

DIALOGUE

LIBERATING THE REAL BODY FROM THE IMAGINARY BODY

A conversation with

ELENA MARTÍN

about *Creatura*

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In *Creatura* (2023), Elena Martín Gimeno—in her triple role as actress, director and screenwriter—documents the evolution of a character at three different ages: child, teenager, and young adult in her thirty-year-old present. Mila's story constitutes a retrospective look at adolescence and childhood, exploring the causes of the mental blocks she experiences in her relationships and sex life as an adult, associated with processes of female socialisation. The film patches together these three stages of life to reflect on the actress's body from the perspective of the gaps between each stage, where the mental blocks tend to be rendered invisible. An actress can facilitate or bring about image changes that could potentially free her from what is paralysing her and open her up to the possibility of a different way of life. The film explores the tension between the real body and the imaginary body: the "body we have in our head, which affects us to the point that it can cause a complex, even an obsession, which arises out of social norms, imposed imaginaries, images of other women" (Joudet, 2024: 14-15). In order to liberate the real body from the imaginary body, an actress's policy of creativity and resistance must

involve focusing on the little perceptible movements: a gesture, a reaction, or the duration of a gaze. She must attend to the little details, the signs of fallibility. But she also needs to play around and take risks—with the body itself—to be open to the unpredictable: sometimes in a profound or exacerbated physical alteration, such as a crisis of hysteria, a possession, a trance or a fit of madness.

While she was working on *Creatura*, Elena Martín starred in *Watermelon Juice* (Suc de sindria, Irene Moray, 2019), a short film about a young woman who experiences possibility and healing as a survivor of a sexual assault. At the same time, she took part in the performance piece *Pussy Picnic* with colleagues in the theatrical artistic collective VVAA. In parallel with these activities, she engaged in an exhaustive process of theoretical research to write Mila as a protagonist who is fully consistent with the traumas she has suffered. We talked to her about her creative process of exploring questions about excesses of the body, gestures and emotions that push normative boundaries, and how to imagine other possible attitudes that challenge the pre-established models for female characters. ■

I. ON ACTING: WITH GAPS AND PROHIBITED GESTURES

This issue considers the body and the performances of actresses, exploring the tension between inherited models and the production of new subjectivities. In this regard, *Creatura* is especially relevant for its treatment of the connection between the teenage Mila (Clàudia Malagelada) and the adult Mila (Elena Martín). How did you work on this gap between the two, in everything from the preparation and casting choice to acting and editing?

We were explaining a very specific wound that is treated in therapy: the Oedipus complex by default. There are two types of Oedipus complex: by excess and by default. In the Oedipus complex by excess, the most extreme cases involve sexual abuse in childhood. On the other hand, the Oedipus complex by default is the opposite: the denial of desire or contact. We documented all the phases of how people redefine their bodies as they grow to adapt to this initial wound of being rejected by the father. At that age, Mila understands that if she feels desire, she won't be loved, and if she isn't loved, she will die. So she starts adapting to everything to avoid that death, to stay alive. As a child, her first gesture in this regard is to say: "I don't want us to call it vulva anymore," which is symbolically equivalent to an amputation. The same thing is repeated in the adult Mila's dream, when she dreams that she doesn't have a vulva. Her dream is linked to that amputation in childhood and her unconscious decision that "if I have to remove this part of me for you to want me, take care of me and protect me, I will do it, symbolically."

Some of these wounds are present in the film, while others are not. We didn't have the time or space to show every phase of the Oedipus complex. But in adolescence, the conflict is reduced to its minimum expression. This is a body that begins to discover the male gaze, which has happened to

many women and men. When Llorenç (Biel López) tells her "I don't remember you being like this last summer," for Mila there is something strange and confusing about his observation. She likes it, but at the same time she thinks: "I've been here the whole time, and I haven't noticed the change" until someone from the outside points it out.

