

FROM THE PICTORIAL TO THE FILMIC: BASES FOR THE DEFINITION OF A POSSIBLE STYLISTIC MODEL IN SPANISH CINEMA OF THE 1940S*

1. Films with a pictorial tradition

It is a well-known fact that most Spanish historical films of the 1940s,¹ especially those directed by Juan de Orduña for the CIFESA film studio—but also others such as *El abanderado* (Eusebio Fernández Ardavín, 1943) and *Reina Santa* (Rafael Gil, 1947) from Suevia Films, or *El doncel de la reina* (Eusebio Fernández Ardavín, 1944) by the ONUBA S.L. studio—made use of pictorial images extensively in the construction of a historically realistic atmosphere. Bombastically proclaiming the spectacular nature of their film productions, these studios brought to the screen immense and complex *mise-en-scènes* in which the story was displayed in all its splendour—and all its tragedy—through its most significant events and protagonists.

Such references to paintings are numerous and they have been conveniently identified. In *El abanderado* appears a representation of *Defensa del púlpito de la iglesia de San Agustín* (César Álvarez Dumont, 1880). *La leona*

de Castilla (Juan de Orduña, 1951) begins with an explicit allusion to the painting *Los comuneros Padilla, Bravo y Maldonado en el patíbulo* (Antonio Gisbert, 1860) (figures 1 and 2). *Alba de América* evokes *La rendición de Granada* (Francisco Pradilla, 1882) first, and then a little later, at the climax of its story, gives a nod to one of the most emblematic images of the conquest of the New World, the painting titled *Primer desembarco de Cristóbal Colón en América* (Dióscoro Teófilo Puebla Tolín, 1862). In *Agustina de Aragón* (Juan de Orduña, 1949), in addition to the explicit reference to *Los fusilamientos del 3 de mayo* (Francisco de Goya, 1814), there is a glimpse, from the very beginning of the story onwards, of all of the 19th-century images of the character who appeared in paintings like *La heroína Agustina Zaragoza* (Marcos Hiráldez Acosta, 1871) and *Agustina de Aragón* (Juan Gálvez, 1810), but especially in *Ruinas de Zaragoza*, a series of 32 etchings and aquatints (by Juan Gálvez and Fernando Brambila,



Above. Figure 1. *Los comuneros Padilla, Bravo y Maldonado en el patíbulo* (Antonio Gisbert, 1860)

Below. Figure 2. *La leona de Castilla* (Juan de Orduña, 1951)

1812-1813), deployed with great effect throughout Orduña's film. This is not to forget the veritable succession of *tableaux vivants* that is *Locura de amor* (1948). In addition to the recognition of Flemish Gothic painting noted by Jean Claude Seguin (1997: 230-232), there is also *Doña Juana la Loca* (Francisco Pradilla, 1877) (figures 3 and 4), *Demencia de doña Juana de Castilla* (Lorenzo Vallés, 1866), and *Doña Isabel la Católica dictando su testamento* (Eduardo Rosales, 1864).

The profusion of these explicit pictorial references, which became the iconographic foundations of the cinematic imaginary of the cycle of historical films produced in this period, but especially, and still more importantly, its core function in the discursive cohesion of the films that employed them, lends credence to the constitution of a singular formal model, differentiated from others that were active during the 1940s. While José Luis Téllez (1990) and Javier Hernández (2001) have doc-

umented its general features, José Luis Castro de Paz (2013), giving it the name "Formalist-Pictorial Stylistic Model", has described it in detail in the following terms:

"Its *mise-en-scène* tends towards a static and pictorial composition of the shot, resulting in difficulties for the usual structural interaction with other visual compositions typical of traditional film editing. [...] It is presented like a succession of living paintings and prints, elaborated on the basis of a chiefly pictorial tradition, often referenced literally. The result of an extremely powerful and authoritative statement, this formalist pictorial shot that dominates the Model seeks autonomy and self-sufficiency."

2. Some pictorial sources and their cinematic implications

While it is obvious that the painting forms the very foundation for the theoretical construction of the model, it is worth assessing this intrusion duly on the basis of two preliminary assumptions. First of all, to consider the painting referenced, and secondly, to analyse how it operates in the discursive apparatus of the Formalist-Pictorial Stylistic Model.² In other words, to analyse the visual and figurative (but also thematic, narrative and declarative) features of the painting cited, so that we may then assess how it affects the thematic, narrative and declarative (but also visual and figurative) structures of the audiovisual discourse of which it forms a part.

