

# FROM THE “FINAL GIRL” TO THE EMANCIPATED HEROINE: FEMALE ARCHETYPES IN THE [REC] SAGA

JUAN MEDINA-CONTRERAS

PEDRO SANGRO COLÓN

Of all film genres, horror is probably the one that most effectively combines the paradoxical pleasure offered by experiencing uncomfortable situations with the liberating potential of tasting forbidden fruit (albeit vicariously). Miguel Ángel Huerta (2019: 175) describes cinema as the ideal device for experiencing a kind of catharsis through exposure to our own fears and phobias in the ritual of the dark theatre. Carlos Losilla subscribes to the same argument, adding that in addition to their phobias, horror film spectators are exposed to their own disturbing or sadistic instincts (Losilla, 1999: 34). In the prologue to a monograph on the theme of women's fears, Desirée de Fez offers a different perspective when she explains that she adores horror films because they allow her to observe her fears from the outside and thus be able to interpret them (de Fez, 2020: 8).

This article analyses the “final girl” archetype described by Carol J. Clover (2015) and its rela-

tionship with the monstrous feminine discussed by Barbara Creed (1993), taking the [REC] film saga (Jaume Balagueró, Paco Plaza, 2007-2014) as a case study. The set of references invoked by the films' creators is explored here based on an analysis of their female protagonists, the reporter, Ángela (Manuela Velasco), and the character of the bride, Clara (Leticia Dolera), in addition to the role of other female characters who appear in the saga, particularly the sinister child Tristana Medeiros (Javier Botet).

Although women in horror films have traditionally been relegated to the role of victim or survivor, for some time now a new kind of female character who actively and independently takes on the leading role has been gaining prominence. As will be argued here, Balagueró and Plaza's saga constitutes a precedent for this new model of femininity in the genre.

## THE [REC] SAGA

Shot in just twenty days and with a budget of only two million euros, *[REC]* (Jaume Balagueró, Paco Plaza, 2007) became the second biggest box office success of the year in Spain, with earnings of more than 7.7 million euros. Its critical and commercial success led to the production of three sequels: *[REC]2* (Jaume Balagueró, Paco Plaza, 2009), *[REC]3: Genesis* (*[REC]3: Génesis*, Paco Plaza, 2012), *[REC]4: Apocalypse* (*[REC]4: Apocalipsis*, Jaume Balagueró, 2014). It also inspired two Hollywood remakes—*Quarantine* (John Erick Dowdle, 2008) and its sequel *Quarantine 2: Terminal* (John Pogue, 2011)—and a graphic novel titled *[REC]: Historias inéditas* (Various, 2012), and there is even a *[REC]* ride at the PortAventura theme park near Barcelona. Outside Spain, the franchise has taken in more than 61 million dollars (Lázaro-Reboll, 2017).

The saga's storyline maintains narrative continuity in the first two films, as the second begins practically where the first one leaves off. Ángela, a television news presenter, and her cameraman follow a fire brigade on an emergency call in Barcelona in the middle of the night. This leads them to a building on La Rambla, where they are attacked by the residents, who seem to have some kind of contagious infection that is controlling them and making them behave violently. When the protagonists try to escape the building, they discover that they have been locked inside by the authorities. Desperate to find a way out, they dodge various infected attackers until they reach the building's attic, where they find the vestiges of different experiments performed by a priest on a young girl possessed by a supernatural being, which appears to be the source of the contagion.

In the saga's second instalment, a Special Operations team enters the building under the direction of a public health official, who turns out to be a priest as well. They search for the source of the disease in the hope of finding a cure, but the

infected residents, who now begin to show signs of superhuman powers, end up decimating the special forces team. The priest, together with the surviving officers, finds Ángela, who appears to be the only person in the building to have escaped infection. However, in the final twist of this instalment, she is revealed to have been possessed and is trying to get out of the building in order to spread the disease.

The third film digresses from the main story. Although its title suggests that it might deal with the origins of the infection, in reality it tells a parallel story in which one of the people infected in the building in Barcelona ends up spreading the possession-disease to the guests at a wedding.

The conclusion to the main story will finally be offered in the saga's fourth instalment. With the intervention of the army, the possessed reporter is taken to a ship at sea so that her condition can be investigated in complete isolation. As might be expected, the infection spreads through the ship's crew, at which point the source is revealed to be a parasite that has been jumping from host to host over the course of the films.

