

Run Lola Run

by Tom Twyker

About the Director

Tom Tykwer was born in 1965 in Wuppertal, Germany. Fascinated by film from an early age, he turned personal arguments into a short film *Because* (1990), followed by a second short *Epilog* (1992) that plunged him into debt. He wrote and directed his first feature film, *Deadly Maria* (1993), which had a limited theatrical release in Germany and internationally, while his second feature, *Wintersleepers* (1997), was shown at several film festivals. With his third feature *Run Lola Run* (1998), however, he achieved worldwide success, and he then cast Franka Potente, the star of *Run Lola Run*, in *The Princess and the Warrior*, about a nurse and an ex-soldier. *Heaven* (2002), with a screenplay by the Polish director, Krzysztof Kielowski, was a haunting work, shot in English and Italian and starring Cate Blanchett and Giovanni Ribisi.

After *Heaven*, Tykwer contributed to *Paris, je t'aime* (2006), a film consisting of twenty vignettes by famous directors dealing with love in Paris. He shot the ten-minute short film, *True*, with Natalie Portman. His latest film is an adaptation of the German novel *Perfume*, also filmed in English, with a cast of English and American actors, including Dustin Hoffman and Alan Rickman.

Version-by-Version Analysis with a Focus on Distinctively Visual

Initial Images

Three Quotations

The first images in this film are two quotations—one from the 20th-century Anglo-American poet TS Eliot, the other from German football legend Sepp Herberger.

Eliot's lines, in their original English, are:

We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.

They come from 'Little Gidding', the last section of his poetic sequence *Four Quartets* (1944) and the relevance of these lines will be made clearer as the film proper commences. The Herberger quote 'After the game is

before the game', featured at the beginning of the film, is matched by another Herberger remark at the end of the opening sequence.

This is followed by the sound of a ticking clock and the sight of a swinging pendulum. As the name of the director is displayed, the pendulum halts. The camera then tracks up to reveal a grotesque head above the face of the clock, which opens. Suddenly we are in a crowded environment where people are hard to distinguish and the camera moves through a haze while insistent electronic music is heard. Hans Paetsch, used as a narrator in this introductory part of the film, is a famous narrator of children's stories in Germany. Occasionally there is a focus on a particular person who will later be seen in the film proper. The last face is that of the security guard (Herr Schuster), who utters a second Herberger remark: 'The ball is round, the game lasts 90 minutes, everything else is pure theory'.

Having spoken, this man kicks the ball high into the air and the camera seems to travel with it. When we look down on the people who had been milling in the previous sequence they are now gathered into the shapes LOLA RENNT—German for 'Lola runs'. The name of Lola is one with great significance in German culture as it is the name of the character played by Marlene Dietrich in Josef von Sternberg's *The Blue Angel* (1930), the film that introduced Dietrich to the world. This work was also updated as *Lola* by Rainer Werner Fassbinder in the early 1980s.

A Range of Techniques

A cartoon sequence commences, with a redheaded female running away from us, dealing with a barking dog and smashing obstacles in her way. The technical credits are shown and a whirlpool emerges that resembles the spiral in Alfred Hitchcock's classic suspense film *Vertigo* (1958). The figure of Lola falls into the whirlpool and then all of the characters are shown in a series of police mug shots, that is, full face and profile, with the names of the actors displayed underneath.

From there we are shown an aerial view of a city by a river and a number of rapid cuts bring us to a building, then inside that building and along a corridor, and finally to a ringing red phone. Lola answers the call of her boyfriend, Manni, who is waiting anxiously in a phone booth having been involved in a smuggling operation. Lola was supposed to have driven him to a

meeting but her moped was stolen. This sequence, and the recollections of Manni, are shot in black and white to suggest that what we are seeing is something that occurred in the past.

Manni catches a train when Lola does not appear but he accidentally leaves the bag with the money behind. Both he and Lola repeat the word for 'bag', with Manni remembering the agony of leaving it behind and Lola realising how the incident would have occurred. The bag is discovered by a homeless man and as we see him emerge from the underground clutching it, along with his usual collection of plastic bags, images flash onto the screen of exotic places that the tramp could now visit with his newfound wealth.

Filmed in Real Time

The frantic nature of the phone call to Lola is now explained, especially when we are shown Manni's sinister looking boss, Ronnie, head-butt him over a trivial incident in the past. Manni has to transport 100 000 Deutschemarks to Ronnie by noon and he will be killed if he does not deliver the money by that time. This noon deadline, by which time Manni must find the money or else face deadly retribution, echoes the 1952 Western *High Noon* where Sheriff Will Kane (Gary Cooper) faces the imminent return of an outlaw he had helped send to prison. Also, both films pass in real time.

