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Performing Gender and Nation in *¡Ay Carmela!*¹

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The jesters are the boil-lancers. [They] let out the pus of anger and fear and prejudice. (Lipman 1997: 240)

There is a voice crying in the wilderness [...] the voice of a body dancing, laughing, shrieking, crying. Whose is it? It is [...] the voice of a woman, newborn and yet archaic, a voice of milk and blood, a voice silenced but savage. (Gilbert 1975: ix)

In a recording of his 1994 performance tour of Scotland, the comedian Billy Connolly describes a scene from his childhood concerning the disabled men who worked in the Glasgow shipyards. He recalls how at the end of the shift the lame and crippled were allowed out first to avoid being trampled in the rush of the able-bodied. As the hooter sounded and the gates opened hundreds of men limped out *en masse*, their grotesque movements creating a bizarre spectacle straight from hell. Surprisingly, in this day of political correctness the audience greets Connolly's story and his mimed parody of these "physically disadvantaged" men not with an embarrassed silence but with howls of laughter. Black comedy such as this, with its images of the grotesque and the ridiculous has evolved as a way of coping with the grim realities of the human condition. As Connolly says when he reminisces on his apprenticeship as a shipyard welder: "you talked really dirty because the life was hard—and you lightened the load by being funny". Like Aristotle's theory about tragedy, comedy offers a cathartic release for from Connolly's and the welders' prurient humour comes the physically therapeutic action of laughing itself and a safe space in which to explore and evacuate the prejudices which fester within us. The blackness of the comedy is essential to this type of catharsis, for as Howard Jacobson says:

Jettison the offence and you jettison the joke. By being too squeamish, you lose much of the violence of comedy, which is *intrinsic* to its function. The purpose of laughter is not just to limber up your facial muscles, but to put demons inside yourself to flight. (cited in Davidson 1997: A6)

Connolly's bizarre vision of the disabled shipworkers is reminiscent of the motley band of beggars—the stunted, the blind and the lame, that appears in Luis Buñuel's film *Viridiana* (1961). Like Connolly's shipworkers, these comic characters evoke a sense of *esperpento*—the wry black humour Ramón del Valle Inclán developed which expressed the tragic reality of life based in the disparity between the ideology of a nation and the actual hardships and injustices endured by its population. Like Connolly's sketch, the appearance of the beggars offers both an opportunity for laughter as well as making a veiled comment on contemporary society.

Similarly, in the film *¡Ay Carmela!* (1990, Carlos Saura, Palace Pictures,

Spain/Italy) Carlos Saura makes use of *esperpento* both to provide comedy and to allow us to explore and expiate the taboo subject of the Spanish Civil War. For just as in the theatrical tradition where the jester has a special license to cross the boundaries of convention and say the unsayable, so Saura, through the distancing of time, the metaphor of film and the mediation of comedy, is able to approach and air the painful issues that touched the whole of the population in 1930's Spain. As Saura says:

I would have been incapable a few years ago of treating our Civil War with humour [...] but now it is different, for sufficient time has passed to adopt a broader perspective, and there is no doubt that by employing humour it is possible to say things that it would be more difficult if not impossible to say in another way [...] (cited in Edwards 1995: 116)

The first comedy made about the Civil War after the repeal of administrative censorship in 1977, was Luis G. Berlanga's *La vaquilla* (1984) which although a huge commercial success was criticized for presenting a centrist viewpoint, a "look back without anger" which ignored social and ideological motivation and suggested that "*everyone* lost the war" (Gubern 1991: 104). This anodyne conclusion was typical of Civil War films made in Spain at this time, partly because a more partisan approach would have upset the tentative consensus that was developing between right and left in a move towards democracy and partly because most films were made by directors too young to have memories of the conflict themselves. Carlos Saura, on the other hand, grew up through the worst years of Franco—he was educated during *los años del hambre* ("the years of hunger") between 1939–51 and he remembers his childish confusion over the issues that split his family: "I never understood why [...] the good were the bad and the bad were the good" (cited in Higginbotham 1988: 77). Armed with these recollections Saura speaks out with conviction and the film "takes sides" by privileging the Republicans and condemning the Nationalists and their styles of indoctrination and propaganda. By looking beyond the politics of the Civil War to the cultural structures which the Nationalists and their fascist allies used to impose and confirm their ideology in Spain, the film both ameliorates its potentially divisive polemic and offers an explanation for the support of a régime which history has shown to be repressive. Similarly, since the film implies that the Nationalists' propaganda centred on a mythical image of "the nation"—an "imagined" notion of Spain and Spanishness, it follows that the enormous fratricide which resulted made the Nationalist forces as much victims of Franco's repression as the Republicans. For as Benedict Anderson points out, despite the actual inequalities and exploitation that prevail, it is the belief that the nation is a "fraternity", "a deep, horizontal comradeship" that convinces millions of people of the need to kill or be killed in defense of this "imagined community" (1983: 7).

