott, 1983) *Metropolis* (Fritz Lang, 1927) with the similarly silvered lettering announcing: ‘Madrid. Federal District. New Year’s Eve 2010. 23:45 PM’, while an ‘exotic’/masculine/retro-futurist *pasodoble* –‘Patricia’- is heard in the soundtrack.^{ix} It can be argued that the film qualifies this music as both masculine (it is first heard in this male-centered narrative sequence to become the male protagonist’s musical motif) and exotic: it is heard in a science-fictional context both at the level of the visual (*Metropolis*, *Blade Runner*) and at the level of the narrative (Spain is represented as a Republic). It could also be added that the absence of ‘woman’ from this heterosexual dance music scenario, functions to qualify ‘masculinity’, embodied by the male character, as itself exotic: a dystopian, science-fictional identity “from which individuality and love are suppressed” (see, King and Krzywinska, 2000: p. 15 and p. 76).

The wide-screen film/TV image of *an explosion* (long shot of the deliberate crash of two space-ships in a science-fiction film shown on a TV set) abruptly *wakes* the Lieutenant Arribas into a ‘traumatic reality’. The reverse shot of a medium close-up of him changing to another TV channel, is a full-screen TV clock striking twelve. A female TV presenter is heard saying: “Happy 2011!! Greetings to you, your family, and all your nearest and dearest who are sharing this special moment with you. Nobody can feel alone on a night like this. [the Lieutenant begins to cough and leaves] Today is the first day of our lives. Be happy!”.

The second sequence of the film opens with ‘a home’ where old people are celebrating a New Year’s Eve party and with a long shot of *Lola’s menacing shadow* approaching the building. A series of travelling shots from her subjective view point *along the empty corridors* are cut with shots of the party where a ‘dirty old man’^x is taking a polaroid of an elderly beautiful lady he is attracted to, Ms. Lidia, as she is about to leave the party to go to her bedroom. Lola, the intruder, *disguised* as a nun

(with the attire of the Mother Theresa of Calcutta), attacks Ms. Lidia, pushes her on to her bed, and stabs her to death. We see a series of shots of ‘the Mother’ holding the knife up before directing it down towards Ms. Lidia’s body (off-screen) as well as a series of shots of the blood splashing on the wallpaper and on a crucifix hanging on the wall.

It is because the film’s enunciation inextricably entwines Lola Otero’s story and Lieutenant Arribas’ story both through the way their initial scenarios are displayed (Lola: *horror* scenario of traumatic birth/ film title/ Arribas: *noir* scenario of traumatic waking to ‘reality’) and through their forthcoming (but already *in* the present of the narrative) ‘encounter’ in a ‘scenario of death’, that it can be said that they are from the beginning portrayed as a ‘science-fiction noir couple’.



The film’s poster also announces the *noir* dimension of the film by setting out the conflict between ‘the scenario of romance’ -the ‘I only want to be loved’ (at the bottom of the poster) defines the motivation of the female protagonist’s violent actions- and ‘the scenario of violent death’ -Lola Otero is *dressed to kill* (Brian de Palma, 1980) as a *Matrix femme fatale* while addressing a challenging look to the spectator from its high position. In addition, the poster qualifies the criminal scenarios that it announces as ‘psycho-logical’. For although in the film’s poster the beautiful and demanding Lola wears black, has dark glasses on, and holds a machine gun (in *noir* fashion), the figure of the “double” (the monster-shaped, threatening shadow) points towards the Gothic genre.

2. Following the conventions of 1940s romantic noir films,^{xi} the Lieutenant’s investigation of the scene of the crime *drives* him to fall in love with the *femme* psycho-killer (Krutnik, 1991: 4). The Lieutenant’s narrative trajectory of investigation begins in a sexually ambiguous criminal scenario - ‘the Mother Theresa of Calcutta’ stabs a beautiful old lady *on her bed*, after a scene in which this woman has been flirting with a ‘dirty old man’– and is triggered by a sexual ‘scene of the crime’: the sentence “new year, new *life*” *written in blood* on the wall (‘Mother’ is *in* the scene of the crime), a group of candles, and Ms. Lidia’s corpse covered with *semen* (later in the film it turns out to be wax). From his arrival at the scene of the crime, the Lieutenant is portrayed as *dominated by* ‘the scopic drive’: he, therefore, comes to re-place the position of ‘the dirty old man’ (the photographer) who is also *in* the scene of the crime (semen-wax). In fact, he is depicted as *driven* by pleasure in looking (Copjec, 1993: 182) in relation to (a) the criminal’s text and (b) the criminal’s image, in a similar fashion to the ‘dirty old man’.

