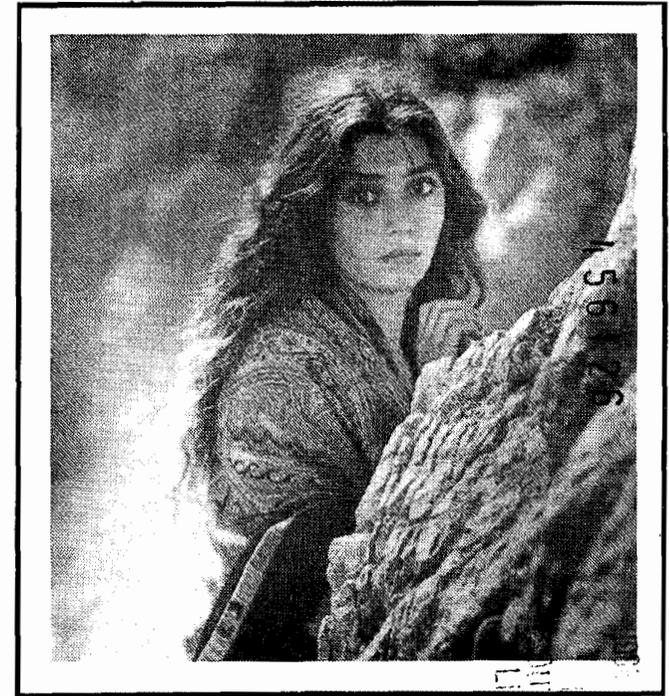


SPECIAL ISSUE

QUARTERLY REVIEW OF
FILM STUDIES

Volume 8
Number 2
Spring 1983



NEW SPANISH CINEMA

Guest Editor: Katherine S. Kovacs

With feature articles by Katherine S. Kovacs, Roman Gubern,
Luis O. Arata, Marvin D'Lugo, Annette Insdorf, Marsha Kinder,
Mario Vargas Llosa, and Jose Luis Borau

Redgrave Publishing Company
South Salem, NY 10590

ISSN 0416-0013

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The Economic and Political Structure of American Television

Guest Editor: David Cook
(Vol. 8, No. 3, Summer 1983)

The Archeology of Cinema

Guest Editor: Mark Gosser
(Vol. 9 No. 1, Winter 1984)

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SEMIOTICS OF CINEMA: THE STATE OF THE ART

Under the above general title, the Fifth International Summer Institute for Semiotic and Structural Studies will be holding a colloquium at Victoria College, University of Toronto, June 18-23, 1984. Key-note speakers will be Jacques Aumont, Nick Browne, Teresa de Lauretis, Umberto Eco, Stephen Heath, Brian Henderson, Bill Nichols, Kaja Silverman, Michael Silverman, and Peter Wollen. Additional papers are invited on any topic related to the *semiotics of cinema*. Papers should be a maximum of 20 minutes in length. Please send an abstract (two pages double-spaced) before Feb. 15, 1984. Acceptance of papers will be announced a month later.

Co-organizers of the colloquium are Paul Bouissac, Teresa de Lauretis, and Cam Tolton.

Papers and inquiries to: Prof. Cam Tolton
Victoria College
73 Queen's Park Cres. E.
Toronto, Ont., Canada
M5S 1K7

THE NEW SPANISH CINEMA Guest Editor: Katherine S. Kovács

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Cover Angelina Molina in *La Sabina* (1979)

The Children of Franco in the New Spanish Cinema

Marsha Kinder

When José Luis Borau recently visited one of my cinema courses at USC, he spoke of his generation of filmmakers who had come from the School of Cinematography (Escuela Oficial de Cinematografía) from which he himself had graduated in 1961 and where he continued to teach until 1970 and where Carlos Saura had also been a professor for several years—and how they had been perceived by those in the film industry before they went on to create the New Spanish Cinema:

It was a very good school or, at least, very useful—we learned almost everything about filmmaking there. What is sad is that it doesn't exist anymore. Now the school is for all the arts; it's become too official and too weak. It's very curious because in fact the school died with Franco. Yet the school was very anti-Franco. We had lots of fights during the Franco years and lots of strikes. We saw films from all over the world—even from Russia, even leftist films. They would come to Spain

only for the school because at that time it was not easy to see foreign films in our country.... The older generations that were already in the film industry hated us. They said we were reds, hippies or existentialists, that we were crazy or stupid.... Although some of us were then 38, 40 and 42, they called us "young directors," and almost nobody would trust us or give us an opportunity to direct. Now in Spain our really young directors are between 20 and 30, and our generation is not young anymore. Our time was very short because we were the children of Franco.¹

Because of their position in the repressive patriarchal Franquist society and in the state-supported, paternalistic film industry molded by Franco (who had followed the example of Hitler and Mussolini²), this generation of filmmakers was forced always to define themselves and their films in opposition to Franco, both before and after his

death in 1975. They were led to see themselves as emotionally and politically stunted children who were no longer young; who, because of the imposed role as "silent witness" to a tragic war that had divided country, family and self, had never been innocent; and who, because of the oppressive domination of the previous generation, were obsessed with the past and might never be ready to take responsibility for changing the future.

José Luis Borau and Carlos Saura, the leading filmmakers of this generation and the two major forces behind the New Spanish Cinema, both struggled against this process of infantilization by asserting their individuality and adopting (in Saura's words) "an active stance" that shaped their approach to filmmaking thematically, stylistically, and economically. This action was directed almost entirely against Franco, which again cast the artists in the role of rebellious sons opposing the father. Saura claims:

I believe that when Franco was still alive, I had a moral obligation—maybe more for myself than for society—to do everything that was possible within my form of work to help change the political system as quickly as possible.³

Saura sees his position historically, identifying himself as a member of the younger generation whose experiments with modernist narrative are shaped not only by the repressive patriarch they try to subvert, but also by his heroic ancestors he tries to emulate.

For me and my compatriots, to make the stories we wanted to do, we had to use indirect methods. For example, we couldn't use a linear structure or the ideas would be too clear. It often forced me to exercise my imagination. The same was true in the Golden Age of Spain when artists like Cervantes, Calderón de la Barca, and Lope de Vega had to avoid the repression of the Inquisition.⁴

To avoid being restricted by the paternalistic film industry, since 1965 Saura has collaborated with independent producer Elias Querejeta, who, like a supportive brother, grants him total artistic freedom in his struggle against the father.⁵

Borau has used a very different strategy to achieve a similar artistic independence. Like Saura, he develops a style that is subtle and indirect, frequently working through political allegory (as in *Furtivos* and *La Sabina*); but instead of turning to post-modernist experimentation with non-linear structure, multi-layered narration, and self-reflexive spectators-in-the-text, he looks back to Renoir and Rossellini for a humanistic realism that focuses on facts, action, and people. Borau is extremely wary of anything that detracts from these central concerns or that calls attention to the filmmaking process and its codes. Even more of a purist than his mentors, he avoids excessive camera movement, beautiful cinematography, nondiegetic music, clever dialogue and scenes designed to reveal character:

I don't like my characters to do things that are unimportant. I like to begin with action and to end with action. The one thing is action.

Though his approach is based on a synthetic style of realistic representation, which Bazin, in discussing the works of Rossellini and Renoir, has described as "a form of self-effacement before reality,"⁶ Borau transforms it into an "active stance," or another means of asserting his own artistic domination over the material and the medium.

I think that when people go to see a movie, there's some kind of contract. You go to see the film and suppose the camera doesn't exist. As soon as you see the camera move, it begins to develop its own personality and becomes somebody else. And I don't need anybody else. In order to express myself, I need only the audience and me.... I don't need music to express feelings. I don't even

like pretty photography because sometimes it makes me jealous. If you say, 'how marvelous the landscape and the photography,' then you are not thinking about the story. I want the audience to be watching the human beings and the action, not the photography or the moving camera. The dialogue is the same. I don't use characters who speak too well. In my opinion, screenwriters are dangerous. If you are not careful, they begin to express themselves through their words, which is not good for me.... A director is not a writer, he is not merely somebody who directs actors, he is the one who finds the meaning of *everything* that he has in front of the camera.

