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**Screaming through the century:
The female voice as cathartic/transformational force, from
Berg's *Lulu* to Tykwer's *Run Lola Run***

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Introduction

Alban Berg's opera *Lulu*, dating from the early part of the twentieth century, and Tom Tykwer's film from the end of the century, *Lola rennt*, (known to English-speaking audiences as *Run Lola Run*), have one striking feature in common: both culminate in an ear-splitting scream. At first glance, these two works appear poles apart in time, genre and cultural context, although both are Teutonic in origin. Berg's "high-art" opera, based on the serial techniques of the Schoenberg School of composition, derives from Frank Wedekind's *fin-de-siècle* Lulu plays, *Earth Spirit* and *Pandora's Box*. By contrast, Tykwer's film is an end-of-millennium "art-house" film that, on its release, quickly became a cult movie in Germany and beyond; fast-paced, visually and technically innovative, and backed by a driving techno soundtrack, its resonances with many aspects of video games and hypermedia position it as a text that heralds the twenty-first century. The screams marking points of transformation at the denouement of each of these early and late twentieth-century works are also very different. While Berg's Lulu screams in agony at the thrust of Jack the Ripper's knife, and is cast as a victim of a fate that seems preordained, Lola's scream in Tykwer's *Run Lola Run* focuses the entire power of her being through her voice; Lola takes destiny into her own hands, defying the laws of chance to save the life of her boyfriend.

Berg commenced work on his intriguing and controversial opera *Lulu* in 1928, but the work remained incomplete on his death in 1935, so that Berg is sometimes described as Lulu's last victim. The Lulu figure is a chameleon that continues to tease and tantalise. Traditionally portrayed as a *femme fatale* who supposedly lures a series of husbands to their deaths, is reduced to supporting herself as a prostitute on the street, and is finally murdered by Jack the Ripper, Lulu has more recently been interpreted as victim and scapegoat.¹ At the end of the opera, Berg's Lulu screams in terror, protesting the horror of her fate. Her blood-curdling death-cry, anticipated in the orchestra by the insistently pounding "fate" rhythm

¹ My own interpretation, which I will briefly outline presently, draws on musicologist, Judith Lochhead's work applying Judith Butler's work on construction of gender, to argue that Lulu performs several versions of femininity in an attempt to survive.

and heightened by the strident fortissimo twelve-note chord and shrieking strings, penetrates to the very marrow of the listener. Lulu, caught up in a *Totentanz* or “dance of death” from which there is no escape, screams as a final cathartic utterance as she relinquishes her earthly existence.²

By contrast, in Tom Tykwer’s 1998 film, *Run Lola Run*, Lola’s scream is one of desperate determination and steely resolve. It marks her last-ditch attempt to find 100,000DM that her boyfriend, Manni, must pay to his gangster boss if he is to escape with his life. Lola’s number has already come up once on the roulette wheel, but she needs it to come up twice in a row to raise the requisite funds in time. The soundtrack’s long, low held notes create an air of eerie suspense as the last bets are placed and the wheel is about to be spun; as it rotates, Lola releases a deafening, (literally) glass-shattering scream, which continues to reverberate with the spinning of the roulette wheel, as if she is tempering the wheel’s movement to her will, in doing so overriding the very laws of chance to save Manni’s life.

The texts in which these two memorable but very different cathartic screams occur—Berg’s *Lulu* and Tykwer’s *Run Lola Run*—mark the starting-point and the endpoint, respectively, of a project examining a group of interrelated Lulu, Lola and Pandora texts which span the twentieth century; all of these works are manifestations of the Pandora myth.³ In order to situate the concerns of this paper in their context, I will give a brief account of the project’s main texts and their interconnections.

My point of embarkation on this Pandora-inspired journey, Berg’s opera *Lulu*, has a cinematic parallel in G. W. Pabst’s classic silent film *Pandora’s Box*, starring the alluring Louise Brooks. Pabst’s film, made in 1928, and Berg’s opera, commenced in the same year, clearly portray the same Pandora-related story deriving from Wedekind’s *fin-de-siècle* Lulu plays. This connection led to the discovery of a whole cluster of interconnected Lulu and Lola-related texts emanating from the Wedekind plays and from another *fin-de-siècle* work, Heinrich Mann’s 1905 novel, *Professor Unrat*. Perhaps the best known of these works is Sternberg’s 1930 film, *The Blue Angel* (featuring Marlene Dietrich’s Lola-Lola).⁴ Created as a remake of Pabst’s film, *Pandora’s Box*, it combines aspects of both Wedekind’s Lulu

² The idea of the *Totentanz* comes from Jarman (98).

