

# War, wounds and women: The Spanish Civil War in Victor Erice's *El espíritu de la colmena* and David Trueba's *Soldados de Salamina*

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## Abstract

*The dreams and losses entailed by the Spanish Civil War have been captured in many films. In Spain, however, the war is often looked at from the vantage point of its aftermath, such as in Victor Erice's classic, El espíritu de la colmena (The Spirit of the Beehive, 1973), and, more recently, in David Trueba's adaptation of Javier Cercas' novel, Soldados de Salamina (Soldiers of Salamis, 2003). This article scrutinises the intimate relationship between the haunting presence of the war in these films and their use of a female protagonist to signify that past. The myth of the Spanish Civil War, I argue, is reinforced by the way in which audiences 'see' it through the innocent eyes of Erice's Ana or those of Trueba's Lola. These females become, for us, true speakers of the war and its effects, thus contributing to the reification of a historical past that has been made attractive precisely by the sadness that it conveys.<sup>1</sup>*

'Pero, a veces, cuando miro a mi alrededor y descubro tantas ausencias, tantas cosas destruidas y, al mismo tiempo, tanta tristeza, algo me dice que, quizá con ellas, se fue nuestra capacidad para sentir de verdad la vida'.

('But, sometimes, when I look around me and discover so many absences, so many things destroyed and, at the same time, so much sadness, something tells me that, with them, our ability to truly feel life was also lost').

Victor Erice y Jesús Fernández Santos, *El espíritu de la colmena* (1973)

Although the Civil War (1936–39) was an event territorially consigned within the borders of Spain, its international projection has made it part of a pan-European past. In some historical interpretations, the Spanish war is considered a predecessor of the ensuing tragedies of World War II.<sup>2</sup> Also, in the minds of many, this 'last romantic war'<sup>3</sup> remains the site of a myth of left militancy and working-class struggle against injustice and oppression. The war, from this perspective, embodies the dreams of people who, as *Ay! Carmela*, the most famous song from the trenches put it, were

## Keywords

Spanish Civil War  
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*The Spirit of the Beehive*  
*Soldiers of Salamis*  
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- 1 An earlier version of this paper was delivered at the conference 'War Without Limits: Spain 1936–39 and Beyond' (Bristol 2006). The argument presented here has benefited from many comments and editing suggestions for which I am deeply grateful to Dave MacIntyre, to the journal's reviewers and to Monica Threlfall.
- 2 For analyses of this perspective, see, for example, Paul Preston (1990 and 1996), Helen Graham (2003) and Michael Richards (1998).

3 The reference to the Spanish Civil War as 'la última guerra romántica de la historia contemporánea' appears in, among other places, Company and Sánchez-Biosca (1985: 13).

4 Carmen Arocena explores *El espíritu de la colmena* as part of her detailed study of Erice's work (1996: 77–188).

5 Edwards quotes Erice regarding the Civil War's shadow for those who, like him, were born immediately after: 'In a civil war everyone is defeated – there are no real victors. What characterizes those people in my memory of my childhood is that they were in general very silent, introspective people' (1995: 18).

prepared to fight bombs with generous hearts. The failure of this effort was represented, emblematically, by endless rows of men and women crossing the Pyrenees on foot only to be herded into French concentration camps and the onset of World War II. More importantly, the defeat of the elected Popular Front, a coalition of Republicans, Communists and, above all, Socialists and Anarchists, demolished many of the illusions that had inspired workers' movements during the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth centuries.

The dreams and losses evoked by the Spanish Civil War have been captured in many films. Inside Spain, the film industry developed during the post-war period to reach right into remote Spanish towns, providing a means to escape a daily life of poverty and rationing. Both this early film industry and the effects of the Spanish Civil War are intricately woven into Victor Erice's *The Spirit of the Beehive* (1973).<sup>4</sup> This confluence is marked from the beginning of the film with the arrival in the village of James Whale's *Frankenstein* (1931). Through the truck carrying the film, audiences are introduced to the Castilian village of Hoyuelos, coming upon from a windy, dirt road in the midst of a barren landscape. As the first houses appear on the screen, we see the sign, Hoyuelos, as well as a prominent yoke and arrows on one of the walls. This symbol, quickly identified by Spanish audiences as the icon of the fascist party behind Franco's uprising, the Falange, links this desolate environment to the Nationalist forces that defeated the Republic. Such an association is soon corroborated by the credits, which locate the film in time, 'hacia 1940' ('around 1940'), and place, 'un lugar de la meseta castellana' ('a place on the Castilian plain'). In fact, the immediacy of the Civil War is stressed in the original script, where the description of the landscape to open the film includes a closed hive, military boots, ruined walls and ammunition (Pena 2004: 49).