Borau has also struggled to achieve autonomy in the economic realm. In 1967 he formed his own independent production company, El Imán, of which he remains the sole owner. This move guaranteed him total artistic control of the projects he writes, directs, and produces in collaboration with his old friends from the Madrid School of Cinematography. In a sense, Borau has created his own artistic family, with his close friend Luis Cuadrado⁷ as cinematographer and former students like Manuel Gutiérrez Aragón, Jaime Chávarri, Iván Zulueta, and Antonio Drove as co-writers and directors, casting himself in the role of benevolent patriarch.⁸ He believes in investing his own money in his films, for it insures that he makes a total commitment to the project and assumes total responsibility for its success or failure. In dealing with government censorship both before and after the death of Franco, he realized that the issues were as much economic as political. When government authorities demanded forty cuts in *Furtivos* before its release, Borau refused to make the changes and then screened the film for critics, who published enthusiastic reviews, and at International Festivals, where it won prestigious prizes. This strategy proved successful, for it created an economic demand for its release in

Spain; *Furtivos* turned out to be one of the biggest box office hits in the history of Spanish film. Borau believes the most dangerous kind of censorship is that exercised by the filmmaker himself, who, anticipating condemnation by the patriarchal authority, fails to take risks out of pessimism and fear. Such self-censorship is encouraged by a state that infantilizes individuals, trapping them forever in the confining persona of Franco's children.

In this essay, I intend to explore how this construct, "the children of Franco," is made manifest not only in the artistic praxis of the filmmakers as they struggled to assert their mature independence, but also in the representations on screen—of the precocious children who are both murderous monsters and poignant victims, and the stunted childlike adults who are obsessed with distorted visions of the past, both placed in the social context of a divided family that is fraught with sexual deviations and that functions as a microcosm for the corrupt state. I will examine this image in seven key works made between 1973 and 1980, the period surrounding the death of Franco: Victor Erice's *Spirit Of The Beehive* (*El Espíritu de la Colmena*), 1973; Carlos Saura's *Cousin Angelica* (*La Prima Angélica*), 1973, and *Cría* (*Cría Cuervos*), 1975; Jaime de Armiñán's *The Nest* (*El Nido*), 1980; Jaime Chávarri's *To An Unknown God* (*A Un Dios Desconocido*), 1977; Manuel Gutiérrez Aragón's and José Luis Borau's *Black Brood* (*Camada Negra*), 1977; and José Luis Borau's *Poachers* (*Furtivos*), 1975.

The Children of Frankenstein in *The Spirit of the Beehive* (1973)

This film marks the screen debut of Ana Torrent, the child actress who most vividly represents the children of Franco. With a brooding sensitivity that captures every nuance of emotion and perception within their field of vision, her luminous dark eyes confront us with a bold knowing gaze, conveying a precocious intelligence, passion and intensity that

seem almost ominous in their power. Yet her pale oval face and slender birdlike frame create a fragility that also marks her as a victim—a delicate instrument for the registering of pain.

This duality embodied in Torrent is fully developed by the film's narrative, which connects it with the mythic resonance of *Frankenstein* while situating it specifically in the historic context of the Spanish Civil War. Ana is the younger sister in a family living in a small rural village in Castile shortly after the end of the war. The film shows how she absorbs the mysteries that surround her—the moral ambiguities generated by the war, the tensions in the family, the secrets of nature, the train that comes from the world outside, a fugitive from prison, the fearful darkness, macabre games, and movie images from the village cinema—all of which she weaves together into her own private vision that both reveals and shapes her consciousness.

In an extraordinary sequence that reverberates throughout the New Spanish cinema, the two sisters go to see James Whale's *Frankenstein*. Ana is imprinted with this cultural myth and its haunting images, which provide patterns for dealing with her own personal experience. Most disturbed by the monster's interaction with the little girl Maria, whom he seems to befriend but later kills (though the murder is not shown on screen), Ana persists in asking her sister why the monster killed the child. As if denying the power of movies and myth, Isabel explains that films aren't real. But this is little consolation to Ana, who has already absorbed the monster and victim as her doubles. Later, when she re-enacts in her imagination the romantic assignation with the monster, she casts herself in the role of the young girl and changes the setting from bright sunlight to her own brooding darkness. When she helps to hide a stranger, a Republican soldier who is fleeing from the Fascist authorities, she sees him as an incarnation of the monster. Unsure whether this act of friendship will result in her murder as in the movie, she is willing to take the risk, perhaps because the images that she saw on screen of the

tender moments between man and child are far more powerful than the report of the killing, in which she can never quite believe. This romantic scene is so compelling partly because it functions as an idealized projection of the potential love between her and her father, whom she passionately loves and fears and who always remains emotionally distant. The secret relationship with the fugitive becomes another Oedipal substitute that she can act out and also embellish in her imagination. When her father learns about this relationship, he strongly disapproves, causing her to flee in passionate rebellion. When the fugitive soldier is killed, Ana reverses the myth and feels partly responsible for his death. In one scene, she looks deep into a well and sees her own reflection transformed into the face of Frankenstein's monster. Her guilt is related directly to her own fantasy life, which has made such a rich use of their encounter, fusing it with the myth of Frankenstein and her own Oedipal drama. She feels guilty for helping the stranger because it implies a romantic identification with the outlaw rebel and a betrayal of her father and other patriarchal authorities; yet she also feels guilty for not preventing his death, which in light of her fantasy projections is associated with the monstrous crime of patricide.

By making this stranger a Republican fleeing from the Fascist authorities in the period just after the Civil War, the narrative accentuates the political context. Under the pressures of a war that divided the nation, the family, and the individual, that generation of impressionable children would respond to repressive patriarchs with love and fear, entertaining distorted fantasies of heroic allegiance and rebellious patricide, dividing the self into victim and monster. The children of Franco would turn out to be the children of Frankenstein.

The James Whale *Frankenstein* is the perfect choice for adaptation to the Franquist context, not only because it's of the right vintage (1931), but also because, of all the versions, it places the greatest emphasis on the dramatic contrast between

the monster's infantile emotions and his adult, giantlike body, and also on the patriarchal nature of the powers that pervert and destroy him. Unlike the highly sophisticated creature in the novel⁹ who speaks several languages, Boris Karloff's monster is a gigantic toddler, clumsily taking his first steps in a world that repeatedly brings disappointment rather than delight, poignantly expressing his needs through his inarticulate babble and moans, through his searching hands that are always seeking contact, and through the fluid range of emotions that play across his waxen face. This paradoxical contrast between the monster's grotesque form and his humanizing movements turns tragic, particularly in the encounter with Maria. Ignoring their physical differences, they share a pure delight in play. When we later learn of Maria's death, we think back to the joy expressed on the monster's face and to his huge hands, reaching out for loving contact with his playmate. Like Ana, we cannot believe that he has murdered her intentionally but surmise that his unawareness of his own physical nature has led him accidentally to kill the one he loves. The crime becomes more terrifying and moving precisely because it was unintended. Like Ana, it makes us fear our own fathomless infantile nature as well as the unknown powers in the hostile adult world that surrounds us.

The patriarchal emphasis is, of course, central to Mary Shelley's novel. Dr. Frankenstein is both an irresponsible, rejecting father to his brainchild and also a dangerous rebel against patriarchal authority. Through his scientific project, he challenges his professors and ultimately usurps the divine powers of creation. This duality is undoubtedly linked to the confusion that commonly occurs between Frankenstein and his monster, whose doubling for each other fosters a similar psychic process within Ana. Whale's movie intensifies this patriarchal conflict by adding several more fathers, all of whom are endorsed: an urbane, cynical baron who sees his son's scientific project as a foolish distraction from his serious class duty of marrying well and per-

petuating the family name, a kindly professor who taught him everything he knows, but still wisely opposes his ambitious experiments; a burgo-master who officially leads both the hunt for the monster and the village celebration of Dr. Frankenstein's wedding; and the Divine father made manifest in the recurrent ringing of church bells, which are harmonious with Frankenstein's actions only when he marries his father's choice. All of these fathers stand in total opposition to the monster, whose destruction represents the final crushing of young Frankenstein's irresponsible rebellion and his rightful placement among the traditional patriarchs.¹⁰

The patriarchal emphasis also appears in the Maria episode, which is so crucial to Ana. Before meeting the monster, Maria urges her father to stay home and play with her, but her request is denied. This added detail suggests that the monster is not only a playmate, but also a father substitute in her own Oedipal fantasies. Her death is visualized in a very moving scene in which her grief-stricken father carries her lifeless body through streets where villagers are joyously celebrating Frankenstein's wedding. The incongruous setting not only heightens the intensity of his grief, which because of his earlier rejection must be tinged with guilt, but also suggests the romantic potential of their love. It is this subtle network of primal associations that Ana as a young spectator unconsciously absorbs as the deep structure for her own private fantasies about all the father figures in her life. *The Spirit of the Beehive* powerfully demonstrates how this story of Frankenstein, which centers on an obsessive love/hate relationship between an austere father and a stunted child, is the perfect myth for the children of Franco.