In 1931 Charlie Chaplin told a reporter that "patriotism is the greatest insanity the world has ever suffered", a conviction he repeated through the mouthpiece of Adenoid Hynkel's double in *The Great Dictator* (Chaplin, 1940). Despite its sincerity, the plea to humanity with which Chaplin ended this film was condemned as a directorial indulgence which preached too obviously. By

contrast, in the allegorical style which allowed his earlier films to pass the gaze of the censor, Saura makes a similar but more subtle plea in *¡Ay Carmela!* through the agency of the central character of Carmela (Carmen Maura). She is presented as a warm and attractive woman, strong but compassionate, a “voice of milk and blood” (Gilbert 1975: ix), who has scruples about making love in the dead mayor’s bed and the courage to stand-up for the foreign prisoners in the face of an enraged fascist audience. Her courage is contrasted with the Nationalist officers who are represented as bullies or buffoons and with the pragmatic Paulino (Andrés Pajares), an ordinary little man who simply wants to survive, being too scared to do anything else. Carmela is thus established as the positive moral centre of the film and by aligning the Republican cause with her, both narratively and in a gendered *mise-en-scène*, Saura makes his political point obliquely but also convincingly. For when she is silenced by the young Nationalist’s bullet at the end of the film, her death speaks of the “death” of the Republican cause and marks the beginning of the forty years of Franco’s rule.

Through the figure of Carmela and the sexual stereotypes patriarchy projects onto her, Saura also exposes both the oppression of patriarchal ideology and points to the oppressive ideological processes which the Nationalists employed in their struggle against the Republicans. For as T.E. Perkins suggests, since stereotypes are “ideological phenomena of a peculiarly ‘public’ and easily identifiable kind they may prove a useful means of studying the practice of ideology” (1979: 135). Thus just as the sexual stereotypes which Carmela negotiates throughout the film result in her ultimate suppression—her death, similarly, the cultural stereotypes that are used to invent a national identity useful to the Nationalists’ cause, result in their legitimation and the suppression of the Republicans.

Narratively Carmela is seen as favouring the Republicans. Although she is prepared, along with Paulino and Gustavete (Gabino Diego) to steal their fuel, her horror at the Nationalist’s firing-squad and their treatment of the International Brigade prisoners suggests in her a growing sympathy so that by the end of the film we feel she has died a Republican martyr. The film also draws a parallel between Carmela and the Republicans by showing that it is within their democratic community that she feels most at home and which by association genders them “female”. Especially when by contrast, the Nationalists are represented as displaying negative and aggressive “male” qualities which are emphasised by Carmela’s vulnerability when she passes into their diegetic space of oppressive patriarchy. Thus the film’s political theme becomes a gendered dialectic between the “mother-country” of Republican Spain and the “fatherlands” of the Nationalists and their fascist allies—Italy and Nazi Germany.

The gendering of the conflicting sides is most clearly seen in the *mise-en-scène* of the two Tip Top Variety performances that frame the action of the film (the last scene in the cemetery being more of an elegiac epilogue). The film opens in the Aragonese town of Montejo where the *troupe* are entertaining the Republican troops with their music-hall act. Paulino’s overblown introduction of Carmela seems comic—“the self-indulgent and harmless propaganda of show business” (Edwards 1995: 118) rather than the inflated language that the

