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**Hidden Secrets, Utopias, Ghosts and the Hispanic Periphery in
Los abrazos rotos (2009):
Pedro Almodóvar's Homage to Lanzarote and César Manrique (1919-92)**

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Abstract

Taking as my starting point Almodóvar's statement that *Los abrazos rotos* contains 'una historia que subyace a todas las demás' and building upon Herrera's attention to the 'doubling' within the film, together with Delgado's and Beilin's claims that it can be linked to questions of historical memory, in this article I will examine in greater detail the Director's comments regarding the influence of Lanzarote and the prominent Lanzarotean artist/ sculptor César Manrique on this film. After analysing the scenes that take place on the island and assessing their relevance to the film as a whole, I contend that Lanzarote is a prime force and, furthermore, that *Los abrazos rotos* contains strong links with the work, life and death of Manrique, whom Almodóvar met during his visit to the island in 1986. Finally, I propose that it is through exploring the significance of Lanzarote and Manrique in this complex, multi-layered film that we can fully appreciate Almodóvar's engagement with contemporary Spanish issues in *Los abrazos rotos* and the way in which he uses the film to raise provocative questions about Spain's present, past and future, the status and role of the Hispanic periphery and the construction of utopias.

Keywords: Almodóvar, Manrique, Lanzarote, secrets, utopias, ghosts, Hispanic periphery, Canaries, Madrid

In 2009, Almodóvar declared that *Los abrazos rotos* pays homage to his love for cinema:

‘Es una película romántica, con varias historias de amor cruzadas, todas ellas muy intensas, pero también hay una historia que subyace a todas las demás: es mi historia de amor con el cine. Es una declaración de amor al cine: por eso hay tantas referencias a tantas películas.’¹

The film has been reviewed by a range of critics, who have covered such diverse topics as fathers and sons,² ‘fatherhood and memory’,³ ‘healing and the body’⁴ and the role of fashion,⁵ together with the film’s ‘art direction’⁶ and Almodóvar’s ‘self-fashioning’.⁷ Herrera, expanding on Kinder’s analysis of *Los abrazos rotos* as a remix of Almodóvar’s earlier films, has examined the ways in which it ‘borrows’ from other films.⁸ However, critics have not yet fully explored the multiplicity of the film’s layers (or ‘historias’) by acknowledging the dramatic importance of Lanzarote and the film’s references to the island’s prominent artist and sculptor, César Manrique (drawing upon his utopian vision and ‘borrowing’ the circumstances of his death).⁹ As this article seeks to demonstrate, this unique Canarian island, together with Manrique’s work, life and death serve as implicit but important elements within the film’s plot. I will query Smith’s claim that in ‘*Los abrazos rotos* background, both historical [...] and geographical [...] is only lightly sketched in’,¹⁰ and propose that exploring the significance of the film’s locations (especially those in Lanzarote), its homage to Manrique and his utopian vision helps us to fathom the complexity and symbolic

¹ ‘Almodóvar: “Esta película es una declaración de amor al cine”’, *El País*, 13 March 2009, <https://elpais.com/cultura/2009/03/13/actualidad/1236898801_850215.html> (accessed 7 July 2019).

² Marsha Kinder, ‘Restoring Broken Embraces’, *Film Quarterly*, 63(3) (Spring 2010), 28-33.

³ Katarzyna Olga Beilin, ‘Broken Embraces’ “Unearthing the dead”: On *amour fou*, Fatherhood and Memory’, *Studies in Hispanic cinemas*, 1 (2012), 35-47.

⁴ Davina Quinlivan, ‘Film, Healing and the Body in Crisis: A Twenty-first Century Aesthetics of Hope and Reparation’, *Screen*, 55:1 (Spring 2014), 103-117.

⁵ Jorge Pérez, ‘Significant Outfits: Almodóvar Wears Chanel’, *MLN*, 133(2) (March 2018), 336-56.

⁶ John D. Sanderson, ‘To the Health of the Author: Art Direction in *Los abrazos rotos*’, in *A Companion to Pedro Almodóvar*, ed. Marvin D’Lugo and Kathleen M Vernon (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 473-94.

⁷ Paul Julian Smith, ‘Almodóvar’s Self-fashioning: The Economics and Aesthetics of Deconstructive Autobiography’, in *A Companion to Pedro Almodóvar*, ed. Marvin D’Lugo and Kathleen M Vernon (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell 2013), 21-38.

⁸ Javier Herrera, ‘Almodóvar’s Stolen Images’, in *A Companion to Pedro Almodóvar*, ed. Marvin D’Lugo and Kathleen M Vernon (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 345-63.

⁹ As I will discuss in greater detail later, Manrique’s sudden death in a traffic accident in 1992 was initially reputed to be murder.

¹⁰ Smith, ‘Almodóvar’s Self-fashioning’, 27.

depth of this multi-layered film. This, furthermore, will enable us to gauge the extent of Almodóvar's engagement with contemporary Spanish issues in *Los abrazos rotos*, and appreciate the way he uses the film (and camera) to pose provocative and probing questions about Spain's past, present and future, the status and role of the Hispanic periphery, and the construction of utopias.

Almodóvar, Lanzarote and the Inspiration for *Los abrazos rotos*

Initially it may appear that Lanzarote plays a relatively minor role in the film, merely serving as the location where Lena Rivero (Martel's wife) and her film-director lover, Mateo Blanco (aka Harry Caine), take refuge, as they escape from the violence exacted by the millionaire-financier, Martel.¹¹ However, although the majority of the scenes were filmed in Madrid (compared with just two weeks of filming in Lanzarote),¹² I would posit that the symbolic role of the island in *Los abrazos rotos* is more significant than that of Madrid. From the outset, it should be noted that the film's origins derived from Lanzarote since it was directly inspired by 'The Secret of El Golfo', a photograph taken by Almodóvar during a visit to the island. Bennett relates that

[w]hen he got the pictures developed, he could just make out two tiny figures standing on the sand. Intrigued, he had the shot enlarged, and revealed a couple locked in a tight embrace, lost in the landscape.¹³

Almodóvar admitted, 'Siempre me quedó la intriga de quiénes eran y qué hacían allí, en la inmensidad de esa playa'¹⁴ and his fascination with its mystery is transferred to Mateo/Harry.

Almodóvar aligned this photograph to his personal mind-set during that period and his perceptions of his task as director:

¹¹ The islands' distance from the Peninsula is highlighted as Mateo/Harry fulfils Lena's request: 'Llévame lejos de aquí [Madrid].'

¹² In *El Diario* we read, '[...] será el rodaje más extenso de su carrera, con trece semanas y media, de las que dos tendrán lugar en Lanzarote.' 'Almodóvar: "Lanzarote está llena de secretos y misterios"', *El Diario*, 29 May 2008, <https://www.eldiario.es/canariasahora/cultura/Almodovar-Lanzarote-llena-secretos-misterios_0_222578719.html> (accessed 7 July 2019).

¹³ Annie Bennett, 'Interview: The Director, The Artist - and The Unframed, Unmounted Work of Art', *The Guardian*, 26 July 2009, <<https://www.theguardian.com/travel/2009/jul/26/lanzarote-pedro-almodovar-embraces>> (accessed 7 July 2019).

¹⁴ 'Almodóvar: "Lanzarote está llena de secretos y misterios".'

‘En este caso, esa primera línea viene de una foto que hice hace nueve años en Lanzarote y de la oscuridad en la que yo vivía en ese momento. De ahí viene también lo del director ciego [a blindness that would be matched with that of Mateo/Harry]. La segunda línea me la tengo que inventar, y ese es el juego que me atrae, porque primero debo descubrirla, y no la quiero descubrir en la realidad. Prefiero descubrirla en la imaginación.’¹⁵

He delved further into its significance in an interview, noting that it exposed the power of the camera:

‘It was like in Antonioni's movie *Blow Up*, when David Hemmings takes the picture in the park and doesn't see the body by the bushes until he develops the film in his darkroom [...]. The camera lens sees more than the naked eye.’¹⁶

As we will see, the significant role of the camera (or film) in exposing something that has been previously concealed (or unseen) is crucial as we explore the multiple layers and hidden secrets of *Los abrazos rotos*. First, however, it is incumbent upon us to elucidate the significance of Madrid as a counterpart to the island location of Lanzarote.

Madrid: The Claustrophobic, Sick City

To an extent, *Los abrazos rotos* reflects Almodóvar's changing relationship with Madrid. He revealed,

‘[...] my relationship with Madrid is less intense now. Being known makes it harder for me to have a relationship with the reality of the city. And if I don't know it, I don't deal with it; I move to the reality of interiors. It's something like a married couple who are together out of habit, but I'm longing to leave for other places.’¹⁷

Accordingly, prior to the couple's escape to Lanzarote, the scenes in Madrid at the beginning of the film prepare us for the contrast between the city/capital/centre/urban space and the island/periphery/coast/rural space, as the

¹⁵ Herrera, ‘Almodóvar's Stolen Images’, 359.

¹⁶ Bennett, ‘Interview’.