My reading of the Lieutenant’s fascination with the criminal’s *image* finds its basis in one sequence where we see the Lieutenant looking at the security-camera video from the old people’s home while

using a taken-from *Blade Runner* Esper machine that enables him to get a printed close-up of the beautiful female criminal, disguised as 'Mother Theresa'. The Lieutenant's fascination with the criminal's image is connoted as *excessive* by the film's enunciation: after getting 'the woman's image', and while 'his pasodoble' is heard in the soundtrack, Arribas is shown removing his hairpiece, his false teeth, and *his fake eye* in his bath-room.

The portrayal of the Lieutenant as *excessively* fascinated with the criminal's image offers a narrative motivation not only for his previous fascination with the criminal's text, which strengthens his investigation of the criminal's image, but also for his previous 'tracing of the invisible' to weave a narrative of the crime. In a brief scene we witness Arribas looking at the polaroid of Ms. Lidia taken by 'her suitor' and realizing that Ms. Lidia's heart-shaped brooch *is missing* from its place (she did not wear it at the scene of the crime). Through the Lieutenant's "signifying description of the scene" around this trace that is *not* visible in the scene of the crime, the film's enunciation (1) portrays the Lieutenant as able to *unmask* "the imaginary unity of the scene of the crime as it was staged by the assassin" (Zizek, 1991: 53) and (2) highlights Ms. Lidia's brooch as the visual-narrative motif that marks both *lack* ('the impossible object of the drives') and desire (the Lieutenant *interprets* this 'invisible object' is the prohibited object) in this film (See Copjec, 1993: 175-9).

It is because the male character is depicted from the beginning not only in the position of 'the Lieutenant' but also in the position of 'the male lover', that, in this film, which partly comes from 1940s Hollywood *noir* films, the detective narrative can be read as an erotic-romantic narrative (Palao Errando, 1994: 79). Lola, played by the fashion model Elia Galera,^{xii} is indeed located in the sexually ambiguous narrative position of *jouissance* by the film's enunciation, for she comes to embody the fantasy of the *femme fatale* (see, Cowie, 1993: 135-6). Similarly to 1940s romantic noir films, the Lieutenant's trajectory of investigation of 'the crime' and of 'the woman' seems to echo the film's enunciation own investigation of 'masculine identity' (see Krutnik, 1991): for the scene in which the Lieutenant is contemplating the scene of the motherly, sexually ambiguous, crime gives way to an antagonistic *Psycho* [Alfred Hitchcock, 1960] 'shower scene' in which a close-up of the criminal's menstrual blood initiates a slow vertical pan that follows Lola's *new* 'perfect body' illegally *created* by Dr. Werner the day of her eighteenth birthday.

3. Like Rita Hayworth's in *Gilda* (1944), Lola embodies the fe/male fantasy of the narcissistic/threatening other driven by *revenge*. However, by setting out four flashbacks that represent the *subjective* view point of Lola in the story world, the film's enunciation (1) psycho-socio logically motivates Lola's criminal behaviour and (2) offers the possibility of a 'fictional solution' both to the science-fictional/traumatic Real dimension of the sexual body (the female protagonist's monstrous-killing body, the male protagonist's weak-wounded body) and to an impersonal ever-present time ('today is the first day of our lives').

Whereas Lola's first flashback (after the after-murder/erotic shower scene) defines her as 'the daughter' of a *blind* 'religious mother' (as a child, Lola lives in a nun-governed orphanage) for whom she has always been 'pretty' because she looks at her 'with the eyes of the heart' (the blind 'mother' gives her 'daughter' a crucifix, the beautiful Otero wears around her neck throughout the film), Lola's second flashback links her present narcissistic/aggressive sexual scenarios –owing to her beauty Lola seduces a narcissistic male lover^{xiii} to her bed and, after 'having fucked him' (this scene remains ellided), despises him and expels him from her flat– to a re-*active* rejection of men.

