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Specular Comedies of Manslaughter by Inés París and Marta Díaz de Lope Díaz

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Abstract

La noche que mi madre mató a mi padre (París 2016) and *Mi querida cofradía* (Díaz 2018) offer comedic retorts to cultural and industrial expectations for women protagonists. The career aspirations of their female leads defy the concept of the traditional angel of the home without resorting to manslaughter, a common recourse of Pedro Almodóvar's leading ladies. The films of Inés París and Marta Díaz demonstrate intimate revolt (Kristeva 2002), encompassing carnivalesque overturning (Bakhtin 1984), the spectacular visualization of specular fantasy, and laughter as resistance for their feminist project of revealing the patriarchal attitudes that obstruct women's professional fulfillment.

Veteran director-screenwriter Inés París (1962–), known for her comedies and advocacy of gender equality in Spanish show business, and debuting filmmaker Marta Díaz de Lope Díaz (1988–) approach the topic of women's professional fulfillment in similar ways that represent a departure from earlier representations and coincide with activity in Spanish current events.¹ Inés París' *La noche que mi madre mató a mi padre* (2016) and Marta Díaz's *Mi querida cofradía* (2018) indicate the persistence of patriarchal attitudes on and beyond the screen through the character of their respective patriarchs and in the measures of female protagonists over fifty to circumnavigate his obstruction. In these features, a patriarchal figure's impairment facilitates the realization of a woman's professional goals. París's feature is a meta comedy of a neo-noir film led by a self-fashioned femme fatale. Díaz's protagonist, who has campaigned for president

of her Catholic brotherhood, overtly identifies with the Virgin Mary but her actions and the film's *mise-en-scène* cast her as *matadora*, one who fights the "bull" of the fraudulent elections. The professional aspirations of these female leads defy the traditional concept of the angel of the home without resorting to manslaughter, a more common recourse of Pedro Almodóvar's leading ladies. As we will see, Julia Kristeva's theorization of the specular and spectacle is useful for explicating how París's and Díaz's films promote gender equality in the public sphere. Specular fantasy desires and visualizes inclusion in the spectacles of performance art and religious procession. Comedy, which exposes injustice and elicits laughter, is the genre through which these directors convey their feminist message.

A number of recent events underlining and undermining patriarchal attitudes form the basis of my claim that such a mentality persists beyond the screen. I situate this article's analysis across four relevant currents in the Spanish political, social, and cultural *zeitgeist* surrounding both film releases that depict clashes and advances in the arena of gender equality. First, the violence of the 2016 "Manada," the infamous case of the sexual assault of a young woman by said "wolf pack" of five rapists during San Fermín's running of the bulls, has exemplified a type of aggressive masculinity and patriarchal judicature (Beatley; Lorente Doria; Minder; Burgen, "Spain's"). This crime and miscarriage of justice ignited Spain's #MeToo, leading to greater support for women's rights, as evidenced by hundreds of thousands marching in as many as 500 cities across the country ("Las manifestaciones," "Día internacional") in International Women's Days of March 2018 and 2019. More women now identify as feminists in Spain (Álvarez). Second, advocacy groups and campaigns (CIMA 2006–, #MásMujeres 2018–) for more women in the audiovisual sector, the works of emerging cohorts of women directors from the ESCAC and Pompeu Fabra film schools in Barcelona (Engel), the gender parity agreement signed at the San Sebastián Film Festival in September 2018 (Pastor), and new funding incentives for productions directed and written by women ("Boletín" 38510) indicate efforts for inclusion in Spanish film and television. Third, the targeted censorship, stemming from the 2015 Ley Mordaza or "Gag Law" against public protest (Arrogante), of leftist professional (*El intermedio*'s Dani Mateo and Wyoming) ("El juez") and student humorists (Cassandra Vera) (Jones "Spanish student") for lampooning the former dictator and

his appointed successor Luis Carrero Blanco, respectively, highlight the Spanish right's attempts to define and police humor. The same law was used against 2019 International Women's Day demonstrators (Albin). Fourth, the exhumation and relocation of Franco's corpse from the Valle de los Caídos national shrine in October 2019 reveals the restlessness and centrality of the national patriarch's remains in contemporary politics. *La noche que mi madre mató a mi padre* and *Mi querida cofradía* participate in this wave of renewed feminist consciousness, in concerted measures of support for women in the audiovisual industry, and in the provocative potential of comedy.

