THE DEPICTION OF MADRID AT WAR IN *FRENTE DE MADRID*

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1. CINEMA AND THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR

It is obvious that immediately after the Spanish Civil War, cinema became a powerful tool at the service of the Franco regime's propaganda machine, as a means of disseminating "ideas that legitimised its victory and justified the repression that would follow it" (Pérez Bowie, 2004: 24). Controlled by a strict system of censorship and by interventionist mechanisms that allowed Spain's political authorities to condition film production in a context of economic autarky, the films made at the end of the 1930s and the beginning of the 1940s were characterised by their simplistic parroting of the official discourse of the new regime.[1]

Within the ideological uniformity of the productions of this period, critics have tended to identify a range of variants, notably including films "with a military inspiration, relating heroic deeds that defined the [Francoist] uprising and victory of the immediately preceding years" (Sánchez-Biosca, 2006: 114). As Jean-Claude Seguin (1996: 33) has pointed out, the first to make a film of this kind about the Spanish Civil War was Edgar Neville, who directed *Frente de Madrid* [The Madrid Front] (1939). Neville's film was the first of a genre that would come to be known as *cine de cruzada* ("crusade cinema"), which would develop in the following months with *El crucero de Baleares* [The Balearic Cruiser] (Enrique del Campo, 1940), *The Siege of the Alcazar* (L'Assedio dell'Alcazar, Augusto Genina, 1940), *Boda en el infierno* [Wedding in Hell] (Antonio Román, 1942), *Rojo y negro* [Red and Black] (Carlos Arévalo, 1942), and *Raza* [Race] (José Luis Sáenz de Heredia, 1942).

However, despite its title and the inclusion of various scenes in the trenches that had surrounded Madrid since the autumn of 1936, *Frente de Madrid*, an adaptation of a short story of the same name written by Neville himself,[2] can only be described as a war film in the loosest sense of the term, referring to films that merely address

PAGE 1: MORE THAN 80 YEARS AFTER THE ESTABLISHMENT OF FRANCO'S DICTATORSHIP, IT IS OBVIOUS THAT IMMEDIATELY AFTER THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR, CINEMA BECAME A POWERFUL TOOL AT THE SERVICE OF FRANCOIST PROPAGANDA

the impact of war on society without necessarily conforming to a "repetitive" formal structure (Altman, 2000: 48) marked by the same clichés. No battles are shown in the film, nor are there any military action or adventure scenes; instead, the war is present in the tale of espionage that underpins the film, in which a Francoist soldier has to cross enemy lines to make contact with Nationalist "fifth columnists" operating in Madrid. It is true that the whole mise-en-scène is conditioned by the war, as shots recreating the military atmosphere in which the Nationalist combatants live are combined with others showing the transformation experienced by Madrid society during the conflict. This duality reflects the peculiar reality, practically unheard-of in military history up to that time, of life in Madrid during the war, when it was simultaneously a battlefront and a rearguard: on the one hand, there was fighting on the outskirts of the city, which remained under siege practically throughout the war, with trenches in neighbourhoods such as Ciudad Universitaria, the Casa de Campo park and the slums in the south of the city; on the other, holding out in the city centre, amid the brutal bombing campaigns carried out by one faction and the fierce, repressive violence perpetrated by the other against its enemies, was a society split in two that had to carry on in conditions of cold, hunger, deprivation and fear.