Nationalists use in the later performance which seems humourless and sinister. The make-shift "theatre" in which this performance takes place is a building used by the community—a village hall or even a barn, for the back of the stage seems to be large slatted doors through which sunshine streams. Natural light also floods in from the uncovered windows that are down one side of the hall illuminating the audience and performers alike. As the camera moves around and among the audience we see that this is a community—men and women of all ages: some in uniform; some in peasant overalls; children; old men in berets; an old woman seated in a wicker-backed chair brought from home. The audience seems relaxed and good-natured, cigarette smoke rises through the shafts of sunlight, people sit or stand, leaning against each other, their body language connoting a community happily linked together by a common cause. As Paulino introduces Carmela: "*aplaudida en el mundo entero, la inimitable, la única, la bellísima, la extraordinaria*" ("the world famous, the inimitable and the one and only, the stunning and extraordinary")² she appears on stage and is greeted by the audience with affectionate enthusiasm. She is dressed in the flamenco costume that speaks of the Carmen myth and performs her first number, a traditional song, with energy and delight. A woman approaching middle-age, Carmela is a "trouper" rather than a young "artiste" but what her act lacks in finesse is made-up for by her warmth and sincerity. As she sings and dances the audience joins in, stamping their feet, shouting the chorus and clapping their hands. The scene becomes a collective performance for the stage on which Carmela dances is low and close to the spectators giving the feeling that she is one of them, dancing in their midst; whereas in the Teatro Goya she is distanced and alienated by the height of the stage and the footlights which act as a barrier. During the performance the camera cuts between the audience and Carmela's point-of-view revealing the mutual pleasure that is being enjoyed by both. The drone of the Nationalist planes which changes the mood and the shared fear that grips performers and audience alike further emphasize the bond between Carmela and the Republican audience. This symbiosis of fear and pleasure set in the redemptive space of community creates a gendered association between Carmela and the Republicans especially when it is contrasted with the second performance which is to an all-male audience which includes the patriarchal head of Spain, Franco himself.

In this second performance the *mise-en-scène* creates a totally different feeling of fear and tension. Having been brought into the Teatro Goya, a purpose-built theatre, Carmela, Paulino and Gustavete are reminded again of the firing squad victims when they see the brick-wall at the back of the stage and are temporarily blinded by the sudden light from the projector and then the footlights. Throughout the second performance we are reminded, as are the performers, of the existence of that brick-wall and the threat it signifies should they not comply with Lieutenant Ripamonte's (Maurizio De Razza) orders. It is significant that in the *La República va al doctor* (*The Republic Goes to the Doctor*), the sketch which Carmela threatens to subvert, the backdrops have been raised and the performers act before a bare brick-wall brightly lit in a way that reminds them and us of the execution yard. The theatre building itself is windowless and in the film we are only shown one entrance through which the performers are brought

by an armed guard. This not only underlines feelings of entrapment but also implies that this is a place of unnaturalness, a place that the healing rays of the sun never reach. Unlike the Republican community, this audience is all-male and is made up of different contingents of the fascist alliance who compete between themselves in an aggressive show of patriotic fervour. As Franco arrives they stand to attention as a single body, then sit in rows, regimented by the fixed seats of the theatre as if they are in the drilled ranks of the parade ground, their sombre uniforms merging into a monochrome of hostility which is unrelieved by colour or independent action. Although they respond enthusiastically to her performance, the camera's movement as it views the distant figure of Carmela from behind the rows of men's heads reminds us of the hundreds of predatory eyes that must be watching her vulnerable female figure. As in the first performance, the camera gives us point-of-view shots which look over Carmela's shoulder at the audience, although this time the footlights prevent her and us from reading the audience's reception. During her numbers the camera registers her changing emotions which swing between a superficial "performed" radiance when she is facing the audience to an expression of fear when she turns away from them.

Having established a strong analogy between Carmela and the Republicans, the film uses this to point to the processes of ideology by associating Carmela's patriarchal oppression with oppressive aspects of nationalism. During the film Carmela is associated with the entire spectrum of sexual stereotypes that patriarchy has traditionally used both as a means of female containment and as a means of legitimisation and reinforcement of patriarchal ideology itself. These range from the idealized at one extreme to the demonized at the other "commonly identified as the Bitch, the Witch, the Vamp and the Virgin/Goddess" (Case 1988: 6). Carmela is idealized as a mother-figure by Gustavete; she is likened to the Virgin Mary by the Murcian truck-driver; Paulino calls her an hysteric; she deliberately performs the role of "vamp" both on stage in a display of overt sexuality as she raises her skirt to show her legs and off when she approaches the Murcian's truck; she is idolized by the prisoners who see her as the subject of their song *¡Ay Carmela!*; she is called a "bitch", a "slut" and a "whore" by the Nationalist audience and even Paulino quizzes her as to how far she went with the truck-driver. By the end of the film, though, she becomes once again idealized this time as a "victim".

