
Miscellaneous

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Submitted

December 22th, 2017

Approved

June 5th, 2018

© 2019

Communication & Society

ISSN 0214-0039

E ISSN 2386-7876

doi: 10.15581/003.32.1.293-311

www.communication-society.com

2019 – Vol. 32(1)

pp. 293-311

How to cite this article:

Antón Sánchez, L. (2019). Re-building the Idea of Being a Woman. The Audiovisual Legacy of Lila Crane. *Communication & Society*, 32(1), 293-311.

Re-building the Idea of *Being a Woman*. The Audiovisual Legacy of Lila Crane

Abstract

This article gives a historical perspective on the route traced by women investigators in Hollywood audiovisual narrative. The starting point and main focus of the thrilling detective story at the heart of the enigma regarding *being a woman* is the character of Lila Crane (Hitchcock's *Psycho*, 1960). The split structure of this horror film masterpiece, defined by literary reviews as a classic example of a tale of modernity, offers a subversive view of women's issues in audiovisual discourse. To assess *the audiovisual legacy of Lila*, we selected a series of audiovisual texts which draw attention to a cultural dialogue with this modern character. A two-fold trend can be seen in these references: the confrontation between a progressive audiovisual narrative and a retro-narrative aimed at restraining the progress of this rule-breaking archetype.

Keywords

Woman investigator, feminism, audiovisual culture, identity, retro-narrative, neo-noir.

1. Introduction

Our main objective was to analyze the careers of women investigators in contemporary Hollywood cinema. The study is intended as a follow-up to previously-published works on women's fiction (Antón, 2014; 2016). Our initial hypothesis was that a rule-breaking archetype who questions institutional gender identity is revealed in a context of social-economic crisis. In other words, we see this turbulent period as the perfect time to revise and/or transform audiovisual symbols and, therefore, to re-write cultural identities.

A similar idea, from the perspective of a sociological study that disregards the analysis of audiovisual discourse, was defended by Philippa Gates in *Detecting Women. Gender and the Hollywood Detective Film* (2011). In addition to pointing out the standard cultural references of the genre –literary narrative, Gothic fiction and the film *noir* model, the study displaces the center of interest of the reviews, fascinated by the study of film *noir* and the *femme fatale*, to reveal the presence of this archetype in B-movie productions during the Great Depression, as a reporter or a lawyer, and in the *blaxploitation* of the 70s: an eccentric situation in the Hollywood film industry that underlined the social impact and rebellious nature of this feminine image in the male-dominated audiovisual discourse (Gates, 2011, pp. 21-22). Within contemporary cinema, this reflexive and revisionist character forms part of the storylines of post-modern films, particularly in the feminine neo-*noir* genre which followed the success of Demme's *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991). This challenging image thus becomes a classic example of how the structures of Hollywood audiovisual discourse changed and even reflects on their state as real proposals.

In these works (Antón, 2014; 2016), we also find a series of relevant symbolic figures and relations in the study of audiovisual discourse that favor the magical, healthy capacity of being able to put ourselves in someone else's shoes, strengthened by the storyline structures, from a female perspective. This perspective is supported by cultural studies on gender¹, in relation to the feminine image constructed and, by extension, by the design of presentation strategies for the (female) audience. In this specific universe, women abandon their normal characterization as objects of male fantasy to become the symbolic subjects of the action. It develops research areas on certain characteristic forms: the passionate, curious and even disquieting expression of the heroine, by means of close-ups and reverse-angle shots; the visual motif of the woman driver; the masquerade of femininity; the difficulty of being heard in a male setting and her relationship with a character who acts as a mentor in forging her image as the heroine.

The action is triggered by an identity crisis relating to the issue of *being a woman*, thus the object of the research is the feminine enigma. This trajectory of desire then acquires a reflexive, meta-fictional note, in which the heroine re-encounters the traditional roles associated with the *woman* concept: woman as the object of male desire, as a prostitute², mother and, undeniably, as a victim. In addition, she also has to confront a monster. This emotional encounter results not only from the drama of the plot, but also from the identity relationship shared throughout the history of culture: the idea of otherness in relation to the male subject of the action.

This reflexive discourse, common to modern and post-modern times, of what *being a woman* means, is the result of a critical and non-conformist attitude that connects with the social reality of the spectators and has contributed to highlighting the hegemony of male stars throughout the history of audiovisual discourse. In a social-historical context and an audiovisual universe that is still reluctant to change³, the heroic search by women detectives can be interpreted as a metaphor of female empowerment. To achieve this, they must overcome resistance that, in a world of men without a woman's perspective, systematically leads to incomprehension and even insanity. Despite this process of victimization and masochism that is reminiscent of the Gothic heroine, its progressive value also lies in this concept. Indeed, the trajectory transmits the idea that the established cultural order is not supernatural or essentialist, but rather is a construct, and, therefore, difficult as it may seem, can be complemented by other ways of understanding the world. The study of this archetype enables us to understand one of the main proposals used in mainstream culture to update its discourse, in other words, to transform the meaning of its forms so as to include other points of view: "Now, on this secondary level of significance it is culture that provides the new meanings, that drains original signs of their denotation and lifts them into a connotation that is culture-specific, fitting a certain *ideology*, a certain set of values, beliefs, ways of seeing" (Kaplan, 1983, p. 17).