For the two leading female roles in the saga, the creators chose two actresses familiar to audiences who could be said to form part of a kind of "star system" within the Spanish television industry, especially for members of the age group that the films are aimed at. In a way, the actress Manuela Velasco shares certain personal resonances with the character she plays. Introduced to film audiences as a child star in *Law of Desire* (*La ley del deseo*, Pedro Almodóvar, 1987), Velasco's career began with a combination of sporadic appearances on prime-time TV series and work as a presenter and interviewer on shows like *Los cuarenta principales* (Canal+, 2000-2005) and *Del 40 al 1* (Canal+, 1990-1998; LOS 40 TV, 1998-2017), which made her a familiar face for the film's target audience. Actress and director Leticia Dolera also spent the early years of her career on television, although her fame with younger audienc-

es has come from her appearances on successful series like the daytime show *Al salir de clase* (Telecinco, 1997-2002), the prime-time series *Los Serrano* (Telecinco, 2003-2008), and leading roles in feature films like *Semen, a Love Sample* (Semen, una historia de amor, Daniela Fejerman, Inés París, 2005) and *Chrysalis* (De tu ventana a la mía, Paula Ortiz, 2011).

## THE “FINAL GIRL” ARCHETYPE IN THE [REC] SAGA

The first part of this analysis will focus on the “final girl” archetype as described by Carol Clover in her book, *Men, Women and Chain Saws* (1993). In broad terms, this archetype evolved from the “damsel in distress” trope that Clover identifies in the slasher subgenre, which could be defined as the last survivor who by the end of the film has managed either to stay alive long enough to get rescued or to confront the killer and bring him down herself, without needing the aid of a saviour (Clover, 2015: 35). In both cases, the distinctive features of this character are her confrontation of the killer alone and her superior skill and shrewdness in managing to survive. This often translates into a type of woman who responds to the villain’s persecution by shifting from passiveness to decisiveness, reflecting a transition in the character from object to subject, in what has been identified as a kind of heroine for second-wave feminism (Garland et al., 2018: 64-65).

The paradigmatic cases that Clover draws on to explain her theory are the films *Halloween* (John Carpenter, 1978), *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (Tobe Hooper, 1974), *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (Wes Craven, 1984), and the wide variety of films that adopt the same narrative formula. Núria Bou and Xavier Pérez trace the origins of this form of femininity in classical Hollywood back to the film serial *The Perils of Pauline* (Louis J. Gasnier, Donald Mackenzie, 1914), and identify the character of Ripley (Sigourney Weaver) in

*Alien* (Ridley Scott, 1979) as the pivotal moment marking a before and an after in the representation of this female archetype, who now tackles the final monster without male help—although it is important to acknowledge the incidental nature of her sex in Scott’s film, given that in the original script Ripley was supposed to be a male character (Bou, Pérez, 2010: 45).

In the filmography of Spanish horror, this type of proactive woman who seeks out a confrontation with evil is not entirely new. Joan Hawkins points to the classic horror film *The Awful Dr. Orlof* (*Gritos en la noche*, Jesús Franco, 1962) as a precedent that broke with the tradition in the genre by featuring a female protagonist in an investigative role (Hawkins, 2000: 103) who even takes the initiative of offering herself up as bait to trap the evil Dr. Orlof (Howard Vernon). Ibáñez Serrador, in his first production for the big screen with *The House that Screamed* (*La Residencia*, 1969) also offers an incipient version of the archetype in the character of Irene (Mary Maude), an antagonist in the beginning but a clever final girl in the last third of the film, when she embarks on her own investigation into the mysterious disappearances of her companions in a classic that served as a direct inspiration (Olney, 2014) for films like *Suspiria* (Dario Argento, 1977), where the archetype is clearly consolidated.

In the [REC] saga of films, the final girl archetype is evident in the actions of the two main protagonists: Ángela in the first two instalments and the fourth film, and Clara in the third. The stories of both these characters exhibit a number of the features that Clover attributes to the archetype, although, as will be argued here, they also diverge in ways that suggest they may serve as precursors to a new model of a fully emancipated heroine.

Among the features that fit the archetype, the female protagonists of the [REC] saga are the last survivors in an apocalyptic scenario and both, in different ways, display the necessary skills either to survive until they are rescued or to rescue them-

---

**THE STORIES OF BOTH THESE CHARACTERS EXHIBIT A NUMBER OF THE FEATURES THAT CLOVER ATTRIBUTES TO THE ARCHETYPE, ALTHOUGH, AS WILL BE ARGUED HERE, THEY ALSO DIVERGE IN WAYS THAT SUGGEST THEY MAY SERVE AS PRECURSORS TO A NEW MODEL OF A FULLY EMANCIPATED HEROINE**

---

selves. Ángela, the story's main protagonist, is the last survivor of the infection that spreads through the building on La Rambla. In the first film, she is literally the last victim of the contagion, and the film ends with the mystery of her disappearance into the shadows. In the second film, Ángela is discovered alive by the Special Operations team, although she herself participates in her own elimination by being possessed by the monster, an unusual point that will be discussed below. In the fourth film she is rescued again, this time by the army, although she ends up in a new situation of confinement with threats of various kinds: now she must escape not only from the new infection victims who are decimating the ship she is being held on, but also from the scientists who want to experiment with her body. Nevertheless, she will be the only woman to survive. In the third instalment in the series, when the infectious outbreak takes over her wedding, Clara manages to escape on her own. However, she will decide to go back to save her husband.

