The spirit of the beehive
El espíritu de la colmena
Víctor Erice

European Cinema Education
for the Youth

PEDAGOGICAL PACKAGE
I – OPENING

CINED : A FILM COLLECTION, PEDAGOGY OF CINEMA

CinEd has joined a mission of transmitting the 7th art as a cultural object and as a support to understand the world. For that reason it was elaborated a common pedagogy, starting from a collection of movies produced in the European countries, partners to this project. The approach intends to be adapted to our era, marked by a rapid, major and continuously change, regarding the way of seeing, receiving and producing the images. These last are viewed on a variety of screens: from the biggest – those in the halls, to the smallest – (to smartphones) ticking, of course, TV sets, computers and tablets screens. The cinema is still a young art whose death has been predicted many times. It is very clear that this didn’t happen. These changes affect the cinema, transmission must seriously take into account the manner increasingly fragmented of viewing movies, starting from this screen diversity. CinEd publications propose and talk about a sensitive, inductive, interactive and intuitive education providing knowledges, analysis tools and dialog between image and film possibilities. The works are described on different levels, of course, viewed in entirety and in pieces, according to different temporality, fixed image, plan and sequence. Educational brochures invite us to take the movie with freedom and suppleness. One of the major challenges is to intelligently get the movie open – mindedly: description, essential step of any analytical enterprise, the ability to extract, select, classify, compare, confront the images between movies and with the images of other performing and exposure arts (photography, literature, painting, theatre, comics...) The purpose is images not only to run but to create emotions; cinema is an artificial art, extremely valuable for build and consolidate the vision of the young generations.

Educational file prepared by A Bao A Qu

Jaime Pena: Context and creation; The author: Victor Erice, background and career of a leading filmmaker; The Spirit of the Beehive in Victor Erice’s filmography: a lyrical exploration of film; Filmography; Comparing images; Connections with other arts; Reception of the film

Gonzalo de Lucas: Cinematographic questions around a photogram; Questions of film; Connections between films: The Spirit of the Beehive, O sangue and Rentrée de classes. Growing up: between the internal and external worlds

Núria Aidelman and Laia Colell: Learning activities

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The Spirit of the Beehive is one of the great films within the European and global cinema traditions, with a style that is unique but at the same time following a particularly productive tradition: seeing cinema as a way of exploring the world. This tradition was created, was conceived and grew up in Europe; some of the great filmmakers of the CinEd catalogue are particularly outstanding in this field: Ermanno Olmi, Jean-Luc Godard, José Luis Guerin, Pedro Costa.

From a very young age Erice, who lived close to the border with France, went to French cinemas, giving him access to films the dictatorship prevented from reaching due to the Franco’s dictatorship. This was a pivotal factor in his work: he grew up with the tradition and knows it well.

The Spirit of the Beehive is set in the 1940s, the years immediately after the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) and the first few years of dictatorship, a fate sadly shared by many European countries, including Bulgaria, Italy, Portugal and Romania (in some films in the catalogue from these countries the theme is also explicitly portrayed or acts as a backdrop).

Over and above its political and historical background, The Spirit of the Beehive is above all a universal film, a film about childhood and discovering the world (internal and external), about the first steps in growing up, about questioning and doubts, and about fear and the ability to be marvelled and awed. It is a film about the intimate emotions of childhood (to an extent these remain deep down in any young person or adult), which are indeed expressed through a film that does not require words to show what a child does not yet know how to say, a film that emphasises materials and shapes: light, colour, frames, spaces, sounds and silences, faces, duration, time.

It is a homage to cinema and its power to fascinate, suggest and enthuse.
I - OUVERTURE

FRAMING

LIGHT

PORTRAITS

TIMING

FIGURE
CINEMATOGRAPHIC QUESTIONS CONCERNING A PHOTOGRAm

LIGHT
The warm light used to capture interiors in the film refers to the same pictorial and emotional world: the light portrays the sentiments and shapes the characters. By means of the visual rhymes and echoes of ochre and amber (the house and the beehive) and the blue at night, the film creates an almost tactile sensation, one of light falling on faces and objects. The adult characters withdraw inside to shelter, but the light brings in the beauty of the world beyond the windows. This extremely sensitive and ethereal nature intensifies the memories and nostalgia for the past. At the same time, these nuances and shadows created by the light cause the wonderment of the potential that film has for capturing what is present and fleeting: the light and the time of day seem to run away with us.

INTERIORS
The way the film is stylised pictorially, in its portrayal of domestic interiors, suggests the work of painters such as Vermeer and Hammershøi [see « Comparing Images », pp. 27, 28]. The space is designed using emotional tones, to suggest the state of mind of the characters: the large empty house is a projection of the mother and father’s feeling of shelter, and their silence and introspection about themselves and life outside. At the same time, the house is also a large set for children to play and fantasise (e.g. long corridors, doors to dark rooms, shadows on the walls).

FIGURE
The house is a large space for Ana, and contains much of her world: a place for playing, for her life with Isabel and their parents, and for dreams. Her small figure crosses these large and almost always empty spaces, such as all those doors she has to open along the corridor, as she embarks on adventure, exploration and discovery, just as she does outside, in the landscapes of the Castilian plateau. Erice brings sensitivity to the space and to the world, so we see it on her scale, from the perspective of Ana’s small body and large eyes.

FRAMING
In the film’s meticulous visual compositions, the windows and doors that frequently appear are used as passage or threshold between interior spaces, or between indoors and outdoors. Erice composes the frames in such a way that what is off-camera is suggested: what is behind a door, in another room, outside, what cannot be seen or what is imagined… The doors or thresholds also mark the boundaries for vision and knowledge, generating tension between what is shown and what is hidden: in this scene, Ana runs along the corridor after hearing a shout which has worried her. The internal space makes Ana even more anxious to see what is further away.

TIMING
In the film, all the composition elements (e.g. frames, light, colour, figures, backgrounds, rhythms, sounds, movements) are harmonised to give form to Ana’s emotions, capturing gestures, gazes and flashes of light on faces, spaces and landscapes, which are unique and unrepeatable. This leads to the feeling that time and the passing of days is all-powerful, as throughout the film it connects to the extremely temporary and fragile experience of the end of childhood, and the discovery of the adult world.

SYNOPSIS
The film is set in around 1940, in the early years after the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939), in the midst of the Franco dictatorship. The cinema lorry arrives in a small village on the Castilian plateau to show Doctor Frankenstein. The audience includes two young girls, Ana and Isabel, who are fascinated by the showing. The story, Frankenstein and the death of the child leaves a particular impression on Ana, the youngest. Her older sister tells her that if she is a friend of the monster she can call him by saying a few simple words: “It’s me, Ana, it’s me, Ana”.

At home, Ana and Isabel’s parents spend most of their time alone and in silence, as if locked in and isolated by their thoughts. Fernando spends his days beekeeping, and during long nights he is writing a treatise on beehives by candlelight; their melancholic mother writes letters to a recipient never revealed to us.

Still affected by Frankenstein, Isabel and Ana visit an abandoned outbuilding after school. Ana, now without her sister, returns many times. Her questions, doubts, mysteries and discoveries pile up.
The Spirit of the Beehive was the first feature length film by Víctor Erice (Carranza, Vizcaya, 1940). It was filmed in February and March of 1973, and in September of the same year was presented at the San Sebastian International Film Festival, where it became the first Spanish film to win the highest award, the Golden Shell. The impact of the award and the fact that for once the specialist critics were unanimous in their approval meant that it was shown commercial cinemas immediately, on 8 October, barely eight months after filming had started.

