Introduction

—“Poco a poco irá olvidando . . .”
(Little by little she’ll begin to forget . . .)

*El espíritu de la colmena* (*The Spirit of the Beehive*) is a film whose density of reference, austere visual and aural pleasures and frissons, and disturbing combination of insight into childhood fears and fantasies with analyses of adult dysfunction and historical disaster might in themselves explain the very large amount of critical work and journalistic commentary that it has attracted internationally. This essay makes use of a good deal of this prior critical work, but it is suggested that readers also try to refer to some of the following basic guides (in descending order of depth of coverage): in Spanish, Pena and Arocena (77–188); in English, Higginbotham, Hopewell, and Stone (87–94). A useful basic outline of what happens on screen is offered by Susan Martín-Márquez:

The translation of the quotations is mine, unless otherwise indicated.
The film’s images gravitate around Fernando (Fernando Fernán Gómez), a self-absorbed, obsessive student of bees, his wife Teresa (Teresa Gimpera), preoccupied with an unspecified person to whom she sends letters via a Red Cross address in France, and the couple’s two daughters, six-year-old Ana (Ana Torrent) and her sister Isabel (Isabel Tellería), three years her senior. The fragmentary plot shuffles glimpses of the family’s daily activities with actions propelled by the girls’—and especially Ana’s—viewing of James Whale’s film *Frankenstein*, which takes place early on in the narrative. (*Feminist Discourse* 200)

To this we need to add four linked elements in the plot: (1) A man dressed like a soldier leaps from a moving train (a train that is the daily focus of interest of the children and of Teresa), injures his leg, staggers to a dark barn in the middle of an empty field, is subsequently found by Ana, may be a member of the maquis (the resistance), and is located and shot by the authorities; (2) Fernando finds out that Ana has been visiting the fugitive and has given him one of her father’s coats, containing his fob-watch, and, at the barn, he attempts to confront her; (3) Ana runs away from her father and goes missing, collapses exhausted in the lee of a ruined monumental gateway, and has a nightmare in which Frankenstein's
monster vividly appears to her in a gothic, moonlit woodland by a dark pool; (4) When she is found she is in profound shock, will not or cannot recognize her parents, speak, or eat, and at the end of the film she is still hallucinating.

A useful summary of common critical reactions is offered by Willem:

[A]djectives such as elusive, mysterious, ambiguous, haunting, and evocative [are used] to describe [the film]. Contributing greatly toward this ethereal quality are three aspects of the film frequently cited [. . .]: Luis Cuadrado’s cinematography, Pablo García del Amo’s editing, and Luis de Pablo’s music. Through the artistry of sight and sound, the atmospheric quality of the film is created: the use of color and design to suggest the beehive motif in the house; shooting the countryside from low angles to emphasize its flatness and desolation; the chiaroscuro effect of shadow and light to add to the mystery and danger; the elliptical editing to cause temporal confusion; the use of children’s songs and drawings to establish the point of view; the simple melodic lines conveyed by few instruments to reinforce the loneliness; and the sound of the wind to stress the isolation. (724)

Such an account suggests a densely textured artwork, full of effects and allusions, drawing on different filmic genres. Additionally, it is now commonplace to frame discussions of the film with allusions to its high cultural status, for example, as “one of the few undisputed canonical texts in Spanish cinema but also a radical film” (Deleyto 39), and as “the undisputed masterpiece of Spanish cinema [a]ppreciated worldwide for its poetic sensibility and profound investigation into the mind and imagination of its child protagonist” (Stone 87), while Erice himself is written of as a key Spanish auteur (Banda Aparte; Higginbotham, Spirit of the Beehive 8–12 and 40–42; and, from a revisionary perspective, Smith “Between Metaphysics”).

However, Hopewell (Out of the Past 207–8), Arocena (85–88), and Stone (88–89) typically want to emphasize not only artistry and atmosphere but also simplicity and transparency. The film’s realistic, if laconic, depiction of the everyday life in a village in Castile one year into the post-Civil War era contributes to its impact for these critics. So too does the satisfying, apparent certainty with which many of its scenes and much of its plot can be decoded as largely having reference to the social, political, and psychological effects of the early years of the Francoist regime. It should be borne in mind, however, that the mapping
of the film’s signs onto actual history is far from direct, and to suppose
that it is directly referential in such a way would be to distort or sideline
other readings (Egea).

Erice’s approach to the taboo subject of the catastrophic polariza-
tion of the vanquished and the vanquishers, of the before and after of a
nation multiply divided, is emphasized by most of the overview studies
of the film from Hopewell onwards as contributing substantially to its
status as a cultural icon. The “spirit” of its title is in part the ghost of
the Civil War, one of the ghosts of the Spanish past to whom Jo La-
banyi, writing from the perspective of theorizations of cultural memory,
persuasively suggests viewers and readers are called on to “bear witness”
and “make reparation” (80). The war ended in 1939—a year ago in the
narrative space of the film—with the victory of the Nationalist forces
under the command of General Francisco Franco, who went about the
task of constructing an artificially unitary “Spain.” The outcome of this
episode of violence in whose psychological and cultural fallout the film
unfolds included: executions, imprisonment, external and internal exile for
Republican militants and sympathizers; the application of a highly repres-
sive form of reactionary, patriarchal patterning of family and society; and
the exacerbation of rural isolation and poverty. This conformed personal,
social, and cultural expression at many levels (Neuschäfer). Furthermore,
as Hopewell has suggested, the Civil War

predetermined [a postwar period] when [. . .] many Spaniards
co-operated with causes with which they did not identify [. . .]
saw themselves defined by actions which they could not always
recognize as their own [and] suffered the consequences of events
they had never experienced and, being in the historical past, could
not hope to change. (Out of the Past 25)