¹ Recent studies confirm that reading increases empathy towards others. According to the expert in emotional intelligence, Pablo Fernández-Berrocal: "Reading fiction enables us to live thousands of lives in one. It helps us to understand how other people feel, to get to know them better and predict their behavior. It is an ability that is essential to successfully relate to others in our personal and professional lives. A love for reading books helps us to understand others and this improved emotional understanding can be very useful for people to love others more intelligently" (Cf. Suleng, 2017).

² Tasker stated that: "The repeated recourse to a narrative device in which a female police officer finds herself undercover as a prostitute functions both to comment on and reaffirm the extent to which women's work involves sexual display and/or sexual performance" (2003, p. 93).

³ In spite of the progress achieved, audiovisual discourse is still dominated by a representation of women who, far from holding the reins of the symbolic action of the story, are seen in conservative gender roles and as imaginary objects. In the latest Christmas lottery spot (Amenábar, 2017), feminism is associated with a classic male fantasy: from a young man's perspective, the woman is displayed as a strange being, an Other, an alien who takes on the appearance of a human doll and hardly speaks, thus updating the male myth of Pygmalion.

This means that, beyond the critical debate on the efficiency of combining a traditional male archetype with aspects of female imagination, its capacity to connect with the social reality at a particular moment in history in an imaginary way, thanks to the psychological process of identification activated by the narrative, makes it one of the most fascinating images of women in contemporary cinema.

1.1. *The audiovisual universe bequeathed by Lila Crane*

The starting point of the story we intend to construct on the history of this archetype is the pioneering and difficult route of femininity. In *La perspectiva Crane. La crisis de identidad femenina en Psicosis* (Antón, 2016), we proposed an analysis from a female perspective, against the flow, and characterized the masterpiece of the king of suspense as a landmark in the development of the female investigator. The modern character of Lila, the other Crane sister, who appears in the second part of the story, is defined by her ability to take a leading role in the investigation of the disappearance of her sister, Marion, and become the heroine, despite the resistance of the male characters, a fact that permits the diegetic world of the film to move from fantasy to reality.

Critical literature has systematically ignored the fact that the modernity of this audiovisual proposal, set in a structure that is disrupted by the murder of the lead character, is related to the trajectory of a female identity crisis (Figure 1). Using the splitting technique, the storyline reflects on the cultural meaning of *being a woman*. The defiant itinerary of the Crane sisters, Marion and Lila, portrays the transition from the idea of femininity of a female victim (Marion) to that of an investigator (Lila). In the second part of the film, after overcoming male resistance (from the detective Arbogast, the sheriff and, in short, from *man* as the subject of the action), Lila manages to take over the investigation into the disappearance of her sister (Figure 2).



The exciting lead-up to the Gothic house in the final climax sequence coincides with the tense timing that is gradually built up. In addition, the structure of the suspense, alternating the converging action between the woman and the men, Sam and Norman, even further heightens the dramatic interest of this part, in which the woman is the main character; this is a meaningful proposal that is reminiscent of some of the most significant figures of film *noir* and Gothic romance. Her gaze into the distance, the successive subjective perspectives and extra-diegetic music re-open the *mise en scène* of a female desire repressed by Marion's murder. In the agonizing search of the Gothic house, a domestic location culturally associated with women that reminds us of the adventures of *the paranoid woman* (Doane, 1987), Lila enters a woman's realm associated with dark love, portrayed by Cupid shooting arrows at the inquisitive woman as she opens the main door to the house and walks up the stairs to the mother and son's room (Figure 3). She later goes unknowingly down to the basement, the underground, where she confronts the emptiness of the cultural meaning of *being a woman*, achieved by terrifying straight and reverse shots, on which the fantasy of the story is constructed. Mrs. Bates' empty eye-sockets point to the imaginary definition of the character and the archetype it represents: the monstrous mother.



In addition to announcing the leading role of the *Final Girl* in the *Slasher Film* (Clover, 1992), Lila's identity journey through the Gothic house would become a valuable precedent in the audiovisual narrative of the female investigator. This reference is markedly highlighted in some of the best-remembered examples of the neo-*noir* style of contemporary cinema (1980-). For this reason, the selection criterion for our study sample was based on locating the imprints of this modern character, in order to discover a meaningful representation of what could be called *the universal audiovisual legacy of Lila Crane*. This universe is made up of Hitchcock's *The Birds* (1963), Wise's *The Haunting* (1963) and its remake, Vont's *The Haunting* (1999), the sequel, Franklin's *Psycho II, The Return of Norman* (1983), and of certain examples of female neo-*noir* cinema, such as Demme's *The Silence of the Lambs* (1992), Coen's *Fargo* (J. Coen, 1996), the first season of the *Fargo* television series (Noah Hawley, 2014-) and Lynch's *Mulholland Drive* (2001).