As with all productions in Spain at the time, this film set in “a place on the Castilian plateau in around 1940”, had to apply for the relevant ministerial authorisation for filming, after going through the corresponding censorship committee. The film is set at the beginning of the Franco dictatorship, shortly after the end of the Civil War which raged in Spain from 1936 to 1939 between the democratically-elected Republican government troops and the rebel troops led by Francisco Franco and helped by Italy and Germany. The Spirit of the Beehive was however filmed and first shown when the dictatorship was coming to an end, so the period between when the story is set and when it was made spans almost all of the Franco dictatorship.

Shortly after its release, on 20 December 1973, the President of Government, Luis Carrero Blanco, was killed in an attack by the terrorist group ETA. The Head of State, the dictator Francisco Franco, was in poor health and his regime was coming to an end. After the death of the dictator in November 1975, the collapse of the regime gathered pace. A year later, now under the reign of King Juan Carlos I, the Law on Political Reform was voted in, putting an end to the dictatorship; in 1977 Spain’s first democratic elections since 1936 were held. Although The Spirit of the Beehive was produced in the historical context of the dictatorship, the country was already changing, and there were some stirrings of political movements within the democratic opposition. This has led to many authors defining 1973 as the start of the Transition to democracy. In parallel, the same process was being experienced by other countries in southern Europe such as Greece, which ended the short-lived colonels’ dictatorship in 1974, and Portugal, where the long Salazar dictatorship was also toppled by the Carnation Revolution in the same year.

Although The Spirit of the Beehive was his first feature-length film, Erice already had a recognised career as critic, screenwriter and producer of various short films. In this sense, he was a product of the new filmmaking of the 1960s. In the late 1950s, all over Europe, a new generation of filmmakers began to move into the industry. Film was reflecting the youth culture that was taking over other areas, especially music, which was revolutionised. The new young filmmakers took advantage of technological innovations that made filming cheaper and easier: lighter cameras and more sensitive film making it possible to film outside and with natural light, etc. As a result, a style closer to the documentary became common, often using non-professional actors.

This was also the first generation of filmmakers to be fully informed about the history of cinema: they were film lovers who had followed the careers of their favourite directors thanks to showings at the new film libraries and film festivals that were starting to become common. Many of them had previously worked as critics before taking the leap to directing, like Erice himself.
In his early days of learning about film, Victor Erice was profoundly influenced by the early discovery of the French Nouvelle Vague, especially *Hiroshima, mon amour* (Alain Resnais, 1959) and *The 400 Blows* (François Truffaut, 1959). Already when a student at the Official Spanish Film School (Escuela Oficial de Cine - EOC) in Madrid and as a critic on the magazine Nuestro Cine in the early 1960s, before he turned to Resnais, Truffaut and Jean-Luc Godard, the young Erice was enthusiastic about the new Italian authors, heirs of neorealism. Filmmakers such as Valerio Zurlini, Pier Paolo Pasolini, Francesco Rossi and Ermanno Olmi continued the work of those considered the two great masters: Luchino Visconti and Michelangelo Antonioni. A stylistic revolution was taking place in parallel to the Nouvelle Vague. To the Nuestro Cine critics, Italian critical realism, unlike the French movement, showed a strong commitment to what was happening at that point in history, and they admired its capacity to extrapolate individual circumstances against a holistic vision of the world.

The result was the “New Spanish Cinema”, represented by directors such as Carlos Saura, Basilio Martín Patino and Antón Eceiza, and producers such as Elías Querejeta. Their films bring a certain touch of the youth and modernity that was taking over European cinema, despite being hindered by the harsh conditions of the Franco censorship. In reality, it was a negotiation rather than a confrontation: the regime needed to promote the image that it was open to the rest of the world and cinema served its interests. The films touched on themes such as the Civil War (*La caza*, Carlos Saura, 1965) and exile (*Nueve cartas a Berta*, Basilio Martín Patino, 1965) with a language in which metaphor was the main discursive element and from the perspective of the losers of the war, something celebrated externally; yet these approaches were too cryptic for the local general public, and so they did not truly make their mark.

In parallel, the Barcelona School was emerging in Catalonia, with filmmakers such as Pere Portabella, Jacinto Esteva, Gonzalo Suárez and Vicente Aranda. In complete opposition to their Madrid contemporaries and with a clear homogenous group or school direction, their interests were mainly focused on expressive exploration, exchanging ideas with the explorations of the Nouvelle Vague and other central European movements. The rapid breakdown of the group led some (Aranda, Suárez) to move towards more conventional approaches of the industry, while others (Portabella with *Vampir/Cuadecuc*, 1970, and *Umbracle*, 1972) ended up filming in secret, meaning they were not subject to the restrictions of the regime and did not receive its subsidies. This last tendency led to true independent cinema, in which experimentation and elliptical narration (for example, *Contactos*, by Paulino Viota, in 1970) became a strategy with which to bypass the regime’s attention. The narrative of *The Spirit of the Beehive* owes much to this underground tendency of Spanish filmmaking.
**THE AUTHOR: VÍCTOR ERICE, BACKGROUND AND CAREER OF A LEADING FILMMAKER**

Víctor Erice is one of Spain’s most well-known directors around the world. After Luis Buñuel, he is probably also the most respected, with homages and retrospectives from every corner of the planet, from Japan to the United States, including of course the majority of European countries. This is despite the fact that he only made three feature-length films, spaced out over three decades. Or maybe it is precisely this fact, combined with his reputation as a demanding director and a rather reserved person, which contributed to his status as a mythical cult filmmaker. This was demonstrated by a survey conducted in 2012 by the British magazine Sight & Sound among critics and filmmakers from around the world, asking them to choose the best films in the history of cinema: after Buñuel, Erice was the most frequently-mentioned Spanish director and The Spirit of the Beehive ended up in position 81 of the best films, the only Spanish production among the top one hundred. In reality, despite having made only three full-length films, Erice has many other achievements in the film world, as his filmography also includes short and medium length films, and he worked as a critic, speaker and teacher.

While for most filmmakers the first shorts serve as a learning experience and at the same time a draft for future works, none of this was the case for Víctor Erice. His work during the 1960s had little in common with the filmmaker who would emerge in 1973 with *The Spirit of the Beehive*. Yet it is very consistent with his career over those years, in particular his work as a critic for *Nuestro Cine*, a magazine for which he wrote between 1961 and 1965. Many of those involved in the Nouvelle Vague (François Truffaut, Jean-Luc Godard, Claude Chabrol, Jacques Rivette and Eric Rohmer) also wrote for the magazine *Cahiers du cinéma* before making the leap to directing. Erice combined his work as a critic with studying directing at the Spanish Official Film School, the state academic institution where he made his first shorts, including *Los días perdidos* (1963), with which he graduated and which showed the strong influence of Michelangelo Antonioni’s films. The EOC, formerly called the Institute of Cinematographic Experiences and Research (Instituto de Experiencias e Investigaciones Cinematográficas), was active between 1947 and 1976 and various disciplines (e.g. directing, producing, photography, acting) were taught to several generations of Spanish filmmakers, and especially those involved in what was called the New Spanish Cinema.