The cutting between the two characters talking to each other on the phone becomes increasingly frenetic and when Lola can take no more she screams. This causes some glass objects to smash and, in a humorous touch, we see a tortoise wandering away from the chaos. Lola's shriek, which is capable of breaking glass, is an allusion to Günter Grass's *The Tin Drum*, a famous German novel adapted into a film in which the central character breaks glass by a similar method.

Twenty Minutes to Noon

Lola vows to somehow obtain the money and get it to Manni in the twenty minutes before the deadline and Manni states he will rob a supermarket for the money if Lola has not come by then. While he is speaking, Manni is shown gazing at a spiral symbol outside a bar, a link to the Hitchcock motif and to the cartoon of Lola. He is filmed from above as he throws his phone card away and places his head on his arms in a despairing fashion. We see black and white footage of dominoes tumbling on a television screen in Lola's bedroom and various clocks drive home the point that Lola has a mere twenty minutes in which to save her boyfriend.

She throws her phone, which is red like her hair, into the air and when it comes down, like the soccer ball in the opening scene, she asks herself who she can turn to. While the camera twirls around her stationary figure we see the people she is thinking of turning to,

some of whom are seen in cartoon form. She decides on her father and when she says 'Papa' he is seen shaking his head.

■ The First of Three Versions

Camera on the Move

It is at this point that three different versions commence. Lola runs past her mother's room and she is asked to get some shampoo. The camera then reveals the mother sprawled on a chair drinking whisky and talking about star signs to an intimate friend, perhaps a lover. The television in her room shows an animated version of Lola running down the stairs and avoiding an angry dog and its owner.

The song 'I Wish', sung by Franka Potente, is heard while we witness the running Lola, her hair a punk red colour that harmonises with her pale blue top and her green trousers. Her boots and belt are black and she has a tattoo on her stomach. The camera tracks beside her as she runs through the streets of Berlin. She almost collides with a woman (Doris) pushing a baby in a stroller and we are given a rapid fire sequence of what transpired in this person's life until this point, or after this moment. She has a child, a violent situation develops and we see a body on a floor. Next the woman is seen kidnapping a baby in a park.

There is barely time to register this sequence before Lola is sighted running beneath an overpass while a yellow train travels above her. The camera shifts perspective from tracking her running in profile to showing her front on. The shot of Lola running towards the camera alludes to *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, where Indiana Jones tries to save his girlfriend. Tykwer, of course, reverses the genders.

An abrupt transition now takes place. We are inside a room in an office, focusing on a longhaired, freckled woman who is in a state of distress. There is no music and the film is shot on a grainy video. The woman's speech is very slow and it is only when a wide-angle shot reveals Lola's father that it becomes clear that she is his mistress.

Again we see Lola running, this time through busier streets. She races between two lines of nuns and is questioned by a male on a bicycle wearing a football jersey. This man (Mike) had been glimpsed in the dreamlike opening and, as with the woman with the stroller, we are provided with a speedy summary of his future. He crashes and eventually marries the nurse who looked after him.

A Range of Camera Shots

The shots of Lola vary from the standard tracking view to rear and front angles and, as she runs along, her arms pumping, there are cuts to the figure of a middle-

aged man (Herr Meier) driving out of a parking place. He seems to recognise her, but as he watches her running away he does not pay attention to the traffic and crashes into a car. Three very tough-looking men emerge from their damaged BMW.

We are shown Manni, a gun shoved into his trousers, talking in the phone booth and receiving bad news. He leaves the booth and is puzzled by the behaviour of a blind woman, who does not take back a phone card she had lent him.

A brief shot of Lola rounding yet another bend in Berlin also shows us the dirty homeless man, struggling with the burden of his many bags, one of which is full of a large sum of money. She, of course, has no idea who he is. In an amusing touch, this character is identified in the credits as Norbert von Au, suggesting that he is an aristocrat who has fallen on hard times.

Different Points of View

We then return to Lola's father and his mistress, who announces that she is pregnant. Lola is filmed running into the bank and the security guard from the opening scene (Herr Schuster) enters the code that allows her to pass into the main offices of the institution. Again, Lola barely avoids a figure sighted in the introduction and this woman (Frau Jager)—tall, dark-haired and with prominent cheek bones—has her future mapped out in a horrifying blur of accident, operation, wheelchair, suicide and burial.