We had a scene that we cut in which, when Mila was going out to a party, her uncle told her she was beautiful and made her turn around on his arm. While she turned around, he was staring at her breasts, and she realised. It was a very strange moment. When Mila perceives that her body is starting to be looked at differently, on the one hand, she experiences a sensation of violence, but on the other, from the perspective of the Oedipus complex by default, she realises that through her body she can get revenge for her father's rejection. The character didn't end up going in that direction, but there are vestiges of that logic: seduce and abandon, seduce and abandon, usually the most inaccessible person, like Llorenç. In this way, unconsciously, she tries to prove that it was a lie that she didn't deserve her father's love.

Generally, this is a phase of discovery and overexploitation of the body. That's why the teenage Mila is provocative, flirtatious, wears her hair long, and is much more feminine. In contrast, the adult Mila wears jumpers and loose-fitting trousers, no make-up, and short hair. She has entered a more masculinised space. Somehow, she has internalised the idea that in order to find stable and familial love, she has to give up the *seductive beast* image and go back to denying her femininity.

Between the teenage Mila and the adult we had to take a very big leap, including with the wardrobe. We told the crew: the child and the teenager are clearly the same character as they share the same playfulness, but in the adult Mila this is not evident until she begins to be more playful with Marcel, to suggest games to him. At first, she didn't seem to be the same person, and that was a risk we noticed in the editing. But as

we had studied it, we knew it made sense that the mischievous part of her personality had been dormant for a long time and that over the course of the film it was coming back to life.

The big difference between adolescence and adulthood is that teenage Mila is more exposed because she is more fragile. On the one hand, she is more connected to her primal instincts, which is something that the adult Mila needs to recover. When she recalls her adolescence, she allows herself to be lighter, more upbeat, which is more noticeable in the central part of the film than it is with Mila in the first act. The dream where boys jump on top of her to lick her shows she is in touch with that more primal desire.

The choice to cast Clàudia was very complex because we were looking for an actress who, in situations such as noticing that someone is looking at her breasts, would elicit a protective reaction from the spectator, who would be perceived as fragile. But, at the same time, she had to have the strength and curiosity necessary to be daring and not to look uncomfortable with physical contact or showing her body.

At the casting call, we asked the girls if in their group of friends there were different levels of experience with sex or romance. They all said yes. Then we asked them if they were one of the ones who had more or less experience. I was interested in the ones who had less. Then I asked them: "When they tell you about these things, what do you feel? Fear, rejection, curiosity, hope?" Clàudia told me she had less experience, but when I asked her this second question she answered quickly: "No, no, I want to be them." That was the energy we were looking for! We needed someone bold, who had no mental blocks that might make the film shoot a bad experience for her; someone who would understand the character deeply. In the scene on the floating platform, for example, I said to her: "Clàudia, the idea is that you would eat them." And she answered: "Yes, yes, I get it perfectly."

Regarding the adult Mila, we wanted to ask you about your experience with the theatre and working with the body, when there is a kind of emotional overload and physical alteration that is perhaps easier to experience or work with on the stage. This might be because the cinema tends to encourage restraint in acting, given that the camera amplifies gestures and details, making it more likely that something will be perceived as excessive. All of this may be connected to the ending to the film, which points to a potential that is open rather than something resolved, suggesting a possible transformative shift—yours as both an actress and a filmmaker—towards a different place. We would like to know your experience in this regard, both in the theatre work you've done and in its connection with your life. Do you think you have been transformed in a way that would have been harder to achieve without the theatre, especially in relation to the liberation of gestures and the body?

Totally. I feel that the theatre doesn't influence me as much as I would like it to; in fact, I would like to go more in that direction. What I have done in theatre, especially with the VVAA collective, is quite extreme in performative terms. There is a lot of risk because we are often performing in the audience, without a protective barrier, and the performative code is really outlandish. I remember starting performances and seeing this feeling of second-hand embarrassment on the faces in the audience and thinking: "Keep going, at some point they'll crack the code." It wasn't easy.