In this sense, apart from the presence of the Flemish painting in *Locura de amor* (which is actually an unusual device of realist legitimation in the historical cycle), it is interesting to note the preference—if not exclusivity—given to the referencing of 19th-century Spanish historical paintings; a striking and clearly intentioned choice from among all the pictorial possibilities. The presentation of a legendary Spain offered by these historical paintings reflected the interests of the more recalcitrant sectors of Franco's regime,

who demanded the presence on the big screen of a *Spanish* cinema anchored in its history, as noted by Félix Fanés (1982) and José Luis Castro de Paz (2012)³, among others.

The prestige in Spain of 19th-century historical paintings, which were largely derivative of aesthetic movements of other countries (firstly French Neoclassicism and then Romanticism), was the product of the 19th-century nationalist *zeitgeist* that was crystallised in a whole range of discourses which, conveyed in disparate expressive fields, as pertinently analysed by Álvarez Junco in *Mater dolorosa* (2001), contributed to the dissemination of the modern concept of the Nation-State. In this context of identity construction, painters were supported and promoted by different government authorities that had understood perfectly the importance of vesting the concept of Spain with some primordial images that could provide the new national consciousness with iconographic sustenance. As José Caveda would recall in his famous memoirs, *Memorias para la historia de la Real Academia de San Fernando y de las Bellas Artes en España* (Madrid, 1867-1868: 137), it was a period when the Academy extolled compositions that depicted “the great national endeavours, the memorable features of heroism and virtue of our forefathers, reconciling the inspirations of patriotism with those of art.”⁴

But beyond the obvious ideological implications in the appropriation and use of depictions that nourished the traditionalist, nostalgic vision of the imperial myth, it is worth considering here the rhetorical and visual framework that establishes them qua images, the armature that makes them function and serve to underpin their filmic counterparts.

We should note at once that, by definition, historical paintings depict actions. This means that it is a genre that represents events that took place in the past, that tells what happened and how it happened and which, therefore, depends on history and especially



Above. Figure 3. *Doña Juana la Loca* (Francisco Pradilla, 1877)

Below. Figure 4. *Locura de amor* (Juan de Orduña, 1948)

the stories that construct that history.⁵ This narrative imperative conditions the genre. It could be argued that the image in the historical painting is an equivalent of the *event* depicted; its mission is merely to illustrate it, to turn the written tale into a visual tale or, in other words, to make the readable visible. The illustrative function is thus a core element of its purpose. As heir to a positivist conception of history, the aim of 19th-century historical painting is merely to anchor the meaning of the event onto the canvas, to freeze it and turn it into a kind of *total image*: everything is said there, within its bounda-

ries. No shadow, no region of darkness can be left out of the frame: it is the truth, pure and whole.

For this reason, all of its rhetorical strategies are subordinated to the guiding discourse that organises it from within. As the visual representation a text, it is under obligation to include the most meaningful aspects, those facts that enable the correct (i.e., true) reading of what happened. In other words, the historical painting depicts on the canvas the key moments of the event, the narrative *core* that facilitates the illusion of a unified and collective vision through their skilful combination on

the pictorial surface. The exact moment when Christopher Columbus leads his troops before the astonished gaze of the indigenous people peeking out expectantly from the bushes on Dióscoro Teófilo's canvas, or the dramatic moment when the lead rebels against Emperor Charles V are executed in *Los comuneros Padilla, Bravo y Maldonado en el patíbulo*, are no more—nor less—than idealised representations encapsulating the different views and times of the event depicted.

This obvious abundance of meanings imposes a visual signification that likewise tends towards abundance. The total image is a hypertrophic image that closes in on itself in visual terms as well: within it or beneath it, history unfolds in a space and time that operate towards a closure of the event. The *mise-en-scène* in this genre is thus configured under the principle of readability, and the space is articulated as a kind of proscenium on which the characters are organised according to their narrative and dramatic function. Hence, although the compositional possibilities are numerous, stateliness and frontality become the visually dominant elements. The historical truth can only be *viewed frontally*, a view that conceals nothing, that places the spectator in front of the action but outside it, as in a spectacle that can only be approached from the outside and viewed as a whole, in the totality of its meaning.