The film uses this preponderance of sexual stereotypes to alert us to look for other signs of the ideological process and the legitimation of a dominant social group which as John B. Thompson points out, includes "promoting beliefs and values congenial to it; *naturalizing* and *universalizing* such beliefs so as to render them self-evident and apparently inevitable [and by] *denigrating* ideas which might challenge it [...]" (cited in Eagleton 1991: 5). The processes of "promotion" and "naturalization" that Thompson mentions are detectable in the exaggeration of the Nationalist audience's patriotic fervour. Their inflated language and their enthusiastic response to Carmela's opening song which has become a meaningless political nonsense are signs of their indoctrination, which like "the fanfares, the uniforms and flags" that we associate with old footage of Nazi rallies are all "part of impressing and fooling the masses" (Metelmann,

cited in Jardine 1997: 13) and identify them as much victims of propagandist oppression as Carmela is of sexual discrimination.

Since the Women's Movement of the 60s it has become widely accepted that the female stereotypes used in the processes Thompson describes, are based on a mythical discourse rooted in the patriarchal fear of gynocracy which locates women's power in their sexuality and ability to reproduce. It follows therefore that since the stereotypical representations of Carmela are false then by association so are the cultural stereotypes upon which nationalism confirms itself. Thus the zealous response of the Nationalist audience to their flags can be seen as a reflection of their misplaced acceptance of a propagandist discourse founded on an equally mythical notion of national identity. Indeed, the uneasy impression of homogeneity that this audience displays illustrates the mythical notion of a unified Spain which in reality is a composite "plural society of different peoples [which] has only recently been hammered into the 'straightjacket of unity by [the] Castilians'" (D'Lugo 1991: 5) and held together tenuously by a shared Catholicism.

In *¡Ay Carmela!*, the falsity of this notion of homogeneity is reflected both in the different factions of the Teatro's audience who sit together in an uncomfortable and artificial alliance and in the unease apparent in the characterisation and performance of the Tip Top troupe. In particular in the sequence where Paulino stands in front of the back-drop of national flags, Saura seems to be drawing a political analogy. The spectacle of Paulino with his eyes and arm raised uncertainly in a fascist salute seems to be a direct quote from Roland Barthes' *Mythologies* in which he describes an illustration from *Paris Match* in which "a young Negro in a French uniform is saluting, with his eyes uplifted, probably fixed on a fold of the tricolour" (Barthes 1972: 116). The nervous Paulino, his eyes ringed with black eye-liner and his face whitened (whether by make-up or the after-effects of his "cat-supper") also evokes the comedian Charlie Chaplin and his performance in *The Great Dictator* when he masquerades as Hynkel on the podium at a Nazi rally. By bringing together a clownish figure, a parody of Hitler and a theory of mythology, Saura implies that the national image being presented here is false and that this image is being used to legitimate something which is also false. For as Barthes says, what the image of the French soldier signifies to him is the contentious argument that:

France is a great Empire, that all her sons, without any colour discrimination, faithfully serve under her flag, and that there is no better answer to the detractors of an alleged colonialism than the zeal shown by this Negro in serving his so-called oppressors. (1972: 116)

The other occasion when the fascist audience demonstrates their nationalistic fervour is in response to Carmela's musical number when dressed as a flamenco dancer she sings of *España de mi querer* (*Spain, the love of my heart*). Although part of the audience's reaction is due to the sincerity of Carmela's performance and to the fact that she is female, it is also due to the patriotic theme of her lyrics and the image of national identity that she portrays in her flamenco routine. Again, the notion of Spanishness that her performance signifies is not as traditionally authentic as it pretends to be for it is based on a foreign import, the

seductive and exoticized Andalusianism promoted in the works of Merimée, Doré and Bizet. This national icon also exposes other ideological inconsistencies for it seems ironic that it was adopted by a régime which was later to censor any display of female sexuality in the media. As the teacher in *Carmen* (1983, Carlos Saura) makes clear when she tells her class that a female dancer's breasts should be like the proud horns of a bull but also warm and soft, flamenco focuses on the curves of the female body whereas in the media of the 40s and 50s the opposite was enforced. As John Hooper points out:

A [...] horror of the female mammary glands led TVE's censors to cut from a Jean-Luc Godard film a glimpse of a magazine advertisement for brassières and to reject [...] [a] classic documentary about Polynesia, on the grounds that it included too many shots of bare-breasted native women. (1987: 187)

The notion of Spanishness displayed in *Carmela*'s evocation of a flamenco folkloric tradition illustrates how folk art can be appropriated to naturalize ideology and thus create a notion of "community" on a national scale. That this national identity must be easily accessible, to be effective for propagandist motives, was cynically recognised by Adolf Hitler when he wrote in *Mein Kampf*:

The capacity of the masses for perception is extremely limited and weak. Bearing this in mind, any effective propaganda must be reduced to the minimum of essential concepts, [...] expressed through a few stereotyped formulae [...] Only constant repetition can finally bring success in the matter of instilling ideas into the memory of the crowd [...] (cited in Golomstock 1990: 173)

The process of appropriation and naturalization can of course be applied equally to the Republicans. *Carmela* is visibly moved by the lyrics of *España de mi querer* for she tells the audience that she always gets goose-pimples whenever she sings it. Similarly, in the opening number of the film when the Andalusian folk-myth is evoked, the Republican audience receive it just as enthusiastically as the Nationalists do later. However, since their reaction is mediated by the wholesome atmosphere of their democratic community, we read their response as positive in contrast to the more frenzied applause of the Nationalists which reflects the repressive nature of their community. As Anderson points out, since "all communities larger than primordial villages [...] are imagined. [So] communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined" (1983: 6). In other words, *¡Ay Carmela!* does not seek to condemn the Nationalists for their creation of a national identity which is false, since all national identities must by Anderson's definition be inventions, be they Republican or Nationalist. But rather it points to the misplaced support of a régime of repression and brutality and the way it is generated by the misappropriation of language and the naturalizing processes that its propagandist rhetoric employs. Indeed, as will be developed later, language and its use and misuse is a major theme in this film.

Although *¡Ay Carmela!* is primarily a tragi-comedy, its musical numbers also associate it with "the Musical", a genre which, as Jane Feuer points out, "provide[s] a particularly clear example of naturalization, in which ideology acts

to make the cultural seem natural". For as she explains in her article "Hollywood Musicals: Mass Art as Folk Art":

This is because Hollywood musicals are not only entertainment in themselves, but are also frequently *about* the production of entertainment. The musical is thus "self-reflexive", as well as being generally reflexive regarding Hollywood and mass entertainment as a whole. (1985: 53)

Since *¡Ay Carmela!* is a film about "putting on a show"—two shows in fact, one that speaks of liberal community and one that speaks of repressive propaganda, its metatheatricity makes Feuer's point very relevant here. Firstly, the film reinforces our belief in Carmela and company by focusing our attention on the fictive nature of their performances on stage which paradoxically strengthens the "reality" of their filmic off-stage lives and the repressive society around them (part of Feuer's "creation and erasure" process working at a "micro" level). Secondly, the film also invites us to examine the function of the performing arts in the naturalizing processes of ideology. For as Feuer suggests, the processes of "creation and erasure" can be applied at a "macro" level too, as in the Hollywood context where "Musicals make mass entertainment (a product of capitalism) appear as folk entertainment (a product of pre-industrial society)" (1985: 53). It seems clear that Saura means to include film in this discourse on the responsibility of the arts for there are several allusions to the cinema in the film. For example: the references to Chaplin through Paulino; the flickering projector which malfunctions in the final scene in the Teatro and especially in the character of Gustavete, whose muteness results in the exaggerated expressions and physical movements we associate with silent film.