Hopewell may have had in mind here Erice’s own declarations in
the introduction to the 1976 published script (relayed by Luis Arata in
a rather stilted translation):

for those of us born immediately after a civil war like ours, the
[older generation] were often just [. . .] a vacuum, an absence
[. . .] because they had died, left, or become self-centred be-
ings [. . .] deprived [. . .] of expression [. . .]. Many returned to
their homes, had children, but something remained ingrained
in them, something deeply mutilated which reveals an absence.
(Arata 28)
This set of statements had already made a connection between the outward history of oppression and other, more hidden, internalized stories. Erice came back to these ideas more tersely in a thirtieth-anniversary interview for *The Guardian*—“the politics are important [but] interiorised [. . .] the narrative has to be allusive, indirect” (Lennon)—and they illustrate Hopewell’s suggestion that “Ana’s story is open to psychological, cinematic, and historical readings, all of which naturally overlap” (*Out of the Past* 205).

In the first decade or so of its life in distribution and in university courses the two main directions taken in academic criticism remained somewhat separate: one was psychological, investigating the socialization of and the particular vision of children (Arata; Riley); and the other was allegorical, emphasizing politics and sexual politics (Camina; Savater; Evans). Important to both lines of enquiry is the figure of the monster. If, as Deleyto says, the film has a “radical” quality (39), this comes in part from the daring simplicity with which its allegorical structuring is achieved, particularly with regard to that emblem of mutilation and inability to express (picking up on Erice’s words via Arata, quoted above) which is the spirit/monster at the core of the film’s structuring. Famously, in the opening episode of the film, the child protagonist Ana and her older sister Isabel watch, wide-eyed, in the village hall, a showing of Whale’s *Frankenstein* and, in particular, the scene by the lake with the monster emerging from the bushes to play with but subsequently seize and drown the little girl María. Isabel, pressed for an explanation of the monster’s actions and of why the villagers killed the monster, improvises in whispers that night in bed what for Ana becomes the compelling explanation that, quite apart from film being untrue anyway, the monster cannot have died because he was in fact a spirit, and the body consequently a mere disguise; moreover, there is a spirit moving locally by night—to see him, or evoke him, all Ana has to do is intone her name. This implantation of fantasy and dread moves through the substance of the film in many complicated directions, but in one direct way—beyond the children’s realm—*Frankenstein* is used to comment on, if not Spain, at least society and its primary ethical struggles. Similarly, although never unequivocally—as Pena points out (69)—an analogy between the monster and Fernando suggests itself.

When Fernando returns to his study after his excursion to the hives on the bright-lit mountainside, he leaves off reading his news magazine (its name, *El Mundo*, reminding the spectator of the world beyond Spain) to attend to the sound track of the horror film, floating in through his windows. The talk is of the piecing together of the monster, of the potential for good and the inevitability and transmissibility of evil
(for the brain that has been used by Dr. Frankenstein in his experiment is a criminal brain). Marsha Kinder observes that “the film implies that the children of Franco would turn out to be like the children of Frankenstein” (Blood Cinema 129). No early audience of Erice’s film is likely, either, to have failed to pick up the link between Dr. Frankenstein’s name and that of the dictator, and the analogy could be taken at least as far as to emphasize the monstrousness of Franco’s original enterprise. It is also conceivable that the monster himself could represent for some a tragically botched recreation of Spain, emerging amoral and amnesiac (Higginbotham, Spanish Film 116–20), a Spain of several nations artificially patched together, a flawed enterprise based on borrowed ideologies coming out of fascist thought, the Spanish Imperial past, the teachings of the Vatican, conservative notions of family and home, and, later in the dictatorship, from the pages of economists’ textbooks. Or perhaps the monster’s body might grotesquely stand in for the mutilated and tortured bodies of the recent war—as Labanyi suggests in her illuminatingly nuanced discussions of the meanings of the monster (76–78), “the monster stands as the embodiment, which returns to haunt the present, of a collective living death” (76).

It is the staging and setting of this embodiment in a space of resonance that allows the film so compellingly to link social, psychological, historical and fantasy materials. In this haunting of the present, history (in part) becomes a “presencia autónoma” (independent presence) constructed out of Spanish audiences’ collective cultural memory, affective reflection, and (resuming an old critical topos) the physical setting—the house and the landscape—as a “sentimental landscape of sadness and solitude” (Lomillos 58).

Memory and Remembering

There is one especially important act of remembering to be done at this stage in this chapter: that is, to bring back to the surface of the visual and auditory imagination the film’s atmosphere of desolation, and the realization that it is reminiscent of that atmosphere peculiar to the aftermath of shock and catastrophe: nearly empty landscapes, semi-ruined and ruined spaces; muted colors; a baldly repetitive insistence on “los grandes misterios de la creación—la vida y la muerte” (the great mysteries of creation: life and death) (as the compeer to the James Whale film puts it); and above all, as de Ros reveals, a “pervasive feeling of silence,” “instances of loss of intelligibility,” sparse dialogue (33), and a “disjunction of sound and image [causing] the subtle estrangement of these two
Memory, Nostalgia, Trauma

