

The Tale-spinner: A Conversation with Cineaste Paula Ortiz.

In this collaboration we wish to pay homage to the cinema of Paula Ortiz by borrowing her metaphor of textile spinning and tale spinning that is central to the construction of her first feature-length film, Chrysalis (2011), in order to articulate our conversation. With the title “La hilandera/The Tale-spinner”, whose image recalls the similarly-named painting (c. 1657) by Velázquez, we wish to highlight how this director participates in a more extensive artistic and cultural tradition, that of telling stories, and evoke at the same time the spiral shape of the raw material of cinema: film. Said metaphor also appears restructured throughout the interview in a triptych of images (the spool of yarn, the tapestry, and the loom) in order to connect the discussion of her origins, her cinematography, and her other professional activities, respectively.

This interview took place on January 20, 2017 during which time Ortiz was immersed in the creative process for her next two projects: an adaptation of the folktale Bluebeard in English and another adaptation based on the play El arte de la entrevista de Juan Mayorga. The contents of the conversation, which took place via Skype during two hours, have been edited and translated with the objective of maximizing the effectiveness of its communication for a wide, multicultural, and bilingual audience such as that of Gynocine (<http://www.umass.edu/gynocine>). It will become evident upon reading this interview that Paula Ortiz can be considered a first-class gynocineaste due to the centrality of female characters in her cinema, her own professional activity, and her public engagement in the fight for gender equality in the Spanish film industry.

The Spool of Yarn: The Unifying Thread of Ortiz’s Biography.



Amapola Films, 2011¹

Paula Ortiz (Zaragoza, 1979) was raised in a family without professional ties to cinema. Following in the footsteps of her parents, she studied Hispanic Philology (2002) at the Universidad de Zaragoza, where she later earned her doctorate in the Screenwriting Theory (2011). Her craft as a filmmaker was refined at New York University (NYU), under Nick Tannis, Spike Lee, or Susan Sandler, and at the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA).

ERIN K. HOGAN & MARIA GARCIA PUENTE: In the dedication of your last film, *The Bride* (2015), you offer some clues as to how you acquired your gaze as a director, thanking your parents for having taught you how to “look through verses.” Could you describe in further detail the poetic gaze of your cinema?

PAULA ORTIZ: The phrase refers to both my parents, who are retired but were language and literature teachers in high schools here in Aragón (Northeastern Spain). In this sense, I think that they made it possible for me to have access to literature and poets and for my reading of poetry to be a part of my daily life, which for many people is something distant, sanctified, intellectual, and not available to everyone. Nevertheless, I think that I have my parents to thank for this part of my everyday life and for how I learned to relate to many forms of expression, including the poetic, as not aggrandized, elitist, or different.

With respect to the poetic gaze with which my team and I work, it is very difficult for me to explain. I work with a group of people and, although I direct the project, this poetic gaze is a compendium of the contributions of numerous people. Here the artistic direction, by Pilar Quintana and Jesús Bosqued (who always work with me), Migue Amoedo, and Javi García, who also edits and operates the camera, have a lot to do with creating the poetic gaze. We worked well together as a group, and we have the same work habits and way of understanding the cinematic experience as a poetic experience, as something that has to reveal an emotion or an idea, to illuminate something with which you were probably familiar but at that moment the film returns it to you as your own but in a different light. I understand the poetic in that sense. I also understand the poetic as ethical and aesthetic in the sense that it intensifies both aspects of art. Both the ethical and the narrative content with which we work can illuminate the most intense experience possible. Not all cinema is like that.

In fact, our cinema, *The Bride* (especially *The Bride*), was harshly criticized by many people for that experience, for the intensification of the languages of photography, music, verbal poetry, wardrobe; this is to say, for the treatment of the aesthetic elements in the shot. Many people do not like that, it seems to contradict their concept of cinema, which is supposed to realistically portray reality. I do not believe in that. For me, the language of realism is just another code, in which you reconstruct the shot so that it appears as realistic to you as possible, but there are also other codes that are accepted in other film traditions but they have not been accepted in Spain for a while. There are directors like Luis Buñuel and Víctor Erice that have made tremendously poetic films but in the last few years in Spain there have been two kinds of cinema: genre cinema (for example, horror or the thriller) and social realist cinema. If you deviate from there, your cinema is dismissed or pejoratively labelled ‘poetic.’ We do not believe in that. We believe that ours is another kind of cinematic experience, not the only type, and we like to work in these terms in order to create that experience; this is to say, that not only the story, nor the drama or emotion, but rather they must come together to reveal a certain kind of poetic verticality at certain moments in the film.

The Tapestry: The Embroidery of Ortiz's Cinema.



Amapola Films, 2011

Ortiz first worked as a screenwriter and director on the short film, Para hacer una historia en cinco minutos (How to Tell a Story in Five Minutes, 2001), followed by Saldría a pasear todas las noches (I Would Go Out for a Walk Every Night, 2002), El rostro de Ido (Ido's Face, 2003), Fotos de familia (Family Photos, 2004), El hueco de Tristán Boj (Tristán Boj's Hollow, 2008), and the documentary Retrato de Esperanza (Portrait of Hope, 2006). In 2011 Ortiz began making feature-length films with Chrysalis, which received critical acclaim, three nominations for the Goya Awards 2012 and the International Pilar Miró Prize for Best Debut Direction at the 56th Edition of the Seminici Festival in Valladolid. Her most recent film, The Bride (2015), an adaptation of the tragedy by Federico García Lorca, Blood Wedding (1933), earned twelve Goya (2016) nominations, confirms Ortiz as one of the most talented and original directors of current Spanish cinema.