Alongside national trends, regional traditions, politics, and current events come to bear on the Andalusian setting of *Mi querida cofradía*. Díaz's film takes place during well-renowned Holy Week celebrations whose *cofradías*, or Catholic brotherhoods led by *hermanos mayores*, comprise their cast of characters. Andalusia has recently been home to the first *hermana mayor*, Maruja Vilches in Seville in 2012 ("Cualquier mujer"), the 2014 feminist performance art of the "coño insumiso," and the post-Franco return of the far-right party Vox. The ideological outlier in this list, the "Guild of the Sacred Rebellious Pussy," was accused then exonerated of crimes against religious sentiment for its 2014 street demonstration in Seville of a two-meter-tall latex effigy of a vagina modeled after Virgin Mary iconography whose walking display emulated a Holy Week procession (Reviejo; Burgen, "Seville"). Emerging from the camp offended by the *coño insumiso* manifestation, Vox's political agenda is hostile to historical memory, women (targeting the gender violence law), LGBTQ persons, and media culture (specifically the local television channel Canal Sur) but protects bullfighting and Holy Week ("Mujeres"). This platform won the party an historic foothold of 24 seats in Spain's parliament in April 2019 (Jones "Spanish election"). *Mi querida cofradía*'s remarkable feminist critique entails revolution in the leadership of the Holy Week procession in Málaga and draws upon iconography of the Church and bullfighting for its articulation. Díaz's film, thereby, advocates for greater gender equality from within two bastions of Spanish patriarchal tradition.

Julia Kristeva's theory of intimate revolt is a capacious concept, encompassing rebellion, the specular, the spectacle, and laughter, that guides my analysis of *La noche* and *Mi querida cofradía*. "Revolt," or "return/turning back/displacement/change" (Kristeva 5), describes the activity of their protagonists. I relate such overturning to the

carnavalesque and, infused with the dark humor of the lower stratum, to the carnival-grotesque. Although grotesque elements (death, sex, bathroom humor, drunkenness, vomiting) are found in either film, I will focus on evidence of carnivalesque inversions in the features for my exposition of their feminist agendas. I will explore the specular, or fantasy, expressed through these narratives of hypothetical manslaughter and women's success. Kristeva recognizes the psychic power of cinema to put fantasies into verbal and pictorial form in order to call attention to a desire but avoid its reprehensible and hyperbolic mechanisms (67). That is, resorting to violence should not be necessary for women's success in the public sphere. Within the spectacle of the performing and visual arts, the specular allows for these protagonists to visualize their professional achievements. Envisioning and ultimately modeling greater gender equality through on-screen performances permit directors and protagonists to harness the potential of spectacle for intimate revolt.

Laughter, the purview of comedy, is a form of revolt that arises from the films' spectators. This physical response desired by the filmmakers invites us to consider comedy, and particularly the corporeal focus of grotesque comedy, a "body genre," thereby expanding upon Linda Williams's theorization in other genres.² Williams and Kristeva focus on the intimate impact of genre cinema. Kristeva contemplates the uses of comedy when she conceives of laughter as resistance and revelation: "The burst of laughter remains the most salubrious means for [the demystification of evil]: when the image, saturated with evil, also allows itself to laugh, identity collapses and all dictators are toppled" (79–80). Similarly, París understands the genres of laughter as thought-provoking, transgressive, and pleasurable (Cami-Vela 372; "Entrevista"). Dark comedy, with its focus on the lower stratum of the body and its appeal to laughter, also elicits a physical response from spectators, which, when coupled with the specular, can even propose psychic then social change beyond the diegesis. Finally, I follow Laura Mulvey's analytical trajectory from form ("Visual Pleasure") to narrative ("Changes") in my close readings of París's and Díaz's films to advance that *La noche que mi madre mató a mi padre* and *Mi querida cofradía* utilize the strategies of intimate revolt to model feminist mobilization in their spectators.

I now turn to Pedro Almodóvar as an example from Spanish film history to illuminate the representation of women in Iberian dark

comedy. The 2006 foundation of the Asociación de Mujeres Cineastas y de Medios Audiovisuales (CIMA) suggests that the audiovisual industry is another stronghold of Spanish patriarchy. Even the “women’s director” (Jordan and Morgan-Tamosunas 117) and 2019 Venetian Golden Lion lifetime achievement recipient Almodóvar has been criticized for his comedic treatment of rape and superficial use of sexual violence as a plot device (Jordan and Morgan-Tamosunas 117; Lev 203; Saenz 247; Zecchi, “El papel”). Placed within this broader cinematic context, the resemblance of París’s and Díaz’s imagined killers to Almodóvar’s murderesses is most significant in its difference; where killing is no longer prerequisite to women’s advancement or liberation. Their protagonists have the arts (*La noche*) and the democratic process (*Mi querida cofradía*) to thank for the realization of their professional goals, whereas the death of the male head of the household in Almodóvar is neither merely symbolic nor is it uncommon. Critic Jean-Max Méjean even wonders, in the context of *Volver* (2006), if Almodóvar has an axe to grind: “Pero ¿qué cuenta tiene que saldar el director manchego con los hombres para que ofrezca una visión tan negativa de ellos y haga desaparecer, casi inmediatamente, al único hombre de la familia?” (174). The *chicas Almodóvar*, having first been mistreated by these men, are responsible for their deaths.