That same year of 1963 he worked as co-writer and director’s assistant on *El próximo otoño* (1963), by Antonio Ecceiza, a sort of generational expression of the New Spanish Cinema, on which Elías Querejeta was the producer. Many of those responsible for this film, the producer, director and writers (Santiago San Miguel, José Luis Egea and Erice), were the members of the so-called “San Sebastian Group”. It was also the first collaboration between Erice and Querejeta, beginning a relationship that would last for twenty years, until 1983.

The next result of this collaboration was *Los desafíos* (1969), the eighth Querejeta production, an anthology film by Claudio Guerín Hill, José Luis Egea and Víctor Erice based on a screenplay by Rafael Azcona. The section by Erice has a very different aesthetic to his practice work at the EOC or to what his writing seemed to predict, and we need go no further than the opinion of Ángel Fernández-Santos, critic and future co-writer of *The Spirit of the Beehive*, for whom this experience “allowed [Erice] to find out, by doing, what he shouldn’t do”.

Four years later, when the director began filming his first full-length film, the Erice we knew, of the *Los desafíos* section but also the critic for *Nuestro Cine*, was no longer the same. So much so that, after attending a complete retrospective of Jean-Luc Godard in Paris shortly before production of his first work, his vision of the French-Swiss filmmaker’s work, which he had initially found formalist, changed radically: “His work contains in-depth questioning, full of anguish, about the meaning of cinematographic language”, acknowledged Erice.

This was how he undertook the filming of *The Spirit of the Beehive*, a film which challenged many of the methods Spanish film had tried to use to depict Francoism on the big screen, with the need to ensure that, due to censorship, references remained oblique. The filming process was not easy and Erice had to overcome various problems, from the number of filming days being cut to the reduced participation by the adult actors, Fernando Fernán-Gómez and Teresa Gimpera, who rarely coincided for the filming. The film was a great success: it won the Golden Shell at San Sebastian, was commended by national and international critics, and had surprise box office success (over half a million viewers). Nevertheless, it took Erice another ten years to make his second feature-length film.

*The South* (*El sur*) (1983), his second feature-length film, was an adaptation of a story by Adelaida García Morales (published after the film was released, in 1985) and could be considered a continuation of *The Spirit of the Beehive*. While his first feature film was set in the 1940s and starred a girl aged six or seven years old, *The South* took place in the 1950s, its lead character now a teenage girl. The backdrop of the Civil War is still very much in evidence, and cinema still holds its role as a trigger for the action. Erice tells García Morales’s story, which is less than fifty pages long, in a screenplay of around four hundred.
The structure is the same: a first part set in the north of Spain, the second moving to Andalusia, where all the mysteries of the leading character’s family past come together. For reasons never completely explained, production was interrupted after filming the first part. This material was used to make the film known as *The South*, which entered the Cannes Festival in 1983. The critical and public success could never hide the fact that it was a truncated project from which Erice would take a long time to recover. His professional relationship with Querejeta also broke down.

Another nine years passed before Víctor Erice reappeared, this time with a very different offering: the documentary *Dream of Light* (*El sol del membrillo*) (1992), focused on the work of the painter Antonio López. Once again he entered the Cannes Festival, but the film’s unusual nature meant that it had a very limited impact, despite its great prestige in the eyes of the critics and the contemporary art world.

_Erice accompanied López while the painter, in a ritual he repeated every autumn, tried to bring to canvas a quince tree planted in his garden. The elusive and changing autumn light made the task impossible, at least for the painter, who was defeated by the arrival of winter; Erice however took on the job of demonstrating how film can reflect the passing of time. *Dream of Light* was essentially this: a dialogue between two forms of art, that of light (painting) and that of time (film)._
THE SPIRIT OF THE BEEHIVE IN VÍCTOR ERICE’S FILMOGRAPHY: A LYRICAL EXPLORATION OF FILM

As stated above, The Spirit of the Beehive is set in the early 1940s. These were Víctor Erice’s childhood years: he was born on 30 June 1940. Although the story is completely fictional, it is based on the memories of the two screenwriters, Erice and Fernández-Santos (born in 1934). Erice has returned to these years in at least two of his later films: Alumbramiento is set in a village in Asturias, north-west Spain. The front page of a newspaper in this film shows the news that the Nazis have reached Hendaye, right on the border with Spain. The newspaper is dated 28 June 1940, two days before Erice was born. La Morte Rouge however is a first person story through which Erice brings us his memories of the cinemas he visited during his childhood in San Sebastian. These memories included the effect on him of the first film he remembers seeing, Sherlock Holmes and the Scarlet Claw (Roy William Neill, 1944), a film set in a fictional city in Quebec, La Morte Rouge.

In The Spirit of the Beehive, the main character is a young girl, Ana (Ana Torrent), who discovers the cinema through a Sunday showing of Frankenstein (James Whale, 1931). Affected by one image in particular, the little girl killed by the monster, Ana embarks on a journey leading her to gradually discover the true meaning of the word “death”.

Films reflect other worlds, sometimes full of happiness, while outside the cinema the sad and difficult reality of the Spanish post-war period awaits. This contrast is the hallmark of many of Erice’s memories from his youth, a contrast which explains the central role played by the cinema in his films, and the way he depicts the adult characters, including the parents played by Fernán-Gómez and Gimpera. They are also portrayed from the perspective of a child, Erice himself, who remembers adults as little more than shadows: “Sometimes I think that for those who truly experienced this void which, in so many basic aspects, was inherited by those of us born immediately after the civil war, the adults were often that: a void, an absence”.

As if this were the case, and they were shadows or mere blurry memories, the characters of the parents are defined through unique or quintessential images. The father is portrayed as a man standing on a balcony facing away, smoking and contemplating the sunset. The mother is a woman writing a letter. Erice himself defined this structure as “lyrical”, and it could certainly be seen as a purely childlike view, in such a way that the whole film was narrated from Ana’s perspective. The result of this approach is that we find out very little about the parents: who they are, what they do or what is their political affiliation. The doubts the child must have are being passed on to us.
This strategy used to portray the adult characters is comparable to that used for the two girls, in this case using the childhood experiences of the two screenwriters, as Fernández-Santos would remember years later:

« The screenplay quickly filled up with fantasies and echoes of our childhood: the idea of the well came from my memory of the father of a child in my Toledo village committing suicide; Erice reminisced about his walks through the mountainous areas around Carranza, Vizcaya, with one of his grandfathers, looking for wild mushrooms; I reconstructed the fragmented snippets in my memory of a mysterious visit to my parents’ barn by a Maqui guerrilla; Erice pulled up his childhood memory of playing at Frankenstein like the girls; I reproduced the rustic method of teaching anatomy used by a teacher in my village, leading to the Don José sequence. »

This appears to explain why The Spirit of the Beehive contains many anecdotes of this type, classified by Erice as “lyrical”, a form which determines the narrative to the point that it is difficult to know how many days the action takes place over, or even how much time has passed between one scene and the next. The extensive use of slow fades appears to take us from one day to another constantly, but most of the time it is very difficult to know whether hours, days or weeks have passed between one shot and the next. This type of vagueness is extended to the ambiguous “around 1940” at the start of the film.