On the other hand, in cinema, all the acting I've done has been in a very naturalistic register. On the level of the staging, with *Creatura* I allowed myself to explore something more, especially with the figurative imagery and the dreams. That was very gratifying, to be able to locate myself in a more theatrical and symbolic place. But as a film actress, I haven't yet reached the same level that I have in theatre.

In terms of tools, the theatre has given me a lot, not only technique, but also in relation to risk. Acting in front of an audience is very different from acting in front of a camera. In a film, knowing that I can repeat a scene three times is a big relief for me. For example, in the series that I just shot, I came back from holidays and on the first day I was stumbling over every sentence in Catalan. The director very tactfully told me that nothing I was saying was intelligible. Without the theatrical background I have, I would have been completely blocked in that situation.

In fact, the idea for *Creatura* came while we were doing *Pussy Picnic*, where the level of physical exposure was much higher than it is in the film. Not so much in terms of the exaggeration or alteration you mentioned, but in terms of explicitly showing the body. In *Pussy Picnic*, as part of a performance piece, we stripped naked in a very technical way: we lay down on the floor, took a gynaecological speculum and opened our pussies, and a video artist filmed inside with a spotlight and projected our whole cavity on a huge screen. Obviously, it was a safe space, where we had decided on everything in full awareness. On the other hand, in the series I just did, I decided not to undress. Not because the crew wasn't trustworthy—they definitely were—but because in that context I couldn't see how it was going to work.

When films show these states of emotional overload, female characters are often immediately pigeon-holed as hysterical. Godard used editing to show how this configuration originated with Charcot's photographs in the 19th century, which turned hysterical patients into a spectacle; this image was then passed onto silent film, as can be seen in the example of Lillian Gish in Griffith's films: the same form, the same image. However, what interests us here is to consider these states, such as possession, from a different perspective, related to the empowerment of the body, to an

outburst that transforms, both in creative terms and in terms of a physical liberation.

I'm very interested in emotional overload, whatever register it might be in. I'm thinking of films about possession: there is something almost magical about that energy that seems to come out of nowhere and suddenly pulls you in. But it is true that when it comes to female characters, this type of expression tends to be punished. A lot of people have told me that at the beginning of *Creatura*, Mila "looks a little crazy." And yet, there have been many women who have told me after watching the film: "I've had these attacks in arguments with my partner." It doesn't necessarily have to happen in sex; it can occur in any moment of frustration.

That's why I find what you mention about hysteria interesting. In therapeutic terms, what happens to Mila at the beginning of the film is not an anxiety attack, but an attack of hysteria. But I use the term *anxiety* because people understand it better. When you say *hysteria*, it evokes the image of Sigmund Freud and of women tied to a bed. But if you look at films like *Thelma* (Joachim Trier, 2017), where the protagonist's convulsions follow the pattern of hysteria, or the new version of *Nosferatu* (Robert Eggers, 2024), where Lily-Rose Depp repeats that same posture when she is possessed, the connection between hysteria, possession and sexuality is clear.

It's almost always about girls in puberty or at the moment of their sexual awakening. *Carrie* (Brian de Palma, 1976) begins with the protagonist's first menstruation; in *The Exorcist* (William Friedkin, 1973), the possession is manifested through transgressive acts that symbolise the passage to adulthood and sexual awakening. And all these stories repeat the same discourse: the characters that surround the protagonist say things like "she's not like she was before" when in reality what is happening is that she's becoming a woman. In therapeutic terms, hysteria is closely related to sexual repression.

As for the ending to *Creatura*, we cut it down because the film already had certain internal rules that didn't allow us to take it to an extreme that was too radical. But we originally had the idea that what happens in the ending wasn't real. It's strange in itself that Mila, with all the mental blocks we've seen in her, would wake up at three in the morning, walk across a forest alone and wade into the sea at night. It's a bit of poetic licence. But in the first version, the scene was much more explicit: she masturbated on the rocks, had an orgasm and then time passed without the spectator realising it. When she opened her eyes, it was already morning and she was surrounded by people, in an awkward situation. I think this space is very interesting because it is tangentially related to possession, although the relationship isn't explicit. Ultimately, possession is only one way to explain erratic or explosive behaviour, from a religious perspective. It's easier to believe that there is a demonic force inside you than to accept that you have simply overstepped certain limits.