In the present of the narrative, before the second flashback takes place, 'the most beautiful woman in the world' is in a bar *looking at herself* disguised as a nun on the TV news (she is watching the video of herself recorded by the security camera at the old people's home) when 'the most beautiful man in the world' (Luis Casanova) approaches her, offers her a cigarette and tells her: 'Do you know what I was thinking of while *I was looking at you?* I was thinking that as a child you must have been a *very pretty girl*'. A metaphorical close-up of Lola's *lit match* is accompanied by the words 'ugly, ugly!!' on the soundtrack. These words function as the soundbridge to a flash-back scenario of rejection and abandonment: a boy who loses in 'the match game', refuses to kiss the monstrous Lola and convinces the other children to leave her behind.

Lola's third flashback (after a scene in which Lola visits her blind 'mother' and tells her she is not married because she has not found 'a man who truly loves her', that is, a man *who loves her with the eyes of the heart*) locates her in a self-enclosed, and narcissistic Cinderella scenario, organized according to 'the pleasure principle'. The monstrous little Lola, alone in the girls' bedroom, wishes to become 'the most beautiful woman on earth'.^{xiv} This 'all-fulfilling scenario', however, is defined by the film's enunciation as 'impossible'. The Other sex ('the ferocious wolf') enters the girls' bedroom and the scenario of enjoyment shifts into a scenario of violence: a group of male adolescents rape 'Cinderella' (off-screen). This scenario of rape, which is associated to 'the taboo of virginity' (the third flashback is introduced by a long shot of the statue of 'The Virgin of the Immaculate Heart of Maria'^{xv} and is ended by a close-up of the Cinderella hand-mirror broken on the floor of the girls' bedroom), retroactively deeps in Lola's exaggerated hostility against men in the present of the narrative, a hostility, that is, which *exceeds* the 'normal hostility' that always mediates the relationships between the sexes (Freud, 1917 [1918]).

The film, however, motivates Lola's present murderous/sexually aggressive scenarios not only via a *past* scenario of male rape (the Real/traumatic encounter with the other sex: third flashback) but also via a *present* female Gothic romance film scenario.^{xvi} The scenario of male rejection (second flashback) returns *in* the present of the narrative via a soundbridge of thunder claps and a dissolve to a close-up of a fairy-tale Quasimodo mask that is in Lola's bedroom. The motif of 'the Quasimodo mask' in the *mise en scène* of the ellided sexual/aggressive encounter between Lola and 'the most beautiful man in the world' stands for *the repressed* (Lola's *disguised* hostility against men) *in* the present of the narrative: Lola murders women. The mask motif, moreover, in the *mise en scène* of the present of the narrative not only announces that men are *seen* by Lola/the fe/male spectator as

'hiding' a *dark* side ('the most beautiful man in the world' steals Ms. Lidia's 'brooch' from her handbag, while Lola is having 'an after-sex/after-murder shower' off-screen) but also that *the return of the repressed* comes from *the future* (Lacan, 1953-4: p. 239). Indeed, Lola's fourth and last *subjective* flashback displays the repressed/disguised conflation between the film's murderous scenarios and a female Gothic Oedipal scenario^{xvii}: Lola's attachment to/dependence on her lost Gothic lover/science-fictional 'father' (Dr. Werner).

Lola's fourth flashback begins with a scene in which Lola is buying a pair of high heeled shoes to hide a machine gun with which she intends to kill the next Miss Spain. A close-up of the Cinderella

ⁱ This film was produced-distributed by an 'independent company' (Aurum Producciones, SA) with the participation of Canal Plus (España) and TVE.

ⁱⁱ Such as the actor Héctor Alterio, the music composer Juan Bardem, the editor Iván Aledo, or the Art director Alain Bainée.

ⁱⁱⁱ Nationalist readings of Spanish films are those readings that look for 'local particularities' or 'local traditions' in order to make them represent a "specifically Spanish cinematic style" (Roberts, 1999: 20). In these readings (1) the International dimension of cinema is played down (in terms of both film-making and film-viewing), (2) the transnational idea that the particularities of a film express 'the essence' or the 'self-enclosed traditions' of 'the Nation' the film was produced in, is taken as self-evident, and (3) the notion of 'nation', introduced by the author, is taken as an objective element of the film (see, Eco, 1968: 459). For instance, Stephen Roberts writes: "*Calle Mayor* [Juan Antonio Bardem, 1956], while acknowledging its debt to neorealism, is actually rooted in different traditions and moving in a different direction: a direction which, this article claims, is essentially Spanish in nature.

A few reviewers of the time realized this and emphasized the specifically Spanish nature of the film, although most of these were film critics in the Spanish press who felt that they had a patriotic duty [...]" (p. 23).