This ambiguity concerning time is similar to the spatial ambiguity, in particular the exact location of the village or the layout and dimensions of the leading family’s house. The village seems to have just three buildings: the cinema, the school and the house. Yet there is no connection between these spaces, no full shot or sequence where the movement allows us to establish the spatial connections, their respective situations, the distance separating them, etc. The family home is also victim to this ambiguity, which is perceived at many moments, and especially in the breakfast sequence after the father identifies the fugitive’s body. The 21 shots making up this sequence are a series of individual shots of Fernando, Teresa, Ana and Isabel, that is, the parents and their daughters. As there is no situational shot, or overview shot taking us from the general to the concrete, the only connections between the four characters are the looks they exchange: so we can see that Ana’s sister is on her right and her father on her left, with her mother opposite. Silences dominate the whole scene until the fugitive’s watch is brought out at the end. In reality, The Spirit of the Beehive is a film about the silence of the period immediately after the war, about a specific context which, in rural Spain, could be extended to all of the Franco period.


FILMOGRAPHY

- En la terraza (short film, 1961)
- Entre vías (short film, 1962)
- Páginas de un diario perdido (short film, 1962)
- Los días perdidos (short film, 1963)
- Los desafíos (medium-length film, 1969) Film of episodes directed by Víctor Erice, Claudio Guérin Hill and José Luis Egea.
- El espíritu de la colmena/The Spirit of the Beehive (1973)
- El sur/The South (1983)
- El sol del membrillo/Dream of light (1992)
- Alumbramiento/Lifeline (short film, 2002) Episode from the collective film Ten Minutes Older: The Trumpet
- La Morte Rouge (medium-length film, 2006)
- Ana, tres minutos (short film, 2011) Episode from the collective film 3.11 Sense of Home
- Vidrios partidos (medium-length film, 2012) Episode from the collective film Centro Histórico
REFLECTIONS BY VÍCTOR ERICE

SOME GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS
In no case should this be considered a narrative film, but rather a work with a fundamentally lyrical and musical structure, where the images appear to be immersed in a mythical experience. It should not be forgotten that this film centres around the world of children and a child taking her first steps towards discovering the world. In short, children do not have the same awareness of time as adults. […] When I make a film, I always hope to be able to discover something new about life. In this sense, filmmaking for me is, among other things, a working instrument and a learning opportunity. It is a language which, ultimately, aspires to become a form of total knowledge. […] Often I do not trust words, because sometimes they can limit the sense of what you want to express. In film, meaning cannot be separated from the image and sound. Above all, the filmmaker’s experience is a visual experience. Therefore I think it is much more useful, complete and less misleading to see the film.

Reflections collected in Rosa Montero, « Víctor Erice : la conciencia de una generación marginada (entretien) », Fotogramas nº 1304, 12 October 1973, pp. 14-16

THE ORIGIN OF THE PROJECT: A COMMISSION TO MAKE A FILM ABOUT FRANKENSTEIN
It was suggested I make a film about Frankenstein, a genre film. We started working in connection with the tradition of 1930s films, and also some Fritz Lang. After reading the synopsis, production found the project too expensive. At my desk, I always had a photogram of Frankenstein, by James Whale: the meeting between the little girl and the monster. One morning, I decided that my film was already in this image, because my Frankenstein, rather than being a literary character, was a cinematographic creature. The film started with this and was enriched by the fact that the star, little Ana Torrent (previously in Cria cuervos –Carlos Saura, 1976), was completely fascinated by the character of Frankenstein. The film was made at a time when censorship was very strict in Spain. Yet when the censors saw it, they were intrigued; they felt that the monster. One morning, I decided that my film was already in this image, because my Frankenstein, rather than being a literary character, was a cinematographic creature. The film started with this and was enriched by the fact that the star, little Ana Torrent (previously in Cria cuervos –Carlos Saura, 1976), was completely fascinated by the character of Frankenstein. The film was made at a time when censorship was very strict in Spain. Yet when the censors saw it, they were intrigued; they felt that the film had something to say about history and politics, but they could not really identify them to demand they were cut out. The Spirit of the Beehive shows how a child sees history: not really knowing who Franco was, or the reasons for the civil conflict. The only thing a child understands is that there are things that should not be talked about. Reflections collected in Alain Philippon, « Victor Erice. Le détour par l’enfance », Cahiers du cinéma nº 405, Le Journal des cahiers, 1988, pp. VI, VII

THE SCREENPLAY: ORIGIN, THEMES, CHARACTERS
Initially, we saw the figures of the parents as kinds of shadows, and that is how we accepted them. We did not try to find out much more about them straightaway. It was enough to have the single, quintessential image which we had come up with spontaneously and unconsciously: “a man contemplates the sunset, a woman writes a letter.” This could explain why, to an extent, the film is made up of fragments: why, having started out on the basis of a myth, it was difficult to consider the characters from a strictly naturalist perspective. Almost without realising it, we were already toying with a lyrical structure. Sometimes I think that for those who truly experienced this void which, in so many basic aspects, was inherited by those of us born after the civil war, the adults were often that: a void, an absence. They were there (those who were), but they were not there. Why were they not there? Because they had died or left, or they were captivated beings completely deprived of their most basic means of expression. I am of course referring to the losers, but not only the official losers, but all kinds of defeated people, including those who, regardless of the side they supported, experienced all the consequences of the conflict without truly understanding the reasons for their actions, simply as a matter of survival. I feel that the experience of this group, exiled within themselves, is also an experience of losers that is full of paths. With an experience they considered a nightmare over, many went home, and went on with their lives, but there was always something profoundly damaged within them, which is what their absence reveals. Possibly this goes some way towards explaining the way we portrayed the beekeeper and his wife.

It could be said that [Ana] follows a path from absolute dependence to taking on some personal adventure. This adventure could be described in terms of initiation, consciousness, or even rebirth. However, I believe that its final consequences mean that what most characterises it is a sort of mystery, one which may be hopelessly overlooked by us, who are after all only the viewers. In any case, this last Ana could not exist without Isabel: she plays an extremely important role. What is moving about Isabel is that she does not believe in the story that she unleashes, almost without realising; for her it is a game. This means that at a certain level, she is only able to simulate, dress up, perform or frighten. She cannot call up the ghost. In the last scene in which she appears, her fear of the night-time shadows is not in the same category as her sister’s. This is because Ana has something Isabel is missing: she believes in the monster, and resolutely looks for it, to the final consequences.

In a way, possibly primarily, the joint path of the two sisters reproduces this conflict between truth and lie («are we playing for real or is it a game»?: this classic expression children use frequently among themselves to specify their way of participating in a game) which is significant in certain processes of consciousness. There is something beautiful, and possibly also self-destructive, in Ana: her absolute need to know.

Reflections collected in « El espíritu de la colmena » (screenplay). Interview with Victor Erice, par Miguel Rubio, Jos Oliver et Manuel Matji, Elías Querejeta ediciones, 1976, pp. 139-159
THE MYTH OF FRANKENSTEIN

Many years before I knew that Frankenstein was a novel written by Mary Shelley, wife of the famous English poet, I had had the opportunity to sit in a darkened room and encounter the extraordinary creature invented by the doctor of the same name. With its strong sentiment of irresistible attraction and rejection, so typical of childhood, this cinematographic image was embedded in my mind forever. As a result, when I finally read Mary Shelley’s book many years later, within my imagination the image of Frankenstein’s monster from the film came into conflict with and challenged the other, very different, image gathered from reading the book. To me, Frankenstein’s monster could not look any different from the actor who played him: Boris Karloff.