In addition to Neville's personal knowledge of what had happened in Madrid during the war,[3] the choice of the city as the setting for his film seems to have been motivated by "an attempt by the Franco regime to reclaim the city in more than a strictly military sense [...]; to reconquer it, to take it back from the working classes who had been occupying the whole city since 1931" (Castillo, 2016: 99). Indeed, throughout the Civil War, while the Republicans were promoting the myth of the "Madrid of the resistance" and the assertion that "*No pasarán*" ("They shall not pass"), the Francoists were constructing an image of the Spanish capital as a city in need of rescue, for which the priority should be to extirpate all its evils, exemplified by the "Red Terror" that had been ravaging the city since the summer of 1936. In an article published in 1937 in the magazine *Vértice*, simply titled "Madrid", Neville himself argued that the Francoists were fighting not *against* but *for* the capital, to defend it against those who had invaded it with "their rancour and their envy". He went as far as to suggest that the city had been "turned into the dunghill of the world's carrion" and even that he would have "rather died than see Madrid in the power of this rabble" (Tranche, 2007: 103-104). In consonance with Neville's article, the film, like the story on which it was based, could be interpreted as yet another example "of the need that the Francoists had not only to defeat the [Republican] defence of Madrid, but to erase the memory of the city of the resistance" (Gómez Bravo, 2018: 11). Indeed, the depiction of "Red Madrid" as a vulgar, violent and chaotic place is present in other films of the period, such as *Rojo y negro* and *Boda en el infierno*, both of which, despite their very different storylines, include at one point in the story the detention of different female characters in one of the notorious *checas* set up around the city by the Republicans in the first months of the war as instruments of repression. Beyond the ideological dimension, in Neville's work the use of the physical and human space of Madrid should be understood in terms of the lifelong connection he had with the city, and especially with the aristocratic locations frequented by the upper classes,

which he viewed as basic features of the traditional, *costumbrista* essence of the Spanish capital that the Republicans sought to destroy.

2. *FRENTE DE MADRID*: PHYSICAL AND HUMAN SPACES

Frente de Madrid was the product of filmmaking partnership agreements signed between the Franco and Mussolini regimes[4] that resulted in the production of "twenty-four feature films between 1938 and 1943 [...] which for Spain represented 15% of its film production" (Álvarez Rodrigo, 2022: 234). Of these 24 productions, two others were also directed by Neville, who spent long periods in Italy from 1939 to 1941: *Santa Rogelia* [Saint Rogelia] (1939) and *La muchacha de Moscú* [The Girl from Moscow] (1941).[5] Although these agreements often simply meant that the films were shot in Italy (usually at Cinecittá studios) and immediately dubbed into Spanish and Italian, in some cases versions in both languages were filmed, and sometimes different actors were even used for each version, as was the case for *Frente de Madrid*.[6] The fact that the film was the product of this international partnership agreement is particularly significant, as on the one hand it gave Neville access to resources and infrastructures that were unavailable in Spain at that time, while on the other, it helps explain why a film whose title underscores its connection to Madrid contains barely any images of the city, except for a few shots, obviously from documentary footage, showing easily recognisable sites such as the Telefónica Building and the trenches and hollowed-out buildings in the Ciudad Universitaria neighbourhood.[7] There are also a few shots filmed on sets with a dilapidated appearance, showing rubbish in the streets, graffiti on the walls and long queues of people outside local businesses.

The near-total absence of points of reference makes the depiction of the city more social than geographical, perfectly reflecting the myth of Red Madrid present in all Francoist rhetoric about the Civil War. In this sense, the depiction of the city in *Frente de Madrid* is based on the conviction that during the war the Spanish capital encapsulated "the animosity towards certain ideas, towards a particular political system and model for society" (Castillo, 2016: 89), as it symbolised an enemy that the Franco regime interpreted in absolutely denigrating terms through an ideological operation based on "dehumanising the Red [...] [and presenting him as] a genuine subhuman with a human appearance, a being incapable of recognising his God, his nation (as an anti-Spaniard), or his family" (Márquez, 2006: 86-87). The whole film reinforces this interpretation—which is already present in the story on which it is based, in which the "legions of scoundrels" who made up the Republican faction stand in opposition against the "common sense" (Neville, 2013: 44) that guided Franco's rebels—through its juxtaposition in the development of the story of two clearly differentiated spaces: one identified with the "combatant city [...] that took up arms to defend the Republic against the rebel siege" and the other with the "clandestine city", made up of those Madrid residents who, as "opponents of the Republic [...], found themselves in enemy territory and [...] decided to contribute to the victory of their fellow Nationalists" (Cervera, 2006: 24).

Obviously, the representation of these two spaces was in keeping with the propagandistic aims of the film, which portrays Republicans as brutal, almost diabolical characters—with a few limited exceptions—and the Francoists as heroes capable of sacrificing everything to defend what were considered the traditional values of Spain. The *combatant city* and the *clandestine city* thus acquire different values in the film, as while the first is intended to convey the chaotic, violent and "anti-Spanish" attitude of the Republicans, the second attempts to legitimise the rebellion of the Nationalists as a way of *saving* the country and

restoring the *national essence* that the Republicans had tried to usurp.