Two by Saura: The Childlike Man and the Patricidal Child

In his very first feature *Los Golfos* (The Urchins), 1959, Saura claims that he focused on young delinquents in order to get commentary past the

censors. Of all his films the image of childhood is most powerful and most political in *Cousin Angelica* (1973) and *Cria cuervos* (1975), the two works that were made and released closest to the death of Franco. These two films can be seen as companion pieces. According to Saura, "Every film is a consequence of the film before it. Only when a film is completed, do I feel the necessity of starting the next one."¹¹ In this case the films are linked by a common image with which *Cousin Angelica* ends and *Cria* begins—a mother combing her daughter's hair before a mirror which is the camera. The image was not in the script for *Cousin Angelica* but came to him during the shooting and subsequently gave birth to *Cria*. In a 1974 interview, he reveals:

I have been obsessed with the image of a mother and her daughter for a long time. It is an idea that haunts me, and perhaps it will become a picture some day. That image fascinates me. I find very exciting to what extent a human being can split in two—because it is the images of Angélica's split, the mother and daughter of 1936, that, at the same time, stand for the present mother and daughter; usly the daughter in 1936 and the mother in 1973 are in fact the same person. It is the confluence but notice that, obvioof two images, separated all along the picture, that are united at the last moment.¹²

This is the territory that Saura explores in both films—the splitting of the self into the isolated, hyper-sensitive, indelibly imprinted child and the emotionally stunted adult, the two sides of the children of Franco. This psychological model of the divided self, a tense oscillation between two ego states, can be found in the films of many other directors, including Ingmar Bergman; yet in Saura's works the psychological construct is always politicized—the childhood traumas are always directly related to historical events such as the

Spanish Civil War in *Cousin Angelica* or the death of Franco in *Cria*.

Cousin Angelica (1973): Devoured by Revisions of the Past

This film follows the outer and inner journey of Luis Cano (brilliantly played by José Luis López Vázquez, one of several fine Spanish actors who repeatedly portray the childlike adult), a quiet, lonely, middle-aged bachelor from Barcelona who comes home to a Castillian town to bury the bones of his mother, who has been dead for twenty years. Visiting his Aunt Pilar, with whom he lived thirty years ago during the Civil War, and his cousin Angélica, whom he loved as a child, he relives moments from his childhood, which was shaped by the war that bitterly split the family and separated him from his parents. The narrative dramatizes the temporal contrast between the past (1936) and the present (1973)—the same comparison that had been implicit in *Spirit of the Beehive* which was set in the late thirties and also made in 1973. In Saura's film, the Civil War is much more clearly identified as the primary force that molds the consciousness of the entire Spanish nation. Saura claims:

The Spanish Civil War has been a decisive influence not only for those of us who lived through it, even if we were children at the time—I was four years old when the war began—, but also for later generations of Spaniards, for people born well afterwards but who, without experiencing the war directly, have lived under its consequences. A political system, awful personal conflicts, deaths in the family (every family has seen one of its members killed in action).¹³

As Saura's first autobiographical film, *Cousin Angelica* dramatizes the imprinting power of the war on the young Saura, whose mother's family was pro-Franco.

Instead of centering on events, Saura's conception of autobiography focuses on mental processes: "I don't like autobiographies that are like diaries. What interests me is the imagination working on one's own life—naturally, this offers a wide leeway for creations."¹⁴ More specifically, the film reveals how the child's mind struggles with the fearful ambiguities of the war and how the adult consciousness reconstructs those vivid, yet distorted memories.

I think I have shown the Civil War as I wanted to, because it agrees with my idea of what a child could feel the war meant. I recall I was at Barcelona at the war's ending; Barcelona was on the Republican side, and when the Franquist troops took the city, my bewilderment was terrible: because then the 'good ones' were already the 'bad ones,' and the 'bad ones' had become now the 'good ones.'¹⁵

These processes are introduced in the opening sequence, which immediately confronts us with powerful images that could be present experience, nightmare, or traumatic memory. As we hear choir boys singing, we see white mist drifting through a church schoolroom, which is illuminated by strange overexposed lighting; the camera slowly glides through wreckage, observing signs of violence from some unknown disaster. Later in the film, when we return to this image, we realize it was a childhood memory of a bombing of Luis's school, but one that has merged with other traumas—e.g., the death of an eleven-year-old boy, who was killed by a bomb while playing in a school courtyard, an incident Luis had never seen but had heard about from a priest who used it to instill the fear of sin and death in his students. In retrospect, the opening images seem less of an accurate representation of an historical event than a symbolic visualization of Luis's consciousness, which has been shaped by the War and the Church.

As in *Spirit of the Beehive*, movies also play a key role in imprinting the young mind, providing germinal images to be reworked in private fantasies and training the child to be a creative spectator to his own experience. One of Luis's most vivid memories is of a wartime documentary called "The Eyes of London," which showed "blue eyes everywhere." When we actually see the film played back in his mind, it is in black and white; the eyes are covered with dehumanized goggles and belong to uniformed men marching through wartime rubble. These images are rooted in Saura's own memories which, like Luis's, are drastically altered.

Cousin Angelica was based on a specific specular project—the adult Saura trying to visualize himself as a child.

One day I looked in the mirror and said, 'My goodness, what did I look like as a child?' I can't remember myself as a child in the mirror. I have photographs, but when I look at them, I feel it's someone I don't know. When I've tried to reconstruct my past, I don't do so with the mentality of a child. Mostly I see myself as I am now, but going back 20 or 30 years. That was one of the fundamental ideas that made me make this film—that you cannot see yourself as a child.¹⁶

Saura assumes that distortion is inevitable; there will always be a gap between the Subject and the Imaginary Signifier—an idea that is visualized in the scene where Luis stares at his reflection in a mirror vainly searching for the child. In all of Luis's memories, we never see him as a boy. As in Karloff's portrayal of Frankenstein's monster, Vázquez must rely solely on his acting to transform his adult frame and features through childish postures, body movements, facial expressions, and voice inflections. After a while, we actually see the child in Luis and realize that it dominates as performer while the adult is restricted to the more passive role of spectator; even in the past, it had been the precocious

consciousness that had observed the actions of the child. Although Luis has come home to bury the past, it is more alive for him than the present. Increasingly, he becomes a spectator to his own reconstructed memories and less capable of taking any action whatsoever.

As the picture proceeds, the past becomes more and more strong, until it ends by overwhelming everything else. Really, I think that the development of the picture is clearly defined in the sense that, if the present has a greater influence during its first half, at the end Luis is devoured by his past.¹⁷

This process of being devoured by the past is most vividly demonstrated in Luis's reactions to Angélica. While rejecting the sexual advances of his adult cousin, he tries in vain to recapture their earlier eroticism with her nine-year-old daughter. At the end of his visit, he borrows the girl's bicycle and takes one last trip into the past. It is the traumatic incident that forever separates him from Angélica. The young lovers flee on a bicycle to Madrid, where they plan to be reunited with his parents. But they are stopped by Franquist soldiers, who return them to her angry father, who becomes the embodiment of Fascist tyranny. As he beats the cringing Luis with his leather belt, Angélica sits in the next room in front of a mirror, tearfully listening to his sobs as her mother soothes her by brushing her hair. This moment imprints them forever, splitting them not only from each other, but also from their own passionate feelings, transforming them into detached spectators of both the present and the past.