³ Macmillan, Maree, doctoral thesis 2007 (forthcoming), provisionally titled “Beyond the *femme fatale*”.

⁴ While the principal female in Mann’s novel is actually named Rosa rather than Lola, the text’s position as antecedent to the Sternberg (and subsequent Lola films) makes it a natural part of this group.

character and of the female protagonist of Mann's novel *Professor Unrat*.⁵ *The Blue Angel* was itself remade by Fassbinder in 1981 as the film *Lola* (starring Barbara Sukova), but the setting is post-war rather than pre-war Germany. Like Sternberg's film, Fassbinder's *Lola* features an alluring cabaret singer as female protagonist.

A more recent Lulu text, Paul Auster's 1998 film, *Lulu on the Bridge*, (starring Harvey Keitel and Mira Sorvino), features a remake of the Pabst/Louise Brooks version of *Pandora's Box* using the device of the film-within-a-film. Appearing later in the same year as Auster's film, and the endpoint of the study, is Tykwer's post-wall *Run Lola Run* (featuring emerging actress, Franka Potente), already cited. Tykwer's *Lola* draws on the whole of the German Lulu/Lola heritage (as well as on numerous other cinematic texts), remaking it afresh for the post-Fassbinder generation of the end of the twentieth century and beyond. Before looking at some of these texts in more detail, a brief exposition of their key generative element, the Pandora myth, is in order.

The Pandora myth

The Pandora myth lies at the very heart of our cultural self-definition. The phrase "Pandora's box", popularly applied to all manner of large-scale catastrophe, continually reinscribes, at least at the unconscious level, the idea of femininity and female sexuality as alluring, but also dangerous, irrational, uncontrolled and chaotic, the source of all the world's ills. As Dora and Erwin Panofsky document in their major study of (mainly visual) representations of Pandora, Pandora's "box" was originally a storage jar or urn, which often contained all good rather than all evil, or a mixture of both. Their study includes two particularly striking visual representations of Pandora as signifying evil femininity: Paul Klee's *Pandora as Still Life* (1920), a vase resembling female genitals and emitting noxious vapours; and Max Beckmann's painting entitled *Pandora's Box*, (begun in 1936 and repainted in 1947), anticipating, then recording, the horrors of the atomic bomb (112-113).

Hesiod's rendition of the Pandora myth, dating from ancient Greece, is the version that has entered popular inheritance, and hence continues to influence Western cultural unconscious. In Hesiod's account of the myth, Pandora, the first woman, is created as the outcome of a protracted contest for power, played out as a game of wits—a series of deceptions and concealments—between Prometheus and Zeus, ultimately centred on

⁵ See Firda (133) and Baxter (68). The name "Lola" perhaps harks back to the Lola who embodies the interdependence of desire and death, pleasure and pain, in Sacher-Masoch's story, as Andrew Webber suggests (9, fn 12).

Prometheus's theft from heaven of the phallic fire torch or firestick: an ember transported in a hollow reed. Pandora, (the "all-gifted" or the "all-giving"), was fashioned out of clay and endowed with beauty and beguiling ways, to seduce and destroy Prometheus in revenge for his deception and theft. However, Prometheus ("forethought") was wary of this gift from Zeus and would not accept Pandora, also warning his brother Epimetheus ("afterthought"). Epimetheus failed to heed this warning and married Pandora, whereupon she opened a fateful box, releasing on the world all the evils and vices which have since afflicted it. Hope alone remained at the bottom of the "box".⁶

According to Hesiod's rendition, both the box and Pandora herself—her beautiful exterior masking the peril of insatiable appetites lurking within—embody the deception characterising the rivalry between Zeus and Prometheus. However, Pandora's very *raison d'être* is as a pawn in a game of male sexual rivalry, power and ownership. Blamed for her very existence and for gifts given to her by the gods, Pandora is set up, framed from the start. She is forced to play out a "femininity" constructed for her by patriarchal myth, yet her active curiosity in opening the box is seen as usurping the male prerogative; Pandora herself is "boxed".

