

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE

Susan Smith Nash, Ph.D.

THE OTHER / La Otra (1946)

Roberto Gavaldón

OVERVIEW

La Otra is a powerful tour-de-force film noir with mesmerizing performance in an “evil twin” role by Dolores Del Rio, and a nuanced expressionistic interpretation of the emerging “film noir” genre. The Mexican variety of the highly popular Hollywood film noir genre incorporated many of the Hollywood elements, but took it much further to explore the tensions between women’s empowerment through subversive violence and a culturally inculcated masochism and submission. In many ways, *La Otra* was a dangerous film for Mexican screen legend Dolores Del Rio to take on because neither of the identical twins she played was actually virtuous. The jealous twin kills her newly widowed sister and masquerades as her, only to come to realize that her successful sister had murdered her own husband at the behest of a cynical, grifting playboy lover. Instead of a typical “doppelganger” dialectic between good and evil, with one twin being the embodiment of good and the other of evil, the inner moral struggle takes place after a slow awakening to the consequences of male debasement at the hands of a manipulative womanizer, and a life of empty conspicuous consumption. *La Otra* explores the idea of hidden passions, secrets, and problematized identities, while also exposing cultural representations of the desirable “good woman” as one of submission and masochism. While the Hollywood female film noir siren was both irresistibly seductive and dangerous, the Mexican noir femme fatale is ultimately put in her place by a sleazy and dishonest womanizer, who also clears the path to a redemptive denouement.

CHARACTERS

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| Magdalena Montes de Oca / María Méndez: | Twin sisters whose rivalry had consequences |
| Roberto González | Detective in love with María Méndez |
| Fernando | Seduces Magdalena, helps kill her husband |
| Licenciado de la Fuente | Family attorney of the Montes de Oca family |
| Carmela | Magdalena’s personal maid |

THE STORY

A Funeral: The opening scene is that of a funeral and people dressed in black, around an open grave. A woman wears a long black veil and peers into the grave and dirt is shoveled onto the casket.

Late to the Funeral: A woman, not wearing mourning garb, scurries up through the open gates to the cemetery. “Who is that woman who is arriving right when the funeral’s over?” asks an onlooker? “She’s the sister,” comments the companion. He suggests she did not have the same “luck” as the other, suggesting she did not marry a wealthy man.

Funeral Cortege: An attorney approaches the sister (Srta Mendes), to implore her to accompany the funeral party to her home. Rather hesitantly, Maria agrees.

An Enormous Mansion: They pull up to the home and go into a massive home. The soundtrack plays eerie music, and one is made aware that something is not right in this home. The woman wearing long black veils leads the sister who wears a gray business suit into the home.

“How does anyone endure black?”: The widow comments to her sister, “How does anyone endure wearing these horrible widow’s weeds?” Her sister comments, “Well, you’d think you had enough incentive to endure it.” Her widowed sister snaps back: “Is that a reproach?” And there we have evidence that the two sisters don’t like each other.

A Life of Luxury: The widowed sister opens an enormous wardrobe where she has gorgeous furs, feathered boas, and designer dresses. She tosses a few dresses to her sister to share. “You’ve always been jealous,” says the widowed sister.

Twins: At first, it’s not completely apparent that the two sisters are twins, but as the widowed sister takes off her mourning veil, and the other sister takes off her glasses, it is clear they are identical twins.

Who is who?: In this scene, we find that the widowed woman’s name is Magdalena, and her sister is María – María Méndez. María drapes a fur around her and looks in the mirror, just as a servant brings in the tea tray. He addresses María as Magdalena, thus confirming just how easily they can pass for each other. “Do you need anything more, Miss Magdalena?” he asks María. María’s eyes gleam. There is potential here!