In these case studies, besides an investigation storyline intended to solve the feminine enigma, there is a reflection on the representative nature of the story. Using this meta-fictional feature, these cultural products identify the source of their proposed meaning: at important times in the story, they make a more or less explicit inter-textual reference to the heroine of *Psycho* and the dismantling of the classic narrative structure. Far from being anecdotes, the references offer interesting cultural dialogues on the construction of female identity, which challenges the alleged indifference of post-modern discourse towards past forms of language.

The idea we propose in order to understand how female investigators have been portrayed in contemporary cinema is that this silence in literary reviews of Lila's heroic discovery has gained ideological support through different forms of audiovisual discourse. In other words, the account of a female investigator offered in these stories expresses an ideological and cultural conflict regarding the definition of *woman*: as opposed to a progressive narrative, there is a retro trend that attempts to eliminate the accomplishments of this defiant archetype.

1.2. A retro-narrative of the female investigator

This concept is inspired by the retro-*noir* style established by Jans B. Wager in *Dames in the Driver's Seat: Rereading Film Noir* (2005). Wager studies the conventions of the film-*noir* style in contemporary Hollywood and perceives a division into two different trends: a neo-*noir* one in which some of its forms of discourse –the archetypes of the *femme fatale* and *homme fatale*, or the cultural issue of race– advance in relation to the changes in the social historical context. Representative examples of this trend are Coen's *Fargo* (1996) and Tarantino's *Jackie Brown* (1997). The other trend is the so-called retro-*noir* in which, despite the social changes that have occurred, there are no significant differences from classic *noir*. Hanson's *L.A. Confidential* (1997) and Fincher's *The Fight Club* (1999) represent this retro-*noir* style⁴.

In this retro-narrative to which we now refer, the original subversive value of the female investigator is frustrated by a fatal destiny, with which the story appears to “put an end” to the insolent scenario of female action, as occurred to the *femme fatale* in film *noir*. It therefore questions one of the most important conventions: women no longer confront the *femme fatale* or female victim, their main antagonists, and even identify with these archetypes, thus betraying the progressive value of their narrative.

A study of this counter-narrative enables us to identify a cultural conflict between two forms of narrative and ways of understanding the world. The cultural battle waged in the field of fiction on the significance of *woman* is not at all new, as it has occurred at other moments in the history of cinema and, in general, of art.

In *Women and Film. Both Sides of the Camera* (1983), Ann Kaplan presents an idea of Molly Haskell that explains the large number of rape scenes that appear in movies in the 70s as a reaction by patriarchal power to women's sexual liberation and progressive women's movements (p. 7). García Cortés, in his cultural study on the figure of monsters in art (1992), also referred to the relationship between the social and cultural achievements of women and the appearance of discourse attempting to silence feminine subjectivity, thus highlighting the uneasiness of patriarchal dominance. That is to say, he connects the social and historical reality of women to male imaginary: “Thus, we can see how some of the most incisive moments that refer to the disqualification of women coincide with those periods in which women themselves were struggling to achieve greater prominence socially and culturally [...]” (p. 92). This means that the visibility of feminism throughout history coincides with men's fear expressed in cultural discourse. It was at the end of the 19th century, with the advent of the suffragist movement, “that the image of the *femme sans merci* of the Symbolists” was toughened; in the 1920s and 30s: “Surrealism ignores woman (as it did with homosexuals) or turns her into the all-consuming monster of Dalí and Bataille”; and in the sexual revolution of the 60s “when painters such as De Kooning, Saura and others tore, mutilated and negated her body” (*ibid.*).

⁴ In “Women in Film *Noir*” (2013), Tasker also identifies these two trends of the neo-*noir* style.

2. The cultural conflict of the female investigator narrative

2.1. *The rhetorical figure of parody*

The number and variety of modern and post-modern trends in which *Psycho* has been involved show it to be one of the most important cultural products of the 20th century. If we follow the legacy of Lila in this maelstrom of references, firstly we have to consider another of the master of suspense's works, Hitchcock's *The Birds* (1963), and, particularly, its climax sequence that re-opens the disturbing drama of the female investigator, the star of the film, Melanie Daniels. We also chose *The Haunting* (1963) and its remake, *The Haunting* (1999), due to their inter-textual references to the car journey by Eleanor Lance to the Gothic house in the trajectory of the Crane sisters. In the 80s, the inevitable sequel appeared, *Psycho II. The Return of Norman* (1983), in which the character of Lila re-appears, although the film is not as popular as the original because it betrays its modernity, and is followed by a post-modern remake: Van Sant's *Psycho* (1998), in which we encounter a more violent Lila.

In addition to the relationship pointed out by Clover (1992) with *The Final Girl* in the *Slasher Film*, Lila's role is fully developed largely in a *neonoir* style. The reference occurs through use of the post-modern figure of parody, in the sense used by Linda Hutcheon in *The Politics of Postmodern Parody* (1991), for whom it is one of the strategies of feminist re-writing:

In other words, parody works to foreground the politics of representation. Needless to say, this is not the accepted view of postmodernist parody. The prevailing interpretation is that postmodernism offers a value-free, decorative, de-historicized quotation of past forms and that this is a most apt mode for a culture like our own which is oversaturated with images. Instead, I would argue that postmodernist parody is a value-problematizing, denaturalizing form of acknowledging the history (and through irony, the politics) of representations (p. 225).