Just before Lola bursts into her father's office he expresses his pleasure in his imminent fatherhood. His mistress, Jutta, is pleasant to Lola, but her father retreats to his chair and stares at Lola as if nothing untoward has been happening. Lola kneels in front of him and asks for the money. We see her from his POV (POV is the standard abbreviation for point of view, a film term used for those scenes where the camera gives the viewer the perspective of a particular character), and he is more concerned with how she looks than with her demand.

Lola becomes increasingly desperate and, after her father displays no knowledge of the boyfriend she has had for over a year, she lets out a shriek that destroys the clock in his room. This brings Jutta back into the office, which causes Lola's father to take decisive action. He grabs Lola and marches down the corridor with her, the camera filming them from front on. Lola's anguished face contrasts with the way she had raced along the streets, her hair flowing behind her.

We hear the father, who is the manager of the bank, state that he feels unappreciated at home and that he is leaving Lola and her mother. All of this is shot from the waist up until his final announcement, that he is not Lola's real father. At this announcement we reach the door leading to the area of the bank open to the general public. The security guard drags Lola to the

front of the building and the sound of her sniffing as she holds back tears, while her feet are scuffing on the floor, is in marked contrast to the energetic, confident figure witnessed only a few minutes previously.

As Lola is dragged from the bank we catch a glimpse of a startled looking teller (Kruse) and as she stands on the footpath a kindly old lady asks her what is troubling her and shows her the time on her watch. This makes Lola run with renewed intensity and she is shot from a distance, the intervening barriers appearing as blurred objects. An overhead shot is followed by a view of Manni emerging from the phone booth, about to rob the supermarket.

Manni, Lola and Split-Screens

Lola runs to the spot from which Manni phoned her, passing a red ambulance that stops abruptly in front of a crew of workers in yellow overalls who are carrying a window pane. The camera lingers on the gun in Manni's back pocket as he makes his way to the place he intends to rob and, as Lola runs, we notice the graffiti on the buildings. A close-up of a clock ticking over to midday coincides with Manni looking at the scene inside the store.

We are now given a split-screen view of Manni looking from the left and Lola approaching from the right. Into this shot emerges the clock positioned in the central square and, as it looms up, Lola arrives at the street corner. She shouts out but she is too late: Manni's robbery is already in progress. The emphasis is on his tattooed arm as he fires bullets into the air and the frightened customers crouch on the floor.

Manni is filmed from the viewpoint of the customers in front of him, and then from the perspective of Lola, standing behind him at the window. They argue about who should have waited for whom, before she decides to help Manni rob the store. There is an exchange about the safety catch on the gun she takes from a guard that will assume greater significance later in the film.

A Homage to Gangster Films

The store robbery scene is a homage to gangster films such as *Bonnie and Clyde* and *Pulp Fiction*. An extreme close-up on Lola's face is succeeded by a slow-motion shot of Lola and Manni fleeing on foot to the accompaniment of the song 'What a Difference a Day Makes', performed by Dinah Washington.

They find themselves surrounded by police, and Manni tosses the bag containing the money stolen from the supermarket into the air. This scene echoes the shots of the ball kicked in the prologue and of the phone Lola tosses before she sets off on her quest to save Manni. A nervous police officer accidentally shoots Lola in the chest and we see the impact of the bullets as she falls to the ground. The soundtrack at this point

is that of the sustained string chords of *The Unanswered Question*, an early 20th-century chamber ensemble work by American composer Charles Ives.

Manni is seen from Lola's viewpoint, and vice versa, until the camera comes closer and closer to Lola's face and then reverts to a red-tinged sequence from their past. The two are in bed discussing their feelings. Lola questions Manni about his love for her and seems unconvinced of its genuineness. While Lola appears to be dying, and the sequence from her memory is probably her last, the film reverts to normal colour and Lola utters the phrase 'I don't want to leave' as the red bag with money becomes the red phone she threw skywards after her conversation with Manni.

■ Second Version

The Film Restarts

At this moment the film seems to restart from the point when Lola has finished her phone call with Manni, and has set off to try and get the money from her father. Her mother calls out and the animated Lola encounters the dog again. It growls and a boy on the staircase trips her. Lola leaves her apartment hobbling, but soon gets into her stride. This time Doris wins the lottery, Lola passes through the lines of nuns and the man on the bike ends up as an addict.

