SUSPENSION AND LIGHT: THE FILMS OF VÍCTOR ERICE

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctorate of Philosophy
Graduate Department of Spanish and Portuguese

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This thesis is a study of Víctor Erice's cinematic style through a close analysis of his three feature films: *El espíritu de la colmena* [The Spirit of the Beehive] (1973), *El sur* [The South] (1982) and *El sol del membrillo* [The Quince Tree Sun] (1992). It examines stylistic choices made in editing, sound, mise en scène, camera movement and structure, focusing on the elements which contribute to the ambiguous and meditative quality of Erice's films. Despite the years separating Erice's three films and their different genres, these films are very much unified in theme, tone and style. Four elements stand out as constants in Erice's work: an acute sense of the passage of time, ambiguity, luminosity and reiterative structures. This is demonstrated through a methodology which begins by assessing the reception of the film before analyzing intrinsic and extrinsic norms.

Chapter 1 argues that the diversity of interpretations of *El espíritu* points to the use of ambiguity as an experience in itself rather than as a mystery to be resolved. I examine how the film’s ambiguity is developed by a focus on objects, the use of ekphrasis, internal parallels and ellipsis, as well as the parodic repetition of James Whale’s *Frankenstein* (1931).

In Chapter 2, I argue against the Freudian readings that have been applied to *El sur*, seeking to wrest the film away from a totalizing interpretation by demonstrating its open and ambiguous nature. Through an analysis of the soundtrack, I demonstrate the complexity of the film’s use of music and sound, paying particular attention to the striking use of silence.

Chapter 3 contextualizes *El sol del membrillo*, an exploration of the creative process of realist painter Antonio López García, within the documentary tradition. I argue that *El
sol communicates an experience of time, in which repetition, ellipsis, music, sound and dialogues all serve to transport the viewer into the contemplative time of the artist.

A concluding chapter gathers up the elements discussed into a tentative poetics of Erice’s cinema.
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The ideas that make a poem present themselves as images. Their significance may not be immediately apparent and indeed may never be [...] Poetry is a drama in which objects are cut loose from their moorings and sent flying to make their own connections.

-Louis Simpson
Introduction

Víctor Erice is considered one of Spain’s consummate film artists, an auteur of international stature despite his sparse output of three films in twenty years. A rather reclusive figure, he has nevertheless exerted an important influence on the work of his peers and a younger generation of filmmakers. His films are described as “haunting” and “poetic” and his meticulous style has often been commented on, though rarely analyzed. John Hopewell, in his 1986 study Out of the Past: Spanish Cinema After Franco, states that “Víctor Erice is one of Spain’s few mainstream directors who invites a detailed study of his style” (203). This thesis pays careful attention to the stylistic characteristics of his work through a close reading of his three feature films, El espíritu de la colmena (1973), El sur (1982) and El sol del membrillo (1992).

Despite the years separating Erice’s three films and their different genres, I see them as very much unified in theme, tone and style. By style I mean decisions regarding how events are shown, including editing, mise en scène, acting style, framing of shots and narrative structure. Four elements stand out as constants in Erice’s work: an acute sense of the passage of time, ambiguity, luminosity and reiterative structures. In the chapters that follow I shall demonstrate how these thematic and stylistic choices interact to create a haunting experience for the viewer. His two finished films show this most clearly: in El espíritu everything convergences to deliver an experience of ambiguity, while in El sol the directorial choices combine to convey an experience of time.

The genesis of this thesis goes back to 1993, when I wrote a paper on El espíritu de la colmena which contextualized the film within what David Bordwell has described as “parametric cinema.” Bordwell uses the term to describe a type of narration that so privileges style that “the film’s stylistic system creates patterns distinct from the [plot] system” (NF, 275). In this reading, I looked at repetition, particularly of shots of the
facades of houses, in terms of an “abstract” pattern that went against the forward movement of the plot. *El espíritu* revealed a tight and strongly unified structure in which frames are repeated exactly, so that time is stopped periodically by a focus on space. The film shares the characteristics that Bordwell defined into a generic category that would encompass “fugitive” works, including repetition of “just-noticeable” differences and a distinctive (and sparse) intrinsic stylistic norm. Examples of fugitive works include Alain Resnais’ *L’année dernière à Marienbad* and films by Mizoguchi and Bresson. These works have received innumerable and contradictory readings but “instead of being absorbed back into the system, [they] continue to open up before us. We try to grasp them but find them perpetually insubmissive” (Andrew, *FA*, 4). All of Erice’s films would fit into such a category.

I have nevertheless changed my theoretical foundation in this thesis to a more supple one which does not exclude interpretation of the stylistic system, although traces of this previous analysis are still to be found in these pages, particularly in the close attention paid to the intrinsic norms of the films. The move away from this formalist position reflects my reassessment of Bordwell’s anti-interpretation stance. Bordwell emphasizes the independence of stylistic elements in parametric films in a certain measure in order to wrest them away from thematic readings which, he claims, assimilate “the particular to the most general, the concrete to the woolly” (282). The examples with regard to the fugitive texts cited, as well as those he draws on in *Making Meaning: Inference and Rhetoric in the Interpretation of Cinema* are numerous and enlightening. They show the common assumptions and interpretive techniques of vastly different readings, for example, about Alfred Hitchcock’s *Psycho*. As Bordwell puts it in his earlier book, the danger is that:

> Every stylistic element gets read the same way: long shots unite characters, cuts divide them; vertical lines isolate or split a character, horizontal lines evoke freedom; point-of-view shots create power relations by making one character the “object” of another’s look. In this game [...] every card is wild (*NF*, 282).
Thematization does indeed run the risk of “losing the specificity of a film’s narrational work” so that a film becomes an example of a theoretical framework (282). It seems to me that this is the case with some readings of El sur, which fit the film into a pre-existing framework and thereby make it correspond to a view of girlhood based on Freud’s theories. This approach privileges the interpretive system, so that the film becomes an illustration of it. As Dudley Andrew puts it: “in such analyses the films are treated wholly for their exemplary force. It is the system that is at stake, be it [...] semiotic, psychoanalytic, or ideological, and the films are scrutinized for the light they shed on aspects of these systems” (FA, 3-4).

But the danger of assimilating the specificity of the film to a broader theoretical construct does not invalidate interpretation, or indeed this type of criticism which tends to have as its goal the highlighting of social reality and power relationships shown onscreen. Interpretation need not be about the interpretive system: it can also reveal individual qualities in specific films. Rather than seeing films as providing “an occasion [...] to entertain, as an imaginative possibility, the juxtaposition and development of certain semantic fields” interpretation can more properly “adjust the knower to the known” and reveal the particular imaginative possibilities unleashed by an individual film (Bordwell, PT, 25; Andrew FA, 13).

It seems to me that interpretation is an essential part of the viewing process, and therefore should be part of critical analysis. Viewing is, after all, “an effort after meaning” and our understanding of the film requires constant hypotheses and revisions — in a word, interpretation. Why should we not discuss the overall interpretation of the film? Cognitivism, as much as it tells us about viewing habits, generic norms and historical issues, seems to require the critic to lay aside meaning as a factor in reception and creation in pursuit of more technical issues. My reassessment of the notion of parametric cinema arises in part from questioning whether style can be meaningless. Stylistic choices very
much affect the experience of the film, and the meaning of the film, its interpretation, must begin with that experience.

Dudley Andrew’s _Film in The Aura of Art_ offers a different way of considering fugitive texts such as Mizoguchi’s or Bresson’s. Andrew examines these films in a hermeneutical framework that takes seriously Barthes assertion that “the text can be not an example but the theory itself” (_FA_, 4). For Andrew, the consequence is that “we must respond to the film, teasing out its method and appeal as it displays that method and appeal” (4). Inspired in many ways by Paul Ricoeur, the book seems to me exemplary in the way it takes seriously the claims of art on the viewer while avoiding “the romantic rhetoric associated with great artworks” (6). Such an approach also seems to me more reflective of the creative process of filmmakers, especially of those who, like Erice, see themselves as artists whose medium provides them with a way of knowing and understanding the world.

This thesis seeks to take a similar intermediary path between strict formalism and overarching interpretive theory, in order to allow for the specificity of Erice’s films to be explored while their meanings are considered. I have integrated Bordwell’s call for a more rigorous analytical framework, using “mid-level concepts” (such as editing, light, sound and framing) that “capture real and significant choices faced by filmmakers and viewers” (_MM_, 272). In order to engage the specificity of Erice’s films, careful attention has been paid to their materiality — use of colour, sound, rhythm, editing— and their effect on a viewer. In line with Susan Sontag’s description of good criticism as “an erotics of art,” I am striving to “reveal the sensuous surface” of Erice’s work (_AI_, 13, 14).

Such an approach seems to me particularly important when dealing with Erice’s films since their visual richness often appears to work against the forward movement of the narrative. Erice’s thoughtful mise en scène creates frames that are as arresting as paintings. Along with a focus on the form and texture of objects, the languorous beauty of these images stops the viewer in her tracks, reorienting the focus from the narrative “what next”
to the poetic “how.” An interpretation that does not take into account Erice’s predilection for exploring the sensuous surface of the world risks relegating style to the role of adornment. As Andrew affirms: “The physicality of the work regulates and directs (at the same time that it invites) the movement toward meaning, at least in artworks of the highest ambition” (*FA*, 12).

The purpose of the focus on objects and landscape in these films is not so much to communicate an idea as to communicate an experience. By forcing the viewer to concentrate on the surroundings of everyday life, Erice invests the mundane with extraordinary possibilities, and moves the viewer toward a suspended sense of time. One comes out of his films almost disoriented, “spent and edging [one’s] way back into the world, blinking with surprise, slow recognition, often with relief and with resignation” to cite the words Julio Cortázar used to describe emerging from a good short story (“On the Short Story,” 35). The comparison with the short story is not fortuitous; it seems to me Erice’s films have something of the same tension between the narrative and the lyrical, the forward movement of plot and the suspended image. It is through careful attention to style that this internal tension is revealed.

My methodology proceeds in two movements: I first look at the context of the films’ reception, then undertake a careful analysis that looks at the intrinsic norms of the film within a reading that highlights associations and the viewer’s role in interpreting these. In hermeneutical terms this approach could be described as taking stock first of all of the “conflict of interpretations” that constitutes the critical tradition and mode of reception, and then proceeding to an examination of the formal and historical elements while drawing interpretive conclusions. Or, to adapt the questions with which Mario J. Valdés sketches a practical Ricoeurian criticism (reversing their order): What does the film say to me that is common to the viewing experience of others? How does the film function? What does it speak about? These are the question that I explore.
The consideration of the context of reception leads me to address key questions of genre: in *El espíritu* what emerges is the concept of ambiguity, which I then follow through the intertext of James Whale’s *Frankenstein*; in *El sur*, I discuss Freudian readings of the family melodrama; in *El sol del membrillo* I consider the conventions of documentary. In the second and third chapter I am seeking to alter the mode of reception by arguing for other possible frameworks. My reasons for seeking to free *El sur* from the Freudian paradigm will be obvious from the discussion of theories that take films as exemplary instances of a system. By paying careful attention to the use of sound and point of view, I show that this reading has simplified ambiguous elements, and that the film can be viewed from a perspective more consistent with Erice’s other films. In the case of *El sol*, the film’s reception has been conditioned, both in Europe and North America, by a definition of documentary that comes to us from the Grierson tradition and direct cinema. Erice himself tries to direct the film’s reception toward a tradition that blends fiction and documentary. I argue for accepting the film within the genre of documentary itself, since a document is never entirely free of fiction. The tradition is open enough to include a film like *El sol*, though documentary is often mistakenly conceived as more limited.

While these discussions give the chapters a certain heterogeneity, the methodology is consistent throughout. Rather than impose a rigid structure, I have let the films and their reception dictate the issues considered in each chapter. The constants in my analysis are the constants in Erice’s style: an attention to the fleeting quality of light, repetition, ambiguity and a focus on moments of change, on the passage of time itself.

These constants are revealed in the analysis of Erice’s style that constitutes the main part of each chapter. These films, although conditioned by certain generic conventions, establish distinctive intrinsic norms (norms which are repeated in Erice’s body of work and come, therefore, to condition viewer expectations of an Erice film.) The narrative action of Erice’s films is so limited—the drama occurring outside the boundaries of what is
presented of the diegetic world and the focus being internal — that the viewer must be especially alert to patterns and repetition. Fine variations are thus invested with significance. Part of the mysterious and haunting quality of his films has to do with this play with viewer’s expectations: where an element has been adopted to suggest one thing, it will later be used to suggest the reverse. The recurrence of silence in *El sur* is one example. In the early part of the film, the silence between father and daughter suggests a connection that does not require words but as the film progresses, silence comes to symbolize their alienation from one another. In terms of the intrinsic norms of the films, then, expectations are built up through repetition and often reversed.

These intrinsic norms play off expectations set up by extrinsic norms, that is, cinematic conventions. As original as Erice might be as a filmmaker, his work is situated within cinematic traditions, mainly that of the European art film. Viewers come with an understanding of conventions and expectations based on films within this tradition. Like Truffaut and Godard, Erice has absorbed the lessons of neo-realism and the Hollywood movie, and he is adept at invoking and playing with the conventions of both. In the case of *El espíritu de la colmena*, James Whale’s *Frankenstein* is re-worked so that parodic citings occur not only in the sequences where the Whale film is shown or heard, but also in visual matching of frames from the earlier film. In this regard, Erice’s work fits into the reinscription of Hollywood which Marsha Kinder has characterized as emblematic of Spanish filmmakers of his generation (*BC*, 6-7). At the same time, Erice relies on viewing habits developed through the films of Bresson, Ozu and the French new wave, especially the patience demanded from the viewer by these works. Erice’s own films build slowly, and a viewer must trust that her patience will be rewarded.

It should be clear by now that I am examining the films in the “aura of art,” to use Andrew’s phrase, and not just as products of culture or of an economic or ideological system (*FA*, 193). Erice’s aspirations are consciously artistic, as is evinced by his
evocation of classical and baroque painting in his framing and chiaroscuro effects, as well as the literary references in his films. More essential to this artistic project are Erice’s references to other movies and his cinematic experimentation. Erice’s use of other arts is not so much to elevate filmmaking as to expand its province and renew it.

At the same time, Erice has expressed envy for the solitary work of the painter who has greater freedom than the filmmaker. Since he first began writing on film as a critic for Nuestro cine (1961-69), Erice has attempted to carve himself a place as an independent thinker and creator. Film is an expensive enterprise, however, and except for El sol which was largely self-financed, Erice’s films have been subject to the nature of the Spanish film industry. It is not surprising that a filmmaker who considers shooting a process of discovery should run into difficulties with his financial backers. But if, as Paul Julian Smith notes, Erice is a maverick who is often portrayed as an isolated underdog, he also worked with the most influential Spanish producer of the seventies and eighties, Elías Querejeta, and “clearly benefited from being associated with a company specialising in serious art movies which dominated the prize and festival circuit” (29). It would be a mistake then to consider Erice’s work wholly apart from the circumstances of its production.

Part of these circumstances is, of course, the collective and hybrid nature of the filmmaking process itself. A director is one of a team of creative talents. As Perkins comments: “film-making involves many separate personalities, distinct and sometimes conflicting intentions, varying abilities and imperfect control. A movie cannot be fully and uniquely one man’s creation” (158). At the same time, the director’s role is to coordinate these varied talents and personalities into a cohesive whole. This tension between collective and individual contributions to filmmaking has fuelled the debate around the question of auteurism since it was first developed by André Bazin and the Cahiers du cinéma critics in the 1950s.
In Spain, auteurism was fostered by a political climate that at once consecrated directors as “resistance fighters on the battlefield of cultural politics” and allowed them to be used by a regime seeking to present itself as liberalized to the international community (D’Lugo, 9). The New Spanish Cinema, the movement with which Erice was initially associated, was very much a product of this tension. As Marvin D’Lugo notes so strong were the inducements toward auteurism that even a decade after French and British film theorists had largely discarded the cult of the auteur for more theoretical readings of cinematic textuality, Spanish filmmakers continued to see themselves as auteurs, fighting a battle against the political forces of Francoist conservative orthodoxy (9).

While the political context has changed, Spain’s industry and subsidies still promote auteurs, as Pedro Almodóvar’s success illustrates. In fact, despite theories which have ushered the director out of the picture entirely, auteurism has continued to be a standard strategy in writing about film. Despite the risks of theoretical naivety and of neglecting the work of collaborators, the notion of the auteur remains a useful critical tool. As spectators, we do in fact recognize the hand of a director in his films. Carlos Saura’s films have a certain flavour and unity despite the variety of his output; the same is true of Erice who has only made three films. A comparison of the early films of these two directors provides a case in point. *El espíritu de la colmena* and Saura’s *Cría cuervos* (1975), for example, have the same producer (Querejeta), star (Ana Torrent) and editor (Pablo G. del Amo); *El jardín de las delicias* (1970) shares *El espíritu’s* producer, editor and cinematographer (Luis Cuadrado). Yet the films are different in rhythm, in framing and colour and in acting style. This can only be explained by the different visions and processes of Saura and Erice.

It has become something of a commonplace in film criticism to begin a study of a director with a caveat about the auteur theory. Dudley Andrew reassures us that this is no longer necessary since “after a dozen years of clandestine whispering we are permitted to
mention, even to discuss the auteur again” (“Unauthorized,” 77). Unapologetically then, I focus my study on the director, confident that our understanding of film is enriched by auteur studies that reveal directors’ “muscular expansion of the repertoire of cinematic representation,” their structures and systems and “what we once called their visions of the world” (“Unauthorized,” 83).

Two comprehensive studies of Erice’s work have recently appeared: Pascale Thibaudeau’s unpublished thesis *Image, mythe et réalité dans le cinéma de Victor Erice* (1995) and Carmen Arocena’s 1996 book *Víctor Erice* published by Cátedra. Our work turns out to be complementary, since each of writes for a different audience and from a different cultural perspective. I have focused my thesis on reception and style and avoided a comprehensive overview of Erice’s career as a filmmaker and critic, since this ground is covered by Arocena. The Spanish critic dedicates a chapter to Erice’s contribution to the anthology film *Los desafíos* and another to his theory of film as expressed in his early writings in *Nuestro cine*. Thibaudeau looks at the treatment of myth in Erice’s feature films, and organizes her study thematically around time, space and reflexivity. It is a detailed study of the figures and themes in Erice’s work. I have chosen to focus more narrowly on film style, and to examine each film in turn in order to show constants and evolutions more clearly. I have had the opportunity to weigh my interpretations and analysis against the conclusions drawn by these two perspicacious critics, as well as those of others who have written on Erice, such as John Hopewell, Marsha Kinder, Robin Fiddian, Peter Evans and Paul Julian Smith. I see my work is a contribution to an ongoing discussion about the meaning and significance of Erice’s films with these and other critics, and perhaps more importantly, other viewers.

The three chapters that follow analyse the intrinsic norms in each of Erice’s films, and each explores a different aspect of the director's style and subject. Chapter 1 begins by looking at the divergent critical readings of specific elements within *El espíritu de la*
*colmena.* My argument is that the very diversity of interpretations points to the use of ambiguity as an experience in itself rather than as a mystery to be resolved. I show how this ambiguity is developed by a focus on objects, the use of ekphrasis and ellipsis, as well as the parodic repetition of James Whale’s *Frankenstein* (1931). By developing Jonathan Lake Crane’s subversive reading of the horror classic, I explore the ways in which Erice’s film recontextualizes the story and show how it uses the Hollywood film to comment on issues of censorship and to question the binary moral categories of the Franco era. I highlight internal parallels and posit that the experience of the viewer mirrors that of the characters, especially Ana, who seeks to understand events though important information is unavailable.

In the next chapter I argue against the Freudian readings that have been applied to *El sur*, in an effort to wrest the film away from a totalizing interpretation by demonstrating its open and ambiguous nature. I focus on the question of voice-over narration, arguing that Estrella’s voice does not control the narrative, as might be supposed, but that a parallel story of her father emerges independently. Through an analysis of the soundtrack, I demonstrate the complexity of the film’s use of music and sound, paying particular attention to the striking use of silence. I show that *El sur*, like *El espíritu*, is structured around parallels and repetitions, with an ending which, partly because of its unfinished state, does not provide closure but rather opens out ambiguously.

Chapter 3 contextualizes *El sol del membrillo*, an exploration of the creative process of realist painter Antonio López García, within the documentary tradition. I highlight the congruences between the filmmaker and the painter, as well as the similarities and differences in their work. I argue that *El sol* communicates an experience of time with repetition, ellipsis, music, sound and dialogues all serving to transport the viewer into the contemplative time of the artist. In the end, all the forms of visual representation that appear in the film — painting, photography, television and the documentary itself — are shown to
be defeated by time. A meditation on the limits of representation, the film also celebrates the ability of art to transcend its limitations by becoming experience.

A concluding chapter gathers up the stylistic elements discussed into a tentative poetics of Erice's cinema.
Notes

1 I have chosen not to examine Erice’s contribution to the compilation film Los desafíos [The Challenges] (1969) since he considers it, rightly, I think, as part of his apprenticeship. Comments Erice: “considero que esta película supone, antes que nada, la individualización de tres temperamentos cinematográficos. También una primera toma de contacto con el medio, de la cual hemos aprendido ciertas cosas” [“I think that this film represents above all the process of individualization of three cinematic temperaments. As well, it was a first contact with the medium, from which we learned some things”] (quoted in Arocena, 44). Though the film depends as much on its producer, Elías Querejeta, as its directors, Erice’s episode nevertheless gives some evidence of the young director’s use of the medium, and stands out from the rest of the film in its subtlety. For a discussion of Los desafíos, see Carmen Arocena’s study, 39-75.

2 During an interview in 1984, Erice mentioned that he was interested in making a more experimental film but that Spanish film had stages it needed to go through. What he was suggesting, in a sense, is that he would have to wait for audience expectations to catch up with more avant garde traditions so that a fragmentary, experimental film might achieve its full effect.

3 “Ce n’est pas facile car le temps d’un artiste, d’un peintre est un temps individuel, alors que le temps du cinéma est collectif” [“It’s not easy because the time of an artist, of a painter is an individual time, while that of cinema is collective”] (Cahiers, 36).

4 Comments Erice: “Pour moi, le tournage est surtout un moyen de connaissance, le moyen d’accéder à une possible vérité qui jusque-là m’était inconnue” [“For me, filming is above all a way of knowing, a way to get at a possible truth which until then had been unknown to me”] (Cahiers, 32).

5 For an overview of the auteurism debate, see John Caughie’s Theories of Authorship.

6 For a discussion of the New Spanish Cinema, see the special issue of Quarterly Review of Film Studies edited by Katherine S. Kovács.
The life in detail, the small moment, the texture of a thing — that is where poetry is. Whatever we extrapolate, however we transform the event, we hold to those first halves of experience in which we can connect what will later seem inevitable.

- Stanley Plumly

The pensive ending acknowledges the narration as not simply powerful but humble; the narration knows that life is more complex than art can ever be, and — a new twist of the reality screw — the only way to respect this complexity is to leave causes dangling and questions unanswered.

- David Bordwell
Chapter 1
Parallels and Ellipses: *El espíritu de la colmena*

Victor Erice's *El espíritu de la colmena* is an extraordinary first feature by any measure. Winner of the First Prize at the San Sebastian Film Festival and the Silver Hugo at the Chicago Film Festival when it was released in 1973, it crowned Erice as one of Spain's grand auteurs, and remains, arguably, his most compelling film. Monte Hellman chose it as the film that had the profoundest influence on him in a recent issue of *Positif*, and quotes Jean Cocteau to describe its fascination:

> une œuvre d'art devrait en même temps être un objet difficile à saisir. Elle doit se protéger du tripotement vulgaire qui la ternit et la déforme. Elle devrait être façonnée de telle sorte que les gens ne savent pas la tenir.

a work of art should also be an object that is hard to grasp. It needs to protect itself from the vulgar fiddling which tarnishes and deforms it. It should be fashioned so that people don’t know how to hold onto it (48).

This well describes *El espíritu*, a film which is so much more connotative than denotative that a synopsis becomes itself an interpretation. If critics are universal in their acclaim of this meticulously fashioned film, they are far from unanimous as to what the film, or even what the film's narrative is about. The bare bones of the plot are simple enough: in post-war Spain a young girl (Ana), is deeply moved by James Whale’s *Frankenstein*, and encouraged to believe the monster exists as a spirit in her world by her older sister. Her father, a beekeeper, spends his time alone in his office, while her mother Teresa writes letters to someone in France. Ana seeks to ritually evoke the monster’s presence. Later a fugitive from the Republican side takes refuge in the abandoned house where the spirit is said to live. When he is killed by the civil guard, Ana runs away from her uncommunicative family. By a lake, she encounters Frankenstein. In the morning her father finds her by a ruin. She has undergone a
trauma and remains confined to bed. The film ends with her going to the window, looking out at the moon.

Hellman describes the film as "une œuvre secrète et mystérieuse, qui traite des mystères les plus grands, à savoir la création et la mort" ("a secret and mysterious work, which treats the greatest mysteries, that is, creation and death") (48). Both he and Marsha Kinder comment on the film's exploration of the power of film to inform our dreams and imaginings. For Kinder the film "focuses on a child's imaginative reconstruction of images she has seen in a Hollywood movie. It shows how she uses the myth to deal with the painful experiences in her own Spanish context" (126). For Emmanuel Larraz the film is an exploration of the "unknown continent of childhood" (226), while for Roger Mortimore it is about "the parents, who have suffered the war. It is not a film about children" (200). Erice himself gives an interpretation based on myth,¹ and socio-political interpretations are plentiful.²

The greatest variations occur in the interpretation of specific elements. For example, Teresa is thought to be writing to a lover, a family member (E.C. Riley), an adopted child (T. Glaesser) or Fernando himself (Thibaudeau); in John Gillett's interpretation, Fernando was on the Republican side, while for Larraz he is clearly on the side of the victors.³ For some the figure of the Frankenstein⁴ monster represents Franco's Spain (M. D'Lugo), while for John Hopewell it is the rejected "other" which promises a way out of the rigidity of the Francoist system.⁵ As for the film's protagonist, given extraordinary life by Ana Torrent, her story is perceived by Riley as a crisis of identity,⁶ while in Glaesser's reading she develops supernatural powers.⁷ The last words in the film can be seen as an affirmation of Ana's independence (Riley), or more metaphorically for Hopewell, as part of the collective desire for resurrection in the post-war period.
If the film permits such a variety of interpretations, it is precisely because it has the intangible quality Cocteau describes, or, to use Dudley Andrew’s term, an elasticity that allows it to be read in a number of ways while remaining unlimited to the bounds of an interpretive framework. *El espíritu* is in this sense, a fugitive work, one which demands a return, a re-immersion in the experience of the film itself, for, as I will argue, that experience is central to, and hardly detachable from, its meaning. Its very openness makes the viewer’s role an active one—of filling in the story, of building a meaning—and in so doing the film ends up questioning the viewer. In this sense, the initial terms of the relationship between the viewer and the film are inverted: questioning, we end up questioned; it is we who are "played" to use Gadamer's analogy.8 Says Andrew: "the tension between explanation and comprehension is the counterpart of the dialectic between criticism and experience, between our "placing" of the work and our "being placed" by the work" (29).

These demands made on the viewer are within the tradition of art-cinema in which “uncertainty about story events, generated by causal looseness and gaps” can make unusual demands on the attention and memory of viewer, particularly through the “thwarting of the primacy effect and a discouraging of exclusive and likely hypotheses” (Bordwell, *NF*, 213). This need to suspend a unitary judgement adds to the viewer’s sense of mystery and makes the experience of the film a haunting one. Erice works in the tradition of the art cinema that pushes ambiguity and style to the forefront of the viewing experience. At the same, the use of other conventions, from painting and neo-realism, and the context of Francoist Spain further complicate the demands made on the viewer. I will discuss some of these demands and the generic codes used in the film in the context of a reading that takes careful stock of Erice’s style, at once to show his mastery of the medium and the relationship of this “mute” element to the viewer’s experience, and thus, to the experience of the film.
A primary element of the experience of *El espíritu* is its unusual visual quality. Stark and carefully constructed, the style of the film is so striking one reviewer deemed it "intrusive." The visual has the greatest weight in any film, yet here, because the dialogue is so sparse that the film feels almost silent, objects and images are essential symbols and the principal bearers of meaning. The whole aesthetic of the film is distilled: Erice has damped down his palette through the use of special filters, reduced camera movement and movement within the frame. Even the acting is restrained and minimalist. Within its first few minutes the film sets up its norms: static frames which characters enter and leave, repetition of patterns and poses, and vital information delivered in small visual details, as for example the yoke and arrows of the Falange that we see in a corner of the shot of the truck carrying the movie, just before we follow it into the town. As Paul Schrader notes regarding Bresson's style: "the static, well-composed environment acts as a frame for the action: a character enters the frame, performs an action, and exits" (67). Often, in Erice's films, the action is no more than passing through, as though the character accidentally entered the canvas of a landscape.

The resulting stasis can be read symbolically, as a representation of the stagnation of Spain under Franco, and particularly of the desolate years "around 1940" in which the film is set. It also serves stylistically to take the film away from the norms of Hollywood, as well as those of neo-realism. As Kinder points out, the film begins with an almost "ethnographic" detailing of the arrival of a movie to a small Spanish town. Yet the titles situate it in the realm of fable: "Érase una vez..." ["once upon a time"]. Along with the vague place and time frame offered, it seems a "partial disavowal" of the film's "cultural and historical specificity" (129). These are not so much contradictions as affirmations of the movement through the everyday to a mythic realm, in something of the way Bresson describes: "I want to, and, indeed, do make myself as much of a realist as possible, using only the raw material taken from real
life. But I end up with a final realism that is not simply "realism" (quoted in Schrader, 63). The grounding in recognizable reality, the very ordinariness of its story, become the means to the mythic and imaginary. According to Kinder:

The strongest germinal images in the film are not Ana's vision of the monster but the close shots of the beehive and the desolate long shots of landscapes, night skies, train tracks, and village interiors. When treated with painterly compositions, long takes, and the brilliant elliptical editing rhythms of Spain's foremost film editor, Pablo G. del Amo, these images of ordinary objects become detached from the spare narrative line and achieve a powerful resonance—a resonance whose aestheticism [...] goes beyond the boundaries of neo-realism (130).

In his focus on evocative, everyday visual details Erice is reminiscent of Kieslowski, who uses banal objects like kettles and watches to fill in a characterization. Both directors focus on the external in order to suggest what takes place internally. What Angela Dalle Vacche claims for Alain Cavalier's technique in Thérèse is also true of theirs:

Although [the] props are limited—perhaps because they are limited—they acquire a huge power. In maximizing texture and form, Cavalier lend ordinary objects a hyperreality. Through this estrangement of the object, the filmmaker directs attention to it (230).

Pascale Thibaudeau puts it another way:

si les objets prennent une aussi grande importance dans le cinéma de Victor Erice, c'est parce qu'ils ne sont pas noyés dans la masse d'une image saturée. Ils ne prennent toute leur force et n'entrent en résonance que s'ils ne trouvent autour d'eux le vide et le silence nécessaire à leur célébration.
If objects have such an importance in the cinema of Victor Erice, it is because they are not drowned in a saturated image. They gather their full strength and have resonance only if they are surrounded by the emptiness and silence necessary for their celebration (294).

In *El espíritu* Erice begins to draw attention to the importance of objects with the children's drawings that accompany the credits: a letter, a train, a well, a mushroom, a pocket watch. These are the key elements that carry the film forward, both on the level of narrative and symbolism. Fernando's watch, for example, comes to suggest metonymically the figure of the father, and later, in a particularly effective scene of the family at breakfast, which in its routine and silence shows the disaffection in the unit, represents Ana's relationship to the fugitive (seq. 46). Nothing is said. Fernando simply opens the watch and its music plays. Yet the scene is pivotal and the silent exchange provokes Ana's flight.

We have seen and heard the watch three times already: once at the start of the film, when Fernando, first presented to the audience in a beekeeper's hat and gloves, opens his coat and checks the time (seq. 6). It appears a second time in the hands of the fugitive, whom Ana seems to consider the embodiment of the spirit of the monster from *Frankenstein* (seq. 40). He finds it in the pocket of the coat she has brought him, and the sound of it initially provokes her alarm; we are reminded of the authority of the father, of his inevitable disapproval. But the fugitive makes the watch disappear in a sleight of hand. The magic trick reassures the child as it confirms her sense of magic in the world that her sister has affirmed: neither the child nor the Frankenstein monster has died and "if you're his friend you can talk to him anytime." The third time the watch appears it is in the hands of another paternal figure, this time the civil authority of the Guardia Civil in the figure of actor Estanis González (seq. 44). When Fernando opens it at the breakfast table, the circle of authority is complete: from civil to familial authority, and the fugitive, a paternal figure without authority, is out of the loop.14
In the same way, the train, a motif that returns throughout the film, both visually and in the distant sound of the locomotive, grows charged with meaning. The train is the link with the outside world, and represents the possibility of escape. At first associated with the mother who mails a letter care of the French Red Cross in a slot in one of the cars, it is suggestive of the monster as we see the girls dwarfed by its speed and size. Later, it takes on an almost magical connotation when the fugitive jumps from it. As the fugitive comes to be associated with the "spirit" of Frankenstein in Ana's eyes, the sound of the train in the distance that closes the film suggests the possibility of a return.

In terms of the film's striking visual style, however, what is most often commented on is the lighting of the interior scenes. Many critics have pointed out the way the octagonal windows of the large old house the family inhabits echo the divisions and light of the beehive, a rigid and closed society that is unified only in appearance. The beehive is a microcosm representing Spanish society under Franco, as is the family. The two are linked by the honey colour that streams through the grated windows of the old house. But this effect of light, all the more extraordinary as the director of photography, Luis Cuadrado, was almost blind during the filming and had an assistant describe the scenes to him before deciding on how to light them,15 also identifies the film with an aesthetics "beyond the boundaries of neo-realism" namely, painting.16

Painting

There are references to painting throughout the film: in the children's drawings of the credit sequence, in the full-frame shots of the angel and child in the girls' room, the painting of St Jerome in Fernando's room, in the careful framings that make the film almost a collection of landscapes, portraits and still lives.17 Erice has a painter's obsession with objects: their texture, form and light. Consider the scene in which the
children lie talking in bed. The camera holds on a night table: in the centre there is a candle, on one side a religious print, on the other, a stuffed chimpanzee. It's an arresting composition—symmetric and perfectly balanced—as well as symbolic of the girls' world, yet obviously realistic within it. The lighting emphasizes the roundness of the contours, even giving a three dimensional feel to the flat surface of the print in the close-ups of the angel. Here again an object evokes the girl's imaginative frame of reference: whereas in the script it is Ana's face that registers her struggle to understand her sister's talk of spirits, in the film the print is what suggests her thoughts.

The same careful composition is at work in the framing of building facades and the desolate landscapes that are repeated in static shots. The exterior of the house, for example, is shown four times, filmed from a head-on angle, filling most of the frame. The town hall where Frankenstein is shown, the schoolhouse and the abandoned house where the maquis takes refuge all receive the same treatment. Sometimes the shots of buildings are held while a dissolve indicates a passage of time, or in the dramatic ellipsis in the fugitive's story, the unfolding of a tragic destiny.

There is a daring in these painterly static shots, since, with the exception of the sequence just mentioned, they go against the forward movement of the plot. Just as the focus on objects seems to unmoor them from the narrative line, these frames invite a concentrated attention on the "how," rather as a metaphor will call for pause and reflection in a poem.

The most notable use of the aesthetic of painting, however, is in the interior shots where characters are posed near windows, and the light plays on the darkness of the house in sensuous chiaroscuro. Iconographically these images are reminiscent of seventeenth century Spanish and Flemish painting: a woman writing a letter, a man reading by an open window, milk being poured—even the dog in the film is straight out of a painting. Often the composition as well as the light echoes the Old Masters: in
the shot of Fernando at his desk, he is posed beneath a large painting, at a desk with writing paraphernalia (seq. 15); the shot echoes an earlier one of Teresa writing a letter (seq. 4), and both of these will be echoed and "modernized" in the young Ana typing at Fernando's desk when her father is away (seq. 34). The shot of Teresa can be compared to Vermeer's *Woman Writing a Letter with Her Maid*: there is something of the same quality of light, the same side-angle single source, the window, the distant absorption of the women. In fact, the prevalence of windows and golden, concentrated light recalls Vermeer throughout.18

These echoes might seem coincidental until one considers the similarities in the project and sensibilities of the two artists. There is a curious intersection in Johan Huizinga's characterization of Vermeer with the feeling of Erice's work: "Everything [...] lies in suspension, as it were, an atmosphere of childhood recollection, a dream-like peace, a complete stillness, an almost elegiac clarity" (84).19 If one accepts Edward Snow's view of Vermeer as rejecting the facile moralism of his contemporaries for a vision of "inner stillness" and calm whose centre is the feminine (158-159), the reflections of his art in Erice's film become more comprehensible. Erice too centres his film in the feminine, a girl who, like Vermeer's *Woman Holding a Balance*, is testing the scale of values given to her, and questioning the binary oppositions posited from outside: life/death, good/evil, light/dark. Like Vermeer "the values predicated [...] are ontological, and they are predicated on a refusal of a conventional moral judgment" (Snow, 148).

When her father describes a mushroom as "un auténtico demonio" Ana responds "¡Qué bien huele!" ["It smells lovely!"], and later disregards her father's warning not to touch it when she finds one during her solitary escape into the forest. Moral ambiguity, the blurring of divisions, is at the heart of *El espíritu*. It is centered, finally, in the spectator who must reach her own conclusions and build a narrative
from the images presented and emotions evoked. The film can obviously be, and has been, read in terms of binary oppositions, but the fact that these contradictory positions are almost impossible to prove except through the force of subjective conviction seems to point beyond these "resolutions" of a mysterious ambiguity to the importance of ambiguity itself, as a moral, political and artistic statement.

Acting

Before turning to the issue of ambiguity, however, I want to look at another aspect of Erice’s style, namely his direction of actors. In some ways Erice’s use of actors is more akin to a painter’s models than anything theatrical. Here again his process is one of simplification. He captures a powerful performance from the little girls, Ana Torrent and Isabel Tellería, because he captures their gazes and reactions. They are called upon not so much to act as be:

Beaucoup de cinéastes aspirent à atteindre la réalité de cet "être" en choisissant des acteurs non professionnels, mais il est rare qu’ils réussissent. Erice y réussit merveilleusement bien en se servant d’acteurs professionnels. C’est lorsqu’il travaille avec les enfants qu’il réussit le mieux, là où il n’y a pas de démarcation absolue entre l’amateur et le professionnel.

