◆ Chapter 4

Vida en Sombras: The *Recusado's* Shadow in Spanish Postwar Cinema

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(translated by Violeta Richards)

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Spanish Postwar Cinema

For some time, Spanish film from the 40's and 50's was called "franquista." Today, nevertheless, time has passed. Above all, a certain consolidation of parliamentary democracy has brought increased critical distance with respect to the regime of Franco. A calmer historiographical reflection allows us to recognize the impropriety of the categorical adjective franquista. *Franquismo* of the early days was above all an extensive and rather confusing counterrevolutionary front. As such, differing from German national-socialism or Italian fascism, it constructed a historically defensive movement, clearly conservative (in the literal sense of the word), lacking both a future historical project and, for itself, a strongly consolidated ideological discourse.

It couldn't be any other way. The very survival of the regime depended on the conservation of a heteroclite front—which had to be realized in the Bonaparte style, constituting the dictator as supreme judge—and it made impossible the adoption of any of the discourses of its diverse factions. This is a long paradox: the

franquista cultural politics never maintained a solid ideological discourse. It was, on the contrary, a politics of the lowest common denominator, one that gathered ideological commonplaces of the conjoined factions at a level of abstraction that almost emptied them of meaning; one that furthermore saw itself obliged more than once to reformulate its positions in light of surrounding transformations in the international sphere.

Thus, in the absence of a well-bound sustained ideology, confusedly reuniting abstractions such as "family," "fatherland," and "God," franquista cultural politics, far beyond what the preceding terms had accomplished, exercised censorship for the explicit good of prohibition. Thus, in the absence of a well-consolidated ideological body, through the negation of everything related to the defeated enemy, the regime's diverse factions could find more or less operative conditions.

In regard to cinematography, the franquista cultural politics established a protective system of national cinema; by means of censorship it legitimized—albeit in a peremptory way—a universe of discourse. Such were the limits in which the Spanish cinema of the period had to develop. Narrow limits, to be sure, but limits traced in a negative manner, which in no way imposed or dictated what should develop within their confines. Strictly speaking, there never existed a so-called franquista cinema. Thanks to this elision, with a greater degree of politeness, we are able to speak of "Spanish postwar cinema." The formula alludes thus to an obvious historical context: that which makes a division between the conflagration of the civil war and the consequently profound transformations that the social body begins to experience in the 1970s.

And yet, it is necessary to note that a temporal demarcation is being made. Though benefiting from a sufficient historical validation, the dividing line still remains exterior to what it inscribes or justifies in the field of film history. The question before us is this: to what degree is it possible, in light of the sum of Spanish films from the forties and fifties, to recognize some common characteristics, seen from the point of view of content, that mark a certain temporal division? If we were to name this period "Spanish postwar cinema," would it be by chance that the imprint of the war leaves the impression of a key date that can permit the orga-

nization and the delineation of sets of pertinent traits before and after Franco? Everything seems to dissuade us from responding to the question: the civil war is found almost completely absent from cinema under Franco; very few films chose it as a theme, and only a few more managed to mention it in passing. But in its absence (understood in the manner of radical negation), we can ask what was it that endowed Spanish cinema of this period with such a strange coherence?

Civil War

Let's begin with an affirmation which is banal only in appearance: *a civil war is a war launched between enemy brothers.* The obviousness implied by this statement will disappear as soon as we undo the humanitarian metaphor and take it at face value: a war between brothers, between children of the same generation who share the same mother tongue but do not recognize any paternal word. If this condition of things existed, if it could be recognized or articulated, the paternal word would already exist on the grounds of the discussion that it actualized.

But there is none of this: the impossible restoration of a symbolic reference leads, finally, to a confrontation in the imaginary: to war, in its most lethal form. We must be sure that our remarks are not distorted: we cannot pretend to cover the reality of class struggle with a psychological veil, the historical dimensions of a combat in which one town on the border of the revolution was destroyed. But if what we must now seek is to establish the textual imprint of the Spanish Civil War in the space of cinema and its cultural environment, we should ground any debate about the same possibility of symbolic inscription, of conversion, in our discussion of a phenomenon that was, we must recall, ultimately settled with bullets. Neither psychologism nor an excess of sociology impedes us from glimpsing some specific problems of the textual nature of this history. At the very least the latter entails lending an ear to the paradox that the expression "civil war" maintains: war that escapes the well-codified confines of the military, that takes root within the fabric of civil life itself, tearing it apart or brutally deracinating the population. War, we have said, in which the factions speak one same (many? the same?)

mother tongue(s). And one, above all, in which each family knows amongst its dead members from both Republican and Francoist sides (although, in either case, they are found in the only side of the dead).

