

# INTRAHISTORY AND THE MEMORY OF INTERIOR EXILE IN SPAIN IN *THE SPIRIT OF THE BEEHIVE* (EL ESPÍRITU DE LA COLMENA, VÍCTOR ERICE, 1973): A VIEW FROM MARÍA ZAMBRANO'S PERSPECTIVE

JORGE VALLE ÁLVAREZ

## I. MARÍA ZAMBRANO WATCHES *THE SPIRIT OF THE BEEHIVE* (EL ESPÍRITU DE LA COLMENA, VÍCTOR ERICE, 1973) IN GENEVA

---

Although she dedicated only a few pages of her vast oeuvre to it, films had a constant presence in the life of the Spanish philosopher María Zambrano. Wherever she lived, she regularly attended the local cinemas, at least until her ailing health no longer permitted it; she talked about the films she saw with the boyfriend of her youth, Gregorio del Campo, and with her Cuban friend Josefina Tarafa, as evidenced by her correspondence with them;<sup>1</sup> she made use of educational films when she took part in Second Spanish Republic's Pedagogical Missions and propaganda films during the Spanish Civil War, reinforcing her firm commitment to the republic's modernising and democratising project; she maintained friendships with Italian directors such as Adriano Zancanella, who

explained the technical details of film production to her; and she attended film cycles organised by the Department of Cinematography in Havana during her Cuban years, which greatly enriched her understanding of film culture. In short, Zambrano was a member of the generation that embraced Rafael Alberti's declaration: "I was born with the cinema, respect me!" (2002: 229). Indeed, in her most autobiographical work, *Delirium and Destiny* (1952), she herself acknowledges that she "loved [cinema] passionately" (1999: 95).

The three articles that Zambrano wrote about cinema in the early 1950s<sup>2</sup> formed part of her quest for a new form of reasoning—which she would later refer to as "poetic reason"—that could meet the need we all have to see ourselves in mirrors that reflect a more complete image of ourselves than rationalism can offer. In this sense, Zambrano's entire philosophy is articulated as a radical criticism of Western rationalist thought, which she often describes as too "self-absorbed"

---

IN SHORT, ZAMBRANO WAS A MEMBER OF THE GENERATION THAT EMBRACED RAFAEL ALBERTI'S DECLARATION: "I WAS BORN WITH THE CINEMA, RESPECT ME!". INDEED, IN HER MOST AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL WORK, *DELIRIUM AND DESTINY* (1952), SHE HERSELF ACKNOWLEDGES THAT SHE "LOVED [CINEMA] PASSIONATELY".

---

and "abstracted" because it is only capable of contemplating itself, forgetting that its primary function is actually to provide human beings with vital truths that can help guide our existence. The inability of philosophical and scientific reason to grasp the full heterogeneity and complexity of the different areas of human life—especially those that Zambrano argues are most essential to it, such as hopes, dreams and feelings—compelled her to look for other means of shedding light on the human experience, such as poetry, painting or cinema.

One of the films that Zambrano found most captivating, and that best exemplify cinema's capacity to reveal what rationalism neglects (as will be demonstrated in this article), is Víctor Erice's *The Spirit of the Beehive* (*El espíritu de la colmena*, 1973), the Basque director's first feature film. At the time it was released, Zambrano was living with her cousin Rafael Tomero in the small French town of La Pièce in the Jura region, in the final years of her long and difficult exile. Her beloved sister, Araceli, from whom she had hardly ever been apart since they were reunited in 1946 in Paris after the city's liberation, had died a year earlier due to acute thrombophlebitis. Her years on this farm in the middle of the French forest thus constituted a period of "accompanied solitude", as Zambrano described it, because despite her isolation she was visited regularly by members of her inner circle of friends, including rec-



Image 1. María Zambrano while in exile in La Pièce, France

ognised cinephiles such as Alfredo Castellón and Joaquín Verdú de Gregorio. Living far away from any large urban centre and with her health deteriorating (especially her eyesight), Zambrano was generally unable to attend the cinema.

This did not mean, however, that she lost her lifelong interest in film. Joaquina Aguilar, a young translator with a degree in philosophy who was helping Zambrano at that time to edit the writings that would ultimately be included in her 1977 book *Claros del bosque* (2019a), convinced her to travel to Geneva to watch a film set on the Castilian plateau in the years after the Spanish Civil War (Image 1). This was how Zambrano came to see *The Spirit of the Beehive*, which fascinated her for three main reasons:<sup>3</sup> first, its use of a cinematic poetry very similar to her own poetic approach to her writing; secondly, the resemblances between the life of the film's young protagonist, Ana (Ana Torrent), and her own; and third, its insight into an experience she had never been able to witness personally: interior exile in Spain. As the first two aspects have already been explored

in depth by José Manuel Mouriño in his documentary *El método de los claros*, this article will consider how *The Spirit of the Beehive* met Zambrano's need for intrahistorical knowledge about Spain's recent history, and how it also contributed to the consolidation of a collective memory of the Republican experience, of which exiles constitute the most palpable sign, at a time, moreover, when the process of Spain's transition to democracy ran the risk of consigning that memory to oblivion.

