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“FRANKESTEIN” IN CASTILE:

THE USES OF THE BRITISH LITERARY GOTHIC IN SPANISH CINEMA AFTER
FRANCO

“FRANKENSTEIN” EN CASTILLA:

LA TRADICIÓN "GÓTICA" BRITÁNICA EN EL CINE ESPAÑOL POSFRANQUISTA

TESIS DOCTORAL DE:

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DIRIGIDA POR:

FÉLIX MARTÍN GUTIÉRREZ

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DIRECTOR: DR. FÉLIX MARTÍN GUTIÉRREZ

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Jonathan Holland

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INTRODUCTION



This doctoral thesis starts with a gaze: but not with the aggressive, Gothic gaze of Stoker's *Dracula*, or of Walpole's *Manfred*, or of Radcliffe's *Schedoni*. In Víctor Erice's film *El espíritu de la colmena*, a six year-old girl, Ana, is taken to see a screening of James Whale's *Frankenstein* (1931) in the Spanish pueblo of Hoyuelos in Castilla-La Mancha. Ana watches the film innocent and open-eyed, too young to properly understand what it is saying. The question of why the monster dies is of special interest to her. Having presumably been born in 1934, Ana is unaware of the quasi-Gothic terrors that have divided and partly destroyed Spain in that most traumatic of eras in Spanish twentieth-century history, the 1936-39 Civil War, but the world in which she is growing up is full of the effects of that war – in the silences of her parents, which fill the house in which she lives with unspoken tensions, in the *maqui* she will later meet, in scenes with echo those of Pip with the convict Magwitch in Dickens' Gothically-inflected *Great Expectations* (1861), of mysterious gunshots which ring out at night, and in the literal detritus of the war which scatter the remote landscapes of Castilla-La Mancha.

Whale's film becomes Ana's frame for understanding that reality, and she undertakes a spiritual journey in search of the answers which will end, in the final

scenes, almost killing her. In other words, it is a framework supplied by the Gothic – by Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1820), by way of Whale, which enables Ana to reach a point where she is finally able to come to a final, affirmative declaration of identity: “soy Ana”. Whereas for the other members of the community in which she lives the film is entertainment, something to be escaped into, for Ana, unburdened by their expectations of what popular culture is for, it becomes an enabling device.

In the opening scenes of Guillermo del Toro’s *El espinazo del diablo* (2001), a bomb falls from the hatch of an airplane. The camera then cuts to a boy, unconscious or dead, lying on cellar flagstones, blood coming from his head: the image of the injured child is redolent of that of Ofelia in del Toro’s later film, *El laberinto del fauno* (2006). A voiceover by the Argentinean actor Federico Luppi asks what these disconnected images signify: “What is a ghost? A tragedy condemned to repeat itself, time and again?” The two images, bleeding child and bomb, inevitably conjure up traumatic aspects of Spanish and Western European twentieth-century history. Such a visual echo is a clear recognition by del Toro of the impact of other films on his imagination: he is very much a postmodern filmmaker, explicitly drawing on other cultural artefacts to make his meanings. But what is important for our purposes here is the allusion to the gothic, a representational mode which has been chosen by del Toro as a methodology by which the film will attempt, ideologically, narratively, and psychologically, to come to terms with the Spanish Civil War.

In the first scene of the gothic novel which is traditionally held to be the founding text of the genre, Horace Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto* (1759), Conrad, the son of the usurper Manfred, is crushed to death by a massive plumed helmet which has come crashing through the roof of his castle. Manfred temporarily becomes an overawed Burkean observer:

He beheld his child dashed to pieces, and almost buried under an enormous helmet, an hundred times more large than any casque ever made for human being, and shaded with a proportionable quantity of black feathers. The horror of the spectacle, the ignorance of all around how this misfortune happened, and above all, the tremendous phenomenon before him, took away the prince's speech. (Walpole 19)

A gothic supernatural manifestation of the “sins of the fathers coming to rest upon the sons”, the helmet symbolizes the legitimate owner's imminent return, its literal and figurative weight meaning that it never disappears throughout the duration of the novel. There are clearly strong parallels between Walpole's helmet and del Toro's bomb. The message of the helmet is that the younger generation will become the victim of legitimate or illegitimate patriarchal politics; the bomb of *El espinazo del diablo* likewise remains, the bomb failing to explode on impact. It remains there, seemingly alive, becoming psychologically connected to the boy Santi, who died on the same night it falls and who will return during the film to wreak vengeance. The bomb is a living presence, and is fascinating to the boys, who listen to it as though waiting for it to speak. Like the helmet in *The Castle of Otranto*, and like the images of *Frankenstein* in Hoyuelos, the bomb is a visitor from and a reference to a past “somewhere else,” a place with a violence which erupts into the present of the boys and represents a threat to their future security. Bomb, helmet and monster are thus all gothic ghosts, incursions into, and explanations of, a potentially violent present. I offer these two key examples by way of introductory demonstration that gothic motifs offer a key to interpretation, hitherto largely unexplored, for Spanish film in the post-Franco era.

It is worth pointing out here that throughout this analysis, we will be using the word “gothic” as it relates to the British literary tradition, not in its main Spanish sense as given in the *Diccionario de la Real Academia Española*: “arte que se desarrolla en Europa desde el siglo XII hasta el Renacimiento”. Our use of quotation marks around the Spanish title - *Frankenstein en Castilla: la tradición “gótica” británica en el cine español posfranquista* – is intended to separate out the British term “gothic” from the Spanish “gótico”. The *DRAE* offers the following definition of “novela gótica” - “Variedad de relato de misterio y terror que aparece a finales del siglo XVIII” – and it is this definition of the term we will be using throughout our analysis. Indeed, the Anglo-Saxon gothic as a genre has to date had little impact on Spanish literary studies, although recent works such as *La novela gótica en España (1788-1833)* by Miriam López Santos (2010) and Abigail Lee Six’s *Gothic Terrors: Incarceration, Duplication and Bloodlust in Spanish Narrative* (2010) may prove to be opening the door on a new chapter of comparative literature that has so far surprisingly remained unexplored.

Since Walpole’s preface to *Otranto*, in which Walpole proposed a “blend of the two kinds of romance, the ancient and the modern”, the Gothic novel has proved itself to be a capacious literary form, proficient at incorporating into itself a wide range of genres as well as of disseminating itself across a wide range of those genres, right up to the present day. In the words of Fred Botting: “Gothic works... harbour a disturbing ambivalence which [discloses] the instability not only of modes of representation but also of the structures that h[o]ld those representations in place” (23).

From its very beginnings, there is an insistence on the Gothic novel’s mixture of medieval romance and realistic novel (although *The Castle of Otranto* markedly tends to favour the marvelous events of the former over the realism of the latter):

I have not written the book for the present age, which will endure nothing but cold common sense [...] this is the only one of my books with which I am myself pleased; I have given reins to my imagination till I became on fire with those visions and feelings which it excited. I have composed it in defiance of rules, of critics, and of philosophers. (Walpole xiv)

Contemporary reactions to Walpole's novel were as ambivalent as the novel itself, with reactions often clustered around the idea of what a novel should be for. If the function of literature is to represent a natural and rational social order and to educate readers in appropriate conduct and morality, then *The Castle of Otranto*, its tone playfully located somewhere between the serious and the ironic/parodic, offered too few clear moral handles on which contemporary reviewers could get a purchase. The Gothic novel is thus conceived of as an area of culture which can push at the boundaries of both forms: the realistic novel, with its insistence on the accurate representation of life and nature, is seen as restrictive to the free play of the imagination, while conversely medieval romance is seen as unnaturalistic and improbable. "In the novel," writes Robert Heilman,

it was the function of Gothic to open horizons beyond social patterns, rational decisions, and institutionally approved emotions; in a word, to enlarge the sense of reality and its impact on the human being. It became then a great liberator of feeling. It acknowledged the non-rational—in the world of things and events, occasionally in the realm of the transcendental, ultimately and most persistently in the depths of the human being. (131)

Heilman is writing about Charlotte Brontë, but it would seem appropriate that the power of the Gothic to transcend the “socially approved emotions” and restricted “sense of reality” of the years of Spain’s post Civil War period would appeal to those film makers who were interested in the idea of “liberating feelings” repressed under the dictatorship of General Franco. As a form capable of interrogating the status quo, then, the Gothic from its very outset acquires subversive value.

One reason for the continuing interest of the Gothic within western culture is precisely its malleability as a form. As Martin Fradley writes in his reviews of Catherine Spooner’s *Contemporary Gothic*:

An enduring truism about the cultural phenomenon known as the Gothic is that it simply will not die. From the Halloween theatricality of Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) and the lurid psychosexual malevolence of Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) to the backcombed gloom of 1980s British bands The Cure and Fields of the Nephilim [...] the amorphous and morbidly persistent fascinations of Gothic culture have unquestionable longevity.

Critics have differed widely in their definitions of what the Gothic is: amongst the more influential interpretations of what the Gothic represents, Baldick (1992) and Mighall (1999) define it according to its emphasis on the returning past; McGrath (1997) on its twin interest in decay and transgression; Punter (1980) focuses on its interest in exploring the aesthetics of fear, and Jackson (1981) highlights the ways in which it fuses reality and fantasy. All of these overlapping interpretations of the Gothic are to the fore in the films under discussion in this analysis.

The Gothic novel as a named genre only came into being during the 1920s and 1930s, but since then its very malleability and openness as a form has meant it has lent itself to a variety of historic-political agendas. The Gothic has been made to mean many things: in *The Gothic Body: Sexuality, Materialism and Degeneration at the Fin de Siècle*, Kelly Hurley says “Gothic in particular has been theorized as an instrumental genre, reemerging cyclically, at periods of cultural stress, to negotiate the anxieties that accompany social and epistemological transformations and crises” (1996: 5). Perhaps the key historicist reading of the Gothic remains David Punter’s influential study *The Literature of Terror* (1980). Punter sees the Gothic novel as concerning with injustice: ‘the society which generated and read Gothic fiction was one which was becoming aware of injustice in a variety of different areas’, when the bourgeoisie, having to all intents and purposes gained social power, began to try to understand the conditions and history of their own achievement of that power. In a period of industrialization and rapid social change, Punter believes, Gothic works reveal the fears and anxieties of the middle classes about their rise, returning insistently to the issues of ancestry, inheritance, and the transmission of property: ‘Under such circumstances, it is hardly surprising to find the emergence of a literature whose key motifs are paranoia, manipulation and injustice. Its central project, perhaps, becomes the understanding of the inexplicable, the taboo, and the irrational.

In their influential essay “Gothic Criticism,” Chris Baldick and Robert Mighall are skeptical about cultural commentators’ tying in of the Gothic to the historical: “... is it the ‘business’ of the Gothic fiction to ‘articulate’ or ‘negotiate’ anxieties?” they ask. Baldick and Mighall disapprovingly quote Stephen Arata’s belief, in *Fictions of loss in the Victorian fin de siècle*, that the Gothic novel, amongst other genres explored in his book, “are cast into narrative, into stories a culture tells itself in order to account for its

troubles and perhaps assuage its anxieties”. Baldick and Minghall point out the “tautological” nature of such appropriations of the Gothic into pre-established politico-historical agendas: “Horror fiction is used to confirm the critic’s own unproven point of departure, that this ‘oppressive’ culture was terrified by its ideological “Others”: and thus if the Gothic features the Other in demonic form, these demonic forms must reflect society’s fears about the Other.”

Baldick and Minghall disapprovingly quote Arata’s contention, when discussing Stoker’s *Dracula*, that given “widespread British fears over the degeneration of their ‘stock,’ especially in the cities, *Dracula*’s threat would inevitably have been perceived in racial terms”: “but”, Baldick and Minghall wonder, “inevitably perceived by whom, other than by the critic who is blessed with the insights of ‘modernity’ and a critical practice that enables the ‘latent’ script to emerge?”

The phrase that Baldick and Minghall are troubled by is “inevitably perceived”. They find it implausible, for example, that readers of *Dracula* who were contemporary with its publication would have perceived what Arata believes is the ideological intention behind it (an intention of which, of course, it is quite possible that Stoker himself, trapped within his times, and with other intentions for writing, was unaware). “Is it not the ‘business’ of the Gothic,” Baldick and Minghall wonder, ‘to be scary or sensational’”? They focus in particular on the fate of *Dracula* at the hands of Gothic Criticism, “*Dracula* standing as the eternal principle of subversion – Otherness itself, to be fashioned according to the desires and agendas of the critic”.

From psychoanalysis, such Gothic Criticism has taken a model of middle class respectability divided against itself, deeply riven by and in conflict with uncontrollable forces; from post-structuralism it has taken the model of ‘Violent

hierarchies', in which the dominant constructs its identity by the constant suppression of the subordinate; and from neo-Marxist theory it has taken a model of the 'political unconscious', the unsaid of a given historical period, which modern criticism is called upon to articulate, finding in the past 'subversive' validations of the desires and agendas of the present. (Baldick and Minghall 240)

One of my aims in undertaking this project is to suggest that there are conditions in which a public may indeed be primed to "inevitably perceive" the ideological intentions of a text, and that one of those conditions is when the "scary or sensational" genre of Gothic fiction is appropriated, and therefore foregrounded, by other texts. Juan Goytisolo's comment on the Spanish "habit of self-censorship and spiritual atrophy that has condemned Spaniards to practise the elusive art of reading between the lines" (44) suggests that under Franco, Spaniards in 1940 were indeed primed to perceive elements of *Rebecca* which neither Daphne du Maurier, nor Alfred Hitchcock, nor their non-Spanish audiences were able to see. Likewise, "reading between the lines" of films such as *El espíritu de la colmena* and *Cria Cuervos*, which were compelled by censorship to employ metaphor and symbol to make their point, was an inevitable part of the process of interpretation, particularly when film makers and audiences were sharing the same ideologically anti-Francoist position.

Rather than criticizing the Gothic, Spanish film makers after Franco have used the Gothic itself as an instrument of criticism, and Baldick and Minghall's canny summary of the wellsprings from which Gothic Criticism has drunk immediately suggest its applicability to Spain under Francoism. Rather than as a critique of the middle class, however, film makers such as Erice and Carlos Saura, and later del Toro

and arguably Alejandro Amenábar and Juan Antonio Bayona, employ the Gothic in their work as a way of criticizing the Francoist model of society - a society which was divided against itself; in which the dominant forces of Nationalism largely constructed its own identity by the suppression of its subordinate, whether Republican, Communist or Anarchist; and in which the “unsaid” of the post-war historical period – the long silences which hang so heavy over the Castilian plains of *El espíritu de la colmena* – sought articulation by artists keen to envision a model for an alternative Spain which might serve for the future whilst simultaneously critiquing the abuses of the past.

From the very outset, then, the Gothic novel is a subversive form which questions the ways in which “realistic” representations function ideologically in the minds of readers, concealing from them the fact that the realism they are reading is not in fact “real” at all. As Botting observes in his discussion of *The Castle of Otranto*, the Gothic questions the function of literature as representing a rational and natural social order and a guide to readers of proper modes of conduct: *Otranto* supplies only uncertainties in its tone and style, which wavers between seriousness and irony. Botting refers to this uncertainty of tone as “perhaps the novel’s cardinal sin and one that is visited in various forms on all its literary offspring” (53).

In their assimilation of Gothic elements – playful appropriations, but with a deadly earnest purpose – many Spanish films made and released after the death of Franco similarly question the functions of art as the vehicle for officially-sanctioned moral codes for behavior and appropriateness, representing a loosening of the rational and moral rules imposed by the Franco regime – “in defiance of rules, of critics, and of philosophers” (Walpole xiv). Indeed, they go one step further by incorporating the thematic of the function of art into the fibre of the works themselves: in *El espíritu de la colmena*, the ethical and moral complexities of Ana’s reaction to the (presumably

officially sanctioned) screening of *Frankenstein* go far beyond anything that the Francoist censor could have envisioned, while in Carlos Saura's *Ana y los lobos* (1972), dolls, apparently innocent playthings, become symbolic of torture and burial, in a highly coded reference by the director to the disappearance of thousands of Spaniards, many of them children, under Francoism; a theme later more tangentially explored in Juan Antonio Bayona's *El orfanato* (2007).

As we hope to make clear, this Gothic tension between realism and romance, the play between the natural and the supernatural, is as much a structuring force behind the Spanish films, dealing with the Civil War and its aftermath, under examination here, as it is in the Gothic novel itself. In *El espíritu de la colmena*, for example, the friction between the grim naturalism of life in Hoyuelos in 1940 – a grimness which is the direct consequence of a way of life imposed by the Franco regime in the aftermath of war – is contrasted with the free play of Ana's confused imagination as she struggles painfully towards understanding and a sense of her own identity. In Guillermo del Toro's *El laberinto del fauno* (2006), the imagination of Ofelia is presented as an escape from the controlling norms imposed by her stepfather, Captain Vidal. In del Toro's *El espinazo del Diablo* (2001), the fragile state of normality which Carmen and Dr Casares have managed to install in the orphanage is threatened and finally overcome by a chain of events set off by the spark of a young boy's imagination, and his willingness to follow through the implications of his imaginings to their final consequence. In Alejandro Amenábar's *The Others*, the precarious, disciplinarian "reality" established in the house by Grace, the mother – a reality based on Catholic notions of appropriateness - is under threat from the very beginning by the imaginings of her daughter, Anna – which turn out, in the end, to be far more than merely imaginings. In *El orfanato*, it is the boy Simón's relationship with his "imaginary friends" which puts paid to his mother's plans

to establish an orphanage. In each case, the oppressive and restrictive rules that have been, or are being, put into place by an establishment figure are challenged by the Walpolean “romance” of a young person’s imagination.

“The Gothic in the cinema in Spain,” Abigail Lee Six tells us, would constitute “a very significant area of research,” which would need to include not only the Gothic elements in Spanish classics, such as the use of the 1931 *Frankenstein* directed by James Whale in *El espíritu de la colmena* (1973, dir. Erice) [*The Spirit of the Beehive*], but also the thoroughgoing incursion into the Gothic by directors like Amenábar in *The Others* (2001) and the meshing of Gothic with fairy-tale and mythological elements in the recent *El laberinto del fauno* (2006, dir. del Toro) (150). Lee Six goes on to affirm, after providing several more examples (a list which has been amplified considerably in recent years, given the increasingly high international profile of Spanish horror films) that “Gothic cinema has been just as successful in Spain as elsewhere.”

It is the aim of this analysis to follow Lee Six’s lead by pointing up some of the ways in which the Anglo-Saxon Gothic tradition has been appropriated by recent Spanish cinema to the extent that it can be said to act as an interpretive framework for one of its predominant concerns, which is the issue of the Spanish Civil War and its aftermath. The use of Whale in *El espíritu*, in other words, perhaps the best-known example of intertextuality in Spanish film, is only the beginning.

For the purposes of this analysis, I prefer the term “appropriation” to that of “adaptation”. Julie Sanders, in *Adaptation and Appropriation* (2006), emphasizes that an “adaptation” will usually contain omissions, rewritings, and possibly even additions, but will still be recognized as the work of the original author. This viewpoint is similar to John Dryden’s classic definition of “paraphrase”, which he defines as “translation with latitude, where the author is kept in view by the translator, so as never to be lost,

but his words are not so strictly followed as his sense, and that too is admitted to be amplified, but not altered” (Venuti 38). The original point of enunciation still stands. Sanders’ definition of “appropriation” is similar to Dryden’s definition of imitation, where the translator can abandon the text of the original as s/he sees fit. The original point of enunciation may now have changed, and although certain characteristics of the original may remain, the new text will be more that of the adapter or rewriter, who has “appropriated” it as his or her own.

For the purposes of studies in adaptation and appropriation - and though admitting that the destabilization of the original text “does enable multiple and sometimes conflicting production of meaning”, which may be fruitful - Sanders is rightly skeptical of Foucault’s and Barthes’ radical dismissals of the idea that the author might have any creative import. “What is often inescapable,” she writes, “is the fact that a political or ethical commitment shapes a writer’s, director’s or performer’s decision to re-interpret a source text” (2).

By way of prelude to our discussion of the incorporation of Gothic motifs into Spanish film, it may be worth offering a brief historical survey of how the Gothic came to filter into Spanish cultural sensibilities, and of how it became an acceptable genre in terms of its absorption into “high” culture. As Terry Hale tells us, few Gothic novels were translated into Spanish prior to 1850, and those which were, were of the sentimental variety and were translated on the strength of the French editions which had preceded them. Mrs Radcliffe’s *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), for example, was not published in Spanish until 1832, and even then in an edition published in Paris: Hale surmises that “the more dangerous [Gothic] works tended to be published in Paris where, as a result of the political upheaval in Spain, there must have been a sufficiently large number of Spanish exiles to make the such ventures (sic) financially viable” (Hale

32). Spain therefore imports from northern Europe the notion that the Gothic is a subversive, smuggled-in genre.

At the time it was developing in England, France and Germany, there is limited recognition of the Gothic in Spain. Interestingly in relation to the thesis I shall be developing here, Curbet tells us that, around 1800, “the few instances of the Gothic that occur in Spain at the turn of the century are the work of specific, isolated individuals who operated in a state of extreme ambiguity towards their own culture”. (170) Curbet suggests that this lack of recognition derived from the persistence of censorship, which increased after Fernando VII’s restoration in 1814, and which continued until his death in 1833. Texts which, like the censored Spanish films of 150 years later, would have succumbed to the censor’s hand, were thus being translated in France and then smuggled into Spain across the border. Only later would the Gothic influence start to make itself felt in Spanish literature, the most significant reason for which was perhaps the fact that a middle-class reading public would not develop in Spain until well into the nineteenth century.

By the second part of the nineteenth century, the Gothic mode was familiar to Spanish writers, and, in the words of Lee Six, “the attractions and relevance of its themes to Spanish readers had reached the point where a writer aiming for commercial success could not afford to ignore them altogether” (14).¹ But the Gothic was not considered to be a genre with literary prestige. Derek Flitter discusses the work of Alberto Lista, the poet, educator and Catholic priest, as representative of Spanish literary trends at the time (around 1840). Lista discriminates carefully between acceptable and unacceptable forms of Romanticism, and writes of contemporary French drama as depicting a “grotesque morality in which man must either satisfy his desire

¹ As we shall see, *El espíritu de la colmena* started out life as a far more commercial project than the one we have – it was to be a commercially more appealing version of the Frankenstein myth.

whatever the human cost or else turn despairingly to suicide.” (Flitter 79) In Lista’s view, this drama was characterized by moral depravity, horrific and bloody spectacle, deliberate falsification of history and a number of other more dangerous anti-social tendencies” (Flitter 79). Martí-López offers further context as she shows “the dependence of [Spanish] literary markets on the importation of French and English cultural paradigms” as an indicator of “cultural prestige”: a work could not be considered truly literary, it seems, unless it had the culturally appropriate foreign forefathers (Martí-López 9). For the filmmakers who followed Víctor Erice in appropriating Gothic tropes into their work, these “foreign forefathers”, as we shall see, were of ideological use precisely because they offered an alternative starting point to the Francoist hegemony – a necessary outsider perspective which Francoism was doing its level best to suppress. “The Spanish novel”, Martí tells us, (9) “was envisioned and constructed through imitation” (9) – but not, it seems, of the Gothic. One collateral effect of this, as expressed by Lista above, seems to have been a sensitivity to literary hierarchies, to what was worthy of inclusion in the Spanish canon and what was not.

Lee Six states that, as late as the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, writers had to “tread a fine line between maintaining their status as quality authors by keeping obviously Gothic techniques at a safe distance” (16), while at the same time drawing upon them to keep readers interested. In *Gothic Terrors*, she explores the strategies employed by pre-1975 writers in order to camouflage their employment of Gothic motifs.

... more recent fiction has been able to embrace the Gothic more openly. As the concept of popular culture has gained in respectability as a valid field of research and as the whole notion of a clear divide between high and low culture has been

increasingly problematized, authors seem to have become less anxious to present themselves as removed from the mass culture in which the Gothic has traditionally been situated, particularly in Spain. (16)

With the breakdown of the traditional barriers between high and low culture, and as popular culture, in the late twentieth century, became a valid subject for academic enquiry, Spanish novelists shed their inhibitions regarding the Gothic and started to appropriate it quite openly in works such as *El testamento de Regina* (Adelaida Garcia Morales, 2001), *Diablos in Musica* (Espido Freire, 2001) and *Ella, Drácula* (Javier García Sánchez, 2006).

Spanish cinema in its history before 1975 was not nearly so sensitive when it came to appropriating the Gothic, to the extent that Spanish film cannot properly be understood without reference to it. José Ramón García Chillerón tells us that between 1897 and 1960 fantasy and horror films had little part to play in Spanish cinematic culture, on account of state repression and a consequent self-censorship employed by the film industry, by film makers and by film viewers. But such films did exist. The issue of *autocensura* is one to which we will return in discussing spectator reactions to the more recent works we will discuss. This is not the place to offer a full history of the Gothic in Spanish cinema, but it may be worth citing a few titles to indicate the historical significance of the gothic in this genre.

Perhaps the earliest uses of the Gothic in Spanish cinema are in Alberto Marro's *Los misterios de Barcelona* (1915) and *El beso de la muerta* (1916). But during the first twenty years of the Franco dictatorship, few films were produced which could be said to have links with the fantastic, and when they were, it was often with parodic intent. Two key works featuring Gothic elements were Edgar Neville's *La torre de los siete*

jobados (1944) and *Tenemos 18 años* (1959), the first film by Jesús Franco, who was later to leave his indelible mark on the Spanish horror genre and to whose *Count Dracula* we will later return.

The 1964 *Nuevas Normas para el Desarrollo de la Cinematografía*, which promoted the idea of co-productions between Spain and other countries, had a defining effect on the incorporation of genre cinema into Spain, but prior to 1964 there are only a handful of films in which the influence of the Gothic can be felt. These include Antonio de Lara's (Tono) *Canción de medianoche* (1947), which features an old house, a prophecy, and hauntings by the house's former inhabitants; *El cebo* (Ladislao Vajda, 1958), based on a Friedrich Dürrenmatt story, a pioneering serial killer movie with Gothic/expressionist overtones; and Franco's *The Awful Dr Orloff* (1961), which may be considered the first authentic Gothic horror film to have come out of Spain – a work in the “mad doctor” tradition which finds its prototype in Shelley's *Frankenstein*. Indeed, for a short while through the early 1960s, Jess Franco was almost single-handedly responsible for carrying the Gothic torch within Spain.

The early 1960s saw the direct introduction of the Gothic into Spanish cinema by way of adaptation, in two co-productions with Italy, Alberto De Martino's *The Blancheville Monster* (1963), an Italo-Spanish response to Roger Corman's treatments of Edgar Allan Poe, and Camillo Mastrocinque's *Crypt of the Vampire* (1964), a free adaptation of Sheridan Le Fanu's pioneering vampire tale, *Carmilla* (1872). José Antonio Nieves Conde's *Sound of Horror* (1965), the first Spanish monster movie, is about a group of war veterans, excavating caves in Greece, who awaken a (richly metaphorical) prehistoric monster buried there. Santos Alcocer's mediocre *Blind Man's Bluff* (1967) starred an ailing Boris Karloff, six years before his posthumous

reappearance in Víctor Erice's *El espíritu de la colmena*, as a sculptor unaware that the skeletons he has been using for frameworks are the remains of his evil wife's victims.

The period between 1968 and 1973, immediately prior to Erice's appropriation of Karloff's Monster, represented something of a golden age for Gothic horror in Spain, as directors such as Narciso Ibañez Serrador, Paul Naschy and Amando de Ossorio created their legacy. Between 1971 and 1973, more than 80 horror films were produced, an upsurge in production which reflected the parallel decline in both quality and production by the English Hammer production company during the same period. The plotlines of these films had to be based on universal archetypes, the actors had to be voiced over or foreign (and if they were Spanish were to appear under pseudonyms so as to pass as foreign), and aesthetically they abandoned trends previously used in Spanish cinema. That is to say, Spanish horror films should not seem to be Spanish and, of course, they could never be set on the Iberian Peninsula, since naturally the Iberian Peninsula was not a place for horror.

These were all, of course, all B-movies, commercially driven, without the "art house" pretensions of Erice. But in the early 1970s, a generation of intellectual, ideologically-driven cineastes emerged who chose to appropriate Gothic and horror motifs in ironical and often political ways, ways which are in fact the subject of this project, with writers and directors striving to find ways of making political and social commentary, even if they had to disguise them in popular forms and genres. Hopewell writes of how Vicente Aranda and Gonzalo Suárez "combined uncompromising political reflection, formal advances and censor-evading techniques best summarized as a resort to diffusion" (69-70). Commercially popular forms such as Gothic horror, with its ambiguities of narrative, tone and form, offered some directors a freedom they were unable to find elsewhere.

Vicente Aranda was among the first Spanish directors to self-consciously incorporate elements of the Gothic into his work, rather than simply perceiving the Hammer and European models of horror cinema as viable for imitation and commercial exploitation. In *La Novia Ensangrentada* (1972), a female vampire seeks revenge against all men with intentions that are obviously ideological, if not particularly subtle. Like *El cadaver exquisito* (1969) considered to be a “genre film for the cultural elite” (Stone 114), Aranda’s film bypassed the censors by virtue of its very incomprehensibility, with the director, by his own admission, sacrificing “conventional coherence for the cinematographic and phenomenological possibilities of each action” (Hopewell, 69). “Absurdity”, as Stone notes, “could be a potent weapon of subversion”.

The often horror-inflected work of Eloy de la Iglesia, for whose horror film *La semana del asesino/Cannibal Man* (1972) sick bags were cannily handed out to the audience by the distributors when it was shown at the Berlin Film Festival in 1972, has started to receive increasing respect and critical attention. De la Iglesia was also responsible for *Otra vuelta de tuerca* (1985), a direct adaptation of James *The Turn of the Screw* which reveals his appreciation of the more “respectable” side of Gothic.

Pedro Olea’s 1971 *El bosque del lobo*, given the historical circumstances, was similarly rich from a metaphorical perspective, which is made apparent from Olea’s telling us “In that film I analyzed the origins of the legendary, why a man could be judged as a monster” (Martí-Olivella 7): much of Olea’s work betrays a neo-romantic perspective which pits individual freedoms against the impersonal governing machine which seeks to stifle those freedoms. Again, the allegorical value of the work becomes clear if we set it against the historical context in which it was made, during the final years of the Franco regime. And since 1990, there has been something of a revival in the

Spanish horror film, a revival charted, for example, in the final chapter of Antonio Lázaro-Reboll and Andrew Willis' *Spanish Popular Cinema*.

This following analysis is structured in the following manner. The first chapter briefly explores ways that Gothic tropes from English literature have been employed in Spanish films, using as its basis the taxonomy of Gothic tropes that Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick supplies at the start of *The Coherence of Gothic Conventions* (1980), showing both how Gothic conventions can inform interpretations of Spanish film and how the makers of these films are drawing on Gothic conventions to inform their own work. We believe that each section of this opening chapter thus offers rich possibilities for further study.

In Chapter 2, we examine Alfred Hitchcock's *Rebecca* (1940), an adaptation of Daphne du Maurier's Gothic novel whose success has led it to form a part of the collective unconscious of a generation of Spaniards. Via the reception theories of Certeau and Hall, amongst others, I explore some of the reasons for the film's success at this precise instant – 1940 – immediately after Spain had seen itself riven apart by Civil War. The fact that the film deals explicitly with the return of ghosts, in the physically absent but actually ever present Rebecca herself, is also seen as crucial to the film's success, as Spanish audiences appropriated this particular example of Gothic popular culture to their own psychological and social needs.

Chapter 3 addresses *El espíritu de la colmena*, the film that first suggested the idea for this thesis in its depiction of the peculiar and striking relationship of a wide-eyed young girl in Castilla-La Mancha in 1973 and the monster from James Whale's *Frankenstein* (1931). Reflection on this incursion of the Gothic into Erice's film led us to discover that the film can be seen as a rich, multi-layered form of ironic Gothic, an idea which I explore in Chapter 1 and then develop in Chapter 3 with particular

reference to the various types of Gothic monster which are to be found in the film, and the metaphorical uses to which they are put. This follows a brief study of the origins of the film, which fascinatingly started out life as a genre piece.

Chapter 4 again focuses on ghosts, and is devoted to a careful examination of Alejandro Amenábar's Gothic ghost story *The Others* (2001) one of the most successful Spanish films ever made. Like *El orfanato*, the film studiously avoids any direct reference to the Spanish Civil War but, I believe, it can still be seen as a national allegory. I propose that Amenábar's film adopts the gothic narrative strategies of doubling and fragmentation – as exemplified in Shelley's *Frankenstein* and Stoker's *Dracula*, both profoundly metatextual - to the extent of actually becoming two separate films, and using the ideas of the Russian Formalists and the French narratologist Gérard Genette, I examine these two films, which I term *The Others A* and *The Others B*. The juxtapositions between the two combined films thus become a parable on the nature of ideology, and an apparently straightforward Hollywood film radically subverts itself from within, ending up as a postmodern questioning of the ideology of dominant narratives.

The idea of the Gothic ghost has been extended by such writers as Jacques Derrida, Nicolas Abraham, Maria Torok and Avery Gordon into the relatively new critical field of hauntology, which is the subject of Chapters 5 and 6. These writers draw heavily on Freud's notion of the Uncanny, a concept which has been of particular interest to students of the Gothic; while Abraham and Torok in particular are more interested in the psychoanalytical components of hauntology than in its application to culture, I propose that hauntology can be employed in a reading of Juan Antonio Bayona's Gothic ghost film *El orfanato* (2007) which opens the film up from being

merely a successful exercise in genre to being a national allegory about the institutional silences of Spain regarding its traumatic twentieth century past.

No thesis about the Gothic can afford to ignore the vampire myth, which is given its most popular and enduring embodiment in Stoker's novel. Chapter 7 is a study of Pere Portabella's experimental quasi-documentary *Vampyr-Cuadecuc* (1970), a trans-generic film little known outside specialist cinematic circles but a fascinating exercise in intertextuality as it was made on the set of Jess Franco's *Count Dracula* (1973), a B-movie of questionable cultural value which nonetheless stands as one of the more faithful filmic renderings of Stoker, and which is given an extra frisson since it stars the actor who is virtually synonymous with English-language cinematic Draculas, Christopher Lee. I interpret Portabella's film in line with his original intentions for it as a veiled but powerful criticism of Francoism, Francoist discourses, and the manipulations of Francoist ideologies: in other words, it represents a more artistically challenging counterpoint to *The Others*.

In Chapter 8, I look at Alejandro Amenábar's feature debut *Tesis*, superficially a straight genre film, but which this time seems to be composed more of references to a depthless postmodern present than to Spanish history. I examine the film as a Gothic allegory of the new Spain and a treatise in the way that Gothic violence has been reconverted into Gothic spectacle, whilst also showing that the "old", twentieth century Spain – the Spain of the Civil War and its aftermath, is still very much present as a ghost haunting Amenábar's film, in its insistence on the fundamental nature of violence and division to the Spanish experience.

It is thus our intention to show that the Gothic, as well as being a formal feature whose repetition in recent Spanish film is worthy of note, is also converted in these films into an interpretive instrument, when we take into account the fact that any film

made *in* a particular country is also a film *about* that country. The Gothic as used by Eríce, Amenábar, del Toro, Portabella and others – the list far from exhaustive – can be seen as a way of ideologically concealing the true significance of these films as allegories on the Spanish condition in the twentieth century (particularly in the case of *The Others* and *El orfanato*) but also as a way of allowing the unsaid, the repressed of Spanish culture – an unsaid largely given institutional weight by the Francoist state apparatus – to emerge. All of these films are in different ways exploring Spain’s troubled, ongoing relationship with its own past, and all of these films have chosen Gothic conventions as crystallised and established in the Anglo-Saxon gothic novel to do so. It is this remarkable coincidence of forms which I shall be exploring over the following pages.

I would like to express my profound gratitude to three people who have assisted me throughout the preparation and writing of this doctoral thesis. On an academic level I wish to thank my thesis advisor, Dr. Félix Martín Gutiérrez, whose expertise, suggestions and experience have been invaluable, particularly through the tricky final stages of the thesis. I should also like to thank Dra. Ana Antón Pacheco for encouraging me to undertake the thesis, and for being my first advisor on the project. On a professional level, I would like to thank Mr John Hopewell, the author of one of the definitive books on post-Franco Spanish cinema, for helping me, primarily a student of literature, to enter the world of Spanish film as a critic, and for his valuable insights into film during the close to twenty years I have known him. On a personal level, I wish to thank my wife, Isabel, for her constant encouragement and for helping me to find the time to write when time was short, and my children, Marco and Laura.

CHAPTER 1

GOTHIC TROPES IN SPANISH FILM

1.1. Kosofsky Sedgwick's Gothic Taxonomy

In *The Coherence of Gothic Conventions*, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick helpfully provides a list of the recurring themes of the Gothic novel:

Surely no other modern literary form as influential as the Gothic novel has also been as pervasively conventional. Once you know that a novel is of the Gothic kind [...] you can predict its contents with an unnerving certainty. You know the important features of its *mise en scene*: an oppressive ruin, a wild landscape, a Catholic or feudal society. You know about the trembling sensibility of the heroine and the impetuosity of her lover. You know about the tyrannical older man with the piercing glance who is going to imprison and try to rape or murder them. You know something about the novel's form: it is likely to be discontinuous and involuted, perhaps incorporating tales within tales, changes of narrators, and such framing devices as found manuscripts or interpolated histories. You also know that, whether with more or less relevance to the main plot, certain characteristic preoccupations will be aired. These include the priesthood and monastic institutions; sleeplike and deathlike states; subterranean spaces and live burial; doubles; the discovery of obscured family ties; affinities between narrative and pictorial art; possibilities of incest; unnatural echoes or silences, unintelligible writings, and the unspeakable; garrulous retainers; the

poisonous effects of guilt and shame; nocturnal landscapes and dreams; apparitions from the past; Faust- and Wandering Jew-like figures; civil insurrections and fires; the charnel house and the madhouse. The chief incidents of a Gothic novel never go far beyond illustrating these few themes, and even the most unified novel includes most of them... (Kosofsky Sedgwick 9)

The repeated “you know about” is testimony to the Gothic’s pervasiveness in our culture, and it is surprising to observe how many of Kosofsky Sedgwick’s Gothic elements resonate into the work of Spanish-language filmmakers dealing with the Civil War. If we interpret Erice’s *El espíritu de la colmena* as a kind of Ur-text, one which establishes many of the conventions which will later be followed by Spanish films dealing with the same subject, then we can hardly help but be struck by the number of points at which the tropes of Erice’s film overlap with the tropes of the Gothic as enumerated by Kosofsky Sedgwick. Several examples will suffice. The “oppressive ruin” can be read either as being the house where the family lives, or the shepherd’s hut where Ana discovers the *maqui*. The “wild landscape” is the plain of Castilla-La Mancha, where the girls play and where Ana encounters the *maqui*. Given the links between Francoism and the Catholic church, the idea of “a Catholic or feudal society” barely needs glossing, with the village of Hoyuelos presented by Erice as a place where time has been made to stand still by political and social forces of which the townspeople understand little, and Ana less. The “trembling sensibility of the heroine” may refer to Ana herself, or to her mother, while the “tyrannical older man with the piercing glance” is suggestive of Ana’s father, imprisoning his family almost despite himself, in circumstances which again he cannot control. The metatextual “framing devices” include the children’s paintings at the beginning and, most clearly, the viewing of James

Whale's *Frankenstein*. A "sleeplike and deathlike state" is suggestive of the trauma suffered by Ana during the latter part of the film, and indeed of the atmosphere which hangs over the town – and the film – as a whole, heavy with "unnatural... silences"; the poisonous effects of guilt and shame" are felt throughout. And so on.

The number and range of the points of contact between the literary Gothic and Erice's film – and by extension, other films of the post-Civil War - are indeed surprising, and suggest that the malleability of the Gothic as a form since *Otranto* has been a useful instrument, whether employed consciously or not, for those making culture about the Spanish Civil War and its aftermath. Over the following pages we shall list and comment on some of these points of contact between the Gothic and post-Franco Spanish film, hoping to broadly indicate how these themes have a particular aptness to the cultural climate under examination in the films we are analyzing.

The following taxonomy and discussion, necessarily brief and incomplete but nonetheless suggestive, of the commonly-agreed elements of Gothic film, inevitably consists of mutually interrelated terms. It is intended as a broad introductory framework, and includes connections which will be explored later in more detail with reference to specific films; it will also serve as a framework which will later inform our more specific readings.

1.2 The Ambiguity of Terror and Horror

Curbet's declaration that the early use of the Gothic in Spain was the work of "isolated individuals" no longer holds true. But what is true is that those filmmakers who do employ the Gothic can be said to operate "in a state of extreme ambiguity towards their own culture" (Horner 170). As we have noted, the smuggling of Gothic

elements into a film can introduce a note of ambiguity into a piece which may be designed to bypass the censor (by disguising political criticism as entertainment), whilst also reflecting the ambiguous attitude of the filmmaker towards the society which s/he is depicting. At some level, the principle of ambiguity is at work and is a key feature – at both structural and interpretive levels – in most of the books and films under discussion in these pages.

As we have seen, Walpole wrote of his attempt to blend the two kinds of romance, the ancient and the modern, with the former based on imagination and improbability. Gothic fiction has continued to move between the laws of conventional reality and supernatural possibilities as suggested by Walpole, and it is always aware of the possibilities that the boundary between them can be crossed, whether physically, psychologically, or both.

These transgressions occur on a continuum which ranges from the “terror gothic” on the one hand to the “horror gothic” on the other, a distinction first elaborated by Ann Radcliffe, following Edmund Burke, in “On the Supernatural in Poetry” (Clery & Miles 163-172). Terror, Radcliffe argues, is characterized by “obscurity” or indeterminacy in its treatment of potentially horrible events, and it is this ambiguity which generates the sublime. By contrast, horror “contracts, freezes and nearly annihilates” the reader's faculties with its unambiguous displays of atrocity. Devendra Varma, in *The Gothic Flame* (1966) is graphically eloquent about the distinction between the two modes:

The difference between Terror and Horror is the difference between awful apprehension and sickening realization: between the smell of death and stumbling against a corpse. (16)

The former, then, is a mode of suspense, while the latter is a mode of violence: in terms of Spanish film, it might be the difference between Alejandro Amenábar's *The Others*, to which we will return in detail later and which is relentlessly uncanny without showing a single drop of blood, and Eloy de la Iglesia's *Cannibal Man/La semana del asesino*. It is also true, though, as James M. Keech points out, that the distinction between Terror Gothic and Horror Gothic may be a difference of *intensity* than of *kind*: "the repulsive horrors of Lewis, Shelley, and Maturin magnify the apprehensions that characterize Gothic fear... Horror is not the finality of terror, but the magnification of it." (Keech, 130)

In a tremendously valuable essay, "Gothic Versus Romantic: A Reevaluation of the Gothic Novel", Robert Hume extends and develops the distinction into a conceptual area where we can further divine its connections with the Spanish films under discussion here.

Walpole and Mrs. Radcliffe maintain the proprieties of a strict distinction between good and evil, though in Manfred and Montoni they created villain-heroes whose force of character gives them a certain fearsome attractiveness, even within this moral context. But with the villain-heroes of horror-Gothic we enter the realm of the morally ambiguous. Ambrosio, Victor Frankenstein, and Melmoth are men of extraordinary capacity whom circumstance turns increasingly to evil purposes. They are not merely monsters, and only a bigoted reading makes them out as such ... To put the change from terror-Gothic to horror-Gothic in its simplest terms, the suspense of external circumstance is de-emphasized in favor of increasing psychological concern with moral ambiguity ... The terror novel prepared the way for a fiction which though more overtly

horrible is at the same time more serious and more profound. It is with Frankenstein and Melmoth the Wanderer that the Gothic novel comes fully into its own. (Hume 282)

It is this moral ambiguity, at the heart of the Gothic novel - its horror and its profundity - which Erice, Saura and others are drawing on. It is clear that an event like the Spanish Civil war creates both monsters and men, and makes monsters of men, depending on which side of the ideological divide one is standing. But rather as postcolonial writers must seek to avoid employing the same good/evil binary oppositions employed by those who were responsible for the repression about which they are writing, so it behoves Erice and Saura to find, as it were, a third ideological way and so avoid becoming easy targets for those who would accuse them of merely replicating the Manichean dualisms which they are criticizing – as Hume says, “the suspense of external circumstance is de-emphasized in favor of increasing psychological concern with moral ambiguity”.

Hogle identifies the audience for Gothic as itself riven with ambiguities, defining its readership as “mostly middle-class and Anglo, though more kinds of audiences (postcolonial, African-American, American Indian, and Latin American, for example) have been drawn in over the years” (3). In the terms of this project, we could easily add “Spanish” to this list. Hogle writes that “Gothic fictions since Walpole have most often been about [...] white people caught between the attractions or terrors of a past once controlled by overweening aristocrats or priests ... and forces of change that would reject such a past yet still remain held by aspects of it.” The parallels are obvious for an early 70s Spanish culture in the act of negotiating its relationship with Francoism, approaching that period of political ambiguity known as the *Transición*, which

established only the uneasiest of truces; and as we shall see later in our discussion of Bayona's *El orfanato*, they are still relevant today in terms of Spain's ongoing, troubled relationship with its Francoist past.

Thus a double conflict, both psychological and political, is being played out in both the central characters of Gothic and its public. On the one hand, the conflict forces and enables characters and readers alike to confront both what has been psychologically buried, which would include both their fears of the unconscious itself, and past desires which have been also been buried. It is worth recalling Freud's appropriation of the Gothic when working towards his concept of the unconscious, and as Mark Solms writes: "Freud's concept of the unconscious was itself a late product of the Gothic movement in Romantic art, which is not to deny its scientific validity. (Solms 83). Leslie Fiedler writes:

the guilt which underlies [much early, Romantic, and even American] gothic and motivates its plots is the guilt of the revolutionary haunted by the (paternal) past which he has been trying to destroy; and the fear that possesses the gothic and motivates its tone is the fear that in destroying the old ego-ideals of Church and State, the West has opened a way for the irruption of darkness: for [cultural and individual] insanity and the [consequent] disintegration of the self. (Fiedler 129)

But Gothic characters are likewise haunted by the social and historical unconscious, caught in the grip of predicaments that become increasingly frightening and potent as the characters (or readers) seek to conceal them from view. Frankenstein discovers that his creation, which later becomes his monster, forces him into

confrontation with the psychologically buried – his dreams of re-embracing his dead mother – but this confrontation is also mingled with various issues bubbling beneath the surface of his culture, amongst them the role of women, and science at the interface between alchemy and modern technologies (see work done by Paul O’Flinn, Chris Baldick, Anne K. Mellor, and others on these issues). Much work has been done recently on the ideological underpinnings of the Gothic, work which explains the continuing hold this most flexible of genres has over us in its ability to remain culturally significant.

1.3 The Ancestral Curse

A second key trope of the Gothic novel is that of the ancestral curse, a motif which indeed figures large as early as *The Castle of Otranto*. The theme or motif of the ancestral curse is clearly related to the motif of haunting, which in turn related to Freud’s definition of the Uncanny, the *Unheimlich*, as an experience from the past apprehended in the present – an effect on which much Gothic fiction depends for its effect.

The relevance of this theme of the burden of the past is clear for a Spanish culture even now grappling with how best to articulate its own relationship to its recent, Francoist past. In James’ *The Turn of the Screw*, for example, Miles and Flora are possessed by the evil spirits of Quint and Miss Jessel, with clear parallels between the symbolic possession of Ana in Saura’s *Cría Cuervos* (1973) by the ghost of her mother; at a more general level, Ana in *El espíritu de la colmena* becomes “possessed” by the demons of Spain’s recent history, as the neurosurgeon hero of Juan Carlos Medina’s *Insensibles* (2012) is forced to investigate the past in order to engage with the current

crisis of his lymphoma. Indeed, Francoism itself, with its construction of a mythically heroic Spanish past, can be read as corresponding to the Gothic's ancestral curse, from which characters living in the present, who are simultaneously attracted and repelled by the weight of this imposed past – caught between confrontation and looking away - must liberate themselves; the ghost of Santi revenging his death at the hands of Jacinto in *The Devil's Backbone* likewise metaphorically represents a form of ancestral curse, the forces of the past returning to inflict damage in the present. In *The Others*, Grace's own recent past is the nightmare from which she is trying, and for most of the film's duration failing, to awake, and her awakening from it is, to which we will return, is ideologically ambiguous at best.

1.4 Saying Grace: Anti-Catholicism

“It is not unlikely,” writes Walpole in the preface to the first edition of *The Castle of Otranto*, “that an artful priest might endeavour to turn their own arms on the innovators, and might avail himself of his abilities as an author to confirm the populace in their ancient errors and superstitions.” (Walpole 6) The anti-Catholic strain which for many is a defining feature of early Protestant Gothic is also an appropriate cultural resource for Spanish films about the Civil War. As Chris Baldick and Robert Mighall tell us:

Italy, Spain and southern France were chosen [as the location for Gothic fiction] because, to the Protestant mind, they were firmly associated with the twin yoke of feudal politics and popish deception, from which they had still to emancipate themselves. Put simply, Gothic novels were set in the Catholic south because,

‘without great violation of truth’, Gothic (that is, ‘medieval’) practices were believed still to prevail there. Such representations drew upon and reinforced the cultural identity of the middle-class Protestant readership, which could thrill to the scenes of political and religious persecution safe in the knowledge that they themselves had awoken from such historical nightmares. (Punter, 234)

Lewis’s *The Monk*, Radcliffe’s *The Italian*, and in “The Spaniard’s Tale” in Maturin’s *Melmoth the Wanderer* are among the better-known examples. In 1824, Maturin had published a pamphlet called “Five Sermons on the Errors of the Roman Catholic Church”, in which he posits that saints were mentally and morally deranged, egotistical, self-aggrandizing, and manipulative, with Maturin explicitly condemning the inhumanity of the Inquisition and the power-hungriness of Catholic dogma.² In the Gothic, Catholicism is associated with repression, corruption and persecution; all are enacted through the fragmenting lens of a superstition that makes it hard to objectively examine the authorities which make such abuses possible.

In the years of the Republic following 1931, there was mutual hostility between the Republic and Spain’s Catholic Church, and during the war the Church was, in general terms, an enthusiastic supporter of Franco: perhaps the key historical document in this respect is the *Carta Colectiva* from the bishops of Spain to the bishops of the world. The *Carta*, which was signed by 48 of the surviving bishops (though two refused to sign) and their replacements, was a justification of the Francoist ‘crusade’: it represented a vigorous defence of the military rebellion as the only way of saving the

² The Spanish Inquisition, of course, was reinstated with the accession of Fernando to the throne in 1814, and was not formally abolished until after his death in 1834. Its limited impact on the Spanish culture of the time is perhaps not hard to explain, considering the part that the Inquisition plays in such novels as *The Monk* and of course *Melmoth the Wanderer* – an explicitly anti-Catholic text, part of which is narrated by a prisoner of the Inquisition, and in which, in the words of Patrick O’Malley, “the Catholicity of Spain becomes the work of the Antichrist” (*Catholicism, sexual deviance, and Victorian Gothic culture*, 52.)

values of Catholic Spain. In the words of Michael Alpert, the *Carta* “was the major statement of the Spanish Church on the civil war and compromised it with the Franco regime for over thirty years” (Alpert 134).