The tone thus set is completed by the view of the dilapidated building where people gather to watch the silent film intently. The voiceover of the film resonates in this static rural community, which evokes Don Quixote's La Mancha not only by its location in an unknown place of the Castilian plain, but also by the overwhelming sense of immobility that permeates all the scenes. More importantly, the plight of the girl protagonist, Ana (Ana Torrent), echoes the blurring of the lines between objectivity and illusion that are part and parcel of Don Quixote's world. Thus, from the onset of *The spirit of the beehive*, silence is associated with the bleak landscape of defeat as well as with the clash between fantasy and reality that underscores the film's narrative. Within this world, as Gwynne Edwards observes, 'people's dreams and ambitions are doomed . . . husbands and wives are driven apart by disillusionment, and . . . children are marked by it all' (1995: 19).<sup>5</sup>

As in *The spirit of the beehive*, the Spanish War and its aftermath have been given attention explicitly or implicitly in many films, an interest which continues well into the present. As Jenaro Talens affirms: 'pocos acontecimientos han atraído más la atención de los cineastas de todo el

mundo que el de la absurda tragedia que convirtió a España, durante tres años, en escenario donde ensayar las formas de detener el avance del socialismo en Europa' ('few events have attracted more attention from film directors than the absurd tragedy which made Spain, for three years, the scenary for the rehearsal of ways to stop the advance of socialism in Europe') (1985: 9). Films dealing with the war range from André Malraux's militant *Espoir* or *Sierra de Teruel* (1938) to the doomed love of Gary Cooper and Ingrid Bergman in Sam Wood's adaptation of Ernest Hemingway's *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1943). More recently, it was successfully reinterpreted in Ken Loach's *Land and Freedom* (1996).

Unlike these Hollywood or European films, in Spain the Civil War is sometimes signified by its absence as a direct reference, such as in *Pan's Labyrinth* and *El Sur* (*The South*, 1983), or has been looked at from the vantage point of its aftermath, as happens in *The spirit of the beehive*, a film surprisingly chosen by many critics as one of the best representations of the war.<sup>6</sup> Such a striking selection underscores the point made by this article that, in film as in real life, the Spanish Civil War did not end when the Nationalists entered Madrid. The spread of fascism in Europe until 1945 and the Francoist climate of revenge meant that the 'crusade' that had led to the uprising of 1936 continued for at least two decades, to wane only during the 1960s and finally peter out after Franco's death in 1975. Indeed, the merger of *war* and *post-war* into a single continuum can also be observed to some extent in Erice's second film, *El sur*, and is even clearer in the famous cinematic adaptation of Camilo José Cela's novel, *La colmena* (*The Hive*, 1951), by Mario Camus (1982) and in Guillermo del Toro's *Laberinto del Fauno* (*Pan's Labyrinth*, 2006).<sup>7</sup>

In Spain, the civil war is currently being reinterpreted once more in books, documentaries and films, such as in the adaptation of Javier Cercas' successful novel of 2001, *Soldados de Salamina* (*Soldiers of Salamis*) by David Trueba (2003). As in *The spirit of the beehive*, the main protagonist is a female with whom the audience identifies and from whose perspective we view the events. This creates an empathetic relationship that, while distancing the spectators from the actual trenches, is nevertheless used to intensify our feelings for the victims of the war. The historical representation of the Spanish Civil War in these films, I suggest, depends on how its horrors are filtered through the innocent eyes of Erice's Ana and the confusion of Trueba's Lola. The gaze of these characters serves to feminise the war for the audiences, forcefully conveying its emotional effects and thus contributing to the reification of a historical past that has been romanticised precisely on account of its sadness.

The backgrounding of the militaristic aspects of the war is not exclusive done through female characters. For example, in the sequences in which we are offered sustained shoots of men's expressions in *Soldiers of Salamis*, the gestures are those of compassion and humanity. This is evident from the crucial scene where the Republican militiaman at the centre of the film's investigation chooses not to shoot nor expose the

- 6 *El espíritu de la colmena* comes third in the survey of critics taken by the magazine *Nickelodean*, which is cited by Javier Juan Payán in his book on the hundred best films on the Spanish war. Payán, however, does not include it in his own study because he does not consider the film to be about the war itself. However, he points to the number of films about the *posguerra* selected by the critics, which reinforces the point made in this paper (2005: 8).
- 7 Two notable exceptions is Carlos Saura's adaptation of Sanchis Sinisterra's play, *Ay! Carmela* (2001) and Vicente Aranda's *Libertarias* (1996).