## 2. THE VISION OF THE INTRAHISTORY OF INTERIOR EXILE IN SPAIN

---

History was one of María Zambrano's key concerns throughout her career, from her very first book, *Horizonte del liberalismo* (1930), which reflects the interests of a philosopher strongly committed to the politics of her time, to the last article she published before her death, "Los peligros de la paz" (1990), written in response to the Gulf War. Zambrano's conception of history is inextricably tied to her criticism of rationalism, whose obsession with facts tends to neglect what lies beneath them. She therefore rejects both the modern vision of history as a succession of significant, decisive events advancing inexorably forward, and the scientific approach to history, which completely overlooks "everyday life, which transpires quietly and shapes the narrative [...] on which the unfolding of the extraordinary life or the significant event must necessarily be constructed" (2012b: 64). Thus, for Zambrano, all history has two levels, based on the categories proposed by Francisco Giner de los Ríos: the superficial level of facts, which history qua science is concerned with; and the deep level, or *intrahistory*, constituted by the experiences of the people who do not appear in the history books but are just as much a part of it. Zambrano thus adopts Miguel de Unamuno's notion of *intrahistory* as her own, referencing it in many of her writings, both implicitly and explicitly (Bonilla, 2024: 17-18).

Given that this knowledge of deep history cannot be acquired using the parameters of rationalism—causality, objectivity, clarity—because it is shaped by the hopes, sorrows, longings and fears of anonymous individuals, Zambrano suggests that it must be acquired by means of "an attitude somewhat like that of the spectator of a tragedy," as if one were "living the life of another" (2022a: 254-255). In this sense, any motion picture constitutes a historical document that alludes to the major events occurring at the time it was made. Zambrano therefore sees cinema as a medium that gives privileged visibility to human experience (both individual and collective), as it depicts human life and human emotions without analysing or objectifying them. No other art form is capable of capturing reality and life with the realism offered by photographic objectivity and the incorporation of time into the image, qualities that clearly characterise cinema, as the French theorist André Bazin points out (2021). Nor is any other medium able to immerse the spectator in a state analogous to dreaming, where our consciousness is numbed and we surrender entirely to the sight of a procession of images of the past. Cinema is thus able to satisfy every society's need for intrahistorical knowledge, and to do so, moreover, in a manner that Zambrano describes as "between truth and dreaming" (2022: 720).

Zambrano's extensive reflections on history in her work include numerous musings on the history of Spain. She was educated in an intellectual and philosophical context shaped by Spain's Gen-

---

**CINEMA IS THUS ABLE TO SATISFY EVERY SOCIETY'S NEED FOR INTRAHISTORICAL KNOWLEDGE, AND TO DO SO, MOREOVER, IN A MANNER THAT ZAMBRANO DESCRIBES AS "BETWEEN TRUTH AND DREAMING"**

---

eration of '98, which had turned the problem of Spain's decline into one of the most discussed issues among intellectuals in the first decades of the 20th century. She maintained a close relationship with the nation both in her youth, as an intellectual committed to the Second Spanish Republic, and during her exile, when she would continue to write about the philosophy of Seneca, the couplets of Jorge Manrique, the idealism of Don Quixote, the use of white in Francisco Zurbarán's paintings, the romances of Federico García Lorca and the novels of Benito Pérez Galdós, because it was in these that she found the deep history of the Spanish people. Indeed, she argued that nobody was able to express the intrahistory of 19th-century Spain like Galdós:

What Galdós offers us in his vast oeuvre is more than just history, because it is history interwoven with the most ordinary events in his *Episodios Nacionales* [...]. He gives us the life of the anonymous Spaniard, the domestic world in its quality as the foundation of the historical, as the real subject of history. The historian has tended to give us the "historical event", which must meet certain conditions to be considered as such: it has to be deemed decisive and significant in the view of those studying it. Conversely, Galdós's novels show where such events come from, what is hidden beneath their significance and what can be taken as the simple vestige of time. (Zambrano, 2022c: 569-570)

Galdós thus offers a comprehensive view of the levels of history described by Zambrano, because he "interweaves" the great events that concern the historian together with the consequences they have on the lives of the anonymous masses, whose lives are neither "decisive" nor "significant", but without whom history is incomplete. By the 1970s, when the prospect of returning to Spain became increasingly unlikely and she had fully accepted her situation as an exile in La Pièce, Zambrano's interest in her country's history shifted from the 19th century to more recent history, to what had happened in Spain since she

had been forced to leave it. Although she had read the news and heard reports from friends who had been to Spain regarding the situation in the country and the events that had marked its political evolution since the end of the war, Zambrano had not personally witnessed the poverty, hunger, distrust, fear, self-imposed silence, grief, penury and exhaustion of those who had been forced into exile within Spain's borders. In short, she was unaware of the intrahistory of the "interior exile", a term coined by the journalist and writer Miguel de Salabert, which he defines as follows:

Because interior exile is neither a literary trope nor a worn-out cliché for use by politicians or journalists. I said then, and I say now, that interior exile is, or was, a historical reality. In a broad sense and as an antithesis of the rootless pilgrim Spain of the [external] exile, it was a reality that included and expressed a Spain that was captive, oppressed and marginalised within its own physical heart; in other words, it included all those Spaniards who passively resisted the Franco regime or whose only form of collaboration with it consisted of not actively fighting against it. [...] Interior exile meant turning into scattered little islands; grabbing your luggage and setting up camp outside the polis [...], buying a screen and cutting yourself off from the world; escaping inwards to respond to the aggression inflicted by walls and newspapers. In short, interior exile was social autism. (1988: 11)

It is thus unsurprising that *The Spirit of the Beehive* so captivated Zambrano, because it offers a vision, between truth and dreaming, of the intrahistory of her country's very recent past, the "captive", "oppressed" and "marginalised" lives of the interior exile described by de Salabert embodied in the adult characters in the film. Aguilar must surely have imagined the impact that the images of the Spanish post-war period would have on Zambrano. On this point, Mouriño argues that the film astonished Zambrano not only because she saw her own life reflected in the character of Ana, but also because it revealed to her, "with tre-

mendous clarity, with the most appropriate tempo and type of gaze, the other side of the fracture that she herself had experienced, the state of affairs in the place from which she had been forcibly expelled” (2021: 85). Years before viewing *The Spirit of the Beehive*, in “Carta sobre el exilio” (1961) Zambrano describes the reality of those who had remained in Spain, “detached from the course of history”, like she herself had been:

The exile was left with nothing, on the edge of history, alone in life and with no place; no place of his own. And so were those with a place, but in a history without precedent. Therefore, with no place either; with no historical place. [...]. They were left with no horizon. And though they might be on their land, where their language is spoken, where they can say “I am a citizen”, by being left without a horizon, man, the historical animal, also loses his place in history. He does not know what is happening to him, he does not know what he is living. He lives in a dream. (1961: 69-70)

The images in *The Spirit of the Beehive* confirmed this idea of Zambrano’s and broadened her limited understanding of the interior exile. Although it is set in a specific place and time—“Somewhere on the Castilian plateau, around 1940”, as the film’s opening caption tells us (Image 2)—the film’s characters have no future, no horizon, as Zambrano suggests in the quote above. The first time Ana’s mother, Teresa (Teresa Gimpera), appears on screen, we see her writing a letter to a man—probably her lover before the war separated them—which perfectly expresses this idea of inhabiting the edges of history that is a characteristic feature of interior exile:

Though nothing can bring back the happy moments we spent together, I pray that God grant me the joy of seeing you again. That has been my constant prayer, ever since we parted during the war, and it’s my prayer still here in this remote spot where Fernando and the girls and I try to survive. Little but the walls are left of the house you once knew. I often wonder what became of everything



Image 2. In the film’s opening shot, a caption locates the action in space and time: “Somewhere on the Castilian plateau, around 1940...”



Image 3. Teresa writes her letter tinged with nostalgia and despair while bathed in the stifling light that enters through the beehive-shaped stained windows of the house

we had there. I don’t say that out of nostalgia. It’s difficult to feel nostalgic after what we’ve been through these past few years. But sometimes, when I look around me, and see so much loss, so much destruction and so much sadness, something tells me that perhaps our ability to really feel life has vanished along with all the rest. I don’t even know if this letter will reach you. The news we get from outside is so scant and confusing... Please write soon, to let me know you’re still alive. With all my love, Teresa. (Image 3)

In the next scene, we see Ana's mother riding her bike to the railway station to post her letter. She exchanges a glance with a young soldier on the train, who perhaps reminds her of her lost lover. The train pulls away, taking with it all the hopes Teresa has placed in that letter, which will never reach its addressee (Image 4). Teresa has lost everything in the war and has now become, like Zambrano herself, a "survivor" who "has not had the discretion to die" (2014a: 1052). The character of Ana's father, Fernando, played by Fernando Fernán Gómez, is detached from history too: he barely exchanges a word with Teresa, spends his time taking care of his bees and sleeps at night at his desk, immersed in a state of apathy that only his daughters are able to shake him out of. Víctor Erice is a director who, like Zambrano, considers cinema to be a poetic tool for exposing the reality of human experience (Arocena, 1996: 11-17), depicting with his camera a reality that he himself has lived:

Sometimes I think that for people who in their childhood have fully experienced that void that, on so many basic levels, those of us born immediately after a civil war like ours were heirs to, our elders were often just that: a void, an absence. They were there, yet they weren't there. And why weren't they there? Because they'd died, they'd left, or they'd become daydreamers radically stripped of their most basic modes of expression. (Cited in Fernández-Santos and Erice, 1976: 68-69)

This feeling of emptiness and absence that characterised the adult world and which Erice himself perceived in his childhood is what Zambrano describes as the lack of a horizon. The filmmaker expresses this feeling with the windows of the house where the characters live, which mimic the hexagonal shape of a beehive and enclose the family behind the stained glass in a warm but stifling light (Image 5). The beehive thus functions as a metaphor for Spanish society under Franco in the years after the Civil War, a completely alienated community governed by an authority that



Image 4. Teresa's hopes vanish, like the train, on the horizon of her vision



Image 5. Fernando opens the window to take a little air, but Erice places him back behind the beehive

oversees the correct behaviour of its members and prevents them from exercising their freedom (Cerrato, 2006: 68-69). At the same time, the exterior landscape also reflects Teresa's and Fernando's mood. The sky is always grey and cloudy, the streets are empty, and the prevailing silence is broken only by the voices of the children playing, who are unaware of the consequences that the tragedy of the war has had on the remote village of Hoyuelos (Image 6).