3. From the canvas to the screen

If the historical cycle of films has any privileged meeting point between the pictorial rhetoric and the cinematic image in the terms outlined above, it is without doubt the opening shots. Indeed, these films often begin to reveal their conclusion in a frame that encapsulates the semantic codes of the plot. *Locura de amor* does so with the dramatic force of Francisco Pradilla's painting, showing a taciturn Juana at the feet of her dead husband while the wind batters his haggard body, a privileged figurative motif and at the same time a

narrative prolepsis that encapsulates in its pathos all of the melodramatic density of Orduña's film. Similarly, under a stormy sky inspired by the painting *Vista de Toledo* (El Greco, 1597-1607), we see the terrible decapitation depicted in *Los comuneros Padilla, Bravo*

**Paradoxically, this
total image can only
be accommodated
at the extremes of the
spectrum defined
by the framing
possibilities: the
furthest away and the
closest**

y Maldonado en el patíbulo, a striking background over which the credits are superimposed. Once again, the narrative foreshadowing of the gruesome scene like the previous one will reveal its full meaning when we witness the macabre presence of Doña María de Padilla watching her husband's execution.

In spite of the importance and function that these explicit and recognisable pictorial references acquire, their presence is not enough to characterise this Model (it may even be debatable as to whether such presence is a necessary condition). This is because, first of all, other films, other filmic formulations active in the period, also make use of paintings to serve different discursive needs. The recognised inspiration of Goya and Solana in Edgar Neville's work, especially privileged and evident in *Verbena* (1941) and, above all, in *Domingo de carnaval* (1945), makes this unquestionably clear.⁶ Without going further than the limits of space would allow here, I will merely note that the paintings used by Neville construct a popular universe that frontally engages the regal universe that acts as the point of reference in the cycle of historical films.

Secondly, the reference is often inscribed in the historical cycle in a manner that is barely perceptible, if not relegated to the background of the image. In these cases it seems as if the filmmaker wanted to show the painting, but without drawing excessive attention to it so as not to cloud the diegetic universe. Consider, for example, the depiction of the death of Isabel, a *flash* of a primordial scene that crosses the screen and gives visual form to the memories of Captain Álvar de Estúñiga, the story's narrator. On the one hand, the reference is presented as of secondary importance, as if included merely in passing, while on the other, the cadence of the device highlights the unbridgeable distance between the fixed image and the image in motion. The opening shots of *La Leona de Castilla* are the same in this respect, although in this case the allusion is also quite remote; it is only its presence within the story that will ultimately confirm the similarity. This could also be said of the painting *Rendición de Granada* in *Alba de América*. Neither the point of view adopted by the camera (much more distant than the perspective of the painting) nor the subsequent fragmentation of the scene in the delivery of the keys to the city makes it possible to establish a clear equivalence.

Therefore, what ultimately defines the Formalist-Pictorial Stylistic Model is not the presentation of paintings familiar to the spectator, but rather their establishment as a formal reference in the visual articulation of the drama. Or, put another way, with the overflowing of the cultural effect, this space of knowledge shared between film and spectator, the pictorial—in reality, a pictorial conception hinted at as a total image—assumes the responsibility of organising and defining the image. This is what seems to distance certain productions that use painting as a historical anchor (falsely historical, it should be added) or as a mere cultural accessory from the Formalist-Pictorial Stylistic Model. In *Goyescas* (Benito Perojo, 1942), for example, the

recurrent presentation of Goya's paintings operates merely as a decorative backdrop to the musical performances. Once the allusion is made, the image resumes its figurative and visual course, which is closer to classical film narrativity than to Goya's pictorial rhetoric.

Contrary to this exceptional case in which the pictorial is re-absorbed by the discourse without further complications, there is a model which imposes an image that resists narrative integration and, like 19th-century historical paintings, is vested with attributes of that representation attempted through a momentous display of a primordial scene. This is a saturated, overflowing image that proclaims its autonomy with declarative violence, as José Luis Téllez would note, apropos of the succession of "*tableaux-vivants* narcissistically closed in on themselves" (1990: 54) that constitute the film *Alba de América*; nothing seems to matter to such an image beyond the image itself. In rather more formal terms it could be argued, paraphrasing Sánchez-Biosca in his definition of the *metaphorical-hermetic model* that would include films like *The Cabinet of Doctor Caligari*, that the negative of the image to be expanded and related to the other images that precede it and replace it occurs here as well by virtue of a particular "virtual identity between the visual form of the space and the visual form of the shot" (1991: 58). However, modernity has taught us, among other lessons, that such identity does not necessarily constitute the self-sufficiency of the shot as exemplified by Bresson, but that it can also operate in the opposite direction: towards the most basic fragmentation. The homology between the visual form of the space and the visual form of the shot in the organisation of such a shot considered as an autonomous whole can only occur on the basis of a non-fragmentary image, a total and self-contained image that renounces its relational value, its narrative condition. This consideration makes it possible to identify certain films which, while they belong to the historical cycle, neverthe-

less do not subscribe to the Formalist-Pictorial Stylistic Model. *La princesa de los Ursinos* is one of these. Consider the remarkable staging of the meeting between the spy and the French ambassador in the hostel on crossing the Pyrenees. The ulterior motives of the foreigners and their machinations unfold in a partitioned and fragmentary space, accentuated by the inclusion of mirrors that duplicate the angles and points of view.