EKH & MGP: As a part of the unifying thread of your cinema, we would like for you to tell us about your characters. Women are central in your last two projects, *Chrysalis* and *The Bride*. How would you characterize your female characters?

PO: For me, the female characters in the two films are very different because their process of creation was very different. In the case of *Chrysalis*, it was a sort of homage to Spanish women and to certain generations of women in Spain that had been silenced during a very long time on every level: historically, socially, and culturally. In recent years and with a lot of work related to historical memory, there are novels and films that deal with this subject. In film there are, for example, horror stories but there was not (or at least not as I would have liked) a personal portrait, of the intimate spaces of women who had not been grand heroines but rather women whose lot was to stay at home without the right to choose. That is the way that it has been in Spain and also in other countries, but in Spain it has persisted until recently, until the early 80s, because even the transition to democracy (after Francisco Franco's death in 1975 following his thirty-six year right-wing military dictatorship) was very long in terms of achieving women's rights; for example, the right to buy a house was not earned until 1986. When I wrote the

screenplay for *Chrysalis*, which was my first film, I had a professor who told me: “Try to tell something that only you know.” I knew the women in my family, who were just like the women in many other Spanish families. My aunts and grandmothers lived dignified lives with a great capacity to construct and reconstruct themselves and those around them, but some of them, because they were from rural areas and had not studied, had the only option of marrying and staying at home, their lives had no cultural impact. So, *Chrysalis* was more a film in honor of them, that tried to delve into those silences, in their constructive capacity, and in the depths of their silenced lives without the option to make decisions about their lives, but that, in spite of that, they constructed, supported, and provided for a country. This is how I wanted to portray these women: to remember them and vindicate them.

Nevertheless, for me, *The Bride* represented another step forward, it was a formidable learning experience in terms of character construction and in the portrayal of many dimensions of women. When I read Lorca and I began to work on *The Bride*, something happened that I had not anticipated nor realized until I began working with actresses, even before working on the script, and it was that Lorca’s female characters have enormous potential. As the tragic characters they are, they give rise to the greatest forces of life and to the most fundamental questions, and Lorca’s women lead in both directions: towards the positive and the negative. That is, they are the greatest forces of creation and destruction, of desire and hate, of freedom and repression. So, while the *Bride* represents that extreme yearning for freedom, the *Mother*, on the contrary, is the extreme longing for repression. For me it was quite a realization that, as women, we cannot keep telling only the most saccharine or heroic part of ourselves or of our tradition but also that both sides of our soul are necessary. I actually argued about this with a journalist in Spain, who said that *The Bride* was masculinist (*machista*). I told her that I thought that she had either not read Lorca or had not understood the vindication of his personage, because I think that Lorca was someone who, due to his education by and with women or his sexual orientation, he audaciously, profoundly, and subtly dealt with issues of gender (even though his generation did not name them as we do). The journalist’s accusation was on account of the character of the *Mother* and I responded that I think that we have to tell the stories of these characters but not from a masculinist (*machista*) perspective. Lorca’s works have always been directed by men, like all authors, who have wanted to see Lorca in a certain way. Why don’t we women delve into the destructive force of the *Mother*? Because many of us have also been complicit in the destruction, in the perverse tradition of repression, perpetuation of machismo and patriarchy like the *Mother*.

EKH & MGP: Furthermore, in both films you portray women’s experiences with a lot of nuance and great complexity. We are thinking of, for example, the ambiguous relationship between Luisa (Luisa Gavasa) and Isabel (Cristina Rota) in *Chrysalis*, that, nevertheless, is a clear example of female solidarity. How did you conceive of this relationship? How did you arrive at this complex representation of sorority?

PO: Well, it also arises from personal experience. It originated from a very specific case. I had a great aunt who raised my brother and myself while she lived with us as children and, thanks to her, my mother, in fact, could work and do many things. When my great aunt was young in her town of Teruel (Southern Aragón), she observed a series of

mourning periods, during which time it was not appropriate to date, and she never married. I do not know if it was because life circumstances prevented her from doing so or because she did not want to. This figure was very interesting to me because, in our case, she had raised two generations of nieces and nephews and she had a very independent life in certain ways, she always lived with her siblings and cousins. My great aunt died when I was 15 years old and, at some point, I wondered if it was possible that she might even have been in love with one of her female cousins.

For *Chrysalis*, I began talking about this with other women. I asked many of my mother's girlfriends and many other women to tell me about their mothers and aunts. They asked their female teachers and other women and they all began to send me letters. As it turns out, this figure kept coming up throughout Spain: women who had lived with their female cousins and with their sisters and, for all of whom, it was not clear if they did not marry by choice or because they were already in a relationship, that they were a love story. At that time, probably, it would have been an anachronism to consider a lesbian relationship. The label itself does not matter because the fact was that two women lived together, probably due in part to circumstance for many of them, and for others it was even chosen. Therefore, it seemed to me that it was something that occurred in many families and that no one had told it on film, as if it did not matter or as if they did not live interesting lives. Initially, I was writing for the script a love story that was more explicit between Luisa and Isabel, although still subtle. Later during editing, the love story was becoming diluted because the producers were not quite convinced by it. As in the case of my great aunt, I do not know to what extent her Catholic upbringing and her self-awareness, of her body and her sexuality, would have allowed her to have a sexual relationship with another woman (it is something that we will never know), I liked that it ended there: that we would never know. It did not matter to me that Isabel's and Luisa's love in *Chrysalis* remained undefined and was, ultimately, a beautiful story of solidarity or sorority to a certain extent, like those that were so common between women following the civil war (1936-39) and the dictatorship (1939-75), and continue today.