In *The Silence of the Lambs* (1992), Clarice's surname, Starling, is the name of a small bird, which updates the (dual) perspective of *Crane*: a machine and also a "leggy long-necked bird" (Clover, 1992). During her investigation, she even finds a stuffed bird. The revisionist aim of its proposal lies in the climax sequence. The structure is once again divided by the issue of perspective regarding the journey towards *being a woman*. The sequence is again divided: a false climax leads to another that, unexpectedly, reveals the truth, with the perspectives of the master and his pupil, who eventually resolves the case. In addition, during the climax based on the heroine's gaze, an important change occurs: the psychopath draws the attention of the camera, as if he were a *voyeur*, thus placing the woman in the role of victim, his expression identifying his power over her, just as in the famous scene in *Psycho*, when Norman spies on Marion (cfr. Antón, 2014).

In *Fargo* (1996), apart from the references to the famous scene in which Marion is murdered, Lila's journey is updated with the presentation of the leading female role in the 31st minute of the film. This unusual and extreme delay in the appearance of the heroine symbolizes the resistance of the narrative conventions to having a woman in the lead role. As in *Psycho*, the structure of the story is sectioned by the murder of a woman, followed by the presentation of the heroine who solves the case. Pregnant Police Chief, Marge Gunderson, appears for the first time after a prolonged fade to black that highlights the structural division. In addition, we carried out a comparative analysis with the television remake, the first season of the television series *Fargo* (2014-), which helped us to evaluate the changes. With this intention in mind, we located narrative segments in which parody becomes important, in the pilot episode, Bernstein's "*The Crocodile's Dilemma*" (2014), and in the final episode 1x10, Shakman's "*Morton's Fork*" (2014).

Finally, our analysis concludes with a reference to *Mulholland Drive* (2001), where just like in *Psycho*, we again find a structurally divided story, which appears to be a standard feature of the historical trajectory of the female investigator.

2.2. Cruel repression of an empowered woman

In the climax sequence of *The Birds*, one of the most interesting and thrilling passages of this narrative resurfaces when the leading actress, Melanie Daniels, almost discovers the truth on which the drama of the character is built: the heroine walks up the stairs with the intention of opening a mysterious door that has greatly attracted to her attention. And it is here that we find some of the forms that link the curiosity of this female investigator to the Gothic woman and the character of Lila. The woman's gaze, off-camera to justify the shot/reverse shot technique, the visual conflict between light and shade and, in general, the strategy of suspense, highlight the temporary nature of the desire of the woman to see what is beyond the door, linked with her identity. She experiences feelings that range from uneasiness to pain and even horror, just like Lila in *Psycho* when she opens the door to the basement or Grace when she does the same in Amenábar's *The Others* (2001). On this occasion, the desire to discover associated with a passionate look is cruelly repressed by the attack by birds seeking the heroine's eyes, a visual motif of the heroine's strange look, which would later be dramatized in Young's *Wait until Dark* (1967) and, some years later in Morales's *Los ojos de Julia* (2010).

Finally, when the man comes to the rescue and saves the woman from certain death, the motive of the shadow of the hero's mother, with an Expressionist influence, appears on the wall, suggesting the cause of the furious attack in a room, where a framed child's drawing has become visible on the wall beside the heroine. The narrative also establishes a connection with Marion's murder in the shower. The image of the sharp beaks attacking the body of a woman, synchronized by external montage and the movement of her fall, segmented by analytical editing, brings to mind the murder of Marion⁵. Melanie Daniels is a woman who, once again, defies the morals held in custody by a cruel mother. Subsequent reference to *Psycho* confirmed the retro nature of the discourse: once they are safe, the man places the woman's hands in the form of a cross, thus referring to the sinister feminine gesture of the object that draws Lila's attention in the mother's room by means of a subjective zoom-in, associated to a domestic and passive woman (Figures 4, 5 and 6).



⁵ In her analysis of the film, Camila Paglia highlights an analogy of the lighting of the scene and Marion's journey, "when the windshield wipers stop working and blinding lights of the approaching cars appear." She also relates Mitch taking the woman's body from the attic to Marion's cadaver wrapped in plastic (1998, pp. 107 *et seq.*).



Marion and Melanie are both empowered women, whose desire *drives* the narratives until they are punished by a cruel mother. In the epilogue, the man takes the wheel of the car in search of a safer place, under the watchful eye of the birds. The shot of Melanie, in the back seat, wrapped in Mitch's mother's arms, incapable of uttering a word, contrasts with that of the woman driver, the subject of the action at the beginning of the story (Figures 7 and 8). Melanie appears to be reconciled with the maternal figure at the expense of having lost her role in the action. In this retro-narrative, the rebel Melanie is identified with the role of a woman victim who is saved by the hero. It therefore fulfills the narrative premise of the opening scene of the story, when the man catches the canary in the store and returns it to its cage: "Back into your gilded cage, Melanie Daniels."



