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Unveiling the Monster: Memory and Film in Post-Dictatorial Spain

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Unveiling the Monster: Memory and Film in Post-Dictatorial Spain



Fig. 1. Francisco de Goya, *El sueño de la razón produce monstruos* (The sleep of reason produces monsters), 1799, Museo del Prado, Madrid, Spain

An Honors Thesis presented by
Juan Pablo Pacheco

To Professor Luis González, Ph.D.
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
Honors in the Major Field

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Abstract

In 2007, the Spanish congress approved the Law of Historical Memory, recognizing a collective desire to exorcize the ghosts and monsters from its abject and repressed traumatic past. Spanish contemporary identities are still heavily impacted by the traumatic Civil War (1939) and the nearly forty-year long dictatorship (1939-1975) that marked most of its twentieth century's history. This research focuses on a close reading of three films located within the aesthetic tradition of the Grotesque and the Gothic, and situated within the aftermath of the Civil War: *El Espíritu de la Colmena* (The Spirit of the Beehive) (1973) by Victor Erice, *El Laberinto del Fauno* (Pan's Labyrinth) (2006) by Guillermo del Toro, and *Balada Triste de Trompeta* (The Last Circus) (2011) by Álex de la Iglesia. Spanish cinema has always played an important role in different socio-political debates, both informing its specific historic contexts as well as constructing narratives of the past through its historical representation. I historically contextualize and theoretically examine the role of these films' aesthetical approaches in the construction of Spain's post-dictatorial identities, and the ways in which they open spaces for monolithic and ideologically problematic narratives of the Spanish past to be questioned and reexamined.

“Los ultraístas son unos farsantes. El esperpentismo lo ha inventado Goya. Los héroes clásicos han ido a pasearse en el callejón del Gato...Los héroes clásicos reflejados en los espejos cóncavos dan el Esperpento. El sentido trágico de la vida española sólo puede darse con una estética sistemáticamente deformada...España es una deformación grotesca de la civilización europea.” Ramón del Valle-Inclán, *Luces de Bohemia*.168

1. Introduction

In 2007, the Spanish Congress of Deputies approved the *Ley de la Memoria Histórica* (Law of Historical Memory), after the first draft had been submitted at the beginning of Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero's presidency (2004 -2011). Despite the initial excitement towards the law and its possibilities for opening spaces for historical justice since the times of the extremely violent Civil War (1936-1939) and the almost forty-year long repressive dictatorship of Francisco Franco (1939-1975), a black curtain fell over the initial attempts to officially and publically recognize the historical, social and human debt of the regime. The popular metaphor of the "two Spains" during the Civil War, which confronted the Second Republic and the ultra-Nationalist military forces, remains almost intact in the popular and collective memories of contemporary Spain. Almost forty years after the end of Franco's dictatorship, there is still a great majority of people who argue that life under Franco's rule was better, easier and less problematic. On the other hand, there are those who suffered violent repression and who blame the tremendously unstable reality of the country nowadays, on the lack of a true democratic transition that holds the inheritors of the dictatorial political institutions accountable for their past injustices. At the same time that organizations such as the Association for the Recovery of Historical Memory exhumes common graves of the victims of the fascist repressive tactics, nostalgic Francoists still visit *el Valle de los Caídos* (the valley of the fallen) every November 20th, a mausoleum where Franco and Jose Antonio Primo de Rivera, the founder of the Spanish fascist party, are buried (see Fig. 2). Spanish post-dictatorial identity is in a constant and dynamic process of (re)construction, where several historical narratives collide in order to attempt to exorcize, mainly through cultural representation, the ghosts and monsters that still haunt and terrorize the collective memory of Spain.

Visual representations of history was one of the regime's main tools for totalizing an entire country's understanding of its own shared past, and it is in the questioning and re-appropriation of historical memory through which peripheral social and political sectors have attempted to reclaim their forgotten pasts, and ultimately advocate for reparation and justice. Memory is, in the Spanish context, a space of social and dialogical tension. Franco's apparatus heavily relied on culture, especially cinema, in order to construct its monumental past and the coherent, yet absurd, nationalist narrative that legitimized its repressive regime. Similarly, the main resistance to Franco's fascistic repression and its immediate legacy has come from cultural production, especially cinema, where alternative and plural discourses created and legitimized the "silenced stories" of the vanquished. Since the last years of the dictatorship, and mostly since the recent approval of the *Ley de la Memoria Histórica* (Law of Historical Memory) in 2007, the public debate around the politics of memory has been informed, reflected and in constant dialogue with the cinematic representations of the nation's past. Visual representation has assumed both a revelatory and a controversial role in reviving the traumatic dictatorial past that most of Spain has ignored. Understanding cultural and visual representations of Spain's past is, therefore, crucial in order to comprehend the public debates around historical memory, and the ways in which an entire nation attempts to make sense of its own traumatic collective past. Parting from a critical understanding of the theoretical discourses on historical memory, this research will closely analyze three films produced after the end of Francisco Franco's dictatorship, and the role they play in the nation's process of recovery, construction and questioning of narratives of the past. The theoretical and textual readings of these texts will also be historicized and socio-politically contextualized, in order to locate these films within the broader social narratives in which they are immersed and produced.

My main concern centers on the possibility to open spaces for monolithic and ideologically problematic narratives of the Spanish past to be questioned, subsequently revealing their artificial nature full of internal contradictions and unequal relations of power. In order to address this complex question, this research will begin by critically examining theories on historical memory, cinema as a tool for historiographical inscription, and the aesthetics of the Gothic and the Grotesque. Immediately after situating the Spanish context within these theoretical framework, chapters 3, 4 and 5 will focus on a close reading of three films located within the aesthetic tradition of the Gothic and the Grotesque: *El Espíritu de la Colmena* (The Spirit of the Beehive) (1973) by Victor Erice, *El Laberinto del Fauno* (Pan's Labyrinth) (2006) by Guillermo del Toro, and *Balada Triste de Trompeta* (The Last Circus) (2011) by Álex de la Iglesia. I will examine these three films through the aesthetic theories of the Gothic and the Grotesque in order to analyze the ways in which they respond to and construct their specific historical contexts, opening spaces for the critical reading of Spain's traumatic past. *El Espíritu de la Colmena*, produced one year before the death of the dictator, reveals a revival of the historical function of a particularly Spanish aesthetic tradition rooted in the Gothic and the Grotesque. This initial approach to a historical moment of collective doubt and social change is recovered several years after by *El Laberinto del Fauno* and *Balada Triste de Trompeta*, which emerge in the highly controversial public debate right before and right after the approval of the Law of Historical Memory. Each film in its own historical specificity and context reveals the importance of the Gothic and the Grotesque aesthetics as historically functional strategies that allow visual culture to play a major role in questioning the ideologically problematic "big narratives" of the nation's past.

Even though my analysis of the Gothic and the Grotesque is specific to the Spanish historical context, several other examples might suggest a broader affinity of these as strategies to

deal with and critique post-authoritarian contexts. In late soviet Georgia, Tengiz Abduladze directs *Repentance* (1984), a film where Varlam Aravidze, a stand-in representation of Stalin, is an immortal zombie that comes to haunt the country's present. In South America, after the heavily repressive dictatorships of the second half of the twentieth century –very similar to the Spanish one in its institutions and systems –film became one of the main ways to work through the traumatic past of each nation. Even though there are the traditionally linear films that monumentalize the past through fetishizing the victimization of the left, films like *El Secreto de sus ojos* (The Secret of their eyes) (2009) by Juan Jose CamFaunella, deals with the symbolic figure of a forgotten body that has been hidden and tortured for several years, revealing the omnipresence of the past in the nation's present. The increase in museums dedicated to historical memory in Buenos Aires and Santiago de Chile, the continuously increasing number of memorials to the victims of the Holocaust, and the negotiation of public spaces for remembrance in Spain, all speak to an increased global interest in the politics of memory and its representation.

It is, therefore, imperative that cultural responses to these debates raise critical examinations of these traumatic collective pasts. The Gothic and the Grotesque aesthetics are important strategies that escape simplistic accounts of complex historical processes, activating audiences to question official and totalizing narratives of the past that, in most cases, do not allow collectivities to work-through history and heal the wounds of repressive and repressed memories. The figures of the ghost and the monster, and the construction of Gothic and dark spaces, have re-emerged in Spanish cinema as a metaphor for the omnipresence of an unresolved past that still comes to haunt the present. I argue, in addition, that this recovered aesthetic tradition of the Grotesque and the Gothic in cinematic representations of the war and the dictatorship, offers a more ambiguous, plural and accurate approach to the past, both problematizing monumental and monolithic histories and opening an important social space for critical perspectives on the past.

This theoretical framework and the specificity of Spain's post-dictatorial cinema will dialectically inform each other, allowing me to draw conclusions from the analysis of these particular cultural texts in their relation to Spain's post-dictatorial identities.



Fig. 2. *El Valle de los Caídos* (The Valley of the Fallen), a catholic basilica and the monumental memorial to those who died during the Civil War, inaugurated in 1959, San Lorenzo del Escorial, Madrid, Spain.



Fig. 3. *Against impunity: solidarity with the victims of Francoism*, pro-Republicans protest as they hold the banner of the Second Republic in a walk at Sol, the central plaza of Madrid, July 2013.

2. Haunting Spain through Deformed Pasts: Historical Memory, Cinema and the Aesthetics of the Gothic and the Grotesque

The highly contested status of historical memory in contemporary Spain has transformed the civil society's claim for reparation and justice into a political rhetorical exercise, where memory is strategically mobilized to further deepen old rancorous political debates. In order to understand the importance of the concept of historical memory in Spain, it is crucial to explore its theoretical and historical development. Mostly developed as an analytical tool in order to understand the nature of social cohesion in the construction of national identities in the nineteenth century, collective remembrance was theorized as an inevitable exercise that established a sense of a shared past through a selective remembrance and forgetting of a people's existence in time. However, throughout the twentieth century, and mostly since the end of the Second World War, the debates around the importance of remembering as an ethical imperative and the inevitability of forgetting as a historical condition, have dominated both the academic and public arena. How is it possible to account for the past in the case of post-traumatic and post-dictatorial nations, without falling into an endless cycle of mutual blaming and historical manipulation? Theorists argue that critical history and critical remembrance, based on a continuous revision and questioning of the narratives of the past as inherently fictional, is crucial in liberating the present from both the injustices and the weight of history.

Cinema, especially in Spain, has always been intimately tied to history, considering the narrative and fictional nature of both. Visual representation of the Civil War and of the dictatorship have, nevertheless, usually slipped into the dichotomy of remembrance vs. forgetting, taking sides with problematically ideological and politicized version of historical memory. Spanish cinema, without a doubt, has been the site where contestations to official

Francoist historiography and power struggles between extremes of the political spectrum have been played out, introducing them into the public sphere. Juan Manuel de Prada, in an interview with filmmaker Álex de la Iglesia, acknowledges the status of cinema in Spain as the ultimate bulls eye for the manifestation of Spain's Cain-esque revengeful hatred (de Prada 2010). However, directors such as Victor Erice, Guillermo del Toro and Álex de la Iglesia have reappropriated and revived the Spanish aesthetic traditions of the Gothic and the Grotesque, exFaunding on its emancipatory historical qualities. Understanding the theoretical framework of the Gothic and the Grotesque aesthetics becomes crucial in order to analyze these films' contestation to historical narratives, and their proposition of critically radical spaces that allow Spain to deal with its traumatic past.

Critical Memories: Beyond Forgetting and the Moral Imperative of Remembrance

Since the 1980s the globalized world has demonstrated a special interest in the social and collective dimensions of memory, ultimately establishing what has been popularly designated as the "memory boom." The end of several authoritarian regimes such as Latin American dictatorships, the Soviet Union, and the Spanish forty-year long dictatorship, enhanced an obsession over the idea of historical memory in the late twentieth century, ultimately manifesting itself in western academia through the creation of departments strictly focused on "memory studies."¹ The empirical and discursive interest in memory is intrinsically tied to a concern about humanity's relation to the past, the significance of tradition; and a sense of people as historical beings in relation to time and space. Nevertheless, current debates about the importance of memory reflect the contested and controversial status of remembrance in the public and social space. Historical memory, a seemingly innocent task aimed at shifting the dichotomy of center and periphery by creating spaces for forgotten or repressed memories, has been co-opted as an

ideological and rhetorical tool by the political left, reproducing most of the problematic appropriations of the past for which traditional historiography was blamed. As Foucault suggests in an interview on the topic of cinema and popular memory, “Since memory is actually a very important factor in struggle (recall, in fact, struggles develop in a kind of conscious moving forward of history), if one controls people’s memory, one controls their dynamism. And one also controls their experience, their knowledge of previous struggles” (252). Both the political right and the political left mobilize discourses of remembrance in order to control, manipulate and ultimately maintain their power over the sector of the population that they claim to represent. The question in post-dictatorial societies such as the Spanish one is, therefore, how to account for and remember a traumatic and violent collective past without reproducing the totalizing quest of meaning over historical experience that politically contingent and dogmatic official historiography has conducted.

The interest in memory studies has grown parallel to the rhetorical mobilization of remembrance in the public sphere, where it has become a morally charged tool that is highly ideological and politicized. Even though in their introduction to the *Collective Memory Reader* Jeffrey Olick, Vered Vinitzky-Seroussi and Daniel Levy attempt to differentiate the discipline of memory studies from the phenomena it studies (29), the responsibility of the way in which academic discourse is created cannot be ignored. Works regarding historical memory, mostly when related to contexts immersed in such highly controversial contingencies such as Spain after the approval of the Law of Historical Memory, need to remain aware that their development of critical discourse can be easily turned into a neoliberal discourse in order to maintain social structures through encouraging nostalgia, uncritical remembrance and conservative values. This research responds, therefore, to a theoretic exploration of historical memory in post-dictatorial Spain, taking into account the material and public impact of its claims and analysis. Contesting

more traditional and self-referential academic production, I will use a constructivist approach to historical memory in order to understand and conceptualize discourse and cultural manifestations as mutually dependent and dialectically constructed, relating the Spanish cultural tradition to its historical contexts and the contemporary debates over the politics of memory.

The concept of collective memory was developed during the nineteenth century when European nationalisms were being legitimated through the sense of shared pasts, and what Benedict Andersen called “imagined communities.”² Classical sociologists such as Emile Durkheim, Auguste Comte, and even Max Weber located the origin of social cohesion on the idea of a general agreement on a collectively similar and identifiable past, usually created and enforced by powerful centralized institutions and structures with clear material goals. In his speech *What is a Nation?* Ernest Renan, a French political philosopher and philologist during the nineteenth century, identifies the vital importance of collective memory in the construction of nationhood, which is established through “hav[ing] common glories in the past and to have a common will in the present” (7). Renan, however, suggests that collective identities are constructed through a dialectical interplay between both collective remembrance and selective and collective forgetting (3), revealing the fictional nature of historical discourse. In other words, the creation of narratives of the past that, by definition, both remember and forget, defines the way in which such societies understand themselves in their temporal present. Our temporal relation to existence and our ability to construct both individual and collective identities is based, as Nietzsche would argue, on a balance between our historical and ahistorical sensitivities; in other words, between the ability for remembrance and for forgetting (74).³ Historical memory in Spain accurately reflects this analysis, where a selective collection of past elements comes together in a usually neat presentation of linear history, revealing remembrance as a highly narrative and politically contingent endeavor.

Right after the Spanish Civil War in 1939, Franco's dictatorship emphasized the creation of a cohesive national narrative that selectively remembered Spain's imperial and monumentally heroic past in order to feed the ultra-nationalist discourse of fascism. The regime's approach to the past could be described through Nietzsche's concepts of the monumental and antiquarian modes of historical representation, which idolize and mummify the past in order to consecrate it as an example to follow, or in the most extreme of cases, as a moment to which one longs to return (74). These memories were founded on tales of the heroic monarchic Spain, of nationalist battles and of a feverous tradition rooted in catholic conservatism. Maurice Halbwachs, one of the foundational thinkers of the "memory studies" canon,⁴ suggests, "No memory is possible outside frameworks used by people living in society to determine and retrieve their recollections" (43). The carefully crafted collective memory of dictatorial Spain preceded the individual and was, as Halbwachs suggests, positioned as a social phenomenon defined by power relations and ideological frameworks. Much like Halbwachs, theorists such as Beverly Southgate, Hayden White and Dominick LaCapra identify the fictional and imaginative nature of historical discourse, bringing History and memory theoretically closer than ever before. Southgate, exFounding and discussing White's argument in *The Content of the Form*, explains, "Historically derived 'fact', then, is once again mixed in with poetic 'fiction', all in this case for dramatic (or, once again, pleasurable) effect" (3). Spain's history has been constructed by both the political right and left as a "poetic fiction" that allows their political and ideological goals to be mobilized as truthful and monolithic, betraying the actual quest for an emancipation of the present from past injustices committed during the Civil War and the dictatorship.

The countercultural movements during the last years of Franco's regime in the early 1970s, identify and mobilize the heavily fictional historical narratives of the dictatorship in order to identify their own histories, reflecting what has been called the paradox of memory; the more

we attempt to understand it, the more distanced and absent we feel from it (Olick, Vinitzky-Seroussi, & Levy 20). Rooted in a time of postmodern questioning of unique and monolithic History, social minorities, once excluded from the national narrative of Spain, begin to push for a reintroduction of their historical memories into the construction of a new, democratic and plural nation. As Pierre Nora, who theorized the term of *lieux de memoire* (sites of remembrance), argues, “The passage from memory to history has required every social group to redefine its identity through the revitalization of its own history. The task of remembering makes everyone his own historian [...] Following the example of ethnic groups and social minorities, every established group, intellectual or not, learned or not, has felt the need to go in search of its own origins and identity” (15). Memory has, therefore, become a way of resisting the exclusive and hegemonic project of globalized progress, strengthening discourses that were silenced by official History, becoming proclamations of justice and historical reparation. For many, memory is the ultimate anti-teleological discourse, as it challenges and fissures the universal determinism that characterizes modern discourses such as the one of Spain’s forty-year long dictatorship.

This moral imperative to remember, as an ethical necessity that liberates humanity from the rationalist and positivist conceptions of a singular history, is mainly founded on Walter Benjamin’s proposition of the redeeming qualities of nostalgia. Benjamin argues, “The true image of the past flits by. The past can be seized only as an image that flashes up at the moment of its recognizability, and is never seen again...For it is an irretrievable image of the past which threatens to disappear in any present that does not recognize itself as intended in that image” (390-391). In other words, current post-traumatic societies are almost required to recognize both the unreachability of the past as well as their responsibility towards it, in an attempt to construct a present that honors and redeems the suffering of those forgotten. As Terry Eagleton suggests about Benjamin’s work on memory, the German philosopher was conscious of the

representational and narrative qualities of historical memory, but still considered that a just society would be able to remember it all, recognizing its present in each and every single representation of the past (Eagleton 2). Contemporary societies, thus, measure their success as bearers of truth and justice in relation to their capacity to remember the excluded narratives that were left out during the project of national History. As Elie Wiesel said in relation to the Holocaust, “justice without memory is incomplete justice” (Rieff 52).⁵ In this day and age, total remembrance is deemed as necessary for the creation of a just society, and the discourse on the importance of memory has become a fundamental part –overall in the rhetorical arena –of progressive movements in post-authoritarian societies such as the Spanish. The case of Spain shows the difficulties in dealing with Benjamin’s utopic vision on remembrance, since the nation has not been able to accept different interpretations of the past, and is still fixed on a political and rhetorical fight for a complete and unique consensus on it. The moral imperative of remembrance has become a rhetorical tool of the political left, completely detached from the philosophical project of both Benjamin and Wiesel.

The study of memory and the contemporary obsession with achieving its omnipresence becomes an ambivalent discourse that engenders both highly progressive movements and conservative pseudo-fascist populist discourses. Even a leftist movement that seeks to restore truth can easily reproduce the fabrication of a single and monolithic past that does not allow for questioning, adopting a totalitarian and oppressive strategy under a narrow and partial understanding of justice and truth. Under the pretense that, “...any myth of belonging, it sometimes seems, even an apparently absurd one, is better than none” (Olick, Vinitzky-Seroussi & Levy 20), these newly created alternative and subaltern memories are still nurtured and validated by the authority of memory itself. Foundational myths, both for the right or the left, are important, yet still problematically dogmatic, rhetorical tools in order to mobilize masses. As

David Rieff suggests in his book entitled *Against Remembrance*, the oversaturation of memory evidenced in historical memory recovery discourses, can be highly dangerous and reactionary as it revitalizes feelings of nationalism as it recreates lost stories; “Fascists and multiculturalists alike pay homage to ‘The Duty of Memory’” (48). In their quest for justice, the leftist movements and the Socialist Worker’s Party of Spain (PSOE) have adopted and reinforced the already established power structures that they so vehemently criticized, inheriting from the ultra-Nationalist discourse a centralized and totalitarian representation of the past in order to consolidate a notion of a liberal national identity. This will be reflected in the wave of “leftist films” during the first PSOE government in the 1980s, which mythicized and monumentalized depictions of the Spanish Second Republic in an attempt to gain the cultural war over the legacy of the dictatorship.

Rieff critiques the progressive posture towards historical memory suggesting that it is everything *but* historical; historical memory is used to legitimize irrational and feverous sentiments of identity, sacrificing precision and truth. (Rieff 19) Very frequently, the revitalization or reconstruction of a specific memory –whether it is anti-modern and radical, or conservative and traditionalist –has engendered and recovered lost hatred and revenge ultimately regenerating war and destruction. Rieff, based on his experience as a journalist in the Balkan’s war during the 1990s, explains,

Far too often, collective historical memory as understood and deployed by communities, peoples and nations –which to repeat the essential point, is always selective, usually self-serving and historically anything but unimpeachable –has led to war rather than peace, rancor rather than reconciliation and the determination to get revenge rather than commit to the hard work of forgiveness.

(37)

This is the case of the highly revengeful political discourses that circulate in contemporary Spain regarding the importance of historical memory. The reopening of the wounds of the past, manipulated through political rhetoric, seems to actually contribute to the perpetuation of a conflict between the so-called “two Spains”: the one that supported Franco, and the one that reclaims justice for the defeated Republic. As Nietzsche suggested, there are no facts; there are only interpretations, which are mediated by narrative and fiction. Positivist rationalism seems to pervade both conservative and liberal discourses on the political role of historical memory in Spain, revealing the heavy impact of politics and ideology in the construction of the nation’s historical memory.

Should the new norm be, therefore, to forget? The greatest anxiety of a collectivity is the fact that it will never be able to remember it all, and that every act is destined, sooner or later, to be forgotten. Remembrance, through this lens, is an act *contra natura*, which, as aforementioned, can engender a dangerous “political messianism” (Wolin 42). Critical thought over the past is replaced by a blind obsession with memory that is easily co-opted by political discourses in an attempt to gain votes and reproduce systems of institutionalized and centralized power. The addiction to memory, manifested through the “politics of regret, the fear for the loss of memory, and the commodification of nostalgia...” (Olick, Vinitzky-Seroussi & Levy 36), ignores any type of ideological and political danger under the elusive and illusive banner of restoration and truth. For instance, the increase in the commodification of memorials of the Holocaust, the reduction of past suffering to a touristic token at historical sites, and the omnipresence of monuments that mummify the past in Eastern Europe, South America and Spain, all reflect the dangerous oversaturation of historical memory. The nostalgia created by this dogmatic adhesion to the past, and by the “promise for a reconstruction of the ideal home, constitute the core of most contemporary ideologies, tempting us to sacrifice critical thought for emotional attachment”

(Boym, “Nostalgia and its discontents” 453). In Spain, this obsession has resulted in the commoditization of the past for political, commercial, touristic and violent ends, mobilizing masses to vote for either right or left based on their claims in relation to remembrance.

It becomes imperative to understand historical memory as a narrative and intrinsically fictional endeavor in order to liberate it from its ideological and dogmatic constraints. However, where does one draw the line between forgetting and remembering? Or –in order to avoid a Manichaeian perspective in relation to remembrance and forgetting –in which ways should we remember, taking into account that as historical beings we live on a constant play between both forgetting and remembering? Nietzsche talks about critical history, in opposition to the antiquarian and monumental modes of representation, as a *suprahistorical* exploration of the past that is released from the stagnation of the extremes of our historical and ahistorical sensitivities. In other words, it is crucial to maintain a constant questioning and reflexive re-examining of the narrative and selective construction of the past, based off the ideological and historical context of the present from where it is being studied. Svetlana Boym seems to agree with Nietzsche by suggesting a reflexive nostalgia as an antidote to the dangerous restorative historical accounts of traditional historiography. Boym’s nostalgia places its emphasis on the fluid qualities of *longing*, opening “non-teleological possibilities of historical development” (Boym, “Nostalgia and its discontents” 455). Rejecting the totalizing quest of meaning over the past attempted by traditional historiography, and allowing collectivities to reflect and constantly long for an understanding of their shared pasts, liberates the present from its dogmatic and authoritarian relation to an ideologically fixed past.

Narrative subjectivity defines the historical voice, since the reconstruction or retelling of the past will always depend on its sociopolitical context. Identity depends on memory as much as

memory depends on identity. In her analysis of the historical perspectives over memory in the case of Spain, Jo Labanyi argues,

...the study of the past can never, however scrupulous it is in its use of documentary sources, get beyond narrative constructions of the past to reach a realm of pure factuality (though it has a major role to play in helping to correct misinformation) ... Indeed, without the “social frameworks” (Halbwach’s term) provided by collective memory (the sum of understandings of the past that circulate in any given society), individual memories could not be recounted, since narrations requires the insertion of data into a narrative structure (or mix of narrative structures) drawn from an available repertoire. (121)

Therefore, strategically calling history a fiction, through the exaggeration of the aesthetics of cinematic representation, activates audiences and historical agents to actively question the way in which truths of the past are constructed. Igor Barrenetxea Marañón, who discusses the role of memory in contemporary Spain, suggests that Spain must “speak of the past not as a place we pass by but as a way of understanding ourselves. The past will also reveal itself not as an unmovable subject over which we can obsess, but on the contrary, as an means for creating consciousness and as the only mechanism able to free us from pain through a heartrending way” (12). In other words, appropriating and mobilizing the fictions of historical narrative, is the only way in which the still heavily present trauma of the past in Spanish society will be exorcized and liberated from its political and ideological deformities.

Representations of Object Pasts: Film, Narrative and Historical Memory

Cinema, as a tool for the inscription of time, space and the body into an indexical and powerful representation, has developed along with twentieth century historiography and its post-structural critiques. In the same way in which history was constructed as an objectivist and positivist enterprise during the nineteenth century, claiming rationality over ambiguity and inscribing particular narratives as truthful and realistic accounts of the past, cinema also participates in the sequencing of images from the past that naturalize certain narratives as indexically truthful. Cinema can also serve as a site of memory, where alternative voices reclaim representational spaces in order to legitimize previously marginalized histories. Cultural studies and critical theory have exFauded on the notion of cinema as history, and further suggested the controversial, ideologically contingent and potentially radical space where narratives of the past are continually recreated and contested. Cinema also redefines socio-cultural spaces for the negotiation of historical narratives, enabling alternative representations to explore the pitfalls and problems of traditionally sequential, logical and realistic historical cinema. For instance, Jean Luc Godard's well-known disjointed and discontinuous editing, is used in *Le Petit Soldat (The Little Soldier)* (1963) in order to more accurately represent the violent and complex history of French colonialism over Algeria. Nonetheless, most historical memory cinema is, much like memory, a double-edged sword that mobilizes a collective fear of forgetting in order to monumentalize a fictional and re-created past.