The story begins two days before the beginning of the Civil War—specifically, 16 July 1936, as indicated by a detail shot of a calendar—when a young couple, Carmen and Alfredo (Javier in the Spanish version of the film and in the original story), are finalising the preparations for their wedding. The set for the opening scene makes clear the social status of the protagonists, who are shown elegantly dressed in a large living room adorned with luxury objects and opulent furniture, notably featuring a piano. This setting contrasts with the scene that Alfredo finds when he goes outside to get his car to drive to Salamanca, as when he steps out into the street, he encounters a dirty, shabbily dressed, bad-tempered man roughly scolding a child. When Alfredo reprimands him, the man replies between clenched teeth: "that's going to change very soon." The man's remark hints at the atmosphere of social tension of that period and foreshadows one of the ideological slogans that in time would become an essential feature of the Francoist interpretation of the war: that the Republicans had not acted to defend their convictions or political legitimacy, but simply to express the *social resentment* that had built up over decades of submission. The first sequence thus exposes the simplistic dualism of the film, analogous to that of the story on which it was based, whereby the narrator describes the events in Spain from 1936 to 1939 not as "a civil war or a political war, [but as] a case of justice and thieves" who confronted "the decent people of a country that rose up against the killers" (Neville, 2013: 158).

The Nationalist uprising and the subsequent outbreak of the Civil War take Alfredo by surprise in Salamanca, and he attempts to return to Madrid to be reunited with Carmen. A squadron of rebel soldiers warn him that there are roadblocks on the highway to the city because it is still controlled by the Republicans, whom they refer to systematically as "Reds". The troubled Alfredo wonders whether "they haven't already purged the city." Obviously, the use of a word such as "*purgar*" ("purge"), whose first dictionary definition is "to clean or purify something, removing the unnecessary, unsuitable or superfluous" (Real Academia Española, def. 1), is a deliberate choice, as it reflects the interpretation of the war that Neville seeks to convey, based on the premise of the Francoists' moral superiority over their enemies, and consequently, the legitimate nature of their uprising, which was necessary to overthrow those who in the story are presented as "bad people", characterised by their extreme degree of "moral turpitude" (Neville, 2013: 44).

The simplistic distinction between one faction and the other also acquires social and aesthetic dimensions, as evidenced in the original story with its reference to the Republicans in control of the Spanish capital as "backstreet scum" and even as people "so ugly [that] they don't look like they could be from Madrid" (Neville, 2013: 24, 43). The film adopts this same simple characterisation, as the first scenes depicting the situation in Madrid are intended as a condemnation of the brutality of the militiamen, who are shown destroying religious images and unabashedly declaring their intention to "annihilate the enemies of the revolution". This opening sequence also depicts a confederal militia forcing their way into Carmen's house. In contrast to the propriety and elegant attire of Carmen and her family, the militiamen look dirty and dishevelled, and their behaviour is rude and uncouth: using foul language, breaking an opulent vase, yanking open the drawers of the dressers, harassing Carmen with lewd remarks, hitting her father, etc. To underscore their intellectual and cultural inferiority, one of them is shown banging randomly at the keys of the piano that Alberto and Carmen were shown playing so skilfully at the beginning of the film.

The sequence ends with Carmen and her father being arrested and taken to a *checa*, whe-

re they will be subjected to so-called "justice by consensus" (Cervera, 2006: 60), an illegitimate, unregulated process that condemned numerous Madrid residents to imprison or even execution, in many cases on mere suspicion of being sympathisers with the enemy, for failing to express their support for the Republican faction with sufficient enthusiasm, for having religious convictions, or simply because somebody had a personal grudge against them.[8] The random nature of these prosecutions is reflected in the fact that one of the men in charge of the *checa*—curiously, the same man Alfredo had confronted at the beginning of the film—approaches Carmen's father, announces "this case is clear to me," and orders his immediate execution. In addition to the so-called *paseos* (literally, "walks", referring to victims being taken out on a walk to the place of their execution, which are represented euphemistically in this scene's dialogue and in a few subsequent shots of a park with the sound of gunfire off-screen), another of the forms of repression used by the political and trade union committees that took control of Republican Madrid in the first months of the war was imprisonment, represented in a scene showing Carmen sharing a cell with two other women. She will not spend much time in prison, however, as a neighbour, Fabricio, will be instrumental in securing her release. Contradicting the monolithic message of Francoist rhetoric, Fabricio is a Republican who is not portrayed as a diabolical figure; instead, he is represented positively as a man who puts himself at risk to save Carmen, explaining that he has supported the Republican cause in the interests of "trying to improve the living conditions of the disadvantaged, not to end up murdering his fellow citizens" and explicitly accusing his fellow Republicans of murdering "innocents".