This was not just a question of institutional hegemony; it was also a learned habit of mind. As Douglas Edward LaPrade writes in *Hemingway and Franco*:

Many of Franco’s bureaucrats thought of his regime as more of a holy crusade than a political movement. This attitude also explains why the censors based their judgments more on religious criteria than on political ones ... Religious criteria were imposed in the evaluation of all books. (LePrade, 100)

Although censorship clearly meant that writers and filmmakers were unable explicitly to criticize the Catholic Church, the appropriation of Gothic tropes permits an implicit criticism, by association, of the tyranny, injustice and superstition of the Church. The Victorian Gothicist George William Macarthur Reynolds concluded his undated horror story “The Tribunal of the Inquisition” with the idea that Catholic ecclesiastical courts could precede judgment with torture because they “fed upon the agonies of their victims”. In *The Others*, a film which includes far more discussion and debate of Catholic dogma than the average blockbuster, the fervently Catholic Grace (apparently not accidentally named) employs terrifying imagery - about which the children, less bound by the conventions of outmoded ways of thought, and as representatives of a “new” generation, are skeptical - to misguidedly attempt to terrify her children in an isolated, emphatically monastic household which she rules with an iron rod as though it were a dictatorship:

Grace: But Justus and Pastor, not afraid... rejoiced and showed themselves willing to die for Christ. When he saw this, the Roman governor was filled with rage... and ordered their heads to be cut off... What do you find so amusing?

Nicholas: Well...

Grace: Well, what?

Anne: Those children were really stupid.

Grace: Why?

Anne: They said they believed... in Jesus and then they got killed for it.

(Amenábar, *The Others*)

In the Gothic, then – with André Breton and the surrealist movement largely responsible for opening up that strain of Gothic criticism which believes that the Gothic novel is an anti-aristocratic, revolutionary and anti-Catholic form³, and Lewis's *The Monk* still perhaps the key text of virulent anti-Catholicism - Catholicism is commonly held to represent a superseded imperial, aristocratic regime, whether feudal, absolutist, or, in the case of *The Others*, simply Catholic; although it would not perhaps be far-fetched to explore the parallels between the tyranny of Grace over her household and the tyranny of the Franco regime over the similarly isolated space that was Spain following the Civil War. The figure of Grace shows Amenábar (whose next film, *Agora*, was a far more explicit attack on fundamentalist religion, and through much of whose work, particularly in *Mar adentro*, there runs a strain of fervent anti-Catholicism) subscribing to the notion of Catholicism as benighted, conservative, and reactionary, with the figure of Grace thereby acquiring fascist connotations, as the strong leader in

³ Breton, André. *Manifeste du Surréalisme*. Paris: France Loisirs . 1990.

an autarkic context whose power is under threat from the new generation. Amenábar says:

I was brought up in Catholicism. And religion gives you the answers. I think it's not good to think that we have the answers. That's what I'm trying to say through this story. For me, it's a journey for Grace and her children toward light, as a form of knowledge.⁴



A dichotomy is therefore set up between Grace's superstitiously Catholic interpretation of events and her daughter's more skeptical, inquiring and rational attitude - an opposition which is also set up, for example, in Sheridan le Fanu's Gothic story "Sir Robert Ardagh", where the same tale is effectively told twice, once from the point of view of Protestant 'rationality' and once from the superstitious, Catholic perspective, in a loose foreshadowing of Amenabar's own technique in *The Others*. As we shall see later, *The Others* is in fact two films, two narratives, woven into one – the film the audience sees on a first viewing, which is focalized through Grace's Catholic

⁴ From *Pop Matters* interview with Alejandro Amenábar, www.popmatters.com/pm/feature/amenabar-alejandro.

perspective, and the second, “retrospective” viewing, in which the “supernatural” events are explained from a rational, skeptical point of view – a point of view which is opened up to Grace and the audience by the insistent questioning of Anne.

1.5 Children

In terms of its relationship to the Gothic, childhood is perhaps best conceived of in terms of its ambivalence. As Dani Cavallaro writes in *Gothic Vision*:

Narratives of darkness tend to construct the child as an ambivalent creature. On the one hand, children are associated with innocence, simplicity and lack of worldly experience. In the Romantic ethos, in particular, they are often ideated as exemplary beings, unsullied by the murky deviousness of socialized existence. On the other hand, precisely because children are not yet fully encultured, they are frequently perceived as a threat to the fabric of adult society: they retain a connection with a primordial and inchoate world that does not respect rigid codes and fixed patterns of meaning. (Cavallero 136)

Children are fundamental to many of the films we are studying here. To take just five examples: Ana in *El espíritu de la colmena*, the gang of orphans in *The Devil's Backbone*, Anne in *The Others*, Simón in *The Orphanage*, and the children of *Insensibles* all find themselves living, as all children do, in a situation entirely not of their own making, and through whose enforced conventionalities they are better able to see than the adults who try, and often miserably fail, to control them.



To some extent, as we will suggest in our discussion of *Rebecca*, the function of children in Spanish films can be translated into terms of female gothic. And as focalizers for the stories which filmmakers such as Saura and Erice wanted to make about the Spanish Civil War and its aftermath – or, in more general terms, about the complex relationship between past and present in late 20th century Spain - they are clearly ideal. As Julia Briggs puts it:

The ghost story's 'explanations' do not operate to rationalise or demystify the supernatural events, but rather to set them inside a kind of imaginative logic in which the normal laws of cause and effect are suspended in favour of what Freud termed 'animistic' ways of thinking, in which thought itself is a mode of power, in which wishes or fears can actually benefit or do harm – ways of thinking that are characteristic of very small children who haven't yet defined their own limits, but which western educational traditions have taught us to reject or leave behind. The ghost story reverts to a world in which imagination can produce physical effects, a world that is potentially within our power to change by the energy of our thoughts, yet practically alarming. (Briggs 137)

The fragility of children therefore combines with their subversive imaginative power to create a unique perspective of one who is both participant and observer.

1.6 Claustrophobia



A further literary Gothic trope which is evident in the work of Spanish filmmakers dealing with the Civil War is that of imprisonment, or claustrophobia. This motif comes to the Gothic partly via folklore - the Greek myth, for example, of Persephone's imprisonment in the underworld – and from fairy tales such as the wife-and-master tale “Peter, Peter Pumpkin Eater”, or the Grimm Brothers' fairy tale of Rapunzel in the tower. Setting aside the literal use of this trope in, for example, Luis Piedrahita and Rodrigo Sopeña's *La habitación de Fermat* (2007), in which the power of rational thought is seen as an agent of escape from a threateningly stifling situation - there is a vivid sense of Gothic isolation about the town of Hoyuelos in *El espíritu*, set in the natural wastelands of Castilla-La Mancha, (and also within the *micropueblo* of the house in which the family lives), about the respectable-but-decadent Madrid townhouse in *Cría Cuervos*, about the orphanage in *El espinazo del diablo*, and about the forest encampment of Captain Vidal in del Toro's *El laberinto del fauno* - which

suggests that escape is not an option - or about the house into which the children in *Insensibles* are locked and later operated upon. There is no physical way out: significantly, it is easier to break out from Pan's Labyrinth via the imagination than it is from the encampment via a physical route.

The literal escape of the young protagonists in each case is therefore re-channelled, via the appropriation of Romantic concepts of the self, into liberation via the imagination. Such gothic isolation – perhaps given its purest expression in Poe's "Fall of the House of Usher", in which Madeleine Usher is buried alive but then awakens to find herself in her own tomb – can be seen in a range of Gothic texts: witness the fruitless attempts of Jonathan Harker to escape imprisonment in *Dracula*. As has been widely noted, the isolated location of *El espíritu* is easily seen as a metaphor of Francoism's self-willed isolation and autarky. As Fernando Savater notes in his 1983 essay "¡Qué hermosa es!":

The beehive in which Erice's spirit struggles is undoubtedly Spain. It would be as absurd to decontextualize the film by forgetting this fact—by degrading it to an intangible allegory—as it would be to subordinate all its meaning to the strange tangle of Spanish history. (Savater, 53–54)⁵

The psychological expression of entrapment, of course, is claustrophobia, the dread of being confined in a narrow space. Claustrophobia in the Gothic novel is not necessarily the result, however, of physical imprisonment, but may figure as the indicator of a feeling of helplessness or the mental awareness of being locked into a situation over which you have no control. The metaphorical consequences of this are

⁵ Savater's subtle comment on both the necessity and insufficiency of interpreting these films purely in terms of historical context underpins much of the thinking behind this thesis.

seen, for example, in Sophia Lee's *The Recess* (1783), in which the (fictional) twin daughters of Mary, Queen of Scots are born in an underground recess, so that they serve as a symbol of the recessive existence of women in the masculine world of court intrigue. Claustrophobic elements in Lee may thus reflect the circumscribed world of women, with females tend "trapped" by patriarchy and obliged to adopt social roles that offer no release for adventure, curiosity, or artistic expression. Such is also the case with the significantly anonymous wife of Perkins Gilman's quasi-Gothic "The Yellow Wallpaper" (1892), a key text of female gothic and of feminist literature. In Poe's "The Pit and the Pendulum", meanwhile, Poe fuses claustrophobia and anti-Catholic tropes by enquiring into the instincts and logic of a male captive of the Inquisition, as we have seen an institution represented in the Gothic as a grotesquely repressive regime.

1.7 The Explained Supernatural

It was Walter Scott who best expressed the Romantic dissatisfaction with the tendency of Anne Radcliffe to end her works by rationally by explaining in literal terms what have previously been read as possibly supernatural phenomena:

We disapprove of the mode introduced by Mrs. Radcliffe . . . of winding up their story with a solution by which all incidents appearing to partake of the mystic and the marvellous are resolved by very simple and natural causes . . . We can... allow of supernatural agency to a certain extent and for an appropriate purpose, but we never can consent that the effect of such agency shall be finally attributed to natural causes totally inadequate to its production. (Scott 370)

In *A Sicilian Romance*, Radcliffe's second novel, for example, the heroines, Julia and Emilia, fear that there is a ghost in a broken-down wing of their father's *palazzo*, but it later transpires that the ghostly sounds are in fact coming from their mother, imprisoned and entombed by their father. Radcliffe's refusal to allow the supernatural to be just that – the supernatural – are explained by her rationalist allegiances. There is a clear echo of this in Bayona's *The Orphanage*, where the heroine, again called Julia, learns that the knocking noises she has been hearing during the night have in fact been caused by her son, Simon, whom she has unknowingly imprisoned whilst searching for him.

Spanish films on the Civil War may follow Radcliffe in supplying a rational explanation for seemingly supernatural occurrences. We may consider, for example, the apparition of Frankenstein's monster to Ana towards the end of *El espíritu*, of her mother to Ana in *Cría Cuervos*, and of the faun and the other monsters to Ofelia in *El laberinto del fauno*. In each case, there is no serious doubt in the minds of viewers that the supernatural events taking place are simply that, and nothing else. In each case, the rationalist explanation is that of psychological trauma being suffered by the child, and it is the reason for, and nature of, this trauma which is in each case the principal interest of the film maker. The supernatural, then, figures in the post-Freudian psyche as an instance of psychological damage, an issue to which we will return in our later discussion of trauma theory.

1.8 Haunted Houses

The haunted house – under which umbrella we also include castles and monasteries, often found within an impressive, picturesque landscape - may, of course

be the single most influential convention of Gothic literature. As Walter Scott noted when assessing the the Gothic romance in relation to Ann Radcliffe, “the characters of the agents, like the figures in many landscapes, are entirely subordinate to the scenes in which they are placed” (Scott, *Complete Works*, 69): indeed, at the risk of seeming bathetic, one is tempted to see post-Civil War Spain itself as a vast haunted house, peopled by ghosts seeking to return.



The Gothic building as a symbol of fear and power is one of the constants of Gothic fiction and film, as far back as the oppressive castles of Walpole and Radcliffe and the exploration of the Inquisition and monasteries in the work of Lewis and Maturin. The famous opening of Radcliffe’s second novel, *A Sicilian Romance*, is exemplary as a description of both such a Gothic castle and its impact on a young mind:

On the northern shore of Sicily are still to be seen the magnificent remains of a castle, which formerly belonged to the noble house of Mazzini. It stands in the centre of a small bay, and upon a gentle acclivity, which, on one side, slopes towards the sea, and on the other rises into an eminence crowned by dark woods. The situation is admirably beautiful and picturesque, and the ruins have an air of

ancient grandeur, which, contrasted with the present solitude of the scene, impresses the traveller with awe and curiosity. During my travels abroad I visited this spot... As I walked over the loose fragments of stone, which lay scattered through the immense area of the fabrick, and surveyed the sublimity and grandeur of the ruins, I recurred, by a natural association of ideas, to the times when these walls stood proudly in their original splendour, when the halls were the scenes of hospitality and festive magnificence, and when they resounded with the voices of those whom death had long since swept from the earth... ‘Thus,’ said I, ‘shall the present generation--he who now sinks in misery--and he who now swims in pleasure, alike pass away and be forgotten.’ My heart swelled with the reflection; and, as I turned from the scene with a sigh, I fixed my eyes upon a friar, whose venerable figure, gently bending towards the earth, formed no uninteresting object in the picture. He observed my emotion; and, as my eye met his, shook his head and pointed to the ruin. ‘These walls,’ said he, ‘were once the seat of luxury and vice. They exhibited a singular instance of the retribution of Heaven, and were from that period forsaken, and abandoned to decay.’ His words excited my curiosity, and I enquired further concerning their meaning. (1)

The focus here is not on the identity of the unnamed traveler who is observing the scene, but on what the castle represents from his perspective: “awe and curiosity” are suggested by the landscape, which in turn provokes his imagination to move onto the idea of the transience of power.

At the time when the Gothic novel was beginning, as Botting (37) and other have noted, Gothic ruins were being used in the culture as a way of privileging classical

cultivation over the barbarities of the past. When ruins are Gothic rather than classical, they can reinforce the idea of enlightened progress, the ascendancy of reason, knowledge, and of course, Protestantism. In “On Monastic Institutions”, Anna Leticia Barbauld takes “a solitary walk amongst amongst the venerable ruins of an old abbey” and reflects that:

... like a good protestant, I began to indulge a secret triumph in the ruin of so many structures which I had always considered as the haunts of ignorance and superstition. (2)

In *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, the following description comes after the novel’s heroine, Emily St. Aubert, and her entourage have reached Udolpho by crossing a bleak and inhospitable landscape:

Towards the close of day, the road wound into a deep valley. Mountains, whose shaggy steeps appeared to be inaccessible, almost surrounded it. To the east, a vista opened, that exhibited the Apennines in their darkest horrors; and the long perspective of retiring summits, rising over each other, their ridges clothed with pines, exhibited a stronger image of grandeur, than any that Emily had yet seen. The sun had just sunk below the top of the mountains she was descending, whose long shadow stretched opening of the cliffs, touched with a yellow gleam the summits of the forest, that hung upon the opposite steeps, and streamed in full splendour upon the towers and battlements of a castle, that spread its extensive ramparts along the brow of a precipice above. The splendour of these illumined objects was heightened by the contrasted shade, which involved the valley below.

"There," said Montoni, speaking for the first time in several hours, "is Udolpho."

Emily gazed with melancholy awe upon the castle, which she understood to be Montoni's; for, though it was now lighted up by the setting sun, the gothic greatness of its features, and its mouldering dark grey stone, rendered it a gloomy and sublime object ... the light died away on its walls, leaving a melancholy purple tint, which spread deeper and deeper, as the thin vapour crept up the mountain, while the battlements above were still tipped with splendour. From those too, the rays soon faded, and the whole edifice was invested with the solemn duskiess of evening. Silent, lonely and sublime, it seemed to stand the sovereign of the scene, and to frown defiance on all, who dared to invade its solitary reign. As the twilight deepened, its features became more awful in obscurity, and Emily continued to gaze, till its clustering towers were alone seen, rising over the tops of the woods, beneath whose thick shade the carriages soon after began to ascend. (Radcliffe 226-7)

Udolpho, an embodiment of Gothic terror, seems to emerge from the landscape which surrounds it. Its effect on Emily is one of "melancholy awe": a sensation closely linked, of course, with the Romantic notion of the sublime.



I should like to explore this idea more deeply. The above image from *El espíritu de la colmena* represents a clear structuring contrast to the multiple, poorly-apprehended restrictions on the lives of the film's characters – an open space suggestive of freedom, and across which the girls gaily skip in search of adventure. But I should like to suggest that the scene also provides a clear echo of the Gothic encounter with the haunted castle, as the girls gaze down over the plains of La Mancha in the midst of which, a mere dot on the landscape, stands the shepherd's hut which the *maquis* has made his temporary home.

But the terms of the encounter have been artfully rearranged by Erice - to the extent, indeed, that the rearrangement borders on parody. Udolpho and the house of Mazzini are positioned above their respective observers, while in Erice's image the *maqui's* cabin (still perhaps invisible in the above images) lies far below Ana and Isabel: the landscape, though desolate, is made of rolling fields rather than the long perspective of "retiring summits". But the "long shadow" remains, as does the "yellow gleam" (here transmuted into the honey tones which dominate the film's palettes) and "the contrasted shade, which involved the valley below". The term "shade" concludes both descriptions: in this image from *El espíritu de la colmena*, as it is to Luis Cuadrado's cinematography generally, the shade is fundamental to the effect.



When the girls finally reach the “haunted castle”, it is a far cry from the splendid terrors of Udolpho or Dracula’s castle: it is nothing but a ruined, abandoned shepherd’s hut, and in both its dimensions and suggestiveness it is rather less impressive than even the townhouse in which the family lives. The suggestion is that even the magnificent, overpowering tropes of the Gothic have, in the years following the Civil War and in the conditions of imaginative poverty to which Spain has been reduced (conditions to which Ana, as a six year-old child, is naturally resistant) have been reduced in size and scale: in a literary manoeuvre redolent of Eliot’s commentary on the downscaling of the imaginative world in *The Waste Land*, Udolpho has been reconfigured for the modern era as an abandoned shepherd’s hut.

But what is important, of course, is not the paltry dimensions of the hut but the effect it – and what it may be concealing – has on Ana’s newly-fired imagination. As far as Ana is concerned, the hut *is* a haunted house, and Cuadrado’s camerawork has shown the audience, in the way the girls are filmed running towards the hut across the plain, the full extent of the sisters’ fear and awe.

The shepherd’s hut, then, can be seen as an echo of the Gothic castle, a remote site, positioned far from those areas of society where conventional rules hold sway, and in which violence is free to flourish. (It is presumably in this ruin, which he has sought out as refuge from the Nationalist forces, that the *maqui* meets his death.) The gothic castle, of course, is the site of a mystery, often permeated with evil, that should not get out: the *maqui*, by hiding away, has symbolically and ironically cast himself in the role of the monster that must not escape, and in doing so, from the perspective of the innocent Ana, he actually becomes the evil monster, defined by the castle in which has

chosen to live. The hut, therefore, represents the alien space into which the young heroine strays, not unlike Emily into Udolpho.

The faded palatial home of the family in *El Espiritu* likewise has its antecedents in Gothic fiction. During the romantic period of the Gothic, during the nineteenth century, its excessive effects started to be refracted through the portrayals of the domestic which were so crucial to the effects of realism. Victorian fiction privileges the family, and by extension the home, as the final refuges against that encroaching sense of loss perhaps most famously expressed in Matthew Arnold's "Dover Beach". But the home can be a jail as well as a refuge, a place of terror as well as a place of escape, as we see, for example, in the highly gothicized *Jane Eyre* and in Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*, in which the house is ruled over by that archetypal combination of Romantic outcast and Gothic villain, Heathcliff, and in which the boundary-breaking passions of Cathy represent a subversive (and exciting) challenge to the period's emphasis on duty, passivity and domestic decorum.



The house in *El Espiritu* similarly becomes a site of struggle in which the securities of domestic life have been invaded by untamed and unwelcome forces, a situation which seems to foreshadow the impact of the Spanish Civil War on Spanish

domestic life: Francoism, via such institutions as the *Sección Femenina*, sought to create a Spain in which quasi-Victorian ideals of womanhood and the domestic predominate, but into which “unwelcome” forces continually intrude, a situation reflected in many Spanish films about the period. One example is Benito Zambrano’s *The Sleeping Voice* (based on Dulce Chacón’s best-selling novel, in which the same family home is shared by two brothers from opposing sides of the political spectrum. As Homi Bhabha writes:

The recesses of the domestic space become sites for history’s most intricate invasions. In that displacement, the borders between home and world become confused; and, uncannily, the private and the public become part of each other, forcing upon us a vision that is as divided as it is disorientating. (Bhabha, 445)

Wilkie Collins’ *The Woman in White* can likewise be seen as a post-Radcliffean work in its use of sensational effects and in particular in its evocation of terror, mystery and reader expectation; its famously complex plot representing a 19th century reconfiguration of Radcliffe, tailored to meet the new demands of the nineteenth century. In “The Nation”, Henry James wrote that Collins “introduced into fiction those most mysterious of mysteries, the mysteries which are at our own door... Instead of the terrors of “Udolpho”, we were treated to the terrors of the cheerful country house and the busy London lodgings. And there is no doubt that these were infinitely the more terrible”. (James 122) Such strategies are thus being reconfigured by Spanish film directors in pursuit of oblique social comment.

1.9 Gothic Romanticism

As has often been pointed out, for example, by Botting (10), the high romanticism of the second half of the 1700s and the early 1800s developed into the literary expression of imagination, mysticism, individuality, the love of nature, and freedom from the constrictions of neoclassicism. These same elements, as well as offering affirmations of the human spirit, also formed the foundations of Gothicism. Romantic fiction flourishes with a revived focus on the emotions and on the human response to solitude and to encounters with nature, with the emphasis on subjectivity and the individual allowing the Gothic, as a subcategory of the Romantic, to question and oppose traditional values, its plots set within ruined castles and monasteries, the remains of lapsed institutions from past eras. Gothic romanticism, as distinguished from the neoclassical Gothic, stresses the pain, barbarity, torment, and murder suffered by human victims, and concomitantly explores the harm that authoritarianism inflicts on society. The cultural clashes taking place across Europe during the Romantic period were being played out on the pages of the novels it was producing. The *ancien régime* was confronted by revolution, and constitutionalism with reaction.

Gothic fiction, which represented one strand of romanticism, reflected this binary conflict. On the spiritual level, the supernatural fought the natural (as we have seen with the concept of Anne Radcliffe's "explained supernatural"), and mysticism challenged materialism, or religion by science. On the socio-political and individual levels, tyrants would rage against victims, with victimhood leading to vengeance; imprisonment would oppose freedom, while hierarchy tried to take control of individuality; authoritarianism and permissiveness were to be found in conflict, and, at the sexual level, repression would fight desire. These conflicts of Romantic Gothicism,

of course, were the very ones being played out in post-Civil War Spain, and which are then ideologically reinscribed in the films under discussion here.

As Ronald Paulson tells us:

The Gothic did in fact serve as a metaphor with which some contemporaries in England tried to come to terms with what was happening across the Channel in the 1790s ... if one way of dealing with the Revolution (in its earliest stages) was to see the castle-prison through the eyes of a sensitive young girl who responds to terror in the form of forced marriage and stolen property, another was to see it through the case history of her threatening oppressor, Horace Walpole's *Manfred* or M.G. Lewis' *Ambrosio*... (532-53)

Paulson cites Lewis' *The Monk* (1795) as an example of the explosion of the repressed monk imprisoned from earliest childhood in a monastery, who wreaks havoc with his "self- liberation (assisted by demonic forces) on his own family who were responsible [for] his being immured". The son, in other words, wreaks havoc on the father, and revenge against tyranny inevitably becomes a form of tyranny itself - a metaphor which can easily be mapped, at a less intense level, onto the psychological issues of Ana with her Francoist father in *Cría Cuervos*, to which we will return, and onto the ghost narratives which form part of so many Spanish film about the Civil War.

1.10 Secrets

As Robert J.C. Young states in "Freud's Secret: The Interpretation of Dreams was a Gothic Novel", "The gothic novel was the first kind of novel to construct its

narrative around the revelation of secrets” (Marcus 206). Spain under Franco was a place of secrets. As Michael Richards tells us in *A Time of Silence*:

The idea of purification and a reality of closed space pervaded the regime’s highly moral construction of the reordered nation and informed triumphalist economic relations. These two ideas signified a repressive silencing both of alternative concepts of the nation and of a humane vision of political economy.

(1)

With this repression and this silencing came secrecy: the secrecy of that which has been repressed by state control, the secrecy of what lies beyond the borders of the closed space mentioned by Richards, the secrecy of those things which cannot be uttered, and of course the secret truths about what was actually happening in terms of the disappearance of thousands of people during the post-Civil War period. To a great degree, Spanish society took the decision to keep these secrets buried with its *pacto de olvido* (“pact of forgetting”, also sometimes referred to as the *pacto de silencio*) which was essential to the success of the transition, but which also contained within it implicit assumption that Spain still lacked the political maturity to openly address the events of the previous forty years. The only piece of legislation underpinning this ‘pact’ was the 1977 Amnesty Law, which granted a general and reciprocal amnesty which made Spain, in the words of Ben-Ze’ev, Ginio, and Winter:

...the first twentieth-century Spanish regime not to call to account those associated with the preceding regime ... [the law] provided the legislative means that allowed the country ‘to pretend that it had forgotten the past’. (49)

“The only way that people have of pretending that they have forgotten,” the authors continue, “is to keep quiet” – or, in other words, to keep secrets. These secrets from the past are the same ones that explode into, and transform the present.

1.11 The Sublime

Samuel Monk’s study *The Sublime: A Study of Critical Theories in XVIII-Century England* (1935) is widely held to be the seminal account of the sublime in literature. In it, Monk argues that the word “sublime” became, in the 18th century, a repository for all the emotional and literary effects which could not be contained within the Enlightenment’s neo-classical virtues of restraint and balance, rationality and order, and indeed represented a threat to these virtues. The experience of the sublime therefore becomes a potentially subversive force against the controlling influences of authority.

Burke’s *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757), is of course fundamental to ongoing debates about the nature and value of the sublime. For Burke, the sublime is located in terms of fear and a sense of threat to the self-preservation of the subject:

The passion caused by the great and sublime in nature . . . is Astonishment; and astonishment is that state of the soul, in which all its motions are suspended, with some degree of horror. In this case the mind is so entirely filled with its object, that it cannot entertain any other... To make anything very terrible, obscurity seems in general to be necessary, for a great deal of apprehension

vanishes when we are able to see the full extent of any danger. Night adds to our dread of ghosts... (Burke 53)

When we are watching the iconic image of Ana's eyes watching *Frankenstein*, we are watching the physiological impact of the sublime (as emphasized by Burke) on a small and fragile human being: she is in the grip of astonishment caused by her first contact with the monstrous as embodied in the form of the monster. The obscure place which creates the appropriate conditions for the sublime experience to occur is of course the town-hall cinema in which the screening takes place. (Darkness is fundamental to the effect of SB: witness the bedtime scenes in which Ana's imagination is fired by Isabel's mysterious, taunting answers to her innocent, troubled questions and the darkness of her final, almost fatal, meeting with the monster after she leaves the relative comfort of her home for her nocturnal walk. As a small child, Ana is not equipped with any of the distancing devices which may make the sublime experience, in Burke's terms, a one of "delightful horror". Burke insists on framing and distancing the sublime moment and his essay has therefore been fundamental to the notion – key to us here – that suspense, uncertainty and ambiguity must attend Gothic presentations of terror. Anna Letitia Barbauld and John Aikin later go on to proclaim that pleasure, and not merely horror, can be derived from the sublime:

When children, therefore, listen with pale and mute attention to the frightful stories of apparitions, we are not, perhaps, to imagine that they are in a state of enjoyment, any more than the poor bird which is dropping into the mouth of the rattlesnake--they are chained by the ears, and fascinated by curiosity ... This is the pleasure constantly attached to the excitement of surprise from new and

wonderful objects. A strange and unexpected event awakens the mind, and keeps it on the stretch; and where the agency of invisible beings is introduced, of "forms unseen, and mightier far than we," our imagination, darting forth, explores with rapture the new world which is laid open to its view, and rejoices in the expansion of its powers. Passion and fancy cooperating elevate the soul to its highest pitch; and the pain of terror is lost in amazement. (Aikin 32)

Barbauld and Aikin's concept of the sublime, therefore, is alert to its power not merely to provoke terror, but also to awaken the imagination. Kant picks up the idea with his belief in what he terms the "mathematic sublime" - that our inability to grasp the sheer extent of a sublime event, such as the 1755 earthquake and tsunami in Lisbon, by which he was fascinated, demonstrates the insufficiency of our sensibility and imagination in the face of such catastrophe. But this feeling of inadequacy is then overcome by reason, which affirms the existence of infinity, this in turn leading to a sense of human moral vocation. The sublime allows us, in other words, to access the infinite capacities of the mind's imaginative powers: "The point of excess for the imagination is like an abyss in which it fears to lose itself". (Weiskel 107)

In general terms, the Gothic displays a dialectic between the Burkean and Kantean models of the sublime – the former locating the sublime in terms of fear and danger to the subject, the latter celebrating the sublime as a manifestation of the power of the mind to apprehend the infinite. We find a good example of the endangering Burkean sublime in *Dracula*:

My own heart grew cold as ice, and I could hear the gasp of Arthur, as we recognized the features of Lucy Westenra. Lucy Westenra, but yet how

changed. The sweetness was turned to adamantine, heartless cruelty, and the purity to voluptuous wantonness... Van Helsing stepped out, and obedient to his gesture, we all advanced too. The four of us ranged in a line before the door of the tomb. Van Helsing raised his lantern and drew the slide. By the concentrated light that fell on Lucy's face we could see that the lips were crimson with fresh blood, and that the stream had trickled over her chin and stained the purity of her lawn death-robe. (Stoker 253)

In *Frankenstein*, when the monster interrupts Victor's Alpine reveries, we are witnessing the usurpation of the Kantian sublime by that of the Burkean sublime. In *The Spirit of the Beehive*, Ana's initial reaction to the monster is that of Burkean fear, as revealed in the iconic shot of her face while watching the film:



But her journey through the film, and her psychological and emotional tackling of various monsters – her father, the *maqui*, her sister, and finally the monster itself – will lead her to the liberation of that final *Soy Ana* and the achievement of the Kantian sublime, her mind having risen above its physical limitations and having overcome the initiation fear-driven check to its vital forces. Her imagination, in other words, has overcome her circumstances.

*

The above chapter may be seen as an introductory study of just some of the formal ways in which Gothic tropes have been appropriated, either literally or ironically, and either consciously or subconsciously, into the films under analysis in this doctoral thesis. Of necessity it is a highly selective taxonomy, and one which could be fruitfully extended. In the following chapters, we shall focus more closely on one gothic trope which has been notable by its absence in the foregoing discussion – that of ghosts and haunting.

CHAPTER 2

WAYS OF VIEWING: SPAIN AND “REBECCA”

“Do you think the dead come back and watch the living?” (Mrs Danvers to Mr de Winter, “Rebecca”)

2.1 Francoism and Repression

“Ghost stories,” Julia Briggs tells us, “have multiple meanings, but one constant element is the challenge they offer to the rational order and the observed laws of nature, though they may do so in a variety of ways, reintroducing what is perceived as fearful, alien, excluded or dangerously marginal.” (176) The source of terror, she continues, may come from “such characteristically human ambitions and activities as war, oppression, persecution, which the twentieth century has made peculiarly its own.” (176)

The observation seems particularly apt when discussing the use of the Gothic ghost in recent Spanish film. 2009 marked the 70th anniversary of the end of the Spanish Civil War (1936-39) and the beginning of General Franco’s military dictatorship (1939-75). It might be supposed that these events would be dead issues in contemporary Spain, which has become a major economic power in the years following Franco’s death, but the reality is that the past continues to resonate strongly throughout Spain. As Federico García Lorca wrote (*Theory and Play of the Duende*):

In every other country death is an ending. It appears and they close the curtains. Not in Spain. In Spain they open them. Many Spaniards live indoors till the day they die and are carried into the sun. A dead man in Spain is more alive when dead than anywhere else on earth: his profile cuts like the edge of a barber's razor. (55)

Aside from being an uncanny prefiguring of his own continuing cultural relevance to Spain following his murder in 1936, a relevance configured largely in terms of the political controversy that his name continues to engender, Lorca's comment offers a useful point of departure for a discussion of the continuing significance of ghosts in Spanish film, and particularly of the significance of those Civil War ghosts which continue to haunt the civic and cultural life of the country. In this discussion of the appropriation of ghost motifs in recent Spanish cinema, it is important to briefly establish the extent and implications of Francoist repression.

Following his victory over the Republic in April 1939, Franco imposed a military dictatorship in which the Catholic Church and the government's pro-fascist political party supervised and controlled all elements of social and political life. Morality, ideology, education and customs fell under Francoist supervision. Anyone who had opposed Franco in the Civil War could expect to be jailed or perhaps to be shot. Society was neatly divided into "winners" and "losers". Michael Richards' *A Time of Silence* tells us that in the post-war years, Franco demonized the 'worthless', 'foreign' and 'disease-ridden' Other, which included Republicans, democrats, liberals, the working classes and masons: "In 1937 Franco made clear . . . that victory for him meant the annihilation of large numbers of Republicans and the total humiliation and terrorisation of the surviving population" (Richards 35). The manipulation,

incarceration, torture, and liquidation of the vanquished were not only justified, but deemed necessary.

Richards illustrates how Franco's system of repression was based on its propagation of historical myths and symbols: the "psycho-pathological language" (48) used from the very beginning of Franco's self-appointed military "crusade" was useful in brainwashing the dictator's supporters into believing that their fellow citizens were inferior, the subaltern "Other",⁶ in a strategy which had strong links with those of colonialism. The systematic liquidation of Franco's enemies was a "purification" of Spain, a rebirth of those fanatical Christian values that had previously led to the establishment of the Inquisition by the Catholic kings in the late fifteenth century with the aim of destroying the hybrid culture in which Arabs, Christians, and Jews had lived and worked together.

Much of the repression against the Republican losers was psychological in nature and, according to Miguel Ángel Ruiz Carnicer, converted Franco's regime into "un estado terrorista" (Ruiz Carnicer 39). The use of terror as an oppressive and repressive weapon went beyond repression with hunger, imprisonment and murder, but represented a strategy to literally change the way the Republican losers of the war thought and felt: in the words of the fascist Spanish author Ernesto Giménez Caballero in *España y Franco*, "los rojos de dentro y de fuera [should] dejen de ser rojos y tornen a ser nacionales y a creer lo que se debe creer y a sentir lo que se debe sentir" (Giménez Caballero 21).

In such an atmosphere of cultural and psychological repression, the cinema became a respite for the general public – warm in the winter, cool in the summer, and cheap in a country which, in terms of cinemas per head of population, came second only

⁶ In a very real sense, Franco colonized Spain. The similarities between the cultural reaction of Spain and that of other post-colonial nations would be fruitful area for further study.

to the United States in 1947, as stated in an article by Henry Buckley in *ABC* (Bosch and del Rincón, 6). Following his victory, Franco took control of the cinema industry by means of censorship (carried out initially by the Junta Superior de Censura, and later by a censorship board composed of members of the Catholic Church) and an incentivized system for film production.

For Spanish films, censorship began at script level and continued in post-production with the option to cut scenes and control over publicity materials (Gubern, *La censura* 81). Scenes which would be typically cut were those including any mention of the vanquished Republicans and their goals, communism, freemasonry, strikes, class struggles, sexual content, and democracy (Bosch). Imported films had to be redubbed in Spanish (Gubern 81). And Spanish audiences, much as they do now, flocked hungrily to the release of Hollywood films in search of escape.

2.2 Theories of Media Reception: Gramsci, Fiske, Certeau

Loosely speaking, Franco was an adherent of the early Hypothermic Needle Model of media reception developed in the 1920s, at a time when radio and cinema were still in their infancy.⁷ This states that audiences passively receive information received via a media text, with no attempt on their part to process or challenge what is being received: information is received like a hypothermic needle injection directly to the brain. It sees the mass media as a simple propaganda vehicle and audiences as passive and heterogeneous. Meanwhile apparatus theory, as proposed by such film theorists as Christian Metz, Jean-Louis Baudry and Laura Mulvey, tells us that cinema, as an apparatus or technology, has an ideological effect on the spectator which either

⁷ See Berger and Croteau & Hoynes. For similarly metaphorical reasons, it is also known as the “magic bullet” theory.

undermines or pushes ideas into the individual's thought processes. Franco, himself a sometime scriptwriter (*Raza*, 1942) and film reviewer (for *ABC* newspaper) also understood this idea, using cinema as an instrument for forwarding his political agenda; commentators on film such as Virginia Higginbotham have examined Franco's use of the cinema and unsurprisingly found it largely propagandistic, working as a way to gain approval of his dictatorship. Using the aesthetics and visual strategies of fascist propaganda, Franco employed mass media overkill to exert coercive power over the Spaniards.

Gramsci's concept of hegemony supplies us with a further analytical framework for understanding the social consent of unequal class relations to dominant ideology: an ideology which is primarily that of a primarily white, middle-class, male social structure. Via the mass media, Franco used specific articulation of hegemonic power to undermine the subaltern groups and cultures by representing a single, homogenous national identity - the identity of a Fascist, conservative, heterosexual, Catholic, and "essentially" Spanish national identity. This leads to a suffocation of (for example) homosexual, anti-fascist, liberal identities, excluding many identities by its positioning of particular types of people as marginal, and hence as meriting little to no recognition.

Franco had almost unlimited power over the film industry, but, as Helen Graham reminds us, "the regime's intent regarding such cultural forms is not ... the same thing as ascertaining their impact on the constituencies of Spaniards consuming them" (238). In other words, intention cannot control reception. Franco's regime used Hollywood cinema as a way of inculcating its own values, but the regime's aim of placating the masses with 'mindless entertainment' was not necessarily the same as the actual effect these films had on the audience. As we shall see, *El espíritu de la colmena*, in which Ana's reactions to *Frankenstein* are far from being those which the *Generalísimo* would

have wished, slips neatly into the gap between the regime's intentions and its public's reception of it.

In her 2000 article "History and Hauntology; or, What Does One Do with the Ghosts of the Past? Reflections on Spanish Film and Fiction of the Post-Franco Period," Jo Labanyi analyzes how 1970s Spanish filmmakers brought to the screen the oft-cited ghosts of the Spanish past, namely those Republican dead who were not afforded remembrance by the regime, especially in *El espíritu de la colmena*, to which we will turn in more detail in the next chapter. The film presents the life of six year-old Ana in Castilla-La Mancha in 1940. In what is perhaps the key scene of the film, and probably also its most iconic, Ana attends a screening of James Whale's 1931 film *Frankenstein*, going on to imagine that the monster actually exists. Late in the film, she even imagines a personal encounter with it – consequences of a viewing of the film which Franco's censors would surely never have envisaged. Erice, in other words, is presenting Ana as a consumer of a foreign film who interprets the film according to her own lived reality. Erice's film is thus an implicit – and, in the context, heartening - comment on the partial freedom of the subject to slip free of ideological conditioning.

John Fiske uses the term "excorporation" (iii) to describe "the process by which subordinates make their own culture out of the resources and commodities provided by the dominant system. It is "the process by which the subordinates make their own culture out of the resources and commodities provided by the dominant system, and this is central to popular culture, for in an industrial society the only resources from which the subordinate can make their own subcultures are those provided by the system that subordinates them" (13). Although critics such as Deborah Cook and Ray Browne have argued against Fiske in that he locates political resistance in what may be "unconscious, unfocused, and apolitical activities" (Cook, "Ruses de Guerre" 229), this is what Ana is

doing in *El espíritu de la colmena*: albeit in an unconscious, unfocused and apolitical manner (radical Marxism would of course argue that the unconscious and the apolitical are themselves governed by the material conditions under which they exist). But although Ana herself might not be employing the “resources and commodities provided by the dominant system” (Fiske 15) (in this case the film of *Frankenstein*) in any conscious way, the film’s director, Erice, certainly is, recognizing that the State-sanctioned “escape” into the cinema which represented crumbs of solace thrown to an oppressed society had the potential to become an agent of political resistance. Fiske tells us that “the study of popular culture requires the study not only of the cultural commodities out of which it is made, but also of the ways that people use them. The latter are far more creative and varied than the former (13).

Francoist censorship effectively stifled means of open expression for the oppressed, with the result that the oppressed were forced to appropriate seemingly innocent forms of popular culture in order to have some form of expression that both spoke to their “immediate wound[s]” whilst also avoiding the radar of the dictatorship: it is my contention here that Hitchcock’s *Rebecca* falls into that category, as suggested by its popularity.

Further credence is lent to these ideas by the theories of Certeau, as somewhat elliptically given in *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Expressed simply, Certeau, following by Foucault’s dictum in *Discipline and Punish* that power is inevitably accompanied by resistance, tells us that even the most oppressive and controlling of cultures (for our purposes, Francoism) cannot stamp out the subversive agency of the “peasant”, a subversive agency which is expressed, among other channels, through mythic stories, proverbs, and verbal trickery. Central to Certeau’s thinking is the distinction between “strategy” and “tactics”: “I call a “tactic,” ... a calculus which

cannot count on a “proper” (a spatial or institutional localization), nor thus on a borderline distinguishing the other as a visible totality. The place of a tactic belongs to the other” (xix).

In speaking of the appropriation of the Gothic monsters of the Anglo-American imaginary into Spanish film, then, we are referring the tactical uses to which these monsters are being put – in the case of *El espíritu de la colmena* by Ana herself, but in other films by the film-makers, and in the case of *Rebecca* by the audiences. The significance of Erice’s film is in its literalization and graphic representation of this process of eking out a space for free imaginative play in the repressive conditions imposed by Franco’s regime. In Certeau’s words:

As unrecognized producers, poets of their own acts, silent discoverers of their own paths in the jungle of functionalist rationality, consumers produce through their signifying practices something that might be considered similar to the “wandering lines” (“lignes derre”) drawn by the autistic children studied by F. Deligny: “indirect” or “errant” trajectories obeying their own logic. [This would seem to be as good a description as any of Ana’s reaction to seeing *Frankenstein*.] ... Although they are composed with the vocabularies of established languages (those of television, newspapers, supermarkets, or museum sequences [or black and white horror films]) and although they remain subordinated to the prescribed syntactical forms (temporal modes of schedules, paradigmatic orders of spaces, etc.), the trajectories trace out the ruses of other interests and desires that are neither determined nor captured by the systems in which they develop. (xviii)

In his influential 1973 essay “Encoding/Decoding”, which deals primarily with televisual media rather than film but whose conclusions have been influential across a wide range of other media, Stuart Hall offers three different spectator positions from which decodings of a televisual text may occur. The first is from the dominant-hegemonic position, when “The viewer takes the connoted meaning... full and straight, and decodes the message in terms of the reference code in which it has been encoded (115). For example: it is unlikely that contemporary viewers of the film which Franco himself scripted, *Raza*, took away from it much apart from what they were expected to take away, it was a tightly-controlled ideological experience in which the guiding hand of the generalissimo was could presumably be felt on the spectator’s shoulder.

Hall’s third decoding position is one in which a spectator will systematically read a text in a “globally contrary” way, “in order to retotalize the message within some alternative frame of reference” (Hall, 127). Such a reading might include, for example, J.M. Coetzee’s revisionist reading of Robinson Crusoe, *Foe*. But it is the intermediate position defined by Hall which is of greatest interest to us here, which Hall describes as the “negotiated code” (116). Hall establishes that “majority audiences probably understand quite adequately what has been dominantly defined and professionally signified” (126) – that the contemporary viewers of Hitchcock’s *Rebecca*, in other words, understood perfectly the conventions of what has been described as “the quintessence of the Hollywood studio system” (Hitchcock and Selznick 82). To this extent, they are decoding the message of *Rebecca* in terms of the reference code in which it has been encoded. But within this hegemonic framework, Hall argues, decoding:

...acknowledges the legitimacy of the hegemonic definitions to make the grand significations (abstract), while, at a more restricted, situational (situated) level, it makes its own ground rules [...] it accords the privileged position to the dominant definitions of events while reserving the rights to make a more negotiated application to “local conditions”. (Hall 115-116)

The theories of Gramsci, Certeau and Hall would go some way towards accounting for the popularity with contemporary Spanish audiences of Alfred Hitchcock’s adaptation, unquestionably “magnificent in sight and sound”, of du Maurier’s gothic novel, *Rebecca*, a film whose ideological work, embedded in its ambiguity, can thus be seen as having been ignored by the censor. Much as Ana excorporates Whale’s *Frankenstein* in *El espíritu de la colmena*, so a generation of Spanish audiences did with Hitchcock’s film. Marsha Kinder, in *Blood Cinema*, quotes an article published in the Falangist weekly *Primer plano*:

A people less infantile than the Yanks would have succeeded in imposing their convictions by means of their gigantic film markets on other nations and won the sympathies of the world. But American movies, albeit magnificent in sight and sound, lack any deep proselytizing purpose.... If American films with their at times almost pornographic excesses had not aroused the embarrassed repulse of our Catholic moral values, they surely would have Americanized the social mores of Spain and the entire world. (33-4)

But this eerily prophetic writer did not know what we know now: that it is precisely the superficial, immediately gratifying “pornographic excesses” of Hollywood that allow it

to mask its ideological work: despite his protests, but for reasons he accurately identified, Hollywood has indeed Americanized the social mores of the whole world.

2.3 Rebecca: du Maurier and Hitchcock

In “Spain and the United States: a cinematic relationship, 1939-1953”, Rafael de España tells us that “... the real success of these years was precisely an American film, David O. Selznick’s classic production of *Rebecca*.” (de España 236) Released in 1940, the film “aroused an enthusiasm among critics and public as any German film had never done [sic], despite the objections and cursings that came from *Primer plano* against the dangers of “rebequismo.” (de España 236.) De España writes of the influence of the film on a whole generation of moviegoers.⁸ Forty years after its release, an *El País* article by Eduardo Haro Tecglen, “*Rebeca*, la vieja historia ha vuelto”, writes of a “generación de *Rebeca*” and “la presencia continua del personaje que no estaba ... , el poder de lo invisible”. *El poder de lo invisible*, the power of the invisible and the secret, is of course one of the structuring tropes of the Gothic. *Rebecca*’s immense popularity among a generation of war-traumatized Spaniards is perhaps no accident, and it is perhaps worth analyzing the film in detail how in order to explain it.

“... the story of *Rebecca*”, wrote du Maurier in *The Rebecca Notebook and Other Memories*, “became an instant favourite with readers in the United Kingdom, North America and Europe. Why, I have never understood!” (1). At its simplest level, *Rebecca* is the story of a haunting – a Gothic ghost story which explores the problematic of silently coexisting with the dead. Of course, this subject is one with particular relevance for a post-war society traumatized by the loss of large numbers of

⁸ Part of this influence is in the fact that the word *rebeca* (“cardigan”) entered the language, an ironic and unpremeditated incursion of a loanword from English into a Castilian that was being tightly policed from above.

its members. As Margaret Forster's biography of du Maurier tells us, *Rebecca* was intended to be about jealousy, an attempt to "explore the relationship between a man who was powerful and a woman who was not" (137-138), and although critics failed to see in it a story about power relations, Spanish audiences for whom the act of living had become politically charged may, pace Certeau and Hall, have done so. The *Times* review spoke of 'an atmosphere of terror which ... makes it easy to overlook.., the weaknesses' (Forster 138), recognizing the book's Gothic elements, while another reviewer wrote, again in implicit recognition of the book's Gothic juxtaposition of realism with romance, that du Maurier was "an odd writer ... hard to pigeon-hole. . . mixing the grossest fantasy with the most admirable transcription of little scenes..." (139)

Rebecca begins with the voiceover of a woman speaking the first lines from the novel: "Last night I dreamt I went to Manderley again", to the images of a ruined country manor – Manderley is a large part of the Gothic apparatus of both the film and the novel. As it no longer exists, except as a ruin, she continues, she can never return to it.⁹



⁹ The only exterior shot of Manderley in the film is a blown-up image of a miniature model of it.

In the paragraphs that follow I shall mix references to both du Maurier's novel and Hitchcock's adaptation of it, which is considered – largely at the instance of its producer, David O. Selznick, who said: “We bought *Rebecca*, and we intend to make *Rebecca*” (Behlmer 257) – to be a faithful rendering. In the film, Maxim murders Rebecca, but in the film the death is an accident, a scripting decision on a plot point changed to comply with Hollywood's Motion Picture Production Code¹⁰, which said that the murder of a spouse had to be punished. But artistically, film and novel are similar in their themes and effects.

In *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*, Avery Gordon discusses the issue of haunting. (We introduce the theme here by way of *Rebecca*, but will return to it later.) Gordon tells us:

... haunting is one way in which abusive systems of power make themselves known and their impacts felt in everyday life, especially when they are supposedly over and done with (slavery, for instance) or when their oppressive nature is denied (as in free labor or national security) ... What's distinctive about haunting is that it is an animated state in which a repressed or unresolved social violence is making itself known, sometimes very directly, sometimes more obliquely... Haunting raises specters, and it alters the experience of being in time, the way we separate the past, the present, and the future. These specters or ghosts appear when the trouble they represent and symptomize is no longer being contained or repressed or blocked from view... Haunting and the appearance of specters or ghosts is one way, I tried to suggest, we are notified that what's been concealed is very much alive and present, interfering precisely

¹⁰ Popularly known as the Hays Code, Motion Picture Production Code was the set of industry moral censorship guidelines governing the production of most United States films released by major studios between 1930 and 1968.

with those always incomplete forms of containment and repression ceaselessly directed toward us. (xiv)

As a motif, haunting is key not only to *Rebecca* but also to most of the Spanish films under consideration here. As we will later see with reference to *The Orphanage*, the “repressed or unresolved social violence” (Gordon xvi) of which Gordon writes are the continuing social repression of Franco’s regime, which continued long after the Civil War was over and which was often based on little more than social suspicion within particular communities; the denial of any cultural platform from which the defeated Republicans could express their mourning; and the throwing of many thousands of bodies into unmarked graves.

Gordon lists three characteristics of haunting which seem of particular relevance to *Rebecca* and its relationship to Spanish post Civil War experience. Gordon writes that “the ghost imports a charged strangeness into the place or sphere it is haunting, thus unsettling the propriety and property lines that delimit a zone of activity or knowledge” (63). This is clearly the case for both the unnamed heroine of *Rebecca* (of this superb, memorable rhetorical flourish of non-naming, du Maurier rather flatly writes that she did not give the heroine a Christian name simply because she “could not think of one” (*Enchanted Cornwall*, 132), and for those mourning their Civil War dead: the lines delimiting the zones of knowledge and ignorance had clearly been redrawn for those who did not know the identities of the killers, and the situation becomes charged with a terrible Gothic ambiguity.

There is much reference in *Rebecca* to locks and keys - and to knowledge being ‘locked’ out of reach. In the dream sequence which opens the novel, Manderley is presented as chained and padlocked - but the narrator, as a ‘spirit’, is able to pass

through. (du Maurier 5). Infantilizing his wife as he so often does, Maxim tells her, in the true patriarchal, dictatorial spirit: “A husband is not so very different from a father after all. There is a certain type of knowledge I prefer you not to have. It’s better kept under lock and key. So that’s that” (du Maurier 205).