- 8 As Tom Conley notes in his incisive analysis of Hollywood's cinema and the Spanish Civil War, Franklin D. Roosevelt's support of the arms embargo to the Republicans had the effect of supporting the fascist forces (1985: 49).
- 9 Molina Foix explains how light defines Erice's work as a whole, which in *El espíritu de la colmena* is reminiscent of early modern Dutch paintings (1985: 115).

hidden leader of the Falange, Rafael Sánchez Mazas: they exchange telling looks while remaining silent. The same humanity is expressed when he sings the moving pasodoble, *Suspiros de España* (Sighs for Spain), with rain falling down his cheeks to accentuate the emotion of the scene.

However, such a humanisation of the conflict does not mean that both sides of the Spanish Civil War are treated as having an equal share of guilt in these films. This is clearly stated in *The spirit of the beehive*, where the sense of loss pervading the whole film is homed in on when Ana loses her *maquis* friend at the hands of the Civil Guard. Likewise, although noting injustices on both camps, *Soldiers of Salamis* does not attempt to even out the responsibility and pain of Republicans and Nationalists. Even if in terms of human cost, the film suggests that both sides could be said to be losers, the fight clearly originated in the rebellion of the Nationalist forces against an elected government. Moreover, the Miralles character goes on to express that viewing the war as a defeat for all Spaniards, amounts to a historical denial, a view similar to that voiced by both Cercas and Trueba (2005) in a joint interview. Regardless of a hypothetical levelling in the reciprocity of horrors, the film reminds us in the last scenes that the war originated in a coup against a regime voted by the people. The policy of non-intervention by European democracies effectively disadvantaged the Republic, especially in terms of arms and war matériel – a shortage that was compounded by the lack of militarily trained troops.<sup>8</sup> The repression that took place during the war's protracted aftermath bears witness to the bloodthirstiness of the forces that instigated that coup, as the killing of the *maquis* in *The Spirit of the Beehive* shows.

Released in Spain during the last years of Franco's life and dictatorship, *The spirit of the beehive* epitomises the way the Civil War was internalised by the generation that grew up after Franco's victory. In fact, it can be said that the film has been appropriated in Spain for that end. As Vicente Molina Foix puts it, '*El espíritu de la colmena* sería, pues, una película sobre la obligación de ausentarse de la realidad, provocada en sus personajes por la guerra civil y sus efectos políticos' ('*The spirit of the beehive* would be, therefore, a film about the duty to be absent from reality, which is provoked in the characters by the civil war and its political effects') (1985: 112). An extended period of autarky marked by poverty, hunger and an immense sadness, the war's aftermath meant the total loss of hope for many people, with fruitless years succeeding each other, clouded in the mist of an eternal winter. This is truly the perception we are given through Luis Cuadrado's remarkable photography, which veils the film's landscapes with a tenuous, yellowish light. This type of setting would be echoed some ten years later in the most important film dealing with the post-war, the aforementioned adaptation of Cela's *La colmena*.

The palette of colours used in *The spirit of the beehive*, in their evocation of sepia photographs, transports the spectators to the doom and gloom of the historical past following upon the Civil War.<sup>9</sup> The sense of grief pervading these images applies both to the immediacy of the defeat and to the

awareness that this moment was merely the onset of a relentless repression that was to last four decades. The couple at the centre of the film, Fernando (Fernando Fernán Gómez) and Teresa (Teresa Gimpera), display an eloquent silence and aloofness in their deliberately slow and controlled movements that extends to their relationship with each other and with their daughters.<sup>10</sup> Within this environment, Ana and Isabel (Isabel Tellería), although not deprived of paternal care or of the means of survival, live in an atmosphere of emotional want, fear and, above all, the overpowering stillness and silence of the time.

That the war makes up the backdrop of those fears and absences is first signalled in the eloquent letter which Teresa writes, a fragment of which I have chosen as the epigraph for this paper. Teresa addresses the letter to someone, probably a past lover, who, she says, may not even be alive, a fact corroborated later on in the film, when we catch a glimpse of the words *Cruz Roja* (Red Cross) on the envelope burning in the fire. The content of the letter, stressing the shattering human loss and the atrocities undergone, indicates lack of hope, as well as vanished love. To post the letter, Teresa cycles along a lonely, winding road that disappears into the horizon, emphasising her smallness and the solitude that she inhabits. She reaches a railway station and waits for a train in which she posts the letter, while observing the passengers' dismal looks and the aura of emptiness surrounding them. The nostalgia evoked by this image is accentuated by the fact that their expressions are partly concealed by window panes, giving them a sense of languor.<sup>11</sup> This cinematic technique is used for a similar effect in the beehive-like windows of the house, and it can also be appreciated in the use of the bus' windows at the end of *Soldiers of Salamis*, as commented on below.