Against such a conception of the scene based on fragmentation and editing, the Formalist-Pictorial Stylistic Model described here advocates the subordination of the edit to the unity of the scene. The event must be presented in all its fullness. This is why films like *Locura de amor*, *Alba de América* and *Doña María la Brava* hardly even need medium-long shots, fragmentary images par excellence that acquire their meaning through their placement in succession. Only reframing makes it possible to alter the space without splitting it up; therein lies one of the main principles established by pictorial and theatrical approaches in the visual formulation of the film model, the same consideration of a *mise-en-scène* that presents the event in its entirety.

Paradoxically, this total image can only be accommodated at the extremes of the spectrum defined by the framing possibilities: the furthest away and the closest. As I will discuss the particular nature of the close-up later, for now I will focus on the general and overall staging of the film, which is without doubt one of the most active declarative instruments in the closure of the image. It could be argued that such an image is doubly closed if we consider Jacques Aumont's argument that both the *limit-frame* and the *window-frame* are deactivated, lacking any rhetorical purpose that would undermine the action unfolding on the screen (1997: 88-90).

With respect to the *window-frame*, the boundary that opens the image to the three-dimensionality of the represented world, its lack of concern (if

not outright contempt) for anything out-of-frame is evident. Making the compositional principle of historical painting its own, the framing operates in favour of the *mise-en-scène* of a *theme* that plunges the spectator's gaze into it: the constable discovering the palace intrigues that have been orchestrated against the will of Doña María la Brava and the king himself; the terrible scenes that will lead to Lieutenant Torrealta's realisation in *El abanderado* (it is no accident that the film follows the Model more closely when history takes the centre of the action); Napoleon's arrogance expressed to his lieutenants that he will easily vanquish the "louse-bitten and pride-bitten nation" that is Spain; or the meeting in the same film of the leaders of Zaragoza with the Countess of Bureta to prepare for the city's uprising against the invading troops, are constructed as absorbing images: everything is said within their frames.

Operating in the same direction is the *limit-frame*, which governs and hierarchically positions the image in compositional terms. There is no twist and barely any foreshortening in the presentation of the drama; nothing that could upset the perfect readability of the screen: frontality is its hallmark. The compositional dimensions tend towards the stasis, verticality and horizontality of their projective axes by virtue of the minimisation (if not open elision) of perspective markers. Hence the noted spatial rigidity that has been a source of critical disdain for the historical cycle, described as "plasterboard" cinema, with an almost *kitsch* aesthetic (GONZÁLEZ, 2009), an undeniable charge in which various factors play a role. The first of these is the actors, whose physicality, performances and choreography "respond to the formalist-pictorial challenge with well-calculated histrionics, achieving a declamatory tone with a marked operatic theatricality, in keeping with certain subtly choreographed movements" (CASTRO DE PAZ, 2013: 60). While Amparo Rivelles and Tina Gascó, in their portrayals of the "Lion-

ess of Castile” and Doña María la Brava, respectively, offer perfect examples of this kind of theatricality, the actress who stands as a performative emblem of the Model is without doubt Aurora Bautista, who embodies more than anyone else the essence of a dramatic type: a woman of unbridled passion for her husband (Joanna of Castile), or a dedicated fighter for liberty (Agustina de Aragón).

Another is the construction of sets “of extraordinary iconographic complexity”, displayed in all their splen-

decorating Agustina de Aragón, whom he defines as a “symbol of all the heroes of Spain”.

The articulation of this space enclosed upon itself, together with the arrangement and movements of the bodies it contains, ultimately defines an affected and meticulous frame, a veritable piece of scenic craftwork that openly declares its illusory nature. Far from being projected into the background, the set is projected towards the spectator as a representation in relief. Background and figure thus converge

figures, supporting a discourse that is both visible and readable and that establishes a spectator very different from the classical film viewer. Like the historical painting, like classical theatre, the representation announces the essential externality of the viewers, indicating their position outside a closed spectacle.