Clover suggests that the shift of the hero role from a male to a female character is accompanied by a symbolic masculinisation of the final girl. Understood from a gender perspective, the horror genre in general, and the slasher in particular, often symbolises conflicts with the patriarchal order. The villain's traditional victims are women and men who break the sexual restrictions associated with their gender. Indeed, in the slasher it is common for female victims to die during or

immediately after extramarital sex, and for male victims to do so in ways that are far from manly, and occasionally ridiculous. When it takes human form, the malignant force is generally identified as male. His murderous rage stems from a trauma that is traditionally sexual in nature, and quite often associated with gender identity conflicts, such as in *Dressed to Kill* (Brian de Palma, 1980) and *The Silence of the Lambs* (Jonathan Demme, 1991).

On the other hand, from the outset the final girl exhibits a virginal or celibate attitude (Keisner, 2008: 418), and is sometimes even explicitly asexual and androgynous (Rieser, 2001: 377). She also displays a set of traits that are traditionally more often associated with the male gender: skills with mechanics, strategic thinking, leadership abilities, etc. (Clover, 2015: 40). In the end, this masculinisation is symbolised in a *Lacanian* way through the appropriation of the phallic weapon of the monster. Clover draws on statements by the director of *Halloween* to argue that "the slasher resolves it either through eliminating the woman (earlier victims) or reconstituting her as masculine (Final Girl). The moment at which the Final Girl is effectively phallicized is the moment the plot halts and horror ceases. Day breaks, and the community returns to its normal order" (Clover, 2015: 50). Klaus Rieser also points out the use of the phallic weapon, but he interprets it more as a reaffirmation of heterosexuality in response to the ambiguity of the monster rather than a masculinisation of the female character: "the phallic struggle between the monster and the girl may be seen to signify that she has to accept sexuality on heterosexual and phallic terms [...] after all, she does not turn these weapons against normative masculinity but against a border-breaking monster that is threatening hegemonic gender relations" (Rieser, 2001: 377).

This symbolic appropriation can be found in the *[REC]* saga in the weapons that its female protagonists end up using, which they are in fact shown holding very conspicuously in the posters for the third and fourth instalments, suggesting, if

we accept Clover's logic, an effective hyper-phallicisation. In her battle against the infected who have turned her wedding into a massacre, Clara arms herself with a mechanical saw of huge proportions that seems to allude to the villain's weapon in *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*. Her husband will brandish a sword that looks quite paltry in comparison, and which, moreover, he is hesitant to use. Similarly, on the poster for *[REC]4: Apocalypse*, Ángela appears holding a huge outboard motor at waist-height, which in the film she alone is able to fire up in the final moment.

This masculinisation of the final girl archetype is associated with the gaze of the audience, which has traditionally been understood in this genre to be predominantly male (Chatterjee, 2018: 134). It is not unusual for these types of stories to seek to align the spectator with the killer's point of view in the first sequences of the film and then to adopt the perspective of the final girl, thereby establishing an identification with the character. In his discussion of this approach, Rieser argues that the spectator neverfully identifies with the character because the camera rarely occupies the point of view of the female protagonist, who most of the time is "observed" rather than the "observer" (Rieser, 2001: 385). This idea is also explored by Hajariah and Briandana, who suggest that the woman in front of the camera is constructed as "the object to-be-looked-at" by the male spectator (Briandana and Hajariah, 2013: 191).

In the *[REC]* saga, the spectator is encouraged to identify with the story by literally taking the point of view of the male characters who accompany the female protagonist on her adventure (Sánchez Trigos, 2013: 302; Rowan-Legg, 2013: 215). The "found footage" technique, a hallmark of the franchise that is used for the first episodes of the saga, involves the use of POV shots that form part of the diegesis, explained based on a metanarrative pretext that enhances the supposed realism: the conceit that the film we are watching is nothing more than raw footage recorded by the

camera and subsequently lost by those responsible for the filming (Hardcastle, 2017). Found footage is of course a well-known concept and very popular in the horror genre. Early examples of the use of films shot from the character's viewpoint can be found in films like *Lady in the Lake* (Robert Montgomery, 1946), *Peeping Tom* (Michael Powell, 1960) and even *Halloween*, and the specific idea of found footage is present in films of the genre like *Cannibal Holocaust* (Ruggero Deodato, 1980), *The Blair Witch Project* (1999), *Death of a Ghost Hunter* (Sean Tretta, 2007), *Paranormal Activity* (Oren Peli, 2007), *Cloverfield* (Matt Reeves, 2008), and *The Last Exorcism* (Daniel Stamm, 2010), to name just a few.