The rather chilling phrase “There is a certain type of knowledge I prefer you not to have” might stand as an epigraph for censorship under Franco, the paternalistic dictator suggesting that the continuing ignorance of his subjects is in their own best interests: the phrase also plays interestingly into the idea of the “pact of silence” which was established during the *transición* and whose effects can still be felt in the Spanish political and civil arenas.

Gordon’s book therefore focuses, as do *El orfanato*, *El espinazo del diablo*, *The Others* and, more indirectly *El espíritu de la colmena*, on the coexistence of the living and the dead within the same social space. (In *Rebecca*, it is the ghostlike Mrs Danvers, Rebecca’s agent in the land of the living, who is the mediator between the two worlds.) In postwar Spain, when the living coexisted with the dead in unmarked graves, often knowing where their dead were buried, this coexistence came close to being literal.

Gordon writes too that that “the ghost is primarily a symptom of what is missing” (63). In terms of the Spanish Civil War, what is missing is the history of the Republicans in Franco’s grand narrative of the war: this was, as the title of Michael Richards’ book suggests, “a time of silence”, in which voices unacceptable to the regime were suppressed. The return of these voices, therefore, can only come in terms of haunting.

In *Rebecca*, the presence of Max de Winter’s first wife is practically omnipresent:

Mrs Danvers came close to me, she put her face near to mine. 'It's no use, is it?' she said. 'You'll never get the better of her. She's still mistress here, even if she is dead. She's the real Mrs de Winter, not you. It's you that's the shadow and the ghost. It's you that's forgotten and not wanted and pushed aside. Well, why don't you leave Manderley to her? Why don't you go?' (du Maurier, 250)

“The ghost,” Gordon tells us in the third of her elements which define haunting, “is alive, so to speak”, and Rebecca is indeed alive, and effectively speaking through the three channels of the intensity of her presence at Manderley, her hold over Mrs Danvers, and her control, from beyond the grave, of Max’s troubled psyche. Indeed, Rebecca quite literally “speaks” in the present of the novel, via words she has written on the title page of a book which the heroine finds.

I picked up the book. I caught my foot in the flex of the bedside lamp, and stumbled, the book falling from my hands on to the floor. It fell open, at the title-page. ‘Max from Rebecca.’ She was dead, and one must not have thoughts about the dead. They slept in peace, the grass blew over their graves. How alive was her writing though, how full of force ... Rebecca, always Rebecca. Wherever I walked in Manderley, wherever I sat, even in my thoughts and in my dreams, I met Rebecca. I knew her figure now, the long slim legs, the small and narrow feet. Her shoulders, broader than mine, the capable clever hands. Hands that could steer a boat, could hold a horse. Hands that arranged flowers, made the models of ships, and wrote ‘Max from Rebecca’ on the fly-leaf of a book. I knew her face too, small and oval, the clear white skin, the cloud of dark hair. I knew the scent she wore, I could guess her laughter and her smile. If I heard it,

even among a thousand others, I should recognise her voice. Rebecca, always Rebecca. I should never be rid of Rebecca. (du Maurier 58).

The handwritten “Rebecca,” within a book, and the narrator’s deletion of it, leaving no trace, an action itself described within a book called *Rebecca*, produce an uncanny effect that ripples unsettlingly outward into the areas of the literary, the personal and the cultural. It is thus only when the unspoken narrative of the “true” story of Rebecca’s death is allowed to emerge that peace can be restored:

She would never haunt me again. She would never stand behind me on the stairs, sit beside me in the dining-room, lean down from the gallery and watch me standing in the hall. Maxim had never loved her. I did not hate her any more. Her body had come back, her boat had been found with its queer prophetic name, Je Reviens, but I was free of her for ever. (du Maurier 289)

The conclusion of *Rebecca* thus offers desired closure for those viewers of the film who are struggling to negotiate their own relationship with the effects of the Civil War and are hungry for a form of closure which perhaps only the dream cinema of Hollywood can offer.

Berys Gaut enumerates four aspects of identification: perceptual, affective, motivational, and epistemic. Simply put, we can imagine seeing what the character sees, feeling what the character feels, wanting what the character wants, or believing what the character believes (Gaut 205). Identification with one aspect of a character’s situation neither entails nor rules out identification with any other aspect; however, in some cases, identification of one kind encourages identification of another. To this extent, the

audience of *Rebecca* is invited to identify and to empathize with its unnamed narrator from the very first scenes when, as it were, she introduces the viewer to the zone of the haunting, Manderley, described by Michael Wood in the *London Review of Books* as a “black and jagged ruin, a Gothic scramble of turrets and and mullioned windows.... Like Mervyn Peake’s *Gormenghast*” (2006). Wood also points out the disjuncture between the narrator’s description of Manderley’s ‘perfect symmetry’ and the asymmetry of Manderley as it is presented magnificently to the audience’s view. A cut back to the protagonist’s wide, startled eyes reveals that she already senses that there is something to be feared in the mansion (as has often been pointed out, perhaps the things she most fears is her lower middle-class encounter with the power of the aristocracy).

Avril Horner and Sue Zlosnik observe that “Whereas other locations in the novel - Kerrith, the grandmother’s house, London, even Monte Carlo - are presented solely in realist mode, Manderley figures as both a ‘real’ house and the stuff of dreams” (101). Dreams, it is probably worth adding, not only for the new Mrs de Winter, but also for the audience. The non-specificity of the location of Manderley, rather like the lack of the heroine’s name, facilitates the process of imaginative entry for the reader/viewer into the text, in which Manderley is a kind of nightmare Wonderland, through which the heroine wanders Alice-like, while the heroine herself, by virtue of lacking the most basic index of identity, i.e. a name, becomes Everywoman, a blank page onto which the viewer can inscribe his or her own buried desires and fears.

2.4 Mrs Danvers and Others

The doors open to reveal the whole staff waiting for the narrator, and Mrs Danvers glides into the frame just as Franz Waxman’s score becomes dark, ominous

and explicitly gothic. Mrs Danvers is the bodily representative of Rebecca; to this extent she is Rebecca's ghost, and hence the extension of her former mistress into the present of the narrative. On the one hand, as Horner and Zlosnik point out, Mrs Danvers is a highly efficient housekeeper within the "realist mode" (119), and on the other she is a Gothic Life-in-Death figure. In an interview with Francois Truffaut, Hitchcock insisted that his aim was to make Mrs Danvers behave like an apparition, with the consequence that she would appear more spectral:

Mrs. Danvers was almost never seen walking and was rarely shown in motion. If she entered a room in which the heroine was, what happened is that the girl suddenly heard a sound and there was the ever present Mrs. Danvers, standing perfectly still by her side. In this way the whole situation was projected from the heroine's point of view; she never knew when Mrs. Danvers might turn up, and this, in itself was terrifying. (Truffaut 129)

To this extent, Mrs Danvers is one of Hitchcock's "floating women", not unlike Madeleine in *Vertigo* or Marnie after committing a theft. Michael Wood observes, however, that actually Mrs Danvers "does quite a lot of walking in the film" (Wood 28), but concedes that nevertheless she "gets very much the result that Hitchcock describes.



“Mrs Danvers,” Horner and Zlosnik tell us, “is a sinister character suggestive of liminality, transition and the instability of boundaries” (120), whose shadowing of Maxim’s new bride might recall Madame Beck’s surveillance of Lucy Snowe in Charlotte Brontë’s semi-gothic *Villette*. As she explores the Gothic labyrinth that is Manderley, the heroine continuously stumbles across reminders of Rebecca, often through conversations with the members of the staff, who reveal little about Rebecca but who, according to Max’s sister, “simply adored” her. At one moment during one of these conversations, Hitchcock has Joan Fontaine turn abruptly to the left, emphasizing her isolation not only in terms of her uncomfortable immediate situation but also in terms of her ignorance of the “facts” of the past. Each new character she encounters is redolent in some way of Rebecca, with Mrs Danvers forcing the second Mrs Winters into actually inhabiting the identity of Rebecca by imitating alongside her the way she formerly combed Rebecca’s hair or, in one famous scene, organizing things so that she will actually wear one of Rebecca’s dresses and embody Rebecca in the present, herself “becoming” Rebecca’s ghost. The identity of the dead woman is thus represented as consuming the identity of the woman who has survived her.

“Maxim de Winter”, writes Wood, “is not the dark romantic villain we and his new wife hankered for and thought we knew. He’s just a sullen, spoilt fellow who had a bad marriage.” (28) Max is thus an example of the fundamental Gothic ambiguity between romance – the romance which readers, viewers, and his new wife seek – and realism. As played by Olivier, he switches between being tortured by memories of Rebecca’s death – the first scene, which has him staring down into the choppy waves from a cliff top in France, a striking moment of visual symbolism from cinematographer George Barnes – and being the seductive, sophisticated millionaire who frequents Monte Carlo. The tortured Max is likely to come unhappily to the surface whenever

anyone mentions Rebecca, thus creating a situation in which all reference to past atrocities has been suppressed and censored: ‘An appalling tragedy,’ she [Mrs Van Hopper] was saying, ‘the papers were full of it of course. They say he never talks about it, never mentions her name. She was drowned you know, in the bay near Manderley...’ (du Maurier 34).

Crucially, the censorship is reconverted into self-censorship for the heroine. As we have already noted, Juan Goytisolo has written of the Spanish “habit of self-censorship and spiritual atrophy that has condemned Spaniards to practise the elusive art of reading between the lines”, and this is very much the position in which both heroine and audience of *Rebecca* find themselves, forced to seek out interpretations of the truth in an environment which has been constructed by Maxim to make such interpretation effectively impossible: Manderley, as Michael Wood says, “is an image of the very idea of obstruction, whatever it is that gets in the way of whatever you want” (Wood 28).

2.5 Silences

Writing about the Spaniards of the 1940s, Manuel Vázquez Montalban in *Crónica Sentimental de España* notes that “llevaban extraños abrigos con mucha hombrera, mucha solapa, mucho peso. . . . Hablaban mucho, callaban mucho, pero por encima de todo trataban de olvidar todo lo que podían” (33). There are numerous literary, historiographical, and biographical testimonies about fear of speaking openly or expressing one’s thoughts during Francoism, particularly during its first ten years. In postwar Spain, and for many older people on into the 2000s, speaking out carried a political liability. Franco’s regime institutionalized this culture of silence, in 1938 (the

year of *Rebecca*'s publication) establishing censorship and regulating free speech via the "Ley de Prensa". In the words of Olga López-Valero Colbert, this culture of silence covered:

a wide range of social and institutional practices and experiences: silence became a mode of behaving collectively as well as individually in the form of self-censorship), institutional silence in the suppression of free speech (censorship), the deliberate and systematic erasure of political enemies (blacklisting), and the emergence of a peculiar mode of communicating in spite of and because of censorship (the whole country was reading between the lines). (187)

This experience of imposed silence is experienced directly, albeit in a very different context, by the heroine of *Rebecca*. At a dinner with the heroine, Max's brother-in-law asks about his new wife's hobbies. She says that she does not sail, and his reaction is to say "Thank goodness for that". In the novel Max is not present during the scene, but in Hitchcock's film he is, and stares away in reflection as everyone looks at him. Those present believe that his suffering is the result of grief at Rebecca's death, but in fact his torture results from the fact that he knows the truth but cannot say it because of the threat that doing so would represent to his own freedom.

Part of the film's enormous popularity is thus in the way it embodies for viewers the fantasy that the enforced maintenance of silence is something that is not only experienced in remote Spanish *pueblos* but also in expensive mansions in Cornwall¹¹, whilst also offering a structure of feeling, a way in which viewers, via affective

¹¹ Discussions of social class have informed many readings of *Rebecca*, starting with Alison Light's "Returning to Manderley" – Romance Fiction, Female Sexuality and Class" (1984).

identification, can negotiate the trauma of their own self-censorship. The mere uttering the name of Rebecca becomes for the narrator a form of psychological relief:

I heard myself saying boldly, brazenly, 'Rebecca must have been a wonderful person.' ... I could not believe that I had said the name at last. I waited, wondering what would happen. I had said the name. I had said the word Rebecca aloud. It was a tremendous relief. It was as though I had taken a purge and rid myself of an intolerable pain. Rebecca. I had said it aloud... Now that I had broken down my reluctance at saying Rebecca's name, first with the bishop's wife and now with Frank Crawley, the urge to continue was strong within me. It gave me a curious satisfaction, it acted upon me like a stimulant. I knew that in a moment or two I should have to say it again. (du Maurier 126-7)

The discovery – a classic moment of Gothic revelation – of the boat which contains Rebecca's body completely transforms the situation. In the boathouse, she finds Max, who knows that the truth about Rebecca's death will now be exhumed along with her body. What has been haunting Max is now cathartically shared with both the heroine and with the viewer: Rebecca did not drown, but was accidentally killed by Max. The cinematography at this point reenacts Rebecca's movements throughout this scene, giving, as it were, the ghost of Rebecca physical embodiment. As Tania Modleski says, "...not only is Rebecca's absence stressed... but we are made to experience it as an active force (53). This "active force" is the "charged strangeness" of which Gordon writes: it is also the closest the film comes to literalizing the ghost of Rebecca, suggesting that her ghost may now be preparing to exorcise itself from the narrative.

Later, following the exhumation scene, the narrator reflects: “There were no shadows between us any more, and when we were silent it was because the silence came to us of our own asking” (du Maurier 292-3). Effectively, the exhumation, and the heroine’s realization that Max never loved Rebecca, leads to the heroine’s release from haunting. Rebecca has until now been felt as a physical presence, with Max making this explicit when he says: “‘Her shadow between us all the time,’ he said. ‘Her damned shadow keeping us from one another’” (du Maurier 270).

2.6 The Narrator as Child

Only after the exhumation does the couple kiss in a celebratory twelve-second clinch: the implication is that the truth about Rebecca’s death has eliminated the trauma of their marriage, provoked by the unanswered questions which lay beneath its surface. At a stroke, the lost little girl whom Max married, a girl so lost that Germaine Greer provocatively referred to *Rebecca* as “the classic novel of paedophilia” (2006) disappears: suddenly she has taken control, and is instructing Maxim about how best to cover up the crime so as to avoid going to jail. As Maxim says: “It’s gone for ever, that funny, young, lost look that I loved. It won’t come back again. I killed that too, when I told you about Rebecca... It’s gone, in twenty-four hours. You are so much older...” (du Maurier 304).

Of course, this sudden maturing of the protagonist can be reread as a symbolic expression of the necessity of confronting and understanding the past in all its complexities if present maturity is to be achieved. Until this happens, both individuals and cultures are destined to remain in the Freudian grip of a “Father” who is setting the social parameters and punishing them for their transgressions. In the film, and for

Spanish viewers of *Rebecca* in the 1940s, this liberation from the past is recognized as personal and individual, but as a collective Spain too has not yet, despite various attempts, been able to face up to and assimilate the truth about its twentieth century past in the way that the protagonist and Maxim do: a general process of suffering and redemption which many commentators have observed has yet to occur in Spain in the way it has occurred, for example, in post-Nazi Germany and in Argentina.¹² For Jonathan Yardley, writing in the *Washington Post*, *Rebecca* is not “just a novel about a lovesick girl’s obsessive jealousy of her husband’s dead first wife, it is also a book about the interweaving of past and present” (Yardley C01). The Gothic mode itself can, as Alexandra Warwick reminds us in her essay “Victorian Gothic”, be thought of as interrogating the anxiety of the influence of the past on the present, a subject of particular relevance in the culture of a twentieth century Spanish culture which is engaged in (or not) interrogating its Francoist past with a view to liberating itself for the future. (Warwick 29).

“Classic novel of paedophilia” or not, the narrator’s childishness, carefully structured in both novel and film, clearly prefigures the centrality of children in Spanish films like *El espíritu de la colmena*, *La espina del diablo*, *Cria cuervos* and other works which deal with the experience of life in post-Civil War and Francoist Spain. Like the twin Anas of Erice’s and Saura’s films, the unnamed narrator of *Rebecca* – the lack of a name is a further index of her lack of a fully-formed identity – is in fact seeking that identity, and the film is partly the story of whether she will successfully find it. The narrator herself, speaking with the benefit of hindsight from the position of dull

¹² The issue of whether or not Spain has actually faced up to its past is much-debated. Vincenç Navarro believes, for example, that “ha habido una enorme resistencia en España, por parte de interest todavía muy poderosos, a que se conozca nuestra historia” (*La memoria de los olvidados* 116). On the other hand, Santos Julia in *Víctimas de la Guerra Civil*, claims that “no faltan entre nosotros quienes a menudo repiten el tópico de que existe en España una gran dificultad para hablar de la guerra civil”.

domesticity in which she now finds herself and the apparently tamed Maxim, repeatedly describes herself in terms of childhood, and indeed does Maxim, who consistently infantilizes her. “‘Put a ribbon round your hair and be Alice-in-Wonderland,’ said Maxim lightly; ‘you look like it now, with your finger in your mouth’” (du Maurier 196).



Rebecca continually emphasizes the heroine’s childishness, contrasting her youth with her husband’s age. Maxim tells her to finish her breakfast “like a good girl,” to stop biting her nails, to wear a raincoat (“you can’t be too careful with children”), and even “never to wear black satin or pearls, or be thirty-six years old”.¹³ Mrs de Winter’s status as honorary infant is further affirmed by, for example, the camera’s use of forced perspective, her fear of Mrs Danvers and her subservience to her own servants, and by the shoulder-level positioning of the knobs on Manderley’s doors, which indeed position her as an Alice lost in a particularly unfriendly Wonderland. Fontaine’s character ‘is continually dwarfed by the huge halls in which she wanders, and even the doorknobs are placed at shoulder-level so that the viewer receives a subliminal impression of her as a child peeking in on or intruding into an adult world that provokes both curiosity and dread’ (Modleski 47).

¹³ All these quotations are from the film, but much of the dialogue is in the film, following Selznick’s wishes for a faithful adaptation, is closely modeled on the dialogues in du Maurier’s original novel.

To go back to that hand reaching out for the doorknob in *Manderley*, say, and gaze at it is to see, all at once, the moment of a child's heading for a threshold, the door as boundary, the struggle of the hand to take possession of the world that is too big for it, the speech of the doorknob—it is polished, it beckons; not to mention the doors both forbidding and immaculate, and therefore the relationship between purity and threat and possibility. (Pomerance 24)

All of this reconfirms the idea that the nameless heroine is in fact a Gothic heroine who has been reconfigured – by both Max and by Hitchcock – as a child. Freud suggests that the subject's identification with an aggressor plays a necessary role in the formation of the superego, and Jacques Lacan develops the idea by arguing that in fantasy the superego is often associated with a "ferocious figure". The construction of a moral, social capacity in the child comes to be, through the mechanism of identification, synonymous with a kind of Gothic terrorism in that the moral order, represented by the figure of the superego, comes to be indistinguishable from the all-consuming and dangerous id.

In *Rebecca*, Maxim is the "ferocious figure" with whom, once the shackles of the past have been thrown off, the narrator is able to identify, thereby achieving adulthood. As we will see later, the journeys of the literal children of the Spanish films we are discussing here will follow similarly symbolic paths.

Part of the ideological appeal of *Rebecca* to Spanish audiences can thus be ascribed to that audience's ability, in Stuart Hall's terms, to accord "the privileged position to the dominant definitions of events whilst also making negotiated application to "local conditions" (516). It seems significant that the power of the past over the

present – the power of Rebecca over Mrs de Winter and Max – is destroyed not only by Mrs Danver’s immolation of Manderley (in a clear reference to the destruction of Thornfield Hall in *Jane Eyre*) but also by the exhumation of Rebecca’s body. This catharsis is not one which could have been achieved by many of the bereaved viewers of 1940s Spain, and it is at this point that the viewer’s experience moves beyond that of identification or empathy and moves into the realm of the actively desired. As Hortense Powdermaker wrote more than sixty years ago: “Hollywood provides ready-made fantasies or day-dreams; the problem is whether these are productive or nonproductive, whether the audience is psychologically enriched or impoverished” (12–13). The experience of watching the end of *Rebecca* was presumably enriching for an audience prohibited from publicly grieving its war and postwar dead, and which perhaps lived in ignorance of their burial place.

“Rebecca’s power,” the second Mrs de Winter tells us, “had dissolved into the air, like the mist had done.” (du Maurier 285) Contemporary audiences would have connected, whether consciously or not, the disinterring of Rebecca’s body with the unmarked graves which lay all over Spain and where the ghosts of Spain continue to have physical presence - Madeleine Davis puts the number of dead Republicans in mass graves at about 30,000 (858-880). The haunting of Manderley and its inhabitants by Rebecca, therefore, offer a catharsis for audiences participating in Hall’s “negotiated application to local conditions” (Hall 116): they are freeing for themselves an area of imaginative (here cathartic) play which cannot be controlled by the censors in the same way that, say, the Franco-scripted *Raza* (released the same year) sought to control them and whose rhetoric and ideology failed to offer them a representation of their experiences. Indeed, it is likely that *Rebecca* was perceived by the censors as chiming perfectly with the demands of the *Sección Femenina*, the women’s section of the

Falange Española established in 1934 under Pilar Primo de Rivera. As Maria Elena Soliño puts it in her essay *Colorín, Colorado, este cuento todavía no se ha acabado*, a study of Carmen Martín Gaité's *El cuarto de atrás*:

El personaje interpretado por Joan Fontaine en *Rebecca* es la mujer ideal, según la sociedad cristiana patriarcal. Es abnegada, tímida. Inocente, y sobre todo dispuesta a seguir a su hombre hasta el fin del mundo ... Esta ideología de la película encajaba perfectamente con muchas de las enseñanzas de los 40's que en España se les ofrecían a las jóvenes en los manuales de la Sección Femenina de la Falange y en los consultorios de las revistas. (193)

One of the apotheoses of the Hollywood studio system, thus becomes despite itself, and despite the wishes of the censors, subversive – a site for cultural play in which Franco's defeated can find cathartic relief, with the narrator's interactions with Rebecca's ghostly presence and Max's traumatizing knowledge of a hidden truth mirroring to perfection how *los vencidos* related to their war dead.

There remains, of course, the identity of the unnamed woman whose body is falsely identified by Maxim as that of Rebecca and who is buried under Rebecca's name. Still as nameless as the unnamed narrator of *Rebecca*, but considerably less celebrated, abandoned by the demands of narrative closure, she stands as a Gothic reminder of the work still to be done by Spain in disinterring the ghosts of its victims, a theme we will return to when we come to *El orfanato*. With this in mind, we turn now to Víctor Erice's *El espíritu de la colmena*, in which a young girl lives among ghosts that are dead, alive - and that are also strange combination of the two, celluloid.

CHAPTER 3

“EL ESPÍRITU DE LA COLMENA” AND ITS GOTHIC MONSTERS

3.1. The Gothic Genesis of *El espíritu de la colmena*



Victor Erice's *El espíritu de la colmena* is widely considered to be one of the finest films in the history of Spanish cinema. And yet it is remarkable how little work has been done on the specific and complex relationship between James Whale's 1931 masterpiece of Gothic cinema and Erice's: and behind both, of course, unifying them in an intertextual web, we have Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818). Chris Perriam cites Linda Willem by way of summarizing the common critical reactions to the film:

[A] djectives such as elusive, mysterious, ambiguous, haunting, and evocative [are used] to describe [the film]. Contributing greatly toward this ethereal quality are three aspects of the film frequently cited [...]: Luis Cuadrado's cinematography, Pablo Garcia del Amo's editing, and Luis de Pablo's music. Through the artistry of sight and sound, the atmospheric quality of the film is

created: the use of color and design to suggest the beehive motif in the house; shooting the countryside from low angles to emphasize its flatness and desolation; the chiaroscuro effect of shadow and light to shade to the mystery and danger; the elliptical editing to cause temporal confusion; the use of children's songs and drawings to establish the point of view; the simple melodic lines conveyed by few instruments to reinforce the loneliness; and the sound of the wind to stress the isolation. (724)

El espíritu de la colmena was Erice's first feature film as solo director, but the third which he suggested to the producer Elias Querejeta as a possible project: it came, according to Jaime Pena, as the result of Erice's having seen Whale's film as part of a season of films on television and of having reread Shelley's novel. The textual germs for *El espíritu*, then, are Shelley's and Whale's masterpieces of Gothic novel and film respectively, conceived of as a vehicle for social observation and the need to comment on Spain's recent political history. Erice's own account of the film's gestation, as quoted by Pena, is worth examining in detail.

La película partía de una consideración del destino moderno de algunos mitos literarios y cinematográficos hoy en trance de desaparecer, degradados, convertidos en fetiches tras la manipulación a que han sido sometidos. Acudiendo a una misteriosa convocatoria, el monstruo de Frankenstein venía de nuevo hacía nosotros desde el mismo lugar donde Mary Shelley le había abandonado: el Ártico. Allí había permanecido en hibernación durante años y años. La médula del argumento estaba constituida por el enfrentamiento de los

personajes principales del libro con una especie de tecnócratas actuales de la cultura y de la ciencia, al servicio de una organización que tenía también un cierto carácter policiaco. La mayor parte de la acción se desarrollaba dentro de un universo concentracionario. Era, desde luego, una institución represiva, y, aunque no se trataba exactamente de un manicomio o de una cárcel, tenía algo de ambas cosas (...) Recuerdo que, en la historia, algunos de los personajes recluidos dentro de la institución se referían con frecuencia a una mujer desconocida que permanecía alojada en una de las zonas más aisladas del edificio, sin salir nunca al exterior, y a la que oían cantar de cuando en cuando, siempre a medianoche. Sólo el doctor Frankenstein y el monstruo, que figuraban también entre los reclusos, parecían conocer, percibir algo distinto a los demás en aquella voz (...) esa mujer era Mary Shelley. El estilo imaginado para la película revelaba una influencia de ciertos aspectos del cine mudo, sobre todo, de algunas obras de Friz (sic) Lang, y de *Nosferatu*, de Murnau. (Pena 31-2)

It would seem then, that the original impulse for *El espíritu* lay in a study of a repressive institution, which would take place in a universe with the characteristics of a concentration camp: the parallels with Francoist Spain, which Erice does not name specifically, seem clear, as is the intention to appropriate genre (“cierto carácter policiaco”, the Gothic of *Frankenstein*) in the service of a deeper study of the degradation of literary and filmic myths which would presumably imply some consideration, whether direct or not, of the political conditions which generated that degradation. Erice goes on to tell us:

Mi película transcurre durante la posguerra por una razón muy simple: porque yo descubrí el cine en los años cuarenta. Y mi película trata de lo que significó este descubrimiento para toda la gente de mi generación. (Pena 67)

It has been widely assumed that the Hoyuelos screening of *Frankenstein* is a recreation by Erice of his own experiences of watching films as a boy in the 1940s: he specifically recalls, as Pena tells us, (Pena 67) watching Roy William Neill's *Sherlock Holmes and the Scarlet Claw* in 1944. Pena suggests that the film is the closest of all the Basil Rathbone Sherlock Holmes films to being a horror - and hence Gothic - film. Erice is on record as having stated that his choice of *Frankenstein* for appropriation in *El espíritu de la colmena* was instinctive, and cites a re-reading of Mary Shelley's novel and seeing the cycle of films on TV as among his reasons. Vicente Molina Foix tells us that in its origins, the project was a commission from a distribution company to Elias Querejeta to make a genre film about the character of *Frankenstein* (278). Pena suggests that this may have been an attempt to cash in on the early 70s vogue in Spain for home-grown horror of the kind supplied by Jesús Franco, Armando de Ossorio and Jacinto Molina: indeed in 1972, Franco made two *Frankenstein*-themed horror films.¹⁴ In its origins, the Erice film was to deal with the return of the monster from the Arctic and his confrontation with “una especie de tecnócratas actuales de la cultura y de la ciencia, al servicio de una organización que tenía también un cierto carácter policiaco [...]” (Pena 31) As Pena reminds us, the project was therefore of a “marcado cariz literario” (32).

Whatever the sources – Erice and his co-scriptwriter Ángel Fernández- Santos decided to carry with them the question “where and when did you first see

¹⁴ These were: *Dracula*, *Prisoner of Frankenstein* and *The Erotic Rites of Frankenstein*.

Frankenstein?” in their minds as they wrote - the choice of *Frankenstein* as a model was inspired, offering a rich cultural seam which it is my intention to explore here. Mary Shelley's "hideous progeny", like its own monster a monstrous hybrid text, looks both back in time – it has its roots, as the subtitle tells us, in the myth of Prometheus – but also forward, engendering numerous versions – “parodic” versions, to use Linda Hutcheon’s term (2000) - in a range of media. The myth ends up here in Castilla-La Mancha in the 1940s, having travelled from early 19th-century England, via 1930s Hollywood, to late Francoist Spain. Hutcheon uses the term “trans-contextualization” to describe Erice’s method here, a technique which allows *El espíritu de la colmena* to become the focal point for a complex network of intertextual references, allusions and echoes, bound together into the perspective of a child.

[...] trans-contextualization can take the form of a literal incorporation of reproductions into the new work. . . or of a reworking of the formal elements: for instance, Arakawa's parody of Da Vinci's *Last Supper* is entitled *Next to the Last*, referring to the last preparatory drawing before the painting, as well as to the work itself. (Hutcheon, 9-10)

It is in keeping with much literature of the Francoist period that the film has as its central metaphor a Gothic monster assembled from different pieces, a concept explored across various cultural forms. A well-known example of this taken from Spanish poetry would be Jaime Gil de Biedma’s “Aparecidos”:

Fue esta mañana misma,

en mitad de la calle.

Yo esperaba

con los demás, al borde de la señal de cruce,

y de pronto he sentido como un roce ligero,

como casi una súplica en la manga.

Luego,

mientras precipitadamente atravesaba,

la visión de unos ojos terribles, exhalados

yo no sé desde qué vacío doloroso [...]

Cada aparición

que pasa, cada cuerpo en pena

no anuncia muerte, dice que la muerte estaba

ya entre nosotros sin saberlo.

Vienen

de allá, del otro lado del fondo sulfuroso,

de las sordas

minas del hambre y de la multitud.

Y ni siquiera saben quiénes son:

desenterrados vivos. (Correa 497)

We might equally well cite Dámaso Alonso's "Solo", from his collection *Hijos de la ira* (1944):

[...] Oh Dios,

no me atormentes más.

Dime qué significan

estos espantos que me rodean.

Cercado estoy de monstruos

que mudamente me preguntan,

igual, igual que yo les interrogo a ellos.

Que tal vez te preguntan,

lo mismo que yo en vano perturbo

el silencio de tu invariable noche

con mi desgarradora interrogación.

Bajo la penumbra de las estrellas

y bajo la terrible tiniebla de la luz solar,

me acechan ojos enemigos,

formas grotescas me vigilan,

colores hirientes lazos me están tendiendo:

¡son monstruos

estoy cercado de monstruos! [...] (Díez Rodríguez 215)

The Franco regime itself created monsters by the dehumanizing of its opponents, by compelling them to live in the silence outside the realm of the publicly acceptable. In *El espíritu de la colmena*, Fernando may well represent this kind of monstrousness, given the multiple connections made between him and the idea. Following Edwards Van Sloan's introduction to *Frankenstein*, for example, we cut straight to him in his alienating beekeeper's mask, and after the girls' conversation in bed, Isabel's "soy Ana, soy Ana" ("it's me, Ana, it's me, Ana") seems to invoke Fernando's ghostly presence via footsteps in his study upstairs. José Monleón tells us:

The totalitarian public sphere admits only the voice of submission. Dissidence—political as well as aesthetic—belongs to silence, to the obscure realm of exile [silence has often been identified as key to the tone and mood of *El espíritu de la colmena*]. This exclusionary act forged two monolithic blocks: on the one hand, an absolute, monovalent public "T"; on the other, a many-headed demon, one

“absent other” invested with all the connotations that had been discarded from the public realm. (264)

This “absent other”, of course, can easily be identified with Kristeva’s abject, thrown aside and desiring return (Kristeva 2). Ingebretsen (11) develops the idea by stating that the monster’s inarticulacy customarily denotes its alienation: to this extent, the silences which predominate in the town and over the landscapes of *El espíritu* may suggest that all the inhabitants are, or have been made to be, monsters, and that all are alienated. The silence of the monster of *El espíritu de la colmena* represents its inarticulacy in the face of the horrors of Civil War, and consequently its alienation. To this extent, as we shall see later, all the main characters in the film, and particularly Ana, can be identified with the monster. As Noël Carroll has pointed out, the horror genre (like the Gothic novel) is a commentary on the abnormal which allows for the confirmation of the monster’s existence:

It is frequently remarked that horror cycles emerge in times of social stress, and that the genre is a means through which the anxieties of an era can be expressed. That the horror genre should be serviceable in this regard comes as no surprise, since its specialty is fear and anxiety. What presumably happens in certain historical circumstances is that the horror genre is capable of incorporating or assimilating general social anxieties into its iconography of fear and distress. (Carroll 207)

The literary monsters of the Spanish post-war period are thus explained, a subject explored by Labanyi and others (Labanyi 2000). But Erice's clever appropriation of the Frankenstein myth speaks not only to the late 1930s and early 1940s in Spain, with its war wounded and internal exiles, but they also speak to the "living dead" whom Erice describes as surrounding him during his childhood:

A veces pienso que para quienes en su infancia han vivido a fondo ese vacío que, en tantos aspectos básicos, heredamos los que nacimos inmediatamente después de una guerra civil como la nuestra, los mayores eran con frecuencia eso: un vacío, una ausencia. Estaban –los que estaban-, pero no estaban. Y ¿por qué no estaban? Pues porque habían muerto, se habían marchado o bien eran unos seres ensimismados desprovistos radicalmente de sus más elementales modos de expresión. (Erice and Fernández Santos, 14)

They speak, too, to the 1970s, as motifs of the living dead return as the embodiment of anxieties about post-industrial society; and, as Claudia Schaefer points out:

[...] if we reread [*El espíritu de la colmena*] under [Steven] Schneider's terms, it would most certainly exhibit the traces of a "metaphorical embodiment of uncanny narratives," narratives that pertain to Erice's time and place. What could be more horrifying in 1973 than the thought that an aging body might not die but might actually return? With Francisco Franco two years away from his

ultimate demise, the return of the dead is an especially traumatic metaphor of the times. (139)

The appropriation of *Frankenstein* therefore sets up interplay between the diegetic period of the film, the present of the audience, and a Hollywood past, with the monster allowing each to act as a commentary on, and a reflection of, the others.

3.2. The Monsters of *El espíritu de la colmena*

Critics have been concerned to find a stable symbol in the figure of the monster in all three texts under discussion here: in Shelley's original, in Whale's 1931 film version, and in *El espíritu de la colmena* itself. It is still common to read interpretations of Shelley which speak of the monster as "representing" "the evils of science," "the dangers of human overreach," "the parent/child relationship," "the abandonment issue," and so on. The monster in *El espíritu de la colmena* has similarly been the victim of much unilateral interpretation. Virginia Higginbotham, for example, has seen the monster as a "metaphor for Spain"; for Marvin D'Lugo, the Monster represents the unknown, the mysterious, the deviant, and the different, all of which Ana identifies herself with in the process of defining herself as an oppositional spirit. Carmen Arocena sees Ana's rebellion as an initiation ceremony through which she adopts the monster's forbidden social values; other commentators, as we have seen, associate the monster with Ana's father, with their relationship and Oedipal love/fear one, based on the

patriarchal authority than is extended to include Franco's dictatorship (Curry 274, Edwards 136-45, Kinder 60-61).

3.3 Ana and Abjection



Despite the above image, Ana is far more than a simple trope of innocence. Her fascination with, and pursuit of, the monster can be explained by reference to Julia Kristeva's concept of the abject. According to Kristeva, the abject is "the in-between, the ambiguous, the composite" (4). Any phenomenon that "disturbs identity, system, order" and that "does not respect borders, positions, rules" (Kristeva 4), as both Frankenstein's monster and its behaviour do not, elicits in readers and viewers a sensation of horror and queasiness, since it is a reminder of traumatic infantile efforts to constitute the self as an ego, or discrete subject, from out of an undifferentiated pre-Oedipal state, and also a reminder of the delicate nature of an ego that is both threatened and fascinated by the possibility of dissolution.

In *The Philosophy of Horror: Paradoxes of the Heart* (1990) Noël Carroll explores the monstrous in art, literature and film. In works of horror, Carroll tells us

(and the concept is easily transferrable to notions of the Gothic), humans regard the monsters they meet as abnormal, as disturbances of the natural order. The abominable status of monsters, however, cannot simply be explained by their physical grotesqueness. They are also, as it were, ideologically unnatural, *un-natural*, relative to a culture's conceptual scheme. Monsters are not only physically threatening, but cognitively threatening also, representing a challenge to the norms of a particular society.

But Carroll's description of the impact of the monstrous on the human does not quite describe the attitude of Ana to the monster in *The Spirit of the Beehive*, or indeed of Ofelia to the faun in *Pan's Labyrinth*. In Kristeva, abjection is described as "dark revolts of being" (1) which take place when the culturally-constructed borders between subject and object, I and other, mind and body, collapse; the Gothic monster, of course, whether it is Frankenstein's monster or a vampire, is always a collapsing of binary terms (fundamentally of life/death). For Carroll "Chimaeras, sphinxes, centaurs, griffins, harpies, satyrs: these fabulous monsters of antiquity are all admixed beings, like the Sphinx with her lion's body, wings and woman's head. Modern literary and filmic monsters also 'specialize in [...] categorical interstitiality and categorical contradictoriness'" (Carroll 1990: 32). The 'beast people' in H. G. Wells' *The Island of Dr Moreau* (1896) and the werewolves in *The Wolf Man* (1941) and *The Howling* (1981) likewise collapse the distinction between human and animal. (Hurley 140)

Like a vampire, like a ghost and like a zombie, Frankenstein's monster, a heterogeneous atrocity which is made up of the disinterred body parts of dead criminals - whose disparate body parts are, in Shelley's words, in 'horrid contrast' to one another, significantly stolen from graves - is, like the medium of film itself, an extension of the supposedly dead past into the living present, a concept which chimes well with Erice's

observation that his parents' generation, here represented by Fernando and Teresa, were effectively zombies – the living dead. In effect, they are haunting Hoyuelos. As Joan Ramon Resina points out, the monster in *El espíritu de la colmena* may represent “not so much the demonization of the ‘other’ as their assignment to the status of ‘living dead’: “in this sense, the monster stands as the embodiment, which returns to haunt the present, of a collective living death...” (76). Both Ana's parents, as well as the community in which they live, “share the condition of being the ghosts of history” (77). Inspired by Torok and Abraham's understanding of the Derridean concept of hauntology, we will return to this aspect of the Gothic in our analysis of Juan Antonio Bayona's *The Orphanage*.

It is to be assumed that the audience of Whale's *Frankenstein* in Hoyuelos indeed experiences the monster as an abnormal disturbance of the natural order – hence the uncanny appeal of gothic horror. But at seven years old, Ana is still an inchoate being, still receiving instructions from her older sister about how to will her identity into being by the incantation of the phrase “Soy Ana”. For Steven Bruhm, twentieth-century Gothic renders visible a contradiction in contemporary ideas of the child because it conceives the child as both as ‘fully-fledged and developed’ and as ‘an infinitely malleable, formable being who can turn out right if only the proper strategies are employed’ (2006). Kristeva insists on the “private aspect” in which one is “abject”, which refers to a state of crisis where the “borders between the object and subject cannot be maintained” and the “autonomy or substance of the subject is called into question”. (“Of Word and Flesh” 22) But as yet Ana has no autonomy to call into question. The clear, culturally-imposed divisions between Ana's self and the Other of the world in which she lives have not yet been inscribed into Ana's identity, which means that her fascination with the Monster will spill out into her active pursuit of it.

Kristeva builds on the psychoanalytic work of Freud and Lacan when she claims that abjection first occurs when on the separation of the child from the mother and on the child's entering the "symbolic realm" of the father by its acquisition of "the autonomy of language". Entry into society, language and identity is thus associated with the paternal, and the development of the subject corresponds to the acquisition of language and culture in accordance with a patriarchal system which organizes life in a way which is, in Kristeva's words, "clean" and "tolerable." From here on, the agents of institutional and structural socialisation – politics, religion, media, law, education, and crucially language itself – start to constitute us, as well as presenting us with shared ideas of what is acceptable and unacceptable.

Within Kristeva's framework, then, monsters can be interpreted as beings that violate accepted cultural codes; those who cannot abide by societal conventions and who escape "that social rationality, that logical order on which the social aggregate is based" may be deemed to be marked Other, to be monstrous. The monster, therefore, and the monstrous human in particular, points to the corruptibility of the order from which it deviates - a corruptibility which indicates the constructedness of the social systems which are assumed to be 'natural'. In Kristeva's words: "Religion. Morality. Law. Obviously always arbitrary, more or less; unfailingly oppressive, rather more than less; laboriously prevailing, more and more so" (16).

The effect (or affect) of engagement with monstrosity or otherness can provoke various responses; among them, according to Kristeva, fear, agitation, nausea and disgust. But the abject is, also "[t]he in-between, the ambiguous, the composite", which "simultaneously beseeches and pulverizes the subject" (Kristeva, 5). It can also provoke a more ambiguous reaction, positioning its subject somewhere between repulsion and fascination, fear and desire. I would suggest that this is particularly true of child

subjects like Ana, Ofelia and Santi in *El espinazo del Diablo*, who are not yet fully inscribed within the patriarchal system.

In such portrayals of post-Civil War Spain, then, the figure of the child, in identifying with the monster, with its unconscious, insistent probing of the prevailing social order, itself becomes abject in Kristeva's terms. Gothic ambiguities are thus able to reinscribe the monster as hero. But a deeper point is being made by Erice's appropriation of Frankenstein's monster into *The Spirit of the Beehive*. This is that the cultural norms which have been imposed by the Nationalist victory in the Civil War - the rules by which the monster can indeed be deemed monstrous - need to be transgressed if there is any political hope for the future. Ana's encounter with the monster indeed almost leads to her death, but there is a quiet optimism about the film's ending as the little girl stands by the window and again utters, this time as a declaration of identity rather than merely a summoning of the monster, "soy Ana."¹⁵

Since it does not form part of the symbolic order, the monster is an outcast: but the Civil War has in a sense created a population of outcasts, of abjects, and as the offspring of abjects, and as a young girl who has not yet entered Lacan's mirror stage, by which she will achieve selfhood, Ana is herself likewise abject. As Isabel tells her, the monster can only be summoned by a plea for identity on the part of her younger sister - "Soy Ana", which by the end, having come to close to death, she is able to achieve.

Having seen *Frankenstein*, Ana duly projects onto her own life the father/daughter/monster triangle at work in both Shelley's original and Whale's film. *Frankenstein* and Ana's life thus blur in the young girl's mind. The monster in *El*

¹⁵ A phrase that will be ironically repeated by the same actress in Alejandro Amenábar's *Tesis*, which we examine later.

espíritu de la colmena is polysemic: it refuses to submit to the stable one-to-one correspondences that some critics have ascribed to it.¹⁶ We have seen that the monster-figure is fundamentally transgressive, and we can now add that the making of monsters always carries with it the threat of becoming a monster oneself. As Edward J Ingebretsen succinctly puts it: “Those who are nominated as monsters may be coded as foreign or outlandish, but rarely are they alien” (203).

In Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, monster and maker famously shade into one another: the issue of who the real monster is in *Frankenstein* is fraught with interpretive difficulties. From Ana’s point of view, the monster, as it were, reproduces itself and multiplies through the film, to the extent that the very reality which Ana inhabits comes to be perceived by the viewer and by Ana herself as an immense, all-encompassing Other against which she must struggle to identify herself. Ana apart, the monster can be identified singly or plurally with any or all of the following characters. This is indeed a text full of monsters.

3.4 Ideological Isabel

At 20:32 of *El espíritu de la colmena*, Ana asks her older sister Isabel the question which the younger girl spends the rest of the film trying to answer: “Why did he kill her?” She asks this twice, indicating an urgent desire to know. The question accompanies, onscreen, Little Maria’s father carrying her into the village: since Ana does not name the subject, and given the ellipsis, there may even be a suggestion that

¹⁶ This may partly a result of censorship, which is easier to evade if meaning cannot easily be ascribed in terms of one-to-one relationships.

she believes it is Maria's father, rather than the monster, who has killed Maria. Were this true, the thematic consequences would be interesting. From the film, between the question and Isabel's answer, we hear the word "Silence!" being shouted to calm the baying mob. The following scene shows the girls running into the house, screaming, and running away from Frankenstein (interestingly, they make the same mistake as many others before and after them, confusing Frankenstein, the creator, with his monster): the house at this point starts to look a little more like the mansion of Gothic horror.

In bed later that night, Ana reformulates her question (22:12): "Why did he kill the girl, and why did they kill him after that?" Isabel sleepily does not answer. "You don't know," Ana says. "You're a liar." Ana's insistence on knowing - despite her apparent knowledge that Isabel may be lying - in a world in which silence apparently reigns, is thus quietly reinforced. She appears to be uncontaminated by the "official knowledge" that the state has imposed on the population, and is thus not, like her mother and father, seeking alternative sources of information: she is seeking any source of information. Indeed, the fact that she is verbalizing questions at all is a sign that she is still at the innocent stage of Little Maria in Whale's film, in that she as yet has no sense of fear based on adult stereotypes. It is this lack of fear which will keep her searching so that she comes very close to suffering the same fate as Little Maria.

Interestingly, the exchange reveals in microcosm the relationship between power and knowledge: presented with a *tabula rasa* and the desire for knowledge, power is free to impose its own meanings. The scriptwriters seem therefore to have a Lockean conception of childhood:

Let us then suppose the mind to be, as we say, white paper void of all characters, without any ideas. How comes it to be furnished? Whence comes it by that vast store which the busy and boundless fancy of man has painted on it with an almost endless variety? Whence has it all the materials of reason and knowledge? To this I answer, in one word, from EXPERIENCE. (Locke 104)

For Locke, egalitarianism is one of the consequences of the doctrine of the *tabula rasa*: the other is the vulnerability of the child, and it is this vulnerability to learned prejudice that *El espíritu de la colmena* explores in the figure of Ana, for whom “experience,” away from the realm of her imagination, is limited and hostile. There is an implicit question here: will she end the film a victim of the distorting powers of ideology, or will she be able to retain her ideological purity?

Ana’s insistence indeed forces Isabel to tell the lie which will dominate Ana’s thoughts throughout the rest of the film:

Isabel: They didn’t kill him. And he didn’t kill the girl.

Ana: How do you know? How do you know they don’t die?

Isabel: Because everything in films is a lie. It’s a trick. Besides, I’ve seen him alive.

Ana: Where?

Isabel: In a place I know near the village. People can’t see him. He only comes out at night.

Ana: Is he a ghost?

Isabel: No, he's a spirit.

Ana: Like the spirit Doña Lucia talks about?

Isabel: Yes, but spirits don't have bodies. That's why you can't kill them.

Ana: But in the film he had one. He had arms and feet. He had everything.

Isabel: It's a disguise they put on when they go outside.

Ana: If he only comes out at night, how can you talk to him?

Isabel: I already told you he's a spirit. If you're his friend, you can talk to him whenever you want. Just close your eyes and call him. "It's me, Ana. It's me, Ana."

Like everything else in *El espíritu de la colmena*, this is an extremely well-crafted piece of dialogue – on, it should be remembered, *Frankenstein*. It is also by some distance the most significant dialogue in the film, and, in a verbally-challenged movie, one of the lengthiest exchanges too.

Isabel begins her explanation with a basic truth: it is indeed true that the monster killed nobody and that nobody killed the monster, because "Everything in films is a lie". There may even be a protective impulse here on the part of the older sister towards the younger. But it's a truth which Ana, thirsty for knowledge, prefers to ignore – as indeed does the viewer, who is presumably not watching *El espíritu de la colmena* in search of "lies" and "tricks".

Isabel then forces the crucial leap into reality by transferring the monster into her sister's own reality, setting Ana up for her later meeting with the *maqui* in the sheepfold outside the village and its tragic consequences. Myth thus becomes reality: the imagined becomes, for Ana, a viable source of truth. Isabel may be the vehicle for that truth, but the real fact of the existence of the monster is what Ana takes away from their bedtime conversation: that, and the fact that the spirit might turn out to be the "friend" she is looking for in a life which appears to be largely starved of affection. The significant thing about Isabel's story is that it is true, logical and coherent within Isabel's frame of reference, and therefore plausible, as well as being what she is seeking emotionally – an Other against which she can define herself and create her identity.

What Isabel is essentially telling Ana at this point is a horror story, one perhaps informed by her wider experience of the genre than that of her sister. She is therefore providing her sister with a referential framework for understanding, and that framework is *Frankenstein*. It may seem perverse to associate Isabel, Ana's sister, with monstrosity, but at a couple of years older than her sister there are clear indications that, in Lockean terms, experience is starting to make itself felt on her character. We have seen that although she initially answers Ana's question about the death of the monster with a literal truth, she quickly lets her irritation at her little sister's questions allow her to deviate into falsehood. She is exercising power over her sister's imagination – in other words, she is controlling the discourses in which Ana sees the world - and ironically it is Ana's credulous belief in the stories which her sister is telling her that leads Ana to near-death close to the end of the film.



That the twistedness of Isabel's experience has left its imprint on her own character is clear in two somewhat disturbing sequences. These are at 54:07-56:57, where she cruelly strangles the cat and then wipes the resultant blood somewhat vampirishly from her lips, and at 57:25-1:04:29, when, perhaps in imitation of the dead Maria in the *Frankenstein* film which the girls have seen, Isabel screams and lets Ana believe that she is dead – with perhaps, more than healthy insistence. She is actually performing a scenario which makes real the story she has told Isabel about the monster: this is Ana's first brush with "death", and a foreshadowing of her later knowledge about the death of the *maqui*. Ana closes the window and reassures her sister that the monster has gone: she goes outside to seek help from the housekeeper, Milagros, but finding none, she returns to find her sister frightening her by pretending to be a monster, wearing Fernando's bee-keeping outfit.

This scene represents the endpoint of the complicity between the sisters. The lesson for Ana is that there is monstrosity in the familiar, too: from this point she launches out on her own, to seek the friendliness in the monster. Henceforth she will utter scarcely a further syllable: in Pena's words, there is now a "paso de una *mirada exterior* a una *mirada interior*" – a replication within Ana herself of the shift from 18th-

century Gothic, where the monsters are external, to Romantic Gothic, where they are inside.

3.5 Don José's Eyes

Don José, the schoolroom mannequin whom Ana herself helps, as it were, bring to life by the addition of eyes – an act which may be seen as making her to some extent complicit in the making of her own monsters, since by adding the eyes she is momentarily becoming Frankenstein - is another manifestation of the monster with which Ana must deal. Like the monster, Don José is a composite of body parts. It is the teacher and the students who physically “make” the monster, and the fact that it is Ana who positions the eyes reflects both the clarity of her vision and, metonymically, her quest for further knowledge. She is, as it were, learning to see.