The same train, a symbol of progress and civilisation, brings the remote village of Hoyuelos into contact with the outside world, and later in the film transports the runaway *maquis*, one of the remaining fighters of the lost war, to the village.<sup>12</sup> This anonymous man, who does not utter a single word in the film, directs his limping steps to the dilapidated barn where Ana believes that 'the monster' Frankenstein lives. Ana's candour, as well as her ability to misinterpret the arrival of the stranger, are clearly communicated to the audience with the economy that gave Erice his authorial signature and has made him famous with art-house audiences ever since.<sup>13</sup>

The presence of the *maquis* in *The spirit of the beehive* reminds viewers of the ongoing guerrilla insurgency fought in Spain during the 1940s in an attempt to offer some resistance to the fascist regime, especially during World War II. This resistance was equally relevant for the time in which Erice's film was released for, effectively, the repression enacted by the winners of the war only ended after Franco's death. The timeframe of this oppression thus coincides quite closely with the setting of the film, stretching from its location in 1940, the year after the war ended, until the film's release in 1973, only two years before Franco's death. The climate of revenge that followed the Nationalist victory is soberly conveyed in the

10 Labanyi remarks that 'the strong sense of place in Erice's films . . . captures the horror of a historical period traumatized by the prohibition on recalling the past through memory and narrative' (2000: 73).

11 Pena describes vividly this scene as somehow surreal (2004: 57).

12 For a comprehensive study of the struggle of the Spanish *maquis*, see Secundino Serrano (2002).

13 *The Spirit of the Beehive* is the Spanish film that is most widely taught and written about. For a recent study which describes the outreach of the film and the complexities of its criticism, see Jorge Latorre (2006).

- 14 In fact, the last executions signed by Franco took place only two months before he died when on 27 September of 1975 three militants from the Marxist-Leninist group FRAP and two from ETA were executed at dawn in Hoyo de Manzanares, in the vicinity of Madrid.
- 15 Kinder describes the directors of Nuevo Cine Español, especially Erice and Saura, as sharing the sense of dismemberment and separation from the past inherent to the period in which they grew up, immediately after the Civil War.
- 16 In the film, Lola shows surprise that the witnesses are still alive, but the only reference to the battle of Salamina comes from one of the 'amigos del bosque', Daniel Angelats, who expresses his lack of understanding of Lola's interest in the Civil War in these words: 'parece mentira que te interese una guerra más antigua que la batalla de Salamina' ('It seems odd for you to be interested in a war that is older than the battle of Salamis') (Trueba 2003: 44).

brief scene where the derelict barn where the *maquis* hides is briefly illuminated by what we soon identify as gunshots. We infer the shots to come from Franco's *Guardia Civil*, who, in the next scene, summon Ana's father to identify the corpse. At this point, Fernando receives back his own watch and clothes, which Ana had been given to the fugitive.

Coinciding with the filming, release and early screening of the film, a number of infamous repressive acts reminded those at home and abroad that the crusading spirit that had inspired the right-wing uprising of 1936 was very much alive: the Burgos Trial against ETA militants (1970), the detention of leaders of the trade union *Comisiones Obreras* (1971) and the executions of Salvador Puig Antich (1974) and of five FRAP and ETA militants (1975).<sup>14</sup> In *The spirit of the beehive* the winners' wrath is remembered in the killing of the *maquis*, whose humanity is succinctly portrayed when he reciprocates Ana's attentions. This he does by playing a magic trick with her father's watch, a gesture that makes Ana smile in return. His ensuing disappearance leaves Ana hurt, a wound that, as the doctor indicates to Teresa at the film's end, will take very long to heal. In fact, Ana's scars are comparable to those of the group of directors to whom Erice belongs, and that Marsha Kinder has called 'children of Franco'.<sup>15</sup>

Although more than twenty years separate *The spirit of the beehive* from David Trueba's *Soldiers of Salamis*, some similarities in the treatment of the Civil War stand out in both films. Unlike Erice, David Trueba belongs to a younger generation of film-makers, one for whom the civil war was already history by the time of the transition to democracy from 1976 to 1982. The immediacy with which Erice can evoke feelings of dismemberment more than thirty years after the war all but disappears in Trueba's film, which captures the conflict from the eyes of a compassionate and conflict-ridden journalist, Lola Cercas (played by Ariadna Gil). The very title of the film, *Soldiers of Salamis*, expresses the distance of that past, which is connected with Salamis, a place that is not only remote in time but is also in geographical space. In a way, the title suggests, some contemporary Spaniards would seem to think that the Civil War had been fought not by one's parents or grandparents, but by some unrelated peoples in a mythical past. For Javier Cercas, the writer, journalist and narrator of the book, as well as for his embodiment in the film, Lola Cercas, the Civil War is initially such a distant event, consigned to history's archives. This is so much the case that the narrator in the book is surprised to find out that two of the men who had helped Rafael Sánchez Mazas to survive in the forest are still alive. As he puts it: 'Es curioso . . . desde que el relato de Ferlosio despertara mi curiosidad nunca se me había ocurrido que alguno de los protagonistas de la historia pudiera estar todavía vivo, como si el hecho no hubiera ocurrido apenas sesenta años atrás, sino que fuera tan remoto como la batalla de Salamina' ('It's curious . . . since Ferlosio's interview woke up my curiosity, I had never thought that any of the protagonists of the story could be alive today, as though the event had not happened a mere sixty years ago, but was as remote as the battle of Salamis') (Cercas 2001: 43).<sup>16</sup>