---

### IN THE *[REC]* SAGA, THE SPECTATOR IS ENCOURAGED TO IDENTIFY WITH THE STORY BY LITERALLY TAKING THE POINT OF VIEW OF THE MALE CHARACTERS

---

Ángela is followed tirelessly by her cameraman in the first instalment and by the cameras held by the members of the Special Operations team in the second, immersing the spectators in the film with the intention, expressed by the saga's own creators, of engaging them as if they were playing a video game (Hart, 2014). In this way, when the protagonist looks at the camera or when she addresses her companion, she breaks the fourth wall and involves the spectator, who feels appealed to directly. Actually, there are cases where the camera continues recording when there is nobody holding it, such as at the end of the first film, when the cameraman dies but the camera goes on filming everything in first person, leaving the protagonist alone "in the company" of the spectator (McKeown, 2019: 212-213).

However, despite these features, the female protagonists in the *[REC]* saga display particular traits that push beyond the boundaries of the ar-

chetype and that ultimately distance them markedly from it.

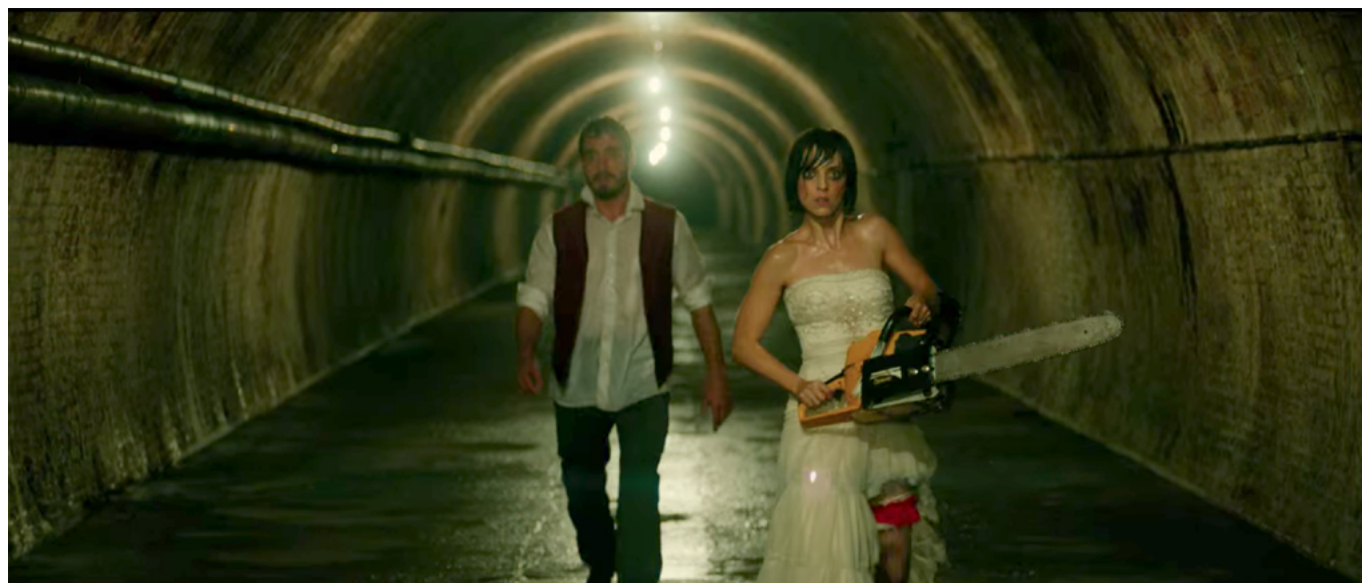
First of all, the female protagonist is almost never alone. She is always accompanied by supporting characters, most of whom are male, who adopt a subordinate role to her. As mentioned above, one of these is the obedient cameraman who accompanies Ángela throughout the first instalment, except in the last few minutes. In the second and third instalments, we will always see her in the company of a team of men which, as will be explored below, will include both allies and enemies. The case of Clara is even more obvious in this sense. Throughout her escape she will always be accompanied by the priest who presided over her wedding and/or various friends who are always under her direction. Subsequently, once her husband reappears, she will continue to be the one who takes the initiative to confront the evil, even when one of the infected bites her and she orders her spouse to cut off her arm to stop the infection, despite his obvious hesitation.