On the other hand, *The Spirit of the Beehive* also gave Zambrano an insight into the reality of the Spanish Maquis, the Republican soldiers who



Image 6. The landscape of Hoyuelos is grey, overcast and empty, with the shadow of the Franco regime looming over everything



Image 7. Ana helps the Maqui, whom she confuses with a spirit

were forced into hiding when the war ended, waiting for the moment when they would finally be caught and shot by Franco's forces. Although Franco declared the war over on 1 April 1939, an armed resistance emerged in the years that followed in response not only to the defeat of the Republican army but also to the widespread repression imposed by the new regime in the former Republican strongholds, forcing many men to escape to the woods or to the bleak plains of the Castilian plateau on an aimless quest to save their own lives, knowing that there was no place or time left for them in Franco's Spain. They were "outlaws and strangers in our own country" for whom "any vestige of political life" had vanished, as they now had to live "disconnected, isolated, alone", like "spectres" whose time on Earth had run out (Vidal Sales, 2002: 30-31).

When Ana encounters a Maqui (played by Juan Margallo), she naively believes him to be a spirit, because she is unable to understand who he is or why is hiding from everyone else. Erice presents him to the viewer with an aura of mystery; Ana never finds out who he is, what his name is, where he comes from, or what brought him there—because she believes, in keeping with Vidal Sales's description of the Maquis and Zam-

brano's understanding of the exile condition, that the Republican guerilla is a "spectre",<sup>4</sup> a ghost in his own land, inhabiting a time that is no longer moving forward, that has stopped for him (Image 7). This suspension of time affects Teresa and Fernando too, as the time imposed by the dictatorship contrasts sharply with the acceleration of time that characterised the democratisation and modernisation project of the Second Spanish Republic. The pacing of the film is in keeping with this atemporal atmosphere that pervades the story, as the scenes are connected by slow lap dissolves. However, the storyline does not advance in a clear, linear way from the past into the future, but progresses instead in accordance with a series of poetic revelations.

The only horizon of hope conveyed in the film lies in the innocence of the two girls who have not lost what Teresa refers to as the "ability to really feel life", because they are unaware of the harsh reality of their country's recent history; in fact, they are quite unaware of anything at all. They have their whole lives ahead of them, and they still have the ability to be amazed or excited. They are driven by a thirst for knowledge that is fully quenched, in the early years of Francoist Spain, by watching *Frankenstein* (James Whale, 1931),

because it is on a film screen, rather than in the brutality of war, that Ana and her sister Isabel come into contact for the first time with fear and death. Erice thus constructs his film on the basis of the contrast between two different time periods, which are further accentuated by the use of the music of Luis de Pablo. One is the time period of the children, who play, go to the cinema and dance to a cheerful melody inspired by children's songs, in a time that looks ahead to the future. The other is the time period of the adults, who barely interact with each other and who remain silent, mired in a longing for what was and plagued by a fear of what is to come, in a time anchored in the past. For the adults, the only option is to carry on in silence and to accept their condition as exiles, like Zambrano herself did.

*The Spirit of the Beehive*, which has been described as “the quietest film in the history of Spanish cinema” (Sánchez-Biosca, 2006: 271), thus offers a picture of a specific time and place that María Zambrano never saw or knew: the interior exile of the post-war period, the anonymous, ordinary lives that comprise the intrahistory of a country that the philosopher had once been so much a part of but which she was forced to leave behind. And we see it all through the eyes of a girl who does not really understand what she sees, who cannot make sense of what is happening and who relates to it with astonishment, approaching reality ambiguously but without unravelling the mystery, illuminated with a light that is not the sunlight of rationalism but a shadowy light more suited to conveying the sense of hopelessness that afflicts interior exiles like Teresa and Fernando, with whom Zambrano no doubt identified.

### 3. THE CONSOLIDATION OF THE MEMORY OF THE REPUBLICAN INTERIOR EXILE

*The Spirit of the Beehive* is an example of how cinema, in contrast to historicist science, can document intrahistory while also serving to recover

the past through the creation of a collective memory in the present. Memory plays a central role in María Zambrano's philosophy because she understands it as “the function of seeing and being seen that the human being undergoes rather than performs”, as that which “intimately drives the keenness for knowledge”, the “first form of sight” that acts “as a support and guide” for the individual and for society (2019b: 83-85). Far from being clear, the past is opaque and inscrutable, whereas memory clarifies what happened and sheds light on an understanding of experience that is indispensable for both individuals and society to know themselves. History is not just the narration of past events but a quest to make sense of what happened so that we can discover the *raison d'être*, both of what is happening now and of what is yet to come. In this sense, Zambrano's view of history is not solely the intrahistorical view offered by Galdós's novels or *The Spirit of the Beehive*, but a knowledge that serves to unveil the enigma of every past event and that prevents the individual and society from grinding to a halt: “We must look back, if we want to move forward. [...] Knowledge of the past is no longer a luxurious curiosity or a hobby that the clever can allow themselves while on holiday, but an absolute necessity” (2015: 571).