^{iv} *La mujer más fea del mundo* has been shown in various international film festivals. It was nominated for 'best film' in The Catalanian International Film Festival (Sitges, Spain), won the Meliés d'Argent at Fantasporto (Oporto, Portugal, 2000) and the Grand Prix Award at PIFAN (2000).

^v For instance, *The Big Sleep* (Howard Hawks, 1944), *Laura* (Otto Preminger, 1944), *Gilda* (Charles Vidor, 1946), or *Dark Passage* (Delmer Daves, 1947).

^{vi} Such as *The Last Seduction* (John Dahl, 1993) –film with a 'progressive feminist' ending scenario: "the heroine coolly getting away with stealing millions of dollars" (Kaplan, 1998: 12; see also Read, 2000: 207) –, *Batman Returns* (Tim Burton, 1992) –film with a 'postmodern feminist' ending scenario: the female protagonist has "renegotiated" its 'feminine identity' with its 'feminist identity' (Read, 2000: 198-9) –, or *Bound* (The Wachowski Brothers, 1996)– film with a 'postmodern' happy ending scenario of homosexual love based on a certain "sameness" that makes lesbians "better partners in crime" (Straayer, 1998: 159-160).

^{vii} Carolina Otero, la Bella Otero (The Beautiful Otero), was born in Pontevedra in 1868 and died in Niza in 1965. After being brutally raped the 6th of July of 1879 in her village, Caldas de Reyes, she went first to France and then to New York (1890) where she initiated her artistic career as a music hall dancer to become one of the most desired women in Europe (1891) during the *Belle Époque* (1889-1914). She made herself up as a legendary 'passionate Spanish woman' (her real name was Agustina) and was famous for wasting her lovers' money playing at the roulette. Among her lovers were the Princes of Wales, Leopold of Belgium, Nicolás II,

shoes^{xviii} that are being promoted in the shop leads to another close-up of a similar pair of shoes being worn by Lola the night of her eighteenth birthday (New Year's Eve 1999). In a mask ball, the 'charming' millionaire Luis Casanova wearing the 'Quasimodo mask' seduces Lola by dancing with her and assuring her that he could fall in love with 'the ugliest woman in the world' because 'if her heart is beautiful, I wouldn't mind her face'. The film constructs Lola's *masked* ball as a wonderful but impossible dream in which spatial dichotomies (inside/outside) collapse. A circular travelling shot of the couple dancing inside the ballroom dissolves into a similar shot of them dancing outside the ballroom in a *Manderley* scenario^{xix}. The sequence also constructs Lola's encounter with Casanova as one of atemporal fusion: while the off-screen clock strikes twelve, another circular shot encloses Luis and Lola looking at each other's eyes. Another series of dissolves expands Luis's action of removing Lola's mask in order to kiss her, so that their wishes can become true: as they kiss in a close-up, the camera pans vertically up to the fireworks in the sky, a Hollywood convention to represent 'the ecstasy of passion' (see, for instance, *To Catch a Thief* [Alfred Hitchcock, 1955]).

However, after twelve o'clock, Lola's *wonderful dream* to be truly loved by 'the golden bachelor, heir Alberto of Mónaco, Alfonso XIII, or Maurice Chevalier. When she was 46, having loved no one, la Bella Otero disappeared not to be seen ageing (Posadas, 2001).

^{viii} Thierry Kuntzel notes that "fade outs are conspicuous signs of rupture, articulation, enunciation; *culminative* with respect to the sequence as a whole" (1980: 11).

^{ix} El pasodoble is a 20th century recreation of Spanish popular dance music that is associated not only to tauromachy but also to modern Spanish wedding parties.

^x In the credits this character is described as 'viejo vicioso'. This role is played by the actor Luis Ciges, in a 'special collaboration'.

^{xi} See, for instance, *Maltese Falcon* (John Huston, 1941), *Experiment Perilous* (Jacques Tourneur, 1944), *Laura*, *The Big Sleep*, or *Dead Reckoning* (John Cromwell, 1947).

^{xii} This is her first role in a film.

^{xiii} A narcissistic other is not necessarily from the same sex as the subject (Freud, 1914).

^{xiv} Lola asks to her 'fake' hand-mirror: "little mirror, little mirror, who is the most beautiful girl in the world?"; and she answers to herself: "You Lola, you are the most beautiful woman on earth".

^{xv} I would like to thank both my mother, Amelia, and her friend, Candelas, for this piece of information.