Just like history, cinema is fundamentally narrative. However, cinema is closer to popular memory than to historiography, as it is distributed as a mass communication medium that becomes accessible to most people as referents for their collective identities. Walter Benjamin, Michel Foucault and Pierre Nora agree in suggesting that modernity annihilated and suppressed popular memory, conceived as an organic narrative that was built upon the everyday experience

of people. Modern institutions of power have been able to gradually standardize memory, in an attempt to control, frame and define the present; cinematic framing is syntactically and epistemologically related to the idea of historical framing, both activities of narrative reconstructions of a past that is always already gone. The popular memory of contemporary and postmodern simulacra culture, to use Jean Baudrillard's terminology (25), is cinema, which constructs and offers narratives of the past that constitute and legitimate historical collective consciousness. Pablo Iglesias identifies cinema's "absolute hegemony in the fictionalization of the past, in particular, in the political interpretation of this past" (2), suggesting that those who control cinematographic production –i.e. popular memory –, and the invention of tradition and history, exercise a strong and materially evident power over the collective present of post-traumatic societies. Franco's dictatorial apparatus was aware of the power of cinema in order to standardize popular and collective memories, as it widely used film in order to monumentalize the role of the ultra-Nationalist party in creating a peaceful, unified and "great" Spain. The so-called "crusade cinema" exemplified by films such as *Rojo y Negro* (Red and Black) (1942) by Carlos Arévalo, *Sin Novedad en el Alcázar* (The Siege of the Alzacar) (1940) by Augusto Genina, and *Raza* (Race) (1942) directed by José Luis Sáenz de Heredia and written by Franco himself, attempted to heroically portray the fascist regime in order to legitimize it through the control of Spain's popular memory of the Civil War.

Cinema is consolidated in Spain, as it is in most of the world throughout the twentieth century, as one of the most influential representational mediums of communications, severely altering the way in which we understand "reality." According to Pablo Iglesias, a cultural critic and political activist in contemporary Spain, "The true importance of all of these [historical] facts does not lie in historiographical debates as much as it does in their political representation and mythification. Cultural governance –the development of artistic forms, especially audiovisual –is,

ultimately, the way through which coherent and unitarian national cultures are created” (2).

Cinema plays a crucial role in the creation and consolidation of national cultural identities, as it builds cohesive narratives, and establishes both debates and consensus around historical interpretations that ultimately reaffirm the processes of identity formation. According to Robert Rosenstone, cinema is a legitimate way of not only understanding but also of *making* history, providing meaning to both past and present (1175). Cinema performs both a passive and an active role within society; it reflects the tensions, perspectives and ideas of the society that produces it, while simultaneously constituting itself as a historical agent, able to influence and modify socio-political processes over time. As suggested by Zulema Marzorati in her analysis of cinema as history:

Cinematographic images contribute to generate historical consciousness in the mind of the modern citizen, helping historians to understand the societies where the films were made. Films stop being only entertainment, becoming documentations of great political influence, highly revelatory of historical tensions and issues that, through the representation of reality, sheds light unto social processes. (44)

That is to say, cinema is a pedagogical tool that provide societies with a perspective and a synthesis of cultural, ideological and political phenomena, solidifying certain narratives once they distributed are inscribed. Cinema continues to play a distinct role in the re-creation of Spain’s post-dictatorial identities in their search for justice through remembrance; historical memory cinema reopens difficult discussions in the public sphere, invoking the ghosts of a forgotten but still present past.

Film’s role in creating collective radical consciousness is crucial in the Spanish context. Taking into account the Foucauldian notion that all power engenders resistance, the big and monolithic narratives of both the dictatorship and of the official left once in power can and

should be questioned by other forms of representation (Foucault, “The subject and power” 780). In order to avoid the ontological paradox of power, where struggles against it further legitimize its presence and importance, I suggest that cinematic representations that question the structural nature of memory’s social configurations create tensions that are able to reconfigure unequal and problematic relations of power. Within the study of historical memory cinema in Spain, my analysis lies within a socio-historical perspective of visual representation, where the cultural product and the visual representation are conceptualized within an ideological and discourse framework in constant dialogue with its production and reception contexts, as discussed by both Marzorati and Labanyi. It is crucial to remember that culture cannot be understood as isolated or different from the political. In other words, political discourses and action bear a mutually constitutive relation with culture. The analysis of cinema as history, within the representational world, helps us to understand and analyze history as a representational narrative; historical memory cinema localizes political subjectivity, revealing the relations of power in the development and (re)construction of the past.

The case of Spanish historical memory is full of cinematographic examples that define, reflect and discuss both official and countercultural versions of the Civil War, the dictatorship and post-Francoism. Analyzing Spanish history through cinema, Pablo Iglesias quotes one of the canonical theorists within memory studies, Eric Hobsbawn, when he argues, “*When the global memory of the Spanish Civil War was created, the pen, the brush and the camera used in favor of the vanquished proved to be more powerful than the sword and the power of the winners*” (Iglesias 5-6). The official and state-sponsored cinema, directly controlled by an oppressive and selective authoritarian apparatus, is contested by the cinema of the vanquished during the aftermath of the dictatorship, evidencing the need for reconciliation in the face of a failed transition to a just and democratic Spain. Revenge and victimization, even within the cultural

arena, continue to be the main way through which the political left derives its legitimacy. That is way, as suggested by Barrenetxea Marañón, it is necessary to produce and create symbolisms that betray the tyranny of the historical *fact* in order to emancipate the past from its dogmatic constraints (10). Cinema becomes a *lieux de mémoire* where fact and fiction come together in a way in which the constructed nature of history is revealed, and where the potential to reevaluate static and problematic narratives becomes tangible and accessible.

The Gothic and the Grotesque: Radical Possibilities of Cinematic Aesthetics

In the same way in which the field of memory studies developed as a reaction to modernity's teleological conception of progress and time, both the Gothic and the Grotesque were conceptualized and developed as aesthetic reactions to the heavily rational and modern notions of history.⁶ These two parallel and often intersectional aesthetic movements find their origins in an opposition to rationalist and hierarchical conceptions of social reality, namely medieval feudalism, the industrial revolution and the enlightenment, and ultimately neoliberal multinational modernity. For Fred Botting, Catherine Spooner, Julia Briggs and Mikhail Bakhtin, the Gothic novel that emerged in the eighteenth century—which for Bakhtin is a romantic version of the Grotesque aesthetics—was a reaction to the Enlightenment's "cold rationalism, against official, formalistic, and logical authoritarianism..." (Bakhtin 37). Botting suggests that the Enlightenment's heavy emphasis on rationality and positivism produced the Gothic, as the latter condensed the dark, supernatural, irrational and ultimately unworthy antithesis of modernity's hegemonic project (3). In a dialectical exercise, Gothic established a reflexive dialogue with modernity's conceptions of time, history and the past in order to account for what was being left out by rationalism: namely the unexplainable, non-representable and dark side of social realities still distorted and haunted by oppression and inequality.⁷

The liminal space occupied by the Gothic, as some sort of bastard and illegitimate child of modernity, resonates with Bakhtin's discussion of the Grotesque. Bakhtin considers the eighteenth century Gothic as a "romantic Grotesque" that emerged from the already subversive and transgressive practices associated with the spirit of the medieval carnivalesque strategies, where social categories and hierarchies were inversed and challenged. The medieval "...carnival celebrated temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order; it marked the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms, and prohibitions. Carnival was the true feast of time, the feast of becoming, change, and renewal. It was hostile to all that was immortalized and completed" (Bakhtin 10). The Grotesque associated with the inversion of social expectations, served to free the material present from the dogmatic discourses that maintained unequal relations of power. The cyclical and non-linear conception of time of the medieval carnival is eventually challenged by the Renaissance's historical consciousness, which rejects popular memory practices in favor of rational and linear conceptions of time, history and progress. The tension between what used to be emancipatory moments of hierarchical subversion and modernity's rationalism is echoed and represented through Gothic aesthetics, which challenges the very notion of the possibility of inscribing reality or time in linear historical thought.

The Gothic's aesthetics also echo many of the concerns manifested by Romanticism (McEvoy 19), the fantastic (Todorov 45; Jackson, 95) and science fiction (Tibbetts 5), since they all blur the lines between fiction and reality, rationality and irrationality, denouncing modernity's conception of time as linear and of history as objective and controllable. Simon Hay's analysis of the modern British ghost story echoes Todorov's claim that "the literature of the fantastic is nothing but the bad conscience of this positivist era" (168), by claiming that the Gothic ghost story is a "*failed* modernity narrative" (Hay 15). This is, precisely, the fundamental relation of the

Gothic and the Grotesque to history, and where their radical contestation to traditional historiography lies; they reveal the constructed nature of neatly presented narratives of the past by pointing at their silences and dark spaces. The Gothic and the Grotesque's historical function of destabilizing modern historiography's artificially and ideologically powerful boundaries between reality/fiction and past/present, is inscribed through the tropes of the fantastic, the uncanny, disfiguration, distortion and the horrific. The fantastic, as suggested by Rosemary Jackson, challenges and defamiliarizes the *real*, through pointing to or suggesting "the basis upon which cultural order rests, for it opens up, for a brief moment, on to disorder, on to illegality, on to that which lies outside the law, that which is outside dominant value systems" (Jackson, 4). The fantastic, therefore, also serves a historical and important ideological function, as it reveals the constructed nature of social order and cultural norms, challenging them through its metemorphosing. Tzvetan Todorov, in his work *The Fantastic*, identifies the liminal nature of the uncanny and the marvelous as the main determinant of the fantastic genre; the idea of hesitation becomes crucial to the definition of fantastic works. The uncanny becomes the aesthetic form adopted to represent the unsaid and the repressed; historical memory –or any other form of narrative excluded from modern historiography –speaks through imagery of distortion and disfiguration, as well as through the figures of the ghostly, the fantastic and the horrific. These historical strategies are mobilized within the Spanish aesthetic tradition in order to question the official versions of reality propagated by centralized history, which are conflated with fiction through Gothic and Grotesque exaggeration.

Even though the Gothic and the Grotesque have been classically defined in different generic worlds, I argue that their historical critical functions are indeed more intimately related, as they both respond to repressive and hierarchical structures of power that deny the fundamental inaccessibility and incomprehensibility of the past. In other words, both aesthetic traditions

challenge the totalizing quest of meaning exercised by powerful institutions, which tend to be informed by dangerous political rhetoric. These functions are also more deeply tied to realism than to Romanticism, which is also a literary and aesthetic genre largely explored by the Spanish artistic tradition during the nineteenth century. Romanticism usually opposes modernity through the figure of the inner exile, attaching a positive notion of imaginative creativity to the eternal possibilities of human subjectivity, and rejecting any attachment to the idea of the “real.”

However, the “heterotopic mirror of the past” discovered by the Gothic’s aesthetics, is appropriated by the “romantic poets, while Gothic finds itself relegated to the popular and trashy realm of cheap, formulaic fiction” (Botting 12). Literary theory consecrates the Romantic as higher aesthetics, more spiritual and aural than the visual and Grotesque characteristics of the Gothic (McEvoy 19). The romanticist’s emancipation from the limitations of modernity and historical irrationality acquires a tone of morality and righteousness, whereas the Gothic sublime “...does not (dare not?) impose its moral principle; instead, the submission to the sublime is against our will, and transcendence is the bliss of pure negation” (Mishra 11). Therefore, as suggested by these three theorists, the Romantic’s aesthetic is tied to a denial of reality, opposite to the intrinsically realistic and historical function of the Gothic and the Grotesque in treating the past and their specific social contexts. The tragedies and forgotten memories of the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth century find in the Gothic a way to come back, as ghosts and monsters, to haunt the present. Opposite to romanticist, surrealist, absurdist and existentialist imaginative crises, the Gothic and the Grotesque ground historical criticism in a distorted realism that exposes the dangerous nostalgia of the historical stagnation of the past and of time.

The Spanish artistic and representational culture has been founded on aesthetic principles that find deep roots in the Grotesque and Gothic deconstructivist and postmodern strategies. The imaginatively tragic paintings of El Greco in the sixteenth century, the satirical novels of

Francisco de Quevedo in the seventeenth century full of Grotesque and dark humor, the obscure paintings of Francisco Goya's dark period in the nineteenth century and, finally, the theatrical *esperpento*⁸ in *Luces de Bohemia* by Ramón del Valle-Inclán in the twentieth century, all reflect an inclination for deforming space, time and shape, and for Grotesque humor and exaggeration. A legacy of the baroque and catholic tradition, the cultural idiosyncrasy of Spain is characterized by a denial of rationality and the belief in the invisible, the exaggerated and excessive qualities of expressive representation –reminiscent of German expressionism or to Italian *Commedia dell'Arte*. Interestingly enough, most of these artistic and aesthetic manifestations respond and relate to oppressive contexts, marked by violence and suffering. As Bakhtin, Kelly Hurley, Peter Podol, Anthony Zahareas and Rodolfo Cardona appear to agree, the uncanny and carnivalesque features of the Gothic and the Grotesque distances and defamiliarizes us from the centralizing and exclusive project of History, opening spaces for critical perspectives on collective traumatic pasts. The subversive possibilities of Grotesque and Gothic representations, full of high contrast and inaccessibility, are bound by specific historical times. Most specifically, the late period of the Spanish dictatorship in the early 1970s marks a socio-cultural space where the most accurate way to represent the repressed silences and the ghostly trauma of an entire nation is through Gothic and Grotesque aesthetics.

Cinema, as an inscription of historical consciousness in visual representation, adopted the figures of Gothic literature in order to create narratives that entered into a critical dialogue with national and cinematographic histories. The doubts towards narratives of positivist science and progress evidenced through the Gothic ghosts and monsters of the nineteenth century such as Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, Bram Stoker's *Dracula* or Robert Louis Stevenson's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, were echoed in cinematic Gothic aesthetics. Classic examples of these aesthetics such as *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1920), *Nosferatu* (1922) or *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*

(1939) made use of the techniques of chiaroscuro, hyper-formalist cinematography, and excess – already utilized by renaissance and Grottesque painters such as Goya, Rembrandt, Caravaggio and Rabelais –in order to construct monsters that critically responded to their specific historical times.

⁹ The creation of liminal spaces that blurred the lines between rationality (history) and irrationality (fiction) was able to challenge the moderation and rationality of social hierarchy and order. The rather obscure horror typically associated with the Gothic echoes the most celebratory tone of the Grottesque carnivalesque, as both fragment the coherent yet exclusive historiographical inscriptions of the past through mocking social structures and revealing the inner inconsistencies of modern narratives through exaggeration and horror. Spanish cinema reflects a cultural memory of its own tradition where pain and suffering are represented through a Grottesque humor, hyper theatricality and high contrasts. Pedro Almodóvar's humor, the silences and profundity of Victor Erice, the excessive and monstrous aesthetics of Álex de la Iglesia and Guillermo del Toro, exemplify the Gothic chiaroscuro that represents the anxiety and uneasiness of a traumatized nation, sunk in collective madness.

The representations of the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) and Franco's dictatorship (1939-1975) repeatedly make use of this excessively crude aesthetics, exaggerating the expression of the most horrifying aspects of reality. Within this aesthetic tradition we find tragic stories that confuse history and fiction, highlighting the subjective and fantastic nature of history, re-inscribing a critical narrative of the past, and ultimately positioning themselves as versions of critical memories within the cultural arena. This is the case of the films that will be further discussed which, even though being unevenly distributed over chronological time, mobilize the Gothic and Grottesque aesthetics in order to critically respond to their specific historical contexts. *El Espíritu de la Colmena* (1973) by Victor Erice, *El Laberinto del Fauno* (2006) by Guillermo del Toro and *Balada Triste de Trompeta* (2010) by Álex de la Iglesia, are connected by their

depiction of Spanish twentieth century traumatic and violent history through an exaggerated and darkly humorous aesthetic, and the use of the monster and the ghost as tropes proper to the Gothic and the Grotesque. José Colmeiro suggests, “the comeback of the past as spectre would be, thus, a symptom of a collective incapacity to correctly comprehend it, but it also offers the possibility for rectification, recognition and reparation” (33). The presence of monsters and ghosts in these movies reflect the social anxieties and doubts towards narratives of progress and linearity that neglect the continuity of the past into the present, and provide a much more complex and ambiguous reading of the past that lies outside of the dogmatic and rhetorical schemes of both the political left and right.

The aesthetic strategies of the Gothic and the Grotesque developed around that which modernity could not access, attempting to reveal the fragmented, irrational and inaccessible nature of reality and of the past. David Punter, in his introduction to the *Companion to the Gothic*, argues, “...what Gothic and much contemporary criticism share is indeed an overarching, even a sublime, *awareness* of mutability, an understanding of the ways in which history itself, and certainly narratives of history, are not stable, do not constitute a rock onto which we might cling –indeed, as Gothic has always sought to demonstrate to us, there are no such rocks, there is no sure foundation” (ix). Similar to the role of memory in postmodern thought, the contemporary Gothic and Grotesque, as aesthetic genres, stand as a concave mirror (to borrow Valle-Inclán’s own description of his Grotesque work in the *Esperpentos*) which problematizes and potentially alters the dangerously hegemonic ideologies behind the construction of our apparently stable realities. I suggest that the cinematic aesthetics of the Grotesque and the Gothic, in light of these transgressive and subversive qualities, contest modern and positivist narratives of history on either side of the political spectrum, opening critical spaces for the constant re-interpretation and the reflexive reading of Spain’s socio-historical traumatic past.

3. *El Espíritu de la Colmena* (*The Spirit of the Beehive*) (1973) by Víctor Erice

The opening credits of *El Espíritu de la Colmena* introduce the film –and, for that matter, the cinematic apparatus/craft behind the production of the film –through a heavily allegorical and symbolic use of the theme of the fantastic fairy tale. The melody of a traditional children’s song called *Vamos a Contar Mentiras* (We are going to tell lies) is juxtaposed with a sequence of childlike doodles that resemble a production story board, foreshadowing most of the scenes and images that the spectator is about to see in the film. Influenced by the Spanish tradition of the Gothic and the Grotesque, Erice’s work “can be studied in light of the progressive desire to resolve what Erice himself called ‘this socially established contradiction between history and poetry’” (Zunzunegui, “Between history and dream” 132). Through the juxtaposing the imaginative credits at the beginning of the film with a historical date that situates the film in the post-Civil War era, Erice places history and fiction in the same place, as activities founded on principles of narrative construction. Erice clearly elaborates his narrative based off this initial juxtaposition between history and fiction as imaginative reconstructions of a visually represented past. Lies, as the introductory song suggests, are an essential part of any historically contextualized narrative, resonating with Ernest Renan’s argument about the importance of forgetting in constructing a nation’s identity, and with Hayden White’s argument about the ideological content of historical form as a narrative genre. Erice makes use of traditionally Gothic and Grotesque imagery in order to destabilize our conceptions of Spain’s traumatic past, and to re-inscribe the latter into the present as historical continuums in opposition to linear notions of time. The film introduces the viewer to the historical context right after the Civil War had ended (1940) while simultaneously placing itself within a self-reflexive cinematic tradition through the use of intertextual cues. Similarly, Erice creates visual and psychological spaces for his

characters that embody, reflect and distort Spain's access to its own memories of the past, while at the same time showing how these repressed memories restlessly haunt the Spanish collective imagination. Finally, *El Espíritu de la Colmena* makes use of the figure of the *esFaunto* (ghost) and the monster in order to illustrate the silences and the fragmentation of a nation disjointed and traumatized by violence and repression.

Just as Halbwachs would suggest, the exercise of remembering reveals more about the historical present where the act of remembrance takes place than about the actual moment in the past. Erice's film cannot be fully understood unless its socio-historical context of production and distribution are fully comprehended. *El Espíritu de la Colmena* was released in 1973, two years before the death of the dictator Francisco Franco and almost forty years after the end of the Civil War that brought the dictatorial regime into power. The bloody Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) was the scene for the confrontation between what has been known as the "two Spains" –namely the Second Republic and the ultra-Nationalist movement –, divided by ideology, violence and a struggle for power (G. Jackson 67; Preston 7).¹⁰ The Republican government, which represented a democratic regime established by vote in 1931, was overthrown by a coup d'état led by the military forces under the flag of the ultra-right banner of the Spanish *Falange*, a fascist party founded in 1933. During and after a fierce conflict that divided families, where thousands of innocent people were collectively shot, and where most of both rural and urban Spain was destroyed, Franco established his authoritarian regime with the support of Hitler and Mussolini.¹¹ Deeply hurt, traumatized and fearful of violence and death, most of Spanish society accepted the silence imposed by the dictatorship in exchange for a peace guaranteed to those who would submit.

Unlike Hitler and Mussolini, Franco had nearly forty years to legitimize his power over Spain, but most importantly, over the construction and fixation of Spain's past. The fascist

apparatus understood the important role of culture in legitimizing its regime, and it spent significant national funds in constructing a historical memory that, “under Manichaeic bases, both privileged the winners and excluded the vanquished” (González, “La invisibilidad de la derrota” 1). The memory constructed by the dictatorship was solidified as the national memory of Spain, erasing the vanquished from most of its records. Just as described by most of the critical theorists on memory, Franco used the latter as a nationalist apparatus in order to legitimize repression, hatred and traditional values through a coercive social cohesion and historical hegemony.¹² Taking into account Nietzsche’s categories of History, Franco’s historical narratives were both monumental –as they elevated both the narratives of the *Falange* and the monarchic and imperial Spain, –and antiquarian –as they mummified the past as a series of static events that served as examples of greatness that should be followed (Nietzsche 75). They were also what Boym terms as a dangerously restorative nostalgia (“Nostalgia and its discontents” 424) that founded its existence on a series of disjointed events that placed Spain within a linear narrative of progress and grandeur.

Francisco’s governance, therefore, adopted strategies very similar to any other effective authoritarian regime: the means of cultural production were rigidly controlled in order to guarantee the naturalization of the official History as the unique and monolithic collective memory of an entire nation. For example, the *Noticiero Documental* (documentary news) also known as NODO, was a series of short documentaries that would propagate the State ideology and values, and it would usually be screened at the beginning of any film in theaters, and widely distributed. However, this rigid control could only produce a similarly strong response from educated sectors of society, who found their main oppositional outlet through cultural production as well. It is not surprising, then, that the first active struggles against the dictatorship happened

in the cultural arena, attempting to fragment and atomize the static and exclusive memory propagated by the regime. As suggested by José Colmeiro,

Following the trauma of the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) and its long aftermath in the repressive regime of General Franco, memory became a site of ideological struggle. Memories of the Civil War were officially repressed, the war was rewritten as a religious Crusade, and historical memory was substituted by nostalgia for a long lost imperial past, when not literally exiled, as hundreds of thousands died, were imprisoned or disappeared in the post-war diaspora. A unified Spanish national identity was imposed from above (one culture, one language, one religion), as different national identities from the periphery (Basque, Catalan and Galician in particular) were subjugated, cultural rights suppressed and censored by the state apparatus. Repressed historical memory formed a vast corpus of oppositional counter-memories as forms of cultural resistance (particularly in literature, film and popular song) many of them produced clandestinely or from exile. (24)

In other words, cultural production assumed the role of introducing historical memory into the collective consciousness, attempting to bring about the justice that the dictatorial courts were not delivering. These cultural manifestations exploited the inherent absurdity of the fascist ideology and regime, founded mainly on the heavy censorship, repression and historical inaccuracy, strategically using different aesthetic strategies such as the aesthetics of the Gothic and the Grotesque. The Grotesque and the Gothic functioned as tools in order to defamiliarize their spectators from the absurd everydayness of fascism, foregrounded as normal through the authoritarian control of popular memory through cinema and other cultural manifestations.¹³

After successfully repressing most of the leftovers of the Republican resistance during the 1950s, who had been hidden in the mountains and were popularly referred to as the *Maquis*, the Spanish dictatorship began a process of aperture in order to manipulate its image in the international community. Its alliance with the defeated fascist regimes of central Europe after the end of World War II had left Spain completely isolated until the United States and the European nations identified Spain as a strategic ally against the Soviet Union during the cold war, further legitimizing the regime internationally. During the 1960s until the end of the dictatorship, the Spanish regime assumed a technocratic approach based on the liberalization of Spain's economy. However, the regime did not foresee that its initial economic aperture would translate into better-educated middle class, which strengthened marginalized sub-national groups that had been violently kept at the margins. In an attempt to deal and respond to the nation's initial aperture to the exterior after a severe isolation, the new ministry of tourism and information in 1966, Manuel Fraga, reformed the information laws in order to allow for alternative –yet heavily monitored – publications, attempting to actualize and modernize the regime.¹⁴

In this context, Erice produced a film in 1973 which could not openly criticize the regime, but which would get the support of the State in order to promote Spain's image as an open and plural nation to the international community. Erice's use of allegory and heavily complex metaphors in order to criticize official fascist historiography is symptomatic of this ever-present censorship. The “transcendental role assigned to metaphor” in the film, as suggested by Santos Zunzunegui, “appears to invert the political priorities of the moment –1973, in the final stages of the Franco regime –in order to set in place a far greater degree of complexity” (132). The film's confusing deployment of narrative, space and character responds not to a clear contestation to the regime, but to a much-needed exploration of the collective trauma of a nation after a violent Civil War and forty years of dictatorship. The film counted with the entire support of the Spanish

regime, because of the way in which the dictatorship was not necessarily addressed in a direct way, ultimately winning the Silver Hugo award at the Chicago International Film Festival, and the Golden Seashell at the San Sebastián International Film Festival, both in 1973. The case of this film, located within an allegorical yet heavy and important opposition, perfectly illustrates how the very same discourse of the dictatorship's censorship dialectically engendered its strongest opposition; the end of Franco's regime was contemplated and brewed in its very same nationalist discourse. *El Espíritu de la Colmena*, through re-engaging with more traditional representations of Spain's official past from the times of the "crusade films", represents an alternative reading of the situation of contemporary Spain in relation to the Civil War and the dictatorship, suggesting that Spain is a corrupted and fragmented child, traumatized and disfigured by the figure of the monster –namely Franco. The film transcends official and simplistic memories of the past, which were created through film's such as *Raza*, through censorship strategies, cultural and educational monopoly and violent repression of alternative stories and identities. The monolithic and totalizing discourse of the regime was reflected in its main slogan throughout its forty years; *Una, Grande y Libre!* (One, Great and Free!). The systematic massacre of plurality in order to legitimize the myth of a single and uncontested national identity, pushed the repressed untold stories into a metaphysical and metaphorical world from which they were later abstracted by filmmakers such as Erice. Through a metaphorical and allegorical depiction of an ambiguously traumatic reality, *El Espíritu de la Colmena* fragments the totalizing discourse of the regime by using the figures of the monster and the child, the disjointed and excessive aesthetics proper to the Gothic and the Grotesque in order to open spaces through which the intertwinement between history and fiction is made evident.

