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ANEXO III. MODELO CARÁTULA

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RESUMEN Tradicionalmente, la película The Barefoot Contessa (1954) se ha analizado como un clásico *show-business* drama, el cual se caracteriza por la subversión pues su objetivo es denunciar la ambición económica de la industria cinematográfica hollywoodense. No obstante, en esta ponencia se defiende que en términos de género sexuado y sexualidad de la mujer The Barefoot Contessa no es subversiva en absoluto. Para ello, se estudiará la huella de un referente literario a lo largo de toda la película: la novela de Prosper Mérimée, Carmen (1847). A pesar de los paralelismos argumentativos y narrativos, el discurso empleado en la película para retratar a las mujeres es mucho más retrógrado que el tono misógino empleado por Mérimée. Paradójicamente, la novela se publicó un siglo antes que el estreno de la película, lo cual indica el retroceso en la representación de la mujer en las artes como reflejo de la postura social dominante.

Palabras clave: género sexuado, sexualidad, patriarcal, show-business drama, sátira, Hollywood clásico, Carmen.

ABSTRACT The film The Barefoot Contessa has traditionally been categorized as a show-business drama. The main feature of this film subgenre is its subversion in the sense that it aims to condemn the economic ambition of film industry. In these films, Hollywood is not the dream factory but a manipulative organization. However, in this paper I defend that in terms of gender and female sexuality The Barefoot Contessa is not subversive at all. In order to identify and analyze the expectations concerning gender and sexuality produced by this subgenre, in The Barefoot Contessa there is a literary referent that adds a new dimension to the film discourse: the novella written by Prosper Mérimée in 1847, Carmen. Despite the parallelisms, I intend to prove that the discourse employed in the film to portray women is much more repressive and outdated than the misogynistic one presented in Carmen even though the film was released in 1954, one century after the novella was published. In other words, the ideology predominant in this film is in fact more reactionary than the one designed by Mérimée as a reflecion of social pressures on art.

Keywords: gender, sexuality, patriarchal, show-business drama, satire, classical Hollywood, Carmen.

The film The Barefoot Contessa (1954), directed by Joseph L. Mankiewicz, has traditionally been analyzed as a drama whose subgenre is show business. The main feature of this film subgenre is its subversion in the sense that it aims to condemn the economic ambition of film industry. In these films, Hollywood is not the dream factory but a manipulative organization. However, in this paper I defend that in terms of gender and female sexuality The Barefoot Contessa is not subversive at all.

The subgenre of show-business drama portrays the other side of the silver screen, that is, the behind-the-scenes world of film industry. It usually adopts a critical tone on celebrities and executives. In particular, The Barefoot Contessa is certainly transgressive in the sense that it demystifies the rise of a star and the tone selected is cynical, but the representation of the female protagonist as well as her sexuality are as conservative as in any other mainstream Hollywood studio film. My theoretical approach will be based on Feminist Film Criticism so as to specify the phallocentric ideology implicit in this film.

In order to identify and study the expectations produced by this subgenre in terms of gender and sexuality, this paper uncovers a literary referent that adds a new dimension to the film discourse: the novella written by Prosper Mérimée in 1847, Carmen. There are numerous similarities in the plot and structure: the tragic story of a Spanish gipsy who dances flamenco, drives men crazy, and is finally murdered out of jealousy narrated from the perspective of several men. Surprisingly, the novella written in the nineteenth century turns out to be more advanced than The Barefoot Contessa despite its misogyny because Woman is triumphant. Carmen becomes an active agent in a society where women are destined to be passive. She is aware of the sexual dimension she is reduced to and uses this knowledge against men.

María Vargas, the protagonist of the film, can be understood as an intermediate figure between the passivity of fairy-tale heroines and the savageness of Carmen, in other words, she could play the part of a tamed Carmen. María has a profound effect on men, but does not take advantage of it. On the contrary, María longs for a man because she is afraid "of being exposed and unprotected" (Mankiewicz n.p.), in other words, María somehow wants to please society by finding a partner that will enable her to retire. This is a key factor that differentiates María from Carmen because the former does feel different and detached from society just like Carmen, but at the same time María suffers due to this rebellious condition. In the end, she is willing to please patriarchal conventions once she meets a count, in other words, prince charming for her. Needless to say, the defying attitude of Carmen is recurrent throughout the novella, whereas in the case of the film María yearns for an authentic man to make her complete. As we can see, María follows the role of the melodramatic heroine imposed by classical Hollywood narrative after all, not the one expected from a daring masquerade inside star system.