A brief discussion of Almodóvar’s femmes fatales is necessary to best appreciate París’s and Díaz’s distinction. Despite what *La noche que mi madre mató a mi padre* suggests, neither of París’s nor Díaz’s protagonists resorts to murder. However, in Almodóvar’s *¿Qué he hecho yo para merecer esto?* (1984) it was beleaguered housewife Gloria (Carmen Maura) at her wit’s end in the kitchen who unintentionally kills her demanding and dismissive husband with a ham bone in a frustrated tussle. Although the confession of her role in his death to the investigator is ignored, she is not free from patriarchy since her son returns home remarking “esta casa necesita un hombre.” In *Volver* it was Raimunda’s (Penélope Cruz) daughter Paula (Yohana Cobo) who kills her (step)father in the kitchen with a knife out of self-defense. *Volver*’s plotline, advanced in Almodóvar’s *La flor de mi secreto* (1995) (Marsh 347; Saenz 254), entails the deferred burial of Raimunda’s husband Paco (Antonio de la Torre) with the help of a freezer chest for the storage of this patriarchal body. It is the second murder of a patriarch in the film following Raimunda’s mother Irene’s (Carmen Maura) killing of Raimunda’s philandering, abusive father

in a fire. Cruz's character grapples with the trauma of sexual abuse by her father and then with her daughter's killing of her own would-be incestuous stepfather. Gloria and three generations of women in Raimunda's family (her mother, her daughter, and herself) embody Almodóvar's *ángeles exterminadores del hogar* that upend the cultural ideal for dutiful wives of earlier provenance and Francoist reiteration: the *ángel del hogar*.

These plot lines might read as women reclaiming power over their lives. However, as scholarship shows, Almodóvar's feminist politics is checkered and critics are not of one mind. Jo Evans argues that although Gloria exemplifies Almodóvar's ironizing of the Catholic icon of the *mater dolorosa* (337–8), whom I read more broadly in her domestic function as the *ángel del hogar*, the director is better known for his Oscar-winning classical depiction of maternal grief in *Todo sobre mi madre* (1999). Others, as I mentioned, question his depiction of sexual violence. By contrast, Frances L. Restuccia's discussion of *Volver* as a Kristevan case study defends the psychoanalytic value of Almodóvar's work. In its treatment of the vicarious revenge for Raimunda's psychic trauma, its appeal to the senses and laughter, and its critical view on television talk shows as spectacle, Restuccia argues that the film exemplifies intimate revolt. She finds that "*Volver* can be experienced as a thought-specular film that gives rise to the spectator's intimate revolt and at the same time is about such a process, about the necessity of intimate revolt" (Restuccia 197). I argue that París's and Díaz's films are not concerned with overcoming a psychic trauma but rather that they imagine the fantasy of gender equality in the public sphere within and beyond the screen. The intimate is public.

In my view, París and Díaz provide alternatives to Almodóvar's depictions of women in patriarchal Spain. Their carnival-grotesque comedy dismantles the patriarchal logic of Spanish cinematic production. As Bakhtin explains, the carnival-grotesque serves "to consecrate inventive freedom, to permit the combination of a variety of different elements and their rapprochement, to liberate from the prevailing point of view of the world, from conventions and established truths, from clichés, from all that is humdrum and universally accepted" (34). In the context of the current article's films we thus witness a proposal for change, the second outcome that Mulvey identifies here: "a negation or inversion of dominant codes and conventions can fossilize into

a dualistic opposition or it can provide a spring-board, a means of testing out the terms of a dialect, an unformed language that can then develop in its own signifying space" (1987, 12). I suggest that París and Díaz utilize the carnival-grotesque and specular, like Almodóvar, but espouse a politics of life and opportunity, not a biopolitics consisting of the killing of the *homo sacer*, for women's advancement.

La noche que mi madre mató a mi padre, a direct result of Inés París's advocacy in CIMA (Gimeno Ugalde 451), is a thesis film that advocates for greater inclusion of women across the audiovisual industry. The film's actress-protagonist Isabel París (Belén Rueda) designs a ruse, for which she writes, directs, and acts in her most elaborate and extended audition, to be cast as femme fatale lead in the neo-noir film written by her husband Ángel (Eduard Fernández) and produced by his ex-wife Susana (María Pujalte). I will discuss how and why Isabel seizes creative control of her career with attention to form, particularly the gaze, and narrative, primarily the characterizations of the femme fatale and her foils. To the latter point, the power reversals from Ángel and Susana to Isabel alongside the feminization of Ángel represent the film's deployment of the carnivalesque to disrupt the patriarchal status quo. Isabel's specular desire involves imagining and casting herself as the femme fatale lead, against the grain of industrial norms. Spectacle and carnivalesque feminist comedic strategies relate to redirecting the male gaze and exposing the patriarchal assumptions underlying film production. I examine this feature by Inés París as an extension of this director-screenwriter's work as CIMA co-founder and first president, and identify how her writings for this advocacy group are reflected in the structural obstacles to her protagonist's professional success.