Few images are as revealing in this respect as the first meeting between the Catholic Monarchs and Columbus to share his colonising intentions in *Alba de América* (figure 5). The frontal staging frames the King and Queen in front of the camera, sitting on their thrones, while they interview Columbus before the attentive gaze of the court made up of nobles, ladies-in-waiting, monks and servants, under a profusely decorated canopy on which is written the famous motto of the monarchs, “tanto monta, monta tanto”. There is no contrast between the set and the actors, no hierarchically positioned combination of gaps and reliefs, but rather the opposite, a positioning on equal terms through an arrangement that defines the figures while at the same time separating them.

4. From history to melodrama

The tendency of the Formalist-Pictorial Stylistic Model towards closure and visual self-absorption creates a density in the depth of the narrative, an overflowing of the approach described here into the folds of meaning that can be considered in metaphorical terms. While the spatial consideration distinguishes those films in the historical cycle that only barely participate in the Model, a narrative sanction establishes another dimension at the level of content: in the Model, the metaphorical prevails over the metonymic or, using a classical narratological distinction, priority is given to stories in which “the functionality of being” prevails over those defined by a “functionality of doing” (BARTHES, 1972: 19).

Rafael Gil’s narrative focus perfectly exemplifies the tension that occurs between the two ways of understand-



Figure 5. *Alba de América* (Juan de Orduña, 1951)

dour and referential saturation, which impose their opaqueness of meaning to the point of exposing their artificial nature, their status as stage machinery. Occupying a special place in this privileged stage for great historic moments is the palace: the Catholic Monarchs listening to the dreams of Christopher Columbus, and then later witnessing the evangelisation of the *savages*; the “Lioness of Castile” in the Council Chamber, subduing the misgivings of the commoners after the death of her husband, leader of the uprising, so that they would continue the fight and not surrender the city of Toledo; and even King Ferdinand VII in the Royal Palace,

on a single superficial plane.

This conversion of the set into a kind of ornamental tapestry creates a striking perceptive alteration: the gaze is vested with that particular tactile condition whereby the eye sees and at the same time touches the image. Unlike the optical space defined by the classical view, the *haptic* image that appears to characterise the Formalist-Pictorial Stylistic Model in its extreme, does not establish any spatial homology with the spectator that would bring image and spectator together in the same fictitious topography, but confronts the spectator like the page of a book in which sets and bodies are transformed into text-

ing the story; the filmmaker does not appear to opt decisively for the metaphorical, at least when it might most be expected. Consider, for example, the presentation of the miracle performed by the protagonist in *Reina Santa*. An essential moment in the construction of her *functionality of being* (her holiness), the whole episode is marked by the narrative project of the king. It is because of the betrayal of his son that he has gone to seek her out, to know whether he can rely on her support. Indeed, if Isabel's supernatural character is concealed from her husband it is due to the needs of the approach to the narrative: if Pedro I had recognised the holiness of his wife at that very moment, he could not oppose her subsequent attempts to protect the life of her rebel son.⁷

This narrative sanction reveals the heterogeneous nature of the historical film genre of the period, as has been demonstrated by authors such as Javier Hernández (2001) and Vicente Sánchez-Biosca (2012). The familial air depicted by this group of films vanishes once we begin examining their textual uniqueness. In spite of their obviously historical subject matter, for example, the *bandolerismo* cycle of outlaw films adheres more to the codes of the metonymic genres of the adventure film and even the Western, while many of Luis Lucía's films during the period appropriate codes from the comedy of errors with dashes of the swashbuckler and the musical. Moreover, the undeniable confrontation between the folkloric approach of Luis Lucía and the historicism of Juan de Orduña can be complemented from this narrative perspective. In the first, history plays out in the outskirts; it is not the great figures who engage in the action, but colourful *secondary characters*, while at the narrative level priority is given to sequentiality and causal connection, as perfectly illustrated by *La princesa de los Ursinos*: the plot progresses through a narrative dynamic based on a process of action-reaction revolving around the trickery and deceit of the protagonists.

Conversely, Orduña's films veer decisively towards the metaphorical, to explore fully the black hole opened up by the drama, in an incessant search for the primordial images that will give shape to the major themes and characters presented. Few images exemplify this better than the opening of *Agustina de Aragón*, as highlighted by the voice that initiates the narration. The film "does not seek to offer an exact historical process detailing the legendary feats that took place in Zaragoza, but rather a fervent and exalted gloss of the mettle

formless background, a hazy, half-made space out of which a body emerges, abstracted from its historical conditions, a body that is placed firmly in the terrain of myth.