senses” (36). Some of this pervasive feeling may well carry over from Erice’s first intention of making a film whose main theme would be the political situation in early-1970s Spain tackled allegorically through the return of the monster to a Spain that resembles a concentration camp run by technocrats and through the setting of the action in a space that was to have been a cross between a hospital and a library, or film archive (the critic Antonio Castro qtd. in Arocena 78). The archive and the wound, memoir and pain, are thrown together by the return of the monstrous. The film reconstructs a posttraumatic space around wounds that may never heal (Pena, Víctor Erice 114). It stages a series of possible reactions to and interpretations of the state of Spain, on the one hand, and a state of mind, on the other hand, connected to horror, nightmare, vicarious remembrance, the loss of innocence, and the perversion of paternal love into deadness, inscrutability, and blank authority. In a manner whose obscurity, temporal discontinuity, illogicality, and ungraspability are appropriate to the symptoms of trauma (Caruth; LaCapra 718–19), the film sporadically crossmatches Ana’s crisis to a nation’s crisis, and in her “discovery” of the damaged fugitive links her to a history of strife and violent exclusion. It is concerned with historical trauma; and it is also, inextricably, concerned with structural—psychic—trauma in Ana, Teresa, Fernando, and Isabel, while also leaving on the viewer’s imagination the ghostly imprint of something that surely does not actually lie in the past, some unrepresentable and unrealized abuse of Ana that goes far beyond and before her father’s disciplinary and dysfunctional aloofness. Her hysterical silence and the hallucinatory illness, which, at the end of the film, she is only just in the midst of, will be returned to later. But first, to memory and to the ways in which the film remits to the past, over and over again, in a series of visual and aural references; or in words that have direct reference to the Holocaust, to the ways in which “the space of the concentrationary universe […] can only be represented traumatically as the registration of a repetitive structure of time” (Rothberg 99–100). Thinking about trauma, as well as about memory and nostalgia, can help maintain a proper dynamic between, in Smith’s terms, “reference and abstraction” (“Between Metaphysics” 112). If this film looks and sounds as it does, it is both because something multifarious and terrible has happened and because that something echoes phantom feelings in the person who sees and hears the emptiness and beauty here, feelings that reconstruct themselves after the (represented) event as memories that possess her.

Although there has been a tendency to suggest that the temporal structuring of the film is itself very complex—views that are summarized and reviewed by Smith (“Whispers”)—in fact the superstructure has two
very simple, linear stories running in parallel over a number of days, or possibly weeks (though visibly contained within one climatically homogenous early or late winter season): that of Ana’s fantasy episode and its development, and that of her parents’ continuing act of survival in the aftermath of the war seen through the prism of the same period. There is little here to suggest the exercise of Rothberg’s registration of repetition. Similarly, the two explicit acts of remembering that give texture to the plot are recorded as linear stories: Fernando’s recording in his diary of his memory of a long-ago day when an unnamed friend came to the house to watch the behavior of the bees with him, and Teresa’s writing of one of her letters to an absent man in which she records the changes that have occurred since he was forced to leave Spain and (more enigmatically) since he was last in the house. Here, though, the registration of repetition does begin to break into the linearity. Fernando’s recourse to his diary is soon revealed as part of his habit of seeking reclusion in his study: the film makes a habit of putting the study windows center frame at crucial moments of transition, the words have a rehearsed, literary feel to them—indeed, Fernando may be not simply remembering but inventing a poeticized memory.

His writing, and his attention to the bees, has an intention of exorcism and, for the viewer, a therapeutic effect. Teresa’s writing too is habitual, a way of filling the emptiness of the present and inscribing the act of survival (Arocena 108–9), and the one text we see (and hear in voice-over) is structured around a linguistic reiteration—of “tantas ausencias [. . .] tanta tristeza [que] se fue nuestra capacidad de sentir” (“so many absences [. . .] so much sadness [that] our capacity for feeling has deserted us”). Teresa’s letter is concerned with creating a memoir in which she hopes to confirm the impossibility of nostalgia, which, as she writes, is a feeling that is difficult to have after what they have all lived through: when she burns a subsequent letter she defies the destructive power of constantly returning memories, of “so many” annihilating events and emotions. Yet they return.

Underlying the stories of Ana and her parents are a number of distinctly nonlinear patterns. The ellipses and discontinuities that Pena and Smith remind us of (Víctor Erice and “Whispers”) are operational in both stories; Ana acts as a prism that fragments her, and therefore the viewer’s, perception of the intradiegetic world (Stone 88), and the marker of most of the re-entries to the episodic tale of her mental and real adventure is an image of her (that is, the young Ana Torrent’s) hypnotic stare, both registering and inducing the thrill of her fugues into fantasy. Crucially, for example, there is an ambiguity around the reality status of the subnarreme of the fugitive’s arrival by train, which is constructed by a memorable dissolve to the sequence from one of Ana closing her
eyes as she wills the spirit into existence in the garden of the house one
gothic night. The back histories of her parents are made discontinuous
and vague. Teresa is sidelined and the substance of her character reduced,
violeently in Deleyto's reading, and Fernando's place in history is uncertain
both on the smaller scale (he is scolded by the housekeeper for never
keeping the same mealtimes as the rest of the family) and the wider
(his university background seems to align him with the intellectual left,
but his current behavior—as indeed the seigneurial manor in which he
lives—with the patriarchal right). Both parents are, according to Erice's
stated intention, shadowy (Arocena 102). For the viewer, reconstructing
the substance of these characters is, like the double act of memory itself
(conscious and unconscious), a difficult, unpredictable, and discontinuous
piece of emotional labor.