The challenge to social conventions is a leitmotiv both in Carmen and The Barefoot Contessa, and in both cases Carmen and María are punished for their insurrections, an attitude that is described as bohemian by literary critics such as Evyln Gould (1). In fact, none of them has a stable homeland. Carmen is a thief and a prostitute, and she is time and again associated with the devil. As a result, at the end of the novella Carmen is stabbed by Don José because she does not let him dominate her and he—as the representative of authority─cannot accept that. In the case of the film, the screenplay is definitely ambiguous since the count always remains a gentleman with no psychological problems. In short, Count Vincenzo is even more innocent than Don José because María´s problems seem to be relegated to the sexual dimension, which is not socially

approved. The tragedy of María Vargas is never due to patriarchal pressures but to her own nature. Other characters such as the producer and his assistant are certainly caricatured as in most show-business dramas. However, María´s dignity and social independence imply that she is out of reach for them. Therefore, according to the discourse of the film they are incapable of doing any harm. The same applies to the playboy Alberto Bravano.

María is punished for defying authority because she despises society. As in the case of Carmen, her concept of love is not understood by the male chauvinistic society where she lives. María was about to become a mother—as her name suggests, the role every woman must aspire to in the Christian World as a reflection of the Virgin Mary−, but perhaps she was not worthy of it according to phallocentric civilization just because she is a rebel. The jet-setter Alberto Bravano tells her: "You are not a woman" (Mankiewicz n.p.). In other words, she does not fit in morality codes. Furthermore, she is a bohemian rebel just like Carmen. At the cemetery there is a splendorous statue of María standing alone and surrounded by other mausoleums with statues of couples. This scenography could be a way to underline María´s independent personality beyond death, but it is also a way to look at her eternally as the splendorous object of the male gaze. Consequently, in the case of María death does not provide peace as in the case of Carmen. On the contrary, it shows everlasting scopophilia. As a sculpture, María will not bother the established social system either in fiction or reality. Once she passes away, all the characters can go back to their daily lives and the spectators can return home since order has been reestablished.

María does not fit in society while Carmen is not a pure gipsy. Carmen and The Barefoot Contessa are stories about people on the frontier, women with alternative points of view who dared defy patriarchy and died for not being absorbed by the

system. Nonetheless, Carmen has a defined personality whereas María is a victim of her inner conflicts. In this case, the moral pressures of Hollywood in the 1950s are so restrictive in terms of gender that they abolish any attempt to create a complete satire on film industry.

Both texts are inside masculine universes full of phallic symbols. These female protagonists are essentially characterized as sexual objects full of fetishistic details. The recreation of Carmen´s physical description could be a symptom of scopophilia. This description coincides with that of Ava Gardner the first time we see her in the nightclub. Nonetheless, while Carmen uses her sexuality, María regrets her magnetism. This could be interpreted as submission to social conventions because she assumes that female sexuality must be invisible. No wonder, she hides her lovers. María is one of the few characters taken seriously by Mankiewicz´s screenplay together with the director and script girl. Unfortunately, the respectable tone adopted for her affected her free will.

Carmen is presented from the point of view of two male, misogynistic narrators: the fascinated traveler and Don José. Both of them establish a kind of homoerotic relationship that goes further than mercy. An example of this is the fact that Don José is described by the traveler as the typical Petrarchan beloved (Mérimée 111). Somehow, Don José´s violent and aggressive actions tend to be justified by Carmen´s cruelty. He keeps reminding the audience that she had to be his and no one else´s. As regards Carmen, we will never read her own words but the traveler´s and Don José´s interpretations of them. That explains why Carmen can look sensual and despotic on the very same page. In this novella, Mérimée creates a profound sense of male comradeship in which women are the object of the male gaze. Men stare at women as a hobby and create fantasies that the latter are supposed to fulfill, while the former follow a kind of

macho code based on violence. Even so, at least Mérimée is honest when he presents the relationship between men and women as the battle of the sexes.

María looks sophisticated and distant in high-society parties but that does not stop society from sexualizing her. The feminist critic E. Ann Kaplan follows Laura Mulvey when she states that the male gaze defines woman as a body full of sexual possibilities (1-2). This reduction has social, political, and economic consequences as there is no significant room for women in these areas. The only dimension which they inhabit is that of object of male desire. According to Kaplan, "Assigned the place of object (lack), she [woman] is the recipient of male desire, passively appearing rather than acting" (26). Woman is a fictional construct by male ideology, not a reality. For instance, we first see María´s hands and later her feet, which introduces her not as a complex human being but as pieces of a fetishized body. In other words, a text decomposed. The tagline of the film is illustrating: "The world´s most beautiful animal." But this animal lacks the strength to follow her own views on existence in contrast to Carmen´s marginal lifestyle. In short, The Barefoot Contessa follows the representation of Woman as spectacle. Teresa de Lauretis, expert in Feminism and Queer Theory, states: "body to be looked at, place of sexuality, and object of desire" (4). In spite of Mankiewicz´s efforts to show the circus around María, this is not enough. The strength of this show-business drama has to do with pushing barriers, but this approach should include gender.