But the act of putting Don José together occurs quite literally under the controlling gaze of Franco, portrayed on one of the classroom walls, following a legal obligation of the time. Don José and Franco appear several times in the same shot, with

their spatial relationship thus suggesting that there is a metonymic relationship between them. Franco, it is suggested – an interpretation which will be understood by contemporary viewers of the film who are “reading between the lines”, to use Juan Goytisolo’s term – is responsible for creating monsters. Thus it is not Franco who represents the monster, but Franco who is Frankenstein, the creator of the monster.

3.6 The Industrial Monster: the Train

A third monster in *El espíritu de la colmena* is the train which speeds powerfully through the Castilian countryside.



As an industrialist famously boasted to James Boswell, “I sell here, Sir, what all the world desires to have, - POWER” (Uglow 257). *Frankenstein*, of course, has often been seen as a warning, within the frame of the Industrial Revolution, about the overreach of such technological power and its incursion into the realm of the human, with humanity’s consequent disempowerment, a theme being taken up at the time of

Frankenstein's writing by the likes of Wordsworth and Coleridge. Frankenstein, as Martin Tropp points out, "is both the industrialist and slave in his factory; his creation is both machine as substitute for man, and men united to form a machine. Behind them both is uncertainty and fear..." (39).

As the sisters excitedly kneel with their heads to the rails to enjoy the faint sound of the approaching train, they become a symbol of that uncertainty and fear, which is so compelling to Ana that she is transfixed by it and, in the film's only real concession to classic suspense, almost killed. Continually wavering between reality and fantasy, Ana of course may not be aware of the train's real power to harm, just as she is not aware of the Frankenstein's monster's power to harm; the train may be a knowing, filmic allusion by Erice to cinema's first monster, which was the approaching train of Auguste and Louis Lumière's *L'Arrivée d'un train en gare de La Ciotat* (1895). The train, enormous, billowing smoke, and clearly at some level a threat, is not presented benignly, as it is when it is the vehicle for the transportation of letters between Teresa and her lover, but in such a way as to emphasize its monstrous characteristics. But differently from *Frankenstein*, this particular monster – the monster of industrial progress – fails to remain in the narrative and swiftly continues on its journey to elsewhere, as though what it represents – industrial development – belongs in a different place, in the metropolis towards which it is hurtling. Put bluntly, here Erice is appropriating the trope of the Gothic monster as a critique of the Franco regime's policy - an indirect result of his post-war decision to make Spain an autarky - of abandoning rural Spain to poverty, effectively abandoned by progress and stranded in a never-ending present, an idea represented visually in the film by the vast expanses of the Castilian plain¹⁷.

¹⁷ For more on the effects on Spain of autarky, see Richards (2006) and many others.

This same train discharges a fugitive – a nameless *maqui*, presumably a Republican on the run.



As we have already seen, the *maqui*, like the monster, is an Other with which Ana enters into a typically ambivalent relationship – frightened by him on the one hand, she is also fascinated by him. His status as the Other has been imposed by the Manichean political strategies of Francoist Nationalism, but this is a culturally-imposed binary opposition which the child Ana cannot recognize: she cannot, in Dani Cavallero’s words, “respect rigid codes and fixed patterns of meaning” (135). The actress Ana Torrent later recalled her experience of shooting this scene and reveals that her own feelings were apparently similar to those of Ana: “The truth is that me, Ana, was very similar to the film’s protagonist. I was having the same fears. The man with the gun in this picture scared me quite a bit. When I had to get closer to him I wasn’t myself. It was just another mystery that I didn’t understand.” (MUBI Europe website)

The fate of the *maquis*, of course, reflects the fate of the monster in Whale’s film: he is, in an indirect allusion both to Whale’s film and Shelley’s novel, hounded down and brutally executed by a torch-wielding mob, in one of the earliest of the formulaic elements of the American horror film. His pursuit follows his brief friendship

with a small girl; and there are echoes here, particularly in terms of Ana's hesitant generosity towards the stranger, of the opening, Gothic-tinged scenes of Dickens' *Great Expectations*, in the relationship between the young Pip and the convict Magwitch, in which the older man is temporarily utterly dependent on the young child, a situation which may of itself be an indicator of a perversely inverted social order.

3.7 The Monster of Censorship

As a genre of extremes and ambiguities, the history of the Gothic novel is intimately bound up with the history of censorship, a history which can be said to have started with the reaction to Lewis' *The Monk* (1796). The reaction of the "Monthly Review" and "Scots Magazine", six years after its publication, to Lewis's *novel-length slight on religious faith and decency led to an injunction by Britain's attorney general for impiety, anti-Catholicism and carnality, with even Coleridge, himself no stranger to the incorporation of Gothic elements into such works as "Christabel," questioning whether Lewis was Christian or an infidel. Lewis was forced into denying that the novel was a political allegory, and rewriting it for its fourth edition: "he expunged every remotely offensive word in his three volumes, with meticulous attention to lust. Ambrosio, formerly a ravisher, becomes an intruder or betrayer; his incontinence changes to weakness or infamy, his lust to desire, his desires to emotions. Having indulged in excesses for three editions, he committed an error in the fourth.* (Irwin 54)

Such establishment reaction to *The Monk* – along with, perhaps, its wholehearted endorsement by the Marquis de Sade, who would later be no stranger himself to the censor's pen - lent the Gothic genre an air of danger and rebelliousness against societal

norms that continue to inform popular reactions to the form to this day. *El espíritu de la colmena* foregrounds this Gothic danger in its inclusion of Edward Van Sloan's introduction to the film, which would have been recognized by 1973 viewers of Erice's film as a comment on, and perhaps an indictment of, Francoist censorship. It is also a necessarily indirect comment by Erice himself on the censorship issues which hung heavy over the shooting of his film – censorship issues which indeed, in terms of the film's multiple ambiguities and its consequent demands on the public in terms of "reading between the lines". The attendant irony is that the very censorship which the censored text seeks to negotiate then becomes a controlling structural principle of that very text: it is to Erice's credit that by the inclusion of the Van Sloan introduction, he renders the process explicit.

During the Van Sloan introduction, Ana and Teresa are in fact watching a distorted, because dubbed, version of the original, which runs as follows:

"How do you do. Mr. Carl Laemmle feels it would be a little unkind to present this picture without just a word of friendly warning. We are about to unfold the story of Frankenstein, a man of science, who sought to create a man after his own image without reckoning upon God. It is one of the strangest tales ever told. It deals with the two great mysteries of creation, life and death. I think it will thrill you. It may even shock you. It might even horrify you. So if any of you do not care to subject your nerves to such a strain, now's your chance to [...] Well, we've warned you!"

The dubbed version, as seen in Hoyuelos, goes like this:

El productor y los realizadores de esta película no han querido presentarla sin hacer antes una advertencia. Se trata de la historia del doctor Frankenstein, un hombre de ciencia que intentó crear un ser vivo sin pensar que eso sólo puede hacerlo Dios. Es una de las historias más extrañas que hemos oído. Trata de los grandes misterios de la creación: la vida y la muerte. Pónganse en guardia: tal vez se les escandalice, incluso puede horrorizarles. Pocas películas han causado mayor impresión en el mundo entero, pero yo les aconsejo que no la tomen muy en serio. (*El espíritu de la colmena*, 05:42-06:40)

There are several small but significant differences between the two versions, some of which can be explained away by linguistic convention, but some which reveal the hand of the censor in the translation. The first is that in the original, the warning is “friendly”: in the subbed version, it is simply a more authoritative “advertencia”. Secondly, there is a difference between creating a living being “sin pensar que eso sólo puede hacerlo Dios” and doing so “without reckoning upon God”: here the difference is in tone, the light irony of “reckoning” having being substituted by a more explicit, dictatorial prohibition. Thirdly, the admonition to “Pónganse en guardia” is an invention of the translator, while interestingly just two of the three possible consequences of watching the film are enumerated by the translator: “shock” may translate as *escandalice*, “horrify” is rendered as *horrorizar*, but “thrill” has disappeared, perhaps because the censor believed that it was ideologically unsound for a foreign film to thrill a Spanish viewer, with its implicit assumption that thrills were in short supply at home.

The final sentence, though, is not a translation, but a thorough rewrite. The original flirts ironically with the idea that viewers who might not wish to submit their nerves to strain are free to leave the cinema – full knowing, of course, that the desire to thrillingly submit their nerves to strain is precisely what will keep the spectator sitting there. The translated version is radically different, emphasising the impression the film has made in the rest of the world but advising the viewer not to take it “muy en serio”. In other words, what makes a big impression elsewhere is not to be taken too seriously in Spain: despite the big impression, *they* are wrong and *we* are right. It is a message which would surely be acceptable to the Francoist censor: censorship is thus evoked in the onscreen world as a commentary on censorship under Francoism.

All of this is being absorbed by Ana’s young, inchoate mind. Initially, then, the girls (and the rest of the audience) are exposed to a introduction which is less “knowing”, less playful, and more paternalistic in tone than the original. If you are scandalized, the dubbed Edward van Sloan effectively tells them, then don’t take it too seriously.¹⁸

It is during van Sloan’s presentation that we first see Ana – her presence at a film which may in fact be unsuitable for six year-old children may be a further indication of the indifference of Fernando and Teresa to the fates of their children. The first clear shot of Ana (they appear briefly just before van Sloan starts speaking, entering the shot from the right, holding their chairs) comes immediately after van Sloan has uttered the word “Frankenstein”; a close-up of her, in which the two sisters are framed, comes as van Sloan is saying “los grandes misterios de la creación.” (It can be assumed that there is little that is haphazard in the *mise-en-scene* of *The Spirit of the*

¹⁸ The introduction, of course, functions as a “meta-introduction” to *El espíritu de la colmena* itself, since it is immediately followed by the mysterious, forbidding and slightly monstrous images of Fernando, behind his mask, at work with his bees.

Beehive, a film whose sense of responsibility is there in every frame, and in which every detail feels intended.¹⁹

Ana signally fails to heed van Sloan's injunction not to take what she sees "muy en serio". Indeed, the fact that as a child – or indeed as a Gothic heroine - "unsullied by the murky deviousness of socialized existence" (Cavallero 1), she lacks the ironical distance and the emotional mechanisms which would enable her to experience her viewings in a "safe" way. Indeed, it is Ana's crucial misreading of what she is seeing – not unlike Ofelia's misreading of the fairy stories in *Pan's Labyrinth*, which later become real for her just as Frankenstein becomes real for Ana, that principally drives the narrative forward from this point. The camerawork, cutting back and forth between van Sloan and the audience, is executed in such a way as to suggest that van Sloan is actually there with them: the shots of van Sloan are unframed so as to break down the distinction between "real" and "unreal", foreshadowing Ana's later failure to distinguish between "real" and "unreal" in her nocturnal encounter with the monster. As Pena tells us: "La actitud de todos ellos ante el espectáculo cinematográfico desborda las fronteras de lo lúdico para adquirir tintes casi rituales. El cine será tratado aquí como un mito que se concretará en el propio personaje de Frankenstein" (68).

Another point of intersection between the two films in this regard, which also has resonances in the idea of censorship, is fundamental to driving the narrative of *El espíritu de la colmena*. Ana's question to Isabel about why the monster is killed is at least in part motivated by an act of "censorship" on the part of Universal Studios of Whale's *Frankenstein*.²⁰ In the version screened in Hoyuelos, the scene between the

¹⁹ Just a couple of examples: a few seconds later, the word "vida" accompanies a shot of a young, bright-eyed boy, while the following "muerte" accompanies a shot of an elderly man lighting a cigarette.

²⁰ The censorship history of Whale's *Frankenstein* is available in Doherty and in Vieira.

monster and Little María cuts (at 48:07) directly to the wedding celebrations (48:32) (in *El espíritu de la colmena*, the scene cuts at 19:28 to Teresa on her bicycle); the scene showing the girl being thrown in the water was deemed objectionable by state censorship boards in Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, and New York. Universal consequently made cuts from the master negative. In a 1937 reissue of the film, this cut was included, along with others, including Frankenstein's line, "Now I know what it's like to be God!", covered by a clap of soundtracked thunder, and some of the footage of Frankenstein's assistant Fritz gleefully waving a lit torch near the shackled monster. The version used in Hoyuelos would have corresponded to this censored version. The scene in which Little Maria is thrown into the water was not restored until 1986 by MCA-Universal, while the full "Now I know what it's like to be God!" line did not reappear in the film until as late as 1999.

What we don't see, as is suggested in the screenplay, is how "de manera torpe e impremeditada, y por ello mismo quizás aún más terrible, el monstruo mata a la niña que recogía margaritas a orillas del río" (Erice 40). Indeed, it is strange that Erice included this in the screenplay at all, given that it was the censored version of the film which was still in circulation at the time his film was being shot.²¹

²¹ Interestingly, reports vary as to the reaction of Boris Karloff, who played the monster, to the deletion of the scene: it has been variously suggested that he was pleased, since it did not show the monster killing a little girl, and upset, since it left to the viewer's imagination the possibly unspeakable acts which the monster does to her. The lacunae of censorship will always generate such ambiguities.



In *Bela Lugosi and Boris Karloff: The Expanded Story of a Haunting Collaboration*, Gregory William Mank describes the 1931 shooting of the scene, revealing that Whale never showed child actress Marilyn Harris the script for *Frankenstein*, simply telling her “what the scene is about, what her lines will be, and what the Monster will do to her” (85). At the first attempt, the book reveals, Harris actually did not sink, buoyant on account of all the clothes she was wearing: “so, in the first take of the toss, Little Maria does just what the Monster believed she would do - she floats like the flower (Mank 85).” Karloff protested that the Monster need not kill her at all, [according to Frankenstein historian Donald F. Glut because “it made the Monster appear to be too brutal” (Glut 118], but Whale insisted on the drowning as being “part of the ritual”, and the girl was thrown in a second time. There is a moral in this story: that the monster is right that children don’t float, and it’s only the manipulators of the media who wish they do.

The presence of this crucial scene, it has been suggested, may have answered Ana’s fundamental question about why the monster kills Little Maria (and therefore negated the entire reason for the existence of *El espíritu de la colmena*). But it is debateable whether Ana, at her age, would possess the interpretative tools to make sense of it even if it *were* shown. Jonathan Lake Crane tells us: “Initially, the little girl

frightens the Monster when he chances upon her. The Monster is scared, torn between fight and flight, because he knows from experience how humans feel about him. She, with no sense of fear based on adult stereotypes, takes the Monster as a godsend” (91).

The parallel here between Little Maria and Ana, both “with no sense of fear based on adult stereotypes,” is interesting. Crane goes on:

[The Monster] accidentally drowns his new friend when he treats her like the beautiful flowers they have been tossing on the water. Like many other young learners, he does not know how to construct error-free extended syllogisms. Reasoning from sign, the Creature constructs the following conclusion: Pretty things float. By analogy, he moves to his second and fatal syllogism: Girls (like flowers) are pretty things. Pretty things float; therefore, girls float. Of course, the minor term is undistributed and the Creature inadvertently assumes all pretty things do not sink in the water [...] The Creature was not acting with evil intent. He errs in logic but not in feeling. His actions are the natural consequence of trying to figure out how he should play with the girl. He meant to treat her as delicately as she treated the lovely mountain wildflowers. She perishes, and the Creature is doomed for the crimes of being both a monstrosity and a child murderer. (91)

Shelley’s description of the moment emphasizes the monster’s desire to save the child, and that it is the mob rather than the monster which is really responsible for María’s death. The concomitant interpretation regarding the spiritual death of Ana would thus be that it is society, in the grip of the political monster of fascism that is responsible:

... a young girl came running toward the spot where I was concealed, laughing as if she ran from someone in sport ... Suddenly, her foot slipped, and she fell into the rapid stream. I rushed from my hiding place and, with extreme labor from the force of the current, saved her and dragged her to shore. She was senseless, and I endeavoured with every means in my power to restore animation, when I was suddenly interrupted by the approach of a rustic ... On seeing me, he darted towards me and, tearing the girl from my arms, hastened toward the deeper parts of the woods. (95)

A child himself, the Monster thus confuses the boundaries between good and evil. As the issue is presented by Erice, Ana senses the contradiction between the Monster's desire to play with Little Maria and the sight of her being carried dead through the town in her father's arms: she cannot explain the evil which has been generated by his apparent goodness. Seeing the monster playfully throw Little Maria into the water would confirm her intuition that there may be good in that which what is deemed evil by authority.

It interesting to note here some comment made by Boris Karloff regarding the horror genre:

Perhaps the best possible audience for a "horror" film is a child audience. The vivid imagination with which a child is gifted is far more receptive to the ingredients in these pictures than the adult imagination, which merely finds them

artificial. Because they have vivid imaginations we must not underestimate children [...] they know far more than we think they do [...] When I played Frankenstein's Monster I received sack loads of fan mail [...] mostly from young girls. These children had seen right through the make-up and had been deeply moved by sympathy for the poor brute.²²

Ana's "untutored" reaction to Whale's film, and Erice's delineation of her reaction, would seem precisely to confirm Karloff's thesis.

In the context of *El espíritu de la colmena*, then, there are two audiences for *Frankenstein*. The first is the audience of men, women and children sitting in the *ayuntamiento* in Hoyuelos: Erice seems to be suggesting that Whale's film is being quietly subversive in suggesting that there is good in what authority dubs evil, but it is a message that apparently only Ana is able to heed. The film's second audience, the viewers of *El espíritu de la colmena*, will perhaps be able to make sense of the message in terms of the war: the *maqui*/Monster who Ana will later encounter, though dubbed evil by the authorities and executed on this account, is in fact a monster in which good is to be found. Thus Whale's *Frankenstein*, like the film in which it appears, is seen to be quietly subversive of power structures (despite the appallingly simplistic tacked-on happy ending of *Frankenstein*, which undoes much of the hard work of earlier in the film, and which was effectively rewritten for its 1935 sequel, *Bride of Frankenstein*).

The issue of the dual censorship, therefore, opens up the notion that Erice's film is appropriating *Frankenstein* as a way of questioning simple oppositional readings which would come from the political left and right. Monsters are transgressive, breaking

²² Interview with Boris Karloff, from "My Life as a Monster", in Issue 14 of "Castle of Frankenstein" magazine, 1969.

down binaries: there is an inherent ambiguity in them, which renders the constructed binary opposition of I/Other fluid and hence fallacious. As Mary Douglas argues in her pioneering study *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*, entities perceived as 'impure' within a given culture are those which trouble a culture's conceptual categories (3), particularly the binary oppositions by means of which the culture, in this case Francoist culture, seeks to meaningfully organise experience in its own interests. So that despite several commentators' disappointments that the film is not politically explicit enough, Erice is focussing on something beyond that.

Erice's focus, then, is on more than inverting the simple good/evil binaries which Francoism has established. As Carmen Arocena tells us, "La concreción de las consecuencias de la Guerra se abandona para optar por un relato más abstracto e íntimo. Se abandona un punto de vista referencial concreto para optar por un punto de vista anclado en la infancia como territorio del mito."

As with Shelley's "original", Erice's focus is not on political specifics, but on the issue of the nature and constructions of power itself, and on how the idea of the "monstrous" is refracted through different societal lenses. Were it easy in the film for Ana to identify exactly what the monster signified, then there would be no story. In part, the narrative is about her pursuit to identify the meaning of the Gothic monster with which, via the medium of cinema, she has been presented.

3.8. Ambiguity and Interpretation

At one level, *El espíritu de la colmena* is a film about faulty sources of information (and consequently ideological discourse), and the consequent mistrust of reality. Indeed, the film itself is the kind of open-ended work that invites multiple interpretations. As Monte Hellman writes in his discussion of the film in “Positif”: “...une oeuvre d'art devrait en même temps être un objet difficile à saisir. Elle doit se protéger du tripotement vulgaire qui la ternit et la déforme. Elle devrait être façonnée de telle sorte que les gens ne savent pas de tenir” (48).²³

The fact that *The Spirit of the Beehive* is hard to hold on to can be seen in the variety of interpretations it has generated, all of them equally valid in terms of the work itself. Hellman himself ironically echoes the description of it in the introduction to the screening of *Frankenstein* by calling it “une oeuvre secrete et mystérieuse, qui traite des mystères les plus grands, à savoir la création et la mort”²⁴ (Ehrlich 48). Marsha Kinder, meanwhile, says it “focuses on a child's imaginative reconstruction of images she has seen in a Hollywood movie. It shows how she uses the myth to deal with the painful experiences in her own Spanish context” (Ehrlich 126). Chris Perriam calls it an “approach to the taboo subject of the catastrophic polarization of the vanquished and the vanquishers, of the before and after of a nation multiply divided” (64). Emmanuel Larraz believes it explores “the unknown continent of childhood” (226), while Roger

²³ (...a work of art should at the same time be an object that is hard to grasp. It must protect itself from the vulgar messing which tarnishes and deforms it. It should be shaped in such a way that people don't know how to hold onto it.)

²⁴ (“a secret and mysterious work, which deals with the greatest mysteries, which is to say creation and death.”)

Mortimore believes the film is about “the parents, who have suffered the war. It is not a film about children.” (200). Erice himself supplies a convincing interpretation of his own film based on myth, while many Spanish commentators have understandably preferred to stress the social and political aspects of a film set after the Civil War.

There is a similar lack of agreement when it comes to the interpretation of specific details of the plot. Fernando’s political affiliations, for example: he has been seen as being on both the side of the Republicans (John Gillet) and on the side of the Nationalists, having, like Unamuno, changed sides owing to fear of the possibility of social revolution (Larraz).²⁵ Erice himself describes Fernando as a *vencido*, but implies that the *vencidos* in a civil war may belong to either the winning or the defeated side. The letter which Teresa is writing may be to a family member (Riley), an adopted child (Glaesser) or, provocatively, to Fernando himself (Thibaudeau). The monster, too, has been variously interpreted: as a representation of Franco’s Spain (D’Lugo); as “an identification with a supposedly malevolent, death-dealing outcast which refers both to the side which lost the Civil War and to the early intimations of mortality to be found in any growing child” (Hopewell 209); as Fernando, the father-figure; and in other ways. The story of Ana herself has, among other interpretations, been seen as a crisis of identity and as being the story of Spain under Franco.

To this extent, the ambiguities of *El espíritu de la colmena* place it firmly within the tradition of art cinema. As David Bordwell tells us:

The art film is nonclassical in that it foregrounds deviations from the classical norm - there are certain gaps and problems. But these very deviations are placed,

²⁵ If Fernando is, or has been, a Nationalist, then the split in the family which is so stunningly suggested by Erice’s tactic of never framing them together is wonderfully reinforced.

resituated as realism (in life things happen this way) or authorial commentary (the ambiguity is symbolic). Thus the art film solicits a particular reading procedure: whenever confronted with a problem in causation, temporality, or spatially we first seek realistic motivation. (Is a character's mental state causing the uncertainty? Is life just leaving loose ends?) If we're thwarted, we next seek authorial motivation. (What is being 'said' here? What significance justifies the violation of the norm?) Ideally, the film hesitates, suggesting character subjectivity, life's untidiness, and author's vision. Whatever is excessive in one category must belong to another. Uncertainties persist but are understood as such, as obvious uncertainties, so to speak. Put crudely, the slogan of the art cinema might be, 'When in doubt, read for maximum ambiguity.' (99)²⁶

The Gothic ambiguities of *El espíritu de la colmena* – the need to suspend unitary, all-encompassing judgment - derive from various sources. As we have seen, and this is a perspective offered more often by Spanish commentators on the work than by English-speaking ones - there was the obligation to get around censorship by making political references and statements obliquely and indirectly.

The film presents its vital contextual information via small, telling details. One example of many: the yoke and arrows of the Falange that we see at the beginning, while the truck carrying the movie of *Frankenstein* is entering Hoyuelos, are the only remaining element of a much longer list of war remnants that were envisioned in the original script – ruined walls, an abandoned trench and a common grave among them.

²⁶ Bordwell's words are equally applicable to Pere Portabella's *Vampyr-Cuadecuc* (1970), which we will be examining later.

The fact that only the yoke and arrows remain show Erice, as Pena tells us, deciding not to foreground its historical dimension. (50).

It is worth pausing to discuss the credit sequence which precedes the arrival of the truck – to focus, on, in Genette’s terms, an element of the paratext²⁷ - which may guide our interpretation. At the same time, there is vagueness about the place and time frame, compounded by the use, at the end of the credits, and over the image of Hoyuelos, of the phrase “Érase una vez...” [“Once upon a time...”] followed by “Un lugar de la meseta castellana hacía 1.940...” which situate the film in the realm of the literary, specifically to the worlds of fable and to *Don Quixote*, which begins “En un lugar de la Mancha, de cuyo nombre no quiero acordarme...”

As Marsha Kinder points out, these references may seem to indicate a “partial disavowal” of the film’s “cultural and historical specificity” (129), but they have further, concomitant functions. Firstly, they take us into the area of myth, situating the film as “story” rather than as “reality”. In a film about the difficulty of interpretation, this relativistic perspective is surely crucial, since it represents a refusal by Erice to acknowledge the fixedness of history – that what Spain is living through is simply one man’s (Franco’s) interpretation of history. What Ana will discover through the film, it is suggested, is another, different story, but one equally valid. Secondly, the fact that a series of fragmentary images open the film – drawings done by Ana Torrent herself and by Isabel Tellería and her sisters, which anticipate the deployment of similar child-drawn images from Amenábar’s *The Others* – basically directs the viewer to how to watch the film, and indeed the images the entire story in distilled form. This will be a film, the drawings tell us, which will primarily be told through images, images which

²⁷ The paratext, as defined in Genette’s *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, describes the elements of a text which surround the main text, such as the author’s name, the title, preface or introduction, or any illustrations. In cinematic terms, this would include the credits, subtitles etc.

initially appear to be fragmentary, and in which a child's perspective will dominate. But the text which is superimposed on the screen suggest, on the other hand, the importance of *words*, words which may not be themselves present in a film which is famous for its lack of dialogue and consequent dependence on image, but which are instead to be found in the film's intertexts.

In their own way, all the main characters in *El espíritu de la colmena* are manifestations of the difficulty in knowing where to turn to in order to find the truth. Fernando's political background is never made explicit in the film – he is widely considered to have been a Republican, perhaps now having been exiled to this remote area in Segovia province, but there is no consensus on this. (If he is indeed a defeated Republican, as many assume, then it is hard to account for his apparently amicable relationship with the Guardia Civil during the scene when he is asked to identify the cadaver of the dead *maqui*.) Fernando is clearly, at some level, one of the *vencidos*, clinging onto what he sees as reliable sources of information beyond his own culture, since inside that culture, all the reliable reference points have gone.



For example, we see Fernando – one of those, in Erice’s words, who “habían muerto” - sitting wearing headphones as he tunes into a primitive shortwave radio set, presumably listening to the BBC’s international broadcasts. He first appears tending beehives in the guise of an apiculturist, and at several points we see him writing in his diary about the behaviour of bees. The passage he writes, or perhaps merely translates, comes from a treatise in entomology written by the Belgian Symbolist poet Maurice Maeterlinck called *La vie des abeilles* (*The Life of Bees*, 1903).²⁸

Fernando may be writing for a thesis, or possibly translating: what is clear is that he is a man clinging to what he considers to be certainties, whether in the alternative view of history provided by the BBC or in the science of his beloved bees. It is perhaps of significance that the very title of the film derives from the most “scientific” of the intertexts which run through it, an ideological positioning of the film as being at the same scientific, objectively truthful level, as the Maeterlinck text.

Teresa, too, is associated with the idea of misinformation. She is constantly writing letters: their intended recipient is as ambiguous as Fernando’s history, and it may be a former lover or a family member who is now in exile in France, as revealed when she burns a letter during one of the later scenes. (The object of her letters may indeed be the maqui who jumps from the train and whom Ana later meets.) By writing, Teresa is attempting to pin down a truth which the film reveals as beyond her grasp. As surely as Fernando is, Teresa is seeking verifiable information about the reality of things where there is no longer any to be found: the political conditions under which she is living have guaranteed the disappearance of the old certainties. As Chris Perriam tells us:

²⁸ The beehive of the title itself, of course, is a clear symbolic reference to the Gothic’s dark, complex labyrinths – territories obeying laws which are practically unknowable to those observing it.

Teresa's writing too is habitual, a way of stilling the emptiness of the present and inscribing the act of survival [...], and the one text we see (and hear in voice-over) is structured around a linguistic reiteration—of “tantas ausencias [...] de tanta tristeza [que] se fue nuestra capacidad de sentir”. Teresa's letter is concerned with creating a memoir in which she hopes to confirm the impossibility of nostalgia, which, as she writes, is a feeling that is difficult to have after what they have all lived through: when she burns a subsequent letter she defies the destructive power of constantly returning memories, of so many” annihilating events and emotions? Yet they return. (68)

Fernando and Teresa, husband and wife, are never filmed together in the same frame. Such facts indicate their mutual isolation. Marvin D'Lugo tells us that the beehive is the film's image of a troubled Spanish society, “a symbol of a social order which, while superficially unified, is nevertheless marked by a radical isolation of each of its members from one another.” (66) This may be true, but it is the reason for that isolation which is the most important thing, and that may be found in the deep mistrust in all human intercommunication which the aftermath of the Civil War has caused, and which derives from the supremely mistrustful personality of the Caudillo himself - a mistrust which has divided family members from one another and also, more significantly - as suggested by Erice - from themselves. The *maqui* is another character whose fate has ultimately been determined by misinformation. But of course this is Ana's story, and it is Ana's search for meaning, ending with her muttered “Soy Ana” as she stands framed by the window, which is most central to the film's development.

CHAPTER 4

THE GOTHIC STRUCTURE OF *THE OTHERS*

The brilliance of Amenabar's ghost story is that it is a film about how haunted houses are born, more than it is a film about a haunted house. In other words, "The Others" ends where the typical haunted house movie begins, with spirits laying claim to property and refusing to share this abode with any of the living.

"Necropsy: The Review of Horror Fiction". Volume III (Fall 2001).

4.1 *The Others* and *The Turn of the Screw*

On its release, many reviews of Alejandro Amenábar's profoundly ambivalent *The Others* noted how the film was a return to the quiet, classical pleasures of Hollywood films of the 40s – the cinema of the era of *Rebecca*, in fact - although few noted its relevance to contemporary Spain: indeed, the total absence of direct reference in the film to anything regarding Spain's twentieth century past seems wilful, as though there was a conspiracy on the part of Amenábar and his producers, on the one hand – perhaps for commercial reasons – to present the project as international, and on the other hand, of critics and viewers to recognize the film's potential relevance to Spanish issues. In terms of the film's lack of special effects and this insistence on the power of absence, whether visual or aural – a power of particular significance in a story about ghosts – this is true. Indeed, it is a ghost story which lacks, until its final minutes, any

ghosts at all. Nick James, writing in *Sight and Sound*, expresses the general critical feeling: “Now, at a time when so much mainstream film-making in Hollywood has had to be put on hold, there should be more room for films like *The Others*, films with the qualities of Hollywood's golden age, superb genre pieces that exhibit restraint, sparseness and gradualism”.

Fred Botting tells us:

Gothic works [...] harbor a disturbing ambivalence which disclosed the inability not only of modes of representation but also of the structures that held those representations in place [...] Gothic works and their disturbing ambivalence can thus be seen as effects of fear and anxiety, as attempts to account for or deal with the uncertainty of these shifts [...] The contest for a coherent and stable account of the past... produced an ambivalence that was not resolved. (Botting 23)

One of the ways in which *The Others* is notably postmodern –and indeed there are multiple formal parallels between postmodern and the Gothic - is in the form of its narrative arrangement, and in its exploration of the instability of structures as cited by Botting. It employs precisely the kind of ambiguity and ambivalence which Henry James exploited to such lasting narrative effect in *The Turn of the Screw*. “Lo importante son las aristas y los recovecos,” Amenábar tells us, “los lados oscuros de los personajes, y por eso mis películas, hasta ahora, han quedado resueltas en una cierta ambigüedad. (Rodríguez Marchante 88)

The most often-cited inspiration for *The Others* is Jack Clayton's marvellously atmospheric film *The Innocents* (1961), itself one of many adaptations (it is widely considered to be the finest) of James' novella *The Turn of the Screw*.²⁹ In *The Innocents*, Miss Giddens (Deborah Kerr) – unnamed in James's novella – is hired as governess to two parentless children, Miles (Martin Stephens) and Flora (Pamela Franklin), by their wealthy uncle (Michael Redgrave), who has no interest in them, and who keeps the children at a remove from him at Bly House, a large country mansion. The children appear to be increasingly under the influence of the dead spirits of two deceased members of the household: the previous governess, Miss Jessel (Clytie Jessop), and a valet, Peter Quint (Peter Wyngarde). Miss Giddens believes that the souls of the children are in danger from these malevolent presences. She has seen both spirits and tries to make Flora admit to seeing Miss Jessel, but the child only shrieks insults at her. She instructs Mrs. Grose, the housekeeper, to take Flora away, herself remaining alone in the house with Miles. Quint's face appears at the window as Miss Giddens attempts to make Miles admit to the fact that he can see Quint, but in a climactic sequence in the garden Miles falls down and dies.

Plotwise, therefore, it is clear that *The Innocents* follows *The Turn of the Screw* very closely. James's novella is a masterpiece of ambiguity, as James himself, in his 1908 Preface to it, explains:

... I find here a perfect example of an exercise of the imagination unassisted, unassociated – playing the game, making the score, in the phrase of our sporting day, off its own bat. To what degree the game was worth playing I needn't

²⁹ There have been nearly a dozen adaptations in English of *The Turn of the Screw* over the last fifty years, as well as many foreign language films, several versions of Benjamin Britten's operatic adaptation, and many theatrical transpositions.

attempt to say: the exercise I have noted strikes me now, I confess, as the interesting thing, the imaginative faculty acting with the whole of the case on its hands ... Only make the reader's general vision of evil intense enough, I said to myself – and that already is a charming job – and his own experience, his own imagination, his own sympathy (with the children) and horror (of their false friends) will supply him quite sufficiently with all the particulars. (James 270)

James' deliberate ambiguity therefore opens up the possibility of many rival interpretations, as well as the possibility for readers (and viewers of similarly-focused adaptations) to project their own desires onto it, operating on the dynamic we examined in our study of Hitchcock's *Rebecca*. As Anthony Mazzella records, critical interpretations of *The Turn of the Screw* have been multiple and often contradictory: the ghosts may be real; the sex-repressed, insane governess may be hallucinating; Mrs. Grose may be the evil genius behind the mysteries at Bly; it may not be the ghosts who are corrupting the children, but the text of the governess's tale that is corrupt. If for "the governess" we read "Grace" and for Mrs Grose "Mrs Mills", then we start to see that in *The Others* Amenábar has allowed for all of these competing possible interpretations simultaneously.

The ambiguity, which the critics seem unable to accept as such, and which is as key to *The Others* as it is to the effect of James' novella, is also maintained in *The Innocents*, though it is widely felt that as a medium, the written word is better at maintaining narrative ambiguities than the visual image. Let us take as an example perhaps the key narrative ambiguity of James' novella – whether or not the ghosts of Quint and Jessel actually exist, or whether (or not) they are simply figments of Miss

Gibbens' crazed imagination - the ambiguity known as "the apparitionist/non-apparitionist controversy", and which *The Others* later so intelligently develops.

James leaves the question open – it seems that Mrs Grose and the children are unable to see the apparitions - and in so doing generates much tension. Clayton is able to replicate this ambiguity at a visual level, despite the obvious difficulties of making a ghost's appearance uncertain in a visual medium: after all, something is either onscreen or it is not. He does it by having Miss Gibbens appear in practically every scene, thus making her (in Genette's terms) the focalizer of the events: what we see, we believe we are seeing through her eyes. When she first sees Quint at the top of the tower, it is against the glare of the sun; when she sees Jessel at the lake, it is always among tall, dark reeds; and Quint's final, terrifying appearance in the garden is among human statues. The surroundings are thus used to naturalize Miss Gibben's possible failures of perception, keeping what she sees on the borderline between the "real" and the hallucinatory.

Such visual strategies are of course also key to the narrative success of *The Others*, with Amenábar following not only James or, for example, Poe's story "The Tell Tale Heart", but also, in terms of the history of Spanish film, following on the tradition of ambiguity as a way of evading censorship.

The undeniable artistry, craft, atmospherics and performances of *The Others* may have kept those critics who were anxious to a return to the glory days of Hollywood happy, but these qualities were almost certainly not what the viewing public reacted to so positively and in such numbers, or what made it the most commercially

successful Spanish film to have been released until that time³⁰. What the viewing public enjoyed more than anything was the film's radical, daring twist ending. Indeed, the narrative of *The Others* made it the kind of film which forces critics themselves into unaccustomed ambiguity. Fearful that they might be revealing the film's biggest surprise and thus breaking contract with their readers, some critics adopted a coy tone, such as Andrew O'Hehir, who wrote: "There's nothing more I can or should tell you about Charles' secret, or Grace's or Mrs. Mills'." These and other similar comments suggest that *The Others* is fulfilling the traditional narrative contract between artist and audience, in which the novelist/director says "I will do everything in my power to convince you of the truth of what you are seeing, if you do everything in your power to believe it – i.e. if you suspend your disbelief".

Many reviewers of *The Others* at the time of its release emphasized the classical nature of the film. Edelstein, in *Slate* magazine, begins his review with a brief survey of the state of play of the horror film at the turn of the millennium:

For American horror buffs, the saddest casualty of the '70s, '80s, and '90s was the slow, suggestive spook tale, which was largely supplanted by special-effects-laden spectacles: big-budget sound and light shows (*Poltergeist* [1982]), splattery gore-athons (*The Evil Dead* [1982]), and oddly transmuted buddy/vigilante thrillers (*Ghost* [1990]). The exceptions, among them Frank LaLoggia's *Lady in White* (1988), were ignored by audiences weaned on the gross and the grosser. But after the summer of 1999 (*The Blair Witch Project*, *The Sixth Sense*, the current cable-staple *Stir of Echoes*) and last year's dumb but

³⁰ In late 2012, Juan Antonio Bayona's *The Impossible*, his follow-up to *El orfanato*, took over from *The Others* as the most successful Spanish film ever at the box office.

frightening *What Lies Beneath*, it may be said that the pendulum has swung back—and the pit's not far behind. Here again is the moody, slow-building chiller, with its shadows, hypnotic silences, and that peculiar Gothic/Freudian compulsion to bury and then exhume.

Two things are suggested by the general tenor of the film's critical reception: first, that there is a return to a different kind of horror: several reviews mention the films' indebtedness to the Gothic horrors of *The Innocents* and *The Haunting* (Robert Wise, 1963). Secondly, that like Amenábar's debut *Tesis* (1995), to which I will return, the film is to be allied principally to a European, rather than Hollywood ("summer blockbuster audience") version of cinema.

As we have seen, the possible film's relevance to Spain has rarely been commented on, which may partly be due to Amenábar's avowed distancing of himself from the Spanish cinematic tradition and his consequent embracing of Hollywood as an inspiration, partly because the film indeed slips so neatly into, and appears to derive so perfectly from genre pieces - the kinds of 40s ghost thriller that we mentioned above - and partly because there is absolutely no mention of Spain in the film. The blindness of Spanish critics to the possible significance of the narrative to that country – a similar blindness was apparent in the Spanish critical reactions to *The Orphanage* – is fascinating, but perhaps beyond the focus of this thesis.

4.2 *The Others* as Gothic Allegory

The Others can, however, be said to connect with other films on the Spanish Civil War and its aftermath via the Gothic. Again with reference to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's valuable taxonomy, we see that *The Others* features, either directly or in equivalent terms, "the priesthood and monastic institutions;" "sleeplike and deathlike states;" "doubles;" "the discovery of obscured family ties;" "affinities between narrative and pictorial art;" "unnatural echoes or silences;" "the poisonous effects of guilt and shame;" "nocturnal landscapes and dreams;" "apparitions from the past;" and "the madhouse" into which Grace's own neuroses have turned the Manderley-like mansion. We might also add to Kosofsky Sedgwick's list other ways in which *The Others* is recognizably Gothic – in its emphasis on mystery and suspense, its interest in visions which may or may not be real, its focus on the supernatural and on overwrought emotion, with Grace as ironical Gothic heroine, perpetually in a state of high anxiety, beginning with the scream with which she awakens herself at the beginning of the film; and in the figure of the distressed, abandoned and unprotected woman.

As Ernesto R. Acevedo-Muñoz points out, overlaps in both theme and treatment can be found between *The Others* and *El espíritu de la colmena*, *Furtivos* (Jose Luis Borau, 1975), and *Cría Cuervos* in that they "adopt conventions of horror, introduce monsters and ghosts and various "uncanny" figures and situations to their plots in ways that are potentially allegorical to the nation's cultural and political transitions of the period." (205)

The primary connection between these films and the other, later ones we are discussing here – is in their use of a young, rebellious protagonist. Acevedo-Muñoz draws on Ismail Xavier's "Historical Allegory":

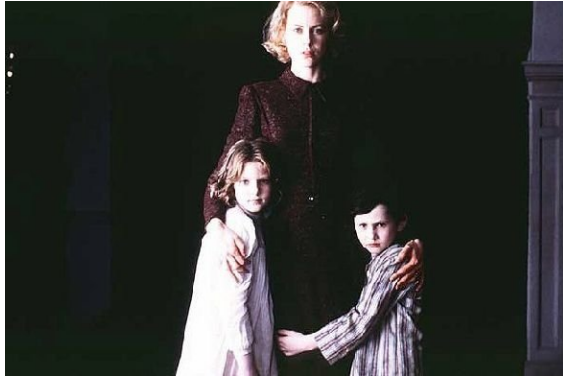
The representation of national destinies through an encoded storytelling process is a recurrent fact in film history. Both First- and Third World films have offered us different versions of the so-called “overt allegory” — when the reference to national experience results from an intentional process of encoding. Moreover, the presence of national allegories in film history goes beyond the examples of overt and intentional encoding [...] Alongside intentional allegories there are also “unconscious” allegories, where the intervention of a “competent reader” is indispensable. (335)

There are clear parallels between what Xavier is claiming here and the strategies of appropriation that we saw being developed by Stuart Hall in our discussion of Hitchcock’s *Rebecca*. Acevedo-Muñoz, following Xavier, proposes *The Others* as an example of “unconscious” allegory, in which competent readers may decode the allegorical features of the film in ways never intended by Amenábar, or intended by him unconsciously. Acevedo-Muñoz finds the allegorical point of contact between *The Others* and other, more explicitly political Spanish films, in the figure of the young protagonist and the terrors she experiences, are not unlike those suffered by, for example Ana in *Cría Cuervos* or Ofelia in *El laberinto del fauno*. Acevedo-Muñoz notes how the gothically isolated setting of the house in *The Others* may mirror Franco’s isolationist policy during and after World War II. But, without ever moving his discussion into a more general debate about the meanings of the Gothic in *The Others*, Acevedo-Muñoz finds that it is in Grace’s use of religion as a tool of repression, which we discussed in Chapter 1, that *The Others* is at its most overtly allegorical in terms of

Franco's fusion of the Catholic church to his own repressive regime. The monsters and ghosts that Grace and her children are stubbornly trying to escape might indeed be those of history itself.

In what aspects of the film, then, does the film's classical quality reside? Generically, as in other ways, the film appears to gothically stand at the interface between several genres. There are always signs that Amenábar is playing with the conventions of the Gothic horror form. The action in the Gothic takes place in and around an old castle. Much of the mystery centres on the issue of whether it is occupied or not, and it is an open question from whose perspective the story is being narrated. Of necessity *The Others* updates its isolated castle, as do Erice and Del Toro in *El espíritu de la colmena* and *El espinazo del diablo*, to a modern setting – the unnamed house on Jersey - where the secret passages, trap doors, secret rooms, dark or hidden staircases of the early Gothic are not literal, but rather suggested, as they are in *Rebecca*, by cinematographically by use of sustained close-ups, unusual camera angles, and by use of darkness and shadow, combining to create the time-honoured Gothic sense of entrapment and claustrophobia. Indeed, the word “house” is uttered 46 times in the screenplay, coming third in a word count only to “going” and to Mrs Mills's perpetually deferent “ma'am”³¹.

³¹ An interesting irony, given that the true matriarch of the house, in Gothic tradition, is not the true owner but the housekeeper. It is Mrs Mills, in more senses than one, who holds the keys in this story.



Secondly, *The Others* is pervaded by a perpetual sense of Gothic threat, of a fear enhanced by the unknown and indecipherable nature of its source. Inexplicable events, in other words, drive the narrative forwards. In *The Others*, the audience learns most of what happens from the point of view of Grace, sharing also in Grace's terrible final realization. For Grace, locked into a narrative situation replete with dramatic ironies for which we will later offer a partial taxonomy, the unknown monsters of the story are the ghosts – the intruders - and the spectator shares in her discomfort as she hears a piano being played by an apparently invisible pianist, or as doors mysteriously close, on one occasional with such force as to knock her to the ground, or as the curtains of the house disappear, thus exposing the children to what she believes to be deadly sunlight. She moves from outright rejection of Anne's beliefs that there are intruders in the house, through unwilling acceptance of them, to the final, chilling confrontation which reveals that Grace herself is the ghost, the monster.

To what extent does the narrative prepare us for the idea that Grace herself might be a Gothic monster? One of the definitions given by Merriam Webster for "monster" defines it as "a person of unnatural or extreme ugliness, deformity, wickedness, or cruelty", and it is in this metaphorical sense that Grace exhibits monstrous traits almost from the start of the story, rather as the apparently

unexceptionable Victor Frankenstein is revealed, on closer analysis, to be the true monster of his story.³²

Grace treats her children, and Anne in particular, in a monstrous manner, imposing her own interpretation of things on them unilaterally and without consideration to the harm she might be causing. As we have seen, Gothic fiction and Spanish film teem with terrifying father figures, in the latter case often indirectly symbolizing Franco, to which Grace might represent a parallel matriarch (even on the issue of the tyrant's gender, Amenábar seems keen to distance himself from tidy one-to-one correspondences between his film and interpretations involving Spanish twentieth-century history).

A fundamentalist Catholic (Amenábar is consistent in his films from *The Others* onwards in questioning the tenets of the Catholic religion), Grace, as we have seen, regales the children with Bible stories which invariably contain a component of Gothic terror, stories which indeed seem to predate horror Gothic as they retell the stories of the Christian martyrs Justus and Pastor, schoolboys who were flogged and decapitated outside the Spanish town of Alcalá de Henares, a hidden Spanish reference in the film and a frankly unusual story for Grace to be acquainted with: "But Justus and Pastor, not afraid, rejoiced and showed themselves willing to die for Christ. When he saw this, the Roman governor was filled with rage, and ordered their heads to be cut off."

After she supposed Anne to have upset Nicholas with ghost stories in bed (the ghost in that scene is not one of Anne's inventions, but "real"), Grace punishes her daughter by making her sit on the stairs. We hear her reading the story of the Binding of Isaac, perhaps the most famous tale of parental cruelty in Western culture. "How long is this punishment going to go on?" Mrs Mills wonders aloud. "It's been three days now."

³² Grace's initial scream – the film opens, like Amenabar's own *Abre los ojos*, with a sleeping body, a shot which is repeated in *The Orphanage* – is monstrous enough in itself, suggesting someone inside whom psychological demons have taken up residence.

Furthermore, Grace's treatment of the servants begins with distrust and ends in outright rejection. As Anne darkly reminds us on several occasions, Mummy went "mad". It all adds up to a portrait of monstrous repression, a portrait visually enhanced by Grace's buttoned-up, sober appearance.

And yet, since the point of view to which we are tied is Grace's, and since there is no other available to us, the spectator empathizes with her – though it might not sympathize with her. Grace has created a dominant narrative for the house which does not brook argument or discussion, and again it is the young who will be responsible for bringing her ultimately fragile ideological structure crashing down. Our relationship with her is thus far more complex than it is with the traditional Gothic heroine.

This character work leads us eventually to the only possible conclusion – that Grace herself is the monster, the intruder in her own home; she is both a literal monster (in that she is supernatural, a ghost) and a metaphorical one (in that she smothered her children to death). But the audience's understanding of Grace's true position does not bring with it the fear that audiences are traditionally meant to feel when confronted with the supernatural. Instead, the effect is a strangely emotional one. This is largely because the film has positioned us to identify with her, and the slow work of building human sympathy cannot be undone at a single stroke.

4.3. Narrative Structure and Ambiguity in *The Others*

As we have noted, *The Others* has a huge debt to pay to James *The Turn of the Screw*: Dennis Tredy outlines the themes and motifs of James' story which were transferred through film adaptations of it, with varying degrees of success. *The Turn of*

the Screw, Tredy tells us, was appropriated for the marketing of *The Others*, while as he says, the title *The Others* refers to a crucial exchange in James' original, during the final confrontation between Miles and the governess: "We have the others." "We have the others – we indeed have the others" (James 297-298). *The Others* was the name of a television adaptation of James' novel, and the use of the word "others" in both James and Amenábar refers to a key ambiguity about whether it is ghosts or human beings which are being referenced.

Tredy's essay is an exploration of the different angles on ambiguity offered by James's novella and the film adaptations of it, with each retelling providing "a personal vision of the governess's personal vision, in line with the *mise en abyme* of subjective retellings found... within the tale itself". (1) Tredy notes that some film makers preserve the original's ambiguity regarding the sanity of the governess and the existence of ghosts, while others fall firmly on one or other side of the question.

It is in the use of ambiguity that Amenabar's film derives most interestingly from James' novella. A.O. Scott, reviewing the film in the *New York Times* (August 10, 2001), could almost have been discussing James's novella when he writes:

For the first 40 minutes or so he weaves a tight web of ambiguity reminiscent of *The Turn of the Screw*. Are the children playing tricks on their hysterical mother? Are the servants trying to unhinge their imperious boss? Is this haunting supernatural or psychological? Could any ghost be scarier than Grace herself, whose maternal temperament seems compounded of stern religious dogmatism, vengeful discipline and desperate need?

But the ambiguity of *The Others* goes beyond this, and, like that of *The Turn of the Screw* it is, of course, embedded into the very structure of the work. Todorov tells us:

[...] it would be wrong to claim that the fantastic can exist only in a part of the work, for here are certain texts which sustain their ambiguity to the very end, i.e., even beyond the narrative itself. The book closed, the ambiguity persists. A remarkable example is supplied by Henry James' tale 'The Turn of the Screw,' which does not permit us to determine finally whether ghosts haunt the old estate, or whether we are confronted by the hallucinations of a hysterical governess victimized by the disturbing atmosphere which surrounds her. In French literature, Mérimée's tale "La Venus d'Ille" affords a perfect example of this ambiguity. (43)

Todorov sees *The Turn of the Screw*, therefore, as a key example of what he terms "fantastic" literature. Within Gothic fiction, Todorov tells us: "Indeed, we generally distinguish, within the literary Gothic, two tendencies: that of the supernatural explained (the "uncanny") ... and that of the supernatural accepted (the "marvellous")" (17).³³

Such ambiguity thus permits a kind of self-awareness in the text, foregrounding as it does the texts' constructedness at the service of a particular effect.

³³ *The Others* would therefore correspond to Todorov's "marvellous", in that the ambiguity in the mind of the reader does not persist beyond the ending of the narrative but is resolved by the séance scene.