París's most recent comedy feature makes visible to spectators what she calls the "mano invisible" (París, "Epílogo" 307) of the industry in which women's talents are undervalued, overcriticized, or overlooked. Isabel is not taken seriously as a contender for Ángel's film and is not considered believable for the role of murderess. In order to prove her talent, Isabel and her ex-husband Carlos (Fele Martínez), a thespian who co-starred with Isabel in *Romeo and Juliet*, stage her poisoning of him to comedic rather than tragic end. A suspicious Diego Peretti (the actor plays a fictional version of himself) soon discovers that Carlos is not dead and eagerly joins Isabel's clandestine troupe. *La noche*, co-written with Fernando Colomo, deploys a num-

ber of feminist comedic strategies to *enseñar deleitando*, or teach while entertaining, with regards to women's status in the audiovisual sector.³ Of such approaches, París's casts of characters often features nontraditional families and, once again, *La noche* relates the characters' blended kin that purposefully complicates the identification of "my," "mother," and "father." "Father" never dies, despite umpteen near-death experiences, nor does the film assign patriarchal attitudes exclusively to male characters. It is dedicated to Inés's father Carlos París, who had recently passed, and the protagonist's ex-husband, also named Carlos, is collaborative rather than competitive.

La noche dramatizes the stumbling blocks that women artists face behind the scenes of show business to belie a number of misconceptions. In París's writings for CIMA, she warned of two governing fallacies of Spanish show business, those of equal opportunity and talent, affecting access and success, respectively (París "Epílogo" 304). In the opening scene, Isabel suffers a two-hour audition for which she leaps in a straitjacket for naught; she is deemed too old for the theater part. Thinly veiled references to women's hurdles and discrimination herein, Isabel jumps repeatedly through the proverbial hoops and represents, nonetheless, the common and pejorative spectacle of the "mad woman." Her domestic duties are another obstacle: Ángel chides Isabel for not having properly packed for their daughter's skiing trip nor done the grocery shopping while auditioning. He has typecast Isabel as the *ángel del hogar* of their home.

In her CIMA work, París claims that the audiovisual industry is ruled by money and power and complicates the access of women to its ranks ("Epílogo"). Studies corroborate this observation: women filmmakers make their first, and often only, feature on an average of five years later and with much reduced budgets compared to their male counterparts (París "La reivindicación" 372; Cami-Vela 368). París explains that producers, of whom men are a majority, must connect with the subject matter of a film in order to produce it, leading to fewer stories by and relatable for women ("Epílogo" 306). Following this logic, gender parity on the San Sebastián festival jury, established in 2018–19, resulted in an uptick in films by women directors in the 2019 competition (Salvà). Women, nevertheless, remain a minority in film direction.⁴

Therefore, it is significant that the film's cinematography signals the inception of Isabel's intimate revolt in which she takes control of her career by first reclaiming the gaze. The film fuses protagonist's

and spectators' points of view such that we observe Carlos through Isabel's eyes (Figure 1). She is a passenger about to metaphorically take the helm. With an ulterior motive, Isabel offers herself as hostess for a dinner party at her home intended to court Diego Peretti, whose star power is needed for the film. Isabel's specular comes to life when Carlos appears at dinner with "Álex" (Patricia Montero), an actress who plays his fictitious dentist girlfriend. Álex has a flair for improvisation and is also a so-called "triple threat": she writes, directs, and acts in "micro teatro."



Figure 1. Isabel (Belén Rueda) is in control of the gaze as she eyes her ex-husband and current collaborator Carlos (Fele Martínez) from Susana's (María Pujalte) car. Film still by author.

Her portrayal, like Isabel's theater audition, points to the limited roles available to women in cinema, denaturalizes these performances, and reveals petty competition among actresses for scarce roles. Criticizing Álex for "overacting," Isabel's comments during their behind-the-scenes rehearsal draw attention to the unrealistic representation of younger women while Álex rightly complains that her character is a stereotype. She too (Figure 2) reorients the gaze by virtue of her selfie with Diego, whom she directs to pucker his lips and make faces.

Isabel's theater turns the tables on the exclusionary duo Ángel and Susana. Their dinner conversation repeatedly confines Isabel to the role of *ángel del hogar* by excluding her from show business shop talk and recognizing only her role as hostess. Nevertheless, Isabel's artifice succeeds on at least two accounts. She cuts Ángel, already 5'5" to Isabel's 5'8" plus heels, further down to size and debilitates Susana. Ángel, sullied by Carlos's vomit, reappears in Isabel's apron,

having destroyed the evidence of the “poison” by doing the dishes and having changed into pajama bottoms, which are too long for his shorter stature. Such domestic wardrobe and activity suggest that he has become the Ángel “del hogar.” It is Susana, notwithstanding, who feels compelled to cast an actress no older than thirty as lead because “se supone que tiene que ser atractiva” and becomes increasingly impaired, by virtue of inebriation, following Carlos’s sudden “death.” Susana additionally marginalizes Isabel by underscoring that her adopted daughter is not Spanish but “china.” Contributing further to discrimination, novelist-screenwriter Ángel racializes his ideal femme fatale as: “una mujer morena, racial, con algo oscuro en la mirada que la veas y crees que es capaz de matar.” The film also proposes a musical hierarchy between Isabel’s seductive, sophisticated tango and Álex’s ridiculed bachata. The obstacles Isabel faces are indicative though not exhaustive of the struggles women encounter in the Spanish entertainment industry and relate to other prejudices.