As in Carmen, The Barefoot Contessa is narrated from the point of view of several men whose lives were affected by María´s presence. In other words, the audience will never receive her own interpretations and reasonings. Her attitudes seem to be contradictory since they are not explained. She looks desirable but at the same time untouchable. As a sample of this desire, there is a key scene in which several men from different countries are discussing María´s future after a screen test, and all their

conversation revolves around power. María is not present, even her friend Harry attempts to control her acting as a mentor. In connection with this, Kaplan uses Laura Mulvey´s theory of the three male gazes in cinema to explain the reasons for scopophilia: the gaze of the camera while it shoots—most of the time, there is a cameraman, not a camerawoman─, the male protagonists, who objectify women, and the male spectator (30). Consequently, María as an entity is reduced to one dimension. Another key scene is the one in which Alberto Bravano and Kirk Edwards have an argument and María is the prize in the competition. As Oscar remarks: "When he watched María, he watched Bravano watch María" (Mankiewicz n.p.). She becomes an exchange commodity for rich men in search of social prestige. In this film the sexual exploitation of the image of woman is more brutal than in the case of Mérimée because it is disguised as protection by gentlemen. In other words, women are treated as weaker human beings whose function is that of luxurious objects of decoration. The plot of the film does specify the sexual connotations that María and other female characters suffer once and again, but it does not offer any response or alternative. Therefore, the discourse of gender in the film is rather conservative.

The Barefoot Contessa examines idealized male screen heroes such as Errol Flynn by introducing the figure of Count Vincenzo, whose masculinity is questioned due to his impotence. In the case of the figure of the hero, the discourse of the film is ambiguous. On the one hand, the count dos not make María complete. On the other hand, he looks dignified and honest. Both Don José (a previous soldier) and Vincenzo are related to Mars, but in their cases this bond does not reflect mastery and courage, but chaos and victimization. Both male characters are aristocrats, but in the case of Don José he leaves everything behind in order to be with Carmen, whereas in the case of the film María is the one that abandons her cinematographic career so that she can move to Count

Vincenzo´s secluded castle. After all, she assumes her duties as a man´s property once she becomes his wife.

Fatalism impregnates everything in the novella and the film from the start and the tone never changes, in this sense both texts could be categorized as tragedies. This is the characteristic tone of show-business dramas in classical Hollywood. As regards the novella, the death of Carmen appears as a consequence of destiny, not of Don José´s abusive behavior. She knows from the start that according to her selected destiny she will be murdered by him, that is why she is not scared of Don José nor tries to run away when he takes her to a desolate place. The narrative of the film is composed of several flashbacks that once and again end up in the scene of María´s burial. These recurrent flashbacks never let the audience forget the fact that she is dead. Nonetheless, we never perceive that she has any intention whatsoever to die—as in the case of Carmen. This increases the tragic tone. There are no rational explanations, just an accumulation of tragic motives. Vincenzo even looks civilized when he calls the police in opposition to Don José´s desperation when he is about to kill Carmen. Count Vincenzo´s rational behavior is that of a man of honor whose dignity has not been respected by María as his property, not that of a man dominated by his passions. Somehow, the ideology implicit in the film justifies Count Vincenzo´s homicide despite the fact that María was expecting a baby. In the novella, Don José is seen as the victim of Carmen´s sexual games because she is a superior entity. Definitely, she is the one that pulls the strings despite social marginalization or even prohibition.

As a conclusion, the novella by Prosper Mérimée is profoundly misogynistic, but the strength of the female protagonist surpasses every possible condemnation. Her most remarkable quality is her invincibility in a social system where women must not be visible. Despite the narrators´ comments, the reader is able to deconstruct their gazes

and reconstruct Carmen´s brave personality in nineteenth-century Spain. Unfortunately, the interpretation of this myth in the case of the film is a step back in the representation of women. The discourse presented is misleading as it indignifies the relevance of María´s psychological complexity despite its compassionate description of her. In the end, María´s existential philosophy provides mental torture, not freedom, that is the lesson that women have to learn. Obviously, the discourse adopted is not coherent in terms of gender. It maintains a brave viewpoint when it deals with labour and personal exploitation and producers´ incompetence for art, but it remains conservative when dealing with the reflection of María´s gender. After all, she remains unknowable.

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