Recollection of lived experience, which Zambrano argues is the first form of knowledge, constitutes one of the most frequently used tools in her work, in which she gives considerable attention to both her personal past and the recent past of Spanish history. *Delirium and Destiny*, the book in which she puts this use of memory into practice most effectively, was written in 1952, more than ten years after the events she recounts in it, when enough time has passed for her to look clearly and coherently at what happened: “historical knowledge can only be acquired when events appear in depth and in unity at the same time, like the bottom of a transparent lake,” (2014b: 395-396). In the introduction she wrote in 1977 to the new edition of her book *Los intelectuales en el drama de España*



(2015), Zambrano urges Spain to remember its tragic past at a time when it was deliberately—and mistakenly, she argues—forgetting it in the belief that only by doing so would the transition to democracy be possible. At this point in Spanish history, forty years after the end of the Civil War and with the Franco dictatorship now gone, Zambrano believed that enough time had passed for the image of Spain's past to appear more transparently and coherently: “we Spaniards need [...] the clear image of our yesterday, even of the most immediate past” (2014: 777-778).

---

**AT THIS POINT IN SPANISH HISTORY, FORTY YEARS AFTER THE END OF THE CIVIL WAR AND WITH THE FRANCO DICTATORSHIP NOW GONE, ZAMBRANO BELIEVED THAT ENOUGH TIME HAD PASSED FOR THE IMAGE OF SPAIN'S PAST TO APPEAR MORE TRANSPARENTLY AND COHERENTLY**

---

The memory of the Republic, which the philosopher experienced as the outlet for a collective aspiration, could thus feed a new hope for peaceful coexistence that—despite the huge ideological differences and the bitter grudges that separated different factions of Spanish politicians and citizens in the 1970s—could bring them together again as had happened with the proclamation of the Second Spanish Republic, which Zambrano saw as a new dawn in the history of a Spain that was finally beginning to stir after long years of lethargy. Like other intellectuals of the time, Zambrano embraced what the historian and cultural critic José Carlos Mainer has called a “thaumaturgical idea of the Republic” shared even by those who would rise up against the new regime only a few years later (1983: 277-278). For Zambrano, the hope placed in the Second Spanish Republic by very different ideological sectors was due to the fact that “in the hours of the expansion of history,”

hope cuts down the distance between neighbours, “because of the bigger dimensions of our person, our soul appearing to our neighbour; we emerge together with him” (2014a: 1020).

Although the dream of the Republic had ultimately turned into a tragic nightmare, Spain needed to understand the failure of the hopeful collective project of the Second Republic if it wanted to “expand” its history once more at a decisive moment like the transition to democracy. But given that for Zambrano true history is found in the hopes and feelings of ordinary people, the vision that 1970s Spain needed could not be offered by historicist science alone; the art, literature and cinema of the time also had a role to play. This imposes upon us “the task of analysing, scrutinising and dissecting the narratives established by the Franco regime in an intellectual, essayistic operation” that Vicente Sánchez-Biosca calls “deconstruction” (2006: 35). Erice, who began his film career in the 1970s, argues that every film is “a social fact” that “reflects the historical situation in which it is produced” because “for better or for worse, it is born in it and finds its *raison d'être* in it” (1961: 56). In this sense, films made during the transition to democracy were not immune to the turbulent social, economic and political dynamics of the period, even if each one expresses those dynamics in very different ways.

Film historian Magí Crusells, who argues that cinema has the capacity to show “the protagonists of history on tape”, concurs with Zambrano that “knowledge of the past gives us an understanding of the present, which helps us to build a better future,” because “when we lose our memory, we cease to be ourselves” and “a people with no memory loses its identity” (Crusells, 2006: 11). Sánchez-Biosca expresses the same view, arguing that cinematic images “possess the plasticity necessary to become symbols, to set down the memory of societies, political groups or sectors of the population, and in collaboration with the narratives, to serve as representations of memory”

(2006: 25). However, he is critical of the idea that films that give the victims a voice and body can substitute for history qua science to examine the past. The collective memory that films consolidate for spectators, although necessary, poses certain risks, such as “the emotional consumption of the document [...] and the identification of testimony with historical truth, two corruptions that threaten to mystify and dislocate our relationship with the past” and the abandonment of the critical spirit that should drive historiography (2006: 37).