In addition to clearly and simplistically underscoring the main points of the film's propagandistic message, the opening sequences of *Frente de Madrid* reveal that the destruction of Madrid, understood more in human terms than in strictly physical terms, is one of its central themes. Neville seems to be interested in tracking the process whereby the pleasant world shown in the opening scene, with a happy family celebrating the imminent wedding of the protagonists, is torn to shreds by the war—or more precisely, by the Republicans' actions in that war. While Alfredo is trapped in another part of the country, Carmen's family suffers the horrors of the repression: prison for her, the *paseo* for her father, and confinement for her brother, who is forced to hide in his house to avoid capture by the Republican militias. The film's mise-en-scène emphasises this change, as there is a progressive shift towards increasingly dimmer lighting, which becomes almost gloomy in some cases. The actor's performances, especially Conchita Montes's portrayal of Carmen, also underscores the transformation, as her character charts the journey from cheerful innocence to suffering. The symbolic importance of Carmen, whose fate seems to represent that of the whole city, has led Fernández-Hoya and Deltell Escolar to suggest that "*Frente de Madrid* revisits the notion of the woman as allegory for the earth, [...] [humanising] the events that took place in Madrid and [...] [expressing them] emotionally through Carmen" (2021: 41).

ALFREDO AND CARMEN SERVE TO CONNECT THE DIFFERENT SPACES OF THE *CLANDESTINE CITY* AND THE *COMBATANT CITY* IN WHICH THE ACTION UNFOLDS

As the main characters, Alfredo and Carmen serve to connect the different spaces of the *clandestine city* and the *combatant city* in which the action unfolds. Indeed, the storyline, which draws heavily on the patterns of the spy film and the romantic drama, revolves around the vicissitudes faced by the couple in their efforts to be reunited in a hostile context of war after their initial se-

paration. Enlisting with the rebel forces, Alfredo experiences life on the front, presented from an idealised perspective with images conveying the camaraderie of the soldiers, who laugh and sing[9] while manning the trenches of Madrid's Ciudad Universitaria neighbourhood. This enthusiastic exultation of the rebels is complemented by evidence of Alfredo's bravery when he offers himself for a mission that will require him to cross enemy lines and return to Madrid undercover in order to contact the Nationalist sympathisers who are conspiring against the Republic from within. In this way, the Francoist rhetoric—and especially the propaganda promoted by the Falangists—presents the idea that "courage and heroism defined the male identity: the camaraderie of the trenches formed the basis of all relationships between men" (Vincent, 2016: 137). However, despite risking his life for the Francoist cause, Alfredo never identifies fully with the "brave and strong" men who "stood undaunted in the face of danger and [who were] governed by reason and determination instead of their feelings" (Vincent, 2006: 138), as it is evident that the reason behind his decision to return to Madrid is not his warrior's zeal or his commitment to Nationalist ideals but his desire to see Carmen again. Throughout the film he is depicted as a carefree individual for whom the war is almost a game and the only thing that really matters is love.

The way Alfredo sneaks into the city is extremely revealing in terms of the ideological discourse the film seeks to convey, and particularly its intention to denigrate the Republicans. First of all, he has to find his way through a series of sewers and tunnels to get inside the city, which is thus graphically represented as a kind of *underworld* with obvious scatological connotations.[10] Secondly, the presence of a whole network of individuals able to conceal their true identities and their affiliation with the Falange, like the ones who help him get from one side of the trenches to the other in order to carry out his mission, clearly betrays an effort to call the strategic ability and intellectual capacity of the Republicans into question. And equally revealing is the way Alfredo dresses in order to pass unnoticed in Red Madrid, wearing a filthy, stain-ridden militia uniform.