Historical Re-Presentation: Gothic Realism, Intertextuality and Film

As an old truck approaches the camera from the left through a desolated rural landscape typical of the so-called “heart” of Spain –the central plateau of Castile –, *El Espíritu de la Colmena* (The Spirit of the Beehive) (1973) begins by situating its plot within the liminal realm that lies between the fairy tale and History. As the camera tracks the entrance of the truck into the rural town of Hoyuelos, the subtitles –within quotation marks –suggest that the film will be placed within the tradition of storytelling, namely that of the fantastic fairy tale: “Once upon a time... somewhere on the Castilian plain, around 1940...” The camera stops once the fascist symbol of the yoke and arrows enters and stays on the right side of the frame. Erice begins his film by inscribing his narrative within the tradition of the fairy tale and fiction as modes of historical representation –entering into a metatextual dialogue with de Cervantes’ *Quijote*–and the romantic fiction of the pure Castilian Spain, where the “true” Spanish identity is thought to be born. However, the film also introduces a clear historical contextualization through the use of an exact date, but also through the revelation of the yoke and arrows, ultimate symbol of Spanish fascism (see Fig. 4). History and fiction in Erice’s film are introduced as interconnected,

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Fig. 4. Victor Erice, *El Espíritu de la Colmena*, 1974, Criterion 2006.

dependent and mutually constructive, ultimately liberating the past from the weight of official and monumental historical narratives. The audience is encouraged to take a critical stance towards historical representation which will permeate the entire construction of the film's questioning of monolithic and static historicism, through the constant interplay of fiction and history. Aesthetically, the film uses a realist depiction of characters and place which grounds the film in a historical realism which is ultimately Gothicized; it is exaggerated, twisted and manipulated. Erice uses the longtake and wide angles typical of realist cinema as historiographical inscription, only to juxtapose them with more formalist close ups, editing and narration that captures the fictional, irrational and Gothic spaces of the film and of Spanish history.

The film depicts the story of Spanish post-Civil War tensions and identities through a narration that focuses on the main character Ana (Ana Torrent), a young girl, and her older sister Isabel (Isabel Tellería). They are both daughters of Fernando (Fernando Fernán Gómez)—a mysterious and old Spanish intellectual who works as a beekeeper—and Teresa (Teresa Gimpera)—a younger and enigmatic woman who is also, allegedly, a housewife. The family lives in Hoyuelos, an old small rural town located in Castile, the center—both physically and symbolically—of Spain. The film is set in 1940, only one year after the end of the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) that finalized in the official establishment of the repressive fascist dictatorship, which epitomizes a series of historical events that led the nation to one of the longest fascist regimes in western history (Preston, 471).¹⁵ Spain went from being one of the biggest empires in the world during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, to a powerless catholic and conservative nation that was easily conquered by Napoleon in the early nineteenth century. The nineteenth century was full of failed attempts to democratize Spain, where several failed constitutional governments led to an ultimate retake by a heavily weakened totalitarian monarchic power.¹⁶ The

beginning years of the twentieth century were politically and economically stable, leading Spain to remain neutral during the First World War. However, social agitation led to the coup d'état in 1923 led by Miguel Primo de Rivera, a recognized military officer who became the dictatorial prime minister of Spain with the help of the monarchy. Losing the support of the king and the civil society because of his lack of strategic governance, Primo de Rivera resigned in 1930 leaving a heavily unstable political and social system.

After holding democratic elections and realizing that the monarchy, associated with the failure of the dictatorship, had significantly less popularity than the republican movement, King Alfonso XIII left the country paving the way for the establishment of the Second Republic in April, 1931. The Republic brought with it a completely different national narrative to the public arena. Mainly composed of a large spectrum of the political left –from democrats to communists and anarchists –the Republic gave political autonomy to the different regions in Spain, secularized the government and the educational system, and embraced the ideas of modernism – politically, economically, socially and culturally. The intensely liberal agenda of the Republic, which would only last three years before the beginning of the Civil War, became the basis for a strong nostalgia after Franco's dictatorship, and even today. However, the Republican government was not an entirely clean and ideal government since the repression of the church and the political right was sometimes as bloody as the conservative repression had been. This social instability led José Antonio Primo de Rivera, son of the previous dictator, to found the fascist political party *Falange* in 1933, which based off the Republic's inability to create stable forms of governance, staged a violent coup d'état in 1936 that engendered the Spanish Civil War. Captured and killed in 1936, José Antonio Primo de Rivera's leadership was assumed by Francisco Franco who victoriously and violently led the fascist armed uprising against the Second Republic from northern Africa, with the support of Mussolini's Italy and Hitler's Germany.¹⁷

Spain was split in two halves, equally fervent and equally resentful. Those who supported the Second Republic were typically aligned with progressive ideologies –from anarchists, to communists and republicans –and advocated for a laic, democratic and egalitarian country that opposed the monarchy. The other Spain was represented by the military uprising led by Franco and Primo de Rivera, who were usually adept to militaristic, catholic and conservative notions of land ownership and distribution of wealth and power. The opening credits and the initial scene of the film where the film shows the yolk and arrows of the *Falange*, situate the film within the specific context of the immediate post-Civil War era. The film therefore establishes itself as a text in reference to historical facts. *El Espíritu de la Colmena* takes place in 1940, right after the end of the Civil War, and emerges in a context of socio-political change, when the narratives of the past which were typically co-opted and interpreted by official History, were being challenged by alternative and peripheral socio-political and cultural spaces. Erice was clearly juxtaposing the beginning and end of Franco’s regime, creating an alternative memory that speaks about the relationship of his present to the traumatic past of the dictatorship’s beginnings.

Victor Erice, therefore, opted for a Gothic realist depiction of post-Civil War Spain that allowed him to historically situate his narrative while simultaneously deconstructing the same historical, physical and psychological spaces through the tropes of inaccessibility and obscurity proper to Gothic aesthetics. In an analysis that historicizes Erice’s film, Paul Julian Smith argues, “*The Spirit of the Beehive* is, quite simply, ‘the spirit of the Spanish society in 1940’: hierarchical, functional, and wholly closed in on itself. The repressions and fears of the children are thus as much socio-political ad psychological...” (99). Smith suggests that the construction of the film’s Gothic form, is intimately related to the repressed memories that were shyly appearing during the last years of the regime. This historical realism, juxtaposed with fantastic elements, provokes a destabilization of meaning that questions the fascist version of Spain’s collective past.

The introduction of Hoyuelos is reminiscent of Italian neo-realist films post World War II such as *Germany, Year Zero* (1948) by Roberto Rossellini, and *Bicycle Thieves* (1948) by Vittorio de Sica, in that the film focuses on the physical characteristics of *place* through the use of long takes and diegetic sound. The long winding road of the opening image, as the truck comes into Hoyuelos, reflects the “continuity between Spain’s feudal past and current modernization” (Smith, 129), subtly critiquing the contradiction of the regime’s discourses on progress and development. The introduction to the town at the beginning of the film is created through several long takes that allow the viewer to appreciate the characteristics of the space; old houses in a rural setting, dirt roads and daily activities such as Fernando walking past the movie theater through the hay, the dog and the granary proper to the archetypal rural Spanish town, yet marked by the presence of the cinematic monster (see Fig. 5). The excess of the long take, however, critically distances the audience from these depictions of the country’s everydayness as it also introduced the idea of cinema as a tool for historiographic identification and inscription.

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Fig. 5. Victor Erice, *El Espíritu de la Colmena*, 1974, Criterion 2006.

As the truck enters Hoyuelos, several children run behind it screaming “the movies have arrived!” A new film is being screened at Hoyuelos, quickly becoming a popular event attended by different generations of the town’s inhabitants. The film screened is *Frankenstein* (1931) by James Whale, which clearly established an intertextual dialogue with both film history and with the cinematic aesthetics of the Gothic, since *Frankenstein* is one of the first big productions that appropriates a typical character of nineteenth century Gothic literature. Ana and her sister Isabel are part of the group of children who receive the truck, placing cinema within the realm of children’s fantasy world. When the town gathers to watch the film, Erice clearly uses editing in order to establish an intimate relation between the world of Whale’s film and that of the children viewing it. When the little girl in *Frankenstein* is talking to the monster in the film, Erice matches the eye line of the monster with that of Ana, placing her within the diegesis of the fiction she is watching. Ana’s mysterious yet captivated eyes reveal the appealing fictional world that cinema represents for this rural Spanish town; Ana identifies with the characters on screen, revealing the power of fictional cinematic narratives. The eye-line match between *Frankenstein* and Ana also reveals the intimate connection between fiction and reality; Ana’s imaginary and fantastic connection to the monster in the film, enables her to make sense of her historical situated-ness and the trauma of the recent Civil War.

Ana is mesmerized and consumed by the image of the monster and the little girl, implicitly identifying *Frankenstein*’s monster as an outlet and representation of her innermost fears and loneliness, in a fragmented house that represents the fragmented nature of dictatorial Spain. After watching the film, both girls run back to their home while the camera introduces their house –a space which I will further discuss as labyrinthine, impenetrable and fragmented – through a high angle, revealing the pressure of history and of time passing over Ana’s family. While lying in bed, Ana’s curiosity in regards to why the monster killed the little girl in the film,

is answered by Isabel as she says that in the movies everything is a lie; it's all a trick. Quickly realizing that it will be more fun to play with Ana's innocence, Isabel continues by telling Ana that the monster exists in reality but no one can see him because he is a spirit, and spirits do not have a body. Isabel recognizes the constructedness of the film's narrative as staged, performative and narrative, while simultaneously implanting *Frankenstein's* fiction into Ana's real world. Ana's close up and her terrified yet intrigued eyes, reveal precisely the blurred lines that Erice is creating between reality and fiction, history and film. Interestingly enough, Erice decides also to name his characters after the original names of the actors, also blurring the line between the fictional and the real, implying that the film's thematic treatment is applicable to both the film's characters as to the *real* historical agents that play and *become* those fictional roles.

Encouraged by her sister, Ana starts calling the spirit of the monster by repeating, "I'm Ana, I'm Ana...", as the film immediately superimposes the sound of steps and cuts to Fernando's studio, full of books, as he walks through the room. The hyper reality that surrounds the historical weight of Fernando's silence and seeming nostalgia, is paralleled with the fantastic world of the girls, creating a tension that will not be resolved but will rather become foundational of the film's uncanny characteristics. As Perriam argues, "This implantation of fantasy and dread moves through the substance of the film in many complicated directions, but in one direct way – beyond the children's realm – *Frankenstein* is used to comment on, if not Spain, at least society and its primary ethical struggles" (Perriam 65). Erice is clearly placing his film as a metatext within both historiographical and cinematic traditions; viewers of Erice's film are watching a film about others also watching a film. These metatextual layers of fiction, juxtaposed with the historical references and intertext, elaborate on the idea of the intimate dialogue between fiction, imagination, and historical narrative. The fantastic and marvelous narrative world of Ana, adopts a "tangential relation to the 'real'," as Rosemary Jackson identifies in the Fantastic mode,

“interrogating its vales only retrospectively or allegorically” (43). The Gothic realism of Erice’s intertextual work, establishes narrativity and fantastic narrative as the foundational way of approaching the past, establishing the several layers of allegorical historical understanding through which the audience is expected to read the film’s disjointed narrative.

Gothic Spaces of Memory: Inaccessibility, Distortion and Fragmentation

Erice explores the almost pathological fragmentation of Spanish spaces of memory through the use of intertextuality with history and social context, and makes use of a local Spanish aesthetic tradition inscribed in the romantic, the Gothic and the Grotesque. The film is a metatextual approach to history, cultural traditions and aesthetic spaces, placing itself as an incomplete, yet critical recovery of counter-memories and stories, and of an aesthetic tradition that reinscribes the irrational and critical anti-modernist ideology into readings of the Civil War and the nationalist fascist project of Franco’s dictatorship. Erice knows well the tradition of Spanish culture, situating his film within two main aesthetic traditions that have characterized the Spanish cultural and collective imaginaries: the tradition of the romanticism solidified in the literary generation of 1898, their poetic yet heavily nationalistic depiction of Spanish identity, and the Gothic and expressionist aesthetic founded on a heavy catholic tradition. The Spanish cultural identity and historical context, said to be immersed in the baroque tradition of catholic duality, excessiveness and dramatism, was and still is prone to the influences of romanticism and the Gothic, which tend to highlight irrationality and symbolism, over rationality and pragmatism. As suggested by Emma McEvoy in her discussion of the Gothic mainly in the anglo-saxon world, “Gothic has since been defined according to its emphasis on the returning past (Bladick 1992, Mighall 1999), its dual interest in transgression and decay (McGrath 1997), its commitment to exploring the aesthetics of fear (Punter 1980) and its cross-contamination of reality and fantasy

(Jackson 1981)” (1). In response to the rationalist discourses at the end of the nineteenth century in Europe, and to the collapse of Spain as an empire because of the loss of its last colonies, the generation of 1898 embraces these core values of the romantic novel in order to create an imaginative world of freedom and endless possibilities, establishing an intertextual dialogue with Cervantes’ *Quijote*, a foundational novel released at the start of the seventeenth century that explores the fictive account of a romantic knight inscribed in different historical events.

El Espíritu de la Colmena clearly references the generation of 1898, which was composed by renowned writers such as Antonio and Manuel Machado, Miguel de Unamuno and Ramón del Valle-Inclán. Through creating inaccessible and fantastic worlds of inner isolation and irrational escape, this literary and intellectual movement in Spain proclaimed a romantic relationship to a pre-modern idea of the Spanish national character situated in archetypical towns such as Hoyuelos, in the geographic and symbolic heart of Spain, Castile. Fernando, Ana’s father, is presumably an intellectual part of this generation who has opted for –or been coerced into –an internal exile once the fascist regime comes into power. The film’s construction of characters through silences, absences and long takes and wide angles that convey a sense of isolation, become images “of the effects of history, of a political repression which rendered its victims speechless and diverted their energies from the public, social arena into the private realm of fantasy” (Smith, 100). Fernando’s isolation and inner exile, intimately connected to his relation to the generation of 1898. Half way through the film, Ana comes to her mother Teresa while she is playing the piano and then looking at some old pictures. Erice cuts to a close-up of one of the photographs where the audience can identify Unamuno and potentially other writers and intellectual from the generation of ’89. Ana reads the back, where it is written, “to my dear misanthrope.” Teresa and Fernando are established as members of an intellectual elite of romantic escapist, who, once the dictatorship came and the war ended, retreated to isolated

spaces, both geographically and internally. Erice juxtaposes their historical situation with the Gothic development of his narrative, in an attempt to denounce the complicit relation that most of the intellectuals of the generation of '98 held with Franco's regime, through their silence and retrieval.

The mise-en-scene of the film attaches itself to a hyper-realist aesthetics that grounds the film in the deep and lonely Castile, a region constructed as the 'pure Spain' in the popular memory of the generation of '98. Erice's cinematography reproduces this ideal Spain through the use of long shots and long takes that enhance the solitude, emptiness and desert-like qualities of Castille –the heart of Spain –and of its inhabitants. The intertextual references to the idiosyncrasy of the generation of '98 are reproduced by the wide shots that linger on the dry, desolated and open-ended landscapes as metaphors for the silence and internal exile of those who were, at the time of the film's release, experiencing the trauma of the Civil War and the repression of the dictatorship. Most of the times that the two sisters encounter the abandoned house where Ana will eventually find a wounded *Maqui*, the camera lingers on a wide shot that emphasizes the emptiness and silence of the space where this house, as a representation of the memory of the oppressed and vanquished, lies. This is the first time that the dictatorial censorship apparatus allows a visual representation of a *Maqui* on screen, establishing Erice's film as an important opening point in the introduction of the repressed memories of the Republic into cinematic representation. Erice, responding to the still present censorship of 1973, uses the desolated and open spaces of Castile, conveyed through the longtake and wide angle, as a metaphor of an isolated dictatorship full of silenced and repressed memories. The inner exile of Fernando, Teresa, Isabel and Ana, visually represented through the open and wide spaces, represents both the historical trauma of the Civil War as well as the epistemological inaccessibility to the past.

Francisco Goya, famously recognized for his dark paintings during the nineteenth century, which are foundational of Grotesque aesthetics in the Spanish tradition, also explored this idea of the desolation and emptiness of spaces as a sign of the impenetrability of history. His famous painting *Perro Semihundido* (The Dog) (see Fig. 7) is an evident influence in Erice's construction of Castile. The silence of the wide open spaces (see Fig. 8 and 9), represents the impossibility to representation the *reality* of trauma and history, resorting to a rather expressionistic and abstract depiction of place and subject. In other words, the positivist and modern ideology of an objective and complete sense of history is challenged by the juxtaposition of history with emptiness, of comprehension and inaccessibility, highlighting the fragmented and irrational nature of modernity itself; it necessitates its opposite, its other, namely Gothic darkness and shadows, in



Fig. 7. Francisco de Goya, *Perro Semihundido*, 1819-1823, Museo del Prado, Madrid, Spain.

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Fig. 8 and Fig. 9. Victor Erice, *El Espíritu de la Colmena*, 1974, Criterion 2006.

order to create itself. Goya and Erice engage in a similar project, through which they use Gothic aesthetics in order to recreate and illustrate the silences of a heavy and oppressive past, and its legacy into the present. This imagery also represents the isolation of Spain right after the end of the Civil War; the first decade of the dictatorship is marked by Spain's isolation from everything happening in Europe and the world, using a heavy cultural and cinematic censorship in order to control and regulate the relationship of Spanish subjects to the rest of the world. Spain, memory and characters are all represented as isolated, silenced and inaccessible in Erice's cinematic aesthetics, opening critical spaces for reconsidering the socio-historical and complex nature of Spain right before the death of Franco.

Ana's family home also becomes a symbolical space of fragmentation and impenetrability, demonstrating the incomprehensibility of Spain's traumatic past, and suggesting that any attempt to do so will only corrupt and narrativize the past. The trope of the beehive and its spirit, as the irrational and incomprehensible force that makes the order of nature function, clearly speaks also to the fragmented nature of identity and history. The house is constructed as a labyrinthine space, through the way in which Erice parallels it to the beehive through its hexagonal windows and disjointed segments and rooms, lit in a chiaroscuro light. The continuous use of close-ups within the narrative moments that take place inside the house, further fragments the house as a symbol of the fragmentation of the regime's historical narratives that have constructed Franco's Spain. The metaphysical and mystical connotations of the beehive, translate into the fantastic world of Ana's imagination. The house as beehive, and the beehive itself, symbolize the fragmented nature of experience, where Ana's imagination is founded and further develops, reflecting the relevance and crucial role of imaginative narratives in order to understand Spain's relationship to the past. The house inhabited by Ana and her family, just like history and our relationship to the past, is a "space of forgetting and remembrance" (Perriam, 72),

reflecting Erice's understanding of the way in which historical narratives are selectively constructed. The construction of the house through its high contrast lighting, close-up and fragmented framing and spatial discontinuity, create the sense of an impenetrable labyrinth of histories, that never truly come together; the past is incomprehensible and inaccessible, only open to people through either their romantic imagination (Fernando) or their Gothic and monstrous experience of trauma (Ana). Pointing at the constructed nature of history, the film is able to critically activate audiences into understanding history as fiction, liberating the past from the totalizing dogmas of traditional historiography.

Erice's film revives a long Spanish aesthetic tradition in its fundamental historical function, also reevaluating its tenets by adapting them to the context of Franco's dictatorship. The use of chiaroscuro in the film reveals a clear Gothic appreciation of space, in which light (reason) is seen in an inevitable dialectical relation to darkness (irrationality), and where mystery and incomplete access to spaces marks the relation of the audience to the film. The house where Fernando and his family live, is a house full of secrets: Teresa writes letters to a character that the audience barely recognizes, and Fernando appears two times narrating the same poem which

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Fig. 10. Victor Erice, *El Espíritu de la Colmena*, 1974, Criterion 2006.

grammatic and syntactic structure are almost inaccessible (see Fig. 10). The romantic writing of Fernando and the secret letters of Teresa, appear to suggest a state of trauma, of silence and of incomprehensibility that manifests itself through the dark spaces that both characters are constantly surrounded by. Similarly, the film never actually reveals why is this family living in such a huge house right after the Civil War, foreclosing their socio-economic status while at the same time implicitly suggesting their belonging to an intellectual elite. Access to *true* historical context is denied, bringing the audience back to the frustration of having a totalizing and objective snapshot of Spanish past, which the official historiography has always given. The frustration found in the film's incompleteness, activates audiences to question the historical context of the film and appropriate the meaning of the highly disjointed narrative.

Similarly, the lighting used in the house reveals a sense of inaccessibility; all the spaces are barely lit by a yellow light that comes through the beehive-like windows, creating spaces of high contrast and secretiveness (see Fig. 11). When Fernando is in his studio writing or thinking, or when Ana is facing the open window where she communicates with the monster or where she discovers her sister lying on the floor, the light that comes through the window barely illuminates their faces leaving everything around them in complete darkness. The dark spaces and the intense shadows, convey the surrounding oppressive and incomprehensible trauma, that even if not accessible is still felt and present. The spectator never quite fully understands the spatial arrangement of the house, or is allowed to understand what lies within it, placing the private space of the home as the receptacle of the collective trauma of the war. The symbol of the house, typically associated with safety and comfort, becomes a desolate and empty space in the film, through which the coldness and trauma of the war and the dictatorship are conveyed.

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Fig. 11. Victor Erice, *El Espíritu de la Colmena*, 1974, Criterion 2006.

The technical and aesthetic choice of creating highly contrasted spaces is reminiscent of other artistic traditions, Spanish and non-Spanish, that deal with the same sense of secretiveness and impenetrability. The use of high contrast and dark spaces by Rembrandt in his portraits convey the same sense of duality and obscurity: the darkness of the literal paint represent the lack of knowledge the spectator is allowed to have about the context of the depicted subject. The dramatism conveyed by Rembrandt's representation of biblical and mythological scenes is achieved by the use of chiaroscuro and high contrast. It is clearly not a coincidence that biblical representations connote excessiveness and, to some extent, an over-dramatic –even melodramatic –representation of mundane yet mythical life. Through this analytical lens, the aesthetics of excess and exaggeration proper to Spanish artistic expression is deeply rooted in catholic baroque, where excess –visually but also in character –becomes a cultural *modus operandi*. The way in which the chiaroscuro blends subject and background, representing objects and people who are in a deep and striking existential relationship to their context, reveals Erice's attempts to reveal the heavily repressive nature of the fascist state through allegorical and metaphorical

creations of space and character. Chiaroscuro blurs the dichotomy of light vs. darkness revealing liminal Gothic spaces of mystery, incomplete access to the psyches of the characters, and to memory. History is revealed as a re-construction, within which Ana's fantastically dark experience reveals a collective trauma that can only be represented through the radical aesthetics of the Gothic.

The highly metaphorical spaces of Eirice's film are constructed through long takes, desolated and isolated landscapes in a nearly forgotten town, revealing the subjective interiority of each character and the silenced yet omnipresent unspoken memories of a wounded Spain. Similarly to the way in which the film denies a complete and clear delineation of the spatial structure of the house –reminiscent of the unbridgeable distance between present and past, and of a critique to history as a single monolithic space –the subjectivity and complexity of each character is conveyed by an inaccessibility to their psyches and motivations. For example, Teresa is in constant correspondence with her brother, who is attempting to cross Spain's border with France in order to escape the heavy repression during the initial years of the regime. She writes letters mentioning the war –something completely new in Spanish cinema, mostly through the lens of a woman who belonged to the vanquished side of the war –and she bikes to the train station through a long winding road, completely desolated and held in the frame by extreme long takes. Her lack of access to accurate information about her brother's situation as an exile, and her inner exile caused by the trauma of the war, is visually conveyed by the open and desolate mise-en-scene of the film's cinematography. The silences and absences of the film's visual language, are an attempt at representing the collective trauma of the dictatorship when the film was released.

Fernando is shown several times in his library throughout the film, where he will have his moments of poetic ecstasy. The presence of books and annotations as well as his relationship to Milagros, the help of the house, clearly situates him as a landowner who is simultaneously rich

and part of an elitist intellectual resistance. His office is dark and illuminated by a dim yellow light, very much creating a parallel between the beehive and his space for inner introspection, where he is haunted by thoughts of war. As he approaches the beehive-like window in his office, he hears the narration of *Frankenstein*, which is being projected in the town's theater. The camera slowly approaches him from the back, conveying his concentration and attempting to enter his subjectivity, but he is behind the blurry yellow and fragmented window, which keeps the audience from fully making sense of his presence; half of the screen is Fernando blurred by the window, and the other half is the war-torn town of Hoyuelos (see Fig. 12). The film, again, denies a complete access to Fernando's character, both through his highly poetic and surrealist writing, and through a cinematography, mise-en-scene and lighting that keeps him blurred, in shadows and giving his back to the camera. These representational aesthetics are able to open spaces for the critical examination and questioning of the identity of Spain after the war and during the dictatorship, revealing and illustrating the spaces of silence and inaccessibility created by the repressive regime.

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Fig. 12. Victor Erice, *El Espíritu de la Colmena*, 1974, Criterion 2006.

Fernando and Teresa, the two adults who inhabit the house and who are the only ones who can possibly have a clear notion of the war that had just ended, are always represented as inaccessible and mysterious, while also having a rather distant and heavily silent relationship. When Fernando is pensively listening to the news, and when Teresa is writing one of her mysterious letters, the camera slowly approaches them from the back. As the camera dollies-in and turns, their faces are revealed, but only after having initially denied a understanding of their activities. The camera places the audience in a rather uncomfortable position, as intruders in the space of the house. Both the mystery surrounding Teresa's letter and the highly poetic and metaphorical poems written by Fernando, speak to this internal exile as a response to the trauma of the war and to, most specifically, censorship. Just like Fernando and Teresa, the film's highly metaphorical and allegorical construction of space and character also responds to the censorship of the time. Their inner exile, reminiscent of the Romanticist's existential void when the fascist regime came into power, is clearly conveyed by Erice's cinematography.

Ghosts, Monsters and Nation: Memories of Spain's Collective Trauma

The construction of both characters and space in *El Espíritu de la Colmena*, responds to the same aesthetic and political concern, namely that of remembering a collective past that had not been publicly recognized or ideologically acknowledged. The engraved and repressed collective memory of the Civil War and the dictatorial present of the film's release, find an outlet in the highly poetic and allegorical depiction of Erice's characters. As Simon Hay and Colmeiro argue, the figure of the ghost represents that which has been left out of official history as the dark side of the past, which haunts the present reclaiming justice and recognition (Hay 18; Colmeiro 25). Similarly, the monster, as suggested by Margarita Cuellar, represents the deformation of a society which has repressed its innermost trauma, that of the suffering and legacy of the Civil

War and the dictatorship (230). Fernando, the *Maqui*, Isabel and Ana are all constructed as ambiguous, impenetrable characters that assume different monstrous and ghostly qualities through the use of lighting, editing and narrative construction.

