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Submitted

September 30, 2016

Approved

January 3, 2017

© 2017

Communication & Society

ISSN 0214-0039

E ISSN 2386-7876

doi: 10.15581/003.30.3.29-39

www.communication-society.com

2017 – Vol. 30(3)

pp. 29-39

How to cite this article:

Losilla Alcalde, C. (2017). The

Woman on the Edge of the Story.

Some examples of female

presence in the Spanish cinema of

the 1940s. *Communication &*

Society 30(3), 29-39.

The Woman on the Edge of the Story. Some examples of female presence in the Spanish cinema of the 1940s

Abstract

Through an analysis of the films *Altar mayor* [High Altar] (Gonzalo Delgrás, 1944), *El clavo* [The Nail] (Rafael Gil, 1944) and *Tuvo la culpa Adán* [Adam's Fault] (Juan de Orduña, 1944), I attempt to support the hypothesis of a certain kind of expulsion of female characters in Spanish fiction films in the years immediately following the Civil War, which would not only exclude them through ideological discourse, but also through the *mise en scène*. The analytical method adopted here moves away both from historiographical approaches and from the *politique des auteurs*, as well as from cultural studies and other similar disciplines, to take a direction already begun by other authors towards a possible history of forms in Spanish cinema. I thus analyse questions such as the relationship of the actress with the shot and the narration, her disappearance from the borders existing between them, her conversion into phantasmagoria, and, in short, the construction of an alternative, *rebellious* story in opposition to the official one. To conclude, I argue for the possibility of viewing the actress's body and gestures as instigators of a kind of materialist poetics in film analysis.

Keywords

Spanish Cinema, 1940s, Female Archetypes, Actresses, Mise-en-scène, Film Theory.

1. Theoretical introduction and objectives

Spanish films of the 1940s are more complex than they seem, offering a wide range of elements for an analysis that could ultimately prove productive and thought-provoking. I do not refer here to vindicating their potential cinematic value, or exploring them from perspectives related to cultural studies, but to attempting an approach through a combination of disciplines that avoids both reasoned (or unreasoned) panegyrics and merely historical or sociological explanations. One on hand, this article examines films made in the decade under study from the perspective of the *mise en scène*, i.e., the theoretical construct that was being articulated by André Bazin (Andrew, 1990) at that same time

in history, which proved so useful for analysing classical Hollywood cinema and which has since undergone mutations as diverse as they are multifarious (Martin, 2014). On the other, its objective is more specifically to locate other, smaller traces in this filmic form, left by the interaction between the body of the actress and the space of the shot, between her physical presence and the image as a whole, with the aim of demonstrating that in the Spanish films of this period the female character and the actress who gives her life can prove especially useful for defining the whole *mise en scène* and even for marking it historically. In this way, this article goes from the most minute level of experience to the historiographical narrative, from filmic microanalysis (Zunzunegui, 2016) to a history of forms which in turn characterises an era in Spanish cinema from the female point of view. My purpose here is not to take an abstract and discursive approach to the active/passive role of the woman in the films analysed here, but rather to explore how the actress—her body, her gestures—intervenes in the filmic form to provide us with *material features* that define the filmic content.

