

Stacey Schlau*
 SOR JUANA OVERSEES THE
 SUBVERSION OF GENDERED STATE
 POWER: FEMINIST GESTURES IN *DE
 NOCHE VIENES, ESMERALDA***

Abstract

Jaime Humberto Hermsillo's film adaptation of Elena Poniatowska's short story "De noche vienes," *De noche vienes, Esmeralda* (1997), questions and challenges gender norms and patriarchal power, just as Sor Juana did in her writings. Unlike the seventeenth-century author, however, he demonstrates women's power through sexuality and emotion, revealing how such impulses can undermine and disrupt the Law of the Father. The film opens up the possibility of exploring, exploiting, and taming the male gaze—historically a device used as part of the apparatus that suppresses women—and offers an alternative polymorphous "female" gaze, one that counters the effects of patriarchy. *De noche vienes, Esmeralda* carefully and repeatedly invites the spectator's active ocular participation in the process of re-defining the power plays of sexuality and gender. While questioning patriarchal convention and tradition, it also asks us to put aside (unconscious) assumptions about propriety and investigate alternative paradigms regarding Mexican national gender roles and sexuality. The protagonist Esmeralda, the ultimate embodied being, strips away the veneer to reveal the emptiness beneath the rules and regulations of patriarchal capitalism, in its nationalistic Mexican form. Taking on the stance of a polymorphic female gaze, spectators of the film can begin to participate in an alternative worldview, one that allows for free expression of love and sexuality, outside the forms created by church and state.

Keywords: Bigamy, Capitalism, Esmeralda, Gender, Hermsillo, Male Gaze, Patriarchy, Power, Sexuality, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz.

* **Stacey Schlau**, Ph.D., Department of Foreign Languages, West Chester University of Pennsylvania.

** My most sincere thanks for the cogent, substantive readings of drafts of this article by Jennifer Eich, Mario Ortiz, and Maria Van Liew; their comments vastly improved the final version of the essay.

Resumen

La adaptación en forma de película de Jaime Humberto Hermosillo del cuento de Elena Poniatowska "De noche vienes", *De noche vienes, Esmeralda* (1997), cuestiona y desafía las normas de género sexual, tal como lo hizo Sor Juana en sus escritos. A diferencia de la autora del diecisiete, sin embargo, demuestra el poder de la mujer a través de la sexualidad y la emoción, revelando cómo tales impulsos pueden subvertir e interrumpir la Ley del Padre. La película abre la posibilidad de explorar, explotar y domesticar la mirada masculina—históricamente parte del aparato que suprime a la mujer—y ofrece la alternativa de una mirada femenina polimórfica, la que contradice los efectos del patriarcado. Mientras la película cuestiona las convenciones y tradiciones patriarcales, también nos pide que pongamos a un lado presunciones inconscientes del decoro y que investiguemos paradigmas alternativos de la sexualidad y del papel de género sexual en el México contemporáneo. La protagonista Esmeralda, ser encarnado por excelencia, revela el vacío bajo las reglas y regulaciones del capitalismo patriarcal, en su forma nacionalista mexicana. Al asumir la posición de la mirada femenina polimórfica, el público puede participar en una perspectiva alternativa de la vida, la que permite la expresión libre del amor y de la sexualidad, fuera de las normas establecidas por la iglesia y el estado.

Palabras clave: Bigamia, capitalismo, Esmeralda, género sexual, Hermosillo, mirada masculina, patriarcado, poder, sexualidad, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz.

In Elena Poniatowska's collection of short stories, *De noche vienes* (The Night Visitor), issues of power—especially as it operates through gender—dominate. The title story of the volume exemplifies this theme in a particularly subversive fashion, one that opens up the possibility of exploring, exploiting, and taming the male gaze, historically a device used as part of the apparatus that suppresses women. This dimension of the story especially is developed in Jaime Humberto Hermosillo's prize-winning film adaptation, *De noche vienes, Esmeralda* (1997), which offers an alternative polymorphous "female" gaze, one that counters the effects of patriarchy.¹ Indeed, the film carefully and repeatedly invites the spectator's active ocular participation in the process of re-defining the power plays of sexuality and gender. Visually expressive, subtle (and some obvious) gestures throughout the film lead viewers toward a position that validates the protagonist's power and ability to heal those around her. While questioning patriarchal convention and tradition, it also

asks us to put aside (unconscious) assumptions about propriety and investigate alternative paradigms regarding Mexican national gender roles and sexuality. And, it pays homage to openness and honesty rather than a religiously-based shame, juxtaposing the abuse of state-supported structural power in the hands of one (male-gendered) human being with the empowerment that results from a sympathetic (female-gendered) person, whose aim is to ensure others' and her own happiness.

As is typical in Hermosillo's filmic universe, the exploration of power plays and mechanisms in *De noche vienes, Esmeralda* occurs through the depiction of "ordinary" middle-class lives, seamlessly integrated with surrealistic scenes: at the same time that he "demonstrates his unique powers of observation of the [behavior], customs, myths and values of the Mexican middle class, caught in their everyday moods . . . Hermosillo is also capable of penetrating beyond it to the fantastic, without any barrier to separate it from reality."² In this film, inner fantasies, thoughts, and feelings as well as Esmeralda's narratives are externalized and recorded by the camera. Off-screen spectators are therefore positioned as diageitic, while the characters' inner workings are made concrete in the visual. The very ordinary quality of their existence establishes the fantastic as believable, and the intricate apparatuses of power and relationship are more readily exposed through on-screen attempts to define and confine the protagonist's polyandric behavior.

Ultimately, reflecting Poniatowska's inquiry into the mechanisms and exercise of power, especially "those elements that make shifts of power possible and at the same time make it difficult to determine who is in control,"³ the film queries, in a Foucauldian sense, whether power resides in the institutions of society or in a complex web of interrelationships between social structures and individuals who interact with the regulations that they engender. Appropriately, an image of Sor Juana, that Mexican national icon whose mutability has served so many constituencies, constitutes a visual (and ultimately, ideological) lynchpin around which the narrative flows; she oversees the interrogation both of the film's overarching issues and more literally, of the protagonist, Esmeralda.

While Poniatowska's story repeatedly and directly juxtaposes Esmeralda's inherent innocence (despite her unconventional life)

with a jaundiced view of the corruption of the ideals of the Mexican Revolution built into the judicial system, Hermosillo uses visual imagery (an upside-down map of Mexico, a poster of Sor Juana) to enact the critique of corrupt nationalistic institutions. The writer ends the story with first a transcription of the legal document, and then a journalistic rendition of Esmeralda's fate. The director ends the film with first a birthday party in jail, in which all the characters participate, and then Solorio's imitation of Gene Kelly singing in the rain, followed by a coda in which the actor Tito Vasconcelos, who has played many roles in the film, pushes a bicycle into going off on its own.