Figure 2. Álex (Patricia Montero) seizes the gaze as she takes a selfie with Diego Peretti (playing himself). Film still by author.

La noche que mi madre mató a mi padre reveals show business as a patriarchal display with gender and racial bias in order to advocate for the advancement of women artists. Isabel’s imaginative *écriture* allows her to constructively insert herself into her own text, into the neo-noir film, and into the cinema career that she desires. She updates, by writing the body into film production and identifying patriarchal attitudes regardless of gender, Cixous’s discussion in *The Laugh of the Medusa* of the exclusion of women writers from the publishing industry (877) and conflict between the sexes. By devis-

ing her own production, Isabel heeds Cixous's call: "Woman must write her self: must write about women and bring women to writing (. . .) Woman must put herself into the text—as into the world and into history" (319). Nonetheless, we can also read against the grain of the happy ending in which both Isabel and Álex are cast in Ángel's film. París and Colomo give us little indication whether the femme fatale of Ángel's filmed screenplay has undergone revision, begging the question whether Isabel's intimate revolt is neutralized by her casting in the film within the film. In the final sequence, Isabel, dressed in black, and Álex, draped in white, flank an angelic mortuary statue, presenting us with an angel outside the home and inviting a symbolic reading of the portrayals of these women, respectively, as sinner and saint. In classic noir, the femme fatale is either destroyed or absorbed into marriage (Stables 171). Similarly, Isabel's character shoots and kills herself during her partner's funeral as Peretti's detective approaches. Ángel's femme fatale is destroyed, although we see Isabel emerge from her role alive.

La noche points to the casting of this femme fatale in her fifties as a deviation from the script of Spanish show business although the role she earns is not nearly as complex as that which París, Colomo, and the fictional Isabel herself have written for her character. I find that *La noche*, a thesis noir comedy by the founder and former president of CIMA, makes its strongest case for women's inclusion and creative control in Isabel's theater *écriture*. *La noche* "hollows out" show business and does not aim at appeasing its audience, Kristeva's respective acknowledgements and warnings regarding spectacle and specular (74, 67), but rather at educating filmgoers that gender equality is an ongoing collaboration.

Mi querida cofradía, Marta Díaz de Lope Díaz's (1988–) ópera prima co-written with Zebina Guerra, utilizes carnival-grotesque narrative tools to explore the obstacles women leaders face in male-dominated arenas. *Mi querida cofradía* begins as sixty-year-old Doña Carmen Ruano, who has devoted herself to the service of her church, runs for *hermana mayor* to lead the brotherhood of her parish in Ronda during Holy Week. The priest with Carmen's opponent in the campaign, Don Ignacio de Herrera Becerra (Juan Gea), steal the election, installing the grossly unprepared latter as the new leader. When Ignacio visits Carmen's home to expel her from the brotherhood, she resolves to put laxatives in the villain's cognac. By accident, she administers

sleeping pills, which gives Carmen the time and space to demonstrate her value to the brotherhood once more. Ignacio's slumber facilitates Carmen's feminist awakening. In *Mi querida cofradía*, therefore, we witness the intimate revolt of Carmen, a conservative Andalusian woman who initially aspires to uphold then subsequently amends tradition from within the religious core of Spanish patriarchy.⁵ Mise-en-scène, cinematography, and narrative detail how the protagonist channels both the Virgin Mary and bullfighter in her take-charge role.

Utilizing the specular and spectacle of cinema, Díaz's comedy envisions a proposal for gender parity in leadership. *Mi querida cofradía* is a carnivalesque incursion during Holy Week rather than Carnival; such disruption occurring beyond the temporal parameters of Bakhtin's examination of the medieval popular tradition indicates a desire to push the envelope further and more definitively change the status quo. The processional march is a call to mobilize, to take to the streets, for women. The film exhibits both an uprising and an overturning, as expected of revolt (Kristeva 5), with social and comedic intent (Kristeva 79–80). There is a return to the legitimate results of the election but this same consensus in favor of Carmen's leadership is an overturning of centuries of tradition. Julia Kristeva's concepts of intimate revolt thereby illuminate my discussion of Díaz's feminist response to Almodóvar and commentary on the status of women in contemporary Spain. I argue that *Mi querida cofradía*, like *La noche*, invites us to imagine a more just world. Díaz's feature is thought-specular whereby Carmen is lektonic for the desire for gender equality in the public sphere that includes both politics and filmmaking.