On this point, it is worth highlighting that in the world of film theory the decades of the 60s and 70s represented something of a “correction”. Scholars abandoned Bazin and the *mise-en-scène* for psychoanalysis and feminism, among other disciplines, which meant, first of all, a shift from the interior to the exterior of the image, from essence to appearance, from the search for epiphany to an exploration of certain *organic arrangements* of the human figure (Elsaesser & Hagener, 2009: 119 et seq.). In this sense, “woman’s films” like *Rebecca* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1940), *Secret Beyond the Door* (Fritz Lang, 1947) or *Possessed* (Curtis Bernhardt, 1947), to cite only a few of the more significant examples from the period that concerns us here, came to be studied from a semiotic perspective based on the physical and psychic operation of the female *being*, or as an affirmative presence that pushes beyond sexist stereotypes (Haskell, 1974), or even as a disturbing and phantasmagorical reality created by male desire (Mulvey, 2007: 81-93). It is this last approach that connects once again with the theories of the *mise-en-scène* and which therefore is of particular interest here, because it links in with psychoanalytic theory in the shared territory of desire, which would be the transgressive passage from the symbolic, especially pronounced in the female context, to the imaginary, as Jacques Lacan defined these concepts (Žižek, 2002 and 2008). I will attempt here to revert to these terms and bring female desire to the foreground, and also to transfer the complex figures of the films cited above—and many others—to the context of Spanish cinema of the 1940s, subject as it was to the Franco regime and its immediate consequences, in view of its unique characteristics, ranging from the morality imposed by National Catholicism, which perfected its power mechanisms in those very years, to its expression in a film tradition torn between the official slogans and the almost secret responses of the female bodies that moved among them, far more restlessly than it might seem.

For the purposes of this analysis I have chosen three films from the same year that could establish a relatively coherent discourse in this respect. In chronological order of their commercial release, these films are *Altar mayor* [High Altar] (Gonzalo Delgrás, 1944), *Tuvo la culpa Adán* [Adam’s Fault] (Juan de Orduña, 1944) and *El clavo* [The Nail] (Rafael Gil, 1944). Why these films? Firstly, because they are texts created at a very specific historical moment, at the height of the Francoist autocracy, but also at the beginning of its decline, given the international situation resulting from the imminent collapse of the Nazi regime in the Second World War. Secondly, because they belong to different genres, at least according to the implicit classification established by the production of the period, of rural melodrama, Hollywood-inspired comedy, and period metaphor, respectively. And thirdly, because they present three female archetypes that are different and yet identical, in which physical expressiveness in the form of sensual gestures (consider, by way of comparison, the mobility of Joan Bennett in the aforementioned *Secret Beyond the Door*, or the poise of

Katharine Hepburn or Rosalind Russell in the Hollywood comedies of those years) is subordinated to a literal seclusion whereby the body closes in on itself, or seeks other horizons with the gaze, or disappears from the diegetic world altogether, vanishing from the shot and even from whole scenes and sequences (exemplified, as will be argued below, by the presence of Maruchi Fresno, María Esperanza Navarro and Amparo Rivelles in the films analysed in this article) as if the story itself were responsible for pulling her out of the narrative so that it can be the male figure that dominates the mechanisms of the *mise-en-scène*. In this way, my analysis of the forms of the image leads to a provisional—but, I believe, sound and promising—conclusion with respect to the need of a film aesthetic inspired by fascism to relegate female desire to the margins of its figurative and narrative framework, and also with respect to the resistance of that same desire and the tensions it generates within the story through its refusal to disappear completely and, as a result, its persistence in the form of an unsettling, disturbing figure that partially *stains* the narrative tendency in Spanish films of those years towards a presentation of a perfect universe.

2. The reason for the disappearance

In *Altar mayor*, Teresina (Maruchi Fresno) is an Asturian native who has fallen in love with Javier (Luis Peña), a rich boy from Madrid who is dominated by his mother, Doña Eulalia (María Teresa Robles, who also co-wrote the screenplay). After a romance in the mountains near Covadonga, Javier has to leave and the narration abandons Teresina, who is left behind in the country. On one hand, Javier leads an incessantly active life in Madrid, driven on by his mother and her admonishments. On the other, Teresina remains outside these images, out of frame, and only appears on screen when she is reading the letters her beloved has sent her. The female body is thus a passive organism that can only watch the action from outside, *in writing*. And this progressive dissolving turns her into a spectre who is at once delicate and threatening. How could *Altar mayor* combine two elements that in reality should not be juxtaposed, the spirituality of a “softer, gentler” presence, as Teresina defines herself on one occasion, and the mystique of an absence that always leaves an indelible mark? (Castro de Paz, 1997: 172–174).