There is a time, the time of firsts, when everything experienced is both extraordinary and formative. There is no doubt that the image of the monster as described by Mary Shelley was the original. Yet within my own experience, as has happened to many people, this image simply came afterwards.

Despite this, it is very difficult, perhaps impossible, to remove Boris Karloff, as he embodies the monster created by Mary Shelley, from his role as intruder. Ultimately, he is a person of uncertain origin and deformed appearance, who wants to be accepted by others at any cost. The monster suffers because he wants to be like everyone else. Society, which goes on appearances only, rejects him. This is where the conflict comes in. The evilness of the famous doctor’s creature is a consequence of his misfortune.


THE CHARACTERS AND DIRECTING THE ACTORS

For me filming is a living experience. The relationship I establish with the actors during film is above all existential. For example, when filming The Spirit of the Beehive it was very important to me that the camera took centre stage, so I could think things like: what will Fernando whistle now? Because in the scene where he is writing at night, while he makes himself a coffee, I asked him to whistle a song that meant something in his life, without telling me what it was going to be. So when I heard Fernando whisper the tango Caminito, with the camera running, I had the feeling I was hearing it for the first time. In the same way, when Teresa had to write an address on the envelope of her last letter, she smiled and said to me: “Great, at least I’m going to know who I’m writing to!” I answered that she should write the name of a person she loved very much on the envelope. So she wrote her son’s name. It’s difficult to read, and very few people know who it is, but for Teresa, at that time, showing it to the camera acquired a special meaning. […] How were we to guide the performance of two young girls, aged six and seven years old, and who were the absolute stars of a film? In answer to this question, there are probably as many methods or procedures as there are directors. In the end, what I did in this case was, above all, create an atmosphere. In the bedroom where the girls spent most of their time I asked the filming team to follow a series of guidelines. This space was always bathed in artificial light from the projectors, as in we created camera obscuras all the windows so that we did not have to depend on the fluctuations of external light. I suggested to the crew that all the words we exchanged between us be in the room should in the same tone that the girls used for their dialogue, a whisper, as if we were in church. At the same time, our movements should be stealthy, as if we were afraid of bothering someone. As I said above, this ritual also included the extremely significant effect of the light, that is to say, there might be daylight outside, but inside it was dark as night. In other words, the space should appear to be located outside reality. The girls noticed it immediately. They might be running around the garden, but when the time came to film, as soon as they went onto the set, they immediately felt the atmosphere there: all these grown-ups moving around very carefully, speaking using signs or very quietly, as if they were afraid of waking someone... who could it be? The ghost, the monster, Frankenstein. So they were also transformed immediately, affected by the fiction and all its consequences; they adopted the same gestures, the same caution, the same threat the adults were showing in their behaviour. The consequence of this mise-en-scène is that the monster was always lying in wait, prowling around, and could appear at any time. For this reason I never had to ask Ana and Isabel to get into character. Anyway, how do you ask a six-year-old to “get into character”?
SHOOTING THE CINEMA SEQUENCE

During filming, the showing of the film *Frankenstein* was real, with the actors and extras watching its images directly. It is the only sequence I filmed with two cameras. The film’s cameraman was Teo Escamilla, who handled the first camera, the only one soundproofed with a blimp, which was used for the full shots. At the same time, Luis Cuadrado used a second camera to film the close-ups of the girls watching James Whale’s film. The day before, Luis had told me that he was going to bring his own, non-soundproofed Arriflex to film the sequence. He used it by hand, while I guided him from one side of the set to the other, situating him opposite the character he was to frame, like documentary filming. This was how Luis captured the extraordinary shot of Ana Torrent at the crucial moment when she discovers the monster for the first time. [see «A shot. Encounter with film: capturing the moment on the face», p. 24].


It is probably the most essential and important moment I have captured as a director. Paradoxically, it was filmed using a technique very much of documentaries. It is the only shot in the film recorded using a handheld camera. I remember that Luis Cuadrado filmed this shot sitting on the ground in front of Ana and I held up the camera by the back and captured precisely the moment that Ana discovered (the showing was real) the images of Frankenstein, and her reaction to the scene of the encounter between the monster and the little girl. It is an unrepeatable moment that I feel could not be created through mise-en-scène. This is what is paradoxical and at the same time extraordinary about filmmaking. If we think a little about this film, I think that generally it was dominated by a very premeditated style intention. However, the moment I consider to be essential in this film is a moment when all of this formal premeditation breaks down. I think it is the crack through which the documentary side of filmmaking breaks into fiction, in any kind of fiction. (...) It is truly the moment of the film that most moves me, even today, and I sincerely believe that it is the best thing I have ever filmed.

Reflections by Víctor Erice, in the television documentary Huellas de un espíritu, de Carlos Rodríguez, 2004

STATEMENTS FROM TEO ESCAMILLA

Teo Escamilla, second camera operator in *The Spirit of the Beehive*

Victor is an extremely introverted person, very much his own person, but I remember that at all times he told Luis [Cuadrado] and me exactly what it was, what he wanted in each shot, and his calm, measured manner of speaking meant that it was a pleasure to listen to him. He explained things with great care, and corrected the frame, always explaining why I should move a bit to the left, or move up a bit more. He knew exactly what he wanted from each composition, and as I was saying, you became party to his secrets and, gradually, got into his head. The patience he had with Ana Torrent was incredible: he sat her on his lap and talked to her for hours, telling her the story while she listened with the same patience. The team waiting, of course, did not have the same patience. Victor repeated over and over, thirty or forty times, the same shot of Teresa Gimpera with her head on a pillow and eyes open, and then at midnight we had to go to a showing in a cinema in the village to see all the takes one after another. Eventually the time came that this was like a form of torture, and it became impossible to see the difference between take seven and take fifteen. Honestly, nobody had much confidence in the whole thing, but then the result taught us all a lesson. Another thing I remember is that Luis Cuadrado’s father was a stained glass restorer (in fact, he had restored Burgos cathedral), and he made the hexagonal, beehive-shaped, caramel colour panes of glass. Luis and I went to his studio; we saw the colours and talked a lot about the matter.

STATEMENTS FROM ANA TORRENT

Due to the 30th Anniversary of *The Spirit of the Beehive* premiere, the actress Ana Torrent gave us her impressions and memories of a shooting that left just as big impression on her life and career. The starting point were a selection of frames chosen by Virginia Hernández.

“The truth is that I, the little girl Ana, was just like the character in the film. I shared her fears: the man lying there, with a gun, frightened me a bit. When I had to approach him, I didn’t trust him at all. It was yet another mystery I didn’t understand. My eyes were opened so wide...”

“I remember this scene perfectly, we had the photograph on display at home for years. I was afraid. That house, the well...I remember having to run a lot, we repeated those scenes several times and it was exhausting. Looking at the fugitive, I must have felt some fear. I was young and I believed in Frankenstein. And he was the monster!”

“I had a good relationship with Fernando Fernán-Gómez and afterwards got to know him well. But that was the part I really didn’t understand of the film. What I wanted was to see Frankenstein! My father was rather strange. I remember well the house, the stairs, the noises from walking around...”

“After I don’t know how many hours crying and running we managed to film this scene. Even so, I think you can see the fear in my face. And all because I met the man playing the monster when he was already made up and dressed up, and I was terrified of him. I believed in Frankenstein and... there he was! We filmed at night, and it was very difficult. Apparently it was very cold and I was half asleep. But I must have learned to feel safe and I never had nightmares”.