The narrator of the novel, Cercas, who works for *El País*, the newspaper that tends to support the Spanish Socialist Party (PSOE), becomes interested in the Civil War as the result of an interview with the (real life) writer Rafael Sánchez Ferlosio, a son of Falangist Rafael Sánchez Mazas.<sup>17</sup> This narrator, not to be identified with Cercas' own persona, as he himself warns the reader, connects in his mind the shooting of Sánchez Mazas with some blurred memories of the interview, in which 'la batalla de Salamina' ('the battle of Salamis') might have been discussed (Cercas 2001: 21). This remembrance takes place, he notes, on the occasion of the sixtieth anniversary of the end of the war, in April 1999. At this point, Cercas reminisces about the sad and lonely death of the poet, Antonio Machado, who was escaping Spain through the French Pyrenees with his elderly mother, who died only three days after him. Among the handful of letters Cercas receives in response to the article, one by a Manuel Aguirre stimulates his curiosity about the shooting of Sánchez Mazas, which he investigates in meetings with Aguirre and through further enquiries.

The character of Javier Cercas in the novel, whose characterisation is modelled on Cercas' own academic and journalistic self, becomes in the film a woman, Lola, while his friend and lover in the book, Conchi (María Botto), who is in the novel a superstitious and quasi-illiterate woman, acquires more complexity in the film. Indeed, the unlikely friendship that develops between Conchi and Lola and their joint encounters, mark the film's stance towards populism, politics and culture. It also highlights the use of uneducated lower-class characters as foils for the protagonists of films or books. In fact, the feminisation of Cercas and the characterisation of Conchi in the film effectively remove much of the misogyny that transpires throughout the novel.<sup>18</sup>

Lola, in her search to illuminate the past, and Conchi, who reads the future in the cards, represent a dialectic between past and future that traverses novel and film. In both, as Javier Cercas and David Trueba claim, the gap between the two is shortened at the end. This is brought home not only after we meet the men who helped Sánchez Mazas in the forest, 'los amigos del bosque' ('the friends of the forest'), but also, and more especially, when Cercas finally locates and talks with Antoni Miralles (played by Joan Dalmau), whom he believes to be the militiaman who spared Sánchez Mazas' life. It is at this point that, both the filmic and the novelistic Cercas characters make us aware that the war is still part of the collective psyche of Spanish people. Above all, we are told in the clearest possible terms that the people living in present-day Spain owe an unpaid debt to the Republican men and women whose struggle was forgotten for decades. As director David Trueba remarks:

We're talking about a country that is confronting its phantoms, its fears and what's been forgotten—for the first time. And it's about time too, time to face the consequences. For the first time people are demanding that mass graves full of anonymous corpses be disinterred. I think there's a debt to a lot of

17 In Cercas' book, it is also Sánchez Mazas' son, Rafael Sánchez Ferlosio, who tells the story of his father's shooting. Sánchez Ferlosio goes on to trace his father's role as co-founder of Falange and personal friend of José Antonio Primo de Rivera, indicating the role of the militiaman who left him alive. Sánchez Mazas then wondered aimlessly in the forest for a few days, until he was found and fed by 'los amigos del bosque' (2001: 20–21).

18 This is clearly noted in the stereotypical ridiculisation of Conchi throughout the book, in which she appears to be not just vulgar and ignorant, but also sexually available. Eva Antón lists some of themysoginuous features in *Soldados De Salamina*, remarking on the male bonding inherent throughout the book.

19 In the book, however, Miralles mentions how the prisoners had started to run before the actual shooting and persecution in the forest (Cercas 2001: 192).

20 The filming also included a variety of scenes with young actors recreating the actual events in flashback, which were released only in the DVD. In a television interview for the program *Cultura con ñ*, Trueba remarks that having the surviving men in the film added some difficulties to the process, but added to its realism. This documentary layering is also boosted by the interpolation of actual footage from the time, which is digitally modified to include actors, such as Ramón Fontserè in his role as Sánchez Mazas.

21 The Falangist's tenth point of their founding 'Diez puntos de El Escorial', issued in 1934, indicated explicitly that violence would be legitimate if it was destined to 'serve reason and justice'.

people who lost their lives in the Civil War or lost their best years to it. A debt that will never be repaid. The Transition meant a final curtain on that recuperation (*sic*). It was a pact and, like all pacts, it was unjust and there were victims of that pact. But, at the same time, it was an enabling pact, a way to keep living together without throwing bricks at each others' heads.

