Josef von Sternberg’s *The Devil Is A Woman* (1935) is allegedly based on Pierre Louys’s novella *The Woman and the Puppet* (*La Femme et le pantin*, 1898), a work whose title was taken from one of Goya’s Tapestries, XLII: ‘In the meadow of Manxannares four young Spanish women toss a [male] puppet in a blanket’ (Symons 1935: 13). Louys’s novella clearly derives from Mérimée’s *Carmen*: don Mateo meets Concha in similar circumstances to those of don José and Carmen—in a brawl between women; both Carmen and Concha, the two devilish female figures, work at a tobacco factory as *cigarreras*, they both have animal qualities and both prostitute themselves to the English. In Louys’s novella, at a certain moment in don Mateo’s narration of his story to André, the French traveller and the other narrator of the story, don Mateo, makes an explicit reference to
Mérimée’s tale when he tells how he and Concha moved to a *palacio* in Seville, in the same street ‘where your Carmen received don José’ (Louys 1935: 184).

*The Devil Is A Woman*, written by John Dos Passos and S. K. Winston, highlights those features and references that easily identify Concha Pérez, the character of Marlene Dietrich in the film, as a variation of the well-known figure of Carmen, mainly through the allusions to the heroine’s youth in a tobacco factory and the brief appearances of the bullfighter, Morenito. But the title, *The Devil Is A Woman*, imposed by the film’s producer, Ernst Lubitsch, against Sternberg’s original *Caprice Espagnol*, also strengthens the connection between Concha/Dietrich and Carmen in the film. With these literary references this last Sternberg-Dietrich collaboration acknowledges its indebtedness to the erotic sensibility of the nineteenth-century Romantic tradition and reinforces the continuity of Dietrich’s onscreen persona with the *femme fatale* figure, a figure that enjoyed a privileged position in the European social imagination of that century. According to Benedetto Croce, Romanticism as a moral phenomenon, as *mal du siècle*, is rooted in the transition from an old traditional faith to a new belief in the liberal ideals, which were still partially and poorly assimilated (Praz 1969: 11). In a similar way, Evlyn Gould has noted that at the heart of Mérimée’s *Carmen* lies the question of the European community, ‘a Europe caught between, on the one hand, the idealistic dreams of a youthful Romantic nationalism […] and, on the other, the stodgy resistance to change of a modern bourgeoisie sympathetic to imperial ideology but also decidedly pan-European in nature’ (Gould 1996: 10). This ideological conflict and the difficulties of the new liberal faith demanded a new type of virility, which was often defined and dramatized through erotic fantasies.

Like his Romantic predecessors, Sternberg places the devilish figure of Concha/Dietrich in erotic scenarios to articulate male desires orchestrated by clashing contemporary cultural values. That the perception of these conflicting values may differ from one country to another seems to be proven by the Spanish government’s condemnation of the film and its demand that all copies should be destroyed, forcing the Paramount studios to withdraw the film from distribution and exhibition everywhere. Here I will examine the extent to which the character of Dietrich follows and departs from the Carmen myth of female otherness. To this purpose, an analysis of the erotic scenarios portrayed in the nineteenth-century narratives will...