Such is the question that we want to formulate: when something has lost all its force of symbolic inscription, when it has unfolded in the purely imaginary order (of unmediated identifications and projections and through which pass lethal designs), how could it be articulated in the filmic discourse of survivors? Such is the essential problem that I shall take up in this essay, a problem that well exceeds the limits of cinema.

Refusal?/Repression

What is most surprising is that in Spanish cinema from the forties and fifties—that is, in the production by the survivors of the civil war—that same war is almost completely absent; in the great majority of films it is never even named; in others vague allusions are made in bold ellipses (it happens in this way, for example, in *Malvaloca*, by Luis Marquina, or in *Huella de luz* and *El fantasma y doña Juanita*, both by Rafael Gil). But it does not suffice to recall this silence. Rather, its relevance must be measured, and so too its incidence in the textual fabric in which we note its presence.

There are silences that speak in voices made manifest in texts through multiple forms of indirect allusion, by means of displacement, metaphor, or allegory. There are others, though, that perforate or punctuate the text in a radically absent manner, leaving openings that extend their effects throughout the entire textual fabric. Two very different textual economies depend on this type of punctuation. The first responds to the exercise of a determined censorship—the police, a repressive mechanism that excludes what is prohibited but at the same time facilitates its constantly camouflaged return; what is silenced resurfaces, despite all else, through metaphor or other allusive forms that have a positive presence: the prohibited inscribes itself in the text with the force of that which succeeds in mocking structures of censorship and prohibition. Second, there is the function of neurosis: "What falls under the action of repression returns, since repression and the return of the repressed are not solely the law? and the reverse of

the same thing. The repressed is simply there, and is expressed in a perfectly articulated manner in the symptoms and multitude of other phenomena" (Lacan 24).

Spanish cinema of the seventies until 1975 responds in a precise manner to the discursive economy of neurosis. The symptoms are seen in the new comedy of this period (in popular farce we see reflected the accelerated transformations the civil society undergoes, especially in the area of a new Spanish middle class that suddenly wants to be "European" but suffers intense pangs of inferiority) and in the "cult" cinema—then called "new Spanish cinema"—that challenged censorship and defined positions that became increasingly and more overtly critical. In comedy the criticism was glimpsed in the wink of the players; in cult films, in metaphoric allusion. Without being allegorical, these traits characterize the dominant lines of this period of Spanish cinema that, as we have already observed, is prolonged until the biographical death of Francoism. The "biological times" also have here their relevance: in the broad picture we can affirm that this period's cinema is produced for a generation that did not fight in the civil war.

But a second economy, one of psychosis, still exists; it deals with the performance of a radical absence in a text, of a tearing of its fabric that signals a place that is present neither in an allusive nor in a metaphoric way. It is something, therefore, that does not attain a positive form: the presence of a black hole or a radical void that, nevertheless, in its negativity, is traced through determined effects. Lacan, in his re-reading of Freud, has recognized the mechanism of psychosis: "Freud admits a term of exclusion for which the term *Verwerfung* [in Spanish, *recusación*; in English, repudiation or foreclosure] seems valid, and that distinguishes itself from *Verneinung* [in Spanish, *represión*; in English, negation][1] which is produced in an ulterior stage. It can occur that the subject refuses the access, to her/his symbolic world, of something that is nevertheless experienced, and on this occasion is neither more nor less than the threat of castration. All continuation of the subject's development shows that it wants to know nothing about it, as Freud states textually, *in the sense of the repressed*" (Lacan 24).

This is the difference between *Verwerfung* and *Verneinung*, between *recusación* and *represión*: In the second there is denial of

something that has previously acceded to the subject's symbolic world; in the first, on the other hand, such access has not taken place, thus producing a void in the symbolic whose effects, notwithstanding, could be verified in the chain of signifiers.

It is now time to make the principal argument of this essay: the absence of the civil war in postwar Spanish cinema cannot be understood in terms of repression. If censorship could explain a hypothetical muffling of the dominated groups of the Spanish population, this argument would in no case serve to explain the silence in the discourse that is being muted. We know, even, that franquismo tried to produce a martial cinema and that it was an unmitigated failure. It couldn't be any other way: the traumatic rupture that the civil war supposed remained latent in the imaginary. Thus, postwar spectators could not accede to its discursivization, its inscription in the symbolic universe.