In *El clavo*, based on the book by Pedro Antonio de Alarcón, the beautiful Blanca (Amparo Rivelles) and the judge Javier Zarco (Rafael Durán) begin a romance in nineteenth-century Madrid, but she mysteriously disappears after a failed meeting. This situation leaves Javier free to turn the spectator’s attention to the mystery of the story: during his time as magistrate in a town in Castile, he discovers a skull pierced by a nail and sets out to identify the murderer. The culprit turns out to be a woman named Gabriela, but in fact she is none other than Blanca, who had been forced to rid herself of a suitor imposed as a marriage of convenience. Of course, the structure of the film responds to its nature as a suspense story, but it is also emblematic in terms of its representation of female desire. Blanca disappears in an ellipsis and Gabriela appears in a flashback. And it is this look back that sets out the motives and circumstances giving rise to the murder, which do not seem to fit into the main narrative. In a way, Gabriela’s thwarted desire, which leads to the murder, has no place in the story she shares with Javier, as a representative of law and order in the official narrative. In the end, the judge judges and the killer is judged; in other words, the story of power removes the alien body of the desiring woman, notwithstanding the fascination it inspires. Intermittently but systematically cut off from narrative visibility, Blanca/Gabriela ultimately drags Javier himself along with her as she falls into the void: the final shot of *El clavo* shows two horse-drawn carriages, each one occupied by one of the members of the couple, being taken away to a life of captivity, real in one case and metaphorical in the other (Company, 1997: 178–180).

In *Tuvo la culpa Adán*, Nora (María Esperanza Navarro) leaves her convent to marry an inveterate bachelor who belongs to a family of incorrigible misogynists. But on her way, not only would her paths cross with Gerardo (Rafael Durán), who would ultimately marry her, but a series of events would unfold that relegate the story of the birth of her sexuality to the background, while sub-plots develop frantically around her, as if the turmoil of the narrative could stand in for the heat of passion. A pair of swindlers burst into her life by chance, thanks to a suitcase mix-up on the train where one of them is travelling alongside Nora. And the resulting confusion culminates with Nora being hit by the car in which Javier and his mother are travelling, in an accident that leaves the girl in a coma, and suspends her evolution towards desire. While the heroines in *Altar mayor* and *El clavo* vanish into thin air, withdrawing their bodies from view for whole sections of their respective stories, expelled from the narrative so that the spectator cannot see what must be kept outside an always oppressive and claustrophobic narrative, the girl in *Tuvo la culpa Adán* appears and reappears unexpectedly, trying to impose her presence even while languishing in a coma, in what signifies a tendency in the Spanish comedies of the period towards the happy ending wedding, which in turn represented the birth of a new model of wife that would be consolidated in the following decade.

Based on these films, then, we could posit the hypothesis of this presence/absence of the female figure in the films of Francoist Spain at that time, understood as evidence of a symbolic attempted murder: that of the woman as subject immersed in the realm of the emotions, contrasting with those men who always stand for the rigid rationalism imposed by the regime. At times, however, the pressure exerted by the narrative ends up provoking an explosion of this sensuality, either in an unsettling off-screen narrative or in a playful in-frame/out-of-frame movement that facilitates the appearance of another figure suspended between two spaces of the story, between one shot and the next, or between the scene we see and the one we do not see. It is, in effect, a phantasmal figure which the physical appearance of the actresses, and their gestures, ultimately establishes as a metaphor for another condition, like the maleficent shadow of the official narrative, a second presence in the story that puts it in tension and in doubt.