A lot of filmmakers aspire to reach the reality of this “being” by choosing non-professional actors, but they are rarely successful. Erice achieves it wonderfully using professional actors. It’s when he works with children that he is most successful, where there is no absolute demarcation between the amateur and the professional20 (Hellman, 49).

The two girls essentially play themselves as they discover the magic of the cinema. Erice comments that Ana Torrent really believed in the Frankenstein monster and that this contributed to the quality of her performance.
The camera focuses insistently on Ana's eyes, and the other characters' faces in mid-shots and close-ups, almost as though the film were made up of portraits. Once again, this evokes the language of painting. It also serves the narrative: at the risk of "automatism or atomism," the constant separation of the characters into individual frames here does suggest their isolation from one another. The parents are seen together only twice, and though the girls are framed together for the first half of the film as Ana explores the mystery of the monster further, she gradually leaves her sister's realm, and they too are shown in individual close-ups.

This is in striking contrast to other films of the period in which the style of acting is theatrical and expressive. Saura's *Cria cuervos*, for example, has Ana Torrent in a similar role as in *Espíritu*, but the tone of the acting is much more dramatic. Indeed, cataloguing Ana's scenes in Erice's film highlights just how often she is called upon to react, rather than make statements or perform an action. The extraordinary nature of the performance is the depth which is conveyed in these reactions.

Ambiguity

That the characters react rather than act is one of the contributing factors to the film's overriding ambiguity. Facial expressions can be read, but given especially that Ana, who is the main focus of the film, rarely smiles or shows clear emotion, the resulting readings will tend to be multiple. I have stated that ambiguity is at the heart of *El espíritu*, as a kind of moral, political and artistic statement. This is in keeping with the tradition of the art cinema within which Erice is working. As Bordwell comments: "art-cinema narration announces its debt to the arts of the early twentieth century by making ambiguity, either of tale or telling, central" (*NF*, 212). Erice makes both of these ambiguous; his stylistic features create uncertainty about time lines,
causal connections and space (which is, as the opening title suggests, both specifically “a place in the meseta” and an imaginary construct) (212).

Through the creation of uncertainties, many art cinema films, and certainly Erice’s, align themselves with poetry by multiplying possible meanings and symbolic resonances. As William Empson put it: “The machinations of ambiguity are among the very roots of poetry” (3). In his cataloguing of ambiguity in poetry, Seven Types of Ambiguity, the critic draws out a quality of ambiguity that is at work in Erice’s film. Though he is very much concerned with the ambiguity of words, in stressing the oppositional nature of ambiguity, he highlights the tension often felt by viewers of art-cinema narration. Ambiguity demands that the viewer “jump the gap between two ways of thinking” and “produce [...] a possible set of alternative meanings” which may, but generally in the case of Erice, may not be resolved (239). Erice pushes the viewer by holding out the possibility of a resolution to the uncertainties in the film — the intended recipient of Teresa’s letter or Fernando’s allegiance during the war, for example — only to make such a resolution impossible within the framework of the whole film. The ambiguity in such instances demands the holding of exclusive hypotheses in balance, thereby warning against making categorical judgments.

Other ambiguities (of Empson’s first type) are created by metaphorical images which suggest comparison, while withholding one of the terms. This is the case with the image of the Frankenstein monster in the film. Is it Franco’s Spain being compared to the monster? The children? The father? The answer, as I will show, is not one or the other, but rather all of these “possible associations” (Empson, 13). In the same way the use of facial expressions and Vermeerian light sets up an equation without giving all the terms. The viewer thus must bring in her own associations to understand the images. The poetic quality so often identified in Erice’s films comes precisely from this multiplication of meanings and connotations.
Bordwell somewhat disparagingly comments that ambiguity is often considered a "good-making property" (212). Without naively placing value judgments on techniques or a concept, it is possible to see in Erice's demand that the viewer hold two opposing possibilities in balance a refusal to play into the prevalent oppositions of his time, be it Francoist assertions of "anti versus true Spain" or the contrary notion that "the good guys" lost the Civil War. These socio-political implications of the ambiguity in the film will presently be explored in relationship to the re-working of the Frankenstein myth.

Frankenstein

*El espíritu* begins with the arrival of a Hollywood film to the small town. There is an incongruous mix of cultures and time as the film's projection is announced by a town crier, as a play might have been in Medieval times. There is a second incongruity in the film being shown in the town hall, a place of authority which will later serve to connect the fugitive with the monster in the film. The same place that serves as the theatre where Frankenstein comes to life will serve as the morgue where the fugitive is exposed in death. Though the film is a sanctioned activity, it also implies danger and must be controlled, as the Spanish prologue to the Frankenstein film suggests, by "not taking it too seriously."

When asked why he chose the Frankenstein story, Erice stated that the choice was instinctive. He cites seeing the cycle of films on television and a re-reading of Mary Shelley's novel, as well as the ever-present issue of funding, as factors that set his mind to work on the theme. Yet it is no surprise that a film set in the immediate post-war period should choose a monster made of dead flesh as its central metaphor. The literature of the period is rife with monstrous images of the walking dead, from the grotesque violence of *tremendismo* to Jaime Gil de Biedma "Aparecidos" ["Ghosts"]:  

28
Vienen
de allá, del otro lado del fondo sulfuroso,
de las sordas
minas del hambre y de la multitud.
Y ni siquiera saben quiénes son:
desenferrados vivos (48).

They come/ from over there, from the other side of the sulphurous deep,/ from the dull/ mines of hunger and of the multitude./ And they don’t even know who they are: /the living dead.

Dámaso Alonso, whose Hijos de la ira, [Children of Wrath] published in 1944, was like a cry that broke the asphyxiating silence of the immediate post-war years, repeatedly uses the image of monsters to characterize a Spain rent by civil war:

Cercado estoy de monstruos
que mudamente me preguntan,
ingual, igual que yo les interrogo a ellos ("Monstruos")

I’m surrounded by monsters/ who wordlessly ask me/
the same, just the same as I interrogate them (“Monsters”).

Y paso largas horas preguntándole a Dios, preguntándole por qué se pudre lentamente mi alma
por qué se pudren más de un millón de cadáveres en esta ciudad de Madrid ("Insomnio").

And I spend long hours asking God, asking him why my soul is slowly rotting/ why more than a million corpses are rotting in this city of Madrid ("Insomnia").

Camilo José Cela's La familia de Pascual Duarte [The Family of Pascual Duarte] has a a monstrous, violent main character; Carmen Laforet's celebrated postwar novel Nada is also full of lugubrious images of the grotesque, often reminiscent of Goya's
black paintings. The harshness of the fratricidal war and difficult post-war situation surely accounts for these images. Even disregarding the shared wisdom that horror is a genre that flourishes in times of social stress since it allows for the expression of anxiety and fear, the horror experienced during the war would be enough to account for the representation of Spain as a cemetery. Indeed the repression of the post-war years and the ostrich-like determination to declare that all was well (in, for example the poetry of the garcillasistas) made for fertile ground for the growth of such imagery.

The horror genre, as Noël Carroll has pointed out, comments on the abnormal and allows for the confirmation of the monster's (the "other," the outsider, the feared dark side) existence. Part of the proliferation of grotesque and horrific images, the explosion caused by Hijos de la ira, for example, has to do with the public release in speaking —metaphorically of course— of what could not be spoken of.

In this sense the regime itself engendered monsters by de-humanizing its enemies, forcing them to exist in the silence outside the publicly acceptable. The imposition of "one 'Numantian' Spain" emanating from the ideology of Franco's regime required the exclusion of any diversity from public life and a clear, fixed vision of what it means to be Spanish. As José Monleón puts it:

The totalitarian public sphere admits only the voice of submission. Dissidence —political as well as aesthetic— belongs to silence, to the obscure realm of exile. This exclusionary act forged two monolithic blocks: on the one hand, an absolute, monovalent public "I"; on the other, a many-headed demon, one "absent other" invested with all the connotations that had been discarded from the public realm (264).

The representation of this in the film comes indirectly through the image of the beehive, an image linked, as I mentioned, to the family's home life through shape and colour. Rather than being "disconnected" to the Frankenstein theme, as Riley
suggests, it is almost impossible to speak of one without touching on the other. They are united in the very title, one which suggests at once the "spirit" of Frankenstein that Ana is seeking—a monster who does not fit the rigid demands of the hive—and the spirit of the times, that is, conformism and isolation. "el reposo mismo de la muerte" ["the sleep of death itself"] (EC, 60; seq. 15). In this sense, Spain is living in the "spirit of the beehive" a hierarchical, immutable society that demands obedience.

The strength of this symbolism comes from the striking visual quality of the beehive itself and the naturalness with which it is presented in the story. The first image of the father we see is of a beekeeper, linked immediately to the Frankenstein monster. Like the monster, the hive as a symbol is polysemic, at once fascinating and repulsive, frightening and enigmatic. The two are inextricably linked in the film. In the desultory post-war years, "el esfuerzo despiado e inútil" ["the relentless and useless effort"] to impose a rigid order where obedience is the only option breeds pathetic monsters, "an oppressive and oppressed minority" (EC, 58; Crane.74).

Thus in using James Whale's Frankenstein, Erice has tapped a rich vein, both in terms of the time he is seeking to portray, as well as the themes he is exploring. The fecundity of the choice accounts to some degree for the sense that the film is at once of its own time as well as that of the period it portrays, and for some of the film's universal appeal. While I have elaborated on the monster theme in a Spanish socio-political context, it has much richer resonances than this. The story, after all, has roots in the myth of Prometheus, and is here transferred from its nineteenth-century British origin to the Spain of the seventies via the Hollywood of the thirties. The "trans-contextualization" allows El espíritu to gather within it a complexity of echoes, without losing as its central focus the simple perspective of a child.

By setting the story of a little girl's discovery of her world and of herself in the context of her investigation of the mystery of a movie monster, the film draws on the
curiosity that is key to both plots. The search Ana undertakes is parallel to the one within the horror film and partakes of the curiosity and fascination that keeps the movie audience glued to its seat: Who is the monster? Where is he? What are his powers? Is he good or evil? As Erice describes it, the seed of the film lies in the early impact of these questions:

¿Cuál había sido mi primera relación con [el monstruo]? Había sido una reacción teñida de atracción y rechazo, establecida en el interior de una sala oscura, en un momento de la infancia. [...] quizá lo más importante de toda experiencia mítica es el momento de la revelación del fantasma, de la iniciación, y a él me remití.

What had been my first relationship to [the monster]? It was a reaction tinged with attraction and repulsion, established inside of a dark room, in childhood. [...] perhaps the most important element of any mythic experience is the moment the apparition is revealed, of the initiation, and that’s what I went back to (EC, 142).

Ana's reaction is a normal one, experienced by the many fans who made Boris Karloff's Frankenstein monster a regular feature in films and fan magazines. Where she differs is in the strength of her identification, and her belief, encouraged by her sister, that Frankenstein's monster exists outside the fictional world of the film. Through the intensity of her belief and her search in her own environment, the horror story neatly dovetails with Ana's childhood coming of age story.

Considering the film in terms of a parody, as Linda Hutcheon defines it — repetition with difference, that is, a complex form of "trans-contextualization" (15) — it becomes clear that the film is structured around Ana's taking of the questions aroused in her in the movie theatre out into her own world. The first third of the film is taken up with Whale's film: the arrival of the movie reels, the announcement of the upcoming screening, the film itself, quoted directly in shots and the soundtrack. In the
latter part of the film the references to Frankenstein are subtler, yet no less present. As I will show, the monster narrative refracts into a series of echoes that run suggestively through the whole film.

In parodying Whale's classic, Erice recontextualizes it. There is, as I mentioned, a jarring juxtaposition of cultures and time in the figure of the town crier who announces the screening of the film, the very un-Hollywood nature of the make-shift theatre (complete with braseros) and the intense faces of the Castillian villagers. But there are elements where there is a curious fit between Whale's film and the Spain portrayed in Erice's. The prologue, for example, where Edward Van Sloan sets the film in a moral framework, speaks to the Francoist desire to control dangerous fictions. Though today it seems "a bit of corny hokum," the words of warning from the producer might have come from the Spanish censor: "Se trata de la historia del doctor Frankenstein, un hombre de ciencia que intentó crear un ser vivo sin pensar que eso sólo puede hacerlo Dios." ["We are about to unfold the story of Frankenstein, a man of science, who sought to create a man after his own image—without reckoning upon God."] The Spanish translation does, in fact, shift the emphasis somewhat from a wink to a rather more real warning: "So then, if you feel that you do not care to subject your nerves to such a strain. Now is your chance to—well, we've warned you!" becomes "yo les aconsejo que no la tomen muy en serio" ["I suggest that you don't take it too seriously"] (EC, 36; seq. 2).

Another point of intersection between the two films, also due to the culture of censorship, drives the plot of El espíritu. The motivation of Ana's search to be initiated into the mystery of the monster rests on a lacuna caused by the censoring of a central scene in Whale's film. The studio deemed the depiction of the monster throwing the little girl into the river "too strong" for movie audiences and the footage was cut (and subsequently lost). We are left to infer what has happened in the
ellipsis between the monster and the little girl playing by the river and the father carrying his dead child to the house of Frankenstein. We don't see, as is suggested in the screenplay "de manera torpe e impremeditada, y por ello mismo quizá aún más terrible, el monstruo mata[r] a la niña que recogía margaritas a orillas del río" ["clumsily and without premeditation, and for that reason perhaps, all the more terrible, the monster kill the little girl who was gathering flowers by the side of the river"] (40). Rather, the film cuts between the father saying goodbye to his little girl and the reaction of the children in the audience as the monster appears. It's hard not to see in this choice of scenes a comment, accidental perhaps, on censorship. What is cut out is precisely the scene that would answer Ana's question, at least on one level. In Jonathan Lake Crane's reading:

He accidentally drowns his new friend when he treats her like the beautiful flowers they have been tossing on the water. [...] The Creature was not acting with evil intent. He errs in logic but not in feeling. His actions are the natural consequence of trying to figure out how he should play with the girl. He meant to treat her as delicately as she treated the lovely mountain flowers (91).

Ana intuIts the monster's goodness in Boris Karloff's portrayal,33 but has no explanation for the evil that comes of his actions. In censoring the scene, Hollywood acerbates the confusion between good and evil (as it makes the film pull its punch with the tacked-on ending) just as the relentless censorship of Franco's regime simplified those categories in history and society (and created grotesque absurdities, infamously in the case of the substitution of incest for adultery in Mogambo).34 The simplification was particularly evident in relationship to the Civil War, which is the foundational ellipsis in El espíritu de la colmena as well as in El Sur. The censored scene would confirm Ana's sense that there is good in what is deemed "evil" by authority. By analogy the audience, particularly its first Spanish audience, still trained to read
between the lines by the literalness of the censors, could read much the same lesson in relation to the history of the war, represented in the figure of the maquis.35

The scenes seen and overheard from Frankenstein thus set the protagonist on her quest, at the same time as they build up a complexity of resonances between the movie, the world portrayed in El espiritu, and that of the audience. The selection of visual and auditory quotes point to Erice's ability to get maximum suggestiveness from a few frames. He has chosen the most striking moments in Whale's film: the scene with the little girl is undoubtedly one of Whale's best, and the image of the father walking through the town with his dead child in his arms is unforgettable. A cut to the reactions of the children in the audience allows us to ascertain that these scenes have a powerful impact on them.

We are filled in on the crucial dilemma and conflict at the heart of the film through the father's overhearing the soundtrack from his study: "¿Qué pasaría si nos fueramos más allá de lo desconocido? No ha ambicionado nunca mirar más allá de las nubes o de la estrellas, o saber lo que hace crecer los árboles y cambiar las sombras en luz?" ["Where should we be if nobody tried to find out what lies beyond? Have you never wanted to look beyond the clouds and the stars or to know what causes trees to bud? And what changes darkness to light?"] (EC, 49; seq. 9). The words distract him from his magazine (Mundo, significantly) and seem to offer a temptation as well as a distraction. As the dialogue between Dr. Frankenstein and his former mentor reveals the danger of the mad scientist's ambition, Fernando is absorbed. We have already heard Teresa describe their situation: "Las noticias que recibimos de fuera son tan pocas y tan confusas" ["the news we get is so rare and so confusing"] (43; seq. 4). Later we will see Fernando trying to find out "what lies beyond" the closed borders of his country by tuning in to a shortwave radio. The juxtaposition of Dr. Frankenstein's
words and Fernando's study connects the former's grand ambition to the latter's longing to see beyond his limited world.

This kind of juxtaposition is at work through the film. The shot of the father with his child is the last scene taken directly from Whale's film. Yet as Ana considers the possibility of the monster as a spirit who takes various forms, images of monsters proliferate in the film. A quick cut between the prologue of the Frankenstein film and an extreme close up of Fernando in his beekeeper's hat earlier suggested an identification of the father and the monster, which is reinforced by the auditory connection between the girls' conversation about Frankenstein and the sound of their father's footsteps above them. Later, at school, Ana is confronted with another creature whose body parts can be taken on and off, an aid to the study of anatomy that the teacher calls Don José (seq. 17). She is entrusted by the teacher to put on his cardboard eyes and "por primera vez "don José" mira "de verdad" a las niñas. Y Ana, muy cerca de esa figura ambigua, se siente, más que ninguna, intensamente mirada" ["for the first time “Don José” really looks at the girls. And Ana, standing very close to this ambiguous figure, feels, more than anyone, intensely watched"] (EC, 67). The suggestive scene in which Ana is mesmerized then dwarfed by a train is another monstrous apparition. To the six year old, a footstep three times the size of her own is evidence of the presence of the monster, and she takes the fugitive to be the spirit in one of his guises.

Many of these echoes of the monster theme come up in the treatment of Fernando, who is related to the monster through editing, sound and mise en scène. The subtlety of these suggestions is well illustrated in the scene where the beekeeper gets into bed after a long night of writing (seq. 16). The sequence is shot without showing Fernando. The focus is rather on Teresa, lying awake in their bed. Fernando appears as sounds off, first his footsteps, then the door opening, the mattress creaking
as he sits down, his shoes dropping to the floor. What we see of him is a shadow cast large against the wall behind the bed. Off in the distance, we hear the sound of a train. Teresa closes her eyes. The sequence demonstrates Erice's compact style: an economy of means that is nevertheless rich in evocative details. The two minute scene communicates the unease and alienation of the couple, as well as something of the source in the sound of the train, where Teresa had earlier dropped off a letter. At the same time, Fernando's shadowy absence in the frame tells of his relationship to his family. As Erice puts it:

Las figuras de los padres se nos aparecían como una especie de sombras [...] pienso que para quienes en su infancia han vivido a fondo ese vacío que, en tantos aspectos básicos, heredamos los que nacimos inmediatamente después de una guerra civil como la nuestra, los mayores eran con frecuencia eso: un vacío, una ausencia.

The parents seemed sort of like shadows to us [...] I think that for those of us who as children experienced profoundly the void, which we inherited —those of us born right after our civil war— in many ways from our parents, the adults were often just that: a void, an absence37 (143-144).

Finally, the sequence suggests the bodiless "spirit" that his daughters' conversation about the Frankenstein movie has conjured up. In these frames it is the beekeeper who is "the spirit of the beehive."

Where the connection isn't subtle it is clearly related to Ana and Isabel's reactions and takes on a comic aspect.38 When Isabel explains her theory that neither the monster nor the little girl are dead because "at the movies evrything is a lie" and that the monster is in fact a spirit who disguises himself at will and can be beckoned by his friends, the sound of footsteps seems conjured by her whispered "Soy Ana, soy Ana..." ["It's Ana, It's Ana"39] (seq. 14). The girls exchange a look of surprise,
and the camera moves upstairs to Fernando's study, where the beekeeper is singularly unmonstrous, making tea (seq. 15).

Regardless of the political position one ascribes to Fernando,40 clearly for the girls he represents a repressive authority, both feared and loved. It is not insignificant that the scenes of anarchic play — the children having a pillow fight, imitating their father's shaving ritual, their tracking of the train, Isabel's feigning death and her experimentation, as well as the ritualized leaps over the bonfire — all take place during the father's absence. The morning of the beekeeper's departure there is an explosion of disorder: the girls play and dawdle instead of getting ready for school. Says Milagros: "Ya está, ya está armada la república" ["That's it, the Republic is armed!"41](EC, 82; seq. 23). The father is thus associated to the monolithic order established under the patriarchy of Franco's authoritarian regime. Kinder's assessment of the film is in this sense accurate:

It demonstrates that under the pressures of a war that divided the nation, the family, and the individual, an entire generation of impressionable children felt a mixture of love and fear for repressive patriarchs — a combination that generated fantasies of heroic allegiance and rebellious patricide and that led them to identify with both the victim and the monster (128).

As I have shown, the ambiguity in the characterization of Fernando makes him both "victim and monster" for the spectator; Ana, however, turns away from her father towards the monster. She has no fantasies of heroic allegiance or patricide, but rather an desire to escape her father and his world. She sees him as complicit in the murder of the fugitive, and therefore disassociates herself from his binary values. Even in the peaceful scene where the girls gather mushrooms with their father — one of the few where the lighting is bright and almost flatly naturalistic, and the only one in which
there is a dialogue between father and daughter— he delivers judgment ("good mushroom, bad mushroom") and death (seq.21).

Mortimore links this scene with the one in which the mother explains that there are good and bad spirits: "a Manicheism irreprehensible if one accepts that the war was won by the 'bad' side and lost by the 'good' side" (200). This same Manicheism, with inverted terms, was part of the discourse of public life until the end of Franco's reign: "Franco's vision of himself as the saviour of Spain in a Crusade to rescue 'true' Spain from 'anti'-Spain and its foreign allies was to set its mark on the history of Spain for four decades" (Carr, 18). Absolutist divisions, it is suggested, are something the parents share with the regime. Fernando Savater describes the crushing of the mushroom as "un involuntario símbolo del tratamiento que reciben los enemigos de la colmena" ["an involuntary symbol of the treatment that enemies of the hive receive"] adding "¿Cómo no guarda mayor solidaridad con su hermana réproba del reino vegetal? ¿No ha sido él también triturado en parte como una seta ponzosa?" ["Why doesn't he have more solidarity with his reprobate sister from the plant world? Hasn't he too been crushed like a poisonous mushroom?"] (EC. 21)

This last question is an essential one, since, although Fernando represents authoritarian order, he seems as much a victim of it as a participant in it. The visual associations of Fernando with the Frankenstein monster connote in him a sympathetic victim of his circumstances. The spectator is witness to the father as more than an authority figure. We see a man trying to reach outside of the rigid limits set by the new regime. A man who is out of time, working all night, out of touch with his wife, distanced from his children. If Fernando is a monster, he is one in the sense of Gil de Biedma's ghosts, a dead soul born of a savage conflict and Franco's subsequent drive to blanket over the profound differences in Spanish society through dictatorship.
Whether Fernando has identified at one point with the victors or not, he is now living a shell of an existence, permeated by silence and isolation.

While it is primarily the father who is visually associated to Frankenstein, in terms of the narrative of Whale's film, it is in Ana's journey that the parodic reworking takes place. When she discovers that the fugitive, who she believes has appeared in response to her evocations of the spirit, has been killed, she takes flight. In frames that are reminiscent of the closing ones of *Frankenstein*, her mother and sister call for her from the balcony, while the men organize a search party (seq. 47-48). Ana here becomes the hunted, the other who has stepped outside the norms of the hive: "Quien se sale realmente de la colmena se convierte en monstruo en espíritu"
["Whoever leaves the hive becomes in spirit a monster"] (Savater, *EC*, 18). Like the monster she wanders a landscape of ruins; like Dr. Frankenstein, she comes to confront the creation of her imagination. The scene of the little girl by the water is played again, with Ana and a Frankenstein who strangely resembles her father. She is not killed, however. The screenplay well describes the encounter:

[El monstruo] levanta sus poderosos brazos, como si quisiera estrecharla entre ellos. Este gesto está cargado de ambigüedad: imposible saber si encierra amparo o destrucción, o las dos cosas a la vez. Ana se mueve un poco, levantándose levemente, como si quisiera refugiarse entre los brazos del monstruo. Este se queda inmóvil, los brazos suspendidos en el aire. Ana cierra lentamente los ojos.

[The monster] raises his powerful arms, as though wanting to embrace her. The gesture is charged with ambiguity: there is no way of knowing if they hold solace or destruction, or both. Ana moves a little, as though wanting to take refuge in the arms of the monster. He remains immobile, his arms suspended in mid-air. Ana closes her eyes (126).
This takes place by a river, in a forest that has a touch of the magical. In the morning Ana is discovered by a ruin. There is thus a visual matching of the landscapes from *Frankenstein*, on the one hand the encounter by the river, on the other the ruins where the monster is hunted down. The extent to which these scenes are meant to evoke the Whale film is attested to in a scene cut in the final edit, which had Fernando returning to the town carrying his child in his arms. What is the outcome of the encounter? What happened to Ana? How did she get from the forest to the ruin? The ellipsis in *Frankenstein* is matched by an ellipsis in these parodied scenes. The spectator is in the same position as Ana at the beginning of the film, seeking to give meaning to a chain of events when key scenes are left out.

Indeed, though the spectator has a more privileged view and more information than any of the characters, seeing the encounter with Frankenstein, for example, from Ana's point of view, she is much the same position as the characters. Since these do not communicate verbally, and in fact hardly at all, the spectator has to intuit, as do the characters, what is going on.

The film is thus structured around a series of parallels, not only between the parodied film and its own narrative, but between the experience of the characters and that of the spectator in watching the film. Before exploring more of these parallels, however, I want to close this section on *Frankenstein* with a few comments on the ambiguous nature of the Whale film. As I have been arguing, there is an ambiguity that is at the heart of Erice's film, one which while seeming to play into the Manichean view of its time—who is the good guy? who is evil?—refuses to offer answers that would satisfy such a view. It refuses, to use Andrew's term, to be neatly "placed," and instead offers the viewer an experience of ambiguity and isolation. Without claiming that *Frankenstein* is the same kind of masterpiece, it is curious to
see how it allows for an "anti-reading" which is wholly sympathetic to the monster and critical of the supposed heroes.

Jonathan Lake Crane has undertaken such a reading in an amusing and enlightening book entitled *Terror and Everyday Life*. The chapter I am concerned with, "Monsters," is headed by an epigraph that reads "that there is a we and a they will have to be mended before long." This mending of the "we" and "they" is precisely what Crane claims to be the accomplishment of Universal's monster movies of the thirties:

Universal reconfigured the strict moral balance between human protagonist and eerie antagonists by radically redrawning the boundaries between good and evil and mortal and monster [...] Even if we sometimes wish they were dead, we oftentimes end up sympathizing with these abnormal beasts and their miserable plight [...] Universal films made it much harder to fully loath the monster (72).47

Indeed, it might be said that Universal made it possible to love (though still fear) the monster. This, of course, is Ana's reaction: a mixture of sympathy and wariness. Crane constructs a logical argument for considering Frankenstein's enemies "reprobates" who in unnecessarily harming him place themselves outside our system of moral reference (88). By torturing Dr. Frankenstein's creation, they call into question their framework of moral and political governance:

[Dr. ] Frankenstein has literally sown/sewn his own destruction by fusing pieces of rebellious property that fight being forced to serve an illegitimate patriarchy [...] When the repressed returns, it is as the most hideous prole imaginable (94).48

Given this sympathetic treatment of the monster, the restoration of order in the tacked on ending is fraudulent, since it has proven to be cruel and morally bankrupt.
Yet the matter is not so simple, because, although the scene with Maria "makes us completely accept the idea that the Monster is intrinsically good" (90), it also poses the murky question of what to do with a creature who kills little girls (however accidentally).\textsuperscript{49} Crane's conclusion is rather cautious and is interesting to consider in relation to Ana's reaction to her encounter with the myth:

Anyone who has seen \textit{Frankenstein} can never again automatically assume that the monster is everything we are not [...] after \textit{Frankenstein} we must reserve judgment and once again pose the question of whether or not the worlds visited by beasts deserve to exist unchanged (96).

Whale's film thus poses a central ambiguity by dividing the spectator's sympathy between the monster's feelings and the humans' safety, and questions an order that creates monsters. \textit{El espíritu} ponders the same dilemma, questioning whether there is, in fact, a "we" and "they," victors and vanquished.

Parallels and Repetitions

This thematic meshing is, as I have shown, at work in the stylistic echoes. In this complexly patterned film, however, the matching that takes place between frames from \textit{Frankenstein} and \textit{El espíritu} is paralleled in frames that are repeated with difference from within the latter film. Repetition is set up as a norm in the film very early. In the early sequences we see the same take of the house three times. First we see Fernando go in, and the camera stays on the house until he is close to the door before following him in. Then the girls go in, running and screaming. The camera stays fixed on the house, and there is a fade to night. The repetitions serve to illustrate the segmentation of the family, who seem to exist as separate units. As daring static shots that demand the same quality of attention as paintings, they create a hypnotic stillness.
The strongest testing of the forward movement of the plot comes in the shot of Teresa on her bicycle going down a hill. Repeated exactly, at a mid-point in the film, it seems to deny the passage of time, as well as the progression of events (seq.31). Yet here too, there is a thematic relationship. Post-war Spain has been characterized as silenced, immutable, in which time hangs heavy. As Hopewell points out, "the silence is broken by the notes Teresa picks out on a piano or by the gun shots which end the fugitive's life — the sounds of boredom and death" (207). Clustered around this shot of Teresa is a series of scenes that emphasize the tedium of afternoons. At school, a poem by Rosalía de Castro is read in a Castillian translation as the teacher stares off into the distance; the words, along with the heavy clanging sound in the soundtrack suggest oppressive deadness: "¡Aire! que el aire me falta" ["Air! I need air!"] (seq. 28). After a cut to Ana performing her ritual by the well, we hear the discordant piano sounds as Ana flips through old photographs that reveal her father to have been a student of Miguel de Unamuno (30). Teresa closes the piano and we cut to the repeat shot of her on her bicycle, thus encircling her in a cycle of "zarandeo perpetuo, enigmático" ["perpetual, enigmatic agitation"] (EC, 58).

Most of the repetitions, however, show change or interrelationship. The scene that follows Teresa's, for example, is of Ana staring into the beehive her father keeps in his studio for observation (seq. 32). Compositionally it repeats an earlier close-up of Fernando watching the beehive with the same distant fascination. Another parallel between father and daughter is established in the previously mentioned shots of Fernando writing and then Ana typing at his desk (seq. 15, 34). These shots, once again, are very similar in composition. Even the scene of the girls' parody of shaving has its echo in the scene with the Civil Guard.
The parallels that mark change suggest that Ana's encounter with the monster is the turning point in the film. There is a reversal in the relationships between the sisters and the parents: while initially Isabel takes delight in telling tall tales about a spirit she doesn't believe in, when Ana is moved out of her room and she is left alone, she is afraid of what might come through the window (seq.55). Where previously Isabel had pretended to have been killed by the monster and didn't respond to Ana's coaxing (and then played the spirit with the beekeeper's hat and gloves earlier identified with Frankenstein), after her encounter with the Frankenstein monster (and possible symbolic death), it is Ana who doesn't respond to her sister's coaxing (seq. 34, 53). The relationship between the parents also evolves. They are drawn together, or rather, Teresa moves closer to her husband as a result of Ana's running away. Again, nothing is set out explicitly: what we have are before and after parallels: before, Teresa sits and writes a letter (seq.4). After, she sits and watches it burn in the fire (seq.49). Before, Fernando falls asleep alone at his desk (seq. 15). After, Teresa takes his glasses off and puts a sweater over his shoulders (the only show of warmth between them) (seq. 56).54

By setting up these parallels rather than neatly tying the loose ends, the film gives the spectator an active role in constructing a narrative and filling in blanks, thus contributing to its haunting and mysterious quality.

Editing

Another stylistic element that contributes to the mysterious feeling of the film is the elliptical editing. I have alluded to the careful and evocative juxtapositions effected through editing, along with the brilliant sequence that tells the fate of the fugitive without showing anything but the facade of the abandoned building he is staying in. As Angel Camiña comments, it is a perfect example of ellipsis:
In a brief shot, you see and hear shots in the night, and in the next shot, now in the daylight, you see the sign "Everything for the Fatherland" [the official slogan of the Civil Guard] No other explanation is needed; everything has already been said regarding what happened to the fugitive (121).

Other ellipses, however, create a plurality of possible interpretations. What is blurred, notably, is the sequencing and causal links between events. Further confusion is caused by the fact that parallel techniques are used to opposite effect. As Kinder describes succinctly, the morning after Frankenstein is shown, "a series of jump cuts to the same shot but each with a slightly different arrangement of children [heading into the school], creat[es] brief ellipsis of indeterminate length" (131). The montage suggests a regular school day, (and makes this spectator think of the activity of a beehive) (seq. 17). At the end of the school day, however, when Isabel leads Ana to the abandoned well where she claims the spirit lives, a jump cut is used to suggest the uncanny, and creates an ambiguity in terms of time (seq. 19).

Initially, as the jump cuts are used to bring the girls closer to the well and the abandoned shelter, the viewer associates the sequence with the preceding one. The camera, which has not changed angle or position, is focused on the building and the surrounding field. A jump cut suddenly brings Ana into the scene, as the screenplay puts it, "como llovida del cielo" ["from out of the sky"] (70). A perspicacious viewer will note that she has different colour tights on, but it is impossible to determine the duration of the ellipsis. If her sudden presence startles us, it is because the film has established as a norm that characters enter the static frame from the side. Ana appears directly in front of the camera, as if sneaking up from behind. That there is a consciousness of the interplay between the position of the camera and the character is suggested in the notes to the scene in the screenplay: after Ana calls into the well, "como acudiendo a esta señal, la cámara da un salto enorme, atraviesa la frontera.
prohibida" ["as though responding to this signal, the camera makes an enormous leap, crossing the forbidden boundary"] (70). The combination of an old technique used to a different end and the breaking of an intrinsic convention has a jarring effect that contributes to our sense that we are entering the realm of the mysterious, perhaps Ana's subjective view,\textsuperscript{56} certainly her private ritualistic world.

The suggestion of the possibility of a subjective and mythical world is also at work in the scene where Ana goes out at night (seq.38-41). We see a shot of the trees and the moon. Ana gazes up at it, closes her eyes. We hear the distant sound of the train, a whistle. A traveling shot of the train tracks is gradually superimposed over Ana's face. Then we are with the train in the early morning and a man, the fugitive, who jumps from the train, stumbles and makes his way towards the abandoned house. The sequence has a rhythm that feels much faster than the rest of the film. There is a fade to black followed by shot of Ana entering her room.

The temporal blurring occurs because Ana comes in the half-light of dawn, while the fugitive has made his leap in brighter light. Nevertheless the montage suggests a causal relationship between the two. Ana has, after all, been evoking the spirit, as the concentrated closing of her eyes suggests. The sequences take us into a symbolic realm, where we are as close to the oneiric as to the everyday.

Myth, lyrical structure

Thus from a beginning that seems to promise a neo-realist story we end up somewhere else. The last shot of Ana going to the window and calling out "Soy Ana, soy Ana" is less a closure of the narrative than a suggestive "opening" that provides neither a tying up of loose ends nor an interpretive key.\textsuperscript{57} It is at once linked to an everyday reality and to the mythic possibilities suggested in the elliptical edit. The film does not, in fact, move from the everyday to another level of reality. The opening
credits suggests precisely an anchoring of the mythic in the everyday—at once "once upon a time" and an exact place and time. Not history or myth, but history and myth: the myth of our everyday existence brought to us through the power of Hollywood movies. This is part of the marvel of the film, that it introduces its mystery as ordinary, plausible and grounded in an accurate and perspicacious psychological portrait of a child's point of view. The most fantastic sequences are anchored in Ana's psychological reality; her encounter with the monster being the most extreme example. What might be a kitsch re-enactment is acceptable because it comes so clearly through Ana's eyes.

The mystery of the film can be explained, if one is so disposed. And yet, something in the experience of the film precludes our doing this; there is something in it that spills beyond a logical explanation. What Erice's style evokes is the mythic structure of ordinary life, and in this, some of the magic of childhood.
Notes

1 See "Entrevista con Víctor Erice" in Erice, EC.
2 See for example Fernando Savater's "Riesgos de la iniciación al espíritu" ["Risks of the Initiation of the Spirit"] in Erice, EC.
3 "Peut-être a-t-il eu, comme Unamuno dont on aperçoit la photo dans son album, la faiblesse de prendre la part des vainqueurs par peur de la révolution sociale, réalisant ensuite tout ce que signifiait la primauté de la force sur le droit" ["Perhaps, like Unamuno whom we glimpse in a photo in his album, in a moment of weakness he took the side of the victors out of fear of social revolution, realizing afterwards what the primacy of force over legality actually meant."] (Larraz, 226).
4 Since the monster has come to be known by his creator's name, references to the latter will be stated as "Dr. Frankenstein" to distinguish between the two.
5 An identification with a supposedly malevolent, death-dealing outcast which refers both to the side which lost the Civil War and to the early intimations of mortality to be found in any growing child" (Hopewell, 209).
6 "The crisis which Ana undergoes is a crisis of identity. She is responding to a deeply felt need to assert herself and establish her independence from the rest of the family, in particular from her father, whom we infer to be a figure inspiring both love and fear in her. Naturally she is unaware of what is really happening" (Riley, 491).
7 "She virtually wishes the fugitive soldier into existence [...] by touching the poisonous mushrooms [sic], she actually frees her mother to throw her unsent letter into the fire" (Glaesser, 250).
8 See Truth and Method 100-150.
9 Hutchinson, 34.
10 Erice describes the process of writing the script as "una labor de decantación de todo el material acumulado" ["a process of decanting the material accumulated"] (EC, 144).
11 Olmi's *The Tree of Wooden Clogs* serves as an interesting contrast to *El espíritu* in this respect. Both made in the seventies, they share a painterly use of light and composition as well as elements of the neo-realist aesthetic. They both begin with almost "ethnographic" specificity, situating the viewer in relation to the daily life of a town. Olmi does not waver from that focus, so that the life of the people begins to build into a kind of an epic, an expansive tapestry taken from the larger story of the history of Italy and the oppression of the peasant. Erice focuses through the everyday to the extraordinary in one little girl's life.

12 This description seems very close to the technique Erice will use in *El sol del membrillo*, a documentary that is not quite about its avowed subject.

13 Bresson is another filmmaker who concentrates on small everyday details to reveal a character: "Bresson places great importance on the revelatory nature of automatic actions and gestures, in particular the way we handle objects in our everyday activities, which may indicate the deeper levels of our unconscious more accurately than the words we utter or the dramatic actions we engage in" (Hanlon, 326). Erice centres these activities on writing, and in Teresa's case the posting of a letter. Note also how Fernando is shown in his daily activities as a beekeeper, the focus on his walk home, his reading of the paper, preparations for tea etc.