(Cercas and Trueba 2005)

Equally telling of the change of mentality taking place from Erice to Trueba is the treatment accorded to the two sides of the war in *Soldiers of Salamis* embodied in the choice of a fascist (Sánchez Mazas) as the figure around which Cercas's investigation starts. A reasonable novelist in his own right, Sánchez Mazas is well known as one of the founders of Falange, and the only one among its handful of ideologues to have survived a war that he so actively spurred on. To highlight the times where solidarity across the frontline might have played an important, if often disregarded, role, Cercas researches a shooting that took place during the last days of Republican resistance. This episode occurred when, on way to their French exile, some Republican soldiers loaded up a bus with prominent Nationalist supporters, including Sánchez Mazas, probably destined to the firing squad.<sup>19</sup>

The approach deployed by Trueba and Cercas seeks to steer clear of the potentially Manichean glorification of the Republican forces as the harbingers of good that were destroyed by the evil of fascism. Throughout both film and book, the positions taken by the two sides often fade before the human conflict of the soldier who, just as he takes aim at the fugitive Sánchez Mazas looks him in the eye and decides to inform his fellow soldiers that he found nobody. Equally important for the humanisation of the conflict is the portrayal of the attitudes of those left-wing *campesinos* mentioned above, Sanchez Mazas's 'amigos del bosque' ('friends of the forest'), who helped him to survive until the fascists arrived in triumph. The testimony of these peasants is used in the film when Lola Cercas tracks down and interviews the real life men, which appends a documentary layer to the fictional narrative.<sup>20</sup> In the interviews, these men remind us that, once he had reached a position of power, Sánchez Mazas did not forget the personal favours received, and was instrumental in obtaining a pardon for them.

*Soldiers of Salamis* invites viewers to feel for the fascist Sánchez Mazas as a human being, in spite of his role in setting in motion the destructive process leading to the Civil War. This is especially evident when we see him in the film deprived of his glasses, his means to see and to fend for himself. Sánchez Mazas is thus humanised more easily than if we were to think of him as the political figure that he was: a founder of the Spanish fascist party who justified violence.<sup>21</sup> Both film and book highlight some emotional dimensions of the conflict and the vulnerability even of enemies of the type of Sánchez Mazas (magnificently conveyed by actor Ramon Fontseré). Miralles, however, goes as far as to claim that: 'si lo hubieran liquidado a tiempo, a él y a unos cuantos como él, quizá nos hubiéramos

ahorrado la guerra, no cree?’ (‘if he had been disposed of in time, him and a few others like him, perhaps we would have been spared the war, don’t you think?’) (Cercas 2001: 192; cf. Trueba 2003: 108).

Although far from looking at both sides of the war under the same light, Trueba and Cercas can intimate each side’s common humanity. In this way, they can be said to participate in the compromise made during the Spanish transition to democracy. Both, however, are aware that the transition’s standpoint entailed a pact of silence, even oblivion. This is made clear in the encounter of Cercas with Miralles, when we are reminded that this political stance entailed an unwarranted amnesty for the crimes committed by those on the winning side. More importantly, this pact of silence deleted the efforts and the lives of those who fought to defend the Republican regime, as film and book go on to show. In later conversations about the book and the film, novelist Javier Cercas illuminates this standpoint:

The Transition was . . . a sort of pact of forgetting . . . maybe there was no better way to do it . . . Anyway, what’s remained is that fog, that oblivion that affects everyone like Miralles. Until just a few months ago the government of Spain had never condemned the military coup. Imagine. And this affects people like Miralles . . . This is indisputable, a historical fact that also affects the others, the victors, the people like Sánchez Mazas. . . . The Transition wiped the slate clean and didn’t judge those who should have been judged. . . . So then, of course, there’s a historical debt. Over the last little while, this has been changing . . . And it’s not that this is good: it’s indispensable. The film will contribute to that . . . And, as for my book, I hope it’s contributed with its grain of sand to this facing up to the truth, because my aspiration was to lie anecdotally, in the particulars, in order to tell an essential truth.

(Cercas and Trueba 2005)

That both writer and director wish to highlight the debt owed to the Republican losers of the war is indeed brought home by the character that Cercas searches for throughout the book and film. Even though Miralles ultimately denies being the soldier who had let Sánchez Mazas live, we are led to believe that he could well be. More importantly, we are given to understand that whether he was or was not that man is not what matters. The significant issue is that he had the innate heroism to make that possible. In this way, although only occupying a small section of book and film, Miralles’ unsung heroism, and his unrecognised struggle on behalf of others, becomes their leitmotif. Moreover, in the film, Miralles ultimately becomes a surrogate figure replacing Lola’s ‘lost father’ (her father dies early on in the film), providing Lola with a link to her past.