Secondly, the phallic symbols that Clover argues are associated with the final girl at the end of her journey are counteracted in the *[REC]* saga by the appearance of signs of femininity, or by col-

laboration with a male. For example, when Clara picks up the chainsaw in the third film, the first thing she does with it is cut the skirt off the wedding dress she is wearing. In doing so, she exposes a red garter on one leg, a markedly feminine undergarment associated with her wedding. Ángela, on the other hand, the only time that she actually holds the huge outboard motor shown in the poster and uses it as a weapon, she does so with the ship's radio technician, a fellow survivor who becomes her partner in the adventure.

The female protagonists in the saga are also distinguished from the final girl trope by their more active attitude towards dealing with the danger. As noted above, the archetypal character is effectively selected by the killer, who chooses a victim who subsequently finds the ability to survive by triggering her masculinised hero dimension in her desperate efforts to escape (Clover, 2015: 60). However, the female protagonists in the saga display none of the passive attitudes expected of the archetype at the beginning of their respective stories. From the very first scene, Ángela adopts a commanding attitude towards her cameraman. Despite some playful depictions of her physical inferiority, such as when she tries

Image 1. The bride arms herself with a chainsaw



on a fire-fighter's uniform that is far too big for her, throughout the film she is the one who orders where to point the camera, who confronts the police and public health authorities that come into the building, and who directs the escape in the final third of the film. Even in the last moments of the first film when their desperate search for a way out leads them to the attic, she insists on filming everything, holding up their escape to examine new clues, like the recording on the tape recorder that explains the origins of the infection. Clara, meanwhile, exhibits a classically heroic attitude when, having just escaped, she decides to turn back at the end of the tunnel, pick up a chainsaw and go rescue her husband on discovering that he has been left behind.

The saga ultimately breaks with the masculinised gaze that characterises its first instalments through the explicit, emphatic abandonment of the found footage technique. This is carried out through two key characters who effectively constitute on-screen *alter egos* of the creators and spectators: the camera operator at the wedding in the third film, and the communications technician onboard the ship in the fourth instalment. The first is presented to the spectator as a filmmaking professional who constantly verbalises the marks of the style adopted in the saga up to that moment: the *cinema vérité* of the hand-held camera that is an eyewitness to the reality being filmed. When the film abandons the first person, an eloquent detail shot shows his video camera smashed to pieces. In the fourth film, the character of the communications officer, who claims to be a fan of the reporter, tries at one point to spy on her undressing using the ship's security video system. However, the protagonist herself will bring an end to this peeping with a reproving glare at the camera, and later more explicitly when she breaks all of the ship's security recording devices one by one as she flees. This renders explicit the female protagonists' shift from observed object to observing subject, freeing the

camera from a male or voyeuristic diegetic gaze and shifting the narrative to a female perspective alternating with the point of view of the film's supporting characters.

## POSSESSION AND AUTONOMY OF THE FEMALE BODY/MONSTER

The diabolical being that seems to be the cause of the infection that afflicts the building on La Rambla in the *[REC]* saga has a worm-like appearance. It is only glimpsed for a moment, passing from one host to another in the second and fourth instalments, and at the very end of the story, when it is finally revealed. *Leucochloridium paradoxum* is a parasite in larval form that attacks gastropods in order to reach the stomachs of birds, where it reproduces. In this way, the infected snail loses control of its motor actions. Its inflamed antennae palpitate, revealing the ferocious worm inside it that controls it completely, directing it towards the top of a tree where it will be easy prey for the next host. In the films of the saga, the worm's impact on its incubators, as in the case of the *leucochloridium*, results in the complete annihilation of their free will and in the capacity to transmit the infection, which drives anyone who is bitten insane. In addition, from the second film on, it also appears to vest the infected with various supernatural powers.

In this way, the story combines two complementary dimensions of possession. The first is physical, infectious, parasitic, expressed in redness of the eyes, sores, blisters, vomiting, and other symptoms reminiscent of films like *Resident Evil* (Paul W.S. Anderson, 2002), *28 Days Later* (Danny Boyle, 2002) and *I Am Legend* (Francis Lawrence, 2007) or, more closely associated with the idea of behavioural transformations, the early David Cronenberg films *Shivers* (1975) and *Rabid* (1977). The second is the diabolical dimension, whose most famous precedent is *The Exorcist* (William Friedkin, 1973), expressed in the ability to change





Image 2. The phallic body of the creature passes from mouth to mouth

the tone of voice or to walk through walls and roofs, along with an aversion to crucifixes. Both dimensions ultimately reflect the same theme throughout the saga: the use of the female body, conceived of both as a receptacle for parasitic life, and as an object of experimentation by male authority.