Cría Cuervos (1975): An Imaginable Future without Franco

I think we are living through a process of destruction, of demolition, from which will arise something else... *Cría cuervos*, in a

way, is a film about this process, the process of destruction and death.¹⁸

Cría Cuervos is the first film by Saura to be released after the death of Franco and the first to be based on a screenplay he had written alone. Though the film was shot while Franco was still alive, it's as if this incipient historical event enabled him to take a new step in asserting his creative independence. Yet the film is more informed by the death of the patriarch than by any liberation that was to follow. Saura continued to be extremely cautious about the political implications. Shortly after making this movie, he observed in an interview:

The truth is that making a picture in Spain with politics as the main theme is unimaginable...at least at this time...I endeavor within the plots of my pictures for a closeness and some references to immediate reality, that which affects me directly, and in that sense I suppose politics hang on the backdrop, indirectly impregnating everything.¹⁹

Although the opening image of *Cría* was born in *Cousin Angelica*, it was transformed by Ana Torrent, whom Saura had seen in *Spirit of the Beehive*.

That image took shape when I saw Ana Torrent... in ...*El Espiritu de la Colmena*. That girl fascinated me and certainly was the necessary stimulus for me to organize the scattered material. Ana, the star of the film, is obviously a sensitive and especially receptive girl who, facing the aggression of the adult world, has formed an isolated and personal world in which ... reality is such that it encloses memories with appearance of the present, desires and hallucinations that are confused with the everyday.²⁰

From *Spirit of the Beehive*, Saura apparently absorbed not only Ana Torrent, but also the conception of childhood that she represented ("I have

never believed in the child's paradise; on the contrary, I think that childhood is a stage where nocturnal terror, fear of the unknown, loneliness, are present with at least the same intensity as the joy of living and that curiosity of which pedagogues talk so much"²¹), and specific traits she possessed in Erice's film: a precocious sensitivity and passion; an imaginative ability to fuse memory, hallucination, and present experience; and a dual capacity of being a victim of a hostile adult world and a murderous monster capable of patricide. Saura takes the primal conflicts that were only subtly implicit in *Spirit of the Beehive* and places them center stage.

When we see the opening image of a mother combing her daughter's hair before a mirror, we at first interpret it as an ordinary domestic ritual taking place in the diegetic present of 1975. When we learn that the mother is dead, we realize it is the girl's obsessive hallucinatory wish fulfillment, perhaps based on a reconstructed memory from the mirror phase when she first recognized her own Imaginary Signifier situated next to that of her mother. When we learn that the film is being narrated by the grown-up Ana from a future perspective of 1995, this opening image is pushed even further into the imaginary, being a reconstructed memory of an hallucination based on an earlier reconstructed memory. And when we consider the creative role of Saura, we remember that this opening can be traced back quite consciously to the final image of *Cousin Angelica* ("*Cría cuervos* was born in the final scene of *La Prima Angelica*"²²) and also functions as an analogue to the earlier Ana's romantic reverie of herself and Frankenstein's monster in *Spirit of the Beehive*.

While Erice's Ana had fused movie monster, romantic stranger, and father into her own Oedipal fantasy that only hinted at incest and patricide, Saura's Ana boldly acts out the latter with her father, who compresses all three figures and whose identity as a high-ranking officer strengthens the political connection with the dying Franco, the ultimate

Spanish patriarch. Unlike Luis and his cousin Angélica, this child refused to be restricted to the passive role of spectator; she rebels against all forms of repressive authority. In a sense, she is a budding female Hamlet starring in her own revenge tragedy that is played out amidst the rottenness of a corrupt family and state. Identifying strongly with her dead mother whom her father had brutalized and betrayed, Ana puts poisonous powder in his milk on the same night that he dies, in bed, with his mistress. It is only later when she tries to repeat the crime against her Aunt Pauline, who has attempted to fill the role of her absent mother, that she realizes the powder is harmless and that her murderous deeds have been confined to the realm of the imaginery—a restriction of action that undoubtedly applied to most of the children of Franco. Since these acts are performed in the name of love for her mother, whose death, betrayal, and substitution she has tried to avenge, Ana fails to see how she herself, in identifying so strongly with her mother, has become her most potent rival. Saura reinforces this nuance through casting, having Geraldine Chaplin play both the dead mother and the grown-up Ana who is narrating the story from an imagined future of 1995. We are left uncertain as to whether the cherished image of the mother has shaped the development of the daughter, or whether Ana's own image has been superimposed over that of the absentee.

In either case, it is the child's consciousness that dominates both the central character and the film, reversing the central premise of *Cousin Angelica* by demonstrating what happens when one can see oneself as a child, long after both parents are dead. In this film, both past and future, self and other, are situated in the realm of the imaginary, along with the conscious desire for patricide and the more disguised impulse towards matricide, which is displaced onto the aunt. Only the repressed incestuous love for the father remains unconscious and unacknowledged. Although the death of the patriarch helps to expand the consciousness of his

children, meaningful action is still only imaginable, not performed.

The Nest (1980): The Romantic Coupling of the Precocious Child and Childlike Adult

Saura's project of absorbing Ana Torrent as the embodiment of Franco's children and elaborating on her characteristics and conflicts from *The Spirit of the Beehive* is carried even further by Jaime de Armiñán in *The Nest*, a film I have written on more extensively elsewhere.²³ Although it was made five years after *Cría* and the death of Franco, it still places politics in the background. Yet now for the first time, both the incestuous and patricidal desires of the precocious child are liberated from the imaginary realm and acted out with a vengeance.

The film pairs a precocious thirteen-year-old girl named Goyita Mendez (brilliantly played by Ana Torrent) with a childlike middle-aged eccentric named Don Alejandro (skillfully portrayed by Héctor Alterio) in a tragic deviant romance. With Goyita as his Dulcinea, Don Alejandro is playing Don Quixote, blithely sallying forth on the great romantic adventure of his life. But once again the child is the controlling consciousness who manipulates the narrative, luring him into her own Oedipal drama where he is to play the role of murderous consort to her Lady Macbeth. Instead, he ends up the willing victim.

While the intertextual connections with *Don Quixote* are only implicit, the references to *Macbeth* are as explicit and pivotal as Erice's use of *Frankenstein*. The first time both the audience and Don Alejandro see Goyita, she is rehearsing her role out the film both characters quote crucial lines from dy Macbeth for a school performance. Throughout the film both characters quote crucial lines from the play, acknowledging the tragic subtext. In one scene the teacher directing the play confides to Don Alejandro that she chose Goyita to play Lady Macbeth because "she's wicked enough to understand the part"; he replies, "I've always

thought that women were more intelligent than men, and more evil." Like the demonic Lady Macbeth, Goyita is a powerful female who manipulates one man into killing another. Her intended victim is a police sergeant, the top patriarchal authority of the city and the tyrannical boss of her weak father. But, since the Don decides not to load his weapon, the sergeant ends up killing the supposed assassin, with Goyita's father filling the role of passive witness. Both killer and victim are traditional patriarchs functioning as father surrogates. Goyita's tragic prototype, Lady Macbeth, had also seen a resemblance between her own father and the man she persuaded her husband to murder: "Had he not resembled My father as he slept, I had done 't" (II,ii,12-13).

Goyita is portrayed not only as a monstrous despot, but also as a highly sensitive young girl victimized by a repressive family and state. Her innate rebelliousness is aimed both at mother and father, and their respective doubles. She hates her mother, who dominates the family and henpecks the weak father, of whom she is contemptuous, worshipping instead the police sergeant to whom she is sexually drawn. Despite the hatred between them, Goyita is much like her mother, having learned how to manipulate her own man, Don Alejandro, sharing a secret contempt for her father for whom she also seeks substitutes, and responding equally passionately to the sergeant (with a burning hatred that probably disguises sexual attraction). She also adopts mother surrogates to double as models and rivals: her attractive young teacher with whom she's engaged in friendly competition (Goyita even forbids Don Alejandro to see her), and Don Alejandro's late wife, with whom she shares the passion of collecting bird nests and whom she envies, despises, and succeeds in replacing. The fact that both of these mother surrogates are perceived as rivals for Don Alejandro's affection further intensifies the Oedipal dimension of their romance.