¹⁷ María Delgado, ‘Sensory Perception’, *Sight and Sound*, 19(9) (September 2009), 40-44 (p.43).

film oscillates between the present (2008) and the past (1994). Manmade skyscrapers, ugly, tall buildings which claw and conceal the sky, are visible from the windows of Martel's office,¹⁸ whilst innumerable dark interior settings convey an atmosphere of claustrophobia and stagnation. None of Madrid's iconic buildings feature in the film. Instead, the exterior settings focus on streets that are monotonously alike and we are obliged to study details (such as the taxi logos) for visual confirmation that we are in the capital. As Sanderson has noted,

[the] generalized monochromatic gray tone for the interiors in which Ernesto and Lena, each also dressed in gray, blend in with the background to convey a sameness related to an exclusive business environment.¹⁹

Even 'the home' provides little by way of comfort. This is evident when Lena returns home from hospital after Martel has pushed her down the stairs. The expensive luxury car, the manicured gardens, an opulent and extravagant, yet artificial setting provide her with little comfort and warmth (unlike the small bungalow she inhabits later with Mateo in Famara), whilst the freshly-cut flowers, like Lena, are doomed to die. The city is afflicted by sickness; Lena's father is dying from stomach cancer, Diego suffers from aspergillosis, whilst Lena is literally and metaphorically crippled. Significantly, there are no less than five different hospital locations in *Los abrazos rotos*.²⁰ A decadent atmosphere pervades the capital, a sharp contrast to the subsequent rejuvenation of the couple's life outdoors in Lanzarote, where natural cliffs and a vibrant sea often dominate the scenes, evidencing Nature's magnitude free from man's manipulative hand.

The city also appears in printed (/fictional) form in the advertisement (published in the Madrilenian newspaper *El País*) for *Chicas y maletas*, the film on which Lena and Mateo worked and 'a clone of Almodóvar's international crossover success *Mujeres al borde de un ataque de nervios* of more than twenty years earlier'.²¹ Once again, the enormity and claustrophobic nature of the buildings is underlined, whilst the main character appears solitary and lost amidst them, in a manner reminiscent of Lorca's *Poeta en Nueva York*. The representation of Madrid in *Los abrazos rotos* is thus somewhat distinct from Almodóvar's earlier films, which 'have

¹⁸ According to Sanderson, these scenes were filmed in an insurance company on the Calle Orense. 'To the Health of the Author', 479.

¹⁹ 'To the Health of the Author', 479.

²⁰ 'To the Health of the Author', 472.

²¹ Smith, 'Almodóvar's Self-fashioning', 27.

La Geria

The first outdoor scene in Lanzarote, contrasting with the cityscape of Madrid, is a high shot (probably from a helicopter) of the inland wine-growing region of La Geria. Almodóvar pronounced, 'I was knocked out by La Geria when I first saw it and knew that I would use it in a film one day.'²⁷ As described by Bennett, 'The slate-grey, gently undulating terrain is scored with thousands of shallow circular hollows, each housing a single green vine protected by a semicircle of basalt rocks.'²⁸

The impression of natural freshness conveyed here, the dramatic contrast between the greys and greens, diverges radically from the brutality of the previous scene in Madrid, where we saw a battered Lena trying to wash her wounds in the privacy of the dark washroom. The symmetry and beauty of the hollows, carved out to protect the vines from the prevailing wind, invoke perfection. Simultaneously, the clear length of the road, sharply cutting through the landscape as the couple's car drives along, arguably matches the couple's newfound sense of direction. Colour is significant here as the sharp white lines of the road contrast with the blackness of the asphalt²⁹ and the couple's red car seemingly represents their passion, whilst complementing Nature's verdant green in the vines.³⁰ The shot also evidences that mankind has been able to rejuvenate the landscape and devise a means of living in a region that had been devastated and left apparently useless following volcanic eruptions. The volcanic ash (*picón*) which carpeted the island in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries now encloses the humidity required to help the vines grow. All this, together with the position of the camera, which pans across the vines in flight, may well communicate the hope that Lena and Mateo might be able to rise above, recover from and repair the ravages of the past.

Fobos (Tahíche)

The camera then cuts to Fobos, the dramatic 13-metre tallest of Manrique's wind sculptures, constructed in 1994-95 at the LZ-1 roundabout in Tahíche, which will

²⁷ Bennett, 'Interview'.

²⁸ Bennett, 'Interview'.

²⁹ Almodóvar recorded in his blog that 'En mi primera visita a la isla mi identificación con el color negro suponía una novedad para mí. El negro no había formado parte de mi paleta de colores. Llegué a pensar en el más fácil de los paralelismos, mi reciente afición al negro se debía al personal duelo por la muerte de mi madre. Mi recién estrenada orfandad encontraba su reflejo en la oscuridad de la isla.' Cited in Sanderson, 'To the Health of the Author', 475.

³⁰ Sanderson has analysed the significance of colour, observing that '[s]ubtlety in the use of color has never been an attribute of Almodóvar's work'. 'To the Health of the Author', 473.

be the location of the film's car crash.³¹ As the camera tilts downwards from the sky towards the base of Fobos, perhaps indicating a return to reality, we catch a glimpse of the cacti, the buildings and the sea, together with a shot of the roundabout (which will be examined in detail later). We also see two cars pass safely without incident on the roundabout, revealing that what will happen to the couple at that same location later will be out of the ordinary. The camera then focusses on the couple in their red car, who are mesmerized, presumably by the sight of the wind sculpture, which Mateo captures on his static camera in the same way as Ernesto Jr. will later capture their accident on his (dynamic) video camera.

El Golfo

The scene then cuts to El Golfo, the setting for the aforementioned photograph that inspired the film. Here, the camera is positioned high above the lagoon, its superior position suggesting again (as in La Geria) hope, the ability to rise, progress and survey Nature's beauty without threat. The combination of greys and greens further enhances the parallels between the two locations (La Geria and El Golfo), but this time the landscape dominates the shot and there is no car to distract the eye. The dramatic green of the volcanic lagoon is juxtaposed with the embracing brown cliffs and grey beach, before the camera pans across to reveal the sea's waves. Water, rather than earth, is the central feature here, naturally so since El Golfo is on the Southern coast of Lanzarote. Unlike in the previous shot of Fobos, the sky is not initially visible here, but it is evidently present, based on our sight of the crashing waves that are driven by strong gusts of air. As Bennett explains, the location of El Golfo is key to the theme of hidden secrets (or seeing what cannot, at first, be seen):

The beach is actually a volcanic crater eroded by the sea, and the green stain is a lagoon, linked to the ocean by lava tubes hidden under the sand. The colour comes from the algae that flourish in a peculiar ecosystem created by the high salt content of the water and the composition of the rock. If you sift through the stones glinting in the sunlight on the beach, you might find crystals of olivine, the green mineral used as a gemstone. But you have to be patient and look very carefully: like the embracing couple, they are not visible at first glance.³²

³¹ 'Fobos', <<http://fcmannique.org/fcm-obra/fobos/>> (accessed 7 July 2019).

³² Bennett, 'Interview'.

The camera then pans across to reveal the couple. Lena's skirt is billowing in the wind but her body is protected from the full force of the brisk Lanzarotean breeze as she holds tightly onto Mateo, just as the black beach cocoons the green lagoon below. In Quinlivan's words, 'El Golfo's volcanic atmosphere holds the promise of wholeness, both in the physical embrace and in its ossification.'³³ Mateo, for his part, is taking a photograph to capture the moment in the same way as Almodóvar had previously, yet unknowingly, captured the photo of the unassuming couple at the same location. The colours of their clothes stand out against the natural greys and browns of the landscape. Lena's green cardigan represents her affinity with both the lagoon's water and the verdant vines of La Geria, whilst Mateo's (complementary) red top, like their car in the earlier shot, displays the extent of their passion before the camera descends to focus on the long shot of the couple photographed in 'The Secret of El Golfo'.

Famara

The next scene is an interior shot in the North of the island, in Famara. Like Lena and Mateo, Almodóvar stayed in a bungalow near the beach there (Bungalows Playa Famara) in the 1980s and even recruited its receptionist (Lyng Dyrup) to act in his film as the resort's manager.³⁴ The couple have changed their outfits; Lena is wearing red on this occasion, while Mateo has a green t-shirt, demonstrating their interchangeable natures and a compatibility that matches the harmonious mood of this serene scene as Mateo reflects on the couple photographed at El Golfo.

Almodóvar had a particularly close connection with this area, declaring, 'Cuando hablo de la isla siempre me refiero al norte, creo que en el sur la cosa es distinta'³⁵ and 'Famara is a place of refuge, which is a key concept in the film'.³⁶ It is also worth noting at this point that although tourism on Lanzarote (unlike on other Canary islands, such as Tenerife) has been controlled - to a large extent thanks to Manrique's input and initiatives - the South (which includes popular resorts such as Puerto del Carmen or Playa Blanca) is noticeably more built-up than the North.

Lanzarote: Constructing a Utopia?

³³ Quinlivan, 'Film, Healing and the Body in Crisis', 114.

³⁴ Bennett, 'Interview'.

³⁵ Cited in Ayala, 'Almodóvar: "César inventó Lanzarote"'.
³⁶ Bennett, 'Interview'.