14 Comments Álvaro del Amo: "El círculo, cuyo trazo coincide con la trayectoria de recuperación del reloj con música (padre-fugitive-civil guard-father), viene a advertir desgarradamente a Ana que debe renunciar por igual a las respuestas y las reconstrucciones. Su reacción, su huida, supondrá convertir su transida serenidad ante el enigma en una aparición" ["the circle, which coincides with that of the musical watch, (father-fugitive-civil guard-father) comes to painfully signal to Ana that she must renounce both answers and reconstructions. Her reaction, her flight, will mean
transforming her deep serenity before the enigma of an apparition”] (in Erice, EC, 159).

15 Cuadrado gave up film work in 1976 due to blindness. He died in 1980.

16 Erice commented in 1992 that “Creo que la pintura siempre tuvo una íntima relación con el cine, a veces una relación un tanto secreta, de la que no están excluidos los sentimientos de atracción y de rechazo” [“I think that painting has always had an intimate relationship to film, sometimes a rather secret one, which doesn’t exclude feelings of attraction and repulsion”] (E. Fernández-Santos).

17 To call a director "painterly" is not to suggest that he is somehow "unfilmic." Erice will show in El sol del membrillo how closely related painting and film are, at least in Erice's terms, in their attempt to capture light and the obsession with time. Light and the revealing surface of objects are in some ways a shared theme of the visual arts, which, in recent times, given the detachment of painting from the representational, has been the focus of film and photography.

18 According to Hopewell, Erice showed Cuadrado Vermeer paintings before they started shooting (208).

19 This is particularly richly demonstrated in El sol del membrillo.

20 Erice comments on this regarding El sur: "[he] preferido utilizar actores que sean, y no que representen. Los actores naturales son, en lo más profundo de sí mismos, los personajes de la película. Yo siempre trato de romper los modelos estereotipados de interpretación, y de recabar del actor lo mejor de sí mismo" [“I prefer to use actors who are rather than represent. Natural actors are, in the depths of their being, the characters in the film. I always try to break the stereotypical models of interpretation, and to get the actor to give the best of himself”] ("Los males", 131)

21 "Automatism or atomism: such are the principal roles style can play in today's interpretation" (Bordwell, MM, 261).
Another contrast that suggests Erice's conception of "acting as being" in its early stages are the short films that comprise Los desafíos [The Challenges]. While the first two episodes by Claudio Guerin and Jose Luis Egea are very much actor driven, Erice gives a starring role to a chimpanzee. In his third film, he uses non-actors entirely and they are introduced in the credits with the words "con la presencia de..." ["With the presence of..."]

The location for the film is, of course, rooted in the practice of the time. It was not so unusual for a small town to project films in the town hall since this was often the only space available.

The shot dehumanizes him, showing nothing more than his toes in the foreground. At the same time, it emphasizes his solitude and status as outcast.

"Horror cycles are likely to occur in periods of pronounced social stress in which horror fictions serve to dramatize or express the prevailing malaise" (Carroll, PH, 210).

The title also evokes an echo of the Francoist propagandist film entitled El espíritu de la raza which was based on a story by Franco himself. Given the above, the reference is obviously ironic. A further intertext evoked by the title is Cela's La colmena [The Hive], though the relationship is more tenuous.

Miguel Rubio quotes Erice as saying that the title of the film attempts to capture the enigmatic aspect of life, since the title is "a term invented by Maurice Maeterlinck in his book The Life of Bees in order to describe this all-powerful, enigmatic, and paradoxical spirit that bees always obey and that man's ratiocination has never been able to understand" (quoted in Deveny, 119).

The term is Linda Hutcheon's.

"The prologue is obviously a bit of corny hokum; whoever sees it has already paid the entrance fee and found a choice seat. Moving a barker from outside the tent, where
a crowd must be baited to enter, to the inside of the venue changes the meaning of the pitch. It signals that the pact between audience and filmmaker in producing workable horror films has been understood by the studio. The only reason why a shill is put in a film is to wink at the audience and say "Here comes the show!" (Crane, 77).

30 All quotes from Frankenstein are taken from Richard Anobile’s transcription.

There were, of course, censorship pressures in Hollywood as well. For a discussion of the Catholic Church’s attempt to contain Hollywood’s "immorality" see Gregory Black’s Hollywood Censored: Morality Codes, Catholics and the Movies.

31 Ana will, of course, do the exact opposite, taking the movie dead seriously.

32 “Su ausencia, a nivel dramático, provoca una elipsis forzosa; elipsis, que, al ser integrada en el montaje dentro de la continuidad visual de la película española, parecía desdoblarse acentuando la impresión de que algo importante se nos escamoteaba” [“Its absence, on a dramatic level, provokes a forced ellipsis; an ellipsis which, being integrated into the visual continuity of the Spanish film through editing, seemed to multiply, accentuating the impression that something important was escaping us”] (Erice, EC, 49).

There is a mistaken impression among critics of the film that it was only the Spanish version that was cut, while in fact it was Universal that here acted as censor. It’s interesting to note that the initial ending of the film, in which Frankenstein perished with his creature, was also deemed unacceptable and a "happy end" where the baron confirms the marriage of his son was tacked on.

33 Karloff’s performance is universally acclaimed. According to Richard Anobile:

"Though surrounded by mediocre, and sometimes laughable performances and stilted direction, Karloff manages to transcend what would normally be disastrous distractions for an audience. The monster is the only character in the film whose vivid personality remains with the reviewer. Though caked with several layers of make-up,
Karloff's face manages to convey the full range of human emotions [...] Karloff's sensitive performance constantly reminded the audience that they were seeing a creation whose origins were human” (6).

34 For a discussion of censorship in the Franco era see Román Gubern y Domène Font, *Un cine para el cadalso*.

35 The damage done by making the devastating experience of the Civil War into something unspeakable—a void that creates a gulf between the children born after the war and their parents is explored in Erice's second film, *El sur*.

36 Riley, among other critics, points this out (492).

37 It should be noted that although the context is post-war Spain this experience of children and their parents occupying separate worlds is universal. Recent films such as *Heavenly Creatures* (1994) have explored the darker side of this, *La Fracture du myocarde* [*Cross my Heart*] (1990) the more positive. *El espíritu* no doubt gains much of its appeal from its careful and accurate portrayal of the "continent of childhood," in Ana's early formation of a sense of self through the process of withdrawl from the terms of her father's world.

38 While the film cannot be described as comic there are flashes of humour, particularly associated with the initial complicity between the two sisters. There is a giddy joy between them; also one cannot fail to be amused by Ana's awed comparison of the fugitive's footprint with her own.

39 The English translation is generally given as “I am Ana,” but I there is an implication of calling to the monster in Spanish: “it's me, Ana,” as in the subtitles.

40 It should be mentioned that Teresa's political position is clearer, as the letter she burns is addressed to someone in a Red Cross refugee camp. Given the couple's estrangement, there is no reason to necessarily suppose their political sympathies are the same.
The subtitle reads: "The outbreak of the Republic!"

This same Manicheism will be seen in El sur where the fluidity of the categories is more directly expressed in the words of Milagros who is responding to Estrella's question as to which was the "bad" side during the war: "Mira, pá que tú te dé cuenta. Cuando la República...¡bueno! antes de la guerra, tu abuelo era de ló maló y tu padre de ló bueno; pero luego, cuando ganó Franco, tu abuelo se convirtió en un santo y tu padre en un demonio. ¿Vé, lo que son lá cosa de ese mundo? Palabra y ná má que palabra" ["Look, so you understand. During the Republic...well, before the war, your grandfather was with the bad guys and your father was with the good guys, but then when Franco won your grandfather became a saint and your father a devil. You see what things are in this world? Words, just words."] (seq. 15).

John Gillett points this out. The part is actually played by Jose Villasante.

Which isn't, of course, limited to Franco's Spain. Hollywood's black and white hatted heroes attest to the pervasiveness of this simplistic binary thinking in America, and elsewhere, given the world-wide popularity of these movies.

Raúl Ruiz has a wonderful article on possible anti-readings of movies, such as watching gladiator films for evidence of the Twentieth Century (like Rolex watches and trains). What Crane is doing is not so "anti" since it doesn't imply ignoring the plot line.

The quote is from Julian Beck's last workbooks in Semiotext(e), 1987.

As Crane also points out, the monster came to be something endearing rather than feared: "only sly, small children who have skirted precipitously early bedtimes appear fascinated by Frankenstein's hulking creation. For a more experienced audience, a sense of winsome nostalgia, not rekindled fear, accompanies the experience of re-viewing Universal classics" (72). The evolution of Mary Shelley's "hideous progeny" has gone from Romantic outcast to existential anti-hero to Abbott and
Costello straightman and finally, despite Kenneth Branaugh’s best efforts to renew our sense of horror, mascot for “Frankenberry” cereal.

48 Thibaudeau discusses some of these echoes from a similar point of view: "Dans l'analyse historique que propose Jean-Jacques Leclercle du roman — écrit peu de temps après la Révolution Française —, le monstre est la métaphore du peuple livré à lui-même qui commet des crimes non par cruauté mais par une réaction à une oppression sociale. Il me semble que l'on peut pousser plus loin la comparaison: en effet, dans le rapport créateur/créature, la rébellion vient d[u docteur] Frankenstein, mais c'est le monstre qui est la victime du châtiment qu'elle entraîne [...] pourquoi ne pas envisager que le savant manipulateur [...] incarne la bourgeoisie, et sa créature, le peuple, l'instrument de sa révolte?" [“In the historical analysis of the novel proposed by Jean-Jacques Leclercle — written shortly after the French Revolution —, the monster is the metaphor of the people left to itself who commits crimes not out of cruelty but as a reaction to social oppression. It seems to me that we could push this comparison a little further: actually, in the relationship between creator and creature, the rebellion comes from [Dr.] Frankenstein, but it’s the monster who is the victim of the punishment which ensues [...] why not perceive the learned manipulator as incarnating the bourgeoisie, and its creature, the people, the instrument of his revolt?”] (323)

49 The problem of the good hearted brute is the theme of more than a few films, notably Of Mice and Men.

50 The fact that the poem is read in translation and not in its original Galician is itself a pointed comment on Franco’s suppression of plurality in the peninsula.

51 Thibaudeau comments: "C'est précisément par l'alternance régulière entre le jour et la nuit que, paradoxalement, le mouvement du temps s'immobilise, car ce qui apparaît clairement, c'est que la temporalité de El espíritu de la colmena est fondée sur la
répétition du même, sur la structure cyclique" ["It’s precisely by the regular alternance between day and night that, paradoxically, the movement of time is immobilized, because what is clear is that the temporality of El espíritu de la colmena is based on the repetition of the same [thing], on a cyclical structure"] (39).

52 While many elements emphasize disunity among the family members, Ana and her parents are all shown in similar poses writing, as Vicente Molina Foix points out. This relates to the film’s self-conscious stance as work of art ("Once upon a time...") More on this in later chapters.

53 "An ironic reversal of her deception," notes Riley (495).

54 Thibaudeau reads this scene in an entirely different light: "on voit Teresa entrer dans le bureau pour couvrir les épaules de son mari endormi, refermer son cahier et souffler la flamme de la lampe à pétrole; cette scène évoque, de par la lenteur des gestes et leur signification (recouvrir, fermer, éteindre) un rituel d’ensevelissement" ["We see Teresa enter the office to cover the shoulders of her sleeping husband, close his notebook and blow out the oil lamp; this scene evokes, in the slowness of the gestures and their significance (covering, closing, extinguishing) a burial ritual"] (115).

55 Kinder notes the contrasting brightness of the shot. The lighting maintains its ocre tone, however, in almost all the sequences, save the mushroom gathering.

56 As Kinder suggests (131).

57 I use the term thinking of the connotations with which Cortázar imbued it. In "Some Aspects of the Short Story," for example, he describes photography as a "cutting out a piece of reality, setting certain limits, but so that this piece will work as an explosion to fling open a much wider reality, like a dynamic vision that spiritually transcends the camera’s field of vision [...] to choose and delimit an image or event that’s significant not just in and of itself, but able to work upon the viewer [...] as a
sort of *opening*, a fermentation that moves intelligence and sensibility out toward something far beyond the visual anecdote the photo contains" (280). While he is discussing the short story versus the novel, it is an accurate description of his own technique, which is in some ways similar to Erice's. In "El perseguidor" ["The Pursuer"] he will create a childlike rebellious anti-hero in Johnny, who, not unlike Ana, sees holes where society sees solid foundations.
Hay en el mundo unas islas que ejercen sobre los viajeros una irresistible y misteriosa fascinación. Pocos son los hombres que las abandonaron después de haberlas conocido; la mayoría dejan que sus cabellos se vuelvan blancos en los mismos lugares donde desembarcaron; hasta el día de su muerte, a la sombra de las palmeras, bajo los vientos alisos, algunos acarician el sueño de un regreso a su país natal que jamás cumplirán. Estas son las Islas del Sur. Cuentan que en ellas estuvo en tiempos El Paraíso.

There are islands that exert an irresistible and mysterious fascination over travelers. Few are those men who abandon them after having known them; most let their hair go grey in the very place they disembarked; until the day of their death, in the shade of palm trees, beneath the trade winds, some cherish the dream of a return to their homeland which they will never fulfill. These are the Islands of the South. They say that that was where Paradise used to be.

(Original the last scene of the screenplay of El sur)

Que se puede amar que no sea una sombra
[What can we love that is not a shadow]
(Hölderlein, quoted at the beginning of Adelaida García Morales's El sur)
Chapter 2
Repetition and Silence: *El sur*

Erice's second feature takes up these themes of myth, movies and the everyday. But if *El espíritu de la colmena* is an extraordinary film at once for its openness and the perfection of its intricate structure, *El sur* is rather a truncated masterpiece. Based on Adelaida Morales García's novella of the same name, it was shot in 1983 amidst controversy and rumours of problems on the set. Although the exact circumstances have not been discussed, it seems that the differences between Erice and his producer, Elías Querejeta, stemmed from the latter's worries about the film's budget and length. A few weeks before Cannes, Querejeta, the influential producer with whom Erice had worked since *Los desafíos*, asked the director to edit what he had filmed up to that point, although a great deal of the screenplay was yet to be shot. Erice did so, hoping that Querejeta might be convinced to allow for the rest of the shoot to proceed as planned. He wasn't, and the film was shown at Cannes as is.¹

Conceding his disappointment, Erice made a terse statement that speaks volumes on the artistic constraints of filmmakers: "soy consciente de la necesidad de que la empresa que ha financiado la preparación y el rodaje de la película recupere su inversión" ["I am conscious of the need of the company which has financed this film to recover its investment"] ["Los males," 131]. He notes in another interview, however, that "el comportamiento del cineasta empieza por asumir sus propios límites" ["the behaviour of the filmmaker begins with accepting his limitations"] (Diario 16, 12/05/92). "La única pena," he says "es que la empresa no haya querido llegar hasta el final del viaje" ["the only thing that’s too bad is that the company wasn’t willing to go to the end of the journey"] ["Los males," 132].

However lamentable its absence, one cannot wish or imagine the second half of the film into existence, since neither the shooting script nor the novella on which it
The film can only be dealt with as it exists on its own. Nevertheless, if, as I have tried to show in the last chapter, Erice is a careful craftsman who builds his films through echoes, repetitions and variations, it seems rather absurd to consider that the film is more perfect for being left unfinished, as some critics have affirmed. El sur has defects that stem directly from its abrupt end, as Erice recognizes, principally because, unlike the ellipsis at the heart of El espíritu de la colmena, the one in El sur is in part accidental.

Perhaps because the film was conceived with commercial marketability in mind, its narrative is less elliptical and more straightforward. It is in some sense an update on El espíritu de la colmena, sharing not only many themes but also plotlines. El sur focuses once again on a young girl's maturation. Set in 1957, it is framed by the grown up voice of Estrella whose father's suicide has been discovered in the opening shots of the film. The film then enters into a flashback, taking us from Estrella's childhood fascination with her water-divining father to her adolescent disillusion. At eight, Estrella is devoted to her father, who seems to possess mystical powers. He eventually teaches her to divine, and makes what Estrella considers an important sacrifice by setting aside his Republican aversion to the church to attend her first communion. Her separation from him begins when she discovers another woman in his life, a movie star named Irene Ríos, whom her father has known as Laura. The failed extra-marital relationship leads to a deterioration of her parents' marriage. Unable to rekindle his relationship with Laura, Agustín sinks into despair as Estrella becomes an adolescent wishing nothing more than to reach adulthood to escape the oppressive deadness of her parents' lives.

Like El espíritu de la colmena then, El sur follows a disconnected family, the latter tracing its disintegration over a longer period. As befits a film that purports to be based on memory, the film condenses the ordinary into single images and develops
high (and low) points at length. This is striking in the treatment of Estrella's mother (Julia) contrasted with that of her father, whose presence pervades these highlights. Julia is shown in domestic poses, presented in a series of cuts. Estrella says in voice-over: "Pasaba conmigo casi todo el día, y, sin embargo, son pocos los recuerdos definidos que de ella en ese tiempo conservo" ["she would spend the whole day with me, yet the definite memories of her during that period are few"] (seq.11). As Arocena points out "en la representación, se opone la duración de lo extraordinario, de los recuerdos que tiene de Agustín, frente a lo cotidiano, los recuerdos de Julia" ["the presentation contrasts the duration of the extraordinary, the memories she has of Agustín, with the everyday, the memories of Julia"] (225). This isn't to suggest that Julia fades into the background; we in fact see almost as many shots of her and Estrella as Agustín and his daughter. It is rather that the mystery of the film lies with Agustín, object of Estrella's childhood fascination. Julia has the more mundane role of providing a grounding for Estrella in contrast to Agustín's flights of fancy.

Erice's films also share elements of visual style, notably the chiaroscuro lighting, the limitation of colour (here browns and dark tones dominate?) and careful composition of shots. Pausing shots of El sur at random reveals a startling number of images that evoke the iconography of the Baroque tradition. Erice uses the language of painting quite deliberately (in his framing of the imagined scene of Estrella's naming, for example) but the sense of painterliness is also a function of his exquisite sense of composition. Erice's films have a sensuality in their visual quality. As Seymour Chatman has said of Antonioni, he is alert to the surface texture of reality, and in seeing through the lens, he shows us more. The desolate cold landscape of Northern Spain has never looked more beautiful.

The film has an imperfect circular structure and a double time line: it begins with Agustín's suicide during Estrella's adolescence, then doubles back to before her
birth. The story then moves forward, going past the point where it began, telling us what occurred after the suicide, but doesn't project the time line much beyond it. It is neatly divided in half by the discovery of another woman in Agustín's life, Irene Ríos, and is bookended by two intense scenes between the father and daughter: the first, when they dance a pasodoble together at her first communion, the second, which proves to be their last meeting, when Agustín invites his daughter to lunch at the Gran Hotel.

This last scene tends to be read as a failed attempt at reconciliation. The interpretation of this scene is fundamental since it provides an essential clue to Agustín's suicide. Most critics do not hesitate to lay the blame for Agustín's suicide on this failed attempt at reconciliation. Carmen Arocena states emphatically: "Es el abandono de Estrella el que le lleva a la muerte" ["It is Estrella's abandonment that leads to his death"] (260). I want to question this view, which is based in part on the Freudian characterization of father/daughter relationships. Many critics, influenced by Peter Evans and Robin Fiddian's seminal 1987 article "Victor Erice's El sur: A Narrative of Star-Cross'd Lovers," see El sur through the lens of Freud. Evans and Fiddian affirm that the plot of El sur coincides with Freud's treatise on female sexuality, notably "Femininity" and "Family Romance." Precisely because of this critical unanimity, it seems appropriate to re-examine the issues as presented by Evans and Fiddian before proceeding to a stylistic analysis of the film that here will focus on the use of sound.

Freud

In "Femininity" and other articles, Freud developed a theory of the development of female sexuality to match the masculine Oedipal narrative he had devised. What he is seeking is to unravel the "problem of woman," perhaps more exactly that caused by women's exclusion from this Oedipal narrative. In short, if
the boy's fear of castration that comes from seeing his mother's lack of a penis is what allows the boy to develop his heterosexual identity, what inspires the little girl, who is without this experience, to transfer her affection from her mother to her father? The answer to the riddle comes from the same source as the boy's castration complex, that is, the mother's lack. In Freud's story of female development the little girl's first phase is characterized by clitoral masturbation ("the phallic stage") but then passes to normal femininity (i.e. vaginal and passive) through the discovery of her own lack of a penis, (and the sad acknowledgment that her clitoris will never grow into "a big visible penis.") This discovery leads to the hostile rejection of the mother for having brought the girl into the world with "inferior genitals":

Her self-love is mortified by the comparison with the boy's far superior equipment and in consequence she renounces her masturbatory satisfaction from her clitoris, repudiates her love for her mother and at the same time not infrequently represses a good part of her sexual trends in general (Essentials, 425).

Since her lack of a penis "debases" her mother (and all women) in value, the child is able to drop her as love object, and turn to her father in hopes he will give her "the longed for penis." Her penis-envy is transferred to a desire for a baby "in accordance with an ancient symbolic equivalence" (426). "With the transference of the wish for a penis-baby on to her father, the girl has entered the situation of the Oedipus complex" (427). Here, presumably, is where we find Estrella in the first part of El sur.13

I have quoted Freud at length since in the "dollar book Freud"14 that has passed into common currency it is easy to forget the masculinist premises that underlie his theory of femininity. The question of the accuracy of this narrative and Freud's characterization of femininity has long been debated, probably from his first public presentation of them, since he often betrays a consciousness of possible criticism from
a "feminist" perspective. My purpose here is not to enter into this debate, but to explore the use made of Freud’s paradigm in relation to El sur, specifically, the passage I have glossed. There seem to me some problems with taking this theory and applying it whole to the film, as Arocena does:

El deseo de Estrella de identificarse con su padre entronca con el complejo de castración puesto al descubierto por Freud; consecuentemente, su deseo de poseer esa fuerza especial que caracteriza al padre se correspondería con la envidia fálica.

Estrella’s desire to identify with her father connects with the castration complex discovered by Freud; consequently, her desire to possess the special power which characterizes the father would correspond to penis envy (217).

As feminists such as Hannah Lerman and others have suggested, Freud’s assumption of the inferiority of women is problematic. His theory of femininity is blinkered, in a sense, by phallocentrism and the unmitigated application of his theory to the film simplifies the more complex feminine coming of age narrated in El sur.

Another questionable element of Freud in relation to El sur is the issue of incest, which he theorized as “childhood phantasy” rather than something perpetrated by adults. In The Assault on Truth, Jeffrey Moussiaef Masson argues that this transference of responsibility from caregivers to childhood eroticism was a denial of the reality of child abuse that Freud had to be aware of. However controversial, Masson’s analysis fits one element of the Freudian readings of El sur, which is the tendency to concentrate on Estrella’s guilt and ignore the father’s responsibility.

It could be argued, however, that El sur is premised on a Freudian view of feminine development. It is quite possible that Erice is in complete agreement with the phallocentrism of Freud. Undoubtedly, Freud exercised a huge influence on creative
impressions — Hitchcock's *Spellbound* comes to mind as a film that parodies the psychological theories of the Austrian doctor. Yet nothing in *El sur* is that direct: the elements that permit a Freudian reading are a close relationship between a father and daughter, a pendulum and a young girl's coming of age. None of this is intrinsically Freudian. The Freudian paradigm is so neat, however, that once the premises are accepted, it proves almost impossible to discard. Arocena's use of Freud in this sense is perfect: Estrella represents a girl's penis-envy, demonstrated in her seeking the power of the phallic pendulum, and her usurping of the paternal power that culminates in her taking his place in his bed. Perhaps she even drove him to suicide (it's her bicycle, after all).

The film's complexity far surpasses such a basic interpretative framework; I would argue that the film contains a human truth deeper than the positivistic theory it is purported to illustrate. Given that *El sur* has so consistently been subjected to one perspective, a different reading restores to it some of its openness. By demonstrating its heteroglossic properties, I am trying to loosen the hold of what has become a totalizing reading of the film. I am not, however, arguing for or against Erice's acceptance of Freud. Such a discussion would have to take place on the ground of the film's interpretation, since the filmmaker has not made any explicit references to Freud in interviews. In the end, the issue is not central; even a film made by the strictest of Freudian theorists can be opened by another perspective.

"Star Cross'd Lovers"

Fiddian and Evans' Freudian reading is more convincing than Arocena's, as they make subtler use of the paradigm. They see the film as a story of star crossed lovers, that is, the father/daughter relationship presented literally as a family romance, on the scale of *Romeo and Juliet* (which appears on a cigarette package in a brief shot in the film) and the romantic novels being read in the film: "we are expected to view
the bond between father and daughter in *El sur* through the delicate lens of ardent intimacy created by these allusions*" (133). In their reading, the film unfolds entirely from Estrella's point of view, and describes her doomed love affair with her father, which culminates at her first communion. Estrella perceives this as a marriage to her father, as she perceives his suicide to be precipitated by her refusal to renew their close bond during their last lunch together. Her guilt leads her to create Irene Ríos, a sexualized projection of herself, so that she can unload some of her guilt onto another "star" in her father's life. Her reconstruction of the past is to fulfill an impossible seduction and allow her to possess her father as she couldn't while he was alive. This isn't an implausible interpretation of *El sur*. Yet several of Freud's problematic assumptions—the inferiority of women, and the transference from adult responsibility to childhood desire—remain like a palimpsest behind Evans and Fiddian's reading, shaping it in a way that needs to be questioned.

Fiddian and Evans view the visual citing of literary works as evidence that the father/daughter relationship is to be read as a tragic love story. That is, *Wuthering Heights* and *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, which are being read in the film, provide a kind of frame through which to interpret the main story. This theory runs the risk of giving more weight to the part than to the whole, and while this is one way to read the allusions, there are others. If we question who is reading what, for example, other connotations are evoked. It is Julia, a woman locked in a loveless marriage, who is reading *Tess*. Is that novel an allusion to her situation? Estrella on the other hand reads *Wuthering Heights* after her father has died.¹⁹ Is the tragic story of these lovers confirmation of her romantic relationship with him or related to Agustín's relationship to Laura (Irene Ríos) and part of Estrella's attempt to decipher her father's history? This possibility is especially resonant when one considers the choice Catherine Earnshaw must make between her suitors, in the accusatory words of Heathcliff:
Why did you betray your own heart, Cathy? I have not one word of comfort—you deserve this. You have killed yourself. Yes, you may kiss me, and cry; and wring out my kisses and tears. They'll blight you—they'll damn you. You loved me—then what right had you to leave me? (Bronte, 194).

Laura might have asked the same question of Agustín. Terry Eagleton's comment that "the act of mauvaise foi by which Catherine trades her authentic selfhood for social privilege is rightly denounced by Heathcliff as spiritual suicide" (401) could also be applied to Agustín. While we have no direct access to the reasons for his suffering, there is a suggestion that he traded, or was forced to trade, a romantic passion for a more stable existence. Agustín is living in a socially secure position, (despite his situation as "represaliado") as a doctor with a respectable domestic wife. Did he trade a more passionate love with an actress for this? The depression and inertia that engulf Agustín suggest this possibility.

Apart from the literary allusions in the film, there are also important filmic references, both direct and indirect. The name of Agustín's lost love, Laura, in the context of the embedded film in which he sees her performing, recalls the noir classic of the same name in which a detective falls in love with a portrait. The film within the film, *Flor en la sombra* [*Flower in the Shade*], as Thibaudeau and others point out, is evocative of both film noir and melodrama. There are similarities in lighting and framing. The use of the mirror, for example, which pervades 40's noir (Welles' *Lady from Shanghai* being the most famous example) is also present in the parodic film, as well as in the one that frames it. Mirrors and portraits—painted and photographed—reflect the surface of things: they are part of our obsession with image, especially, as women writers from Sor Juana onwards have pointed out, the image of women. Agustín, who watches Irene Ríos comb her hair in front of a mirror, and stares at his daughter's photograph in the shop window, is stirred by these idealized versions of
the women he knows. They are, at one step removed, less accessible and more perfect. Like the detective in *Laura*, Agustín grows enraptured with the two-dimensional representation of a much more complex reality.

Erice cites a second film classic as an important influence in the film: "Vi Rebelde sin causa. [...] poco antes de comenzar el rodaje de El Sur" ["I saw Rebel without a Cause [...] just before starting filming *The South*"] ("En el camino," 68).

Erice wrote several articles for a monograph on Nicholas Ray that he put together with José Oliveto in 1986. He is obviously a fan, stating that reviewing Ray's films helped him with his work with actors:

[sus] obras están llenas de sugerencias extraordinarias [...] Para mí Ray ha sido el mejor director de actores de su generación, superior a Elia Kazan que, sin embargo, tiene más fama.

[his] works are full of extraordinary suggestions [...] For me Ray was the best director of actors of his generation, superior to Elia Kazan, although Kazan is more famous ("Camino," 68).

In an article entitled "Tiempo de Crisis", Erice sums up Ray's *They Live by Night* with words that evoke his own male protagonists:

Entre el hombre y aquello que toca hay una zona de irrealidad: el mal. Pero no se trata aquí de un mal de características exclusivamente sociales — señaladas oportunamente a lo largo del relato — , sino que al mismo tiempo surge, en una dimensión más amplia, como reflejo de una caída y una culpa míticas; es decir, como una suerte de desgracia primordial engendrada por la pérdida de la inocencia, la ambición, la cobardía o el simple envejecimiento.

Between man and what he touches there is a zone of unreality: evil. But it's not a question of evil with exclusively social characteristics — indicated opportune throughout the story — , rather at the same time in a broader dimension, it arises as a reflection of a mythical fall and sin; that is, as a kind
of primordial misfortune caused by a loss of innocence, by ambition, cowardice or simple aging (NR, 36-7).

In addition to the affinities between the two directors, there is a thematic link as well: Rebel Without A Cause is all about the effect of powerless, absent and abdicating fathers on their children. Fiddian and Evans are rather dismissive of Erice's claim of influence, since this does not suit their reading.

The only direct allusion to other films however, is Hitchcock's Shadow of a Doubt, a coming attraction at the cinema where Agustín sees his old lover as a screen siren. Given its prominence (the poster is held full-frame for a few seconds) Fiddian and Evans are quite right to consider it a linchpin for El sur as Frankenstein is for El espíritu de la colmena.24 In their words:

Hitchcock's film is the story of a girl's fascination with her 'Uncle Charlie'. She herself is named Charlie after him, and a very close relationship develops between them to the point where he becomes her fantasized father, eclipsing her natural father who is a pleasant but rather dreary man in no sense the equal of her uncle in adventure and mystery. The latter appears as a romantic hero with whom the girl shares a magical, telepathic understanding. Or so it seems (133).

There are many parallels between the films, most importantly, I think, the process of mythification and its reversal that forces the adolescent girl into maturity. It seems rather reductive, however, to consider this film another instance of "melodramatic love-stories concentrating on doomed, intensely felt emotions between a central pair of lovers" (133). To understand the film this way, one has to equate a young girl's adoration of a father figure with a love affair. This is, of course, what this reading would have us do. But it is quite a move from the recognition of the part sexuality plays in childhood to the equation of an eight-year old daughter's feelings
for her father with those of an adolescent for her lover. Curiously, there is this kind of equivalence, but not as it might seem:

Agustín had broken off his liaison with Irene/Laura when Estrella was born, and by the time they journey north she has taken Irene's place in his affections. Time and distance do not prevent Agustín from remembering his mistress, but it is only at critical moments of his relationship with Estrella that he contacts Irene (132).  

There is, in fact, only one critical moment: Estrella's first communion, her symbolic entry "en el mundo" ["in the world"] into independence and away from her father (seq. 19). Thus Estrella seems to take the place of a lover for her father. This equivalence, however, of child for lover tells us more about Agustín than Estrella. If the film can be seen as a gauzy "family romance" from the child's point of view, it also contains a disturbing portrait of a father incapable of fulfilling the paternal role for his child. An immaturity in him is gradually revealed. Whether scenes are wholly from Estrella's point of view or not, (and I think there is a lot of evidence to say they are not) what emerges is broader than her fantasy. Thibaudeau comments: "l'analogie entre l'actrice et Estrella se poursuit, au-delà de la simple onomastique, dans un processus d'identification mené par Agustín lui-même" ["the analogy between the actress and Estrella is pursued beyond the names in a process of identification led by Agustín himself"] (115). It is Agustín, not Estrella, who provides the link between Flor de la sombra and the scene in the Gran Hotel, by suggesting Estrella has forgotten "their" song, just as the lover in the film accused Irene Ríos of being insensitive to "Blue Moon," a song that represents their shared past.

The initial scenes of closeness are cast in a different light by Agustín's abdication in the second half of the film. From the time Estrella hides under her bed, hoping her father will come to find her, he will fall from acting as parent to the role of the child as a counterpoint to Estrella's growing up. This shift is represented
graphically: in the early scenes we see Estrella looking up to her father, on the train, after his divining of the well and of course, at her first communion. After he sees *Flor en la sombra*, however, we see him sitting and Estrella stands above him. She becomes a solitary child then, writing in her diary, hoping to fulfill elsewhere the void left by her parents: "il ne s'agit pas seulement du vide créé par la mort du père, mais également de celui qu'il provoque à partir du moment où il s'éloigne de sa fille" ["it's not just a question of the void created by the death of the father, but also that which he creates from the moment he distances himself from his daughter"] (Thibaud, 85).

In focusing on Estrella's fantasy rather than the father's role in her development, Fiddian and Evans seem to give Estrella full responsibility for what happens, including her father's suicide. In their words: "The imagery [...] implicates Estrella in her father's suicide" (131). Since the truncated state of the film makes this one of the most problematic areas of the work, it is a difficult point to settle definitively. Certainly, Estrella's abandonment of her father in the Gran Hotel directly precedes Agustín's taking his life. He does ride her red bicycle to the place he chose for his action. And a telephone receipt seems to indicate he tried to communicate with Irene before he died.

Yet none of this would necessarily prompt us to lay blame for a father's suicide on a child. Undoubtedly the child would feel guilt, as would the adult the child becomes, but she would remain blameless. Estrella might consider herself implicated, and thus give herself and her mother the role of "latter day Parcae" who hold the thread of Agustín's life in their hands. But actual guilt is something else entirely. Fiddian and Evans have her guilty by association as well:

coincidences embedded in the tissue of the film suggest that Estrella projects her fantasies, her guilt, her whole psychological drama on to the figure of Irene Rios. [...] The mature Estrella can [...] ignore the feeling that she and Irene share much of the responsibility for
Agustín's death: not only does Agustín shoot himself next to Estrella's bicycle, he also chooses a río as a location for suicide after his fruitless telephone call to Irene Ríos (132).

I have shown that the possibility exists that it is Estrella's father who is the source of the links between Estrella and the movie star. The child, undoubtedly, wants to be the star in her father's eyes, and part of the harm done to her is her sudden eclipsing through her father's infatuation with a celluloid image. But to say that this glamorous image "provides her with an imaginary outlet for her mature fantasies" and a "vehicle through which the mature but disoriented Estrella may recover the spiritual essence of a man she could in no other way possess" is speculation that better fits Freud's view of what it means to find oneself as a woman than it does the film (Fiddian, 132). The voice of the mature Estrella comes to us through a disembodied, unspecified present; as the film is incomplete, so is the portrait of that adult voice. There is little in that voice to suggest her reconstruction of her past is in order to fulfill an impossible seduction or possession; rather as Erice puts it "si Estrella crece es, entre otras cosas, para comprender bajo otras luces la figura paterna, completar su historia, afirmar por vez primera su propia identidad" ["if Estrella grows up it is, among other things, to see her father in a different light, to complete his story, to affirm for the first time her own identity"] ("En el camino," 66). Like El espíritu de la colmena, El sur deals with a coming to identity through separation, in this case (as in the former), a distancing from the asphyxiating paralysis of the family in order to survive.

Agustín's taking of Estrella's bike to his place of suicide does seem to implicate Estrella — it is a blameful gesture on his part. He is, in a symbolic sense, stealing her childhood by stealing her bicycle. The process began earlier: he had gradually taken her place in their relationship, giving her more and more responsibility while he withdrew into a helpless state thorough alcohol. I mentioned Estrella's hiding
under the bed, hoping her father will come to her, as a significant break in their relationship (seq. 33). Her mature voice recognizes a quality in him that will prove symptomatic in later years: "Comprendí que él seguía mi juego, aceptando mi reto, para demostrarme que su dolor era mucho más grande que el mío" ["I understood that he was playing my game, accepting my challenge to show me that his pain was far greater than mine"] By playing her game, Agustín places himself on the same level as his child, refusing to comfort her — in a sense shunning her because he himself is in need of comfort. In a key scene at the Gran Hotel (seq. 37), Agustín asks his daughter: "¿Me vas a reñir?" ["Are you going to scold me?"] She plays the role of responsible adult, while her father asks her to cut classes, and is incapable of facing her questions. To her thrust towards the future, he responds with a nostalgia for the past31: "¿Y cuando eras así [de niña] me entendías?" [And when you were a little girl, did you understand me?] "Papá, no es lo mismo" ["Dad, it’s not the same thing"] she responds. And indeed, it isn’t, since she has matured in her understanding.

A new complicity with her father would require an honest exchange, not just a transfer of his knowledge to her, but his recognition of her own. Agustín seems rather to be looking for a return to an earlier hero worship when he was looked up to.32 If this is an attempt at reconciliation, which I’m not convinced it is, it's a rather pathetic attempt to recover an impossible past, not unlike Agustín's letter to Laura. Laura tells him as much in her reply: that the star he saw in Flor en la sombra no longer exists, but more importantly, the girl he loved has grown up. Fiddian and Evans equate this preoccupation with growing up as a parallel with Estrella's story. It is also something of a chiding remark; in her "Ya me he hecho mayor" ["I’ve grown up"] there is an unspoken "Maybe you should try to do the same".33 Agustín is left behind, "sentado junto a la ventana, escuchando aquel viejo pasodoble. Solo. Abandonado a su suerte" ["sitting next to the window, listening to that old pasodoble. Alone. Abandoned to his fate"] (seq. 37).
This last scene, however, can also be interpreted as a last farewell. While Agustín might be asking his daughter to save his life by restoring his past, he also wants to "make peace" before he leaves her. His taking of her bicycle, while perhaps a cruel accusation, also represents a final exchange of places: Agustín takes Estrella's childhood, suggested by her bicycle, in exchange for the powers of his adulthood, represented in his pendulum. It is significant in this sense that Estrella enters his inner sanctum, falling asleep in his study, from which she had previously been excluded.