List of sequences prepared by Núria Esquerra, editor of the film

« Analysing the list of sequences is particularly revealing and allows us to discover how the structure is constructed from the repetition of patterns, spaces and elements that change over time and film. »

1 – Credits superimposed on children’s drawings. “Once upon a time…” (00:00:30–00:01:57)

2 – “A place on the Castilian plateau in around 1940…”. Arrival of the cinema lorry in Hoyuelos, celebrated by the children. The town crier announces the showing of Frankenstein (00:01:57–00:04:18)

3 – Children and adults get ready while the projectionists load the 35mm projector. The projection begins; Ana and Isabel are among the expectant faces (00:04:18–00:06:55)

4 – Fernando, beekeeper, removes the panels from the beehives (00:06:55–00:08:07)

5 – Teresa reads the letter she is writing; about family, absences, the lack of news… (00:08:07–00:09:17)

6 – Teresa rides her bicycle to the station, where the train on which she deposits her letter is arriving. Exchange of glances with a soldier (00:09:17–00:11:29)

7 – Fernando leaves the beehives. He passes by the projection hall before reaching home. The sound of the film comes through the balcony of his office (00:11:29–00:17:22) [see « A photogram. On the balcony: composing a state of mind », p. 23]

8 – Ana and Isabel watch Mary’s encounter with the monster in fascination. Teresa cycles past the projection hall. The film continues with Mary’s father holding his daughter in his arms. “Why did he kill her?” Ana asks Isabel (00:11:29–00:17:22) [see « A shot. Encounter with film: capturing the moment on the face », p. 24]
9 – Ana and Isabel run home. Night falls (00:20:57–00:21:56)

10 – As they lie in their twin beds, Ana lights a candle and asks Isabel to tell her the story of the film. Isabel tells her she can call the spirit by saying “It’s me, Ana” (00:21:56–00:24:29)

11 – Fernando in the office: he makes coffee, listens to the Morse emitter, writes and goes to see the girls. By morning he is asleep on the desk (00:24:29–00:28:55)

12 – Teresa wakes up but remains in bed with her eyes closed. Fernando enters and prowls around the room (00:28:55–00:31:00)

13 – Arrival at school. Science lesson with the body of Don José. Ana adds the eyes: “Now Don José can see”, says the teacher (00:31:00–00:35:17)

14 – Ana and Isabel spot an outbuilding with a well among the fields and go to explore it. We hear the melody of Vamos a contar mentiras (We’re going to tell lies) (00:35:17–00:37:21) [see « A sequence. The outbuilding: exploring the world, constructing time », pp. 25, 26]

15 – Ana returns alone to the outbuilding. She explores the well and the empty building and finds a large footprint among the furrows (00:37:21–00:40:32)

16 – In their bedroom, Ana and Isabel make shadows with their hands while they talk about Ana’s visit to the outbuilding. When their father comes in they turn off the light (00:40:32–00:41:18)

17 – In the small forest, their father explains to Isabel and Ana how to tell wild mushrooms apart and warns them about the dangers of the poisonous ones. He crushes a poisonous mushroom (00:41:18–00:45:12)

18 – Fernando leaves at dawn by horse and cart. The girls play on their beds until Milagros tells them off. They play at shaving themselves. While Teresa does Ana’s hair, the child questions her mother (00:45:12–00:48:36)

19 – Ana and Isabel wait for the train to pass. Ana is reluctant to get off the track. The train passes by them, with its deafening sound (00:48:36–00:49:58)

20 – Reading of a poem by Rosalía de Castro in class (00:49:58–00:50:36)
While Isabel sleeps, Ana gets dressed and goes outside, where the trees create shadows everywhere she looks. She watches the moon shining between the clouds (01:06:25–01:08:14).

Isabel and the other children play at jumping over the bonfire. Ana observes them, first from the house and then seated among the empty beehives. Teresa passes through the village at dusk. Ana remains by the fire, and Milagros takes her into the house (01:04:36–01:06:25).

Tracking shot on the train tracks. A man in a military coat jumps from the train and goes to the outbuilding by the well (01:08:14–01:09:17).

The four members of the household have breakfast in silence. Fernando looks at the watch and makes the music play. Long exchange of looks between Ana and her father (01:16:49–01:18:49).

Ana runs towards the outbuilding, where she finds the traces of blood. Fernando is observing her from the threshold. She runs away, ignoring her father’s call (01:18:49–01:21:32).

In the morning, Ana returns to the bedroom and ignores Isabel’s questions (01:09:17–01:10:39).

Fernando visits the authorities. They go to the projection room where the fugitive’s body lies. They return his watch, shoes and coat to him (01:14:17–01:16:49).

Ana discovers the fugitive in the outbuilding. She offers him an apple and later returns with more food and Fernando’s clothes. He finds the musical watch and makes it disappear in a magic trick. Ana smiles. As night falls, machine gun fire can be heard from the outbuilding (01:10:39–01:14:17).

In the office, Ana types until she hears a shout from Isabel. She finds her on the floor, playing dead. Ana looks for Milagros but does not find her. When she returns, Isabel frightens her with their father’s beekeeper’s gloves. Isabel laughs (00:57:08–01:04:36).

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33 – Teresa and Isabel call Ana from the roof of the house and the hill opposite the outbuilding (01:21:32–01:22:08)


35 – Ana alone in the woods. She observes and touches a poisonous mushroom (01:22:28–01:23:09)

36 – Teresa rereads a letter before throwing it into the fire (01:23:09–01:24:31)

37 – Ana approaches the river. She looks at the reflection of her face in the water, and it is transformed into Frankenstein’s face. When the monster kneels down beside her and touches her shoulder, Ana closes her eyes (01:24:31–01:27:13)

38 – At dawn the search continues and Fernando’s dog finds Ana lying behind the ruins of a wall. Her father gives her a hug (01:27:13–01:28:22)

39 – The doctor reassures Teresa, telling her that Ana is still affected by the fright and that she will gradually forget (01:28:22–01:30:22)

40 – Isabel goes into the bedroom, where her mattress is missing. She opens the net curtains and looks at Ana (01:30:22–01:32:10)

41 – Night. The yellow glass of Fernando’s office lights up. His silhouette comes and goes, as he notes down his observations. Isabel cannot sleep. The bedroom is tinged with a bluish light. Teresa covers a sleeping Fernando, and turns off the light (01:32:10–01:34:27)

42 – Ana drinks water in her bed. She gets up and goes to the balcony door, now bathed in blue light. The dogs howl. She goes outside. “If you are his friend you can talk to him when you want. It’s me, Ana. It’s me, Ana”. Ana closes her eyes. We hear the train (01:34:27–01:36:33)

43 – Final credits (01:36:33–01:38:06)

1. The reference in a single sequence to García Lorca (poet), Miguel de Unamuno (novelist and intellectual) and José Ortega y Gasset (philosopher) is significant. The three were notable figures in the Spanish progressive intelligentsia. The first was assassinated by the Francoist army; the second (dead in December 1936, five months after the start of the Civil War) was removed on Franco’s orders from his position as rector of the University of Salamanca in October 1936; the third in 1931 along with other intellectuals founded the “Grouping for the Service of the Republic” and was elected member of the Constituent Courts of the recently proclaimed II Republic for the province of León; he went into exile during the Civil War and did not return to Spain until 1945, although it was impossible for him to return to his position as chair of metaphysics in the university.
QUESTIONS OF CINEMA
SHOWING WHAT IS HIDDEN. FACES, SILENCES, ELLIPSIS

The film creates a lyrical world of sensations and emotional states about the awakening of Ana’s perspective on the world of adults: her parents, who live withdrawn lives where they barely communicate with each other; the fugitive she finds in the outbuilding, etc. Alongside Ana’s point of view and her rising awareness of the world and family sentiments, Erice films an experience of initiation, full of wonder and uncertainties (the first film, the first time Ana sees the outbuilding with the well, the wondering about death, her night-time outing, etc.). All this is shown and felt through the sensations the world traces on the figures (light, colour, sounds, landscapes), without explaining or clarifying many narrative aspects, or the historical and political context or indeed the story itself and the characters. As this is Ana’s story, from her perspective, Erice manages to ensure the film shares her feelings and insights about what is happening, but without providing facts unknown to her: so, the dictatorship and the civil war are never mentioned, but we feel their traumatic effect on the experiences of the adults due to the emotional state in which we see them.