This commonly reflects male insecurity or fear of the woman, of her uncontrolled body; these are momentary outbursts that usually leave the man feeling paralysed or besieged. However, perhaps women have begun to conquer other spaces, like power dynamics, expressing themselves through their bodies, being excessive outside the private sphere. All of this is intertwined, and this intersection makes the crossovers so interesting.

There are a lot of films that address this in some way, even though they don't belong to the horror genre. I'm thinking of Ingmar Bergman. In *Secrets of a Marriage* (Scener ur ett äktenskap, Ingmar Bergman, 1974), Liv Ullman's character takes a new direction and the man's response is not paralysis, but physical aggression. However, in recent times this has evolved. The woman has the man up against the ropes. In the drama genre, this conflict is often shown. The woman exercises her power the only way she can, which is usually through emotional

manipulation, because it is the only space of power that she has been allowed; women are highly educated emotionally, as this is the only territory they have left. And those are her weapons: make his head explode, smother him until he cries. It's a dynamic that has been heavily criticised, but it seems incredibly powerful to me. Not in my personal life, but as a space of creation I find it thrilling.

In Hagai Levi's television remake of *Scenes from a Marriage* (2021), the roles are reversed, swapping the one who commits adultery and the one who leaves, but the power of manipulation remains in the woman's hands, as it is unthinkable that the man could ever be emotionally smarter. Unfortunately, many women are abused by their husbands, who also psychologically manipulate them. But in this context of an intellectualised semi-bourgeois couple who have probably been through therapy, it is clear that the husband is lost.

In the creative process I'm working on now, there is a bullying female character who starts to have outbursts of violence and at one point does an online search: "I almost killed the person I love most. Am I an abuser?" While researching for this project, I also entered this question online [in Spanish: *¿Soy una maltratadora?*], and then I searched the same question in masculine form: "*¿Soy un maltratador?*" In response to the question in the masculine form, a lot of people try to console you, but they don't deny that you're an abuser. In response to the question in the feminine, there was one answer that has stayed with me, which said: "*Maltratadora* [abuser] is a very big word," and the user's message literally read: "When my boyfriend doesn't listen to me, I break things, I hit him, I scream..." And of course... Maybe the word isn't all that big, is it?

2. CREATION BASED ON THE GESTURE: IMAGES BEYOND THEIR LITERALITY

From a cinematic perspective, it is important to discuss and explore how to reconsider these

dynamics. In this sense, the final sequence may be the one that most openly expresses the adult Mila's desire: a desire that is self-sufficient and reflects a fuller connection. Her blocking and unblocking in this scene are deeply tied to the physical dimension, to something that doesn't need to be rationalised, interpreted or gauged, but that manifests itself as a purely experiential and material desire. Do you think that films made by women today are exploring this dimension in depth or are they still too timid?

I think there are people who are exploring it a lot and there are other cases that are more timid. My inspirations come to mind, like *Elle* (Paul Verhoeven, 2021), for example. Michelle (Isabelle Huppert) is an irreproachable character, despite the fact she sleeps with her friend's husband. She is an extremely kind person; when she first met her friend Ana (Ann Consigny) in the hospital, she offered to breastfeed her baby because her own child was in an incubator. But at the same time, she is capable of unbelievable violence, with all her power. I get the impression that with any hostile, violent or unpleasant character, there is a tendency to explain the origins of their problem therapeutically, to spell out their previous trauma; I too fall into this trap, and I have to make an effort not to reinforce the dynamic. Socially, we try to show empathy, to contextualise everyone. For example, I really like *Titane* (Julia Ducournau, 2021) because yes, she had a car accident, but so what? This doesn't explain why she kills; it doesn't explain why she's a serial killer, and I like that. At the same time, it's almost incidental. The emotional dimension in the film happens elsewhere and not in relation to the crimes.