Seen together, these scenes in Lanzarote arguably offer a refuge, an alternative way of living, if not an attempt to construct a utopia, conforming to Kloc-Konkolowicz's view that 'la isla de Lanzarote se aparece como un lugar directamente predestinado a la realizacion de una utopia'.³⁷ In her analysis of eighteenth-century Hispanic utopian narratives, a period when Lanzarote boosted a successful agricultural industry prior to the devastating series of volcanic eruptions (1730-36) that would dramatically (and irrevocably) change the island's landscape, obliging its inhabitants to adapt to new ways of living, Almanza writes, 'The pursuit of utopia is understood as a desire to change an unsatisfactory order of things by proposing an alternative organizational system that can better an existing society.'³⁸ In line with this, and in contrast to the busy, bustling scenes in Madrid, in *Los abrazos rotos* the couple's life in twentieth-century Lanzarote is often portrayed in terms of peaceful harmony, a life that is distinct and distant, both literally and metaphorically, from the (as I will argue later, historically and politically symbolic) violence exacted by Martel. As such, Lanzarote in Almodóvar's film, like the texts studied by Almanza, seemingly portrays 'an organized utopia space', serving to 'indirectly criticize the existing order while proposing or insinuating an improved version of it'.³⁹ The island, two thousand miles from Peninsular Spain in the Hispanic Periphery, also corresponds to Almanza's observation that '[a] basic condition of the utopian space is its insularity',⁴⁰ and other key questions singled out by her as being commonly posed by utopian texts (including the role of the family, money and private property) are also addressed in *Los abrazos rotos*, where they are similarly combined with satire.

Almodóvar's films have been associated with utopias previously. He had, for instance, explored the theme of utopian love in *Hable con ella* (2002), declaring,

I think that there is always a part of utopia in any romantic relationship. I am sure that you don't understand your wife completely. This is almost impossible in one company. There is a lack of understanding in almost every love story. In terms of utopian love, I think that if you look at Benigno and Alicia, it is a real relationship. Or at least in Benigno's mind it is a real

³⁷ Jakub Kloc-Konkolowicz, *Manrique y su proyecto Lanzarote. ¿Una utopía realizada?* (Tahíche: Fundación César Manrique, 2019), 15.

³⁸ Carla Almanza Gálvez, *Form and Reform in Eighteenth-Century Spain: Utopian Narratives and Socio-Political Debate* (Oxford: Legenda, 2019), 1.

³⁹ *Form and Reform*, 17.

⁴⁰ *Form and Reform*, 17.

relationship because he feels absolutely compensated by taking care of this woman and being with her every moment of the day.⁴¹

Although it is not directly tied to the question of utopias, it is also noteworthy that the Canaries were posited to the policeman (played by Felix Rotaeta) in *Pepi, Luci, Bom* (1980) as an opportunity to escape (from his past crime, after raping Pepi), as his brother tells him that if he were transferred there, nobody would know him. This forms an interesting contrast to *Los abrazos rotos*, since the couple take refuge in the Canaries to avoid crime being committed *against* them, although in both cases the implication is that this journey would enable the characters to commence a new life. *Los abrazos rotos* goes even further than these films, moving beyond relationships and gender concerns to explore, question and unravel the complexity of the process of constructing a (physical and mental) utopia, delving into issues concerning the status of the Hispanic periphery, Spanish politics and marginality more broadly, as well as tying the theme to Manrique.

Lanzarote: Exile and the Questioning(/Destruction?) of a Utopia

Having proposed this link, it is important to acknowledge at this point that Almodóvar's films rarely lend themselves to neat and simplistic interpretations. Hence it is not always the case that Lanzarote, juxtaposed against Madrid, constitutes a utopia. As Smith rightly notes,

the cratered black volcanic soil of Lanzarote, a new location for Almodóvar, is captured by Prieto in strikingly handsome aerial shots. But it is an ambivalent site, at once beautiful and deadly, for an idyll that is as much cinematic as it is romantic.⁴²

Although Lanzarote serves as a refuge, it is also a site of obligatory exile and, in view of the fact that Lena dies, the couple's attempt to escape was evidently futile.⁴³ Hints at this outcome can be detected if we revisit the potential symbolic significance of the scenes filmed on the island. The grey of the volcanic ash and the absence of greenery

⁴¹ José Arroyo, 'Pedro Almodóvar', Interview published in *The Guardian*, 3 July 2002, <<https://www.theguardian.com/film/2002/jul/31/features.pedroalmodovar>> (accessed 21 August 2019).

⁴² Paul Julian Smith, 'Airless love', *Sight and Sound*, 19(6) (2009), 18-20 (p.19).

⁴³ As suggested by the anonymous reader of this article, the aforementioned representation of Lena in relation to the "apparently trite symbolism of 'woman and nature'" might therefore have been included by Almodóvar so that it might be later undermined with this ambiguity (i.e. utopia vs. dystopia).

in parts of the land in La Geria, for example, could suggest that perfection will never be fully attained and the past will never be entirely inescapable. This sense is enhanced by the camera's zooming in to focus on the car like a bird of prey, reminding us of the couple's vulnerability (the red on this occasion could be seen as sinisterly predicting the blood that will be spilt during the car-crash) and the presence of an ominous superior force, matching that which Martel had displayed previously through his ruthless acts of violence against Lena. Therefore the film questions the simplicity of the binary Madrid (claustrophobia) versus Lanzarote (utopia), unravelling and refuting the viewers' temptation to advance black-and-white interpretations, shaking them out their complacency.

Likewise, the scenes in El Golfo remind us of Man's insignificance in the face of Nature's superior power. Natural forces (notably the water, cliffs and beach) are contrasted against the man-made rope rail, which serves as a mechanism for preventing humans from falling off the cliff, yet simultaneously suggests a sense of restriction, if not claustrophobia or man-made interference with the natural landscape. The location thus harks back to Madrid, curiously combining elements of a refuge with that of a prison, contradictory features which have often been associated with islands more generally. In Chapter 17 of Carlos Fuentes' novel *Los años con Laura Díaz*, for instance, the character Jorge Maura, who also sought refuge in Lanzarote, tells the protagonist, 'Esta isla es mi prisión y es mi refugio.'⁴⁴

El Golfo's nature has been recognized by Quinlivan, who argued that the

'embrace' of the film's title [...] not only suggests the lovers of its narrative and their immortality but, in Kleinian terms, connotes the desire for wholeness with the mother, an 'embrace' which the volcanic lava tubes hidden beneath the sandy shore threaten to facilitate. Indeed, the volatile nature of the volcanic location also embodies an ambivalent entity, much like the mother's body in Klein's theory of reparation; the landscape can be seen to reflect a kind of psycho-geographic topography, or externalization of psychic trauma.⁴⁵

There are also parallels with *Volver* (2006), which Gutiérrez-Albilla (drawing upon the clinical psychologist Bracha Ettinger's work, *The Matrixial Gaze* [1995]), has convincingly maintained,

⁴⁴ *Los años con Laura Díaz* (Madrid: Santillana, 1999), 307.

⁴⁵ Quinlivan, 'Film, Healing and the Body in Crisis', 114-15.

attempts to reimagine, to reinhabit, to recuperate, or to reappropriate a rural space which becomes a kind of utopian, maternal space as a therapeutic cure for the traumas produced by patriarchy, and the latter's association with Francoism, and by late modernity in the subject and in the collective imaginary.⁴⁶

In Quinlivan's view,

the filming of El Golfo also intensifies the fissuring nature of space and memory in *Broken Embraces*. While the broken landscapes are filmed in ways that heighten their organic nature and their pictorial presence in the film's 'body', they prefigure the somatic trauma that will affect Blanco after Lena's death. Almodóvar's filming of the flat, crumbling terrain of El Golfo enables the film to enter a two-dimensional plane of reality in which attention is drawn to the surface of the image, much like haptic perception.⁴⁷

Although she does not make this point, the link between space, memory and trauma, the tension between positivity and negativity, and Lanzarote's ambivalence are equally evident in the scenes filmed in Famara. The beach scene here, for example, set against the dramatic backdrop of the tall cliffs, turquoise sea, and golden sand, which is intermittently broken up by grey rocks and green bushes, appears to harmonize with Mateo's psychological mind-set, but it is embroiled in an atmosphere combining power and negativity. Mateo has recently discovered that Martel has released *Chicas y maletas* (which, as noted previously, references Almodóvar's earlier work) and his anger, unleashed with fury, is matched by the power of the vigorous, crashing waves and (the wind that batters the couple, whilst Lena's white dress (later replaced with a white t-shirt) matches the foam. Human attempts to enjoy and be at one with Nature are represented by the surfing class and kite-flying (a scene repeated later, following the accident, as Mateo revisits the beach with Diego). However, Nature asserts its power and, in the guise of the wind, it blows the newspaper away, seemingly reminding the characters of its superior power and attempting to compel them to dispense with the past. The scene also conveys the battle between Man and Nature as Lena finds it difficult to relinquish the past and tries to recover the pages of the newspaper. The dramatic contrast between centre/city and periphery/coast is

⁴⁶ Gutiérrez-Albilla, 'Returning To and From the Maternal Rural Space', 331.

⁴⁷ 'Film, Healing and the Body in Crisis', 115.

underscored too, as the backdrop to Pina's character in the film's advert (crowded city buildings) contrasts dramatically with Famara's natural setting.