This is an example of lyrical film, in which the images show the emotions of the characters, but at the same time hide or barely explain the narrative details. This allows significant space to be left for the viewer to interpret the internal world of Ana, Isabel, Fernando and Teresa. This is the reason for choosing to film faces, so full of desires, beauty, curiosity, solitude and sadness, but also mysteries and secrets, and stories which cannot be explained.

FACES
The underlying plot of the film is that made up of and told by the emotions filmed using the light, colour and sound that pass over and reflect on the characters’ faces. Erice manages to unite and harmonise all the different elements of film to create a work that is a set of layers, some visible and some hidden, which mask and unmask the feelings of Ana and Isabel, and their parents, Fernando and Teresa. Sometimes we see these emotions surface in Ana’s extremely alert eyes [see «A shot. Encounter with film: capturing the moment on the face», p. 24]; other times we feel, particularly about the parents, that they are private feelings that remain opaque and are not shown to the other characters or to the camera. Below all their stories lies a historical and political context that is silenced and repressed, in the same way as their emotions are silenced, making dialogue impossible.

The film starts with the projectionist, the woman announcing the film and the viewers from the village: shots of faces taken in a documentary style. This is where the fictional story starts, when we discover the faces of the two lead characters, the little girls who are so excited about Frankenstein, and in parallel their father, hidden under the beekeeper’s suit, and their melancholy mother, writing and sending a letter. The film is the story of their faces, what they experience and what we can guess about their feelings and state of mind.

ENCOUNTERS AND SILENCES
While viewing the sequence of the monster and the girl in the lake Ana experiences the first of her many encounters (later will come the outbuilding with the well, learning about wild mushrooms, the fugitive), but we feel that Fernando and Teresa are imprisoned within themselves, in their private world. They do not talk to each other, and seem to live in an internal exile, an emotional silence that is a result of the war. There, in this “corner where Fernando, the girls and I try to survive”, as Teresa writes in her letter, the house is a space of isolation, protected from the outside by the closed windows, full of amber colours and light: “the news we receive from outside is so scarce and confused”, she writes in this same letter.

This feeling of isolation is also suggested by the external shots: Hoyuelos is a small village surrounded by far away horizons and fields, like the one with the outbuilding, and various roads and paths, such as the dirt track snaking around the house, or the tarmacked road along which Teresa rides her bicycle. In this sense, the train plays an important role by providing a connection to the outside world: Ana and Isabel play dangerously on the tracks while they wait for it, in the same place we later see the fugitive jump; Teresa takes a letter to the station, and observes the passengers through the window; the film closes with Ana’s face and the sound of the train.

However, while for the adults it is a small isolated village, with the small figure of Ana contrasts with its vast and extensive landscapes differently. From the scale of the full shots, we can tell that the places appear immense to her: they are an enormous world, full of mysteries in which to have adventures.
In the house, Fernando spends many hours in his office at night, writing about the beehive and the bees or thinking, until dawn; in the morning, we see Teresa awake in bed, with her head crooked on the pillow, while we hear Fernando come to the room (we see his shadow on her face) and get into bed. Yet she remains motionless and silent, not turning towards him or speaking, lost in her own thoughts. Although we can see the affection they share in small gestures, such as Teresa throwing an absent-minded Fernando the hat he has forgotten from the balcony, or when she covers him after seeing he has fallen asleep in the office, we almost never see them together in a shot. Ana herself gradually stops asking her sister Isabel questions, until in the second part of the film, she also falls into silence, and the strangeness of her private world that is open to dreams and fantasy, and an escape from reality.

The characters therefore end up communicating with each other more through gazes and silences than through words: for example, observe the scene showing the family breakfast, which takes place in silence, with the four characters filmed separately. It is the looks exchanged between them which show us what they are saying to each other: when the father takes out his watch, in a way he is questioning his daughters to find out which one was in the outbuilding with the fugitive.

**ELLIPSIS**

Much of what happens in the film is hidden, veiled and suggested: underneath the images or between them by means of ellipsis [see « A sequence. The outbuilding: exploring the world, constructing time », pp. 25, 26]. The film follows the experience of initiation to the grown-up world from Ana’s point of view, leaving much of the story uncertain and mysterious, off-camera: we only see one subjective, fragmented part of what is happening. For example, the film only provides a few minor details about the historical, political and narrative context (the envelope of the letter to show that Teresa is writing to someone at the Red Cross in Nice, surely an exile, or vague information about the matters (the silences cover up absences, war, dictatorship, barely pointed out in the photographs of the family album or in the letter). But to whom is the mother writing and sending letters? What separates her from Fernando and makes them so introspective? What happened to them during the civil war? Who is the man taking shelter in the outbuilding? These are not facts Erice wishes to clarify, maybe because we are sharing Ana’s experience, and she does not know the facts either. What matters is the sensitivity of this world, and how the child understands it intuitively, deeply and emotionally: everything her face feels, contains, knows, desires and seeks.

Erice thus carries out a beautiful exploration of how images show and at the same time hide: he films the death of the fugitive using a single full shot of the outbuilding at night, where shots can be heard. We will later see the body in front of the cinema screen (in fact, we only see a naked foot). During the breakfast scene mentioned above, which has no dialogue, Fernando discovers that Ana was there when he opens the watch and it plays music, and she reacts by staring at him, surely worried about what could have happened to the man. We understand and see all this without the need for words, but what does Ana really feel at this instant? How can we describe this look? What emotion is she feeling? We can see the outside of a face, but what is happening inside? Emotions are like veils over this impenetrability and the mystery of cinema itself, acting as lyrical tones that we can interpret as music, depending on the experience of every viewer.
LYRICAL AND PICTORIAL IMAGES
To film this process of gaining awareness of the world through the character of Ana, the images are composed on a lyrical and pictorial [see «Cinematographic questions concerning a photogram» and «Connections with other arts», p. 5 and pp. 31-32] rather than narrative basis: they create rhythms and sensations of the world that reflect the ephemeral and the passing of time: the wind on the plateau, the brush of yellowish light, the red reflection of a fireplace, the blue and cold night, the shadows of the clouds or those projected by hands on a wall. The film is like a memory, an powerful reminder of those days of childhood of our earliest initiation into the world of adults, when all our senses are open to so many discoveries, exposed to a world that appears immense in scale, with far-off horizons.