EKH & MGP: By contrast to the female characters of your feature-length films, strong women who face their adverse destinies with dignity, the characteristics of your male characters present us with more variability throughout your works. Among them we find protective, possessive, kind, violent characters, and possibly even in your next project, killers. Their motivations seem to be, at any rate, as complex as those of your female characters. How do you think that your male and female characters compare?

PO: My male characters are always secondary to my female characters because my films' perspective and experience belong to my female characters. Nevertheless, with *Chrysalis*, as a tapestry of women's experiences that vindicates these women, one of the questions with respect to my male characters and with which I was obsessed was their relationships to the female characters so as not to demonize them nor turn them into the bad guys but rather to show that their intentions were incompatible. That is, despite the variability (each one corresponds to a certain age and type of relationship) there was a desire to portray men with kindness, showing their faults as well-meaning mistakes, in the sense that it is how they love the women in their lives that is the error. This is the case, for example, of Violeta's uncle (Carlos Álvarez Novoa) towards Violeta (Leticia

Dolera); or of Valentín (Luis Bermejo), the shopkeeper, towards Luisa, that they do not love these women as they wished to be loved. On the other hand, the three male protagonists, Paco (Roberto Álamo), Inés' (Maribel Verdú) husband, whom the actor fleshed out with a tender sort of masculinity, is probably one of the most archetypal characters within Spanish culture: the anarchist or the Republican fighter who returns and is imprisoned. We have seen this in other films and, probably, Paco and Inés have the most passionate relationship of all in the film due to their age and the time in their lives.

In the case of *The Bride*, nevertheless, it is different because we departed from Lorca's text, from its tragic code and archetypal characters. All of Lorca's characters have an archetypal quality and, in fact, that was his intention when he named them "The Bride", "The Mother" and "The Bridegroom"; Leonardo as well because, even though he has a name, he is still the lover, that caricaturesque object of desire. However, while working close-up with cinema, which is so psychological, the work consisted of creating more volume for Lorca's characters. In *The Bride* every character represents the courage or the strength that desire, security, or confidence exert, and precisely in order to avoid cliché, we dedicate a lot of attention to the actors. We did not want the Bridegroom (Asier Etxeandia) to be the weak man whom the Bride (Inma Cuesta) married simply for economic or social reasons but rather we wanted to construct a character with attractive masculinity, different from Leonardo's (Alex García Fernández), but still strong and appealing to the Bride. Despite the fact that the role of the Bridegroom in *Blood Wedding* is smaller, in the film I think that we managed to flesh it out some more but, if we are critical of ourselves, Leonardo's character is the one that ultimately lacks dimension. I hope that he at least reaches the heights of the force of desire that we portray but, as a character, I would have liked him to have had more volume, even though the text conditions you psychologically. Nevertheless, I think that we achieved that with the Bridegroom and with the Father (Carlos Álvarez Novoa) as well. The Father of the Bride is another character that has his agenda in Lorca's text, he is the patriarch who wants to marry his daughter and consolidate his land and that's it, but Carlos gave him a lot more dimension and tenderness in certain moments, certain fragility and understanding towards his daughter, that do not exist in Lorca's text and that we wanted to create.

EKH & MGP: How have you navigated the tension between form, your embellishing gaze, and content, violent episodes, in your films? We are thinking of how difficult it must have been to film the rape of Violeta (Leticia Dolera) in *Chrysalis* and the hand-to-hand combat between Leonardo (Álex García) and the Bridegroom (Asier Etxeandia) in *The Bride*. What technical decisions with respect to filming and editing did you make? Why did you make these choices?

PO: We talked a lot about this with the director of photography and with Javi García Arredondo, from the perspective of camerawork and editing. For *The Bride*, for example, we were very aware of something that Leonard Cohen had said with regards to Lorca: that Lorca had taught him how to work within the strict margins of dignity and beauty, so, in general, when we approach scenes of this kind (that are not in and of themselves dignified nor beautiful) we ask ourselves precisely that question: how do we work within those strict margins?

In the case of Violeta's rape in *Chrysalis*, the idea was to operate almost exclusively with Violeta in close-up. As a cinematic experience, this way of filming is as

cruel and difficult or even more so than if the spectator were to see more of the violence, because sex scenes or violent scenes are filmed in the same way, like dance sequences. It consists of fragmenting a lot of what the spectator sees, capturing small parts of the body, small violent movements. The more fragments included, the greater the impression that the spectator has of the entirety of the scene, even though it is an illusion, because in reality the spectator reconstructs the scene in his/her mind. In this case, nevertheless, with *Violeta* the directive was precisely the opposite: not to show hardly anything, so that we maintained the crudeness of the act, trying at the same time to respect her dignity and pain. In the scene there are only a couple of cuts and we simply see Violeta's heartrending cry when she is grabbed from behind. If the actress who portrayed Violeta had not been Leticia Dolera, who has a very powerful imagination, I do not know how we would have done it because she is an actress who knows very well how to very rapidly enter and exit extreme experiences such as these (like María Alfonso Rossa, the Beggar Woman in *The Bride*), but there are other actors who work by method and have to find their emotional connection to the moment. If that had been the case with Leticia, we would not have been able to do it because we would have obligated her to experience rape in real time, captured in close-up, even though she would not have felt it physically. However, since she is an actress who plays emotionally with extremes, immersing into and withdrawing from her role without it affecting her, we tried it and, in fact, she found it to be a cathartic experience.²