In *Raw* (Grave, Julia Ducournau, 2016), for example, there is an eroticising gaze from a subjective female perspective that we are not used to seeing on screen. This gaze destabilises the usual representation of desire and breaks with our traditional understanding of sexualisation, as can be

seen in the scene of the football match. In *Creatura*, bodies en masse also play a key role, like the bodies of the firefighters in *Titane*, exploring a collective physicality that challenges conventions related to desire and the representation of the body.

Yes! *Raw* is an influence. The scene on the platform is inspired by the football match in *Raw* and we showed the scene to Clàudia so she could understand what we wanted to achieve, which she understood perfectly. As for this other gaze you mention, it is already so naturalised in our conversations that I wonder: What do people do when they write a film? Do they reinvent themselves to adapt to a standard gaze? Between you and me, I think this option has always existed. For example, as a teenager, I had a lot of friends who decorated their notebooks with images of naked boys. That has always been around.

I think I have always thought about it because of literature, which has given me a lot of influences, from Annie Ernaux to Anaïs Nin. Also more contemporary stuff like Miranda July, which reveals a subjectivity and a compulsion of desire. In her diaries, Anaïs Nin describes how she devours one man after another. It's not just about sexualising them but also about dominating them emotionally, manipulating them, and then abandoning them.

But yes, during the filming I said to the boys too: "In this scene, we are sexualising you, we're filming you shirtless in slow motion." And we would ask them: "Are you comfortable with that?" We didn't want to replicate what men have done to us, right? And at the same time, I liked that all the boys in the scene had different bodies, many of them non-normative. Her desire isn't like that: it's not pornographic; it's hormonal. They're young boys, full of energy; it's something much more animalistic than aesthetic.

Desire in *Creatura* is expressed through animality rather than standardisation. A clear example is the dream scene, where the boys move like animals, generating a feeling closer to the cannibal-

istic than to the strictly sexual, as if they were devouring her. This context unleashes a different type of body movement that expands the register of the erotic, shifting away from conventional representations of desire.

When we were writing and pitching this scene to the producers, interestingly, it was the most controversial. However, once we filmed it, everyone got it. I thought about the dream scene: do you really think a teenager couldn't dream about a fantasy of submission in which five boys devour her? Of course she could have that kind of dream! But that doesn't mean that she wants anyone to overstep any boundaries in reality. In the dream, it's a given that they are not hurting her; in fact, several boys are giving her pleasure at the same time.

We worked a lot on this scene physically during rehearsals, giving it a more theatrical treatment. Writing a dream is an amazing experience; it makes you understand why people choose to write books rather than making films. In a dream, you can explore a space where anything is possible. The protagonist enters a garden that isn't necessarily the garden at her house; it's an imagined garden that is transformed into an endless path filled with subjective elements. One day, when I have a bigger budget for a film, I will invest in these things.

When we saw the boys walking, the scene lost its power. In the script, they were naked, but a lot of them were underage, so we couldn't do that. That's why we decided that they would wear the swimsuits they have on in the scene on the platform, creating a connection between the dream and another moment when she felt desire for them. We got them to crouch down gradually. What we lost by filming the dream in a realistic location, like the garden at her house, we tried to compensate for with little distortions of the setting and the attitudes of the characters, to make it clear that they were in an unrealistic environment.

Literature invites us into more of an imaginary mental space, which in many cases is able to circumvent censorship more easily. On the other hand, although it also draws on the imagination and connects with the spectator's subjectivity, cinema is usually more restricted due to the tendency to interpret the images in a literal and explicit way. It is important to work to recover and expand that imaginary space in cinema, especially because it is a highly industrialised medium conditioned by codes and conventions imposed by the distribution market, which limits its expressive potential.