^{xvi} 1940s Hollywood films included in this category are *Rebecca* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1940), *Suspicion* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1941), *Gaslight* (George Cukor, 1944), *When Strangers Marry/Betrayed* (William Castle, 1944), *Dragonwyck* (Joseph L. Mankiewicz, 1946), *Undercurrent* (Vicente Minnelli, 1946), *The Two Mrs. Carrolls* (Peter Godfrey, 1947), *Secret Beyond the Door* (Fritz Lang, 1948), or *Caught* (Max Ophuls, 1949). Gothic romance films are focalized through a female character, display the psychological-social conflict between the erotic and death drives in relation to the other (sex), and are addressed to female audiences (see Cowie, 1993).

^{xvii} For a feminist analysis of the female Oedipal scenario in *Rebecca*, see Modleski (1988).

^{xviii} See Bruno Bettelheim's analysis of the female's Oedipal scenario in the Cinderella story (Bettelheim, 1976).

^{xix} Manderley is the name of the Gothic mansion in *Rebecca*.

of one of the biggest fortunes in the country, a successful business man, a sportsman, and a *bonviveur* (as he is defined later in the film by Dr. Werner) is constructed as impossible/'prohibited' by the film's enunciation (Metz, 1977: 87). Because Lola stays at 'the enchanted ball' after midnight, Prince Charming throws up and leaves. However, the disgust associated to Lola's third and fourth flashbacks (the scenario of Cinderella's *rape* ends with a close-up of Lola's 'fake' mirror on the floor, the scenario of Cinderella's *enchanted ball* ends with a close-up of the two masks on the floor: the vomit between them) returns *in* the present of the narrative: after getting ready to kill the next Miss Spain, Lola coldly subjects another male lover to *her* Quasimodo mask, despising him when he doubts about his virility.

4. In order to work through Lola's 'impossible and ever-lasting dream' of being truly loved by Casanova, the third narrative segment of the film displays a series of scenarios constructed according to 'reality principles' relevant to both the Lieutenant Arribas (Lola's 'pursuer') and Dr. Werner (Lola's 'creator'). In contrast to the collapse of spatial difference between 'outside' and 'inside' that occurs in the *masked* ball dance featuring Cinderella and Quasimodo, this third narrative segment introduces a clear-cut construction of spatial dichotomies (exterior/interior). A long shot that shows 'the exterior' of the Federal cyber-library, where the Lieutenant goes to discover more about Lola, is followed by a long shot of 'the circular' library interior. After a fade out to black, the next sequence commences with a repetition of the spatial distinction between 'exterior' (long shot of the exterior of Dr. Werner's clinic) and 'interior' (long shot of Dr. Werner in his office). This formal structure (exterior-interior/fade out to black/exterior-interior) establishes a connection between Lieutenant Arribas and Dr. Werner. Such a link, moreover, is also represented at the level of the narrative. On the one hand, inside the library -the locus of the scopic-epistemological drive-^{xx} the lieutenant watches a sentimental television programme about 'The beautiful Otero: A fairy tale' delivered in voice-over by Dr. Werner. On the other hand, inside his private clinic -the locus of the death drive- Dr. Werner is threatened by 'his beautiful doll', gun in hand, who *steals* 'the beauty injections' from him. It can be noted, then, that the two male characters are linked not only through their view of Lola but also through the view between them: Arribas becomes increasingly obsessed with the female killer's video-camera/TV image *because of* Dr Werner's tele/vision story of Lola as a revengeful *black widow*. In Dr Werner's story, at the funeral of Luis Casanova and his wife (a recent Miss Spain) who have been killed in a car accident while on honeymoon in Monaco, Lola announces to the press that she 'will never forget what, that bitch!, has done to me'.

The formal structure 'exterior-interior/fade out to black/exterior-interior' also establishes a radical difference between Lieutenant Arribas and Dr. Werner. Contrary to Dr. Werner's illegal 'morphogenetic experiments' with patients -he was expelled from the University after his creation of

^{xx} As has been noted by Slavoj Žižek, "the drive's ultimate aim is simply to reproduce itself as drive, to return to its circular path, to continue its path to and from the goal. The real source of enjoyment is the repetitive movement of this closed circuit" (Žižek, 1991: 5).

Lola and continues to protect 'his beautiful criminal doll'-, the Lieutenant remains on the side of the (judicial) law. Firstly, he arrives at the clinic just on time both to arrest Dr. Werner (as an accomplice in Lola's murders) and to rescue the scientist from Lola's gun. Secondly, he *misses* Lola who runs away from him disguised as a nurse with dark glasses.