I have left for last the other crucial scene of Estrella's first communion (seq. 18, 19), which Fiddian and Evans characterize as a "figurative marriage," and Thibaudeau interprets as a "symbolic incest." The scene is undoubtedly rife with marriage symbolism, as is the ceremony itself: Estrella is dressed "igualita' que una novia" and walks up the aisle. Her first communion is a momentous occasion for her, as it is in the Catholic social world she is seen to be entering in a rite of passage towards autonomy. Hopewell describes the sequence eloquently:

Beginning with a close-up of Estrella's gown, veil and bouquet deposited on a chair at the head of the table, sweeping down the table and out to Estrella and Agustín dancing together, tracking the two with great elan before returning to Estrella's First Communion attire, the sequence shot captures the panache of Estrella's particular joy but encloses it within a symbol of a social coming of age (211).

From childish joy at being the centre of her father's world to the suggestion of incest is rather a leap. Incest is not the fantasy of a child to marry her father; it is rather the dysfunctional sexuality of the father projected onto the child. A reading that sees this scene as symbolic incest — the fulfillment of Estrella's childish desires to marry her father — seems to me to involve a dangerous distortion of what the word means. It is
precisely this obscuring of the nature of incest that has led in part to the discrediting of Freud and his paradigm. In terms of the film, it closes off some of the wider implications of the marriage imagery that will be revealed in the last scene.

The communion party will be rhymed with the last scene of farewell, where a couple's marriage is contrasted with Estrella's family disunion. If the suggestion of the incest taboo is present in the scene, it seems to function more in the sense of a danger for Agustín (whose child, we have seen, replaces a romantic love). Like the father of the Natalie Wood character in Rebel Without a Cause, Agustín seems unable to cope with the threat of that taboo, withdrawing from his daughter rather than facing its dangers.36

In tracing an alternative reading to the one by Fiddian and Evans and other critics who use Freud in their readings, I am not suggesting that Agustín is to blame, though he is a man, as they point out, whose:

insights into the mysteries of nature do not benefit his role as father, husband and son. In the course of the film his mother, wife and daughter all suffer spiritual or physical ills for which he can legitimately be held responsible (129).

Like Fernando, Agustín is a complex figure, both in and outside of his society, both authority and oppressed, a sympathetic figure whose self-destruction is painful to watch. I am problematizing him so that his complexity can better be seen, and to show that he is responsible for Estrella rather than the other way around. His is a complex self-destruction that has to do with his nostalgia and painful choices made and imposed by a stagnant, authoritarian society.

After having rebelled against his father's tutelage, Agustín continues to find himself in a society that embodies his father's values.37 As in his marriage, Agustín is caught with one foot in and one foot out: he cannot bring himself to fully participate in
the regime he fought against, yet the freedom of exclusion is denied him. In his process of self-destruction he shirks his role of father, and thrusts a burden onto his child, leaving her alone to find her way in the world he has come to despise. In this he and Julia are similar to the shadowy parental figures of *El espíritu de la colmena*.

Erice declared, as I quoted in part in the previous chapter, that:

> [para] los que nacimos inmediatamente después de una guerra civil como la nuestra, los mayores eran con frecuencia eso: un vacío, una ausencia. Estaban —los que estaban— pero no estaban [...] porque [...] eran unos seres ensimismados desprovistos radicalmente de sus más elementales modos de expresión [...] terminado lo que consideraron como una pesadilla, muchos volvieron a sus casas, procrearon hijos, pero hubo en ellos, para siempre, algo profundamente mutilado, que es lo que revela su ausencia.

> [for] those of us who were born immediately after a civil war like ours, the adults were often just that: a void, an absence. They were there, but they were not there [...] because [...] they were inward-looking beings who were radically deprived of their most elemental means of expression [...] When the war, which they considered a nightmare, ended, many returned to their homes, they had children, but something inside them was profoundly mutilated, which is what their absence reveals (Erice, 144).

Agustín's suicide and Julia's withdrawal into depression leave Estrella without real parental guidance, but their tragedy is inscribed in a larger historical and social context, and the assignment of blame is moot. As Pérez Gómez puts it:

> La ambigüedad moral (¿quién es el bueno y quién es el malo?) de *El espíritu de la colmena*. [...] vuelve a aparecer aquí. En definitiva se impone la pesadumbre de un tiempo triste y frustrante: la posguerra en los años cincuenta.

> Moral ambiguity (who are the good guys and who are the bad guys?) of *Spirit of the Beehive* reappears here. Definitely the sorrow
of a sad and frustrating time imposes itself: the post-war years of the fifties (248).

This initial reading is an anti-Freudian one. Nevertheless, I recognize the usefulness of Freud in describing the place ascribed to women in society. Freud can tell us a lot about the "where we are already" that is, the social assumptions about femininity. This is, finally, the aim of Fiddian and Evans, to weave *El sur* into a broader context that includes 'Woman's Pictures,' melodrama and a society that demands that woman give up her authentic self for a surface existence in the role of wife and mother or *femme fatale*. Yet in doing so, they also, inadvertently perhaps, end up with some of the most problematic assumptions of Freud, as do Thibaudeau and Arocena: women are enamored with their own objectification, "agitated" (read hysterical), envious, seductive, and most importantly, their development proceeds from "penis-envy" which is eventually sublimated in a desire for a "penis-baby" from the father. Ironically, though their reading supposes that the film unfolds entirely from Estrella’s point of view, Fiddian and Evans end up seeing the film sympathetically placed with Agustín rather than Estrella.

All of this strikes me as reductionist and problematic in its placing of blame on Estrella. *El sur* contains the same moral intelligence as *El espíritu de la colmena*, a refusal to schematize or simplify. As I will show, stylistically, the film is as complex as *El espíritu de la colmena* and contains the same kind of ambiguity. The film begins with an essentially Vermeerian image of a girl holding a pendulum by a window, and Edward Snow's description of Vermeer, quoted in the last chapter, serves to describe the opening sequence, and indeed, the whole film: "everything lies in suspension, [in] an atmosphere of childhood recollection, an almost elegiac clarity" (84). Like Ana, Estrella must weigh the values she inherits, and make sense of her parent's tragic existence. The viewer must do the same. If the film contains more loose ends than it
might because of the circumstances of its making, it is doubtful that all the pieces would have fit neatly together in any case. There is nothing neat about El sur. The narrative is constructed around an essential enigma: Agustín's suicide can never be fully understood, and any reconstruction of his life can only be partial. The film is thus based in the unknowable, and made all the more ambiguous by the distance of memory.

First person voice-over narration

I want to turn now to the question of the narrator of the film. As I mentioned, Fiddian and Evans's Freudian reading is premised on the idea that the film is exclusively a first person narration by Estrella: "Estrella's mind is envisaged as a screen on which a tragic 'family romance' exalting her father is projected" (130). Her limited childhood perspective is broadened by her older self heard in the voice-over, and by the careful twinning of her story "with the theme of Spain's exhumation of its recent past" (128). The limited perspective of the first person narrator is underlined by the consistent use of off-screen sound; it is also, however, abandoned several times throughout the film.

The difficulty of limiting the camera to the first person is illustrated by the failures of The Lady in the Lake. That is, singular focalisation (seeing from one character's point of view) is extremely rare in fiction films; by the same token, however, a single narrative perspective is equally rare. The camera tends to see more, to take flight, as it does in El sur. There are several points where we get information beyond Estrella's viewpoint. Thibaudeau outlines six sequences — the naming of Estrella before her birth (seq. 2), the hospital (seq. 5), the film Flor en la sombra (seq. 23), Agustín's letter to Laura (seq. 24), her response (seq. 27) and Agustín's attempt at leaving (seq. 29) — but there are more if we include shots such as Agustín's body
by the river (seq. 38) or the arrival of the women from Seville (seq. 14). There is even a sequence (24) where the characters leave the viewer and camera behind.

When Estrella comes across Agustín writing in the café, the camera is, at first, in the café with Agustín who writes his letter in voice-over. As Estrella approaches and knocks on the window there is a cut to the exterior. The next shot is again from inside the café. Agustín gets up and goes outside to greet his daughter, but the camera angle doesn't change. We remain inside, seeing them, but not hearing them, through the window. The camera then pans to Agustín's letter, which we have heard, and know the import of, though Estrella doesn't: "sólo sabía que escribía una carta" ["I only knew he was writing a letter"] (seq. 24).

This sequence demonstrates the flexibility of focalisation and point of view. Of the sequences outlined by Thibaudau as outside of Estrella's narrative control, only the first, Agustín’s naming of his child, is presented as a product of Estrella's imagination. She tells us as much in her voice-over, but the spareness of the scene also points to it. In combination with its painterly mise en scene, this creates a sense of dislocation from any realistic setting or time. The rest of the sequences which Thibaudeau has isolated can be seen as moments in which the narration passes to another, supra-narrator as it were, who gives us a perspective beyond that of Estrella's. The detail of the scene of Agustín at work, Agustín's attempt at returning to the South, his reading of the letter from Laura, all suggest that we are seeing more than Estrella, that in the story of her adoration of her father there is also his own more mundane story.

It is not insignificant that all the scenes in which the voice-over narrator is superseded concern Agustín, whether he is in the scenes or not. The arrival of Milagros and the grandmother to "La Gaviota" ["The Seagull"], as the house is called, could have been shown strictly from Estrella's point of view, by cutting out the scene
of the women in the car, for example. Instead we get a few instants of these women on their own, giving us information about them, and therefore about Agustín's origins. The dynamic between the characters is also important as a comment on class, which Estrella would not be able to deliver, and to which she seems oblivious as an adult. In the same sequence, we are privy to an intimate moment between Milagros and Agustín, where she asks him: "¿Está' feliz? ¿no me engañas?" ["You're happy? You're not deceiving me?"] It is a crucial question in light of his suicide, and introduces a note of doubt about Agustín as the model family man his daughter has portrayed.

In her study of voice-over narration, Sarah Kozloff points out that first person narration is always plural, since "voice-over narration is just one of many elements—editing, lighting, sound effects—through which the cinematic text is narrated" (44). Beyond the narrator there is what has been termed the implied filmmaker, or the primary narrator, who can show more, or even undercut the diegetic narrator's words. Because the word is not primary as in a literary text, the cinematic narrator doesn't have the same degree of control over the presentation of the story. As Richard Neupert explains in The End, his fascinating study of endings in film:

The interesting aspect of narrative levels lies in what happens before and after fictional narrators [...] tell us their stories [...] Primary narration is the narrative voice that opens and closes the film, reaching beyond the capabilities of homodiegetic narrators. It is this larger heterodiegetic narrator that begins and ends the film with credit sequences, selects the non-diegetic music, and does the job of narration in films lacking a homodiegetic narrator (25).

Kozloff, however, argues that "voice-over narration is like a strong perfume — a little goes a long way" (45). Since the spectator easily identifies with the human narrator rather than the not-quite-human narration presented by the camera, editing and other
technical elements, it is sufficient to establish the first person narration early in the film for the audience to identify the rest of the film "as the narrator's speech even when there is none" (Smoodin, 19).43

This position seems to me to overestimate the role of the diegetic narrator. To define this role, it is useful to examine the role of the extradiegetic, primary narrator in a film without voice-over narration. El espíritu de la colmena might be seen as not having a narrator, yet narratology has taught us that where there is narration there must be a narrator. It might be argued that Ana performs this function diegetically, since the story unfolds from her point of view.44 While some of the film leads us to identify with Ana's point of view — for example, in the sequence in which she discovers Isabel lying sprawled on the floor, we are as surprised as she is by Isabel's trick — other sequences in the film give us insights into other characters that she could not have. There is little reason to ascribe to her an awareness of Teresa's writing the letter, for example. And other scenes combine her perspective with that of an observing adult: in the sequence where she measures her foot within the print left by a man, we at once absorb her perspective and see her miscalculation which makes us laugh.45 When Isabel lies frightened in bed, we see the shadows on the wall of her room from her perspective, and the sequence in which Fernando gets into bed is perceived through Teresa.

That is, in El espíritu the camera doesn't necessarily focalise from one character's viewpoint, but the implied narrator adopts a shifting emotional point of view. The combination of different focalisation and viewpoints and the careful construction of the story which I have examined in the previous chapter characterize the primary narrator, "a collection of narrative voices and strategies" (Neupert, 25). This presence can be considered the implied filmmaker, what Metz terms the "maître
Thus in a film without voice-over narration, there is a variety of perspectives: there is no reason to suppose that the implied narrator is monologic, to use Bakhtin's term. Is the "perfume" of voice-over narration so strong that it annuls these shadings into a univocal narrator? Kozloff points out that the use of the technique does not deny the implied filmmaker's claim in the construction of the images: "a homodiegetic voice-over narrator is always subsumed by and thus subordinate to a more powerful narrating agent" and her analyses show the creative tensions that can arise from the filmmaker's play with the shared control of the narration with the voice-over narrator (49). Denying this multiplicity in the case of first person voice-over narrators strikes me as akin to negating the dialogic nature of first-person narration in fiction so eloquently mapped by Bakhtin.46

In the case of El sur, the shifts between narrators are often clearly marked. At two crucial points the camera quite literally moves beyond Estrella's viewpoint, cranling up and over an obstacle to her view. At one juncture, the viewer is offered a powerful image that Estrella cannot see, in another, we go over her head for a better vantage point. The first time (seq. 23), Estrella waits outside the theatre for her father (while the camera goes in), the second time (seq. 37), the camera cranes up above her. We watch newlyweds dance as Estrella had done at her first communion. The significance of these scenes in terms of repetition and mythification should not be overlooked. What I want to point out here however is how deliberately the camera traces a path for the viewer, acknowledging her need to see. The camera movements are striking because, like El espíritu de la colmena, El sur sets up a norm of fairly static shots, carefully composed and lit like paintings.47 Within this context, the
movement of the camera draws attention to the presence of the implied filmmaker as one of the participants in the construction of the story.

Though it is more of a straightforward narrative, *El sur* shares many of the poetic techniques of Erice’s other films, not least of which is the presentation of the work as a self-conscious work of art. In *El espíritu de la colmena*, he draws attention to the construction of the story by placing it in the hands of the viewer; in *El sol del membrillo* he will go further, ending the film by showing the viewer a camera that presented the documentary. Rather than hiding the camera, Erice makes it present, subtly or overtly. Since the camera is a powerful part of the construction of myth for both Ana and Agustín, who each seek the Hollywood image in the world, making the viewer conscious of it deflates its own mythic power.

Voice-over narration in *El sur* serves to underline the film as represented reality. As Kozloff demonstrates, first-person narration is ideally suited to breaking “the illusion that one is watching an unmediated reality” (53). As she explains:

By making the "voice" more obvious and exploitable, voice-over films highlight the double-layering effect discussed by narrative theorists — the text can now clearly be seen as the interplay between the narrative action, the story, and the process of telling it, the discourse (53).

The mediation is doubly underlined by the subjectivity of the voice and its basis in memory. Alain Philippon notes that the frequent black-outs in *El sur* function to define scenes as "une série de ponctions dans le noir de l’enfance" ["a series of punctures in the darkness of childhood"] (“Enfance,” 49). Like the presence of the camera, Erice’s use of fades and black-outs reminds us that what we are seeing is a constructed story, in this case, constructed (or reconstructed) partly through memory, a sifting through time and remembrance.
It suggests something similar to the ellipsis of *El espíritu de la colmena*: that what is taking place on screen is only a small part of what has taken place in the characters' lives. As Thibaudo puts it:

Par le choix de ce type de montage, le cinéaste donne à voir ce que l'on ne saura jamais; en signalant ces trous au spectateur, il indique l'existence de ce qui ne peut affleurer à la surface de la conscience, quelque chose qui se trouve au-delà ou en-deçà des mots et des images, quelque chose qui se trouve *entre*.

By choosing this type of editing, the filmmaker shows what we can never know; by pointing out these holes to the spectator, he indicates the existence of what can only be glimpsed on the surface of consciousness, something which is underneath or beyond words and images, something which is *within* (56).

Like many films of the post-Franco era, and Erice's own first feature, *El sur* explodes the myths of the regime—one Spain, one happy family—by centering on one young girl's unraveling of the myth of her father, who has been seduced by mythic images of his own.49 The viewer should not be seduced, however. Erice plays with limiting and expanding perspectives in the film to achieve something not unlike Cervantes' "reality principle," a hint that the truth lies somewhere just beyond each of the perspectives, that neither Estrella's, nor Agustin's, nor even the camera's view is complete.50

**Sound**

Another technique which emphasizes that what we are seeing (and how we are seeing it) is mediated and incomplete is the continual presence of what is off-screen through sound. The film opens, as I've mentioned, with Estrella discovering her father's pendulum beneath her pillow. While the camera stays narrowly focused on Estrella in her bed, the action—Julia's frantic call to the hospital in search of Agustín,
her shouting of his name, the discovery of his definitive absence—takes place out of frame and is heard rather than seen. This places us with Estrella, in her limited, yet perhaps more profound understanding of what has taken place. It also creates a tension between image and sound: the stasis of Estrella contrasted with the flurry of activity we hear. Erice is here boldly placing the action off screen (and in the imagination of the viewer) making the camera focus on an internal struggle rather than external actions. He is in some sense inverting the traditional role of sound in film, to provide psychological or emotional "atmosphere" to an action taking place. Here the image is the emotion cue, the sound the dramatic action.

The same use of off-screen sound is made in the scene where Estrella is awakened by her parents' fighting (seq. 25). The muffled sound of discord is the action, but Estrella's reaction is the essential information. Careful listening reveals Julia saying: "si quieres vas y le hablas, haz lo que te dé la gana" ["if you want to, go and talk to her, do whatever you want"] and Agustín responding "no es eso, estás equivocada, Julia," ["it's not that, you're wrong, Julia"] but we don't need to make out the words to understand the situation. Sound and light make the statement: when Estrella awakens, the light in the window next to hers casts a yellow glow on her bed. We hear the muffled voices ("¡que vas a despertar a la niña!" [you're going to wake the girl!] ), footsteps going downstairs, a door slamming and footsteps following. Finally, the light goes out. It is a perfect encapsulation of the situation of the child, who is excluded from the adult world, though singularly affected by it, and yet, in the end, left in the dark. Like Estrella, we surmise that Agustín's longing for another woman has brought discord to the family. By burning the picture of Irene Ríos, Estrella tries to destroy the cause of that discord, and in doing so ceases to be an accomplice to her father's secret.
I have commented on some of the particularities of Erice’s use of sound in the chapter on *El espíritu de la colmena*, how sound, notably in the case of the train whistle, provides essential information to the construction of the story. The sound of the train, which returns layered with meaning, has the same function as the watch, which we both see and hear. (While we do see the train, it recurs as an aural motif.) Erice’s use of sound is reminiscent of Bresson who claimed “he replaces an image with a sound wherever possible, thus remaining faithful to the principle of maximum bareness and spareness that underlies his creative method” (Burch, 200).

Erice often uses suggestive sounds that invoke a whole context. In *El espíritu de la colmena*, for example, the scene where Fernando goes to the town hall to identify the fugitive’s body is tied to the offscreen sound of church bells, which, together with the presence of the Guardia Civil, serves as a reminder of the two pillars of Franquist Spain. The changes brought by the time elapsed between the first and second part of *El sur* are suggested in Casilda’s singing about television: “Vísteme bien mamá, vísteme bien que voy a transmitir” (“Dress me well, Mama, I’m going to be broadcast”) (seq. 34). The offscreen sound of a train pulling away, associated with longing and change, which is heard over the shot of Agustín’s sepulchral sleep in the pension communicates at once the impossibility of Agustín’s return to his past and its mythic attraction.

Erice incorporates a limited number of musical cues, none of which were written for the film. They come then, with their own connotations, as "Vamos a contar mentiras" [“Let’s tell lies”], "Il était un petit navire" [“There was a little ship”] and Lorca’s "Zorongo gitano" [“Gipsy song”] do in *El espíritu de la colmena*, where Luis de Pablo was responsible for the music. In the later film, extradiegetic music is used very sporadically, almost as an atmospheric underlining of memory and mythification. The most sustained piece of music is Granados’ "Danza española número 5"
["Spanish Dance Number 5"] in the sequence where Estrella looks at postcards of Andalusia. These contain the clichés of Southern Spain, flamenco dancers and palm trees in delicately colorized photographs. The musical theme is related to these same notions of the south as a romantic land of exoticism, folklore and abundance (characterized by Estrella's question to Milagros: "Oye, ¿es verdad que hay moros allí?" ["Is it true that there are moors there?"]). It continues through the whitened shots of the yard, as a contrast perhaps, between this cold landscape and the previous warmth. At the same time the reversed shots draw attention to themselves as being "unrealistic" in the same way as the postcards. The yard is made unfamiliar and more beautiful by the technique, which connotes memory, as still black and whites conventionally do. The music, underscoring all this, links the two sequences together.

In another striking scene (seq. 27) the emotionally resonant music is given a more realistic setting and source. In the café where Agustín reads the letter he has received from Laura (whose voice we hear in a subjective-internal voice-over), Agustín's emotional reaction to her words is evoked by the discordant piano that is being tuned in the background. When the voice-over ends, the camera moves to the exposed piano chords, thus providing a diegetic source for the disconcerting sounds that echo Agustín's internal state. The piano being tuned strikes the note of discord that will characterize the rest of the film.

What is most striking in Erice's use of sound, however, is the pervasiveness of silence. El espíritu de la colmena, despite the presence of extradiegetic music and diegetic sounds, is suffused in a thick silence. It comes to be "the loudest of noises, just as black, in a brilliant design, can be the brightest of colours" (Cavalcanti, 111). The silence, of course, emanates not from a lack of sound, but from the absence of words. As Chion points out, silence in film can be the product of demarcated sounds — the plinking of piano notes, for example, or the sound of coffee being stirred that
reinforces the tension of the family at breakfast. These noises denote silence because they would not be audible if a conversation were taking place. In the first example, Teresa's playing uses an opposite effect: it is quite loud, but produces nevertheless an impression of silence "all the stronger because the only sound there is so intense, and heightened by the lack of other sounds, bringing out this emptiness in a terrible way" (Chion, 58).

In "Wasted Words," Chion's manifesto against clarity of dialogue in film, he identifies "rarefaction" of dialogue as one strategy to relativize speech, though one with two major drawbacks:

on the one hand, situations must be specially created in order to explain, more or less artificially, the absence of voice; on the other hand, we sense a feeling of silence and emptiness between the few spoken sequences, which begin to sound like a foreign body within the film (107).

Erice turns these problems to his advantage, resolving the first by showing the characters in solitary activities, or too estranged to speak to one another and the second by making the oppressiveness of silence a theme of his film, which is, in a sense, about what cannot be said. This is part of the mirroring of the experience of the viewer and the characters: each is engulfed in the oppressive weight of the unspoken. One might suppose that the few words spoken have a great significance; in fact, they are leveled onto a plane where noise, image, words and music create meaning together.54

It is in El sur, however, that the expressive possibilities of silence are exploited to the full. Although Erice deploys an opposite strategy, multiplying language through the presence of the voice-over narrator, the quoting of literary texts and the conversations of characters, silence returns as an underlying theme, changing
meanings and giving a different emotional tone. By using ambient sound as the main sound in the majority of sequences, the film is bathed in a quiet that seems natural and unoppressive to the viewer.

Unlike the prevalence of silence in El espíritu, the lack of communication between family members in El sur occurs over time. Only certain things can't be mentioned, namely the Civil War and Agustín's extramarital relationship, and these are all the more mysterious because of the tense silence that surrounds them. Agustín never mentions his father, or his life in the South. He is incapable of divulging his own secrets, or even his love. He envies El Carioco's ability to speak his heart for all the world to hear ("es bonito [...] decir a todo el mundo lo que se piensa" ["it’s lovely [...] to tell everyone what you’re thinking"] he says) but he cannot do the same for his daughter, and apparently was unable to do so for Laura, who was shut out of his life by eight years of silence. On one occasion, however, he quite literally breaks his own internal quiet: on the day of Estrella's first communion he takes to the hills with a rifle (seq. 16-17). The shots ring out his frustration at the social and religious ceremony that surrounds Estrella, represented in terms of the women fussing over her. Fused with the image of Estrella in her gown standing in the yard, the bullets seem almost to be hitting her as she flinches with the noise. The gunshots also suggest Agustín's discomfort with the presence of the women who embody his past. The violent reports remind us that the peaceful doctor once participated in a war, one that explains his father's absence at this reunion. At the same time, the shots rhyme with the gunfire that kills Irene Ríos in Flor de la Sombra. Both provide a kind of auditory foreshadowing of the father's violent end (which we will neither see nor hear).

It is through her mother and her father's nanny that Estrella will learn some of the facts about her father's roots. Yet even they speak about it in hushed tones. Julia whispers conspiratorially when she explains why the family has never gone to the
South (seq. 15). Milagros censors herself and Julia as she talks about the war to
Estrella saying: "no me haga' caso, Estrellita, que cada vez empiezo a soltar disparate' 
y no paro" ["don't pay attention to me, Estrella, I keep saying ridiculous things"]
about her own words and "podría haberte contado cosa' más bonita'" ["she could
have told you something nicer"] about Julia's. Julia in turn censors Estrella when the
girl asks why "papá está raro desde que se escapó" ["Dad has been strange since he
escaped."] Julia replies: "No se escapó. ¡Las cosas que dices!" ["He didn't escape.
The things you say!"] and then "haz el favor de no hablar así" ["please don't talk like
that"] (seq. 31).

Faced with this ban on words, Estrella tries to use silence to restore
communication with her father (seq. 33). But the now-painful silence that has
descended upon the house is represented by Agustín's answer: a dull tapping. Estrella
hears it almost directly above her as she lies under her bed, as though her father had
divined her hiding place as he had previously located water under the earth. When
Julia finally finds her daughter (Erice uses several fades to indicate the passage of
time), we see relief and anger cross her face, and then tenderness as she sees that
Estrella is crying, in a particularly expressive scene. Estrella pulls away from her
concern, deeper into her hiding place. But the tapping reveals the source of her tears.
Julia hears the tapping, looks up, and understands Estrella's behaviour. The tapping
emphasizes the silence that has descended on the house, but in that silence there is a
strong message: "his pain was far greater than mine" Where Agustín previously
needed silence to concentrate on a deeper discovery, he now needs it to escape
detection, to guard his secrets and nurse his wounds. Where Julia in an early scene
kept the house quiet for him to work, she no longer has to when Estrella is an
adolescent because Agustín is rarely at home.
Silence, however, had previously been used to show complicity between father and daughter. In sequence 10, in which Estrella helps her father find a well in a field and figure its depth, hardly any words pass between them; Estrella knows what to do without needing to be told. The sound of the wind blowing in the field emphasizes the concentration of the scene. Indeed, whenever the pendulum is used Erice blanks out everything but ambient sound (as in the first time Estrella gets to use the pendulum, where only a few bars of music are heard as the scene comes up from black). Estrella's apprenticeship is an initiation into a contemplative silence that will lead to a knowledge deeper than words. Ironically, she will need this skill to fathom her father's silences, especially that sealed by the finality of his death.

This technique of repetition with a reversal in meaning is also at work in the central scenes between father and daughter, at her first communion and at the restaurant. Both times the pasodoble "En er mundo" ["In the World"] plays. The title of the tune is not insignificant in this context: the first communion, as I mentioned, is seen as a rite of passage away from childhood. In Estrella's case, it marks her entry into an expanded consciousness of the adult world as she discovers soon afterwards that all is not as it seems between her parents. The initiation, as Hopewell notes, is into the imperfect world of human relations: "Erice in general seems to view maturity as accession to a world of social symbols which distance people, annulling the emotional spontaneity of youth" (211).

The second time the tune plays, there is no doubt Estrella is "in the world." Some of the complications of romantic love have been revealed to her through her relationship with the insistent "El Carioco," who, present only as a diegetic off-screen voice, seems to embody more threat than possibility. Telling her "tú no me conoces, Estrella, que yo soy capaz de cualquier cosa" ["you don't know me, Estrella, I'm capable of anything"] he is rather a sinister courtier. As Fiddian and Evans point out,
the women in this film do not thrive in romantic relationships. The presentation of love is negative: Laura is physically left behind, Julia is emotionally abandoned and Irene Ríos, the femme fatale of 'startlingly unreal sensuality', is killed.\textsuperscript{56}

In terms of Estrella's relationship with her father, an unbridgeable distance has set in. She is no longer spontaneous and free with him, and despite the love between them, they cannot find a common ground on which to meet. This is suggested poignantly in the scene where they see one another at a distance, Agustín staring at his daughter's photograph in a storefront window and Estrella, hidden by the arches of a building, watching him in turn (seq. 35). They are no more than observers of one another, incapable of getting below the surface:

Agustín sólo tiene de su hija su imagen, pues todo lo que compartían cuando era una niña ha desaparecido, Estrella ahora tiene acceso visual a la decadencia de su padre, refugiado en el alcohol, pero nada más. Para ella, Agustín es también una imagen.

Agustin only has an image of his daughter, since everything they shared when she was a child has disappeared, and Estrella now has visual access to her father's decadence, but nothing more. For her as well, Agustin is an image. (Arocena, 256).

Despite their attempts to move beyond this impasse at the Gran Hotel, they are unable to bridge the gap between them. As the pasodoble celebrated their union, it comes to mark their separation. The music, while recalling the earlier scene, has its own connotations, however. The repetition is thus doubly contrastive: it connotes happiness, but here is used to mark sorrow.

The music establishes a contrast at another level as well, one between the social celebration taking place next door and the lonely meeting between father and daughter in the empty dining hall. The music floats underneath their talk until Agustín
points it out and we concentrate on it, along with Estrella. Like a first communion, a wedding represents youthful hopes and a new beginning. As Estrella has moved beyond the promise of her communion day, Agustín has long abandoned whatever hopes were embodied in his wedding day. Unlike these social celebrations, father and daughter are alone, outside the social order, and while Estrella returns to that of her school, Agustín remains unable to go back.

Repetition

The technique of repetition with or without reversal of meaning is prevalent in Erice's visual style as well as in his use of sound. One instance that masterfully combines the two is a matching set of sequences in which Estrella sits on a swing, awaiting her father. The first sequence (6), early in the film, is shot during the day. We hear the sound of the swing as Estrella moves back and forth. She stops, however, cocking her ear to a sound the viewer is not yet aware of. The sound turns out to be Agustín's motorbike, and Estrella rushes off to 'La frontera' ['The Frontier'] to get a ride. The sequence suggests that father and daughter are very much in tune. A similar shot of Estrella on the swing, at night this time, is used later in the film when their separation occurs (seq. 30). We hear the sound of the swing again, but nothing else. Agustín is present in the shot, in fact looking out his attic window at his daughter, but he will not come out to find her.

This kind of repetition is seen throughout the film. The first frame of Estrella lying in bed by a window will be rhymed with shots of Agustín lying on his back in the changing light of morning; later we see Julia reading in bed, and after Agustín's suicide, Estrella will be confined like her mother. Each in turn, the members of the family succumb to a depression that lays them flat, but it is only Estrella who will recover. As she starts the film lying prone, she ends it standing up, nervous, but
ready to discover what for her has been the promised land: "por fin, iba a conocer el sur" ["finally, I was going to get to know the South"] (seq. 44).

Milagros's help in bringing this about is announced with a shot that has been repeated four times throughout the film. The shot of the seagull weathervane is first seen in a sequence that presents three shots that will be repeated cyclically through the film: the view of the city from the river, the house, the weathervane (seq. 4). On one level, the last item explains the name of the house. Symbolically it points South, in the direction of longing. Frozen in flight, the gull represents the paralysis that overcomes Agustín. All three return in order after Agustín's suicide, as a kind of trilogy of confinement (seq. 38, 40). As symbols, however, the repeated shots incorporate a contradictory duality: they are at once hope and failure. For Estrella, the seagull is, as I mentioned, connected with possibilities associated with the South: it announces the arrival of "dos mujeres extraordinarias del sur" ["two extraordinary women from the South"] and her own escape, but it also serves as a marker of winter and frustrated flight.

The city and the rented (and therefore impermanent) house have the same kind of duality. The first time we see them, they represent a respite from wandering. The city is seen atop a hill, surrounded by walls, the river like a moat around it. It is a sturdy refuge in its isolation, though this too is double-edged, for isolation is part of the family's suffering. When the river is shown again after Agustín's suicide, it has gathered a variety of connotations. It is ironic that the water diviner should kill himself near the river, as though seeking its cleansing, but not quite able to find it. 'La Frontera' functions in much the same way, a road that in fact emphasizes the isolation of the house, since we never see it leading anywhere. (We only see the road near the house, not its connection to the city.)
The house is also an ambivalent symbol. For Agustín his attic room is a place to concentrate and gather his forces, while for Estrella it holds an aura of magic. The house initially gathers the family: Julia, thoroughly domesticated, is never seen outside of it. As Agustín loses his proper place in the home (loses or refuses it), his refuge in the attic is shown as the place of his suffering. By the time Estrella is an adolescent Agustín is seen almost entirely in public places, outside the home. These too evoke confinement, however, as in the sequence where he reads Laura's letter where mirrors enclose him in endless repetition. The house and Agustín's place in it embody some of the dualities of masculinity in the pull between settling down and wandering, forming a unit and remaining oneself, the domestic world and the public self. Julia, forced to abandon her career by the reprisals of the Nationalist government, is literally confined to the house by the end, unable to leave her bed. For Estrella, the house becomes a place she wishes above all to escape: "deseaba con todas mis fuerzas hacerme mayor y huir de allí" ["I longed with all my strength to grow up and run away from there"] (seq. 34).

This desire is granted in a long sequence that elides Estrella's life between the ages of eight and fifteen (seq. 34). We see Estrella leave the house as a child, bringing her white bicycle furiously to the road, getting on and riding away. The shot is held for five seconds, then a slow dissolve shows the return of a now adolescent Estrella who places her bicycle (a red one this time) at the spot from where she had taken it. The dog that greets her is no longer a puppy, the season is different, the trees are painted white: some things have changed, but the hope embodied in the South, represented in the form of a letter from Milagros, and the oppressive atmosphere of the house remain as they were before. The ellipsis is, of course, in the interest of narrative economy. Estrella's voice-over commentary — "crecí más o menos como todo el mundo, acostumbrándome a no pensar en la felicidad" ["I grew up more or less like everyone else, getting used to not thinking about happiness"] — is richly
informative of Estrella's stifled youth (what she describes is not at all how everybody grows up) and takes us quickly to other indelible moments in her development. At the same time, the long and elegant sequence points to temporal ambiguities within the film that show that time is being measured emotionally, rather than cyclically as in *El espíritu de la colmena*, or chronologically as might be expected.

This is most clearly seen in the scene that follows Estrella's first communion. The month the women arrive from the south is identified as May in the shot of the weathervane, where a dissolve takes us from winter to spring. Estrella identifies the next sequence as "the same period", but it is winter again when she discovers Irene Ríos. It is as though summer is banished from memory; what prevails is the cold of winter that mirrors the emotional coldness that sets into Estrella's life. It is spring again as Estrella sets forth for Sevilla, and the promise of summer lies there, beyond the line that divides Spain, Agustín from his past and Estrella from her roots.

The warm tones of sunny, mythical Andalusia and the reconciliation these represent remain just outside the film. But the ending nevertheless suggests a hopeful new beginning. Like in *El espíritu de la colmena*, the last shot doesn't provide closure, but rather opens the film with an ambiguous image—a young girl looking out a window towards her future.
Notes

1 The film ends extremely abruptly, just as though the celluloid had suddenly run out.

2 There are important differences, for example, between the published screenplay of *El espíritu de la colmena* and the film. The filming of *El Sur* itself presented more than a few contingencies that forced Erice to alter some of the shots as he had conceived them. See "En el camino del sur," 63. *Cuadernos hispanoamericanos* published the last three sequences in the film. Thibaudeau and Arocena contest the notion that the film is based on the novella. However, since Erice says as much in several interviews, I see no reason not to take him at his word, even though the novella was published after the film was made. For a complete catalogue of the differences between the two works see Arocena 264-274.

3 Thomas Deveny asserts: "I believe that the ending of the film imbues the work with an even greater mysterious and poetic quality and certainly cannot be considered a defect" (252). Emmanuel Larraz shares his sentiment ("une oeuvre envoutante dont le charme vient peut-être en grande partie du fait que l'on ne voit précisément ce Sud qui lui donne son titre" [a bewitching work whose charm perhaps derives in large part from the fact that we never see the South which gives it its title]) (268) as does Alain Philippon: "il faut dire que cet inachevement même convient à merveille au sujet: le Sud, objet de fascination et d'émerveillement [...] reste ainsi mythique pour le spectateur comme pour le personnage" ("it must be said that that the incompleteness is perfectly suited to the subject: the South, object of fascination and marvel [...] thus remains mythic for the spectator as well as the character") (50). This supposes that the film's subject is myth and not its deflation.

4 Erice made the comment "evidentemente, el suicidio del padre puede aparecer ahora como injustificado...En cualquier caso adquiere otro sentido" ["obviously the suicide of the father might seem unjustified now...In any case it takes on a different meaning"] ("En el camino," 66). Comments Angel Fernández-Santos: "*El sur que
vemos en la pantalla tiene belleza y vigor, pero también lagunae, huecos, pozos, hilos cortados, cabos sueltos, caídas, incongruencias y arritmias que corroen en parte esa belleza y ese vigor. El poder de captura de las imágenes y atmósferas iniciadas, pero no cerradas y consumadas, por Erice permite que la gravedad de las carencias pase inicialmente casi inadvertida. Una segunda visión del film, no obstante, hace que comienzen a brotar de él preguntas sin respuestas, o lo que es peor, con respuesta variada e incluso equívoca" ["The South that we see onscreen has beauty and vigor, but also lagunae, holes, pits, cut threads, loose ends, failures, incongruences and irregularities that partly erode that beauty and vigor. The power of the images and atmosphere initiated but not completed or consummated by Erice allows the gravity of these lacks to go almost unnoticed at first. A second screening of the film, however, poses unanswerable questions, or what is worse, questions with various answers or incorrect ones"] (56).

5 There is a neat symmetry between the interval in real time and that of the periods represented in the films.

6 This adulthood will be ironically forced upon her by Agustín's suicide, as I will argue in the next section.

7 José Luis Alcaine, the cinematographer of El sur, stated that the deliberate dark tones of the first part of the film were going to be contrasted with the sunny tones of the second half, set in the South.

8 Erice comments on the Baroque in an interview about El sol del membrillo: "Il y a dans le baroque une ressemblance du sommeil avec la mort, l'idée de la lumière qui s'étentre et de la mort" ["In the Baroque there is a similarity between sleep and death, the idea of light that is extinguished and death"] (Cahiers, 36). It's a particularly interesting statement in relationship to the repeated shots of the characters lying down which will be explored further along.
Comments Chatman: "Through ellipsis and other manipulations of narrative time, Antonioni insists the way painters do on the sheer wonder of the world’s appearance” (79). His assessment of the Italian filmmaker has parallels to Erice’s visual style: “the central and distinguishing characteristic of Antonioni’s mature films [...] is narration by a kind of visual minimalism, by an intense concentration on the sheer appearance of things” (2).