Unlike *Cría*, which compresses all patriarchal aspects in a single character, here as in *Spirit of the*

Beehive they are separated into several figures: the weak, repressed biological father, who is as emotionally distant from the mother as he is from the children; the romantic stranger, whom she meets in secret and converts into an outlaw accomplice and for whose death she is largely responsible; the tyrannical militaristic officer, whose death she longs for and arranges but fails to accomplish and whose sexual appeal she refuses to acknowledge; and the monster (this time a caged eagle) whom she loves and trains and with whom she plays and strongly identifies as an instinctive predator. Resenting Goyita's keeping a bird of such imperial power, the sergeant confiscates the creature and lets it go. This act of aggression drives Goyita to confront him with full passion and to threaten him directly with murder. But the patricide as well as the incest are doubly displaced from the familial and civil patriarchs onto Don Alejandro, the romantic childlike outlaw.

Unlike the tragic subtext of *Macbeth*, in which the regicide committed by the overly ambitious couple destroys their psychic peace and brings havoc and corruption to the state, the consequences of the murder-plot in *The Nest* are more benign. Don Alejandro calmly accepts his fate, carrying an unloaded rifle, convinced that the sacrifice of his life is well worth the chivalric adventure, and Goyita survives the experience enriched, both emotionally and materially, and more firmly committed than ever to liberated eccentricity and deviant passion. When transferred to the context of post-Franco Spain, the myth of *Macbeth*, like that of *Frankenstein*, obviously takes on new meaning.

Two Films From 1977

By 1977 making a picture in Spain with politics as the main theme was not only imaginable, but also do-able — as *Black Brood*, the most explicitly political film ever produced in Spain, so valiantly proved to the world. Yet that same year also marked the release of *To an Unknown God*,

another remarkable film that was equally impressive in its subtlety. Its emphasis on an unconventional form of sexuality, the obliqueness of its political implications, its highly intelligent, literate script, its modernist structure, its depth of characterization, and its brilliantly subtle performance by Héctor Alterio all suggest connections with *The Nest*, implying that the best indirect style of the Franquist period might continue to develop indefinitely in the post-Franco future. Although *Black Brood* and *To an Unknown God* represent opposite poles in terms of political explicitness, both films place children of Franco at their emotional and narrative center—focusing, like Saura's two works, either on the stunted childlike adult or on the precocious killer-child.

To an Unknown God (1977): The Childlike Adult as Deviant Lover

Like Saura's *Cousin Angelica*, Jaime Chávarri's *To an Unknown God* is the story of a lonely middle-aged bachelor who is obsessed with memories from 1936 that fuse eroticism with political violence, both steeped in the moral ambiguity of the wartime context; like Luis, José returns to the scene of his childhood, the grand estate where his father had worked, to explore these haunting recollections. But in Chávarri's film, the remembered events are far more mysterious and melodramatic: the boy witnesses the murder of Federico García Lorca by the Falangists on the same night and in the same garden where he had just had his first homosexual experience. The garden setting heightens the mythic resonance of this loss of innocence, poisoning the boy's emotional life with a double sense of guilt. Since his own sexual act could be seen as punish-able, particularly by repressive Fascists, the boy identifies with the victim, who was also associated with homosexuality. Yet, like the young girl in *Spirit of the Beehive*, he also irrationally feels partly responsible for the murder—particularly since his lover Pedro was obsessively in

love with Lorca.

Thirty years later José is still haunted by his love for Pedro who is now dead and whose memory has been fused with the ghost of Lorca, who has come to represent the tragedy of lost potential for José and his entire generation of Spaniards. This idea is dramatized when José performs his wardrobe ritual in the presence of Pedro's fetishized photograph while listening to tapes of Lorca's "Ode to Walt Whitman," which contains such lines as:

That is why I do not raise my voice, aged Walt Whitman,
against the little boy who writes
a girl's name on his pillow,
nor the boy who dresses himself in the bride's
trousseau
in the darkness of the wardrobe,
nor the solitary men in clubs
who drink the water of prostitution with nausea
nor the men with a green stare
who love man and burn their lips in silence.
But against you, yes, pansies of the cities,
of tumescent flesh and unclean mind,
mud of drains, harpies, unsleeping enemies
of Love which distributes crowns of joy.

Against you always, you who give boys
drops of soiled death with bitter poison.

As an internationally acclaimed modernist poet, Lorca sought to combine his exploration of consciousness and the mechanics of its creation with what was most traditionally Spanish—a combination that made him threatening to the Fascists as a boldly experimental artist, a free-thinking intellectual, a leftist, and a martyr. As if preparing to offer himself as a sacrifice, Lorca became obsessed with the Spanish idea of *duende* (avenging one's family honor):

Spain is at all times obsessed with *duende*...because it is a country that opens to death. In all other countries death is an end. It comes and one draws the curtains. Not in Spain. In Spain a dead man is more alive as a

dead man than anywhere else in the world: his profile wounds like a razor blade... The *duende* wounds and the tendency of that wound, which never closes, distinguishes the creative man.²⁴

To an *Unknown God* powerfully demonstrates that Lorca is very alive as a dead man and as an open wound in the minds of José and his generation, including the creative men who produced the New Spanish Cinema—an idea reinforced by Saura's recent stunning adaptation of Lorca's *Blood Wedding*.

The adult José is a character with far more depth than Saura's Luis. While Saura's film explores the mental processes as they reconstruct past and present, Chávarri's work is a character study that examines a complex, multifaceted individual within a particular social context, one whose emotional and intellectual capacities seem so rich to the spectator, yet who experiences great unhappiness and an overwhelming sense of loss. José's job as a nightclub magician allows him to wear theatrical disguises and to remain in touch with the mysteries of childhood and creative transformation, even if his powers are largely based on illusion. Despite the emotional wounds from his past, he is supportive of his younger bisexual lover when he decides to enter politics, even though their relationship is problematic. His potential as a father is explored in a scene in which he teaches a young boy to ride a bicycle. The encounter is observed by José's sister, who at first fears that he may try to molest the child; becoming aware of her own horrid prejudice against homosexuals (which is probably shared by many spectators in the audience), she soon realizes that José is taking great pleasure in playing the father, a role for which he is well suited but that he will never be allowed to fulfill. This same issue arises again in his encounter with a confused teenager who lives in the same building and who seeks out José in his apartment, hoping to be seduced. It is José's very capacity to identify with the boy,

which enables him to act as a responsible adult, forcing the boy to acknowledge his own curiosity about the homosexual world yet refusing to exploit it. The relationship with the teenager is fraught with incestuous overtones since his mother has proposed a marriage of convenience to José. He rejects her as he has her son, for very different reasons, but with the same sensitivity to her feelings and needs. In all of these instances, José directly acknowledges his own homosexuality, realizing the price that both he and Pedro have paid for the latter's failure to face his own.

In certain key sequences Chávarri seems to draw on germinal images from *Cousin Angelica*, adapting and elaborating them to suit his own character and purpose. Saura's resonant image of the mother combing her daughter's hair before a mirror, splitting the self in two and combining past and present, is transformed into a sensual scene in which José brushes the long tresses of his sister, who sits bare-breasted in front of a mirror calmly gazing out the window while he speaks of the similarities between homosexual and heterosexual love. He performs this act of intimacy with a sense of ritual bordering on fetishism. We wonder whether there are incestuous desires or experiences in their past to parallel the incest we have seen enacted between Pedro and his sister. But the scene might also evoke a boy's fantasies about being a girl ("the boy who dresses himself in the bride's trousseau in the darkness of the wardrobe"). Perhaps the sister allows such intimacy because her brother's homosexuality has neutered him in her mind. Because José's images from the past retain their mystery, they remain more malleable and resonant than those of Luis for their use in the present.