4.4 Twisted Endings

Crucially in terms of this structural foregrounding, *The Others* can be classified as a “twisted ending” narrative. There is, of course, nothing new in the idea of a twist ending. Defined as the conclusive form of plot twists, a twist or surprise ending is an unexpected conclusion or climax to a work of fiction film or, often containing irony or causing the audience to retrospectively re-evaluate the narrative or characters. In the case of *The Others*, the use of the technique is radical to the extent of creating in retrospect an entire parallel narrative to the one the audience believes it has been watching, an issue to which we will return.

The dynamics of twist endings in film are invariably drawn from literary precursors, and it strikes us that *The Others* is simultaneously employing a range of these strategies. The first, uncovered by Aristotle, is *anagnorisis*, or discovery, often of one’s own identity or true character. A classic example of this would be *Oedipus Rex*. Another early example is ‘The Three Apples’, a story from the *One Thousand and One Nights* collection, in which Ja’far realizes that his own slave, Rayhan, is the murderer of the dead woman found in the chest.

A second deceptive strategy is that of the unreliable narrator who twists the ending by revealing, often close to the end of the story, that the narrative has been manipulated or fabricated. Perhaps the best-known example of this in British popular culture is in Agatha Christie’s *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* (1926), described by Christie’s biographer Laura Thompson as “the supreme, the ultimate detective novel. It rests upon the most elegant of all twists, the narrator who is revealed to be the murderer.

This twist is not merely a function of plot: it puts the whole concept of detective fiction on an armature and sculpts it into a dazzling new shape.” (155-156)

The Others, of course, does not feature a diegetic narrator: there is nothing approaching a voice-over, despite Aviva Briefel’s belief that “Grace as narrator seems to have full knowledge of her fate as she leads us through the various repetitions of her story” (106). But the narrative strategy employed by Amenábar and his co-scriptwriter Mateo Gil is essentially the same one, which is that of misleading the audience until the climax.

The film-maker Amenábar himself, in other words, is here adopting the role of the unreliable narrator, withholding key information from us. Three of the characters – the servants – possess the information which we would need to make sense of the story from the outset; but they keep it to themselves for reasons which are, despite some gnomic utterances by Mrs Mills, never made clear within the narrative itself.³⁴

A third Gothic trope employed by the ending of *The Others* is *analepsis*, or flashback. The flashback at the end of Hitchcock’s *Marnie* (1964) is a good example, while *The Three Apples* also uses the technique. Although the flashback is not literally presented onscreen, Grace is forced into imaging, into *unrepressing*, as it were, her killing of the children, and as she does so the viewer, too, is compelled into recollection by the twist ending itself. As we have seen, any twist ending such as this forces the viewer/reader into an instant reappraisal of what has been seen: a kind of viewer flashback over the narrative is the only way that the viewer can confirm that the whole hangs together coherently.

³⁴ Indeed, in diegetic terms, this is one of the few logical flaws of the narrative: why don’t the servants reveal the truth of her condition to Grace as soon as she opens the door? Their role seems to be to guide her to see the truth for herself rather than to coerce her.

The “Chekhov’s gun” convention in narrative derives from Chekhov’s comment, in a November, 1889 letter to Aleksandr Semenovich Lazarev, that “One must not put a loaded rifle on the stage if no one is thinking of firing it”.³⁵ It has since come to refer to an element which is introduced early in the story, but whose significance does not become clear until later on. Again, ‘The Three Apples’, which appears to be a kind of Ur-tale of narrative techniques, features it (in the shawls and carpets in the trunk discovered by the fisherman).

A classic example in film is Andy Dufresne’s geologist’s hammer in *The Shawshank Redemption* (1994), which he uses, over the course of 19 years, to tunnel his way out of jail. A more recent example is from the ghost story *What Lies Beneath* (2000), in which the significance of a car accident, and other small details, is hidden from the audience until the end. In terms of the *The Others*, then, Grace’s initial scream is perhaps the Chekhov’s gun which goes unexplained until the very end, when we realize that she is, as it were, awakening from death – from having killed her children and then shot herself.

In *The Others*, a case might also be made for the trope of *peripetia*, or the sudden reversal of fortune: at the end, the revelation that she and the children are dead comes, despite the pain of accepting it as a revelation for the good. This is one reason why the final effect of this horror film is not of shock, disgust, or simple vindication, but of a gentle, even moving, lyricism: death, in fact, seen as a kind of rebirth.

None of the above narrative strategies, then, on each of which *The Others* to a degree depends, can be said to represent anything new in the context of film history. Movies that take an unexpected turn in the closing stages are nothing new: at the end of

³⁵ Chekhov, letter to Aleksandr Semenovich Lazarev (pseudonym of A. S. Gruzinsky), 1 November 1889.

Robert Wiene's German expressionist horror classic *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1920), where the 'twist ending' reveals that Francis' flashback is actually his fantasy, and the man he says is Caligari is his asylum doctor. Hitchcock, one of Amenábar's masters, was also a master of the twist ending: apart from *Marnie*, we might cite *Vertigo* (1958), and of course *Psycho* (1960), where it is revealed that the murderer is Norman Bates, who commits the atrocities whilst wearing his mother's clothes.

But what makes *The Others* different from any of the above examples is the amount of viewer effort required to accept, absorb and assimilate the multiple ramifications of the final twist. To discuss this, I will be using the Russian Formalist terms *syuzhet* and *fabula*. The *syuzhet* describes the actual arrangement and presentation of audiovisual information as experienced by the reader/viewer. However, all texts contain gaps that the audience, seeking order and coherence, fill in. The *fabula*, by contrast, is "the whole story"; the chronologically-sequenced narrative structure that spectators progressively and retrospectively create. In all the films mentioned above, new information in the *syuzhet* leads to a breakdown of the *fabula*, and the audience is thus forced into mentally creating, in effect a new film. In the case of the films mentioned above, this is a straightforward task. The new, information, though unanticipated, is easy to process. A second viewing is not required to ensure that the details cohere.

A further kind of twist ending, one which has a similarly destructive effect on the *fabula*, is the now-clichéd "it was all a dream" ending, as first (and still, perhaps best) exemplified by *The Wizard of Oz* (Victor Fleming, 1939): again, *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1920) is the model here, though it is not a character's dream, but a character's fantasy, that is the trope. Another reference point here is the false flashbacks of Hitchcock's *Stage Fright* (1950), which are imaginings. A more recent example is

Adrian Lyne's *Jacob's Ladder* (1990), in which the entire film is revealed to have been a dying hallucination by the soldier Jacob Singer (Tim Robbins).

There is, of course, one a basic difference between *The Others* and films where the twist reveals that what we have seen has been merely a dream, a hallucination, or imaginings. In such films, the parts of the *syuzhet* which come before the twist are revealed to be 'untrue' in narrative terms, i.e. they did not 'really' happen: they are not, in terms of the Gothic, examples of the Radcliffean supernatural. In *The Others*, however, everything in the *syuzhet* remains diegetically true – but we now realize that what we have seen has not been the whole truth, since certain vital pieces of information were held back from us in order to lead us to the construction of a false *fabula*. The twist, therefore, simultaneously reveals the incompleteness of what we have so far witnessed and, at the same time, it reveals 'the complete truth'. Hence, perhaps, the artificiality and obvious "constructedness" of *The Others*, about which some contemporary reviewers complained – characteristics of which neo-Gothic, sensationalist novels such as Wilkie Collins' *The Woman in White* (1865) were also accused on their publication.

Indeed, the self-reflexivity of many Gothic texts, starting with the troublingly ambiguous preface of *The Castle of Otranto* and continuing through the multi-textuality of *Frankenstein* and *Dracula*, suggests a further level of ambiguity which exists at the textual level. Examples are too numerous to mention, but suffice it to say that the technique of the false document has persisted throughout the history of Gothic fiction. *Otranto* is presented by Walpole as the translation of a sixteenth-century Italian manuscript, rediscovered in a library belonging to "an ancient Catholic family in the north of England" (1); *Frankenstein* is an epistolary novel; and *Dracula* is a tapestry of similarly false documents. Techniques of false documentation – a technique which has

largely been transferred to the already exhausted notion of “found footage” in contemporary film - an avenue also explored by Amenábar in *Tesis* (1995) - are traditionally conceived of as attempts to deceive the reader into believing the incredible. Even such a self-conscious writer as James feels the need to embed his main narrative of *The Turn of the Screw* via the reading by a friend of a manuscript written by a dead governess whom the friend knew. Ambiguity is thus inscribed deeply into the structure of both *The Turn of the Screw* and of *The Others*. I should now like to analyze in more detail the “forked structure” of the narrative of *The Others*, to use David Bordwell’s term.

4.5. The Double Narrative Structure of *The Others*

In *The Others*, *syuzhet* and *fabula* are widely separated almost to the extent of being two separate films which are united only during the striking, climactic séance scene. The first of these two films, which I shall term *The Others A*, is the one the spectator sees the first time s/he sees the film. It is the story of a widow, Grace, who employs three servants. Grace and her children start to believe that they are being visited by ghosts. Initially resistant to the idea because of her Catholicism, Grace first suspects the servants of wishing to kill her children and later learns that they are themselves ghosts. This film ends with the entry of Grace into the séance.

The second film, *The Others B*, is the one the spectator watches the second time s/he sees the film – or the one which s/he mentally rapidly reconstructs, retrospectively, following the séance revelations. This film concerns three ghosts, Grace, Anne and Nicholas, who do not realize that they are ghosts and who start to believe that there are

‘intruders’, i.e. ghosts, in their house. Through the duration of the film, they are slowly coaxed and cajoled into accepting their status as ghosts by another ghost, Mrs Mills. During a séance, Grace receives final proof of this by seeing a séance: she learns that the “intruders” were in fact real people, and that she killed her children and then shot herself.

In dramatic terms, *The Others A* is clearly a less satisfactory film than *The Others B*, but on first viewing this is indeed the film we have seen. The “twist ending” of the film has the effect of ‘doubling’ the *syuzhet*: the viewer is led to construct a *fabula* that at first seems quite straightforward until, during the séance scene – in *The Others*, perhaps at the specific moment when Anne shouts “we’re not dead” at the medium - a new piece of information is introduced that subverts the fictional world (*The Others A*) we have created.

Suddenly the viewer is aware of another *fabula* (*The Others B*) which runs parallel to the first but, as it were ‘under’ it, hidden from view. Once we become aware of the new *fabula*, though, everything in the *syuzhet* takes on new meaning. We now have the schema to make sense of it. The viewer instantly returns to the outset of the story and, based on his/her recollection of the account given, seeks to follow the correct *fabula* this time – either through memory, or literally, by watching the movie a second time.

It is a commonplace that in order to read a book for the first time, we have to read it a second time, because only the second time can we be aware of the structure of the whole and understand how the details, often the *prolepses* and *analapses*, are functioning with relationship to the complete structure. This truism is perhaps even more emphatic in terms of “twist ending” narratives such as *The Others*, of which the

late Anthony Minghella wrote in the *New York Times*: “*The Others* is a movie that terrifies an audience, not because of what happens but because of what has happened ...”

As Bordwell tells us, it is common to consider the differences between Hollywood cinema and art cinema by considering the different kinds of question they ask viewers. Classical Hollywood movies focus viewer attention exclusively on causal links in the *fabula*. But as Bordwell states:

Like classical narration, art-film narration poses questions that guide us in fitting material into an ongoing structure. But these questions do not simply involve causal links among *fabula* events, such as ‘What became of Sean Regan?’ (*The Big Sleep* or ‘Will Stanley seduce Roy’s husband?’) (*In This Our Life*). In the art film ... the very construction of the narration becomes the object of spectator hypotheses: how is the story being told? Why tell the story in this way? (210)

And the structure of *The Others* seems to guide us towards such reflections: the plot-points listed above force us into negotiating directly with the narrative. To this extent, and not unlike *Tesis* and *Abre los ojos*, *The Others* is a combination of the Hollywood tradition and the alternative, art cinema tradition, an issue to which we will return. But even within the art film tradition, *The Others* represents, as it were, a new kind of twist.

Generally, art films encourage us to contemplate the process of narration at the same time as we are watching. *The Others*, by contrast, begins in the manner of a conventional horror/haunted house mystery, employing the tropes and iconography of

the genre we examined earlier. Aesthetic distinctions between Hollywood cinema and art cinema are often mapped onto a parallel ideological distinction between reactionary and progressive film practices. Hollywood genre narratives are thought to (re)present and (re)produce unhappy social circumstances, while the self-conscious devices of art cinema, for example jump-cuts and direct address of characters to camera, are seen as tools of liberation, a notion we will return to in our discussion of Pere Portabella's *Vampy-Cuadecuc* (1970).

The Others complicates this model enormously. We can see, for example, how Amenábar's *Tesis* and *Abre los ojos* are at one level playing the Hollywood game whilst simultaneously challenging its assumptions. A corresponding assumption made about Hollywood film is that, in the name of 'realism', it strives for 'transparency', seeking to efface all traces of the process of production, and so giving the illusion of filmic continuity, by efface traces of editing through continuity editing. This can be contrasted with the more self-reflexive, art cinema practices that actively draw attention to the process of film-making and to the role of the film maker. As Geoff Mayer puts it:

This emphasis on continuity and coherence through motivation serves to deflect attention away from the actual process of narration. The narration draws attention to itself only at codified moments, such as the opening or closing moments, and normally avoids what the Russian Formalists describe as 'laying bare' the artificiality of the device. While such moments are not totally unknown in the Hollywood cinema, they are normally motivated generically (the elaborate musical number in the musical, for example) or compositionally, such as a montage segment which condenses time. A camera movement that deliberately

exposes the system of narration, or even a glance directly into the lens, unmotivated by a reverse shot justifying this intrusion, is unlikely except in comedy where it is generically motivated. (Mayer, 125-126)

And here we are starting to touch upon perhaps the key difference between *The Others A* and *The Others B*. As a whole, *The Others* seems to have it both ways: on first viewing (*The Others A*), it is closer to the classical Hollywood model, but on a second viewing (*The Others B*) we are in a position to analyze its self-conscious strategies, as we started to do above. Only after the twist is introduced can the viewer discover the correct but concealed *fabula*, and only at that point are we able to scrutinize the *syuzhet* to find out at which points s/he was led to make initially incorrect inferences.

The reason for the journey back through the film, either through our recollection of what has happened or by a second viewing of it, is basically to see whether we have been deceived – whether the information in the *syuzhet* of *The Others A* was contradictory or, rather, was the foundation for a rational, coherent *fabula*. The screenwriters and director are faced with the challenge of providing just *sufficient* information during an initial viewing to make the *fabula* rational and coherent on reviewing, but *insufficient* information to make it too easy to predict the ending, which would obviously destroy much of the viewing pleasure.

The success of twist movies thus depends on the careful manipulation of *syuzhet* information—there is a thin line between revealing too much and too little. And, as a rule of thumb in the creation of successful suspense narratives, the more clues the *syuzhet* contains without the audience being able to predict the ending, the more dramatically successful the movie and the more intense the final act.

Point of view is significant here. What Grace experiences as baffling throughout the movie – the doors which apparently open themselves, the missing curtains etc. - the viewer also experiences as baffling: until the final, cathartic revelation, she is as unaware as the viewer is of her condition as a ghost.



4.6 The Others: Detailed Analysis

It is fundamental to the viewer's belief in the "world" which *The Others* creates that the script should make every effort to convince us that the *syuzhet* information that precedes the twist makes sense even when we are restructuring our understanding of the story. Let us now look in more detail at *The Others B* to try and support the coherence or otherwise of the *syuzhet* – a taxonomy (by necessity in such a well-structured script, incomplete) of the narrative details in *The Others* which take on a new meaning on a second viewing.³⁶

³⁶ *The Others* was released in the middle of a shift in viewing technology to DVD, which overtook videocassette technology. Unlike the latter, DVDs permit the viewer rapidly to return to key scenes and so to "test" the scenes for their narrative coherence, an ability which is particularly useful when dealing with narratives such as this or *The Sixth Sense*, in which ghosts are unable to recognize their own deadness. This is a narrative phenomenon has been termed "spectral incognizance" (Briefel 95)

02:07: The drawings – presumably intended to be Anne’s which are under the credits end in a view of the house, which then becomes the ‘true’, photographed view of the house. As a framing device (similar to that used by Erice for the beginning of *The Spirit of the Beehive*), his indicates a doubling between ‘real’ and ‘fabricated’ views of the truth, which is of course fundamental to the film’s dramatic and thematic effects.



02:29: Grace’s scream: Like *The Others*, Amenábar’s previous film *Abre los ojos* opens with someone in bed screaming. For the viewer watching *The Others A*, it functions as little more than as an index of genre: we are about to watch a film in the horror/suspense/Gothic mode. It may also function as an index of character, suggesting Grace’s neurosis and her inability, as it were, to “sleep easy”. But the viewer of *The Others B*, the scream represents her horrifying realization that she has killed her own children, an awareness which she will successfully repress for most of the film’s duration.

02:32: During our first view of Grace, following her terrifying scream, she is dressed in white, on white bedclothes, a possible index of her ghostliness. Indeed, the suggestion of transparency in the blonde, light and slightly ethereal presence of actress Nicole Kidman herself could be seen as playing into the classic phantasm iconography of the Gothic.

03:00: The first line of properly audible dialogue, spoken by Mr Tuttle (Eric Sykes), as the happily laughing trio of ghosts make their way up to the front door, is: “I imagine he’s dead, like all the rest”. The line suggests that there will be nobody in this film who is alive. (Indeed, the word “dead” appears 27 times in the script.) Again, the large house, the mist, and the angle of the camera are all part of haunted house film iconography, and a key part of its transtextuality in referencing, for example, Robert Wise.

03:53: Grace says: “You must be the gardener”. Tuttle’s reply is “Ay, that’s right, the gardener...” His uncertainty suggests that he has come, as it were, unprepared: that he is playing a role, performing a function of some kind.

04:04: “Don’t let that angel face fool you,” says Mrs Mills with reference to Lydia. “She’s older than she looks.” Indeed she is. To the extent that she’s dead, and presumably stopped aging at the point of death: and she truly has an “angel” face. There is a certain playfulness about Mrs Mills’s turns of expression that may simply be a way

of amusing herself, but it may also be a way of alerting Grace to her true condition, which is of course why the servants have gone to the house.

04:44: Grace explains that the previous servants disappeared almost a week ago. This is met by an ambiguous exchange of glances between the servants: the ‘disappearance’ was presumably when Grace went mad and shot the children.

06:23: Grace prohibits the use of the piano because it “sets off” her migraine. Your ghost might indeed suffer from pains in the head if you had killed yourself with a shot to the head, as Grace has. Grace also says that “Silence is something that we prize very highly in this house”. The crying of the children might have been what provoked her to kill them: again, silence, rather than noise, is associated with the world of the dead.

09:53: The initial breakfast conversation between Mrs Mills and the children is heavy with ambiguous suggestion. Anne’s complaint about the taste of the toast – “It tastes funny. I liked it better before” – reveals her as the plain speaker she is: her outspokenness is a constant source of irritation to Grace, and also provokes the final revelation. When she asks when the old servants will return, Mrs Mills says with absolute confidence “they won’t be coming back,” initially suggesting that she knows about some misdeed. But of course she knows that the servants will not come back to work at a house where their mistress has killed herself. The conversation also includes Anne’s first reference to Grace’s “going mad”: at this point, there is no logical

interpretation of this. Nicholas denies it. This suggests that Anne is suspended between the worlds of the living and the dead – indeed, in the limbo to which the script makes regular reference - with some access to both, a notion reinforced by the fact that she can commune with the living, and is later possessed by and able to communicate with the medium.



19:38: Grace: *Was she born like that?*

Mrs Mills: *Beg your pardon, ma'am?*

Grace: *The girl, was she born a mute?*

Mrs Mills: *No... I think I've finished here, ma'am.*

Mrs Mills feels unable to explain the reason why Lydia is a mute. We later learn that she was struck mute with the shock of learning she is dead.

20:14: Grace hears crying and assumes it to be Nicholas. It is not. This is the first of Grace's uncanny manifestations, not dissimilar to those experienced by Laura in *El orfanato*: at this point, she is connecting with the "living" world. It is actually Victor, the frightened son of the house's new owner, who is crying.

21:57: "His father is with the others in the hall", says Anne. In the final analysis, of course, the dramatic effect of the film's final parts depends heavily on our understanding of who "the Others" really are, and whether the phrase refers to the living or the dead.

23:12: Grace: "Do you think that I would overlook such a thing and endanger the life of my own daughter?" Unremarkable in *The Others A*, this phrase, delivered by Grace as she is chastising Mrs Mills for having, as she believes, left a door open, is rich with ambiguities in *The Others B*. First, and most obviously, there is a major irony in the fact that Grace not only endangered the life of her daughter, but suffocated her with a pillow. Secondly, there is the fact that she has "overlooked" one very significant thing – that she is dead.

23:44: Anne: Ghosts aren't like that.

Nicholas: What are they like?

Anne: I've told you, they go about in white sheets and carry chains.

Even ghosts themselves, it is suggested here, are subject to the clichés of popular culture regarding their appearance! This is one instance of Gothic self-referentiality or self-awareness in the film, with Amenábar explicitly locating his film as part of the Gothic genre.

26:11: Like all older sisters, Anne enjoys frightening her younger brother, rather as Isabel enjoys frightening Ana in *El espíritu de la colmena*. Perhaps the climax of this strand is in the children's bedroom. Nicholas believes that he and Anne are in there alone (*The Others A*), where in fact Victor also seems to be present. When Anne asks Victor to touch Nicholas's cheek to show that he is real, a hand does so. It surely must be Anne's (*The Others A*), but in fact it is not (*The Others B*): the colour of the cuff on the arm of the hand which touches Nicholas is not the same as that of the cuff of Anne's nightgown. This image is on the screen for less than a second and so could not be picked up other than by a second viewing on a DVD.³⁷

28:57: Grace wonders, in a conversation with Mrs Mills, whether the priest will ever "deign to pay [them] another visit." In *The Others A*, there is the suggestion, no doubt unpleasant to the Catholic Grace, that something "unholy" is taking place in the house, and that the Church has, as it were, abandoned them. But the reason why the

³⁷ As we have already noted, it is possible to surmise that the boom in what Thomas Elsaesser terms 'mind-game movies', which often feature the same kinds of twist as *The Others*, is related to the rise of the DVD, which offer the possibility to the viewer of a host of viewing possibilities previously unavailable, such as, for example, the chance to freeze frame or watch the frames one by one. The task of finding out whether a film is logically coherent by submitting it to a second viewing, with the chance of thereby having a partially emotionally different viewing experience, is thus facilitated. However, further reflection reveals that there are twist endings aplenty in the cinema of the early 90s, before domestic use of DVDs was widespread: examples would include *The Shawshank Redemption* (1994), *The Usual Suspects* (1995), and *The Game* (1997) – all examples of 'mind-game movies'.

priest is no longer paying any visits to the house is that he is under the impression that there is no longer anybody living there.

29:05: In the same conversation, Grace says “I’m beginning to feel totally cut off from the world”. This is a to-the-point declaration of what it must feel like to be a ghost. Of course, much of Grace’s isolation is self-imposed: even isolating the children through (perhaps) inventing their photosensitivity is a strategy calculated to minimize the necessity of having contact with other people, therefore of maintaining total control over the situation. As with all the films under discussion here, there are echoes here of the Gothically isolationist policies of the Franco regime.

34:00: Grace, while looking frantically for the others in a room filled with sheet-covered furniture, uncovers a mirror and sees her reflection. She herself is the ‘intruder’, the “Other”, she is seeking. There are others in the room with her, and what they are witnessing – white sheets flying from furniture – is typical of ghost films seen, as it were, from the perspective of the living. This prefigures the striking images, at the end of the séance, of torn paper flying around – the only moments in the film, and brief they are, where the point of view directly becomes that of the “living” characters.

34:28: When Grace leaves the room, she finds that Anne has been overhearing the conversations of the intruders, whom she says are going to take down the curtains. This is clearly because the intruders are irritated by the constant (and to them,

inexplicable and frightening) opening and closing of the curtains by Grace and the servants.

36:02: In what is, in our opinion, the most elegant and subtle nod to the alternative narrative, when Grace is preparing the shotgun to search the house, she briefly pauses and looks puzzled, struck by an uncanny moment in which her past has briefly invade her present. A brief memory has come through about the last time she held the rifle, which was to shoot herself. (The question remains of how the rifle found its way back into its container.)



39:54: A post-mortem photograph – a theme to which we will return - is shown of two small children: Grace, the killer of two small children, is duly horrified, calling it ‘macabre’.³⁸ In *The Others B*, this is prolepsis, since Anne and Nicholas are later revealed to be dead. This is a good example of the screenwriters offering sufficient

³⁸ Like many of the ideas of *The Others*, which at one level is indeed pastiche, this incorporation of post-mortem photography is not original. Antonio Aloy employs post-mortem photographs in *Presence of Mind* (1999), his adaptation of *The Turn of the Screw*.

information to make the narrative cohere, but not too much to spoil the final effect: if the picture has been of a boy and a girl looking too much like Anne and Nicholas, the revelatory cat would have been too early out of the narrative bag. Mrs Mills' reaction is to say to Grace that "grief over the death of a loved one can lead people to do the strangest things": a clear suggestion to Grace, which as usual Grace fails to pick up, of the reality of Grace's own situation (presumably it was "grief over the death of a loved one", her absent husband, which caused Grace to tip over into madness and kill her children.

43:36: Grace apologizes to the sleeping Anne for being so hard on her. But Anne is only feigning sleep, presumably not trusting her mother after, as Anne repeatedly reminds us, she "went mad". Anne is aware that her mother went mad, but is unaware of the consequences of it.

43:58: Grace asks Mrs Mills why she left the island, and Mrs Mills replies that "twas on account of the tuberculosis. The whole area was evacuated." The tuberculosis, of course, was what killed the servants. A couple of lines further on, Mrs Mills explains that "one day [Lidia] just stopped talking. Again, there is double meaning: when you die, you indeed "stop talking".

48:21: "There is something in this house," Grace tells Mrs Mills, "Something diabolic... Something which is not - not at rest." This is about as close as Grace gets to accurate self-description before the final frames of the film. Mrs Mills, continuing to

suggest the truth, quietly tells Grace that sometimes, “the world of the dead gets mixed up with the world of the living”: a phrase which succinctly describes not only the uncanny world of *The Others*, but which might also serve as an epigram for the genre of Gothic as a whole.

51:00: “Now she thinks the house is haunted,” Mrs Mills irritably tells Mr Tuttle after Grace has set off to the village in search of the priest. This is a strange comment from one who knows, since the house actually is haunted. Mr Tuttle asks her “And when do you think we should bring all this out into the open?” Her reply is “All in good time, Mr. Tuttle. All in good time,” since Grace is clinging obstinately onto her Catholic faith and refuses to acknowledge the truth despite the best efforts of Mrs Mills, and indeed of Anne, to reveal it to her. From this point on, Mrs Mills becomes a more aggressive character.

53:00: The sequence featuring the return of the war-torn Charles to the house is seen, in *The Others A*, as just that. In *The Others B*, of course, he is dead: a situation perhaps prefigured by the utterance of the film’s clumsiest line: “Sometimes I bleed”.

57:10: Around the dinner table, Anne asks Grace “when people die in the war, where do they go?” The answer is clear – “to this house” – but only in *The Others B*.

57:28: “How do you know who the goodies and the baddies are?” asks Anne at the dinner table in reply to her mother’s stock Catholic implication that the ‘goodies’ go to heaven while the ‘baddies’ go to hell. The multiple ambiguities of the film are thus neatly summarized by Anne: only at the denouement will be realize who the ‘goodies’ and the ‘baddies’ are, and in terms of our traditional expectations, the roles have been quite reversed. The issue of who the goodies and baddies are is a vexed one in Spain, and later we explore the ethical and ideological ramifications of the narrative structure of *The Others*.

58:02 Following another argument with her mother, Anne starts breathing in an exaggerated, deliberately provocative manner. The provocation is indeed deep, since the last time Grace will have heard her daughter breathing with difficulty like this was when she was suffocating her. Grace’s injunction to the children to “stop breathing” thus become highly charged in *The Others B*: we are actually watching a restaging, possibly engineered by Anne to provoke Grace into cathartic recognition, of the children’s murder.



1:00:20: The lengthy scene, intercut with others, featuring Anne trying on her communion dress, starts to play fairly explicitly with the ghost theme. The iconography is there as she dances ethereally in front of the mirror, making spectral sounds and conforming ironically to her own stereotype, as described to Nicholas, of what ghosts are like. When her mother comes into the room and the keys start jangling, they become the ‘chains’ which Anne described to her brother. Indeed, the continual jangling of keys (there are 50 doors in the house, and 15 keys) are perhaps one of the things which alerted the “intruders” to the existence of strange goings-on in the house. At this point, of course, Anne is possessed by the sightless old lady whom she has seen fourteen times and whom we still assume to be a ghost (*The Others A*); soon we will realize that the old lady is the medium who has, as it were, come looking for them and who has found Anne to be the most “accessible” to the world of the living of the inhabitants of the house. Anne is thus being employed as a means of presenting the ‘reality’ of the situation to Grace. The vision throws Grace off kilter, and she starts hitting Anne, thus confirming to the viewer that the nervousness to which she is always prone is indeed liable to explode into the physical violence which actually killed them. In *The Others A*, again the scene is an index of character: of Anne’s playfulness, perhaps, as she pretends to be a ghost. But in *The Others B*, the scene becomes a *mise en abyme* of potential interpretations. Is Amenábar signalling Anne’s relative closeness to the world of who she believes to be the ghosts, allowing her to meet them, as it were, halfway so that she can then be possessed by (or indeed, possess) the medium? Is the script raising questions about the traditional, formulaic concepts of the appearances of ghosts? Is he signalling to the viewer that in *this* film, the ghosts are different? There are multiple answers: but the notion of having a ghost dress up as a ghost is a fascinating one.

1:06:06: This is the only point at which Grace, uttering the words “Or do you?”, expresses any doubt about her own rightness about things, following Mrs Mills assurance that “they know what needs to be done”.



1:07:12: Some viewers have claimed that there is a clue to the fact that Charles is a ghost by the fact that we can't see his reflection in the bedroom mirror – a suggestion of vampirism, perhaps, which we will take up when discussing Pere Portabella's *Vampyr-Cuadecuc* - but in fact we can, at precisely this point, as Grace is opening the wardrobe. During the next 16 seconds, the dialogue between Grace and Charles continues with no reflection, suggesting that Amenabar may be having fun with the idea of Charles as a 'disembodied voice'. In the same scene, there is the following exchange:

Charles: I'm not talking about the ghosts. I'm talking about what happened that day.

Grace: I don't know what you're talking about.

Charles: Tell me it's not true. Tell me what happened.

Grace: Happened? I don't know what came over me that day. The servants had left during the night. They hadn't the courage to tell me to my face. And they knew that I couldn't leave the house. They knew.

In *The Others A*, this dialogue is ambiguous, bordering on meaningless, simply increasing the mystification surrounding Anne's repeated accusations that "Mummy went mad". What "happened that day"? In *The Others B*, it is all too clear, and Grace must face up to having killed the children. She does not feel remorse, however, because they have all, she believed, been saved by a miracle, as she reveals at the climax. (To Grace, the return of Charles is another "miracle" which she can use to justify her situation to herself.) Presumably, according to *The Others B*, the servants left after the murder, whereupon Grace shot herself.

1:08:44 "They know that I love them," Grace says in her conversation with Charles. "They know I'd never hurt them. I'd die first." The first sentence may be true, but the full ironical import of the second and third sentences is only felt whilst watching *The Others B*. Grace is a woman in deep denial.

1:15:40 The curtains all been taken down – allowing, incidentally, a metaphorical light to flood into the house, and enabling Grace to achieve a full view of her situation. Grace will now be forced to "see the light". Grace now suspects that the servants want to kill her children. Angrily, she again explains that the children are photosensitive. "Yes, but that was before," Mrs Mills gently reminds her. "The

condition could have cleared up by itself.” The word ‘before’ here is far more heavily loaded in *The Others B* than in *The Others A*: the children’s condition has indeed cleared up, as a result of their dying. Indeed, the children have indeed been sleeping in sunlight and nothing has happened to them (1:12:24), a fact which Grace seems unwilling to accept.

1:16:21 Grace storms out of the kitchen to get her shotgun. The servants then appear from behind her, in an unexpected place, as ghosts are liable to do, and as the ghostlike Mrs Danvers, the living agent of Rebecca in *Rebecca*, repeatedly does. It is rapidly becoming clear that the servants are not what they seem; a suspicion confirmed at 1:21:49, when Grace finds the post-mortem photo of them.

1:24:42 “We must all learn to live together,” Mrs Mills tells Grace through the door, ambiguous to the last. “The living and the dead.” The sentence, of course, is guaranteed to reassure both the viewer and Grace that Grace is indeed still alive before the final, upcoming twist. The ‘intruders’ of whom Mrs Mills and Mr Tuttle speak are still taken by both Grace and the viewer to be ghosts like the servants.

What we have come to notice, as we focus on these details in our second and posterior viewings of *The Others B*, is the constructedness of the narrative of *The Others*. In a similar way, the film makes the viewer aware of him/herself as viewer: by making us aware of the equivocal nature of the film’s narrative cues during *The Others A*. In other words, albeit in retrospect, *The Others*, taken as a whole, is a highly self-

conscious narrative, which would ally it with the art cinema, rather than the Hollywood tradition. It is, in fact, both.

The more than thirty moments above – and many more could be found, this being a richly ambiguous, well-crafted script – are the evidence that *The Others* is, indeed, making every effort to convince us that the *syuzhet* information that precedes the séance scene makes sense even when we are restructuring our understanding of the story: in other words, it is quite good at convincing us that Grace and the children have, in fact, been dead all along. *Syuzhet* information has obviously been manipulated to smooth out possible contradictions, but there are sufficient hints and clues to outweigh them.

A film with a similar twist ending, M. Night Shamayalan's *The Sixth Sense*, has many more problems in this respect. Given the structure of the film, there is a *Sixth Sense A* and a *Sixth Sense B*, and the latter is riddled with plausibility issues. Most of the problems *The Sixth Sense* has are because the film is set in the real world, where a ghost has to interact with real people. In *The Others*, there is only one reaction with living people, and it comes at the end. This is, it should be remember, a film with a total cast of only 14, seven of whom are dead.

4.7. The Ideology of the Narrative Structure of *The Others*

Twist endings are often seen as cheating on the part of the film maker. As David Richter puts it in “Your Cheatin’ Art: Double Dealing in Cinematic Narrative”: “To claim that a film cheats is to imply that there is a tacit narrative contract between the

film and the viewer, and that the film in some way breaches that contract” (11). *The Others*, largely by virtue of its obvious craft and seriousness, has largely avoided such criticisms. Richter continues, by making reference to Ambrose Bierce’s story *An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge* (1890) (to which, from a narratological perspective, *The Others* is remarkably similar, since both involve the final revelation that the protagonist is in fact dead) and Ian McEwan’s novel *Atonement* (2001). What he says could equally be applied to Amenábar’s film:

In both the Bierce story and the McEwan novel we ignore hints we are given about the actual state of affairs within the fictional lifeworld, having been drawn in to the false version by the pleasure principle. We are thus made aware of the power of our own fantasies, either about escaping our fate or about wrongs that magically right themselves, and so we are hardly in a position to criticize, much less demand back the price of admission. (12)

In his essay, Richter defines various forms of narrative cheating, one of which he terms “ethical cheating”, and the twist ending of *The Others* falls into this category, in that it doesn’t supply “an unearned emotion, like surprises that violate story logic”. But I would go further and suggest that *The Others* is also *ideological cheating*, particularly in the way the story relates to particularly Spanish issues.

On the face of it, Amenábar and his co-scriptwriter Mateo Gil have made every effort to distance the film from Spanish issues, its multiple Gothic elements apparently aligning it strongly to the Anglo-American tradition of Gothic as encountered, for example, in *The Turn of the Screw*. But as we have seen, closer inspection reveals that

The Others has many parallels with Spanish films dealing with the Civil War and its aftermath, and that many of these parallels are drawn from the Gothic. As Acevedo-Muñoz tells us:

Los otros denies the apparent safety inspired by the destruction of evil in the classic horror ... [in which] after going through the ... journey of fear and death, there is generally confidence of safety at the end of the tunnel; the knowledge that order will be restored, that the monster will be killed and that then we will awake from the nightmarish trance. (214)

Such closure, typical of more traditional Gothic narratives, is denied to us in *The Others* as it is in *El espíritu de la colmena*, in *Cría cuervos*, and in both *El espinazo del diablo* and *El laberinto del fauno*. The ambiguous *fabula/syuzhet* structure of *The Others* has the effect of bringing to the viewer's awareness processes of narrative reconstruction which generally take place unconsciously in the mind of the reader/viewer. Richter tells us, using terms borrowed from James Phelan: "...our attempts to naturalize the anomalies thematize the fact that we are processing a film and the rules, mostly tacit, by which we "read" and therefore construct cinematic texts" (12).³⁹

To use Richter's terms, the process makes us "aware of the power of our own fantasies," a process reenacted for the viewer in the figure of Grace, in whom we witness a slow and painful revelation of the fact that the "reality" which she has been experiencing, and which she has sought (and failed) to impose on her children, is in fact

³⁹ This is also true of readings of the Gothic *The Turn of the Screw*, which as we have seen is widely considered to be a primary source for *The Others*, and a book whose ambiguities again focus attention on the text as constructed artefact.

a self-created construction, in part dependent on a religious faith which also, by the end, has crumbled as she consigns herself and her children to a future life in limbo, stuck as ghosts between earth and heaven.

The Others can therefore be read as a parable of the functioning of ideology, in Althusser's terms of "the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence" (Althusser 162). For most of the duration of the film, Grace clings desperately to a Marxist "false consciousness," preferring to believe what she believed when alive, repressing the truth of her situation and seeking to inculcate that same false consciousness (among which are the discipline and consolations of the Catholic religion) into her children.



It is clear from the outset, however, that Grace is a woman terrified, that her rage for order is underpinned by a maelstrom of insecurities pertaining to her position as a woman, a wife, and a mother. In *The Others A* this is simply a given of her character, but in *The Others B* it could be said that Grace's fears are the result of her placelessness, the ambiguity of her status, and her latent knowledge that she, like the audience, is ripe for a brutal epistemological awakening, as she first suggests at 1:6:06.

Grace is the film's focalizer, to employ Genette's term, and it is through her that the audience perceives the action. Amenábar has taken great care to locate both Grace and the audience into a state of Gothic ambiguity which he has built right into the structure of the film itself, with the double aim of keeping the audience interested in his story but also, via his explicit revelation of the constructedness of the fictions of both Grace and himself, of encouraging us to reflect on the benefits and pitfalls of knowing and of harbouring secrets.

The implications for a story set in 1944 – in the decade following the Spanish Civil War, in which women were being left alone by husbands at war, in which Spain's ghosts were piling up, and in which families were being forced by political circumstance to metaphorically turn rifles on their own flesh and blood – what better way to allegorize a Civil War? – are surely obvious. But as Susan Bruce says: "We should not... *The Others* suggests, seek to exorcise our ghosts. Instead, we need to learn to live with them." (39)

So far, institutional Spain, which continues to be sharply divided along ideological lines established in the past, has sought neither to exorcise its ghosts nor to live with them. It is with this in mind that I now turn to another commercially successful film, Juan Antonio Bayona's *El orfanato*, one which is similarly concerned with dismantling the hidden connections between the official and unofficial narratives of Spanish history.

CHAPTER 5

HAUNTINGS AND HAUNTOLOGY

The spectral rumour now resonates, it invades everything: the spirit of the 'sublime' and the spirit of 'nostalgia' cross all borders. (Derrida 169)

5.1. Hauntology

The Gothic, as hardly needs pointing out, is structured around ghosts. Freud's notion of the uncanny permits a rethinking of what we might term the 'unsaid' of Gothic. The persecutions of Radcliffe's heroines, or of Amenábar's, may indeed have a basis which we can term 'historical', 'cultural' and so on, in the sense that they relate to the specific conditions of the times – to the power relations, gender relations, and social organization.

We have analyzed briefly some of the mechanics of Francoist repression in our discussion of du Maurier's *Rebecca*. At a certain point, the ghostly concerns of the Gothic and those of Spanish films concerned with twentieth century Spanish history, the result of such repression, spill over into the theoretical area of hauntology. The term was coined by Jacques Derrida in *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning & the New International* (1993), one of the most controversial and influential works of Derrida's later period. The text owed its existence to a conference that asked, following the extinguishing of communism in Eastern Europe, the question 'whither Marxism?' Derrida offered a challenge to the then fashionable opinion held by some commentators that Marx's theories had been defeated and that liberal democracy had

won the day.⁴⁰ Derrida suggested that Marx would continue to haunt human history, precisely as ‘the spectre of communism’ was famously described, at the opening of Marx’s *Communist Manifesto*, as haunting Europe. The term ‘hauntology’ (*hantologie* in French) is a pun on the word ‘ontology’ – “if ontology is a pretentious way of referring to what there is, hauntology is a tongue-in-cheek way of referring to what there isn’t,” as one commentator has written.⁴¹ Hauntology, then, explores the problematic ontology that such specters as those of Marx, in their incessant haunting, in the *presentness of the past*, create for discourse on history, describing the manner in which a historicised present is haunted by specters which cannot easily be absorbed into ontology, as Fukuyama sought to do with Marx.

As a concept, hauntology is easily linked to the methodology of deconstruction that Derrida pioneered – read as a metaphor, a spectre, since it is neither *this* nor *that*, challenges basic binary oppositions such as ‘dead/alive’, ‘absent/present’ and ‘present/past’, and so can be thought of as being deconstructive. The metaphor of haunting can thus be developed. Traditionally, ghosts – the ghost of Santi in del Toro’s *The Devil’s Backbone*, for example - invade the present to rectify an imbalance, to warn the present about the probable future turn of events.⁴² Hauntological spectres operate in a rather more general way, coming to bother us and our images from perceived discrepancy between things as they were, are, or will be and things as they are thought to have been, or be, or may be in the future. Hauntology thus replaces the priority of being and presence with the indeterminate, ambiguous figure of the spectre as one which is neither present nor absent, neither dead nor alive.

⁴⁰ This was Francis Fukuyama’s argument in *The End of History and The Last Man* - an opinion which Fukuyama has recently, in 2011, revised.

⁴¹ <http://www.users.globalnet.co.uk/~rxv/infomgt/ontology.htm>

⁴² In literary terms, the return of Hamlet’s much-discussed father is exemplary in this respect; Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* is a key 20th-century example.

In literary critical circles, Derrida's rehabilitation of ghosts as a respectable subject of enquiry has proved to be a useful instrument. It has been seen (Davis 2005) as an ethical twist on deconstruction. The ghost comes to represent that which cannot be comprehended within our available intellectual frameworks, but whose otherness we have a responsibility for preserving. Fredric Jameson neatly synthesizes the issue:

Spectrality is not difficult to circumscribe, as what makes the present waver: like the vibrations of a heat wave through which the massiveness of the object world - indeed of matter itself - now shimmers like a mirage... Spectrality does not involve the conviction that ghosts exist or that the past (and maybe even the future they offer to prophesy) is still very much alive and at work, within the living present: all it says, if it can be thought to speak, is that the living present is scarcely as self-sufficient as it claims to be; that we would do well not to count on its density and solidity, which might under exceptional circumstances betray us. (quoted in Sprinker 139-140)

This is the threatening situation in which Spain, which in political terms can still be thought of as being at an ideological crossroads, and which has failed in any psychologically enduring way to address its past, continues to find itself. The relevance for the study of twentieth century history – and for the films which represent this history – seem clear, in a culture which the *pacto de olvido* means that the democratic political present seems to rest on very insecure foundations, foundations which are threatened by the ghosts of unresolved past violence. The Gothic focus on the ghost in recent Spanish film, then, starts to look less like a mere formal appropriation from other cinemas, and more like an unofficial enquiry into the instability of the present.

As we have seen, in the Gothic, the repressed and abject return in the present in terrifying form, seeking acknowledgement: in terms of Spanish history, the ghost returns as a manifestation of a part of the country's identity that has been repressed. Other examples might include, for example, *The House of the Seven Gables* (1851), in which Hawthorne uses Gothic tropes as a way of engaging with the pernicious effects of Puritanism, or Thomas de Quincey's study in *The Confessions of an English Opium Eater* of psychological breakdown as a way of understanding the consequences of British imperialism. The Gothic as a mode is thus well-suited to exploration of traumatic conditions, as it is in del Toro's *El espinazo del diablo* (2001), and *El laberinto del fauno* (2006), and Agustí Villaronga's *Pa negre* (2011).

But these films are examining the Francoist legacy with regard to the post-war inheritance. Other films take this exploration further, into the present, as though to suggest that the Francoist inheritance has survived Spain's *transición* to democracy during the 1970s and 80s, an era in which Spaniards could finally start to believe that the past was genuinely behind them. To take just one recent example, Juan Carlos Medina's *Insensibles* (2012) is a rare exploration of the impact of the ghosts of Spanish history on the present, one which reveals its questionable "density and solidity". A neurosurgeon, David (Alex Brendemühl) who needs a medical operation in the present, asks his parents for economic help and is refused by his father (Juan Diego), a refusal which opens the doors on a secret, tremendously violent Civil War past. It is therefore a film which explores, again through genre – in this case, historical drama, thriller and terror film - the continuing psychological and social choice that Spaniards have to make between opening up the past and burying it, and which explores by extension the consequences of that decision on the present. Interestingly, Medina calls it "una fantasía más científica que sobrenatural. Es más H. G. Wells o Mary Shelley que Bram Stoker",

referring to the film's literary rather than cinematic antecedents. "Mi propósito," Medina says, "era tratar la memoria histórica como un tema que pertenece a lo indecible, que está ahí, escondido tras un muro de misterio y de silencio" (García, Interview with Juan Carlos Medina).

The central metaphor of *Insensibles* is that of a group of rural Spanish children who are born without the ability to feel pain, implicitly the result of having grown up in an atmosphere of hate and intolerance: loosely, they represent a generation of Spaniards who have become inured to the suffering that looking back will imply for Spanish society as a whole. The children of *Insensibles*, then, are hauntological ghosts, long dead and gone, but still forming a part of the ideological structure of contemporary Spain as manifested in this film; only through grappling with the consequences of their continuing influence, as David does, can Spain hope to advance. The visually potent and tremendously cathartic final scene, in which the man/creature Berkano, having spent a lifetime inflicting pain on other precisely because he is unable to feel pain himself, shows him finally learning the truth that emotional pain exists. The film thus uses the Gothic to explore the dichotomy of a society which is caught between, on the one hand, a self-willed desire not to suffer – in other words, choosing to forget – and on the other the fundamental, reconciliatory human desire to love and be loved by others, which involves an openness to, and forgiveness of, the past. Such themes are also explored in *El orfanato* (2007).

5.2. Abraham and Torok

A second primary source of hauntological theories, prior to Derrida but relatively unacknowledged, is the work of psychoanalysts Nicolas Abraham and Maria

Torok, especially as collected in several essays from *L'écorce et le noyau* (1999). Abraham and Torok were interested, as *Insensibles* and *El orfanato* are, in the processes of communication across generations, specifically in the ways in which undisclosed traumas of previous generations could affect the lives of their descendants. What Abraham and Torok term a "phantom" is the existence of a dead ancestor in the living Ego, one with the intention of not allowing its traumatic secrets from emerging. It is key to recognize, therefore, that for Abraham and Torok the ghost does not make a literal reappearance, as does Hamlet's ghost, or as does the ghost of Santi in *El espinazo del Diablo* – in a further example of the central trope of Gothic fiction, according to Baldick (1992) and Mighall (1999) - so as to reveal something that has been forgotten or hidden, or to rectify a wrong. Rather, the phantom for Abraham and Torok is unreliable, one who aims to mislead the haunted subject and thereby guarantee that its secret remains hidden. Phantoms are therefore not the spirits of the dead, but, in a beautifully seductive phrase, 'les lacunes laissées en nous par les secrets des autres' (gaps left in us by the secrets of others') (Abraham 427).

The following lines appear at the head of the chapter 6 of Torok and Abraham's *Anasémies*:

The phantom is the work in the unconscious of the inadmissible secret of an Other (incest, crime, illegitimacy). Its law is the obligation of ignorance. Its manifestation, as anxiety, is the return of the phantom in bizarre words and acts and symptoms (phobic, obsessive, and so on). The phantom's universe can be objectivized in fantastic stories. There then occurs a particular affect that Freud described as the 'uncanny'. (391)

The “fantastic stories” to which we are referring may be Gothic fictions, of course, or they may be those cinematic works which draw on the tropes of Gothic fiction which we are studying here. For Torok and Abraham (171-2), the phantom is a formation of the unconscious, which results from the passage of the parent’s unconscious to the child’s unconscious. The phantom who returns to haunt is the witness of the existence of death buried in the other.

The insights of Torok and Abraham thus offer a new rationalization of ghost stories, and of films which feature ghosts, which are described as the mediation in fiction of the encrypted, unspeakable secrets of past generations. *The Wolf’s Magic Word: A Cryptonomy* (1986) and *The Shell and the Kernel* (1987) offer a new approach to the mind’s secrets, whilst also establishing the parameters of a new science, proposed by Torok and Abraham, *cryptonomy*. Equally influential has been their concept of the “crypt”, the construction of which occurs when a loss, a “segment of an ever so significantly lived Reality - untellable and therefore inaccessible to the gradual assimilative work of mourning” - cannot be admitted as a loss”. (Stephan 258) Similarly to its physical equivalent, the mental crypt is hermetically sealed. The crypt therefore keeps its contents away from any danger or infiltration from the outside world, since the contents within it might destabilize stability of the present. The crypt is thus ‘a place in the inside of the subject, in which the lost object is “swallowed and preserved” (Torok and Abraham 130). The secret chambers in *Insensibles* in which the Jewish doctor (Derek de Lint) performs his macabre experiments are a case in point, hidden for the entire duration of the film until David, at the end, is able to access it: the room in El orfanato in which the séance takes place may have the same function for Grace. Thus, this mental *topos* becomes, according to David Punter:

the repository of the secrets of the past, it is the place where the memories of our parents and grandparents are buried, the site on which are stored all the stories which have been so painful, too embarrassing, too revealing to tell; it is the crypt that the secrets of our own genesis may be buried, but we are ourselves unaware not only of its contents but of its existence or whereabouts. (263)

Literary critical work which utilizes the thought of Abraham and Torok most often revolves around the problem of secrets, but despite works by Rand, Rashkin and others, the direct impact of Abraham and Torok on literary studies has in fact been restricted.

Derrida's "specters" should be distinguished from Abraham's and Torok's "phantoms". Derrida's spectre is a figure inspired by deconstruction who hovers between death and life, between absence and presence, responsible for causing hesitation where there have been established certainties. It does not belong to the order of established knowledge:

C'est quelque chose qu'on ne sait pas, justement, et on ne sait pas si précisément cela est, si ça existe, si ça répond à un nom et correspond à une essence. On ne le sait pas: non par ignorance, mais parce que ce non-objet, ce présent non-présent, cet être-là d'un absent ou d'un disparu ne relève pas du savoir. Du moins plus de ce qu'on croit savoir sous le nom de savoir. On ne sait pas si c'est vivant ou si c'est mort. (25–26)⁴³

⁴³ (It's something we do not know precisely, and we do not know if this is exactly, if it exists, if it responds to a name and corresponds to an essence. We do not know: not out of ignorance, but because this non-object, this non-present, this being-there of an absent or missing is not knowledge. At least most of what is understood under the name of knowledge. We do not know if it's alive or if it's dead.)