A shortlist of critics who refer to this interpretation includes Hopewell, Arocena, Edwards and Thibaudeau.

While Fiddian and Evans refer to "Family Romance" they use the term much differently from Freud, who describes in his article the (male) child's desire to replace his parents with the more interesting ones of his imagination.

As D.N. Rodowick notes "the implicit conceit of Freud's statement [on femininity] is the pretense of having resolved the problem of masculinity" (45).

The Oedipal phase is described thus: "She gives up her wish for a penis and puts in place of it a wish for a child: and with that purpose in view she takes her father as a love-object. Her mother becomes the object of her jealousy. The girl has turned into a little woman" (409).

The term is Orson Welles', quoted by Laura Mulvey.

"If you reject this idea as fantastic and regard my belief in the influence of a lack of a penis on the configuration of femininity as an idée fixe, I am of course defenseless" (430). (Indeed.) "You may take it as an instance of male injustice if I assert that envy and jealousy play an even greater part in the mental life of women than of men" (424).

"For the ladies, whenever some comparison seemed to turn out unfavourable to their sex, were able to utter a suspicion that we, the male analysts, had been unable to overcome certain deep-rooted prejudices against what was feminine, and that this was
being paid for in the partiality of our researches" (416). The accuracy of this analysis is surprising.

16 A list of the commentators on Freud and film theory would be long indeed, but the heavyweights in relation to the question of femininity include Laura Mulvey’s Visual and Other Pleasures and Fetishism and Curiosity; Mary Anne Doane’s The Desire to Desire; Teresa de Lauretis’s Alice Doesn’t; and Rodowick The Difficulty of Difference. See also Anne Kaplan’s compilation of key articles, Psychoanalysis and Cinema.

17 I am referring to the straightforward use of Freud made here, and not the theorizing of his ideas by Lacan and others. Lerman, however, makes a stronger claim: "I do not believe that the modern revisions of psychoanalytic theory further the health and well-being of the modern woman. Assumptions about the inherent inferiority of women are embedded at the very core of the structure of psychoanalytic theory. They are not readily uprooted and are also not very amenable to patchwork repair" (Lerman, 170). For Carroll, the adaptation of psychoanalysis to feminism is "tantamount to adding epicycles to the Ptolemaic theory of the heavens, that is, perhaps feminists would be better off dropping the paradigm altogether" (MM, 214, note 24). For a discussion of some of the difficulties Freud and Lacan present for feminist film criticism, see Jackie Byars’ All That Hollywood Allows 132-209.

18 Alice Miller presents a similar argument in her book Thou Shall Not Be Aware: Psychoanalysis and Society's Betrayal of Children. Miller’s analysis is stronger than Masson’s, as she contextualizes Freud’s blaming of the victim within the larger context of religion, nineteenth century child rearing and society’s negative view of children. In essence however, she and Masson concur that Freud’s drive theory helped to shift responsibility from the parents to the child in the case of incest and other kinds of abuse. Miller also describes the damage done by narcissistic parents
who use their children to fulfill their own needs, be it sexual or otherwise (a need to be seen as great, to control etc.) This is an analysis particularly applicable to the situation in the film.

19 Thibaudeau comments: "les deux classiques du romanticisme anglais [...] d'un côté mettent en scène un espace du nord, et de l'autre, ils permettent un rapprochement entre Estrella et Julia puisqu'elles partagent les mêmes goûts littéraires. Mais surtout, ces deux romans sont associés dans le film à la mélancolie: *Tess d'Urbervilles* peut constituer un indice prémonitoire de la dépression de Julia dans la dernière partie, quant au livre d'Emilie Brontë, il intervient pendant celle d'Estrella après la mort de son père" ["the two classics of English Romanticism [...] on the one hand enact a Northern space, and on the other, allow Estrella and Julia to get closer since they share literary tastes. But mainly, these two two novels are associated in the film with melancholy: *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* can constitute a premonitory sign of Julia's depression in the last part, and as for Emily Bronte’s book, it comes up during Estrella’s [depression] after her father’s death"] (344, note 10).

20 "A victim of reprisal." The term refers to the “perpetual ostracism” of those who had sided with the Republic during the Civil War, which was especially fierce during the 1940s. For a discussion of the relationship between vanquished and victor (‘*el pacto de la sangre*’ ['the blood contract']) see Carr 15-20.

21 These novels have both been made into films which, as Thibaudeau points out, makes the allusions doubly reflexive: "les romans cités ayant été adaptés à l'écran, ils peuvent être perçus comme une forme de relexivité endophorique, médiatisée par une référence extérieure (et écrite) qui renvoie, par rebond, au cinéma lui-même ["The fact that the novels cited have been adapted to the screen means that they can be perceived as a form of endophoric reflexivity, mediatized by an external (and written) reference which indirectly refers back to the cinema itself"] (344).
Arocena notes that these images are public ones, substituting the private relationship: "al igual que Irene Ríos se convirtió para Agustín en una imagen proyectada en las pantallas del cine, en una realidad que sólo puede admirar pero no aprehender, Estrella, la substituta en el presente de Irene Ríos, se convertirá para Agustín en otra imagen, esta vez expuesta en las vitrinas de la tienda de un fotógrafo. Son imágenes ambas que más pertenecen a una colectividad, que al propio Agustín"

[“Just as Irene Ríos became for Augustín an image projected onto the movie screen, in a reality which he can admire but not grasp, Estrella, the present substitute for Irene Ríos, will become another image for Augustín, this time exposed in the windows of a photography shop. They are both images which belong to a collectivity, rather than to Augustín alone”] (242).

Erice is himself an excellent director of actors, as the superb performances in El sur attest.

Although describing Erice as "indebted" to Shadow of a Doubt seems to misconstrue the relationship. I don't think Erice "reformulated" the earlier film, but rather chose to allude to it because of the thematic parallels. The relationship between the films is thus not a parody as is the case with El espíritu de la colmena, but rather part of a larger series of allusions that have thematic, but not visual, parallels. (In this sense Rebel without a Cause, which goes unmentioned in the film, also plays a role.)

Hopewell makes the same observation: "For Agustín, Estrella and Irene Ríos substitute each other; he stopped seeing the actress, their correspondence reveals, not when he got married but when Estrella was born; he starts writing to her after Estrella's First Communion, which marks the beginning of her growing up and inevitable independence from her father" (210-11).

This quote seems to me to illustrate some of the complexity of the narrator in film. Fiddian and Evans here seem to be invoking less the character — Estrella as narrator—
than the implied filmmaker, the one who puts together the imagery. They end up arguing not just that Estrella sees herself as guilty, but that the implied filmmaker presents her as guilty. More on this in the next section.

27 As I mentioned previously, Erice recognized the difficulty of finding a justification of the father's suicide. His long-time collaborator makes the point "¿No es cierto que la dramatización de un suicidio, por insondable que sea, debe obedecer a una graduación casi matemática de síntomas?" ["Isn't true that the dramatization of a suicide, as unfathomable as it is, must obey an almost mathematical graduation of symptoms?"] ("33 preguntas," 57).

28 Hopewell uses the term referring it to the fleetingness of time in the film: "A sense of time running out is conveyed by an almost classical image: Julia, distraught at Agustín's attempt to leave for Andalusia, rapidly winding up a bundle of wool like some latter-day Parcae" (213).

29 It also better suits Adelaida Morales' novella, which is much more "Freudian" than the film. I would still argue, however, that the mature Adriana (as Estrella is called in the book) is neither "agitated" nor "disoriented," coming away with the essential insight that "Ahora tenía una nueva pieza para encajar en el rompecabezas de tu imagen: habías sido un cobarde. Pero pensé al mismo tiempo que tu sufrimiento, incluso tu muerte, te remidían de ello" ["I now had another piece to fit into the puzzle of your image: you had been a coward. But I thought at the same time that your suffering, and even your death, redeemed you"] (47).

30 Thibaudeau sees this differently suggesting that "c'est à elle qu'il a pensé avant de mettre fin à ses jours, et d'une certaine façon, il a souhaité qu'elle l'accompagne puisqu'il a emprunté sa bicyclette" ["it's her he thought about before killing himself, and in a way, he wanted her to accompany him since he borrowed her bicycle"] (121).
31 Thibaudeau comments: "Tous les échecs d'Agustín sont liés à son refus du présent et à son désir vain de faire revivre les temps révolus. Sa quête est cyclique et s'oriente à l'envers, en direction du passé et non de l'avenir" ["All of Augustin's failures are linked to his refusal of the present and his vain desire to relive the past. His search is cyclical and faces the wrong direction, towards the past rather than the present"] (119).

32 Erice comments: "In all parenthood, the creators are defeated by their offspring—and that applies to artistic creation too. But there are people—mothers and fathers—who would like their experience to crystallize at a moment in infancy. That is what happens to Estrella's father" (Sight and Sound, 28).

33 Edwards concurs: "In suggesting that she 'has finally grown up,' she prescribes a course that he must also accept, however difficult that might be" (157).

34 When Estrella asks him what the occasion for the exceptional lunch is, Agustín responds: "quería hacer las paces" ["I wanted to make up"] (seq. 37).

35 *dressed like a bride, Estrella views the ceremony as a figurative marriage to Agustín, interpreting his last minute appearance at the church, despite anti-religious feeling, as evidence of his devotion to her* (130).

36 Thibaudeau associates this temptation of incest with Agustín's putting away of his pendulum: "l'abandon du pendule peut être interprété comme une forme de châtiment qu'il s'impose à lui-même après la tentative de l'inceste. En n'utilisant plus le pendule, il s'aveugle d'une certaine façon, il renonce à son don de double vue. Ce qui nous renvoie au mythe d'Oedipe-Roi, déterminant dans la problématique de l'inceste" ["the abandonment of the pendulum can be interpreted as a form of punishment which he imposes on himself after the temptation of incest. By not using the pendulum, he renounces his gift of double sight, which sends us back to the myth of Oedipus Rex, essential to the problematic of incest"] (320). This interpretation obviously takes
Freud as a given, and runs into the same kinds of problems I have enumerated earlier, talking about "la consécration publique de l'inceste" ["the public consecration of incest"] and Estrella's late arrival to the Oedipus complex, with all that that supposes. Thibaudeau's framework, however, is very flexible and she uses Freud quite loosely, invoking Claude Levy Strauss as much as the father of psychoanalysis in this section.

37 The Civil War, as in El espíritu de la colmena, is a powerful if barely mentioned backdrop to everything that unfolds. We learn of Agustín's distancing from his father through the words of his nanny Milagros, who explains that Agustín and his father were on opposing sides during the conflict.

38 "Cet acte recèle, dans une optique historique, une double impossibilité: celle de s'intégrer à une société qui l'a vaincu, et celle de s'en détacher" ["this act contains, from a historical perspective, two impossibilities: that of integrating into a society that has vanquished him, and that of detoxing himself from it"] (Thibaudeau, 119).

39 Arocena, though taking a Freudian approach, agrees: "Nosotros espectadores accedemos a un saber mayor que el de la Estrella-narradora pues se nos muestran en la pantalla acontecimientos a los que Estrella no ha tenido acceso, como es el de la lectura de la carta de Irene Ríos que recibe Agustín y la reacción de éste ante la película que se proyecta en el cine" ["we as spectators have access to more knowledge than Estrella, since we are shown events onscreen to which Estrella hasn't had access, like the letter from Irene Ríos received by Augustín and his reaction to the film projected at the theatre"] (202). Thibaudeau also criticizes Fiddian and Evans's view, stating that "[réduire] le point de vue de El sur au seul point de vue d'Estrella-narratrice [...] est discutable, la question de l'énonciation étant plus complexe" ["to reduce the point of view to that of Estrella as narrator [...] is debatable, the issue of the enunciation being more complex"] (322).
Thibaudeau cites an interview with Erice in which he comments: "Mi intención era ir abriendo poco a poco el punto de vista de Estrella, hacerlo compatible, contrastarlo, incluso con otros puntos de vista [...] En la parte que se desarrollaba en Andalucía, la visión de Estrella co-existía con la del resto de los personajes; se establecía incluso un cierto contraste entre lo que la voz en off decía y lo que realmente veíamos" ["My intention was to open Estrella’s point of view little by little, to make it compatible, contrast it even, with other points of view [...] In the part that was to take place in Andalucia, Estrella’s vision co-existed with that of the rest of the characters; a certain contrast was to be set up even between what the voice off was saying and what we really seeing"] (368).

Arocena comments: "Por una parte, El Sur cuenta el largo trayecto de un hombre insatisfecho que decide acabar con su vida; por otra, es la lectura de este trayecto por su hija, totalmente implicada en la acción de Agustín" ["On one hand, The South tells the story the long journey of an unsatisfied man who decides to end his life; on the other, its the interpretation of the journey by his daughter, totally implicated in Augustín’s action"] (Arocena, 211).

As Thibaudeau points out, it would be highly unusual for a Republican who had been in prison to find work as a doctor at a local hospital. The suggestion is that his family’s Francoist connections helped him get established. The mother is obviously upper class, traveling with what are essentially servants, although curiously, Milagros treats Casilda with the same kind of "noblesse oblige" that Rosario does. The difference in accents is of course the clearest marker of class, and Milagros says as much, identifying Agustín’s uninflected Spanish as that of a "señorito." See Thibaudeau, 31.

This seems to be Fiddian and Evans’s position, though they have indirect recourse to the suggestion of an implied narrator. Statements such as "the limited psychological
context of the girl's relationship with her parents, particularly her father, is carefully twinned [...] with the theme of Spain's exhumation of its recent past" and "coincidences embedded in the tissue of the film suggest that Estrella projects her fantasies, her guilt, her whole psychological drama on to the figure of Irene Ríos" (128, 132) beg the question, who is doing the twinning and the embedding? The suggestion is that it is someone other than Estrella.

44 And she and Isabel have supplied the drawings in the credit sequence.
45 The same is true of the sequence where the girls hear footsteps above them as if in response to their call for the monster. The amusement comes from the deft switch in perspective.
46 See especially "Discourse in the Novel" in the Dialogic Imagination, 259-422.
47 When the camera moves, it tends to track the characters.
48 It is interesting to note that Erice considered this technique for El espíritu de la colmena. The first drafts of the screenplay had Ana returning home to her father's funeral as a framing device, but Erice decided against mediating the experience of the child through her adult self.
49 The intertwining of history and myth should be noted here. As in El espíritu de la colmena the father's story (and indeed the mother's as well) is representative of a historical trajectory. Perhaps more so than in El espíritu the family's story is the story of Spain, where father turned against son, and remained a "house divided." Agustín's family division between North and South is significant, as is the possibility of reconciliation of the extremes embodied in Estrella.
50 Harry Levin describes the "Cervantes principle" as "attacking literary illusions [in order] to capture the illusion of reality" (22).

Thibaudeau makes a similar point in a different context: "De même que Cervantes avertissait des dangers de la littérature en montrant l'emprise des romans de chevalerie
sur Don Quixote [...] Víctor Erice s'inscrit pleinement dans la modernité cinématographique en mettant en évidence, de l'intérieur de ce mode d'expression, le pouvoir dangereux du cinéma à travers deux victimes principales: Ana et Agustín" ["In the same way that Cervantes warned of the dangers of literature by showing the hold of chivalric novels on Don Quixote [...] Victor Erice is fully within cinematic modernity by underscoring, from within this means of expression, the dangerous power of cinema through its two main victims: Ana and Augustin"] (375). I'm not sure one could accurately describe Ana as a victim of the movies in the same way as Agustín, however, since for her the experience leads to a search for mystery and independence, while for Agustín, more occupied with the surface of the filmic image than its "spirit," it leads to dependence and death.

51 It is important to note that these sequences — the fight, and Estrella's burning of Irene Ríos' picture — do not follow one another temporally: they are linked causally, but do not necessarily occur in the same night.

52 See Thibaudeau, 177.

53 Arocena makes the same association: "El sonido del tren en off es el sonido de la huida, el sonido del Sur que llama a sus hijos desde el pasado. Y al igual que las tierras sureñas, el tren jamás aparecerá en la pantalla. El silbido y el traqueteo del tren al iniciar su marcha señalan la imposibilidad de recuperar el pasado y la renuncia a los sueños del presente" ["the sound off of the train is the sound of escape, the sound of the South that calls her children from out of the past. And just like the South, the train never appears onscreen. The train whistle and the rattling of the train as it starts out signal the impossibility of recovering the past and the renunciation of the dreams of the present"] (251).

54 Chion notes that many filmmakers were attempting to relativize speech from the time of the first sound films: "They attempted to inscribe speech in a visual, rhythmic,
gestural, and sensory totality where it would not have to be the central and
determining element" (*AV*, 178)

55 Once again it is Milagros who speaks the taboo, saying to Agustín when she first sees him: "¿Sabes de quien me estoy acordando ahora? De tu padre...si él estuviera aquí..." ["You know who I’m thinking of right now? Your father... if he were here..."] (seq. 14).

56 The description is Colin McArthur's, quoted in Dyer, 57.

57 For a discussion of space in *El sur* see Thibauden 91-200.
Ne vous laissez pas distraire, de simples objets sont un monde.
[“Don’t let yourself be distracted, simple objects are a whole world.”]

-Hubert Comte

The question of time is a question of the play between presence and absence, origin and end, eternity and temporality, metaphysics and history, thing and representation [...] Poetic time is, in effect, the self-questioning of presences.

-Richard Jackson
Chapter 3

*El sol del membrillo: The Time of the Artist*

Erice’s next film would indeed represent a new beginning, though there would again a ten year interval between *El sur* and his next project. *El sol del membrillo*, (alternately titled *Dream of Light* and *The Quince Tree Sun* in English) a documentary about the realist painter Antonio López García, seems at first glance to be a departure for Erice. Nevertheless, the film gathers up many of his themes — painting, light, time— and stylistically, it is almost a summation and distillation of his art. Erice had mentioned his desire to make a non-traditional film in interviews about *El Sur*. He told Vicente Molina Foix in 1984:

> Souvent j’ai eu la tentation de dériver vers une structuration cinématographique fragmentaire, le journal intime, l’essai, la réflexion, avec peut-être un soupçon de fiction. La fiction d’une certaine manière a fait naufrage.

> I was often tempted to drift towards a fragmentary filmic structure, the personal journal, the essay, a reflection, with perhaps a hint of fiction. Fiction in a certain way has foundered (51).

Hopewell comments that Erice had in fact sketched out a project for this kind of film in the early eighties but that

> several factors held him back: a personal timidity [...] the fact that ‘the Spanish cinema has not experienced several stages of growth’ so that it was one thing to receive a theoretical education in modernist film-making but quite another, as a director, to attempt such a cinema (210).

By the time Erice made *El sol del membrillo*, Spain had passed through many stages of growth, and took its place in a modern Europe quite for granted. The film was released in 1992, when the world was flocking to Spain for Expo and the
Olympics, and Madrid was designated the Cultural Capital of Europe. The film industry had overcome its desire to make up for lost time by putting everything forbidden onscreen at once, and Almodóvar had blown the tradition wide open. Having escaped the straight jacket of Francoism, the country was shaking off its hangover of excess and brooding reflection.

The context, both personal and cultural, thus allowed Erice a freedom he had not previously enjoyed. But it would be naive to see this as a great liberation. Film is always bound by the pressures of the marketplace and it was only by stepping outside of the industry that Erice could make such a personal film.

The project began embryonically as a short for television on López's Laterraza de Lucio (one of his cityscapes) for TVE, the Spanish national television channel, but was transformed when funding fell through. Erice had been following López around with a video camera, eventually imitating the meticulous painter in a kind of comparative experiment. As Erice describes it in the press kit for the film:

Tomando como guía los motivos presentes en algunas obras anteriores de Antonio, [...] cuyo conjunto componía una especie de "suite" urbana, acudí en solitario a los lugares de la acción; es decir, me sitúé con la cámara en el mismo punto y a la misma hora en que el pintor lo había hecho con su caballete tiempo atrás [...] en esa tentativa, el ojo de la cámara impusó sus límites, evidenciando unas diferencias [...] que revelaban, de una forma muy sencilla, algunos de los rasgos generales, específicos, de ambos medios de expresión.

Taking as a guide the motifs present in some of Antonio's previous work, [...] which together formed a kind of urban "suite" I went alone to the places they were painted; that is, I situated myself with the camera in the same place and hour of the day as the painter had done previously with his easel [...] in this attempt, the eye of the camera imposed its limits [...] which revealed, in a simple way,
some of the general and specific traits of each means of expression (Press kit, 6).

When López told him he was going to start painting a quince tree in his garden, Erice decided to make that his next project. He began the film without any backing, which he describes as "madness," and was forced at certain points to shoot on video when he ran out of 35 mm film. López's wife Marfa Moreno, herself a realist painter, decided to provide some of the funding so that the film could be finished. Two other companies came onboard, along with the Instituto de la Cinematografía y de las Artes Audiovisuales. The film, shot in 1990, was released at Cannes in 1992, winning the Critic's Prize and the Gold Hugo at the Chicago Festival later that year.

Critics have been almost unanimous in their praise. Writing in *Time Out*, Geoff Andrew calls it "Erice's most sophisticated film and his most accessible," and French critic Andrée Tournès claims: "Aux premières images s'impose la beauté, la justesse surtout. Une image nette comme un ton juste; sans tremblé, sans trivialité, sans superflu" ["From the first images beauty, and precision especially, impose themselves. An image as clear as the aptness of its tone: nothing shaky, nothing trivial, nothing superfluous"] (50). Janet Maslin sums up the general view in her review for *The New York Times*:

Mr. Erice's method is modest, yet his film manages to achieve a mesmerizing intensity. The purity and breadth of this meticulous study are all the more gratifying in view of its unprepossessing style.

Where there is some disagreement is on how to classify the film, and while Valéry's comment that "one cannot get drunk or quench one's thirst with labels on a bottle" is a truism, given the particular status of documentary, it is a question worth exploring. Because of the complexity of its reception and the artfulness of its making,
*El sol del membrillo* poses central issues about truth, art and the place of the real. Simply subsuming the film to the category of fiction skirts the complexity of these issues, and leaves intact a hierarchy of genres that Erice's film implicitly questions. As Michael Renov comments: "the reciprocal interrogation of the terms of the inherited hierarchy —fiction/nonfiction— can clarify our understanding of both" (11).

**Documentary**

Some critics ignore the question of genre and take Lindsay Anderson's advice to "just talk about films" (Levin, 67). William Johnson is one of the rare critics who considers *El sol del membrillo* a documentary, finding the dream sequence to be a "glib coda" that, while offering "conventional mystifications and solutions [...] also throws into relief the achievement of the rest of the film: to entertain and challenge us with the mystery of ordinary events shown clear" (44). The tendency, however, is to consider the film a hybrid documentary or not really a documentary at all. Andrew describes it as "superficially a documentary-diary" (20); Tournès says "du sujet nous apprenons qu'il était quasi-documentaire [...] un jeu entre fiction et hasard" ["we find out that the subject is semi-documentary [...] a game between fiction and chance"] but proceeds to review it without an elemental knowledge of the context, which results in a curious reading of the film. Arocena recognizes its documentary traits but goes on to state that it transcends "lo observado y llega a la reflexión, a la creación personal, es decir, a la ficción" ["the observed and reaches reflection, personal creation, that is, fiction"] (323). M. Torreiro comes closest to the paradox, commenting that

sin romper nunca con lo real, sin alejarse ni un milímetro de las cosas, Erice desvía sutilmente del filme y lo abre a la dimensión ficcional, a una polifonía de sentidos que son su mejor hallazgo.

without ever breaking with the real, without getting even a millimeter away from things, Erice veers subtly away from the film
and opens it to the fictional, to a poliphony of senses which is his best discovery (32).

Jennifer Dunning claims that it "amounts[s] not to a documentary but a journal of an artist's work and life and a film about creation and life itself" (16). This comment is in some sense emblematic of a critical attitude that makes "documentary" and "a film about life itself" antithetical terms. Since "documentary" on one level seems to imply "undoctored" along with immediacy and rawness, there is perhaps a reluctance to ascribe a great film to that genre. This reluctance is further compounded by the low esteem in which the genre is often held.

Documentary has long been on the margins of filmmaking, providing an alternative to both Hollywood and the art film but never gaining their audiences. Great filmmakers have made great documentaries, but more often than not as a stepping stone to feature films (Franju and Kieslowski, to give two examples) and few documentaries are given commercial distribution, although this is beginning to change with the newer crop of feature documentaries. Film criticism has only recently turned its attention to the documentary form, and it is striking that most of the seminal critical explorations have been published since the late 80s. By choosing the documentary form, then, Erice is working on the fringes, and he recognizes that the film "ha sido posible porque las personas que la financiaron no son gente de cine" ["was possible because those who financed it weren’t film people."]

The auteur risks, however, finding himself in marginal company. In interview after interview Erice is at great pains to point out the interpenetration of fiction and nonfiction in film history, placing his film in a lineage that includes Murnau and Flaherty’s Tabu, Jean Vigo’s Zéro de conduite, Rossellini’s Paisà and Renoir’s The River. Antonio López displays the same unease with calling the film a documentary saying that it is instead “una película de Víctor Erice, y con esto creo que resumo el
resultado porque él, junto a Pedro Almodóvar, son los dos cineastas españoles más auténticos” ["it is a film by Victor Erice, and I think with that I’m summarizing the result, because he and Pedro Almodovar are the two most authentic Spanish filmmakers."] (Press kit, 3).

Documentaries that have achieved commercial success generally do so on the strength of their famous subjects (such as Gimme Shelter (1970), or Don’t Look Back (1966), a film like Roger and Me (1989) being the exception.) The word itself bears a kind of stigma — witness the recent attempt by Miramax Films (distributors of Roger and Me and other documentaries snubbed by the Oscars) to have the Academy Award category’s name changed to “best non-fiction film” to jettison the ‘negative connotations” of “documentary” (quoted in Renov, 5). As Louis Marcorelles laments:

Thousands of bunglers have made the word [documentary] come to mean a deadly, routine form of film-making [...] the art of talking a great deal during a film, with a commentary imposed from outside, in order to say nothing, and to show nothing.11

Regardless of the bunglers, however, within and without the documentary community, there is a sense that “art” and documentary are somehow opposites, and documentary, as a style (now adopted by television dramas and advertisements), has often relied on the grit of its images to prove its authenticity.12 As Cavell comments: “some will still feel the real distinction is not between the fictional and the factual within the art of film but between film as art and film as document” (in Warren, xii). As Renov cogently argues, the dichotomy emerges from Western dualism that sets “truth” against “beauty.” He quotes Hans Richter on the effect of this binarism:

It became clear that a fact did not really remain a ‘fact’ if it appeared in too beautiful a light. The accent shifted, for a ‘beautiful’ image could not normally be obtained except at the expense of its closeness to reality (25).
The dualism also supposes that the capturing of the real is somehow scientific: that truth must not only be unbeautiful but also unmetaphorical. The metaphor reveals the maker’s hand, and documentary is supposedly “objective.”

The implicit definition of documentary I am describing comes to us through Grierson’s work and cinéma-vérité or direct cinema, as it was called in its influential American incarnation. In his critique of the Grierson legacy, Brian Winston sums up the tradition as didactic, objective and serious with “pretension to a superior representation of actuality” (254). Kevin Macdonald and Mark Cousins in their compilation of articles *Imagining Reality* put it tersely:

John Grierson has a lot to answer for. Not only was he the populariser of that most dreary and off-putting of terms, ‘documentary’, but he proceeded to convince us that the only type of documentaries worth making were the type that he approved: utilitarian, pedagogic and impersonal (xi).

Direct cinema, which came to be the definition of documentary in the popular imagination, supposes in addition unmediated material, with the camera as “an impartial and unobtrusive observer capturing the sight and sound of real life” (quoted in Winston, 150). That any of these claims are tenable is a matter of current critical debate.13 The tradition, however, from Flaherty’s *Nanook* onward is not so “pure,” “objective” “undramatic” or “uninterventionist” as a popular view of documentary might suppose. Flaherty had Nanook recreate the seal hunt for filming purposes, but examples of recreation, dramatization and other “unobjective” (or fictional) techniques abound from cinema’s earliest infancy when Lumière rehearsed subjects and had them act naturally for the camera.14 The French tradition —exemplified in Jean Rouch’s *Chronique d’un été* (1961), Chris Marker’s *Sans Soleil* (1982) and Alain Resnais’s *Nuit et brouillard* (1955)— privileged the impressionist essay and was “generally, and unambiguously [...] poetic, aesthetic and personal” (Winston, 184). In contrast the
demands on the anglophone documentarists and their own claims sound like Star Trek's first principle of non-intervention, and are equally unsustainable.\textsuperscript{15} Recent documentaries have tended to eschew the Grierson strictures to embrace the subjective, personal and poetic (Peter Mettler's \textit{Picture of Light} is a striking example, as is Nick Broomfield's work in Britain.) \textit{El sol} fits into this stream (which includes a number of important documentaries made in Spain), at once an intensely personal film and a record of a specific event; at once a document and a poem.\textsuperscript{16}

Examined within a Griersonian framework, of course, \textit{El sol} does not stand up and cannot be considered a documentary at all. There is far too much ambiguity, far too much artistic use of the medium. Yet it seems to me it is important to claim it as a documentary so that this kind of limiting definition can be laid to rest. As Macdonald and Cousins show, the common definition of documentary excludes a good part of the documentary films that have been made, and tends to obscure the relationship between the real and the filmed.

Part of the difficulty is the expectation that an objective truth is obtainable through a semblance of scientific method. Arocena, for example, would have \textit{El sol} become fiction a soon as there is "reflection, personal creation", which seems to require documentary to be completely objective. Gadamer has argued cogently that "consciousness cannot, by pulling on the bootstraps of method, extricate itself from the very history of which it is part" (13), and post-modernism has effectively demolished the last remaining pretensions to objectivity\textsuperscript{17}. A scientific method is historical, ideological and cultural and hence not "abstract" or objective. In any case, as Winston argues, the view of the camera as a scientific instrument is historical and not impervious to deconstruction.\textsuperscript{18}

Heisenberg's uncertainty principle, whereby the very act of observation influences the results of an experiment is never truer than in the case of the camera.\textsuperscript{19}
Though Thibaudeau, for example, goes on in detail about the passage of the painter from “personne à personage” in the final scenes of El sol, the camera turns everyone in its viewfinder into “characters” if only by making them self-conscious. López describes the change the camera effected in his work:

Pendant le tournage, la caméra me préoccupait beaucoup. Je demandais sans cesse à Victor si l’objectif suivait la réalité du moment, et il devait toujours me rassurer. Malgré ça, c’était quelque chose qui me freinait. Cela tient peut-être à mon tempérament, peut-être que si j’avais été fait autrement, j’aurais pu donner plus. Tel que je suis, la caméra a joué un rôle dans mon travail.

The camera preoccupied me a lot during filming. I was always asking Victor if the lens was following the reality of the moment, and he kept having to reassure me. Nevertheless, it was something that held me back. Maybe it has to do with my temperament, maybe if I were made differently, I could have given more. But the way I am, the camera played a role in my work. (Cahiers, 33).

Both López and Erice, however, claim that the words and performances are authentic. As Erice said in another interview, “[les conversations] étaient tout à fait spontanée. Aucune ligne n’en était écrite” [“[the conversations] were all completely spontaneous. Not a single line was written”] (Cahiers, 32). But he is not thereby claiming that the film is not his own. In the very act of pointing a camera there is selection and reflection, and thereby a degree of subjectivity and artfulness (or lack thereof). Levin states it simply: “every film is the result of many subjective choices, as what to shoot (framing, angle, lighting etc.) and the fact of editing (omitting certain shots, juxtaposing shots or sounds)” (4). Erice’s artistic framing of scenes, his minimalist camerawork and the rhyming of sequences that gives the film a poetic structure are so far from the hand-held vérité style that has come to be identified with
documentaries that he can be described as “fictionalizing” through his very filming technique. As Trinh T. Minh-ha comments:

When, in a world of reification, truth is widely equated with fact, any explicit use of the magic, poetic or irrational qualities specific to the film medium itself would have to be excluded a priori as nonfactual (98).

Though this is part of the reasoning for excluding El sol from the documentary genre, what most critics focus on is the use of López’s dream, as this is what seems to take the film into the realm of fiction:

il est évident que nous sommes ici en pleine fiction car, puisque le couple d’artistes ne vit pas sur place, pourquoi ne réveille-t-elle pas son mari et pourquoi remet-t-elle l’objet dans sa poche avant de partir au lieu de l’emporter? [...] La signification de ce geste est bien sûr d’ordre symbolique.

it is obvious that we are here in the realm of fiction since, as the artist couple do not live [at the studio], why doesn’t she wake up her husband and why does she put the object back into his pocket before leaving instead of taking it with her? [...] The significance of the gesture is of a symbolic order. (Thibaudeau, 396).

Erice himself refers to El sol del membrillo as an "unconventional documentary" in which the objective language of non-fiction is joined to that of the dream (Sight and Sound, 26). The “objective” language of documentary, as has been discussed, is rather illusory, although undoubtedly Erice is making use of the conventions of documentary in terms of audience expectations. He avoids point of view shots, giving us head-on symmetrical shots that are an ideal point of view (that of the tree?) By carefully marking time in impersonal titles, the film stakes its documentary truth-claim: “this really happened.” The audience expectations, however, gradually shift as we are seduced, or entrapped by a different time: not of the document, but of the artist.
Nevertheless, the film is a document of that artist’s time (which we experience watching the film). This becomes particularly evident when looking through books on Antonio López’s work. It is startling to find photographs of López in much the same position, painting in the garden in 1976 and earlier.²¹ Some of López’s drawings of quince trees date from 1961.²² In the same way, the presence of Enrique Gran and their conversations about their years at school is an essential part of the record of the artistic process of a man who has been closely identified with his fellow-students throughout the years not because of a similarity in style, but through a bond of friendship.²³ Even as it presents the contemplative time of the artist, however, the film records the radio news reports that Antonio listens to in the garden (an enactment of the tension between creativity and the real). Unlike Clouzot’s Le mystère de Picasso which focuses purely on the creative process, operating in a present that is nevertheless a cheat (says Picasso: “ce que je regrette c’est que les gens vont penser que j’ai [terminé la toile] en dix minutes” [“what I regret is that people will think that I [finished the canvas] in ten minutes”]), in El sol the documentary past is allowed to show through the present time of the spectator.

Though the dream that is recounted and the gestures that accompany its introduction are ‘set up’ and operate symbolically, the line here too is murky. The film emerges from a dual instinct: the dream that López recounts at the end of the film, and the desire to embark on a spontaneous adventure to capture whatever happens.²⁴ In some sense these can be described as fiction and non-fiction, but for Erice the dream informs his understanding of López’s work (those who object to the coda do so on these grounds, that it explains too much) and is thus part of the informative element of the film.²⁵
As I mentioned, the camera turns everyone into characters. Throughout the film the couple are acting, since everyone who appears before the camera pretends that it’s not there and that they are not being watched by a crew (a look that will later be multiplied by the director, the editor and finally the audience of the completed film.\textsuperscript{26}) As Thibaudeau says:

Il est évident que la solitude et le silence observé par le peintre sont pure fiction, car le simple fait d’être filmé implique la présence d’une équipe de tournage qui, pour réduite et discrète qu’elle soit, n’en est pas moins encombrante et bruyante. Et pourtant, Antonio López fait comme s’il était seul, comme si tout l’arsenal cinématographique était invisible.

It is obvious that the solitude and silence observed by the painter are pure fiction, since the simple fact of being filmed implies the presence of a camera crew, that, as reduced and discreet as it might be, is still loud and intrusive. And yet, Antonio López acts as if he were alone, as though all the cinematic arsenal were invisible (380).

These elements can be seen as problematic if one is seeking to include El sol in a strict definition of documentary of the kind that I have been discussing. In the end, Erice fluidly mixes “fact” and “fiction” throughout the film. In doing so he is well within the documentary tradition since “fact” cannot come to us devoid of some “fiction” if “fiction” is defined as “made.” Lindsay Anderson’s distinction is quite useful in this regard:

There is a clear distinction between the creative and poetic use of invented elements, and documentary at its purest and most poetic is a form in which the elements that you use are the actual elements. It is the manipulation of the actual world into, as far as I am concerned, a poetic form –and that is documentary. If you invent your characters, invent your situation, then you go on from documentary into a different form (Levin, 66).
Tournès qualification of El sol as “a game between fiction and chance” is actually very apt, and it seems to me, in fact, an excellent definition of the documentary.

Painting

In choosing Antonio López García as his subject, Erice explores a creative process quite similar to his own. Both are meticulous, detail-obsessed artists who found early success. López is considered one of the foremost painters of Spain, “un caso aparte”[“a case apart”] who has been very influential. He works for years on his canvases and drawings — Margaret Moorman describes him as “work[ing] from life at the pace of life itself” — and his subjects are simple and domestic: still lives, the streets of Madrid, his wife and children, an open refrigerator, a bathroom, a tree (143). Like Stanley Plumley, quoted in the early pages of this thesis, López presents us with “the life in detail, the small moment, the texture of a thing.”

He has sometimes been called a hyperrealist, but his work does not quite fit that label. Much of his canvases remains blank, and many elements are rendered impressionistically. Madrid Sur, a painting completed over twenty years (1965-85), shows a panoramic view of the city; on the right side of the canvas the roofs are painted in energetic strokes that seem almost to emanate heat. What it represents is an impossible real, a city devoid of cars, trains or human presence. In the same way his famous Gran Vía (1974-81) has an eerie stillness. It is the busy Madrid street as no one has ever seen it, without people or cars. His Lilas series (1981, 1982) are done in broad strokes of muted colour.

Many of his subjects are framed by windows or doorways. In Taza de water y ventana (1968-71), space is divided symmetrically by the lines of the window, the tiles and the verticals of the corners of the walls. But once again the relationship to the real is not straightforward: the painting is divided into two halves by a horizontal grey
line, and the verticals of the top half do not quite correspond to those of the bottom. It produces an effect of “extrañamiento” [“estrangement”] and makes us look again: “así, lo vulgar se convierte en sorprendente” [“hence the ordinary becomes surprising”] (Moreno Galván, 202). The painting is marked by time — the rust stains by the window, the wear around the toilet, a cigarette butt on the floor— and there is something vaguely melancholy in its starkness. His extraordinary drawings have the same quality, “an unsurpassed level of intensity. Vacant rooms; spaces of light; pure illumination” (Calvo Serraller, 39). The human figures seem somehow suspended, serious and vulnerable. Like Erice’s films “all [his paintings] have an indefinable quietude, perhaps partly because they are usually centered or balanced” (Moorman, 143). Both their works are ambiguous, carefully framed (making use of windows both for light and to break up space) and give the most banal objects a kind of mythical quality by the intensity of their gaze.