Once inside the city, Alfredo carries out his two objectives. In accordance with his own priorities, he goes to Carmen's home first. A wide shot shows the house, which has changed little since the beginning of the film, apart from some rubbish strewn around it and a poster that reads: "It is better to kill a hundred innocent people than to save one Fascist" (a slogan which, although it has some basis in reality,[11] was never actually used in Republican propaganda, and which thus seems intended merely to stress the idea of the moral bankruptcy of the "Reds"). Apart from the obvious desire to conceal any signs of the destruction that the Francoists wreaked on the city with their repeated bombing raids (thereby promoting an interpretation of the war in which all violent acts are attributed to the Republicans), the absence of artillery damage on the building is historically accurate, as the Salamanca district, the location of the street where Carmen lives (Calle de Serrano), suffered very few attacks during the war, not only because it was an upper-class residential neighbourhood that was home to many Francoist sympathisers, but also because it was home to numerous embassies (Cervera, 2006). The location of Carmen's home in this district may also reflect Neville's attempt to identify the traditional, pure Spanish essence of Madrid with neighbourhoods in the city centre historically associated with the bourgeoisie and the aristocracy, in opposition to the periphery, which was home to the masses of workers who had moved to the city in the early 20th century. The film thus conveys the idea that the Francoists' desire to take back the city was not just a strategic objective in the war but the consequence of a process that had begun with the rise of the Second Spanish Republic, when "Madrid had turned into a city taken over by the masses,

by lower classes who were calling for a series of reforms that clashed with the values and lifestyles that had defined Spanish society up until that time" (Castillo, 2016: 18).

After reuniting with Carmen, Alfredo comes into contact with a member of the Falange in hiding in Madrid who has managed to infiltrate the Republican hierarchy for the purposes of spying and carrying out sabotage. The film thus introduces the idea of the "Fifth Column", a recurring trope in Francoist mythology related to wartime Madrid, represented with the usual hero and martyr stereotypes. This time, the clandestine resistance is presented in the form of a secret association that attempts to send information on the strategic plans of the "Reds" to the rebels stationed at the front surrounding the city. In Alfredo's various encounters with the members of the clandestine Falangist organisation that he must collaborate with to complete his mission, we can find a number of the essential elements of the anti-Republican underground in Madrid. Notable among these is the radio, which "played a role of huge importance" (Cervera, 2006: 148) because it facilitated communication of information about developments in the war that would otherwise have been impossible to discover in a Madrid under siege and subjected to Republican censorship. The conversations between the members of the organisation—a fictional version of the "clandestine Falange" that operated during the war—underscore the same values of manliness and sacrifice evident in the portrayal of the soldiers in the trenches, as the various characters spur one another on with calls to be brave and assurances that they must not hesitate to give their lives for a good cause.

Carmen expresses herself in similar terms, as after seeing the impact of the war on her family she also decides to collaborate with the secret organisation, recognising the need to "make sacrifices" and telling Alfredo that although they may be on opposite sides of the front, they are "fighting for the same cause". In this way, the female protagonist transcends the passive, submissive role traditionally assigned to the woman, reflecting how "in the complex ideological model of early Francoism [...] the only gender equality permitted [was] that of submission and political activism at the service of the Fatherland" (Fernández-Hoya & Deltell Escolar, 2021: 42). Alfredo and Carmen thus represent the same values (although expressed with more conviction in Carmen's case because, unlike Alfredo, she never gives her romantic feelings precedence over the cause), thereby confirming that the requirements of sacrifice and self-denial traditionally associated with the woman also served for the construction of male role models in the context of military conflict.

THE FEMALE PROTAGONIST TRANSCENDS THE PASSIVE, SUBMISSIVE ROLE TRADITIONALLY ASSIGNED TO THE WOMAN, REFLECTING HOW "IN THE COMPLEX IDEOLOGICAL MODEL OF EARLY FRANCOISM […] THE ONLY GENDER EQUALITY PERMITTED [WAS] THAT OF SUBMISSION AND POLITICAL ACTIVISM AT THE SERVICE OF THE FATHERLAND"