The Spirit of the Beehive is situated in the allegorical world of a cultural Spain still controlled by the late years of Franco's regime, and it critically approaches the social taboos of the vanquished against the winners for the first time, invoking that spirit that had been left in the past. The spectator is confronted with a mysterious and ambiguous narrative, where it is difficult to understand the significance of the various symbols used by Erice in order to represent the war and its consequences. As Chris Perriam suggests, "The 'spirit' of its title is in part the ghost of the Civil War, one of the ghosts of the Spanish past to whom Jo Labanyi, writing from the perspective of theorizations in cultural memory, persuasively suggests viewers and readers are called on to 'bear witness' and 'make reparation'" (64). In other words, the repressed memories of the Civil War are embodied in the figure of the spirit of Frankenstein's monster, as it comes back to haunt the present of a nation that has not been given the appropriate spaces to work-through its historical past. The spirit comes back to the present in order to reclaim its place, through its ultimate possession of Ana's character as a symbol of its ever-presence in the Spanish collective memory. The radical quality of the film lies in its allegorical simplicity, which represents the central spirit and monster of the Spanish society through the symbols of mutilation, the incapacity of expression, and dismemberment.

In the same way in which Erice's film becomes a dynamic and open-ended memorial of Spain's traumatic past, closer to the real ambiguity that characterizes our relationship to the past, other films such as *Volver* (2006) by Pedro Almodóvar and *El Orfanato* (2007) by Juan Antonio Bayona, also approach the past through the construction of ambiguous and fantastic stories that deal with history through the figures of the ghost and the monster. Ana, Erice's protagonist, and

her process of identification with the monster, goes beyond a simple poetic and symbolic allusion to the war, becoming a political model through which effective criticism is constructed.

Similarly, the main characters in *Volver* and *El Orfanato* who experience the return of a traumatic past, turn their struggle into a model for those who still deny the presence of the several ghosts that haunt Spain's historical present. As suggested by Colmeiro, even though some of these films might appear not to be *about* the Civil War, it is clear that they make use of "the trope of the ghost to confront the traumatic legacy of the past into the present" (32). The presence of the ghost reminds the spectator that it is necessary to confront and question the past in order to construct a just, truthful and truly representative reality.

Similarly, the figure of the monster is also used by Erice as a way to convey both the repressed and fragmented identities of Spain's late dictatorship. The suffering still present in Spain's collective memory is manifested through internalized (his)stories of fantasy caused by the heavy repression of the dictatorial regime; what has gone unseen throughout the long dictatorial culture, is brought back to the forefront by Erice's use of the fantastic (R. Jackson, 175). The figure of Frankenstein's monster in Gothic literary theory has been conceptualized as the dark/failed side of positivist scientific modernity; a human that attempts to control life through a rationalist experimentation of experience, ends up creating a patched monster that has a life of its own (Crook 62). The monster will haunt its creator, and therefore also his ideological assumptions, demonstrating the irrational, uncontrollable and inaccessible nature of reality. According to Margarita Cuellar, who speaks about the figure of the monster in cinema as an expression of Otherness, "this *other* does not necessarily cohabitate outside of the individual or of its culture, but it is an *other* that has been repressed, and that in order to be rejected needs to be externally projected" (230). Erice uses the trope and symbolism of the Frankenstein monster in

order to create the monstrosity of his characters, through the use of parallel editing and *mise-en-scène*.

Ana and Isabel attend the town's school, which is introduced through the use of a wide shot over which the film plays a music that becomes reminiscent of the initial child-like credits. A flute and a typical Spanish guitar place Hoyuelos and the school within both the realm of Spain's symbolic heart, and of childish fictional narratives. The school itself, with a flag of the new dictatorial regime waving in its front, is a place where notions of history, education and fantasy interact with each other. Inside the classroom, the teacher introduces the children to Don José, a human model made out of cardboard, through which they are supposed to learn anatomy. Don José is intimately related to Frankenstein; it is an incomplete and fragmented model, a disjointed monster, which the children are supposed to (re)member. Ana is the last child who steps up to place the missing eyes in Don José's body, symbolizing the way in which this patched monster, which represents, just like Frankenstein, the fragmented nature of Spanish dictatorial identities, cannot *see*. Ana, the innocent child who will then also become possessed by the spirit of the monster, has the task of re-constructing Don José by placing his missing eyes. Erice uses the school as the space to introduce this new monster in order to contest one of the most rigid systems of the dictatorial system. Education, much like film, was one of the main tools of the fascist regime in order to indoctrinate Spaniards into their totalitarian ideology while simultaneously legitimizing and naturalizing the regime's official version of History. Ana's interaction with Don José represents Erice's call for Spain to (re)member its fragmented past, in order to be able to *see* clearly.

Just like Don José, Fernando is also paralleled to the figure of the monster, revealing the also fragmented and traumatic experience of his character. Fernando as a monster symbolizes his fragmented and disjointed inner exile, and the legacy of the traumatic past into his identity in the

present. The way in which the film parallels Fernando with the monster, represent not only an apparent blame to the generation of '98 as the intellectual crafters of the fascist discourse on the "pure" soul of Spain, but also the impossibility to make coherent sense of the Civil War and its continuity into the present. The film introduces Fernando through an extreme close-up of his face through the veil of his beekeeper's suit. The figure on screen is ambiguous and fragmented, highly texturized by the patterns of the veil. Just like Frankenstein's monster, which is a patched construction of different humans that represents the Gothic liminal spaces between life and death, Fernando's face is also visually fragmented, conveying his state as a disjointed product of the Civil War. The film's editing also parallels Fernando and the monster, as mentioned before in the scene when Ana and Isabel appear to hear the footsteps of the monster only to cut to Fernando walking in his upstairs library. This parallel to Whale's film, "places the greatest emphasis on the dramatic contrast between the monster's infantile emotions and his adult, giant like body and also on the patriarchal nature of the powers that pervert and destroy him" (Kinder, 128). Fernando, as Frankenstein's monster, reveals and defines the power of the dictatorial regime as the source of oppression and implicit violence. The house, the monster, Fernando and, ultimately, historical narratives themselves, are all filtered through the fragmentation of the beehive and the fantastic nature of the spirits that inhabit these spaces and characters.

However, Fernando is clearly aware of the existence of this evil spirit and presence, to which he refers in his poetry and in the metaphor of the mushroom. He takes his daughters on a walk through the woods in order to pick mushrooms, something he used to do with his grandfather. This tradition and memory of the past is, however, tainted by the appearance of a venomous and *bad* mushroom that, as explained by Fernando, is treacherous when young but recognizably dangerous when old. Whoever tries it cannot be saved from it. His description of the mushroom as always having a hat and black stripes clearly parallels the fascist imagery of the yoke and the

arrows, therefore allowing the audience to read his description of the evil and corrupt mushroom as a description of Franco and fascism. He finally violently steps on the mushroom, evidencing his hatred and desire to exterminate the evil regime that he, in reality, cannot fight. It is this impossibility, which was historically faced by those who attempted to resist the repressive regime, causing Fernando to retreat into the escapist and allegorical world of romantic poetry, similar to Erice's approach to memory in 1973, when Franco, the true and main monster, was still alive. Erice is highly critical of the Romanticists' escape into an inner exile in order to avoid a direct confrontation with the regime, and uses Gothic aesthetics in order to critically examine their role during the dictatorship as this one is coming to an end.

The figure of the Maqui is also highly relevant to the construction of the monstrous and ghostly world of the film. *El Espíritu*, released in 1973, was the first film in Spanish cinema that was allowed to clearly have a Maqui as a character, which had been previously censored by the dictatorial apparatus. Isabel's stories and dark playfulness, encourages Ana to wholeheartedly believe in the presence of the monster and the spirit in the old abandoned house. Imagination becomes Ana's way of understanding and making sense of history and reality. After being traumatized by her sister's game through which she faked her death, Ana decides to leave the house alone in the middle of the night. The shadows, the blue lighting, and the music suture the audience into an eerie and mysterious imaginative world. Ana closes her eyes in order to deal with her fear, and the film instantly cuts to a train from which the Maqui jumps out. The train and the Maqui, in the logic of the film's editing, emerge from Ana's powerful imagination, revealing not only the interplay and interdependence between history and fiction but also the parallel between the Maqui and the monster; Ana looks for and calls the monster in the woods, and the monster's spirit materializes in the Maqui.

Marsha Kinder, analyzing this radical representation, argues, “by transforming the monster into a Republican fugitive fleeing from the Fascist authorities after the Civil War, Erice’s narrative appropriates the myth for a political discourse that was still suppressed from representation in Spain” (128). The film further enhances this political take on the repressive tactics of the regime during the initial aftermath of the Civil War, by locating the Maqui’s hiding place in a desolate and ruined abandoned house. The abandoned house, located in the middle of an open plain, represents the silenced and rather destroyed memory of those who were repressed during the initial years of the dictatorship, attempting to illustrate the suffering of the vanquished, who the film is attempting to allegorically portray. The house also has an empty and rather eerie well, clearly referencing the world of fairy tales and fantasy; the Maqui becomes, therefore, a fantastic outlet of Ana’s trauma, materializing what the Spanish dictatorial society has constructed as invisible (R. Jackson, 5). Ana goes to the house in the morning and meets him, quickly becoming friends. He is hurt and wounded, and Ana becomes some sort of maternal figure for the rebel, just like the girl and the Frankenstein monster in Whale’s film. In her second visit, Ana brings him food and her father’s jacket, which has a musical clock in it. After Ana leaves, the camera shows the house in the middle of the night from an extreme long shot, and suddenly we see gunfire and hear shooting; he has been killed. Fernando comes into the police station, since they probably found the jacket and the clock. He does not recognize the rebel, but is instantly compared and juxtaposed to the figure of the resistance; Fernando becomes complicit.

The corpse of the Maqui, covered by a white sheet, is revealed as the camera tilts down from focusing on the film screen; the film theater becomes the morgue, where both cinema and death coexist. The historical fact of the repression against the Maquis is confounded with the fiction and narrative of cinema, reflecting the way in which both worlds coexist and depend on each other. Ana’s fantasies and imagination materialize in history, revealing the way in which

historical meaning can only be derived or understood from imaginative narratives, subsequently liberating the past from its dogmatic apprehension by the official historiography. After Fernando comes back from the police, the whole family sits down to have dinner. Ana sees her father in possession of the clock that she knew was with the rebel, understanding that something happened to her new friend, and identifying her father as a figure of total control; her fantasy becomes real and interactive. During the dinner, the camera frames the four members of the family through medium shots of each character, and never through placing two characters in the same frame, revealing the tension and isolation that dominates the already fragmented house. Similarly, the abandoned house and its ruins, reflect the destroyed and forgotten state of the memory of those forgotten by the official history of the fascist state. However, by establishing parallels between the Maqui and the monster, as well as with Fernando, Erice appears to be critically examining both sides of the political spectrum instead of just blindly defending one over the other through a moralistic and Manichean division of good and evil.

The last character that is constructed as a monster is Ana, the protagonist, through whom most of Erice's concerns and critiques about Spain's state are represented. Ana is constantly lit in a very ominous and Gothic light, mostly when she is inside the labyrinthine and inextricable space of the house. After the scene where Don José is introduced, Teresa is combing Ana's hair and having a conversation about spirits. Ana is clearly interested in the ghostly matters of her imagination, asking her mother what a spirit is. Teresa only responds that a spirit is a spirit, while she combs Ana's hair under a highly formalist and expressionist lighting reminiscent of Rembrandt and Goya. The chiaroscuro and high contrast come together with the theme of the spirit, introducing the audience to Ana's obsession and identification with the monster she had earlier seen on screen. The screen fiction, for Ana, becomes real; cinema and history come

together as narrative devices to make sense of the nation's trauma through the figure of the innocent girl.

Right after seeing her father with the clock during dinner, Ana runs back to the abandoned house to discover that the Maqui is no longer there. As she approaches the well, the fantastic and mysterious music starts playing, queuing the audience into Ana's obscure inner desires. She goes back into the dark-lit house, and sees both blood on top of the hay where the Maqui was and then her father standing at the door framed through a low angle, conveying his authority and monstrosity. Ana is in shock, and she escapes into the wild. All the town will now be looking for Ana: Teresa, from the house's balcony that uncannily resembles a castle's terrace, screams her daughter's name. The entire town, with dogs and weapons, sets out to look for her, reminiscing the chase scene in *Frankenstein*, where the entire town hunts the monster that kills the little girl. At this point, the parallels with the trope of the Frankenstein's monster become clearer, yet more complex; the spectator wonders if Ana, just like the little girl in Whale's film, is going to be killed or die. Ana becomes a symbol for Spain, as a historically ignorant subject being chased by the fragmented monster of the nation's historical trauma. The film, however, will become more complex as it establishes a final identification of Ana with the monster, suggesting the ultimate scarring experience that will forever define the psychological and historical consciousness of the little girl –and of Spain itself.

Ana is wandering alone through the woods, and the fast-paced editing, dark lighting and handheld camera convey a sense of inner instability. She finds a mushroom, which clearly stands in juxtaposition with the evil and fascist mushroom introduced by Fernando, and enters into a state of trance. She eats of the mushroom and its poison, resembling the way in which Spain succumbed to the evil of fascism after the Civil War. The scene of the mushroom fades into a fireplace, where Teresa will burn a letter from the red-cross that suggests that her relative, to

whom she has been writing letters to, has died. Death, forgetfulness, and tragedy come together in the literal burning of the past and the corruption of the young Ana. Ana finds a small lake where she will lean down to see her reflection; her reflection on the water quickly changes to the image of Whale's Frankenstein monster. Ana, as a representation of the Spain that has just eaten the mushroom of fascism and that has been undergoing severe trauma, becomes the fragmented and patched monster that she both feared and was fascinated by. Frankenstein's monster then materializes as it appears on screen, walking towards Ana and finally grabbing her, as she closes her eyes, and lets herself go. Ana's curiosity and innocence are poisoned and corrupted by her own recognition of herself as a monster, as a patched and fragmented nation that. Even though alive, exists in between death and life. Ana symbolizes the state of Spain during the release of the film in 1974, attempting to establish a historical continuum between the Civil War and the unstable and repressive state of Spain right before Franco's death and the transition to democracy.

Ana is found in these old romantic ruins, symbolic of the way in which the new traumatized and monstrous Ana lies in historical ruins, just as Spain does. Ruins represent a space of remembrance, of destroyed memories of the past, just like those left out of Franco's official history. Ana relives Spain's suffering, leaving her weak and shocked as Doctor Miguel, a family friend, will suggest. He says that Ana will slowly forget, reminding Teresa that what is most important is that she is still alive. Ana, however, does not recognize or speak to anyone anymore; she is kept in complete isolation. Ana's subjectivity becomes the only medium through which the ethical conflicts and dilemmas of an entire society can be transmitted and dealt with. Perriam suggests that in Erice's film, "...the monster himself could represent for some a tragically batched recreation of Spain, emerging amoral and amnesiac...a Spain of several nations artificially patched together, a flawed enterprise based on borrowed ideologies coming out of

fascist thought...” (66). Frankenstein’s monster, the beehive, the fragmentation and general forgetfulness symbolized through Teresa’s burnt letters and Fernando’s imaginative yet escapist writing, reflect and critically examine an amoral and amnesic Spain, artificially created by a fascist and nationalist discourse. The name Fernando is clearly not arbitrary; the phonetic relation between Fernando, Frankenstein and Franco are clearly indicative of the deep relationship between these characters. Just like in Mary Shelley’s Gothic novel, Franco, the fascist positivist of dictatorial Spain, creates his monstrous Nation through a patched and fragmented arrangement of absurd historical narratives.

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Fig. 13. Victor Erice, *El Espíritu de la Colmena*, 1974, Criterion 2006.

The film, however, ends in an incredibly open and ambiguous tone. After the spectator hears the doctor’s diagnosis, who says that Ana will eventually forget –foreshadowing what actually happened to Spain during the almost four decades of Franco’s dictatorship –Ana’s trauma manifests through the spirit that still haunts her. The presence of the ghost and the monster, blurring the lines between reality and fiction, and revealing the constructed nature of memories,

challenges the pathological approach to Ana, and subsequently Spain, embodied by Doctor Miguel. Ana stands up from bed and walks towards the same window through which she had her first encounter with the spirit of the monster; the camera frames her in the center, as a highly contrasted blue moonlight bathes her from the outside (see Fig. 13). Fernando's poetry, which speaks to irrationality and madness, is repeated over the image of Ana. She opens the window and says, "if you are *his* friend, you can speak to him... whenever you want, just close your eyes and call him," referring to the monster, or in other words, to the collective repressed memory and trauma of an entire society after a bloody Civil War, and in the last moments of a forty yearlong dictatorship. Remembrance, one that escapes the binaries of good and evil, winners and vanquished, is what the Gothic qualities of Erice's film appear to be suggesting as the only potential way to reconstruct a healing memory of Spain's collective historical trauma.

4. *El Laberinto del Fauno* (Pan's Labyrinth) (2006) by Guillermo del Toro

In a short introduction to *El Laberinto del Fauno* (2006) DVD edition by New Line Home Entertainment, director Guillermo del Toro says, “this movie almost killed me...” Interestingly Guillermo del Toro, a Mexican, speaks from the point of view of the exile, allowing him to enter the Spanish historical memory through the lens of a historically contextual yet estranged identity. This violent and almost tragic depiction of the making of the film reveals the long lasting difficulties and legacies of Spain's historical memory, still present at the moment of the film's production in 2006. In the same way in which Erice reconstructs a labyrinthine history of Spain through the monstrous trauma embodied by Ana, *El Laberinto del Fauno* establishes an intimate relation between the traumatic experience of the young Ofelia and post-Civil War Spain. The film intertwines the fantastic fairy tale, the Gothic spaces of inaccessibility and irrationalism, and Grotesque monsters in order to question not only the dictatorial regime, but the general historical account of Spain's past that have been produced by both the central ultra-nationalist regime and by the peripheral minorities located in the political left. Ofelia, the film's protagonist, represents –just like Ana in *The Spirit of the Beehive* –a Spain where the traumatic memory of fascist repression was displaced from a national consciousness to a collective and silenced remembrance, transforming its weight into a fantastic world in a continuous constructive relationship with reality. However, unlike the unresolved ambiguity of Erice's film, *El Laberinto del Fauno*'s fantastic approach to historical reality is resolved in a clearer manner where one can morally categorize the different characters and their symbolical identities, setting the ground for what would be the film's wide international success.

In order to understand the historical moment in which the film is released, it is important to historically contextualize the last years of Franco's dictatorship and the several transitional

events that led to what is now a questionably democratic government in Spain. The last years of Franco's dictatorship were not easy for the regime, since several peripheral movements –such as unions, liberal sectors of the church, intellectuals and students, and regional nationalists –had organized in an unprecedented way, attracting the international media's attention.¹⁸ The cultural arena became the main outlet for the repressed alternative stories to the national discourse, gaining force due to the changes in media and information policies brought by the minister Manuel Fraga in 1966. Young university students, children of those who had experienced the Civil War and whose memories had been institutionally and ultimately individually repressed, were distant enough from the trauma of the Civil War in order to estrange themselves from the everydayness of the regime and rethink the legitimacy of an almost forty-year long dictatorship. A nationalist Basque guerilla (ETA), fighting to achieve the freedom and autonomy of the region, placed a bomb in Luis Carrero Blanco's car, murdering Franco's most likely successor in an explosion in the middle of Madrid.

Francisco Franco died on the 20th of November of 1975. Franco's dictatorial apparatus had been preparing for his inevitable death, fearful of the changes that would certainly have to come. Predicting the transition to democracy, the regime's leaders were able to effectively negotiate a smooth transition with the opposition leaders, which became popularly known as *el pacto del silencio/olvido* (the pact of silence/forgetting), foregrounding any attempts to reclaim for justice in a post-authoritarian transition. "Francoism has never been placed on trial," argues Giles Temlett in his book *Ghosts of Spain*, "silence was at the hart of Spain's transition to democracy –enrished in the *pacto del olvido*" (82-83). The amnesty of the regime was reflected on the official endorsement of forgetting as the implicit legal and political decision of the political elites of the country, leaving many injustices and suffering unsettled. The official Spanish democratic transition happens without the active participation of the civil society, even

though the true and systematic democratic transformation of Spain was led by an actively resisting civil society since the 1960s.¹⁹ However, the general perception of historical memory was still tainted by fear, symptomatic of a Civil War that was not yet forgotten, and of a long and repressive dictatorship where anyone who opposed it was violently punished. The re-emerging political left, fearful but also shameful of not having overthrown the regime earlier, accepted the so-called “pact of silence.” As suggested by Carlos Castresana Fernández, the possibility of a reform was sacrificed hoping that institutions would organically change with time (Castresana, 2001). Opposing the major critique to the lack of judicial and legal accountability to those linked to the regime, David Rieff argues that the delay in the judicial judging of those responsible for the dictatorship enabled a smooth and peaceful transition (Rieff, 72). Nonetheless, most governmental institutions did not dramatically change and the transition did not hold accountable the structures of a regime founded on violence, totalitarianism and repression (Grimaldos, 30). Cinematic spaces of memory, which had been heavily allegorical during the regime’s hard censorship, assumed a radical opposition that would dangerously replicate the totalitarian control over history and experience proper to the regime.

Right after Franco’s death in 1975 –a possibility that had remained a national taboo because of the construction of his mythical omnipresence –and after the end of the official informational censorship in 1976, several films that were previously forbidden were released, and the production of films from the perspective of the “victims” –namely the left and the Republicans –were produced. Most of these films reopened culturally and politically revealing debates from the stances of historical certainty, openly challenging nearly forty years of official, centralized and hyper nationalist fascist versions of Spanish history that had been founded on the “crusade films” and that pervaded through the regime’s censorship apparatus. Important and renowned documentaries such as *Caudillo* (1974) and *Canciones para Después de una Guerra*

(clandestinely produced in 1971, and released in 1976), both directed by Basilio Martín Patino, were produced during this time. Simultaneously, the “leftist cinema”, also known as the cinema of acknowledgment (Sanchez Vidal, 512) was solidified through film such as *Siete Días de Enero* (1978) by Juan Antonio Bardem, *La Fuga de Segovia* (1981) by Imanol Uribe, and *Operación Ogro* (1979) by Gillo Pontecorvo. Such films narrated repressive and traumatic events such as the massive assassination of the Atocha lawyers who were supporters of the political left, or the revolutionary actions of the separatist revolutionary group ETA, in an attempt to place them at the center of History and legitimize their socio-political positions. Most of these films adopted a historically realist tone, that will pervade most Spanish cinema of the Civil War and the dictatorship until the early twenty first century, reproducing the dangerous totalizing quest for historical meaning exerted by the dictatorial cinematic apparatus. The Gothic and the Grotesque as historical aesthetic strategies were left to the side in search for a presumably more realistic restitution of the repressed memories of the vanquished during the Civil War and the dictatorship.

This new revolutionary and revelatory cinema found its main limitation in the ideological and political space after the 1977 elections, which ensured a general political amnesty for all of those involved in the dictatorial regime. Adolfo Suarez Gonzalez, Spain’s first elected president, was intimately close to Franco and established an underlying ideological continuum hidden under pseudo-democratized institutions. Spain’s new cinema and its attempt to denounce, blame, and hold Franco’s dictatorial apparatus responsible for its repressive actions, entered in crisis. The “pact of silence” and the elite’s support of official policies that attempted to eradicate historical memory, reinvigorated a cultural taboo around the idea of reopening the wounds from a war that was, and still is, present in the nation’s collective memory. In 1986 the European Community accepted the “new” democratic Spain, legitimizing a country that had not recognized or taken responsibility over a long and violent political repression for nearly forty years. However, as Jo

Labanyi suggests, these memories were not necessarily *forgotten* (Labanyi, 123) as they filtered a cultural *modus operandi* that continually attempted to reconstitute the validity of these repressed memories. The struggle against the official version of an exclusive and elitist transition happened in the cultural arena, where cultural actors attempted to reconstruct and legitimize the silenced memories through performing and conducting the justice that no tribunal was. As Jose Colmeiro suggests,

Memory was dismissed from the institutionalized political discourse and displaced into the cultural and intellectual scenes, where it found a distinctive space, or in other words, a sort of *lieux de mémoire*, as evidenced by the sudden increase, during the first years of the transition (between 1976 and 1978), of literary works, documentaries and film, as well as testimonial and historical narratives that accounted for the recent past, and the public's wide recognition of these works. (27)

In the transitional Spain, where the obsession with progress and integration into the late twentieth century multinational world marked the decision to forget, the past became a cultural taboo only invoked by a few cultural outliers who dared to call upon the ruins and ghosts of a fragmented and disjointed nation, themes intimately related to the Gothic and Grotesque aesthetics.

The general silence that predominated during this transitional period was initially broken by the election of Felipe Gonzalez in 1982, the first president of the Spanish Socialist Worker's Party (PSOE). The PSOE would remain in office until 1996, evidencing a change in the social perception of the political reality and history of the country, and reopening a public space for the discussion and questioning of the pact of silence. Cultural sectors were encouraged to talk about the *other* story that had been left out of official historiographical records, opting for heroic depictions of the Republic and other forms of anti-fascist propaganda. The counter-informational

role was adopted by TVE (the national state-owned television broadcaster), and by another wave of film such as *Las Bicicletas son para el Verano* (1983) by Jaime Chávarri, *Los Santos Inocentes* (1984) by Mario Camus, and *La Vaquilla* (1983) by Luis García Berlanga, which reassumed the role of condemning the repressive tactics of Franco's Spain. The historical melodrama and more sentimentalized aesthetics of these new revisionist representations of the past, problematic and dangerously restorative, were crystalized in the "kitsch nostalgia" of José Luis Garci's film *Volver a Empezar* (1982), which won the Academy award for best foreign film in 1983. The neutral and almost apolitical version of history embodied by this new wave of cinematographic historical representation, was evidenced through the film's narrative of a man who returns to the "new" democratic Spain in order to find his lost love –or rather, his lost Spain –replacing a commitment to reflexive and critical history with kitsch sentimentalism. Leaving behind the cinematic aesthetics of the Gothic and the Grotesque, and their potential to liberate the past from the chains of dogmatic and rhetorical political discourses, this new cinema sacrifices radical criticism in favor of neutralism and centralism (Sánchez Vidal 510). Historical memory cinema adopted a liberal –non-radical –agenda, representative of a middle class characterized by an apathetic sociopolitical attitude.

The economic crisis faced by the government and the still present rancorous gap between the official responses to historical memory and the still unrepaired memories of the civil society, permeated into the 1996 elections won by José María Aznar from the Popular Party (PP). The PP had hosted several of the old regime's politicians who had received amnesty, developing a fringe group that vocally advocated for an institutional return to the times of the dictatorship. The tension between both parties and their policies regarding historical memory is still present in the twenty first century, after the debate over Spain's memory was reopened. In 1996, president José María Aznar mentioned that the Spanish government and the political elites still had a historical

debt, since his party had never publically recognized its responsibility for the violence and repression during the Civil War and dictatorship. However, most public institutions and the majority of the PP, strongly stood against a revival of historical memory as they argued that it would reopen and deteriorate the wounds and vengeful rancor between different sectors of society. In 2004, the PSOE won the elections partly due to its mobilization of the discourse on the revival of historical memory as an election tool. The party took on the task of proposing and official recognition of historical memory under the presidency of José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, bringing the collective repressed memories into the public sphere.