Since Hesiod's time, Pandora has assumed many different guises; she is aligned with Eve in the Judaeo-Christian tradition as being responsible for the release of evil into the world. (Eve's less familiar Jewish predecessor, Lilith, provides a possible link to the name Lulu.) However, as well as Pandora's traditional portrayal as early *femme fatale*, there is also a completely different, more "hopeful" characterisation of Pandora—that of goddess bringing goodness—that can be traced to the eighteenth century, as documented by the Panofskys. Goethe's *Pandora*, dating from the early nineteenth century, exhibits quasi-Christological aspects: Pandora, the embodiment of cosmic beauty, returns to heaven, leaving the earth in mourning and eagerly hoping for her return.

Theoretical approach

Given the wealth of attention already granted to the *femme fatale* aspects of Pandora, my own study of Lulu/Lola/Pandora texts aims to illuminate the more positive possibilities stemming from the hope left at the bottom of Pandora's "box". Drawing on Julia Kristeva's notion of intertextuality and on Judith Butler's concept of gender and identity being performatively constructed, I posit that as a group, these works constitute a variety of

⁶ This account of the Hesiod is based on the work of the Panofskys.

manifestations of the Pandora myth, whose mutual interrogation suggests that Pandora's chaos can be read as a cathartic force that is not always destructive, but may also be regenerative, liberating and even redemptive.

I suggest that Kristeva's concept of intertextuality, with its implication that "modern" readings of texts are necessarily coloured by both earlier and more recent texts,⁷ and Butler's idea that gender and identity are constructions whose performances can be multiple and even "contradictory", are played out in this Lulu/Lola/Pandora context on both the macrocosmic and the microcosmic level. On the macrocosmic level, the Lulu/Lola works in my project can be viewed collectively as expressions of different facets of Pandora, including both *femme fatale* and redemptive aspects. On the microcosmic level of the individual text, many of these works themselves investigate the implications of multiple, composite, fractured and/or "contradictory" performances of identity and gender. In addition, Butler's concept of identity as performance is played out literally, in that in all these Lulu/Lola/Pandora texts, the protagonist performs physically within the diegesis, usually as a performing artist of some description. In most of these works, the female voice is pivotal, often marking or facilitating a point of catharsis and/or transformation.

A process of mutual interrogation of these works in the light of Butler's framework suggests that even the Lulu of Wedekind's, Berg's and Pabst's texts, traditionally viewed as destructive *femme fatale*, can be shown to possess redemptive attributes, serving as scapegoat who is ritually sacrificed to redeem the evils of the society that created her. The female protagonists of a second group of texts, Mann's *Professor Unrat*, Sternberg's *Blue Angel* and Fassbinder's *Lola*, generally regarded as sirens who lure respectable men to their destruction, can be viewed as agents or catalysts of transformation, offering the possibility of a more fully lived existence which promises good as well as ill.⁸ Two more recent texts—the 1998 films, Auster's *Lulu on the Bridge* and Tykwer's *Run Lola Run*—present the central Pandora figure as playing a clearly redemptive role; despite this apparently positive

⁷ Kristeva defines intertextuality as "the transposition of one or more system of signs into another, accompanied by a new articulation of the enunciative and denotative position." Jeremy Tambling, in discussing how "texts remake themselves and are remade", interprets Kristeva's concept as implying that "at each stage in a text's fissured and discontinuous history, it enters into new relationships, it meets other texts, it changes as it is placed in these new positions." Both citations from Leon S. Roudiez's introduction to Kristeva appear in Tambling (23).

⁸ Another Fassbinder film, made the year before *Lola*, deserves a mention in this context. *Lili Marleen*, whose very title is a song, explores an ultimately unsuccessful attempt to actually equate woman with song. One of the film's major preoccupations is the cathartic spectacle of iconic "feminine" performance. While not a direct part of the lineage of Lulu/Lola texts, this film is tangentially related: the name "Lili" is close to "Lulu", and could also be seen as evoking Lilith, Eve's predecessor.

representation, how far the respective female protagonists transcend the patriarchal constraints that “box” Pandora is open to question.

Given the limitations of this paper, I will briefly revisit the starting point of this study—the operatic Lulu—in the light of the redemptive aspects of the Pandora myth, then outline the more positive possibilities offered by texts traditionally seen as featuring *femmes fatales*: Sternberg’s *The Blue Angel*; and Fassbinder’s *Lola*. These Lola films are the works that most powerfully feature the female protagonist’s voice at points of catharsis, and also serve as landmarks in the Teutonic lineage linking the scream of Berg’s Lulu with that of the end-of-millennium post-modern version of Lola in Tykwer’s *Run Lola Run*. A preliminary exploration of the positioning of Tykwer’s Lola and the representation of “the feminine”, in comparison with the situation of Berg’s Lulu, concludes this paper.