More significantly, although Lena and Mateo enjoy intimacy and happiness in their small, cosy bungalow (which contrasts with the luxurious, yet cold setting of Martel's home in Madrid), all is not peaceful harmony as a disturbing note is struck in Famara. Whilst the outside, natural world may convey a sense of escape and freedom, this is merely temporary and it is, disturbingly, inside that the darkest secrets lurk. It is indoors (in their bungalow) that the couple watch Rossellini's film *Viaggio a Italia* (1953), significantly underlining not only the 'film within a film' dimension of *Los abrazos rotos* (prominently conveyed through abundant self-references), but the 'life as film' theme running through Almodóvar's work. Lena is visibly upset as the archaeologists discover the embracing skeletons of a couple buried by lava at Pompeii, she and Mateo embrace and, once again, it is Mateo, this time using a self-timer, who captures the moment on camera. Whilst this initially appears to be a declaration of never-ending love and an explanation for the film's title,⁴⁸ it could also be regarded as a premonition of Lena's future death. Other features set an ominous tone; the flowers on the sofas at the couple's bungalow suggest artificiality, a futile attempt to bring the outdoors inside, and it is significantly 'inside'/'indoors' (both within the bungalow and within the TV) that the skeletons are revealed, seemingly indicating that all closeted secrets will be brought to light at some point.

The discovery of the skeletons can be accorded several symbolic purposes. It serves as a shocking reminder of Nature's power, recalling the volcanic eruptions that devastated not only Pompeii, but eighteenth-century Lanzarote. Almodóvar explicitly highlighted this connection when he declared that 'Lanzarote would be the island where Lena and Mateo hid, Famara their refuge, their Pompeii, and the roundabout their Vesuvius.'⁴⁹ This sequence could also be related to the local Lanzarotean legend surrounding the newlywed bride who was killed when the Timanfaya volcano erupted.⁵⁰ Furthermore, it harks back to the devastation exacted by humans, from the massacre of the indigenous *guanches* and *majos* during the Conquest of the Canaries, to the Spanish Civil War. As asserted by Beilin, 'the image [...] clearly evokes the debate on the need to open mass graves from the time of

⁴⁸ Bennett, 'Interview'.

⁴⁹ Cited in Kinder, 'Restoring *Broken Embraces*', 30.

⁵⁰ Her body was recovered by her distraught groom, who served as the inspiration for the 'devil' of the area, and the new plants were named Aloe and Vera in memory of the couple's blood that gave them life.

Spanish Civil War'.⁵¹ It is not insignificant that the characters watch skeletons being unearthed in the Canaries either since the (Canarian) island of La Palma 'fue pionera en España en la recuperación de la memoria histórica, con la apertura de la primera fosa común de las tres que se han encontrado en Fuencaliente'.⁵²

Situating the revelation that 'skeletons' will be (literally and metaphorically) unearthed on a broader platform, we could proceed further and suggest that, through this scene, the film is commenting on Spain's historical predicament, implying that 'skeletons'/'secrets' should not be hidden because they will always be revealed. In so doing, *Los abrazos rotos* contests and effectively demolishes what the 'Pacto del olvido/silencio' had tried to resolve by 'forgetting' and 'remaining silent' with regard to the past (and its 'secret' horrors). As Delgado has stated, *Los abrazos rotos* is 'profoundly engaged with Spain's 2007 Law of "Historical Memory", which sought to end the "amnesia" surrounding the crimes committed during the Franco regime'.⁵³

The Spirit of César Manrique: The Utopian Visionary

So how does all this relate to Manrique? Firstly, it should be noted that Lanzarote and Manrique are virtually inseparable and it is practically impossible to visit the island without noting Manrique's important impact there. Foreign tourists arriving at the (recently renamed) César Manrique airport, for instance, are welcomed by a large mural by the artist/sculptor and offered tours to the numerous sites on which he worked.⁵⁴ Naturally, then, although they might initially appear to be 'hidden secrets', once recognised it becomes evident that references to Manrique's life and work in *Los abrazos rotos*, and particularly his commitment to the utopian vision that he had devised for Lanzarote, not only reinforce the importance of the island in the film, but are inextricably linked to the questions concerning the validity of constructing utopias. They also enable Almodóvar to interweave subtle commentary regarding the contemporary Hispanic world, including the power of the business world and capitalist enterprises, and situate the film within a broader, real-world framework, underlining the significance of Lanzarote, together with those living and working (in the margins) in the periphery.

⁵¹ Beilin, 'Broken Embraces', 36.

⁵² David Sanz, 'Ravelo: "En la Semana Roja hubo un pacto social para no derramar sangre"', *El Español*, 5 March 2017, <<https://diariodeavisos.elespanol.com/2017/03/ravelo-la-semana-roja-hubo-pacto-social-no-derramar-sangre/>> (accessed 7 July 2019).

⁵³ Delgado, 'Sensory Perception', 41.

⁵⁴ Lanzarote was the island 'en la que su trayectoria artística ha dejado huellas imborrables'. Fundación César Manrique website, <<http://fcmorique.org>> (accessed 7 July 2019).

I will begin by exploring how references to Manrique's life and work (notably his efforts to construct a utopia) are interwoven into *Los abrazos rotos* through the use of 'doubling', of which there are innumerable examples. Herrera, for example, has examined the various levels on which doubling functions in the film as a whole, whilst Smith has contended that 'Mateo Blanco, played by stage veteran Luis Homar [...] serves as a stand in for Almodóvar himself as he approached his sixtieth birthday' and thus the film is '[c]onfessional, albeit in a symbolic mode'.⁵⁵ 'Doubling' is employed in a similar manner to draw significantly close links between *Los abrazos rotos* and Manrique.

Born in Lanzarote's capital (Arrecife) in 1919, Manrique spent many Summers in Famara (which, as we have seen, plays an important role in *Los abrazos rotos*, implicitly contrasting the utopian setting of the still natural and relatively underdeveloped Northern coastline with the built-up tourist resorts in the South). He then moved to Madrid, where he studied and lived from 1945-64, and spent two years in New York (1964-66), before returning to Lanzarote. He was keen to foreground the island's unique character and became involved in numerous landscape projects,

un conjunto de acciones e intervenciones dirigidas a poner en valor el paisaje y los atractivos naturales de la isla, que configurarán su nueva faz y su proyección internacional, y que forma parte de la transformación paisajística y la adaptación de Lanzarote a la economía del turismo.⁵⁶

Throughout his life, Manrique engaged in an ambitious utopian project, which led to bitter conflicts with the businessmen keen to profit from development on the island, often expressing (and seeking to impose) what could be seen as a black/white, unrelenting attitude, for instance towards high-rise buildings and roads. His life was cut short in 1992 when he died in a traffic accident, which initially sparked rumours that he had been murdered. Almodóvar had met the artist/sculptor: 'Lo conocí en el año 86 (la primera vez que fui a Lanzarote no fue hace diez años, sino en el 86), yo acompañaba a un amigo en busca de paz interior. Estuvimos una semana y César fue nuestro cicerone y anfitrión. Todo generosidad, gracia e inspiración [...].'⁵⁷ According to Irene Gómez of the Fundación César Manrique,

⁵⁵ Smith, 'Almodóvar's Self-fashioning', 27.

⁵⁶ <<http://fcmorique.org>>.

⁵⁷ Cited in Ayala, 'Almodóvar: "César inventó Lanzarote"'.

‘Sabemos que visitaron juntos el Centro Cultural El Almacén, el antiguo estudio de Manrique en Arrecife, los Jameos del Agua y algunos otros rincones de la isla.

De esos encuentros únicamente conservamos algunas fotografías, muy pocas, y no disponemos de correspondencia entre ambos.’⁵⁸

To an extent, as Bennett has observed, the film pays homage to Manrique’s (and Almodóvar’s) love for Lanzarote; “Lanzarote is like an unframed, unmounted work of art,” [Manrique] famously said, insisting that anything manmade had to be integrated into the landscape.⁵⁹ Manrique revealed that it was possible to work creatively with the landscape to create beauty, as can be seen from his architectural feats, including Taro de Tahíche (/Casa del Volcán), his home and now the Fundación César Manrique, which was built on an apparently useless lava field and constructed around five natural volcanic bubbles.

Perhaps surprisingly, however, some of the key locations on which the artist/sculptor worked do not appear in *Los abrazos rotos*. This is possibly because Almodóvar, aware of the controversy the direct link might provoke, wished to ensure that the references to Manrique were not explicit. Thus, of the sites on which Manrique worked, neither the famous El Diablo restaurant at Timanfaya National Park, nor Jameos del Agua (where the film was first screened in Lanzarote)⁶⁰ appear in the film. In addition, despite press reports, the scenes filmed in Manrique’s Jardín del Cactus did not appear in the final film (although there are torn photos of cacti, presumably from this location, in Mateo’s bag),⁶¹ and the scene shot at El Mirador del Río, an old gun point converted by Manrique into a restaurant/observatory overlooking the island of La Graciosa, was later cut.⁶² Even Manrique’s home, Taro de Tahíche, tantalizingly close and just down the road from the crucial roundabout

⁵⁸ I am extremely grateful to Irene Gómez for providing me with this information following my inquiry and visit to the Fundación in July 2019.

⁵⁹ Bennett, ‘Interview’.

⁶⁰ See “Los abrazos rotos” se estrena en Lanzarote con las ausencias de Pedro Almodóvar y Penélope Cruz’, *Europapress*, 23 March 2009, <<https://www.europapress.es/islas-canarias/noticia-abrazos-rotos-estrena-lanzarote-ausencias-pedro-almodovar-penelope-cruz-20090323203311.html>> (accessed 10 July 2019). The article ends with a brief note: ‘Precisamente la rotonda de Tahíche, en la que falleció el artista lanzaroteño en un accidente de tráfico, ha constituido otro de los puntos en los que se rodaron escenas.’