Carmen, unlike the "chicas Almodóvar," does not cast off the strictures of patriarchy by murder but rather places her faith in an imperfect electoral process and in the confession of her sin. Although Marta Díaz recognizes Pedro Almodóvar and Luis García Berlanga as her filmic "big brothers" (García Puente and Hogan 3), I argue that Díaz's feminist comedy moves the needle of Iberian dark humor towards greater gender equality. Gloria Muñoz's casting as Almodóvar's Alicia in *La flor de mi secreto* (1995) then Díaz's Carmen invites comparison between the two films and directors. In Almodóvar's feature, protagonist Leo (Marisa Paredes), a romance novelist writing under the pseudonym of Amanda Gris, meets with her editor Alicia (Gloria Muñoz), who takes issue with Leo's *écriture*: "Cuando alguien compra un libro nuestro, quiere olvidarse de la sordidez en la que

vive, soñar con un mundo mejor, aunque sea mentira. (. . .) La realidad es para los periódicos y la televisión y mira el resultado: por culpa de tanta realidad el país está a punto de explotar.” Alicia finds Leo’s new work, which details the plot of *Volver*, too close to reality and thus not sufficiently escapist. My analysis of Díaz’s film examines the feature’s reality, scrutinizes its context and considers how, by dialoging with Kristeva’s notion of the specular, Carmen’s reality in fact does allow spectators to, using Alicia’s words, “soñar con un mundo mejor.”

Mi querida cofradía exhibits the productive and obstructive facets of the specular-spectacle coupling. Kristeva notes such contradictions, observing that specular images may appease but not liberate (67) while also recognizing the potential of spectacle: “Faced with the invasion of the spectacle, we can still contemplate the rebellious potentialities that the imaginary might resuscitate in our innermost depths. (. . .) [B]y keeping our intimacy in revolt we can preserve the possibility of their appearance” (13). A clear negative example of spectacle in *Mi querida cofradía* consists of a viral video that turns Carmen’s warranted indignation into a mortifying show. Carmen pauses, abashedly, the unflattering image of herself as “angry woman” that she views on her smart phone. But she also becomes complicit in patriarchal power. In the first act of her administration, she criticizes the wardrobe of the “mantillas,” as her sisters in the *cofradía* are called, for its defiance of conservative norms of modesty. She views them as spectacle, foregrounding and chastising their deviation. Carmen soon sees her error in enforcing patriarchal rules: “lo importante no es el largo de las faldas. Lo importante es que seguimos unas normas impuestas por hombres. Las que llevamos las faldas somos nosotras. (. . .) Estas normas van a cambiar ahora.” Carmen hereby alludes to the change of intimate revolt.

Marta Díaz’s specular film makes visible women’s contributions in the public sphere and makes a spectacle of patriarchy. Ignacio, during his ill-fated visit to Carmen’s home, arrogantly summarizes the characteristics of their context: “Lo que pasa aquí es que por mucha experiencia que tú tengas, por mucho que te esfuerces, por más talento, tiempo y ganas que dediques a esta hermandad, tú eres una mujer y yo soy un hombre.” Carmen recognizes her experience during Ignacio’s snooze: “es muy difícil querer ser algo que nunca has visto.” That is, she puts the visibility of spectacle to work for women

in the public sphere. In *Mi querida cofradía*, Carmen's thesis alludes to Díaz's own experience as a woman filmmaker and her appreciation of cinematic *hermanas mayores* (García Puente and Hogan 2–3). The director explains the broader allegorical nature of the *cofradía*: "la hermandad de Carmen en *Mi querida cofradía* podría representar muchas otras realidades: un ayuntamiento, el mundo del cine, en definitiva, cualquier institución regida por una jerarquía en la que se discrimine a la mujer" (García Puente and Hogan 9). Díaz thereby gives voice to the relevance of identification that Alicia mentioned in her critique of Leo.

Carmen's surroundings are dominated by the strictures of patriarchy, which appears in the film in a number of incarnations and forms an entangled trinity of symbolism. First, the Catholic Church, which has historically denied women access to leadership roles, is the primary reinforcer of male privilege in this story. The duo of parish priest Don Fermín (Juan Sánchez Rodríguez) and Don Ignacio, represent the patriarchs of the film who consolidate and take pains to maintain their grip on power. Fermín assures Ignacio that his election is effectively rigged with the phrase, "todo está bien atado," that echoes Franco's famous affirmation towards the end of his regime that he had left everything "atado y bien atado" (Encarnación 33). Second, Catholic iconography permeates the film whereby two Christ-like bodies and one Marian figure play their roles in Ronda's final week of Lent. Third, cinematography and mise-en-scène allude to *tauromaquia*, where Carmen represents the bullfighter and Ignacio the bull in a reversal of its more common gendering.