The Lulu/Lola/Pandora texts

In Berg’s opera *Lulu*, traditionally, the protagonist is cast as *femme fatale* who is blamed for the deaths of her three husbands; her murder at the hands of Jack the Ripper is seen as avenging these deaths, and in particular, that of her third and most significant husband, Dr Schoen.⁹ However, none of the deaths is in fact directly initiated by Lulu: her first spouse drops dead; the second slits his throat; and her third, Schoen, dies as a result of his trying to force Lulu to kill herself in order to save his honour, so his death is arguably the result of self-defence on Lulu’s part.

In a more detailed intertextual examination of Wedekind’s, Berg’s and Pabst’s texts elsewhere, I argue that it is not Lulu who unleashes disaster, but the society that produced her, and within which she is trapped.¹⁰ A key structural feature of the opera is critical to this contention: in Berg’s meticulously constructed operatic adaptation of the Wedekind plays, the three singers that play the three husbands of Lulu return in the third act of the opera to play three clients of Lulu, who by this time is working in the streets of London as a prostitute.¹¹ Jack the Ripper, played by the singer who also plays the part of Schoen, and who represents the nether world of crime and corruption on which the bourgeois civilised veneer of Schoen and his world depends, acts as Schoen’s *Doppelgänger*, killing Lulu to avenge his death and reassert the patriarchal order in doing so. Mark Gaal, director of the

⁹ See for example George Steiner.

¹⁰ See, for example, Macmillan, Maree, “‘Boxing’ Pandora.”

¹¹ To enable this doubling to occur, Berg reduces the four clients of Wedekind’s play to three, to match the three husbands.

Australian Opera's 1994 production of *Lulu*, describes the opera in terms of a social allegory:

Along with the notion of personal revenge, the “ghosts” of the husbands, as clients, can be seen as revealing unmasked aspects of the husbands and the society in which they live. In other words the last scene exposes the husbands as they are and their society for what it is. As the music in the last scene can be seen as a raw, exposed, reworking of music used earlier in the opera, so Lulu's lifestyle as “prostitute” can be seen as having connections with her lives as “wife” and the earlier “civilised” settings are paralleled with the desperate squalor of the last scene.

The chameleon Lulu, given a different name by each of the male characters in the opera, and playing out the projection of each of their desires in her effort to survive, is unable to break out of the patriarchal strictures that bind her. Lulu, despite her multiple performances of “femininity”, is caught in a *Totentanz*, sacrificed as a scapegoat to redeem society's evils. As the Viennese satirist of Berg's time, Karl Kraus, puts it: “The great reprisal has begun, a men's world is brashly taking revenge for its own guilt.”¹² Lulu's scream as she is penetrated by Jack the Ripper's knife, marks the end of her struggle to survive, both physically and psychologically, in a universe that is pitted against her from the start.¹³

In contrast to Wedekind's, Pabst's and Berg's Lulus, all of whom die at the hands of Jack the Ripper, the Lolas in the group of texts addressed in this paper fare much better. In both Sternberg's and Fassbinder's films, the central Lola figure not only survives, but uses her voice as a force of transformation; her performance of “femininity”, through the literal performance of a song, offers the respective male protagonists liberation from their hitherto constricted lives, for good or ill as they choose. In opening up generative as well as destructive possibilities, these (so-called) *femme fatale* Lolas can be seen as the precursors of the more consciously and actively cathartic—but (ultimately) not necessarily more powerful—Lola of *Run Lola Run*.

The protagonist of *The Blue Angel*, Marlene Dietrich's Lola-Lola, who performs the “performance of femininity” to the point of drag, has come to epitomise the cinematic

¹² This is cited in Jarman (105). Musicologist Judith Lochhead takes a similar position: “Lulu is the symbol of this comprehensive social tragedy since, as archetypal Woman, she bears the greatest social burden: she is the scapegoat for society's evil, she is Pandora, she is Eve. But the tragedy is not hers alone. It belongs to all the men and the women who participate in this ‘Totentanz’.” (98)

¹³ Lochhead demonstrates that Lulu does this through a performance of “the feminine”—mediated through her voice—in the face of ongoing attempts to imprison or kill her.

femme fatale, traditionally deemed to be a coldly calculating destroyer of men.¹⁴ However, recent interpretations of the film present a different picture, as evidenced in Angela Carter's forthright summation:

... Dietrich's attractive unimaginative cabaret singer ... marries a boring old fart in a fit of weakness, lives to regret it but is too soft-hearted to actually throw him out until his sulky tantrums and idleness become intolerable. If that is the story of a femme fatale then some of my best friends are femmes fatales and anybody who feels ill-used by them has only himself to blame (134).