The Bride is very different. It was really interesting because an expert fight choreographer came to teach the actors and to help me with the final duel scene. He told me that he had never worked on a scene like this with a woman (because women do not direct fights). I had insisted that I was not very interested in the actors' movements nor did I have the goal of seeing stabbings. My will was to conceptually live in slow motion that moment of the duel; in other words, we wanted to capture that moment suspended in time. Slow motion gave us that poetic sensation, it is capable of capturing the impression of deceleration that we feel when we suffer an emotional beating or even, a physical one, when we fall. This strategy allowed us to, on the one hand, visualize on screen the physical perception of a moment like that, but also the idea was to portray a kind of waltz, a dance of death, first between the two rivals (Leonardo and the Bridegroom) and after with the Bride in between them. So, the will of the entire crew, the director of photography, the camera operator, and the specialist who helped the actors to fall without hurting themselves, was really for that moment of the duel and the mutual killing to be aesthetic, not a scene of crude violence in Tarantino style. Violence is often both masculine and masculinized in the sense that it has been socially coded that masculinity is like that. However, I aspired to change that language and to show that it is also possible to film a violent scene, of death and hand-to-hand combat, that tells the same story in a more aesthetic way.

EKH & MGP: Who is your audience? For whom do you make your films and what do you want to communicate to your spectators?

PO: I never have an audience in mind, honestly. In fact, I do not think about it because, if I thought about my audience or in everything that follows the making of a film, I would not do it. Right now we are simultaneously writing *Bluebeard* and another script, that is an adaptation of a text by Juan Mayorga, a playwright who is working a lot in Spain right

now and has a lot of interesting works, among them, a really beautiful text about three women in a family that is called *El arte de la entrevista* (2014). What we are reflecting on now in full swing of the creative process is the value of the project; that is, if it will interest someone, it is a worthwhile experience. One question that I always ask myself when I work on a project is if it will be poetically, dramatically, narratively, spiritually, or sociologically useful for someone. I remember that I had a professor who would always insist that if the story we wanted to tell was not worth two hours of someone's life, then we should not tell it. I always have that professor in mind and that question of worth and expense weighs on me.

Then, the reality in Spain is that the makeup of the majority of my audience are adult women (over 25 years old), even though, curiously, *The Bride* also enjoyed an audience of younger women. I think that it must be because they are reading *Blood Wedding* or also because it is a more adolescent story, a coming of age conflict, that, when you are older, you live differently and with a different perspective; you do not live with Leonardos and Bridegrooms in your head, but there is a period in your life when I think that you do.

EKH & MGP: What is your process for creating your visual universe? What are the steps that you take?

PO: It is very eclectic. For example, currently with *Bluebeard* or *El arte de la entrevista* we are departing from an existing fable, but normally the seed of that process comes from an emotion or a connection from which we begin to construct. I really like accumulating artistic references (pictorial, cinematic, photographic, sonorous, etc.) that can help us describe the plastic universe of the film. Deep down no one is original but instead we all mix and match the references and inputs that we receive.

Something that I always do is make a visual book, on which I work side-by-side with Jesús Bosqued (who is the artistic director and designer) and, for example, in the case of *Bluebeard*, we then make it into the dossier that we present to producers. In the book we normally include atmospheric (light, color, texture, materials) references and maybe the general aesthetic outline of the film. So, in *The Bride* we tried to recreate a rural Mediterranean space and a somewhat ambiguous time that covered a broad twentieth century, in which you would not know if you were in the forties, thirties, or sixties. In this case, something that was hard for us to sketch out was the wardrobe because it always marks time. After a lot of searching, we found a collection by Valentino that had a particular style of dresses with shirt collars (that could very easily cover the frame of time within which we were operating) and eclectic fabrics reminiscent of the Mediterranean: Grecian whites with blue flowers; black Spanish-style florals, like Manila shawls. This was the direct inspiration for the female characters' wardrobe design for which, nevertheless, instead of the blues of Valentino's dresses, we used a palette of brown and yellow earthtones that was more suitable for the telluric world of *The Bride*. Having a book of images is also very useful because, even after the producers have seen it, it serves as a guide for the different teams working on the film so that they have an idea of what materials to work on, and from there, they can begin the physical work.

EKH & MGP: We can imagine how difficult it must have been to adapt *The Bride*. What texts did you consult in the process? Did you find inspiration in Carmen de Burgos' short novel, *Puñal de claveles* (1931)? Additionally, with respect to perceived variations or divergences between Federico García Lorca's *Blood Wedding* (1933) and your version of the story, how and why did you arrive at the changes that you made?