Filled with envy and rage: María is filled with envy and rage. She rejects her sister’s mocking offer of clothing and takes a bus back to her working class neighborhood where she works as a manicurist in a barber shop, where she has to endure the gropings and flirtations of the customers. It is clear that she resents her sister, not only for her position but also for her wealth and status. The night is dark, cold and rainy. The shadows wrap her, and we can see her state of mind as well as her location.

Christmas Eve: María meets her fiancé for coffee. He remarks that she seems increasingly moody and pessimistic. He does not understand. She glowers down at her coffee and does not respond.

The Dreams and the Love: The detective loves María, but for some reason, he does not seem to be able to express his love. María also seems equally blocked. She looks at Roberto and seems to be pushing him away with a strange coldness. It is possible she wants more, and is still obsessed with the luck of her sister, and the fact that the man who proposed to Magdalena had claimed to have loved María, but there was some sort of monkey business with their appearance (twins).

Christmas Gift: María quits her job and uses the last pay to purchase a gift for her fiancé, who is a private detective. She purchases a modest cigarette lighter. Something is troubling her.

Return home, darkness falls: María returns to her apartment, where darkness falls. A group of children file by, accompanied by nuns. They are singing Christmas songs, and there are fireworks as well.

Call to Magdalena: Dark clouds swirl outside her window, and she can hear the children singing from the street and fireworks going off. Her mental state is reflected in the chaotic skies and the intense shadows, and her backlight silhouette.

Magdalena arrives: Magdalena arrives and mocks María for talking about suicide. María tells Magdalena to sit down, and she will communicate what is going on. “Is this about money?” asks Magdalena.

María: “I’ve never hated, but now I hate you with all my energy and force of nature.” She stands up with a gun and shoots her widowed sister, point blank, in the rocking chair where she is seated. The gun fires at the precise moment when the piñata and fireworks go off in the street below.

No blood? Conveniently enough, there's not much blood from the gunshot wound. So, María pulls off her clothing and dons it herself. She then arranges the body as though it were a suicide, and places the gun in her hand. Now, dressed as Magdalena, she's ready to assume her identity.

The "good" twin: María walks through a passageway filled with sparks from Christmas fireworks in a scene evocative of a fiery inferno.

The reading of the will: María, as Magdalena, appears for the reading of the will. It is quite a spectacle, given that her husband was so wealthy and important. They chant a rosary for the dead, and then start the reading of the will, in a scene that demonstrates the absolute hypocrisy. If killing her sister was intended to restore her to sanity, it did no such thing. She looks at a ticking clock and begins to lose her grasp on reason.

The dog knows: María races upstairs to Magdalena's bedroom with its enormous close. Magdalena's pit bull barks aggressively. He knows. She sees her reflection in the mirror. She feels horror.

The maid is fooled: "Your bath is ready," said the maid. "You seem very troubled," she continues. María roams from room to room, at least in the few rooms she can enter without being attacked by a furiously barking pit bull.

Lights and darkness: Lights from passing traffic comes into the room. Eerie music continues, and María has had to take sleeping pills in order to finally collapse into sleep. The swirling lights, the shadows, and the voices make it clear that she is not well.

Meeting with Roberto: Roberto explains how much he loved María. Why did she commit suicide?

Reading the will: Magdalena has inherited everything. She can't sign – "It's because of my sister," she says. Of course, that's just a partial truth. She needs time to practice her sister's signature, which she does. She conveniently throws all her practice signatures into the fire. Looking into the fire makes her think of the fires of hell, and she looks at her hands as though they will turn up as bloody as she expects.

Madness: María heats up a poker in the fire. Then, she takes it from the fire and burns her hand. Does she do it as penance? As a stigmata? Well, there's that – but there is the diabolically practical María – now she has to sign and write with left hand (although right-handed).

Shopping Spree: Now that she can sign checks, María goes on a massive shopping spree (as if what was already in her closet were not enough). She is elegant, and she gives elegant parties. She's in her perfect habitat.