In any case, Zambrano is not so interested in reconstructing history with scientific precision and accuracy as uncovering its underlying meaning, which, being tied to the life experience of those who lived it, can never be objective. The memory that individuals and societies need of their own past is a constructed, changeable, subjective memory, which does not mean that it cannot be shared by the majority. On the other hand, it is important to acknowledge that at the time of the democratic transition Zambrano was speaking from the perspective of her condition as a victim, still in exile and without prospects of an immediate return, seeking recognition and reparation. She thus needed not only to see the Spanish intrahistory of interior exile, but also to know that Spain saw her and other exiles of her generation. *The Spirit of the Beehive* showed her what she had never been able to see, but it also showed Spanish audiences something they did not know and had not wanted to see: the brutal reality of the exile, whether interior or exterior, of those who had fought for democracy, at a moment in history when Spain was moving towards it once again.

## CONCLUSIONS

Any past that never fully passes becomes a ghost, and the same could be said of those like Zambrano who had survived the Spanish Civil War only to be doomed to wander in an interminable exile, never able to settle down anywhere and never recei-

ving recognition from their own country. Mouriño suggests that the exile is a “ghost in a perpetual state of unfulfilled return” who, “in the absence of the place it understands as its own,” is doomed to “a habitation without rest”; this means that “to look at the exile, at that object of the gaze, is to look upon a past too difficult to assimilate. Every ghost is a matter of the past that comes back because its conflict was never resolved” (2021: 84). Similarly, Zambrano describes exiles as “souls in purgatory, for we have descended alone into the infernos of our history, some of them unexplored, to salvage from them what can be salvaged, what cannot be given up. [...] We are memory. Memory that salvages. [...] Memory of what has passed in Spain” (1961: 69-70).

For Zambrano, the exile embodies the best of an unjustly crushed Spain: the generation of the “bull”, as she liked to refer to it: a generation sacrificed by history that had its voice taken from it, whose history needed to be told in order to break “the silence that surrounds the murdered inspiration” (2014a: 1028). *The Spirit of the Beehive* fulfills that duty of reparation and recognition that Zambrano called for in Spain’s transition towards democracy, because it brings the exile experience to the big screen and gives a voice to those who had lost it. The view of intrahistory offered by cinema, between truth and dreaming, is also capable of undoing the spectral condition of the exile. Teresa, Fernando and the Maquis, those interior exiles, are ghosts condemned to inhabit an uninhabitable place and time outside history, beyond the frame of what we see and know. But just as Frankenstein’s monster crosses the film screen to become a powerfully real presence before Ana’s eyes, the exile takes shape and form before the eyes not only of Zambrano, but of all Spanish spectators (Images 8 and 9). In this way, *The Spirit of the Beehive* satisfies both Zambrano’s need to see and to be seen by a Spain that should remember the Republican experience and construct a shared collective memory if it wants to



Image 8. This still-frame from *Frankenstein* (James Whale, 1931) anticipates one of the final scenes in Erice's film



Imagen 9. Ana is fascinated by the vision of the extraordinary that cinema offers her

build the new democratic project emerging in the Transition of the 1970s. In short, Erice's film captures that experience of "seeing and being seen" that Zambrano refers to repeatedly throughout her work as an inherent need of every human being, of which the exile had been deprived. ■

## NOTES

- 1 Zambrano's letters to Gregorio del Campo can be found in Zambrano (2012a). Her correspondence with Josefina Tarafa, which has not yet been published, was consulted in the archives of the María Zambrano Foundation.
- 2 The original publications of these three articles can be found in the references section of this article (Zambrano, 1952a; 1952b; 1953).
- 3 Following the impact the film had on Zambrano, Joaquina Aguilar mediated between the philosopher and Víctor Erice so that they could exchange views not only on the film but also on other issues such as the desacralisation of life, which concerned them both. Thanks to Aguilar's mediation, Zambrano and Erice began a written correspondence. The letters exchanged between the two, which unfortunately have not been preserved, included mutual praise for each other's work, as Erice himself recalls in an interview for José Manuel Mouriño's documentary *El método de los claros* (2019).
- 4 According to Jo Labanyi (2001), in her in-depth study of the ghosts of the past that populate Spanish literature and cinema, there are various ways to confront these spectres (ranging from refusing to look at them, which implies denying one's own history, to offering them a home in the present, which implies recognising the mark they leave). In *The Spirit of the Beehive*, this second approach is adopted, as the Maqui appears as a manifestation of an unknown past in a run-down, abandoned barn, perceived by the young girl Ana as an extension of what she has seen recently in *Frankenstein* and by the spectator as a presence of the past that becomes powerfully real on the film screen.

## REFERENCES

- Alberti, R. (2002). *Cal y canto (1926-1927)*. Madrid: Biblioteca Nueva.
- Arocena, C. (1996). *Victor Erice*. Madrid: Cátedra.
- Bazin, A. (2021). *¿Qué es el cine?* Madrid: Rialp.