The character of Tristana Medeiros is referred to as the “patient zero” of the pandemic. She can only be seen using a night-vision device, and her deformed body is covered in scars and sores resulting from years of torture and experiments carried out by a representative of the Catholic Church (Davies, 2019: 648). Not much more is known about her, and her past is only alluded to in the films through fleeting images of newspaper cuttings, although it is suggested that most of her suffering was not so much the result of her demonic possession as of the attempts to exorcise it by means of a scientific-ecclesiastical force.

In discussing her concept of the monstrous feminine, Barbara Creed points out that films about possessions tend to make use of the pretext of exorcism to explore taboos and behaviours that are considered obscene or contrary to the patriarchal order, which are generally presented as

monstrous yet perversely appealing to a gaze that is, once again, predominantly male: “It is not unlike a ritual of purification in that it permits the spectator to wallow vicariously in normally taboo forms of behavior before restoring order” (Creed, 1991: 37). This approach also usually leads to the exploration of themes of a sexual nature. *The Exorcist* is a paradigmatic example of this, as it positions a pubescent girl as the focal point of the possession, an idea that has influenced numerous films with

the same theme to the point that it has become a cliché, such as *To the Devil a Daughter* (Peter Sykes, 1976), and even veering into pornographic territory in cases like *Malabimba* (Andrea Bianchi, 1979) and its successive reformulations. However, as A. S. Monnet (2015) points out, in the case of *[REC]* the stereotype of sexualised possession is subverted. The protagonist, although constantly exposed in front of the camera, barely explores this idea; despite appearing half-naked, Medeiros’s body is an anti-erotic image that simultaneously suggests monstrosity and vulnerability, much like other supporting female characters, none of whom are pubescent and all of whom elicit horror not through their erotic or seductive qualities but through their sudden shift from the vulnerable to the monstrous, like the frail old woman and little girl apparently in need of aid who suddenly lunge at the characters who approach to help them.

Clover points out that possession via the mouth is now a cliché in the horror film genre (Clover, 2015: 79). At the end of the first instalment, Ángela and Medeiros meet, and in the epilogue to the second film we are shown the moment when the parasite passes from one host to the next: the creature’s phallic body passes from



mouth to mouth, thus alluding to an oppressive force that is male in essence. Monnet highlights the idea of the juxtaposition of these two women of opposing appearances in this moment of final recognition that renders them equal in terms of the openness of their bodies to the spectator's gaze: "Yet the final scene presents these two women as made strangely equal before the camera by the eerie effects of the green night vision glow. Both are in the dark and unable to see, yet both are visible to the audience and on display" (Monnet, 2015, eBook). In the end, the two women are given the same status of hosts of the monster, and thus in the final instalment of the saga, Ángela will potentially become a new Tristana unless she refuses to submit to the interventions of the male characters on her body.

The fourth film begins chronologically after the end of the second; Ángela has killed young Medeiros to take her place both as the malignant force that seeks to spread its infection and in relation to the thematic focus of the film: the use of the female body as a site of experimentation by men. After the shock of her liberation, Ángela wakes up chained to a bed. A doctor injects her with a tranquilliser without her consent. In the ship-prison where she is now being held there is only one other woman, an insane elderly lady who very quickly falls victim to the infection. Once they discover the content of the video recording showing the transfer of the parasite from one host to another, all the men on the ship's crew—both friends and enemies—turn on Ángela and try to seize control of her body against her will in order to extract the parasite that they mistakenly believe dwells inside her. Christopher Sharrett draws on the example of *Rosemary's Baby* (Roman

Polanski, 1968) to make the point that although the horror genre presents the subversion of society's patriarchal values more honestly than any other, control of the female body always emerges as a recurring theme (Sharrett, 2014).