In a key scene, Lola-Lola's initial rendition on stage of the film's famous theme song, "Falling in Love Again", creates a point of catharsis whereby the naïve and masochistic grammar school teacher, Professor Rath, moves from disapproval of Lola-Lola and her world, to deluded, self-destructive infatuation. Lola-Lola directs her performance explicitly to the fawning and self-conscious, but secretly delighted Rath, hammily depicted by Emil Jannings.

If Lola-Lola is a siren here, she is one that is playful and indulgent, rather than fatal. It is Rath and his masochistic self-delusion that are (literally) in the spotlight, rather than any evil intention by Lola-Lola to corrupt. Even Lola's song is saying, "It's not my fault if men do this to themselves." In fact as several critics argue, Lola-Lola offers Rath the chance to break the bounds of his highly regimented and constricted existence as a schoolmaster, and to become more fully alive.¹⁵ However, Rath displaces his inherent obsessiveness on to Lola-Lola and submerges himself in her world, completely abandoning his old life and the dignity it affords him.

At the end of the film, it is again Rath who is literally in the spotlight, this time one that is created by the torch of the grammar school's janitor, which illuminates Rath at his desk in his old classroom, where he has returned to die. Having forfeited his job, his self-respect, and having been cuckolded by Lola and humiliated on stage in front of the whole town by the troupe leader, Rath is a broken man. While Lola-Lola acts as a catalyst for transformation, showing Rath a world beyond the rituals and routines of his life as a conservative and dictatorial professor, it is Rath who is the author of his own fate; he maintains what Judith Mayne describes as "supreme narrative authority" throughout the film (35).

¹⁴ As Linda Mizejewski illustrates, Dietrich's trademark pose from *The Blue Angel*, (occurring when Lola-Lola first sings "Falling in Love Again") has itself achieved iconographic status, occurring in Bob Fosse's *Cabaret* (1972) and as drag in Luchino Visconti's *The Damned* (1969). Dietrich herself explored the drag element more explicitly in her next film *Morocco*; in addition, a more recent film appearing soon after Tykwer's, E. Kutlug Ataman's 1999 film *Lola und Bilidikid*, concerns Berlin's gay and transvestite Turkish culture.

¹⁵ As Haskell suggests, Rath is at least briefly alive as moth to Lola's flame. (110)

Indeed, the whole film can be seen as a construction and projection of Rath's character and of his irrational apprehension of the world. The film's structure, soundtrack, characterisation and *mise-en-scène* all serve to reflect Rath's perceptions (literally and metaphorically), to expose his fundamental nature and signal the fate that he is in the process of creating for himself.¹⁶ Mayne, contending that "if Rath's attraction to Lola is fatal, then so is Lola's attraction to Rath" (37), argues that during the course of the film, Rath reifies Lola-Lola as the ultimate projection of his needs and desires, creating her as stereotypical *femme fatale* by the end of the film. For her final performance of "Falling in Love Again", Lola-Lola appears alone on stage in sultry black, aggressively straddling a chair. As I argue in more detail elsewhere, like the multi-faceted Pandora, Dietrich's Lola-Lola simultaneously performs the *femme fatale* and resists this categorisation.¹⁷

Fassbinder's 1981 film, *Lola*, originally conceived as *homage* to *The Blue Angel* but set in 1957, reveals a society where patriarchal-authoritarian structures persist despite Germany's reconstruction and "economic miracle". The town in which the film is set depends on a complicated web of corruption and hypocrisy in order to function. When the arrival of a new and idealistic town planner, Von Bohm, queers the pitch of Schukert, a large-scale and rather shady developer who also owns the local brothel, it is Barbara Sukowa's Lola, the brothel's star attraction and personal whore of Schukert, who plays a key role in ensuring the continued survival of the new regime.