Furthermore, the two prologues to the film—the arrival of the travel-
ing cinema and the prologue of Frankenstein within the film (Deleyto
40)—are supplemented and anticipated by the static visual synopsis of a
sequence of a child's drawings showing the key symbols and plot movers
of the film; and the film's first words, in subtitle, are the archetypal “Érase
una vez…” (“Once upon a time . . .”), prompting diffuse memories of
tales once heard and pictures once enjoyed in the seeing or the drawing.
Spanish viewers have their aural memories prompted too by the pastiche
of folk songs and children's songs that makes up Luis de Pablo's score;
and Spanish readers pick up on the half-resonance with the opening of
Don Quixote in the continuation of the establishing subtitles, as many
academic critics have been quick to point out, up to and including Stone
(88). Similar half-resonances are later revealed of the preoccupations with
the central Spanish landscape as the bearer of the traces of history of
writers of the Generation of 1898, whose ghostly presence is signaled
by visual references to Unamuno (see Pena, Víctor Erice 60–63), the gen-
eral thematic of Castile in the wake of periods of exodus and national
catastrophe, attention to landscapes of ruins and signs of past grandeur
(like Fernando's home), fields as past battlegrounds, and inhabitants who
(especially in one oddly choreographed scene outside the village hall as the
film is getting underway inside) move as might have done the “atónitos
palurdos” (dumbstruck rustics) seen by the speaker of the poem “A oríl-
las del Duero” (“On the Banks of the Duero”) in Antonio Machado's
Campos de Castilla (1917). The film, then, bears a number of possible,
significant, textual memories suggesting return and repetition.

The reflexivity of the film, examined by Linda Willem and
Thibaudeau (following a longish line of other critics interested in the
issue), also gives it an archival inflection. As Thibaudeau observes, not
only does Erice's film refer back to Frankenstein but the reference refers
the viewer to the whole genre of fantasy film, “perhaps” nostalgically on
the part of Erice (16). De Ros expands substantially the field of operation
of memory by suggesting that, as part of the film’s “[interrogation of]
the constructed nature of cinematic representation” (27), it “illuminates
the different inflections that the visual and the aural may have in cinema
and the ways their boundaries can be transgressed or can form alternative
alliances within the prevailing order of knowledge” (32) (thus—though
De Ros is too subtle to say so outright—abetting the film’s attack on
Francoism). The viewer is reminded, in fact, of the history of cinema, and
of the transition—located in this case as a memory within a memory, in
the figure of the silent monster, a “misfit [. . .] in the flourishing world
of the talkies” (34)—from silent films to sound.

The locations and interiors of the film invite the viewer to follow
in the footprints of memory. Absent, suppressed referents abound: if the
long road emphatically featured leading off into the harsh landscape and
the railway, and its sounds, are taunting reminders within the film of a
world outside, they both (the road with its bicycle and cart; the train
with its steam and whistle) signal pastness to the viewer as much as
remoteness of freedom to, say, Teresa. The sparsely populated village is
an empty archive of former community and activity; the vast ruined and
isolated arch where Ana is tracked down at the height of her crisis goes
back further still; and most of all the echoing family house, whose many
resonances are picked out by Evans and Molina Foix. This is a house
presided over by a father who is alienated to the point of insensitivity
and despotism where his wife and his children are concerned, an intel-
lectual at the centre of a house coded by its windows and passageways
(and the title of the film) as a hive, reduced by circumstance to keeping
bees whose main reference drifts back and forth between the terms of
entrapment, meaningless activity, the production of nightmares, and the
production of the sweet substance of dreams.

Molina Foix’s careful and brilliant reading of the house-related im-
egagy gives rise to the suggestion that the film be read above all in terms
of absence, making it a space of forgetting as much as of memory. The
characters are immersed in unreality, or the absence of reality, obliged by
the Civil War and its aftermath to absent themselves from reality and
live through dead and empty hours: the presence of the war is made
conspicuous by precisely this, it is “a presence based on an absence” (112).
The light that characterizes the interior shots, he suggests (115), is a
filtered, “censored” light offering little contrast, and seems to correspond
to the muffling and damping down of all passionate exchange between
the characters. Indeed, as he demonstrates through an analysis of fram-
ing and editing, there is more communication by the adults with absent others than between themselves or with their daughters (113–14).

The house contributes notably to the sense of the film's being full of memorials to the past and to survival and mortality. It is heavily coded with pastness, even in and precisely because of the emphatic absence of many of the objects it once held (as, again, Teresa's paradoxically full letter tells the viewer): an allegorical painting of Saint Jerome in the baroque style, skull in the foreground, refers to lessons of the past on the vanity of earthly things; the fortifications of the house from which Teresa calls out Ana's name recall pre-Renaissance frontier battles; the furniture is an overlaid archive of several generations, heavy with the traces of wealth and ambition now proven vain. The ruined monumental gateway that serves as Ana's Freudianly appropriate place of crisis remits to frontier times once more (and can easily be imagined to have served as a frontline post or snipers' favored location in the more recent war); the open fields, as has been suggested, might look back to iconic representations of Castile as core of the nation at two moments in literary history; the schoolhouse where Ana and Teresa attend class is, on a shorter timescale, not just a place where multiplication tables are memorized and knowledge is laid down but one whose treatment, as Marsha Kinder suggests, establishes it as a strong image of the specificity of daily existence at a particular time in history (Blood Cinema 129–33).

One of the key memorial sites of the film is the isolated barn, not least because it is eventually the place where the fugitive is shot and dies and is intuitively known as such subsequently by Ana, for whom it becomes an integral part of her traumatic experience. After a class in basic anatomy in which a metal man is pieced together, like Frankenstein's monster, and lastly given eyes to see, Isabel takes Ana out to show her this barn for the first time to open her own eyes to the mystery of the spirit. The contextualizing importance of the sequence that leads from school to barn is considerable and moves away from the spaces of memory into those of nostalgia and trauma, since what is at stake is a combination of loss of innocence, the discovery of an unbearable connectedness between the real and the imaginary, and a vertiginous conflation of painful images for Ana and for the viewer.