El Laberinto del Fauno appeared in this historical and political context, where the wounds of the past are being reopened in the public space of a nation still caught in the debate between remembrance and forgetting. The rehabilitation of those who had been disqualified by Franco, the exhumation of the victims of the fascist violence, and the new wave of cinematographic, literary and intellectual production on the topic, begin to solidify the recovery of historical memory as a moral and ethical imperative. As suggested by Labanyi, “those who have suffered political repression should have the possibility to articulate that pain in the public sphere, if they so decide, and for that pain to be publically recognized” (121). The Civil War and its authoritarian legacy are still important and vital themes for the Spanish society since the wounds are still open and the *corpses* of the dead are still stuck to the nation’s backbone (González, “La Vaquilla” 75). The aesthetics of the Gothic and the Grotesque become crucial in this exorcism, not only because of their unique treatment of social repressed taboos through the figures of the ghost and the monster, but also because of their attempt to step away from a totalizing and dogmatic approach to the past.

Fantastic Tales: The Return of the Gothic's Historical Function

El Laberinto del Fauno emerged from a clear tension between the liberal attitude that characterized the more dogmatic and restorative version of historical memory with its heroic and victimized depictions of the Republic, and a more critical approach to the past evidenced through the return to the aesthetics of the Gothic and the Grotesque that had proven to be so effective in depicting the complex and narrative nature of historiography, trauma and the past. Very similar to the cultural repression of memory that existed during the years immediately before and after Franco's death when *El Espiritu de la Colmena* was produced, del Toro's film responds to a similar cultural silencing of the past that permeated the duration of the PP's presidency (1996-2004). The use of the fantastic in dealing with the representation of the immediate years after the end of the Civil War in the film allows the audience to cross boundaries that it cannot normally transgress, and to name and represent the things that it does not dare to due to institutional, inner or collective censorship (Todorov 158). Del Toro's film initially attempts to deal with the past through a fantastic approach that confounds reality and fiction, opting for the figure of the ghost and the monster to reveal the traumatic and disjointed spaces of Spanish memory, but it ultimately resolves its plot by revealing the uncanny nature of its fantasy, falling again back in a dangerously rhetorical restoration of the vanquished that sacrifices any critical engagement with the past.

The historical fairy tale of *El Laberinto del Fauno* takes place in 1944 during the early years of Franco's regime, five years after the end of the Civil War. The army of the victorious ultra-right coalition was still actively confronting the Maquis hidden in rural towns and in the hills, through violent repression and extermination. The story unfolds through the perspective of Ofelia (Ivana Baquero), a young girl who travels from Madrid to a rural military post with her pregnant mother, Carmen (Ariadna Gil), who has recently married Captain Videla (Sergi Lopez),

a high rank soldier in the fascist army. Amidst the bellicose and violent space of the military camp's mission to destroy the Republican resistance still present on the hills, Ofelia encounters a Faun in a labyrinth, which will lead her to experience fantastic adventures in order to prove that she is the lost princess of the magical kingdom beyond the labyrinth. Her imagination is constantly paralleled with the historical context of the early dictatorial repression, serving both as an escape but also as a contest and subversive alternative to the official regime. The Gothic use of space and lighting, as well as the Grotesque nature of the main characters and the monsters that Ofelia encounters through her adventures and imaginative journeys, challenge the borders between fiction and history, questioning the validity of official historical narratives.

The immediate aftermath of the Civil War was highly repressive, since Franco's apparatus legitimized its power by detaining, torturing, murdering and forcibly deporting the political opposition. The film opens by historically contextualizing its narrative, through situating it in a clear date (1944), and through an inserted text that introduces the political situation of the Republican groups being killed and chased by the new fascist regime. Propaganda was increasingly important in this early period, mostly since the elevated number of deaths and food scarcity could easily resolve into another attempt for a revolution or coup d'état. Del Toro clearly shows these propagandistic attempts by including in the film one of the staple slogans of the regime; as one of the soldiers is distributing bread to the local inhabitants of the town, he claims that in the new Spain of Franco, no one will die of hunger. As the allies were defeating Hitler's Nazi Germany and central European fascism, Spanish fascists were left to finish the war they had won by annihilating and massacring the remnants of what was the Second Republic. *El Laberinto* is denouncing a historical fault that has not yet been recognized by the international community, or the Spanish nation itself.

However, soon after the historical contextualization of the film, the nostalgic tune that plays at the beginning turns even more mysterious and ominous, as the camera reveals Ofelia bleeding. The shot is, nonetheless, played in reverse, as the blood from Ofelia's nose appears to be returning from where it first came, suggesting the film's nostalgic attempt to reverse history and undo the deaths and massacre of all the innocent ones who died at the hand of the fascist repression and the Civil War in general. Del Toro starts the film foreshadowing its end, establishing the circularity of the fairy tale and of history, always already haunting the present. The past, as suggested by Benjamin (392), is recognized by del Toro in a fleeting image of the present, attempting to redeem the suffering of those left behind by the violent and abrasive advance of the ultra-Nationalist regime. Ofelia's blood, the music, the blue light and the chiaroscuro composition that blends Ofelia into the background, reveal the intimate connection between history and the Gothic fairy tale, placing both as inherently narrative modes that enable us to make sense of the past. The blue light and the figure of the young girl, a victim of irrational violence, establishes a clear dialogue with Erice's film, proposing a return to these aesthetics as the most accurate way to make sense of a complex history. As the camera moves into Ofelia's eye, suggesting an entrance into her imagination, a deep masculine voice-over reinforces the fairy tale by opening the film with a stereotypical fantastic trope, "They say that, long, long time ago..." The voice-over plays a major role throughout the film, as it legitimizes the fairy tale as historical narration, revealing the intricate dependence of reality and fiction and questioning the constructed and dogmatic nature of the dictatorial historical accounts.

The narration tells the story of a princess, clearly paralleled with Ofelia, who escaped from the magical and safe kingdom of her father into the world of humans. The light outside the magical underworld erased her memory of the past, and she forgot who she was. The film's intertextual dialogue with Plato's allegory of the cave is clear. However, del Toro goes a step

beyond by saying that the initial curiosity that takes Ofelia –the philosopher –to the ultimate knowledge that lies outside of the cave, can also make us forget our identity and those who are still inside the cave. Ofelia, just like Ana in Erice’s film, stands as an archetypal trope of the nation as feminine, and in this case, innocent. The Spain of the film’s release, from where the act of remembrance is being performed, does not remember what it was before the dictatorship, as the blinding light of positivist progress and linear time displaced memory into a deep untouched, yet present and haunted/monstrous cave. The underworld kingdom, referring to those repressed memories of a pre-fascist Spain, is awaiting for the return of the princess, in an attempt to reconnect reality and fiction and bring justice to the forgotten. As the narration continues, the camera Fauns through different ruins, conveying the destroyed and ruined *lieux de memoire* where the memories of the war lie (see Fig. 14). The world of the film, always hesitantly lying between reality and fiction, establishes a continuity between the ruins of the fantastic story and the images of the cars with the symbol of the yoke and the arrows as they approach the military post.

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Fig. 14. Guillermo del Toro, *El Laberinto del Fauno*, 2006, New Line Home Entertainment 2007.

The voiceover narration of the historically contextualized fairy tale stops as the camera frames a book with an illustration of a fairy, through an over the shoulder shot of Ofelia. Her mother tells her, in a demeaning tone, that she reads *too* many fairy tales, an anxiety that will only increase as the film's plot get more violent and dramatic. The tension between adult and child, revealed through the adult's denial of fiction as part of historical understanding, reveals the identification of the primal and uncorrupted Spain with Ofelia's belief in fiction. The distance between the two figures is reinforced by the silence, which represents the unspeakability of the trauma caused by the recent Civil War. As Ofelia wanders to the side of the road where she finds an intimidating face carved into a rock, an eerie and fantastic music queues the audience into the fantastic world where her imagination meets reality. A bug comes out of the rock, and Ofelia sees it as a fairy, revealing the way in which her life and perception of reality is contained and informed by the books she reads. The camera becomes complicit with her imagination, as it frames the exit of the cars through the perspective of the bug/fairy, personifying it and suturing the audience into the fantastic world where history and fiction are not easily distinguishable. This conflation strategically functions to call into question what will become the oppressive and overpowering presence of the fascist military presence, attempting to emancipate the past from the heroic and monumental depictions of the dictatorship.

Ofelia, the innocent Spain, meets the Captain for the first time, as he symbolically grabs her hand hurting her. Similarly to the premise in Erice's film, the Captain's overwhelmingly powerful presence as the leader of the regime's forces, acts as a patriarchal and oppressive figure over the innocent little girl, which acts as a trope for pre-Civil War Spain. Ofelia immediately follows the bug, which takes her to the labyrinth for the first time. Mercedes, the maid in the house who secretly supports the Maquis hidden in the mountains, follows Ofelia. Ofelia is not a

naïve escapist child; she is well aware that her father died in the war, revealing that a recognition of fantasy and fiction is not necessarily exclusive from a groundedness on historical realism. Del Toro, through the figure of Ofelia, is effectively revealing the way in which the past is brought as history into the present through inherently fictional narratives, mediated by historical subjects. This recognition of historical reality during the first encounter of Ofelia with the labyrinth, works again to conflate both history and fiction, as the camera becomes complicit with the bug-as-fairy once more, framing Ofelia and Mercedes walking away from a point-of-view shot from the bug's perspective (see Fig. 15). The cinematography of the film is clearly constructed in a way in which the audience is invited and sutured into both a historical setting and to a fantastic world, allowing the audience to constantly question the validity of the ultra-Nationalist depiction of reality.

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Fig. 15. Guillermo del Toro, *El Laberinto del Fauno*, 2006, New Line Home Entertainment 2007.

The tension between fantastic and historical narratives revealed by *El Laberinto del Fauno*, works in order to establish the implicit imagination in both types of accounts of the past, ultimately questioning the official versions –both from the political right and the political left –of a falsely static and recoverable past. Jane Hanely analyses del Toro's film, suggesting that it

approximates the idea of “historiographic metafiction, where the reformed and disobedient fairy tale interrogates the narratives of the past” (38). The film constantly plays with the interaction of two worlds that destroy and reconstruct Ofelia, who incarnates a Spain traumatized by the official narratives of repressive fascism. The connection between the world of a war-torn, violent and cruel Spain, where Ofelia loses his father and which destroys her family, and the fantastic but dangerous and mysterious world of the Faun, is created through the presence of the fantastic characters in both worlds through editing, sound and cinematography.

Fantastic and real spaces are constantly being juxtaposed through editing, blurring the borders between both worlds, a characteristic proper to the fantastic story. After Ofelia is given her first task by the Faun, which is to recover a key hidden inside a monstrous frog inside a magical tree, the film cuts between Ofelia walking towards the tree and Captain Vidal’s horsemen in a search of the Maquis in the woods. Ana’s quest for justice and for remembering who she was/is –princess Moana of the magic underworld –is juxtaposed and visually compared to the repressive actions of the fascist military, almost confronting both through the editing. Similarly, as Ana accomplishes her second task inside a magical cave where she finds a terrifying creature with eyes in its hands referred to as the pale monster, the film constantly cuts back to the cave in the hills where the Maquis are hiding. Both places, as sites of fear embodied in the figure of a monster –the monstrous creature implicit in the Maquis’ cave is Franco –again depict Ofelia as a heroic figure, confronting the cruel monster of fascism through her imaginary world. Hanley argues,

El Laberinto draws on both childhood and adult experiences, both child and adult conceptions of narrative, and through the constant circulation of historical and imagined realities and the film’s refusal to validate one over the other, the

significance of events becomes a process of negotiation between text and audience.

(28)

The film activates an audience used to passive spectatorship, and similarly to *El Espíritu de la Colmena*, provides an open and critical reading of the past, encouraging the viewer to appropriate his/her own version of the narratives of historical memory. The film's use of an ambiguous depiction of the historical and imagined realities as mutually dependent, challenges the traditional experience of the spectators, who is queued to evaluate both the official historiography of the right and the nostalgic rhetoric of the left. The silences of the past, engrained and solidified through the pact of silence and the failed transition, are recovered by heavily symbolic and inaccessible aesthetics grounded on Gothic and Grottesque constructions of historical memory. The ghosts of Spain's dictatorial past were brought to the present in an effort to turn the collective memory processes into serious acts of resistance against institutional forgetting. The Gothic fairy tale becomes as much a legitimate way to access the past as historiographic accounts are, since both of them respond to the very same notion of narrativity and fiction.

Ruins and Memories: Gothic Spaces of Trauma and Remembrance

Simon Hay suggests that the Gothic aesthetic of the nineteenth century British novel is a response to the trauma of the social transition to modernity (Hay, 18). As much as the historical novel responded to a notion of historicity that could only emerge in a time where progress was defined by conceptualizing time in a linear and progressive way, the Gothic novel could only emerge as a resistance to this, founded on the old tradition of Grottesque dialectical inversion. Trauma, in this case historical, seems to be a necessary condition for the spaces of Gothic and Grottesque aesthetics to emerge. *El Laberinto del Fauno* enters into a dialogue with the collective trauma of the Civil War and the dictatorship through creating Gothic spaces where imagination,

spirits and monster, as subversive embodiments of historical storytelling, invoke remembrance as a weapon for justice. Nonetheless the intricate and complex ruins and memorials where remembrance takes place, as much as they stand in for a clear ideological support for the act of historical memory, also question modernity's rationalist notion of reducing historical experience to a logical sequence of organizable and empirically quantifiable facts.

The labyrinth where Ofelia encounters the Faun is the main space of remembrance, a highly symbolical setting that calls into question Spanish history and the more foundational matter of historical *representation* (see Fig. 16). Both Emma McEvoy (7) and Benjamin Hervey (234) suggest that the labyrinth is a Gothic trope that represents confinement, the secret, the forbidden and the inaccessibility to the *reality* of historical experience. Labyrinths dislocate rational and linear thought, replacing it with multiplicity, fragmentation, and confusion, effectively representing the complex access to knowledge itself. Jorge Luis Borges, one of the main modernist and anti-rational writers of the Spanish language in the twentieth century, wrote *Labyrinths* in 1962 as a collection of essays that reflected his concern with fiction and reality. The labyrinth in del Toro's film places the narration within this precise realm of (meta)fiction,

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Fig. 16. Guillermo del Toro, *El Laberinto del Fauno*, 2006, New Line Home Entertainment 2007.

magic and fantasy, and it is where narratives conflate in the figure of the Faun and in the opening and ending image of Ofelia dead at the center of the labyrinth. Just like the abandoned house in Erice's film, the labyrinth is where fiction meets history, where innocence is lost in the face of monstrous historical trauma, and where reality is embraced as a production narrativity as reality.

The first time that the labyrinth is introduced, when Ofelia first arrives at the military front of Captain Vidal, Mercedes tells Ofelia that the labyrinth is made up of old stones, already there since the beginning of time. The allusion to ruins first suggests that Spanish historical memory, located in this intricate and almost inaccessible space, is made up of ruins, of destroyed and lost places that can only be thought of as memorials. The timelessness of the old rocks suggested by Mercedes, represents the always already presence of fiction in the way in which we understand and make sense of the world: fiction's relationship to the notion of historical time is timeless, or in other words, ever present in human notions of meaning. The past is always already gone, and the only way of representing it is through a rejection of the pretension of total mimesis,

and embracing narrativity as the only way to circumvent its labyrinthine paths in order to activate and redeem our presence in the fleeting present, as suggested by Benjamin (390). The labyrinth as a metaphor suggests that historical thought can only resemble an intricate, forbidden and complex connection of past events that is always incomplete and fictionally reconstructed.

The military post, which is also the house of the Captain, Ofelia, Carmen those who work for them, is a dark place that, like Ana's house, conveys coldness and aggression. The house in *El Laberinto del Fauno* is also a space where fiction and history come together through the way in which the house is lit, parallel editing and highly crafted sound design. During their first night in the house, Carmen tries to calm Ofelia's fear of the noises in the house by saying that it is just the wind, and that these houses creak as if they could speak. Carmen clearly personifies the house, as a site where the past haunts the present through the cathartic experiences of Ofelia's imagination. Ofelia's creative imagination is awakened by the house's noises, releasing her imaginative creation through the story she tells her brother still inside her mother's womb –a reminder of the romantic aspect of the Gothic, and establishing an intertextual relation to Fernando's highly allegorical poetry in *The Spirit of the Beehive*. Ofelia tells a story about a rose on top of a hill, surrounded by spines, highly symbolical of fascism as dark spines that sieged the more vulnerable and innocent flower of Spain. The bug/fairy intrudes into her narrative, and, as if there was no border between the fantastical world of her story and her historical presence in the house, the bug enters through the window. It is in the house, as a space of high contrast, dark spaces and disjointed opposition to fascist rationalist unity, where the bug first becomes a rather Grottesque-looking fairy that will guide her into the labyrinth to meet the Faun.

Both labyrinth and house have a dark quality to them, where monsters, both fantastic (Faun, pale man and fairies) and historic ones (Captain Vidal), act as oppressive and mysterious forces that repress Ofelia's and her mother's desires. Both places are constantly lit through a high

contrast lighting, reminiscent of the chiaroscuro in Erice's film and in Goya's grotesque dark paintings, highlighting the importance of shadows and unperceivable things in the construction of narrative realities. When Ofelia is in the bathtub attempting to read over the book given to her by the Faun in their first encounter, the light that comes through is fragmented by the dust, frames and dark objects inside. The image of Ofelia being visually bathed by a gothically crafted light, represents her presence in a liminal space that challenges traditional notions of historical reality, using fiction and the dark spaces of the scene as a visual contestation to the oppressive presence of the military forces in the house (see Fig. 17). Ofelia, instead of bathing in preparation for a dinner with the Captain's guests, decides to challenge the figures of patriarchal and historical authority by reading the blank book given to her by the Faun, as marks and drawings magically appear in its pages. Fantasy, in this sense, "traces the unsaid and the unseen of culture: that which has ben

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Fig. 17. Guillermo del Toro, *El Laberinto del Fauno*, 2006, New Line Home Entertainment 2007. silenced, made invisible, covered over and made 'absent'" (R. Jackson, 4). The house that symbolizes Ofelia's repression and fears, also allows her to enter and have access to the fantastical world through which she will ultimately challenge Captain Vidal's authority. Ofelia's

fantasies are able to materialize the silenced of Spain's pasts, and to give shape and voice to the abject memories of the nation in 2006.

The places where Ofelia has to perform the tasks given to her by the Faun are usually paralleled with the historical reality of the fascist repression, turning these fantastic spaces into sites of contestation and remembrance. Ofelia's first task happens in a magical, old and muddy tree, which is dying because of a frog that lives inside it. Ofelia must confront the frog and get the key that will allow her to fulfill her second task. The sequence of her going into the magical space of the tree is constantly juxtaposed with the Captain's military force looking for the Maquis in order to kill them. These cuts establish the Gothic realism of the film, very much like in Erice's work, suggesting that the "frog monster" that is killing the magical tree –a symbol of innocent life –is truly the fascist repression that the editing constructs as the antagonist to Ofelia's quest for remembrance. This conflation and hesitation to decide which world should be privileged over the other, is characteristic of the "pure" fantastic suggested by Todorov and of the contestational and radical features of the fantastic genre suggested by R. Jackson. Ofelia is empowered by the film's editing as a historical agent capable of contesting the historical weight of the dictatorship, through the fantasies of her world. Del Toro is defending fantasy, storytelling and Gothic representations, as legitimate and important ways of understanding and dealing with the traumatic past of the Civil War and the dictatorship, still felt during the time of the film's release.

The symbol of the cave is also a crucial allegory to the state of memory and the Gothic construction of reality that the film mobilizes in order to oppose rationalist historical methodologies. Ofelia's second task takes place in a sort of medieval castle court, more like a monstrous cave, to which she has access through a door that she draws with magical chalk on the wall of her room. The Faun warns Ofelia that the place she is about to visit is inhuman and full of

temptation, as the film cuts to Mercedes and the Captain's doctor, who is secretly also supporting the rebels, enter the cave where the Maquis are hiding. The cave is a space of fear and of darkness, where the threat of fascism, as an absurdly violent enterprise, is always lying in wait. Mercedes' brother, Pedro, is one of the Maquis hiding in the cave, visual and narrative evidence of the way in which the violent Civil War and its aftermath divided Spain literally in half. The anxiety and suffering in this space is mirrored by Ofelia's quest in the Gothic castle's court, where she must open one of three doors with the help of the fairies. The Faun had warned her not to take any food from the table, where a pale eye-less monster is sitting. Ofelia cannot resist, and as she eats some of the food on the table, the monster awakens and chases her until she is finally able to escape. The tension and horror of this sequence, conveyed through the fast-paced editing, the chiaroscuro composition of both caves, and through the music, epitomize the importance of the fantastic and Grotesque figure of the monster as a political strategy, rather than a fearful escapism. Through her courage and challenge to the monstrous figure, arguably a symbol of the fascist apparatus, Ofelia is confronting her deepest fears, rooted in the monstrous and haunting presence of the past through its fantastic manifestation in the monster.

Abject Memories: Deformity, Memory and the Monster

Ofelia's world, full of uncanny parallels between an imaginative fantastic world and the reality of the violent fascist dictatorship of Franco's regime, finds its main developments through the use of the monster and the deformation of physical bodies. According to Margarita Cuellar, horror cinema uses the figure of the monster as a reflection of social anxieties, in an attempt to confront the threat of their presence and introduction into the historical realm (230). Similarly, Simon Hay, Chris Baldick and Robert Mighall suggest that historical ruptures manifest themselves as monstrous horror, revealing the irrationality and fragmentation of modern

conceptions of time and history. *El Laberinto del Fauno* makes extensive use of the figure of the monster through the inclusion of fantastic creatures that are both intriguing and terrifying, and by deforming the human body through torture and violence, reflecting the more visceral and Grotesque parallels between history and fiction. As John Tibbetts argues, “This blurring of the lines between the terror sublime and the uncanny, the rational and the irrational, science and art – indeed, between the living and the dead – is central to the workings and effects of Gothic horror and science fiction, past and present” (5). The fantastic and horrendous creatures work to blur the lines that usually divide rational history and irrational fiction, acting as important contesters to the authoritarian control over the past exercised by political discourses. The Grotesque bodies of the monsters in del Toro’s film serve to blur the borders between fiction and history, in order to call into question the official history of Spain and to complicate the typically linear quest for the representation of the past.

The four main monstrous characters that cross boundaries between the fantastic and the historical worlds are the fairies, the Faun, the mandrake and the pale hand-eyed monster in the cave. The grotesquely metamorphic bodies of these monsters, as Hurley would argue, become bodies “...of fear, but fear tempered with fascination” (138). We fear them at the same time that we are fascinated by them, and in this eschatological relation between death and desire we encounter the trauma of the past that finds its main cultural outlet through these Gothic and Grotesque spaces in the film. The body of the bug/fairy, which is the first cinematographic depiction of *real* and *tangible* fantasy, reflects the dark nature of most of the monsters that will appear. The body of the bug turns into a dark rather unpleasant fairy, contrary to what we would normally think of as an innocent magical creature. In fact, both the fantastic and “real” characters are constructed and illustrated through chiaroscuro lighting and dark make up, revealing the gothic construction of liminal identities mobilized by the film. The dark colors and lighting

surrounding the characters, sets up the ambiguous moral space occupied by these monsters, and appropriates the shadows and dark spaces of history as part of its narration. As suggested by Hervey when discussing the construction of spaces in the Gothic film, “this play of light and darkness symbolically underlines [...] Gothic conflicts between rational and irrational, present and past...” (234). In other words, the constant use of chiaroscuro in the creation of the film’s confound the grotesque and abject characteristics of the film with the historical ones, demonstrating the ambiguity and non-dichotomous nature of historical experience. The Gothic is neither an inscription of light nor of darkness, but rather a constant interplay and dependence between the two.

The Faun is clearly the main monstrous figure that drives the fantastic plot, and its intimate relation to the historical context of the film’s story. The Faun inhabits the cave located at the center of the labyrinth, which is supposed to represent the ruins of the entrance to the palace of the underworld where Ofelia, as princess Moana, truly belongs. Just like Ana’s first encounter with the spirit of the monster in Erice’s film through a fragmented window bathed in moonlight, Ofelia’s first encounter with the Faun, after being led by a fairy in the middle of the night, is marked by the blue lighting of the moonlight that reveals the shadows, high contrast and ominous character of the Faun’s world. The Faun symbolizes, as the labyrinth does, the timeless presence of nature, as he says that he is the hills and the earth. His disjointed speech and faltering movements code the Faun as the main Grotesque body of our own fascination, serving as a dark carnivalesque figure that embodies historical narrative. The Faun is also shown eating raw meat, in a very bodily and Grotesque manner, revealing the lower stratum to which he belongs: beyond intellectual and mimetic pretensions, simply *being* in time. Just like the labyrinth, the Faun’s ambiguous personality –friendly yet authoritative and scary –illustrates the complex and

inaccessible nature of the mediums of representation through which the past becomes acknowledged.

The ambiguously evil and untrustworthy depiction of the Faun, evidenced through his enigmatic tasks, his morbid laughter, and his Grotesque presence, stand in juxtaposition with his authoritative position as the holder of truth and knowledge. The Faun guides Ofelia through the tasks that will prove that she is still a “pure” soul, capable of returning to her original fantastic underground kingdom. The moonlight become a crucial symbol for Ofelia’s quest, as the Faun proves his claims by pointing at the moon-shaped body mark in Ofelia’s back. The final task, where fiction and history will ultimately come together, is also supposed to happen during full moon. The light of the moon, commonly associated with the darkness of the night, and in constant interplay with the idea of the chiaroscuro, enhanced the film’s play of light and darkness as mutually constructive and dependent. The Faun is, therefore, both a figure of fictive imagination, and the only character that Ofelia –and the audience –can trust or believe to be a powerful adversary to Captain Vidal. Ofelia often wonders if what the Faun has said is true, but is met with a dark smile and the rhetorical question, “Why would I lie?” Del Toro suggests that the Gothic fiction represented by the Faun is not any more about lies than what historical memory is, as the Faun embraces its narrative existence in a world defined and marked by historical events such as the Civil War.

Right after Ofelia completes the first task inside the frog’s tree, Carmen’s condition begins to deteriorate. As Ofelia opens the blank book to look for the next task, the book stains with blood, forming a symmetric womb oddly resembling a Rorschach test. The fictive world of Ofelia, once more, adopts an evident relation to reality as it alerts her to the state of her mom in the real world. The book, as a symbol of fantastic narratives, provides her with practical strategies to confront reality. The Faun visits Ofelia in her room and gives her a magic mandrake

that will cure her mother. The mandrake, which moves and sounds like a newborn baby, resembles the bodily Grotesque complexion of the Faun and the fairies. Its relatively disgusting features and texture create a sense of discomfort and fascination that sutures the viewer into the liminal spaces of historical representation. The mandrake, part of Ofelia's fantastic world, has a real effect on her mother's wellbeing as pointed out by the Doctor who defines Carmen's betterment as supernatural and miraculous. The unexplainable and uncanny condition of this hesitation between the rational and the irrational blurs the line between the two, founding its cultural basis on the superstitious character of catholic, baroque and gothic Spanish idiosyncrasy. What is attributed to the influence of the supernatural monster in the film is typically attributed in catholic tradition to God's providence, making this feature of the fantastic something proper to Spain's cultural modes of representation.