2.3. "The Haunting": the conflict between female desire and the law

In *The Haunting*, an adaptation of the novel *The Haunting of Hill House* written by Shirley Jackson in 1959, Eleanor Lance, the leading character, bears a close structural analogy with the drama, the identity crisis, on which the character of Marion is built. In both characters, the expression of female desire (for Marion, to be with her partner; and for Eleanor, to gain her independence) opposes a prohibition. In other words, the storyline associates the meaning of *woman* with transgression. The woman's decisions find great opposition in her environment, to the extent that she seems to become a fugitive.

Eleanor is not a thief like Marion, however, after a heated argument with her sister and brother-in-law, she takes the automobile without their consent. Unlike Marion, Eleanor is presented as a nervous and insecure woman but, in both cases, the characters make the identity-crisis journey towards *being a woman*. The storyline highlights feminine protagonism through the driving of a vehicle, as a metaphor for female empowerment and rupture with social and family constraints. The automobile is the means used by the woman to search for her own destiny.

This protagonism is strengthened by the narrative perspective of the scene, which contrasts with the audiovisual presentation at the beginning of the story, comprised of two prologues separated by the initial credits. The first is dominated by an omniscient narrative perspective with a voice-over by one of the characters, the doctor, who presents the mystery of the house on the hill; after the credits, the same voice-over narrates the background of the mystery of the successive deaths of women that have something to do with the house and the doctor's interview with the current owner of the house, who wants to investigate the mystery with a group of associates to find "the key to another world." However, in the next sequence,

the protagonism of the story is dominated by Eleanor Lance. A zoom in is used to highlight her name on the list of people chosen by the investigator on a blackboard, together with a close-up of the woman who says: “You’ve got to let me have the car, I need it.”

When the journey begins, the narrative stresses the female perspective using the shot/reverse shot technique. As in Marion’s journey, in this case the female drama also appears to express a fantasy, with the staging of female desire. Through a voice-off, which is cut with extra-diegetic music, the character fantasizes about her family and future as a woman: “I hope... this is what I’ve been waiting for all my life. I’m going. I’m really going. I’ve finally taken a step... By now they know the car is gone... but they don’t know where. They would never have suspected it of me. I would never have suspected it of myself. I’m a new person.”

This inner monologue, which continues throughout the story, is interrupted by the entrance gate to the house on the hill. After getting past the gate, the woman and her desire drive up a winding road (Figure 9). This scene is reminiscent of the initial sequence of Hitchcock’s *Rebecca* (1940), in which a voice-over by an unidentified woman narrates her dream (desire): “Last night, I dreamt I went to Manderley again. It seemed to me I stood by the iron gate leading to the drive, and for a while, I could not enter for the way was barred to me. Then, like all dreamers, I was possessed of a sudden with supernatural powers and passed like a spirit through the barrier before me. The drive wound away in front of me, twisting and turning as it had always done. But as I advanced, I was aware that a change had come upon it [...]” Eleanor’s hairstyle and clothes reinforce the analogy with the character. The subjective perspectives and the woman’s voice-off, before encountering the Gothic house with shots/reverse angle shots, coincides with the woman with no name in *Rebecca* and Marion in *Psycho*⁶ (Figures 10 and 11).



⁶ In *Rebecca*, the mansion also appears from a female perspective in the dream-prologue and, later, in a flashback as a reverse shot take of the heroine.



Thus, the character of Eleanor thus forms part of the female drama known as paranoid woman films (Doane, 1987). The Victorian house, full of doors and mirrors, personifies the drama of a woman: “I am like a small creature inside a monster”, says her voice-off. Once inside, a number of mirror reflections are seen, referring to the splitting of the character, her identity crisis. When she is about to pick up her suitcase and follow the housekeeper, she sees her reflection in the mansion floor. And then, in her room, she enters the adjacent room through the bathroom door to encounter another woman, Theodora, a member of the investigation team. From a semi-subjective perspective, Eleanor sees a similar scene to the one that has just taken place in her room: the housekeeper giving the new guest instructions. Later, there is a series of mirror reflections of both characters, in which Theodora, a more secure and modern character than Eleanor, appears as her counter-figure.

During the story, the star encounters several female archetypes: the mother, represented by her sick mother and her sister, the modern woman and the victim who is linked to the mysterious disappearance of the doctor’s wife. However, the role of the female investigator cannot be developed. The vision in the attic, which is reached by a spiral staircase, of the victim-madwoman, one of the Gothic genre conventions, is presented as more than a phase that is part of the solution of her identity crisis, and as a precedent to her final destiny. Strangely, Eleanor meets her death at the wheel of the car in which she began her journey to freedom. The woman finally feels identified with the house and an undecipherable mystery, as can be seen in the prologue when she appears to give voice to the monstrous house on the hill. A similar merging takes place in the epilogue of *The Others*.