This point is especially important because it encapsulates the whole meaning of the saga and the evolution of the final girl and monstrous feminine archetypes. At this moment, the story adopts a markedly ambiguous perspective that positions the men's gaze and the woman's will in relation to her own body in opposition with each other. The men, both allies and enemies, all seem to agree on the need to extract the parasite that they think is inside Ángela. The spectator, who does not yet know at this point that the parasite has passed from her to another host, and who still has the memory of the possessed Ángela who killed all the rescuers in the second film, cannot help but agree with the men's perspective. The audience's gaze is thus very clearly positioned, only to be abruptly subverted shortly thereafter: Ángela manages to escape from all her oppressors, taking control not only of her own body but of the whole narrative; she smashes the security cameras set up to observe her as an object of study, an act that in a way symbolises her emancipation from the saga's original premise, with the use of the found footage style that positioned the female as an observed object rather than a subject of the story;

Image 3. Attempt to extract the parasite against the protagonist's will



she reveals that she is not the demonic monster's host as everyone—including the spectators—suspected; and in the final confrontation she makes it clear that she is capable of repelling the monster by her own means, ultimately to reclaim her freedom and even liberate her collaborator/fan in the process.

## CONCLUSIONS

Balagueró and Plaza's saga offers a revision of the final girl archetype and adapts it to an emancipatory logic that has become increasingly prominent in cinema in the second half of the last decade. Ángela in *[REC]* emerged alongside the female protagonists of *Mad Max: Fury Road* (George Miller, 2015), *Rogue One* (Gareth Edwards, 2016), *Arrival* (Denis Villeneuve, 2016) and *Annihilation* (Alex Garland, 2018) in other genres: self-sufficient female characters with no love interests, who subvert the tropes of the genre to establish a leading role on their own terms and who appeal to a gaze that is postulated as neither male nor female.

The films of Balagueró and Plaza thus propose a new female archetype that represents a logical evolution of the final girl: an emancipated heroine whose qualities are not the product of any inheritance or mythical lineage; women who, without abandoning their feminine qualities, confront obstacles with the same determination as traditional male heroes, and offer a more egalitarian representation of gender roles. ■

## REFERENCES

- Bou, N., Pérez, X. (2010) Épica y feminidad en el Hollywood contemporáneo. In P. Sangro and J. F. Plaza (eds.), *La representación de las mujeres en el cine y la televisión contemporáneos* (pp. 39-58). Barcelona: Laertes.
- Briandana, R., Hajariah, S. (2013). Gender and the Action Film: Questions of Female Heroism (Analysis of Female Masculinity of the Female Heroic Character), *Jurnal Visi Komunikasi*, 12, 183-198.
- Chatterjee, A. (2018). Forgive Me Father, for I Have Sinned: The Violent Fetishism of Female Monsters in Hollywood Horror Culture, *Rupkatha Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities*, 10(2), 129-135. <https://doi.org/10.21659/rupkatha.v10n2.13>.
- Clover, C. J. (2015). *Men, Women and Chain Saws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film*. (Originally published 1993). Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Creed, B. (1993). *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis*. London, New York: Routledge.
- Davies, A. (2019). Women and Haunted Houses in the Films of Jaume Balagueró: The Nightmares of Presence, *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies*, 96(6), 641-653. <https://doi.org/10.3828/bhs.2019.38>.
- De Fez, Desirée (2020). *Reina del grito. Un viaje por los miedos femeninos*. Barcelona: Blackie Books.
- Garland, T. S., Phillips, N., Volland, S. (2018). Gender Politics and The Walking Dead: Gendered Violence and the Re-establishment of Patriarchy, *Feminist Criminology*, 13(1), 59-86. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1557085116635269>.
- Hardcastle, A. (2017). Why They Film: The Camera and Viewer Address in Found Footage Horror Films from Spain. En J. Marí (ed.), *Tracing the borders of Spanish Horror Cinema and Television* (Ebook edition), Routledge.
- Hart, A. C. (2014). Millennial Fears: Abject Horror in a Transnational Context. In Harry M. Benshoff, *A Companion to the Horror Film* (pp. 329-344). Hoboken, NJ, USA: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118883648.ch19>.
- Hawkins, J. (2000). *Cutting Edge: Art-Horror and the Horrific Avant-garde*. Minneapolis: Minnesota Press.
- Huerta Floriano, M. Á. (2019). *Los géneros cinematográficos. Una introducción*. Valencia: Tirant Humanidades.
- Keisner, J. (2008). Do you Want to Watch? A Study of the Visual Rhetoric of the Postmodern Horror Film, *Women's Studies*, 37(4), 411-427. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00497870802050019>.
- Lázaro-Reboll, A. (2017). Generating Fear: From Fantastic Factory (2000-2005) to *[REC]* (2007-2014). In J. Marí (ed.), *Tracing the Borders of Spanish Horror Cinema and Television*. (Ebook edition), Routledge.
- Losilla, C. (1999). *El cine de terror: una introducción* (original edition 1993). Barcelona: Paidós.