Raza

We first spoke of exceptions. *Raza* is for this purpose the best example. In *Raza* the budding franquista state was overturned in the effort to speak about its origins. War origins, without doubt... And nevertheless it is precisely at this point where, in spite of everything, *recusación* imposes its play of absences in a determinate manner: in *Raza*, the Crusade's apology, the nucleus of the martial scene will never be shown, the armies' confrontation will never appear, nor will the hand-to-hand combat that has to end in death.

Regarding this blind spot in which the repressed figure marks its impression, the film is organized in the style of paranoid discourse. On the one hand, there is the performance of a constant method of production which constitutes the enemy's figure; *Raza* finds itself, in this sense, in the same register of the discourses that, in the immediate postwar period, spoke in the name of the dictator himself—for the rest, as we know, the scriptwriter stuffed his scenario with constant allusions to international, Judeo-Masonic, and other conspiracies. On the other hand, there is the articulation of a delirium of grandeur made manifest in a sacrificial key: its heroes are not characterized by their martial prowess, they are never affirmed in the deployment of some always ab-

sent phallic attributes, but rather in their capacity for suffering, in their constant offer to be sacrificed. This is the way in which the protagonist's brothers' deaths are portrayed, the priest as well as the communist-but-repented brother. The visual metaphors that enshroud these deaths espouse an openly mystical vocation: for the first brother, ocean waves illuminated by the light of dawn; for the second, a diegetically unjustified crescendo of light that unleashes an apotheosis of victorious flags.

The light, in both instances—and in many others that would be tiresome to enumerate—inscribes, in an always excessively explicit manner, the theme of illumination, of the access to a certain sacred resplendence of the Truth. Through it we witness a delirium of grandeur that will obtain its greatest expression in the execution and in the hero's subsequent resurrection: an old body that will be seen regenerated by death to give birth to a new, completely spiritualized body, capable of assuming a Messianic task.

This sacrificial constant will be projected even in the remote origins, such as those in which the hero's father lived, with the same sacrificial passivity, without the least real combative gesture, the fleet's curse in the Cuban naval battle: thus the castration is discovered, in a well-defined way, as the return of that refusal of the real which, as Jacques Lacan would say, characterizes psychosis. The film's rigidity is hardly surprising; it especially affects the staging and is notably concretized in the awkwardness of the actors' movements, but much less so in its dialogue. Everything is intended to serve those completely delirious moments in which the (impotent) bodies are sacrificed on the altar of history.

Balarrasa

No less exemplary for this purpose is *Balarrasa* by Nieves Conde. It tells the story of a valiant Legion captain who is tormented by a companion's death for which he feels pangs of guilt (occluded because he was substituting for his friend in a night guard that they had wagered in a card game). After the war ends, he enters a seminary, and while preparing to become a priest, he takes advantage of a vacation to redeem his corrupted family, a dissipated example of the high madrilenian bourgeoisie.

Also on this occasion, as we have seen in *Raza*, the martial confrontations are not all that is clearly excluded: even the enemy is perpetually kept from view. Thus, the bullet that kills Balarrasa's friend comes from a black space *off*, a kind of dark warning in front of which the hero will have to feel a sensation of interpellation.

The film devotes itself, at a ritualistic and ponderously slow pace, to the exchanging of the military uniform for the priest's cassock, of the regimental pistol for the crucifix. The guilt leads, then, back to sacrifice. We see all the characteristics of a castration ceremony. Captain Balarrasa renounces all emblems of masculinity with which the film had endowed him in its beginning (the uniform, the gun, but also drinking, swaggering gestures, his rank as sky champion, and, of course, his fiancée), in order to accede to definitive purification.

The regime's ultraconservative Catholicism is presented to us here as something more than a mere ideological screen or a comfortable commonplace of the ideologies arising from the different factions of the dominant power. In fact, as these films show us, it occupies a necessary place that defends the repudiated figure's dynamism. This can explain the intimate relationship between the period's military films and those of strictly religious stamp (such as *Misión blanca* by Juan de Orduña, *La guerra de Dios* by Rafael Gil, or *Molokai* by Luis Lucía), a relation to which certain films that situate themselves between some and others, without a solution of continuity (*Cielo negro* by Manuel Mur Oti, for example) are perfect testimonies.

Action Cinema/Melodrama

In light of these considerations, a general reconsideration of postwar Spanish cinema can be undertaken. Obviously, this is a task that exceeds the scope of this essay and would require the collaboration of many specialists. Yet, in the manner of a general hypothesis, we can sketch the broader outlines of the project. We can state, on one hand, that the absent *recusado* (the martial confrontations between which they fought in the civil war) tends to extend its presence over all of the period's cinema, thus making impossible the inner consolidation of those cinematographic genres that pivot around a phallic hero summoned to test his attrib-

utes in hand-to-hand combat. Thus, and differing not only from Hollywood but also from other traditions closer to Spain, such as French and Italian film, the absence of strictly war movies, cops-and-robbers, and adventure cinema is striking. In other words, the ensemble of genres that constitute what has been called "action cinema" is not evident.