In a similar vein, in his earlier flamenco dance trilogy Saura uses dancers to interrogate the role that cultural artefacts play in the construction of social and personal identities pertinent to Spain. As D'Lugo explains:

the centrepiece of all three films is the figure of *performance*: dancers playing the part of fictional characters who are bound inextricably to fatalistic scenarios; individuals whose identity as dancers is itself the result of a willed submission to a cluster of artistic and social mythologies; finally, the figure of the Spaniard as performer of a cultural ethos to which his own identity appears irrevocably bound. (D'Lugo 1991: 193)

Similarly in *¡Ay Carmela!* Saura focuses on a figure of *performance*, Carmela, to examine the process of naturalization in which stereotypes achieve a supposed "naturalness" through their social performance. For since, as Judith Butler (1993: 312) points out in regard to gender: "all gendering is a kind of impersonation [...] a kind of imitation for which there is no original", it is only through repeated performance of that stereotypical identity that it can be confirmed and reinforced. The spectacle of excessive sexuality which Carmela presents both on stage and before the "footlights" of the truckdriver's headlights suggests a "performed" femininity for it is apparent from Carmela's off-stage persona that she is not a sexual exhibitionist. In the mayor's apartment we see her dressed modestly in a long-sleeved dress which has a demure white collar and cuffs and she is obviously uncomfortable under the ogling eyes of the Italian guard as Gustavete takes her bust measurement for her costume. Although her deliberate

adoptions of the "erotic" identity may appear complicitious with patriarchy, the film uses them to expose the strategies that women are forced to employ in a society in which men dominate and to subvert the stereotypes themselves. Twice Carmela offers her breast as an expedient measure—once to divert the Murcian's attention from the petrol stealing and once to distract the Italian lieutenant from Paulino's incriminating description of their act. And in the final scene in the Teatro she bares both breasts in a gesture of desperation and defiance. The expedience and excessiveness of Carmela's erotic femininity is used here to draw attention to its performative and therefore fabricated nature.

Implicit in this notion of social performance is the notion that the performer must also be a spectator, for as José Ortega y Gasset points out in his essay *Theory of Andalusia*: "The only people who can imitate themselves are those who are capable of becoming spectators of themselves, of contemplating and delighting at their figure and being" (cited in D'Lugo 1991: 193). In *¡Ay Carmela!* this narcissism can be seen both in a theatrical and a social context. Theatrically, we see this self-reflectivity when Carmela watches her own reflection as she makes-up in the dressing-room mirror and assesses how she will appear to the theatre audience in much the same way that the dancers use the studio mirror in *Carmen*. Similarly, in the sequence where she glides up and down the stage in a preoccupied rehearsal of her flamenco routine, we can see her "seeing" herself through the eyes of the imagined audience who in reality are filing into the theatre auditorium beyond the curtain. Carmela also assesses her social performance which is reflected in the admiring gazes of the Murcian truck-driver; Gustavete; Lieutenant Ripamonte; the Polish prisoner and Paulino. Although D'Lugo implies that this narcissism is a feature common to both sexes and indeed it is in the Antonio Gades' role in *Carmen* that it is most telling, it is in regard to women that this concept has received most recognition. Filmically, in Laura Mulvey's feminist discourse on woman as "spectacle" and in the visual arts in John Berger's theory on the representation of the nude female in painting. As John Berger explains, because of patriarchal containment:

A woman must continually watch herself. She is almost continually accompanied by her own image of herself [...] She has to survey everything she is and everything she does because how she appears to others, and ultimately how she appears to men, is of crucial importance [...] [for] how a woman appears to a man can determine how she will be treated [...] (1972: 46)

Indeed, much of the motivation for Carmela's treatment at the end of the film when she is called a "whore" and a "slut" stems from her performance of exaggerated sexuality in the *Uruguay* routine and her performance as "The Republic" which conspire together to result in her death.