The woman who runs away in disguise exacerbates the erotic-lethal tension between the members of 'the noir couple' and decreases the probability that they can overcome their complicated relationship with the (symbolic) Law. Soon after she is gone, the Lieutenant is able to send back to Lola "the true significance" of her message –*I am deceiving you*- (Zizek, 1991: 57) by hardening his pursuit of her. In fact, while a *Bullitt* –of Steve McQueen fame- type music is heard on the soundtrack, the Lieutenant, together with his police crew, literally *drives* to Lola's apartment. As he goes up stairs and walks through a series of *long and winding corridors* (this visual-narrative motif links this sequence with the second sequence of the film: when Lola stabs 'her beautiful mother' on her bed), we hear a *heart beating* drum, getting louder as the Lieutenant 'forces' his way into Lola's place,^{xxi} the cause of his anxiety.^{xxii} As a deeper and slower sound encroaches on the soundtrack, Arribas moves into Lola's hall and looks around *the empty place*.

Lola's absence from 'her place' motivates both the Lieutenant's judicial order to 'search and arrest Lola Otero' and a series of *suspense* travellings shots that follow Arribas as he scrutinizes Lola's things (her lighted candles, her veils, a collection of burned Barbie dolls, a photograph of Mother Theresa, photographs of herself in women's magazines, and a snap of her as a child – the face deleted- with her blind 'mother'). Meanwhile, the soundtrack changes tone to introduce a sharper music (double bass and cellos, with brief intrusions of *Legend* [Ridley Scott, 1985] 'romantic violins') that indicates that the Lieutenant has fallen in love with the female killer.^{xxiii}

As in Preminger's *Laura*, the Lieutenant's *excessive* (loving) trajectory regarding the investigation of the crime/the woman provokes 'an experience of death' (Zizek, 1989: 68). While Lola kills *the double* of the Other Woman who 'stole' Luis Casanova from her (Lola disguises herself as one of the organizers of the forthcoming Miss Spain context, picks 'Miss Cantabria' up at the airport, kills her, and buries her in a military area), the Lieutenant edits a loop of close-ups of Lola Otero (from Dr. Werner's TV programme), in which she addresses him using the words *she used to say* to the now dead Casanova: 'I love you. I'll never forget you. You are the man of my life'. The series of frontal-mirror shot/reverse-shots between the male character's narcissistic/dead look and the female character's all-loving/vertiginous image *drives* the Lieutenant/spectator to *fall* into a 'visual espiral' and into a brief *subjective* wide-angled 'nightmare sequence'. In this sequence (located in a

^{xxi} In contemporary science fiction, sound effects such as loud pulsating sounds are often used emphatically "to heighten excitement and create a physical impact on the body of the viewer" (King and Krzywinska, 2000: 71).

^{xxii} Anxiety is an 'internal' sign that warns the subject that the fulfilment of the drives is *too* close (Freud, 1919-1920 [1920]: 281-2).

^{xxiii} I would like to express my gratitude to both Miguel Angel Martín and Marcos Monge for their narrative reading suggestions and musical descriptions of this sequence.

place similar to Ms. Lidia's bedroom), a provocative Lola sitting on a table, wearing a white, light, evening dress, and her eighteenth birthday mask, repeats the desired sentence, 'I love you. You are the man of my life'. Shots of her are rapidly cross-cut with shots of Dr Werner and Sergeant Pelayo, the Lieutenant's Watsonian companion,^{xxiv} also repeating Lola's phrases to the Lieutenant.^{xxv} The nightmare ends with a wide-angled medium close-up shot of *Lola laughing hysterically* while a candle is burning in the background.

This wide-angled nightmare sequence can be seen as the final visual scenario 'placed in the service of a defence against the [scopic-epistemological] drive' (Copjec, 1993: 192). After the artificial loop of close-ups of Lola looking at Arribas (as the dead Casanova) and telling him that she loves him and that he is the man of her life, the Other's difference returns in an uncanny way. The emergence of 'a non-symbolized fantasmatic surplus' (Zizek, 1993: 220) *in reality* (Lola's laugh soundbridges the nightmare and 'reality') announces that the Lieutenant is close to 'the dark chamber where the death drive ends' (Turim, 1989: 180). That is to say that he is close to 'symbolic castration'. In fact when the Lieutenant abruptly wakes from 'his nightmare' he loses his fake eye, which falls on the *original* polaroids of 'the scene of the motherly-sexual crime', including a close-up of Lola disguised as Mother Theresa and another with the sentence "new year, new life" written in blood on the wall. A medium close-up of the Lieutenant covering his one-eyed face with his hands, fades out to black via a cross-shaped fade.