Systematically, when the principal themes of these genres are reviewed, the forceful presence of the *recusado* leads to a slippage through which the sacrificial (and self-punitive, self-castrating) gesture occupies the place of the unnameable, the unrepresentable. This can be observed in an exceptional way in one of the most significant genres of the period: historical cinema. As Félix Fanés has indicated, the Spanish variant of this genre is populated almost exclusively by female characters. The mere enumeration of their titles is, in this respect, surprising: *Eugenia de Montijo, Inés de Castro, Reina Santa, La princesa de los Ursinos, Locura de Amor, Agustina de Aragón, Catalina de Inglaterra, Alba de América, Amaya, Jeromín* . . . If we remember that *Jeromín* has a child as its protagonist and that *Alba de América* presents a Columbus who is more of a mystic than a fighter, we cannot fail to note that wherever the spirit of the fatherland is glorified, something is opposed to the emergence of a virile hero. Ad hoc characters such as the Cid or Fernán González would have to wait for Hollywood to accede to filmic representation.

Slippage in the direction of the sacrificial, predominance of the feminine (which is extended to the folkloric atmosphere in its diverse manifestations: musical, drama, or comedy) leads, in a logical manner, to the almost absolute kingdom of melodrama. In a certain sense, melodrama can be understood as opposed to action narratives. If the latter is sustained by the virile gesture, by the test of the hero's power and audacity, the former is based on the lack, the loss, the suffering generated by the absence of the beloved. Hence it becomes a suitable field for the staging of guilt and its pacifying correlatives, self-renouncement and sacrifice.

A history of Spanish postwar melodrama is yet to be written. Its difficulty, which has led a studious few to undervalue its quantitative and qualitative dimensions, resides in its astonishing expansion, which leads it to penetrate, in an imperialist manner, all other genres. It happens thus in comedy, whose almost unsupport-

able softening (exception made from an absurd and banal tradition that sooner or later will have to be treated properly) and insanity do not respond so much to censorship as to the constant infiltration of the thematics of guilt—or its more immediate product, goodness. But we could say the same about many other genres, such as the musical (which is always folkloric), the historical, the religious, the martial, the so-called Levite cinema—cinematographic adaptations of nineteenth-century novels—and last but not least, the taurine cinema.

Next to these two great characteristics, apart from this complement, consistent in the impossibility of action cinema and hypertrophy of melodramatic films, we should still point out a last important characteristic of this period's Spanish cinema: the impossibility of including any historical discourse about the present. That is, the films based on historical topics are obliged to find their unexceedable limit in some, always diffuse, moment of the preceding twenty years. This impossibility of reaching the present exceeds its most significant evidence in the incapacity that franquismo suffers in staging its own history, that of its insurrection and of its national resurrection—exception made, of course, for the brief, delirious outbreaks such as *Raza* or *Caudillo, ese hombre*. It could not be otherwise, because in this story's origin we discover nothing other than the core of the *recusado*.

Vida en sombras

Vida en sombras (Lorenzo Llobet Gracia, 1948) is, for many reasons, an insolent film. It radically breaks away from the context in which it was produced. The motive of the crushing failure was surely not other than what made its premiere suffer in its delay, five years after its realization. It has only begun to be repaired after its recent rediscovery by the Filmoteca Española (that owes much to the arduous reconstruction work of the film carried out by Ferrán Alberich) and in its recent televised rerun on "Noches del cine español."

Insolent, in the first place, because, at a time when the regime had already renounced its vain project of making a cinema of the Crusades, it dares to speak about the civil war. In the second place—and this, of course, is much more surprising—because

it portrays, in an implicit manner which is no less symptomatic, the story from the side of the defeated. And in the third place—perhaps this is the least noticeable difference for the unadvised spectator, but, in all, the most surprising for the cinematographic historian—because it proposes, when classical Hollywood cinema is still at the apogee of its glory and splendor, an exciting reflection about cinema both as the site of the producer's desire and that of the spectator. The film proposes a dramatic voyage through its imaginary dimension.