Nostalgia

As is suggested in Pierre Nora's project Les lieux de mémoire, on France's reconstruction of its identity around sites and monuments specifically
invested with the intention to remember, “collective memory emerges” (in Nancy Wood’s gloss on Nora) as a ‘symbolic topography’ or ‘dynamic ensemble’ of diverse representational forms, both material and immaterial in nature, that articulate the heritage of a given community” (3). As we have seen, *El espíritu de la colmena* is not only replete with memory referents but is a major part of Spanish cultural heritage as well as forming part of the ensemble of forms that students of Spanish culture take as access points to more or less nuanced readings of its relation to the sociopolitical realities of the period 1939–1975. It stands as a dynamic memorial. In particular, for those who lived through the war, and perhaps exile, and who saw the film in its early years of circulation, it must surely have been a reminder of their experience. For certain audiences, then, it is a reminder of how, as Wood has it, quoting Joëlle Bahloul:

[the] “uprooted memories” of a diasporic community [. . .] must compensate for their lack of access to their own *lieux de mémoire* [. . .] by summoning memories whose key locus is the very spatial parameters from which the community is physically excluded. Surcharged memories of places—especially domestic spaces—are “part of the syndrome of exile”; they are an “embodiment of the life cycle” and therefore an “embodiment of genealogy”—highly cathected substitutes for the physical traces of lineage their bearers have been forced to abandon; their function is to “erase deracination by recreating genealogical loci.” (177)

The house in Erice’s film, with its many chambers, and the long perspectives opened up as doors reveal corridors and light (as the children play, in the temporary absence of the father, who blocks the play of imagination), is just such a space of surcharged memories; as are the Castilian fields and ruins and the rundown pueblo itself. Although the match between the (Algerian) diasporic community being discussed by Bahloul and the more fragmented Spanish exile community is not a direct one, the film certainly presents a dynamic ensemble of places that, in substituting for the lost “traces of lineage,” recreates a space of continuity—not just for political exiles and their heirs but also for viewers possessed by a more generalized sense of loss. However, while offering the possibility of continuity by revitalizing genealogy in this way (through substitution) and by reopening a way into the future, the ensemble of places would also seem to be powerfully nostalgic objects in the sense of “condensations of childhood values, derivatives of early fantasies that are used to idealize the past, preventing movement towards the future” (Harvey A. Kaplan qtd. in Wood 145–46). Thus, the film is a space where the spirit might move the viewer in either temporal direction.
The very look of the film makes it in itself an object of nostalgia, particularly for post-1980s audiences attuned to the possibility of a Spanish heritage movie. An unnuanced viewing of this film concentrated on the visual traces of period typicality (buildings, costumes, customs) might move quickly toward simply taking pleasure in pastness as commodity (leaving no scope for a future-oriented production of a space for continuity) and might risk what Nora terms patrimonialization, where the past is a virtually autonomous moment, a “localized heritage, claimed as the cornerstone of one’s singular identity” (Wood 176). A more complex, though equally problematic and nostalgic, framing of the film is exemplified in a lyrical review in the otherwise usually sober journal Dirigido, which regrets its own inability to fulfill its mission of remembering the film appropriately because everything has already been said on it: the critical voice (Monterde) finds itself excluded from participation in the once available plenitude of dialogue with the admired object. The film is figured here as a “light” not yet extinguished and a space of “initiation” (Monterde, “El espíritu” 98), a trajectory from darkness to the revelation of a myth of unity, the realization of “our” inevitable loss of innocence and exile from this space, the revelation of the pain of consciousness, but also of the need to satisfy the quest for knowledge (99). In a twenty-fifth anniversary special dossier in Banda Aparte abounding in auteurist and aestheticist accounts, a similar perspective has the film’s construction of a possible alternative “world” through Ana affirm at the end her “verdad interior” (inner truth) (Laínez 56). Both these brief critical raptures are good examples of the urge to abstraction that Smith (“Between Metaphysics”) seeks to counterbalance (while also duly preserving) in his arguments for a coherent synthesis of the historical and the poetic in encounters with the film.

Despite the seductive magic of the film—Laínez reminds us of the drawing of a magician in the opening titles, which denotes the trickery of illusion (55); see also de Ros on this issue (36)—the children in the film do not, or at least should not, easily invite idealizing readings of childhood as a space of innocence, as Martín-Márquez shows in her analysis of Isabel and as Deleyto shows in his of Ana and Teresa as two aspects of rebellion (Feminist Discourse 49–51). If we posit Ana not so much as a child but as a figure with a maternal aura—following one of three lines of thought prompted by the objects on the children’s bedside table (a picture of the Madonna, a candle, a toy monkey, signaling spiritual maternity, enlightenment, childhood mischief)—we may investigate precisely a nostalgia that negotiates the line between screening off the past, preventing movement into the future, on the one side, and accessing continuity on the other. It is a nostalgia for redemption that the film perhaps most powerfully provokes through Ana (principally, but not solely),
a nostalgia both conforming and not conforming to the classic sense of “serving the function of denial and of a defence against, and substitute for, mourning” (Wood 145), given that the lost object here, the object susceptible to recovery, is composed of an operation (impossible really), which in theological terms erases spiritual exile, returns the people to the light, renews, guarantees, and perpetuates.

It is Ana’s communication with the absent Spirit that enables a passionate involvement of the viewers as community in the activity of breaking out of the structures of the patriarchal hive. Martín-Márquez’s feminist reading (developing ideas of Mary Ann Doane) of Ana’s encounters with the monster implies that the film is empowering in that Ana as the female protagonist is prompted by her curiosity to take investigative action (to find her monster) and thus take control of the gaze. Her moments of empathy with the monster allow recognition by the female spectator, as suggested by Linda Williams, of its similar status as “other” in a patriarchal society, and they allow the uncovering of the workings of that structure of power (Martín-Márquez, Feminist Discourse 222). Ana only avoids victimhood in this reading, however, through the way her sister Isabel (who teeters on the verge of mischief and evil throughout) “takes on the truly monstrous role, conforming to expected female behaviors under patriarchy” (Martín-Márquez, Feminist Discourse 229), and is positioned “to play both victim and monster” (228), the first because of her socialization and connectedness with representations of the monstrous feminine, and the second ostensibly through her spiteful play (with the black cat she starts to throttle, and with Ana, to whom she feigns death and disappearance at the hands of an intruder).