Part of the notion of performance also includes the idea of a role to which the performer is forever tied—a role which has been learned through repeated rehearsal and repetition and from which no deviation is allowed. In the Spanish context these prescribed roles become the "fatalistic scenarios" (D'Lugo 1991: 193) of death and revenge which can be found, for example, in the honour plays of Calderón, the blood theatre of Lorca and even in the foreigner's view of Spain, in Bizet's *Carmen*. Thus the metatheatricity of *¡Ay Carmela!* and the

similarity between Carmela's name and Bizet's heroine prepare us for her inevitable death. For she symbolizes the "archaic" woman of tragedy, the transgressor who must be destroyed so that the dominant order can be reaffirmed. Similarly, the maternal images that are attached to Carmela: her motherly treatment of Gustavete as she buttons up his coat to keep out the rain; the way she teaches the Polish officer to pronounce her name just as a mother might teach a child and the way she persistently agonizes over the prisoners' mothers, suggest that away from her theatrical persona, in her social role of the "symbolic" mother, Carmela is involved in an equally inextricable role which will end in her death. As Marsha Kinder points out: "No other national cinema contains so many matricides" (1993: 232).

In the dark womb-like space of the Teatro Goya where the stage functions as a space on which to dream and fantasize, we see a reinscription of the Oedipal narrative which subverts rather than confirms the reproduction of the patriarchal society of the Nationalists. The Oedipal crisis we see played out here involves two narratives which although separate both culminate in the death of the "mother"—Carmela. The first Oedipal narrative, which is closest to the Freudian model, concerns Carmela (the symbolic mother), the young Nationalist officer who shoots her (the symbolic patriarchal son) and Franco (the symbolic father).

In her performance of *España de mi querer* Carmela brings together the stereotypes of whore and mother, an oxymoronic combination which not only seems to have come straight out of Freud's Oedipal scenario but which is also "deeply embedded in the Castilian language and especially in its slang" (Hooper 1987: 192). As John Hooper goes on to explain:

Hijo de puta (son of a whore) is a serious insult, yet *de puta madre* (Whore-motherish) means "great", "superb", "fantastic". The allegation, in *hijo de puta*, that one's own mother might be a whore is intolerable, but the abstract notion of a woman combining both erotic and maternal qualities is nevertheless thought to be highly appealing.

During her performance Carmela evokes these contrasting identities through her body, her dance movements and her singing. She uses a red fringed shawl as a prop—first erotically to suggest a striptease and the discarding of garments and later to denote modesty and religious devotion when she wears it like a head-scarf. While the body language of her flamenco dance evokes the sensual, Carmela's matronly figure and the lyrics of her song speak a maternal language that evoke fertility and motherhood. She sings:

'Que en el vergel de España, mi amor, como una flor, siempre estarás [...] dentro del alma te llevaré [...] cuna de gloria [...] España sol y lucero, muy dentro de mí te llevo escondida [...] España flor de mi vida' (my emphasis)

(*'In the Spanish orchard my love will bloom like a flower [...] I will carry you within my soul [...] cradle of glory [...] Spain the sun of my life! I carry you hidden deep in me [...] Spain the flower of my life!'*) (my emphasis)

Of course, to the non-Spanish speaking members of the audience—the International Brigade prisoners, the Germans and the Italians, these lyrics are meaningless—they can only read Carmela visually and so get a diluted representation of motherhood. To the young Spanish officer, however, she is the

ambivalent "erotic mother" and in his Oedipal struggle against his patriarchal destiny, this "son" of Spain displaces his violence onto Carmela rather than onto the over-powering father figure of Franco. For as Kinder (1993: 238) explains: "when a Spanish son rebelled against his father, he was also rebelling against Franco and against God. No wonder it was far less threatening to rebel against the mother", especially when in this case it was not just an image of Franco but Franco himself. Because of Carmela's moral status in the film and because of her association with the Republicans, this Oedipal model can be expanded to be read in terms of the nation. As Kinder explains in relation to the Spanish Oedipal narrative, when "the powerful mother is converted into a positive figure [...] [she] must be read against the recurring historic confrontation between the 'two Spains'" (1993: 213).