- Bonilla, A. B. (2024). *Misericordia: apuntes filosóficos para una intrahistoria de la piedad a partir de textos de Miguel de Unamuno (1864-1936) y María Zambrano (1904-1991)*. *Interpretatio. Revista de hermenéutica*, 9(1), 15-27. <https://doi.org/10.19130/iifl.ir-h.2024.1/29W00XS022>
- Cerrato, R. (2006). *Víctor Erice: poeta pictórico*. Madrid: JC Clementine.
- Crusells, M. (2006). *Cine y guerra civil española: imágenes para la memoria*. Madrid: Ediciones JC.
- Erice, V. (1961). Sección crítica: «Siempre es domingo» de Fernando Palacios. *Nuestro cine*, 4, 56.
- Fernández-Santos, A., Erice, V. (1976). *El espíritu de la colmena*. Madrid: Elías Querejeta Ediciones.
- Labanyi, J. (2001). Coming to Terms with the Ghosts of the Past: History and Spectrality in Contemporary Spanish Culture. *Arachne@ Rutgers: Journal of Iberian and Latin American Literary and Cultural Studies*, 1(1), 1-18. <https://doi.org/10.14713/arachne.v1i1.7>
- Mainer, J. C. (1983). *La Edad de Plata. Ensayo de interpretación de un proceso cultural*. Madrid: Cátedra.
- Mouriño, J. M. (Producer and Director) (2019). *El método de los claros*. Spain: José Manuel Mouriño/RTVE. Retrieved from <https://www.rtve.es/play/videos/somos-documentales/otros-documentales-maria-zambrano-metodo-claros/5474502/>
- Mouriño, J. M. (2021). La visión en su cima: «El método de los claros». *Aurora. Papeles del «Seminario María Zambrano»*, 22, 80-89. Retrieved from <https://raco.cat/index.php/Aurora/article/view/385482>
- Salabert, M. de (1988). *El exilio interior*. Barcelona: Anthropos.
- Sánchez-Biosca, V. (2006). *Cine y Guerra civil española. Del mito a la memoria*. Madrid: Alianza.
- Vidal Sales, J. A. (2002). *Maquis. La verdad histórica de la «otra guerra»*. Madrid: Espasa-Calpe.
- Zambrano, M. (1930). *Horizonte del liberalismo*. Madrid: Nueva Generación.
- Zambrano, M. (1952a). El realismo del cine italiano. *Bohemia*, 22, 12-13, 108-109.
- Zambrano, M. (1952b). Cine en la universidad. *Bohemia*, 49, 23, 120-121.
- Zambrano, M. (1953). Charlot o el histrionismo. *Bohemia*, 5, 3, 137.
- Zambrano, M. (1961). Carta sobre el exilio. *Cuadernos del Congreso por la Libertad de la Cultura*, 49, 65-70.
- Zambrano, M. (1990, 24 November). Los peligros de la paz. *Diario 16*, 279, p. 1.
- Zambrano, M. (1995). *Delirium and Destiny: A Spaniard in Her Twenties*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Zambrano, M. (2012a). *Cartas inéditas (a Gregorio del Campo)*. Ourense: Linteo.
- Zambrano, M. (2012b). Para una historia de la Piedad. *Aurora. Papeles del «Seminario María Zambrano»*, 64-72. <https://raco.cat/index.php/Aurora/article/view/260744>
- Zambrano, M. (2014a). *Delirio y destino (1952)*. En *Obras completas VI*. Barcelona: Galaxia Gutenberg.
- Zambrano, M. (2014b). El conocimiento histórico. La visibilidad. In *Obras completas VI*. Barcelona: Galaxia Gutenberg.
- Zambrano, M. (2014c). Amo mi exilio. In *Obras completas VI*. Barcelona: Galaxia Gutenberg.
- Zambrano, M. (2015a). *Los intelectuales en el drama de España y otros escritos de la guerra civil*. In *Obras completas I*. Barcelona: Galaxia Gutenberg.
- Zambrano, M. (2015b). *Pensamiento y poesía en la vida española*. In *Obras completas I*. Barcelona: Galaxia Gutenberg.
- Zambrano, M. (2019a). *Claros del Bosque*. In *Obras completas IV*, tomo 1. Barcelona: Galaxia Gutenberg.
- Zambrano, M. (2019b). *Notas de un método*. In *Obras completas IV*, tomo 2. Barcelona: Galaxia Gutenberg.
- Zambrano, M. (2022a). *El hombre y lo divino*. In *Obras completas III*. Barcelona: Galaxia Gutenberg.
- Zambrano, M. (2022b). *España, sueño y verdad*. In *Obras completas III*. Barcelona: Galaxia Gutenberg.
- Zambrano, M. (2022c). *La España de Galdós*. In *Obras completas III*. Barcelona: Galaxia Gutenberg.

## INTRAHISTORY AND THE MEMORY OF INTERIOR EXILE IN SPAIN IN *THE SPIRIT OF THE BEEHIVE* (EL ESPÍRITU DE LA COLMENA, VÍCTOR ERICE, 1973): A VIEW FROM MARÍA ZAMBRANO'S PERSPECTIVE

### Abstract

In 1973, María Zambrano travelled to Geneva to see Víctor Erice's *The Spirit of the Beehive*. The philosopher was captivated by the view the film offered of Spain's recent intrahistory, marked by the hopelessness and despair that afflicted those Spanish Republicans who had been forced to remain in the country as interior exiles. Zambrano saw the film just a few years before Spain's transition to democracy, at a time when she believed it was essential to recover the buried memory of the Republican project, whose imprint was still present in the lives of Spanish exiles, in order to build the new democratic project that would emerge in Spain in the late 1970s. The aim of this article is to analyse the images of *The Spirit of the Beehive* based on the notions of intrahistory and memory explored by Zambrano in her work in order to consider how cinema may be able to undo the "spectral" condition that Zambrano believed was the lot of every exile.