In these ways Ana is a role model, and more political in her connotations than spiritual. The film’s open ending, however, does not entirely allow the spectator to make so rational a decision about her role and the meanings attaching to her. As the lights go down in Fernando’s study, his own careful, metaphysical discourse on the awesome life of the bees is both dimmed and consecrated; the power of the father in the realm of language is both taken from him and restored to him. And as Ana rises from her sick bed, she becomes powerful by resisting the prediction of conventional (patriarchal) medical science—the bearded family doctor’s phlegmatic assurance that she will soon forget the whole incident of the “monster” and the refugee. She defies once more both father and common sense as she is absorbed into the gothic poetics of the scene, leaves her bed and goes to the window with moonlight streaming in, conjuring up in her mind the sound of the approaching train and the words of invocation of the spirit, “Soy Ana” (“It’s Ana”). At first she is apparently subjugated to the film’s symbolic purposes, which might be to signal Freudian or social troubles (or both); but when she turns to face the camera in a
hieratic and dramatic gesture she seems, like a priestess or a white witch, to offer solutions rather than troubles and from a position of dominance challenges those gathered to see the swirling blue mists beyond the window as prefiguring a liberation of the imagination or the spirit. This scene, as much as encouraging an irresponsible nostalgia for dreams of innocence and protectedness, or calling on the viewer to surrender to the powers of horror, demands a reconstruction of the sound of the train as the promise of communication, escape, a new civilization, a future even. The image of Ana insists on being envisaged here as having on behalf of her audience somehow passed through abjection (to anticipate the next and final section of the chapter); to have attempted to confront and expel the disorderly and the horrible and yet to enter into communion with it. She seems to have enacted an exorcism of the past by binding herself to a fantastic substitution of it (making “our” nostalgia redundant). While it is not at all clear into what new history, what new imaginings, this disturbing little figure is gazing on behalf of the viewer, she seems to be in control, and to point the way to new action, interceding. In as much as this is, of course, all an effect of the light, it responds to the material concerns raised by Smith (“Between Metaphysics”), but what truly grounds this nostalgia which is not one is the issue of trauma, and the psychic and historical encounters with horror that backfill so much of the space of the film and responses to it.

Trauma

Although early work by Pierre Janet, Sigmund Freud, and others on the effects of trauma on human subjects started at the level of the damaged individual, and although as late as 1998 it was possible for the presenter of a special issue of the journal *Diacritics* on the subject to state directly that trauma theory is a “branch of psychoanalysis” (Jacobus 3), the traumatized family, community, and nation are, as is well known, categories of growing significance. The interdisciplinary critical literature on the social aftereffects of the Holocaust (among other major genocides, conflicts, and catastrophes) continues to grow (Whitehead; Rothberg), and the volume on the politics of memory in the Spanish context to which Labanyi has contributed reflects the emphasis of her piece on the embodiment of the past and the bridging across from psychoanalytical concerns to historical ones via a rethinking—through the trope of ghostliness in Labanyi’s case—of “the current postmodern obsession with simulacra” (65; also 80). Trauma theory, as well as being inextricably involved in the politics, politicization, and rehistoricization of memory, suggests Kai Erikson, “takes account of events that happen [...] in the intimacy of the family and
in the ambiguously interpersonal or social dimensions of sexuality where events intersect with issues involving gender, power, and powerlessness as well as with pre-existing psychic structures”; “trauma has a social dimension” (185), and there are “social climates, communal moods, that come to dominate a group's spirit” (190). Particularly, Thomas Elsaesser points out that trauma theorists “want to articulate a theory of the subject not around desire and its constitutive lack (the Freud-Lacanian route), but around memory and its—politically enforced, patriarchally inflicted—gaps, absences, and traceless traces” (194).

The difficulties of bringing issues of trauma into the social, collective, and even cognitive spheres are not inconsiderable, however. As Cathy Caruth notes, “in trauma, the greatest confrontation with reality may also occur as an absolute numbing to it [and] immediacy may take the form of belatedness” (5); trauma's “refusal to be simply located” and its “insistent appearance outside the boundaries of any single place or time” (8) make it a difficult matter to cope with in any attempt at mapping the numbing, achronological, paradoxically inaccessible experience of it onto histories, whether personal, collective, national, recorded, or represented. Erice's film's use of ellipsis, simultaneity, dislocation, and deferral reproduces this difficulty; and it does so in a way that ought to disallow the normalizing matching up of meanings by encouraging a genuine attention to disjunctures, rather than to equivalences (Egea 526–27).