3. The phantasmagorical gesture

In *Altar mayor*, there is a strange and mysterious moment, especially if we consider the context that brings it about. When Teresina and Javier meet again after their original separation, once again in the mountains of Asturia, she advances towards the camera, towards the spectator, dressed in white, much to the surprise of Javier, who had believed her to be elsewhere, and asks: "Do you think I'm an apparition?" The question is far from trivial and takes on literal rather than comic hues. Maruchi Fresno appears out of nowhere, out of the invisible background of the shot, and seeks to capture the attention of both the male protagonist and the spectator. The actress's rhythmic movements, as if she were floating on air, make her appear on the right of the frame and pass in front of Javier as if he didn't see her, as if he had not yet had time to assimilate her presence, compelling her to speak up to get his attention. Teresina seems to live on the edges of the frame, and of the story, so that her sudden appearances represent a kind of invasion of the filmed reality from some nameless place. Later, we will see her preparing for the definitive encounter with Javier, first with the light of her bedroom window behind her, then in shadows in the sanctuary where she is praying... Nature and religion have turned Teresina into an ethereal being, removed from mundane reality, but for that very reason a bearer of an appeal that goes beyond the mere physicality of other women, of the calculated vulgarity of Leonor (María Dolores Pradera), her rival for Javier's love. Nature, religion and phantasmagoria turn into a combination that simultaneously upholds and subverts the National Catholic

discourse. The creation of an invisible parallel universe, where female desire reigns through the spell of her mystery, even casts doubt on the conclusion to the story where Teresina ends up married to her local suitor, José (José Suárez): desire is consummated in the realm of the imaginary, the only place where it can be.

In *El clavo*, there is a whole sequence that in its way repeats this situation in which a ghost in the shape of a woman undergoes figurative transformations that problematise her identity. At the end of the trial, Gabriela disappears from the story once more. Javier calls to her (“Blanca!”) but she vanishes on the left side of the frame, as if she hadn’t heard him. From that moment, the judge works tirelessly to obtain a pardon for her. The film inevitably characterizes these two characters as belonging to two very different worlds. He moves through the halls of power, the courts, the houses of the most powerful magistrates, an inextricable labyrinth that always leads back to where it begins. She is left out of the frame, in her cell, locked away and immobile, outside the story. He follows the pathways laid down by the law, in a meticulous struggle for rational control of a universe that ultimately slips out of his grasp, revealing its absurd side. She has followed her impulses, her passions, her desires for love and for death, completely refusing to enter the rationalism of the world in which Javier lives. Against the male universe, constructed on the foundation of a false rationalism that attempts to control everything, Gabriela opposes a series of immediate reactions that confound the unsettle authority, even while they condemn her. Blanca/Gabriela, in her dual manifestation that even casts doubt on the perception of the female body by the male, in a curious foreshadowing of *Vertigo* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1958), becomes even more impalpable when Javier goes to a high society party at which, for social imperatives, he is forced to dance with a stranger. Suddenly, the woman’s face mutates into Gabriela’s, as if the judge’s perspective could transform reality... or perhaps as if her absence could make it possible for her to reappear as a ghost? In any case, this short-circuiting of the narrative empties out the scene, as if all the dancers had disappeared except for Javier and Gabriela, who continue dancing outside reality, in a mental space that belongs only to them, because it is the sum of their respective desires.

In *Tuvo la culpa Adán*, the story begins with the absence of two women. A clear appreciation of the way in which Gabriela/Blanca is made *present* in *El clavo* is needed for Juan de Orduña’s comedy to have its full effect. We need to see and sense the way in which Amparo Rivelles combines erotic expression and absent expression, gazing into space to embrace a kind of rebellious mystique with no desire to be part of the present, but which cannot decide where to belong, as if her future involved no more than wandering through an inhospitable yet promising territory that is beyond her and her everyday world. Indeed, Rivelles possesses control of this expression, at once vulgar and hallucinatory, that leads the spectator into the undefined universe where, going further than Maruchi Fresno’s character in *Altar mayor*, an erotic urgency prevails, in the way that the woman passes in front of the man like a ghost, but also like an object of desire that can never be attained. Against all this, at the beginning of *Tuvo la culpa Adán* there is of course someone called Adam, going beyond the Biblical metaphor, surrounded by a gang of men immune to despondency. It is the story of an entirely male family, defined by a basic failure, an original sin which—as always—must be attributed to a woman: one of the members of this tribe of brothers, governed by a caring father, walked down the aisle with a woman who rejected him at the last minute. And also absent is the woman they are talking about, the woman that one of them is engaged to and will probably marry. This *mise-en-scène*, this “invocation” of two women who are not there, constructs the female phantasmagoria that will subsequently be embodied in Nora, in an actress like María Esperanza Navarro, at once dull and exultant, an ordinary woman who can suddenly become the leading man’s love interest, who goes from socially awkward to the socialising gesture in the blink of an eye.