- McKeown, W. (2019). What happened to her eyes?: Self-sacrifice in [REC], *Horror Studies*, 10(2), 209–226. [https://doi.org/10.1386/host\\_00005\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1386/host_00005_1).
- Monnet, A. S. (2015). Body Genres, Night Vision and the Female Monster. In Fred Botting and Catherine Spooner (eds.), *Monstrous Media/Spectral Subjects* (pp. 143–156). Manchester University Press. <https://doi.org/10.7228/manchester/9780719089770.003.0011>.
- Olney, I. (2014). Spanish Horror Cinema. In H. M. Benshoff (ed.), *A Companion to the Horror Film*. (ebook). Wiley Blackwell.
- Rieser, K. (2001). Masculinity and Monstrosity, *Men and Masculinities*, 3(4), 370–392. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1097184X01003004002>.
- Rowan-Legg, S. M. (2013). Don't Miss a Bloody Thing: [REC] and the Spanish Adaptation of Found Footage Horror, *Studies in Spanish & Latin American Cinemas*, 10(2), 213–223. [https://doi.org/10.1386/slac.10.2.213\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1386/slac.10.2.213_1).
- Sánchez Trigos, R. (2013). Tradición y transnacionalidad en el tratamiento de lo fantástico en la saga REC de Jaume Balagueró y Paco Plaza, *Brumal*, I, 285–307.
- Sharrett, C. (2014). The Horror Film as Social Allegory (And How It Comes Undone). In H. M. Benshoff, (ed.), *A Companion to the Horror Film* (pp. 56–72). Hoboken, NJ, USA: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118883648.ch4>.

## FROM THE "FINAL GIRL" TO THE EMANCIPATED HEROINE: FEMALE ARCHETYPES IN THE [REC] SAGA

### Abstract

The [REC] saga is one of the most successful franchises in the history of Spanish horror. In this article we argue that this saga sets the precedent for a new female archetype that goes beyond the traditional "final girl". The depiction of resolute female protagonists who confront their enemies on their own, voluntarily and without the need of male help, offers a new vision of femininity similar to those offered by other films of the late 2010s. In this way, [REC] is a franchise that subverts traditional horror tropes while honouring their influence and legacy.

### Key words

[REC]; *Monstrous Feminine*; *Final Girl*; Spanish Horror; Jaume Balagueró; Paco Plaza.

### Authors

Juan Medina-Contreras is Associate Professor of Audiovisual Media Studies at Universidad Pontificia de Salamanca, where he also coordinates the master's programme in Screenwriting. Contact: jmedinaco@upsa.es.

Pedro Sangro Colón is Professor of Language and Audiovisual Narrative and Vice-Rector of Research and Educational Innovation at Universidad Pontificia de Salamanca. Contact: psangroco@upsa.es.

### Article reference

Medina-Contreras, J, Sangro, P. (2021). From the "Final Girl" to the Emancipated Heroine: Female Archetypes in the [REC] Saga. *L'Atalante. Revista de estudios cinematográficos*, 32, 79-90.

## DE LA FINAL GIRL A LA HEROÍNA EMANCIPADA: ARQUETIPOS FEMENINOS EN LA SAGA [REC]

### Resumen

La saga [REC] es una de las franquicias de mayor éxito en la historia del terror español. En este artículo argumentamos que sienta el precedente de un nuevo arquetipo femenino que va más allá de la clásica *final girl*. La representación de protagonistas femeninas decididas que se enfrentan solas a sus enemigos, de forma voluntaria y sin necesidad de ayuda masculina aporta una nueva visión de la feminidad que acompaña a otras producciones de la segunda mitad de la década de 2010. [REC] es, de esta manera, una franquicia que rompe con los estereotipos tradicionales del terror al tiempo que honra su influencia y legado.

### Palabras clave

[REC]; *monstrous feminine*; *final girl*; terror español; Jaume Balagueró; Paco Plaza.

### Autores

Juan Medina-Contreras (Huelva, 1985) es profesor contratado doctor en el área de Comunicación Audiovisual de la Universidad Pontificia de Salamanca, donde dirige el Máster en Guion de Ficción para Cine y Televisión. Contacto: jmedinaco@upsa.es.

Pedro Sangro Colón (Madrid, 1968) es catedrático de Lenguaje y Narrativa Audiovisual en la Universidad Pontificia de Salamanca, donde ejerce el cargo de Vicerrector de Investigación e Innovación educativa. Contacto: psangroco@upsa.es.

### Referencia de este artículo

Medina-Contreras, J, Sangro, P. (2021). De la *final girl* a la heroína emancipada: arquetipos femeninos en la saga [REC]. *L'Atalante. Revista de estudios cinematográficos*, 32, 79-90.

Edita / Published by



Licencia / License



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