⁶¹ See, for example, ‘Penélope Cruz graba “Los abrazos rotos” en el emblemático Jardín de Cactus de Lanzarote’, *La Región*, 27 May 2008, <<https://www.laregion.es/articulo/cultura/penelope-cruz-graba-abrazos-rotos-emblematico-jardin-cactus-lanzarote/20080528134258053588.html>> (accessed 7 July 2019).

⁶² Bennett, ‘Interview’.

does not feature, although the sign to ‘Costa Teguisse’ (a resort on which he worked) does, and the position of the couple’s car in the first scene shot at the roundabout even leads viewers to suspect that they might be about to visit the Fundación. Nonetheless, it could be contended that for those familiar with Lanzarote, Manrique’s spirit serves as an essential undercurrent that prevails in the film. Moreover, examining *Los abrazos rotos* in relation to Manrique’s life, work and particularly the circumstances of his death, casts a sharply sinister edge on the film, enabling us to elucidate its hidden secrets.

In terms of the obvious connections, firstly, it is noteworthy that *Los abrazos rotos* was premièred in 2009, 90 years after Manrique’s birth. (Lanzaroteans have since celebrated the centenary of his birth [2019], which included a carnival and a series of concerts in his honour.) Secondly, a number of Manrique’s works have been mass-produced as prints, principally to target the tourist market, and a number of these are on display in the scenes filmed in Famara. Taking into account the comments by Antxón Gómez (art director and production designer who worked with Almodóvar) on the film director’s attention to detail,⁶³ together with Sanderson’s observations regarding other ‘graphic *atrezzo* elements [that] provide meaningful subtextual nuances’,⁶⁴ it is unlikely that the appearance of Manrique’s prints in *Los abrazos rotos* lacks significance. As we will see, they not only present Lanzarote as a utopia (thereby complementing the island scenes examined previously), but require viewers to be active, to piece together their symbolic meanings and establish their relevance within the film as a whole. In many cases, they not only reinforce themes, link and mirror scenes within the film, but transport the questions concerning the validity of constructing utopias into a real-life context.

One of Manrique’s still-life prints, the slightly dull-coloured ‘Bodegón 265’ (1990),⁶⁵ first appears behind racks of postcards on the wall in the reception area at Bungalows Playa Famara. There is a jug and what appears to be a fig-branch (perhaps not unlike the fig-tree that Manrique found growing in the lava field that would later be the location of Taro de Tahiche), a possible reference to the Garden of

⁶³ ‘A Pedro le gusta tener los decorados acabados con mucho tiempo. Recuerdo la pensión donde Zahara tiene un encuentro fugaz con un antiguo amor suyo en *La mala educación*. Ese decorado estaba en el plató dos meses antes de que se llegara a utilizar y Pedro pasaba por allí de vez cambiar esto o aquello; poca cosa pero siempre aprovechando la ventaja de poder trabajar con tanto tiempo disponible.’ Cited in Sanderson ‘To the Health of the Author’, 479-80.

⁶⁴ For instance, he draws attention to the relevance of a copy of *Life* magazine featuring Fellini’s 8½ in Mateo’s office. ‘To the Health of the Author’, 481.

⁶⁵ The numbers (‘Bodegón 265’ and ‘Bodegón 1’) relate to the labels displayed on the prints available in the Manrique shop in Playa Blanca in July 2019.

Eden as the fig-tree symbolises the Tree of Life/Knowledge. The wall is pink (invoking harmony?) and the open window with a clear blue sky may imply hope.

Next to 'Bodegón 265' (on its left) is another of Manrique's works, 'La Pesca' (1950), set in Famara and one of a series of murals that he painted at the Parador de Turismo in Arrecife (now the UNED).⁶⁶ Deemed to be of a *costumbrista* style, it presents an alternative way of living to the city-life we saw in the scenes filmed in Madrid in *Los abrazos rotos*, as it pays homage to the island's working people, in this case the fishermen, their survival and their families' commitment to their livelihood. According to Díaz, Domínguez and Parreño, '[Manrique] sentía una especial empatía por los campesinos, salineros, pescadores y camelleros',⁶⁷ and the mural conveys

el ingenio de campesinos, salineros y hombres de la mar, que con paciente tenacidad mezclan sabiamente el instinto de supervivencia con un sentido pragmático de respeto al medio natural. Según César, todos ellos dejan una huella de su buen hacer y de su sentido de la armonía, configurando un paisaje insular irreplicable.⁶⁸

Together with 'Bodegón 265', therefore, 'La Pesca' highlights the utopian possibility of Man living in harmony with Nature, in addition to drawing attention to the simple, basic pleasures of life, a lifestyle which the couple seemingly also enjoy on the island.

On the second occasion, Manrique's still-life brightly coloured picture of fruit and wine, 'Bodegón 1' (1990) is hanging on the wall while Mateo phones Judit. As with the contrast between the settings (Madrid vs. Lanzarote) and the ambivalence within Lanzarote itself, this picture can be contrasted with other artworks on display in the film's scenes in Madrid. For instance, this modestly sized modern reproduction with its vibrant colours in Lanzarote contrasts radically with the huge, presumably original and darkly coloured still life with its ornate gold frame and clumsy, oversized fruit, whose orange colour clashed with Lena's red dress in an earlier scene in Martel's home in Madrid. There is also a dark, more modestly sized still-life picture

⁶⁶ The other two were 'El Viento' and 'La Vendimia'. See <http://www.cesarmanrique.com/pintura06.htm> (accessed 13 July 2019).

⁶⁷ Ramón Díaz Hernández, Josefina Domínguez Mujica and Juan Manuel Parreño Castellano, 'La utopía de Manrique: el paisaje reinventado y la apropiación turística', Conference paper delivered at the XIV Coloquio Internacional de Geocrítica: Las utopías y la construcción de la sociedad del futuro, University of Barcelona, 2016, <http://www.ub.edu/geocrit/xiv_diazdominguez.pdf> (accessed 23 August 2019).

⁶⁸ 'La utopía de Manrique'.

in Lena's parents' flat that matches the predominantly sombre colours and atmosphere that prevail in the capital.

As in Almodóvar's films, colour is symbolically significant in Manrique's works and there are numerous links between *Los abrazos rotos* and these pictures. The red colours of the fruit and the wall in Manrique's 'Bodegón 1', for example, remind viewers of the couple's car and Lena's red clothes, both in Madrid and in Famara, whilst the blue connects the sky and the sea, possibly suggesting eternity, maybe even a sense of religious perfection, as blue recalls the Virgin Mary's clothing, complementing the fact that Jesus often wears red in religious paintings. The impression of serenity is enhanced further through the use of complementary colours, the red on the wall matching the fruits, the blue of the wine-bottle matching the table decoration and drawer handle. Meanwhile, the presence of the wine reminds us of the earlier scene in the wine-growing region of La Geria, and the physical shapes of some of the fruits in the print naturally overlap, in the same way as scenes 'overlap' and mirror each other in *Los abrazos rotos*. The tomatoes in this picture, for instance, link back to the scene where Lena/Pepa, preparing gazpacho in the kitchen, was chopping tomatoes in the first scene of *Chicas y maletas*, a scene recalled later when we see her in the kitchen of the bungalow in Famara. Interestingly and pertinently, even though he does not draw the connection with Manrique's picture, Sanderson observes that this scene in *Chicas y maletas* is 'almost a still-life painting'.⁶⁹

Worthy of note (and confirming Almodóvar's particular interest in still-life painting and different modes of representation) are Corbett's report that in his show, 'Waiting for the Light', '[Almodóvar] pairs wilting flowers against vividly painted backdrops to create a series of still-life compositions that are inspired more by the history of painting than photography', and Almodovar's statement, 'I increasingly use paintings for dramatic effect, for an interaction with a character standing in front of it.'⁷⁰ Building upon this, in its entirety the table of food in Manrique's composition (presumably consisting of locally-made products) may well remind viewers of Lanzarote's associations with the Garden of Eden/Paradise. As the couple indulge in their temporary utopia and their opportunity to enjoy what will be their last days of

⁶⁹ Sanderson, 'To the Health of the Author', 484. Red fruits/vegetables also appear in other scenes; for instance there are tomatoes (often deemed to symbolize health and passion) on the table as Diego prepares breakfast for Judit, and there is a picture featuring a large red apple (perhaps ironically symbolizing temptation and original sin as per the Garden of Eden) on the wall in Pina's flat.

⁷⁰ Rachel Corbett, "I Wouldn't Be Offended If You Described It As Decorative Art": Filmmaker Pedro Almodóvar On Why He's A Floral Still-life Photographer Now', *Artnet News*, 7 May 2019, <<https://news.artnet.com/art-world/pedro-almodovar-photography-1535581>> (accessed 2 August 2019).

love together in Lanzarote (/Paradise), this still-life picture, capturing a moment in time for posterity, reminds viewers that they were essentially fulfilling Manrique's words: 'Vivimos tan corto espacio de tiempo sobre este planeta que cada uno de nuestros pasos debe estar encaminado a construir más y más el espacio soñado de la utopía, construyámoslo conjuntamente: es la única manera de hacerlo posible.'⁷¹

'Bodegón 1' also references aspects of Manrique's life and work. It is unlikely to be a coincidence that in *Los abrazos rotos* this print, focussing on the fruits of Nature, is situated next to a serene picture of some trees at sunset (representing Nature outside man's manipulative forces). To its right, too, there is an aerial photograph of Caleta de Famara, relatively untouched by building developments, unlike some of the other island resorts that were threatened with the destruction of their natural local character at the hands of developers, whose initiatives Manrique vehemently opposed.⁷² The three pictures, viewed together, further exhibit different ways of capturing reality; in broad terms, the tree picture is realistic, the photograph is an 'accurate', static shot, whilst Manrique's style invokes abstraction. They, moreover, complement the way in which Almodóvar has, himself, creatively experimented (in multiple ways) with the task of reproducing/ representing/ recasting/ recreating reality using film.