In essence, María Esperanza Navarro stands the perfect intermediate point between Maruchi Fresno and Amparo Rivelles. When her character is in a coma, when we see her wavering between life and death, she is placed in that “phantasmal position” that the other two convey through a kind of erotic sleep-walking, halfway between fiction and an “out there” to which they direct their gaze every now and then, with wide eyes that appeal to the world outside a reality that they cannot bear. Nora/Navarro does not feel comfortable in that reality either, and therefore enters that space between life and death that allows her to shut her eyes yet continue breathing. She is the perfect zombie-actress of Spanish 1940s cinema, and her absence, the absence of her gestures during her coma, represents the expulsion from the discourse suffered by the other two women: while Fresno wanders like a spectre amid the Asturian mountains and their spiritual mystique, while Rivelles appears and disappears in a dream version of Madrid because her body is not able to enter the labyrinthine world of law and power, Navarro is there and not there, moving from monastic solitude to worldly festivity as if in a dream because in reality her character belongs to nothing, a simulacrum in suspension.

4. Hypernarrativity and the Woman in the Folds

In *Altar mayor*, the narration is broken when Javier and Teresina are separated. From that moment on, as noted above, she acts only as a receiver of certain messages in the form of letters which, in reality, are addressed to the spectator, fulfilling a merely informative function for the ultimate addressee of the film (and of any film). She thus serves another intermediary role, another phantasmagoria, this time in the form of loss. Indeed, Teresina is also lost in the story, with a *slimming down* of her narrative presence until she becomes no more than a link between discourse and spectator, as the words addressed to her by her beloved are made public and vanish into the air, as if the story violated her privacy and surrendered it to the audience with no concern for what would happen next. And what does happen? A woman with no secrets, or who is forced to share her secrets, leaving her with nothing to hold onto, can do no more than pass from one story to another, from one narration to another, to determine whether there is anywhere she can cling to in order to keep from disappearing. In this way, Teresina will be an *other*, forever. She almost leaves for Cuba with her sister, but in the end stays behind in Asturias, where she becomes the operator of the jewellery store in the hotel where the protagonists come to stay. She identifies with Adela, Javier’s mother’s paid companion, who is doomed to live out the stereotype of the “spinster” with no voice of her own because she has wandered everywhere without finding her place in the world, in what is perhaps the perfect foreshadowing of Teresina’s own future. She finds her double in Leonor, the woman in love with Javier who will die in her place, so that Teresina need not die and continue bearing the weight of the plot without ever being its protagonist. And she will find another love—or the narration will find it for her—in José, the noble and wholesome youth who has never left the place of his birth, and whom she ultimately marries in another of those acts of erotic substitution that so greatly abound in these films. Narrations within the narration, sometimes even differentiated by a wide variety of stylistic features, these plot twists turn Teresina into a person who in reality is not one but several characters, and who can only identify herself in this multiplicity of identities, as if the fate of every woman required her to wear a mask or a disguise, which is essentially another way of disappearing.