In the course of their clandestine activities, Alfredo and Carmen have to meet each other in a bar called the Shang-Hay, where she, disguised as a cigarette seller, acts as a liaison to bring him together with a Francoist spy who will provide him with information on the Republican army's strategic plans. As the epitome of Red Madrid, and by extension of Republican Spain, the place where they meet is dark, grimy and crowded, with a raucous atmosphere that turns to absolute chaos when a wild brawl breaks out in which everyone seems to be fighting against one another. The women in the bar are depicted as the antithesis of the submissive and demure Francoist female; in fact, many of them are portrayed as prostitu-

tes. A notable aspect of the men is the diversity of nationalities represented (with reference to the brawl, one character remarks that "an African and a Chinese man were fighting"), reflecting Neville's intention to promote the idea that wartime Madrid was a foreign city at the mercy of international powers—during the war, the term *Madridgrado* ("Madridgrad") became popular among the rebels—and contrary to true Spanish values. The fact that the bar is given a name with cosmopolitan connotations (*Shang-Hay*, as in Shanghai) is far from incidental, as it is worth noting that after the war bars and cafés appeared all over Spain with patriotic names such as *Nacional* or even *España*.

After Alfredo escapes Madrid and brings the information he obtained to his superiors, he discovers (thanks to the radio communication system that keeps the rebels in contact with the fifth column inside the city) that Carmen's activities have been discovered and a group of militia men are on their way to capture her. Determined to save her (and proving that love is more important to him than any political cause), Alfredo crosses the trenches in an attempt to get back into Madrid. He is spotted by the Republican soldiers guarding the front, and after an exchange of gunfire he falls, mortally wounded, beside another man in the "no man's land" between the respective trenches of the two factions. He begins talking to the other wounded man, and they discover that although they have been fighting on opposite sides, they both used to live in the centre of Madrid—one on Calle Cádiz and the other on Calle Trujillos, where Neville himself had once lived—and that they had both unknowingly crossed paths several times before the war. Both in the final throes of death, they end up attending to one another's wounds, leaving aside their ideological differences. The film thus offers an image of reconciliation that is quite rare in the simplistically hostile rhetoric of early Francoism. It is an image already present in the story on which the film was based, which concludes with a call for a future "union of Spaniards, the good and noble ones on both sides, against the villains and killers, from wherever they may come" (Neville, 2013: 81). This spirit of reconciliation can also be found in the scenes showing day-to-day life in the trenches, when soldiers on either side of the front shout out to one another, sharing their common interests, discovering their connections in life before the war, and in short, revealing that what unites them outweighs what separates them.

However, to assuage any doubts as to the suitability of the film as Francoist propaganda, the film does not end with the scene of Alfredo and the Republican soldier. After Alfredo dies with Carmen's name on his lips, superimposed over a shot of his dead body are images of Madrid after it has been taken by the Francoists—aeroplanes flying over the Puerta del Sol and the Telefónica Building, soldiers in formation, crowds making the Fascist salute, etc.—that dissolve into a shot of Alfredo and Carmen side by side with a Spanish flag flying in the background while a military song plays. This final shot of the protagonists, depicted as martyrs who have achieved the reunion in heaven that they were denied on Earth, conveys the idea that their deaths have not been in vain, as their efforts helped rescue Madrid from the *claws of the Red Terror*.[12]

3. NOSTALGIA AND PROPAGANDA

The analysis offered in this article exposes an ambivalence in *Frente de Madrid*, which conforms to the aim of legitimising the new regime that characterises all Francoist propaganda while at the same time offering small signs of dissent like those identified above, which could be interpreted as the result of Neville's ambiguous political position and attitude towards Franco, as previously explored by authors such as Burguera (1999), Ríos Carratalá (2007) and Torreiro (2016). Despite its obvious subjectivity, the realistic, documented re-