The hand-eyed pale monster is probably one of the most unhingeable and memorable characters and moments of the Faun's Labyrinth, precisely because of the audience's abject fascination with the inscription of the revolutionary Grotesque into the body of the monster. Ofelia's second task takes her to this monster's lair, where she must use the key from the first task to open a door, where she will ultimately find an old dagger. Even though the Faun warns Ofelia not to eat anything from the monster's table, she succumbs to the temptation awakening the pale monster that had been sitting immobile on the table. The monster, previously lacking any eyes, slowly places two eyes that are lying on the table into his hands. Del Toro established an intertextual dialogue with Don José in Erice's film, an instructional model without eyes that is given its ability to see by Ana. Just like Ana, Ofelia's decisions and actions place cause the return of the monster's ability to see, representing the historical agency of both girls as tropes for Spain, but also their innocent yet complicit relation to the repressed and abject memories of Spain's violent past. The eyes stand as a metaphor about the ability to *see* into the past, of memory as a

tool for historical knowledge. However, this knowledge is always fragmented, monstrous and disjointed, mostly when its subject is a traumatic nation that, even in 2006 when *El Laberinto del Fauno* was released, has not come to terms with its violent and dictatorial past.

The body of the monster, just like the one of the Faun, is grounded on the bodily stratum, crucial in Bakhtin's conception of the Grotesque (5). The monster is activated by food, and as it awakes it catches two fairies and violently eats them as blood drips from its mouth, reverting its existence to the very bodily and grotesque nature of survival and existence. The visceral and vertiginous experience of the audience throughout this scene is meant to activate the spectator's understanding of the oppressive force of the repressed taboos pertaining Franco's repression and the massacres of the Civil War, while also liberating the past from objectivist and highly



Fig. 18. Francisco de Goya, *Saturno devorando a un hijo*, Museo del Prado, Madrid, 1820-1823

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Fig. 19 and 20. Guillermo del Toro, *El Laberinto del Fauno*, 2006, New Line Home Entertainment 2007.

intellectual historical pretensions. The image of the monster eating the fairies is also intimately related to one of Goya's famous dark paintings, *Saturn Devouring His Son* (see Fig. 18, 19 and 20). The pale monster, in a metatextual dialogue with Goya and Spanish aesthetic traditions, reveals the monstrous character of Spain as a nation that devours its own people through absurd wars and violence. The reference can also be read through Saturn as god of time in Roman mythology, establishing the pale monster as a representation of *time* itself, which instinctively devours fantasy and history, the narrative attempts to grasp its essence and presence. As Hurley suggests, these gothic and grotesque strategies full of gross and bodily images revert back to our material existence, rejecting high intellectual pretensions but also tying us back to our own irrational existence beyond ideologically contingent historical narratives (138). The use of the pale monster serves this function, as it creates a point of tension in the narrative where objective history is replaced with a cultural manifestation of repressed and abject fears. Through placing the pale monster in the medieval court, Del Toro also compares the monstrous presence of fascism to the court of a deformed and violent monarchy, proposing a critique of the continuum of oppressive social hierarchies across different historical times in Spain.

El Laberinto del Fauno replicates the grotesque depiction of fantastic bodies in the construction of the characters involved in the Civil War as combatants, namely the Maquis and Captain Vidal. The deformation of their bodies as monsters serves to destroy the Manichaeic dichotomy of good and evil, and of fantasy and fiction, placing violence and fragmentation as a common characteristic to both sides of the political spectrum. The Maquis, hidden in a cave in the mountains, are represented through a heavily high contrasted lighting similar to the one in which the Captain is depicted. Even though del Toro clearly emphasizes more with the Maquis' cause than with the fascist repression, the absurdity of the war is evidenced through the visual

parallels established between the rebels' cave and the Captain's house. Grotesque violence plays an important role in this construction, introduced by the pale monster as he grossly eats the fairies. A stuttering guerrilla fighter is caught in combat by the fascist military, and then tortured by Captain Vidal, who appears to sadistically enjoy the blood and violence inflicted upon others' bodies, just like the pale man over the fairies. The camera reveals the completely destroyed and deformed body of the Maqui, creating a reflexive distancing through the use of the monstrous abject and of horror, enabling the audience to critically examine the historical absurdity of the fascist enterprise.

Captain Vidal is probably the biggest monster in the film, whose body is physically deformed by the end through a viscerally shocking cut in his face in the form of a clownish and sadistic smile. Captain Vidal is a cold-blooded monster who calculates all the details to his militaristic and repressive actions, ultimately turning into an *actual* monster through the deformation of his physical body. The first time the Captain is depicted as a symbol of the violent fascist repression, is during his first encounter with leftist suspects, a father and his son caught with "red" propaganda. The captain kills the son by violently hitting his face with an empty glass bottle until his face is totally disfigured, and then shoots the father. The camera does not cut in the action, and the special effects allow the long take to show the deformed face of the son as the bottle destroys it. This abject and bloody depiction of fascist violence, serves to both reveal the historical responsibility of the regime as well as to distance the audience from a monolithic representation of the dictatorship, embracing its fictional characteristics through its own exaggeration. Del Toro reveals the way in which the dictatorship enforced censorship through bloody and violent tactics, revealing the regime's absurdity through the social inversion that the fantastic, the Gothic and the Grotesque allow. The Gothic and the Grotesque become the only possible aesthetic strategies that are capable of revealing the already contained absurdity within

fascism; through their juxtapositions, blurring of boundaries and inversions, these spaces and characters reveal the inherent problems with rationalist and linearly scientific notions of historical memory.

Captain Vidal is constantly depicted performing several routines, mostly shaving and checking his clock. Both things appear to be common symbols of fascism, as Erice also uses the shaving and the clock when introducing the fascist policeman who killed the Maqui in the abandoned house. Captain Vidal's organized routine that involves shaving, polishing his boots and cleaning his clock represents the obsession of fascism with control over time. Fascism as an ideology is understood as absurd in its hyper-rationality and obsession with modern time, progress and linearity. This obsession with order and hyper-rational behavior is symbolized by the metaphor of the clock as a measurer of time, one of the main and most important inventions of modernity as it allows to control and "objectively" mark the pass of time and history itself. However, as mentioned before, the absurdity of fascism is always already inscribed in its performance of control. During one of his routines, Captain Vidal looks at himself in the mirror and allegorically cuts his reflection's throat with the shaving blade, revealing both the film's end but also the suffering, affect and absurd self-inflicted violence proper of ultra-rightist historiography.

The clock, within the diegesis of the film, also symbolizes the fascist attempt to immortalize heroic figures as monumental examples of historical prowess. In a dinner hosted by Captain Vidal, the aristocracy, upper classes, a catholic priest and Doctor Ferreiro –the only secret dissenter –reveal the social make up of the dictatorial apparatus, as everyone talks about the justifications for the massive killing of the political left and the remnants of the Republic. Captain Vidal, as the ultimate representation of a militaristic dictatorial regime, reminds his guests and the audience that equality does not exist: they won the war and the Republicans lost it,

and now it is his duty to wipe them out. His heroic task, mimicking the heroic construction of a monumental past throughout the forty years of Franco's rule, is reinforced by the story told by one of the guests who refers to Vidal's father in the frontlines of the fascist army's rebellion in northern Morocco, where Franco began his leadership. Captain Vidal's father hit his clock against a rock right before dying, in order to freeze his time of death so that his son could remember him as a hero who died in battle, for the liberation of Spain under the hands of the *Falange*. The glorification of the soldier's violence and the control over time are all depicted as characteristics of the rationalist and modern enterprise of fascism, against which the Gothic, fantastic and Grottesque construction of the film stands.

Carmen dies giving birth to her child, and the Captain obsesses over the newborn as the potential continuum into the future he sees himself constructing for Spain, through whom he will be able to replicate the monumental and heroic narratives of the past that his father, as a symbol of Franco himself, had instilled in his own nationalistic identity Mercedes and Ofelia attempt to escape with the child, but they are caught by the military. Captain Vidal attempt to replicate his torturing techniques with Mercedes, but she manages to escapes and cuts the Captain's face in the form of a sadistic smile that completes his transition into a complete monster. Vidal as a monster, much like *Frankenstein* or Fernando in Erice's film, reveals the abject and dangerous consequences of fascism, allowing audiences to critically examine the historical narratives of such characters. The film shows the captain stitching his face back together, creating the visceral distancing and fascination that enables the audience to critically examine the film, as well as relate the monstrous depiction of the characters to the social taboos and repressed topics in a Spain that is unwilling to invoke the ghosts and monsters of a still traumatic past.

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Fig. 21. Guillermo del Toro, *El Laberinto del Fauno*, 2006, New Line Home Entertainment 2007.

Captain Vidal symbolizes the rationalist refusal of fiction in historical narrative, as he constantly denies and destroys Ofelia's –and Spain's –emancipatory and subversive imagination. Before Carmen dies, the Captain catches Ofelia under her mother's bed with the mandrake and aggressively pulls her out, diminishing the mandrake and Ofelia's fantastic world as “shit”. The mandrake, through the Captain's point of view shots, is completely inanimate, opposite to how it has been depicted before, moving and crying as a baby. Ofelia's fantastic world continues to prove resilient, as the Faun comes to give her a second chance after her failure at the pale monster's cave. Her new task is to take the newborn baby and the dagger to the center of the labyrinth, receiving pieces of magical chalk like the ones she had used to draw a magic door to enter the pale monster's abode. Ofelia uses this chalk to escape from her room into the Captain's room, revealing again the *actual* power of fictional and imaginative narratives as challenges challenge to the regime's horrifically monumental narratives of the past. Fantasy becomes a legitimate strategy to contest the oppressive and violent legacy of the war and the dictatorship.

As the rebels take over the house, outnumbering the fascist military force, Ofelia escapes with her newborn brother in arms towards the labyrinth. The sadist and monstrous Captain chases her through the labyrinth, as the latter magically shifts and transforms its composition to give advantage to Ofelia, confusing official history represented by Vidal, as he tries to circumvent the intricate complexities of the labyrinth as a site of memory. When the Captain reaches the center, Ofelia is speaking to the Faun. However, through the Captain's point-of-view shot, Ofelia appears to be talking to no one. The film, therefore, resolves the hesitation proper to the fantastic through an uncanny manner, as suggested by Todorov, revealing the *reality* behind the fantasy. Del Toro, as opposed to Erice, resolved the fantasy of Ofelia's imagination by denying her ultimate chance to prove the audience that her world is connected to presumed historical facts. No one sees the fantastic world of Ofelia except for her, placing the audience in a strange position where one is compelled to judge Ofelia as mad. Captain Vidal finally shoots Ofelia after recovering his son from her arms, only to be encountered at the end of the labyrinth by Mercedes and the other Maquis who have taken over the town. Acknowledging his imminent death, the Captain hands his son to Mercedes, asking her to remind him that he had a brave father who died in battle. Mercedes denies the privilege of memory to the fascist Captain, as he is shot in the eye.

The realism and adult rational narratives win over Ofelia's imaginative contestation, as the ultimate enforcers of justice. Del Toro sacrifices his more critical engagement with the notion of historical memory, which he had explored through the use of the Gothic and the Grotesque, in order to assume a clearer stand in relation to justice and reparation to the victims of Francoism, very much in the spirit of the immediate years previous to the approval of the law. Unlike Ana, who is ultimately possessed by the absurdity of the dictatorship, blurring the boundary between innocence and corruption, good and evil, history and fiction, past and present, and rational and irrational, Ofelia represents a redemption of historical memory through fiction, more as a political

agenda than as an aesthetic and critical commitment. The resolution of the film, as Ofelia descends to the magical underworld kingdom after her innocent blood is dropped inside the labyrinth's cave, suggests that fantasy and fiction is the place where the memory of these innocent voices lives on. It is through fiction and fantasy, and through the recognition of the inherent narrativity of historical inquiry and production, that the memory of unjust suffering lives on and is contested.

Del Toro rewrites Spanish history by making the Republican resistance victorious through his film, and denying the regime's forces a place in historical memory. However, this resolution of the film's fantastic conflation between history and fiction seems to become more binary in its division between both categories by the end, assigning clear values of heroicness to the victims of the Republic, and attaching the monstrous evil only to Franco's fascism. Ofelia's fantasy is denied as real, and contained within her own imagination; her evident death, and the point of view shots of the Captain, resolve the fantastic into a sort of inner delusional exile, as a romantic escape to reality, losing its radical potential to contest and revise historiographical notions of right and wrong. This seems to be very much a product of the sociopolitical context of the film's release, where even though intellectuals discussed the validity of history in relation to memory and fiction, there was a clear and highly divided public debate over the recovery of the forgotten memories of those repressed by the dictatorial regime. Not surprisingly, as the nation engaged in uncovering the past –both intellectually and in the archives as well as in the physical exhumation of common graves –the PP and other rightist movements opposed this renewed interest, arguing that reopening old wounds could endanger the country's stability. However, as the debates have increased, Spain has seen a recent “public interest in memory, after several decades of diagnosed ‘collective amnesia.’ This awakening has resulted in the creation of political, judicial and social movements that claim, literally and symbolically, for the exhumation of the nation's past”

(Colmeiro 29). This increased mobilization of historical memory in the public sphere leads to the approval of the Law of Historical Memory in 2007 as a collective call for the importance of working through a violent past that had been covered and hidden by the political elites.

5. *Balada Triste de Trompeta* (The Last Circus) (2011) by Álex de la Iglesia

The newspaper *El País* reported that, during the opening of *Balada Triste de Trompeta* at a cultural center in Bilbao in 2010, Álex de la Iglesia said that his film represents an “exorcism of the monsters of the past” (Landa, 2014). De la Iglesia says that growing up right before and during the times of the Spanish transition to democracy, when the repression of dissident voices was hidden under a seemingly superfluous peace, deeply marked his identity and notion of Spain’s past and political reality. His anxieties surrounding the lack of public and open debates about the past as well as his concern over the heavily politicized version of historical memory embodied by the “two Spains,” made him wonder if reconciliation was even a possibility. *Balada Triste de Trompeta* emerged from this socio-political and historical concerns of its writer and director, in an attempt to radicalize representations of Spain’s past and liberate the nation from the weight of historical dogmas. The film makes audiences uncomfortable by confounding the boundaries between humor and tragedy, establishing a critical dialogue with its historical context in order to produce a unique and excessively grotesque and gothic visual representation of Spain’s collective past. One of the most nominated films to the Goya Awards in Spain, and awarded with Best Director and Best Screenplay at the Film Festival of Venice, *Balada Triste*’s extensive recognition is not surprising considering Spain’s outcry for a different perspective on the overdose of traditional approaches to historical memory since the approval of the Law of Historical Memory in 2007. The recent political and financial scandals in Spain, the economic crisis and the lack of trust in a corrupt political system, have engendered a collective discomfort with the narratives of the past that have either consecrated Franco’s regime, or that have nostalgically preserved an idealized version of the victims of the war and the dictatorship. The film, through its grotesque humor and gothic spaces, unfolds the cycle of collective madness in

which the country has been immersed since the climactic violence of the Civil War, offering an alternative and critical reading of Spain's historical memory.

De la Iglesia's film emerges in a sociopolitical moment of despair, where the narratives of the past are being mobilized by both the political right and the political left as rhetorical tools for the manipulation of the masses. Since the public reopening of the discussion about historical memory as a national responsibility in 1999, when the PP won the elections for the first time, the civil society began to actively claim for the creation of spaces for true justice and accountability. Several sectors of society nowadays, ascribe the democratic and economic crises of the country to the lack of a truly honest and open transition into a healthy democracy. Carlos Castresana Fernández argues that the impunity towards those responsible for crimes against humanity during the dictatorship has frustrated the attempt to develop political and legal systems that go beyond the mere paper, and where citizens trust and view their own institutions as legitimate (1). Civil independent organizations such as the Association for the Recovery of Historical Memory (ARMH for its initials in Spanish) founded in 2000, attempt to morally compensate the victims of the dictatorship and their families through the exhumation of common graves, attempting to close a death cycle that started with the Civil War and Franco's repression. These organizations demand the State's responsibility –financially and logistically –for such efforts, paradoxically losing most of their governmental support once the PP came back to power at the end of 2011. The ARMH is still struggling for justice through memory, advocating for the latter as the most legitimate way to achieve a true and healthy democracy.

However, the discourse on the recovery of historical memory has become a narrative full of ambiguous relations of power that continue to exercise a problematic ideological control over the past, ultimately over the nation's present. As Colmeiro suggests, the new forms of institutional remembrance appear to fill the memory void with a cultish culture of nostalgia

consumption, through spectacle, commemoration and the obsession with museum (28). The oversaturation of memory and its kitsch popularization through empty monuments, radical political discourses and the increasing interest on restorative nostalgia –both towards Spain’s secluded and conservative past in the case of the PP and other civil organizations, as towards the liberal agenda of the PSOE, the ideological inheritants of the Second Republic, and other members of liberal sectors of society –reveal the discursive and rhetorical dangers of historical memory as a public tool. Memory “has become an industry generating public interest for economic [and political] ends” (Labanyi, 119). Labanyi’s claim is evident in most of the cultural productions since the 1990s such as the acclaimed TV series *Cuéntame cómo pasó* (Tell me how it happened), which provides dangerously nostalgic approaches to a repressive past, ignoring the complexities of the dictatorship and of historical representation. This oversaturation of memory is evidenced through other recent works, such as Isaac Rosas’ interestingly named novel, *¡Otra maldita novela sobre la guerra civil!* (Another damned novel about the Civil War!) (2007), which mockingly points at the omnipresence of such discourses and their current lack of deep analysis and critique. Even more, the rancorous and uncritical discourse of the populist left tends to idealize the Second Republic ignoring its historical responsibilities during its regime (1931-1936) and during the Civil War (Iglesias Turrion, 2). The Second Republic, as much as the ultra-Nationalist regime, massacred and killed innocent people during its government, a fact ignored by most of the people who still wave the Republican banner at the central squares of Madrid.²⁰ However, the victimized discourse of the PSOE and other leftist groups, ideological heirs of those who had lost the Civil War, has legitimized itself as the authentic voice and judge of history, believing in its right to blame without taking responsibility for its own guilt in the violence of the past, and in the crisis of the present.

The victim's discourse, as suggested by Labanyi, runs the risk of fetishizing history as something that *just happens*, denying the agency of both the individual and the collective (120), and ultimately generating a sense of social stagnation. The debates around memory in Spain reveal heavily contingent contemporary notions of history as a site of mourning, full of dangerous nostalgia, and of feelings of regret and revival towards the past; some people in the right still think that life was better under Franco, and some people in the left still think that life was better under the Second Republic. This sentimentalist and uncritical approach –as denounced by David Rieff (52) and Svetlana Boym (453) –avoids a true commitment for political action and for the reconstruction of more inclusive and participatory historical narratives and political systems. The recovery of historical memory, thus, has not turned into a critical, dialectic, reflexive and pedagogical debate, but into a static and restorative rhetoric. The cultural and intellectual production needs, more than ever, to propose critical readings of the past that challenge the ideologically problematic binary between memory as fiction, and history as reality. Both the individual and collective memories of the suffering during the Civil War and the dictatorship, as Labanyi suggests, should be publically recognized in order to enable a collective treatment of the legacies of the past into the present. Only through recognizing the healing and inevitable role of narrativity in the reconstruction of the past, while also advocating for justice, will Spain be able to begin its remembrance processes.

Right after the Law of Historical Memory was approved by congress in 2007, the Spanish jurist Baltasar Garzón, who had dealt with the post-dictatorial judicial cases of Chile's Pinochet and Argentina's Videla, was brought to Spain to introduce a law that responsabilized all those complicit with the illegitimate regime of Franco. Even though Garzón counted with with the support of the ARMH and other civil organizations, he was officially disqualified from all Spanish courts in 2008. Beyond the mere approval of the law, the lack of a true institutional

support to the revival of public historical memory was evidenced through the lack of active support he received from the PSOE, a party that mobilizes the discourses on memory when convenient, but shies away when dealing with actual restitutions. The approval of the Law of Historical Memory was revealed to be a symbolic and rhetoric act, very much aligned with the superfluous and dangerous oversaturation of memory as commodity.

Influential and public intellectuals such as Pablo Iglesias Turrión have called for “...professionals and activists [...] to fight from the plain of cultural governance, from the production of imaginaries, in the activation of memory as a political weapon in the hegemonic struggle for the meanings of the present” (8). Many think that it is through the field of cultural governance that Spain will be able to ressort its crisis, as cinema, literature and the arts in general have always been so important in constructing Spain’s identities in the midst of crises. The question becomes *how* to effectively represent the non-dogmatic and truly radical historical memory of a country that, clearly, has not exorcized and dealt with the ghosts and monsters from a past that still haunt its present. According to Alison DeMenezes, the stagnation and dangerous dogmatization of the discourses on memory, could potentially be emancipated or “...opened to new perspectives through a reevaluation of the carnivalesque...” (242), and the Grotesque as suggested by Mikhail Bakhtin. Rodolfo Cardona, Anthony Zahareas and Peter Podol have all theorized on the historical functions and the radical possibilities of the Grotesque *esperpento* in Ramón del Valle-Inclán’s theater during the early twentieth century. I argue that these same considerations can be applied to contemporary Spain, where there is a general disappointment with the institutional co-optation of suffering and memory. As suggested by Podol:

It is not surprising that the writers of a land choked by traditionalism and repression and noted for its inquisition and for the periods of absolutist terror and dictatorial regimes that culminate with the most recent attempt at establishing yet

another military government on the 23rd of February of 1981, should opt for an aggressive weapon such as the Grotesque. (194)

The grotesque, seen as an artistic and representational weapon, opens spaces that emancipate Spain from the authoritative and tyrannical weight of history, constructed by narratives informed by powerful and non-plural ideologies. The way in which *Balada Triste* represents Spain's past from the Civil War to the last years of Franco's regime through the use of madness, dark spaces, dark humor, and monstrous deformation place the film within the Spanish tradition of the Grotesque and the Gothic as radical aesthetic approaches to historical representation.

As suggested by Alison Ribeiro De Menezes in his analysis of *Balada Triste*, the turn of the millennium evidenced an "irruption" of new cultural memories of the Civil War and the dictatorship (241). Taking on this renewed interest, and based on his personal experience living during the last years of Franco's dictatorship as a child, Álex de la Iglesia took up the task of creating a monstrously dynamic film that constructs a post-dictatorial world able to reveal the ambiguities of a truly irrecoverable past, but with a clear continuity into a concrete present.

Produced in 2010, the film enters in a critical dialogue with the recently passed Law of Historical Memory, suggesting that beyond the power of the law and the state, there is still a monster that haunts and traumatizes the entire nation's socio-political functioning. In other words, a single law that reflects the rhetorical discourses of the leftist party's attempts to win votes in times of crisis, is not going to suddenly exorcize the ghosts and monsters in people's memories, and, most importantly, in the still inefficient and highly corrupt political systems. *Balada Triste* breaks the dichotomy between past and present, representing the themes that have acquired the status of terribly feared Other in Spanish society; the Civil War and Franco's repressive dictatorship. The film does not part from a mimetic pretension to reconstruct a totalizing meaning of the past as in a historiographical investigation; on the other hand, it obscures and deconstructs historical events,

using purposeful anachronisms such as the occupation of Madrid by Franco's army during the war, the murder of Carrero Blanco and the death of Franco, breaking the limits between memory and history, fiction and truth. The film becomes a text of cultural accuracy rather than historical one, where de la Iglesia calls for a total anarchy of historical notions of the past, reverting the traditional and Manichaean order that opposes winners against vanquished, good and bad, truth and lie, history and memory.

Esperpentic Memories: Intertextual Historical Fiction, Laughter and Dark Humor

Álex de la Iglesia makes use of a heavy intertextuality with the Spanish aesthetic tradition of the Gothic and the Grotesque, and with history itself, reappropriating the latter in a critical and darkly humorous way. Based on Anthony Zahareas' theories on the historical functions of the Grotesque *esperpento* in the theater of Valle-Inclán, de Menezes argues:

the *esperpentic* mode of representing the Civil War and Franco's dictatorship in contemporary Spain, far from being vacuous, can be understood as a productive form of engagement with the past that employs satirical deformation, the carnivalesque, and the burlesque to engage with and challenge prevailing memory horizons, and so make a serious and meaningful contribution to memory debates.

(243)

These elements proper to the Grotesque, seems to acquire what had been their historical function with Valle-Inclán's theater, constructing new spaces for critical historical accounts. Similarly, Emma McEvoy's analysis of the Gothic aesthetics in relation to the functions of the Grotesque concludes that the Gothic has "...been defined according to its emphasis on the returning past [...], its dual interest in transgression and decay [...], its commitment to exploring the aesthetics of fear [...], and its cross-contamination of reality and fantasy" (1). All of these characteristics

becomes highly relevant in De la Iglesia's film, as it represents a cultural and historical continuum that attempts to destabilize static notions of reality and the past, through the use of both Grotesque imagery and Gothic spaces. Margarita Cuellar argues that filmmakers such as Álex de la Iglesia, use this sense of aesthetic and historic pastiche in order to reevaluate narrative codes, and in order to parody their own responses to the main source of social anxiety (240). *Balada Triste*'s clear main source for collective anxiety is the ever-presence of the politicized version of the Civil War and the dictatorship, to which it responds by actively mobilizing grotesque humor in its thematic and aesthetic treatment of history, enabling the film to inverse historical and representational categories of power. Historical memory becomes highly gothic and grotesque, as de la Iglesia embraces the Lacanian paradox of truth/fiction in order to raise important questions about the ideologically and contextually contingent nature of remembrance in the Spanish context.

The plot of *Balada Triste de Trompeta*, which begins during the second year of the Spanish Civil War (1937), is driven by Javier's (Carlos Areces) desire of revenge. As a young child, Javier witnesses Franco's armies as they violently enter Madrid and capture his father, a circus clown, who is forced to join the prisoners' forced labor camps. After his attempt to boycott the construction site of *el Valle de los Caídos*, Javier's father dies at the hands of Colonel Salcedo (Sancho Gracia). Javier's trauma serves as the connecting point of the film's fast forward to 1973, when he is hired as the sad clown at a local circus in Madrid. Javier meets Sergio (Antonio de la Torre), the happy clown, who is a rather disturbed, authoritarian and violent circus clown, and Natalia (Carolina Bang), a beautiful young trapeze artist in a destructive relationship with Sergio. The plot of the film evolves around Javier's increasing obsession with Natalia, her masochistic and passionate love for both clowns, and Sergio's jealousy and violence. Javier will become increasingly violent and monstrous, in an attempt to gain Natalia's love and annihilate

Sergio, as the film turns into a monstrous grotesque fiction that plays with historical figures and events such as Franco himself and Carrero Blanco's death. Along with the rest of the outlandish characters who work at the circus, the three main characters develop a story of dark madness, where a Grotesque and Gothic representation of history, death, love and violence attempts to raise important questions about the representation of the past, and its legacies into the future.