PO: In our research and process of documentation, we searched for the news item in the papers and we also watched the documentary by Javier Rioyo about the event on which Lorca based his play. It seems that the Bridegroom died recently, in 1992, and that neither he nor the Bride, who died in the eighties, would give interviews while they were alive. There was a lot of secrecy surrounding the facts but once they had died, their daughter agreed to be interviewed for Riollo's documentary. Additionally, I perused other tragedies and also fragments of Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872) because I was obsessed with the form tragedy takes today. I did not want to review the general criticism on *Blood Wedding* but rather the texts that compared Lorca's work to Greek and modern tragedies. I also read the scholarship of a professor I had at NYU, Gabriela Bastera, who wrote a thesis called *The Fate in Lorca* (for which she utilized Steiner) and many poems by Leonard Cohen, who was closely connected to Lorca's poetic sensibility and that of other authors of the Generation of 27.³ With respect to Carmen de Burgos, I came across *Puñal de claveles* very late in the writing process. The script was already finished but it did help me prepare for filming. Actually, during the shoot I repeatedly read another text, a poem by Laura Casielles, a young Asturian poetess, that is entitled 'La levedad del pájaro.'⁴

With respect to the process of adaptation, the story was very clear, with regards to narrative, there was no doubt. Dramatically, there was indeed some room, but with rather narrow margins because the story was very simple; you know what happens to the characters and what they want. Therefore, the matter of cinematic construction was ultimately one of constant decision making in terms of which images that Lorca expresses in verse to transform into photographic or cinematic imagery; that is to say, in what is seen and said. For example, in Lorca's tragedy the verse, "What splinters of glass are stuck in my tongue" [Lorca 51], is repeated three times, while it is only said once in the film. What we typically did was film at another time how the Bride coughed shards of glass in order to generate in the most simple way (because we were not exactly going to show a tongue pierced with glass) that poetic sense.

Therefore, the work of the adaptation was, in the first place, a reordering of the scenes; then, a matter of proportioning the narrative and drama (which did not imply big changes with respect to the source text); and finally, the decision of which scenes from the original would make it into the film. This is where it is possible to perceive the greatest number of divergences. The killing of the Félixes, to mention one, does not really appear in the play but rather the Mother alludes to it when she remembers how she licked her hands that were bathed in the blood of her son. That is the moment where the spectator sees that death and that blood on screen and there are many other examples like this one. The other big challenge was choosing which verses to include in the dialogue of the script and which to translate into images or to excise entirely because a feature-length film does not support a play's worth of verse. So, The Mother's lines where she talks about hate and death three different ways ("but my son's an armful of withered flowers

now. My son's a fading voice beyond the mountain" [Lorca 58]) were filmed but we had to cut many of them. Finally, the other problem to solve was how to synthesize Lorca's characters of the Beggar Woman, The Moon, and Death into one unitary tragic character and to decide which texts to combine in order to do so. Initially everyone told me that I had to eliminate The Moon because even though it works in theater (where there is a different understanding with the spectator), in cinema it is not possible to sustain The Moon's monologue, we were not making a fantasy film after all. Therefore, it was really difficult to combine the three characters into one believable character.

EKH & MGP: In the case of the Bride's and Leonardo's sex scene in the forest, you deviated from the original story, *Blood Wedding*, in which the Bride defends her honor till the end, when she comes face to face with Leonardo's mother. Why did you choose to make this change?

PO: This was another one of the more delicate points. Since the very beginning I decided to make this change because, considering today's sensibility, the issue of honor and virginity are not understood the same way as they were in Lorca's time and work. Therefore, there was a moment in which I decided to eliminate those lines, spoken by the Bride and the Mother, from the script about purity and honor (even though it is a very interesting subject and one that has a terrible weight for women), leaving only the part that had to do with pain, desire, and death. This decision granted greater intelligibility to the story and, in particular, to the protagonists' tragic denouement since it makes more sense for Leonardo and the Bridegroom to die if the Bride had been unfaithful to the Bridegroom on their wedding night and, what's more, that he discovered the two in the act. Then, the reality is that the sex scene was a very fast shoot, we filmed it in just three hours. It is a very technical scene and there were no complicating factors involved. On the other hand, we filmed separately the love scene in which Leonardo exclaims "Oh, I'm not the one at fault./ The fault belongs to the earth" [Lorca 52], but the scenes on their own were not holding their weight in the final editing, so we decided to combine them later.

EKH & MGP: We perceive a sort of evolution in your filmography from the local to the universal. *Chrysalis*, for example, is clearly framed within the national context of Spain and three key moments in the twentieth century. In your second feature, on the other hand, it seems that there is a desire to relocate the story to a broader space, the Mediterranean, and an indeterminate time. With your third project, in which you will film the universal story that is *Bluebeard* in English and with an international cast, there seems to be a consolidation of this universalization. Or, are you, perhaps, returning to the world of fable from your first short films? What is your opinion of the trajectory of your cinema?

PO: It is both, and I do not think that it will be definitive. For example, one of the works that I would like to adapt in the future with screenwriter and current CIMA president, Virginia Yagüe, is *Nada*, by Carmen Laforet. Virginia is very familiar with Laforet's novel and we have spoken about this possibility because there are very few adaptations of the novel. Nevertheless, *Nada* is tremendously local; it is a coming-of-age tale that is

specifically contextualized, with respect to time and place (city). Therefore, I think it has to do with my career's current circumstances.