Mi querida cofradía is the feminist, humorous parable of the passion of Carmen. Both Ignacio and Carmen are surprisingly Christ-like but Ignacio is also likened to the cross she bears. We cannot ignore the fact that Ignacio's inert body comes back to life in time for Easter. While Carmen has her hands full at church during Holy Week, her neighbor Juana (Carmen Flores) and daughter Beatriz (Pepa Aniorte) follow Carmen's instructions to relocate Ignacio from Carmen's home to Juana's. This neighbor calls the task a "vía crucis" and a burden. She gripes: "Hay que ver lo que pesa que una mujer llegue al poder." It is certainly problematic that our villain is likened to Jesus Christ. However, I argue that although Ignacio is neither killed nor sacrificed, his bid for *hermano mayor* is interred in Carmen's final victory at the, aptly named, Santo Entierro church. The recognition of Carmen as legitimate *hermana mayor* nullifies Ignacio's power play.⁶ In a sense,

Carmen is also a new messiah; the film's poster proclaims: "Ella va a hacer que cambien las cosas." This change ties in again to Kristeva's etymology of revolt.

Form and narrative associate Carmen with the María Auxiliadora. She is literally and symbolically elevated to power upon the Virgin Mary's processional platform. Carmen is framed by the saint's aureole and effectively stands in her place as her earthly intermediary. In Carmen's one-on-one with the Virgin Mary, she identifies with her and recognizes their value: "ay María Auxiliadora, si no fuera por mujeres como tú y como yo, yo no sé qué sería de todo esto." Carmen carries the burden of Ignacio's brand of patriarchy and of ensuring that Holy Week festivities are executed without a hitch. Her place directing the Holy Week procession, elected in Ignacio's stead, represents a feminist act that, unlike the Guild of the Sacred Rebellious Pussy's performance, honors the cult of the Virgen. The film's poster, featuring Carmen dressed as *hermana mayor* with mantilla, and feminist Guild alike recall Marian iconography. Nevertheless, another María, Carmen's granddaughter played by Rocío García Molina, carries Carmen's and Ignacio's great grandchild, presenting an alternative to the immaculate icon and positing a future source of friction or cause for reconciliation within the family.

Carmen is also a fighter. In a swift and determined gait, she often passes Ronda's Plaza on her way to the Santo Entierro church, her bull-fighting arena. To the soundtrack's beat of the "Virgen del Valle" march, close-ups show Carmen readying for battle, donning her Holy Week version of the *traje de luces* to fight her bull. Such shot sizes of the dressing of a sixty-year-old woman in slowed motion alert us to Díaz's difference. The director supersedes the androcentrism of bull-fighting through gynocentric cinematography and casting. Although ecofeminist scholar Alicia H. Puleo has likened the sacrificial conditions of bulls and women in this tradition (6776), Díaz recasts Ignacio as bull and Carmen as bullfighter. In another approach, the overview of Katarzyna Olga Beilin, who analyzes the blood sport from a biopolitical framework, notes the cult of suffering of the bullfighter (50) and indicates how Catholic culture is primed for this spectacle of death and sacrifice (21). The *tauromaquia*'s beast, who is slaughtered rather than resuscitated during the *corrida*, remits to this animal's multiple meanings including predatory masculinity, Carmen's triumph over patriarchal tradition, and bare life. In this last sense, the character-

ization of Ignacio flirts with his portrayal as animal instead of the animalistic representation of the bullfighter, the latter of which Beilin explores as bare flesh (57). Carmen's role as *hermana mayor* is intertwined with sovereignty, whereby she determines whether Ignacio lives, dies, defecates or sleeps, neither killing nor sacrificing him, on a symbolic level. His sidelining is temporary, lasting the duration of the sleeping pills. Ignacio's *homo sacer* relates to biopolitical exclusion but takes the more theological form of life as sacred.

I have asserted that *Mi querida cofradía* allows us to *soñar* or *imaginar un mundo mejor* by celebrating the recognition of Carmen's decade of church service through her election as *hermana mayor*. The protagonist's determination triumphs over a strong patriarchal undertow. Although Carmen's victory is a rather conservative one that does not topple church authority and is related to her skillful service, she has both undergone a feminist awakening and accomplished her leadership goal. The soundtrack's final processional "Macarena" is a directive mobilizing future strides, resignifying the Holy Week rhythm for the women's march. Nevertheless, the film's concluding image, a cut to black, occurs as our *hermana mayor* is about to take her first steps in this role onto the streets of Ronda, where she is likely to encounter additional obstacles.