Hermosillo takes advantage of the medium of film to more fully explore the sexual politics built into political and social structures. He also makes far more concrete than Poniatowska the sexual politics of sexuality in male-female and male-male relationships. Primarily given voice through interior monologues in the story, in the film version Solorio's eye not only finds an outlet in his (internally voiced) thoughts, but also is externalized and duplicated in the camera's lingering perusal of Esmeralda's body, especially her legs. Hermosillo highlights female solidarity in the face of patriarchal ideologies and practices as much as Poniatowska does (especially through the character of Lucita, transformed from the fat glutton in the story to a thin, sexually starved admirer of Frida Kahlo in the film). He also remains faithful to the nuances of Esmeralda's character: an innocent, she is a quintessential nurturer fulfilling the stereotypic feminine gender role; a sexually liberated being, she recognizes the individuality and uniqueness of each human being.

Toward a Polymorphic Female Gaze

Since the publication in 1975 of Laura Mulvey's provocative "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," in which she posited an opposition between women on the screen as passive objects who are looked at and spectators, whether women or men, who assume a masculine subject position insofar as they do the looking, the term "male gaze" has become part of the language of film and other kinds of (feminist) theory. Mulvey argued that in classical narrative films, the spectator looks, the male characters look, the camera looks, and

the female characters are looked at, thus re-creating all film viewers as gendered masculine subjects. Through narcissistic identification with male characters and voyeuristic objectification of female characters, the look becomes a "gaze" and the female character an object of desire.⁴ Although roundly criticized for what some call its essentialist view and others its rigidity, the essay nevertheless laid the groundwork for a frame of reference that opened up subsequent lines of inquiry. Later, in "Afterthoughts," Mulvey added to the argument, noting, among other matters, that "gender identification, and hence identity, is a *process*: the real task is to enact the contradiction of female desire, and of women as social subjects, in terms of narrative . . . spectators are historically engendered in social practices, in the real world, and in cinema too."⁵ She posited film's potential as a vehicle for creating a (visual) space in which to critically examine the often-incongruous mechanisms through which individuals and society dynamically interact, and together help to shape gender role expectations and behaviors. Following Mulvey, Hermsillo takes full advantage of the *mise-en-scène* and other technologies of his medium to explore the socially constructed ambiguities and conflicts of gendered identities.

Specifically, *De noche vienes, Esmeralda* plays out the tensions between individual and social desire through the formal and formulaic questioning of the protagonist for the crime of bigamy (she has five husbands). Several critics have noted that the polymorphous quality of sexuality in the film constitutes queerness. Sen, for instance, suggests that the film "showcases an exciting array of subversive discourses of desire stemming from the director's intentions of creating an essentially queer space to challenge the official status quo."⁶ I focus rather on a narrower topic, the nature of *female* desire, as expressed in the film, although always within the pansexual—that is, queer—terrain that Hermsillo envisions.⁷

Esmeralda is the center of attention, a phenomenon to which she is clearly accustomed. She expects and mostly receives quintessentially respectful treatment: on the best of terms with each of her husbands, she reciprocates their trust, even claiming to understand why Pedro, the fifth, brought the charges against her that resulted in her imprisonment. The hostility that Solorio—her interrogator and judge—displays to mask his desire, appears quite

novel in the protagonist's experience. Yet she eventually conquers even him, with her body as well as her humanity. The camera's perspective on the protagonist interrupts the construction of passive femininity and sexual objectification implicit in the male gaze at the same time that it ensures the viewers' awareness of the combined power of physical attractiveness and human kindness, gendered as female nurturing.

One form of parody of the male gaze is effected through the spectators who gather during Esmeralda's interrogation, and whose faces often reveal obsessive and even prurient interest in what is transpiring. They, and by extension we the film viewers, become voyeurs. The film takes place in the police precinct, in a room open to public view, where Solorio conducts his interrogation of Esmeralda. Hermosillo emphasizes the public nature of the inquiry by placing Esmeralda in a chair on a platform with a great deal of empty space around her, emphasizing that she is on the witness stand. Combined with a barrier of open wood bars that, without obstructing sight, defines the actual location of the proceeding and at the same time marks Solorio's territory, her positioning ensures that film viewers become aware of the audience within the film. The number of these onlookers increases when subjects of great interest such as sexual behavior are treated and diminishes otherwise—but never disappears entirely. Unsurprisingly, the largest audience appears during the scene in which Esmeralda and one of the husbands, Jorge Luis, make love in exercise clothes, with exercise equipment as a prop. In the first row sit García, Solorio, and Esmeralda's father's assistant—the most interested spectators of all—with complete attention focused on the proceedings, gazes rapt, and arousal evident in the tension in their bodies.

For the alert viewer, Jorge Luis stands at the center of another example of Hermosillo's mocking treatment of the male gaze, which occurs through visual cross-references internal to the succeeding chapters in the narrative of Esmeralda's love life within the film. He is Esmeralda's next-to-youngest husband, gay and/or bisexual, and a well-respected neurosurgeon who works in the same hospital where Esmeralda is employed as a nurse. We first see him at her bedside wedding to her second husband Virginio, the "famous" poet who has known her since she was a child. Jorge Luis attends as a

well-wisher—and also, of course, as an observer. First an onlooker, then a husband and her lover, but also the lover of his male partner, and an assiduous and affectionate supporter of Esmeralda when she is in prison (he sends her flowers and a phone, then calls her), Jorge Luis's multiple roles serve as a counterpoint to the narrowly focused, apparently unyielding gaze represented by Solorio.

Close attention is also paid, although only in a few short clips, to the Goth teenage prisoner whose cell is across the aisle from Esmeralda's. Another of several androgynous characters in the film, he looks on lustfully while masturbating, when Esmeralda and Antonio (another husband) make love in the prison cell. The camera brings our attention to him with a complete lack of subtlety, zooming in on one of his (heavily made-up) eyes, rapt not only with attention but also sexual tension. Clearly, he is not content with mere observation, but participates vicariously in what to him must be pornography. While he primarily functions as another pair of eyes looking at Esmeralda, his very behavior emphasizes the sexualized nature of seeing. His crossdressing cellmates, on the other hand, appear wrapped up in their own drama; they pay far less attention than he to the drama unfolding on the other side of the bars that imprison them. Through the focus on the gaze, indifference and interest are counterpointed.

The most important subversion of the male gaze occurs through the construction of Solorio's subject position, especially as contradictorily articulated through his interior monologues. Enacted as words rather than looks, he nevertheless always returns to his construction of Esmeralda as the object of his gaze. His thoughts function as the obverse of his words and actions, revealing his inner struggle to resist the temptation she represents, the attraction he feels for her. The first time we hear his perceptions, about twenty minutes into the film and at the beginning of the interrogation, he notices her legs appreciatively, and promptly responds to this attraction by telling the prisoner to stop moving around so much.⁸ Soon after, he thinks to himself that she looks like the Virgin Mary or a saint, an ironic take on the (traditional) moral judgment he affects externally. Indeed, later on he calls her a whore, prostitute, and slut while secretly wondering what she smells like. Finally, he participates fully and enthusiastically in the collective voyeurism

that accompanies her narrative, gaining a secondhand thrill from the account. His judgment thereby renders absurd the saint/whore dichotomy.