This tendency towards the metaphorical seems to favour the participation of melodrama in the Formalist-Pictorial Stylistic Model, as suggested by Castro de Paz apropos of *Altar Mayor* (Gonzalo Delgrás, 1943) and *El milagro del Cristo de la Vega*. This is a a classification that could also be extended to the *cine de retablos* ("tableau cinema")



Figure 6. *Alba de América* (Juan de Orduña, 1951)

and valour of its sons and daughters, its heroes and heroines united in the unequalled figure of Agustina de Aragón, a symbol of the valour of the people and of the incorruptible spirit of independence of all Spaniards." Such an impeccable prologue could only introduce the portrayal of a symbol, the very essence of Spanishness, the figure of the nation made woman, rising up beside the canon launching her fiery harangues at the enemy. The most striking aspect of this approach lies perhaps in the absence of any spatial or temporal reference. There is no set or decoration, but only a figure with no background or, to be more precise, a figure in front of a

advocated by Florián Rey and perhaps best illustrated by the second version of *La aldea maldita* (1942), a veritable "parade of stasis"⁸ that is also a parade of the melodramatic style in a *Costumbrista* disguise. It also allows the inclusion of Rafael Gil's *La pródiga* (1946), which, not coincidentally, begins and ends with a painting which on a symbolic level stands in for the wound that distinguishes the protagonist: a gloomy tree on a promontory under which he will mourn the loss of his beloved. And it confirms, as José Luis Téllez noted, that if Juan de Orduña exemplifies better than any of the other filmmakers discussed here the spirit and form of

the Formalist-Pictorial Stylistic Model it is because, purely and simply, his films are consolidated “on their powerful and captivating melodramatic foundations” (1990: 53).

Unsurprisingly, the saturation of visual signification and the engrossing quality of the story are not exclusive prerogatives of historicist discourse; they are equally, if not even more so, prerogatives of melodrama. The hypertrophy of the historical sign finds its symmetrical reflection in the hypertrophy of the melodramatic sign. And while the total image, in its historicist version, seemed to be better displayed in the carefully crafted mosaic, in its melodramatic version it finds its main visual expression in its compositional opposite: the close-up. It may be worth remembering that, as Gilles Deleuze has suggested, the close-up is also in itself an “entity”, an image that only emerges by plucking an object out of a composition of which it forms a part, without abstracting it from its spatio-temporal coordinates; a frame turned into an autonomous whole (2001: 142).

This capacity of the close-up to offer an “affective reading of the whole film” (Deleuze, 2001: 131), to concentrate onto it all of the other images that surround it, to suspend, in short, its narrative fate, is what places melodrama fully in the Model. Thus, the intense irrational excess of *Locura de amor* is encapsulated in the self-absorbed face of Juana demanding Felipe’s love, but also in the infinite compassion of Teresina covering over the dead face of Leonor in *Altar mayor*, or in the dimly lit faces of Juan and Acacia while he passes judgement on his wife’s dalliances in *La aldea maldita*, and especially in the face of Christopher Columbus and his lost gaze to a point off-screen that is, above all, out-of-frame: the hero facing his narrative destiny, but also the hero facing history, which is the same as facing the virtual spectator who updates his story with each viewing (Fig. 6). It is in this infinite gaze that *Alba de América* encapsulates all of its power of persuasion, but also its spectacular failure:

the presumptuous attempt to achieve the unconditional adherence of a subject submitted to such a great vision of history only serves to unmask the delusional unreality of an outdated ideological project sustained by a ghost. ■

Notes

* This study has been completed in the context of the R+D+I research project: “Hacia una reconsideración de la cultura posbélica: análisis de los Modos de Representación en el cine español (1939-1962) a partir de la impronta de Wenceslao Fernández Flórez” (CSO2012-34648). Ministry of the Economy and Competitiveness. Government of Spain.

The images illustrating this article have been contributed voluntarily by the author of the text, who was responsible for locating and requesting copyright permissions for their reproduction. In any event, the inclusion of images in the texts of *L’Atalante* is always done by way of citation, for their analysis, commentary and critical assessment. (Editor’s note).