And nevertheless, in its radical eccentricity, *Vida en sombras*, whose title is already an admirable metaphor for the historical context in which it is born, is at the same time a reflection about cinema that at once puts forward and constitutes an exemplary place where the following hypothesis—that the *recusado*'s shadow is cast over postwar cinema—can be examined. What happens when the *recusado*, the civil war, the hand-to-hand combat between brothers, when all these elements strive, despite their absence, to be made present in the discourse?

We will thus try to respond to this question, knowing full well that the analysis that leads to it inflects our own discourse and that this inflection will make it incapable of giving a sufficient account of a film that, in our opinion, constitutes one of the most beautiful and dramatic masterworks that the cinema has known in its entire history.

And a last warning. It would be easy—and it will be necessary to engage the problem, at another time—to link what follows with the producer's stormy biography: combatant on the Republican side, active cinematographic critic, committed to a psychiatric hospital after his son's death, of which he fantasized himself a guilty party. But it is not our intention here to psychoanalyze the director; via textual analysis we will seek, instead, to read a filmic text and give an account of its discursive economy. If we appeal to certain psychoanalytic notions to do so, we are doing so for the purpose of studying discursive economy.

Impressions of Castration

At the antipodes of the paranoid discursivity of *Raza*, *Vida en sombras* constitutes nevertheless a discourse monitored by a psychotic

economy at the very moment its discursive register is situated under the shadow cast by schizophrenia. Here the *recusado* is foreseen, by way of an evident void, in the center of the film. His impact is felt throughout the rest of the text, which in turn endows the figure with its thrilling, anguishing, and palpitating effects.

This nuclear void is constructed, newly, by the war, the object of an ellipsis inscribed at the center of the film. But a first difference should be noted: the two sequences prior to this ellipsis, through a notable displacement, inscribe in the text the most punctuated impressions of the *recusado*. In the first place something that, apparently, would call our interpretation into question: an armed confrontation, on the first day of the civil war, between Falangists and the workers in a street in Barcelona. And nevertheless here the war is presented to us as a war of "others." Individuals without names, simple extras, secondary figures, that will glide along another emergent track in the film, where combat is markedly theatrical. The outdoor street has been abolished by quite evident scenery—while the character, always exterior to the conflict, records street life with his cinematographic camera.

It is impossible, thus, not to note the terms of this opposition through which the war, as the *recusado*'s being itself, is projected in the form of a war of others: gun versus camera. This decisive opposition in the text thus signals, in a negative way, that which will be excluded by the ellipsis: we see a war of others in which the protagonist maintains a non-gun, that is, a camera; but then, during the war that we do not see, the character will try to maintain a gun—even though, in fact, no image will confirm the realization of this desire.

Further ahead, in the duration of a brief sequence in the producer's offices in which the character tries uselessly to speak on the phone with his wife—while her face accuses the persecutor who is firing a machine gun off-screen—returns home to find her cadaver. The war of others is found, then, at the site of her own death; the wife's cadaver is thus connected in a chain of signifiers that recognize in the castration the effect of meaning. Four links are evident:

1. The *recusada*'s war (projected in the war of others)
2. The cinematographic camera as a non-gun

3. The wife's death
4. The death of the child that she carries inside her

The last two links—but also, in a certain sense, the first—give a sense of the brilliant staging of this sequence. The camera shows us first the character in the shadow of the door, as he directs his gaze to an area *off* in which the cadaver is found, in order to abandon it right away, followed by a panoramic shot to the left that, combined with a tracking shot of approximation, arrests on a figurine of the Virgin of Montserrat (the wedding of the two protagonists took place in her monastery) that, only an instant later, will stand decapitated. Then a backward tracking shot combined with an accelerated ascent (a crane shot), will discover him in a tilt at the feet of the dresser on which the statuette is found, next to the woman's cadaver.

This enunciative gesture establishes as its objective a strong association between the decapitated statue of the virgin and the dead wife. We have here, therefore, a metaphor, but one of such density that it becomes the intersection of one of the strong points of the text's signification.

Ana (this is Carlos Durán's wife's name) is apparently presented as a metaphorized term for a metaphoric term for the Virgin. The common semantic elements, on which the metaphor is based, can be thus noted:

Ana = pregnant woman = Virgin
cadaver = death = decapitated body

But the meanings mobilized by the metaphor are not limited to these common sémic traits. Much to the contrary, we will be able to accede to its richness only if we consider the metaphoric effects of other sémic traits that we find in opposition. Thus, given that

Ana = Virgin

then:

Ana = (wife vs. Virgin) = Virgin
(pregnant = mother)

But this opposition that we just isolated in the interior of the metaphor

(pregnant) wife vs. Virgin (and mother)

reminds us of another equivalent opposition that affects the paternal figure. Given that:

pregnant wife = presence of the male as father

and that

Virgin and mother = absence of the male as father

then

presence of the male vs. absence of the male as father.