The production credits that introduce the film juxtapose the names of its main producers and contributors over the frantic laughter of children; every time a new title comes up on screen, children appear to be directly reacting to it off screen, establishing an important process of identification between audience and the children's laughter. The audience is expected to identify with the way in which de la Iglesia mocks the film industry, as a symbol of contemporary censorship, transgressively encoding his film in a liminal space of authorial relevance. However, this introduction also sets the film within the realm of the fantastic children's tale, rapidly betraying its initial expectations as it becomes a violent, bloody and dark comedy that turns infantile spectacle into historical and grotesque spectacle. The audience is expected, therefore, to embrace this mockery and humor while also be sutured into the fantastic yet uncomfortable world of the dark comedy that laughs at Spanish cinematic and governmental institutions. Just like Víctor Erice and Guillermo del Toro, de la Iglesia sets his film in the realm of the uncanny fantasy which he will then juxtapose and compare with history, in an attempt to blur the boundaries between the two.

Right after the first scene of the film, the extremely well crafted credits introduce the film's cast and crew, while also summarizing the highly political argument and tone of the film. The credits of *Balada Triste* establish an active intertextual dialogue with Spanish history and aesthetic traditions, revealing the intricate connections between its events and figures, and the cultural idiosyncrasy of the country. The credits introduce the film's actors quickly inter-cutting

to close-ups of the yolk and arrows, the main symbol of the *Falange*, over the a fast-paced drumbeat reminiscent of the Holy Week music typical in the south of Spain. The use of symbolism in this introduction to the film's thematic approach, establishes important connections between the film's fiction, the real world of the actors, fascist symbology and images of gothic, artistic, or cinematic grotesque, creating multiple layers of understanding that reveal the metatextual nature of culture and representation. The title of the film appears over a map that shows the spread of fascism from Mussolini's Italy through the rest of Europe, immediately contextualizing the film's "sad ballad" (from the literal translation of the original title in Spanish) in relation to fascist ideology as the main source of the madness that will unfold. Most of the visual power of the credits is conveyed through the use of an Eisensteinian editing that establishes important connections between Spain's cultural and political history. The fast-paced montage editing juxtaposes imagery and symbolism of religion, the church, Franco, the Civil War, Goya's paintings, monsters, Salvador Dali and art. The credits also suggest that the historical possibility

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Fig. 21. Álex de la Iglesia, *Balada Triste de Trompeta*, 2010, Magnolia Home Entertainment, 2011

for the existence of such an absurd and nostalgic regime as Franco's, lied in the heavily irrational and superstitious Spanish national identity, influenced by the tragic and painful catholic tradition and by the heavily grotesque modes of artistic representation. However, the credits also suggest that the only response to the collective madness of the nation is through artistic representation, namely extreme movements such as the ones alluded to on screen. The monster of the Civil War and the dictatorship, the monster of Goya's paintings and Dali's surrealism, and the deep irrational passion and suffering engrained in catholic doctrine, come together in the introduction of what can be considered to be a quintessential Spanish film, in terms of idiosyncratic bases. Franco and the church are paralleled with death and the monster, and art is elevated as a socio-political agent in historical contestation (See Fig. 22). The soundtrack over the credits, composed by Roque Baños, is deeply rooted in the catholic traditions of the south of Spain, where extremely passionate and intense songs that reflect the suffering and pain of believers are sung during Holy Week. Baños' music, played over the highly politicized and metaphoric credits, enhances the critical intertextual dialogue that de la Iglesia establishes with Spanish idiosyncratic, cultural and political histories.

The film starts, just like del Toro's and Erice's, by historically situating its narrative, in this case in Madrid, 1937, one year after the start of the Civil War that brought Franco into power. However, similarly to the way in which Zahareas has argued that the Grotesque functions in Valle-Inclán's work, "the choice to call a fiction fiction is a key factor in the ways Valle-Inclán's Grotesque spectacles, in their very functionality, always function historically" (Cardona & Zahareas, 198). The way in which de la Iglesia opens his film by establishing a clear relation to fiction and art, turns the historical contextualization into a radical contestation to traditional modes of historiographic inscriptions of the past. At the time in which the film opens, Madrid was one of the main symbols of the resistance, where slogans such as "they shall not pass!"

became symbolic of the Republican resistance to the invasion of the military forces that led the coup d'état. The audience soon understands that the children's laughter over the initial credits is actually directed towards a couple of clowns performing in Madrid. As suggested by Bakhtin, the laughter in these moments of social chaos frees the representation from ideological, historical, religious and dogmatism, by displaying social order as spectacle (7). This radical space occupied by laughter and apparent innocence is, nevertheless, visually constructed as a hyper formalist obscure space in high contrast lighting, conveying the dark humor that reveals historical suffering through children's fantasy. The place where the clowns and children are is being bombed, placing humor as a desperate yet appropriate reaction and strategy to tragedy, fear and horror. The excessiveness of this first sequence, which exaggerates the circus' already high contrast and performativity through composition, lighting and a hyper theatrical performance of its actors, creates and defines the tone of the grotesque comedy throughout the film, exaggerating its abject characteristics as it progresses.

As the clowns attempt to entertain the children through violent and rather aggressive performances, the leader of the Republican army enters the stage. He tells the entire circus that that he has come to recruit men for the war, revealing the desperate measures of a Republic that was evidently losing its battle against the fascist armies. However, the film executes a highly intentional anachronism, since Franco's armies do not enter Madrid until 1939. Displacing the Civil War temporarily in the film, reaffirms de la Iglesia's rejection of historiographical accuracy and mimesis, in favor of a cultural precision in its depiction of the suffering and legacies of the violent war. The typical historic division between the "two Spains," which confronted entire families against each other based on ideological pretenses, is challenged by the clown Manuel, who says that he is not with anyone, and by calling the war senseless and humorless.²¹ The clown's integral and coherent voice reveals the stance of many Spaniards after the dictatorship

and during the time of the film's release, to which de la Iglesia subscribes to, creating a third and liminal Spain that is able to critically examine the rhetorically dangerous discourses of both the political left and the political right. As suggested by Kamilla Elliot in her discussion of gothic film parodies, these "...go further to challenge one of few remaining polarized oppositions in Gothic criticism: that between left-wing and right-wing politics" (225). In the context of the public debates around the Civil War and the dictatorship during the time of the film's release, right after the approval of the Law of Historical Memory, the film criticizes the commodification of memory as a political and economic tool in contemporary Spain. The binary division that still permeates the Spanish public debates, is challenged by grotesque and gothic imagery of the circus clown as a site of social revision and inversion, culminating in the image of Javier as a little child, standing alone in the middle of the frame as a lion approaches the him from the obscure background, symbolizing his power and sense of justice but also his fear and corruption into adulthood.

Javier's father, one of the circus clowns, is given a machete to fight against Franco's forces entering Madrid. The Grotesque and *esperpentic* juxtaposition of humor and violence, destabilize meaning and historical understanding, mostly when placing the killing clown in the middle of the historical battlefield over Spain's capital city. As the clown kills with his machete in slow-motion, the camera is splashed with blood as it tries to focus on the clown's sadistic face (see Fig. 22); the Republic is embodied through the killer clown, a circus figure that represents the carnivalesque aesthetics of Bakhtin in the madness of the bloody Civil War. The bodily aspect of the Grotesque depiction of violence, and its theatrical construction through the slow-motion, work to critically activate the viewer in order to realize the highly performative and constructed nature of this violence, detaching it from a *truly* Spanish identity and ultimately

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Fig. 22. Álex de la Iglesia, *Balada Triste de Trompeta*, 2010, Magnolia Home Entertainment, 2011 distancing itself from the dichotomy of right and left. As suggested by Veronica Martinez Monferrer in her analysis of the clown in *Balada Triste*, the clown's humor is a result of the way in which the imminently tragic and absurd quality of human existence is made laughable and digestible through the mediation of exaggeration, the Grotesque, comedy and the delirious (Martinez Monferrer, 1). The audience laughs because the clown's high performativity, reveals the obvious absurdity inherent in what are rather conventional and acceptable historical moments of violence. The image of the killer clown destabilizes the rigidity of historical accounts of Spain's past, calling into question the traditional historiography on the topic while also rewriting Spanish history through Grotesque excess, activating audiences to critically examine the absurd nature of extreme and irrational violence.

As Javier looks for his father, captured by the victorious Nationalist army, the tracking camera shots reveal the brutal repression of what will become Franco's dictatorship. As a group of Republicans stands about to be collectively shot, in a composition that resembles Goya's painting *Third of May 1808*, catholic priests stand next to the firing squad, blessing the massacre of those who fought on the side of the Republic (see Fig. 23 and 24). De la Iglesia is denouncing,

through this scene and earlier through the film's credits, the complicit relationship between the church and the violent dictatorship, using catholic symbolism throughout the film to reveal its foundation on suffering, irrationality and the obsession over death. Catholic irrational tradition based on superstition and authoritarian belief, is exposed as complicit with the repressive dictatorial regime through its parallel with the monster of the war. The images of extreme violence and the image of the clown, as well as the constant use of laughter –both from children but also from the clowns and the people who have succumbed to the madness around them – reveal the important role of black humor as a “...perverse laughter effected for the purpose of revolt against the existential pain and absurdity inherent in life [...] generating a highly visual form of the Grotesque in contemporary Spanish theater and film” (194). This dark humor pervades *Balada Triste* and works to reinforce union between rational and irrational, a liminal space proper to the Gothic, revealing the distorted and deformed nature of Spain as a nation whose traumatic past can only be understood through cultural representations that engage with the aesthetics of grotesque humor.

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Fig. 23. Álex de la Iglesia, *Balada Triste de Trompeta*, 2010, Magnolia Home Entertainment, 2011



Fig. 24. Francisco de Goya. *Fusilamientos del 3 de Mayo* (The Third of May 1808), 1814, Museo del Prado, Madrid, Spain

The historical weight of the film is heightened by the way in which the film transitions from the initial years of Franco's regime into 1973, when Javier becomes the sad clown of a local circus. De la Iglesia uses found footage of the inauguration of *el Valle de los Caídos* (the valley of the fallen) in 1959 (see Fig. 2), one of the most contested sites of memory in Spain, and of the already established and relatively globally accepted regime of Franco through images of billboards and signs that ironically state "25 years of peace!". The juxtaposition of these images of historical documentation with the fictive and highly aestheticized representation of the film, liberate history from its ideological constraints while also revealing the impact of media, television and entertainment in the legitimization of the dictatorship. De la Iglesia suggests that, just as the regime was solidified through culture, the subversion of its legacy must also take part of

such cultural dialogue, radically questioning and deconstructing official narratives through deforming an already absurd and fragmented past.

Javier's new circus is located in what seems to be the ruins of an old Madrid. As Ramiro, the elephant trainer, shows him around the circus, Javier sees Natalia, a young trapeze artist for the first time. The camera reveals Natalia through slow-motion and an almost blinding light, conveying Javier's automatic obsession and love for her. She is falling from the sky wrapped in red cloth, mirroring the vertiginous and violent end of the film, where she will die while also falling on a red cloth from the immense cross at *el Valle de los Caídos*. Javier meets Sergio, the other clown of the company, who is a violent and authoritarian leader in the circus, even though he does not actually own it (see Fig. 25). Sergio is immediately paralleled with the dictatorial Spain, as he reveals his authoritative, irrational and violent character by saying that if he was not a clown, he would be a killer. Javier, on the other hand, embodies the shy legacy of the Republic, an insecure clown traumatized by the violence he saw as a kid and by his father's death at the hands of the Franco's armies. Ironically, Sergio is the clown who is able to make children laugh, while Javier, the sad clown, is subject to ridicule and is ultimately driven by revenge. This complexity introduced by de la Iglesia to the apparently easily recognizable metaphors of the ultra-right regime in Sergio and the repressed left in Javier, is intimately related to the film's questioning of the dichotomy between evil and good, and between official history and marginal stories. No account of the past is privileged by the film, as in the end both clown will become monsters because of their love over Natalia –who arguably symbolizes the feminized version of the nation –killing her in their obsession.

The film clearly establishes the love triangle through which the plot will evolve into a grotesque and monstrous depiction of Spain's historical memory. Gathered in a cafeteria after one of the first performances since Javier joins the circus, Sergio makes a joke about a father in

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Fig. 25. Álex de la Iglesia, *Balada Triste de Trompeta*, 2010, Magnolia Home Entertainment, 2011

his newborn child's birth room. The father cries as the nurse smashes the baby against the window, only to be finally told by the nurse that the baby was born dead anyway. This sadistically grotesque imagery situates Sergio as a disturbed and violent man, desperately looking for attention, much like the already weak dictatorial regime by 1973. The men around the table do not dare to challenge his joke, and the camera isolates every woman on the table and Javier by framing them alone, in silence. The Republic, as embodied by Javier, is feminized in order to highlight the powerful patriarchal and oppressive power of the dictatorship over the nation's minorities. Javier, however, timidly says that he does not understand the joke, unleashing Sergio's rage. Natalia tries to intervene, but she is brutally beaten by Sergio as everyone ignores the abuse and goes on. Natalia, etimologically symbol of nativity and rebirth, stands in as a common trope for the feminized nation –as in Erice's and del Toro's film –and her abuse symbolizes the dictatorial desperate repression over dissenting voices at the end of its illegitimate governance. This extreme violence generates an ironic juxtaposition to the historical footage that has earlier claimed "25 years of peace", revealing what de la Iglesia refers to as a violent war hidden in the apparent calm times during the last years of the regime.

After everyone leaves, Javier returns to look for Natalia, who is unconsciously lying on the floor. However, as she wakes up to the film's non-diegetic dramatic music, a close-up of her mouth shows her tongue erotically licking the blood off her lips. The bodily and grotesque imagery of blood, a corporeal fluid, being eaten, reveals the morbid fascination of Natalia for violence and distances the audience from a victimizing the figure of the violented woman. De la Iglesia is not interesting in blaming any of the characters for the collective madness of Spain, as all of them, to some extent, take part and enjoy the endless cycle of violence in which they are caught, similar to the way in which Spain seems to enjoy, even forty years after Franco's death, the abject presence of its most violent memories. This connotation is reinforced when Sergio abruptly returns to have violent sex with Natalia, as Javier hides behind the window. As Sergio tells her that she wants to destroy and kill her, the camera focuses on her breasts being pushed on the window, and on her expression of pleasure. Natalia, as a symbol of the traumatized and torn Spain, has a violently destructive love for Sergio, the fascist symbol of the film. The film suggests that Spain, a nation torn and fragmented by the heavily repressive and authoritative tactics of the regime, is morbidly infatuated with its legacy as it gave both an easy life for its supporters and an exciting and thrilling one for its detractors. De la Iglesia challenges traditional depictions of Spain's history in favor of a more nuanced, complex and culturally accurate depiction of Spain's collective trauma.

Natalia, nevertheless, seeks Javier as she attempts to seduce him into going out with her. As much as Javier tries to oppose it, they end up going out to a city carnival, entering a museum of horror where children's laughter, disjointed editing and a sense of discontinuity create a space of fragmentation and discomfort. As they lie in bed, Natalia expects Javier to abuse her as apparently every other man has done, but he does not, sparking another erotic interest in Natalia. The image of the victimized woman is destroyed, as Natalia is seen in possession of her pleasure

and her sexual life. Javier and Sergio's obsession over her is partly due to the fact that they cannot seem to control her; she loves them both, but they grow increasingly obsessed with possessing her on exclusive terms. Analyzing the symbolism of the characters' love triangle in an interview with Álex de la Iglesia for ABC, Juan Manuel de Prada says, "We, Spaniards, love Spain very much, each of us in a particular way; the drama is that, even though Spain might love us all, we want Spain exclusively and our love is incompatible with that of the other. Consequently we end up killing her 'because she was mine'" (de Prada, 2010). This statement clearly speaks to the way in which the film attempts to represent the violent obsession of the "two Spains," embodied in the figures of the clown. Both the ultra-Nationalist and the leftist violent and obsessive competition for the love of their motherland, is what ultimately ends up killing her, turning both sides of the political spectrum into equally problematic monsters.

The playful and humorously dark interaction and re-appropriation of Spanish history, allows *Balada Triste de Trompeta* to highlight the fictional aspects of history in its rewriting of such an important moment in Spain's collective past. The audience is encouraged to question the historical accounts of the past that it has heard before, blurring the space between the "real" narrative of historical documents, and the film's "fictional" appropriation of remembrance. Summarizing the radical role of the grotesque tradition in Spain's cultural aesthetics, Rodolfo Cardona and Anthony Zahareas suggest:

To do literature as *esperpento* is to deform through art an already deformed spectacle of Spanish realities and their history. And this implies; to define the social factors that have Grotesquely deformed Spanish civilization; to discover their interrelationships, and to seek, behind the interpretations provided by the media, the impulses that determine historical events. (207)

De la Iglesia recovers the aesthetics of the Grotesque *esperpento* that Ramón del Valle-Inclán had effectively mobilized at the beginning of the twentieth century in order to question and explore Spanish cultural and historical identities. Through instilling an uncomfortably dark laughter in the spectator and deforming historical narratives through the use of the clown, the Grotesque and the Gothic, de la Iglesia is able to achieve a momentary liberation from the depressing weight of the absurd of the war and the dictatorship, while also exploring the complex makeup of a forty-year long regime that legitimized itself through, precisely, cultural spaces.

Grotesque Memories: Madness, Deformity and Monsters

In an interview conducted by the cinema magazine *Fotogramas*, Álex de la Iglesia says that *Balada Triste* is a film about death, love, humor and horror.²² The film uses the idea of love, as explained in the previous section, to exFaud on the humorous and horrific madness of a nation obsessed with historical memory but blind to the idea of reconciliation. Scott Brewster argues that Gothic aesthetics, being concerned with the idea of excess, are intimately related to madness as an “excess of reason” (281). De la Iglesia seems to criticize the excessively rational approaches to Spanish history, embodied in recent publications such as the 2012 book *Spanish Holocaust* by Paul Preston, using black humor in order to depict madness as the bad consciousness or crisis of rationalism. Goya’s illustration entitled *The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters* (1797) seems to address this same concern, related to the historical criticism that has praised Gothic and Grotesque aesthetics as a counter cultural response to the constraints of rationalist thought. The relationships of the love triangle in *Balada Triste* embrace the idea of madness, which transforms Javier from a relatively benign representation of the defeated and repressed Republic, into a violent and jealous monster.

Sergio confronts Javier about Natalia, telling him that he is not a bad person and that he truly loves Natalia. Both Natalia and Sergio are trapped in a destructive love that they know will end up killing them, but from which they cannot escape, mirroring Spain's relation to Franco's regime. As Natalia manifests her increasing love for Javier's infantile and shy attitudes, Javier becomes more aggressive to her, mimicking Sergio's jealousy and possessiveness. On a second date at another town carnival, Natalia tells him that he is a real man since he has been the only one able to confront Sergio, as they finally kiss under a replica of the Eiffel Tower, commemorating the rather kitsch and absurd relation of Spain to its atomized historical narratives. Sergio discovers them, and after violently hitting Natalia in front of everyone, he goes on to brutally beat Javier with a hammer from a carnival game, reinserting violence within the darkly humorous space of the circus and the carnival.

At the hospital, Javier hallucinates and the film immerses the audience into his surreal imagination, where he is trying to reach Natalia as his father steps into his mind. Replicating and embodying the typical discourse of the Republicans and the left in contemporary Spain, Javier's father commands him to remember his pledge of vengeance for his death. In his dream, Sergio, as a symbol of oppression and fascism, is the one who kills his father, epitomizing his quest for revenge. Dream and reality come together in this sequence, much like fiction and history come together through the Grotesque and Gothic aesthetics of the film. This attempt to re-inscribe historical memory into the present actions of Javier, which he sees as fair and redeeming, reproduce the left's idea of reintroducing the marginalized stories of the Republic as central to Spain's history, instead of critically examining the construction of Spanish violent history and complex national identity.

Naked and in an attack of madness and obsession, Javier escapes the hospital to confront Sergio, and seemingly reclaim justice for his past suffering. As he approaches the circus, followed

by all of its outlandish crewmembers, Javier sees Natalia and Sergio having sex through a curtain. Javier uses a hook and a trumpet to cut through the curtain and kill Sergio, splashing blood everywhere. As Natalia screams and cries out of shock, Javier claims that he has freed her from the monster, as the audience clearly realized that he has become an irrational and violent monster as well. The notion of madness is, therefore, reversed and inscribed within the initially shy and repressed symbol of the Republic, raising the question of whose pathology is truly in question. The horrific representation of the death and the disfiguration of Sergio's body exemplifies the way in which the "Gothic does not merely transcribe disturbed, perverse or horrifying worlds: its narrative structures and voices are interwoven with and intensify the madness they represent" (Brewster, 281), working as an exaggeration that critically distances the viewer through a Grotesque experience of the two clown's madness and disfiguration.

The film distorts both Javier and Sergio, inscribing madness in their physical bodies through exaggeration and deformation. Sergio, with his wounded and destroyed face, is taken by Natalia and the rest of the circus crew to a veterinary who attempts to sew back his face as his wife, terrified and in disagreement, screams that they only repair pigs. The animalization of Sergio, and his patched and re-fragmented face, stands in clear allusion and dialogue with the figure of Frankenstein's monster, in a similar way as in Erice's film. Sergio, as the symbol of the dictatorial regime, is revealed as what he always was; a fragmented monster that, as Hurley suggests is marked by abject Grotesque and Gothic inscriptions (Hurley, 138) (see Fig. 26). Sergio, seeing his deformity in the mirror of a bar, loudly screams as he recognizes his disfigured body, now absent of the mask that allowed him to introduce a complexity to his character. As an actual monster, Sergio is rejected by children as he walks through the street, and his attempt to become a clown again will be frustrated by the reveal of his monstrosity in the middle of a children's party.

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Fig. 26. Álex de la Iglesia, *Balada Triste de Trompeta*, 2010, Magnolia Home Entertainment, 2011

Similarly, Javier's body will also be animalized and ultimately inscribed with bodily disfiguration, bringing the two clowns even closer through the deformation of the Spain which they were set so represent. After attacking Sergio with the trumpet, Javier escapes from the Guardia Civil into the woods, reminiscent of the chase of Frankenstein and the search for Ana in Erice's film. Naked and lost in the woods, Javier becomes a monstrous animal living in a cage and eating raw meat from animals he finds dead. This hybridity inscribed in Javier's body, both human and inhuman at the same time, is one of the main characteristics of the Gothic aesthetics that blurs lines between rationality and irrationality (Hurley, 137). The audience knows that Javier's initial trauma is located in the historical events of the Civil War, but his rather Grotesque deformation, as a dirty and naked body in a cave, blurs the lines between fiction and history, death and life (Hurley, 138), activating the viewer's critical interpretation of the monstrous and absurd continuity of the past into the present.

Javier, as a savage beast who has apparently forgotten his human nature, is found and captured as an animal by Colonel Salcedo, who recognizes him as the one who wounded his eye back at the bombing in *el Valle de los Caídos*. Javier is, then, coded as a Maqui as he hides,

desperately and inhumanly in a cave in the woods, just like the Maquis in del Toro's film. During his stay in this rural house, where the regime's colonel lives, Javier will be turned into a hunting dog used during the traditional hunting weekends that have been popularly inscribed in Spain's memory as proper to the dictatorship's elites. The rural house and the hunting connote the feudal and violent Spain, further developed in the depiction of the elite's oppression of the lower classes in Mario Camus' *Los Santos Inocentes* (1984), based off its eponymous novel written by Miguel Delibes. De la Iglesia decides to introduce the figure of Franco, through a rather satirical and mocking depiction (De Menezes, 240), in order to develop Javier's rebellious attitudes. As Franco is hunting and saying how he loves the smell of gunpowder, Javier, on four legs like a dog, violently bites the dictator's hand (see Fig. 27). *Balada Triste* is here playing with historical representation and with the abject, depicting the image of one of the most taboo characters of Spain's history, still some sort of ghost within the public and cultural milieus. De la Iglesia renounces to historical mimetic accuracy, embracing the fictional nature of historical narrative

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Fig. 27. Álex de la Iglesia, *Balada Triste de Trompeta*, 2010, Magnolia Home Entertainment, 2011

through cinematic representation, ultimately politicizing and radicalizing his take on historical memory. Both Franco and Javier, established as Gothic monsters, are violently deformed through a bodily inscription of the abject memories that resort to revengeful violence.

After being locked down, Javier sees Natalia as the Virgin Mary in a hallucination, reminding him of his call for vengeance. The Gothic space created in this moment, through the lighting, the dark music and the heavily recharged mise-en-scene, is reinforced as the music from the initial credits, the Holy Week lament of southern Spain, begins to play. Javier embraces his role as a historically functional clown, inscribing his Grotesquely humorous identity into his body by fixing a clownish make up through burning his face with acid and a burning iron (see Fig. 28). The intense music that conveys the suffering rooted in the catholic tradition, paired with Javier's costume as a dark bishop-clown, reinforces the cultural intertextuality that de la Iglesia uses to create this quintessential Spanish historical monster. De Menezes suggests, "...this literal embodiment of clownery, the turning of the most innocent facial make-up of the circus into a deadly rebellion, becomes the moment when Javier asserts agency, when he is most fully alive and able to confront life..." (251). The effect of this rebellion in the audience, which recognizes the figure of the Republic as gaining agency and power through a deformation of the past, is one of estrangement and critical distance. Through the Grotesque and bodily aesthetics of Javier's transition "... all that was for us familiar and friendly suddenly becomes hostile" (Bakhtin, 48). Javier kills Colonel Salcedo as he loudly and cynically laughs, ultimately threatening the stability of a regime that in 1973 was losing international support and was evidently coming to an end. Even though his initial revenge is completed, his obsession over his love for Natalia keeps him going. The abject memories, typically relegated to the realm of silence and repression but inscribed within the daily lives of Spaniards, becomes suddenly hostile and unfriendly, enabling a

critical examination of the historical memory of the PSOE and other leftist groups that Javier has been set up to represent.

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Fig. 28. Álex de la Iglesia, *Balada Triste de Trompeta*, 2010, Magnolia Home Entertainment, 2011

Both Sergio and Javier are marked with their monstrosity, as they enter into a deadly fight over Natalia, a symbol of the two Spains' fatal competition over Spain's historical memory. As Javier tried to find Natalia, who at this point is reunited with Sergio, he enters a bar where he plays Raphael song *Balada triste de trompeta*. His laughter/cry, allegorical of the despair of a left that has lost its foundational path and goals, finds an outlet through his random shooting and threat to children, who he, as a sad clown, was never able to actually entertain. As he wanders around the Madrid, with a gun in hand, an explosion happens. Historical footage and context make it clear that the explosion is the one that in December 20th, 1973, killed Carrero Blanco, the most likely successor to Franco's regime. Javier finds himself literally on top of the ruins of one of the events that marks the monumental historiography of Spain's Transition, blurring again the boundaries between history and fiction, and inserting the clown's Grottesque madness into one of the most traumatic events of the end of the dictatorial regime. As he walks away, a car stops next

to him; the men inside exchange complicit looks with Javier, as the latter asks them to what circus do they belong. Clearly, these people in the car represent the members of the revolutionary and terrorist organization ETA, who were soon going to recognize their responsibility over the explosion. The circus becomes a metaphor, which will be further discussed, of Spain's collective trauma and madness, as a performative site where historical meaning is constantly re-negotiated.