Considered in relation to these representations of Famara (the photograph of Caleta de Famara and the scenes filmed indoors and outdoors there), the aforementioned 'La Pesca' enriches the theme of multiple perspectives. In addition, the fact that it is a frame within a frame not only reinforces Manrique's comment that 'Lanzarote is like an unframed, unmounted work of art', but also complements Almodóvar's aforementioned statement that within his film there is '[una] 'historia que subyace a todas las demás'. All these pictures draw our attention to the importance of 'doubling' in the film (mirroring, for instance, the aforementioned self-references in *Chicas y maletas*) and match the potentially utopian atmosphere of the scenes filmed in Lanzarote. Simultaneously, they remind viewers of the broad range of styles adopted by Manrique and convey the extent of the artist/sculptor's impact upon the island, confirming that Manrique's influence is still prevalent in twenty-

⁷¹ <<https://www.museosdetenerife.org/cedocam-centro-de-documentacion-de-canarias-y-america/evento/2593>> (accessed 14 November 2018).

⁷² According to Allen Hernández, 'Las denuncias insistentes de Manrique representan su yo político. César decía la verdad llanamente: hemos destruido la costa al convertirla en suelo urbano, hemos desprestigiado el turismo al masificarlo. Esto es un horror y un error de incalculables consecuencias.' Jonathan Allen Hernández, 'César Manrique y el futuro imposible', *Atlántica: Revista de arte y pensamiento*, 8 (1994), 64-68 (p.67).

first-century Lanzarote.⁷³ In short, *Los abrazos rotos* immortalizes both Manrique's life and Lanzarotean traditions and customs.

There are other implicit references to Manrique's life and work in the film. The fish on the outside wall of the couple's bungalow, for example, recall the fish and sea creatures in his other works (such as the 'Fauna Atlántica' series). Meanwhile, the fact that it is single-storey recalls Manrique's aversion to high-rise buildings such as the Gran Hotel in Arrecife (not dissimilar to the skyscrapers that dominated the cityscape from Martel's office), which he regarded as an eyesore.⁷⁴ The anchors, for their part, whilst initially resembling crosses (complementing those that appear in Mateo's and Judit's apartments) also link to the anchor wrapped around the print in 'La Pesca' and, again, pay homage to the dominance of the fishing industry in the area. In proposing an alternative lifestyle to the fast-moving business-world of Madrid, these features underscore Manrique's vision for Lanzarote as a utopia, which is initially endorsed but, as we will see, is later contested in *Los abrazos rotos*.

Although Almodóvar hinted at the film's hidden 'secretos y misterios' when speaking of Manrique during interviews, he apparently toned down the hostility that the artist/sculptor had faced during his lifetime. He also appears to have made no explicit comment on the conspiracy theories surrounding Manrique's death (outlined in Ravelo's thriller, *La ceguera del cangrejo* [2019]),⁷⁵ and focussed instead on championing Manrique's achievements in the Hispanic periphery, away from Franco's influence:

'César Manrique inventó Lanzarote en un momento (los años 60) en que en España se inventaban Benidorm y Torremolinos. Supongo que Franco no le prestó demasiada atención a las Islas Canarias, suerte para ellos. De ese modo los isleños pudieron actuar con más libertad e independencia. Me hubiera

⁷³ Manrique's aspirations continue to be represented through the Fundación César Manrique, which still plays a key role on the island. Its influence was evident in the Summer of 2019, when the Fundación successfully protested against the Cabildo's erection of 'Geoparque' billboards, proclaiming, 'Evitar o mitigar el impacto de los soportes publicitarios en el territorio constituyó un componente estético y simbólico significativo del modelo paisajístico singular que impulsó César Manrique.' The billboards were subsequently removed. See 'La Fundación César Manrique rechaza la instalación de vallas publicitarias en distintos puntos de la Isla por Geoparque Lanzarote y Archipiélago Chinijo', *Crónicas de Lanzarote*, 14 March 2019, <<http://www.cronicasdelanzarote.es/La-Fundacion-Cesar-Manrique-rechaza-la-instalacion-de-vallas-publicitarias-en.html>> (accessed 6 August 2019).

⁷⁴ In Bennett's words, 'Passionate about his homeland, he campaigned for the introduction of regulations that saved Lanzarote from the ravages of rampant development. Highrise buildings are prohibited and there are no roadside advertising hoardings.' 'Interview'.

⁷⁵ Alexis Ravelo, *La ceguera del cangrejo* (Madrid: Siruela, 2019).

gustado que César supiera que he rodado, por fin, en su isla y que he fotografiado algunas de sus obras.⁷⁶

What Almodóvar neglects to mention here is that Manrique supported the Falange and fought in the Civil War on Franco's side.⁷⁷ Moreover, his 'invention of Lanzarote' (and notably his construction of a utopia), whilst concerned with preserving the island's natural character and traditions, could also be related to Franco's Spain, 'a historical period whose dominant ideology [...] was heavily charged with mythical resonances'.⁷⁸ Perhaps unsurprisingly, therefore, (and as I will argue later), the initial impression that this island (in the Hispanic periphery) constitutes a utopia for the couple is questioned, notably at the end of *Los abrazos rotos*.

Manrique's Death: The Destruction of a Utopian Dream?

It is significant that the car crash, a dramatic event that, not unlike the crash in *Amores perros*,⁷⁹ will have a devastating impact, killing Lena and leaving Mateo/Harry blind (and in his words 'dead' as Mateo), takes place at the very roundabout where Manrique was killed on 25th September 1992. Although Almodóvar acknowledged that it was 'una de las secuencias esenciales de la película', he claimed that this was a coincidence:

'Elegí esta rotonda sin saber que César Manrique había muerto justo allí, y eso después me impresionó mucho, esta coincidencia corrobora que la isla parece estar llena de secretos y misterios.'⁸⁰

This statement is, however, questionable since there are numerous other sinister links to the death of the artist/sculptor, who detested cars.

Firstly, within the Lanzarotean context, the demise of one of the characters in a car crash is somewhat anomalous on an island where it is common knowledge that more lives are lost at sea than on the roads. Furthermore, after the crash, we hear the engine of a car driving off, suggesting that this was not only a hit-and-run

⁷⁶ Cited in Ayala, 'Almodóvar: "César inventó Lanzarote"'.
⁷⁷ See 'El pasado militar franquista de César Manrique', *ABC Canarias*, 29 November 2018, <https://www.abc.es/espana/canarias/abci-pasado-franquista-cesar-manrique-201811271743_noticia.html> (accessed 6 August 2019).
⁷⁸ Jo Labanyi, *Myth and History in the Contemporary Spanish Novel* (Cambridge: CUP, 1989), 2.
⁷⁹ It is not coincidental that Rodrigo Prieto, who worked on *Amores perros*, was also the Director of Photography for *Los abrazos rotos*.
⁸⁰ 'Almodóvar: "Lanzarote está llena de secretos y misterios"'.

incident, but a driver who has no regard for the couple. This, coupled with Judit's subsequent guilt at having revealed the couple's location, endorses suspicions that they were the victims not of a chance accident, but an organized murder attempt (as was initially rumoured in the case of Manrique's death, although it was later accepted to have been an accident).

Secondly, the vehicle that hits the couple's car was a Toyota 4x4, the same car reported to have hit Manrique's Jaguar (although this accident occurred during the day, and not at night-time).⁸¹ As is common in Almodóvar's films, the vehicle that crashes into the couple's (small, brightly coloured) car has a symbolic import; its size corresponds not only to the wealth displayed by Martel (who we previously saw in his dark-coloured Rolls Royce), and perhaps those of the producers who sought 'more credit for their creative contribution' (alongside 'the frequent and traumatic changes in film funding in post-Franco Spain'⁸²), but also the power exerted by the rich businessmen who clashed with Manrique in the development plans for Lanzarote. Almodóvar was certainly aware of Manrique's reservations regarding the domination of personally-driven financial motives in these plans, since he revealed, 'Tiempo después me he dado cuenta de que César tuvo la visión que el turismo, además de aportar riqueza, también podía destrozar la Isla.'⁸³

Thirdly, contrasting the Toyota Land Cruiser and equally intriguing, is the fact that the Opel Corsa in this scene bears a remarkable resemblance in terms of its size and shape to the Seat Ibiza that Manrique was commissioned to paint with his unique artwork (for the 1987 Barcelona Motor Show), and which is now on display at his other home, Casa del Palmeral in Haría.⁸⁴

Considered in light of Manrique's death, then, the themes of treachery and violence extend far beyond the love triangle in *Los abrazos rotos* to gain a broader, real and disturbing import that (as in *Amores Perros*) questions the power of capitalist influence and the ruthlessness of those 'in charge' in contemporary Spain. Martel

⁸¹ See 'César Manrique's death', <<https://lanzaroteinformation.co.uk/cesar-manriques-death/>> (accessed 7 July 2019): 'Manrique had been working at the foundation in Tahíche to finalise events for World Tourism Day. The 73 year old was on his way home to Haría and therefore only moments into his journey, when he was hit in the side of his car at an intersection. The artist was driving his Jaguar, the other vehicle in the impact was a Toyota 4x4. The impact left César Manrique trapped inside his car with very serious injuries. A passing ambulance was diverted to the scene whilst his body was cut free of the wreckage.' The article proceeds to offer an explanation for the accident, stating that Manrique had recently had a cataract operation (a link with Mateo's subsequent blindness?) and should not have been driving but his driver had been taken ill. It also claims that the roundabout was overgrown and the artist/sculptor probably could not see properly.