Hermosillo's film not only subverts and opposes the male gaze, it also uncovers and advocates a polymorphic "female" gaze, reinforced by the sometimes-overwhelming focus on the image of Sor Juana's face, an image that Solorio seems not to notice, further proof of his complicity with patriarchy (see the section below on the role of Sor Juana in the film). The power of this gaze is further evidenced in Esmeralda's behavior and looks. Hers is a critical non-dichotomous gaze, one that plays around with the heterosexual male gaze, moving through parody toward the goals of freedom and happiness. She does not try to engage in a contest of gazes with Solorio; rather, she looks elsewhere, thereby deflecting his interrogation, which is at once in his gaze and his discourse.

As Foster notes, Esmeralda's gaze is fully sexualized, and at the same time clinical, since she is a nurse.⁹ The male body is to be admired and desired from her perspective, but also humanized, not objectified. In a sense, she re-writes the notion of sexual objectification by seeing the whole (though damaged) person, not simply his appearance. An active and passionate lover, through her sexuality, Esmeralda's expresses a wholehearted acceptance of her partners. Her husbands vary greatly in age, physical type, and sexual attractiveness; she asserts that she loves them all equally. Esmeralda's actions and gestures humanize men, but also empower herself, and by extension all women.

The audience is required to read the film carefully. Subtle visual details help to define the parameters of Hermosillo's argument and posit the viewer's gaze as polymorphous female, rather than male: that is, to see the story from a perspective sympathetic to the feminist impulse of disrupting patriarchal authority, equalizing power based on gender, and ultimately of humanizing the characters, whatever their gender.

The active viewer, for instance, focuses on Esmeralda's clothing. The design on her dress changes as the *mise-en-scène* shifts during the interrogation. The background fabric is consistently white, obviously a symbol of Esmeralda's purity of intention and deed. The

dress hugs the body but does not seem to overtly invite sexual advances or any kind of attention deemed inappropriate by those who reinforce dominant ideology. Initially appearing with a pattern in pale colors of leaves and flowers on the white background, after the story of her marriage to Jorge Luis and the arrangement she has with him and his lover Armando, her dress, which appears to be the same dress, changes to one with a design of deep green flowers and leaves. A few minutes later, the design has again metamorphosized: the flowers are pink. In its next incarnation, which occurs after Solorio calls Esmeralda a slut, the design includes flowers of several different colors. At her feet, little pink flowers fall to the floor, as though from the dress—she is literally deflowered. When one husband, Antonio Rossellini, manages to get into the jail to be with her that night, the dress has a totally pale pink and brown design. Later on in the film, just before Solorio's secretary Lucita reads the summary of the charges, García picks up one of the small pink flowers, and presses it between the pages of his book: a children's volume on dinosaurs, perhaps suggesting that the flowers also symbolize (lost?) innocence. As Esmeralda is transferred to prison, she wears the dress once more: this time, the colors are muted again. In the final scene in which Esmeralda appears, at her birthday party in the courtyard of the jail, she wears a different, completely white, tighter-fitting dress. In her hair, a large pink flower echoes the earlier small ones. Thus, she re-gains her "flower," suggesting a final retention of innocence. Lastly, she changes into a transparent blouse, which she wears without a bra, a paradoxical reinforcement of her essential purity: members of the audience on and off the screen can see her as she is, with no hidden agenda.

Sexuality and the Gaze

Like the transparent blouse at the end, the clear plastic shoes and bag Esmeralda carries earlier visually symbolize her honesty and openness. The shoes also remind us, of course, of Cinderella's glass slippers—except that unlike in the fairy tale, these fit others as well, as we see when Lucita tries them on. Still, they mark Esmeralda as a hidden treasure whose value Solorio unknowingly helps to bring into the open with the interrogation. When she changes out of her wedding dress into street attire for the interrogation, her dress with

the white background, and its often-muted and ever-changing pattern, also seems to reflect her essential purity, despite the unorthodox sexuality she displays. And, as mentioned above, the blouse with no bra underneath in the last part of the film, a birthday gift from one of her husbands, visually affirms that Esmeralda will never renounce her honesty. Foster avers that it has another, market-driven purpose as well: "the beatific way in which Esmeralda evokes her multiple husbands contributes to the sanitization of sexuality and makes . . . the legitimation of promiscuity . . . much more palatable to a broad moviegoing audience."¹⁰ He also links her behavior, which disrupts "heteronormative patriarchy,"¹¹ to the free expression of (male) homosexuality. Lesbian sexuality is, however, markedly and noticeably absent in the film.

Perhaps the asymmetry reflects Hermsillo's interests, since male homosexuality plays a significant role in the film. According to Sargeant García, it is precisely because Esmeralda has been frank about Jorge Luis and Armando's relationship as lovers that she is found guilty of polyandry and sent to jail. When García questions the wisdom of her having revealed the triangular interaction, she asks, "It's ok to do it, but not to talk about it?" This is one way in which Foster's insistence that *De noche vienes, Esmeralda* "is easily the queerest film made to date in Mexico"¹² and Manzo Robledo's assertion that "Hermsillo trata de demostrar la *queerización* intrínseca de la sociedad mexicana"¹³ (Hermsillo attempts to demonstrate the intrinsic *queerization* of Mexican society) come into play. Esmeralda's acceptance is more than rhetorical; she hides nothing. Ironically and predictably, during the last party scene García himself appears to have accepted that he is gay.¹⁴ In sum, bisexuality and homosexuality (though only among men) are treated with the same casual frankness as heterosexuality. The film openly displays a pansexuality free of guilt and repression. At the same time, Esmeralda verbalizes the audience's voyeurism with her question ("It's ok to do it, but not to talk about it?"): the desire to participate but impeded by fear of social sanctions. This is one more way in which she affirms the public capacity for openness—of the polymorphic female gaze disruptive of the status quo, but that also points to a subjectivity and a sexuality subversively conceptualized.

Esmeralda's father's assistant, charged with looking out and caring for her, contributes to this subversion. This character's ambiguous sexual identity adds to the film's mystery. S/he acts primarily as a supportive onlooker, not a voyeur for her/his own pleasure (although there is a suggestion of that too), but a silent back-up, someone to whom Esmeralda can look as a friend. The multiple metamorphoses s/he undergoes—including, but not limited to, appearances as tai chi instructor, painter, lingerie vendor, and casual onlooker—also serve to subvert the notion of a stable gender identity and/or sexuality.

Esmeralda accepts others' sexual behavior and proclivities without judgment. She marries Jorge Luis, for instance, so that his mother does not find out he is gay. Of course, it is later revealed that his mother knows, contributing yet another layer of acceptability to "marginalized" sexualities. In addition, she appears to have few inhibitions about enacting her sexuality, apart from the major issue of insisting on marriage as a prerequisite. We see her freely enjoying herself with at least four of her five husbands at some point during the course of the film. Indeed, the tone of the film with regard to sexuality is remarkably unashamed. Visual language reinforces the lack of shame. The camera caresses Esmeralda, often pans to her body with extreme close-ups, starting with her feet, lingering on her legs, then moving upward. With the narration regarding her first husband, we see her inhibitions being broken down, replaced with a carefree innocence and joy that replace any left-over sense of culpability with overt enjoyment.