Lola crosses the pedestrian bridge and we see the blind woman outside the phone booth where Manni is becoming frantic. This time Lola runs over the top of Herr Meier's car and she collides with the tramp. In other words, this second version is already displaying more signs of confrontation and the soundtrack is similarly angry in tone.

A Slight Delay

Because of the slight delay that resulted from the trip on the stairs, the collision between Herr Meier's car and the other car takes place slightly later and Lola arrives at the bank a moment later, which leaves enough time for Jutta to explain to Lola's father that she has become pregnant by someone else. Lola notices people gathered in the corridor outside her father's offices and after she bursts into the room she interjects in the argument and becomes infuriated by the situation.

She is slapped by her father and retaliates by throwing furniture. When Schuster utters some glib remarks Lola steals his gun and screams at Frau Jager, whose future involves dining with a mild-looking teller, bondage and marriage. The journey with her father, which in version one had been dominated by him, is this time dominated by Lola, who has a pistol at her Papa's head throughout. She robs her father's bank at gunpoint, which requires Kruse retrieving money from a different part of the bank to make up the total. At

this stage the pace slows dramatically, as we watch the teller count money into piles and Lola and her father sit in silence.

One of the most interesting series of shots in the film occurs when Lola is shown in close-up when she emerges from the bank and we then see her POV of the police snipers positioned around the bank. The camera pulls back to reveal Lola standing alone in front of the severe exterior of the Deutsche Transfer Bank. The hand gestures of the police suggest that she move away and suddenly men in balaclavas with high-powered rifles tackle her.

Rushing away with the money in a bag, Lola meets the old lady who she asks to tell her the time. This time the woman has a Zimmer frame and is unable to give the time. Lola tries to hitch a ride on the ambulance from before, but distracting the driver makes the ambulance crash into the window pane, which is filmed from above, on the side and in front.

As occurred with the first version, we see Manni glance from the left of the screen while Lola runs from the right, but this time he hears her cry out and stops himself from entering the store. However, when Lola reaches Manni, he is run down by the red ambulance that had been delayed due to the crash with the large pane of glass.

Lola drops the green bag full of money in a slow-motion sequence and, as she crosses the street towards Manni, he is filmed from above, his body spreadeagled on the road. As Lola cradles Manni's head in her arms the camera moves towards his bloodied face and then a second memory sequence ensues. In this red-tinted scene the characters' roles are reversed and Manni questions Lola about what she would do if he were to die. When Lola says, in the flashback, that Manni is not dead yet we see him revive in the present and the money bag is filmed falling to the ground as a plane flies overhead.

It is curious that, after being slowed down by the trip on the staircase and the extra time spent at the bank, Lola is able to arrive at the supermarket before she did in version one.

■ Third Version

Lola Speeds Up

The story starts a third time. Again we hear Lola's mother talking about Sagittarius on the phone. The animated Lola, her eyes drawn in such a way that they appear to spin out of her head, is slightly faster and is able to leap over the snapping dog on the staircase. This time Doris does not swear at Lola, but simply pokes out her tongue. The third version of her future has her praying in church, receiving communion and handing out religious tracts.

The yellow train again rounds the bend, but Lola swerves to avoid the nuns and almost crashes into Mike riding his bicycle. At this point the plot changes direction, for we follow Mike to a café where he meets Norbert the tramp and sells him his bike. Lola slides across the bonnet of Herr Meier's car, which prevents the accident that happens in the two previous versions.

Split-Screens and Tracking Shots

A tracking shot shows us Norbert contentedly riding a bike and the conversation between Lola's father and Jutta reaches the moment where she mentions becoming pregnant, before a message is received that Meier has arrived at the bank to pick up Lola's father. A split-screen has her father walking along the corridor on the left-hand side while Lola runs in the right. He passes Frau Jager, Herr Schuster and Kruse, without us learning anything about their subsequent histories.

Lola's anguished cry in the third version is aimed at her father and, as he drives off, the screen reverts to a single image. Meier is seen chatting in his car and Lola is filmed from a camera mounted on a crane as she reaches the facade of the bank. There is now a puzzling exchange between Lola and Schuster the security guard. He calls her 'dear' and there seems to be some recognition of a prior relationship more significant than that of a guard and the daughter of the bank manager.