Fernando arrives: In the middle of a dramatic party, a guest arrives. It's Fernando. María is shocked that he embraces her and is extremely passionate – "These last six months – six centuries – have been a torture to me." María has no idea why he's acting so weird and intimate. She finds out.

Fernando, the womanizing dog: They've had an affair. Worse than that, Fernando expects something from her. Everyone notices Fernando and they're not impressed. They liked her husband and she seems to have moved on rather too quickly. The women point out how cold and indifferent she seems about her late husband. The men dislike him – he's acting as though he owns her.

Fernando, the murdering dog: Fernando is determined to have his way with her. She shows up for their agreed-upon date several hours late. He is not amused. 'I've decided not to come.' But,

it's clear that there is something terrible that happened. Fernando waits for María in his new apartment. It is modern and sterile, and the camera focuses on the bare walls, the ticking clock, and his glasses of champagne. He is wearing a robe, and makes the very picture of a suave demon. Slowly, María becomes aware that she had an affair with Fernando and worse – the two of them conspired to murder her husband. Oops. She is in a pickle. María, the murderess, has assumed the place of her twin sister, Magdalena, the murderess. In most doppelganger “evil twin” movies, one twin is the “good” twin and the other is evil incarnate.

Abuse: María declares that she cannot have a relationship as before. He disagrees. Fernando hits María. Then, he forces her to have intimate relations (as before). She is filled with nausea.

María returns home: There is a repeated scene, with the security mirror. It shows María entering and retreating. The emotion that is captured is one of anxious worry and the notion that the mirror shows the truth of reality, while one's perceptions of the big picture or a close-up can be flawed.

Clearing out her bank accounts: “But you're taking out all your funds,” comments the bank teller. “I'll replace them next week,” she says. It's not true. She's pulling out all her money and finding all her jewelry to give them to Fernando, who smugly takes them.

Fernando gets the jewels and the cash: María had begged for many jewels and other expensive baubles. “You can have all of it – it does not matter – just get out of my life.” Fernando mocks her. “And what will happen if I decide not to leave?” María picks up a pistol and points it at him. “I'd rather die than stay in this maddening slavery with you.”

Arsenic: “You won't kill me. You're too smart and calculating to kill with a gun. You kill scientifically.” This is when she learns that she and Fernando murdered her husband with arsenic.

I've been robbed!: María files a report with the police about the “robbed jewels.” She has not actually been robbed. Instead, she has given the jewels that Magdalena's husband bought for her to Fernando, who María finds was having an affair and also murdered Sr. Montes de Oca.

El Greco: Fernando leaves, as agreed, but he can't resist putting his sticky fingers all over her home to mock her and make her pay for her rejection. He steals a priceless El Greco painting on loan from the museum.

The police investigate: Why did you do this? Why did you give him the painting? María says, “It's simple. I love him.” Fernando's smug smile provokes shudders.

Exhumation: The body of her husband is exhumed. He has arsenic in his body. And, it was enough to kill him – slowly, excruciatingly.

Sentenced to 30 years in jail: María is tried and sentenced for the death of her husband. In a strange scene in the courtroom, Fernando and María stand together and she explains to him that she deserves the punishment. Fernando says he reminds him of her sister (imagine that).

Chiaroscuro: María enters the prison. All is clanging metal, fog, and bars. In the distance, one hears screams and shrieks. She is about to descend into the inferno, but she does so with a smile on her face. There are shadows, and a strange light illuminates her. He looks at her, wondering about the similarity, and she tells him, simply, “Merry Christmas.”

Infinite parallel lines of the prison bars: Roberto walks slowly out the prison, through light and shadows of the prison bars. He stops, turns, looks back and lights a cigarette with, (yes, you guessed it), the cigarette lighter she gave him.

Redemption: The sinner is being punished, and she glows with a saintlike illumination. She is simultaneously experiencing redemption and punishment. At the same time, she is simultaneously alive and in the suspended animation of what will be a life sentence. María occupies a strange place – hell for having committed her crimes, but filled with a kind of mystical love. It is quite disconcerting.