And this is what we arrive at: the metaphorized term (Ana) is nourished not only by the meaning that it shares with the metaphoric term, but also with those that it finds in an anonymous position:

Ana, pregnant but virgin.

This statement's apparent absurdity will cease in the same instant that, discarding prevailing theories about the metaphor, we understand that a third term exists, exterior to the metaphoric statement (that only talks about Ana and the Virgin): the protagonist, Carlos Durán. All the pieces of the puzzle find their place when this third term leads us to the metaphor via the chain of signifiers of castration (noted above):

cadaver = death = (guilt) = decapitated body = castration = war of others = no-gun = no son = absence of the male as father.

Thus, finally, the impressions of the *recusado* emerge:

the civil war = castration = absence of the father

The Circle, the Mirror

And such is the power of the void being delimited in the film's center: the narrative, even when biographical, far from knowing any kind of progression, devours itself in a circular structure. It is not only because this film ends by returning to its beginning—that of ambiguous ciphered origins in the parents' wedding pic-

ture—that we discover how the last sequence will be, literally, the same one that we thought we had just seen end in a closed gyration that definitively introduces us to the anguish. But also, the film's overwhelming circularity is translated in its division into two halves. The pivotal point between the two is determined by the void that organizes the division. The axis is structured within the mirror.

Thus, the sequence in which the children go to the neighborhood theater will have its counterpart in Carlos Durán's return to the same theater, after the war, but this time without daring to go inside. At the entrance he will see, in the publicity photos, images from the love story during the first part of which he kissed Ana for the first time.

But this theater, where the kiss took place, will be the same one that he will accede to much later to contemplate *Rebecca*, another love story marked by its impossibility. Thus everything is split: the first childhood photographs will be found in an echo, in a similar mise en scène, including a very similar angularity, when he realizes the short film that he will prepare with Luis and Clara. In both parts of the film, a letter from the producer will arrive offering him a job. The girlfriend's picture that hangs happily on the wall will fall later in a necrophilic vision of a familiar movie in which Ana also will look toward the camera. The beach scene, where she confesses her pregnancy, will find its sinister reincarnation in the sequence in *Rebecca* in which Joan Fontaine, also on a beach, will decide to approach the abandoned house—the very house associated with Rebecca's death and another pregnancy that also had to conclude in death.

To prolong this relation would necessitate a minuscule structural analysis of the narrative that would offer us many surprises. But we do not have sufficient space for it now. We believe, in any case, to have brought sufficient data about this specular structure that denies the story all progress in order to constitute it as a circular discourse whose axis marks the *recusado*'s absent place.

Thus, two differences made manifest in the two halves of the film can be noted. On the one hand, the well-revealed absence in the second part of these historical marks that were constantly punctuating the narrative's first part. One of the *recusado*'s strong effects is the impossibility of all discursivization in the historical

present. It cannot be surprising that, in this second part, the protagonist totally abandons the documentary in order to dedicate himself to directing fiction films.

On the other hand, nothing could be so consistent with the narrative's circular configuration. The story is abolished as history, but at the same time as biography: when the collective narrative becomes intimate, the status of the individual is problematic. Furthermore, therefore, from the dark ellipsis, Carlos Durán's biography is converted into a rapid regression toward an always doubtful origin.

A regression that, it must be admitted—and this is the other major difference that opposes the narrative's two parts—will be an *escorada* regression toward the sinister: Carlos Durán's dark pension room, inhabited by resistant ghosts, will occupy the pleasant, familiar house; *Rebecca*'s morbid beach—also clearly phantasmal—will substitute for the beach on the Costa Brava where the protagonist knew an ephemeral happiness. The end of the film is introduced by the reappearance of a calendar with the date July 19, which will remit us to the day of Ana's death and lead the character to her tomb, thus to mark definitively the presence of the sinister in the new film's beginning. In this penultimate sequence of the film, a disappearance of Carlos Durán takes place, which refers us, in the mirror, to his appearance—at his birth—in the second sequence of the film. Appearance, thus through the parents' wedding picture; disappearance, then, just before returning to that same wedding picture where the circle closes forever.

The Absence of the Father

None of this could, in any case, surprise us, because the sinister left impressions, even though less clear, in the film's first part. We should remember the content of many of the protagonist's filmed reports: skiing or race car accidents, floods, fires, including the first childhood film, even when interpreted by a child, that shows him hopeless, spilling his wine bottle in a state of intoxication.