In *Creatura*, it gave me great pleasure to be able to keep a scene that I still don't understand completely, one that emerged when we first started writing the script and made it through to the final cut. I understand it emotionally, but I don't know what it means. When people ask me about it, I don't know how to answer. It's the scene where Mila's mother tells her that she dreamed about Mila and her grandmother, when Mila was little, and the three of them were in bed. In the dream, Mila asked her mother to pat her on the *culete* [bottom]. Mila, now an adult, is taken aback and asks: "Did I used to ask you to pat me on the *culete* too?" Her mother replies: "Of course, every day!" Mila then feels conflicted, because this scene, in some way, suggests a reinterpretation of everything we've seen, although I don't know what it is. Her mother is a secondary character, and we never see her pat her on the *culete*. I don't know what this scene means, but I find it moving. Maybe it's a reflection on how memories are subjective and how we can receive unexpected information in unexpected moments. Some people have asked me whether Mila is displaying a moment of hysteria, or whether the scene isn't real and is in her imagination. But no, it's real. It's simply a perceptive nuance, and the sensations it conveys are real.

This scene comes from a real conversation with my mother. It's the only scene in the whole film that wasn't analysed. The rest of the film, as I

said before, was designed with an almost scientific approach. But this scene was born while we were writing the script. One day, while we were writing, my mother called me and told me that she'd had a dream about me when I was a child. She told me that my grandmother was in the dream too. And she explained that I'd asked her to pat me on the *culete*, and apparently it was something I often used to ask her. When I hung up, I told Clara Roquet (the scriptwriter): "We've made a mistake." And she answered me: "No, no, we have to put this scene in." In fact, the storyline of the grandmother and the mother is the only one in the film that is based on autobiographical facts. The rest is a hotchpotch of research and personal accounts. However, we had to do substantially cuts to the part of the grandmother, who originally appeared much more in the sections of Mila's childhood and adolescence. For example, when she reads the grandmother's diaries, that part is a personal experience, but those scenes didn't make it into the final cut.

And did you have to cut out a lot the mother's scenes in the editing process? Ariadna Ribas (the editor) explains that the first cut was about four hours long. We get the impression that the mother is a character whose part was heavily cut down.

We had to cut scenes with the mother during Mila's childhood quite a bit. That was the moment when her mother began to be important again and was stepping into the foreground, and at the end of the film we wanted to bring her back in. We shot several scenes from the point of view of Carla Linares, who plays Mila's mother when Mila is a child, but in the cut they looked strange. The film is so focused on Mila's point of view that although we liked them a lot, those scenes didn't fit.

In fact, there was quite a long scene in the kitchen, between Carla Linares, Paula Hernando and Teresa Vallicrosa, where they were preparing a meal. At one point, Teresa, who plays Mila's grandmother, starts telling Carla off for complain-

ing about her husband, when Carla says: "He's with the girl all day, but after that he doesn't do anything." And the grandmother replies: "You're so ungrateful; you have the best husband," and so on. Carla felt totally cut off. There were a lot of similar dynamics, where family members constantly praised Gerard, and she felt completely overshadowed. But Mila doesn't understand it. It looked strange, like: why is this here if Mila doesn't understand it, and all the rest of the story is told from her perspective? This scene explained how the mother felt, but Mila doesn't get it.

In a way, the feeling we wanted to convey in the chapter on her childhood is already made clear by the simple fact that we don't see the mother when she should be present. Some shots left from Mila's point of view were kept in, such as when she rejects her on the beach and she moves away into the sea, jumping into the water. From that scene, you can infer her mother's unhappiness.

Returning to the subject of genre, we wanted to ask you whether the horror or mystery element that pervades the film, especially in the nocturnal and nightmare scenes, which were filmed in a horror register, came naturally due to the topic of the film, or whether it was an aspect that was debated and determined during the process.