Derrida calls on us to heed the spectre when it addresses us, despite the enforced on us by our intellectual traditions, to which the spectre represents a challenge: “Or ce qui paraît presque impossible, c’est toujours de parler du spectre, de parler au spectre, de parler avec lui, donc surtout de faire ou de laisser parler un esprit’ (32).⁴⁴

We do not, then, communicate with ghosts in the hope that they will reveal some secret, whether shameful or otherwise. They may rather reveal to us the experience of secrecy as such: a fundamental unknowing which lies beneath, and which could undermine, what we believe we know: the instable foundations on which our illusory beliefs about self and society are built. While for Abraham and Torok, the secret of the phantom should be revealed, for Derrida it is not a specific meaning to be uncovered, but rather an opening of a new interpretive space. The spectre’s secret is a productive opening of meaning rather than a determinate content to be uncovered. Derrida associates this kind of essential secret with literature in general:

La littérature garde un secret qui n’existe pas, en quelque sorte. Derrière un roman, ou un poème, derrière ce qui est en effet la richesse d’un sens à interpréter, il n’y a pas de sens secret à chercher. Le secret d’un personnage, par exemple, n’existe pas, il n’a aucune épaisseur en dehors du phénomène littéraire. Tout est secret dans la littérature et il n’y a pas de secret caché derrière elle, voilà le secret de cette étrange institution au sujet de laquelle, et dans laquelle je ne cesse de (me) débattre. [...] L’institution de la littérature reconnaît, en principe ou par essence le droit de tout dire ou de ne pas dire en disant, donc le droit au secret affiché.

⁴⁴ (But what seems almost impossible, is always to talk of the spectre, to talk to the spectre, to talk with him, especially to make or let a spirit talk.)

(Manzari 222)⁴⁵

Hauntology's appeal for critics arises from the link between the themes of hauntings, ghosts, and the supernatural, and the general processes of textuality. For these writers, ghosts are a singular theme because they allow for new perceptions into the nature of texts. For example, Julian Wolfrey's *Victorian Hauntings: Spectrality, Gothic, the Uncanny and Literature* (2002) begins with several assertions about the importance of literary ghosts: 'to tell a story is always to invoke ghosts, to open a space through which something other returns ... all stories are, more or less, ghost stories' (*Victorian Hauntings*, pp. 1–3). Ghosts are not, therefore, simply one theme amongst others, but instead a key to the unlocking of all storytelling.

The key difference between the Derridean concept of hauntology and that of Abraham and Torok, therefore, is to be found in their differing attitudes to the meaning of the secret. Abraham's and Torok's phantoms are a subject of shame and prohibition; they should be verbalized so that the phantom and its poisonous continuing effects can be exorcized and thus dispelled. Abraham and Torok wish to find a place in the knowledge system for the ghost, while Derrida is happy for the ghost to remain outside the order of meaning, because it is sufficient simply to encounter what is strange or other about it, thereby opening up the possibilities of alternative modes of interpretation. The secret of the ghost is not a secret because it is taboo, as for Torok and Abraham, but because it cannot be spoken in the languages which are available to us. Derrida, then, is not interested in secrets as such, but in the nature of secrecy.

⁴⁵ Literature has a secret that somehow does not exist. Behind a novel or a poem, behind that which is indeed the richness of a meaning to interpret, there is no hidden meaning to seek. The secret of a character, for example, does not exist, it has no depth beyond the literary phenomenon. Everything is secret in the literature and there is no hidden secret behind it, and there is the secret of this strange institution about which, and in which, I never stop debating. [...] The institution of literature recognizes, in principle or in essence, the right to say or not to say, so the right to secrecy is kept.)

5.3. Avery Gordon

In *Ghostly Matters* (50-8), Avery Gordon develops some of the ideas of Derrida regarding melancholia and mourning. Gordon declares that Freud, though he does recognize the significance of haunting in his work, dehistoricizes it by considering it as psychological projection: ghosts are an entirely imaginary externalization of the unconscious.⁴⁶ But both Gordon and Derrida are adamant that ghosts are not simply psychic projections, but the form in which the past lives on in the present. Indeed, for Gordon, haunting is ‘neither pre-modern superstition nor individual psychosis’ but ‘a constituent element of modern social life’ (7). Sociology - traditionally a facts and statistics-based science – finds itself impotent when dealing with issues of haunting, and has thus declared that ghosts do not exist. But Gordon wishes to know – with particular relevance to the Spanish issues we are debating here: “How do we reckon with what modern history has rendered ghostly? How do we develop a critical language to describe and analyze the affective, historical, and mnemonic structures of such hauntings?’ (18).

Avery finds her answers in readings of literature such Luisa Valenzuela’s Argentinean narratives of the ‘desaparecidos’, or Toni Morrison’s stories of the ghostly returns of previous generations of black slaves. Similarly to Valenzuela or Morrison, in *El espíritu de la colmena* Erice’s decision to represent Frankenstein’s monster makes the point that ghosts, when it is psychologically necessary that they are remembered as it is for Ana, can come to acquire an objective existence as the incarnation of the past in

⁴⁶ Discussion of Freud’s *Unheimlich*, or Uncanny, is of course widespread in literary studies, although surprisingly the subject has received little book-length attention. One fascinating example is Nicholas Royle’s *The Uncanny: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2003).

the present.⁴⁷ This would be one explanation of the, for some commentators troublesome, idea that the monster appears to Ana close to the end of the film not simply onscreen, but as a real, tangible presence.

The Ana-monster sequence opens with a subjective point-of-view shot of the kind which is so typical of the film: the monster is thus constructed as a psychic projection by Ana. But as it blends into a new version of the scene from James Whale's *Frankenstein* in which the monster appears to the little girl by the lake, the camera changes position, so that now both Ana and the monster are being filmed from behind, objectively, from a position that does not correspond to that of any character. At this point, the monster cannot simply be dismissed as a psychological projection. It is, as it were, actually physically present (even if only represented on celluloid, a ghostly shadow). At this point, therefore, the monster is a perfect illustration of the way in which history haunts the present, with Ana the only character in the film who is able to make the imaginative leap into addressing the past directly and thus building the all-important bridge between self and other on which the spiritual revival of Erice's ghostlike Spain depends.

5.4 Hauntology and Spain

The theories of Derrida, Torok and Abraham and Gordon are of particular interest to the study of Spanish twentieth century history as it is revealed in cultural artefacts. As Jo Labanyi asks: "What does one do with the ghosts of the past?" Although much has been made of Spain's attempts over the last thirty years to reinvent

⁴⁷ To deflect criticism that I am conflating ghosts with monsters here, would suggest that Frankenstein's monster in *El espíritu* is to all intents and purposes a ghost: Ana believes that the creature is real, and also that the creature is dead. In the sense that celluloid figures are already ghosts, Frankenstein's monster is in fact the ghost of a ghost.

itself, Spain is still widely perceived as having failed to address its 20th century history.

In Paloma Aguilar's words:

Throughout the Spanish Transition a tacit pact was formed among the most visible elites in order to silence the bitter voices of the past which caused such unease within society. A part of this anxiety seemed to be based on a fear of the imminent resurrection of the old resentments of the war which were, perhaps, not quite as much a thing of the past as the political leaders and some sections of the media tried to make the population believe. This was probably due to the fact that no formal and explicit reconciliation had ever taken place within Spanish society. The defeated elements of society had been gradually, and almost always silently, reincorporated into the life of the country, and only the most famous cases had been publicly addressed, with the individuals in question thus being partially rehabilitated. (xx)⁴⁸

In the words of Ignacio Fernández de Mata, "Spanish society [...] alienated a part of itself and accepted the hegemonic theses of the dictatorship, silencing its guilt and misgivings about consenting to the violence" (281). The sudden, incomprehensible and terrifying experience of war made all aspects of Spanish survivor's lives precarious; dismantling at a stroke possible sources of warmth and support and creating an environment of hostility that made the process of daily life insecure and terrifying. Transmitting this experience directly is hard not only because it is incomprehensible to anyone who did not experience it at first hand, but because the ruptured social fabric has

⁴⁸ The link between the significance of Spain's historical silence and the significance of the concept to Gothic is made explicit by passages such as the following, from Punter: "...it is clear that many ghost stories - perhaps the whole tradition of ghost stories - revolve around moments of Silence, which somehow allow a sense of the 'other' to intrude. Emblematic here would be the stories of Walter de la Mare; the silence which inhabits the great cathedral in his 'All Hallows' (1926) [...]"

stayed ruptured, especially for those who still live under the weight of a hegemonic memory that kept both themselves and others remote from their own terrifying experiences.

As we have noted, it thus falls to the makers of culture to articulate what the Francoist hegemony has repressed, and the issue of Spain's past has been addressed by filmmakers into two blocks: firstly in the early 1970s (Erice, Saura) and then, following a decade of brash postmodernism (the *Movida*, etc.) again in the 1990s on (Guillermo del Toro, Medina, David Trueba, José Luis Cuerda etc.). There are both many kinds of ghost, and many ways of dealing with them. It is possible to refuse to acknowledge their existence and just shut them out, as Dr Casares does with Santi in *The Devil's Backbone* and as Grace does to her children in *The Others*: in both cases, such a refusal to see is indicative of a kind of moral blindness, but in the latter case a later interaction with the ghost will permit the achievement of a new perspective and a fuller understanding. The perspectives of Dr Casares and Grace are, indeed, corollaries to those of the State in that they suppress the explicit manifestation of the popular imaginary.

Another way of dealing with ghosts is to cling to them obsessively through that process of introjections which Freud termed "melancholia" ("Mourning and Melancholia", 1915), thereby allowing the past to take over the present. And a third way is to acknowledge the existence of the ghost and to offer it a place in the present – a process which would represent Freudian "mourning", since it permits one to lay the ghosts of the past to rest by recognizing them as exactly that – past. The first of these two possible attitudes to ghosts will result in a denial of history. The last option, however, permits the recognition that the past continues to exist in the present, and allows us to live in a state of potential reconciliation, in the present, with the traces of the past. As Derrida says:

To exorcise not in order to chase away the ghosts, but this time to grant them the right, if it means making them come back alive, as Tenants who would no longer be Tenants, but as other *arrivants* to whom a hospitable memory or promise must offer welcome without certainty, ever, that they present themselves as such. Not in order to grant them the right in this sense but out of a concern for justice. (Wolfreys 162)

In our sense here, ghosts are the traces of those who have not been allowed to leave a trace – we might think of Ana’s mother in *Cria cuervos*, of Santi in *El espinazo del diablo*, or of the parents of Medina’s *Insensibles*, who may be that films true monsters, represented by Medina as isolated and marginalized – indeed, abject. They are history’s victims, returning to demand reparation or justice, and to ask that their name be honoured rather than depredated (or indeed simply forgotten).

Labanyi cites the study *Memory and Modernity: Popular Culture in Latin America* (Rowe and Schelling), and in particular a section of the book in which they discuss a “traumatic erasure of memory” in some villagers with regard to events that took place during the military government of 1976-85. Rowe and Schelling suggest that the reason for this memory loss was the fact that there was no collective sphere in which remembering could take place other than the sphere of surveillance –in other words, the subjects lacked a private space in which to remember – and the memories that were being lost, fascinatingly and tragically, were not social or historical, but private and personal. The gothic-influenced films we are discussing here – in our next section we

will focus on *El orfanato* – offer such a space for remembrance to their spectators, as indeed did *Rebecca* for contemporary audiences of that film.⁴⁹

Pierre Nora's notion of "lieux de mémoire", or "realms of memory", is shown by Labanyi to be useful in this regard, with Spanish films functioning, effectively, as a site in which collective memory can occur: we have already seen this dynamic in operation in our study of *Rebecca*. Nora examines the dependence of memories on being attached to some particular site such as a landscape or a monument. The sense of place in all of the film under discussion here is extremely strong – witness, for example, the oppressive, silent spaces of Erice's *The Spirit of the Beehive*, the oppressive interiors of Carlos Saura's *Cría cuervos*, or the isolated, quasi-Gothic buildings of *The Others* or *El orfanato*. In all these spaces, there are at best limited possibilities for collective memory, and in each case it becomes the work of someone living to find out what "really" happened, in each case by addressing, or achieving contact, with a ghost.

The importance of film and other historical images are significant in this regard. As we have seen, *El espíritu de la colmena* begins with metatextual drawings by Ana, and of course a film (James Whale's *Frankenstein*) is key to the film and its meaning. In *Cría cuervos*, other snatches of memory, in the form of family photos, are significant, while in *The Others*, the use of post mortem photographs offers another variation on the same theme. All of these are images of a ghostly, spectral past which is impinging on the present: unlike the closed, official discourses of history, however, they are not continuous, structured narratives but instead open, unstructured flashes, lacking in causality, which is why they are able to let the ghosts in. The Gothic as a mode contains features of fragmentation, repetition and parallel which reflect the uncertain struggles of survivors as they seek to recount past events in the effort to reconstruct themselves into

⁴⁹ Remembrance, of course, is not always wished for. In Spain there is historically a split between a left-wing which wishes to remember and a right-wing which wishes to forget.

a contemporary, coherent whole. The fragmentation of the Gothic, therefore, comes metaphorically to represent damaged or traumatized psychological conditions, which are also often unrecognized as such even by those experiencing them. These fleeting images of memory - which haunt not only the films about 20th century Spain but also its novels - are expressions of an alternative, non-officially sanctioned version of history, which can only be recuperated in these spectral forms: the ghosts have, as it were, spotted the ideological gaps in the present and darted into them. Thus Erice, Saura and Amenabar are recognizing the existence of ghosts and using Gothic frameworks as vehicles through which to express the literality of this existence.

The use of such “fragments of memory” as this is converted into an artistic principle by Basilio Martín Patino in films like *Caudillo* (1976) and *Canciones para después de una guerra* (1971), which juxtaposes voiceovers of personal remembrance and images of cultural trivia such as comics, advertisements and popular film and song with newsreel footage of people leaving Spain for exile: the songs are largely about the pain of loss, and as such are evocative of the ghosts of war whom official histories have made invisible: superimpositions and dissolves are used to give the human figures here an appropriate ghostly aspect. Other ghosts are also visible: Franco, for example is depicted in children’s comics, again offering an “alternative” view of Spain’s “authorized” history.

Caudillo, meanwhile, begins with a sequence featuring ruins – quasi Gothic ruins - left behind after the Civil War. These lead to a graphic representation of Franco, who is therefore himself represented as a Gothic ghost, inhabiting ruins which he himself has created. These images are not simply indices of moral and physical degradation, but also function as figures for the way in which history’s losers have been consigned to the “dustbin of history”. In *El espíritu de la colmena*, the *maqui* fugitive

whom Ana meets emerges ghostlike from the ruins of an abandoned sheep hut: the faces and walls of the film are photographed in such a way as to stress their ruinous, haunted quality, with the concomitant suggestion that the relics of the past continue to live on into the present.

Greil Marcus, in *The Dustbin of History* – a phrase he borrows from Trotsky’s 1917 description of the Mensheviks - explains how the word “history” has come to mean its opposite:

Turn the television to almost any station and you’ll soon catch the ruling mode, as someone in a sitcom or drama or commercial snaps off one version or another of “It’s history.” This cant phrase, in all its myriad variations, has worked its way through our talk for more than a decade now—like a language-germ, a neologism that won’t go away, that holds its place in culture by poisoning the language around it—and what the phrase means is the opposite of what it says. It means there is no such thing as history a past of burden and legacy. (22)

In other words, the western narrative of progress has come to mean that we regard history as something of an embarrassment:

History is written as we speak, its borders are mapped long before any of us open our mouths, and written history, which makes the common knowledge out of which our newspapers report the events of the day, creates its own refugees, displaced persons, men and women without a country, cast out of time, the living dead... (Marcus 17)

The writing of official histories, in other words, creates zombies – and the image of Erice’s *maqui*, leaping from the “train of progress” into a remote Castilian field, comes inevitably to mind – creating a “living dead”, for whom the shame of their own stories, which they cannot tell because they would not be believed, has led to a situation in which they “can barely credit even their own memories”.

Labanyi (2000) catalogues some of the appearances of ghosts, in their various varieties, in the books of such writers as Juan Marsé and Antonio Muñoz Molina, in their works dealing with the Civil War: the use of vampires in Marse’s *Se te dicen que caí* (1973) is referenced, while in Manuel Vázquez Montalbán’s *Crónica sentimental de España* (1980), the effects of Francoist repression and censorship as referred to as a “vampirización de la memoria”, in which personal memories are sucked away by the state to be replaced by their own “official” versions. As a demonstration of how the use of the gothic trope of ghosts permits the reclamation of the past by those held wrongly to be dead, we turn now to a detailed examination of Juan Antonio Bayona’s *El orfanato*.

CHAPTER 6

HAUNTOLOGY AND THE GHOSTS OF *EL ORFANATO*



6.1. *El orfanato* and Spanish History

The Spanish Civil War continues to be a living memory in the field of Spanish culture, and although Spanish film audiences at times seem to be heartily sick of it⁵⁰, Spanish filmmakers and novelists, whether directly or indirectly, continue to exploit its richness as a subject. There is currently an increasing interest in memory in Spain, and as we have seen under the theories of hauntology as instigated by Freud, in “Mourning and Melancholia” (1917), and then developed by Derrida, Torok and Abraham, Cathy Caruth, Avery Gordon and others, it becomes possible to see films which have no apparent direct interest in the Civil War and its aftermath – films unlike, say, *El espíritu de la colmena*, *El laberinto del fauno* and Alex de la Iglesia’s *Balada triste de trompeta*

⁵⁰ The sickness of Spanish audiences may be unfounded, since there seems to be a perceptual imbalance between what they believe and the facts. In September 2011, the Spanish Film Academy convened a meeting to discuss the prejudices against Spanish film that many Spaniards appear to hold. At the meeting Pedro Pérez, president of the FAPAE (the organization which brings together Spain’s TV and film producers), publicly affirmed that “Sólo el 1,4% de las películas estrenadas en la última década trataban de la Guerra Civil”.

- often more recent films - which appear to have been made with primarily commercial interests in mind – as national allegories, in which Spain’s 20th century past of war, and fratricidal violence returns to haunt the present moment and its inhabitants.

At the metatextual level, *El orfanato* is a catalogue of allusions to Gothic tropes which have led some commentators to discuss it as mere Gothic pastiche. Thus we find versions of the ancestral curse (in the way in which Laura’s locking of Simon into the cellar comes back to haunt her later); body snatching (Benigna’s return to the orphanage to try to remove the bodies of the dead orphans, as first exhibited in *Frankenstein*); claustrophobia (in the imagined final sufferings of the entrapped Simon); entrapment (in Simon’s ‘burial’ we find an allusion to Madeleine Usher’s in Poe’s “The Fall of the House of Usher”); the explained supernatural of Radcliffe (the ghostly noises and bumps that Laura hears in the house are actually being made, pathetically and bathetically, by Simon); female gothic, in the trials and tribulations of Laura herself; the haunted castle (care is taken from the first scene to present the orphanage as an isolated place in which the apparent innocence of childhood is contaminated by evil); the grotesque; the pursued protagonist; the machinery and gadgetry of the supernatural; and, predominantly, ghosts – by whom Laura is haunted, and one of which she will herself have become by the end of the film.



The skepticism of Carlos, her husband, about Laura's belief in ghosts is redolent of a thousand natural protests in Gothic fiction, as the voice of rationality – which is also, entirely non-coincidentally, the voice of supposed “authority” - seeks to suppress the unconscious from bursting dangerously forth. In Wilkie Collins' sensation novel *The Woman in White* (1861) – the sensation novel is a form which effectively yanks the Gothic violently and pleasurably into Victorian England - a Limmeridge schoolboy is rebuked by his schoolmaster when he mistakes the figure who transpires to be Anne Catherick for a ghost: ‘If I hear another word spoken about ghosts in this school, it will be the worst for all of you. There are no such things as ghosts; and, therefore, any boy who believes in ghosts believes in what can't possibly be’ (Collins 57).

It is the uses to which *El orfanato* puts the gothic trope of ghosts which interests us most here. At the formal level, *El orfanato* has several Gothic elements in common with *Los otros*, *El espinazo del diablo* and *El laberinto del fauno*. These include much of the paraphernalia of the typical Gothic novel and film: the strong contrast between darkness and light, enclosed spaces and the contrast between “safe” and “unsafe” spaces, extended corridors, two levels (one where daily life takes place and the other where the monster and fantasies' are located), protagonist children who don't understand the adult world and who seek evasion via their rich imaginings, and finally the threat of a monster or ghost which may be imagined, or may be real. It has been pointed out by commentators such as Ma. Natalia Andrés del Pozo and María Salgado that the story of *El orfanato* may be a half-unconscious metaphor for the country's recent past at both the collective and individual levels. Writing about the Gothic, David Punter and Glynis Byron ask:

... to what extent are we – as citizens of a ‘civilized’ nation, and also as writers and readers of scenes of depravity and cruelty – implicated in the perpetuation of these vices? In one sense, indeed, Gothic distances, relocates, reterritorializes these scenes; in another, of course, it ceaselessly incarnates precisely the material which it claims to be banishing, and in doing so provides us with a kind of secret history of what goes on beneath the veneer of culture. (289)

The immensely watchable *El orfanato* provides a perfect example. Most commentaries and reviews on the film – both Spanish and international - following its release chose not to see it as in any way connected to Spain’s twentieth century past: if reterritorialization⁵¹ had taken place, they seemed unaware of it, just as they had with Amenábar’s *The Others*. Instead, critics preferred to see it as an accomplished genre piece⁵², rather than as a “secret history” whose own secrets conceal yet further secrets relating to issues of Spanish history. But it is clear that *El orfanato* can be read as a reconsideration of the process of the revision and recovery of the past that Spanish culture, politics, and society have been tackling since the *Ley de la Memoria Histórica* (Historical Memory Law) was passed in 2007. Perhaps representing the culture’s preparation for the law, Spanish literary works dating from the late 1990s to have dealt with wartime and post-war repression include *O lapis do carpinteiro* (Manuel Rivas, 1998); *Soldados de Salamina* (Javier Cercas, 2001, also filmed by David Trueba); and *La voz dormida* (Dulce Chacón, 2002). In terms of feature films, the list would include

⁵¹ In anthropological terms, “reterritorialization” is the process whereby a culture reproduces an aspect of popular culture, doing so in the context of their local culture and making it their own. Korean cinema’s adaptation and extension of Hollywood horror tropes is one example: the appropriation by Spanish film makers of the Gothic into films about the Spanish Civil War are another. The ideological reasons for such cultural blindness on the part of Spanish critics would be a fascinating subject for further research.

⁵² “Rather than clutching at originality,” wrote Anthony Lane in the *New Yorker*, “Bayona, like any wise practitioner of the genre, seems happy to raise the dead—to bring fresh life to old tropes and buried images.” Justin Chang in *Variety* called it “a fastidiously grim ghost story that rattles the bones of the haunted-house genre.” Their views are typical in their containment of the film within genre.

Silencio roto (Montxo Armendáriz, 2000), *The Devil's Backbone* and *Pan's Labyrinth*; and *Pa negre*. Each of these films in one way or another expresses a debt to the Gothic, which it has appropriated for its own ends.⁵³

All of these works are concerned to “dig up the past”, and as such represent a metaphorical form of bodysnatching. But as Labanyi notes, “[the] process of ‘digging up the past’ has been literalized since 2000 by the excavation of mass graves containing the bodies of victims of the Francoist repression during and after the war, undertaken by the Asociación para la Recuperación de la Memoria Histórica” (95). Fernández de la Mata further explores this process on the minds of Spaniards perhaps hitherto repressed into passivity by the extension of Francoist hegemony beyond the year of the dictator’s death:

The Walter Benjamin—type “eruption” of this historic conflict in the present, in which a significant social sector demands attention and analysis of “the past” has come as a surprise (especially for international observers), for it has caused quite a stir on what appeared to be lethargic consciences. Relatives of the men and women whose bodies were buried in unmarked mass graves have led the social movement that seeks to reinstall these direct victims of repression into the political and social life of the country, even as they themselves are indirect victims and survivors. (291)

Ghosts, in other words, are demanding to be heard in the present. Perhaps *El orfanato* does not deal with the war directly, or even with its consequence. But the relationship with the past is explicitly made via the film’s study of its protagonist’s psychological

⁵³ It should be remembered that not all films dealing with the war owe such an explicit debt to the Gothic. *La lengua de las mariposas* (José Luis Cuerda, 1999), *La niña de tus ojos* (Fernando Trueba, 1999) and Ken Loach’s *Land and Freedom* (1995) all offer a more social realist, less generic take on the war.

state. By using the theories of Torok and Abraham that we have seen above, it becomes possible, no less than with *Rebecca* – and with specific references to its Gothic elements - to see *El orfanato* as national allegory, for a nation in which the ghostly presence of the past is a constant, and present, feature.

6.2. The Ghosts of Spain

Spain's *Ley de la Memoria Histórica* was finally ratified on December 26, 2007. The main provisions of the law which concern us here are the recognition of the victims of political, religious and ideological violence on both sides of the Spanish Civil War, and the state assistances offered in the tracing, identification and eventual exhumation of victims of Francoist repression whose corpses, often buried in mass graves, are still missing. One of the law's main objectives has been to provide a legal way for families to honor deceased relatives with a formal burial - no easy task, since it is estimated (Ferrán, 30) that about 30,000 people are still believed to be interred in mass graves throughout the country – some of them dating back to the war, but some of them dug as recently as the 1950s.

Under Franco, the precise location of graves was kept secret from loved ones, who were also forbidden from visiting them and from leaving flowers. Public mourning, including the wearing of black, was also forbidden: the censorship of the state extended deeply into the private and personal lives of the survivors, thereby unwittingly creating a national unconscious with which film and literature would later be populated by ghosts eager to be heard. The bereaved families are concerned with having their loved ones exhumed primarily because of the powerful symbolism of reinternment: in a powerfully ironic sense, formal burial reinscribes the dead as members of society, since

it brings their life-cycle to a “proper”, socially-sanctioned close, much as though the naturalized explanations of Anne Radcliffe’s ghosts enable their restoration at the human level.

The potential for social rupture following the death of Franco was therefore enormous, given the Francoist project, efficiently carried out, of dividing the country in two. As we have noted, Spanish politicians and society opted for the solution of a pact of silence (*pacto de silencio*). Its aim was to unite the political parties so as to guarantee a smooth transition to democracy that would not be threatened by difficult questions about the legality or otherwise of events during the previous forty years. But as Vicente Navarro wrote as recently as 2008 in *Counterpunch*:

[...] Spain remains the only country where genocide and crimes against humanity remain without sanction. The pact of silence continues. But for how long? At this very moment, there are young people still trying to find their grandparents and working to mobilize people. We will see who will win in the movement to recover the bodies of the disappeared and the history of Spain.

The use of Gothic motifs *El orfanato*, as I hope to show, is a part of this process of the recovery of the dead - though without ever explicitly mentioning the Civil War - via its complication, extension, and inversion of the idea of young people finding their grandparents into a story about a youngish woman finding her own son/victim. As Ofelia Ferrán tells us, a generalized consensus emerged in the years immediately following Franco’s death, one promoted by the political elites and apparently accepted by society at large, that it was better not to excavate the past for fear of another civil war. The attempted military coup of 1981 was seen as a reminder of the very real

possibility of such a return to violence. The transition, in other words, was a form of historical *tabula rasa*, “a completely new act in a play in which the most major actors did not want to be reminded of their connections with any of the previous scenes”. (Ferrán, 25)

The Amnesty Law of 1977 represented the official sanctioning of this philosophy of “turning the page”. There was, however, no true blank slate. There was, rather a disguised record of the activities of the previous regime, containing valuable and damning information for anyone who wanted to find it. Within the pages of these documents lie the ghosts of Spanish history, because ghosts, in Labanyi’s words, “are the return of the repressed of history - that is, the mark of an all-too-real historical trauma which has been erased from conscious memory but which makes its presence felt through its ghostly traces” (6) – a perspective echoed in the opening words of Guillermo del Toro’s *El espinazo del Diablo*, which asks: “What is a ghost? A tragedy doomed to repeat itself time and again? An instant of pain, perhaps. Something dead which still seems to be alive. An emotion suspended in time. Like a blurred photograph. Like an insect trapped in amber.” As the Spanish psychiatrist Luis Rojas Marcos wrote with regard to the Madrid terrorist attacks of 11 March, 2004:

Burying distressing memories can cause great anguish or depression and stop the process of recovery. Moreover, by hiding how we feel, we distance ourselves physically and emotionally from others precisely when we most need human touch, support, and consolation. What is worse, the persistence of these symptoms—which in the beginning are normal—during more than four or five weeks, and the incapacity of integrating little by little the traumatic experience

with the rest of our autobiography is a sign of danger, a sign that the emotional wound will worsen or become chronic.

So the situation will become “chronic” after a mere four or five weeks: in the case of the Civil War and its aftermath, such silence may have been sustained for fifty years or more.

Fernández de la Mata briefly reflects on the psychological reaction of people born during the democratic regime, the grandchildren and the great-grandchildren of the war, who have been “relatively free of the conditioning” of their parents and grandparents. It is these younger film makers, as Acevedo-Muñoz reminds us in what could be an epigraph to this thesis, that adopt conventions of horror, introduce monsters and ghosts and various ‘uncanny’ figures and situations to their plots in ways that are potentially allegorical to the nation’s cultural and political transitions of the period.

In films such as *El espíritu de la colmena*, *Cría cuervos*, *El espinazo del Diablo*, *El laberinto del fauno* and *El orfanato* it is, significantly, a young person who first accepts the reality of, and then confronts the ghost, in whichever form it takes, since it is the young who have the bravery and the psychological openness to directly interact with it: in this sense, the role of the Radcliffean Gothic heroine may have been usurped, in recent Spanish film, by the figure of the child. The filmmakers choose children – in some instances, the children that they themselves once were, as focalizers – as a generation of Spaniards who did not fight in the Civil War, do not have political allegiances, and who are not responsible for it – but who, having inherited the trauma of the war, “seek[s] to resurrect the past and learn to live with its ghosts” (Hardcastle 123). Indeed, the convention of using children is common to many ghost stories, but it seems

particularly relevant to culture dealing with war and its aftermath. Fernández de Mata writes of this generation:

They ignore or are indifferent to the horrors experienced by their grandparents' generation, and they are the key factor in the definitive national reconciliation, which must begin in the recognition of others' pain and respect for others' suffering. ... Many turn to artistic imagery, particularly film, to understand and explain that unknown reality that they can then approach through fiction... They must negotiate a past that they did not know belonged to them. (294)

In order to achieve this recognition, it is necessary to discover strategies for representing this pain and suffering in indirect ways which will not represent a threat to the political status quo. And it is in this search for an ideologically unbiased way of expressing violence and suffering that film makers (and to a lesser degree, writers) have turned to the horror genre and to the Gothic, offering a “realm of memory”, a theatre in which the collective insecurities of a traumatized nation can safely be played out. Having supplied a little historical background, we can now move to an analysis of how the most explicitly Gothic elements of *El orfanato* – its ghosts – can be reinterpreted as a commentary on the recent history of Spain.

6.3 The Return of the Ghost

We start with the return of Tomás: thirty-odd years after the death of Franco, a figure – representative of Spain's past – who has not received a proper, formal burial returns to

haunt the living, who have attempted to ignore its existence.⁵⁴ As Joan Ramón Resina writes of the silenced voices of Marxism, in phrases which suit our present purposes equally well:

Resonating in the rarefied medium of the past, those voices clamor for a justice that will always come too late for them—too late and yet also too soon, for the end of history is expected to lay all the ghosts to rest. In that way history will twice make casualties of its uncelebrated agents, first as victims and then as definitively disremembered anachronisms. Until that second coming, though, specters will not let up. They will continue to importune the remorseful memory of the living, asking for the arrears of an ever-outstanding debt. (v)

Several questions are raised by the return of Tomás. Firstly, why does he (or the past, represented in him) return? Secondly, what is the status of his relationship to those who are still living – particularly his relationship to Simón, Laura’s HIV-positive son? And what are the thematic and ideological functions of these questions?

The film’s first scene shows us a classic convention of horror novels and cinema (see *Frankenstein*), the happy family scenario. But the choice of this opening scenario may not be purely conventional. In Gothic fiction, the family often signifies membership, belonging, even though, as is the case here, the family will later be tainted by curse – a Gothic tradition dating back to *The Castle of Otranto*. Given that the family was the social pillar of Francoist society, it is significant that it is allegorically reconfigured here, as a site of potential problems, or resistance, or critique: the structure of Laura’s family will break apart under the pressures of newly-revealed past

⁵⁴ It has been pointed out that the police investigation surrounding the death of the children in *El Orfanato* must have been stunningly incompetent not to have uncovered the truth about their deaths, but this could also be seen as part of the point – it is sometimes necessary, in order to sustain a *pacto de silencio*, to avert one’s gaze from the blindingly obvious; indeed, institutional silence such as this one are part and parcel of the problem.

knowledge, only to be reconstituted in a new form, one based on the natural bond of mother and child, at the end of the film.



This, however, is not a conventional family. It does not, for a start, appear to be one structured along traditional patriarchal lines (as indeed, neither are the families in *Wuthering Heights*, or in *The Woman in White*, each equally threatened by past revelations). In Bayona's representation, it is Laura who is the family leader; indeed the film has been criticized for the psychological slightness of its portrayal of the father figure, Carlos. The family lives in an old orphanage in northern Spain with their ill, adopted son, Simón (Roger Princep), and Laura, who lived there thirty years before, plans to open the orphanage up to other afflicted children. During the opening party, Simón disappears, and Laura's frantic search for him will ultimately lead her to a tragic encounter with the past. As she is seeking Simón, Laura changes radically, her loss eventually leading her to kill herself so as to be reunited with him beyond the grave.

At this point, we return to Freud's 1917 study "Mourning and Melancholia". According to Freud, in the processes both of mourning and melancholia, loss leads to such psychological effects as profoundly painful dejection, cessation of interest in the outside world, sleeplessness and refusal to take nourishment, but it should result in an

inner process of closure and memory. In mourning, the object of loss is identified as something external to the subject. But melancholy, in Freud's words, is described thus:

... the free libido was not displaced onto another object; it was withdrawn into the ego. There, however, it was not employed in any unspecified way, but served to establish an identification of the ego with the abandoned object. Thus the shadow of the object fell upon the ego, and the latter could henceforth be judged by a special agency, as though it were an object, the forsaken object. In this way, an object-loss was transformed into an ego-loss and the conflict between the ego and the loved person into a cleavage between the critical activity of the ego and the ego as altered by identification." (586)

The melancholic subject feels itself to be "worthless, incapable of any achievement and morally despicable; he reproaches himself, vilifies himself and expects to be cast out and punished. He abases himself before everyone and commiserates with his own relatives for being connected to anyone so unworthy" (584).

This description applies well to Laura. After losing Simón, her behaviour changes. She blames herself for Simon's disappearance, her relationship with Carlos worsens, and she feels she has been a failure as a mother. She retreats from the outside world and becomes increasingly isolated from it. Laura has experienced a process of rejection caused by introjections, leading to a pathological inflation of the ego. Labanyi's explanation of the process runs thus:

... one can cling to [the lost person] obsessively through the pathological process of introjections that Freud called melancholia, allowing the past to take over the present and convert it into a "living death". Or one can offer them

habitation in order to acknowledge their presence, through the healing introjections process that is mourning, which for Freud differs from melancholia in that it allows one to lay the ghosts of the past to rest by, precisely, acknowledging them as past. (65)

Given that she will later turn out to have been responsible for Simón's death, it is not beyond conjecture that Laura has repressed what happened to him. At no point, despite the protestations of Carlos, does she come close to acknowledging that he might be beyond access to her – that he might be well and truly dead and gone. At the end, when she discovers Simón, she still refuses to believe that he is dead until she has seen the evidence of the corpse: she needs physical evidence of Simon's death in order to be able to continue her mourning. On the other hand, though, Laura does seem to be aware of the past of Tomás and of the other five dead children, even though she has no evidence for their present existence – this may be because Laura is herself an orphan who has become used to co-existing with loss and with contemplating the fact of the death of her own parents.

At this point it seems relevant to return to Torok and Abraham. In *The Wolf's Magic Word: A Cryptonymy* (1986) and *The Shell and the Kernel* (1987), as we have noted, they propose a new approach to the self and the secrets lodged in the mind while laying down the parameters of a new science, *cryptonymy*, that postulates the existence of a 'mental crypt'. Abraham and Torok explore the mental landscapes of submerged family secrets and traumatic tombs in which actual events are treated (or rather, *not* treated) as if they had never occurred: the relevance to Spain's pact of silence, the uneasily negotiated political agreement between past and present, seems clear. Similar to its physical counterpart, the mental crypt of Torok and Abraham is a hermetic place,

sealed-off, whose main functions are, as Jacques Derrida puts it, “to isolate, to protect, to shelter from any penetration, from anything that can filter in from the outside” (Derrida xiv). The crypt serves to keep its contents away from any danger or infiltration from the outside world as the contents within might threaten the stability of the present.

Abraham and Torok suggest that what is concealed in this psychic space cannot be identified precisely because repression is lacking. Introjection has not occurred; the elements contained in the crypt have therefore not been repressed but transferred. As an alternative to Freud’s concept of *dynamic repression*, Abraham and Torok instead propose *preservative repression* (Torok & Abraham 18), which seals off access to part of one’s own life in order to shelter from oneself any view of “the traumatic monument of an obliterated event”. The self therefore is unaware of trauma within the life itself, a neat psychological parallel to the political concept of the pact of silence, which encouraged, as it were, an unawareness on the part of the grieving about the causes of their grief. Even to the person carrying them, the contents of the crypt are secrets.

When we consider the “crypt” in which Simón dies in *El orfanato*, the significance of Torok and Abraham starts to become clear. But there are many other “Gothic secrets” lurking in *El orfanato*. Indeed, the word “secret” is spoken in the opening scene. To calm down Simón’s anxieties after she hears him screaming, Laura tells him about the “secret” of the old lighthouse which can be seen from his bedroom window:

Can you keep a secret? Actually it does work. But the light’s invisible, and it protects us from danger. (*El orfanato*)

The secret of the lighthouse and the light it projects in the middle of the night has clear symbolic value. The light can be seen in the film's opening and in the closing scenes. At first, Laura lies to Simón by telling him that she is not afraid of being in the house, since they are protected by the light. This is emphasized by the fact that the light she tries to persuade Simón is real is actually the reflection of a clock face (a clock being an instrument which marks time - and which consequently marks off the distinction between past and present).

Metaphorically, Laura is using the clock as a way of convincing herself that her past can in fact be detached from her present, and that there is no traffic between them: and that there genuinely is, therefore, the possibility of a "fresh start." In this sense, and at this early point of the drama, she is representative of those who subscribe to the *tabula rasa* theory of Spanish political advancement as enshrined in the *pacto de silencio*. For Laura, the light which she tells Simón is protecting them is making her feel happier about a present which in fact is subliminally frightening to her, since by returning to the orphanage she is exposing herself to her own past, and so risking the re-opening of old wounds. The voices she hears – the voices of Simón's invisible friends – are therefore felt by her (and by the audience) as a threat, the past making its classically Gothic encroachment upon the present.

But by the end of the film, when Laura is reunited with her old friends and with Simón, the lighthouse is again working, rather as the light floods in through the removed curtains of *The Others*, since an understanding has been reached with the hitherto buried past. Having previously been enveloped in darkness, the scene is now illuminated. Secrets have emerged into the open, and the masks covering the truth about the past have been taken away in much the same way that she has torn away the strips of paper covering the entrance to Simón's "hiding place." Significantly, too, Tomás is no

longer wearing his mask, so that the shame of the past has also been overcome in what has regularly been termed this “uplifting” coming-together of past and present: although it may seem strange to use the word “uplifting” to describe an ending in which a disturbed woman commits suicide, it is uplifting precisely in the sense that by killing herself, Laura is reestablishing her contact with the past and with her son, and therefore reestablishing the familial “norm”. Gaining this new “healthy” relationship with her personal past (and metaphorically, with Spain’s national past) is worth the sacrifice of one individual life: hence the fact that it is “uplifting”.

Another Gothic secret in *El orfanato* has to do with Simón’s life: he is an orphan and is carrying the HIV virus. There is also the “secret” at the end of the game which Simón and Laura play: the film, like most Gothic, is very much concerned with secrets and their revelations. But of course the most significant secrets for the audience, and for Laura, are those relating to the corpses found in the outhouse, and those secrets pertaining to Tomás’ story and his later return ‘to life’. Laura and Carlos are not Simón’s real parents, and his illness will thus lead to his death. A reading of Abraham and Torok would imply that that it is the dead Tomás who reveals to Simón this truth:

Tomás told me the truth. That I’m just like them. I have no mother or father.

And I’m going to die. (*El orfanato*)

Although Laura and Simón conceal the truth from Simón, he comes to an understanding of the secret about him via, we are asked to believe, Tomás. It is Simón’s communication with the dead, therefore, which has opened up for him the truth about his present. Likewise, the game he plays immediately prior to the scene in which he

shockingly reveals his new knowledge to Laura. This is one of the ways in which *El orfanato*, like *The Others*, plays with meaningful ambiguities.

The question thus arises of how is it possible that an invisible friend – a ghost – can be communicating with Simón. The audience never sees the friends. This returns us to the apparitionist/non apparitionist debate of *The Turn of the Screw*. Do the ghosts exist, or are they simply a figment of Simón’s imagination, as is happening in *El espíritu de la colmena*? Or do they have a “real” existence outside his mind?⁵⁵ The key thing here however, pace Torok and Abraham, is that a transgenerational secret has been transmitted from son to parent.

Similar issues are raised with regard to Tomás, Benigna’s son. His disfigurement means that his mother has kept him isolated from the other children, seeing him as a reason for shame, hiding him from other people’s sight, and covering him with a burlap sack (which is, conveniently given the film’s strong Gothic overtones, also a suitably grotesque image.) Tomás’ final resting place is the beach cave where he died thirty years before, and from which he now returns, seeking justice. The hermetic, isolated and remote cave – apart from being a parallel of secret room of the orphanage itself - is a powerful symbol of Torok and Abraham’s mental crypt, as indeed is Tomás’ ‘little house’, located inside the orphanage but unrecognized as such by all who live there: nobody, least of all the clairvoyant Aurora (Geraldine Chaplin), locates the room when looking for Simón. When Laura discovers the room beneath the stairs, she finds it concealed with wallpaper which she has to peel away in order to access it.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ I would suggest, in terms of the film’s dramatic parameters, that it is because Simón, who has the HIV virus, is already dying, that enables him to communicate in this way with the ghosts: that he is already, in a sense, at a “half-way house” between life and death, much as Anne in *The Others* is able to communicate with the medium. In, for example, *El laberinto del fauno*, the question of the “reality” of the ghosts is considerably more ambiguous.

⁵⁶ Of several incoherent plot points in the film which have been pointed out by critics and commentators, this is perhaps the trickiest to explain: how can Simón accidentally enter a room whose door has been wallpapered over, since Laura has to remove that wallpaper in order to access it?

The specific location of Tomás' hideaway, within the orphanage but in a significant sense apart from it, can be tied into interpretation of it as a crypt. As the mental crypt it is "an enclave between [the dynamic unconscious and the ego of introjections], a kind of artificial unconsciousness, lodged in the very midst of the ego" (Abraham, and Torok 159). The outhouse in the garden, where the orphans' poisoned bodies were buried by Benigna, functions in a similar way. These places harbour secrets: the cave hides the corpse of Tomás, and later his ghost; while the cabin hides the orphan's corpses and the little room, Simón's corpse. Laura is the only character with the power to trace them and so to reveal their significance.

Throughout the film, even before her son's disappearance, Laura instinctively feels unease about things, the result of her intuitions (rejected by Carlos) about the true state of things. According to Abraham and Torok, as Derrida affirms, "the crypt is enclosed within the self, but as a foreign place, prohibited, excluded. The self is not the proprietor of what he is guarding. He makes the rounds like a proprietor, but only the rounds ... and in particular he uses all his knowledge of the grounds to turn visitors away" (Derrida xxxvii). The self is, in Torok and Abraham's words: "a Cemetery Guard." Laura is unaware of what is hidden there, but she does feel that she has to protect it. She performs this role when she is invigilating during Benigna's entry into the cabin in her attempt, so to speak, to unbury the corpses of the orphans.

These crypts are inhabited by the revenants that return to haunt the living: Simón is constantly present in Laura's mind, the presence of the orphan can be felt around the house, and Tomás appears to Simón, the dying child. The inhabitant of the crypt, in Derrida's words, is "always a living dead, a dead entity we are perfectly willing to keep alive, but as dead, one we are willing to keep, as long as we keep it, within us, intact in any way save as living" (xxi). This being is one of the living dead primarily because it

has not been properly mourned and repressed, and so a working-through into restored healthiness has not been achieved. Laura's wish is to keep the orphans alive: as far as she is concerned, they have in fact never died.

Tomás' presence in Laura's narrative can thus be seen as the return of the troubled, unreconciled past to haunt the present, a phenomenon experienced by Spanish culture in its revision of the Civil War and its aftermath. In the figure of Tomás, past and present shade into one another. Although concealed from society's view, and therefore conscience, Tomás has in a very real sense always "been" there. He has inhabited a symbolic room in the basement, a location on a different spatial and symbolic area from the one where everyday life has gone on. The crypt thus embodies a site where memories and experiences from various time periods overlap. In this symbolic crypt, as the psychologist states, "past, present and future are superimposed and they cross" (*El orfanato*).⁵⁷ The location of the film thus consists of two distinct layers: house above (present), and basement below (past). To retrieve the past it is necessary to identify it with the present, which is why Laura replaces new décor with the old. She tries to unravel the past, to restore it, by effectively superimposing it on the present. This strategy has already been alluded to during the opening credits, during which the audience can see a hand, perhaps incoherently in dramatic terms, peeling off red wallpaper from an unknown wall.

⁵⁷ Botting extends this idea when he writes of the Gothic mode: "Historical events or imagined pasts, also, delineate the boundaries of the normalised present in a movement, an interplay, that leaves neither where they were" (13). The idea may be of even greater relevance to *The Others*.



Following Abraham and Torok's explanation of the mental process of the crypt, the Ego "carefully provides [them] with false leads and fake graves" (159) so as to protect what is concealed within this space. This idea is dramatized by Bayona in 'the treasure hunt game' which Simón and Laura play. The key to the drawer is found inside in a Russian doll, which comprises of one layer on top of another. A parallel situation is the unearthing of other objects that had been buried in sand. Each of these clues or stages is a lesser crypt, in Torok and Abraham's terms, that is slowly opened until they lead Laura to the principal crypt, the one that contains all the secrets.

Another possible interpretation for Laura's enactment of the past, for her dressing up as Benigna and laying the table during the climactic scenes, is that it dramatizes her own attempts to come to terms with the past. In Freudian terms, this is 'acting out', that is, repeating the past until mourning is achieved. This scene can be understood as the acting out Spanish society needs before facing its past. The issue of Judge Baltasar Garzón, who in 2012 was prohibited from continuing to practice, is significant in this respect: Garzón issued an international warrant to for the trial of the former Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet in pursuit of justice for the Spanish 'desaparecidos' during the Chilean dictatorship. The move caused an international outcry since it appeared that the Spanish justice system was more interested in implementing justice under other regimes than under its own Franco regime. But in terms of Freudian acting out, this can be seen as a preparatory step for a Spanish

national confrontation of its past that has yet to take place, and which has effectively been postponed by a conservative Spanish judiciary afraid of what too much digging around might reveal.



Metaphorically, then, Tomás represents Spain's recent past. The fact that Tomás's face has been hidden beneath a sack, the result of his mother's shame and embarrassment at his deformed appearance, and the fact that Benigna has kept Tomás in his room, isolated from contact with the wider world, may be reminiscent of the shame of Spanish democracy about its own grotesque, "unfaceable" past: the *pacto de silencio* is an attempt to create a *tabula rasa*, with Spain preferring not to acknowledge that its new democracy is founded on a deformed and unnatural foundation. The image of Spanish historical awareness as being deformed, as Tomás is, is not new. Ortega y Gasset, in *La España invertebrada* (1921), writes of "la enfermedad española", which, "es, por malaventura, más grave que la susodicha "inmoralidad pública". Peor que tener una enfermedad es ser una enfermedad. Que una sociedad sea inmoral, tenga o contenga inmoralidad, es grave; pero que una sociedad no sea una sociedad, es mucho más grave (59).

The view of Spanish history as somehow deformed has been regularly restated, as for example in Juan María Sánchez-Prieto's essay "Cien años sin memoria":

El siglo XX más que un siglo perdido es el siglo del olvido. España no es una excepción: Los cien años que transcurren del 98 al 98 son sustancialmente cien años de desmemoria, los responsables últimos de una conciencia histórica deformada, viva aún entre los españoles. Son tres las fuentes del olvido: 1) el pesimismo regeneracionista del 98; 2) la España eterna franquista; y 3) el materialismo histórico marxista de los años 60 y 70. (13)

In *El orfanato*, then, this deformed past visits the present in search of healing, in pursuit of a process of assimilation and naturalization which has been denied it, There are issues relating to the past which need to be settled, and the reappearance of Tomás in the present, rather like that of Santi in *The Devil's Backbone*, shows the past returning to ask for a settling of debt in the present. As Avery Gordon says, pace Derrida: "What's distinctive about haunting is that it is an animated state in which a repressed or unresolved social violence is making itself known, sometimes very directly, sometimes more obliquely" (Gordon xvi).

The notion of the maintenance of secrecy of unpalatable truths can be extended, in terms of national allegory, to the relationship of Laura to Simón. Laura, like the director Bayona of a generation which knows of the Civil War but which did not experience it at first hand, prefers to conceal from the young Simón (i.e. the future of Spain) the truth about his condition: but his realization of the truth about his infirmity is what sparks off the rest of the narrative, which will, of course, terminate in Laura's own "death-in-life" and her reconciliation with not only Simón, but Tomás too.

Simón, then, may represent Spain in the present and Tomás his equivalent in the past. There is reference in the film to the idea of the Gothic *Doppelgänger* and indeed, Tomás and Simón may be seen as *Doppelgängers*, in that there is, later in the film,

confusion on the part of the Laura (and the audience) about which of the two she sees in the scene in which she is violently pushed back into the bathtub, and in which Tomás appears to Simón as an “imaginary friend” to whom he has access on account of his own illness, which is to say his own closeness to death. The encounter between Tomás and Simón, in other words, represents the encounter of contemporary, democratic Spain with its deformed historical double, generating a disease in the present which can only be exorcized via a working-out of the issue through assimilation by the present of the truth about the past. The “disease” which Simón has inherited from his parents is, significantly, hereditary. Like his mother, he has not directly experienced the past of Spain, but is struggling with the consequences of its moral errors: he belongs to a generation of Spaniards which has not be taught the truth of the past as he should have been, and who is consequently in danger of carrying those same mistakes forward with him into the future, mistakes generated by ignorance and disremembrance. In George Santayana’s lapidary formulation: “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it” (284).