The notion that the Republic is a past that has to be acknowledged as the ‘lost father’ of contemporary Spaniards is clearly spelled out in the final pages of the book, which are even more forcefully conveyed in the last scenes

of the film. At this point, some melodramatic techniques are used to intensify the viewing process in order to demonstrate the obligation to honour the men and women who fought for the Republic. Concisely, Trueba recreates this feeling in Lola's tears, as the taxi takes her away from Miralles and the care home where he lives in Dijon. To emphasise the emotional parting, the camera shifts to occupy Lola's space, departing with her and separating us from Miralles, whose lonely figure shrinks in the middle of the frame. In this way, from the moving car, audiences first notice and then feel for Miralles' solitude, very much like Lola does. This is accentuated when the focus shifts to Lola, her grief further emphasised in the next and last take, as she looks out of the bus as her face is duplicated by its reflection on the window pane.

Viewers of this parting are therefore invited to share Lola's resolution never to allow oblivion to delete from the collective memory of all Spaniards the lives and dreams of Miralles and those like him. In this way, Miralles entrusts Lola with the names of those who, as he laments, were never given an opportunity to enjoy life's small pleasures: 'los hermanos García Segués (Joan y Lela), Miquel Cardos, Gabi Baldrich, Pipo Canal, el Gordo Odena, Santi Brugada, Jordi Gudayol' (Cercas 2001: 199; Trueba 2003: 112). Through Lola, these names of those men are passed on to an audience, thereby enjoined to remember, honour and celebrate their lives, their struggle and their sacrifice.

Differences notwithstanding, both Erice and Trueba enable their audiences to see the war and its effects from the eyes of Ana and Lola. Indeed, the camera lingers and highlights the expressiveness of the eyes of the actors Ana Torrent and Ariadna Gil. Torrent, in particular, has been repeatedly judged for the intensity of the stare with which she gazes at the terrible world before her. Innocence, as well as disbelief, inheres in that look, transporting the viewer to a position of identification and empathy, while understanding Ana's predicament and endorsing her confusion.

By contrast, viewers' identification with Lola in Trueba's film may not be as immediate. What Erice can perform with Ana, a guileless child who drags the audience with her, Trueba has to create gradually, with greater obstacles. Initially, Lola appears as a character who we only partly understand but eventually viewers identify with her contradictions and her search to give meaning to the past in order to construct a sense of self. The 'child of Franco', Ana, can thus be said to have grown into Lola, a sophisticated, complex, worldly-wise woman who is riddled with personal conflicts and a lack of understanding of the history that has made her what she is. This leads Lola to seek a link with that past, which she starts to find when meeting those who lost the war. In this way, we gaze back at the war through Lola's investigative forays, archival as well as personal. Consequently, we can distinguish and value history from the perspective of a semi-detached observer who, unlike Ana, has not been intimately dislocated by the cruelty of that past. Eventually, however, with Lola and like her, the audience cannot but attempt to search for a meaning in that past and become part of it in order to understand and live in the present.

*Soldiers of Salamis* therefore re-fashions the Spanish Civil War, especially from the perspective of its silent victims, reflecting the political demands first raised in the 1990s that culminated with the creation of the *Asociación para la Recuperación de la Memoria Histórica* (Association for the Recovery of Historical Memory) in 2001 and the passing of the law to commemorate historical memory in 2006 (Jefatura del Estado 2006). We are given this perspective in the film when Lola's friend Conchi, with her simplicity and forthrightness, sharply urges her to make her presence felt in the book that she is writing. This scene, which is absent from the book, has Conchi reading and then commenting on Lola's draft, saying: 'en esta historia no te veo a ti. No sé que opinas sobre las cosas que pasan ni por qué has decidido escribirlas . . . Si te implicaras de alguna manera, si participaras en la historia . . .' ('I can't see you in this story. I don't know what you think of what is going on, nor why you've decided to write about it. . . . If you were engaged in some way, if you participated in the story . . .') (Trueba 2003: 82–83). Conchi indicates that the writer's presence should be felt in order to convey the necessary emotion. Feelings, as well as motives would make the story real for the reader. Likewise, in the book, the narrator comments that he finds the draft 'insufficient', as though it had a 'missing piece': 'el libro no era malo, sino insuficiente, como un mecanismo completo pero incapaz de desempeñar la función para la que había sido ideado porque le falta una pieza. Lo malo es que yo no sabía cuál era esa pieza' ('the book wasn't bad, but it was insufficient, as though it was a complete mechanism yet unable to fulfil the function for which it had been invented. Sadly, I did not know what that piece was') (2001: 144).