La noche que mi madre mató a mi padre and *Mi querida cofradía* move women's representation on screen forward, beyond that of exterminating angels of the home. Their protagonists achieve their goals without resorting to manslaughter but their flirtation with violence and the limitations of their triumphs nevertheless indicate entrenched opposition. Inés París's film identifies a number of obstacles that women face in the audiovisual sector, whether in Spain or in Hollywood.⁷ Her deployment of the specular envisions the fantasy of gender equality in its absence; while no audition is necessary of movie star Diego Peretti, veteran theater actress Isabel goes to great lengths to prove her talent to Ángel and Susana, who represent the patriarchal mentality of Spanish show business. Isabel's theater actor ex-husband conspires in her professional fulfillment while her film business husband does not, but neither dies. The film's lesson is one of collaboration rather than killing. Similarly, Marta Díaz's thought-specular feature presents us with a fantasy of gender equality achieved at great pains to Carmen (and Ignacio). Carmen puts Ignacio on snooze in order to reinstate herself as *hermana mayor*. Her

director places more faith in the democratic process and in the faithful rather than in the Institution of the Church. Carmen's intimate revolt in *Mi querida cofradía* relates to her steadfast confidence in her abilities, contributions, and value, producing an overturning of centuries of gender discrimination if only on a micro scale. Such specular narratives make projections for gender equality beyond the screening room into the broader public sphere, yet their reach and results remain to be seen.

Notes

- 1 Inés París, co-founder and former president of CIMA, began her near thirty-year career by screenwriting for television and cowrote films as a team with Daniela Féjerman. She has since created and co-created two feature-length fiction films. París has also made documentaries related to her work with the Fundación Mujeres por África and to women in male-dominated professions in Spain. Her films, which often explore mothers and queer and reconstituted families through a comedic lens, have won festival awards and earned Goya nominations. Marta Díaz de Lope Díaz is from Ronda (Málaga, Andalucía) and an instructor at her alma mater, the ESCAC. She forms part of a cohort of up and coming women directors from the ESCAC and Pompeu Fabra that has been dubbed "Generación Ágata" after one of their collective films (Engel). Díaz's previous short form works—*Menopáusicas* (2011), *La gran noche* (2011), *Y otro año, perdices* (2013), *Los pestiños de mamá* (2016)—reveal the characters, spaces, and other characteristics of her gynocentric cinema, which include: female-led casts, the centrality of the matriarch, sisterhood and sibling rivalry, the domestic space and gastronomic traditions, the experiences of women, and celebration of popular culture. Díaz de Lope Díaz's debut feature film draws upon these identifying characteristics.
- 2 I consider the grotesque comedy another "body genre," identified by Linda Williams in melodrama, horror, and pornography given the physical responses (tears, shudders, arousal, respectively) they elicit in their spectators. Williams does not discuss comedic genres besides "physical clown comedy," which she dismisses for its failure to produce mimicry in spectators (4).
- 3 Regarding Spanish feminist cinematic techniques, scholars highlight strategies such as the reorganization of the traditional family, role reversals, feminist laughter, and the exploration of alternatives made possible in a magical world (Jordan and Morgan-Tamosunas 125; Zecchi, "La comedia" and "Inés París"). See Zecchi's "La comedia" for a general overview of feminist and other theories of humor (Bakhtin, Cixous, Freud, Frye, Irigaray, Rich, et al.) pertinent to Spanish cinema, which I list in the previous sentence.
- 4 In 1998, Jordan and Morgan-Tamosunas celebrated the decade's bumper crop of debuting women filmmakers in Spain while still recognizing the funding limitations for women (122). Unfortunately, sustained growth has not occurred and even this boom escaped the attention of many. In fact, Marta Díaz, a young film spectator in the 1990s, was unfamiliar with women filmmakers besides Isabel Coixet (García Puente and Hogan 9). CIMA's studies of 2016 show that women, who form 40 percent of the industry, are found mostly in wardrobe, hair, and makeup, and that only 26 percent of leadership roles in film and television are held by women ("Las mujeres").

More recently CIMA reported that only 20 percent of Spanish films were directed by women in 2018 (“Solo”). The 2019 Goya awards further proved CIMA’s case whereby less than a fourth of nominees in any category were women (Carmona).

- 5 While this debut film’s box office numbers have been modest, amounting to nearly 400,000 Euros (Ministerio de cultura), reception of the feature has been overwhelmingly positive and has registered the film’s feminism (Rivera; Zurro). Its resonance with spectators is evidenced in audience awards from the Málaga and Barcelona Film Festivals. One exception is a critical *Diario de Jerez* review by Marco A. Velo, in whose view the script is unoriginal, lacks humor, displays “feminismo demasiado forzado,” and misrepresents church efforts for inclusion. However, we should recall both that the first *hermana mayor* was only elected in 2012 and that the diocese of Ronda, remarkably, gave its blessing to the filming in its Santo Entierro church with one minor change (García Puente and Hogan 7).
- 6 It may not be a coincidence that the brotherhood by this name (Santo Entierro) in Sevilla was one of the three last remaining associations that still prohibited the participation of women in 2011 (“Cualquier mujer”).
- 7 In fact, the film seems to have resonated with Colombian American actress Sofía Vergara’s experience, who has bought the rights to remake it (Zecchi, “Inés París presenta”).

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