6.4 Simon’s Game



Simón’s treasure hunt game may represent a ludic attempt at discovering a procedure by which the past can be recovered. It is perhaps worth rehearsing in detail

the structure of Simón's game, since it is the detonator of all that will follow in the narrative. The game, of course, has been suggested by Simón's imaginary friends, ghosts who are speaking to him urgently about the importance of revealing the truth about the present. The game involves taking a valuable thing, then following clues to find it: when you have found it, you can make a wish. Simón's special objects are coins which he has found in the park: and coins are, of course a transmission of past values into the present, a symbol of remembrance as well as a functioning currency. The treasure hunt leads to a key which opens a cupboard containing the files relating to Simon's adoption procedure: at the local, personalized level, then, the ghosts have done their work on Simón and can now incorporate him as one of their members, so that the truth about their own death and burial can be allowed to emerge. Crucially, though they are phantoms, the agents of change are the young, in contrast to the older generations which prefer to leave the past untouched, and which prefer for the young generations to remain in ignorance. This centrality of the young to the process of change is, as we have seen, also common to *El espíritu de la colmena*, *The Others* and *El espinazo del diablo*.

The corpses later uncovered by Laura are therefore the traces of a disremembered past which is seeking recognition and understanding in the present. In Nora's terms, as we have seen, the discovery of the bodies would establish the outhouse as a "lieu de mémoire," a place of memory, defined by Nora as "any significant entity, whether material or non-material in nature, which by dint of human will or the work of time has become a symbolic element of the memorial heritage of any community (in this case, the French community)" (Nora 1996: XVII):

The "acceleration of history," then, confronts us with the brutal realization of the difference between real memory—social and unviolated, exemplified in but

also retained as the secret of so-called primitive or archaic societies—and history, which is how our hopelessly forgetful modern societies, propelled by change, organize the past.

The unearthing of these bodies in the outhouse forces Laura into a new understanding of the past: what has until now been merely an outhouse like any other is at a stroke transformed into a site which radically alters her understanding of the past and forces her into a new understanding of it, and into learning from it, just as the opening of Spanish mass graves, themselves potent *lieux de mémoire*, places which exists “to stop time, to block the work of forgetting” (Nora 19), and of opening up the possibility of a voice for those who have been silenced by past tyrannies.

The issue is one of receptiveness: as Aurora tells Laura: “oyes, pero no escuchas”, and, in what is perhaps the film’s most famous phrase: “no se trata de ver para creer, sino de creer para ver. Cree y verás”. This last phrase is a challenge to institutional reconstructions of the past, and can be seen as Aurora’s attempt to encourage Laura to see beyond the evidence of her eyes and to see past and through the official narrative of the story, which has been founded on willful forgetfulness.⁵⁸ Cathy Caruth, writing about loss and trauma, tells us that there is “an other who is asking to be seen and heard, this call by which the other commands us to awaken...” (9).

But in order to be heard, there has to be receptivity on the part of the living. As in all ghost stories, as in much Gothic fiction, the final question is one of belief, with the narrative pitting those who “believe” against those who do not, a battle between supposed rationality and superstition, between disbelief and credulity. The reactions of Carlos and Laura to Simón’s disappearance are exemplary in this respect, with Carlos

⁵⁸ The clarity and power of this exhortation was brought home clearly to the writer on a recent visit to the Valle de los Caídos outside Madrid, a building whose immense literal and figurative silences have clearly been conceived to hide as much about twentieth century as it has been designed to reveal.

concerned – and ultimately failing - to preserve the family structure via recourse to skepticism, and Laura sacrificing this institutionally imposed structure as she goes in pursuit of reconciliation with her own particular demons via assimilation of the past.

Isolated in the orphanage following Carlos's departure, Laura now has the time, the space and the freedom to learn and face the horrific truth about what happened to her son, which is that she has accidentally locked him into the room which, symbolically, we have described as a crypt. But interestingly, although the truth of the past has been made visible to Laura, her own death means that the "truth" of what has taken place in the orphanage will remain invisible to society at large: she prefers to die and be with Simón and her former friends than to live and try to communicate the truth to others. The past is thus resealed.

To return to Torok and Abraham, there may be a suggestion of the "transgenerational phantom", or "work of the ghost in the unconscious," which effectively means that family secrets are handed down from generation to generation. The final scene has Carlos picking up the medal/coin he lent to Laura, and which had to be returned when she found Simon again. A door gently opens, the result of a draft of air perhaps, but perhaps of something more, something supernatural. Thus the final scene shows the formerly skeptical Carlos admitting to himself, with a half smile, the possibility of the "reality" of ghosts – he is thus a living Spaniard existing in imaginative empathy with the dead. In the words of Torok and Abraham, "shared or complementary phantoms find a way to be established as social practices along the lines of staged words" (176), and the phantoms of Spain's past now become social practice, as embodied in what is also a partial *lieu de mémoire*, the film of *El orfanato* itself.

CHAPTER 7

PERE PORTABELLA'S *VAMPIR-CUADECUC*: GOTHIC TRANSTEXTUALITY AND POLITICAL MEANING



“... Vampir, no a pesar de todo, sino como resultado de todo.” (Pere Portabella, presentation of “Vampir-Cuadecuc” at MoMa, 1972)

I would fain have rebelled, but felt that in the present state of things it would be madness to quarrel openly with the Count whilst I am so absolutely in his power. (Bram Stoker, “Dracula”)

7.1 Dracula and Spanish Gothic

In 1931, Freud’s disciple Ernest Jones wrote:

The two chief metaphorical connotations of the word [vampire] are: 1) a social or political tyrant who sucks the life from the people ... [and] 2) an irresistible lover who sucks away energy, ambition, or even life for selfish reasons.' (Jones 151)

It is with the first of these uses – which Jones notes as coming as early as 1741 – that we are concerned here. Although Carol A. Serf refers to the Count as not an “overtly political threat” (Serf 94), it is this facet of *Dracula* which may be an appropriate reading for contemporary Spanish audiences. In “The Politics of Dracula” (1966) Richard Wasson supplies a neat introduction to some of the political themes of *Dracula*, themes with which recent *Dracula* criticism has been less concerned than with the novel’s psychosexual aspects, telling us that Count Dracula “represents those forces in Eastern Europe which seek to overthrow, through violence and subversion, the more progressive democratic civilization of the West” (Wasson 20). Wasson reminds us that the novel is set in a “portion of Europe where the laws and customs of the West do not apply”, a direct reference to Transylvania as the kind of Gothic locale which Maturin, for example, saw Spain as being, an area of Southern Europe which has supposedly remained undeveloped while the rest of the continent has developed an “enlightened” culture. Wasson also points out that Dracula’s “best chance for survival is now in England”, with the implication that he finds it harder to survive in the kind of superstitious region where people actually believe in him: England’s social life, its politics and science will serve to protect him. What the novel finally reveals, for Wasson, is that “though progress makes England vulnerable, it also provides the means by which Dracula can finally be destroyed”, whilst warning the 20th century of the dangers which faced it:

The popular imagination so stirred by the political horrors of our time, which turns again and again to the nightmares of the Nazi era and which reads the warnings of science fiction with great attention, cannot help but be stirred by the political implications of DRACULA. (Wasson 26)

Although Wasson was writing in 1966, the appropriateness of his reading to the Spanish context seems unarguable, and it is precisely this political reading of *Dracula* which is behind the making of Pere Portabella's *Vampir-Cuadecuc* (1970), a film which is simultaneously an expressionist homage to Murnau and Dreyer, a critique of the Spanish B-movie tradition as incarnated by Jess Franco, and a critique of a tyrannical regime which, by 1970, was starting to fail. As Francesca Poggi writes:

Le vampire, mort et immortel, qui fuit la lumière et les crucifix et se nourrit du sang de ses victimes est une parfaite métaphore du pouvoir, de sa solitude, de son aberration et de sa fascination.⁵⁹

There is, of course, a danger with such mythological beings as Frankenstein and Dracula, which is that they can be shaped to mean whatever a particular culture wishes them to mean. For example, Judith Halberstam writes:

...the others Dracula has absorbed and who live on in him, take on the historically specific contours of race, class, gender and sexuality... the vampire

⁵⁹ (The vampire, death and immortality, who leaks light and crucifixes and feeds on the blood of his victims is a perfect metaphor of power, of its solitude, of its aberration and of its fascination.)

Dracula, in other words, is a composite of otherness that manifests itself as the horror essential to dark, foreign and perverse bodies. (Halberstam 250)

This leads Chris Baldick and Robert Mighall, in their influential essay “Gothic Criticism”, to observe that “the vampire itself has become a cipher, merely the vehicle for the desires and agendas of modern critical discourse...” (Baldick & Mighall 223) Such a dynamic operates to the extent that the vampire, once a threat to the Victorian bourgeoisie, has now become something of a hero, with, for example, Robin Wood suggesting that, far from representing tyranny, “it is not far-fetched to claim Dracula offers himself as a privileged focus for any enquiry into the possibilities of liberation within Western civilization” (Punter 283). Baldick and Mighall are rather scornful of such “anything goes” approaches to the Dracula myth, noting that such logic practically represents an inversion of Stoker’s original intention in creating the Count.

But Pere Portabella’s experimental *Vampir-Cuadecuc* (1970), is a very different kind of vampire film - one which is indeed “an enquiry into the possibilities of liberation”, a perspective demonstrated by the fact that it was banned by the Franco regime while the many other vampire films of the period, made by the likes of Amando de Ossorio and Leon Klimovsky, and generically easily classifiable as commercial horror, were not (although such sensationalist works were sometimes subject to censure).

De Ossorio and Klimovsky apart, the third key member of Spain’s 60s and 70s directorial vampire triumvirate was Jesus (Jess) Franco. After enticing Christopher Lee into making *El Conde Dracula* (1970), a remake more faithful than most of the *Dracula* which would become the basis of Portabella’s masterpiece, Franco went on to make five vampire films including *La Comtesse aux Seins Nus* (1973), a spicy, X-rated update of

Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla* in which the heroine attacks men and kills them via fellatio: Franco was quick to detect and capitalize on the oft- explored erotic undertones of Stoker's novel, although in *El Conde Dracula*, perhaps in its search for faithfulness to the original, he played down the explicit sexual content.

The background to the story of how Pere Portabella came to vampirize Franco's film is concisely recounted in Jonathan Rosenbaum's review of *Vampir-Cuadecuc* in *Time Out* magazine (Sept. 21, 1972).

Two years ago, Jess Franco was shooting a Dracula film in Spain starring Christopher Lee. Portabella shot a film about the film being shot, and created a haunting meditation of death and artifice that is wholly his own. (A check-up on Franco's film reveals a sow's ear; Portabella took the same actors, sets, part of the action and plot, and turned it into a poem.) Apart from the final sequence, where Lee describes the death of Dracula and reads the corresponding passage from Stoker's novel, the entire film was shot silently and overlaid judiciously with a richly varied soundtrack... Portabella's camera freely carves a subtle theme-and-variations around the very notion of horror film production. How does Dracula survive in 1970? In decaying, ethereal images dredged up from the tombs of film museums, accompanied by irrelevant noises from the street, lost in the matrix of intense, illegible intrigues and plots, and interrupted by stray details in the shooting... (Rosenbaum, 147)

The end of the 60s and the start of the 70s was a turbulent period in Spanish politics. The Franco regime was aware that it could not keep going, and that its collapse was only a matter of time: paradoxically, it intensified the levels of violence,

creating a return to the repressive conditions of earlier in the dictatorship. At the same time, there was an unstoppable liberalization in social habits and a rise in levels of social and political protest: this would culminate in the 1973 assassination of Carrero Blanco by the Basque political group ETA (who were not at the time considered by democrats to be terrorists).

At the same time, Franco's technocrats were starting to overhaul Spain's economic system, with a corresponding boom in the economy. Construction and tourism start to dominate. The counter culture was thus able to find a foothold within the Francoist hegemony, and it is in the context of this counter culture that Portabella's films were made and screened. The minority audiences who watched the films of the Barcelona School⁶⁰ would be well aware of their status as subversives, in the sense that by their presence they are authorizing the existence of an alternative model of cinema – and hence of representing reality – to the dominant one.

They are aware that Portabella's work represents a questioning of the rhetorical apparatus which is being imposed on them from above, and which the majority of viewers will quickly internalize and naturalize. As Company and Tarin point out, they are watching the film in a political context from which it cannot be separated:

[...] lo esencial es pensar y pensar se da como una manifestacion de la libertad del individuo: el propio ejercicio interpretivo se convierte así en una toma de posicion frente a un sistema en que la norma establecida nunca había contado con la opinión de los ciudadanos. (69)

⁶⁰ The Barcelona School was a 1960s group of Catalan filmmakers, with stylistic affinities similar to those of the pop art movement. And French New Wave. Perhaps the key exponent was Vicente Aranda, and his key film *Fata Morgana* (1965).

Thought itself therefore becomes an act of resistance, ideologically speaking. Althusser, defining ideology in a position probably close to Portabella's, tells us that "ideology represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence" (Althusser 162). The body of Portabella's work, both formally and thematically, exposes this process by revealing and representing the "imaginary" nature of what has been taken as "real": it acts as a deconstruction of the social myths which have been perpetuated by the Franco regime, but which have never "contado con la opinion de los ciudadanos".

In "Gothic Criticism", Baldick and Mighall criticize the recent tendency of Gothic Criticism as the arena for the playing out of new models of Gothic historical fantasy, fantasies in which the tyrannies and enslavements of Stoker's *Dracula* are in fact seen as sexually liberating, and a criticism of bourgeois Victorian anxieties about, principally, class and sexuality: as David Punter states, wrongly in Baldick and Mighall's view, "to a "middle class", everything is a source of fear except perfect stasis". (Punter 1996, 201) But Portabella's rereading of *Dracula*, filtered as it is through Franco's filmic retelling of Stoker, restores something of the original spirit of *Dracula*. Portabella's Count is indeed the Other, but in the context of 1970s Spain, it is not a liberating other, but the tyrannical other of Stoker's original vision, with one key difference – that he is revealed to be a straw man. In Spanish terms, Rosenbaum's question "How does *Dracula* survive in 1970?" is tinged with incredulity, with the subtextual suggestion being that it is remarkable that in 1970, a figure such as General Franco survives. In both Stoker's original and in Franco's film, for example, unlike in the vast majority of *Dracula* films, *Dracula* starts as an old man who becomes younger as he dines on the blood of the young. The metaphorical applications of this to a Francoist regime which is slowly drawing to its agonizing, drawn-out close are clear.



7.2. Pere Portabella: Contexts

Pere Portabella founded his company Films 59 in Barcelona, and produced early films by maverick directors Marco Ferreri, Carlos Saura, and Luis Buñuel, principally Buñuel's 1961 classic *Viridiana*. It is thought to be Portabella's disenchantment with the troubled reception of *Viridiana* that led him into making films of his own – films which were to be deliberately marginal. John Hopewell refers unambiguously to Portabella as a member of the Barcelona School (Hopewell 69), alongside such directors as Vicente Aranda and Gonzalo Suárez, but there is a question mark about the extent to which Portabella himself wished to be identified with the school: Hopewell describes their work as combining “uncompromising political reflection, formal advances from the *nouvelle vague*, and censor-evading techniques best described as a resort to diffusion”. (Hopewell 69) It is worth exploring in more detail some of the characteristics of Portabella's cinema in general.

Portabella's films are best considered as intertextual collages: an approach exemplified to perfection in his appropriation of Franco and, via Franco, Stoker. To quote Julia Kristeva: “any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another” (Kristeva 66). The narrative itself is relegated

to a secondary level, with the primary focus on the active interpretation of the viewer, who must bring her/his own experience to what is being seen and heard in order to make sense of the film (a strategy which replicates that we have seen in operation in audiences in Spain in the 1940s during screenings of Hitchcock's *Rebecca*). As Gerard Genette states, it is "the reader's expectations, and thus their reception of the work" which is key. Portabella, like Erice to a lesser degree, and like the Gothic novel in literature, therefore employs intertextuality as a way of demystifying and making explicit the deceitful mechanisms of film(novel)-making and, very explicitly in the case of *Vampir-Cuadecuc*, of politics, and of creating perceptions in the mind of the viewer – in this case, perceptions relating to contemporary political events in Spain. *Vampir-Cuadecuc* is thus a structural/materialist film – one which, in the words of Peter Gidal, "attempts to be non-illusionist. The process of the film's making deals with devices that result in demystification or attempted demystification of the film process" (Gidal 1).

Until 1976, Portabella uses either 35mm or 16mm film stock, and shoots in a combination of colour and black and white. Although in part the result of the financial strains of by working under the Franco regime, this fact also inevitably provokes reflection on the physical materials used in the production of a film, and consequently on how the ideological transmissions of the "reality effect" – consisting of naturalization and consequent identification with characters and situations – are achieved. Regarding the material conditions under which his films were made, it is worth pointing out that following *Nocturno 29*, in 1968, Portabella broke completely with the Spanish film industry, making his films without presenting them to the censors or asking for distribution permission. This effectively means that Portabella is defining his work as militant and marginal.⁶¹

⁶¹ A process fascinatingly discussed by Román Gubern, Joan Enric Lahosa and Miguel Bilbatúa during the interview sections of Portabella's *Umbracle* (1971), which features Lee in a different role.

Portabella's films are thus conceived and made without recourse to the normal infrastructures of the film industry. He uses the same small team repeatedly: the writer Joan Brossa contributes to the script; Luis Cuadrado (also responsible for *El espíritu de la colmena*) was responsible – until replaced by Manuel Esteban – for the camerawork; and Carles Santos was responsible for the music, which has a defining effect in Portabella's work at the signifying level.

The way that characters are presented in Portabella is novel, challenging mainstream expectations. Characters do not have clearly-defined psychological characteristics and do not form part of the diegetic world of the film. Christopher Lee, for example, appears both in *Vampir Cuadecuc* and in *Umbracle*: but in each case, the fact that we are materially watching Christopher Lee himself, with all our preordained expectations of what his powerfully iconographic status represents, is more significant than the way the Lee himself is creating his role. The performance of the film therefore becomes a reflection on the meaning of performance itself. As Jonathan Rosenbaum says:

In a haunting way that is difficult to pinpoint, Lee's appearances stand in relationship to the rest of the film somewhat like the way that Franco stands in relationship to modern Spain – both as an emblem and as a continual theatrical presence... (Pohle & Hart 148)

In *Monsters: Evil Beings, Mythical Beasts, and all Manner of Imaginary Terrors*, David D. Gilmore tells us that monster tales reveal “a recurring structure no matter what the culture or setting”. Firstly, to the surprise and shock of a human community, the monster emerges from some mysterious region. Second, it attacks and

kills human beings, with early attempts of the victims to defend themselves failing. Thirdly, the community is saved by a hero who uses his wit and ingenuity to defeat the monster. If the monster is driven away, it will probably return: if it is killed, its offspring or kin may later reappear.

From one, admittedly general and simplistic, but mythical perspective, the structure of the monster's presence as here identified by Gilmore, and as reenacted in the Gothically-influenced films under discussion here, could be seen as the history of Spain between 1936 and 1982. The monster, Franco, emerges from the mysterious nether regions of North Africa to penetrate Spain in search of the young blood of the Republic, bringing about a Civil War in which hundreds of thousands are slain: attempts by Republican communities to defend themselves are doomed to failure. In 1939, the monster's triumph is sealed and there begins a 36-year reign of terror, towards the end of which the monster starts to fail physically as the "forces of good" start to prevail. Finally, the monster dies, with the "hero" (the pro-democracy forces in Spain) defeating the system it has implemented and opening the way to a new politics. But the legacy of Franco is still strong: the monster may have been driven away, but there can never be any guarantee that it will not return.

In *Fear and Progress*, Antonio Cazorla Sánchez writes of the significance of fear in maintaining the Francoist project:

...by blocking any negotiation over the country's future, Francoism left open only a single and unacceptable door for opposition politics: to take up arms and start a second round of the Civil War. This was not a real option, at least not one that the absolute majority of ordinary Spaniards would ever accept. In this way, peace was nothing but the regime's manipulation of Spaniards' fear of more

violence ⁶²... the dictatorship did not try to bring reconciliation among Spaniards. On the contrary, it fueled and used fear opportunistically to achieve its own objectives. (18-19)

The phrase “the opportunistic use of fear” is one echoed, in fact, by even the skeptical Baldick and Mighall: “Is it not ... the business of the Gothic to be scary and sensational?” (Punter 280) Perhaps the definitive accounts to date of Franco’s politically Gothic methodology are Paul Preston’s *The Politics of Revenge* and *The Spanish Holocaust* (2012):

The purpose of terror as a weapon to generate fear far and wide was made clear by the broadcasts of both General Mola in the north and, more systematically, by General Queipo de Llano in the south. His obscene descriptions of the bloody atrocities were heard nightly from Seville and may have contributed to provoking some atrocities by his listeners... In the south, the horrors were perhaps greatest as a colonial army applied against the civilian population the techniques of terror used in the African wars. (Paul Preston lecture: The Crimes of Franco Study day BFI Southbank, January 19, 2008)

The *garote vil*, in other words, was a tool that Franco borrowed from the Inquisition - a Gothic instrument that came to lodge itself firmly in the collective unconscious of a generation. The creation and exploitation of fear, then, are also the aims of the horror writer and film maker.

⁶² Cazorla Sánchez does acknowledge that the dictatorship was not solely responsible for the climate of fear, which had started before the war. His explanation also serves to part-explicate the powerful sway of the *pacto de silencio*, to which we have referred in previous chapters.

Vampir-Cuadecuc is perhaps one of the unacknowledged masterpieces of Spanish arthouse cinema. Superficially, the film is an early example of a “making of”, based on the Barcelona shoot of Franco’s *Count Dracula*. In presenting *Vampir-Cuadecuc* at MOMA in 1972, *in absentia* as part of a retrospective on his work at which he could not be present, the authorities not having given him permission to travel, Portabella emphasizes the cultural significance of the film over its content, via a discourse on the film as one of those which has been “marginados” in Spain, and which in fact did not legally exist.⁶³ It existed, as had the Gothic novel before it became acceptable via its literary appropriation by the likes of Jane Austen in *Northanger Abbey* (1818), in opposition to the mainstream culture. For Portabella, the fact that the film could have no legal existence in Spain during the early 1970s (it was not officially released until 2008) was the best expression of “la realidad española que todas las representaciones oficiales de España en los festivales internacionales, al margen del interés que pueda merecerles el filme” (MOMA): the film therefore exists “*no a pesar de todo, sino como resultado de todo*” (not despite everything, but as the result of everything”).

7.3. Intertextualities

In his introduction to the MOMA screening, Portabella therefore places very little emphasis on the actual content of *Vampir-Cuadecuc*.

⁶³ As Portabella wrote in his Introduction to the 1972 MOMA screening: “*Vampir* is one of the first outcast films made in my country. A warning that the marginalization, in our case, is not the result of a voluntary choice, but forced on us by our current political, social and cultural context. It is the only possible response, the only way out for independent cinema in Spain; it starts with the definitive rejection of the “protection” of the State and the auspices of the great distributors, of censorship and official and industrial control, and the need to grapple with our actual reality, with a politics of ideological production coherent with our needs, fully rejecting the Administration’s channels which, in the best of cases, are nothing more than another manifestation of the machinery of power.”

Vampir es un esfuerzo de reflexión sobre el lenguaje cinematográfico. Es quizás, también, un intento de desentrañar lo fantástico reducido al género de terror; una travesía a través del género cinematográfico, un discurso sobre un discurso, un filme-vampiro pues ha sido realizado durante el rodaje de la producción *El Conde Drácula* dirigida por Jess Franco.

The film therefore combines several transtextual modes, in Genette's terms (and indeed the relationship between the concepts of transtextuality and vampirism are worth exploring in greater detail). The first type of transtextuality which Genette identifies is "intertextuality", or the "effective co-presence of two texts" (Kundu 2008), whether as quotation, plagiarism, or allusion: Stam, developing Genette's theory to encompass film, tells us that it can also be seen in "medium-specific forms" (Stam 28) such as camera movements which refer to other films. Intertextually, *Vampir-Cuadecuc* is heavily dependent not only, and most obviously, on Franco's *Count Dracula*, but also on many elements of the Dracula myth which precede it – going back, via its use of grainy, high-stock images, through Dreyer's *Vampir* and Murnau's *Nosferatu*, to Stoker's "original" and perhaps even beyond. Much of what we can say about *Vampir-Cuadecuc* from the intertextual perspective can, of course, also be said of Franco's film, on which it so closely depends.

Genette's second type of transtextuality is paratext, which refers to "the relation, within the totality of a literary work, between the text proper and its 'paratexts' - titles, prefaces, postfaces, epigraphs, dedications, illustrations ... in short all the accessory messages and commentaries which surround the text". This is relevant to *Vampir-Cuadecuc* in terms of its relationship to Franco's film, with which it clearly has a vampiric relationship. Genette's third category is metatextuality, which denotes implicit

or explicit references of one text to another text: "... it unites a given text to another, of which it speaks without necessarily citing it (without summoning it), in fact sometimes even without naming it. (Genette 4). Via metatextuality, one text effectively becomes a comment on another. Thus the metatextual elements of *Vampir Cuadecuc* become an ironic comment on the commercialism of the industrial Franco "original" of which it is made, as well as of the Stoker "original" which Franco's film attempts to render so faithfully.

The architextual relationship between *Vampir Cuadecuc* and the works which precede it relate to the generic considerations, which will include figurative and thematic expectations about texts. "No hace falta mencionar los diálogos," says Portabella wearily in an interview with *El Mundo* newspaper, "la historia de Drácula es muy popular y todo el mundo ya sabe lo que se dice" (Reyes).⁶⁴ Stoker's original is therefore largely present, as it were, by its absence, at least at the explicit level. The first word of the title of the film suggests that the audience will be watching a vampire film, but the second word – meaning "worm's tail", but which can also refer to the unexposed footage at the end of a film, and may refer to the tail-end of the Franco regime, as it was being experienced by contemporary inhabitants of Spain - complicates things enormously, suggesting that there will be a self-referentiality about the film – film as film – which will explore the very issues of filmic representation, for example by its deliberate anachronisms - the most striking of which is the extended use of the noise of a drill on the soundtrack, which conveniently also covers the dialogue which, in a more conventionally coded piece, would be considered "explicatory".

At a more general level, of course, *Vampir Cuadecuc* questions audience expectations not only about the genre of horror, as we shall see, but also about the very

⁶⁴ What is missing from this declaration is the centrality of the *political* reading of Franco/Stoker which Portabella's film makes explicit.

genre of film itself, about the way that “reality” is represented. By breaking down, for example, the traditional relationship of sound and image to one another, the film forces its viewers to reexamine their own relationship to the horror (gothic) genre, and to the film itself, and hence to become conscious of the distorting power of all cultural representation – particularly, perhaps, that used by Franco in creating his personal and political mythology. It is making audiences aware of the viewing process and how it is seeking to manipulate them.

7.4 *Vampir Cuadecuc* and the Dominant Cinema

Defined as *materialismo fantasmático* by its director in the interview with *El Mundo*— a generic definition which suggests its roots in both the Gothic and in Marxism - *Vampir Cuadecuc* was shot during the shooting of Jess Franco’s *Count Dracula* in Barcelona. Franco was able to persuade Christopher Lee - who is still, on account of his performances in Hammer Horror film during *Dracula*, an icon of vampirism to the British mind – to take part with the promise that he was going to make a film which was more faithful to the Stoker original than anything which has preceded it.

This was the only time in my life that I was able to pay some sort of tribute to Stoker and try- the only actor who had ever done so – to show [Dracula’s] character on the screen almost entirely as he described, physically... the script was based to a great extent on Stoker’s book, but it was only a shadow

of what it should have been. But it was the nearest approach – with all its pitfalls – to Stoker’s story (in every way) ever made. (Pohle, and Hart 186)⁶⁵

Both *Vampir-Cuadecuc* and *Count Dracula* are obviously vampirical with regard to Stoker’s master text, with both drawing selectively on the iconography of the vampire film as originally established in *Nosferatu*, which itself established many of the conventions of later Gothic films: the use of shadows as indicators of doom; shots and reverse shots of the monster approaching and the victim retreating; the use of reaction shots to signal the effect of a noise or utterance on the listener (the name of Dracula as sonorously uttered to the villagers, for example), and the many special effects: doors opening by themselves; dissolves and superimpositions of the vampire; the stiff-backed rising from the coffin, etc. Jess Franco has said: “the presence of Pere Portabella, with his cameras around the filming locations and revealing all my tricks, led to difficulties.” (Cine Zine Zone) And this is effectively what *Vampir Cuadecuc* is: a materialist, quasi-Brechtian revelation of the “tricks” used in film, and by extension in politics, to perpetuate myth.

Juan Miguel Ramón and Francisco Javier Tarín have identified seven formal characteristics of Portabella’s work, characteristics which, either combined or singly, could be said to apply to experimental film in general. They represent a systematic overturning of the classic Hollywood model of cinema as described by David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson in *Film Art: an Introduction*. These elements, Ramón and Tarín tell us, are constants in Portabella’s films, and are strongly in evidence in the two films which concern us here, *Vampir-Cuadecuc* and *Umbracle*: they correspond closely to

⁶⁵ To what degree Franco’s film is faithful or otherwise to Stoker’s *Dracula* is a question of debate. One thing it loses is the self-consciousness, the multi-layered intratextuality of the original, which *Vampir Cuadecuc* brilliantly restores. Like much of Franco’s work, *Count Dracula* has polarized critical opinion.

Peter Wollen's definition, based on his studies of Godard, of counter-cinema (Peter Wollen 6): the Barcelona School (whether or not we consider Portabella to have been a member) is generally thought to have taken its inspiration from French New Wave cinema, and more specifically from the work of Godard. Since Wollen's definitions of counter-cinema perhaps have a wider currency in the field of film studies, it is those to which we will refer here. Our aim later will be to study the political dimensions of Portabella's counter-cinematic approach, but before that it is perhaps worth seeing to what extent *Vampir-Cuadecuc* indeed follows the counter-cinematic models of Wollen and Ramón and Tarín.

In the dominant cinema – which, broadly speaking, includes most of the films under discussion here - one event narratively follows another, the construction is clear, and each event builds upon the event before it. There is a causal chain which runs from exposition to complication to resolution. In counter cinema, classic narrative continuity on the Aristotelian model, based on cause and effect, with consequent narrative closure, is suppressed. The aim is to disrupt the narrative's "emotional spell", to refocus the viewer's attention and to permit thought and reflection in a way that the dominant discourse does not permit. In *Vampir-Cuadecuc*, this is only true up to a point, since even though the film is both highly elliptical and fragmented in its narrative treatment, it is still relatively simple – perhaps with the prior knowledge which Portabella assumes us to have - to discern the outlines of the narrative of the film on which it is based, Franco's *Count Dracula*. This is largely because the film actually employs lengthy footage from *Count Dracula* itself (or footage shot from close to Franco's camera position). Though it is not a film which lends itself easily to summary, we might describe the narrative of *Vampir-Cuadecuc* thus:

A man (unnamed by Portabella, but it is Jonathan Harker) arrives at a building which turns out to be a hotel. Harker meets another man (presumably the hotel owner) and a woman, presumably his young wife. Harker has bad dreams and is visited in the night by the wife, who runs away, afraid. All this takes place in the first 3:19 of the film, before the credits have opened.

Harker is then picked up by a carriage and taken to a castle into which he is invited by a stranger (Dracula). The stranger, it becomes clear as they enter a room with a mirror, has no reflection. Harker and the stranger talk together: firstly at a table, then in armchairs. The stranger drops an object, which is a photo of a girl.

Harker realizes that he has been locked into his own room. He sees a bat outside the window and then sleeps. Vampires rise from their coffins and visit him in his room, but an angry Dracula throws them out. Harker awakens: he has been bitten. He explores the castle and, upon seeing the contents of a coffin her opens, he runs away.

Harker awakes in a different bed, presumably in a different place, where he is being attended to by a doctor. He is visited by women: one of them (Lucy Westenra, Soledad Miranda) we have seen before, on the photo dropped by Dracula. We then see her sleepwalking, followed by the other woman (Mina Murry, Maria Rohm), and being bitten by Dracula. Another man arrives on the scene (Quincy Morris) and is welcomed by an older man (Van Helsing, Herbert Lom). Lucy is visited by Dracula as she sleeps and is bitten (36:14): there is then some business with Van Helsing, and Lucy is again visited. She then walks through a graveyard and later, has a stake driven through her heart by Harker and Van Helsing (46:47).

We then see Mina at a public performance with opera on the soundtrack, where she is visited by Dracula. Van Helsing too is visited by Dracula: Van Helsing creates a burning cross on the floor and Dracula seemingly evaporates. We are then transported

to the vaults of his castle, where Harker, Morris and the American Quincey Morris (Jack Taylor) drive stakes through the hearts of the three vampires we saw earlier.

Finally, in the powerful final scene, the actor Christopher Lee removes his makeup and recites the scene of the death of Dracula from Bram Stoker's novel. And so the stripping away of the myth is complete – what we have been watching, the scene reminds us, is representation, and therefore manipulation. As Marcel Expósito says:

Comme tous les films sur les vampires, il se termine avec la disparition de Dracula mais ici, une telle disparition coïncide avec le déguisement de la fiction. L'illusion est brisée à l'intérieur de l'histoire de Dracula, à l'intérieur de la fiction même". (Poggi)⁶⁶

This bald summary does scant justice to the complexities of Portabella's work, but it reveals several things. Firstly, that *Vampir-Cuadecuc* can, in fact, be watched as a straightforward vampire narrative, albeit an unusual one in which most of the trappings of the form have been eliminated or played with, converting Portabella's film, essentially, into a commentary on Francoism and hence on the master text, Stoker's novel.⁶⁷

Gidal tells us:

⁶⁶ Like all films about vampires, it ends with the death of Dracula, but here such a disappearance coincides with the unveiling of the fiction. The illusion is broken inside the story of Dracula, within the fiction itself. "(Poggi)

⁶⁷ A key element of both Franco's film and Stoker's novel that Portabella chooses to suppress is the story of Renfield (Klaus Kinski), locked into his asylum cell and mysteriously communicating with Dracula, although it is likely that the decision was imposed on Portabella since, for example, Kinski's scenes may have been shot on a second unit to which Portabella did not have access.)

The problematic centres on the question as to whether narrative is inherently authoritarian, manipulatory and mystificatory, or not. The fact that it requires identificatory procedures and a lack of distanciation to function, and the fact that its only possible functioning is at an illusionistic level, indicates that the problematic has a clear resolution. (Gidal 20)

Thus is it that the materiality of Gothic – the diaries, notebooks, newspaper examples of say, *Dracula* – allows the work to become, as a whole, a questioning of the authoritarian, manipulatory nature of classical narrative. When we consider the material conditions under which Portabella's work was made, in which the Franco regime controlled the narratives which were permitted for publication, it does not seem far-fetched to assume that this deconstruction of the narrative by Portabella and his co-scriptwriter, Joan Brossa, should be using counter-cinema to question the Francoist use of narrative in constructing the myth of the dictator himself. "Narrative", Gidal resoundingly states, "is an illusionistic procedure, manipulatory, mystificatory, repressive":

The repression is that of space, the distance between the viewer and the object, a repression of real space in favour of the illusionist space. The repression is, equally importantly, of the in-film spaces, those perfectly constructed continuities. The repression is also that of time. The implied lengths of time suffer compressions formed by certain technical devices which operate in a codified manner, under specific laws, to repress (material) film time. (Gidal 46)

Vampir-Cuadecuc, in its demystifying of narrative codes, can therefore be seen as a questioning of the mechanisms of repression itself, and of the way that this oppression becomes naturalized by the subject via such mechanisms as self-censorship. Real space and illusionist space coexist side by side throughout *Vampir-Cuadecuc* – a deeply unsettling experience for the viewer unused to having their interpretative expectations disturbed.

El efecto, dijo el propio Portabella, fue el de crear una película esencialmente “fantástica” sobre la película “de terror” de otro. Con *Vampir* consiguió aquello que le exigía al cine: despojarse del argumento. “Lo que siempre me ha interesado del cine –dijo– es la forma de quebrar las coordenadas tiempo-espacio. Con el ritmo sugerente, las imágenes son polifónicas. La banda sonora, la música, los ruidos, la luz, objetos que entran y salen. Lo que me interesa del cine es el hecho de convertir la realidad en una forma de mirar. El argumento es siempre secundario. (...) Hay que abandonarlo e ir directamente a la temática.” Y es en ese sentido que se trata de un cine militante y subversivo: porque narra subvirtiendo los códigos del lenguaje del poder; inventando otras imágenes y otros sonidos pero extrayéndolos de la misma realidad que la cultura oficial se dedicaba a aplastar todos los días. (Kairuz)

7.5. Vampyr-Cuadecuc: Analysis

This coexistence of the two spaces is first seen just a few seconds into the film. A horse and carriage cross a rainy courtyard towards the building which will be Harker’s hotel. Everything suggests that this is the 19th century Europe of “Dracula”

(although the presence of the clock on the wall, one of several examples of anachronism⁶⁸ which lay bare the unrealistic nature of realism, may suggest otherwise). But then the scene cuts to a man running across the courtyard, trying to shelter from the rain, his mackintosh and hat strongly suggesting that this is not the 19th century after all. Such formal demystifications also have their political aspect also. The narrative which Harker wishes for his own life (a visit to Transylvania, followed by a happy marriage to Mina) is cruelly interrupted by the imposition of a dominating narrative, that of Dracula, who during Harker's time in the castle effectively takes control of his time (Harker is not free to leave when he wishes) and space (Harker is locked into his room).

Secondly in his taxonomy of the features of counter-cinema, Gidal points to the issue of estrangement vs. identification. In the dominant cinema, identification refers to the emotional involvement with characters/stars. The spectator then finds points of psychological and emotional points of alignment in the onscreen action, thus "pulling him/her into the action". In the counter cinema, we instead find estrangement/distanciation/alienation in the form, for example, of direct address to the spectator, multiple and contradictory characters, or commentary. Gidal takes the idea of identification further:

The commercial cinema could not do without the mechanism of identification.' It is the cinema of consumption, in which the viewer is of necessity not a producer, of ideas, of knowledge. Capitalist consumption reifies not only the structures of the economic base but also the constructs of abstraction. Concepts, then, do not produce concepts; they become, instead, ensconced as static 'ideas' which function to maintain the ideological class war and its invisibility, the state

⁶⁸ Gothic itself has often been seen as an inherently anachronistic medium. See, for example, Punter 278.

apparatus in all its fields ... The mechanism of identification demands a passive audience, a passive mental posture in the face of a life unlived, a series of representations, a phantasy identified with for the sake of 90 minutes' illusion. (Gidal 4)

And Peter Wollen, though he is writing about Godard, might as well be writing about Portabella when he says:

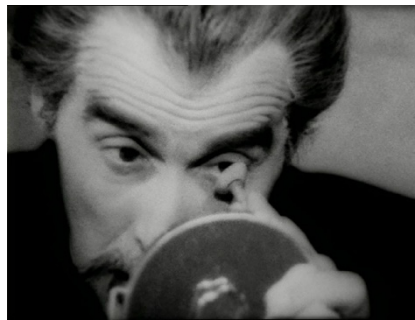
Godard's cinema, broadly speaking, is within the modern tradition established by Brecht and Artaud, in their different ways, suspicious of the power of the arts- and the cinema, above all- to 'capture' its audience without apparently making it think, or changing it. (Wollen)⁶⁹

In Portabella, the question of identification is thrown back in the face of the viewer in multiple ways. Again, two or three examples will suffice. It is plausible that during the pre-credit sequence, in which (the unnamed) Jonathan Harker arrives at the inn, a viewer might identify with his plight (an identification in part caused by the viewer's previous knowledge of *Dracula*. We see him suffering in his sleep on a bed and engaging in a brief, troubled conversation with the woman of the house, both of which scenes are capable of provoking a vague sympathy for him. The sympathy we feel, of course, is precisely the sympathy of the inn-owner's wife – that he is on his way to visit Count Dracula, and so on his way to a fate worse than death.

But in the scene immediately following the credits, we see an operator distributing "fog" from a smoke machine. Immediately following this, at 6:26, we see

⁶⁹ We have seen in our discussion of *Rebecca* how, under certain social and historical conditions, audiences might not be as passive as they seem.

the figure of Dracula briefly lowering his mask, saying something directly to camera as he smiles, and making a brief, self-consciously theatrical gesture to camera. In other words, the mask of Dracula quite literally falls to reveal the actor, Christopher Lee, and the human being performing the role of Dracula, beneath.



The illusion that the audience is actually watching Dracula has thus been broken, and our identification with Harker's situation is thus also called into question, since the focus of the film's terror is revealed to be a mere construct.

A similarly deconstructive scene occurs at 20:09, when, along with a jolting change in the soundtrack, we see Dracula/Lee making a jokingly aggressive swipe at the camera before climbing *into* his coffin (a reference to the classic iconography of vampire films, in which the vampire is seen climbing *out of* the coffin), whereupon he is sprayed with cobwebs. Again, the illusion is broken and the heart of terror (General Franco) is revealed as an impostor. Indeed, the technique of "breaking the fourth wall",

to revive Denis Diderot's coining, by looking directly into camera is employed at various times in *Vampyr-Cuadecuc*, as at 24:34 when Mina/Soledad Miranda does it, again half-playfully, or a little further on at 25:55, when we see the actress smoking on a bed, entirely out of character.

As Wollen tells us, without unified characters to guide it, identification becomes impossible: motivational coherence becomes impossible when characters are incoherent, fragmented, multiple, and self-critical. In *Vampir-Cuadecuc*, interestingly, it is only the vampiric characters who are allowed to break frame like this: a similar moment occurs at 44:12, when a vampire again half smiles to camera. The point seems to be that the viewer is being asked to identify with the fears and concerns of a group of characters who are forces for "good", whilst the film is revealing the constructedness and artificiality of the "evil" forces which are controlling them.

Wollen's next criterion for the counter cinema is transparency. In the dominant cinema, a seamless flow of images hides the fact that the film is a construction, a fictional product. The spectator becomes pulled into the narrative flow, and the dominant cinema utilizes a battery of disguising techniques, primarily techniques of editing, to ensure that films do not call attention to their own making. The destruction of the sense of illusion is understood to lead to the destruction of the spectator's visual and narrative pleasure.

In the counter cinema, the production of meaning is foregrounded: the material instruments used in the creation of the film's illusions are directly presented to the viewer. The most common way of doing this, of course, perhaps most often seen in Godard but also in the work of many other avant garde film makers, is by showing the camera itself onscreen, something which happens repeatedly throughout *Vampir-*

Cuadecuc: the key factor here is that the way in which meaning is being created is being documented, thereby revealing the film itself as something constructed and anything but transparent. The image is given a semantic function within a genuine iconic code.

Wollen writes of conventional cinema depicting a homogeneous, diegetically unified world: everything that the audience sees belongs to the same world; even movements in time and space (such as flashbacks or changes of setting) are carefully signalled and located. The beholder gains access to a coherent and self-sustained world, one in which time and space have a consistent order and logic to them. The audience is made to feel, in other words, comfortable, at home in familiar surroundings.

This can be opposed to the multiple diegesis of counter cinema, in which the “screen world” we see is not coherent and integrated, and where different characters seem to be acting in different films. A clear example of this, again, is in the figure of Christopher Lee, who is by turns playing himself, playing Dracula, and playing an actor, so that instead of a single narrative world, we have a plurality of worlds.

According to Wollen, dominant cinema means self-contained works of art, harmonized within certain generic boundaries. The film world exists on the screen and ends with the closing of the curtain. But Portabella’s work, as we have seen, quotes enthusiastically from, and intertextually spills over into, the entire Gothic tradition, rearranging deconstructing and adapting it to present purposes. *Vampir-Cuadecuc* references not only the Gothic of Stoker and Franco, but also the whole burgeoning subgenre of vampire movies, starting with the Gothic of Murnau and Dreyer. The contextualization of the work (i.e. the work as it would have been understood by the 1970s underground audiences for whom it was intended) provide another layer of intertextuality. Then there is the ironical referencing of the “dominant” cinema itself,

with its neatly-drawn generic boundaries, to which the fragmented structure and audiovisual games represent a challenge, and the referencing of the genre of documentary cinema, with its supposed claims on “the truth”, which Portabella’s film is equally keen to question (to what extent do the Franco-authorized NODO documentaries represent “the truth” of life in Spain for those audiences for whom it is intended?). Within *Vampir-Cuadecuc*, in other words, there are several competing discourses jostling for primacy: it is a polyphonic experience. The resulting juxtaposition and recontextualization of discourses makes of *Vampir-Cuadecuc* a battle, a confrontation, between meanings, one whose final purpose is to reveal the constructedness of the Francoist authoritarian discourse and indeed of film itself, with its claims to authority.⁷⁰ As Jonathan Rosenbaum writes, stressing the films deliberate openness and resistance to cinematic convention:

... the film creates a ravishing netherworld that seems to exist in neither the 19th century nor the 20th but in a unique zone oscillating between these eras, just as it seems to occupy a realm of its own that is neither fiction nor non-fiction. The high-contrast cinematography, moreover, suggests some of the meditative beauty of Murnau’s *Nosferatu* and Dreyer’s *Vampyr* as well as the dissolution and decay experienced when we see these films today in fading prints.
(Rosenbaum)

⁷⁰ It is significant that the only moments in the entire film in which sound and image are explicitly synchronized is at the end, when Christopher Lee reads out the ending of Stoker’s *Dracula*. The suggestion seems to be that only now, when we have a declared actor reading from an established text, is the “truth” being exposed: that the terrifying dictator figure, Lee/Franco, is being revealed as a textual construct whose power is based not only on actual violence, but also on the mythology surrounding that violence.

It is perhaps precisely in its openness and its willingness to assimilate other forms - in order to question them - that *Vampir-Cuadecuc* is at its most Gothic. We have repeatedly emphasized the multiple ambiguities of the Gothic as far back as Walpole, an ambiguity which has meant that historically the Gothic has been employed to represent not only pro-Revolutionary tendencies (Godwin, Shelley) but also its ideological opposite, the conservatism of Burke and Sir Walter Scott. When Rosenbaum writes of the film's "all-embracing sensual pleasure and humor overriding centuries, generic categories, and conventions", he might be writing not just about Portabella's film but also about the Gothic genre itself, as a form which has repeatedly, and in ways too numerous to explore here, assimilated itself into other forms and been assimilated by them.

To this extent, *Vampir-Cuadecuc*, just as much as *The Others*, may be seen as a work of Gothic parody/pastiche: as Richard Poirier points out, Gothic as 'a literature of self-parody that makes fun of itself as it goes along' (Poirier 339); while Fred Botting observes how 'Stock formulas and themes, when too familiar, are eminently susceptible to parody and self-parody.' (Botting 168). Linda Hutcheon, a key theorist in the field of parody, defines it as "a form of imitation, but imitation characterized by ironic inversion, not always at the expense of the parodied text. (Hutcheon 6)

Vampir-Cuadecuc imitates the genre of vampire films, but not at the expense of it: within *Vampir-Cuadecuc*, the figure of Dracula "imitates" the figure of Franco, but most definitely at Franco's expense.

CHAPTER 8

GOTHIC AND THE DEPTHLESS PAST: ALEJANDRO AMENÁBAR'S *TESIS*



8.1. The Inauthentic Gothic

As the above image shows, twenty-eight years on from *El espíritu de la colmena*, the gaze of the actress Ana Torrent returned to haunt a different generation of Spanish film viewers, this time in Alejandro Amenábar's *Tesis* (2001). As we have seen, Amenábar has constantly incorporated tropes of the Gothic into his work, creating a body of work which is superficially conventional according to the Bordwell/Steiger model of Hollywood cinema whilst at the same time, because of its social/historical context, raising questions about the silent but looming foundations on which it is built. The silences behind *The Others*, that film's careful excision of specific political and historical resonance, suggest that Amenábar is keen to show that Spain has moved on, that it has achieved, so to speak, full modernity. To this extent, they may indeed be examples of an ideological conservatism, implicitly admitting that the past may have a

Gothic influence over the present whilst carefully refusing to state which particular past is being referred to. If we refer back to Kosofsky-Sedgwick's Gothic taxonomy, we find that Amenábar's first full-length feature film, *Tesis*, represents in almost anthological form, a reconfiguring of Gothic tropes into a postmodern idiom: it is, indeed, a pure example of postmodern female Gothic, using found footage instead of found manuscripts); it uses Madrid's Complutense (and its labyrinths) to stand in for the isolated Gothic castle; and Bosco, played by Eduardo Noriega, is the archetypal, fascinating Gothic villain, attractive and repellent at the same time. The references to the Spanish Civil War and to Spanish history in general are again muted if not altogether absent, and we are apparently witnessing a new kind of modern Spanish Gothic, one which is widely held to have opened the way to the wave of intelligent gothic horror for which Spanish cinema has since become a byword. Within the Spanish cinematic tradition, *Tesis* opened the way for a wave of "quality genre" films which closed the door on the B-movie tradition and which, internationally, has become almost a byword for Spanish cinema. *Tesis* repostulates the question which all Gothic fiction asks: to what extent are we, as consumers of these Gothic fictions, and also presumably as "civilized" inhabitants of "civilized" nations – implicated in the scenes of cruelty and violence on which the Gothic depends, which it claims to be banishing whilst at the same time endlessly reinvoking it?

Amenábar left Madrid's Complutense University before completing his degree in order to make *Tesis*, the value of his short films having been recognized by his producer-to-be, José Luis Cuerda. The script was partly inspired by Amenábar's reading of Román Gubern's *La imagen pornográfica y otras perversiones ópticas*, which features a chapter on so-called "snuff" movies and which suggests that, like the thesis

which Angela is writing in the film, the film itself will be a cinematic thesis on violence.

Me pareció interesante plantearlo como un thriller, porque quizá mi intención prioritaria ha sido realizar un ejercicio de estilo. Había ensayado determinados mecanismos de thriller en los cortos y en la película apliqué lo que había aprendido, combinándolo con cosas nuevas. (Vera and Badaríotti 19)

The book from which these interviews are taken dates from 2002, and Amenábar is distancing himself from the European concept of the *auteur*: *Tesis* was to be merely an ‘exercise in style’, a way of putting into practice mechanisms he had learned.