In the 1999 remake, *The Haunting*, there are major changes to the original film to explain the mystery of the house. It is not identified as a woman, but rather as a beastly male businessman who, in the past, killed the children working for him, whose souls are trapped in purgatory. The heroine’s mission consists of investigating the case, guided by the oppressed souls of the children and the fiend’s wife who commits suicide and eventually turns out to be their great-great-grandmother. Just like before, the doors, the spiral staircase and the mirror reflections become the main visual motifs of the investigation, now on the subject of motherhood. The voices of the children that the heroine hears are combined with the identity crisis in one of the rooms of the strange mansion full of mirrors: “That’s not me”, “Who am I?”, she asks, when she sees herself as pregnant. Although Eleanor is able to somewhat more develop her role as a female investigator, her fate is similar, but now she is a tragic heroine. Eleanor faces the monster and is able to free the children and her soul ascends with theirs.

2.4. *The return of Lila?*

Over 20 years later, in *Psycho II. The return of Norman*, Lila reappears, now as Mrs. Loomis. In the opening scene, Lila objects to the judge setting Norman free. Together with her daughter, Mary Loomis, she attempts to drive Norman insane so he will be put back into a psychiatric institution. Despite the fact that the prologue sequence begins with a gender convention when she questions the law, this sequel to *Psycho* is undoubtedly intended as its counter narrative.

Both Lila and her daughter become the victims of a psychopath who snatches the protagonism from the women.

The treatment of the climax sequence of the film anticipates the end, as the woman ceases to be the center of the action, through her offensive look/desire. The beginning of the sequence brings to mind Lila's climax sequence in *Psycho*. However, the audiovisual discourse is very different. Lila again goes to the Gothic house, but the action is not seen from Lila's perspective, but rather from that of Norman's psychiatrist and the omniscient perspective of the narrator. This steals the protagonism from the female character. Lila is no longer the subject of the action and becomes the object of the male character's attention. In fact, Lila is murdered when she is about to dress up as Norman's mother, her counter-figure in the original film, and it is the doctor who takes charge of the investigation (Figures 12, 13 and 14). Shortly afterwards, the psychiatrist and Mary, also dressed as the cruel mother, also die.



The discourse of the film appears to reverse the order of the events of the first part, in which the murder of detective Arbogast, now transformed into a pastiche of the murder of the doctor, precedes the emotional entrance of Lila into Mrs. Bates' house. In fact, the final sequence confirms this retro movement in the structure of the story, as Norman Bates kills his true mother, so returning to the initial situation of *Psycho*.

2.5. Parody of the male investigator in "Fargo"

In his analysis of the film, Antonio Santamarina points out an inter-textual relationship between *Fargo* and *Psycho*, based on the connection between Marge and Marion: "Whereas in the Hitchcock film, the leading female character dies twenty minutes into the action, in *Fargo* she does not appear until half an hour into the film, thus destroying one of the most established conventions of the genre" (2012, pp. 177-78). However, in our cultural reading it refers to the police chief's link with Lila, the lead and *snoopy girl* in the second part of *Psycho*.

Indeed, in addition to the reference to the memorable scene in the shower⁷, the parody reference on which the structure of *Fargo* is built occurs in the 31st minute of the film. After developing what has been the main plot until now, in which a man contracts two criminals to kidnap his wife and collect the ransom, we find a reference to the duality of the female identity, the victim and the investigator, which deconstructs and reconstructs the structure of *Psycho*.

At night, on their way to the refuge, the kidnappers kill three people, the last victim being a girl who is trapped in her car. The sound of the shot is followed by one of the fades-to-black in the film that interrupt the story and, in a diegetic world full of snow, contrast it with the heroine of the story. The murder of the girl in the darkness of the night contrasts with the presentation of the leading female role, one of the most admired characters in feminist reviews, although it has a comedy context.

The audiovisual treatment of the discourse contrasts with that of the three men at the beginning. The epic extra-diegetic tone of the music is combined with a peculiar camera movement. This travelling does not fit the narration, which implies the textual emergence of a mega-narrator of the story, and questions the strategies of erasure of the dominating discourse up to this strong point in the narrative. This independent camera movement compels the audience and directs their gaze through the space: a lengthy shot opens with the painting of a duck, oblivious to the gunshot that ended the previous scene, then moves slowly to a room with figures of ducks and, finally, to a bed where a couple are sleeping. In contrast to the first part, the traditional gender roles are now reversed: the husband makes breakfast and Marge, despite being heavily pregnant, leaves the house in the middle of the night to go to the crime scene (Figure 15).

⁷ In the improvise kidnapping carried out by the good for nothing pair of delinquents, the woman hides in the shower and flees through the house wrapped in the curtain until she finally falls down the stairs.



Indeed, her belly and morning sickness do not prevent her from efficiently performing her job as police chief; she corrects her assistant and solves the case. According to the reviews, the main appeal of the character lies in the interesting parody of a male character, combining violence, as when she shoots the murderer in the leg, with the figure of a pregnant woman (Wager, 2005, pp. 129-130; Neroni, 2005, pp. 124 *et sq.*).

