

## **Erotic Transgression in Carlos Saura's *Tango*\***

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### **Abstract**

Carlos Saura's musical film *Tango*, an audio-visual poem, is patterned upon the discourse of the Argentine tango in its pursuit of cultural otherness. The film elucidates the mid-life crisis of writer/director Mario reframed in an erotic site wherein his masculinity is challenged, distressed, and resurrected. With a playful metanarrative attached to love romance and dance spectacle, *Tango* crosses between the genres of melodrama and dark fantasy to conjure up the weakness of masculine hegemony threatened by murder and sexuality. A genealogy of the erotic via Georges Bataille's taboo-transgression relation substantiates the perception that Mario's self is being reconstituted in an erotic and sacrificial rite transpiring on the architectural terrain of tango dance and

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musical scenes. In these *mise-en-scènes*, the subject separates his “other” self from a patriarchal figure with the help of revisionist *femme fatales* Elena and Laura, as well as with his competitors, Ernesto and Angelo, who challenge him to avoid a living death. It is this quintet of five characters who create the tango microcosm of the film. Supported by his integral relationship with the camera and the mirror set in a cavernous rehearsal hall, Saura and his surrogate, Mario, challenge notions of conformity while reflecting the history of tango, “now and then,” in an interconnected multi- dimensionality worthy of Borges’ labyrinthine narratives. As a symbolic metaphor and psychological meditation, tango serves to reflect Mario’s configuration of the self/other and the encounter with sex and sexuality, death and resurrection, taboo and transgression. Eventually Mario’s self, possessed by his mediators’ otherness, desires a shift from the self to otherness and focuses intently on the coupling bodies, redoubling his excitement upon entering the maze of the tango.

**Key Words:** Bataille and Borges, self and other, fictional death, Argentine tango, playful metafilm