THEMES

The themes in *La Otra* are the same as in classic Hollywood film noir, but there is more. *La Otra* explores a uniquely Mexican vision of film noir that also includes womanizing scoundrels and self-castigating “bad women.” While Hollywood film noir celebrates the anti-hero, in the case of Mexican film noir involving a female protagonist, the genre is intensely normative, which is to say that the bad women are punished, and by the end of the film, order has been restored.

Disorder vs. Order: The film begins with a deeply disordered value system that privileges superficial wealth and social standing above the love one would have for one’s own family, particularly, one’s twin sister. The desire for wealth is so strong that it perverts the ordinarily modest María and makes her a murderous beast. It also allows the womanizing scoundrel, Fernando, to blackmail and sexually assault (deeply implied if now actually filmed) María. The disordered values continue to spiral downward until the victim’s body itself exposes the crime by revealing it is chock full of arsenic – the kind of arsenic you’d have by eating or drinking poisoned home cooking.

Doppelgangers Are to be Feared: María is overjoyed when Magdalena’s maid mistakes her for Magdalena. She starts to realize that she can put a diabolical plan into place, and simultaneously punish her sister and obtain the wealth and standing that she believes she so richly deserved, simply because Magdalena out-competed her and ended up marrying the wealthy suitor. María and Magdalena are identical twins, with very few physical differences. María wears glasses and Magdalena’s voice is a bit higher-pitched. One seems to be good and the other bad, but here, both twins are killers, and so the double (doppelganger) is doubly evil.

Appearances Deceive: María is a modest young woman who does not like the lewd advances of the men in the barber shop who nuzzle and grope her when she gives them a manicure. She lives in a modest apartment and seems to be quiet and modest. You would never dream that the heart of a stone, cold killer lies within that modest, buttoned-up chest. The “appearances deceive” theme ties closely to a concept of identity and beingness itself. Ontological issues / beingness manifest themselves in the confusion that people have about the person and her traits. For example, the people at Magdalena’s party are surprised that “Magdalena” (really Maria) liked certain foods that previously she detested.

Womanizing Scoundrels Operate with Impunity: Fernando is a greedy, materialistic, womanizing scoundrel who takes sadistic pleasure in seducing women and then having them commit great crimes in that will result in his personal enrichment. Thus, he seduced the vain and shallow Magdalena and convinced to kill her husband by means of a methodical, slow, and scientific poisoning by arsenic. Later, when she attempts to free herself of him, he takes great sadistic joy in stealing the priceless El Greco painting on loan from the National Art Institute, and then making her confess to the police that she did it – and she did it for the love of Fernando. That moment is truly classic – his look of smug control. It was pure Stockholm Syndrome.

Identity Is a Construct, and a Kind of Prison: When Maria assumes Magdalena’s identity, she also seems to assume some of her personality, becoming very flamboyant. It is an about-face from the identity of the mousy and rather prudish Maria. Maria spends lavishly on clothing and a large, ostentatious party upon the 6-month anniversary of Sr. Montes de Oca’s death. When confronted with Fernando, with whom Magdalena had an affair and helped murder her husband, Maria’s personality seems to be shocked into reconstituting itself as the dignified

person who wants nothing to do with blackmail, dirty money, and above all, but shocking revelation that she is now doubly trapped as a murderess. If she suddenly

Romantic, Idealistic Men Are Left with Nothing: Roberto, the detective, loves María. However, each time he gathers up enough courage to tell her, she starts emitting a kind of “don’t touch me / don’t get too close” energy which discourages him. After she has murdered her sister and has begun masquerading as her, she happens to have a coffee at the same coffee shop (Sanborn’s?) with Roberto – this time, though, as Magdalena, sharing memories of María to Roberto. He remarks on how eerily similar she is to María (whom he assumes is dead from suicide). He tells her how much he loved María, but of course, it’s too late. Victory comes for the bold, not those who lack the fortitude to proffer their truth at the appropriate time.