In *El clavo*, this dissolving of identity is shown even more clearly. The woman we see in the opening scenes is not who she says she is; she is not Blanca, but Gabriela, as we will learn later. It could be argued, however, that Blanca is Gabriela and Gabriela is Blanca, and that therefore neither of them is who she claims to be. Both women, in the actress Amparo Rivelles, share a single face and a single body, and thus depend on the narration to be

identified with one name or the other. They also depend on the male presence and on the establishment of one temporal frame or another based on that presence. When Javier Zarco is only her lover, at the beginning of the story, the spectator sees Blanca. In the trial that occurs later, when the same man also plays the role of magistrate investigating the mystery that has taken over the plot, the audience will identify her as Gabriela. But Blanca never leaves Gabriela's body, at least in Javier's memory, just as the disturbing spirit of Gabriela ultimately possesses the unstained memory of the graceful Blanca. The two narrations become one and a single woman moves in the spaces between them like a spirit incapable of taking a central position in either story, which is always occupied by the male. What can Blanca/Gabriela do? Perhaps she can only become a figure who, in the shadows, devises alternative narrations of which she could be the protagonist, from which nobody would be able to expel her. Who imagines, for example, the couple dancing on that empty dance floor from which all the other couples have disappeared, when the judge mentally *changes* the stranger in his arms into Blanca/Gabriela and her face fills the screen in an extreme close-up? The shot that follows this scene shows the woman to the left of the frame, sitting at a table in her cell with her head resting on her arms, as if she were sleeping, when somebody bursts into the cell and forces her to get up. The syntactic logic of the classical narrative could not deny the possibility that this transition represents a punishment for the dream of the dance, dreamed by Blanca/Gabriela, as impossible as it may be to confirm the narrative link between the two scenes. In any case, it is clear that the dancing figure of the female protagonist, her extreme close-up, and the way she then raises her head in the cell—three shots that follow one another in a way that calls for an explanation—leave the female figure in the folds of the stitches that join them (Oudart, 1969), outside a story which—paradoxically—revolves around her in the same way that her body whirls around in the dance hall.

In *Tuvo la culpa Adán*, the story begins with at least two different openings. In the first, the father and his sons, the family of misogynists, argue at breakfast over the fact that one of them has become engaged to a woman, with particular reference to the experience of one of his elder brothers, who was left at the altar on the day of his wedding, as noted above. We then see the girl he is engaged to, who is in fact a novice who has abandoned her vocation for a secular life, discussing her situation with her Mother Superior. And then, as we had switched to another film, we bear witness to a dialogue between a man and a woman talking about a third person whom the woman has to meet in Lisbon, in what seems the beginning of a crime story that will not be developed. Of course, this was in the final moments of classical cinema and there was no place for parallel universes, at least explicitly, or for narrative experimentation. However, this deviation from the story places Nora, the frustrated nun, at the heart of the narrative, claiming attention both from the scene before her appearance and from the one that follows it. In the first, she has been spoken about. In the second, she is not even mentioned. And yet it will be the latter scene that links in first with her story, as the mysterious woman will travel on the same train that takes Nora to the capital and their meeting will be decisive for the subsequent development of the plot. Trapped on the borders between these scenes in the same way that she is trapped between her religious present and her secular future, even as Nora travels from A Coruña to Madrid on a night train, she also travels from one set to another without settling in any of them, rejected in every one by a zigzagging narrative that so far offers her no safe haven. Mired in this position, in this narrative blackout, she is left with no choice but to disappear, to drop out of circulation, and turn into a ghost: in the following scene, a car runs her down and she ends up in a coma, which brings us back to the point explored above.

All three films thus constitute the figure of the female ghost not only through the cinematography, but also through the narrative. Blanca/Gabriela, Teresina, and Nora all become lost in the narrative folds, in the structural vertigo of their respective stories, as if

the threat of expulsion to which they are constantly exposed would never go as far as catapulting them out completely, and instead loses them in a labyrinth of events whose purpose is never located completely within their reach. And at this point, the superiority of the spectator, understood as the addressee of the story, proves decisive. What does Blanca/Gabriela know of the adventures of her beloved Javier as a judge in a small Castilian town, or the steps he takes to obtain a pardon for her? Why doesn't anybody explain to Teresina the conversations between the man she loves (another Javier) and his meddling mother, or the excursion that will take the life of her rival, Leonor? And what does Nora do in a coma while the other characters weave and disentangle stories around her, as if the body lying on the bed, the mind that has stopped thinking, were of no importance at all? In any case, all of this is seen by the spectator. And this gives that spectator more knowledge than the women abused by the story, negated by the narrative, who ultimately accept their fate without knowing much about the paths that have led them there.