López is a painter of time, of changing light and “it is as though the small movements of life are occurring within the drawings as we look at [them]” (Moorman, 144). Classical in his symmetry, he is baroque in his depictions of subtle erosion of time and the natural world at its moment of fruition — the perfection before decay. Erice has a similar interest in the moment of change, his previous films exploring the fall into knowledge, into adulthood from the perfection of childhood. As he comments:

Les thèmes principaux de la peinture d’Antonio sont les mêmes que ceux du baroque espagnol, de Velásquez et même de la poésie de Quevedo. Il y a dans le baroque une ressemblance du sommeil avec la mort, l’idée de la lumière qui s’éteint et de la mort.

The principal themes of Antonio’s painting are the same ones as those of the Spanish Baroque, of Velasquez and even of the poetry
of Quevedo. In the Baroque there is a similarity between sleep and death, the idea of light being extinguished and death (Catiers, 36).

As though suddenly conscious that he is speaking perhaps more about his own film than López’s paintings, Erice adds that El sol is not pessimistic, since the fact of making it is a positive thing. Thus the intertwining of the artists is as complex as the intermingling of fiction and reality, each reflecting on the other, as López is, finally, seen through Erice’s lens.

An example of this is the article on López chosen for the press kit. Written by Santiago Amón in 1969, it presents the realist painter through the image of a tree, “una realidad única que sólo puede poseerse por un acto de adhesión total” [“a unique reality that can only be grasped by an act of total adherence”]. The extracts emphasize López’s childlike perspective, and were probably chosen with an eye toward evoking an elemental resemblance between the collaborators:

Pocas veces amanecieron las cosas en la mirada del hombre con aquella verdad, esencia y tiempo detenido que Antonio López sabe infundir a los objetos revelados desde su ser primigenio [...] El retorno a la infancia es una actitud cognoscitiva, una senda elegida para aprehender la realidad, una tendencia del alma hacia lo verdadero. No se trata de suscitar la infancia a manera de espectáculo o por vía anecdótica: se pretende, ante todo, recuperar desde hoy aquella visión primigenia que poseyeron los ojos infantiles. No hacer del recuerdo tema argumental: proponer a la mirada del presente, desvirtuada, intelectualizada, deformadora, una memoria afectiva, inmersa y esclarecida en las aguas manatiales de la infancia.

Rarely have things been revealed through man’s eyes with the truth, essence and detained time with which Antonio López infuses objects, revealed in their primary being [...] The return to childhood is a conscious attitude, a path chosen to apprehend
realism, a tendency of the soul toward truth. It is not a matter of
raising childhood as a spectacle or anecdote: it is an attempt,
primarily, to recover the original vision of childish eyes from the
present. Not to make memory a theme, but to give the present
perspective, which is spoiled, intellectualized and deformed, an
emotional memory, immersed and enlightened in the fountain of
childhood (Press kit, 12).

This quote could also serve as a description of Erice’s intention to renew film
by returning to its infancy, before the “pollution of images.” Erice turns away from
conventional storytelling in this film to seek renewal. He turns to the documentary as
an alternative to the glut of television shows and films whose storytelling techniques
have become clichéd. The static camera, for example, is consciously used as the polar
opposite to television camera work. By avoiding all of the conventional techniques
of documentary, he renews that genre at the same time. The instinct is similar to that
of the realist painter: how to really see, stay with the real and penetrate it. Erice, often
his own best interpreter, comments in various interviews about this issue:

[le documentaire] c’est une façon pour moi de rester près des
 choses, de partir de choses comme elles sont, de s’en rapprocher,
pour commencer. C’est une garantie pour le regard.

[the documentary] is a way for me to stay close to things, to start
from things as they are, to get close to them, to begin. It’s a
guarantee for the eye (Cahiers, 36).

one of the great problems we have as filmmakers today is how to
give authenticity, truth, to the mass-produced image [...] sometimes
you need to look back to the origins — not to imitate, because it’s
impossible to reproduce the same thing, but because within a
disoriented world in crisis, these origins can shed a certain light.
Today everything is made according to formulae, formulae that have
expelled reality, stereotypes [...] so it’s important to get back in
contact with reality (Sight and Sound, 27, emphasis mine).
In a sense documentary is the filmic equivalent of realism, and the latter term has some of the same problems in the art world as the former in the film one. (One critic asks "why paint like this?" and then poses the "companion question", "Why make a film like this?" Johnson, 44.) For López, realism is a choice that has made him something of a maverick, above fashion, or out of it, depending on the critic. His almost impersonal, detached perspective is analogous to the documentarist’s striving to balance a found truth with a personal interpretation, an attempt to do the subject justice:

El objeto para mí es más importante que mi trabajo, que debe ser el reflejo de una contemplación apasionada, pero no manipuladora [...] La imparcialidad no es posible, pero mi voluntad es que esa impregnación no altere lo que para mí es más importante en el objeto y en ese tiempo en que he estado mirando [...] lo importante es que toda esa experiencia visual, mental, emocional, pase a la obra con precisión.

For me, the object is more important than my work, which should be the reflection of passionate contemplation that isn’t manipulative. Impartiality is not possible, but what I want is to make sure that the saturation doesn’t alter what for me is the most important part of the object and the time that I have spent watching it [...] what’s important is that all of that visual, mental, emotional experience pass into the work with precision. (López García, 212).

Erice expresses the same desire to respect López’s environment and his creative process, to be faithful to the time they spend together:

The film is built around the dates of filming which I respected. It was the natural solution for editing. It has a relationship with the natural in any case. Antonio López is a painter who paints from the natural (Cahiers, 33).

For all the similarities between López and Erice’s creative processes, however, the media they work in are different. If Erice began by experimenting, imitating the painter, the final contact between the media poses the question of the nature of the filmic image. As I have shown, Erice’s cinematic style is painterly: traces of Vermeer are to be found throughout El espíritu de la colmena and El sur, and El sol is no less crafted in terms of framing and light. The still life makes an even more marked appearance in the last film, where the camera remains on objects after the people have left the shot. Erice affirms the similarity of the frame to the painting (“le plan, c’est la conscience, comme on a dit” [“the shot is conscience, as someone said”] Cahiers, 33) and expresses a certain envy of the painter’s solitary freedom. At the same time, Erice is also conscious of the limitation of painting, especially in terms of his central theme (and that of López): time.

Painting reaches towards atemporality, a moment frozen, while film, especially documentary film, is movement in time. López distills time into a still canvas, a synthesis of moments, even while he attempts to follow its movements and include its permutations in his canvas. Erice, with his immobile camera and still lives, nevertheless captures time’s flow. Film is a continuous present, but one at the same time that reveals a past. This is part of the fascination with the photographic image explored by Susan Sontag and Roland Barthes, and I think, part of our fascination with documentary. As Macdonald and Cousins comment:

There is something undeniably poignant about seeing moments from the relatively distant past preserved, knowing that everyone who appears in those films is long dead and buried (5).
Even if they are not dead and buried, the people and cities captured on camera have a poignancy in being left behind by time:

the nostalgia of old photographs is the perception that mortality is at some point to be stopped in its tracks. The figures in them seem so vulnerable, so unknowing of what we know about them, of the knowledge in store for them (Cavell, 75).

Fiction film does not have quite the same impact since our involvement is with the characters, and these continue to exist in our present.\(^5\)

With *El sol*, Erice invites painting into the film, both as a visual reference and as subject. Erice problematizes the nature of the filmic image by introducing its older relative as part of its theme. With the shots of the televisions in darkened rooms, the photograph that Enrique is seeking and the one Antonio holds, four generations of visual representation are juxtaposed in the film. The theme of the creative process doubles out into the question of visual representation. As Thibaudeau points out, the images of the television screens are treated similarly to the images of López’s canvas: both are shown surrounded by black, which points to their framing by the camera. Nevertheless, there’s an important difference in the treatment:

Tandis que la peinture est mise en valeur par le cadre et envahit l’écran du cinéma, l’image de la télévision, mouvante et floue, est réduite à une dimension ridicule dans une vaste étendue de noirceur. Plus qu’une rancœur de cinéaste face à la prédominance (malgré sa petite taille) de l’image télévisuelle, ce que ce plan signifie surtout, c’est qu’elle crée elle-même le vide qui l’entoure.

While the painting is shown to advantage by the frame and invades the screen, the television image, flickering and blurred, is reduced to a ridiculous dimension in a vast black space. More than a filmmaker’s grudge against the predominance of the television image
(despite its small size), what this shot signifies especially, is that television itself creates the void around it (350).

Erice presents the differences between the media as one of time; by choosing a contemporary painter who paints from nature, who seeks to accompany nature even as he races against time to capture the perfection of its fleeting light, Erice has posed the question of the interrelationship of media in terms of their relationship to the natural cycle. Time in *El sol* is measured by the change of light. The painter of the tree is intrinsically bound to this cycle (and José is defeated in his attempt to paint at night by the power outage). Television, however, appears at night, negating, or replacing, the cycle of nature. In the darkened room it provides the only light. The television tower (el piruli) appears like an enormous tree, illuminating the night. The film camera is also shown at night, in a light that mimics the day.36 Erice comments:

Parfois, au milieu de l’asphalt de la grande ville, un arbre apparaît comme le résidu d’un monde qu’on croyait disparu. Penser que le cycle vital de nos journées, ce sont les moyens de communication qui peuvent l’ordonner, en faisant fi des rythmes de la nature, cela signifierait que l’on accepte l’empire de l’artificiel, l’autorité de l’abstraction.

Sometimes, in the midst of the asphalt of the big city, a tree seems like the residue of a world that has disappeared. To believe that the media orders the life cycle of our days, ignoring the rhythms of nature, would mean that we accept the empire of the artificial, the authority of abstraction (*Positif*, 16).

Antonio López neither accepts the authority of abstraction, nor the empire of the artificial. His garden is presented as a kind of *locus amoenus*, away from the grit and graffiti of the city. The garden also juxtaposes the time of the artist, unmeasured except by the changing light, and the anecdotal time of the news (the weather, which is mentioned several times is, of course, “el tiempo” in Spanish). The Gulf War and
the fall of the Berlin Wall, also mentioned in the news reports were already in the past when the film opened, yet this doesn’t touch the present of the film, the artist, who has been standing in the same spot in his garden, over and over, for thirty years.37

The painter’s time is a time of meditation, waiting for the exact light, a willingness to be alongside the model. Erice comments that “it’s as if he gets into a silent, mysterious, secret dialogue with the tree” (Andrew, 21). López describes his own artistic quest as an encounter:

Yo, más que con el final, disfruto con el viaje. Por eso no siento angustia cuando llego al punto en el que abandono y dejo el óleo inacabado en la bodega. Lo importante para mí es estar junto a algo tan primario y perfecto como el membrillero.

For me, the journey is more enjoyable than the result. That’s why I don’t feel anxious when I reach the point where I abandon the oil painting and leave it unfinished in the cellar. The important thing for me is to be close to something primary and perfect like the quince tree (García, 33).

Francisco Calvo Serraller, in discussing López’s work, claims that waiting plays a central part in his creative process. It is not that López cannot catch the light that he is trying to represent, but rather that between a beginning and a necessarily undefined end, it is more a question of waiting than of falling behind. Knowing how to wait is artistically more difficult, but for Antonio López it is also absolutely essential. Knowing how to wait supposes the adoption of an ascetic posture, but one in which passivity is not inevitable (38).

Here Erice’s process clearly joins López’s, since the documentary demanded of him a contemplative patience, a willingness to accept what unfolds — the presence of the construction workers, for example, whose banging was perceived by the
soundman as not particularly fortuitous, becomes integral to the film— and clearly, the process is not a passive one. Erice chooses his set-ups carefully, and often works with only two angles (more often than not). It’s rather like López’s careful setting up of the parameters of his work, the horizontal and vertical lines that he traces with string, the spikes in the ground, the white lines: Erice describes it as a laying of a trap. He quotes López as saying “Tous les automnes je me mets près de l’arbre avec ma canne à pêche. Et si, de toute facon, ça ne mord pas, le propos est d’être là” [“Every autumn I go near the tree with my fishing rod. And if nothing nibbles, the point is to be there”] Positif, 12), which is an apt description of both their activities. Erice felt it was essential to be present everyday, not necessarily filming, but so as not to miss a revelatory moment.

This contemplative state is evoked in the audience by the rhythmic construction of the film, the beauty of its images and the constant references to time’s passage—not just the titles, but the shots that show the changing light, the dissolves, the discussions of the past. The viewer has to let herself be enthralled by details, a minor suspense, intimate, internal explorations. She has to give herself up to El sol’s different time. In the experience of that contemplative time lies the meaning of the film. Like El espíritu de la colmena, the experience of the viewer mirrors that of the people onscreen: we are immersed in López’s creative process. But more than that, we are immersed in an experience of time that is delivered through the decadent light of the camera.

Style

Every aspect of the film is oriented towards communicating that experience of time: editing, sound, framing and plot are all linked to this overriding theme. The film begins with a careful definition of time and place: “Madrid, otoño 1990. Sábado 29 de septiembre” [“Madrid, Autumn 1990. Saturday, September 29”]. We hear only the
sounds of the street as Antonio enters the yard, prepares his canvas. The preparation in silence has a ritualistic feel, framed with head-on simplicity. Antonio is situated as though with the gods in his studio, framed with a statue of Venus. Dissolves are used to suggest the passage of time, and the sequence ends with what I have termed a still life: a shot of the chair and painting instruments in the studio. Thus in this first sequence the film sets up its norms: a documentary anchoring in a precise time and place, a private ritual, references to the visual arts through the content and framing of shots and a focus on objects. In this first sequence the spectator has not yet “allowed himself to be taken prisoner” by the filmmaker: we are unsure of what López is doing or what’s going to happen (Tarkovsky, 120).

The stylistic elements, however, are closely related to Erice’s other films; even the patience demanded of the spectator is part of previous films’ ethos — a long silence, as it were, as the key elements of the film are threaded up. In this case the silence remains for a long while: it isn’t until sequence five that the spoken word enters the film fully, in the discussion of Antonio and Mari about the the light on the tree. I have said earlier that this film represents a distillation of Erice’s art, and in some ways it resembles El espíritu more closely than El sur. Both films share an extreme minimalism in terms of camera movement. As in El espíritu, people walk in and out of static frames that are repeated throughout.

Repetition is in fact, the essential characteristic of El sol, as if to focus the viewer’s attention on the minutia of change, the details that indicate time’s passage. The repetition is part of the structure of the film: we hardly move from the garden and the studio. When we do, the camera, like in El sur, makes sweeping gestures that take us into a different perspective. The camera leaves Antonio for the first time accompanied by the sound of the train: (seq.4). We are shown the barrio, houses and apartment blocks where televisions are seen through the windows. Antonio’s singing
binds these shots to the garden, but, significantly the first mention of death, the graffiti that warn of the dangers of heroin — "la chispa de la muerte" ["the spark of death"] — is shown in silence.42

The train, as we have seen, returns as a motif in both El sur and El espíritu, with connotations of longing and escape. A dimension is added, it seems to me, in El sol, given its reflexivity and its questioning of the status of the image. The train is closely allied to the cinema (some attribute the latter’s invention to the view out of the windows of moving trains, the staccato movement preparing the eyes for the moving picture.) The oft-quoted story of the 1895 spectators rushing out of the cinema fearing the train in L’arrivée d’un train en gare de la Ciotat [Train Arriving at Ciotat Station] would, in the words of Gorky, “plunge into the darkness in which you sit, turning you into a ripped sack full of lacerated flesh and splintered bones” is only the first of many intersections between film and the train (Macdonald, 8). As Lynne Kirby explains in Parallel Tracks, the cinema and the train have a reflexive relationship:

Some would see the cinema’s interest in the train as that of the double: the cinema finds an apt metaphor in the train, in its framed moving image, its construction of a journey as an optical experience [...] As a machine of vision and an instrument for conquering time and space, the train is a mechanical double for the cinema and for the transport of the spectator into fiction, fantasy, and dream. It is a metaphor in the Greek sense of the word: movement, the conveyance of meaning (2).

Here the train is shown juxtaposed with television: the daily barrage of images makes the first spectators’ innocent reaction impossible. Still, the train holds a kind of nostalgia for us and the distant whistle of the train which returns is another reminder of time’s passage, the flux of the city outside the painter’s contemplative space.
Other repetitions are also part of the acute investigation of time's passage and the painter's progress. Erice, as I mentioned, uses a minimal set-up, so that shots continually repeat themselves with minute variations. Antonio, for example, is shown painting from two angles, the reverse allowing us to see the painting, the other his concentration. The canvas' evolution is also shown in a simple repeated shot of the canvas, surrounded by black, with the date at the bottom of the screen. The shots come in twos (seq. 13-14; 19-20; 22-23), so that changes are visible. The repeated shots of the quinces show us the growing white marks on their skin, and, since an explanation for their existence doesn't emerge until the visit by the Chinese artist Xiao Ming and her interpreter (seq. 29), they seem, as Erice says, a kind of language (resembling the notations of the I-Ching) that traces the internal movement of the tree.

In the same way the repetition of shots of clouds and the moon and the sun immerses the viewer in the natural cycle. There are ten such shots, the sun appearing with the clouds four times, the moon three; in sequence 16 and 44 these shots both open and close the sequence. Significantly, the first shot of the sun and clouds appears in the sequence in which Antonio speaks (seq. 5), and recurs during the longest days (that is, the days that get the longest representation), October 1st and October 9th. These days form the nucleus of the film, and are spread over several sequences. October 1st is covered by sequence 3 to 11, and the 9th, from 14 to 18. Both are introduced and closed by fades up and down from white. These are the ascent, as it were, of the creative process.

The alternating use of the fades to black and white can be seen as dividing the film into large blocks (what one critic called chapters). The film begins on a fade up from black, but white-outs and dissolves predominate until López gives up on his project. The first fade to black is after Enrique declares that he has given up on his search for the old photograph, and precedes the first fruit falling from the tree. White-
outs are not often used in film, having a “heavenly” connotation, but here they serve the same function as a black-out, lending at the same time a lightness to the transitions. Black is used towards the end, when renunciation is imminent. This is not to suggest that the central sequences do not contain a kind of failure, tracing as they do the bad weather that forces López to renounce his painting, but they have the excitement of a new adventure.

October 1st: dramatis personae

October 1st is the first weekday in the film, and it brings with it the Polish construction workers who are renovating the studio. These, like Mari later in the same sequence, as well as Enrique and Julio (all the artists, in a sense) are shown walking through the gate (into and out of the frame). As well as providing a parallel—they too are making—the Polish workers serve as a counterpoint to Antonio’s mediated view of the tree, looking on his work, quite literally, with the eyes of foreigners. They stand around the painting, and later taste the quince, their curiosity piqued. That they find it “nada del otro mundo” (“nothing out of this world”) (or as Janusz says, “good for making jam”) serves to underline the singularity of Antonio’s view of the tree as something almost sacred.

His view is quite literally mediated, that is, seen through media, and before tasting the quince Marek must first remove the traces of that medium, the paint marks that transform it into an artist model. The mediation (the Spanish “mediatización” might be a more appropriate term here) helps to explain Antonio’s elaborate preparations and the tracing of the white lines on the wall behind the quince tree. López’s lines and plumb-bob transform the tree, indeed the very intensity of his gaze transforms the natural, just as the gaze of the camera transforms him in turn. The workers, who have never tasted a quince, are prepared for something extraordinary
because of the production around the tree. The extraordinary in the fruit tree, however, is precisely its ordinariness: the abundance and beauty of a simple thing. This is recognized by Elisa, who sees the tree without the mediation of López’s set-up, wondering why the fruits are stained. “¿Cómo puede un árbol tan pequeñito dar tanta fruta?” (“How can such a small tree give so much fruit?”) she asks, and the viewer takes the question beyond Elisa’s tangible level. Not just fruit, but a painting, a drawing, a film.

Despite their skepticism about Antonio’s enterprise, it is nevertheless the workers who help with the final element of the tree’s sanctification when the painter anticipates a rainstorm and has them help him cover his model and painting with an awning. Leutrat captions a photograph of Antonio under this set-up as “un modeste Michel-Ange sous l’arc de la Sixtine” [“a modest Michelangelo under the arc of the Sixtine chapel”](7), which is an apt characterization of the treatment of the tree as “something out of this world.” There is something quixotic in López’s efforts, and the notion of sheltering the tree from the rain is one of several humorous touches in the film (“sería divertido si no fuera tan serio” [“it would be funny if it weren’t serious”] says Enrique as he is recruited to hold up a leaf so Antonio can accurately depict the fruit beneath it.47)

As well as providing another (non-painterly) viewpoint (which the audience might share), the presence of the Polish workers is also connected to the theme of time. They express the desire to finish as soon as they can, not to waste any time (“if we don’t finish soon we’ll be losing money,” one of them asserts). On the other hand, their work of construction is shown in dissolves that allows us to see their progress in a slow movement. Each step in the transformation is haunted by the previous one, a layering that is more melancholy than celebratory, as though every change carries with it a loss.
Sequence 3 also introduces Mari, the painter's wife, and José, a painter living at the studio, who along with Antonio's daughters, complete the *dramatis personae* of the film. As Thibaudeau points out, this sequence is edited in strict symmetry. As with the workers, a parallel and counterpoint is established between Mari and her husband. She is working on an engraving (black and white) in artificial, indoor light; he is working on a painting (colour) in outdoor, natural light (261). Sequence 7 establishes the same kinds of parallels and counterpoints between José's abstract work and López's realism.

Still life

The symmetry is present throughout the overall section that comprises October 1st. The same elements are repeated in the light of morning and of evening: the house, the apartment blocks, the arrival and departure of the workers and the painters. The shots of the sun and clouds are repeated three times, tracking these changes in the light. We are immersed in the leisurely pace of the everyday, Antonio's domestic world. The events of the day are utterly mundane — husband and wife discuss a visit to the doctor, the workers have lunch, practice their Spanish, the daughters buy their father some shoes, the painters work, evening falls and everyone goes home.

The focus on mundane domesticity is a characteristic of Erice that, along with his shots of objects in striking light, he shares with the the still life tradition. The first "empty chairs" shot is shown here, as well as one of Erice's careful symmetric frames of objects — a Spanish book, a glass, some handcream. As I have commented in a previous chapter, Erice uses objects to convey meaning, sometimes metonymically, for example, in the case of the father's watch in *El espíritu* or the pendulum in *El sur*, or metaphorically, in the case of the train in all three films. Here these shots of isolated objects are even more enigmatic than in *El espíritu* or *El sur*, since they are not linked
to a particular point of view. The plumb-bob, for example, suggests balance and in sequence 34 sways like a metronome counting time, but it is not evocative of anyone’s interior state. Linda Ehrlich compares this to Ozu’s transcendental style, in which “mute objects speak in a familiar yet barely decipherable language” (28). The effect of these shots is to show the traces of time in ordinary objects. As Tarkovsky, another filmmaker whose work is haunted by memory and the inexorable passage of time, puts it “No ‘dead’ object — table, chair, glass— taken in a frame in isolation can be presented as it were outside passing time, as if from the point of view of an absence of time” (Tarkovsky, 68).

As well as close-ups of objects, Erice makes extensive use of dissolves that show a room after the people in it have gone, the “empty chairs” shot. This use of “post-diegetic space” can be compared to Antonioni’s use of temps morts, in which the “camera’s lingering makes the place pregnant with possibility” (Chatman, 126). The use of the dissolve, however, gives a slightly different tone to the technique. The solidity of the inanimate is underlined; the constance of objects contrasted to the brief, dissolving human presence. The result is a play of presence and absence that once again immerses us in time. Objects retain the traces of the human presence, they are what is left behind, and the camera scrutinizes them as though they might reveal their secrets.

The news

Another aspect that is first introduced during October 1st is the news on the radio, which poses the problematic of time in a different way. As I mentioned, the news, in its anecdotal collage of the immediate, does not really touch the present of the painter:
Dans le jardin d’Antonio López, et dans le film de Víctor Erice, tout échappe au circonstantiel, à la vacuité du présent car, malgré la conscience lucide de l’éphémère, est mis en œuvre le processus éternel de la création.

In Antonio López’s garden, and in Víctor Erice’s film, everything escapes the circumstancial, the vacuity of the present because, despite the lucid consciousness of fleetingness, the eternal process of creation is put into practice (Thibaudeau, 19).

In speaking of the “eternal process of creation” the critic perhaps overstates her case, but a contrast is undeniably set up between the flow of disposable present found in the news and the gathering up that is López’s creative process. There is very little difference between one day and another in the garden, López displaying the same concentration throughout. He continues to paint as the radio takes him to “Vienna 1815” and maintains his peaceful concentration despite news of the Gulf war. The radio thus juxtaposes the outside world with the quiet of the garden, and juxtaposes time measured by the news with the time of creative activity, which is, as I said, unmeasured except by the change of light.

The news, however, contributes greatly to the viewer's sense of passing time, in the same way as the titles, by providing an external, documentary measure to counterbalance López’s untimed ritual. The events of 1990 on the world stage connect us to López and his world through a shared history, that, although to a greater or lesser extent peripheral to our lives, has a place in our memory. A space thus opens up for the viewer’s own memories and associations related to the events of what has been termed “the New World Order;” on the one hand the optimism of the German reunification, on the other the cynicism of the Gulf war. Within the film, these two events can be related to the theme of death and regeneration: the deaths of soldiers and civilians; the death of a state and the rebirth of a new one.
This first weekday, then, shows the social dimensions of Antonio’s environment. The reality of Madrid, the international scene and Antonio’s garden are brought together, juxtaposed and framed by time itself, the movement of the sun in the sky. The people that form Antonio’s social context are also presented, their activities juxtaposed with Antonio’s own through the parallels and contrasts of a rhythmic montage.

October 9th: memory

October 9th is also shaped by careful symmetry and repetition. The whole day centres on a visit by Enrique Gran, an old friend of López who studied with him when he first came to Madrid. The two painters tend to be included in the same generational grouping despite their age difference (Gran is seven years older than López) and Gran’s abstract style. Their visit is shown in four sequences (14-18), with shots of clouds appearing three times. The day has the same distended feel as October 1st. It is in fact the longest day represented in the film, yet also the most concentrated, centering entirely on the relationship between the two men. Each sequence with Enrique Gran in it focuses on time in a different way: the first in terms of the evolution of the canvas (“todo queda” [“everything remains”]) the second in relation to the shared history of the men; the third is linked to art history; and the last repeats the theme of creativity and old age.

The central sequence (16) begins and ends with a shot of the sun and clouds. It focuses most directly on the past, with Enrique conjuring up images of himself and López in their youth (“¡vaya soldado yo! [...] un chico andando conduciendo su propia orquesta” [“some soldier I was! [...] a kid walking around conducting his own orchestra”]), early paintings that have disappeared, their teachers’ advice, a photograph taken in front of the academy where they studied. The close repetition of
the cloud shots punctuates the fleetingness of time expressed in their words, enclosing them in the transformations of the present.

Enrique expresses more nostalgia than Antonio and his desire to find the photograph of them taken when they first met is an expression of that nostalgia. Photographs have a talismanic quality, imprinted as they are with the the real — "all photographs are memento mori" writes Sontag— and Enrique’s search for the photograph is an attempt to hold on to something, to steal a moment from time’s "relentless melt" (OP, 15). That his nostalgia is manifested through a longing for a photograph fits the film’s exploration of different media. Nostalgia, and the rescuing of moments from the oblivion of history, are central to photography. From the first mention of the photograph, the conversation becomes wholly oriented towards the past.

The difference in attitude between Antonio and Enrique can be seen in their discussions about their teachers in art school. Antonio seems to remember things more clearly, though Enrique expresses more of a sense of loss for what has disappeared or changed: "íbamos a algunos cafés que se han perdido [...] todos teníamos mucha pasión por la música [...] la seguimos teniendo, pero claro, es de otra manera." ["we’d go to cafés that got lost [...] we had a lot of passion for music [...] we still have it, but in a different way"]). For Antonio the past is not lost, but part of the present:

sa vision du passé est indissociable du présent, car ce qui transparaît dans ses paroles, c’est l’idée d’un passé fondateur, non seulement de son amitié présente pour Enrique, mais également de sa conception de l’art et du monde.

his vision of the past is indissociable from the present, since what transpires in his words is the idea of a foundational past, not only of
his present friendship with Enrique, but also of his conception of art and the world (Thibaudeau, 151).

The past underlies and informs the present, just as nothing is lost in his work, despite being painted over. When Antonio speaks of the past, his teachers and his art school days, he relates it to his present experience:

Pues, fíjate, a mí, Soria me dijo algo que es lo único que me ha valido y todavía me vale. Lo que pasa es que en aquel momento no lo entendí. Y lo decía siempre. Siempre te lo decía. Más entero. Más entero [...] Y... con el tiempo...ya despítes caí en la cuenta....Y es algo tan importante lo de más entero.

Well, Soria said something to me, the only thing that was useful and still is. The thing is at the time I didn’t understand it. And he used to say it all the time. He’d always say it to you. Fuller. Fuller [...] And then...with time...after I understood...And it’s something that’s so important, the notion of fullness (seq. 16).

The notion of “más entero” [“more whole”] is central to the film, in relation not only to López’s painting style, the richness that builds up through layers of attempts at capturing the real, but also to the passage of time which serves to make him more entire as a human being. As time makes the painters more able to assimilate the lessons of their masters, it takes away the sense that everything is ahead of them that they had as students. These painters, like Erice, are in the autumn of their lives, rather like the quince tree.

Autumn is a prevalent season in Erice (Agustín kills himself in November, and El espíritu takes place almost entirely in the Fall) and in El sol del membrillo there are a series of parallels between the season in nature and its corresponding season in life of the artist. Enrique Gran, Antonio López and Víctor Erice, now past middle
age, are all artists who have had success in their youths and are entering a different phase. Enrique gives voice to the sense that time is running out:

Alguien me dijo que los pintores de París, ya maduros, en la edad que tenemos ahora, trabajaban con una intensidad febril [...] Ahora lo entiendo porque yo, más o menos estoy en esta edad [...] trabajó continuamente [...] porque el tiempo real no puede ser largo.

Someone told me that the Paris painters, once mature, at the age we are now, worked with feverish intensity [...] Now I understand because I’m more or less that age [...] I work all the time [...] because in real terms there isn’t that much time (seq. 18).

Erice expresses the same sense of urgency: “Dans ce moment de ma vie, j’ai l’impression que le temps coule très vite; il faut faire les choses qu’on a envie de faire” [“at this time in my life, I have the impression that time is flowing very fast; you have to do what you want to do”] (Cahiers, 36). Thibaudeau argues that López doesn’t share this feeling, yet he is the one we see painting continually (often in the rain) and he is engaged in a more acute race against time. When Xiao Ming visits she asks him whether he thinks he can finish his drawing before the quinces fall. Antonio laughs, but that suspense underlies the film, and surely contributes to his urgency in preparing the canvas for his drawing after the rain has made him give up on his painting.

The theme of old age emerged in the previous sequence, in which Enrique and Antonio discuss Michelangelo’s age when he painted The Last Judgement, contrasting the darkness of his vision with the lightness of Greek art represented in the statue of the goddess. Greece is the cradle of Western art, and Antonio is inspired later in the film to make a trip there by an old photograph of himself and Francisco López in front of the Parthenon. This can be assimilated on the one hand to his desire to make the past part of the present, and paralleled on the other to the return to origins that
Erie undertakes with the documentary form. *The Last Judgement* and the statue represent different views of the gods, as Antonio and Enrique discuss, the Greeks representing the divine as the best qualities of mankind—healthy, beautiful, powerful—while Michelangelo depicts a punishing, tyrannical God. Curiously, Enrique associates this representation with Michelangelo’s age, as though the fear he shows in the Just of the painting mirrors his own as he approached death.

Death is, of course, the end implied in the notion that “time is running out.” It recurs thematically at several points throughout the film. As I mentioned, there is the death of a state, the deaths implied in the Gulf war, the number of dead in car accidents announced on the radio as well as the graffiti that warn that death is only a needle prick away in the disordered world outside the garden. This is not a prelapsarian eden, however: here too there is death, in the quinces that fall to the ground, the rain, the coming of the winter. It rains on October 2nd and from October 21st to the 24, when Antonio finally gives up on the painting. In what Thibaudeau describes as “un ensevillissement” [“a burial”] the canvas is lain to rest in the cellar (161). The sequence is shot from within the cellar the camera looking up, so that when Antonio closes the hatches the screen is left in dark.

Significantly, the ceremony is accompanied by extradiegetic music, a slow tune on the bandoleón. The Argentinian instrument is associated with the tango, the music of exile, melancholy and loss, songs that lament *what time has taken away*. It is the first time extradiegetic music is used, so that it is doubly striking. If López is not sad about giving up trying to capture the light of autumn on the quince tree, the bandoleón nevertheless infuses the scene with gentle melancholy. Yet Antonio’s equanimity gives *El sol’s* emotional arc a subtlety that contrasts with most films about painters, such as Jacques Rivette’s *La belle noiseuse* or Pialat’s *Van Gogh*, to which it is most
often compared. Erice's concerns are wholly internal, the process of creation, and the tranquil painter has none of the turmoil explored in these films. As Leutrat comments:

La quête [...] de la couleur ne se déroule pas dans la fièvre et l'exaltation, si bien que son échec n'est pas suivi d'une dépression: le tableau peint dont le peintre semble faire son deuil sans drame cède la place au dessin, qui, cernant les traits, renonce à la lumière et aux couleurs.

The search for colour doesn't unfold in fever and exaltation, so that failure is not followed by depression: the painted canvas which the painter mourns without drama is replaced by a drawing, which outlining features, renounces light and colour (8).

The bandoleón music returns in a later sequence with Enrique Gran (seq.34). One of the most charming of the film, it has Enrique holding up a leaf so that Antonio can see the quinces beneath while he draws. Together they sing “Cariño mío” [“My love”] as if to the tree, giving it three tries before they are satisfied. They return to the themes of the last visit: painting, their student days, the photograph, time's passage. Enrique cannot find the photograph and has given up the search for it: “hay que renunciar a la foto” [“you have to give up the photo”] he says, using the same word that Antonio used when he explained to Xiao Ming why he went from a painting to a drawing instead of the reverse. The notion of “renunciation” is important to each of them. Enrique must give up the attempt to hold the past in a photograph, and Antonio the attempt to hold the present in a painting.

Antonio's aim in his painting was to capture the autumn sunlight on the quinces, which, as we see and as he says “no dura nada...es tan cambiante” [“It doesn't last...it changes so much”] “No es posible,” [“it's not possible”] he concludes “es un lenguage muy limitado. Es maravilloso pero hay que renunciar, he tenido que renunciar. Hay que renunciar a algo” [“it's a very limited language. It's
wonderful, but you have to give something up, I had to give something up. You have to give something up” (seq.30). He thus turns from trying to capture the light on the tree to the perfection of its form. Time is against him here too, however, as the quinces get heavier and heavier and are covered by overgrown leaves. Antonio keeps going by having first José, then Enrique hold up the leaves with a long pole. These scenes are quite amusing. The other painters reluctantly roped in as Sancho to Antonio’s Quixote, they are self-conscious, aware of the ridiculousness of their position.

Antonio is not quite ready to renounce his enterprise, however, since as he tells his family while his wife cuts his hair, he can’t take up the canvas next year since the tree will be transformed. Thus he keeps drawing, bundled up against the cold, but the end of this sequence suggests that here too something will have to be given up. Antonio and Enrique’s words fade away as the camera moves up to the skyline and the bandoleon starts up. The last audible words are:

Antonio: ¿Sabes cuánto tiempo llevo aquí?
Enrique: Pues no sé.
Antonio: Desde que empecé, desde que empecé el cuadro...Con cuadro y dibujo.
Enrique: ¿Cuatro meses?
Antonio: Meses, meses...

[Antonio: You know how long I’ve been here?
Enrique: I don’t know.
Antonio: Since I started, since I started the painting...With the painting and the drawing.
Enrique: four months?
Antonio: Months, months...] (seq.34).

The bandoleón is what we hear over shots of the setting sun over the city, the last shot fading to black. (The first black-out, as I mentioned, since the beginning.) The cuts in
the sequence emphasize above all the passage of time, the ground covered in the film, and there is a marked melancholy in its conclusion: "la musique, le crépuscule et la nuit du fondu préfigurent un achèvement, une mort prochaine" ["the music, the twilight and the night of the dissolve prefigure completion, an impending death"] (Thibaudeau, 153).

This death will be the quince that falls from the tree in the next sequence. Antonio picks it up, smells it and continues on with his drawing. He soon enlists the help of a mirror, as though conscious that he has very little time before the task becomes impossible. Indeed, on the 10th of December, when he comes across a quince rotting on the ground, Antonio breaks the strings that have served as guides to his sightline, takes his drawing inside and has the workers help him take the awning away. The tree returns to its natural status, as Marek comes over and picks a quince. It is hard to tell whether Antonio has finished his drawing or simply let it go, for the sake of the tree, so that its fruit is not wasted.

There is an element of failure in Antonio's renunciation of his enterprise, and his restoration of the model to the status of simple tree. For the months that he has been besides it, López had in a sense humanized the tree, communing with it as much as drawing it. The friends of López and Moreno who come to visit pay their respects to the tree, and López comments as he sees them: "admirando el modelo..." ["admiring the model"] (seq. 32). As he explains to the Xiao Ming:

Para mí, tiene, de esta manera, este árbol, una presencia, una solemnidad como un ser humano. Al centrarlo en el papel y no jugar con ningún tipo de estética del espacio. El personaje se presenta aquí, de una manera, totalmente ordenada en relación a la simetría

{"for me, this way the tree has a presence, a solemnity like a human being. By centering it on the page and not playing any kind of
The aesthetics of space. The character is presented here, in a way, completely reordered according to symmetry (seq. 29).

The change in the tree’s status will be rhymed with Antonio’s change in status within the film. The painter becomes the model, from protagonist to object of a stare.

Thibaudeau comments that this change in status is illustrated in the last slow dissolve as he takes his instruments in:

un fondu enchainé [...] qui introduit cette fois le même espace mais vide, est amorcé avant la sortie du peintre. On le voit ainsi devenir transparent, évanescant, comme s’il n’était plus que le reflet de lui-même (je rappelle qu’il porte un miroir)

a dissolve [...] which introduces the same space but empty this time, is begun before the painter exits. We thus see him become transparent, evanescent, as though he is no more than a reflection of himself (390).