A central narrative thread in the film is Esmeralda's account of her five marriages, primarily about the sexual part of those relationships. Each time she takes up the story of a marriage, the audience (both on- and off-screen) is literally transported to the narrative location she describes. Esmeralda has had practice telling these stories, since she had recounted them to her second husband (the poet), with all the details, in order to stimulate him. But she also receives official approval. When Virginio lay dying, she agreed to marry him for his comfort; no less an august personage than the priest who performed the ceremony complimented her on her good deed. Thus, a venerable institution, the Catholic church, one of the foundations of Mexican society, is portrayed as condoning her actions. One imagines Hermosillo's ironic wink.

The conventional moral code that Solorio defends crumbles in the face of Esmeralda's fun-loving sexuality. For the viewer, who shares the perspective of the polymorphous female gaze, no acts in the film appear pornographic. Licenciado Solorio's haranguing of his prisoner, the critique of her behavior as disrupting norms, as refusing to recognize the moral, social, political, and legal implications of the case, as he puts it, sound hollow in the face of Esmeralda's authenticity of manner and discourse. She even deflects his attempts at intimidation: for instance, upon his informing her that she is arrested, she remarks that jail is not so bad. And when he asks her if she suffers (implying that she should, because of violating socially-imposed moral regulations), she responds, "Sometimes, when my shoes are too tight." Their differences extend to other aspects of life. To his accusation of lying, for instance, she counters that at times she just does not speak, but she never lies. Clearly, she has an entirely different ethical framework than he, than that of the dominant societal norms that Solorio represents.

Finally though, contact with Esmeralda transforms his attitude toward sexuality. At first, in a clear allusion to Adam and Eve, he attempts to resist the temptation that she represents. He scolds her for singing, rocking back and forth, etc. And he harangues her for being "pornographic," a destroyer of family values, a whore and a slut. Yet when Solorio dramatically reproaches her, looking down upon her in his most intimidating fashion, the onlookers on screen all look shocked—by his language, not by her. Like his pointed questions, which reflect a voyeuristic need to titillate his imagination, his interior monologues reveal his struggle and gradual capitulation to Esmeralda's charms. Whereas at first he thinks that she looks like the Virgin Mary or a saint, he later harps on her physical attractiveness: legs, eyes, hair, and smell. Solorio winds up capitulating to Esmeralda's worldview and falling in love with her, which is signaled by a change in his appearance and dress. He becomes a dapper dandy, complete with dyed hair, neck scarf, and sunglasses (provided by his hairdresser, another role that Tito Vasconcelos plays), thus reinforcing the importance of dress and appearance in signifying freedom. His is the almost-final scene when, in homage to Gene Kelly and *Singing in the Rain* (1952), he dances and sings "Amorcito, corazón" (My Love, My Heart),¹⁵ unaffected by the downpour.

Solorio is not the only one influenced by Esmeralda's liberatory sexuality; other characters enact their versions of free desire as well. We have already mentioned the (male) prisoners in the cell across from Esmeralda's, who present additional aspects of sexualities that are marginalized and restricted: two crossdressers and a Goth teenager form part of the tableau. And Lucita, Solorio's secretary, has had a traditional marriage in which her husband immediately after the ceremony began to cheat on her: she now takes a lover, a reporter, with whom she has an impassioned, uninhibited affair, shown on camera.

In sum, a lighthearted tone, which has misled some viewers,¹⁶ masks the critique in the film of "los empujes atrevidos a la heterosexualidad compulsiva en México"¹⁷ (the daring challenges to compulsory heterosexuality in Mexico). The protagonist's continuous smile and Marilyn Monroe¹⁸ postures bespeak an open and freely expressed attitude toward desire. Paradoxically, Esmeralda challenges Mexican compulsory heterosexuality (and, of course, that construction of masculinity that requires the sexual conquest of women) by interacting sexually with several men at once, in what some might see as compulsive heterosexuality, and developing "narratives of multiple pleasures . . . [that] become . . . a reference point for all other discourses."¹⁹ Sexual pleasure comes to symbolize freedom from traditional mores and regulations as well as freedom to express oneself authentically.

The Critique of Machismo

Unlike Sor Juana, Esmeralda is not exactly a typical feminist hero; indeed, her behavior and words seem almost perversely apolitical, whereas Sor Juana consciously articulated a framework inspired by the desire for gender equality. In some ways (other than polyandry),²⁰ however, Esmeralda comes to defy convention and inspire others to willingly do the same. While she never verbalizes a politically feminist framework or participates in any kind of collective action, her actions disrupt the system. Still, she behaves in contradictory ways. All along, for instance, she affirms that she is a practicing Catholic, although she has used birth control and expresses no desire for children. Nevertheless, her conventionally feminine and

artificial dress and manner reveal that she cares a great deal about her appearance. She also plays with her skirt and hair constantly, and smiles continually, clearly attending to the desirous male gaze. The viewer might interpret this behavior as a form of armor with which to protect her self from discursive attacks.²¹

Another inconsistency emerges in that Esmeralda upholds religiously-sanctioned sexuality insofar as she will not have sex with any man to whom she is not married. Toward the end of the film, though, some of the vestiges of conventionality slip away when she announces to Solorio that she no longer feels she has to marry a man to have sex with him. It may be that the change is due partly to Esmeralda's father's having confessed when he brought her clothes to the jail that he and her mother were not married, "porque ella no quiso; dijo que el único nudo válido en la pareja era el amor" (because she refused; she said that the only valid tie for a couple was love), a confession to which Esmeralda appears to have no immediate or direct reaction.

Although motherhood is never entertained as an option, the very view of marriage that Esmeralda propounds is stereotypical: her husbands are her children, and as such, require her care. Each one—after the first, Jaime—has or has had some kind of physical disability, to which she responds first as a nurse and then as a nurturer/lover. Manzo Robledo even suggests that she becomes a kind of fairy godmother.²² Nevertheless, there seems to be little stereotypically self-sacrificing in Esmeralda's behavior and demeanor. The husbands, who appear to be "regular" men, without serious disabilities and apparently living a bourgeois life, represent the personnel and terrain of most of Hermsillo's films. All appreciate her; none takes her for granted. Notably, it is the youngest, Pedro, who—angry and with ego bruised—lashes out by filing the charges against Esmeralda; he is "the most conventionally macho of the lot."²³