Meanwhile, Manni returns the phone card to the blind woman he borrowed it from, but this time the woman makes a gesture that alerts Manni to the fact that the homeless man who took his money is at this moment riding by on a bicycle. Swerving to miss Manni on foot and the tramp on a bicycle, Herr Meier and Lola's father have a head-on collision with the BMW that in versions one and two had been subject only to minor damage. A man in white overalls also becomes involved in this multiple accident, which claims the lives of both Meier and Lola's Papa.

Camera Angles and Impressive Editing

An impressive camera shot of the tangled red hair of Lola seen from above swings down to a front-on view, which is then cut to a profile shot of her running while she ponders what to do. Just avoiding being run over by a giant truck makes her look around for help, which comes in the form of a casino. In one of the many in-jokes Tykwer dots throughout the film, the casino's exterior is that of Berlin's Deutsches Historisches Museum.

Lola receives a single 100-mark chip, and finds a roulette table. The contrast between her visible bra strap and bare midriff and the men in suits and women in elegant clothes is very striking. She wins a bet on the number '20', no doubt chosen because that was how many minutes she had to save Manni. This causes several casino employees in bowties to approach her and Lola is asked to leave.

When the ball is spinning around the roulette wheel for a second time, tension is created by judicious cutting between two camera angles. One camera comes closer to the action on the table while simultaneously another moves away from Lola, who lets out a scream that shatters champagne glasses. An extreme close-up of the ball falling into the '20' slot suggests that Lola has made this happen and, as the startled patrons look on while Lola receives 127 000 marks, the camera takes a journey back into the gambling area. We see a painting on the wall of the spiralling hair of Kim Novak as she appeared in the 1950s suspense classic *Vertigo*, and then a clock shows how little time Lola has in which to save Manni.

Manni is successful in catching the tramp and recovering his money and, in return, he hands over his gun. When the red ambulance stops in front of the men carrying the window pane Lola hitches a ride, unnoticed by the driver. Inside the ambulance Schuster, the security guard from Lola's father's bank, is being treated for a heart attack. Although the English subtitles have Lola saying 'I'll stay with him', the German line is 'Ich gehöre zu ihm', which translated literally is 'I belong with him', which helps explain the intense moment outside the bank and could even suggest a father-daughter relationship between them.

The amazed look on the face of the ambulance man as Schuster's heart-rate begins to return to normal, and the looks Lola received at the casino, give her a quality verging on the supernatural. She is dropped off at the booth from which Manni phoned her and, as Tykwer's camera spins around, Lola looks for Manni and the clock ticks over to twelve.

As Manni steps out of Ronnie's car we notice the bag that he retrieved from Norbert the tramp. Clearly Manni is no longer in danger and as he walks towards Lola there is a shift to a shot of both characters in the one frame. The movie ends with Manni asking Lola what is in her bag. She smiles and the image freezes. The credits then roll in a downward motion that subverts the normal pattern of such sequences and the word 'ENDE', German for 'End', scrolls from right to left in large red letters on a black background.

Key Issues

- Consider the many examples of the distinctively visual contained in *Run Lola Run*. Tykwer uses a variety of techniques to convey his message about the randomness of life. He mixes animated sequences with tracking and dolly shots of his protagonist running through the streets of Berlin. He occasionally inserts slow-motion passages into an otherwise action-packed narrative. On several occasions he has characters standing in a stationary position while the camera revolves around them.

- **Think about how the director consciously plays with our knowledge of film history.** The restricted timeline alludes to *High Noon*, the whirlpool and a painting in the casino refers to *Vertigo*, and the scene with the pane of glass is a staple of Hollywood comedy. In carrying out the robbery Manni acts like a character from *Pulp Fiction* and the alternative stories are reminiscent of the English film *Sliding Doors*.
 - **Examine how the director treats the people that Lola bumps into or passes by throughout the film, both visually and in terms of what happens to them.** Details of each person's subsequent future are shown in a series of still frames, as if we are viewing a number of Polaroid images. The futures are widely divergent, for example in one scenario a woman whom Lola bumps into wins the lottery, but in a different scenario she kidnaps an unattended baby after social workers remove her child, while in a third the woman becomes a religious convert.
 - **Think about the appearance of Lola, and other images in the film.** Lola's 'look' is one of the most striking aspects of this film. The blurred figure with the henna red hair, blue singlet top and finely checked green trousers stay with the viewer. Other images that linger are the almost bare streets, the bank where Lola's father works, and the phone booth and supermarket where Manni spends most of the film. While colour is used effectively in the bulk of the film there are some flashback sequences that are shot in black and white and the discussions that Manni and Lola remember as they are about to die are filmed in a red haze.
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