Lola, during the course of seeking to better her own social position, "redeems" the intransigent situation between the rival males and the "contradictory" worlds they represent. (The idea of the civilised veneer, represented by town-planner Von Bohm, dependent for its existence on the nether world of developer Schukert's brothel, harks back to the notion of the Schoen/Jack the Ripper dyad identified in relation to the Lulu texts.) In achieving this balance between the two worlds, Lola consciously plays out two completely different performances of femininity, both of which are expressed in song at crucial points; like Lulu, Lola even has different names for her different personae.

Lola sets out to seduce Von Bohm, whose old-world courtesy and somewhat naïve integrity appeal to her, by dressing and behaving demurely and feigning an interest in his

¹⁶ German film historian Werner Sudendorf's reading of the film takes a similar approach. See his audio commentary on the German version of the re-mastered DVD release on KINO VIDEO, New York, 2001. Indeed, this film was originally the performance vehicle for the (then) much more famous actor, Emil Jannings, renowned particularly for his portrayal of masochistic roles.

¹⁷ Many theorists, including Mayne, propose a similar reading. To do justice to the vast amount of commentary on Dietrich is beyond the scope of this paper.

pursuits: Eastern art and classical music. The pivotal moment in this seduction occurs when Lola and Von Bohm sing a folk-song, in canon, together in church, an act that seals a spiritual bond and commitment between them. Lola's air of innocence and simplicity here is in marked contrast to her over-the-top sensuality as a cabaret *artiste*.

When Von Bohm arrives unexpectedly at the brothel, Lola's two worlds collide. Von Bohm's witnessing of Lola's performance of "The Capri-Fisher", represents a moment of realisation that creates a radical transformation of consciousness, precipitating a kind of cathartic madness in both of them. Lola, having been unmasked, breaks into a parody of whoredom while continuing to perform her song, tossing masses of red hair in a frenzied evocation of Rita Hayworth's famous performance of "Put the Blame on Mame" in *Gilda*.

The song Lola sings at this point—like "Falling in Love Again" in *The Blue Angel*—recurs at key moments in the film, continuing to haunt Von Bohm until he eventually decides that he must have Lola regardless. Whereas Professor Rath in *The Blue Angel* self-destructs, Von Bohm eventually embraces (however reluctantly), the greater range of life-experience that Lola offers, thus enhancing his ability to survive in this volatile social climate; his capitulation is not just a result of weakness and sexual infatuation, but also shows political insight. When at the end of the film, Lola agrees to marry him, she negotiates a deal that both achieves a viable working relationship between Von Bohm and Schukert, and meets her own economic, emotional and sexual needs.

Although Fassbinder's Lola must operate within the existing power structures, she is not content to function solely as a projection of the needs and desires of the male characters. By revealing the hypocrisy supporting the regime and consciously using it to her own ends, she plays an active part in her own fate, thus anticipating the even more active engagement of Tykwer's protagonist in *Run Lola Run*, the final work in my study.

Tykwer's end-of-millennium Lola embodies a particularly complex, post-modern performance of Pandora, citing innumerable cinematic texts, combining a range of sophisticated visual technologies and affording a plethora of multifaceted and "contradictory" coexisting interpretations. At first glance, Lola appears to be portrayed as almost unequivocally redemptive rather than destructive; however, ultimately how powerful a figure she projects remains open to question.

On the narrative level, Lola adopts an active, questing role, energetically performing three versions of herself by three times pounding the streets of Berlin to save the life of her boyfriend. While like Lulu, Lola is initially blamed for the life-threatening situation of the

central male, it is she who acts as his liberator and saviour; in addition, she saves a dying man and confronts her dependence on her father, during the process of claiming her own power.

Like Lulu, Lola exhibits multiple performances of identity, but whereas Lulu, despite her efforts, succumbs to the “dance of death”, Lola runs on until she triumphantly rescues Manni, the “swain in distress”. In this, the only text in the study, apart from the Mann and the Fassbinder, in which both male and female protagonists survive, Lola appears in charge of the game, empowering not only herself, but also her boyfriend: he moves from dependence and ineffectuality at the beginning of the film, to actively finding his own solution by the end. Lola’s self-belief engenders empowering possibilities for female and male alike, offering an enhanced range of performances of “masculinity” as well as “femininity”, it might be argued.