Saura's pivotal scene of Luis searching for the child in his own mirror reflection is paralleled by José's wardrobe ritual, in which he slowly and methodically undresses in his bedroom, fastidiously putting everything away and then examining his wrinkles and sagging flesh in his bathroom mirrors. José's reactions to his reflection reveal a strange

mixture of anxiety and acceptance, of narcissism and detached observation, as if, despite his regular detailed scrutiny, he is still always somewhat surprised by what he sees in the mirror. One imagines that when he closes his eyes, he returns to an Imaginary Signifier from the past; and yet, unlike the drab, inconspicuous Luis, José's appearance is always dramatically constructed to arouse a specific effect in the spectator, even when that spectator is himself. It is only in the wardrobe ritual that he fully relinquishes all disguise and faces the wounded child still obsessed with Pedro and Lorca.

In the film's final sequence this wardrobe ritual is repeated with one important difference — the presence of his bisexual lover, standing in the doorway fully clothed, observing José's private rites without speaking a word. The granting of such an audience may imply on José's part either a pessimistic indifference as he moves closer to old age and death, or another step toward greater self-revelation and intimacy. In either case, what these two sequences communicate so subtly is his realistic awareness of both the limitations and diminished prospects of his life and also the emotional and moral strength he still holds in reserve. José emerges as a creative man with a wound from the past which will never close, yet, unlike Luis Cano, he is not completely stunted nor entirely incapacitated for the present. Rather, he is a sensitive, complex, multidimensional human being still capable of performing limited acts of magic.

Black Brood (1977): The Monstrous Child As Precocious Fascist

Co-written by Manuel Gutiérrez Aragon (who was also director) and José Luis Borau (the producer), *Black Brood* is a blatantly antifascist portrait of a family of rightwing brothers, who sing in a church choir by day and perform acts of terrorism by night. In both ventures they are led by their fanatical mother Blanca, who is inspired by her late

Falangist husband — an absent patriarch evoking shades of Franco.

When asked about the political boldness of this project, Borau observed:

After my success with *Furtivos*, I wrongly thought that I could do anything in my own country. Whenever I produce a film, I always do the one the director wants to do. Manolo said, I am going to do a film about rightwing terrorists, and I said, 'Okay, let's go!' When I asked him why were we making a film about rightwing rather than leftwing terrorists, he answered, 'Because I want to do a tragedy. It's more tragic to be a rightwing terrorist because, although leftist terrorists are also killing people, at least they are working in some way with history. But rightists are working against history. They have no future, so it's more tragic.' We did the film because I liked the ideas of the director. But things were not changing as fast as we thought after the death of Franco. When we opened with the film, the reaction was terrible — there were bombings, protests and threats. Even now, five years later, there are many towns and villages where the film is not shown.

The story focuses on the youngest brother Tatin who at fifteen desperately wants to be accepted as an adult member of the secret terrorist organization. To accomplish this goal, he must fulfill the three requirements of modern heroism, enunciated by his mother: to keep their path secret, to seek revenge against their enemies, and to be willing to sacrifice their closest friend or relative for the cause. Raised in a poisonous atmosphere that converts all of his heroic potential into fuel for fascism, the boy soon succeeds in becoming a callous killer.

As in many of the other films under discussion here, this work links the protagonist's sexual and moral development, which are both crucial to his quest for manhood. Tatin's first act is to avenge his

brother's honor by raping the bookshop clerk who has accused him of taking part in the earlier raid. Not entirely successful, he flees the shop and encounters a young mysterious woman named Rosa, who befriends him and initiates him sexually. The unwed mother of a four-year-old son, Rosa offers Tatin a positive human alternative for his moral and sexual development, allowing him to play both the coveted roles of elder son and substitute for the absent father that he longs to assume in his own family. Ironically, she is the close friend and relative whom Tatin chooses to sacrifice to the fascist cause of his perverted matriarch. He takes Rosa to a deserted field and, just as they are on the verge of making love, he brutally beats her to death, chanting, "Spain, Spain, Spain." After depositing her naked body in a pit, he plants a tree on the shallow grave as a patriotic tribute to the New Spain.

While the link between fascist repression and sexual deviance in the children of Franco was only implicit in the other films under discussion, here it is made quite direct. In killing the woman who combines the roles of lover and good mother, Tatin not only rejects human tenderness but also his successful resolution of the Oedipal complex. He chooses to embrace a perverted life of sexual violence that he has absorbed with his mother's milk. Blanca's fanaticism is also identified with sexual repression. While she denies any sexual contact to her current spouse, her bedroom is dominated by a large photograph of her late husband in his Falangist uniform, which she has converted into a fetishized icon.

Annette Insdorf reads the dominance of the bad mother and the absence of the father in the New Spanish Cinema — a pattern that is also found in Borau's *Poachers*, Gutiérrez Aragón's *Sleepwalkers*, and Saura's *Mama Turns 100* — as a commentary on "the intimate connections between matriarchy and church." She concludes:

Like the bloodthirsty Mama of *Black Brood*

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who claims that 'rage can be holy,' these women suggest that the authority of religion in Spain is ultimately stronger than that of politics, for it incorporates transcendence.²⁵

Indeed, the battle for Tatin's soul is waged by two matriarchs whose names suggest religious allegory — Rosa and Blanca, two rival versions of the Madonna. Tatin's ritualistic act of planting a tree over Rosa's grave has not only political significance, but also religious overtones, evoking the building of a shrine over the remains of a dead saint. As a young knight-errant, he still remains perversely loyal to his own Holy Mother and Courtly Lady, betrayal of whom is far more threatening than the act of murder.

Poachers (1975): The Chain of Brutalization Between The Devouring Parent And The Murderous Child

Opening in Madrid only two months before the death of Franco, Borau's *Poachers* presents the most powerful rendition of the tragedy of Franco's victimized, murderous children — a label that can be applied to all five of the film's principal characters. *Poachers* is a chilling dramatization of the chain of brutalization that passes from authority to subject, hunter to prey, and parent to child — a concept that was implicit in the myth of Frankenstein. Here it is linked very specifically to the political context of Spain, which Franco loved to describe as "a peaceful forest" but which Borau reveals to be a treacherous wood full of predators.

In describing his film, Borau quotes a line from Antonio Machado: "In the loneliness of the forests, the peasants become crazy," He elaborates:

Cruelty is the most extreme in nature, and especially among the poor. The poor are not happy, beautiful and peaceful... I wanted to show that the peaceful woods hid killing and cruelty. The Spanish title *Furtivos* has two

meanings — illegal hunters or poachers, and also those who live their lives in a secretive way. Both meanings apply here — I wanted to show that under Franco, Spain was living a secret life. Virtually everyone in this film is a *furtivo*.

Populated with characters who are both poachers and prey, the film presents extreme acts of treachery, incest and murder, all submerged beneath a calm surface of dark beauty, dramatizing the corrosive effect of Franquist repression. *Poachers* is a masterpiece of artistic control and emotional compression, which has a haunting effect on the spectator.

Also based on a screenplay by Borau and Gutiérrez Aragón, *Poachers* shares the tragic pessimism and political anger of *Black Brood*, though expressed with far greater subtlety. The two stories are in many ways similar, but reach very different resolutions. Instead of the protagonist being a young boy, this time it is a childlike man named Angel, who doubles as the stunted adult and the murderous child. Like Tatin, he is also the object of a bitter struggle between two women, both associated with the church: a young girl named Milagros, who has run away from a convent school and whom Angel has picked up in town, has brought home to usurp his mother's bed, and eventually marries; and his dominating mother Martina, who is a true believer, but whose fanaticism is in the service of self-interest rather than being religious or political. Stirred by a passionate jealousy, she murders her daughter-in-law in the woods in order to reclaim possession of her Angel.

Again it is the women who are the aggressors and who wield the sexual power. After Angel gives Milagros some of his lunch, she gets him to buy her a new dress and then casually offers him her body in exchange. Once having experienced this sexual contact, Angel's desire to make love to her is so strong that it leads him quite literally to throw his mother out of her bed, promising his new love: "This is your house, and this is your bed!" After

Milagros has disappeared and Angel returns from searching for her in the snow, his mother removes his wet clothes, seductively trying to engage him in the incestuous acts they have shared in the past, but at the same time infantilizing him: "We're better off alone... I can see your pecker. I want to..." He pulls back in disgust, insisting that she leave him alone. Borau claims, "This is the most important scene in the film."