In addition, there are two noteworthy aspects in the film discourse relating to women that are very different from how women investigators are normally portrayed. The first is because, unlike her conventional archetype, Marge does not have to prove herself professionally in a male-dominated world or make an effort to make herself understood, in fact she has the support of her husband and her work colleagues. The other fundamental difference is associated with the way she investigates. Not only does it compare her with traditionally female roles, such as the victim, wife or mother, but rather and above all, the investigation appears to confirm male weakness and the empowering of the woman investigator. Marge not only stands out for her intelligence and levelheadedness in complicated situations, but her attitude also contrasts with a gallery of men that appear in the story with esthetics like those of a caricature: the greed of a man who pays two thugs to kidnap his wife; the authoritarian father of his wife; a ridiculous pair of good-for-nothings, a high school acquaintance that Marge meets who cannot stop crying and takes on the role of the victim, and the insecurity of her husband in relation to the contest are clear representations of the idea of masculinity in crisis, as opposed to the outstanding intelligence and easy-going nature of the policewoman. The only thing she does not understand is the murderers' lack of morals: "Well, I just don't understand it."

2.5.1. The return of traditional gender roles

Many of the features of the parodic character of a pregnant female investigator in *Fargo* which make it a modern and reflexive proposal using black humor, are blurred and brought into question in its remake for television. Unlike her female reference, the television character has to earn a position of power in her profession. Like Marge, in the pilot episode, "*The Crocodile's Dilemma*", she has a late appearance. Molly Solverson appears in the 15th minute. However, there are significant differences. In addition to the disappearance of the special treatment the mega-narrator gives to the woman character, Molly is not the police chief like Marge, but rather an assistant. The narrative of the series also brings back a common convention of the archetype that was absent in the film: Molly contends with a male-dominated working environment in which she is not taken seriously.

In the series, Marge's role is taken over by a male police officer. In him we see a parody of Marge which, far from updating the forms of audiovisual discourse, appears to put things back where they were, which confirms the retro nature of the narrative. Now, the

independent movement of the camera, accompanied by extra-diegetic music, goes towards a bed where the chief of police is sleeping with his pregnant wife. While he is talking on the phone, his wife puts her arm over him, copying the gesture of the husband in the original film. The murder of the police chief is the starting point of Molly's investigation, in which she faces a criminal psychopath in addition to dealing with the different obstacles imposed in her workplace.

Nevertheless, the most significant change that betrays the original intention can be found in the climax sequence of the final episode, "Morton's Fork" (2014). It is her husband, having left his job as a police officer to get away from the murderer, who discovers where the villain-beast is hiding (the encounter on the road with a wolf blocking his way appears to tell him to look in the cabin where the murderer is hiding), and confronts and kills him. Meanwhile, his wife, the pregnant police chief, waits for him at home.

The series therefore appears to dramatically recover the vitality of the male identity in crisis, by undoing the narrative of the female investigator. In Marge's case, being pregnant was perfectly integrated into her profession and even combined with the violence linked to the archetype. However, Molly cannot trap the villain *because* she is pregnant. In the final scene, with the family sitting on the couch, the husband says that she should get the credit and she answers: "No, this is your deal... I will be the chief." Action is not for a woman, a pregnant woman, the discourse seems to stress (Figure 16). A very different treatment, despite not being pregnant, is received by the character of Catherine Cawood, in Wainwright's *Happy Valley* (2014-), in which a police sergeant attempts to get over her daughter's suicide and faces a psychopathic murderer in the basement, a typical location for the genre.



2.6. *The desire to be a female investigator*

The parodic reference to *Psycho* can be observed in the labyrinthine, typical post-modern structure of *Mulholland Drive*. Just like in *Psycho*, the story is also structured around a dichotomy relating to the issue of female identity.

This structural duality is approached for the first time in the prologue, visually characterized by light and darkness. The film begins with a shot of a group of couples dancing, which turns the characteristic conventional narrative setting into an abstract Expressionist space. The figures of the imaginary dancing couples appear on a violet background and their long shadows are projected onto the backdrop, where they are mixed up with the figures. Straight away, a visual feature helps to enhance the dreamlike nature of the segment. A bright shape blurs the space to become a medium low angle shot of a smiling woman who radiates light and fades into the bright shape. After a fade to black, a dark scene takes place, in which

the bright shape is again superimposed. The movement of a hand-held camera, representing a subjective view, moves across the area and stops at a pillow that opens up into a dark place called "Mulholland Dr." The luminosity of the letters takes us back to the previous scene. In this space, a mysterious vehicle is seen moving on a dark road. After the credits, a close-up appears of a dark-haired woman. In a retrospective analysis of the film, the white smoke that floods the scene after the accident represents female fantasy. The dark woman we saw before emerges and her image is highlighted with subjective reverse shots of the illuminated city the gravely injured woman is moving towards. A camera movement locates the action in "Sunset Bl 7200 w." The proposed significance of the film places it within the *noir* narrative and, shortly afterwards, as a neo-*noir* parody: a strange pair of detectives who seem to be in charge of the case never reappear, as their role is taken over by an improvised pair of female investigators.