I did not think that I would be able to make *Bluebeard* now. It is a project that I had placed on the backburner for many years and that was very interesting to me because, as a folktale, it has incredible potential. There are many films inspired by this fable but there is no Disney-style super-production of it like there is of *Snow White* or *Cinderella*. Ours would not be a super-production either but it would be a larger production compared to earlier projects, and the story is clearly related to the folktale tradition. Our *Bluebeard* has many elements from fantasy and horror, like the source tale does, even though something I defend with producers is that we delve into women's terror. The experience of horror is ultimately very cathartic because it pushes us to the edge of our fears, fears that, nevertheless, are often masculine. What happens is that the horror genre is very masculine. In fact, there are hardly any female directors of horror films because it is a genre in which the extreme or adolescent experience is presented and codified in a fixed way. What I am interested in exploring in *Bluebeard* are fantasy and fable (which is abstract and universal) while at the same time constructing a more material, physical, and emotional experience than that found in other horror films.

The opportunity to make *Bluebeard*, which will be an expensive film, has come up now because *The Bride* was a commercial success. However, since it is more expensive, its financing will take longer and its international cast will require us to wait on actors, in this case the actor who will play Bluebeard (the primary role), to become available. Therefore, it is possible that *El arte de la entrevista* by Juan Mayorga, which is much easier to make, will come out first because it is a film with a theatrical setting; it takes place in a house among three women of the same family (the grandmother and her physical therapist, the daughter, and the granddaughter). Mayorga is a philosopher and mathematician and everything he writes is very abstract, it is not emotional in the least; that is, he writes conceptually. Nevertheless, I would like to offer emotional answers to the conceptual questions Mayorga poses. What I am certain of is that the story will not be set in a concrete place, just as François Ozon's filmic adaptation *Dans la maison* (2012) of a text by Mayorga is not.⁵ Therefore, I realize that it is true that at this moment my work is becoming more universal, maybe it is circumstantial, but this does not mean that I will continue to only make fables, or fantastic tales in English like *Bluebeard*.⁶

Ultimately, my cinema arises from an experience or a concern I have at a particular moment that I then turn into art. When I directed *Chrysalis*, I was concerned with the recuperation of those women and their reconstruction following heartbreak and loss. In the case of *The Bride*, I was interested in tragedy and the issues with which *The Bride* deals. Now with *Bluebeard* I want to explore the domination and predation that Bluebeard exerts on women and also the reasons why a woman submits to this. I am most interested in her process of liberation.

EKH & MGP: We are very curious about *Bluebeard*. How do you imagine the visual universe of your next film? For example, the illustration that appeared in *Variety* announcing the project reminded us of Lorca's drawings.

PO: That is a drawing by Jesús Bosqued and it is quite a few years old. When *Bluebeard* inspired me years ago I told Jesús and he proposed that I write the story to be published

as a graphic novel. Now that we have this opportunity to make the film, we have simply recovered those drawings, and that is why they are reminiscent of Lorca's illustrations.

For the aesthetic construction of *Bluebeard* we want to maintain an essential part of the story (somewhat naïf, imaginative, and fantastic) but without reproducing the Baroque style of fantastic elements reminiscent of Tim Burton's work. I think that it should not be like that because *Bluebeard* is a harsher story and, for that reason, more adult. Therefore, from the aesthetic perspective, our *Bluebeard* drinks from the universe of fable and it also has a Baroque quality in the sense that the protagonist is ostentatious, he shows off his wisdom and wealth, and this shapes his world to a certain extent. Nevertheless, I am determined that this world be imperfect, unrefined and unpleasant, that we should feel how rough its materials are. Two visual references of interest to us in constructing *Bluebeard* are *Jane Eyre* (2011) by Cary Fukunaga and the adaptation of *Wuthering Heights*, with hardly any dialogue, by Andrea Arnold the same year. With *Jane Eyre*, *Bluebeard* shares the Victorian universe and the world of ghosts and spirits, and the afterlife. Moreover, something that attracts us to Fukunaga's version is its Baroque Victorian atmosphere, that is singularly realist, with a certain tinge that is asphyxiating and very hard and rough at the same time. What Arnold's film has in common with *Jane Eyre* is that it is very physical, very intensely sensorial. It is beautiful the way Arnold portrays the characters of Heathcliff and Catherine and their adolescence and how she captures on screen the sensations of the countryside: how they both collect feathers and stones, how cold it is, the blisters they have on their hands, etc.

It has been difficult to decide on the time period of *Bluebeard* because, even though it is a fable, you cannot avoid assigning it a time and an aesthetic. Despite the fact that *Bluebeard* is medieval, many people have linked it to Romanticism, Gothic horror, and Mary Shelley's and Edgar Allan Poe's worlds. They imagine the cold, the fog and the house with Victorian hallways because this is the aesthetic that they associate with horror. Nevertheless, I think that Anglo Saxon cinema (because it is their world) does it better. For that reason, my team and I are thinking about transplanting the story to a more colonial Romantic aesthetic, that we will still have to tie to a certain time period, the forties or the sixties. Even though it will be harder to do, I keep leaning towards the sixties (a fabled, abstract sixties) because the female protagonist is a woman with musical talent, a rarity. For that purpose, the later we situate the story, the greater number of opportunities from which she will have to choose and decide if she wants to go with him or not, and *Bluebeard* will definitively be more severe. And in the sixties women were starting to study music and science, they could accomplish themselves in other fields, but a flutist at the turn of the century or in the forties would have been a real outlier.