The film will also take a new role, since the film has thus far been external and here takes an internal turn as López recounts his dream in voice-over. As one cycle ends, another begins. Giavarni notes that

rien n’est détourné dans Le Songe de la lumière, mais tout vient dans un certain ordre où la mort des choses pourra encore trouver une destination vivante. La preuve, on y mange un coing [...] Rien n’est perdu, mais tout est transformé, et la durée de ce vrai film de cinéma est exactement celle de ces métamorphoses dans le plan

doing nothing is diverted in Dream of Light, but everything comes in a certain order where the death of things could still find a living destination. The proof is that a quince is eaten [...] Nothing is lost, but everything is transformed, and the duration of this true film is exactly that of the metamorphoses in the shot (31).
The ambivalence of life and death is enacted in the film by Mari’s painting of her husband, which seems to be a portrait of a dead man, even as he lies beside her, very much alive. As she paints, López falls asleep (a small death), dropping the glass sphere he has been holding. This filmic reference to Citizen Kane reinforces the blurring of sleep and death that Erice has associated with the baroque (and Mari’s dark still painting is reminiscent of the art of the period). The reference is pursued in the evocation of childhood as the source of an adult obsession.

Between Antonio falling asleep and the dream, however, there are three sequences. After Mari stops working and puts the glass sphere into her husband’s pocket, leaving him alone to sleep, we are shown the television tower again, with shots 505 to 508 repeated from sequence 40. This time, however, the third time we see a television set in a lonely apartment, someone gets up and turns it off, and the television tower itself goes off. The artificial sun has finally set.

It gives way to the film camera, which is filmed alongside the quince tree artificially illuminated in the night. Intermittently ambient sound is replaced by the noise of the camera. There is a kind of avowal of failure in these images — the magician revealing his tricks. As Ehrlich notes, filming the camera places “in the foreground the inescapable artifice of the cinema, even in a film with as flat a narrative style as Dream of Light” (34). The camera has its limits in what it can show or evoke:

paradoxically, the placing of the camera in the foreground in this dimly lit scene adds to the film’s sense of mystery, as we realize even more clearly the inadequacy of our attempts to record the powerful changes in nature (Ehrlich, 34).

Film and visual art again placed in tandem, the next sequence shows the storage room filled with paintings, busts and casts sandwiched between shots of the full moon and
clouds. The melancholy of time’s passage is reinforced once again with the sound of the bandoleón.

What the camera cannot show is the internal, and here the documentary gives way to words that cannot be captured by happenstance. López tells his dream in voice-over as shots of quinces in various degrees of decay are shown in close-up. The images of the dream are apocalyptic, linking it to the thread of biblical images running through the film. The garden, which, as has been noted, has biblical associations as a timeless place of perfection, here becomes a place of death and decay. The dream is of time creeping into the garden in fastforward, the innocence of childhood invaded by decay. It is worthwhile to cite the text of the dream in its entirety:

Estoy en Tomelloso, delante de la casa donde nací. Al otro lado de la plaza, hay unos árboles que nunca crecieron allí. En la distancia, reconozco las hojas oscuras y los frutos dorados del membrillo y me veo entre los árboles junto a mis padres, acompañados por otras personas cuyos rasgos no logro identificar. Hasta mí llega el rumor de nuestras voces, saltamos apaciblemente. Nuestros pies están hundidos en la tierra embarrada. A nuestro alrededor, prendidos de sus ramas, los frutos rugosos cuelgan cada vez más blandos. Grandes manchas van invadiendo su piel y en el aire inmóvil percibo la fermentación de su carne. Desde el lugar en que observo la escena, no puedo ver si los demás ven lo que veo. Nadie parece advertir que todos los membrillos se están pudiendo bajo una luz que no sé cómo describir, nítida y a la vez sombría, que todo lo convierte en metal y ceniza. No es la luz de la noche, tampoco es la del crepúsculo, ni de la aurora...

I’m in Tomelloso, in front of the house where I was born. On the other side of the square, there are trees that never grew there. In the distance, I recognize the dark leaves and the golden fruit of the quince tree and I see myself under the trees with my parents, accompanied by other people whose faces I can’t identify. I hear the sound of our voices, chatting quietly. Our feet sink in the muddy
soil. All around us, the wrinkled fruit hangs from their branches, getting ever softer. Dark spots spread over the skin and in the still air, I can smell (seq. 46, my emphasis)

That it is the child who perceives this light and not the adults relates to the conception of childhood as a source of creativity and adulthood obsession. The light that is described in the dream is otherworldly, unnatural, and cannot but be associated with the light of the cinema revealed in the previous sequence, “que todo lo convierte en metal y ceniza.” The camera transforms the real and displaces it. The documentary is like a time machine, taking us into a reality that is no longer; at the same time it imposes itself as “reality” itself when it represents but one perspective. Erice shows us the small machine that captures the real at the same time as its essence seems to lie beyond its powers of observation.

Each medium of visual representation in the film is represented as limited in different ways, each defeated by time. But the mediums are also represented in their glory: the failure to capture the light is not really a failure for López since for him the process is more important than the product. If the documentary is not totalizing, and the camera is as much a concealer of truth as its revealer, the process of watching the film delivers an experience that is apparently beyond the camera’s reach. By focussing on the surface of the real and the minutiae of the everyday, El sol captures something ineffable about our experience of time —at once joyful and melancholy, trivial and essential.

Like El espíritu de la colmena, the film is imbued with apparent contradictions that co-exist peaceably: not joy or melancholy, but both at once. Not fiction or documentary, but both in and through each other. The film does not, in fact, move from the everyday to the mythic and metaphorical, but shows how the most ordinary acts are rich in symbolism, how the artist’s creativity reenacts the mystery of creation.
itself. The immersion in time — “presence and absence, origin and end, eternity and temporality, metaphysics and history, thing and representation” — makes the experience of the film an individual one (Jackson, 20). Some will feel it with baroque anxiety, others with zen-like equanimity. Both poles are present; to speak of time is to speak of life itself.61

One cycle ends, another begins. The film ends not on Antonio asleep, but with the return of spring: the rotting quinces are replaced by new fruit. A long black-out separates the last two sequences, and the coming of spring is suggested by the birds singing during it. Yet what is shown as we come up from black is a rotting quince with traces of white paint, as if to show the interconnection of the old and the new. The time frame is here much less specific, the title stating simply “Primavera” [“Spring”]. As in Erice’s other films, the ending suggest not closure but a new beginning: the tree grows new fruit, Antonio hums, as he presumably, undertakes another impossible project.
Notes

1 The sense that the past has been laid to rest, as in the rest Europe after 1945, is understandable but only very partly true. Paul Julian Smith comments on the prevalence of ‘garbancerismo’ in the films of the post-Franco period: “the lazy and nostalgic recourse to reassuring popular clichés [...] that say no one is guilty of anything and we were all victims” (29). I would disagree that El sur suffers from this defect as Smith claims, but there is a truth to what he says in that the Civil War and its aftermath is not a theme that has in any way been exhausted in film. Carlos Saura’s recent film Taxi (1996) explores this eruption of the buried past into the present. For a discussion of this issue see Hopewell 215-242.

2 Or rather those critics who wrote reviews, since many voted with their feet and abandoned the Cannes screening room soon after the film began. More recently the irascible John Harkness of Toronto’s Now magazine called it a "gaseous bore of the worst sort" (53).

3 Corner puts it eloquently: “Simply to collapse documentary into a kind of rhetorical variant of fiction fails to do justice to the specific, if troubled, nature of its referentiality and to the particular kinds of self-constraint which documentarists have chosen to work within in order to achieve a level of evidentiality, of expository accuracy and of general truth to the circumstances not normally required in fictional works (and often seen as an unwelcome limitation of their imaginative capacities” (5).

4 This happens so rarely, however, that it has the equivalent of subsuming good documentaries to the category of fiction films.

5 Tournès thinks Enrique Gran is someone named "Paco," apparently the same one to whom the film is dedicated: "Avec Paco, les souvenirs, une vieille photo prise en Grèce, la dimension romanesque s’ouvre au film [...] Ce Paco-là a dû mourir. Le film est dédié "In memoriam Paco" [“With Paco, memories, an old photograph taken in
Greece, the fictional dimension of the film opens up [...] That Paco must have died.
The film is dedicated "In memoriam Paco""] (52).

6 "Documentary film has captured no general audience for itself” comments Stanley Cavell in his preface to Beyond Document: Essays on Non-Fiction Film.

7 Kieslowski's reasons for abandoning the documentary form are worth quoting:

"Not everything can be described. That's the documentary's great problem. It catches itself as if in its own trap. The closer it wants to get to somebody, the more that person shuts him or herself from it. And that's perfectly natural. It can't be helped. If I'm making a film about love, I can't go into a bedroom if real people are making love there. If I'm making a film about death, I can't film somebody who's dying because it's such an intimate experience that the person shouldn't be disturbed. And I noticed, that when making documentaries, that the closer I wanted to get to an individual, the more the subjects which interested me shut themselves off. That's probably why I changed to features. There's no problem there. I need a couple to make love in bed, that's fine [...] somebody's supposed to die. That's fine. In a minute, he'll get up again. And so on. I can even buy some glycerine, put some drops in her eyes and the actress will cry. I managed to photograph some real tears several times. It's something completely different. But now I've got glycerine. I'm frightened of those real tears. In fact, I don't know whether I've got the right to photograph them. At such times I feel like somebody who's found himself in a realm which is, in fact, out of bounds. That's the main reason why I escaped from documentaries (Macdonald, 315-16).

Erice expresses something similar when he states that "j'avais l'impression que quelque chose de très intime entre l'arbre et Antonio échappait à la caméra" ["I had the impression that something very intimate between the tree and Antonio was escaping the camera"] (Cahiers, 34). The decorum of Erice's film avoids the ethical dilemma of voyeurism in a way, since it focusses on López's work and avoids giving us
anecdotal personal information. Though no documentary avoids the ethical issue entirely, Erice’s film is exceptional in that it places the subject on the same footing as the director and makes him a partner in the film (“según una idea cinematográfica original de Antonio López y Víctor Erice” [“from a original filmic idea “] read the credits.) For a discussion of this thorny issue, see Winston, 40-47; 219-247 and Trinh T. Min-ha, 90-107.

8 The reason for the resurgence of the documentary in recent times is above all related to the economy of filmmaking, where exorbitant costs have made fiction features beyond the reach of “mid-level” filmmakers who turn to the documentary to tell stories. At the same time, a growing number of specialty channels provide an international market for the documentary that isn’t available to the fiction filmmaker. (I am grateful to producer Carl Bessai for these insights.)

9 Bill Nichols points out that from the mid-seventies to 1989 no single-authored book on the documentary in general was published except for the five on Frederick Wiseman, the popular American direct cinema documentarist who came to almost define the genre. Winston points out that the situation in Britain is somewhat different, with general studies emerging from 1985 on. Prior to the seventies, studies on documentary theory (in English) were concentrated around Grierson and Rotha. In the Spanish context, there is one major study of the art documentary by Carlos Fernández Cuenca (1967) but little on the broader genre. Comments Kathleen Vernon: “non-fiction film production in Spain must be reconstructed from a number of scattered references in a number of sources; the standard Spanish and English-language histories of Spanish cinema are silent on the question of documentary as a genre” (183).
10 Quoted by Arocena from notes taken from the course *El cine como experiencia de la realidad* [Cinema as an Experience of Reality] given by Erice in La Coruña in 1994 (279).

11 Quoted by Trinh T. Min-ha, 95.

12 Consider the rapid camera work and awkward framing of a television show like *NYPD Blues*, the shaky camera and grainy black and white film stock used in recent Nike ads. As Renov puts it: “in the wake of countless TV ads which trade on their documentary “look” [...] the technically flawed depiction of a purported reality no longer suffices as visual guarantee of authenticity” (23). Curiously, as early as 1898, technical flaws were traded on to shore up authenticity. See Macdonald, 14-16 for Albert E. Smith’s amusing example. See also Trinh T. Minh-ha, 99 for a catalogue of the techniques that have become part of the documentary “style” and their uses for purposes of persuasion by advertisers and politicians.

13 See Renov’s *Theorizing Documentary*, Winston’s *Claiming the Real* and Corner’s *The Art of Record* for the most recent discussions.

14 Macdonald and Cousins comment: “for all their sense of spontaneity, of ‘life caught as it is,’ the Lumière films (like every documentary to come) tampered with, and organized ‘reality’. Most of their films were, literally, ‘set-up’: subjects can sometimes be seen responding to a signal from behind the camera before starting their activities; often, as in *A Train Arrives at the Station* the people involved were not anonymous members of the public, as one might think, but members of the Lumière family, obviously rehearsed and positioned and then told to ignore the camera and *act naturally*.

On a more subtle level, even when these, almost the simplest films we can imagine, are not actually ‘set-up’, they do what all art does: they give form to the chaos of life and make it meaningful. Take, for example, *The Workers Leaving the
Unlike the 'reality' from which it is drawn, the film is discrete; it has a beginning and an end and it is carefully structured so that it begins with the big, wooden gates of the factory opening and ends as they are about to close again. It has a circular narrative [...] Even in the simplest non-fiction film, the relationship between film and reality is not a straightforward or literal one, but that of metaphor" (5).

15 The documentary has a different role and a different relationship to its audience in other cultures, particularly in Third World cinema. For a discussion of the documentary in Latin America, see Julianne Burton’s The Social Documentary in Latin America.

In the Spanish context, the documentary was very much affected by the interdiction in 1942 against non-official documentaries and the subsequent dominance of the No-Do (Noticias Documentarias). As Marsha Kinder notes, this led to a suspicion of the ideological slant of the genre in Spanish audiences: “this policy tended to make Spaniards suspicious of any constative claims for documentary, for it was based on the assumption that all images carry ideological implications [...] The key question, then, for the Spanish spectator was not merely what was being documented (the referent) but from which political perspective and for what end” (RS, 69). The art documentary survived Franco’s ban, and El sol obviously extends this subgenre along with Saura’s Flamenco (1995). Nevertheless, in terms of the reception of El sol, I think the Anglo-American paradigm is at work, especially, but not exclusively among English-speaking critics. Arocena’s comment, for example, that the film is more than a documentary since “además reflexiona sobre el tema [...] transcende lo observado y llega a la reflexión, a la creación personal, es decir, a la ficción” [“it also reflects on the theme [...] it transcends observation and becomes reflection, personal creation, that is, fiction”] seems to be based on a view of documentary as “simple
observation,” and is likely influenced by the definition of documentary that comes out of cinéma-vérité.

16 I am thinking particularly of Chávarri’s *El desencanto*, but films such as *La vieja memoria* and *Canciones para después de una guerra* are also personal meditations in a sense. Marsha Kinder contextualizes *El sol* within “an international subgenre of documentary [...] meditative films on representation that renegotiate the blurred boundaries between art and popular culture, modernism and the postmodernist tradition” including Godard’s *JLG/JLG: Autoportrait de décembre* (1994) and Antonioni’s *Par delà des nuages* (1995).

17 Noël Carroll critiques such a view in “NonFiction Film and Postmodernist Skepticism” in *Post-Theory*, 283-306. This is not the place to undertake a discussion of this complex philosophical issue. Suffice to say that despite the forcefulness and clarity of Carroll’s arguments I remain convinced that objectivity is an illusive concept. There are, of course, degrees of subjectivity. Nevertheless Gadamer’s contention that “consciousness cannot, by pulling on the bootstraps of method, extricate itself from the very history of which it is part” is a wise warning against the notion that the “prophylactics of method” allows subjectivity to be transcended (Gadamer, 38; Weinsheimer, 13).

18 See his discussion 127-218.

19 Thibaudeau makes a similar reference to Heisenberg in relation to the artist’s self-representation: “on pense, à ce propos, au principe d’incertitude défini par le physicien Heisenberg [...] [qui] a signalé qu’on ne peut pas savoir quelle est cette trajectoire, car le dispositif mis en place pour pouvoir les observer, provoque une altération de celle-ci. Dans le cas qui nous intéresse, on ne peut qu’observer la trajectoire d’Antonio López altérée par le cinéma et non sa trajectoire réelle, celle qui existe à l’abri de tous les regards virtuels que contient l’objectif de la caméra” (“in terms of this we are
reminded of the uncertainty principle defined by Heisenberg [...] who noted that we can never know what the trajectory is, since the mechanism put into place to observe [it] alters it. In the case that is of interest to us, we can only observe Antonio’s trajectory as altered by the cinema and not his real trajectory, the one that exists outside the virtual gazes contained in the lens of the camera”[380].


21 See Antonio López Proceso de un trabajo, 194.

22 See Calvo Serraller et al, Antonio López, García, 122-123.

23 The exhibition catalogue Otra realidad: Compañeros en Madrid [Other Reality: Companions in Madrid] explores the links between these artists, some of whom appear in the film, including Enrique Gran, Lucio Muñoz and Julio López.

24 Erice mentions in several interviews that the dream was part of the inspiration for the film: “lorsqu’ [Antonio] me dit qu’il allait peindre un cognassier, immédiatement je me suis remémoré les images de ce rêve. Il s’est passé quelque chose, peut être l’équivalent de ce qu’on a coutume d’appeler l’inspiration, mais qui m’a beaucoup ému. Ça a été l’impulsion dont j’avais besoin pour commencer à tourner [‘when Antonio told me that he was going to paint a quince tree, immediately I remembered the images of that dream. Something happened, the equivalent of what we usually call inspiration, which moved me deeply. That was the impulse I needed to start filming”] (Positif, 11). Arocena quotes him as saying that the film itself is an attempt to explain the dream: “siempre he tendido la sensación de que he tenido que rodar la película para intuir lo que hay en las imágenes del sueño” [“I always had the impression that I had to shoot the film to intuit what was in the images of the dream”] (314).

25 As are other “provoked” elements of the film, such as the visit by the Chinese painter, which allows López to explain the white marks on the fruit (Fernández-Santos).
This is, of course, the conceit of all cinéma-vérité, where the camera is an
unacknowledged observer. Allan King’s *Warrendale* is interesting in this regard, since
it is a rare film where the problem posed by the presence of cameras is discussed.

Comments Francisco Nieva: “Ha sido incluso el consagrador de un tópico, con sus
alacenas, sus viejos parientes, su flora y su cacharrería zurbanescas” [“he has even
established a commonplace, with his larders, his old relatives, his flora and his
Zurbanesque pots”] (in Tussell, 16).

In terms of the erosion of time, I am thinking of *Taza de water y ventana*
[Bathroom Glass and Windows] which I have discussed, and *Cuarto de baño*
[Bathroom], among other works.

Erice comments in an interview: “Le cinéma est formidable pour exprimer la
naissance et la décadence des choses [...] On présente toujours le cinéma comme
quelque chose de très juvénile, d’appolonien, mais je trouve que c’est un langage qui
exprime des choses plus fugitives” [“Cinema is wonderful for expressing the birth and
decadence of things [...] Cinema is always presented as something very juvenile,
Apolonian, but I think it’s a language which expresses more fugitive things”]
(Cahiers, 35).

The phrase is Wim Wenders’s, quoted by Erice in several interviews. Wenders
can be cited as an influence, given his own poetic documentaries, particularly *Lighting
over Water* about Nicholas Ray’s last days.

“The tournage s’est fait en plans fixes pour éviter le style de la télévision” [“The
filming was done in static shots to avoid the style of television”] (Erice, Cahiers, 36).

For a discussion of Erice’s use of the still life see Linda Ehrlich’s “Interior
Gardens: Victor Erice’s *Dream of Light* and the Bodegón Tradition.”

Erice stated in an interview published in *El País*: “Envidio al pintor porque el suyo
es un lenguaje individual ajeno el tiempo. Me sigue produciendo una emoción
extraordinaria ver la mano de Antonio López sobre un papel. La cámara no permite esa aventura solitaria en la que uno se puede embarcar con la pintura” ["I envy the painter because his is an individual language alien to time. Seeing Antonio’s hand on a paper still produces an extraordinary emotion in me. The camera doesn’t allow that solitary adventure which can be undertaken with painting"] (García, 33).

34 The presence of time in a painting is not simple, as Mieke Bal, Yves Bonnefoy and others point out, our encounter with the work evolves in time, and analysis begins to bring it to (narrative) life. Nevertheless, as Bonnefoy notes of Piero della Francesca, we often “cannot imagine a past or a future for this gesture, this moment. That is why we cannot fit them into any duration and why we decide that they are timeless” (in Bryson, 11).

35 It isn’t a neat line, of course, since fiction films immerse us in another age and ethos, and there is a poignancy in seeing actors in their youths, before their various fates engulfed them. Sunset Boulevard exploits this pathos. As Stanley Cavell comments: “when we see her [Gloria Swanson] watching her young films, the juxtaposition of the phases of her appearance cuts the knowledge into us, of the movie’s aging and ours, with every frame (74). The actor, however, is also, in a sense, a fictional construct (as Cary Grant quipped: “everybody’d like to be Cary Grant. I’d like to be Cary Grant) and as such is out of time.

36 According to Erice: “on pourrait dire, de manière un peu littéraire: dans tous les foyers brille un unique soleil, celui qui jaillit des écrans de télévision” [“we could say, in a rather literary way: in all homes shines a single sun, the one that flashes from the television screen”] (Positif, 15).

37 It does affect the reception of the film, as I will discuss.

38 Fernández-Santos entitles his review “A la caza del tiempo” ["In pursuit of time."]
39 The film, it seems to me, is infused with a sense of fleetingness, and there is a melancholy despite the joy in López's creativity. More on this later.

40 “Pour rencontrer quelque chose, il faut rester. Si le spectateur ne reste pas dans la salle jusqu'à la fin de Citizen Kane, que saura-t-il de la signification du mot “Rosebud”? Il faut ça pour arriver à une fenêtre ouverte, un peu ouverte, sur l'inconscient” [“To find something, you have to stay. If the spectator doesn’t stay in the theatre until the end of Citizen Kane, what will he know of the significance of “Rosebud”? You need that to get to an open window, a slightly open window on the unconscious”] (Erice, Cahiers, 34). Erice’s reference to Citizen Kane is not gratuitous, as we will see.

41 The duration of the film contributes to this effect, of course, since, at 132 minutes, it is far longer than usual.

42 “Il y a plusieurs morts dans ce film” [“there are several deaths in this film”] (Leutrat, 7). “Desaparición o muerte son dos conceptos que constantemente se introducen en el discurrir de la narración” [“Disappearance and death are two concepts which are constantly introduced in the flow of the narrative”] (Arocena, 320).

43 Perez Turrent is corrected by Erice when he says: “Je divise le film en chapitres et, pour moi, chaque apparition des fenêtres, la télévision à la tombée de la nuit et la tour de télévision viennent clore chaque chapitre” [“I divide the film into four chapters and for me, each shot of the windows, the television at nightfall and the television tower close each chapter”] since the television tower appear three times. Still Erice comments: “la division en quatre chapitres que vous proposez ne me paraît pas mauvaise” [“the division in chapters that you propose is not bad”] (Positif, 16).

44 For example, Lynne Stopkewich’s recent Kissed uses the white out to suggest ecstasy, the heroine transported to a different dimension.

45 This might recall Moonlighting with Jeremy Irons, as Leutrat comments.
46 "ces ouvriers maçons qui peignent eux aussi, sur les murs de ciment gris, sur le plâtre" ["those masons who also paint, on the grey cement walls, on the plaster"] (Tournès, 52).

47 Leutrat points out other touches of humour: "les ouvriers se plaignent de manquer de sable quand les informations parlent de la guerre du Golfe, la "pesanteur" est celle du coing qui, mûrissant, grossit et se trouve menacé d'être sublimé en confiture" ["the workers complain that they don’t have sand the Gulf War is discussed on the news, the "heaviness" is that of the quinces, which as they ripen and grow are threatened with being sublimated into jam"] (8).

48 Thibaudeau comments: "le cinéaste prend le temps de montrer tout ce qui pourrait sembler insignifiant à d'autres, exigeant ainsi du spectateur qu'il redonne sa place à l'essentiel et prenne lui aussi le temps de réapprendre à regarder, à écouter palper le coeur des choses" ["the filmmaker takes the time to show what might seem insignificant to others, thus demanding of the spectator that he give the essential its place, and take the time to relearn how to see, to hear the beat of the heart of things"] (59).

49 As in his previous features, war is not far from the diegetic world.

50 Part of modernity is precisely this breakdown in differences in time and space: people from Canada and Spain can map their lives according to what was playing on the radio, and the differences will be surprisingly slight.

51 Photographs play a role in all three films. As Ehrlich notes: "In the Spirit of the Beehive, they inform the child Ana of her parents’ irretrievable past; in El Sur, they show the the adolescent Estrella the south, a place of promise and possibility, and, in the photograph of Irene Ríos, they signal the end of Estrella’s innocent immersion in her father’s world" (33).
The word is related to “integrity” as well: “‘integro’ c’est la figure entière. Le mot a deux contenus, la signification morale, mais en premier lieu l’intégrité du modèle” (“integrity is the whole figure. The word has two contents, the moral sense, but firstly the integrity of the model”) (Erice, Cahiers, 36). It also has some echoes of King Lear’s “ripeness is all” (Act V, scene II).

Erice describes autumn as “una época presidida por el duelo, por las personas que poco a poco van desapareciendo” (“a period governed by mourning, by people who are slowly disappearing”) (quoted in Arocena, 316).

"El pintor emprende su aventura en otoño, se encuentra en el otoño de su vida, el membrillo es un fruto de otoño" ["the painter undertakes his adventure in autumn, he finds himself in the autumn of his life, the quince is an autumnal fruit"] (Arocena, 316).

Another member of the Madrid group of painters.

For a discussion of the uses of the mirror in Erice’s films see Thibaudeau, 351-357.

Comments Fernández-Santos: “el fracaso estético del artista se convierte de esta manera en un triunfo ético” [“the asthetic failure of the artist thus becomes in an ethical triumph”] (“A la caza”).

When Lucio Muñoz and Julio López visit Antonio’s set-up one of them comments: “Yo no soy capaz de verlo tan cerca, yo tendría que estar trabajando un poquito más lejos, quizá por una visión más de espectador que de protagonista” (seq. 32).

M. Torreiro considers this “la sombra premonitoria, intuida pero no menos real, de la muerte en el cuadro de María Moreno, su esposa, que le retrata casi de cuerpo presente; en los membrillos caducos” [“the premonitory shadow, intuited but no less real, of death in Maria Moreno’s painting, her husband, painted almost in bodily presence; in the rotten quinces”] In an interview for Cahiers du cinéma, López.
explained the origin of the painting: “L’idée de ce tableau est née pendant un voyage que ma femme et moi avons fait à Pietra Santa, en Italie [...] Nous étions dans une chambre d’hôtel, il faisait froid, il n’y avait pas de chauffage. Je gardais le manteau dans la chambre et je me suis même couché avec pour lire. Maria a fait un petit dessin, un croquis. Dans le tableau, elle a reconstitué ce moment où, en fait, j’étais en train de me reposer. Plus tard en effet elle était préoccupée parce que des gens qui passaient nous voir trouvaient aussi que ce tableau avait quelque chose de sinistre. Simplement, comme le personnage est à l’horizontale, les paupières fermées, on a l’impression que je suis endormi ou mort. Mais je suis bien vivant” [The idea for the painting was born during a trip that my wife and I took to Pietra Santa, in Italy [...] We were in a hotel room, it was cold, there wasn’t any heating. I kept my coat on in the room and I even lay down with it to read. Maria made a small drawing, a sketch. In the painting, she reconstituted the moment when I was in fact resting. Afterwards she was worried because people who came to see us thought there was something sinister in the painting. It’s just that since the character is horizontal, with his eyes closed, you get the impression that I’m dead or sleeping. But I’m very much alive”] (36).

60 In another parallel between Erice and López, one of the painter friends who visits López asks him “¿No te importa que se ve los entrecíjos?” To which López responds “no, como son tan obvios...” (seq. 32).

61 According to López: “tout art élevé, tout art qui est un grand art, traite du temps, de la conscience du temps. Au lieu du temps, on pourrait parler de la vie” [“all elevated art, all art which is great deals with time, with the consciousness of time. Instead of time, we could speak of life”] (Erice,Cahiers, 35).
Conclusion: Towards a Poetics of Erice’s Cinema

In tracing the constants of Erice’s style, I have also explored some of the recurring themes in his films: time and mutability, moments of change, the passage from innocence to knowledge and from adulthood to old age, the incursion of history into domestic worlds, family relationships, the persistence of memory. Paul Julian Smith eloquently sums up the director’s work, suggesting that “the image which remains of Erice’s cinema is of objects suspended in light: the child’s face before the window, the pendulum by the window, the quince in the pale autumn sun” (29). Theme and style coincide in this description: suspension and light. The still, contemplative quality of all three films emerges from this connection between the moments of change presented and the fragility of the light in which they are bathed. For Erice, film is perfectly suited to capturing fleeting moments of transformation. He has commented that though film is the newest art, it has nevertheless grown old very quickly:

Pendant le tournage, Antonio m’a dit une chose qui m’a beaucoup frappé, à propos de la façon dont le cinéma a vieilli très rapidement. Selon lui, ce phénomène s’explique par le fait que le cinéma a été inventé alors que l’homme était déjà très ancien.

During the shoot, Antonio told me something that really struck me, about the way the cinema has aged rapidly. According to him, this phenomenon can be explained by the fact that cinema was invented when man was already very old (Cahiers, 35).

Elsewhere he adds that “el cine se muestra especialmente capacitado para captar todo aquello que se desvanece, lo más fugitivo que existe: el tiempo” [“the cinema is especially able to capture everything that vanishes, the most fleeting thing of all: time”] (Fernández-Santos). This is the central concern of El sol del membrillo, but there is an “elegiac stillness” in El espíritu and El sur as well, an awareness of the passage of time and
its transformations. As Erice has described, all his films concern change, a journey toward understanding:

> I think all the films I have made have a common characteristic: they describe a journey of discovery, a spiritual journey. At the outset there is a consciousness that is beginning to discover things and at the end of the journey that consciousness has understood something (Sight and Sound, 27).

My study has privileged the ambiguity in these processes of discovery. Each film, as I have noted, is open-ended, concluding with an image that suggests a new beginning—a young girl looking out a window or the renewal of spring. I have discussed how the elements of the narrative tend to be suggested rather than shown. Elliptical editing, minimal dialogue and suggestive juxtapositions create openings which the viewer must fill in. The role of the viewer then, as I have posited it, is an active one. The viewer interprets, fills in ellipses and makes connections as the film unfolds. To use Louis Simpson’s image that was cited at the beginning of this thesis, objects “cut loose from their moorings and set flying to make their own connections” in Erice’s cinema make their connections in the spectator. This accounts both for the variety of interpretations of his films and their poetic, haunting effect. The ambiguity of images and narrative leads to polysemy and metaphor.

Víctor Erice is currently at work on a new film. This makes any summary of his style tentative, especially as he has expressed a new urgency to create, which can lead us to hope that the intervals between his films might get shorter. Nevertheless, I would like to conclude with a catalogue of Erice’s stylistic choices in his feature films to date, and thus provide a synthesis of the characteristics that have been discussed separately in these pages. I am confident that a new film by this auteur will bear his unmistakable stamp. Thus some of these techniques and effects will stand as constants, although the direction of Erice’s new work remains to be seen.
Acting

Erice is a great director of actors, and he has stated that this is the most rewarding part of his role as filmmaker. He works to strip away actors’ defenses, seeking real emotion that remains just below the surface. As I have demonstrated, Erice directs his actors towards an internal, low-key style, filming their reactions more often than their actions. Rather than asking that they dramatize their characters, the director wants his actors to be, to embody the characters. This is why he prefers to use non-actors who are before the camera for the first time. In *El espíritu*, the two girls essentially play themselves as they discover the magic of the cinema. In *El sur*, Iciar Bollan’s lack of experience introduced a spontaneity which Erice felt worked to the film’s advantage: ²

Quand [les rythmes des acteurs] ne sont pas égaux surgissent des fissures à travers lesquelles, soudain, l’acteur se met à respirer et établit un rapport différent avec le personnage, je dirais d’une manière plus intuitive. J’avoue que ça me plaît de briser tout cela: la maîtrise de la voix, l’intonation.

When [the rythms of the actors] aren’t equal fissures arise through which, suddenly, the actor begins to breath and establishes a different rapport with the character, I’d say in a more intuitive way. I admit that I like to break with all of that: mastery of the voice, intonation (*Positif*, 50).

In *El sol*, of course, everyone appears as themselves, not actors but presences. The effect they have is similar to that of children in Erice’s previous films, since they too encounter the camera for the first time. Unlike actors, they are new to the viewer as screen presences, and this lack of history means there are no echoes of past roles in their performance, as is the case with Fernando Fernán Gómez, for example. According to Erice:
The non-professional actor [...] has no history to add; these actors are themselves, and what the spectator observes is what might be termed their essence as human beings (Positif, 50).

The use of non-actors is thus related to a search for newness and authenticity. By having them work in a minimalist style, with more reactions than actions, Erice uses his actors and "presences" suggestively so that the viewer intuits what might lie behind a small gesture or a pensive look.

Camerawork

Minimalism is also at work in the use of the camera. Erice favours the static frame which characters enter and leave, with the camera tracking characters occasionally, but generally remaining still. As I have discussed, framing is more often than not symmetrical and as carefully composed as a painting. In El espíritu and El sol especially, the angles are limited, and characters are shot frontally. Schrader describes a similar technique in Bresson commenting that "Bresson strips the camera of its editorial powers by limiting it to one angle, one basic composition" (67). In the same way, the simplicity of angles and austerity of presentation in Erice’s work contribute to the ambiguity in the film. The camera adopts essentially the same non-expressive position towards each character (and the buildings, which are so often shown frontally) so that it is up to viewers to establish their own position towards them. Erice’s minimalism reaches an extreme with El sol, where both the content and angles of shots are severely limited, but all of his films are marked by a distillation of movement.

When the camera makes sweeping movements, as in El sur, these gain in significance because of their rarity. The communion scene, as was discussed in Chapter 2,
is emphasized as the high point of the film by the remarkable sweep of the camera, and divides the film in two. The other times when the camera tilts dramatically, it is to take the viewer beyond Estrella’s point of view. There is no rigidity in Erice’s use of the camera then: where appropriate, the camera moves with great fluidity. There is no flash, however, no movement for its own sake. Erice chooses to limit his means in order to achieve a maximum of expressiveness.

Editing

A great deal of suggestiveness is created through Erice’s complex and elliptical editing. Discontinuity editing is used to break down strict narrative order in El espíritu and El sur, but in all three of his films, the Eisensteinian principle of creating associations through montage is subtly at work. In El espíritu editing creates ambiguity by confounding the viewer’s expectations of time and by omitting key events that are implied rather than shown. The sequence where the fugitive is shot is emblematic of Erice’s practice of conveying dramatic action with a minimum of frames. In El sur, the cyclical shots of the weathervane, the river and the house serve the same evocative function. The viewer draws her own conclusions from these images that come to serve a symbolic function without straying from the realist anchoring of the narrative. In the same way, the repetition of shots of the moon in El sol evokes associations in the viewer.

Indeed, an essential element of Erice’s editing style is repetition and careful paralleling of compositions. The graphic rhyming of shots allows for associations to be subtly evoked. Erice’s films all have internal divisions that are created through repetition, whether it be the rhythmic recurrence of black-outs in El sur and El sol, or the before and after established through repetition and reversal of meaning in El espíritu and El sur. Again, Erice draws a great deal of power from a simple and minimalist stylistic choice. The graphic patterns that emerge from the editing contribute to the tension between the forward
movement of the plot and the arresting of the viewer’s attention toward the how. Editing is essential to the mysterious and hypnotic quality of Erice’s films.

The soundtrack

I have demonstrated how the same principle of repetition and reversal apply to the use of sound in Erice’s films. There is an evolution towards a greater use of ambient sound and a minimization of music. Many musical themes run through El espíritu, a few in El sur, while only the bandoleón is heard in El sol, and only on a few occasions. Music is used to give an emotional tone to scenes in all three films. Sound serves the same evocative purpose, suggesting connections that do not have to be established visually. The soundtrack thus serves Erice’s minimalism. The complexities of Erice’s use of silence in his films have been explored: it seems to me that this paradoxically demonstrates his heightened awareness of the expressive possibilities of sound. Erice replaces dialogue with silence, and it comes to have a range of meanings. Silence can, ironically, be harder to work with than sound.

Painting, cinema, literature

Another way that Erice’s films gain resonance is through the inclusion of the other arts. The Frankenstein myth provides El espíritu with a rich, historical theme which is exploited in numerous ways. There are not only the direct images and sounds from the Whale film, but other interpretations of the monster story that refract into a series of echoes running suggestively through the whole film. El sur plays on echoes from melodrama, Hitchcock’s Shadow of a Doubt, and the Victorian novels that mother and daughter are reading. As I have noted, what the viewer associates with these films and books will shape the interpretation of the film that contains them.
In El sol, the echoes are overwhelmingly from the visual arts. Yet, as I have shown, painting plays a major role from the very first film. Vermeer is present in the framing and luminosity of El espíritu, in the chiaroscuro of El sur and the themes of El sol. The film artist and the master painter, in different centuries and media, coincide in their search for light and balance and their rejection of the binary moralism of their age.

Erice has a painter’s fascination with light and the texture of objects, as well as a masterful eye for composition. His highly aestheticized images are nevertheless sober and simple: if there are elements of the Baroque in Erice’s choice of theme and use of light, he is classical in composition. The painterliness of Erice’s frames, like the rhythmic editing, concentrate the viewer as much on the images themselves as on the development of the plot.

El sol is a kind of culmination of Erice’s preoccupation with visual representation, bringing painting, sculpture, photography and film into the realm of the documentary. As I have argued, it is as though Erice were taking the measure of these against the inexorable movement of time. Here too there is ambiguity: how the viewer perceives Antonio López García’s art and disposition, and how the resonances of the other pieces affect her will determine what she takes away from the experience of the film.

Whether it is conceived as nostalgic or future-oriented, this experience is connected to time. Erice is, in the end, “searching for light, searching for time” —be it time present or past— through the lens of the camera (Smith, 27). The stylistic means of this search are ambiguity, minimalism, deep cultural resonance, an economy of means rich in evocative details and painterly luminosity. These are the constants in Erice’s work so far. Though his desire to renew cinema might lead to surprises in his next films, Erice will undoubtedly continue to enrich the expressive possibilities of the composite art that is film.
Notes

1 Erice comments: “j’ai besoin de travailler beaucoup. Dans ce moment de ma vie, j’ai l’impression que le temps coule très vite et il faut faire les choses qu’on a envie de faire. Le songe de la lumière, c’est un film sur l’automne de la vie, une époque où il faut se mettre à réaliser les choses qu’on veut faire. Ce n’est pas facile car le temps d’un artiste, d’un peintre est un temps individuel, alors que le temps du cinéma est collectif. Ce n’est pas facile. Il faut travailler” [“I need to work a lot. At this point in my life, I get the impression that time is slipping away quickly and you have to do the things you want to do. Dream of Light is a film about the autumn of life, a period when you have to do what wanted. It’s not easy. You have to work”] (Cahiers, 36).