Nonetheless, if only to open up more gaps, it is worth asking: could Ana's way of viewing the monster stand for a common experience of fear and coping with fear, a common structure and attempted structuring of trauma? Thinking back to the first moments at the isolated barn, Ana is caught in a waking nightmare of loss and absence that is later to be intensely internalized, but she is also caught up in a deindividualized moment, a common premonition of death and absorption into the other. The abstract foreboding of the blowing winds (an aural image that in effect defocalizes and despecifies) and the archetypicality of the deep, dark well ritualize the moment. The barn becomes a sacred space (Arocena 130), first of communion (as Ana tends to the fugitive) then of sacrifice (when he is shot), then of shocked and interrupted mourning (when Ana discovers the cruel repetition of the absence of the spirit she is seeking and—when Fernando finds her there—the unbearable return of the possibility that he is the more powerful manifestation of the spirit with which he has been associated by sound and image [Arocena 147–50]). However, that sacredness is defiled, brutally reinserted into history, by the shooting, since this turns the space retrospectively into that of a condemned cell, and presently into that of an execution chamber—it becomes part of the film's concentrationary universe, to reapply Rothberg's terms. Ana's empty
space, after the death, is the empty space of a numbed nation. The event of the shooting, filmed in the dark and at several hundred meters, has a horrifying familiarity to it. It is a historical reiteration that deepens the sense of the iterative structures of the film that link individual and collective experience, as studied by Kinder (Blood Cinema 126–32). To Labanyi’s stress on the reinsertion of the fugitive into history through Ana’s hospitality toward him, as a ghost of the past, we need, in a traumatic reading, to add a consideration of the resistance to such temporal relocation that is written into the traumatic memory. This ghost, having been ushered back into the realm of the present, again disappears for Ana—subject to Rothenberg’s “registration of a repetitive structure of time”—since the body in the improvised chapel is literally unknowable to her; and the twice-dead subject is once again dispersed among different figurations of monstrousness, pulling away from embodiment; but the emotional pain caused to the viewer by that tension draws attention no less sharply to history than to oblivion.

In the schoolroom just before the first visit to the barn, the rudimentary anatomy lesson had drawn the children’s attention to the vulnerability of the body, the separability of body parts, and also the connectedness of flesh, feeling, and perception (as the heart and the eyes are put in place, the latter by Ana). It had been precisely anatomy that had centered so many of the early debates on hysteria and reactions to shock and psychic damage, and body image continues to play a major role in the psychoanalysis of trauma (Whitehead 1997); so, when Ana manifests her symptoms in the wake of the double shock of her vicarious and belated discovery of the truth of death (in the evidence of the absence of the maquisard) and of her confrontation with her father’s anger (at the barn later) they are hysterical symptoms, and traumatic ones in the sense explored by LaCapra, as discussed by Whitehead (191), where “‘acting out’ reflects the overwhelming nature of trauma, in which the past has not been assimilated or even experienced and so is perpetually relived.” Becoming a fugitive herself, she acts out just such an unlived past; and layer on layer of monstrous images return to haunt the viewer.

One of the greatest difficulties in locating the traumatic in the film is the constant deferral of identification of a traumatized subject, whether collective or individual. Ana—as her symptoms so painfully show—has seen nothing; Fernando is saying nothing; the viewer is not necessarily (especially as time passes) somebody who has witnessed atrocities of war and repression in Spain. It is also, at the very least, questionable that most viewers have had an experience of growing up that is so violent and so hedged about by damaging authority that they are possessed by images that find their correlatives returning in this film. It is as if the past
event at stake here has not even been experienced (as already suggested in a different context by Hopewell, Out of the Past 25), or as if events witnessed, remembered, and suppressed have been disconnected from the individuals represented or interpellated (as viewers) and redistributed, by the structures of the fiction, among the characters, places, and objects.

However, in a manner true both to the "radical disruption and gaps of traumatic experience" (Caruth 2) and to theoretical assertions about the collective nature of trauma, this begins to make sense. If the viewer is frequently dropped into the abyss of Ana’s individual point of view by cinematographic and narrative ambiguities, the images remitted to there are images just as much of damage to “the tissues of the community,” in Erikson’s terms (185); the human beings represented at the bottom of the well of her imagination represent a “gathering of the wounded” (187). And, as we have seen, these images relate (as closely as they do obliquely) to the political meanings of the film. Like the bees in the hives and cages, the wounded are trapped; unlike the bees, though, what traps them is not a perfect (if tyrannical) system—which allows neither sleep nor death, as Fernando recalls revealing to his absent, horrified friend—so much as a new, rigid system imposed on a disrupted society. The film, then, speaks of “memory and its—politically enforced, patriarchally inflicted—gaps, absences and traceless traces” (Elsaesser 194).

It is time now to return to the troubling ghost of a suggestion that Ana’s “structural” traumatic trouble has a nonliteral but not for that any less disturbing reference to abuse within the family; that is, the trouble does not relate only to historical trauma at the extradiegetic level of the film (to what the audience remembers of the catastrophe of the war) or to what has happened to the adults in the film, but also to a more individualized set of histories, some of them lived by Ana in character, some of them imaginable (or, rather, unimaginable) for empathizing viewers. Although Martín-Márquez’s attention to the figure of Isabel in relation to the structures of horror and Kinder’s reminder about the centrality of Ana’s response to her viewing of Frankenstein were useful correctives to some of the more repetitive symbol-fixated and formalist readings of the film in the critical repertoire, it is also true, as Lomillos suggests, that Ana’s adventure is based on her desire to know the “dark and secret world” of the adults around her (59) and that she is compelled to search by the need to replace the emotional and signifying vacuum left by the dysfunction of the family (67).

Lomillos is interested in the space of family as a space of separation, a once or should-be protective space that has become unbearable (59) precisely because it has become an isolating and isolated enclosure. In Teresa’s case, her letter writing remits to individual entrapment on
the one hand, as the camera circles her as she writes (as if haunting or stalking her), and to collective loss on the other, as the nonspecificity of the addressee allows him to merge his single identity with that of a whole exiled community. Perhaps she conforms to Pierre Janet’s model of elimination of the traumatic memory in a context where it is impossible to “[sustain] theoretically or practically the opposition between forgetting and remembering” (Leys 129). As Deleyto has suggested (40–45), the framing of the scene variously disempowers her; the chiaroscuro points up the emptiness of this space, and she is lit—that is to say defined—by the honey-colored light through the cellular panes that is one of the film’s key visual features and that signifies an interior both “real” and psychological, both nurturing and entrapping (Evans, “The Monster” 13). She and Fernando live like the marginalized couple in exile who form part of Inger Agger’s studies of traumatized subjects (Agger 103), where the woman makes herself frigid while the man “locks his feelings in” (103). Personal harm and harm to the community criss-cross in them. If Ana, as Smith observes, is the one who is open to, and opens out, revelations “about the role of the Other in the constitution of a sense of self” (“Between Metaphysics” 112) she is also vulnerable through her abnormal socialization to the effects of the discontinuities of others. This is her traumatic inheritance.