5. Conclusions: The Actress and the History of Forms in Spanish Cinema

The field delimited for this study (three films of 1944) is intended to serve as a preliminary sample for a broader study that I hope to continue in future publications that will follow on or complement this one. Using a historiographical approach as a filter for choosing the study samples and placing them in their national and international context and not as a chronological method for the analysis, leaving aside the *politique des auteurs* understood as a hermeneutic system, taking the *mise en scène* as the theoretical point of reference for the development of all kinds of formal considerations (the arrangement of bodies and objects in a particular space, but also the camera work, the pacing of the editing and the narrative structures) (Martin, 2014), and adopting this as a point of departure for deductions that may range from their tiniest microelements (an actress's gesture) to their most all-encompassing macroelements (deconstructing a formal system that itself constructed an aesthetic ideology related to women and their role in cinema), it is then possible to analyse the films in terms of their sensory and material elements (what we see, what we hear, what forms these audiovisual constructions take and how we can approach them without distorting them, i.e., conveying both their physical appearance and the meaning derived therefrom), and finally to establish networks (of actresses, of films, of trends, etc.) in which to locate the different circulations of that same *meaning* (Deleuza, 1989: 50-56).

Taking into account the global context of cinema in the period in question, I will offer a recapitulation of my analysis here. *Tuvo la culpa Adán* mimics at least two classical Hollywood comedy films, notwithstanding the fact that the film was based on a novel by Luisa María Linares. The misogynist mob of brothers seems to be modelled on the group of professors who are holed up together in an old house working on an encyclopaedia in *Ball of Fire* (Howard Hawks, 1941). Similarly, the film's structure draws on the screwball comedy genre, specifically the "comedy of remarriage" defined by Stanley Cavell, and more specifically on *Bringing Up Baby* (Howard Hawks, 1938), the ending to which reappears in Orduña's film when various characters end up in jail (Cavell, 1993). On the other hand, both *El clavo* and *Altar mayor* could be easily classified among the foreign replicas of the "woman's films" that so abounded in American cinema from the 1930s to the 1950s, and in this sense their female characters should be viewed as Spanish answers to the characters portrayed by Bette Davis, Barbara Stanwyck or Joan Crawford (Cavell, 1984). While in the United States, the decades immediately before and after the Second World War were marked by a number of social upheavals, including the entry of women into the workplace and their consequent assumption of more active roles in romantic relationships, in Spain the victory of fascism represented a marked step back in this respect, with female archetypes being limited to the dimensions identified in the three films studied here:

religion, the upper classes and the countryside, three of the ideological pillars of Franco's regime.

Idleness and submission to their predetermined roles thus constitute a weakness inherent to the nature of these heroines that makes them unique in the historical moment studied in comparison with their counterparts in Hollywood and other parts of Europe, which leads them to their disappearance, and which gives rise to a desire in them that is always unorthodox, always underground, and that occasionally bursts one or another of the story's narrative seams. Whether through the frame from which she is absent or appears only as a shadow, the ellipsis that conceals her and takes her body out of the spectator's view, the flashback that imprisons her like a cell, or the narrative levels within whose folds she is forced to survive, among other coercive mechanisms, the women in these Spanish films suffer the restraint of their desire in different *mise-en-scène* structures that reflect the power structures in Spain at the time. In *Bringing Up Baby*, it is Susan (Katharine Hepburn) who drives the plot, who steers David (Cary Grant) in directions very different from those that the original story and his gender would have reserved for him. In *Rebecca* and *Secret Beyond the Door*, it is Joan Fontaine and Joan Bennett, respectively, who act as detectives working on a mystery that they have to solve, and end up redeeming the male characters in the process. In *Letter from an Unknown Woman* (Max Ophuls, 1948), Joan Fontaine is once again trapped in a long flashback that takes up practically the whole film, but this doesn't stop Louis Jourdan, initially the narrator and protagonist, from being relegated to the background by the magnitude of the tragedy that the woman meticulously constructs for herself. Similarly, in *Now, Voyager* (Irving Rapper, 1942), the female character indulges in her suffering, like an offering made to herself, to enjoy a kind of masochistic pleasure which in the case of our Spanish heroines is limited to a mystique that can sometimes have an impact on certain timely ruptures in the oppressive narrative: seeing Bette Davis in Rapper's film in the midst of a solitary orgasm after the failure of her disastrous love affair is quite a different experience from watching Amparo Rivelles in *El clavo*, always restless, fluttering here and there, as if she could only ever find happiness in *another story*, which the film itself relegates to a place outside the narrative.