The choice of a female journalist for the role of Lola is, then, highly significant in the reconstruction of the Spanish past. Indeed, that a woman should take over the persona of a chauvinist male narrator in the novel in order to bring the Spanish Civil War into to the twenty-first century is without any doubt the most interesting aspect of this adaptation. Initially designed to intensify the effect of some actions and to make the present alive, a female protagonist also allows for a different approach to other issues. The most immediate is to highlight the growth of Spanish women's struggle to vindicate their rights. Also, a female actor can bring to her role a degree of empathy and humanity with an immediacy that can be more difficult to express through a male actor. This is nailed, as I have argued, in the scenes in which she meets the main objective of her quest, former Republican soldier Antoni Miralles.

Similarly, in *El espíritu de la colmena*, a female character, Ana, brings home the sense of historical loss of the Civil War, as we share in her devastation and sense of defeat at the death of the *maquis* that she had befriended. This loss also entails for Ana a separation from her own father to whom she attributes the death of the *maquis*. Ana infers this to be the case when she sees him holding the watch that she had given her friend and, subsequently, when she returns to the abandoned barn where she had first met the fugitive to find trails of blood. When Ana sees her father

22 Peter Evans, however, stretches the polyvalence of the symbol, when arguing that the monster is 'connected with Ana's father, seen as an embodiment of patriarchal authority' (2000: 76).

behind her, she is in no doubt that he has caused her friend's death, which makes her run away from him. Once she finds herself alone in the night, Ana's imagination conjures up the 'monster', Frankenstein, whose death in the film had so impressed her at the beginning of the film. As she looks at her own reflection in the water, Ana's image is transformed into that of the 'monster' who then approaches her and holds her, while the terrified girl loses consciousness. At dawn, Ana is found lying on the ground by the search party that restores her to her family home. There, we learn from the doctor that Ana will have to face up to a healing process which, as indicated above, will take a long time to be complete. Throughout the whole film, then, Ana remains unable to distinguish fact from fiction in a world for which she is wholly unprepared.

Although written and directed by men, both *The spirit of the beehive* and *Soldiers of Salamis* use women to rewrite history and incorporate the point of view of the defeated. In *The spirit of the beehive* Ana suffers directly the effects of the war and is dissociated from her past when she mistakenly assumes her father to have caused the demise of her friend. Ana's association of the monster with the soldier, therefore, suggests that the monster would be an embodiment of the 'others' that fascism demonised in order to eliminate. Jo Labanyi interprets the monster in light of Jaques Derrida's concept of 'hauntology' to explain the ways this film deals with the past: 'the monster is . . . a perfect illustration of the ontological (hauntological) status of history in the present' (2000: 78).<sup>22</sup> It is therefore significant that, at the film's end, Ana is seen to cling to a weakened sense of individual identity to communicate with the 'monster' that she calls by whispering her name: 'Soy Ana, soy Ana' ('It's Ana, it's Ana').

By contrast with Ana, the adult Lola becomes progressively aware of the need to look into the past and to come to terms with the emotional closeness of the war and its aftermath. As a contemporary Spanish woman, Lola exemplifies the coming of age of a generation who grew up in a democratic Spain, surrounded by the silence over the past that followed Franco's death. Ultimately, however, she realises that such a collective loss of memory affects not only of those who fought on the losing side of the war but also of her own sense of self. Ana's gesture of approaching a window in the night's sky to call up the presence of a dead man who had been fashioned as a spirit and a 'monster' is made tangible by Lola's tears, as she urges herself and the audience never to forget the humans behind the Republican forces fighting the Civil War. At the film's end, Lola enjoins the audience to observe the duty to honour Miralles and, through him, those who fought for the Spanish Republic, thereby obliterating the silence that the Francoist years and the transition to democracy imposed.

In their different approaches, *The spirit of the beehive*, and *Soldiers of Salamis* pay homage to the sad defeat of the Republican fighters who defended Spain against all odds. These men and women lost the war not only for the nearly forty years that the dictator ruled, as seen in *The spirit of the beehive*. *Soldiers of Salamis* shows that they were also defeated during

the democratic years in which fear of the re-enactment of that violent past inspired a collective pact of silence. However, the memory of the Republican forces defeated in Spain is alive today, and their place in history is constantly being written and rewritten. Within this history, Republicans have finally broken the silence expressed in *The spirit of the beehive* and smile faintly at their ultimate victory. Ana's plight, like Miralles' ambiguous denial, invites us to remember the Republican forces that lost 'the last romantic war'. These films remind us that what matters today is that the losers were real men and women whose lives and deaths we still need to talk about. This form of resuscitation not only rescues them from silence and oblivion, but also enables them to contribute to the creation of the future. Ultimately, the dead, including the 'monsters', are restored to a people's collective memory, as well as to their individual imagination.

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