In this reading of the film, the mood is optimistic; its Hollywood-style happy ending where the central characters walk off hand-in-hand can be seen as a wryly ironic re-establishment of the status quo of traditional female-male relations. In the final scene of the film, Manni, having fortuitously (finally) reclaimed the money he lost, and focusing on currying favour with his gangster boss in an attempt to secure his place in the male pecking-order, is blissfully unaware of the huge physical, emotional and psychic/spiritual energy Lola has expended on his behalf, and reclaims as rightfully his the controlling “masculine” position in the relationship.

However, even in terms of the narrative, it may be argued that Tykwer’s Lola is just as subject to patriarchal framing as her predecessors. Her quest, although admittedly undertaken voluntarily, and indirectly for her own emotional benefit, is nevertheless performed in the service of her boyfriend and in response to his ineptitude. Furthermore, as Ingeborg Majer O’Sickey contends in “Whatever Lola Wants Lola Gets, (Or Does She?): Time and Desire in Tom Tykwer’s *Run Lola Run*”, perhaps Lola is not happy to settle for things as they were. O’Sickey argues that the film can be read as portraying a lack of sexual sync between the protagonists. He suggests that when, at the end of the film, the pair are still out of sync—with Lola arriving alone at the empty crossroads, then Manni appearing totally nonchalant and unaware—confirms Lola’s feeling that she has outgrown him and feels free to make her own life, with her own money. (The frame freezes at the end of the film before Lola answers Manni’s question, “What’s in the bag?”, so we never know what Lola tells him.)

On another level, Lola may be regarded as a cyber character, likened to a figure in a computer game, as many commentators note.¹⁸ In *Run Lola Run*, the repetitions that allow the “player” to start again, the use of the introductory animation sequence, the driving techno soundtrack and the way the characters are introduced, all evoke the electronic game medium. Even in her appearance Lola resembles the popular game superhero, Lara Croft. Tykwer’s Lola can be seen as another male creation—a pawn in the game of the director as the mythical Pandora was an instrument of Zeus—packaged and created by Tykwer as Dietrich was famously “created” by Sternberg, in a Svengali-Trilby symbiosis.

Andrew Webber describes Tykwer’s protagonists as “child-women and child-men, prematurely cast into the demands of adult gendered identities” and Lola as “a doll dressed for action: a sort of hybrid of Ken and Barbie” (10), and as a “director’s doll” after the fashion of Sternberg’s Dietrich, Lang’s Maria (Brigitte Helm), and Hitchcock’s Novak in *Vertigo* (13). Webber posits that in Tykwer’s film, “the agency and power of the female or feminised figure is conditioned, as so often in the computer games which *Lola rennt* cites, by the controlling hand of male power and fantasy, by the need to perform for the male gaze” (12). Webber contends that:

With [his central character, played by Franka] Potente, Tykwer clearly wanted to create a new Lola who would redefine the allure of the doll and her to-be-looked-at-ness. But the sweating, screaming, tattooed Lola, with DMs for high-heels, showing her underwear in a less staged fashion than Dietrich’s Lola, is nonetheless an intensely styled cinematic construct (14).

Drawing on mythological constructions and historical and cinematic citations, Webber presents Tykwer’s Lola as an icon of Berlin, who, like Pandora, “is figured as both redeemer and criminal, child-like innocent and daunting femme fatale” (5). In a reading too complex to address in detail here, Webber examines references to Hitchcock’s *Vertigo*, as well as to Sternberg’s and Fassbinder’s Lola films, in the light of Butler’s work, to argue that the gender performances in Tykwer’s film are “conditioned by hysteria, which afflicts both male and female leads” (1). Webber goes on to suggest that *Run Lola Run*:

...represents through its patterns of repetition, re-enactment, and impersonation, a potentially dire threat to both male and female identities. ...that the film scenario might spiral in on itself, that repetition might become a desperate compulsion, that the quest-run might spin into free-fall, following the film’s effects of *mise-en-abyme* (14).

To conclude, it is evident that interpretations generated by *Run Lola Run* range from empowering and hopeful, to destructive and despairing, (where, as in the last example, the

¹⁸ See for example Mesch.

“box” of Pandora becomes a terrifying and all-engulfing abyss). Thus, in the context of the study as a whole, while it might first appear that, on the one hand, Lulu’s scream protests her fate and signals her death, whereas on the other hand, Lola’s scream transforms her universe and affirms life, the “contradictory” readings that these Lulu/Lola/Pandora texts generate, suggest that Pandora’s chaos continues to unleash an energy that has the potential for both regeneration and annihilation as we proceed into the twenty-first century.

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