In the film (and the story), Esmeralda's success is measured in terms of her ability to attract and maintain connections with men. The gestures she performs, on one level transparently heterosexual and heterosexist, nevertheless point to a recognition of women's strength that is pointedly misunderstood and underestimated in the patriarchal universe that Solorio inhabits and advocates during

the interrogation. Solorio's "bombastic demeanor" and outrage as a representative of the law, which officiously moves forward despite the on-screen sympathetic audience, is pitted against the stance of incomprehension affected by Esmeralda.²⁴ He uses words as weapons, to try and tear down the position that she constructs, of the earth mother-sexual being whose interests coincide with and indeed buttress men's deepest needs. She, on the other hand, undoes his patriarchal "logic" by being coquettish and discursively logical in her polymorphous way, a strategy mirrored by the film structure as a whole. Moorhead's comment about the relationship between discourse and power in Poniatowska's story applies equally well to the film. She argues that while Solorio consistently tries to:

categorize Esmeralda through traditionally male-dominated language and stereotypes . . . she refuses or is unable, to respond to any of his openly vehement admonitions, and . . . escapes his sphere of influence . . . Esmeralda . . . has somehow managed to place herself outside derogatory language, and hence, out of reach of the system.²⁵

Against her freely-admitted "crime"—the crime of giving, of loving—however, his words ultimately defeat him, such as when he makes the horrific joke that the husbands, not Esmeralda, need a rape kit. With this sentence, he deliberately undermines the very basis of the dreadfulness of sexual assault against women. In making the joke, which, of all the people gathered in the room (Lucita, García, Esmeralda herself, the onlookers) only he thinks funny, he highlights the violent side of machismo. That is, his verbal violence, directed squarely at Esmeralda and an attempt to keep her under control when she clearly escapes his reach, echoes the physical assault to which he refers. It also emphasizes that violence, and the threat of violence, stand at the very center of male power over women.

Solorio's behavior, words, and position highlight the connection between machismo and the state. As Sergio de la Mora has pointed out, ". . . historically the concept of machismo . . . is an integral component of Mexican nationalism. Machismo is intimately linked to State power and to the highly contested gendered social contract . . . in the post-revolutionary period."²⁶ His notion that

the "ideology of heterosexual male supremacy that in Mexico gets wedded to the institutionalized post-revolutionary State apparatus"²⁷ is given ample space in the film, through Solorio's handling of the interrogation of Esmeralda, his interior monologue, and the *mise-en-scène* of the police precinct.

On the other hand, Lucita, the secretary who transcribes the interrogation, functions from the beginning of their acquaintance as the harbinger of female solidarity in her reactions to and interactions with Esmeralda. She offers the erstwhile prisoner a piece of her sandwich when they first meet. When Solorio wants her to allow García to take over her job as stenographer so that she does not hear the "dirty" events that Esmeralda discloses, Lucita defends both her professionalism and her personhood, assuring him that she is a mature, responsible, knowledgeable adult (capable, one must assume, of functioning in the workplace as well as a man), not the fragile "woman" he constructs her as, imagines her to be. Lucita also assures Esmeralda that she and others will help her, once the interrogation is over, and gives her advice about how to behave and what will happen. And most importantly, she explains the value of Esmeralda's polyandry, contrasting it with her own situation, trapped with several children and a cheating husband. In one crucial scene, Lucita and Esmeralda bond in the bathroom, a woman's space, (symbolically) trying on each other's shoes, implying that Esmeralda might not be so unusual a Mexican woman after all. New definitions of gender, freed of *marianismo* (Marianism) and machismo, emerge in the film.

The bond of female solidarity is taken into the public sphere, although with tongue in cheek, in the depiction of demonstrations in support of Esmeralda. While some demonstrators, such as the group of nuns whose sign reads "Ex-comunión para Esmeralda" (Excommunication for Esmeralda), protest her behavior, the vast majority, mostly women, express their support. The demonstrators are, however, not only women; some unions and other groups such as cooperatives and the Grupo Humano contra el SIDA (Human Group Against AIDS) participate, symbolically linking their struggles. During the protests, the most visible signs read, "Nos sirve como bandera y su lucha es nuestra lucha" (She serves as our flag and her fight is ours), "Esmeralda, tu lucha es nuestra" (Esmeralda, your

fight is ours), "Libertad para Esmeralda" (Freedom for Esmeralda), and a sign held by a baby that reads, "El futuro de poligamia" (The future of polygamy). These scenes, which were presaged with Sor Juana's gaze, summarize and recapitulate the audience of onlookers seen earlier, inside the police station: a cross-section of the Mexican population, they advocate for changes in gender norms, or at least question existing systems of gender-based power.

The Economic Basis of Patriarchy

Several references to economic affairs in the film make a connection between gender roles and capitalism, and also bring these issues back to the Mexican national context. Although the principal characters are middle-class and (lack of) money does not seem to play a pivotal role in the film, it nevertheless forms a major component of its ideological infrastructure. Not only do we see, for instance, a newspaper article on women as unsalaried workers, but more centrally to the film's narrative, García, Solorio's sergeant, deplores Esmeralda's polyandry for economic reasons. Specifically focusing on possible children and obliquely alluding to Engels' theory that private property is the root cause of women's oppression because men wanted to ensure that *their* children inherit, he asserts to Lucita that "Esa forma de sexualidad pone en riesgo todo un sistema capitalista basado en el paternalismo" (That form of sexuality puts at risk the entire capitalist system based on paternalism). In that moment García becomes the spokesperson for maintaining the current economic system, giving voice to and legitimating orthodox capitalist macroeconomics. The irony is inescapable: because he is gay (as we discover later in the film), he is not a "real" man in the neoliberal "new" Mexico that he defends so ardently. That he argues this position against the background of demonstrators who mostly protest Esmeralda's arrest clearly juxtaposes the disruption of the entire system, whose root is economic, with the status quo of patriarchal capitalism.

Esmeralda's financial arrangements, of great interest especially to García, defy the patriarchal capitalist logic of property: private and inherited patrilineally. She and her husbands share a joint bank account: in Marxist fashion, each takes according to his (or her)

needs and each contributes according to his (or her) ability. For instance, it is from the joint bank account that Esmeralda's first husband Jaime's taxi and his music CD were financed. In a further challenge to patriarchal capitalism, Esmeralda appears to manage the account.

De noche vienes, Esmeralda harps on the commodification of everyone and everything rampant in late-twentieth-century consumer society. Even the most banal of situations may evoke the economic logic of capitalism, especially on a micro-level. Two stand out. The class dynamics apparent in the interaction between Esmeralda and the woman who keeps the bathroom clean (another of the roles played by Tito Vasconcelos) clearly objectify this member of the working class: she is part of the background for Esmeralda and Lucita—who are in the process of building female solidarity with each other—not a human being. In another, apparently unrelated moment in the film, Jaime, a rock musician and taxi driver, sells rather than gives a CD to Lucita and a tape to García after they compliment his music. And even Esmeralda's father's studio, which peddles "alternative" forms of enlightenment—tai chi and astrology, specifically—seems to function primarily as a means of earning a living, thereby also commodifying (pseudo) spirituality.

Near the beginning of the film, after Esmeralda leaves Pedro's hotel suite and until she gives it to a member of the (sixth) wedding party to hold, we see her pocketbook—a clear plastic bag whose logo reads "J. Crew." The bag itself, like her "glass" (plastic) shoes, symbolizes the transparency of her interactions with the world, despite the apparent deception of Pedro (he, unlike the other husbands, had not realized that he was one of several). Yet it also stands for unconscious acquiescence to the global economic system, the influx of U. S. goods into the Third World, and perhaps even more specifically, alludes to NAFTA (the North American Free Trade Agreement), implemented in 1994, which has had an enormous impact on the Mexican economy. Ultimately, the bag—a quintessentially female accoutrement—comes to symbolize the ways in which economic issues create a foundation upon which the gendered dynamics of power build.