Female Virtue and Masochism: The Mexican film noir story is a normative morality tale in which begins as an intriguingly naturalistic depiction of the more lurid of the human emotions that lie hidden in the mind and the heart. Greed, jealousy, and a violent heart seem to be the requisite components of success, but that is only until it becomes clear that the consequences of one’s actions are a profound existential solitude, made infinitely worse in *La Otra* by the fact that the one person Maria truly loves finally expresses his love for her, but it is for naught. Maria can never tell him that she has actually murdered the twin she is pretending to be. He has to think of her as the murderess of Sr. Montes de Oca, and not the murderess of the murderess. In the end, the illuminated face of Maria suggests a conversion to holiness, a beatification, as she is punished for the crime and locked away in prison.

To Be Rich, You Must Be Ruthless: Over and over, again and again, in all kinds of settings, the message is the same. “If you want to be rich, my son, you’re going to have to learn to be ruthless. To make an omelette, you have to break a few eggs (as they say). Magdalena has become wealthy by stealing María’s suitor from her, marrying him, and then when she wanted even more, she killed him. Fernando wants to be rich, and he is manipulative, womanizing, blackmailing and now, capable of murder.

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

María: Intensely competitive and jealous person who is angry that her twin sister seems to have more love, happiness, and material wealth than she does. Seemingly good and studious with her glasses and smart business suit, María has a murderous heart. She will stop at nothing to punish those who take what she wants, or to eliminate those who stand in her way.

Jealous: After the funeral, Magdalena gives María a ride home. Magdalena gloats over the fact she married well, and that Maria would never be able to afford the items that Magdalena has at her disposal. Maria claims not to care about the material wealth, but is filled with rage at the fact that Magdalena stole the man by pretending to be Maria and seducing her. Jealousy the outward manifestation of a deeper, ontological insecurity. As a twin who has ruptured her relationship with her twin, Maria is an incomplete personality, a ruptured being, and the underlying ontological anxiety cries out for completeness. She tried to find it with Roberto, but the only true healing would be to rejoin her twin. Unfortunately, she finds a flawed way to do so (shoots her and assumes her identity).

Obsessive: Maria is obsessed with the idea that her sister “stole” the man who would have been her husband, and then cared nothing when he died is a drumbeat that beats in her head. She cannot rest until she punishes her sister for her betrayal. Film noir techniques such as chiaroscuro and different point of view camera angles help reinforce the fact that Maria is obsessed. There are numerous closeups of a pensive Maria, and then quick cuts to Magdalena’s mansion, the staircase where Maria makes grand entrances, which reinforce the notion that Maria desperately wants to trade places.

Lonely: Meeting with Roberto for coffee on Christmas Eve at a familiar restaurant assuages Maria's deep sadness and mystical bent. She and Roberto often embark in philosophical conversations, which fascinate and stimulate Roberto. They have a budding friendship and seem truly attached to each other, but there is something that seems to get in the way. We learn later that it has to do with her jealous obsession with Magdalena and the fact she married the man that Maria had thought possible for herself. Later, as Maria masquerades as Magdalena, her loneliness is all the more acute. She can talk to Roberto, and he can comment about how much she resembles the person he thinks committed suicide, never suspecting that "Magdalena" is the real Maria. The loneliness and existential isolation is profound, and made even worse when whatever unholy alliance with Fernando had with Magdalena is projected, with all its carnality, but absolutely none of whatever mental or spiritual connection that there used to be.