At a general level, as in *Psycho*, the duality depends on the structure. The story is built on the splitting of the narrated diegetic universe into desire-fantasy and the reality of a Hollywood actress, Betty/Diane. After her time at the *Silencio* Club, one of the key scenes in the construction and meaning of the film, the opening of a mysterious blue box, marks the limits between these two universes, in which a multifaceted female identity is inserted. The transition between the two universes is marked by certain points in the narrative, which divide the story into two asymmetric parts.

The first section is the longest, and goes on for 113 minutes of the film's 140 minutes, and deals with desire, in the form of a woman's dream: she is a promising actress who becomes an improvised female investigator to help another woman who does not know who she is. The discourse dramatically marks the transition to the second part, which, far from continuing the first, calls into question the degree of reality and defines it as a dream. It is therefore defined as the counter-figure of the first part, as it shows the painful and unbearable reality of the same (sleeping) Hollywood actress. Although a retrospective analysis of the film provides meanings that mark the beginning of the woman's dream, the viewers are still unsure, until the beginning of the second part, as to whether the first is an imaginary vision. This confusion of imagination and the reality of the diegetic universe so as to reflect on female identity allows it to be compared to another modern-day masterpiece, Bergman's *Persona* (1966), in which the identity of a theater actress is divided into a dual desire-imagination/reality.

This structural division is added to the duality of the female characters. In the first part, dazzling Betty reappears approximately in the 15th minute, in association with an advertisement-fantastic image (one of the reverse shots is an iconic image of palm trees with the words: "Welcome to Los Angeles"). This is compared to the mysterious dark woman who loses her identity in an accident: "I don't know who I am."

Their identities are, in fact, transformed after they discover in the *Silencio* Club that "there is no band... it is all a tape recording... an illusion." Rita/Camila, the post-modern *femme fatale* of the film searching for her identity –in the first part through a complex mirror reflection of Vidor's *Gilda* (1946)– opening the modern (blue) Pandora's box, which activates other female roles (Figure 17). These counter-figures confirm the fragile nature of female identity. The women investigators of the fantasy, Rita and Betty, become a *femme fatale* and a female victim, Camila and Diane.



3. Conclusions

The archetype of the woman investigator is defined as the symbolic expression of the identity crisis of the dominating female. An analysis of the scripts chosen confirms the existence of an audiovisual legacy of Lila Crane that enables us to identify a cultural conflict in the contemporary Hollywood narratives of female investigators. Its *retro* look questions the progressive value of the narrative, putting an *end* to the challenging career of the archetype: woman is presented as a mystery or a victim. The development of female investigators, nevertheless, portrays a complex female identity, in which women address several narrative roles without fully identifying with them.

Finally, the excessive transformation of identities in *Mulholland Drive* gives rise to the question: does the fact that a brilliant character (Betty) takes on the role of victim (Diane) or that the woman without an identity (Rita) is an obscure object of desire, a *femme fatale* (Camila), mean that *Mulholland Drive* is a retro narrative of the female investigator?

This is only superficial, in other words, if we do not consider other relevant aspects of the film discourse. In this case, we obviously need to go to the key scene in the film, which is essential to understanding its meaning and where the characters find the key that opens the mysterious blue box. On the stage in this pivotal scene that takes place in the strange *Silencio* Club, the illusion-identity of the characters fades painfully and melodramatically (with the song "Crying"), as does the magic of narrative film. The scene displays the mechanisms of representation (the stage, the director-narrator of ceremonies, the spectators) because in fact, "there is no band... it is all a tape recording... It is an illusion."

This dreamlike, hellish staging plays its role in creating a sense of alienation, a distancing from the figure of the spectator which is necessary in order to place the discursive aspects of the film (Figure 18). This reveals the fantasy of the representation and the archetype structures that shape the meaning of the word *woman*⁸. Both women's professions in this split narrative and the constant references to Hollywood highlight the construction of reflexive discourse on the female image, which extends as far as Lynch's *Inland Empire* (2006).

⁸ "A film such as *Mulholland Drive* (David Lynch, 2001) suggests the extreme re-articulation of the female types that feminist criticism has identified in *noir*. Good/bad women morph into each other in dreamlike scenarios and inexplicable shifts which suggest how insubstantial –that is, fantastical– these images are" (Tasker, 2013, p. 367).



Perhaps it is here, in this excessive transformation of identities proposed by the film's discourse, where the progressive value of the story of the female investigator lies: in the even now rule-breaking anti-narrative gesture of exposing, with its lights and shadows, the gallery of images with which it is constructed and reconstructed, it transforms the action of *being a woman*⁹. Something similar was what the heroine Lila discovered, forty years earlier, in the dark Gothic house: upstairs, the mother and son's rooms and, in the basement, at a subconscious level, the fantasy upon which the story is constructed.

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⁹ This narrative reality contrasts with the sociological reality, given that currently “[a]lmost half of all Europeans believe that a woman's most important role is taking care of her home” (Sánchez, 2017).

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