More significant is the fact that all these traces of the sinister scattered in the film are attached to cinema—including the trag-

edy of *Romeo and Juliet*, present in Cukor's filmed version—and, more concretely, with Carlos Durán's camera. This is to say, with the camera that, as we already know, heads the chain of signifiers of castration. What can we say, then, about this camera that, as a fetishized object, the character carefully guards in the dresser on which the statuette of the Virgin rests? And later, in the film's second part, in another similar dresser on which the dead wife's portrait will be found—with which, a posteriori it insists on the metaphoric dimension, establishing a link between this object and the decapitated statuette? Fundamentally this: the camera deals with the father's heritage.

We see then how, again, all the signifiers that we already saw are organized around the metaphor of the Virgin and the dead wife. And the father, whose function we then noted as absent, reappears here as something other than father: far from being equal to what grants the phallus, he is presented as the figure who grants his negation, the condition of the no-gun where the character will remain trapped all his life.

This absence of the paternal function sends us back to the film's first two sequences: to the parents' enigmatic wedding picture—and that because of this it was shown to us inverted in the photographer's camera—that also will have to close the film; but, above all, to that admirable sequence in which the producer's birth is interwoven with the protagonist's own birth.

A little later, in the target shooting hut, the father practices his marksmanship. "My husband never hits the bullseye," exclaims his wife, as in passing. Nevertheless, this time, he hits the mark and receives as a prize a zoetrope. This is a curious prize that only ambiguously sanctions his marksmanship. We will better understand its sense if we remember that this precinematographic toy from the beginning of the century is no more than a popular version of the phenatiscope. *Phenakistikos* and *escopio*, that is, *escópico*, deceit, fiction of the gaze to which the character will always remain attached. It is not necessary to remember now the multiple occasions in which this toy appears throughout the film. It interests us more to note its circular form, which produces an illusion of movement that repeats itself indefinitely. The circularity—of the film, of the biography—is suggestive of the first paternal gift.

Thus there is something deceitful in this shot by the father. What wouldn't be decisive in itself if it weren't because in what follows, this father doesn't appear to render any role. In fact, all the staging, where the producer's magical and diabolical traits dominate the scenography, seems to indicate that Carlos Durán's enlightenment is the product of his mother's encounter with this beam of light from the projector, or with the Lumière brothers' unforgettable train entering the station at La Ciotat. It is, at least, what extracts the first breath of labor in a very beautiful close-up of the woman.

This birth's magical and at the same time diabolical side—that is, in all the senses of the word, an enlightenment—will be underlined by this fair magician that takes a baby from its top hat. Absence, then, of the paternal function that, at the same time that it multiplies the chain of signifiers of castration, certifies an essential deficit of symbolization that will make it impossible for the protagonist to escape the net of the imaginary—because it is what feeds his guilty passion for the cinema—and that will lead him at the film's end to return to the wife's tomb and to that already indecipherable image of the parents.

This is, then, what is at work in the whole film: the impossibility of breaking that circle traced over the *recusado*, the impossibility of escaping the mirror, the imaginary's dominion, the impotence, in sum, of acceding completely to the symbolic order. Perhaps from that the big roll of paper speaks to us, proceeding perhaps from an adjoining printing, but this white paper—like the documentary that the character films and that without a doubt will never be mounted, paper not written that Carlos Durán pushes and makes slide down the street through filming the cadavers of the street encounter. Absence, in sum, of a discourse that could introduce a certain order at the impasse of the imaginary.

The Kingdom of the Imaginary

The imaginary's kingdom: such is the lethal mark in which Carlos Durán's passion for the cinema is inscribed. It is now time to return to the sequence that constitutes one of the most brilliant stagings of such a kingdom known in the history of cinema. In his room, in the dark, illuminated only intermittently by the light

from an *off* where the theater that is showing *Rebecca* is found—that same theater, let us remember, where he kissed Ana for the first time, Carlos Durán alone and, in front of him, in a medium shot that contains everything, the dresser—in whose closed drawer we know the camera is found, the dead wife's portrait, the zoescope, and above both, a mirror that reflects nothing.