Instead of a house full of older rightwing brothers, Angel has the Governor, a middle-aged official who was raised and nursed by Martina, to whom he frequently returns with his friends and deputies and a hearty appetite for the home cooking and maternal affection he enjoyed as a child. In exchange for their menial services as cook and guide on the hunt, the Governor provides Martina and her son with meager financial assistance and shuts his eyes to their poaching. Despite his childish nature, he fills the role of the absent father, who is never mentioned, giving advice and wielding patriarchal authority over all aspects of their lives. Borau associates this kind of secret arrangement with the widespread corruption that was tolerated during the latter years of Franco — which might have ranged from poaching to incest. After witnessing Martina's attempted seduction of Angel and thinking back to certain subtle gestures and remarks between her and the Governor, we suspect that his relationship with his nanny might also have been incestuous. Thus, the Governor is not only Angel's older foster brother, but there is some slight possibility that he could also be his actual father. This complex network of incest lurks in the background, further complicating the actions and intensifying their primal power.

In contrast to young Tatin, everything about Angel's appearance, character and behavior is anti-heroic. He allows himself to be dominated by his mother, he chooses a woman who admits she is in love with another man, and he lacks the courage to kill the hateful Governor, shooting his prize deer instead. As a final concession to his mother, he

goes to the Governor and joins the official brotherhood of the Forest Guard — a step she has long urged him to take. When he returns home and discovers his wife's box of treasured mementos, he realizes that Milagros would never have left voluntarily without it and concludes his mother must have killed her. Like Tatin, he gathers his courage and calmly decides to commit murder, but he makes the opposite choice: this time the son will kill his mother in order to prove loyalty to his lover — the one person who has briefly humanized his poisonous life. Yet, in a sense, the crimes in both films are misdirected. If these young men were able to perceive and fully understand the political dimensions of their respective situations, then Tatin would be better off committing matricide against Blanca, and Angel, patricide against the Governor.

Once his decision is made, Angel follows the three requirements for modern heroism enunciated by Blanca in *Black Brood*. He takes his mother to church where he forces her to go to confession, granting her soul one last chance to be saved and then requesting a mass. When the priest asks for whom the mass is to be performed, Angel replies, "for my intention," keeping his path a secret. Although the priest assumes that the mass is for Angel's missing wife, it is really for the victim and killer in the murder to come. This final act of matricide simultaneously takes revenge on his enemy and sacrifices his closest relative, for Angel concludes they are one. The matricide is not restricted to the realm of the imaginary like the patricide in *Cria*, nor is it displaced onto another as the *The Nest*. Though we see Angel aim the rifle and hear the shot, we do not witness the actual killing. As with the catastrophes in Greek tragedy, the action must occur in the imagination of the spectator, where it becomes a far more haunting presence.

The power of *Poachers* lies not only in the story, with its extreme actions of incest and matricide, but also in the way it is told with such restraint in dialogue and visual style and with such masterful control over the performances and tone.

Consistent with Borau's preference for action over dialogue, there are several scenes with little or no conversation whatsoever. The dialogue that is present is sparse and cryptic, gaining impact through understatement. Take, for example, the final words exchanged between mother and son at the murder.

Martina (kneeling in the snow with her back to her son): What are you going to do to me?
Angel: You already know.

Martina: Then go ahead and do it quickly, you bastard.

Luis Cuadrado's cinematography is subdued but stunning, capturing the natural light and subtle shades of the forest in winter and creating interiors that are painterly in composition and lighting. The overall effect is one of somber dark beauty. Borau claims:

There are two reasons for the dark visual style — the forest and the suffering. When characters are searching for something, they are in darkness. This darkness is also found in Spanish paintings, where the subjects are usually in rooms without windows. When El Greco came to Spain, he painted without windows, too. Cuadrado was my best friend from the E.O.C. (Escuela Oficial de Cinematografía), which means we know each other very well and understood our ways of working. But we frequently argued because he always wanted to shoot in this dark style, yet some of my earlier films were comedies that needed more light. When I decided to make *Poachers*, I came to him and said, "Now I am going to do your film in darkness."

Another source of the film's power is the mythic dimension of its deep structure. Borau acknowledges that when he and Gutiérrez Aragón were writing the script, they consciously selected ele-

ments from fairy tales.

Old fairy tales are still living because they respond to the eternal needs of the soul. So in this film, we include all the elements of a very old tale — the primeval forest, the King (in one scene, Martina even calls the Governor 'my King'), the witch, the old mother, and two innocent children lost in the woods.

The specific fairy tale evoked is, of course, Hansel and Gretel, in which a weak father is persuaded by a bad stepmother to abandon his poor children in the woods, where they encounter an evil witch, whose sugar house they try to consume. A struggle ensues between the old witch, who wants to devour the boy, and the young girl who tries to save him, resulting in the murder of the witch, who doubles for the bad stepmother. Thus, the desire for matricide lies at the center of the tale, making it (like the myth of Frankenstein) a favorite among abused and rejected youngsters and particularly appropriate for the children of Franco.

Despite this mythic subtext, the forest is demystified and treated quite realistically. The focus is on its inhabitants, the wild animals who absorb much of the human violence. Although the murders occur offscreen, the brutal violence against animals is depicted very graphically. Borau explains:

The killing of animals shows the cruelty under the surface. In many movies violence is made enjoyable, but not in *Poachers*. Here the brutality against animals shows who is violent and who is bad. The mother's brutal killing of the wolf proves she is capable of killing the girl. We don't see the boy killing his mother, but we see him killing a deer. We never see the Governor and his men killing any people, but we watch them take pleasure in the senseless slaughter of animals in the hunt.

The she-wolf that Martina captures and chains on the night that Angel brings home Milagros is

particularly resonant in the way that it functions in the narrative. After being cruelly ousted from her bed, Martina goes out into the bitter cold night and brutally beats the animal to death, venting the rage she feels toward Milagros and foreshadowing her subsequent murder. Although the creature is clearly a surrogate for the young girl, as the embodiment of demanding possessiveness the wolf also represents Martina. In the following scene, the priest mediates at the business negotiation where Angel sells the pelt of the dead wolf, just as he later officiates when Angel marries Milagros and when he brings Martina to church for final confession. As the reigning church patriarch, he adjudicates the fate of all three she-wolves, reinforcing their triple identification.

Another source of the film's power is its excellent casting, which is very important to Borau. Relying almost entirely on faces and how people move, Borau uses the physical presence of the actors to define the characters. In *Poachers* virtually all of the principal characters look simultaneously older and younger than they actually are, reinforcing the monstrous chain of brutalization between parent and child and causing all of them to double as stunted adults and murderous children.²⁶

Played by Borau himself as a caricature of the Francoist patriarch, the Governor is a stately middle-aged man with fastidious tastes, yet his petulant, self-centered manner and gestures are infantile. This doubleness has been marvelously described by Penelope Gilliatt:

An upholstered, childish man, wearing spectacles and a striped scarf, with a fussy mustache, he treats the woman (Martina) with the sexual possessiveness of a toddler beating on the tray of his high chair for more porridge.²⁷

Although Lola Gaos as Martina has the wizened face of an old hag, her small frame, slender limbs and agile movements are girlish. So short that (in Borau's words) "he is almost a dwarf," Ovidi Montllor's Angel is boyish in stature, yet his dour expres-

sion, defeated walk, and passive slouch make him seem as withered as an old man. The contact with Milagros brings him to life, awakening the child that lies buried within. Even after she is gone, when the Governor tells Angel, "You're better off without her," we see this rebellious spirit erupt into a tantrum.

Supposedly an under-aged school girl, Alicia Sánchez's Milagros has a face, as one critic has astutely observed, that looks more like thirty. When her head is shaved as a punishment for having run away from the convent, one can't quite decide whether her baldness makes her look infantile or aged. In either case, she looks grotesque, which is accentuated by the context of the wedding ceremony where this physical transformation is first revealed and where Angel repeatedly tries to hold her veil in place, as if to restore her former more appealing image.