1 This is a cycle encompassing a wide variety of genres (from adventure dramas to musicals, and including melodrama) comprising approximately twenty titles. It began in the early 1940s, with films like *El abanderado* (Eusebio Fernández Ardavín, 1943), reached its peak at the end of the decade with films like *Locura de amor* (Juan de Orduña, 1948), and saw its decline in the early 1950s due to lack of audience interest in productions like *Alba de América* (Juan de Orduña, 1951). The traditional discredit with which the cycle has been judged for decades has now evolved into a more reasoned historiographical view. Apart from exploring the centrality of the female figure as analysed by Marta Selva (1999), this re-assessment has developed in two complementary directions: on the one hand, trying to better understand its impact on the audiences that it targeted, as explored by authors like Jo Labanyi (2002, 2004, 2007); on the other, exploring the textual tensions of films in the cycle beyond their mythical-historicist focus, as analysed by authors like Castro de Paz (2002, 2014). The irreconcilable contradictions of *La leona de Castilla*, that is, the impossible nature of narrative formalisation

of the confrontation between the “narrow view” of the Spanish commoners and the “ambition of the Spanish Caesar” (Charles I of Spain), without ascribing the role of antagonist to either, is highly emblematic of the complexity of some of these film; moreover, and more importantly still, many of them cannot under any circumstances be considered a mere ideological transposition of the Francoist project

2 A preliminary methodological classification is imposed here. I share José Luis Castro de Paz’s view that the Formalist-Pictorial Stylistic Model, qua theoretical model, is not directly in keeping with the films it classifies. Rather, it is a formal construction which, from the outside, orders the formal similarities that can be identified among the different films studied.

3 This type of referencing is in no way exclusive to Spanish cinema. As already pointed out by Javier Hernández (2001), the pictorial device in historical films was also a constant in the cinema of nearby nations, such as Germany and Italy, and even in countries as far removed from the fascist orbit as the United Kingdom or the US.

4 For a detailed analysis of the main themes in 19th-century Spanish historical painting, see, for example, REYERO (1989), VARIOUS AUTHORS (1992), PÉREZ VEJO (2001), ÁLVAREZ RODRÍGUEZ (2010), PELLETER (2012). On its presence in the historical cycle, see HERNÁNDEZ (1999), GONZÁLEZ (2009), SÁNCHEZ-BIOSCA (2012), MORAL (2014).

5 Unsurprisingly, the relationship between the painter of history and the historian is common terrain in theory on the pictorial genre, as noted by Francisco de Mendoza in his work *El manual del pintor de historia*: “It is thus necessary, once the subject has been chosen, to read it many times until it is well understood and known by heart,” in order to ensure that the spectator will “come to develop the illusion that it really happened that way and that it is occurring in his presence” (1870: 32-33).

6 According to the filmmaker himself, in *Domingo de carnaval* he had the intention of making “a Solana painting in motion”, as well as highlighting its profound association with the masquerade and the carnivalesque universe established by Goya: “There are scenes that transpire on the hills of Parque

de San Isidro, with a Goya-esque Madrid skyline in a background, and the whole film I hope will have that bustling joy of Goya's *Burial of the Sardine*." Statements by the filmmaker in the magazine *Cámara*, No. 50 (1 February 1945), quoted in Castro de Paz (2012: 271). Obviously, Neville was not interested in the historical Goya, whose famous compositions are closer to the pictorial conception described in this article as the total image.

- 7 *Don Quijote de la Mancha* also appears to swing between the metonymic and the metaphorical without defining itself in spite of its attempt to become "an iconographic fastener of the Cervantes classic" (CASTRO DE PAZ, 2013). Compare the filmmaker's version with Albert Serra's radical exercise *Honor de Cavallería* (Honour of the Knights, 2006).
- 8 Statements by Benito Perojo collected in BARREIRA, 1968.

Bibliography

- ÁLVAREZ JUNCO, José (2001). *Mater dolorosa. La idea de España en el siglo XIX*. Madrid: Taurus.
- ÁLVAREZ RODRÍGUEZ, María Victoria (2010). "La revisión de los temas de la Antigüedad en la pintura de Historia Española del siglo XIX: Entre la evocación del pasado y la legitimación del poder." *El Futuro del Pasado: revista electrónica de historia*, 1, 525-539.
- AUMONT, Jaques (1997). *El ojo interminable*. Barcelona: Paidós.
- BARREIRA, Domingo (1968). *Biografía de Florián Rey*. Madrid: Agrupación Sindical de Directores Españoles de Cinematografía.
- BARTHES, Roland (1972). "Introducción al análisis estructural del relato." In Various Authors, *Análisis estructural del relato* (pp. 9-43). Buenos Aires: Tiempo Contemporáneo.
- CABEDA, José (1867-1868). *Memorias para la historia de la Real Academia de San Fernando y de las Bellas Artes en España: Desde el advenimiento al trono de Felipe V, hasta nuestros días*. Madrid: Imprenta de M. Tello. Accessed at <<http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=ucm.5306806878;view=1up;seq=143>>.
- CASTRO DE PAZ, José Luis (2002). *Un cinema herido. Los turbios años cuarenta en el cine español (1939-1950)*. Barcelona: Paidós.
- (2012). *Sombras desoladas*. Santander: Shangrila.
- (2013). "De miradas y heridas. Hacia la definición de unos Modelos de estilización