Altar mayor, *El clavo* and *Tuvo la culpa Adán* present at least three female figures that from the outset, through the gestures of the actresses who portray them, betray a desire to flee from the constraints of the story through gazes off camera or presumably disruptive actions. Teresina and Blanca/Gabriela fall in love with male representatives of the Francoist upper class, while Nora refuses to marry into a family of eccentric societal drop-outs, very much in keeping with a certain tradition of the moderate right, from the plays of Enrique Jardiel Poncela to the humour of the magazine *La Codorniz*. The intention of all three is thus to break with the rigid social standards of the country at that time, to undermine the narratives that ideologically underpin them. And as this cannot be done through an explicit discourse, they attempt it through formal ruptures that operate underneath these stories that constantly expel them. On the one hand, their presences in and absences from the shot sometimes create transitions that make them persist as ghosts, reminders that *they were there*, that traces of them remain. On the other, their movements through the interstices of the story, nearly always hypernarrativised, has the effect at times of illuminating the narrative folds through this presence-absence that becomes even more threatening due to its *indefinite* nature, to a time within and outside what is being narrated, condemned to the outside but simultaneously engaged in a *clandestine activity* that refuses to accept its forced non-existence. In *Altar mayor*, Teresina survives on the margins of the hotel where she works, where a well-to-do family has organised a marriage celebration which, to her despair, does not include her. In *El clavo*, Blanca/Gabriela turns in on herself to have more chances of being there and achieving her goals, from which she is drastically distanced however tirelessly she struggles to *appear*, like a kind of pagan virgin: she will cross the

judge's path again after he has forgotten her, and will take the place of the stranger with whom he dances through the usurpation of her face... In *Tuvo la culpa Adán*, Nora refuses to remain in her coma and wakes up to turn the social world around her upside down, an operation that she had already foreshadowed by *getting in the way* both in the story that leads from the misogynist family to the pair of swindlers and of the car being driven by Javier, which will bring her into his life...

This form of *intervention* in the *mise-en-scène* and the story lead to a *poetics of disappearance* that turn these female characters into veritable *nuisances* to the mechanisms of the stories. My interest here is thus not to affirm the tragedy of their expulsion, but to identify and describe this *tactic of intermittence* whereby they trespass onto forbidden territory, going where they are not called and *disappearing with a trace*, a spectral trace that prevents everything from going on as before, that hinders the development of the events as they had been planned, that sows anxiety where only the peace of victory had previously reigned, the victory of both the National Catholic ideology and of the story associated with it. In this respect, it is no mere coincidence that the full and decisive appearance of Rivelles should have the force of a hurricane wind at the least convenient moments in *El clavo*, or that Fresno's ethereal and hallucinatory movements should lend *Altar mayor* the dreamlike quality that pervades it, or that Navarro's childlike self-confidence should facilitate her extraordinary journey through the universe of *Tuvo la culpa Adán*. This is also a case of a *poetics of the actress* that is related not to their talent as performers, but to their participation in a *mise-en-scène* that includes them on every level. Because these actresses should also contribute to a hypothetical history of forms in Spanish cinema.

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