presentation of the physical and human space of Madrid is central to conveying this message, as it allows the filmmaker to establish a simple opposition between the values of the Republican and Nationalist factions and to uphold the "Red Madrid" myth that was so popular in the first years of the Franco regime. However, the choice of setting seems to serve a function that transcends the strictly ideological, as Neville made use of Madrid as a setting in many of his films, such as *The Tower of the Seven Hunchbacks* (La torre de los siete jorobados, 1945), *Carnival Sunday* (Domingo de carnaval, 1945), *The Crime of Bordadores Street* (El crimen de la calle Bordadores, 1946), *El último caballo* [The Last Horse] (1950), *El baile* [The Dance] (1959) and *Mi calle* [My Street] (1960). The interpretation of the Spanish Civil War offered by the film should therefore not be understood solely in political terms, as it is also—and mainly—a social interpretation, given that the director is also interested in taking a nostalgic look at the traditional, aristocratic, elegant and enlightened atmosphere to which he belonged and which he identified as the essence of Madrid, which the Republicans had threatened to usurp during the war. Madrid in *Frente de Madrid* is thus more than a mere backdrop to the story; it is a symbol used with the aim of erasing the signs of the myth of Republican resistance, conveying the values of the new regime, and expressing Neville's love for his hometown.

FRENTE DE MADRID CONFORMS TO THE AIM OF LEGITIMISING THE NEW REGIME THAT CHARACTERISES ALL FRANCOIST PROPAGANDA WHILE AT THE SAME TIME OFFERING SMALL SIGNS OF DISSENT

NOTES

1 For an exploration of the propaganda dimension in cinema in the first years of the Franco regime, and particularly the importance of film depictions of war, see Monterde (1995), Pérez Bowie (2004), and Sánchez-Biosca (2006).

2 The story first appeared in 1941 in the compilation *Frente de Madrid*, which also includes the war stories "La calle Mayor" ["Main Street"], "F.A.I.", "Las muchachas de Brunete" ["The Girls from Brunete"] and "Don Pedro Hambre". Some of these stories had been previously published in the Falangist magazine *Vértice*.

3 Neville was stationed intermittently on the front from May 1937 to January 1938, working for the Radio and Propaganda division. According to Hernández Francés León and Justo Álvarez (2022: 275), his activities included installing loudspeakers in the trenches, preparing and delivering speeches, taking photographs, and accompanying foreign journalists to the front. Neville's experience at the front—reconstructed by Burguera (1999) and Ríos Carratalá (2007) and rounded out with the discovery of his war journal, "Los que teníamos muchas moscas", written in 1937 and as yet unpublished—provided essential material for the stories "Frente de Madrid" and "F.A.I.", as well as the documentary *Ciudad Universitaria* (1938), a propaganda film made for the National Department of Cinematography.

4 The Franco regime established international agreements with Germany and Italy. Specifically, in addition to the co-production of a series of films, the agreements signed with the Italian fascist government included reciprocal exchanges of actors, directors and film crew. As Cabrerizo explains, these agreements entailed a financial investment by the Italians, who covered nearly all production costs in return for the protection of the distribution rights to their films in Spain and Hispanic America, giving them advantages over other national film industries (2004: 122-124).

5 According to Ríos Carratalá (2007: 259-261), Neville's time in Italy was made possible thanks to the support of the producer Renato Bassoli and (especially) Spa-

nish Minister of Propaganda Dionisio Ridruejo, who facilitated the translation and subsequent publication of some of his short stories—including "Frente de Madrid"—in the Italian magazine *Nuova Antología. Rivista di scienze, lettere e arti*.

6 While in the Spanish version the male lead was played by Rafael Rivelles, in the Italian version, which was released under the title *Carmen fra i rossi* [Carmen Among the Reds], the actor was Fosco Giachetti. According to Monguilot-Benzal (2017: 155-156) and Ríos Carratalá (2007: 262-266), the distribution of the film was complemented by the appearance of two other versions: a successful German version based on the Italian one, released in 1942 as *In der roten hölle* [In the Red Hell], and another Spanish version released after the original version that premiered in March 1940 in Madrid, modified by the censors, who eliminated certain scenes and dialogues.

7 Both these locations played an important role in the Spanish Civil War and in the subsequent mythical narrative constructed around it by the Francoists. The Telefónica Building, which was home to the Republicans' main communications centre, suffered severe damage in the bombing raids, due to both its height and its proximity to Cerro de Garabitas in Casa de Campo Park, where Francoist troops were stationed. It was located on the Gran Vía, the main boulevard that came to be known as the "Avenue of the Howitzers" or the "Avenue of the Fifteen and a Half" (an allusion to the calibre of the bombs used) because it was subjected to so much bombing. In the case of Ciudad Universitaria, the project to rebuild the parts of this neighbourhood destroyed in the war entailed a transformation of its significance, as it became a Francoist "place of memory" whose regenerative force was constructed in opposition to the Republican zeal to annihilate.