Para mí era muy importante una preparación exhaustiva de la película. Creo que esa es la clave para que el cine europeo —o el cine español en nuestro caso— pueda competir con el cine norteamericano. (19)

Amenábar goes on to cite as his main inspiration the American cinematic tradition, as we have seen a tradition inspired in large measure by the British Gothic tradition. He criticizes recent American film as over-dependent on technique, which is a criticism that could easily be leveled at much recent Spanish genre film, whose primary focus seems to be on form, and with a concomitant draining of content which might distract the films from their main purpose, which is to generate intense neurological

reactions in the viewers. Recent examples of this in Spanish cinema might be the [REC] quartet of films, *Los ojos de Julia* (Guillem Morales, 2010) and *El cuerpo* (Oriol Vila, 2012), amongst many other examples. Amenábar states:

Se puede decir que en *Tesis* he copiado de los americanos. Supongo que es porque es el cine que he visto, pero tampoco me identifico directamente con ellos. Me gusta el cine que me gusta y punto, puede ser americano o francés. Cuando el cine norteamericano funciona y está bien, lo reconozco y digo: ¿Por qué no se tiene que ver? *Tiburón 3* es una gran película de acción, *ET* una gran película de ciencia ficción y las de *Alien* son grandes películas de ciencia ficción y de terror. Pero con las últimas películas del cine oficial de Hollywood que he visto me he llevado chasco tras chasco. El cine norteamericano del cual he sido muy admirador - [Alfred] Hitchcock, [Steven] Spielberg, [Stanley] Kubrick y [James] Cameron— ahora me está defraudando, porque es un cine absolutamente dependiente de las técnicas. (21)

Interestingly, given this comment, *Tesis* itself is also ‘dependiente de las técnicas’ – but to a large degree, like *Vampyr-Cuadecuc*, it is also a study of them, a point to which we will return. It is thus worth analysing just how well or otherwise *Tesis* copies ‘los americanos’, as Amenábar says. Is it mere technique, or is there something more behind the attractive, postmodern surfaces of *Tesis*?

8.2. The Centrality of Narrative

In *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*, Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson provide pointers as to the typical structure of classic narrative cinema as embodied in the Hollywood model – a model whose primary purpose is to entertain, and which we discussed in our previous chapter.

First, Bordwell refers to the Hollywood model as “excessively obvious cinema” (Bordwell, Staiger & Thompson 3), in the sense that the cinematic style exists to explain, rather than obscure, the narrative. On this cinematic model, a series of signs lead the spectator through to the conclusion, never straying from the path of verisimilitude – although, of course, the ‘reality’ it claims is obviously limited, contrived, conventional and generally unrealistic. The ‘order/disorder/order restored’ triad is followed: an initial event disrupts a harmonious order which then sets in motion a chain of causally-linked events which finally lead to restored order.

Tesis would seem to follow this reassuring convention pretty much to the letter: all is well (though perhaps edgy) until Ángela asks Figueroa to seek out violent cinematic material for her, which leads to his death in the screening room, the event which generates the multiple disruptions that follow. At the end, harmony is restored with the reconciliation of Ángela (Ana Torrente)⁷¹ and Chema (Fele Martínez) in the hospital – though there remains the social message of the film’s coda, with the hospital patients awaiting, open-mouthed, the screening of the images from snuff movies which the TV channel claims to have in its possession.

⁷¹ Torrente is, of course, the same actress that played Ana in *El espíritu de la colmena*. *Tesis* features at least two homages to Erice’s film, one in Ana’s repetition of the phrase “Soy Ángela” as she and Chema walk through the tunnels beneath the university, and then when Ángela puts her head on Bosco’s chest, echoing a scene in *El espíritu* in which the girl believes the monster has killed her sister, Isabel.



But this reading ignores a key factor in the script's arrangement of the narrative – that it is framed by two standalone scenes which have no direct influence on the plot, which do not advance it in any significant way, and which are in fact the only noteworthy scenes which take place outside the film's four basic locations, namely the university – a Gothic edifice, replete with dark labyrinths - Chema's apartment, Ángela's home and Bosco's parents' chalet in the suburbs.

The opening scene takes place on the Madrid metro.⁷² A guard informs passengers, including Ángela, that a man has committed suicide by jumping onto the tracks and that they should all disembark. The guard warns the passengers not to look at the man's body and most of them do so, but Ángela breaks away from the line to look, thus establishing her as fascinated by morbid images. (Her fascination is never explained by reference to any backstory, but has to be taken as a given in much the same way that Bosco's psychopathy is.) At the precise point at which the viewer is to see the image of the dead man's body on the tracks, the screen goes black, thus withholding the shock, whilst at the same time - if the thesis of Castro as he expresses it

⁷² (We assume that during the scene, Ángela is on the way to the university, but the metro station is not in fact Ciudad Universitaria – which is what the station is called in reality, and which would have aided the film's verisimilitude – but “12 de Octubre”, which is miles from the university but interestingly close to one of Madrid's main hospitals, the 12 de Octubre: the final scene of *Tesis* takes place in a hospital).

later is to be believed, i.e. that people actually *want* to see these images – generating a desire in the viewer to remain seated, because that blank screen represents a promise that we’ll be able to witness such a scene later.

We are again in the realm of Gothic ambiguities, as established in Walpole’s preface to *The Castle of Otranto*. The film continually plays with expectations about what the viewer wants to and can, does not want to and cannot, see, caught on the cusp between terror and horror. In Freudian terms, Amenábar is playing with the viewer’s scopophilic drive, i.e. the infant’s libidinal drive to pleasurable viewing. First, Amenábar has constructed the spectator as subject by encouraging us to see things from Ángela’s perspective; second, he has established the desire to look – the re-enactment of the Freudian primal scene, in which the male child, unseen by his parents, witnesses them having sex. According to Metz (63-5) all film viewings do this, thus creating a re-enactment of the process involved in acquiring sexual difference and at the same time positioning the viewer as voyeur – observing what happens onscreen without the knowledge or consent, as it were, of those who are actually on the screen. (Though at the commercial level, most actresses and actors happily give their consent to being observed by as many people as possible.)

Tesis complicates this process by withholding from us the climax of the scene and by using that withholding as the bridge into the narrative proper. It also creates a tension between the notion of “pleasurable” viewing, i.e. viewing which will conform to the viewer’s expectations and satisfy them, and “unpleasurable” viewing – an image of a dead man on the tracks – his body, according to the guard, has been sliced in two – which exceeds or transgresses the viewer’s expectations and could potentially be harmful to the viewer’s sensibilities. Thus a masochistic element is introduced into the

viewing experience, later given diegetic existence by, for example, providing the viewer with Bosco's point of view as he prepares to torture Ángela.

The metro scene also creates another bridge – this time between the story we are going to see and the society in which this story will take place, and of which Ángela obviously forms a part. The scene therefore contextualizes, and implicitly comments on, the issue of audiovisual violence, suggesting that the film be more than “simply a story”, or the exercise in thriller mechanics which Amenábar suggested he was making, but that it will address questions of the relationship of that story to society at large. In an interview with Carlos F. Heredero, Amenábar said:

Lo que plantea *Tesis* es hasta dónde puede llegar la expresión visual de la violencia que no es ficcional, y estoy convencido de que, en ese aspecto, la televisión llega mucho más lejos que el cine. Y esto es lo más preocupante, porque en el cine se trabaja con elementos de ficción, pero en la televisión se está haciendo espectáculo con la realidad, lo que me parece que es algo que no se puede ni se debe hacer. (Heredero 91)⁷³

This brings us to the film's final scene, which takes place after Ángela and Chema are last seen making their way, somewhat uncertainly, down the hospital corridor towards their uncertain future. The camera pulls back to a hospital ward in which the death of Vanesa is being recounted on a reality TV show: elderly people stare vacantly at the flickering image in the corner. A link is thus established between this

⁷³ (Amenábar demonstrates here a touching faith in the opposition between fiction and reality, an opposition which he will complicate to great dramatic effect in *Abre los ojos*.)

kind of sensational subject matter and a sick society – the society, of course, which has produced the killer Bosco. The presenter assures us that the TV station has acquired images of the murder and will now show the images of the death of Vanesa. The audience does not, however, get to see them, since the device of the start of the film is repeated – in a visual echo of the first scene, the screen goes black at exactly the point where we would see the images. (Several critics, among them Dominique Russell, have pointed out how the horror of *Tesis* is as dependent on the audio component as much as on the visual.)

Significantly, we have not seen these images in all their awful explicitness. We have heard Vanesa's screams and seen brief images of the violence done to her, and we have seen the effects of the images on Ángela and Chema, but the fictional world of *Tesis* withholds from us the images which the television will show us – with the aim, presumably, of increasing audience ratings. All of this suggests that there is a strong element of social critique in *Tesis*, a bedrock of moral debate on which the whole is constructed and which requires active interpretive work on the part of the viewer – not attributes which are typically associated with the classic Hollywood narrative. Amenábar thus short-circuits potential critiques of *Tesis* as an exploitative film by building his critique into the movie itself – a smartly metatextual strategy that legitimizes the film as social commentary in the European tradition whilst at the same time offering the straight-up thrills which the classic Hollywood narrative is expected to provide. Amenábar, in other words, might be borrowing his basic structure from Hollywood as established by Bordwell, but he is framing it in a manner more redolent of European cinema, and by extension of the European gothic tradition.

8.3. Character-led Drama: but what kinds of characters?

Secondly, according to Bordwell et al, the Hollywood plot must be character-led, meaning that the narrative is psychologically and individually motivated: “Character-centered —i.e. personal or psychological—causality is the armature of the classical story. (Bordwell, Staiger & Thompson 12). The initial event in *Tesis*, Figueroa’s death, is thus motivated by Ángela’s desire to obtain strong images for her thesis. But the issue of why she should require such strong images is left psychologically unexplained; the answer may be in the kind of societal explanation which classic Hollywood cinema tends to leave well alone, but which here Amenábar, albeit somewhat ambiguously, confronts. (We have seen above how the central narrative of *Tesis* avoids asking complex questions about the social context in which it takes place, but explicitly addresses those questions in the starting and closing scenes which frame it.)

The question which interests us here, though, is not whether or not *Tesis* is character-led, because it obviously is – for much of the time, Ángela is our eyes and ears, and the narrative proceeds in accordance with the desires and fears of herself and Chema. So far, so Hollywood. The more interesting question is what *kinds* of characters are presented in the film. As a starting-point for discussion of this issue, we might consider a quotation from Oti Rodríguez Marchante’s extended interview with Aménabar:

Lo que cada día tengo más claro es que copiar, sin más, de ese cine espectáculo no sirve de nada, para empezar porque en cuanto a despliegue técnico los

estadounidenses ganan por goleada. Pero hay algo con lo que todos podemos competir en igualdad de condiciones: nuestros personajes. Por eso definiendo más que nunca el cine con alma. (Rodríguez Marchante 163)

There is the suggestion here that although it is not possible to compete with Hollywood at the level of pure spectacle (i.e. budget), it is possible for European cinema to compete at the level of character: elsewhere, Amenábar criticizes latter-day Hollywood cinema for lacking soul, a real (if somewhat hard-to-define) element which is perhaps experienced most strongly through a film's characters. To a certain extent, Spanish cinema is free of the restrictions of Hollywood's star system, which means that scripts are often built around an audience's preconceived idea of the kind of character a particular actor will play. As Jordan and Allinson put it:

... the effective separation of actors (professionals who perform) from celebrities (famous people) in Spain is one substantial difference ... between the Spanish cinema industry and its Hollywood equivalent. For the latter, an actor's meaning for the audience is produced jointly by what they bring as celebrities and through their verbal and physical performances. (118)

Spain's star system is obviously at a far earlier stage of development than that of Hollywood, and none of *Tesis*' three central performers could remotely have been thought of as "celebrities" at the time the film was made. Ana Torrent had not played a central role in a film since 1976 when, at the age of eight, she had been in *Cria cuervos*;

Fele Martínez had done theatre work but was making his screen debut; and Eduardo Noriega had played only minor roles in a handful of films (including Montxo Armendáriz's groundbreaking *Historias del Kronen*, 1995), a film whose concerns are closely linked to those of *Tesis*).

Of the three central characters in *Tesis*, only one could be called stereotypical, and that is Eduardo Noriega's Bosco. Indeed, Noriega explicitly tells us "Bosco es más un prototipo, es como de televisión o de publicidad" (Vera and Badariotti 113). Rodríguez Marchante refers to Bosco as "un villano en estado puro al que ni siquiera Amenábar, su creador, le dedica el menor interés por entender o explicar sus actos: es villano y punto".⁷⁴ The 1980s and 90s saw the emergence of the good-looking, wealthy psychopathic killer in the culture, as perhaps best exemplified by the figure of Patrick Bateman in Brett Easton Ellis' *American Psycho*, a character who "embodies a postmodern vision of a world devoid of spiritual meaning in the midst of material abundance" (Nolan).

Amenábar does not emphasize the idea, as do Ellis and later Mary Harron, in the film version of *American Psycho*, that Bosco's murderousness is the logical extension of his massively consumerist tendencies (in this sense, he is not far removed from the territorial aspirations of Count Dracula. But Bosco is presented as almost entirely without motivation, and it seems clear that Bosco has been constructed on the same cultural foundations. Bosco, therefore, is presented as nothing more than a *style* – a postmodern killer, attractive and dangerous in the line of the Byronic romantic hero, for whom explanations in terms of personal psychological history would be entirely

⁷⁴ Rodríguez Marchante interestingly goes on to praise Amenábar, whom at the time of writing had made only *Tesis*, *Abre los ojos* and *The Others* – three Gothically-inclined films of intrigue and terror which depend for many of their effects on fear – for having generated so much of that emotion without having had to create any further villains, an observation which remains true to date. His two most recent films, *Mar adentro* and *Agora* (though it does contain elements of intrigue), are operating in different genres.

superfluous. Amenábar is aware that contemporary audiences are quite happy to accept such depthless killers as the norm. He is, however, clearly the product of his times: and the Spanish society from which Bosco has emerged – a society which had only been free of Franco for a quarter of a century at the time *Tesis* was made – seems to have hastily embraced the American consumerist model of democracy favored by the United States, with the consequent rise of a generation of “bored rich kids” like Bosco in search of violent kicks. Thus the “meaningful violence”, so to speak, which engendered the Spanish Civil War, which became the means of achieving social control and which led to so many deaths has been emptied of meaning in the figures of characters like Bosco, who conceive of violence not as an instrument of political change but merely as an means of achieving personal pleasure. The issue of where Bosco’s family got its money from is never addressed directly in the film, but it is either from money made during the Franco era or as a result of the unusual opportunities opened up by the economic opportunities which opened up in Spain following the transition to democracy. Either way, Amenábar is engaged in a strong implicit social critique.

Neither of the other two central characters, however, are stereotypical, if we think of stereotypicality in terms of monodimensionality - and neither are they particularly easy for a mainstream audience to identify with. Both were conceived by Amenábar with verisimilitude in mind, as interviews from *Cómo hacer cine* make clear. Ana Torrent describes how she and Amenábar worked on the character of Ángela:

Alejandro... me decía cómo era Ángela, cómo le veía. Me contaba que tenía una fachada, que ante su familia, la facultad, los profesores y en su relación con la gente, era la niña modosita, buena, estudiosa y aplicada. Pero luego, cuando no

tenía que guardar esa fachada, era una chica diferente. (Rodríguez Marchante, 106)

In other words, Ángela is a complex, contradictory character. The same can be said of Chema, who initially strikes us as the stereotypical violence-obsessed, unwashed geek. ⁷⁵ “Chema”, Martínez states, “es un impresentable. No hay otra palabra para describirlo.” (Vera & Badariotti, 122) But again he goes on to indicate the dualistic, and therefore complex, nature of the character:

Tiene dos planos: por un lado es muy duro, **muy** insociable, muy solitario. Pero por otro lado necesita compañía y está hasta las narices de estar sólo. Ese lado tierno se ve sobre todo cuando está en los túneles [under the university] con Ángela y le cuenta un cuento. A partir de ahí, su disposición hacia ella cambia. (123)

This change in attitude converts Chema, eventually, into the closest thing *Tesis* has to a conventional hero – a figure prepared to risk personal danger in a spirit of altruism. I would suggest that one of the reasons why *Tesis* was critically so well-received at the time and why it is still thought-of as a turning-point in the recent history of Spanish cinema is precisely that it combines its Hollywood-inspired desire to generate a particular effect in the spectator – i.e. suspense – with an attention to the details of character that such suspense-based material generally foregoes. The artistic

⁷⁵ Martínez partly based the character on a friend of Amenábar’s, to whom he was introduced by the director.

principle which states that everything extraneous to the creation of the final effect must be sacrificed is actually not complied with in *Tesis*, where there is a resonance and nuance in the treatment of character that roots it solidly in the psychologically real.

The issue of characterization, then, is another area in which Amenábar is doing more than simply imitating *los americanos*. It is also worth pointing up one of the films' relationships with which Spanish viewers would identify, but which is not easily translatable into other cultures – the relationship between the *pijo* (posh kid) Bosco (his name itself is considered to be *pijo* in Spain) and the geeky Chema: in *Tesis*, in the time-honored Hollywood manner, the underdog – an underdog with whom much of the film's intended audience would presumably sympathize - wins out in the end.⁷⁶

8.4. Narrative Closure

Thirdly, according to Bordwell and Staiger, classic narrative cinema - of whatever genre - must achieve closure. In *Tesis*, the death of Bosco (Noriega) may not put an end to the thorny issue of the effects of audiovisual violence in society, but it does put an end to his murderous activities, which does bring closure to the narrative.

⁷⁶ It was the lack of interest on the practical craft of making films that left the young Amenábar disenchanted with his own cinematic education at the Complutense:

Todo lo que sé no lo he aprendido en la Universidad sino viendo películas. La Facultad sólo me ha servido como punto de encuentro. (Barrio & Pérez)

In this sense *Tesis*, with its focus on the pragmatics of film-making, may represent his counter-dissertation to the overly abstract institutional education provided by the Complutense.) It is also worth noting, as Matt Hills does, that “*Tesis* centrally contrasts academic, institutional knowledge with horror fan knowledge”. Indeed, given Amenábar's early exit from the Complutense University, his entire career may be testament to the triumph of fan knowledge over institutional knowledge.

The ideological message of such closure reaffirms the dominant ideology: evil is punished, since its twin purveyors, Castro and Bosco, have been killed.

Narrative closure is a defining element in the classical Hollywood plot structure. And although the main narrative of *Tesis* indeed ends with closure at the narrative level – i.e. we do discover the identity of Vanesa's murderer, who is punished by death – the final frames of the film seem to raise far more questions than they answer: about representations of audiovisual violence in the mass media and its effects on viewers, about the complex relationships between the media and the viewers, and about the morality of displaying such images.

The narrative thus breaks free from the order-disorder-order triad to explicitly suggest that although order may have been restored in terms of the drama, the social reasons underpinning the issue which the film explores remain far from solved. The film's final frames, therefore, can hardly be termed 'escapist', in classic Hollywood style – instead they are asking the viewer to examine her/his own attitudes in the light of what has just been seen, thus potentially creating viewer disturbance.

8.5. Metacinematic Style: *Tesis* as Countercinema

The fourth component of the classic Hollywood narrative relates to style, which must be subordinate to narrative. Colour, shots, lighting, editing, sound and mise-en-scène must not call attention to themselves but must work together to generate realism. Potential ambiguities must be dissipated through the functioning of spatial and temporal contiguity, so that the spectator can feel comfortable about where s/he stands in relation

to the plotline and characters. Reality, in other words, is reassuringly ordered. Editing functions to propel the narrative forward; shots need to be spliced together to provide the illusion of continuity; lighting, sound and music exist to suit or generate an emotional or psychological tone which can be understood in the spectator's own terms.

In this respect, *Tesis* differs radically from the standard Hollywood narrative in that it is a highly self-conscious, self-reflexive film in which the *how* of moviemaking is subjected to the same kind of intense scrutiny as the *what*. Indeed, as several commentators have pointed out, the title is revealing in that the film itself may represent a thesis on what a horror film actually is – a view which is supported not only by multiple metatextual references to the art of cinema within the film itself – mainly from Professor Castro and from Chema – but also by the film's focus on the techniques of film-making. Dominique Russell, for example, tells us:

... I want to read the film less as a thesis about national cinema, and more as a thesis about the horror genre and its spectators. (81)⁷⁷

The scenes which show Chema and Ángela starting to ask questions about who the killer of Vanesa is on the “snuff” video which has caused the death of Professor Figueroa are sufficient to indicate *Tesis*'s foregrounding of the formal aspects of film-making – and, of course, it is significant that it is “fan knowledge” – the popular, subversive voice, rather than institutionalized “academic knowledge” – which unlocks the mysteries of the narrative to its participants. In such scenes, the spectator is being

⁷⁷ Amenábar had to “modernize” Madrid's Complutense University in order to bring it into line with the technological concerns of *Tesis*. One major plot device of the film depends on there being surveillance cameras on the campus: in reality, there were none.

asked to “break frame”, in Erving Goffman’s postulation, and to focus on the apparatus of movie-making: the camera itself, as it were, enters the frame and as such is no longer acting as merely the vehicle for the supposedly unmediated “reality” that the film is supposedly showing. Indeed, on one reading, this focus on the technology enhances the reality effect rather than destroying it.

Such scenes distance spectators from the film and create a reflexive space for us to assume our own critical space and subjectivity in relation to the film – a strategy historically associated with the European counter-cinema of, for example, Jean-Luc Godard and Agnès Varda - rather than with the classic Hollywood narrative.

Comparisons between *Tesis* and Michael Powell’s classic of transgression *Peeping Tom* are relevant here. Both are examples of films by supposedly mainstream directors who have chosen to incorporate counter-cinematic strategies into their work: much of the interest of Alfred Hitchcock for the French auteurs of the 60s and 70s derives from Hitchcock’s assimilation of such self-reflexive strategies into his work and indeed a discussion of *Rear Window* (1954) would not be out of place in a discussion about *Tesis*. Like *Tesis*, *Peeping Tom* is a film about movies, but also about the spectators who watch them and their scopophilia.

[*Peeping Tom*] ... foregrounds the three looks that characterize the cinema: the look of the camera; that of the character; that of the spectator. It foregrounds the power of the film-maker: Mark Lewis, the protagonist. He is a compulsive film-maker who, by the time the film picks up with him, has taken to murdering the women he is filming by pointing a spiked leg of his camera tripod at their throats

and stabbing them to death. The spectator is positioned behind the camera (foregrounding her or him as director or murderer or voyeur). (Hayward 140)

In this series of shots, Mark returns home to find his lodger watching one of his 'murder' films. He confesses his crimes and then approaches her with his spike/camera. There is a mirror fixed to the camera so that she can see the reflection of her face. The viewer sees the shots from behind the camera and, in a reverse-angle shot, those of the face reflected in the mirror. The role of the viewer is thus foregrounded as director/spectator/voyeur – but we also see the victim as the voyeur of her own victimhood. The film is watching the spectator watching the film.

These four components of classic narrative cinema have come to be the standard against which other models of film-making must be judged, to the extent that Noël Burch, in *Praxis du cinéma*, refers to it as the “Institutional Mode of Representation”. Again, *Tesis* apparently fulfils its obligations to classic Hollywood narrative admirably: Amenábar is copying well.

8.6. *Tesis* and Genre

There is, of course, a different set of codes and conventions which has to be observed: those of genre. *Tesis* sits most comfortably within the thriller genre – Amenábar himself defines it as a “thriller urbano y juvenil” (Barrio & Pérez) - though some commentators (Hills, Russell) have noted that it exploits elements of horror, too. Thrillers, of course, are notoriously hard to define, but *Tesis* is perhaps best seen as a

psychological thriller with touches, perhaps, of noir and detective thriller, as Ángela and Chema set about discovering the identity of Vanesa's killer. As a thriller, *Tesis* conforms superbly to the brief but accurate definition of "villain-driven plot", and much of what has been written about the thriller codes can indeed be applied to the film. It relies on intricacy of plot generate a mood of apprehension and fear, sustained by the delay of resolution; it plays on our own fears, by tapping into infantile, repressed fantasies, sexual and voyeuristic in nature; and its basic theme – in this case the effects of disturbing images on those who watch them - is not where its main interest lies. Susan Hayward is unequivocal in her judgment on the genre:

Thriller films are, then, sadomasochistic. Indeed, the psychological thriller bases its construction in sadomasochism, madness and voyeurism. The killer spies on and ensnares his victims in a series of intricate and sadistic moves, waiting to strike. The killer is most often psychotic and his madness is an explanation for what motivates his actions. (Hayward 477).

This is clearly applicable to *Tesis*, but differs from staple examples of the psychological thriller (Hitchcock's *Marnie*, Polanski's *Repulsion*) in that no explanation whatever is given, or really even suggested, for Bosco's psychosis apart from a moral suspicion, as we have seen above, of wealthy, good-looking young men in our culture, as exemplified by Ripley in Patricia Highsmith's novels and, as we have seen, by Patrick Bateman in Brett Easton Ellis's *American Psycho*.

More than two hundred studies, involving over 43,000 individuals as subjects, point to a link between media violence and aggressive attitudes and behavior in susceptible individuals, generally those who already harbor violent fantasies or have experienced abusive upbringings or have difficulty identifying the boundaries between real life and fictional media worlds (Paik and Comstock 516).

None of this is explored in *Tesis*, which remains gothically ambiguous on the issue: Bosco may or may not be a killer by reason of repeatedly watching screen violence but Chema's moral framework seems to have been left undamaged by such activity. Perhaps Amenábar does not wish to be drawn into such potentially complex psychological terrain at this stage of his career: in imitating *los americanos*, he does not see that as his brief but instead prefers to focus on generating tension.



Hayward draws many of her examples from Hitchcock, of whom Amenábar is a professed admirer, but also touches on Powell's *Peeping Tom* (1960), with which, as we have seen, *Tesis* has much in common – particularly in its foregrounding of voyeurism

and its explicit positioning of the spectator as voyeur; which, if we follow Freud's belief in the scopic drive, anyone who watches a movie is.

What seems clear, as several have pointed out (Matt Hills, Barry Jordan and Mark Allinson) is that *Tesis*, whilst conforming to the thriller model in terms of the complexity of its plotline, also incorporates elements of Gothic horror.

As a type of 'horror thriller/slasher movie', *Tesis* ... connects with trends in post 1960s horror, fundamentally redefined by Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960). The latter located the monstrous in the 'ordinary' modern psyche (Norman Bates) and linked horror with the psychological thriller, thereby helping to inspire the slasher, stalker and serial killer movies of the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s. (Jordan and Allinson 105)

The 1990s thus spawned, in Carter and Weaver's neat phrase, 'a new wave of designer violence' (65) in which there was an emphasis on brutal, random and sexualized violence, which was also aesthetically pleasing: examples would include Oliver Stone's *Natural Born Killers* (1994) John MacNaughton's cultish *Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer* (1986), and of course the early works of Quentin Tarantino. As Jordan and Allinson point out, these films pre-empted public criticism of their perceived legitimization of screen violence by defending their works as 'serious, knowing, often parodic treatments of media exploitation of violence and public fears of crime and disorder' (Jordan & Allinson, 105). In seeking to answer the question of the extent to which *Tesis* rides this 1990s wave of 'slash/serial killer savagery', and whether or not it qualifies as 'postmodern horror', Jordan and Allinson refer to Matt Hills' essay

in which Hills explores the opposition between academic and institutional knowledge in *Tesis* (Ángela) and horror fan knowledge and expertise (Chema). The film thus becomes ‘a postmodern parable based on the de-legitimization of authority and contestation of institutional knowledges’ (106). Jordan and Allinson, however, point out that *Tesis* also qualifies, in Cynthia A. Freedland’s term, as “realist horror” which sets up a “credible, diegetic world, creates terror and unease, promises but largely withholds and denies the spectacle of violence, and contains ordinary rather than fictitious monsters” (106).

8.7. Gothic Extremes: Snuff



“We may believe,” writes Danel Olsen, “that we would be better off not knowing our weakness for the torturous in the Gothic, what has been called its “dark other, the stuff of “slasher videos, snuff films, and violent pornography... what do we really know about our furtive longings, then, the Gothic asks, and what do we know

about people?” (Olsen xxiv) *Tesis* is a horror/thriller with the study of another cinematic genre – albeit a mythical one - embedded in it: the so-called “snuff” movie.⁷⁸

The employment of the snuff motif is perhaps one of the most European – or at least non-Hollywood - elements of *Tesis*. As we have seen, the film was part-inspired by Amenábar’s reading of Ramón Gubern’s *La imagen pornográfica y otras perversiones ópticas*, which chronicles and connects the 1970s rise of, in Gubern’s view, the twin genres of porn and gore films. The existence of snuff movies was, during the 70s and 80s, the stuff of excitable conjecture, but none – in the accepted definition of “a motion picture genre that depicts the actual death or murder of a person or people, without the aid of special effects, for the express purpose of distribution and entertainment” – actually exists. There are, of course, many examples, of real deaths captured on film – the beheadings of foreigners in Iraq, for example, can easily be downloaded on the Internet - but none can be shown to have been made “for the express purpose of distribution and entertainment”. In other words, snuff is an urban legend – a borrowing from the Gothic borderline between reality and romance - that Amenábar exploits to double effect: firstly to create the requisite chills and thrills, and secondly as a platform on which to base his thesis on the dangers of audio-visual representations of violence.

In *Killing for Culture: An Illustrated History of the Death Film from Mondo to Snuff*, David Kerekes and David Slater list a series of films which have been central to what Neil Jackson refers to as the “cultural construction” of snuff. These films include Joe D’Amato’s *Emanuelle in America* (1976), Roger Watkin’s *Last House on Dead End Street* (1977), David Cronenberg’s *Videodrome* (1982) and *Henry: Portrait of a Serial*

⁷⁸ The unpleasant epithet “snuff” was first used by Ed Sanders in his book *The Family: the Story of Charles Manson’s Dune Buggy Attack Battalion* which claimed that Manson’s “Family” filmed the 1969 murders they were responsible for.

Killer (1990); examples since have multiplied, and would include Eli Roth's example of so-called 'torture porn' *Hostel* (2005), and Roland Joffé's *Captivity* (2007).

Jackson points out the fact "that virtually all of these titles emerged from beyond the major studios of Hollywood (in fact, four originated in Europe) highlights the confrontational role played by foreign, sub-cultural or "exploitation" forms in the propagation of mainstream fears". The films represent a mini-compendium of soft porn, B-movies, and auteur or arthouse, but none are mainstream Hollywood, suggesting that Hollywood has to date been unwilling to accept that the same technology that created Shirley Temple, *The Partridge Family* and Hannah Montana can also be used to film murders.

The use of the snuff theme in the film may therefore function as a way of shocking the viewer into a reappraisal of her or his own motivations in watching *Tesis* itself – an extremely metacinematic strategy which reminds us of similar strategies as used by, for example, Michael Haneke in such films as *Benny's Video* (1992) or *Funny Games* (1997). Haneke of course, has almost iconographic status as the European arthouse director par excellence – employing the tropes of classic genre cinema as a way of itself questioning those tropes, and in the process implicating the viewer to an uncomfortable level – indeed, they transform the theory that the viewing of thrillers is a sadomasochistic act into film itself.

It may be fruitful to consider these two film-makers, Amenábar and Haneke, as two sides of the same Gothic coin – the former incorporating metacinematic and self-reflexive strategies into films which have basically been manufactured with entertainment in mind, the latter doing the opposite – incorporating the tropes of Hollywood into works which are effectively updates on the counter-cinematic tradition.

We might compare, for example, *Tesis* with *Funny Games*. The following is drawn from an interview with Amenábar from Reel.com:

Fear is the emotion I like to experience when watching a horror film, not disgust. It's not that I'm against blood in films, it's just for me, as a creator, it just doesn't work. When I first wanted to do a film about violence, I found that no matter how much blood I put in the film, it would have been as effective to not have shown it. There is a film I really like called *Funny Games* — it's a German film, I think [It's actually Austrian - Ed.] — it's really, really hard to follow, because it's really, really clever. The way [director Michael Haneke] plays with all the clichés that all the directors and writers have to follow in order not to disturb the audience too much. So he doesn't show anything explicit, thankfully, but the plot is so dark and, er, so that's interesting. (Thorsen)

I would suggest that much of the cleverness of *Tesis* exists precisely in its ability to provide many of the thrills, shocks and delays typically provided by the thriller and horror genres whilst at the same time offering a pretty comprehensive critique of the societal assumptions which make such effects possible. In other words, Amenábar's claim that he is simply imitating *los americanos* is disingenuous, perhaps deliberately so, because at the same time as offering the kind of straight-up, calculated chills which Chema prizes so highly and which disturb Ángela so profoundly, he is simultaneously critiquing the genres he is imitating – bringing a sceptical European consciousness to bear on the raw thriller material which he himself has generated.

The epithet “intelligent thriller” has regularly been applied to *Tesis* (as well as to *Abre los ojos*), and much of this perceived intelligence can be located in its scepticism. Firstly, the fact that Ángela is writing a thesis about audiovisual violence implies a detachment towards the film’s storyline: one can imagine that Ángela’s own interpretation of the film in which she figures would be ambivalent at best. Whilst Tarantino and the Oliver Stone of *Natural Born Killers*, for example, are forced in interviews to defend their work as parodic of, or commentaries on, screen violence, the figure of Ángela incorporates this commentary into the film itself: as far as I know, Amenábar has never had to answer to the criticism that his film is disturbingly violent (perhaps more on the aural level than the visual), because he has extra-diegetically short-circuited such questions by including Ángela to embody audience guilt about what they are watching. The film’s knowing self-referentiality thus becomes a strategic weapon, heading off the familiar criticisms of exploitation whilst affording the viewer a comforting surrogate – whilst also nuancing Hayward’s contention that “thriller films are ... sadomasochistic”. Depending on who is doing the screaming, there is psychological comfort in thrillers too.

As a self-confessed fan of screen violence – who significantly turns out to be the hero, instrumental in saving the life of the beleaguered heroine – Chema also fulfils a fantasy for a different kind of viewer, legitimizing the ‘unhealthy’, violence-obsessed nerd by proving that underneath the pimples and spectacles there beats a true manly heart.

The “relativism... of [Amenábar’s] narrative world” (Jordan, Allinson 109) thus has the function of blurring many of the binary oppositions on which thrillers and horror

films have traditionally depended, leaving us with a film which is emphatically postmodern in its scepticism about all forms of authority. Even before we know that Ángela is writing a thesis and is thus being positioned as intellectually detached from and analytical of her subject matter, it is clear right from the initial scene on the Madrid metro system that there is a morbid, instinctive component to her attitudes to violence that undermines any authority she may claim on the subject. (The desire she feels to observe the mutilated body at first hand – significantly, the other passengers seem happy to walk away from the scene as instructed) later becomes an obsession with the man she suspects to be the serial killer, Chema’s recordings of her having captured her kissing a TC screen on which Bosco’s image appears).

Chema, who is responsible for all of the humorous notes of *Tesis* and is thus strangely sympathetic, offers an alternative form of authority on matters audiovisual, the unquestioning, visceral reaction of the obsessive fan, prepared to be judged negatively by “normal” society if it means he can pursue his “unhealthy” hobby of obsessively collecting and viewing images of violence and pornography. It is Chema’s expertise which recognizes the Sony XT500 video recorder and which thus sets in motion the narrative chain leading to the uncovering of first Castro and then Bosco; he is also the unlikely hero, responsible for saving Ángela’s life at the end, whom is granted further legitimacy by being reincorporated by society in the final frames, when a possible relationship between himself and Ángela is suggested. But his authority is far from absolute, and Chema has to undergo the humiliation of being accused himself of being the serial killer – and of being effectively rejected by Ángela as such – before closure is reached at the end. Thus *Tesis* elegantly provides two contradictory but equally valid viewing experiences in a film which cunningly offers, as it were, something for everyone.

8.8. Rebellion and the Institution

One Gothic theme that *Tesis* sets up fairly explicitly is that of rebellion within the institution. Down the years, a large part of the mythology of *Tesis* in the Spanish popular consciousness derives from the fact that Angela's thesis advisor – responsible in the film for editing the snuff movies made by Bosco is called Castro, as was Amenábar's own professor of Narrative during the time he spent as a student in the Information Sciences Faculty at Madrid's Complutense University. Around the time of *Tesis*' release, much was made of the fact that Castro had failed Amenábar in the course several times, with *El País*' M. Torreiro terming it a “venganza, ejemplarmente artística al dotar a uno de los personajes del filme de las más siniestras intenciones” (Torreiro).

Revenge or not, the film develops into a significant, multi-layered critique of institutional failure. As has been pointed out, as a student, Ángela is highly suspect: intellectually uncertain, lacking in curiosity, and oddly innocent on the subject of audiovisual violence, which is purportedly to be the subject of her thesis. The suggestion is that she is ill-prepared for the task at hand except at all but the most theoretical, abstract levels: Indeed, Amenábar, in the 1995 interview in *El Mundo*, question the institution's ability to teach when he says “Todo lo que sé no lo he aprendido en la Universidad sino viendo películas. La Facultad sólo me ha servido como punto de encuentro” (Barrio & Pérez). It is the enthusiastic fan Chema who possesses the greater knowledge in the film – indeed, he has sufficient knowledge to save Ángela's life.

The portrayal of the university itself is about as negative as it could be. As represented in *Tesis* – which was in part actually shot there, during the month of August, when things in Madrid are quiet - it is a place where respected professors edit snuff movies in collaboration with students; where those students themselves use the university's own equipment to make those movies; where murders occasionally take place without apparently being followed up by the law; beneath whose physically unattractive surface seemingly endless labyrinths run, like a symbol of the endless corruption running through and below a system which has supposedly emerged from a gothically dark twentieth century. If *Tesis* does represent Amenábar's revenge, then it's a comprehensive one – even though his subsequent career is perhaps even sweeter.

Tesis therefore adopts a Gothic attitude of scepticism towards the teaching and learning afforded by institutions which reflects Amenábar's own scepticism regarding the laws laid down by official institutions. Though he has repeatedly stated in interviews that his favourite films were made in that great institution of film, Hollywood, he has also repeated affirmed his scepticism about more recent Hollywood production, as for example in *El País*:

Lo menos que se le puede pedir al cine de Hollywood, quizá lo único, es que al menos entretenga y hace mucho que no lo hace; por eso el éxito de *Titanic*; pero salvo ésta, la mayoría de las películas americanas son comerciales sólo por las campañas de promoción, no por su capacidad de entetener. (Márquez)

Amenábar has often been classified by European commentators as a Hollywood director – for example, by Jordan and Allinson above, or by Rob Stone in *Spanish*

Cinema, describing how Amenábar “feeds off Hollywood and MTV, video games and the Internet, but has harnessed this enthusiasm to an astute sense of narrative and an exemplary way with genre” (Stone, 201). Leora Lev similarly analyzes the technological aspects of *Tesis*, seeing the film as being about the eye’s predatory nature: “security cameras, video recorders, electronic eyes, instruments that invade private, personal space with a voyeuristic impetus that ultimately kills.”

We thus end with a clear link between *Tesis* and the other films we have discussed in terms of their relationship to Spanish realities, with Lev seeing the film in a Spanish perspective and stating that “Francoist surveillance may be a thing of the past, but an inquisitorial, fratricidal fervor is still fed by this network of spying mechanisms embedded within the very architecture of the new, technologically savvy, consumerist Spain.” (35)

In other words, and despite Spanish protestations that things have moved on, Count Dracula is still there in his tower, controlling and terrifying those unfortunate enough to be trapped in his castle.

CONCLUSION: OTHER GENRES

The British gothic tradition established a series of conventions which, as we have seen, have been of great use to Spanish film makers in exploring the complexities of a society in flux. After all, the Gothic, finally, is all about limits and transgressions – an ambivalent transgression that celebrates the exploration of the unknown and the marginal whilst at the same time revealing the power of that unknown to unsettle the comfortable foundations, often binary, on which our culture is founded. This analysis has sought to analyze the ways in which the appropriations of the British gothic tradition have been appropriated, either covertly or explicitly, by Spanish language film makers in order to enable the generation of meaning and consequently open the films up to often political interpretations, sometimes in ways not perceived by the film makers themselves. From this point of view, it is instructional to compare two superficially very different films, Portabella's *Vampyr-Cuadecuc* and Amenábar's *The Others*: the former a piece of political film making made entirely consciously, the latter a formal exercise in the generation of suspense which almost despite itself becomes an enquiry into the workings of ideology.

By way of introduction, we analyzed a small cluster of post-Franco Spanish films so as to test our feeling that the gothic appropriations were more than simply a formal component of them, but could actually open up interesting ways of reading these films. We used of Kosofsky Sedgwick's handy taxonomy at the start of *The Coherence of Gothic Conventions* as our starting point, but in truth any such taxonomy of the formal features of the Gothic would have sufficed. The study was inevitably partial, since a full exploration of the tropes adopted by Spanish film would require a whole other thesis. From Kosofsky Sedgwick's list, for example, we chose to exclude the idea

of doubles, a Gothic trope which is employed with great wit, for example, in Nacho Vigalondo's *Timecrimes* (2007) and in Amenábar's *Abre los ojos* (1997), both profoundly uncanny films which smuggle this Gothic trope into a primarily science-fiction frame (one of the many fascinating features of *The Others* is that the members Grace's family are, in a sense, doubles of themselves – once as “real”, then as ghosts). “The poisonous effects of guilt and shame”, another convention listed by Kosofsky Sedgwick, is again not directly examined but represents a theme that can clearly be found in most, if not all, the works under study here. The use of the gothic labyrinth, as explored most explicitly in del Toro's *El laberinto del fauno* and Amenábar's *Tesis*, likewise goes unexplored. In writers such as Smollett and Fielding, the maze is used to signify the complexity of a society which nonetheless remains unified, but in the Gothic romance it becomes a site of confusion, isolation and alienation, with for example Lewis's monk Ambrosio unable to escape from the labyrinth in which he finds himself, or from the dark desire that have brought him there. Guillermo del Toro cleverly combines both readings by making the labyrinth of the title simultaneously a place of fear for the young, bookish Ofelia, but also an extension of her imagination, one in which she ultimately finds her freedom. We mention these exclusions – and there are many more - by way of emphasizing that the importing of such structures into Spanish film are not merely formal, but also ideological, enablers of interpretation and of suggesting that there are still many potentially fruitful areas of study in the relationship between specific Gothic tropes and Spanish film available for any future scholars who wish to tackle them.

Our second chapter seeks to understand why a film like Hitchcock's *Rebecca*, heavily gothic in both its tropes and mood, might have been so popular in Spain at the particular time (1940) it achieved its success. We found the answers in theories of

audience reception, another field in which work needs to be done: recent work on the incorporation of horror film motifs by Spanish directors includes, for example, chapters by Andy Willis and Barry Jordan in *European Nightmares: Horror Cinema in Europe Since 1945* (2012). The influential critic Andrew O’Hehir chose to start “Have horror movies hit a new golden age?” a *Salon* article published in October 2012, with a discussion of Jaume Balagueró’s *Sleep Tight* (2012). Spanish horror films in the 2000s have become almost synonymous with Spanish cinema itself, with cult fans of the genre flocking to see, for example, the *[REC]* films directed by Jaume Balagueró and Paco Plaza and *Sleep Tight* (2012), to mention just two examples of Spanish horror which have made an international impact. These films are resolutely non-specific in location (unlike Amenabar’s *Tesis*, for example, whose postmodernist slant can be seen as having opened the way in Spain for this latest wave of Spanish horror) and deal only obliquely with the influence of the past on the present, suggesting that Spanish horror is now starting to free itself from national concerns in ways that *The Orphanage*, for example, did not.

How, then, to explain the continuing interest in, and successful production of, Spanish horror, even beyond its obsessive relationship to the ways in which the Spanish present is haunted by the Spanish past? Does the fact that film makers like Amenábar and Balagueró shy away from direct involvement with unresolved Spanish issues – a lack of involvement endlessly reiterated by Spaniards who claim to have grown weary of films about the Spanish Civil War, and reflected in the apparent inability of Spanish critics to interpret their films in any other than generic terms – reflect a fundamental ideological conservatism at the heart of the Spanish film industry, a decision to continue to suppress the discussion of issues which have still not been dealt with at the institutional level?

Through the middle sections of our analysis, we used theory – primarily narratology (*The Others*) and hauntology (*El orfanato*) as a way of revealing what we consider to be the ideologically concealed areas of the films we are discussing: *The Others* is revealed to be a fable about the workings of ideology, while *El orfanato* dramatizes the theories of, primarily, Torok and Abraham to play out ideas of the burial or otherwise of Spanish history, suggesting – much as does *The Others* itself – the way forward to a “healthy” relationship between Spain and its traumatic twentieth century past, much of which it still prefers to keep buried. The creation, distribution and viewing of these films in Spain is, of course, crucial to the slow healing process – a process the need for which, as we have noted, is still far from achieving consensus either at the institutional or social levels, with both politicians and citizens still sharply divided over the issue of the country’s *memoria historica*. Our final chapter, on Amenabar’s *Tesis*, sees the film as a gothically-inflected critique of a surveillance society, thus indicating the continuing significance of the gothic as a instrument for social study its cinematic form.

We should like to address now a couple of possible misconceptions regarding our analysis. One is the absence of references to the film which many people believe to be the archetypal cinematic work of Anglo-Saxon gothic in Spanish cinema, Gonzalo Suárez’s *Rowing in the Wind* (1988), a film which builds a quasi-horror and highly-stylized fiction around the true encounter of the Romantic poet Lord Byron and the Shelleys in Europe in 1816, an encounter which led, of course, to the writing of *Frankenstein*. Despite certain similarities of treatment between this film and Erice’s *El espíritu de la colmena*, particularly in both film’s conception of the liberating effects of the Romantic imagination via the apparition of Frankenstein’s monster, it was felt that the film’s pre-twentieth century setting excluded it from a discussion of the connections

between the Gothic and post-Franco Spain; Suárez's concerns, in this film at least, are not primarily national.

Several other films which employ Gothic conventions have also, for reasons of space, and in the belief that discussing them would largely constitute mere reiteration, been excluded from our study. Among them are Alex de la Iglesia's *Balada triste de trompeta* (2010), a highly personal, idiosyncratic and extremely violent black comedy about the playing out of past psychological traumas in the present which ends with a delirious scene at Franco's tomb at the Valle de los Caídos. Here, the gothic is of the horror rather than the terror variety, its anarchic, deliberately disruptive and authentically troubling mingling of comedy and gothic coming as close as any Spanish film yet has to reproducing the ideological confusions and violence which continue to simmer between the surface of a society which may not yet have fully achieved its long-wished for democracy and which, as we have repeatedly noted, continues to be ideologically deeply riven: the film ends with an image of two clowns, one laughing cynically and the other weeping inconsolably.

In order to forestall objections that practically any film at all may be said to incorporate Gothic tropes if it is examined carefully enough – such is the openness of the form, as we have repeatedly insisted - it should be remembered, of course, that there are a great many Spanish films about the Civil War, and also about more recent Spanish history, which do not use the Gothic tradition in any explicit way. Other genres, though, do come into play. These include melodrama (Emilio Martínez Lázaro's *Las trece rosas* (2007) and Benito Zambrano's *La voz dormida* (2011)); comedy (*Belle Époque* (1992) and *La niña de tus ojos* (2004), both by Fernando Trueba; and attempts at revisionist historical drama (Vicente Aranda's *Libertarias*, 1996, which like *La voz dormida* offers

a feminist perspective). The ways in which such films have appropriated the conventions of these respective genres offer rich terrain for further study.

We should like to conclude by offering a necessarily brief overview of the incorporation of another genre into recent Spanish films about Spanish history – science fiction.⁷⁹ As a genre, and despite there being few recent examples of it – perhaps primarily due to budgetary constraints for a genre which is famously costly – Spanish science fiction has seen notable recent success. Nacho Vigalondo's *Timecrimes* (2007) is a low-budget time travel drama that can be read, ideologically, as a film about what happens when the desire to escape from the present is perhaps inevitably followed by the inability to return to it: again it thus plays into themes about the inescapability of the past. The same director's gently comic *Extraterrestre* (2011) sees a young man desperately trying to maintain normality in a Madrid under threat from an alien invasion, this time playing with the idea that alien institutions search as state and church exercise an unwelcome and inhibiting threat to the successful development of the capitalist lives we wish to lead – an indictment of the disconnect between politics that have now become alien to its citizens and the citizens who have to endure its intrusions, manipulations and surveillance. *Eva* (Kike Maíllo, 2011), set in a 2041 when humans coexist with robots, takes as its central theme the complex relationship between the two, and in this sense it acts as a complement to films like Steven Spielberg's *A.I.* whilst again returning to *Frankenstein*.

Eva does not seem to have a decisive relationship with the specific issues of Spanish history, but Oscar Aibar's deceptively complex *El Bosc* (2012) does. A daring hybrid of the kind of rural Civil War drama that José Luis Cuerda makes with a science fiction element inspired by Wells' *The War of the Worlds*, which I explicitly references,

⁷⁹ In *Contemporary Spanish Cinema and Genre* (ed. Beck and Rodríguez Ortega, Manchester UP, 2008), science fiction is not among the featured genres. This suggests that as little as four years ago, its influence was too scarce to be deemed worthy of inclusion.

the film harks back to *El espíritu de la colmena* and *El laberinto del fauno* in its juxtaposition of a rural Civil War story with genre elements. Gruff Ramón and his put-upon wife Dora eke out an existence in a rural area of Aragón. Ramón has the reputation of being the only fascist in town: when the war breaks out, the anarchists seize power, forcing him into hiding.



Close by Ramon's house is a circle of trees where every solstice, a strange, pulsating light appears into which people are known to disappear. Ramon escapes from his pursuers by entering the light, leaving Dora alone. After six months, Ramon returns with stories of a land populated by fish-like aliens living in houses that look like artichokes: the film waits until its very final frame before allowing the audience actually to see one of the fishy aliens, themselves metaphorically a race in hiding just as Ramón himself is.

This unusual generic juxtaposition of Civil War drama with standard science fiction trope generates an intense feeling of defamiliarization in the viewer even at this late stage of the game, in 2012. From the point of view of character, we trace Ramon's development from being a rather surly country man with narrowly right-wing perspectives to someone with the sympathetic and empathetic capacities to welcome

into his own home an alien that looks like a massive fish – a spiritual journey paralleled by that of Dora, with the arrival at their home of a troop of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade.

But significantly, Ramon has to make a spatial and temporal journey away to achieve this newly conciliatory perspective – a journey away not only from Spain physically, but also temporally, with the film’s concomitant suggestion that in a nation divided by war and by ideologies, it is impossible to achieve the perspective necessary for reconciliation. Effectively, the only escape for Ramon from the cruelty of other human beings is to allow himself to be abducted by aliens, who are in fact friendly and welcoming rather than aggressive. Like Ana, and like Ofelia, he has escaped from a reality experienced as heavy with exhaustion and alienation, into a fictional world coded by Aibar as kind, meaningful and with a true sense of community. Genre, in other words, has transformed Ramon’s life in the ways that the 1940 viewers of *Rebecca* sought temporary transformation.

The Spain of the Civil War has become once again a place where everyone you meet is by definition either one of you, or an Other, and only by a radical removal of the self from the scenario can reconciliation be achieved, with all that this applies for the successful future functioning of society: interestingly, and unlike most films about the Civil War, *El bosc* takes great pains to indicate that neither fascists nor anarchists are all good or all bad.

What is significant about all of this for our purposes here is that Aibar would have had great formal difficulties in giving this precise form to this precise theme using any other tropes than those appropriated from science fiction. As I wrote in my review of the film, “the fit between genre and message feels nice and tight”. *El bosc* thus suggests that Spanish films, in their continuing negotiation with the past of the country

which they seek to revise and articulate, may still be open to a range of as yet unexplored generic possibilities, possibilities which are likely to be explored further with a forthcoming remake by Guillermo del Toro of *Frankenstein* - a new, revisionist gaze at the film with which this study began, and with which it now ends.



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