EKH & MGP: Will it be as artisanal as your earlier projects? Will your next project bear the same aesthetic signature as your previous works? On a related note, will you be able to continue working with your team from your earlier projects?

PO: I do not know. In actuality, we work more subconsciously than you think. The economic dimensions of *Bluebeard* complicate the responsibility, but I hope that they will allow the art design department to continue its artisanal work but with greater liberty. Up until now, we have had to make two films with lofty aesthetic aims and constructions (they were also well-crafted) and with very little money. To give you a better idea, *The Bride* was made with a smaller budget for artistic direction than even *Chrysalis*'. In the

case of *Bluebeard*, I do not know how much of my team I will be able to maintain; the director of photography is confirmed but it is possible that we will need to collaborate for the artistic design team.

In spite of everything, I am sure that the artisanal aspect of my films is and will continue to be very important to me. I conceive of aesthetic pleasure as a part of life's lessons and of fiction's intensification of life. If a scene is constructed in such a way that the spectator can feel the texture of the elements (the fabrics, the flowers, etc.), it reproduces an experience in an imaginary place, on that other horizon, that is richer at all levels. Since I perceive reality in that way and I experience many moments of beauty and learning, I like to reproduce them in my cinema as well. I am not interested in a cinema that takes the camera to the street in order to capture reality as it is. Sometimes you can find jewels and, other times, reality is incredible and it can even outdo fiction but, in general, that is not the case. There are people who know how to make marvelous cinema within those parameters, but as far as how I work and what I know how to make, my cinema is artisanal and, as best I can, I will ensure that it continues to be so.

EKH & MGP: Why have you decided to film in English and what concerns do you have as you take this next step in your career?

PO: That is one of my fears: filming in English. In reality, a British screenwriter will write the final version of the script, that was first written in Spanish, because it is one thing to communicate in English for work and something very different to reproduce the subtle nuances of poetic or psychological experiences, and my English would not even come close. For technical direction, it is not a challenge because all that is technical is measurable; that is, you can use technical parameters to explain a frame, lack of sound, color tonality, or to organize a filming plan. For example, in *The Bride* we had to do part of the shoot in Turkey (Cappadocia) where we worked in English. Nevertheless, in *Bluebeard*, even though I think I will understand the script entirely when I read it, I am worried about how to direct the actors. Directing actors can be very tricky because it is a very serious exercise of trust and vulnerability on the part of all the actors and the director. You never know if you are getting your ideas across to the actor or actress on the most delicate emotional level and this would be even more difficult in a second language. I am sure that it will be quite a challenge. The *Bluebeard* that we have in mind is precisely Benicio del Toro, whose knowledge of Spanish will make this easier.

With respect to the question of why English, this is a matter of cinematic logistics and pragmatism. It makes sense to make the film in English because this production will be more expensive and it will need to reach beyond Spain in order to achieve higher returns in the box office. Right now, the Spanish market does not generate very much money because piracy is rampant in Spain. Moreover, the Spanish-language market, by contrast to the English-language market, is not well connected. It does not make any sense that Spanish-language cinema markets work differently in Mexico and Argentina, but that is how it is.

The Loom: Ortiz's Professional Activities.



Amapola Films, 2011

Ortiz combines her professional activity as a screenwriter, producer (Amapola Films and Get in the Picture Productions), and director of films and advertisements with teaching and research. She is a professor of Film History in the program of Audiovisual Communication at the Universidad de Barcelona. She has published extensively within her field of narrative and screenwriting. Additionally, she collaborates actively with CIMA (Association of Women in Film and Audiovisual Media), on whose executive board she serves, and she is the Vice President of the EWA Network (European Women's Audiovisual Network).

EKH y MPG: In “Cinema with Boobs” Icíar Bollaín takes issue with the application of labels such as “feminine cinema,” “women’s cinema” or “feminist cinema” to her filmmaking because in her opinion they are limiting. In your case, how would you define your cinema and your gaze? Feminine? Feminist? Women’s cinema?

PO: This is always a controversial subject depending on the context. I think that I have a feminine gaze and, of course, I try to have a feminist gaze. This, depending on where you say it, will be received in one way or another. In the academic context, it is clearly understood; in others, they jump all over you.

In Spain, as in the U.S., there is a lot of recent protest on the part of screenwriters, directors, and actresses with respect to this topic. The terms do not bother me but what does really bother me (and in this sense I understand Icíar) is when the labels of ‘women’s cinema’ or ‘feminine cinema’ become a kind of reductive box to which films by women are relegated and condemn them to making cinema that reproduces what is socially expected from the feminine and of women; that is, an intimate, personal, delicate, soothing cinema that does not transgress the walls of the home nor go beyond familial, generational, sentimental conflicts; a cinema that is nothing more than a romantic comedy, a romantic drama or social cinema nor does it aspire to other filmic languages or genres. In other words, these labels are confining and they have made it so that today the market never considers women narrators (and I use this term in order to talk about not only women film directors but also directors of photography and screenwriters) to take on a production or super-production.