Inner conflict and an incomplete sense of self. On the one hand, Maria is jealous. On the other, she is melancholy and yearning. Her state of being a twin suggests that she is in an existential state of incompleteness, and while on the surface it may seem she is motivated by jealousy and material status, the fact that the film includes masquerades and doublings of characters suggests something utterly different. The twins kill in the quest for wholeness. Magdalena killed to please the manipulative man in her life because his approbation made her feel whole. Maria killed Magdalena to reclaim the half of her self that had been split at birth. By killing and merging her identity with Magdalena, she might, in theory feel whole. However, she simply feels abject and irreparable.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. When *La Otra* opens, Maria is arriving late to the funeral of her sister's husband. Many funeral-goers remark upon the fact that she arrived just as the grave-diggers were tossing dirt from their shovels into the open grave. Magdalena, Maria's sister, is dressed in a long black veil, and long black dress. Maria is wearing a light-colored coat and a plaid scarf. What do the outfits and positions suggest about each of the sisters? How is Magdalena's funeral garb reminiscent of a nun's habit? How does Maria's outfit suggest about her attitude about the funeral? How does the viewer start to form ideas about the relative virtue of each?

2. In many ways, *La Otra* functions as a normative piece of visual discourse that conveys the appropriate role and behaviors of women. What do the outfits that Magdalena and Maria wear suggest about societal values with respect to women?

- * Dark, heavy mourning veils and long black dress
- * A mink stole that, when draped on one's shoulders, makes a woman feel glamorous
- * A dramatic feathered evening gown and matching slippers
- * A modest dress that resembles a nurse's uniform, worn by a manicurist
- * A splendid evening gown worn while gliding down a stunning staircase
- * A tailored suit jacket and skirt

3. As twins, Maria and Magdalena, could be said to represent parts of a whole, and in such a theoretical psychological model, as long as they are separated or at odds with each other, neither one will be able to achieve an integrate psyche or any form of emotional well-being. Describe how Fernando's seduction of Magdalena could be seen as evidence that Magdalena needed Fernando's affirmation in order to feel whole, and thus it made her vulnerable to manipulation. As for Maria, describe how Maria's anger at Magdalena's marriage could also be explained by the profound solitude and abandonment that Maria felt after losing her sister to marriage,

4. Describe the way that the camera angles, lighting, and movement are used to reflect the inner emotional and cognitive state of the protagonist (Maria).

- * At the funeral
- * In Magdalena's house
- * In the streets and in the department store, decorated for Christmas

- * When she speaks to Roberto in the guise of Magdalena
- * When she speaks to Fernando, and looks at the side mirror to see what is happening in the entryway as he enters the house
- * During the trial
- * When incarcerated for murder

5. Describe how the camera work calls into question the nature of perception and reality, and introduces a deep subjectivity rather than objective reality. Which scenes allowed you to see by means of the subjective perceptions of different individuals? How did they help you see through masks, disguises and hidden identities?

- * The family pit bull barks furiously at Maria (but loved Magdalena)
- * The guests at the party comment upon how much Magdalena's tastes have changed
- * The maid comments on the changes in the mistress's tastes and behaviors
- * Fernando wonders why "Magdalena" (actually Maria) recoils at his touch
- * Roberto remarking at the voice and words of Magdalena (actually Maria)

ILLUSTRATIVE SCENES



This is the opening scene of the movie. We see gravediggers shoveling dirt into the grave. In her mourning garb, Magdalena could also remind one of a nun. The juxtapositions of religious / Catholic iconography and women's roles leads to paradoxes and a profound destabilization of women's roles in society. Ultimately, it is a normative role, and those who are deviant will ultimately pay a high price.



Prim, prudish, and above all, jealous, this is Maria, sister of the newly widowed Magdalena. Magdalena bagged the rich husband Maria wanted, and she has been bitter ever since. Notice that she did not wear deep black in mourning. She is dressed for the season, though. It is in December and approaching Christmas.