He has arrived a few seconds ago, fled from the vision of that other mirror called *Rebecca* in which he has seen himself intimately reflected. His hair acknowledges grey hairs identical to those of Laurence Olivier; with the latter he has merged in a devouring shot/reverse shot that opposed his fascinated face to the vision of the incarnated ghost in the film. And there is no doubt that it is the ghost that returns: "Last night I dreamt that I was returning to Manderley." Rebecca's ghost, which is none other than that of the dead wife, of the non-existent son, of the absent paternity, and of the impossible phallus. All is there, even though in this game of mirrors that confronts *Vida en sombras* with *Rebecca*, the point of view has been inverted: no longer Joan Fontaine's—or Clara's, both confused with the dead wife, but, this time, Carlos Durán's—or, as it is given, Laurence Olivier's. The Joan Fontaine of *Rebecca* or the Clara of *Vida en sombras* incarnates the woman-child, the companion for games—or the Ana from childhood, not the loved woman. She is designated by Rebecca's ghost or by the dead wife and is only possible here as an inaccessible and castrated woman.

Thus, the change in point of view that separates *Vida en sombras* from *Rebecca* is not gratuitous. In the Hitchcock film the adoption of Joan Fontaine's point of view, at the same time that it permits a dosage of the narrative information on which the structure of the thriller rests, also makes possible sufficient distance that separates the spectator of the persecution to which the ghost subjugates Laurence Olivier. In *Vida en sombras*, on the other hand, it is the experience of this persecution to which the spectator is invited to accede: to accede, in sum, to delirium as emergence, in the real, of the imaginary.

Thus, it is Rebecca's vision (that Carlos Durán has detained there where it really ends, eliminating the residual comfort of deceitful explanations) which has been called the *recusado*. The immersion into the imaginary is then presented through that brief

flashback, proceeding from *Rebecca*, in which Fontaine and Olivier contemplate the familiar film that they shot during their honeymoon. But an added minimum is found: above the images from Hitchcock's film appears, intermittently, through lap-dissolves, the word "Rebecca," referring to the theater's illuminated sign whence Durán has fled: the signifier of the dead wife thus becomes engraved over the apparently jovial cadavers of the husbands.

The imaginary has been unchained: Durán turns on his projector and his shadow is cut off above the white screen. Necessarily, the screen that is marked by the character does not constitute a rescreening in the interior of the screen of *Vida en sombras*. Both screenings are merged, are mutually erased in order better to reveal the immersion in the imaginary. He then accedes to the hallucination, to the return of the *recusado* in the real: a foreshortened view of the character's face. In the center of the picture, invading the two screens, the image, in an extreme close-up, of Carlos Durán himself, manipulating a movie camera—the one with which he filmed those same images—that, finding himself logically in countershot, is now replaced, his place invaded by the already mentioned foreshortening of the character that gazes. And on the left, in the background, across Durán's large face, the dead wife. The subject, his specular image and through it, the ghost. No other element is necessary, since it would lack all sense of place. Time itself has been abolished in this absolute emergence of the unconscious. (Because of it, perhaps, the disappearance, with no justification of diegetic order, of intermittent light coming from the window that, against all anticipation, inscribes its sparkle only a few instances before the proceeding flashback of *Rebecca*.) If the camera and the projector have now been excluded from the picture it is because they already represent nothing, given that they are discovered by us as mere substitutes of the subject's gaze, subjugated to the register of the imaginary.

Such is this imaginary universe's pregnant implication, to which we accede through the shot's semi-subjective configuration, that subjugates us to the character's point of view; thus its delirious potency, when Ana's image leaves the picture for a minute ("Hey, hey, leave me but don't leave the picture," exclaim Carlos Durán's images in a paradoxical enunciation that admirably translates the syntax of the unconscious), the subject that looks in foreshorten-

ing by turning his head to the left, following the woman farther away, to the end of the screen, with his gaze. As we know, no spectator behaves like this, no one looks outside of a picture when a character leaves. It happens like this because the spectator knows and respects the law of framing—of segmentation—as the first operation in the symbolic that makes the filmic discourse possible. But here, in this moment, the symbolic laws aren't in force. Because of that, Carlos Durán's gaze that pursues the ghost outside of the screen proclaims that in the imaginary the *off* doesn't exist.

And from the deepest level of the unconscious, where the forms of the imaginary dwell, it is impossible to withdraw the gaze. Thus the subject's gesture in foreshortening marks the spot, from whose point of view, let us remember, we participate: separate his gaze from the screen—leaving his face in profile—and nevertheless he continues—we continue—seeing the ghost woman who asks, "What do you want me to tell you?"

It is not inappropriate to end here: the delirious metaphor has already been consolidated—he who doubts it should remember that sequence where Carlos Durán will smile at his dead wife's picture—where the subject will find his definitive, but precarious, equilibrium.

Notes

1. Translator's note: Included are English translations of the German terms, as found in Laplanche and Pontalis 1967: 13 and 112 respectively.

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