The Nationalist Political Context

Overall, the national situation intrudes with (ir)regular frequency. As we have seen, Esmeralda's case becomes public discourse. One sample newspaper headline reads: "¡CINCO! Como los dedos de la mano" (Five! Like the Fingers of the Hand). Another exclaims: "¡Quiniela—El Jockey es una mujer!" (Quiniela—The Jockey is a Woman!), referring to the system of gambling linked to horse racing and soccer, two masculine pursuits that one may infer Esmeralda undermines with her behavior. Lucita tells Solorio and García (during the demonstrations) that sub-comandante Marcos of the Zapatistas has gone on public record supporting Esmeralda and that a famous director wants to make a film about her. García adds that the story is all over the internet. For those who watch the film with some knowledge of Mexican politics, it is difficult to forget that in the same year that the film was released (1997), María Rojo, who plays Esmeralda, and is one of Hermosillo's favorite actors, ran for and won a seat in Congress. She succeeded in having Congress pass the Ley Cinematográfica (Cinematographic Law) in 1998, which provided much-needed additional resources to the Mexican film industry, as well as some protection against Hollywood.²⁸

The corruption and chaos of the legacy of the Mexican Revolution and of public life are reflected in the film as well. The first sign of critique occurs when the painter hangs the map of Mexico on the wall upside down; no one except Esmeralda notices. Also, as a matter of course, husband Antonio Rossellini tries to bribe the police officers in order to see Esmeralda while she is in jail; they happily accept the money, but García forces them to return it. Nevertheless, García finally allows Antonio to spend the night in her cell, has the phone that Jorge Luis supplied brought to her, and permits her to speak to him. Esmeralda clearly receives (caricatured) special treatment, another form of solidarity.

Solorio functions as a supposed mouthpiece of the fight against corruption and for Mexican authenticity, posing as an upholder of nationalistic values. He is, however, not very convincing. At one point during the interrogation he screams at Esmeralda, saying that her actions betray the principles of the Mexican Revolution—an accusation with the flavor of a cliché that only accentuates his frustration and the lack of foundation for his stance. As an example

of his rigid adherence to protocol, to form rather than content, he becomes infuriated with Lucita when she omits from the affidavit, “Sufragio efectivo, no re-elección” (Effective suffrage, not re-election), the slogan that appears just before the signature on official documents in Mexico. He insists that the transcription of the interrogation and all other documents, include it.²⁹

Finally, two nationalistic female icons appear: Sor Juana and Frida Kahlo. Both serve to highlight the gendering of nationalist discourse. Their images are clichés of the Mexican popular visual repertoire, and Hermosillo ensures that they form part of the subtext of his film. Just as significantly, he omits two others, both racialized as Other: the Virgin of Guadalupe, a religious rather than cultural figure, and Malintzin, who has come to symbolize betrayal and treachery in the Mexican popular imagination. Sor Juana plays a far more active role in the film than Frida Kahlo, but both stand for female solidarity and against machismo. Tellingly, it is only Lucita who displays the images of Kahlo, thus insinuating solidarity among women, but Sor Juana appears both in an official building, emphasizing her role as a nationalist icon, and on the wall of Jorge Luis’s apartment hallway, reflecting the rich substrata that make up the personal lives of the apparently bourgeois gay men who form part of one of Esmeralda’s households. Still, Sor Juana’s gaze tells us that she judges and finds wanting the *machista* attitudes enshrined in Solorio’s discourse and demeanor. And, she implicitly sides with Esmeralda, the sensual lover—in spite of having been a (celibate) nun and a person for whom the intellectual realm was paramount.

The Two Sor Juanas

Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz plays an important role in *De noche vienes, Esmeralda*, although she only appears six times, as an image on a poster, and as the name of the street on which Esmeralda’s father lives. Most critics have noted in passing her presence in the film, simply referring to her as a feminist foremother, but the issues with which the historical Sor Juana was most concerned—at least in her written work—and her choice to reject participating in the (hetero)sexual economy of her time appear very distant from those treated in the film. Nevertheless, the overarching concern

with societal restrictions on women's development as full human beings, and with empowering women, unite the historic and the iconic figure.

In terms of nationalistic female iconography, the focus in the film is on the artistic and intellectual spheres, and Sor Juana fits the bill nicely. By using the figure of the seventeenth-century nun-intellectual, Hermosillo participates in a trend that has been growing in intensity over the past several years. The number of plays, novels, films, performance pieces, and even operas about Mexico's most famous woman writer has dramatically increased. Her image is elsewhere in public circulation: she appears, of course, on the Mexican 200-peso bill, as well as in advertisements for products. She is suddenly everywhere and anywhere.

Sor Juana's entrance onto the stage of international popular culture began, and continues full force, in Mexico. As Emily Hind points out, there is "a twentieth-century Mexican official culture that idealizes Sor Juana as first among women, and . . . Sor Juana's image [is applied] by the Mexican citizenry at large and assorted cultures beyond Mexico to serve causes such as Chicana identity and lesbian rights."³⁰ Yet for official Mexican culture, as Hind further argues, Sor Juana's light skin and chastity support her status as saintly icon, on a par with the Virgin of Guadalupe. Her intellect, too, can be seen as non-threatening, since it is divorced from biological and social maternal roles. In the official Mexican version, derived from colonial labels, Sor Juana as the "tenth muse," the "Phoenix of America," and a secular Madonna seems cerebral, virginal, and borderline superhuman. For twentieth-century Mexican women writers such as Carmen Bullosa and Elena Garro, Hind notes, she offers a similar protection, as an asexual intellectual.

Making an apparently opposite move in *De noche vienes, Esmeralda*, the film's director, Jaime Humberto Hermosillo, positions Sor Juana as an agent of female solidarity across differences of access to sexuality and intellectuality and as a representation of (female) authority who sanctions the protagonist's free expression of her (heterosexual) libido, because it disrupts state and patriarchal hegemony. In addition, both technically and thematically, the film deliberately and consciously participates in the construction and re-construction of Sor Juana as a uniquely multidimensional figure who

serves the purposes of multiple contemporary (and contradictory) ideologies: nationalist, feminist, and (anti)capitalist.

The seventeenth-century nun-author and intellectual appears in the film as a wall decoration. The image—a poster—comes in two forms, with two differences: in color palette and in what Sor Juana holds in her arms. We see the poster six times: five in the police station and once in Jorge Luis's home. Mostly, when Sor Juana appears, the camera tightly frames her, just as it does with Esmeralda, but in the case of the nationalist icon, only briefly, and intermittently, as though the mere reminder of her presence, particularly in a police interrogation room, a public building that advertises the military power of the state, were enough.