2 “Entre los actores posibles, Omero era el que mejor respondía a lo que yo buscaba. Además de sus cualidades como actor, su aspecto correspondía a cierta idea del personaje. En algunas películas, el actor, si es muy conocido o está muy encasillado por público, puede suscitar ideas preconcebidas, equivocadas, sobre el personaje. Con Omero esto no sucedía. Estoy muy contento del resultado de su trabajo” [“Among the possible actors, Omero was the one who best corresponded to what I was looking for. In addition to his qualities as an actor, his look corresponded to a certain notion of the character. In some films the actor, if he’s well-known or type-cast by the public, can raise preconceived, erroneous ideas about the character. This didn’t happen with Omero. I’m very happy with his work”] (Casablanca, 66).
Appendix A

Segmentation for El espíritu de la colmena

Director: Víctor Erice; Producer: Elías Querejeta; Screenplay: Ángel Fernández-Santos and Víctor Erice; Cinematography: Luis Cuadrado; Editor: Pablo G. del Amo; Sound: Luis Rodríguez. 98 minutes (1973)

Synopsis: In the immediate post-war years in a village of central Spain, Ana, a six-year old and her eight-year old sister, Isabel, watch James Whale’s Frankenstein. Ana wants to know why the monster killed the little girl in the film, and why he is killed in turn. Isabel tells her that the monster is in fact alive, and lives as a spirit in an abandoned house nearby. Ana tries to evoke him, eventually going out at night to find him. When a Republican fugitive takes refuge in the abandoned house, Ana takes him as the incarnation of the monster, and suffers a terrible shock when he is shot by the authorities. She escapes from her stern father, a beekeeper, and her withdrawn mother into the woods, where she encounters the Frankenstein monster by a river in a scene reminiscent of the Whale film. She is found by a ruin the next morning in shock.


2. (14-35) A truck comes along a road. [title: “En un lugar de la meseta hacia 1940”] [“In a place in the meseta around 1940”] The camera pans and follows the truck. As it rounds the corner, the “Yugo y las Flechas” on the sign that reads Hoyuelos is held briefly. Truck in front of the city hall building. [voices of children: "Viene al cine"] [“the movies are coming”] [horn blasts] The town crier announces the film. Inside the makeshift theatre, kids rush in with chairs. The entrepreneur is at the door as the adults come in. The film is wound, a light bulb unscrewed, light and sound of the projector. Frankenstein. The producer steps out from the curtain [“Buenas noches. El productor y los realizadores de esta película no han querido presentarla sin hacer antes una advertencia.”] [“Good evening, the producer and director of this film didn’t want to present it without a word of warning”] Audience reactions.
long black-out

3. (36-43) CU: Fernando in a beekeeper mask *sounds of dusk spray* Fernando with his bees.

[V. O.: Teresa's letter: “Ni siquiera se si esta carta llegará a tus manos...”] / [“I don't even know if this letter will reach you”]

4. (44-45) *V.O. continues* CU: Teresa's hands, letter. Teresa in profile against the honeycombed windows, writing.

5. (46-56) Teresa bikes into the horizon. Train steam, the station. Teresa enter the frame, camera pans, following her. She walks into the steam as the train arrives, emerges and deposits her letter. Her glance meets a soldier’s on the train. High view of the station. *sounds of the train*

6.(57-61) CU: Fernando's coat. He takes out his watch, opens it. *music* CU: Fernando. He replaces the watch. Walking along, he takes his mask off, lights a cigarette, then walks out of frame.


8. (67-70) Facade of the house, Fernando walks into frame. He walks up to the house, dog greets him. [camera follows him] *bells, dog* Interior of the dark house. Fernando goes up the stairs and out of frame calling: "Teresa!" Milagros feeding the chickens.

9. (71-73) Fernando comes into the study, gets a newspaper and sits down.*offscreen: Frankenstein film* Fernando reads, then takes off his glasses. He gets up, opens the window, goes onto the balcony. The camera pans forward as he listens to the dialogue from the Frankenstein film.
10. (74-89) Ana and Isabel’s reactions are intercut with the scene of the little girl by the water in the Frankenstein film.


12. (92-104) Projector light. Frankenstein film: father walking with his dead girl in his arms. Ana asks Isabel why he killed her.

13. (105-106) Facade of the house. Ana and Isabel come in, shouting and laughing. [dissolve] The shot of the house is held as night falls and the lights go on. [Ana reciting a prayer] Lights off.

14. (107-129) CU: candle. Ana asks Isabel to explain the movie. She tells her that the monster is really a spirit who lives in an abandoned house, and to call him you just have to say "It's Ana." [sounds of steps]


16. Teresa asleep. [sound of footsteps] [Bells] Teresa feigns sleep, Fernando gets into bed. [sound of the train]

fade to black

17. (154-189) Fade up on school, kids going into the school. [series of dissolves] Ana and Isabel go in. [dissolve] The flag is raised, camera stays on the school's facade. [song:
"4 y 4 son ocho" ["4 and four are eight"] Interior of the school. The anatomy lesson. Ana puts on Don José’s eyes.

dissolve

18. (190-197) Ana and Isabel are on the hill, running. [music: ends when the girls stop] [dissolve] An empty field. [dissolve] The well. Ana and Isabel enter the frame. Isabel runs off towards the well. CU: Ana. Isabel at the well, enters the abandoned house and comes out the other door. Isabel and Ana run out of the frame.

19. (198-218) Ana comes into frame from the left and walks to the well. [music: stops as Ana gets to the well] She calls into it, throws a rock in, then goes to the house. The camera pans the empty building. CU: footprint. [music] Ana measures her foot, camera pans the field. CU: Ana. CU: footprint [music ends.]

dissolve

20. (219-224) Ombres chinoises. CU: Painting: a child. [Isabel: "fuiste al pozo"] ["Did you go to the well?"] CU: Angel who is holding her hand. [Ana: "Sí"] ["Yes"] Ombres chinoises. ["¿Qué viene papá?"] ["Daddy’s coming!"] Candle, monkey, candle is blown out.

fade to black [footsteps]

21. (225-244) Fade up on Fernando, Ana and Isabel picking mushrooms. [music] [birds] They exit the frame. [music ends] Isabel enters the next frame, Ana and Fernando following. Fernando asks for the name of the mushroom. They discuss the mountains. [music] [birds] CU: mushroom, Fernando, Isabel and Ana. ["Un auténtico demonio"] ["A real devil"] CU: Ana. ["¡Qué bien huele!"] ["It smells lovely"] CU: Fernando’s foot squashing on the mushroom.

fade to black

22. (245) Quick fade up on the house. [music: "Il était un petit navire"] ["there was a little ship"] Fernando comes out, stops, he forgot something. Teresa comes onto the balcony, throws him his hat, camera pans to a waiting carriage, it drives away. [music ends]
23. (249-255) Ana and Isabel jumping on their beds giggling and shouting. Milagros is polishing Fernando's study, hears them, runs to their room. ["Ya está armada la República"] ["The Republic is armed"] Ana and Isabel are told to get ready for school.

24. (256) Ana and Isabel imitating shaving.

25. (257) Teresa combing Ana's hair as she asks her mother about spirits.

26. (257) Ana and Isabel running through the hallways.

dissolve

27. (258-274) Ana and Isabel at the railroad tracks, listening to the rails. [sound of the train] They are dwarfed by it as it goes by.

dissolve

28. (275-281) The facade of the school. [tail end of "il était un petit navire"] CU: girl reading Rosalía de Castro poem. ["Yo voy a caer en donde el que se cae nunca se levanta"] ["I'm going to fall where he who falls never gets up"] ["mystic" music]

slow dissolve

29. (282-287) Ana running circles around the well. Isabel spies on her ritual.

dissolve


31. (307) Teresa cycles into the horizon.

dissolve
32. (308-311) CU: Ana watching the bees through the funnel. CU: Bees. CU: Ana blowing on them.

33. (312-324) The cat comes in the doorway. [meowing] Isabel on the bed, picks him up, calls his name into his ears, massages him, he starts to stray. She slowly strangles him. CU: cat. He gets away, scratches her. Isabel licks her finger. CU: lips in the mirror. [music starts] CU: Isabel looks at herself.

dissolve

34. (325-352) St-Jerome painting. Camera pans the painting, hands and skull. [music ends] Ana typing in Fernando's studio. The camera pans back. [sound of things knocking over, scream] Ana goes to see. In the corridor, she calls Isabel. Isabel lying down in another room. Ana goes to her, turns her over. CU: Ana. Isabel stays prone. [dog barking] Ana shuts the window, goes back to Isabel. CU: Ana on Isabel's chest, strokes her hair. Ana goes out. Camera stays on Isabel. Ana returns, goes out to the balcony and calls for Milagros. Garden. [birds] Isabel is gone and Ana finds a leaf in her place. Isabel's hands, with the beekeeper gloves, over Ana's eyes. Ana is upset, Isabel laughs.

fade to black


37. (369) Ana is alone by the fire embers. Milagros comes to find her. They exit frame.

fade to black [“Mystic” well music]

38. (370-374) [Mystic music continues] CU: Ana's fingers tying her laces. Isabel sleeping. Ana leaves the frame.
39. (375-381) Ana walking, trees. CU: Ana, moon, clouds. CU: Ana closes her eyes
[sound of a train muffles the music]

dissolve

40. Train tracks traveling shot. Train. [whistle] A man jumps. [music crescendo]
He gets up, looks around. The train in the distance. Man walks into frame, limping toward
the house. [music ends]

fade to black

41. (389-399) The girls' room. Ana comes into frame [door creaks] and gets into bed.
CU: Isabel, then Ana, and Isabel again. [Isabel: "¿Dónde has estado?"/ "Where have you
been?" ] Ana turns away, closes her eyes.

dissolve

42. (400-411) Match shot of the fugitive asleep. Ana is in the doorway, the fugitive wakes
and pulls a gun. Sees Ana through a hole in the wall, puts it down. [wind] Ana goes to
him and takes an apple out of a bag. ["Ten"] ["Here"] The fugitive's shadow towers over
Ana.

dissolve

42. (412-425) Shot of house and well. Ana enters the frame, running with a bundle in her
arms. [birds] Ana gives the fugitive Fernando's coat and some bread, ties his shoelace.
The fugitive finds a watch and opens it. CU: watch, as music plays. CU: Ana worried.
The fugitive makes the watch disappear and Ana smiles. She finishes tying his shoelace.
[dissolve] Ana leaves the frame.

slow dissolve

43. (426-427) Match frame the house: night. [gunshots] Hold frame.

fade to black
44. (428-433) Fade up on civil guard building. Fernando walks into frame. [bells] Capo shaving. He winds Fernando’s watch, stares at himself in the mirror.

45. (434-435) Fernando walks with two civil guards. [cocks crow] The camera tracks them. Movie screen. The camera pans down to reveal the fugitive’s body lain out, his feet with one sock on. The officer enters the frame, shows Fernando the face. Fernando shakes his head, is given his coat and watch. He opens it. [music] Exits frame.

dissolve

46. (436-456) The family at breakfast. Individual CUs: Fernando is backlit from the honeycombed windows. He lights a cigarette. Teresa stirs her coffee, Isabel and Ana exchange looks. Fernando takes out his watch, winds it. Ana watches Fernando over her bowl. Fernando opens his watch. Fernando looks at Ana and away. CU: Ana, Teresa. Fernando smokes and looks at Teresa.

dissolve

47. (457-469) Ana running in the field. The camera tracks her as she goes into the house and out the other door. She scans the horizon, goes to the well. [music begins] She walks around it, goes back to the house, looks around. CU: blood. She touches it. Fernando is in the doorway, Ana turns and runs when she sees him. Fernando calls her name as she recedes.

fade to black

48. (470-472) Teresa on the balcony calling. Isabel calls from the field.

dissolve


rapid dissolve

fade to black


fade to black

52. (501-508) Fade up on a dog and a man running. The dog barks, runs through a ruin. On the other side, he wakes Ana who is asleep on her schoolbag. Fernando and the men run to her.

fade to black

53. (509-516) Fade up on piano, doctor enters the frame, sits down, writes. Teresa enters. CU: Teresa, Miguel. ["Lo importante es que tu hija vive. que vive." ] ["The important thing is that your daughter is alive, she's alive"] Milagros enters, gets prescription, exits. Miguel and Teresa exit.

54. (517-522) Isabel enters the room, opens the window and crosses to her bed. The mattress is gone. Ana doesn't respond to her. Isabel tiptoes to her, takes back the sheet, looks at her, puts it back.

fade to black [dog barking]


dissolve

56. (525-529) Isabel in bed. [dog barking] Shadows of the trees. Isabel pulls the sheets over her head.
57. (530-533) Fernando asleep on his desk. Teresa enters the frame and puts a sweater over him. She closes his book, takes off his glasses. CU: light blown out. [music ends]

58. (534-540) CU: glass of water. Ana drinks, puts the glass back. She goes to the window. [mystic music begins] [Isabel V.O.: "Soy Ana"/ "It's Ana"] CU: Ana. Looking up, she closes her eyes, then opens them as we hear the sound of the train.
Appendix B

Segmentation for El sur

Director: Victor Erice; Producer: Elías Querejeta; Screenplay: Victor Erice, based on a short story by Adelaida García Morales; Cinematography: José Luis Alcaine; Editor: Pablo G. del Amo; Sound: Antonio Illan. A Franco-Spanish co-production. 93 minutes (1982).

Synopsis: Estrella and her parents, Augustin and Julia, live in Northern Spain under the Francoist regime. At eight, Estrella is devoted to her father, who is a water-diviner. He eventually teaches her to divine, and makes what she considers an important sacrifice by setting aside his Republican aversion to the church to attend her first communion. The ceremony, attended by Augustin’s mother and nanny, is joyously celebrated. Soon after, however, Estrella discovers another woman in her father’s life, a movie star named Irene Ríos, whom he had known as Laura. The failed extra-marital relationship leads to a deterioration of Augustin and Julia’s marriage. Augustin sinks into despair and alcoholism as Estrella becomes an adolescent wishing nothing more than to escape her home life. After her father’s suicide, she leaves for the south.

1. Opening credits in black slow fade up on Estrella lying in bed. [dog barking]
(shots 1-3) Estrella wakes to her mother’s frantic search for Agustín, her father. [music begins] (shot 3-6) She finds a pendulum, realizes that her father has left permanently.

date to black

2. Slow fade up from black.
(shot 7) Agustín waves the pendulum over Julia’s pregnant belly, divines it will be a girl and names her Estrella. [V.O.: “Una imagen muy intensa que yo, en realidad, inventé”] / “An intense image that, in fact, I invented” / [music ends]

date to black

3. Fade up from black. [sound of the train]
(shot 8-13) The family on the train. [V.O.: "fui creciendo mientras nos trasladamos de un lado a otro." ] [“I grew up as we moved from one place to another”]

4. (shots 14-16) The river, the house, the weathervane. [V.O.: “El buscaba un trabajo fijo. Lo encontró al Norte en una ciudad rodeada de murallas a orillas de un río.”] [“He was looking for steady work. He found it in the North in a walled city on the banks of a river”]

5. (shots 17-21) Agustín gets on his motorcycle, the camera follows to "La frontera" [“The Frontier”] [dissolve] Exterior of the hospital. Agustín goes in, consults patients with a nurse by his side. [dissolve]

6. (shots 22-26) Estrella is on the swing waiting for her father. She hears his motorbike, runs out to "La frontera" to meet him. He takes her on a ride.

rapid fade to black

7. (shots 27-40) Rapid up from black. Estrella is playing ball. Julia comes out and tells her not to make noise because her father is working. Estrella creeps upstairs, puts her eye to the keyhole of her father's office. The balls gets away from her, bounces down the stairs. Her mother scolds her. [footsteps, ball bouncing]

fade to black

8. (shots 41- 52) Fade up. [dog barking] Estrella asks Julia about her father's powers and whether she might share them. They discuss his need for silence.

fade to black

9. (shots 53-55) [music begins] Slow fade up on Estrella and Agustín with the pendulum. [music ends] Estrella takes the pendulum according to her father's instructions, walks around him, concentrating.

fade to black [wind]

10. (shots 56-88) A field. Agustín holds a divining rod, searching for where to build a well. Two men and Estrella watch him a few feet away. Estrella joins him to measure the
depth of the water with coins. The sequence ends with Estrella looking up to Agustín with devotion.

dissolve

11. (shots 89-95) [music] Julia in various domestic poses. [V.O.: "aunque mi madre pasaba casi todo el día conmigo, son pocos los recuerdos definidos que tengo de ella."] ["although my mother spent almost all day with me, the memories I have of her are few"] Julia and Estrella reading.

dissolve

12. (shots 96-98) [V.O: "Los orígenes de mi madre siempre habían sido un auténtico misterio..."] ["My father's origins had always been a real mystery to me..."] Agustín picking mint, Estrella joins him.

dissolve

13. (shots 99-107) Julia and Estrella discuss the South. [dissolve] (109-121) [music] Estrella and her postcards of the South. (122-126) Negatives of the yard. (127) Weathervane [music ends] [dissolve to spring] [V.O.: "Desde el sur, una tarde de mayo llegaron dos mujeres"] ["From the south, two women arrived one afternoon in May"]

dissolve


15. (shots 168-206) The house at night. Milagros and Estrella discuss Agustín, the Civil War, the communion ceremony.

fade to black

16. (shots 207-211) Fade up from black. The house. Julia, Milagros and Rosario getting Estrella dressed for her communion. [gunshots]
17. (shots 212-215) Estrella in the yard. [gunshots]

dissolve

18. (shots 216-239) The church. [organ music] Estrella receives her first communion. Goes to greet her family. Milagros tells her that Agustín is at the back. Agustín steps out of the darkness as Estrella goes to him. As Estrella returns to the front of the church we hear her internal voice: "lo ha hecho por mi" ["he did it for me"].

dissolve [accordion music starts over church music]

19. (shots 240) The camera tracks back from Estrella's veil on the chair to reveal the family and guests sitting and watching as Estrella and Agustín dance to "En er mundo" the camera pans in to Estrella, up to Agustín they go out of frame, spinning, the camera returns to the clapping people at the table, and the headress.

20. (shots 241-243) Rosario and Milagros' car pulls away, the family waving. [V.O.: "Desde este día, cuantas veces evocaba el sur, la imagen de estas dos mujeres acudiría a mi memoria"] ["From that day, whenever I thought of the south, the image of those two women would come to mind."]

fade to black

21. (shots 244-246) fade up. Estrella goes through Agustín's desk, discovers her father's drawings of Irene Ríos.

slow fade to black

22. (shots 247-248) Julia is ironing, Estrella asks if she knows Irene Ríos. [V.O.: "La ignorancia de mi madre hizo crecer en mi la sospecha de que detrás del nombre de aquella mujer, mi padre guardaba algo que yo desconocía."] ["My mother's ignorance increased my suspicion that behind the name of that woman, my father kept something I didn't know"]

fade to black [bells ring]
23. (shots 249-330) *sounds of traffic* The city viewed from the river. Estrella sees her father's motorbike at the cinema "Cine Arcadia" she goes in, looks at the stills, asks for a programme. Goes back to the street. [*"Blue Moon" starts up, ending when we are with the film*] The camera cranes up, goes into the cinema. Agustín is watching a black and white film. Reaction shots as Irene Ríos is shot by an old lover. [*"Blue Moon" begins again*] Camera tracks back down to the street. Agustín comes out, decides to go to a café.

24. (shots 331-345) *piano music inside the café* Agustín is writing a letter, which we hear in voice-over. ("después de tanto silencio...Sí, ya sé que las cosas que ocurren en el cine son mentiras") * extradiegetic music* The camera moves outside to Estrella who knocks on the window. Agustín joins her outside. [V.O.: "Nunca olvidaré la cara que puso mi padre"] ["I'll never forget my father's face"] [music stops]

25. (shots 345-346) Estrella overhears her parents arguing.

26. (shots 346-347) Estrella burns the programme of Flor en la Sombra.

[fade to black *piano being tuned*]

27. (shots 348- 356) Agustín in the café reads Laura's letter, which we hear in her voice-over. [*"He andado de la treca a la mecca, pero no he encontrado el lugar del que nunca se quiere regresar. ¿te acuerdas?"*] ["I've gone to the ends of the earth, but I haven't found the place you never want to return from, remember?"]

quick fade to black *birds*

28. (shots 357-359) Quick fade up. *dog barks* Julia shouts Agustín's name. Estrella gets out of bed. [V.O.: *"Era la primera vez que papá se iba en plena noche sin decir nada a nadie."*] ["It was the first time dad went away in the middle of the night without saying a word to anybody"]

quick fade to black *train whistle*

29. (shots 360-369) Agustín smoking in bed [fade up] Agustín asleep [dissolve] *footsteps, knocks. "la hora que se va el tren"* ["It's time, the train is leaving"] Agustín
stirs. [fade down and up] Agustín is fast asleep [train whistle] Agustín wakes to hear the train pulling away.

dissolve

30. (shots 370-372) Agustín returns home by the back door. [V.O.: "Volvió por la mañana." / "He came back in the morning" / [dissolve] Estrella on the swing at night. Agustín looks out from his attic window.

31. (shots 377-379) Estrella is helping her mother unravel a ball of red wool. She asks about her father's "strangeness." Julia denies anything has happened, and Estrella storms out of the room. Julia rewinds the wool that Estrella has thrown on the floor. [music starts]

32. (shot 380) Estrella takes the pendulum from Agustín's desk, puts it back. [V.O.: "a partir de aquel día, mi padre ya nunca volvió a usar el péndulo"] / ["From that day, my father never used the pendulum again"] / [music ends]

dissolve

33. (shots 381-397) Estrella hides under her bed. [a series of dissolves show time passing] Casilda comes in. ["V.O.: "desde mi escondite yo desafiaba con mi silencio."] / ["from my hiding place I challenged him with my silence"] / [dissolve] [Agustín's cane] Julia comes in and finds her.

fade to black [dog barking]

34. (shots 398-423) Estrella leaves on her bike as an eight year old [slow dissolve] [bird calls] [change of season] She returns an adolescent. Opens a letter from Milagros, checks on lunch with Casilda, goes to her mother's room. [phone rings] Conversation with "El Carioco." Agustín comes home, sees "I love you" painted on the outside wall. He meets Estrella as she goes out. She tries to erase the graffiti.

dissolve

35. (shots 424- 435) View of the city from the river. [dissolve as street lights go on] Estrella walks by the cinema, sees the poster for Shadow of a Doubt. She looks at her
photograph in a store window. Sees Agustín, avoids him as he stumbles out of a café, drunk. He stares at her photograph.

fade to black

36. (shot 437) [fade up] Estrella writing in her journal. [V.O.: "Volviendo a leer estas páginas, me di cuenta hasta que punto había llegado a considerar las crisis de mi padre como algo diario y inevitable." / "Re-reading these pages, I realize to what extent I had come to consider my father's crisis as something daily and inevitable"]

37. (shots 438-542) The Gran Hotel. Estrella and her father have had lunch. [sounds of the wedding party next door] She asks him about Irene Ríos, but he dodges the question, goes to the bathroom, washes his face. When he gets back she has decided to leave. [V.O.: "fue la última vez que hablé con él." / "it was the last time I spoke to him"]

dissolve

38. (shot 543) View of the city from the river. [sounds of water, crickets] The camera tracks back to the riverbank, reveals Estrella's bicycle, a coat, Agustín's legs, a gun.

dissolve

39. (shots 444-445) Estrella sits on her bed with the pendulum. [end of flashback] [silence]

fade down

40. (shots 546-564) Shot of the weathervane /birds/ The sign that reads "La gaviota" is broken. The attic, the yard, Estrella's bicycle. Estrella stares out the window at it.

41. (shots 565-569) The camera pans over Agustín's effects. [V.O.: "Encontré un recibo...que escondí sin decir nada a nadie"] / "I found a receipt, which I hid without saying anything to anyone"]

fade to black
42. (shots 570-579) Agustín's room in the attic. Julia steps out of the darkness, opens the shutters. She finds Estrella asleep, goes to make her bed for her.

fade to black

43. (shots 580-585) Fade up on Estrella's book (Wuthering Heights). Casilda comes into her room, forbidding Estrella to get up. [sound of birds] [V.O.: "Desde el sur, la voz de Milagros llego a mi ayuda"] ["From the south, Milagros's voice came to my help"]
Weathervane, shot of the house. [music of postcard sequence reprised]

44. (shots 586-588) Estrella is finishing packing. She adds the box of postcards, the phone receipt and the pendulum to her suitcase. [V.O.: "Por fin, iba a conocer el sur."] ["At last, I would see the south"]
Appendix C

Segmentation for *El sol del membrillo*

Director: Victor Erice; Producer: María Moreno; Inspired on the work of Antonio López García; Cinematography: Javier Aguirresarobe and Ángel Luis Fernández; Video Photography: José Luis López Linera; Editor: Juan Ignacio San Mateo; Music: Pascal Gaigne; Sound: Eduardo Fernández. Financed in part by the Instituto de la Cinematografía y de las Artes Visuales. 132 minutes. 1990-92.

Synopsis: Antonio López García, a realist painter, begins a painting of a quince tree in the garden of a studio he shares with his wife, María Moreno and another younger painter, Julio López Fernández. The studio is being renovated by three Polish workmen, Janusz Pietrziak, Marek Domagala and Grzegorz Ponikwia. As Antonio paints he is visited by his old friend Enrique Gran who hangs around reminiscing about their student days. When it begins to pour rain after a couple of weeks of work, Antonio switches to a drawing. He is visited by a Chinese artist, Fan Xiao Ming. The fruit eventually begins to fall from the tree, and Antonio gives up on the drawing as well. He then models for his wife, lying on a bed with his coat on. He falls asleep, and in voice-over, we hear him recount a dream.

Fade up from black


white out


4. (shots 114-126) Reverse angle: Antonio painting; the camera pans up slowly to the houses beyond. [sound of a train] Shots of the barrio [Antonio's singing] Boy with soccer ball, women with washing, houses and apartment blocks, televisions are seen through the windows. Cut to the train. [singing ends] The camera pans to graffiti "La chispa de la muerte" ["The spark of death"] then back down to Antonio's work in the garden.

slow dissolve

5. (shots 126-133) Clouds, the sun [Antonio's voice off] Mari and Antonio discuss the sun hitting the tree, her visit to the doctor. Shots of the tree and the painting. Antonio and Mari leave.

6. (shots 134-141) The workers stand around the painting. Inside, they have lunch, practice Spanish, translate the seasons from Polish. [dissolve] Empty chairs. Shot of Spanish book, glass hand cream. The yard. The workers go in and out.[radio]


8. (shots 151-153) Antonio's daughters visit, look at the painting, comment on the marks on the leaves. Antonio tries on a jacket and shoes they have brought him.

dissolve
9. (shots 154-164) Shot of clouds, sun. Antonio working. \[radio: \text{Israel and USSR re-establish diplomatic relations} / \text{Gulf war}\]
dissolve


11. (shots 1760-176) Nights: El "Piruli", apartments, televisions are visible through the windows. Antonio's set-up [slow dissolve] Canvas white out

12. (shots 177-179) Clouds, moon. [\textbf{title: Martes, 2 de octubre}] [dissolve] \[\text{thunder, barking}\] Antonio looks at the sky, goes out of frame. back in with workers, out, in again with awning. Slow dissolve. The tree, the rain.
dissolve

13. (shot 180) Canvas [\textbf{title: lunes 8 de octubre}]
dissolve

14. (shot 181) Canvas [\textbf{title: martes 9 de octubre}]
white out

15. (shots 182-200) The camera follows Enrique Gran up the street. The yard. Mari greets him, they talk briefly about the house, he goes to Antonio. Antonio shows him his set-up, asks him about lowering the painting. Enrique helps him trace a new horizontal line.
dissolve

16. (shots 201-252) Shot of clouds and sun. \[\text{radio}\] Antonio paints, Enrique sits by. \[\text{opera music, train}\] [dissolve] CU plumb bob. Antonio discuss their first meetings at Art
college, an old photo that Conchita had taken, what they learned from their teachers ["a ver estos valores" "más entero"] ["let's see those values" "fuller"] [dissolve] Shot of sun and clouds.

dissolve

16. (shots 253-280) Enrique and Antonio discuss the Michelangelo painting, the sense of guilt and horror in contrast to the representation of the Greek goddess.

fade to white

17. (shots 281-292) Shot of clouds. Enrique discusses his work [music] ["trabajo con una intensidad febril" "el tiempo real no puede ser largo" ] ["I work with feverish intensity" "the actual time we have can't be very long"] [radio: news] Antonio and Enrique leave frame, Antonio returns to shut off radio.

slow fade to white

18. (shot 293) Canvas. [title: viernes 12 de octubre]

dissolve


21. (shot 309) Canvas [title: jueves 18 de octubre]

dissolve

22. (shot 310-314) Canvas [title: martes 23 de octubre] [dissolve] Antonio's set-up in the rain. [dissolve] Night, the rain continues. José walks into the shot with a flashlight, calls Mari ["se ha ido la luz...es que estaba pintando...voy a tener que acostarme"] ["the
lights's gone... it's just that I was painting...I'll have to go to bed" / Antonio's set-up in the rain.

23. (shots 315-316) [title: miercoles 24 de octubre] Shot begins on awning, the camera moves down to Antonio looking up, getting wet. He's about to light a cigarette, folds up, runs in with painbox, canvas.

24. (shots 317-325) The studio, night. Mari and Antonio prep a canvas for a drawing [dissolve] they are back with paper [dissolve] rolling [dissolve] cleaning up glue [dissolve] paper on top [dissolve] they put a board over top [dissolve] and spread tiles over it. They turn the lights out, leave. CU canvas in shadow. [rain]


26. (shots 328-347) The camera pans down from the awning to Antonio painting. CU fruit, hands, tree. [Antonio starts to sing] [radio: news] Antonio draws. [radio: "tiempo tormentoso"] ["stormy weather"]

27. Mari cutting Antonio's hair [title: domingo 28 de octubre] The family and José sit in a circle having a snack. Antonio explains to his daughter why he's given up on the painting. [dissolve] Empty chairs, pan up to trees.


white out

29. (shots 369-397) Fade up on clouds [title: viernes 2 de noviembre] [extremely slow dissolve] Visit by Xiao Ming and interpreter (two angles only) . ["¿representar la luz? No. no es posible...[la pintura] es un lenguaje muy limitado... hay que renunciar a algo"] ["portray that light? No. it's not possible...painting is a limited language...you have to give something up"]
30. (shots 398-420) [title: lunes 5 de noviembre] From the ground, the camera pans up to Antonio singing while he draws. Alternating CUs of Antonio, hands, drawing, fruit. Feet, ruler, brushes.

31. (shots 421-424) [title: sábado 10 de noviembre] Lucio Muñoz and Julio López examine Antonio’s set-up. Antonio and Mari and other women come into frame
[*"admirando el modelo"] ["admiring the model"] [dissolve] ["¿no te importa que se ve los entrecijos?" [You don’t mind us seeing the mechanics?] [dissolve] discussion of cigarette butts [dissolve] ["Vámonos" ["Let’s go"] [train]

fade down

32. (shots 425-433) Quick fade up. Julio holding a leaf up with a stick. [title: lunes 19 de noviembre]

dissolve

33. (shots 434-444) Drawing [title: viernes 23 de noviembre] [dissolve] Enrique holding the leaf up, Antonio drawing. Together they sing “Cariño mío” ["My love"] three times. Antonio draws, Enrique talks about the photograph, he cannot find Conchita: “hay que renunciar a la foto” ["you have to give up the photo"] which captured “la pasión por el arte y la losa que llevamos encima por no tener un duro...” ["the passion for art and how broke we were"] The camera slowly moves up to the Madrid sky as Antonio asks how long he’s been working [voices fade down, extradigetic bandoleón music starts up] Shots of Madrid. Setting sun over the city.

fade to black

34. (shots 445-450) Up from black on Antonio’s set-up [title: lunes 3 de diciembre] [bells ringing] Antonio comes into frame, sees a fruit on the ground. He picks it up, smells it, looks up. Shot of leaves. Antonio smells the fruit, put it back. Shot of the drawing.

35. (shots 452-459) Antonio at his set-up [title: domingo 9 de diciembre] Antonio drawing with a mirror behind him. [wind, trains]
36. (shots 460-481) Antonio at his set-up, mirror. [title: lunes 10 de diciembre]

fade to black

37. (shots 482-485) Worker walling up a door [title: martes 11 de diciembre] [dissolve] the wall is higher [dissolve] Mari with worker [dissolve] wall, nobody.

dissolve

38. (shots 486-491) Antonio in studio stares at his drawing. [off: ¿y por qué están tan manchados?] [“Why are they so stained?”] [dissolve] Elisa and Antonio’s daughters pick the fruit from the tree. [¿Cómo puede un árbol tan pequeño dar tanta fruta?] [“How can such a small tree bear so much fruit?”] [dissolve] drawing. Antonio in CU, Antonio sweeps up.

39. (shots 492-503) A fruit is being washed under a running tap. The polish workers taste the quince. [“abitdry”] Medium shot of the room. [dissolve] Empty chairs. CU cut up quince. Shot of the quince tree: another fruit falls.

fade to black

40. (shots 504-510) “Piruli” night. Houses, televisions, night. The facade of the studio, light goes on. [extradiegetic music]

41. (shots 511-548) Bed and light, Antonio comes into frame. Mari closes the window. Antonio puts on a coat and Mari helps him into bed. She turns a light on to light her painting of Antonio. Match of painting and model. Antonio suggests that he can get Mari a new canvas ready so she can start over. Mari wants to try a few more things before giving up. They discuss whether he should be holding the photograph or the sphere of glass. He holds both while they decide. Antonio suggests they take a trip to Greece. CU photo. [dissolve] CU hands and sphere. [extradiegetic music] [dissolve] CU Antonio’s face,
hands. Antonio falls asleep, drops sphere. Mari puts down her paintbrush, turns the spotlight on her painting off. She puts the sphere in Antonio’s coat pocket, turns off the light.

42. (shots 549-555) “Piruli” night. [dissolve] Repetition of shots 505-508 with dissolves between each: houses, television [dissolve] television illuminated, someone gets up to change the channel. [dissolve] TV turned off, black. Tower lights go off. [traffic]

fade to black

43. (shots 556-564) [sound of camera, beeps] Camera and quince tree [fade down] [back to ambient sound] Camera and tree [beep, sound of camera] light goes on. CU light meter. Illuminated quince. Camera placed at Antonio’s spikes. Quince. Light goes down. [back to ambient sound]

deep to black

44. (shots 565-575) [extradiegetic music of sequence 25] Full moon and clouds. The storage room in dark, busts, painting and casts in CU. Moon and clouds.

45. (shots 576-588) Antonio asleep [dissolve] CU in grey light. [dream is recounted in voice-over: “...nadie parece advertir que todos los membrilleros se están pudriendo bajo una luz que no sé cómo describir, nítida y a la vez sombría, que todo lo convierte en metal y ceniza. No es la luz de la noche, tampoco es la del crepúsculo, ni la de la aurora” ] /”no one seems to notice that all the quince trees are rotting under a light that I can’t describe, sharp yet dark, that changes everything into metal and ash. It’s not the light of night, nor is it that of twilight or of dawn”/ [dissolve] Tree in same light. Quinces on the ground [dissolve] quince rotting [dissolve] black quince. The shadow of the tree and the camera [fade down] Antonio asleep purple light.

Fade to black

Long black [birds singing]

46. (589-605) CU Rotten fruit [title: Primavera] Shots of tree, new fruits [Antonio’s humming] [slow dissolve] Tree [birds, trains, humming]
fade to black

A Paco Solorzano, in memoriam
Appendix D

Biographical Sketch: Victor Erice

Erice was born in Carranza (Vizcaya) in 1940, but lived in San Sebastián until the age of seventeen. He moved to Madrid, studying Political Science at the Universidad Central. In 1960, he was admitted to the I.I.E.C. (Instituto de Investigaciones y Experiencias Cinematográficas), later the Escuela Oficial de Cinematografía. As a student he made several short films: *En la terraza* (16mm, 1960-61); *Entrevías* (16 mm, 1961-62) and *Páginas de un diario perdido* (35mm, 1961-62). His graduation project was entitled *Los días perdidos* (35 mm, 1962-63). After graduating, he collaborated on scripts by Antón Eceiza (*El próximo otoño*) and Miguel Picazo (*Oscuros sueños de agosto*). From 1961 to 1966, he wrote criticism for *Cuadernos de arte y ensayo* and *Nuestro cine*, where he was a member of the editorial board.

In 1969 he directed one of three episodes for the Elías Querejeta compilation film *Los desafíos*, along with José Luis Egea and Claudio Guerín. The film starred Dean Selmier, an American actor who also provided the financing. It won the Concha de Plata at the San Sebastian Film Festival that year.

His first feature film was *El espíritu de la colmena* (1973), also produced by Querejeta. He co-wrote the script with Ángel Fernández-Santos. It won first prize at the San Sebastian Film Festival and the Silver Hugo at the Chicago Film Festival.

*El sur* (1982), based on a short story by his then-wife Adelaida García Morales, was shown at Cannes on May 18, 1982, too late to be considered by the jury. It was nevertheless highly acclaimed and won a top prize at the Chicago Film Festival.

*El sol del membrillo* (1992) shared the Jury Prize with Russian director Vitali Kanesvski’s *An Independent Life* and won the International Critics’ Prize at the 1992 Cannes Festival.
as well as the Gold Hugo at the Chicago Film Festival. In 1993 it was awarded the National Cinematography Prize (Spain).

In the intervals between films, Erice has earned his living directing advertisements and programmes for TVE. He adapted another García Morales’s story for the screen (Bene), as well as short stories by Jorge Luis Borges, one of which was directed by Carlos Saura in 1990 (La muerte y la brújula). He wrote a documentary on Velasquez’s Las Meninas, but another director came out with a similar film before Erice had secured financing, and the project was abandoned. He has also worked as a critic and teacher.

Víctor Erice lives in Madrid.
Filmography

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Jaime Camino. La vieja memoria. 1977.
Henri-George Clouzot. Le Mystère de Picasso. 1955.
Robert Flaherty. Nanook of the North. 1922.
-------- and Wilhelm Murnau. Tabu. 1931.
Gonzalo Herralde. Raza, el espíritu de Franco. 1977.
Alfred Hitchcock. Shadow of a Doubt. 1943.
---------. Spellbound. 1945.
---------. L'Arrivée d'un train à la Ciotat. 1895.
Peter Mettler. Picture of Light. 1996.
Lewis Milestone. Of Mice and Men. 1939.
Otto Preminger. Laura. 1944.
---------. *Rebel without a Cause*. 1955.
---------. *Cría cuervos*. 1975.
--------. *Taxi*. 1996.
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IMAGE EVALUATION
TEST TARGET (QA-3)