5. The camera fades in to a cross-shaped close-up of Lola *disguised* as 'the dead Miss Cantabria', as she enters the all-white, hyper-futuristic building where the Miss Spain contest is to be held. This fantasy space 'gives body' to a certain limit that "changes the *impossible* into the *prohibited*" (Zizek, 1993: 216). It materializes 'the encounter with the Law'. Inside the 'police-room' in this building, the Lieutenant's *excessive* relationship with the female character is substituted by a more tame relationship. Unlike his team of policemen, who look at women like a voracious spaceship crew, Arribas is portrayed not only as reluctant to be seduced by appearances (he refuses to look at the female models' photographs) but also as 'the weak embodiment of the Law' of desire: he 'prohibits' his policemen scopic *jouissance*. 'Have you all become stupid?, Have you lost your judgement? [he coughs]. This is not a game [he coughs again]. I remind you that you are on duty and that we are in a murder case. So I don't want anymore nonsense'. The lieutenant's tame position regarding the female character is further related to the Law in the next sequence. A long shot of the sepulchral exterior of the Federal Prison is followed by a scene inside the prison in which the Lieutenant interrogates Dr Werner about Lola's heart: 'She is not bad, Lieutenant', says the scientist, 'She has had bad luck, that's all. Nobody has ever truly loved her. Nobody. Do you know what it must feel like?'

The fantasy scenario of violent confrontation between the female psycho-killer and 'the weak embodiment of the Law' to be held at the Miss Spain building is initiated by a series of cross-cut medium close-ups of Lola and the Lieutenant loading their *equal* weapons. In similar fashion to

1990s multinational *noir* thrillers involving ‘female avengers’, the confrontation between the woman and the Law is explicitly related to 1970s feminism (Read, 2000: pp. 3-13). On the one hand, the furious, cross-eyed, 1970s feminist leader that is to remain outside the building, is mistaken for Lola when she attempts to illegally enter the building disguised as a nun with the intention of stabbing any ‘top model’/‘bitch’ with a knife, resembling Lola in the Lieutenant’s *nightmare*. On the other hand, Lola is mistaken for the 1970s feminist leader, as she is defined as ‘an intellectual doll’ by one of the male members of the jury.^{xxvi} By relating Lola’s murder of her main rival for the Miss Spain crown - the competitive, clever, and galactic/femenine ‘Miss Barcelona/Miss *Photogenic*’ - to the feminist leader, the film’s enunciation unmasks the 1970s feminist fantasy of solidarity between women (see Read, 2000: 194). By locating Lola’s murder of Dr Werner in the man’s toilet (after helping him pee, she strangles him), the film’s enunciation unmasks the 1970s masculine fantasy of women’s excessive hostility against women (Dr Werner’s televised fairy-tale/revenge story of Lola). Additionally, the film’s enunciation connotes Lola’s sadistic killing of her science-fiction creator/lustful ‘father’ (she kills him after a scene in which he looks at her with desire and ‘recognizes her’ because of the crucifix given to her by her blind ‘mother’) as both the dead-end of the fashion model’s vengeful feminist trajectory (she kills a man) and the beginning of her ‘monstrous feminine destiny’.

6. The previously mentioned scene in which Lola kills ‘her creator’ in the men’s toilet ends with the image of *La Pietá*, and gives way to a television reality-show of Lola’s *orgasmic* mutation from top-model to female monster.^{xxvii} ‘I’m ugly!’, she tells the Lieutenant, ‘I have always been ugly! Don’t you see it?’. Then she shoots at a huge TV screen-mirror, while watched by a large group of diegetic spectators gathered in Madrid’s central square La Plaza de España (the Square of Spain). At this science-fictional point where the film mobilizes the visible (Kuhn, 1990: 6) - the televised spectacle of the female protagonist’s Real monstrous body -, the film also mobilizes the origin of meaning. By depicting a visible monstrous Lola *choosing* not to become ‘the uncanny embodiment’ of non-sensical *jouissance* (the embodiment of that which should have remained hidden: the death drive),^{xxviii} the film’s enunciation celebrates the ideology of individual freedom against the ideology of individual fate: Lola is portrayed *choosing* to substitute ‘the impossible object of the drives’ (the top model’s TV *image* and the Miss Spain crown with Ms. Lidia’s heart-shaped jewel stamped in its centre: Lola liberates her hostess, ‘Miss Las Palmas’) for ‘the object of a symbolic prohibition’: her active machine gun with which she *injures* Arribas in one leg.