Especially the first time we see it, the print of Sor Juana inverts and helps to undermine the power of the male gaze in the film. This is a highly stylized, even sexualized Sor Juana whose almost-smile is reminiscent of Mona Lisa's and whose positioning may remind us of the Andy Warhol Marilyn Monroe series; whose sensuous red lips, straight nose, and wide eyes, all set in conventionally pretty face, invite us to look at her; and whose initial color palette of green, red, and white makes clear her status as an emblem of Mexican nationalism.³¹ Here, the camera pans to the print on the wall of the police precinct even before it moves to introduce us to Solorio. She wears the large emblem famous from her often-reproduced portrait, but instead of angels and cherubs, it contains the Mexican national symbol, the eagle above a tree, done in the colors of the Mexican flag. Thus, she fulfills the role of encapsulating nationalist pride and alludes to Mexico's rich cultural history at the same time that she observes the proceedings. As Solorio enters, the camera follows in such a way that his face is partly hidden, although he seems unaware that Sor Juana is looking directly at him.³² The image occupies center stage; the camera focuses on her, and for a moment, Solorio and Esmeralda are visually positioned on either side, flanking the poster, acting as a frame within the frame. Solorio walks in front of her/it, although he continues to ignore the tri-color print on the wall. By extension, we can see that he can only see the image of a woman that fits his (metaphorical) picture of her. We, the viewers, can also see that Sor Juana also gazes off-screen, unafraid of state authority and assertive in her stance.

We glimpse the poster in the background for the second time, again positioned precisely between Esmeralda and Solorio, not exactly separating, although clearly above them. It is as though Sor Juana were arbiter, judge of a very different case than the one Solorio supposes he is conducting. That is, for him, Esmeralda is the defendant and he the prosecutor/judge, but the visual language of the film suggests another proceeding, one that judges him—a representative of patriarchal power and the rigidity and blindness of the institutionalized Mexican revolutionary system—as deficient and unworthy. This is significant, because when Lucita makes a negative comment about Solorio, Esmeralda defends him. In other words, she acts as his advocate at the same time that Sor Juana, who becomes a meta-woman, appears to judge him. The two positions taken together constitute at once condemnation and redemption, or at the very least, a conditional acceptance. And, they emphasize Esmeralda's humanizing gestures of assent and inclusion.

The next time we see the Sor Juana poster in the police station, it has metamorphosed: when the painter (played by Tito Vasconcelos, who, as we have seen, also plays, among other roles, Esmeralda's father's assistant, a street vendor in the police station, a woman bystander and onlooker, a hairdresser, and a shoe polisher) replaces the poster after painting the walls, he puts up one whose composition appears to be the same, but is actually different, in color and details. This switch is paralleled on the next wall, where he has re-hung the map of Mexico—upside down; together the two become a tableau of subversive nationalism, of recognition of Mexicanness, but in a manner that challenges the officially sanctioned version.

The *mise-en-scène* shifts to the apartment of Jorge Luis, one of the protagonist's five husbands, the gay/bisexual neurosurgeon. Initially, the camera lingers for a moment in the entranceway, where on the wall hangs the same Sor Juana poster as the one the painter put up in the police station. Again, a mere 5-second close-up of the poster is enough. The color palette is that of a rainbow—purple, green, red, orange, etc.; Sor Juana is caressing a cat who sits in her lap, partially blocking the emblem she wears. Both the colors and the cat evoke queerness. We enter another

world, replete with the richness of people's lives based on individual decisions relatively free of social pressures. This Sor Juana has little to do with the historical figure, except insofar as the seventeenth-century intellectual and writer attempted to, and to a large extent succeeded in living her life according to her priorities, within the framework of her socio-religious circumstances, and everything to do with the postmodern appropriation of her image.

The Sor Juana poster makes two more appearances. Back in the precinct, when Lucita enters the shower to "watch" the sexual story of Esmeralda and Jaime, her first husband, she passes the poster on the side. As Lucita passes, we hear a "meow," a sound that transfers the cat in the poster to the world of living beings. Finally, as Solorio has his hair styled after deciding to re-make himself, we glimpse the Sor Juana poster in the background for the last time.

It is no coincidence that the Sor Juana poster comes to symbolize an alternative mode for human beings to build relationships, free of the limitations of gender roles, unequal balances of power, and hierarchization of sexualities and desire. No timid virgin, chaste and asexual, but rather a role model who somehow becomes a validation of Esmeralda's worldview; no intellectual, but rather an earthy, practical arbiter of a new set of rules; Sor Juana represents rich possibilities for fulfillment in a society that unshackles itself from the strictures of the past.

Jaime Humberto Hermsillo's *De noche vienes, Esmeralda* questions and challenges gender norms and patriarchal power, just as Sor Juana did in her writings. Unlike the seventeenth-century author, however, he demonstrates women's power through sexuality and emotion, revealing how such impulses can undermine and disrupt the Law of the Father. Esmeralda, the ultimate embodied being, strips away the veneer to reveal the emptiness beneath the rules and regulations of patriarchal capitalism, in its nationalistic Mexican form. Taking on the stance of a polymorphic female gaze, spectators of the film can begin to participate in an alternative worldview, one that allows for free expression of love and sexuality, outside the forms created by church and state.

NOTES

¹ The film won several categories of the Ariel Prize (for script, costuming, scenography, and supporting actress), as well as receiving several other awards See: Luis Rubén Maldonado, "Me voy a morir haciendo cine": Entrevista con Jaime Humberto Hermosillo," *El pueblo* 11 April 2005. <<http://www.elpueblo.com.mx/chihuahua/reportaje.cfm?num=52>>.

² Pérez-Turrent, qtd. in Carl J. Mora, *Mexican Cinema: Reflections of a Society, 1896–2004*. (Jefferson NC: McFarland, 2005) 147.

³ Margarita Vargas, "Power and Resistance in *De noche vienes* by Elena Poniatowska." *Hispanic Journal* 16.2 (1995) 286.

⁴ Diana Saco, "Feminist Film Criticism: *The Piano* and 'the Female Gaze'." <http://www.gate.net/~dsaco/Female_Gaze.htm>. May 11, 2006. 1–2.

⁵ Qtd. in Patricia White, "Feminism and Film." *The Oxford Guide to Film Studies*. Ed. John Hill and Pamela Church Gibson. (New York and Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998) 121.

⁶ Kanischka Sen, Rev. of *De noche vienes, Esmeralda*. *Chasqui* 28.2 (1999) 149.

⁷ In *Cinemachismo: Masculinities and Sexuality in Mexican Film* (Austin: U of Texas P, 2006), Sergio de la Mora notes that "Not until the films of Jaime Humberto Hermosillo (1971–present) did Mexican cinema break with its tradition . . . of coding male sexual identities with the corporeal accoutrements of butch and femme polarities" (119).

⁸ In her study guide, "Cinergia Movie File: *Esmeralda Comes at Night* (*De noche vienes, Esmeralda*)." <<http://lilt.ilstu.edu/smexpos/cinergia/Esmeralda.htm>>. July 14, 2002, 5, Carrie Kobierecki asks, surely expecting an affirmative response, "Does the film (and the characters within it) treat *Esmeralda* as a fetish, especially in regards to her legs?"