⁸² Smith, 'Almodóvar's Self-fashioning', 29.

⁸³ 'Almodóvar: "Lanzarote está llena de secretos y misterios"'.

⁸⁴ 'Cicar vuelve a reeditar el Seat Ibiza pintado por César Manrique', *Diario de Lanzarote*, 9 July, <<https://www.diariodelanzarote.com/noticia/cicar-vuelve-reeditar-el-seat-ibiza-pintado-por-c%C3%A9sar-manrique>> (accessed 26 October 2019).

(who was sentenced to prison for fraud and tax evasion, and conflicts with Mateo), in addition to recalling 'Almodóvar's early struggles with moneymen before the founding of El Deseo gave him artistic independence'⁸⁵ and representing 'a broker who took advantage of the relaxed legal environment of the 1980s',⁸⁶ could be aligned to the businessmen belonging to the ring of corruption in both the Peninsula and Hispanic Periphery, similar to that explored by Ravelo in *La ceguera del cangrejo*, also set in Lanzarote.

In addition to raising questions as to the circumstances of Manrique's death (including whether he was murdered or not), as Beilin has argued, in *Los abrazos rotos* '[t]he love triangle (or two love triangles) [...] is a mini-model of a civil war. Violence, betrayal, spying, passion, exile and death occur at both personal and political levels alike'.⁸⁷ Beilin then proceeds to examine the way that (as explained by Almodóvar) 'the story of Mateo was thought out as a parable of the trajectory of Spanish debates about the memory of the Civil War and Franco's times'.⁸⁸ We can go further than this to question whether, in this context, Martel's aforementioned acts of violence against Lena hark back to Spain's dictatorship, his wrath symbolically resonating with the power of the fascist dictator, a link reinforced through Martel's ownership of a (Silver Shadow) Rolls Royce, a make closely associated with Franco, who, in 1948, had ordered (and later processed in) three armoured Rolls Royce Phantom IVs.⁸⁹ Martel's power is juxtaposed with the powerlessness of Lena, who nonetheless dramatically asserts her independence by engaging in a love affair with Mateo. Not dissimilarly, the car crash underlines concerns regarding the abuse of power, as the symbolic insignificance of the tiny, red and vulnerable Corsa (whose colour is arguably politically meaningful) is no match for the large, dark-coloured and brutally powerful 4x4 which crushes it. On this occasion Lena, like many Republicans (*Rojos*) who rebelled against Franco, is exterminated.

Other factors are worthy of attention in this short but significant crash scene. Firstly, it takes place at night-time, drawing our attention to the seedy underworld that operates beneath the figment of a romantic, sunny resort. Secondly, the wind, as is commonly the case in Lanzarote, is blowing, demonstrating the power of the

⁸⁵ Smith, 'Almodóvar's Self-fashioning', 28.

⁸⁶ Beilin, 'Broken Embraces', 36.

⁸⁷ 'Broken Embraces', 37.

⁸⁸ 'Broken Embraces', 37.

⁸⁹ These were custom-built solely for Royalty and Heads of State. Two are still used on ceremonial occasions by the Spanish Head of State. Alejandro Tovar, 'Todos los secretos y curiosidades de los coches del franquismo', *El País*, 26 October 2019, <<https://motor.elpais.com/actualidad/todos-los-secretos-curiosidades-los-coches-del-regimen-franquista/>> (accessed 26 October 2019).

natural world and potentially, too, the currents that will continue to operate against the underworld and Spain's fascist past. The wind sculpture, a witness to the car accidents that afflicted both the couple and Manrique himself, was a feature that Almodóvar was keen to incorporate. He revealed in his blog,

‘Desde que escribí el guión de *Los abrazos rotos* siempre pensé que esta secuencia (la del accidente) tendría como testigo una de las enormes esculturas móviles que César Manrique sembró por toda la isla.’

and

‘Cuando fuimos a localizar elegí una escultura que imita el continuo movimiento de la tierra y los planetas, diseñada para ser movida por el viento. Los círculos, tres círculos, diáfanos, tienen también algo de la rueda de la fortuna. En este caso de la mala fortuna.’⁹⁰

Ruiz de Chávez has also highlighted the sculpture's role:

La imagen de la escultura *El juguete del viento* de César Manrique situada en Lanzarote [sic], aparece en el filme como una metáfora a una enredadera compleja que representa un juego continuo de obsesiones, traiciones, secretos y pasiones que se mueven a través del tiempo narrativo.⁹¹

In addition to reflecting the fragility of human life, it serves as a reminder of the continuing influence of Manrique following his death, its dynamism both contrasting and complementing the static nature of the prints that we saw in Famara.

The fact that the crash takes place on a roundabout is equally significant. As well as linking to the work of Manrique, who ‘detested the amount of traffic on the roads and had been campaigning to introduce roundabouts at busy junctions in Lanzarote’,⁹² like innumerable features in this film, it can be accorded a symbolic meaning. The couple turn onto it but fail to leave it, which could imply that they are trapped in a vicious circle and make no real progress (just like the roundabout sign).

⁹⁰ Cited in Ayala, ‘Almodóvar: “César inventó Lanzarote”’.

⁹¹ Eva Ruiz de Chávez, ‘Los abrazos rotos: Almodóvar sin retorno’, *Nexos*, 31(383) (November 2009), <<https://www.nexos.com.mx/?p=13389>> (accessed 7 July 2019).

⁹² ‘César Manrique's death’, *Lanzarote Information*, 31 August 2018, <<https://lanzaroteinformation.co.uk/cesar-manriques-death/>> (accessed 14 July 2019).

In addition to recalling the high shot over the lights down the winding stairs as Mateo descends to find Lena after she has been beaten, this seemingly reminds viewers that Lanzarote, if not Spain and Spanish history too (the map of Spain in Mateo's flat underscores this connection), are still in a process of transition; they are going around but failing to enter the road to the future. Noteworthy, in this regard, too, is the fact that the accident is captured on film by Martel's son, Ernesto, leading us to suspect that he may be suffering from perpetrator guilt. Reading the film in this manner, thus, suggests that, rather than being the case, as proposed by Smith, that '*Los abrazos rotos* appears unconcerned by current social conditions in contemporary Spain,'⁹³ it is, in fact, as Delgado has affirmed, Almodóvar's 'most political film to date'.⁹⁴

Confronting the Ghosts of the Past

Los abrazos rotos pays homage not solely to the art of filmmaking, but to the island of Lanzarote and the work, life and death of Manrique. As Almodóvar wrote in his blog,

'No sé por qué encontré la casualidad [the location of the car crash and its link with Manrique's death] natural, la verdad es que en esta isla tan original todo me parece natural, por ancestral, supongo. Me hubiera gustado que César, el hombre que luchó y consiguió preservar Lanzarote del turismo devastador, supiera que su isla ya está inmortalizada en el negativo de mi película. Y que los negativos, con poco que se los cuide, son eternos.'⁹⁵

The film not only immortalizes the island⁹⁶ but reminds viewers of the need to confront the ghosts of the past. Ghosts are present through various references; Kinder has noted that

With simple changes in costuming, Cruz evokes an array of dead movie stars, from Audrey Hepburn's ingénue to Marilyn Monroe's seductive platinum blond, reminding us that cinema brings ghosts back to life.⁹⁷

⁹³ Smith, 'Almodóvar's Self-fashioning', 28.

⁹⁴ Delgado, 'Sensory Perception', 40.

⁹⁵ Cited in Ayala, 'Almodóvar: "César inventó Lanzarote"'.

⁹⁶ In Almodóvar's words, 'Lanzarote permanecerá para siempre en el corazón de *Los abrazos rotos*.'

Cited in Ayala 'Almodóvar: "César inventó Lanzarote"'.

⁹⁷ Kinder, 'Restoring *Broken Embraces*', 28.

Almodóvar, too, referred directly to ‘los fantasmas’ that joined him in *Los abrazos rotos*, although he did so jokingly, since these were the actors who had worked with him previously:

‘En las naves del Estudio Barajas, donde nos encontramos ahora, rodé *Mujeres al borde de un ataque de nervios* y *Átame...* y siguen allí los fantasmas ... de Antonio Banderas, Victoria Abril, María Barranco, Paco Rabal o Carmen Maura porque los fantasmas saben esperar, esa es su especialidad.’⁹⁸

Finally, we have the ghost of Manrique, as *Los abrazos rotos* confirms the success of his utopian project for Lanzarote (in the sense that it is still ongoing), although it also recalls that his personal dreams were truncated by his premature death and the film’s ending questions the validity of constructing utopias in more general terms. Revisiting the question why Almodóvar did not make the link between the film and Manrique more explicit, in addition to taking into account the possibility that he wished to avoid the controversies that this might unleash, we can usefully refer to the director’s blog. Here Almodóvar provocatively declared,

‘I promise to tell only the truth, but that doesn’t mean I’m going to tell you everything about me and about the film and its preparation. On the contrary, I intend to say as little as possible about the story and the characters. I’ll wander on the fringes, in purely tangential elements.’⁹⁹

Conclusions

There are a number of lessons to be gleaned from all this. Firstly, it is deliberately left to viewers to unravel the film’s complexity, to explore its hidden secrets and discover the real ‘historia que subyace a todas las demás’, namely its homage to Manrique and Lanzarote. As Epps and Kakoudaki have indicated, it is not untypical of Almodóvar to confuse critics or tantalize them with claims that are later to be proven to be untrue.¹⁰⁰ Secondly, escaping from the ghosts of the past is not an option since they need to be confronted them head on. This is essentially what

⁹⁸ Cited in Ayala, ‘Almodóvar: “César inventó Lanzarote”’.