No, no, it arose in a completely natural way from the beginning. In fact, the film was much more permeated with a horror tone. We even shot some horror scenes, but we didn't include them in the final cut because they didn't fit. There were several where Mila was home alone, hearing noises clearly typical of the horror genre. I remember one in which I'm working at home, looking towards the window, while the camera is filming me from behind. There's a very slow tracking shot. Strange sounds are coming from the house, and there I am with my back exposed, which is a classic trope of the genre. At one point there's a loud bang, and I turn and say: "Guys, I have to hang up," because I'm on a video call. Then I go into my grandmother's

bedroom, where the noise came from. There was a whole plotline related to the grandmother, who was dead now and manifested herself in the film. In this scene, I come to the door of her room and it's the first time I've gone in there. The window is completely open and a box has fallen to the floor; everything's a mess. I begin picking the things up and I find her diaries. I close the window and sit down to read them. At one point, I read something about my grandfather and begin feeling a growing anxiety. Increasingly anxious, I start stripping off my clothes due to my discomfort, when the door and window open suddenly, almost magically. There's a shot that was one of the most impactful in the film: me on my back, starting to take off my clothes and discovering that my back is completely covered in hives, at the peak of the allergic reaction. It's a pretty terrifying and also monstrous moment, because my whole back is covered with spots, while the window is open. Mila stays there, trying to soothe her itching with the breeze.

Is this a film that you feel is still unrealised inside you? Do you feel the desire to continue exploring it, to delve into those images from the perspective of your own evolution as a filmmaker?

Yes, there are several things that are still unrealised. One of them is the question of adolescence and post-adolescence, that cycle of seducing and abandoning, seducing and abandoning. The power dynamic between the adult Mila and the teenage Mila, which we've seen. This would represent an arc towards the end of adolescence, but in *Creatura* we couldn't make such a wide arc, so we limited it to the key elements that were important to the story. That part was left out, but in a more extreme way, without being subordinated to a whole therapeutic explanation of repression.

The question of therapy, which we also left out, really interests me. There were therapy sessions in the film that we ended up cutting out, and that's something I'd like to explore more.

Then there's the question of possession. I'm a big fan of horror films; it's what I used to watch most. My favourite film for many years was *The Exorcism of Emily Rose* (Scott Derrickson, 2005). I feel that in horror there's a kind of justification for doing evil, for the impossible, you know? Like "I've got a demon inside me." We talked about it with Clara Roquet. There is something almost of the superhero in this, that a possessed woman acquires superhuman powers, and I love to think about that. It's a fantasy that goes beyond the erotic. It's a fantasy of violence. My anxiety, instead of staying inside me, would turn into destruction. I think that is a pleasure rather than a physical consequence.

And it happens to me when I'm writing, that as I progress with it I wonder: "Why does she do this?" But why? "Because she feels like doing it, right? Because she desires it." As women, we have a very strict relationship with violence, as if we're never able to feel immoral. If we hit someone, it's in self-defence, or because they're about to rape us. But writing a female character, why couldn't you write that she hits someone simply because she wants to, without having to justify it?

I haven't read Leonora Carrington's *Down Below*, but the other day I was told that in this book Carrington describes how, during her moments of psychosis, she experienced a superhuman strength. This happens in people who suffer a fit; perhaps it's the adrenaline, which gives you a huge boost of power. People acquire disproportionate strength when they're in danger, a strength that seems impossible. That's why strait-jackets were invented, for example.

I've been thinking a lot about the idea of transgression. In the project for the series that I'm going to direct, I'm exploring the sheer banality of male violence. You start unpacking all this and you realise it's there because it's violence that is structurally permitted and supported. You think: "Why do they do it?" And the answer is because they can, because it's approved of, or at least not disapproved of; it is permitted. Sometimes when

I'm writing female characters I think: "If a man did this, it would be horrible." And I always have to remind myself that she's a woman. Unconsciously, I always do this translation. In cases of partner violence, for example, if it was the man who committed the violence it would be terrible, but why do I have so much fun writing it if it is her? And I think it's perverse and I question myself: "What am I trying to say?" I try to justify it, but what the character I'm writing is doing is a transgression. It's a given that she shouldn't be doing it, but she does it anyway. And this is where a very important dramatic problem arises: the chase. In real life, the police would arrive and there would be a chase. And I ask myself: "What fantasy realm can I create to prevent that chase from happening, or at least for it not to be successful? Violence can also be ecstatic; I've been thinking a lot about this idea for my next film.