8 According to Oviedo Silva, "these prosecutions are a recognisable feature, almost a cliché, of the memory of wartime Madrid" (2018: 374), and in many cases were the work of the porters at residential buildings. The importance of these individuals in such summary proceedings is reflected in *Frente en Madrid* in the porter at Carmen's family home, who is in constant contact with the militias, notifying them of the presence of individuals hostile to the Republic in the building, and who commits petty robberies in the apartments that she is supposed to be guarding.

9 The song they sing is *Adiós, Pamplona*, a popular number that originally served as a closing tune at the Festival of San Fermin, but which came to be used as a song of farewell to the young recruits who joined the rebel forces. Its inclusion in the scene gives the portrait of the Francoist rebels a more populist quality than is suggested in the original story, which stresses the educated backgrounds of the soldiers, who talk about Chopin, Beethoven, Mozart, Debussy and de Falla, read history books and recite Shakespeare.

10 According to Monguilot-Benzal, the presence of the dark passages and tunnels that Alfredo has to take to get into the city reflects Neville's interest in "portraying [...] underground spaces, often gloomy and claustrophobic, which serve as bridges between different realities, the best example of which can be found in his film *La torre de los siete jorobados* (1944)" (2007: 159).

11 Although there are different theories regarding its source, it is widely agreed that the original phrase was uttered by the Spanish communist leader Dolores Ibárruri (nicknamed *La Pasionaria*). Its exact wording was apparently: "Better to condemn a hundred innocents than to absolve one who is guilty." The remark was made in the context of the internal conflicts within the different parties of the Republican faction in the spring of 1937. The "guilty" referred to were therefore not Francoists but members of the Workers' Party of Marxist Unification, who were labelled as dissidents by the Spanish communists.

12 While the film's realism and technical quality were generally reviewed positively by critics, they questioned its "ideological inconsistency" (Pérez Bowie, 2004: 113; Monguilot-Benzal, 2007: 152-155).

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THE DEPICTION OF MADRID AT WAR IN *FRENTE DE MADRID*

Abstract

This article analyses the depiction of the city of Madrid in the film *Frente de Madrid* (Edgar Neville, 1939), an adaptation of the director's short story of the same name. Aware of the importance of cinema as one of the most effective forms of propaganda, Neville depicts Madrid as a war-torn city that the Francoists, characterised as heroes, must save from the "Reds", who are portrayed as brutal thugs. The film, associated with what came to be known in Spain as *cine de cruzada* ("crusade cinema"), is set in the Spanish capital not only for the purpose of the storyline, but also because of the symbolic value that the city acquired during the Spanish Civil War for both sides in the conflict. Beyond the obvious ideological and political significance of the city, the depiction takes on a markedly social dimension through its emphasis on how the war destroyed the traditional, bourgeois, enlightened atmosphere that Neville idealistically identifies with the city.

Key words

Frente de Madrid; Edgar Neville; Madrid; *Cine de cruzada*; Spanish Civil War.

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LA REPRESENTACIÓN DEL MADRID EN GUERRA EN *FRENTE DE MADRID*

Resumen

En este artículo se analiza la representación de la ciudad de Madrid en la película *Frente de Madrid* (Edgar Neville, 1939), adaptación de un relato homónimo del mismo autor. Neville, consciente de la importancia del cine como uno de los más eficaces medios de propaganda, representa la ciudad de Madrid como un espacio bélico al que los franquistas, caracterizados como héroes, deben salvar de los *rojos*, que son retratados como seres brutales. La película, adscrita al denominado *cine de cruzada*, no solo se contextualiza en la capital española por cuestiones estrictamente argumentales, sino por el valor simbólico que la ciudad adquirió durante la contienda para los dos bandos en lid. Más allá de la evidente carga ideológica y política del espacio urbano, la representación adquiere un marcado tinte social en la medida en que se insiste en cómo la guerra ha destruido el ambiente castizo, burgués e ilustrado que Neville identifica de forma idealista con la ciudad.

Palabras clave

Frente de Madrid; Edgar Neville; Madrid; Cine de cruzada; Guerra Civil española.

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