The female character’s *new position* of desire, mediated by the embodiment of the Law – both by removing his ‘mask’ (his hairpiece, his fake eye, and his false teeth) and in his recognition of Lola (‘I know how you feel, Lola’), Arribas approaches ‘the female monster’ –, triggers ‘the birth of female subjectivity’. Out of love for a truthful *Quasimodo*, “the ugliest woman in the world” lays down her ‘possible’ weapon (Zizek, 1993: 216) and in a *miraculous* transformation lets the hopeless but brave male Other to hug her in a *wonderful/circular* but *tamed/mediated* TV embrace.

By 'giving body' to a limit (the vertiginous embrace between Lola and Casanova in the fourth flashback), this fairy-tale, happy ending TV-style scenario ('the man' rescues 'the woman' from *her own* fate [death], after having been rescued by her from *his own* fate) announces the narrative presence of the symbolic Law of desire. After a fade out to black, a series of shots of different newspaper headlines (the spectator is informed of the 250 year jail sentence handed down to 'the beautiful Lola Otero') dissolve into a scene in which Arribas (with an eye patch and the help of a stick) enters the Police building to *lay down* his Lieutenant's 'narcissistic identity' card and gun. A long shot of Arribas leaving 'the interior' of the Police building dissolves into a long shot of 'the exterior' of the Federal Prison (New Year's Eve, 2011) and, while an 'exotic'/feminine *bolero* 'Lamento Gitano' is heard on the soundtrack,^{xxx} Arribas approaches Lola's cell. The cell is constructed as the space of desire: time is measured ('visiting time'), Lola's monstrous *image* is *masked* by a broken mirror, there is a couple united on the basis of their common lack (Zizek, 1989: 171-2). A series of shot/reverse shots symbolically differentiate between 'the crippled, one-eyed man' and 'the monster woman'^{xxx} while 'the man' *gives a ring* to 'the woman' as a birth-night present. Lola switches the radio on. In modern Spanish fashion, they eat the twelve grapes together in time with the chimes of the clock heralding in the new year.^{xxxi} The film ends with a close-up of Lola smiling with happiness while the radio presenter's female voice can be heard saying: "We, the family of channel 10, hope that your last year's wishes have come true and that the year 2012 sees your wishes fulfilled and brings you love, a lot of love, to you. And remember, *today is the first day of the rest of your life*'. In the right foreground of this final personal, toward-the-future ending shot, there is an opened bottle of champagne.

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^{xxiv} Throughout the film this male character embodies tragic-comic 'contemporary gender trouble'. In a fancy-dress party, celebrated the evening Ms. Lidia was murdered, the heterosexual Pelayo falls in love with 'a woman' disguised as a 'female tamer of lions' that turns out to be a travestite.

^{xxv} For an analysis of the relationship between the classic detective and his companion in terms of transference, see Slavoj Zizek (1991: 58). For an analysis of the homoerotic relationships between characters in film noir, see Richard Dyer's work (1978).

^{xxvi} As a finalist of the Miss Spain contest, when she is asked about her ideal of beauty, Lola answers: "I think that what really counts is the beauty inside oneself. That is why my ideal of beauty is the Mother Theresa of Calcutta. She was really beautiful because her beauty was spiritual. I think that all women in the world should resemble her".

^{xxvii} Here science fictional make-up special effects (by David Marti and Montse Ribé) fulfill the function of 'representing the unrepresentable' (see, King and Krzywinska, 2000: 64).

^{xxviii} I am indebted to Vicente Mira for his lecture on Freud's "The Uncanny" (11th of June, 2003, Colegio de Psicoanálisis, Madrid).

^{xxix} 'El bolero' is a type of popular music that deals with love matters. The first bolero is considered to be *Tristezas* by José 'Pepe' Sánchez, Cuba, 1886.

^{xxx} "between the shot and the backshot the bar that separates the man from the woman is marked out, defining at the same time, in the same axis, at the point of convergence of the two diagonal looks, the place of the third one" (González Requena, 1993: 249).

^{xxxi} The origin of this custom is properly modern. It began in 1909 as a marketing campaign designed by harvesters to sell their grapes stocks.