⁹⁹ ‘Blog Pedro Almodóvar’, Online at <<http://www.pedroalmodovar.es>>. Cited in Smith ‘Almodóvar’s Self-fashioning’, 33 but no longer accessible at this URL.

¹⁰⁰ They write, ‘[i]n an article that he published in *El Europeo* in 1989, Almodóvar professed himself to be “absolutely ignorant in everything concerning geography and history” (67). If that self-assessment was accepted by many in 1989, two decades later it is not.’ Brad Epps and Despina Kakoudaki, *All About Almodóvar: A Passion for Cinema* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 32.

Mateo/Harry achieves, as he eventually dispenses with his dual identity to produce his final film, the ‘real’ film of *Chicas y maletas*, which we presume will be a success. This can be linked to Spain’s historical context and the challenge of ‘unearthing the dead’, as Beilin has convincingly contended. Moreover, as Almodóvar explained, Mateo represented the fact that

‘It wasn’t possible to look to the past, otherwise the feuds would have begun again; too many Spaniards had too much to throw back in the face of their compatriots. [...] During the transition it was important to look ahead, to create a new constitution looking to the future. But the issue has not gone away. It is now a humanitarian issue: of allowing families to unearth their dead.’¹⁰¹

Taking into account the strong contrast between city (Madrid) and periphery (Lanzarote) within the film, together with Manrique’s love of nature and hostility towards the high-rise buildings of cityscapes, it is also notable that Mateo returns to Madrid in order to fulfil this aim. Although the island of Lanzarote serves as a refuge and temporary utopia for the couple, enabling them to enjoy their last precious days in love,¹⁰² it is also an exile (albeit voluntary), a pointless escape and essentially an artificial utopia.¹⁰³ Tragically, it ultimately comes to represent the location of Lena’s demise, the location of past (and lost) memories. There is another link with Manrique here, too, since the artist/sculptor returned to his birthplace in 1966, following years overseas and, as mentioned previously, he attempted to construct a utopia in Lanzarote, only to die in a car accident at the age of 73. His dreams were thus dramatically and unexpectedly curtailed, at a time that Díaz, Domínguez and Parreño describe as a movement ‘[d]e la utopía a la protesta por la distopía’.¹⁰⁴ The authors proceed to question and note the limitations of Manrique’s utopian vision, commenting, for instance, that ‘su concepción turística adolece de cierto elitismo’,¹⁰⁵

¹⁰¹ Delgado, ‘Sensory Perception’, 44.

¹⁰² Penélope Cruz, who played Lena, described their stay as follows: ‘Mi personaje vive una de sus etapas más felices en Lanzarote, y la verdad es que está facilitando mucho las cosas el hecho de empezar aquí el rodaje [...]. Lanzarote tiene algo especial que afecta a mi personaje, y que también me afectó a mí la primera vez que vine, hace ya muchos años.’ Almodóvar: “Lanzarote está llena de secretos y misterios”.

¹⁰³ Almodóvar also problematizes the simplistic ‘island = utopia’ formula through the dramatic contrast between Ibiza (where Lena endured a loveless and intolerable 48 hours ‘indoors’ with Martel on top of her) and Lanzarote (where there are numerous ‘outdoor’ scenes and she happily indulges in her passion with Mateo).

¹⁰⁴ ‘La utopía de Manrique’.

¹⁰⁵ ‘La utopía de Manrique’.

whilst Allen Hernández has described him as ‘la máquina constructora de un futuro imposible’, open to extreme solutions; ‘la solución al horrendo caso urbano del Sur de Gran Canaria era “arrasar con todo”’.¹⁰⁶

Manrique’s essential link to Lanzarote (and the film) is affirmed even after Mateo has left the island through the shot of the plastic bag ‘of memories’ (containing the torn photos of the couple), which bears the iconic Lanzarotean logo that the artist/sculptor designed. In addition to confirming Manrique’s relevance to contemporaries years after his death, corroborating his declaration that ‘Yo soy un contemporáneo del futuro’ (1970),¹⁰⁷ this can be related to the ‘search for the meaning of history’ and Hirsch’s theory of post-memory (as Beilin posits¹⁰⁸), although in this case, unlike in *Volver*, the character’s efforts in reconstructing the film are focussed not on a nostalgic utopia but on reconstructing the truth and recuperating Lena’s memory. It arguably also serves to remind us that the couple’s (and Manrique’s?) attempts to construct a utopia on the island were destroyed. Returning to Almodóvar’s declaration, ‘I’m longing to leave for other places’,¹⁰⁹ and building upon Smith’s aforementioned assertion that *Los abrazos rotos* is ‘[c]onfessional, albeit in a symbolic mode’,¹¹⁰ then, one might wonder whether the film represents the director’s struggles as he tried to come to terms with his new relationship with Madrid, a city where his life had been marred by numerous public controversies.¹¹¹ Does the fact that Mateo returns to Madrid thus convey Almodóvar’s personal recognition that he would always be tied to the capital? It is notable, too, that the scenes filmed as Mateo leaves the ‘Clínica Azeca’ on Lanzarote¹¹² are bleak and windy, perhaps symbolically representing the fact that without Lena (and his sight), he is no longer able to indulge in an utopian life there. Hence he (literally and metaphorically) takes his first steps ‘downwards’, albeit with Pedro and Judit to accompany him on his journey to recovery.

¹⁰⁶ ‘César Manrique y el futuro imposible’, 64.

¹⁰⁷ <<http://fcmanrique.org/centenario/?lang=es>>.

¹⁰⁸ Beilin, ‘Broken Embraces’, 38.

¹⁰⁹ Delgado, ‘Sensory Perception’, 43.

¹¹⁰ Smith, ‘Almodóvar’s Self-fashioning’, 27.

¹¹¹ Smith recalls that, whilst ‘[t]he première of *La mala educación* was marked by Almodóvar’s controversial and unfounded claim that, after the terrorist outrages in Madrid on the eve of a General Election, the Partido Popular were planning a coup d’état’, ‘the main story on the release of *Los abrazos rotos* was not the film itself, but Almodóvar’s public quarrel with the leading newspaper, *El País*.’ ‘Almodóvar’s Self-fashioning’, 32.

¹¹² They were, in fact filmed at the *finca* of La Torrecilla, near the Volcán de la Corona (one of the island’s highest volcanoes) and the village of Yé, in the municipality of Haría. See Bennett, ‘Interview’ and Jesús Perdomo Ramírez, ‘La Torrecilla’, Historia municipio de Haría website, 13 July 2015, <<http://www.historiadeharia.com/PUEBLOS/Ye/Torrecilla.htm>> (accessed 16 May 2020). (There is another link with Manrique here since, as noted previously, the artist’s other home, Casa del Palmeral, was also in Haría.)

Finally, perceiving the film in broader terms, in addition to empathising with Manrique's mission to construct a utopia on Lanzarote and simultaneously condemning brutalistic capitalist power through Martel, one might wonder whether Almodóvar was suggesting through the cases of Lena and Mateo that, with regard to the future, leaving Peninsular Spain will never be a solution; there will always be the necessity (or reason) to return? Does the film imply that the city (and the centre), rather than the Hispanic periphery, will be the important turning point as regards Spain's future? (The song 'Werewolf' in the first scene in *La Geria* underscores the characteristics of marginality, 'outsiderness', 'the outcast', if not rebellion too, shared by the Canaries, Lena and Mateo.) Is it natural that Harry/Mateo should return 'home' to Madrid in order to face his ghosts through the reconstruction of his film? Should we (or should we not) engage in the construction of utopias? Is the ghost of Manrique laid to rest through the immortality of his work, life and death in this film? What does *Los abrazos rotos* tell us about the power of the camera/film not only as a vehicle for social protest but to reconstruct, recuperate and preserve the past, to 'unearth the dead' (including Manrique)? There are innumerable thought-provoking, yet unanswered questions, in line with Almodóvar's belief that 'it's important to leave some [doors] open for the spectator to close'.¹¹³ What is unquestionable, however, is that this film-within-a-film, which is also a story-within-a-story and history-within-fiction, a work that in Almodóvar's words, offers 'more commotion than emotion; more disturbance than thrill' may, despite his reservations that it does not offer 'the analgesic purpose',¹¹⁴ serve as a catharsis for viewers if hidden secrets and meanings can be unravelled by those who choose to move on from their futile attempts to construct a utopia, to overcome their blindness, to acknowledge, confront and deal with the ghosts of the past in order to face the future.

¹¹³ Delgado, 'Sensory Perception', 42.

¹¹⁴ Cited in Delgado, 'Sensory Perception', 41.