In the final scene of the film, Angel goes through Milagros's box of treasures and stares at a photograph of her taken when she was a child. The camera moves in for a close-up on this image of lost innocence — the only sign of innocence in the entire film and one of the few existing in the New Spanish Cinema.

In this essay, I have tried to show how the filmmakers who grew up as children of Franco have dealt with this persona in their own artistic development and more particularly in their films. As we have seen, most of the works under discussion divide this construct into two figures — the sensitive, precocious child and the stunted childlike adult. If one places the two within a developmental model of the divided self, then one perceives the tragedy of lost potential. What emerges repeatedly in these films is a struggle to achieve some meaningful form of maturity while maintaining contact with the spirit and vitality of the imprinted child. This project is aided by a rich use of intertextuality and mythic subtexts, which extends the resonance of the struggle by placing it within a larger tradition

that includes other periods and cultures. Thus the filmmakers appear to be successors to a long artistic heritage, which makes them sophisticated members of a younger generation.

Though the emphasis in the films is most frequently on psychological issues — e.g., Oedipal guilt, matricidal or patricidal impulses, obsessive fantasies — they are always politicized by being placed in specific reference to the Francoist context. The same is true of sexual issues. Being forced perpetually into the role of Franco's children was undoubtedly emasculating. In these movies childlike men all have sexual conflicts related to incest, homosexuality, or pedophilia. None of them ever becomes a father, as if they dare not compete for the position of patriarch or feel too strong an aversion for the role. Though all the films discussed here were written and directed by men, they frequently portray the imprinted child as a young girl who identifies with a male creature, drawing on his physical strength in order to act out her own repressed rage. This sexual strategy is similar to the ones used by Lady Macbeth (who persuaded her husband to perform the murders she had conceived) and by Mary Shelley (who clearly identified with the monster yet chose to make him male) in key mythic subtexts that underlie two of the films. The choice of this kind of sexual reversal either by a male filmmaker or a female author probably reflects childhood uncertainty of one's sexual identity and potency. Possibly even more telling, the dynamic of sexual reversal also arises repeatedly in the displacement that occurs between patricide and matricide. Whether male or female, the children of Franco must have felt impotent and repressed, identifying all forms of sexual expression with rebellion against the parental authorities in the family, church and state.

Despite this overwhelming handicap, the filmmakers of the New Spanish Cinema have valiantly succeeded in transforming this rebellion into a highly refined art that is fuelled by primal forces from childhood, yet has proved capable of treating

sexual and political issues with a rare maturity and passion.

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NOTES

¹All subsequent quotes from Borau in the text will be taken from this lecture at USC on April 14, 1982.

²"It is true that there has never been a cinema industry in Spain. Cifesa, founded in 1932 and long since defunct, was the only company run on remotely Hollywood lines. In the silent era films were often made by businessmen ignorant of cinema.... During the Second Republic, while the bulk of films continued to be kitsch (bandits, bullfighters and gypsies), there were some that betokened awareness of social and political realities; and this tendency continued in the Republic during the Civil War. Franco's victory, however, ushered in a state-supported cinema of white telephone comedies and films in praise of the armed forces." Roger Mortimore, "Reporting from Madrid," *Sight and Sound*, 49:3 (Summer 1980), 156.

³From an interview I did with Saura on August 20, 1978, previously published in "Carlos Saura: The Political Development of Individual Consciousness," *Film Quarterly*, 32:3 (Spring 1979), 16. Many of the ideas in my discussion of the two works by Saura will draw on this earlier article.

⁴*Ibid.*, 15-16.

⁵In addition to the films directed by Saura, the other films discussed in this essay which were produced by Querejeta include *Spirit Of The Beehive* and *To An Unknown God*.

⁶André Bazin, "The Evolution of the Language of Cinema," in *What Is Cinema?*, Vol. I (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of Calif. Press, 1967), p. 29.

⁷*Poachers* is the last film shot by the late Luis Cuadrado before he became ill and eventually went blind. Other films discussed in this essay which were photographed by Cuadrado are *Spirit Of The Beehive* and *Cousin Angelica*.

⁸Though Borau did not produce *To An Unknown God* or *The Nest*, he collaborated on earlier films by these directors — as producer on Jaime Chávarri's documentary *Estado De Sitio* (1971) and co-writer and producer of Jaime de Armiñán's black comedy *My Dearest Señorita* (1972), both of which were el Iman projects. While he was still Borau's

student at the E.O.C., Chavarrí wrote the screenplay for *Al Escondite Inglés* (1969).

⁹The novel was written in 1818 by Mary Godwin Shelley, whose mother Mary Wollstonecraft died giving her birth, whose father William Godwin never forgave her, and whose husband Percy Bysshe Shelley (whom she has explicitly identified with Dr. Frankenstein), was both the loyal disciple of her father and the loving devotee of her dead mother, at whose graveside he proposed marriage. At its emotional center, it is a moving tale about a creature who, despite having an enormous intellectual potential, is emotionally and morally crippled by the cruel, irresponsible rejection of his creator. Out of blind pain, this victimized child is transformed into a murderous monster, who seeks revenge against the father which leads ultimately to patricide. The tragic poignance of this rejected child comes through in every version of the story, even in a parody like *Young Frankenstein*, and helps explain the great survival power of the myth and its adaptability to so many different genre, media, periods, and cultures.

¹⁰The triumph of patriarchal power is also reinforced by Whale's visuals. Practically all of the art deco sets are dominated by strong verticals, and the rooms are divided into tall, narrow spaces. Both the laboratory watchtower where the monster comes to life and the tower of the windmill where he is destroyed are particularly phallic, as are the long poles carried by the men on the hunt, which are later replaced by torches of the same shape. No matter what human gestures may animate them, these recurring geometric forms, and their symbolic associations to patriarchal power, remain as rigid and inescapable as the grotesque form of the monster.

¹¹Saura interview, *Film Quarterly*, 18.

¹²Enrique Brasó, "Nouvel entretien avec Carlos Saura (A propos de la Cousine Angélique)," *Positif*, No. 162 (Octobre 1974), 34.

¹³*Ibid.*, 33.

¹⁴Saura interview, *Film Quarterly*, 20.

¹⁵Saura interview, *Positif*, 34.

¹⁶Saura interview, *Film Quarterly*, 20.

¹⁷Saura interview, *Positif*, 34.

¹⁸Angel S. Harguindey, "Entrevista con Carlos Saura" in *Carlos Saura's Cria Cue-vos...* (Madrid: Elias Querejeta Ediciones, 1975), p. 125.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, pp. 126-27.

²⁰*Ibid.*, p. 129.

²¹*Ibid.*

²²*Ibid.*

²³"El Niño," *Film Quarterly*, 35:1 (Fall 1981), 34-41.

²⁴F. García Lorca, as quoted by Michael Hamburger in *The Truth of Poetry* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1969), p. 203.

²⁵Annette Insdorf, "Spain Also Rises," *Film Comment*, 16:4 (August 1980), 16.

²⁶The only exception is the actor who plays the former boyfriend, who is merely a conventionally handsome rebel and whose selection Borau now considers to be a mistake: "At the beginning of the shooting, we did a scene where we needed to have a photograph of this character. So I found this man who looked right for the part. But on the first day that he came to shoot a scene, I realized it was a mistake."

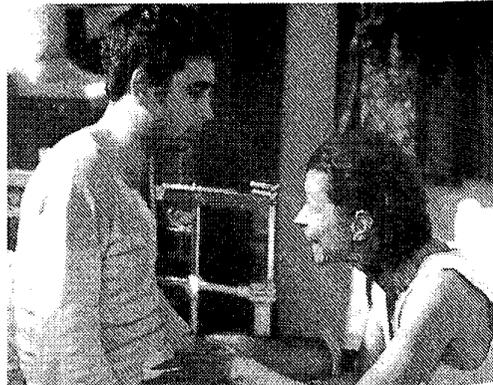
²⁷Penelope Gilliatt, "The Current Cinema," *New Yorker*, 54 (March 27, 1978), 121.

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A Un Dios Desconocido (1977)

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Ovidi Montllor and Lola Gaos in *Furtivos* (1975)