Director Gavaldon uses this technique quite often, which evokes a painting from the Dutch Masters such as Vermeer, who explores the world within the frame – the reflected world. In the case of Gavaldon's direction, the reflected world is a world that shows the truth about how people would like to see themselves. In this case, the self-contained Maria tries on a fur wrap that Magdalena has carelessly let fall. Her expression immediately transforms itself to one of dreamy glamour. It is at this moment that the male servant (butler?) mistakes Maria for Magdalena. The idea is hatched!



“What a mysterious sensation to look at the city from above, wondering what might happen,” muses Maria, showing that in her heart of hearts, she is a romantic. There is a sense of brooding tension, with the dark, shadowy Expressionistic lighting. Essentially, the landscape is a direct reflection of what is going on in her heart and her mind. In this case the Expressionistic elements of film noir function as an extended visual metonymy / metaphor for emotional states.



Roberto questions the troubled Maria. On the one hand, she is jealous. On the other, she is melancholy and yearning. Her state of being a twin suggests that she is in an existential state of incompleteness, and while on the surface it may seem she is motivated by jealousy and material status, the fact that the film includes masquerades and doublings of characters suggests something utterly different. The twins kill in the quest for wholeness. Magdalena killed to please the manipulative man in her life because his approbation made her feel whole. Maria killed Magdalena to reclaim the half of her self that had been split at birth. By killing and merging her identity with Magdalena, she might, in theory feel whole. However, she simply feels abject and irreparable.



This is a classic film noir shot. The gun is silhouetted against the lighter backdrop of the shooter's lighter coat. It is winter, thus cold, dark, and in this case, rainy. The darkened bedroom is in stark contrast with the loud fireworks and Christmas festivities going on outside. The gun is held by a woman, but intensely phallic in its appearance. It is only appropriate since it has been the presence of men and the deep, emotions precipitated by them that wrenched the two twins apart.



This low-angle medium long-shot shows Fernando, the manipulative and murderous playboy in all his loathsome glory. He has no redeeming qualities whatsoever, so does not qualify as an antihero. He is pouring champagne for the woman he thinks is Magdalena, his iniquitous co-conspirator in the murder of her husband. Fernando is the perfect villain because he makes the self-tormenting Maria sympathetic although she is a murderess. The crime of passion (killing her sister) seems less heinous than the crime of avarice (killing Magdalena's husband for his possessions). Only when she meets Fernando does she realize that he and Magdalena had an affair, and that Magdalena's husband had been murdered.



The long shot with steep camera angle reinforces the notion of judgment on high. Although Maria did not commit murder, because that was actually committed by her twin, Maria is guilty of murdering her sister. Interestingly, she never does turn on Fernando, but takes responsibility for the entire crime of murder, in addition to the theft of the El Greco painting, which she claims she did for love (when in fact Fernando absconded with it, leaving her seeming guilty). The shadows behind her, and her position in the middle of the courtroom reinforce a sense of isolation and judgment for a crime she alone committed.



Saint or Sinner? At the end of the film, this beautiful close-up echoes images of the Virgin Mary, specifically, Our Lady of Guadalupe. Her face is bathed in light from above, and tears of penance and spiritual ecstasy seem to bathe her eyes. Maria has been sentenced to prison and in this scene, she is speaking to Roberto, whom she never informs of her true identity. She seems, if not content, at least resigned. The visual iconography communicates a clear message that the evil twin has been redeemed through mortification of the flesh. The castigation and trial by fire not only meted out justice, they also restored Maria. She now seems to be an integrated being, and whole, even as she is being punished. The underlying message that crime does not pay and female masochism will make you glow as an angel or saint, is not without its irony.



The techniques of German Expressionism and film noir are evident here in the isolated courtyard of the women's prison. The prison bars make dark, parallel shadows onto the light from the gas lamps and electric lights. Maria holds onto the bars as Roberto strides off, cigarette in his mouth, still awed by the resemblance of Magdalena to Maria. (He never realizes that Maria has killed Magdalena and is masquerading as her). The shadows suggested fragmented selves and above all, existential isolation and loneliness.