Javier enters into an active interaction with the theme of Raphael's song, *Balada triste de trompeta* –eponymous of the film's title –as the central idea of the film. He plays the song at a bar where he starts shooting randomly, and encounters it again at a film theater where he has a dialogue with Raphael dressed as a clown on the screen. As de Menezes suggests regarding the inclusion of this theme, "The melancholy repetition of the song, 'Balada triste de trompeta', by Raphael, with its simple lament 'por un pasado que murio', further reinforces the film's depiction of an almost existential sense of traumatic loss" (250). This loss is represented through the figure of the Grotesque and bloodily violent clown, which enable de la Iglesia to construct Spanish post-dictatorial identity as grounded on disfiguration and deformation.

In this tradition of the Spanish *esperpento*, the disfigured monster and the fragmented story attempts to deconstruct history, reflecting the way in which, even after the law of historical memory was approved, Spanish society is still submersed in a collective madness where the past still haunts the definitions of collective identity. The bodily inscription of the clown, as Bakhtin would suggest of the bodily characteristic of the carnival, "...becomes grandiose, exaggerated, immeasurable. This exaggeration has a positive assertive character" (19). Margarita Cuellar reminds us that "the lens of psychoanalysis evidenced that, beyond being a fantastic genre, the cinema of horror attempts to figure and shape themes that have been repressed" (Cuellar Bayona, 229). The horrific monster clowns personify the social anxieties of post-dictatorial Spain. Álex de la Iglesia tests the limits of cinematographic representation challenging the norms of historical

accounts and fictional accounts of the past, as he plays with a parodic figure of Franco and of the assassination of Carrero Blanco. Cuellar suggests that these attempts create a tension, particular to the cinema of horror, which can result in both a traumatic or a satisfying experience. Cuellar argues,

In terms of horror cinema we would find that the emotions that are woven from its vocabulary (such as fear, anxiety, anguish and suspense), are generated in relation to a struggle between apparently oppositional forces such as good vs. Evil, diabolic vs. Sacred, obscurity vs. Day, etc. The monster plays a central role in this films since its figure personified these antinomies and, therefore, is the body where all these anxieties converge. (228)

The past possesses the clown turning him into a monster, using what De Menezes summarizes as the “bad taste” of de la Iglesia’s aesthetics, in order to reveal the deformity of Spanish history (251). The disfiguration and inscription of deformity in the clown’s faces, symbolize the tension –and destruction –of antiquated and outdated traditional division that conceptualize the world through moral dichotomies, and the deformed nature of a Spain still heavily traumatized by its abject memories of the Civil War and the dictatorship.

Grotesque and Gothic Remembrance: Intertextual Spaces of Historical Representation

Much like the historic function of the figure of the clown and the blurring of the boundaries between fiction and reality, the main physical spaces of the film also suggest a contestation to traditional views on Spain’s historical memory, and attempt to liberate it from the rhetorical constraints imposed by its political and rhetoric appropriation. The circus, the film theater and *el Valle de los Caídos*, become symbols of the carnival idiom, which as suggested by Bakhtin, “...are filled with this pathos of change and renewal, with the sense of the gay relativity

of prevailing truths and authorities” (11). These spaces of dark humor and of historical and representational symbolism are degraded from an intellectual and abstract pretension for a mimetic relation to historical truth, into a material and bodily realm that releases them from ideological constraints (20). The highly rhetorical discourses of the right and the left are brought back to the material level of violence, blood and humor, so that “...through distance and laughter, [audiences are] *not* being taken in by the cherished myths propagated in history” (Cardona and Zahareas, 191). The use of carnivalesque spaces, where social expectations are inversed, enters into a critical dialogue with Spanish representational history attempting to activate audiences into questioning the meaning inherent in their national symbolism of the war and dictatorship.

In *Balada Triste*, the circus becomes a carnivalesque space very much in relation to Bakhtin’s description of the medieval feast of fools, where the inversion of social expectations and roles, reveals the absurdity and madness implicit in the social hierarchies that structure society. The culture of folk carnival humor described by Bakhtin, is characterized by its “...variety, fold festivities of the carnival type, the comic rites and cults, the clowns and fools, giants, dwarfs, and jugglers, the vast and manifold literature of parody...” (Bakhtin, 4). The circus is the first space through which the film introduces the spectator to the Spanish Civil War in 1937, when Javier’s father and his friend Manuel are performing for children in the middle of the conflict. The continuity of the circus as a fundamental space through which historical meaning is negotiated, becomes clear through Javier’s participation in the circus of 1973. This circus is constantly depicted as a site of madness and of anxiety, through the use of non-continuity editing and the chaotic and bizarre mise-en-scene. Ramiro tells Javier that his elephant, “Princesa”, is in love with her and killed his previous wife out of jealousy, as a motorcycle stunt performer crashes onto a wall. The carnivalesque nature of the circus is intimately tied with Bakhtin’s

notion of the feast of the fools being essentially related to time; the absurdity of its events located within historical context reveals the “historic timeliness” if its social transgression (Bakhtin, 9).

The circus is, therefore, a place of historical relevance. As Álex de la Iglesia points out in an interview described by Ricardo Grande, he was representing “the chaos of the madness of the country [...] it is impossible to make a parody of what was already a parody. In those years, everything was extreme, there was no in between. Spain was a circus, and it still is” (Grande, 2010). The circus in de la Iglesia’s film, assumes a central role in the depiction of Spain; it seems as if history is inscribed within the circus, and that the other spaces where the narrative will develop will be constantly framed through the carnivalesque lens of the initial circus. It would seem appropriate to claim that the Spanish cultural milieu is marked by this idea of the Grotesque carnival, since as Bakhtin argues, “carnival is not a spectacle seen by the people; they live in it...” (Bakhtin, 7). The scene where Javier asks the members of ETA to which circus do they belong to, situates one of the most important events of the Spanish transitional period within this realm of the carnivalesque, as an aesthetic strategy and exaggeration used by de la Iglesia to reveal the powerful ideological and political rhetoric that, in a total absurd way, have constructed Spain’s present. The circus also elicits metaphors of performativity, excess and disguise, which relate directly to the idea of the historical function of the Grotesque, which works to distance audiences from the dangerously neat myths presented by traditional historiography.

The film theater is another space of performativity through which de la Iglesia also develops Javier’s character. After transforming into a physical and Grotesque clown, burning his face and dressing up with the attire of a bishop, Javier goes off into Madrid with a gun, lamenting his recent loss of Natalia. He comes into a movie theater, where *Sin un Adiós* (1970) by Vicente Escrivá is being screened, a film where Raphael, a famous Spanish singer from the times of the Transition, dramatically sings a song entitled *Balada Triste de Trompeta* dressed as a clown.

Clearly, de la Iglesia is establishing a close intertextual dialogue with Spanish cinematic traditions, embracing the ironic suffering of the clown embodied by Raphael through a Grotesque lens. In a moment reminiscent of Woody Allen's *Purple Rose of Cairo* (1985), Raphael begins to talk to Javier through the film screen, breaking the fourth wall of representation. Javier identifies with the clown on screen, activating the audience into questioning and reflecting on their relationship to what is being presented to them in de la Iglesia's film. Javier's father also steps into the frame of the film, establishing cinema as a site of remembrance, and encourages Javier to mock destiny as he did before, and to find happiness through vengeance. The cinematic apparatus is, therefore, revealed as an essential piece in the construction of Spain's historical memory, to some extent revealing the responsibility of artists in the perpetuation of revengeful wounds. It is interesting to note that the first time that cinema was commercially introduced in Spain, was in Madrid on May 11, 1885, and "the spectacle took place in a circus, next to other attractions, and not in an old and exclusive aristocratic salon" (Talens and Zunzunegui, 36). Cinema, in the Spanish tradition, is intimately tied with the space of the carnival, which situates its foundational representation within the realm of the Grotesque historical politics of social transgression.

However, the most contested and probably most inverted site of memory in the film is *el Valle de los Caídos*, a monument that epitomized the Francoist closure of the Civil War as a victorious catholic crusade over the Republic (see Fig. 2). Álex de la Iglesia, in his interview with Juan Manuel de Prada, says that *el Valle de los Caídos* "is the symbol that, in one way or another, hurts, hurts, always hurts" (de Prada, 2010). Constructed under Franco's rule to symbolize his victory, the mausoleum nowadays hosts the tombs of the dictator and of Jose Antonio Primo de Rivera, the founder of the *Falange*. Even though the Law of Historical Memory of 2007 banned the use of the site for political reasons, it is still a site of pilgrimage for the Spain that still mourns

the loss of a time where, beyond political repression, peace was guaranteed to those who stayed silent.

After the first sequence of the film, when the Nationalist army that invade Madrid captures Javier's father, the film uses historical footage to contextualize the initial years of Franco's regime through photographs of death, massacres and destruction. Javier, already a teenager by then, comes to see his father behind bars on what is already the Madrid of Franco, without Republic and without circus. His father tells him that he has to be a clown following his family's tradition, conditioning him to be the sad clown because of all the suffering he has seen; Javier never had a true childhood, born in the midst of socio political conflict and destruction. This anger, hatred and trauma –paralleled with Spain's collective trauma and repressed memories –will be ultimately channeled through the revengeful figure of the clown, ultimately deformed as a monster. Javier's father mentions that they are building a huge cross, clearly alluding to the construction of the Valley of the Fallen, which was actually built by political and war prisoners forced to work. Javier decides to go to the construction site in order to commit his first act of vengeance, placing a bomb in the interior of the cave. Colonel Salcedo violently kills Javier's dad as his horse steps on his chest, as Javier immediately manages to hurt the captain with his own rifle, leaving him half blind. The first act of vengeance and violence, which will then unfold in the creation of the monster when Colonel Salcedo reencounters Javier in 1973, symbolically takes place in the monument where the skulls of those who died during the Civil War are visibly placed in underground caves.

As suggested by De Menezes, this first introduction to the monument is presented through a neo-Gothic style of esperpentic deformation, through several underground and dark tunnels that symbolize the obscure complexity and inaccessibility of the past, much like the Faun's Labyrinth in del Toro's film (250). However, *el Valle de los Caídos* as a site of negotiation of historical

meaning becomes important through its inclusion at the end of the film. After Javier has turned into a monstrous clown, he captures Natalia and takes her to a sort of temple he has built inside one of the caves of the mausoleum. The space is intensely Gothic, as it is full of skulls, dead bodies of the Civil War that stand bluntly yet defiantly looking at the audience, the film's characters and history itself. The site is constructed as another circus, full of animals and with an ongoing projection of Raphael singing *Balada triste de trompeta*. Natalia, as a symbol of the contemporary torn Spain, is brought back to the site where the all bodies of the Civil War, the foundational traumatic myth, are together. Javier reminds the audience that that is the funniest irony of life; that in the end, red or fascist, everyone ends up together. Death, one of the foundational traumas of historical living and which lied beyond ideology, is what ultimately brings Spain together. This Grotesque depiction of national character again serves to activate an audience into questioning the political debates around memory, by reducing everything to the most bodily image of skulls and death.

Sergio arrives to *el Valle de los Caídos*, beginning the tragic and violent fight over Natalia that will take place on the monumental cross that stands as a reminder of catholic traditions and ultra-rightist heroicism at the mausoleum. The camera's long takes convey a sense of vertigo that appropriately relates to the existential loss experienced by the two clowns, and by Spain itself. As they climb to the top of the cross, the camera distorts the spaces enhancing the dramatic resolution of a film where the dichotomies of good and evil have been destroyed through an *esperpentic* depiction of all characters, fascinated with violence and unable to escape a cycle of destructive vengeance and pleasure. Ramiro and the motorcycle stunt man are standing at the base of the monument, anxiously watching the clown's fight over Natalia. They decide to fire the motorcyclist at the monument, simulating a bomb and symbolizing an actual violent attack at the monumental memory of fascism and the war itself. De la Iglesia appears to be suggesting that

Spain's only way out of its collective madness is through a strategically comic Grotesque appropriation of Spain's past, which will ultimately be able to exorcize the monster that still haunt it and destroy the still present emblems of the lingering suffering of the Civil War.

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Fig. 29. Álex de la Iglesia, *Balada Triste de Trompeta*, 2010, Magnolia Home Entertainment, 2011

El Valle de los Caídos, one of the most emblematic and contested sites of remembrance in Spain, even to this day, is the site where the germ of violence and vengeance is engendered, and where the film will come to a tragic end. Natalia loves both clowns, and attempts to save them from death. She jumps from the monument, tied to a red cloth as she had done in the circus –once more, introducing the theme of the carnival into the rather serious monument of Spanish past – finally dying, as she hangs from the immense cross (see Fig. 29). The clowns' obsessive love for Natalia finalized with her death, establishing, through the symbol of the monument as a site of revenge, a continuity between the Civil War, the last years of Franco's Spain, and the still traumatized Spain of the Law of Historical Memory. The two clowns are captured and put into a truck where, for the first time, they look into each other's eyes recognizing their monumental

loss. Their final laughter, at moments easily confused with laughter, reveals the way in which, similarly to Valle-Inclán, the Grotesque “corresponds, in historical terms, to the capacity, through distance and laughter, of *not* being taken in by the cherished myths propagated in history” (Cardona & Zahareas, 191). As Juan Manuel de Prada suggests, the clown becomes that deeply engrained Spanish resentment that cries over the corpse of a dream that he himself assassinated (de Prada, 2010). The film’s dramatic ending, and excessive depiction of the Spanish cultural and historical traditions, subverts and undercuts the rhetorical and dangerously ideological discourses on historical memory, revealing the monstrous trauma that Spain needs to collectively exorcise through true reconciliation.

6. Conclusion

Álex de la Iglesia, in an interview conducted by Juan Manuel de Prada for ABC in 2010, poses the question, “¿Por qué no nos reconciliamos de una maldita vez? (Why can't we just reconcile once and for all?)” Almost forty years after the death of Francisco Franco, and almost eighty years since the end of the Civil War, the rancour and division between the political left and right still pervades the Spanish public sphere, mostly in relation to the importance of historical memory in the twenty first century. As De Menezes suggests:

Spanish history [cannot] be anything other than a horror story for de la Iglesia, a horror story full of esperpentic monsters that Spanish society was too anxious to confront during the period of the Transition, the backdrop to much of *Balada*, and that Spain remains too cowed to confront propety, at least in our director's view, even as late as 2010. (251)

In this light, the Law of Historical Memory, put into effect in 2007 as an apparent public acknowledgment of the importance of recognizing remembrance in the public sphere, is a mere paper that does not effectively translate into an actual restitution to those still haunted by the memories of war and dictatorship, and that is not capable of holding those responsible for repression and violence accountable for their actions. The historical continuum of trauma, silenced memories and repressed histories is invoked and dealt through the three films that this research focused on, revealing the relevance and importande of the Gothic and the Grotesque as historically functional aesthetics that open critical spaces for the questioning of the nation's contested past.

The development of the concept of historical memory throughout the nineteenth and the twentieth century, was mainly focused on the dichotomous and dialectical relation between remembrance and forgetting. Further criticism has pointed at the constructed nature of historical memory, as a narrative that is ideologically contingent and dependent on its socio-historic context. However, since the “memory boom” during the 1980s, memory has been commodified as a rhetorical tool used by neoliberal politics and systems in order to mobilize masses, appealing to their affective relationships, to a sense of collective identity and to an increasingly evident moral imperative of remembrance. Contemporary Spain’s case is a clear example of this deformation of memory as a political tool, where the act of evocating the past has been an important site for contestation of meaning since the end of the Civil War.

Cinema, as a form of historiographic inscription, was always understood by the dictatorial apparatus as a crucial medium through which it was possible to unify and standardize the popular memory of Spain’s collective pasts. However, cinema also provided the means for the cultural and ideological resistance to represent the abject pasts that were violently repressed during the dictatorship, and culturally and politically censored during the country’s transition to democracy in the late 1970s. Since the last years of the dictatorship, even though there have been countless productions of historical memory films, few of them have actually been able to capture the fictional character of historical narrative, ultimately liberating the past from the ideological and dogmatic weight of political rhetorics. The Gothic and the Grotesque became important responses to the collective trauma of Spain, grounded in a long cultural tradition that has placed an important role in the irrational, dark, absurd and exaggerated qualities of both aesthetic forms. Resisting the dictatorship’s censorship, the recovered aesthetic tradition of the Grotesque and the Gothic in cinematic representations of the war and the dictatorship, offer a plural and culturally

accurate approach to the past, problematizing monolithic official histories and opening an important social space for critical perspectives on Spain's past.

El Espíritu de la Colmena (The Spirit of the Beehive) directed in 1974 by Víctor Erice, is the first film that, still produced during the last years of the regime, was able to deal with the abject memories of those vanquished and ultimately forgotten during the Civil War. Gothic aesthetics allow the film to construct spaces of memory that, through chiaroscuro lighting, fragmentation and distortion reveal the inaccessibility to the past and the constructed nature of history. Erice's interest in destroying the dichotomy between historical accuracy and poetic fantasy, is reflected through his treatment of the trauma of the civil war through his main characters, conflating fact and fiction, effectively liberating the past from the traditional historiography of the official regime. The film also resorts to the figure of the monster and the ghost, embodied in an intertextual dialogue with Frankenstein's monster, a quintessential Gothic figure, in order to deal with the silenced pasts that come back to haunt the nation's present. Through representing its characters and places through the metaphor of fragmented beehives, monsters and memories, the film is able to (re)member the disjointed narratives from the past, ultimately illustrating its continuation into the present.

Approximately thirty years after, Guillermo del Toro directed *El Laberinto del Fauno* (Pan's Labyrinth) in 2006, recovering the aesthetics of the Gothic and the Grotesque during a period when the Law of Historical Memory was gaining increased public attention. After several years of traditional historical memory films that either vilified the right, or victimized and heroically depicted the left, del Toro revives the Gothic's historical function through a fantastic tale about a girl during the immediate aftermath of the Civil War, conflating history and fiction and pointing at the dogmatic construction of historical narratives mobilized before the approval of the Law. *El Laberinto del Fauno* uses the trope of the ruins, the labyrinth and chiaroscuro

spaces in order to reveal the inaccessibility to the past, embracing fiction as the only way of understanding historical contexts. This liberation of the past from its use by the political rhetoric is reaffirmed by the portrayal of the monster and the deformation of characters, which materialize Spain's abject memories in an attempt to exorcize the ghosts that still haunt its present.

Finally, Álex de la Iglesia directs *Balada Triste de Trompeta* (The Last Circus) in 2010, three years after the approval of the Law of Historical Memory. The film collects the critical view towards the commodification historical memory, and represents it through an intensely grotesque drama that weaves love, death, revenge, remembrance and passion together, through the history of two violent and repressed clowns obsessed over the love of a masochistic yet seemingly innocent woman. De la Iglesia chooses the grotesque *esperpento* used by Ramón del Valle-Inclán in his theatrical historical criticism during the early twentieth century, using dark humor to activate the audience into critically examining the narratives of the Civil War and the dictatorship. The grotesque phenomenon alienates those who experience it from the oppressive weight of official historiography, subsequently revealing Spain's memories through the depiction of madness, deformity and the monster. The film ultimately destroys the taboo and almost sacred aura surrounding the monument of *el Valle de los Caídos*, one of the most contested sites of memory in Spain, where Francisco Franco and José Antonio Primo de Rivera, the main representatives of Spanish fascism, are buried. The film challenges simple depictions of the right and the left, putting both together in the same place of madness, obsession and absurdity, reflecting a cultural perspective tired of the politicization of memory.

The role of historical memory in Spain is not about exhumating "the past that lies buried in some kind of time-capsule, waiting to be brought to light" (Labanyi, 122), but a rewriting of narratives of the past that account for the suffering of the repressed silences that were officially left to be forgotten, and that accounts to an ultimate justice. The Grotesque and the Gothic,

through their uncanny, fantastic and exaggerated aesthetic qualities, engage its audience into a critical perspective on history, reclaiming memory as a useful experiential and epistemological tool to challenge traditional monolithic discourses on the past (Hurley, 144). The historical function of the Grotesque and Gothic cinema is to unveil the monstrous construction of Spain's post-dictatorial identities; "this unmasking process tests critically the ideological presuppositions of official historiography and, at the same time, projects in place of the claims of mimesis a radically daring reversal: the 'historical' reality or potential of a mimetic illusion" (Cardona and Zahareas, 198). Historical accuracy is, therefore, rejected in favor of a "mimetic illusion" that can effectively portray the very Grotesque and fundamental nature of our relation to time, the past and memory. The radical possibilities of gothic and grotesque cinema points at a potential end of the problematic and dogmatic totalizing quest for meaning mobilized by Reason, taking audiences to accept the plurality inherent in historical experience, and ultimately redeeming the past through recognizing its presence in the present.

Notes

¹ This new epistemological field constitutes itself parallel to other marginal departments of study in Western

² For a further discussion on the construction of nations as inherently imagined communities that require myth and memory, see Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities: Reflection on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*.

³ Likewise, Nietzsche conceptualizes humanity's temporal existence based on the dialectical exercise between historical and ahistorical sensitivities. Historical consciousness is characterized by remembrance, while ahistorical sensitivity is exemplified by forgetfulness. Both, nonetheless, constitute our temporal relation to existence and our ability to construct both individual and collective identities.

⁴ In the introduction to their reader Olick, Vinitzky-Seroussi and Levy develop a detailed and nuanced discussion of an already present interest for memory in previous academic studies, and identifies the various influences that enabled Halbwachs to formalize his discourse and theory in collective memory.

⁵ Elie Wiesel is probably one of the most fundamental cultural critics and political activist, who survived the Nazi concentration camps during the Second World War. For a critical discussion on his ideas of memory as the ultimate resistance to the injustices of the past, see (Rieff 52).

⁶ The concept of genre is fundamental to the analysis of specific Works, as suggested by Tzvetan Todorov, as their study composes or derives from these cultural categories. However, my intention here is not to (re)delineate the boundaries of the Gothic and the Grotesque as aesthetic genres, but rather to apply their theoretical and material implications to the examination of critical historical memory. Even more, as Bakhtin suggests, the Grotesque image is "noncanonical by its very nature" (Bakhtin, 30) making it rather quasi impossible to define its generic characteristics.

⁷ For a larger discussion on the way in which the Gothic developed as an aesthetic movement that formally and thematically haunted modernity, see Rosemary Jackson's *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion*, and David Punter "The uncanny."

⁸ The *esperpento* is a term coined by Ramón del Valle-Inclán, literary theorist and writer associated to the generation of 1898, through which he defined the Spanish mode of representing history through grotesque aesthetics. In *Luces de Bohemia* del Valle-Inclán describes Spain as a deformation of the European civilization. For a larger discussion on the historical function of the aesthetics of the *esperpento* in del Valle-Inclán's work, see Anthony Zahareas and Rodolfo Cardona "The Historical Function of the Grotesque (Valle-Inclán's Art of Spectacle)."

⁹ For an extensive discussion on the socio-historical context of pre-Nazi German cinema, and its aesthetic and thematic implications with the totalitarian regime of Hitler's dictatorial apparatus, see Siegfried Kracauer's *From Caligari to Hitler: A psychological history of the German film*.

¹⁰ Paul Preston discusses the origins of the hatred and violence that led to the Civil War, and that divided the entire nation, in the first part of his book *The Spanish Holocaust*. Gabriel Jackson, explains the way in which the revolution and the counter-revolution emerged during the Civil War, and the way in which the consolidated the violent opposition between the Republicans and the Fascists, in chapter four of his book *A Concise History of the Spanish Civil War*.

¹¹ The military intervention of the Allies that brought Central European fascism to an end during the Second World War did not terminate Franco's fascist regime. Spain was also not an active player in the war, keeping a safe and strategic distance from a political dynamic dominated by its neighbors and the United States. Spanish fascism – which some people fear to call as such – was the only ultra-rightist regime that survived the Second World War and that prospered long into the second half of the twentieth century –at the expense of a violent and crude repression, and the further support of western governments as an economic ally.

¹² For a further discussion on the affective role of memory in the creation of nationalist identities, see Ernest Renan's speech *What is a nation?*, and the first chapter in David Rieff's *Against Remembrance*.

¹³ In order to expand on the discussion of cinema as popular memory in relation to power relations and resistance, see Foucault's "Film in Popular Memory."

¹⁴ In fact, the laws of aperture were not an indicator of the regime's willingness to recede its power; on the contrary, it was an attempt to regain control through creating the illusion of freedom and openness. It is the Spanish dictatorship that established the basis for the Latin American dictatorships during the 1970s, especially those in Argentina, Chile and Uruguay. Since the late 1960s, Franco's fascist political elite controlled Spain's destiny and profited from the rigid socio-political control exercised by the regime, while hiding behind the apparent opening of the dictatorship.

¹⁵ Paul Preston, one of the main historians of the Spanish Civil War, explains the way in which the civil war progressed until a final institutionalization of terror on the side of Franco, through permanent and merciless executions, trials and political prisons. For a further discussion on the end of the Civil War and the establishment of the repressive dictatorial apparatus, see Parts 5 and 6 in Paul Preston's *The Spanish Holocaust*.

¹⁶ A country that had been one of the biggest empires in the world with countless colonies in the Americas during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, had become a powerless catholic and conservative nation, which was easily conquered by Napoleon in the early nineteenth century. The last colonies that Spain had by the end of the century – namely Cuba, the Phillipines and Puerto Rico – were lost in the war against the United States, which brought about a certain political and cultural consciousness of the identitarian and socio-political crisis faced by the nation.

¹⁷ For an extensive discussion on the international implications and involvement in the war, see chapter seven in G. Jackson's *A Concise History of the Spanish Civil War*, and part 1 of Preston's *The Spanish Holocaust*.

¹⁸ Similarly, the peripheral national identities –both geographically, such as Cataluña, Galicia or the Basque Country, and socio-political, such as the working class, unions, and the radical clergy –began a process of organization and mobilization that was unprecedented. It is in these moments that some critics have identified the *real* commencement of the transition to democracy, from the bases of society.

¹⁹ The catalogue of the 2007 exhibition by the Center of Contemporary Culture of Barcelona (CCCB for its initials in Spanish) entitled "En Transición" (In transition), discusses the socio-cultural transformations that had occurred during the late years of Franco's dictatorship and during the times of the transition. For a clear and concise analysis of the most important social movements that, without a doubt, engendered the *true* transitions towards democracy, see the introduction to the catalogue written by the directors of the center Antoni Marí, Manel Risques and Ricard Vinces, also professors of History at different universities in Barcelona.

²⁰ For a larger discussion on the violent and repressive tactics of the Second Republic, see Part 3 in Paul Preston's *The Spanish Holocaust*, entitled "Institutional violence in the rebel zone."

²¹ It is interesting to note that the actor who plays Manuel, Alfonso Aragon Sac, is an actual Spanish clown who was part of a very popular family of clowns that would appear on TV during the times of the dictatorship, reinforcing de la Iglesia's metatextual negotiation with Spain's history and culture.

²² See, De la Iglesia, Álex. "Álex de la Iglesia: 'Balada es una Historia de Amor y Muerte'."

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