The second Oedipal narrative is based on the Lacanian analysis of the Oedipal scenario and takes up the film's important theme of language. This narrative involves the nuclear family of Carmela and Paulino and their symbolic son Gustavete, who comes to the film as an addition to the play on which *¡Ay Carmela!* is based. Gustavete's muteness presents him as an infantilized adult, one of "Franco's children" of the traumatized generation that grew up during the Civil War and as such he acts as a spectator-within-the-text which also works to increase the poignancy of the film's message. His lack of speech and his child/mother relationship with Carmela places him in the pre-Oedipal Mirror stage of the Imaginary when the child believes itself to be part of the mother and perceives no separation between itself and the world. As Toril Moi explains:

The child when looking at itself in the mirror—or at itself on its mother's arm, or simply at another child—only perceives another human being with whom it merges and identifies. In the Imaginary there is, then, no sense of a separate self, since the "self" is always alienated in the Other. (1985: 100)

According to Lacan's theory the Oedipal crisis occurs when the father intervenes to break up the dyadic unity between the mother and the child. This rupture allows the child to leave the Imaginary Order of the mother and enter into the Symbolic Order of the father where he can take up his place as an individual separate from the Other and which, for Lacan, is linked with the acquisition of language.

In *¡Ay Carmela!* we are told that Gustavete has lost the power of speech as a result of an explosion, probably a bomb. It is the violence of patriarchal conflict then that has caused his withdrawal from the Symbolic Order of speech and is responsible for his regression back to the safety of the Imaginary where he is once again the pre-language child of the Mirror stage in a symbiotic relationship with the "mother". This idea is reinforced by Carmela and Gustavete's "mutual gazing" (Kaplan 1983: 205), their moments of communication when they "speak" to one another through the close mother/child relationship which exceeds patriarchal authority. For example when Carmela looks into his face for approval following the first part of the Teatro show and he gestures that she was marvellous. Without his voice Gustavete communicates with facial expressions and by writing on his slate, but these words are often broken up into meaningless phonemes because of the slate's size and so bear little resemblance

to the written language of patriarchy. It is only when Gustavete experiences a second Oedipal crisis, when the patriarchal figure of the Nationalist officer forcibly separates him from the mother figure by shooting Carmela that Gustavete reluctantly re-enters the Symbolic Order—an entry that is signalled by his re-acquisition of language when in a voice creaky through lack of use, he hoarsely utters Carmela's name. This moving moment marks the horrific climax of the film and turns the affection we have come to feel for Carmela into tears of anger and regret that such a warm and compassionate woman has been snuffed out so that patriarchy can be perpetuated. In order for Gustavete, this "child of Franco", to find his voice, Carmela (and by implication Republican Spain) must forfeit hers for the Law of the Father offers the child no choice.

The bleak treeless landscape of the final scene, the brooding sky and the somber colours of the muddy track down which the battered van travels carrying the remnants of the Tip Top Variety troupe, evoke the forty years of repression that lie ahead for Spain. In some ways Carmela is the more fortunate for she escapes this sentence—as the woodcutter says in *Blood Wedding* "Better to be dead with no blood than alive with it festering" (Lorca 1992: 44). Gustavete's slate remains behind to speak as a headstone for the now silenced Carmela. Despite the downbeat mood of the scene, the muted strains of *¡Ay Carmela!* and the flowers that lie on her grave signal that the fire of the Republicans has not been completely extinguished. The red of the flowers remind us of Carmela's dress as she sang *España de mi querer*—a female island of colour and warmth in the drab cold sea of patriarchy. Once again, like other tragic heroines, like Shakespeare's Desdemona and Ophelia, Strindberg's Miss Julie, Lorca's Bride and Bizet's Carmen, the body of the woman like a palimpsest has been written upon and once again the writing has been effaced so that the status quo can be restored.

Notes

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² The English translations of film dialogue which are given in parenthesis throughout this article are taken from the English sub-titles of the film *¡Ay Carmela!*.

Filmography

- ¡Ay Carmela!* (1990) Dir. Carlos Saura, Palace Pictures, Spain/Italy.
Carmen (1983) Dir. Carlos Saura, Emiliano Piedra Productions/Televisión Española, Spain.
The Great Dictator (1940) Dir. Charles Chaplin, US.
La vaquilla (1985) Dir. Luis G. Berlanga, Incine/Jet Films/Madrid, Spain.
Viridiana (1961) Dir. Luis Buñuel, Uninci/Films 59/Gustavo Alatriste, Spain/Mexico.

Videography

- Two Bites of Billy Connolly* (1995) Vision Video Ltd., Polygram Record Operations Ltd., Sleepy Dumpling (Music) Ltd., UK.

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