The nature of her access to her social self needs, however, to be read against the nature of her access to her sexual self. Recapitulating late 1970s and 1980s Freudian and post-Freudian interpretations of the film, which have complemented the available allegorical readings, Kinder has very properly reminded us that in fact the film “focuses on a child’s imaginative reconstruction of images she has seen in a Hollywood movie” (Frankenstein), and on how she “uses the myth to deal with the painful experiences in her own Spanish context [and] especially her interactions with [the] Republican fugitive […] and with her father” (Blood Cinema 127). The child, Ana, “is most deeply moved by the sequence from Frankenstein in which the monster seems to befriend the little girl Maria” (Blood Cinema 128). Ana “[absorbs] both monster and victim as her own doubles, and the primal associations of the love and the violence between them as the deep structure for her own fantasies about the father figures in her life” (128) (that is to say, her actual father and the fugitive). It is almost certainly just such a “deep structure” of associations that is signaled by the perspective down the well by the barn (studied in detail by Pena 85–86), as also in the troubled reflection on the pool in the spookily encoded woodlands in Ana’s vivid nightmare. On the run—in tacit mimesis of the monster and the fugitive—she sees, in a fevered dream that may or may not be a waking one, her own reflection
in water again, on a dark pond, and, replacing it, the reflection of the face of Frankenstein's monster, in full color, and indeed there behind her, then kneeling as had the monster next to little Maria by the lake, to hold out his hands to her in a moment frozen between contact and menace. In addition to that hesitation between contact and menace, on first viewing and because of the position of the camera and the two actors, there is also an ambiguity about what the monster is reaching out to touch—whether Ana's breasts or her shoulders. Through her dreaming and in her life, Ana is waking to a sexualized adult self as well as discovering horrors and delights; she is acting out an instinctive attempt at access to what is forbidden, transgressive female sexuality (Deleyto 49). There is, after all, as has been extensively argued (for example in Creed, *Monstruous*), barely a horror film scenario that is not in some sense about sexualized transitions of the body, and in particular of the female body into adolescence and adulthood. As she looks into and onto the dark and obviously symbolic waters (Deleyto 50), Ana is not just placing herself as an individual in relation to real and imagined figures in the world around her (thinking about her father, the “monster,” her dreams), but confronting also the hint or the presage of a much more indefinite antagonist. In the darkness and in her reflection—inside her, the suggestion might be—there is horror without name, but framed by sexuality, the family, and the nation.

Julia Kristeva, in her philosophico-poetical explorations of the power of horror in the psychological life of phobic adults, speaks of their relation to horror in terms of an attempt to pass over an untouched and untouchable abyss (Kristeva, *Pouvoirs* 53) where there is “un ’quelque chose’ que je ne reconnaiss pas comme chose. Un poids de non-sens [. . .] qui m’écrase” (“a ‘something’ which I do not recognize as a thing at all. A crushing weight of non-sense”), something “not me,” and yet “not it” either, unnameable (*Powers of Horror* 9–10). If an object of fear forms in the mind (in the viewer’s, or, as in Ana’s case, a monster) it does so precisely to give at least some shape to that something which is no thing and which threatens to destroy sanity and integrity of personality. What remains to be seen is whether Ana’s fusion with monster, mother, Other, viewer offers the possibility of progress toward closure (whether, that is, the bearded doctor is right when he says that little by little she will start to forget) or whether (when she turns at the end of the film to look back at the viewer) Spanish cultural memory is marked (if “only” vicariously) by the invocation through her of the repetition of horrors of different provenance and of different reality value that are too dispersed—too generalized and yet too unique—to settle into comprehensible narrative, or assimilable sounds and images that all but remain at base traumatic.
Notes

1. For a useful, brief discussion of the distinction and the possible conflation of the two types of trauma, see LaCapra.

2. In a way he is plagiarizing, not inventing: Erice is said to have appropriated to his purposes Maurice Maeterlinck's 1901 essay on *The Life of the Bee* (Higginbotham, *Spirit of the Beehive* 13; Stone 89).

3. Higginbotham floats the possibility of the letter's addressee being the wounded fugitive and her motive fear of the letter's discovery (*The Spirit* 12): this would mean an even more emphatic killing off of the possibility of nostalgia.

4. As Neuschäfer remarks in relation to twentieth-century Spanish literature, one could write a whole history of censorship around the symbol of the isolated, encapsulated house (57).

5. The opening chapter of *Civilization and Its Discontents* juxtaposes the archaeology of Rome—the process of building upon ruins—with the archaeology of the mind, similarly layered, but with all the old sites still intact.

6. The film also has its Christ figure in the form of the fugitive. There are narrative resonances of *Whistle Down the Wind* (Brian Forbes, 1961), with its discovery by three children of a fugitive in a barn whom they take at first to be Jesus. Also, after the shooting, the fugitive's corpse is laid out in the village hall, and the "fore-shortened perspective of his body [...] recalls Renaissance images of the deposition of Christ on the eve of resurrection" (de Ros 36) and the projection screen effectively becomes, in the sequence, a reredos in an improvised chapel. Elliptically, Ana's care for the fugitive is connected to Mary's for Christ.