But it is essential in the field of artistic creation that you can get dirty in this sense, exploring contradictory and challenging images. Especially when it comes to gender, everything tends to be subject to a system of control that structures it too rigidly. There needs to be something that can break with these norms; otherwise, you run the risk of creating from a place that is too comfortable.

Totally. I don't know whether there will be another driving force after this, but for me, after *Creatura*, this is the only driver. I loved a tweet that Clara Serra posted about *Creatura*, where she shared an article in [the Spanish newspaper] *El País* that related the film to *Elle*. I didn't understand how anyone could make this comparison, but she talked about the expression in both films of an "improper" desire on the part of a female character, liberating desire from the obligation to be healthy, exemplary and harmless. It liberated desire from the pressure to civilise the world, from being an example of civility in the face of male barbarism. And she said: "No, female desires are powerfully dark, unfathomable, toxic and harmful." ■

NOTES

- * This publication forms part of the PID2021-124377-I00 project, funded by MICIU/AEI/10.13039/501100011033 and by ERDF, EU.

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Joudet, M. (2024). *La segunda mujer. Lo que hacen las actrices cuando envejecen*. Seville: Athenaica.

NOTAS

- * Esta publicación es parte del proyecto PID2021-124377NB-I00, financiado por MICIU/AEI/10.13039/501100011033 y por FEDER, UE.

REFERENCIAS

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FREEDING THE REAL BODY FROM THE IMAGINARY BODY. CONVERSATION WITH ELENA MARTÍN ABOUT CREATURA

Abstract

An interview with the filmmaker and actress Elena Martín Gimeno, discussing the creation of new female subjectivities in cinema to challenge inherited models of gender and performance. With reference to her latest film, *Creatura* (2023), she explains the process of researching, writing and creating a character depicted at different temporal and emotional points. The discussion of this film raises issues such as the influence of theatre on her life and her way of working, writing and acting, excessive gestures and their relationship with transgression, the representation of hysteria or demonic possession, and the use of these gestures to find ways of pushing the normative limits of cinematic language in order to liberate the gaze.

Key words

Creatura, Female subjectivity, Hysteria, Possession, Excessive gestures.

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LIBERAR EL CUERPO REAL DEL CUERPO IMAGINARIO. CONVERSACIÓN CON ELENA MARTÍN SOBRE CREATURA

Resumen

Entrevista con la directora y actriz Elena Martín Gimeno, con quien hablamos sobre la producción cinematográfica de nuevas subjetividades femeninas con relación a los modelos heredados de género e interpretativos. A propósito de su última película, *Creatura* (2023), nos explica cómo es el proceso de investigación, escritura y creación de un personaje contado entre intervalos temporales y emocionales. A raíz de esta obra surgen temas como la influencia del teatro en su vida y en su forma de trabajar, escribiendo e interpretando; los gestos excesivos y la relación de esto con la transgresión, cómo puede ser la representación de la histeria o la posesión demoníaca; así como el uso de estos gestos para encontrar maneras de hacer desbordar los límites estándares del lenguaje cinematográfico para liberar la mirada.

Palabras clave

Creatura; Subjetividad Femenina; Histeria; Posesión; Gesto excesivo.

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Article reference

Trias Alguacil, M., De Lucas, G. (2025). Freeing the Real Body from the Imaginary Body. Conversation with Elena Martín about *Creatura*. *L'Atalante. Revista de estudios cinematográficos*, 40, 109-122. <https://doi.org/10.63700/1323>

Referencia de este artículo

Trias Alguacil, M., De Lucas, G. (2025). Liberar el cuerpo real del cuerpo imaginario. Conversación con Elena Martín sobre *Creatura*. *L'Atalante. Revista de estudios cinematográficos*, 40, 109-122. <https://doi.org/10.63700/1323>

Edita / Published by



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ISSN 1885-3730 (print) / 2340-6992 (digital) DL V-5340-2003 WEB www.revistaatalante.com MAIL info@revistaatalante.com