### Key words

María Zambrano; Víctor Erice; *The Spirit of the Beehive*; Intrahistory; Memory; Spanish Republican Interior Exile; Cinematic Reason.

### Author

Jorge Valle Álvarez holds a PhD in Philosophy from Universidad de Salamanca, with a doctoral thesis titled *Vida, tiempo y sueño: el cine como forma de razón poética en María Zambrano* ["Life, Time and Dream: Cinema as a Form of Poetic Reason in the Work of María Zambrano"]. He also holds degrees in Humanities and Art History from the same university. He has completed research stays at the Fundación María Zambrano and Università degli Studi di Roma La Sapienza, where he has also been a visiting lecturer. His lines of research encompass the areas of Spanish and Ibero-American philosophy, and specifically the ideas of the Salamanca School and the work of María Zambrano, as well as the connections between philosophy and film theory. He is also a researcher with the JANO Recognised Research Group (History of Philosophy and Critical Ontology), a full member of the Institute of Medieval and Renaissance Studies and Digital Humanities (IEMYRhd) and a member of the Association of Philosophical Hispanism. Contact: jor\_valle@usal.es

### Article reference

Valle Álvarez, J. (2025). Intrahistory and the Memory of Interior Exile in Spain in *The Spirit of the Beehive* (El espíritu de la colmena, Víctor Erice, 1973): A View from María Zambrano's Perspective. *L'Atalante. Revista de estudios cinematográficos*, 39, 39-52.

## INTRAHISTORIA Y MEMORIA DEL EXILIO INTERIOR ESPAÑOL EN EL ESPÍRITU DE LA COLMENA (VÍCTOR ERICE, 1973). UNA VISIÓN DESDE MARÍA ZAMBRANO

### Resumen

En 1973, María Zambrano se desplaza a Ginebra para visionar *El espíritu de la colmena* de Víctor Erice. La filósofa queda cautivada por la visión que ofrece la película de la intrahistoria reciente del exilio interior de España, conformada por la falta de horizonte vital y las desesperanzas que caracterizan a los republicanos que se vieron obligados a quedarse en el país. Por otro lado, Zambrano ve esta película en un momento, los años inmediatamente anteriores a la Transición española, en que rescatar la memoria olvidada del proyecto republicano, cuya huella sigue viva en las vidas de los exiliados, le parece imprescindible para fecundar la nueva experiencia democrática que está naciendo en España. Así, este artículo se propone analizar las imágenes de *El espíritu de la colmena* desde las nociones de intrahistoria y memoria que despliega Zambrano en su obra para determinar de qué manera el cine puede deshacer la condición de «espectro» que, para la pensadora, posee todo exiliado.

### Palabras clave

María Zambrano; Víctor Erice; *El espíritu de la colmena*; Intrahistoria; Memoria; Exilio interior republicano; Razón cinematográfica.

### Autor

Jorge Valle Álvarez (León, 1994) es doctor en Filosofía por la Universidad de Salamanca, con una tesis doctoral titulada *Vida, tiempo y sueño: el cine como forma de razón poética en María Zambrano*. Asimismo, es doble graduado en Humanidades e Historia del Arte por la misma universidad. Ha realizado estancias de investigación en la Fundación María Zambrano y la Università degli Studi di Roma «La Sapienza», donde ha sido, además, profesor invitado. Sus temas de investigación se enmarcan dentro de la filosofía española e iberoamericana y, más concretamente, en el pensamiento de la Escuela de Salamanca y la figura de María Zambrano, así como en las relaciones entre la filosofía y la teoría cinematográfica. También es investigador del Grupo de Investigación Reconocido JANO (Historia de la Filosofía y Ontología Crítica), miembro de pleno derecho del Instituto de Estudios Medievales y Renacentistas y de Humanidades Digitales (IEMYRhd) y socio de la Asociación de Hispanismo Filosófico. Contacto: jor\_valle@usal.es

### Referencia de este artículo

Valle Álvarez, J. (2025). Intrahistoria y memoria del exilio interior español en *El espíritu de la colmena* (Víctor Erice, 1973). Una visión desde María Zambrano. *L'Atalante. Revista de estudios cinematográficos*, 39, 39-52.

recibido/received: 28.05.2024 | aceptado/accepted: 28.10.2024

Edita / Published by



Licencia / License



ISSN 1885-3730 (print) / 2340-6992 (digital) DL V-5340-2003 WEB [www.revistaatalante.com](http://www.revistaatalante.com) MAIL [info@revistaatalante.com](mailto:info@revistaatalante.com)