⁹ David W. Foster, *Mexico City in Contemporary Mexican Cinema*. (Austin: U of Texas P, 2002) 119.

¹⁰ Foster 118.

¹¹ Foster 113.

¹² Foster 112.

¹³ Francisco Manzo Robledo, Rev. of *De noche vienes, Esmeralda*. *Chasqui* 28.2 (1999) 147.

¹⁴ The film hints at García's as-yet undiscovered homosexuality. Clearly, he has not fully outgrown childhood, and not just in terms of not recognizing his own sexuality. He serves as Solorio's sidekick and subordinate, yet also collects dinosaur figurines much as very young boys often do: these figurines and a children's book on dinosaurs sit on his desk. And, he wears a tie with cartoon figures on it.

¹⁵ Undoubtedly the scene is also Hermosillo's tribute to one of the famous Mexican singers and actors of all time, Pedro Infante (1917–1957). Infante appeared in dozens of films and recorded hundreds of songs, one of the most romantic and popular of which was "Amorcito corazón."

¹⁶ The Reel.com website suggests that *De noche vienes, Esmeralda* matches *Belle Epoque* (1994), *Doña Flor and Her Two Husbands* (1978), and *Like Water for Chocolate* (1992), characterizing them all as “erotically charged” or “steamy.” While that statement in and of itself might be accurate, it misses the point of these films.

¹⁷ Lori Oxford, Rev. of *De noche vienes, Esmeralda*. *Chasqui* 32.2 (2003) 118.

¹⁸ Foster 115.

¹⁹ Sen 152.

²⁰ Others have pointed out that her polyandry constitutes a direct reversal of the role of the Mexican macho man, who maintains a “casa chica” (a house for his mistress). See, for instance, Moorhead 133.

²¹ Sen’s reading of Esmeralda’s smile attributes to it far more subversion than mine does. She argues that it “disturbs and confuses the coherence of the legal discourse” and “displaces the ‘rational,’” thereby becoming part of a “queer performance that aims to legitimize ‘strangeness’” (150).

²² Manzo Robledo 148.

²³ Foster 112.

²⁴ Foster 114–115.

²⁵ Florencia Moorhead, “Subversion With a Smile: Elena Poniatowska’s *The Night Visitor*.” *Letras femeninas* 20.1–2 (1994) 134.

²⁶ Sergio de la Mora 6.

²⁷ Sergio de la Mora 7.

²⁸ David R. Maciel, “Cinema and State in Contemporary Mexico, 1970–1999.” *Mexico’s Cinema: A Century of Film and Filmmakers*. Ed. Joanne Hershfield and David R. Maciel. (Wilmington DE: Scholarly Resources, 1999) 226–227.

²⁹ The phrase has a long and complicated history. Porfirio Díaz first used it in 1871. Francisco Madero then appropriated and used the line in 1910 against the dictator as part of the San Luis Potosí Plan, the document generally considered to have begun the Mexican Revolution.

³⁰ Emily Hind, “Sor Juana, An Official Habit: Twentieth-Century Mexican Culture.” *Approaches to Teaching the Works of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz*. Ed. Emilie L. Bergmann and Stacey Schlau. (New York: Modern Language Association, 2007) 247–55. This paragraph summarizes ideas in the article.

³¹ Mario Ortiz suggested (in a personal communication, March 9, 2007) that perhaps the film intends to underscore the similarities and connections among Warhol’s Monroe, the poster of Sor Juana in the film, and Esmeralda. Certainly, all emerge as iconic objects of the male gaze, sexualized in male fantasy.

³² Kobierecki 8.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- "Esmeralda Comes by Night (1997)." <<http://reel.com/movie.asp?MID=43421&Tab=matches&buy=open&CID=0>>. June 30, 2006.
- Foster, David W. *Mexico City in Contemporary Mexican Cinema*. Austin: U of Texas P, 2002.
- Hermosillo, Jaime Humberto, dir. *De noche vienes, Esmeralda*. Distrib. Image Entertainment. México DF: Instituto Mexicano de Cinematografía, 1998. 107 minutes.
- Hind, Emily. "Sor Juana, An Official Habit: Twentieth-Century Mexican Culture." *Approaches to Teaching the Works of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz*. Ed. Emilie L. Bergmann and Stacey Schlauf. New York: Modern Language Association, 2007. 247–55.
- Kobierecki, Carrie. "Cinergia Movie File: *Esmeralda Comes at Night (De noche vienes, Esmeralda)*." <<http://lilt.ilstu.edu/smexpos/cinergia/Esmeralda.htm>>. July 14, 2002.
- Maciel, David R. "Cinema and State in Contemporary Mexico, 1970–1999." *Mexico's Cinema: A Century of Film and Filmmakers*. Ed. Joanne Hershfield and David R. Maciel. Wilmington DE: Scholarly Resources, 1999. 197–232.
- Maldonado, Luis Rubén. "Me voy a morir haciendo cine': Entrevista con Jaime Humberto Hermosillo." *El pueblo* 11 April 2005. <<http://www.elpueblo.com.mx/chiuhua/reporteaje.cfm?num=5>>.
- Manzo Robledo, Francisco. Rev. of *De noche vienes, Esmeralda*. *Chasqui* 28.2 (1999): 146–48.
- Moorhead, Florencia. "Subversion With a Smile: Elena Poniatowska's *The Night Visitor*." *Letras femeninas* 20.1–2 (1994): 131–40.
- Mora, Carl J. *Mexican Cinema: Reflections of a Society, 1896–2004*. Jefferson NC: McFarland, 2005.
- Mora, Sergio de la. *Cinemachismo: Masculinities and Sexuality in Mexican Film*. Austin: U of Texas P, 2006.
- Mulvey, Laura. "Afterthoughts on 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' Inspired by *Duel in the Sun* (1947)." 1981. Penley 69–79.
- . "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." 1975. Penley 57–68.
- Oxford, Lori. Rev. of *De noche vienes, Esmeralda*. *Chasqui* 32.2 (2003): 186–90.
- Penley, Constance, ed. *Feminism and Film Theory*. New York and London: Routledge, British Film Institute, 1988.
- Poniatowska, Elena. "De noche vienes." *De noche vienes*. 1979. México DF: Ediciones Era, 1985. 149–64.
- Saco, Diana. "Feminist Film Criticism: *The Piano* and 'the Female Gaze'." <http://www.gate.net/~dsaco/Female_Gaze.htm. May 11, 2006>.
- Sen, Kanishka. Rev. of *De noche vienes, Esmeralda*. *Chasqui* 28.2 (1999): 149–53.
- Vargas, Margarita. "Power and Resistance in *De noche vienes* by Elena Poniatowska." *Hispanic Journal* 16.2 (1995): 285–95.

White, Patricia. "Feminism and Film." *The Oxford Guide to Film Studies*. Ed. John Hill and Pamela Church Gibson. New York and Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998. 117–31.