In Spain, unfortunately, women have not been trusted with large productions. An example of this is that Antena 3 Media and Telecinco, who finance big pictures in Spain annually, still have not financed a film by a woman because they will not trust women with their big Spanish blockbusters. For last year’s adaptation of *Palm Trees in the Snow* (González Molina, 2015), a ‘feminine’ blockbuster based on a novel by Luz Gabás

characterized as a ‘women’s novel’ with a female readership and for which Antena 3 Media had a very high budget (10-15 times *Bluebeard*’s), no female filmmaker was proposed to direct the film even though there are many who would have been more appropriate to direct a project of this nature than the director who was hired. It is not just that they do not consider us but also that they demand more of us. I have spoken about this with Isabel Coixet and Icíar a lot. I understand that producers will test me, but they even test Coixet, who has demonstrated that she can do it all with commercial and critical success and popularity with audiences, and they still question her abilities. But then there are male directors who have just begun and hardly have anything to show for their filmography, and they are not subjected to this scrutiny. This is incomprehensible. There is also sexism and a double standard in advertising. In fact, Icíar and I work with the same advertising company and we always laugh because they ask us to make the commercials for skin creams, food, and lingerie, while the advertisements for Mercedes or Audi are reserved for male directors.

So, I think that labels can be very dangerous and can condemn us in the sense that they tie us down in accordance with certain expectations in the film industry. However, from a conceptual perspective, my desire as a narrator is to make feminist cinema that defends as fully as possible the breadth and depth of the feminine. I understand the feminine (like I understand the masculine) as a sensibility that is everywhere and it can be in women or not; it is found in the forms, the stories, the characters, the conflicts, and in the way the conflicts are perceived.

EKH & MGP: Would you consider yourself an *auteur*?

PO: No, in reality I feel like each film will be my last because it is a very expensive project, both economically and personally. So, I never think in terms of authorship; I simply think about the story I am working on and how to salvage it. If we understand the *auteur* as a criterion for establishing a sort of vision, I still do not consider myself an *auteur* because I like to integrate the input of the whole team; our cinema is collective.

At any rate, it is a term that we would need to debate. I do not know if it is also something very feminine, but I think that many of my female colleagues would probably respond in the negative to that question because we are all still too humble. I am obsessed with this topic and I was thinking about creating a series of new characters related to it. It is a conflict that has been called “imposter syndrome” and it is a problem worth exploring in the cinema because women experience it not only in the film industry but in all professions.

EKH & MGP: What is the question that no one has asked you and that you would like to answer?

PO: I firmly believe that a narrator or a filmmaker must have a series of conditions or characteristics. I would not be able to tell you all of them but one that is fundamental is a connection to the sensibility of one’s time in order to be able to tell a story in any way. However, I look at directors around me who have lost that connection and, despite it all, continue making cinema but it does not have much relevance. Recently I had a conversation with my father precisely about this and I told him that I hope that someone will tell me when to stop making films if I have lost touch. My father responded that he

thinks that I will always be able to direct films, even when I am much older. This comment made me ask myself: What films will I make when I am older? And that is an unanswered question that I would like for someone to ask me even though I do not yet have the answer.

We wish to express our gratitude to Paula Ortiz and Barbara Zecchi, director of Gynocine, for collaborating with us on the publication of this conversation.

***Erin K. Hogan, University of Maryland Baltimore County.
María García Puente, California State University San Bernardino.***

Notes

¹ All the images in this interview come from the promotional webpage of *Chrysalis*, <http://detuventanaalamia.com/>.

² Ortiz continues this idea, citing the article that Leticia Dolera wrote about the rape of Maria Schneider in *Last Tango in Paris* (Bertolucci, 1972) and Bertolucci's controversial response. Referring to her own experience in *Chrysalis*, Dolera writes critically about the justification that Bertolucci offers for the sexual assault of the young actress during filming. As Dolera puts it and Ortiz reaffirms in this interview, it is possible to film a rape scene 'with a close-up...without focusing on morbid details...[and] in a way that is both respectful and professional, without losing an iota of truth.' Please refer to works cited at the end of this article.

³ The interviewers have not been able to find a thesis by this title but have found Basterra's work on Lorca in *Seductions of Fate: Tragic Subjectivity, Ethics, Politics* (2004). Please refer to works cited at the end of this article.

⁴ This poem is included in *Los idiomas comunes* (2010), 2011 recipient of the Premio Nacional de Poesía Joven Miguel Hernández. Please refer to works cited at the end of this article.

⁵ Ozon's film is based on Mayorga's *El chico de la última fila* (2006).

⁶ Ortiz also comments on another text by Mayorga on which she and her team had begun to work and to which they might return in the future, *La lengua en pedazos* (2011), based on the writings of Santa Teresa de Jesús. Incidentally, Teresa de Ávila is both a local figure and, as a mystic, one with universal quality.

Works Cited

Basterra, Gabriela. *Seductions of Fate: Tragic Subjectivity, Ethics, Politics*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004.

Casielles, Laura. *Los idiomas comunes*. Madrid: Hiperión, 2016.

Dolera, Leticia. “Haya o no cámaras delante”. *eldiario.es*, 26 Dic. 2016, eldiario.es/tribunaabierta/camaras-delante_6_595000502.html. Accessed 29 Jan. 2017.

García Lorca, Federico. *Blood Wedding*. Trans. Gwynne Edwards. London: Methuen Drama, 2006.

Hopewell, John. “Morena, Get in the Pictures Team for Paula Ortiz’s English-Language Debut ‘Bluebeard’ (EXCLUSIVE)”. *Variety*, 20 Dic. 2016, <http://variety.com/2016/film/festivals/morena-paula-ortiz-bluebeard-san-sebastian-1201865357/>. Accessed 30 Jan. 2017.