- en el cine español de la posguerra (1939-1950)." *Quintana* 12, 47-65.
- DE MENDOZA, Francisco (1870). *Manual del pintor de historia*. Madrid: Imprenta de T. Fortanet.
- DELEUZE, Gilles (2001). *La imagen-movimiento*. Barcelona: Paidós.
- FANÉS, Félix (1982). *Cifesa. La antorcha de los éxitos*. Valencia: Institución Alfonso el Magnánimo.
- GONZÁLEZ, Luis Mariano (2009). *Fascismo, kitsch y cine histórico español (1939-1953)*. Cuenca: Universidad de Castilla-La Mancha.
- HERNÁNDEZ, Javier (1999). "Historia y escenografía en el cine español: una aproximación." In J.E. MONTERDE (coord.), *Ficciones Históricas, Cuadernos de la Academia*, 6, 179-190.
- (2001). "Películas de ambientación histórica: ¿Cartón-piedra al servicio del Imperio?" *Cuadernos de la Academia*, 9 (AEHC conference proceedings), 127-136.
- LABANYI, Jo (2002). "Historia y mujer en el cine del primer franquismo." In *Secuencias: revista de historia del cine*, 15, 42-59.
- (2004). "Costume, Identity and Spectator Pleasure in Historical Films of the Early Franco Period." In S. MARSH & P. NAIR (eds.), *Gender and Spanish Cinema* (pp. 33-51). Oxford and New York: Berg.
- (2007). "Negotiating Modernity through the Past: Costume Films of the Early Franco Period." *Journal of Iberian and Latin American Studies*, 13:2-3, 241-258.
- MORAL, Javier (2014). "De imágenes primordiales. Fundamentos literario-plásticos del Modelo de estilización formalista-pictórico." In *Actas del VI Congreso Internacional Latina de Comunicación Social*. Universidad de La Laguna.
- PELLETER, Stéphane (2012). *Cuando los artistas pintaban la historia de España*. Madrid: Ministerio de Educación, Cultura y Deporte.
- PÉREZ VEOJO, Tomás (2001). *Pintura de historia e identidad nacional en España*. Universidad Complutense de Madrid.
- REYERO, Carlos (1989). *La pintura de historia en España*. Madrid: Cátedra.
- SÁNCHEZ-BIOSCA, Vicente (1991). *Sombras de Weimar. Contribución a la historia del cine alemán 1918-1933*. Madrid: Verdoux.
- (2012). "Una nación de cartón-piedra. Las ficciones históricas de Cifesa." In I. SAZ and F. ARCHILÉS (eds.), *La nación de los españoles:*

discursos y prácticas del nacionalismo español en la época contemporánea. Universitat de Valencia.

- SEGUIN, Jean Claude (1997). *Locura de amor* (1948). In J. PÉREZ PERUCHA, *Antología crítica del cine español (1906-1995)* (pp. 230-232). Madrid: Cátedra.
- SELVA, Marta (1999). "Mujeres y cine histórico." In J.E. MONTERDE (coord.), *Ficciones Históricas, Cuadernos de la Academia*, 6, 179-190.
- TÉLLEZ, José Luís (1990). "De historia y folklore (notas sobre el 2º periodo Cifesa)." In J. PÉREZ PERUCHA (coord.), *Cifesa: de la antorcha de los éxitos a las cenizas del fracaso*. Valencia: Archivos de la Filmoteca, 4.
- TORREIRO, Casimiro (1999). "Por el Imperio hacia Dios. El cine histórico de la autarquía." In J.E. MONTERDE (coord.), *Ficciones Históricas, Cuadernos de la Academia*, 6, 54-55.
- Various Authors. (1992). *La pintura de Historia del siglo XIX en España*. Madrid: Museo del Prado.

Javier Moral has a PhD in Film Studies from the Universitat Politècnica de València. Member of the Asociación Española de Historiadores del Cine (AEHC), he has taught several courses and seminars about film and art. He is the author of *Guía para ver y analizar Lola Montes* (Nau Llibres, 2015) and *La representación doble* (Bellaterra, 2013), and the editor of *Cine y géneros pictóricos* (MuVIM, 2009). Besides, he has contributed to a dozen books and has published numerous articles in scientific and cultural journals.