BETWEEN SEEING AND NOT SEEING, BETWEEN KNOWING AND NOT KNOWING: FILM
This generates a poetic tension between what we see and what we do not see, and between what we know and what we do not know. As the images outline various layers on the faces, the film ends by opening up to the most fantastical and dreamlike images, when the shadows of the night are projected onto Ana and her imaginary encounter with the monster occurs. By doing this, from the documentary register to the fantastic, Erice goes through all types and of film and uses all its potential (from reality to dreams), fixing on Ana’s face as if it were an emotional landscape.
The scene shown in this photogram occurs fifteen minutes after the film starts [seq. 7]. Fernando, father to Ana and Isabel, returns home after his day of work (we have previously seen that he is a beekeeper). He sits in the armchair in his office to read a magazine, but his curiosity is sparked by the far-off sound from the showing of the film Frankenstein, which his daughters have attended, and he gets up and opens the door to the balcony to go outside. The shot lasts a little over a minute and the pace is calm, expressing the period of rest and peacefulness after a day working outside.

Three moments can be distinguished within this shot. In the first part, with the camera fixed, we see Fernando approach the door and open it: suddenly, we hear other sounds outside, birds singing. Then, with the figure already motionless on the balcony, a slow tracking shot starts, moving closer to him: as it takes place, the sound of the projected film becomes louder and louder. Just when we hear the phrase “wake up and see the reality”, the camera stops and the shot is maintained, with the image of Fernando’s silhouette behind the hexagonal pieces of glass. This is the third moment.

In this photogram, Víctor Erice uses cinematographic elements to compose an introspective state of mind. The camera brings us up close to the contemplative figure of Fernando, and to his emotional perspective. Through this technique the image becomes more subjective as the shot advances, and it becomes more sensitive, or rather it corresponds with the sentiments and internal experience of Fernando; in the final part, when he is standing with his back to the camera, motionless, this experience takes shape as an instant of solitude, silence, thought, and contemplation.

The frame divides the image into two parts vertically: on the right, Fernando is a difficult to see shadow through the ochre surface of the translucent glass; on the left, we can see some of the houses in the village, the source of the sound of the projection. Here again, Fernando is a viewer, but not of the film (which is off-camera), but of this instant of time. Erice films this kind of moment when we see things from the distance, and place ourselves in the reality like a landscape.

The image encapsulates the tension between the private world (internal, intimate) and the external world, which is one of the main themes of the film. This separation between indoors and outdoors, between the character and world, is also composed using light, colour and sound, in order to give shape to the reserved and silent character of Fernando, who is withdrawn into his inner world except when with his daughters.

By the light and colour we can tell it is evening, with the internal darkness of the office and yellow warmth of the glass contrasting with the cold sky of dusk falling over the village outside. In an earlier scene, we saw the face of Fernando “locked in” behind the netting of the beekeeper’s suit, in the same colour as the beehive. This visual rhyme between the beehive and the house shows the closed off and tidy internal space of the house, in opposition to the external reality.

In a similar way, the internal sounds of the house and the external sounds (the birds) contrast with the (fictional) voices in the film and a double layer of sound is created. The idea is beautiful: the world of film and of fiction uses sound, as if it were a fantasy, something ethereal and impossible to grasp, to overwhelm or fly over the space of the village and the house, and the reality of the post-war period: film projects an imaginary world, and provides an escape from reality.

In the fragment of the film heard, Doctor Frankenstein pronounces the following sentences: “Have you never wanted to look beyond the clouds and the stars or to know what causes the trees to bud and what changes the darkness into light? But if you talk like that, people call you crazy. But if I could discover just one of these things, what eternity is, for example, I wouldn’t care if they did think I was crazy!”.

Before and after this scene, we see Frankenstein through the eyes of the girls and the people of the village. This image thus shows us another perspective via the sound projection, as an indirect perception of this experience which conveys the distancing, separation and feeling of solitude that are the traits of Fernando’s character. Although almost nothing can be seen, neither the projection of the film nor Fernando’s face, internally there is much to be seen. Although the figure of the actor is nothing more than a shadow or silhouette, the emotional expression of his character can be felt without the need for words.
III - ANALYSIS

The Spirit of the Beehive starts with the arrival of the cinema in the village of Hoyuelos, where the projection of Frankenstein is a special event. Erice creates two main blocks for the film showing: the start, with the prologue of the film, showing the people of the village forming the audience [seq. 3], and then the scene showing the monster and the little girl in the lake, and the moment when the father carries the child’s body in his arms [seq. 8]. It is in the second block that Erice uses their faces to introduce us to the two main characters, Ana and Isabel.

In this shot, it can be seen that the experience of film and of life are indistinguishable: film is an emotion experienced by the viewers, an encounter. Ana (the child actress Ana Torrent, and at the same time the character of Ana) is experiencing a real and transformative experience, where she is discovering and opening up to the unknown and incomprehensible (“and why did he kill her?”, she asks her sister afterwards).

Erice filmed a real emotion with this shot, not performed for the film by a character, but really experienced by Ana. It is the emotion of a first time, of the discovery of this other reality created by film: in this isolated village during the post-war period, the cinema came from outside to open up a space where the girls could dream and imagine, but also become aware of and wonder about the mysteries of life and death. It is a unique moment of cinema, where a film reveals its lead through her emotions, resulting from a real experience as seen on her face. Right from this instant, the silent and observant face of Ana broadcasts the film’s emotions. Erice’s idea is very beautiful: cinema can be seen in the screen formed by the face of the person watching it; the face is an emotional landscape.

In this shot the camera manages to find and capture the truth and beauty of this original instant, and stop it from slipping away forever. From this instant, Ana’s face, intrigued by the mystery, wants to see and explore. The experience of childhood, with its discoveries and incomprehension, becomes the essential theme of the film: the world as perceived by children, with its share of enigma and fantasy.

A SEQUENCE.
THE OUTBUILDING: EXPLORING THE WORLD, CONSTRUCTING TIME
[Seq. 14 – TC : 00:35:17–00:37:21]

The first scene showing the visit to the outbuilding by the well is an adventure, a game and an exploration, but also Ana’s first discovery of the adult world. By means of the instrumental version of the Spanish children’s song Vamos a contar mentiras (We’re going to tell lies), a playful tone dominates the shot that opens the sequence: the girls before a landscape of the Castilian plateau, with a small house in the background [1].

It is a beautiful composition of the figures in relation to time and space. The girls run to the outbuilding and Erice takes three slow shots to follow the movement and fluidity of the passing of time with the passing of the clouds, and the variations in light (at other points in the film he goes back to this construction of the passing of time and light using slow shots) [2, 3, 4]. In terms of space, the frame contains one of the film’s major themes based on the scale chosen for the full shot: little Ana discovers the immensity of the world (the large empty expanse of fields and the horizon) and her vital progression from contemplation (as we saw her in the showing of Frankenstein) to actively going into spaces that are new and mysterious to her, like this outbuilding by the well.

In the shot where the girls are now right in front of the outbuilding, the sound of the wind replaces the music and intensifies the apprehension and feeling of mystery the place triggers for Ana. We cannot hear the dialogue between them (we see them in the distance), but we do hear Ana whispering: “Isabel, Isabel”. What does Isabel then say to Ana after entering the outbuilding, to make them both run out? We know that in the previous scene in the bedroom, Isabel told her sister that the monster was alive because she had seen in it in a place she knew and that it was a “spirit”. Yet here, as in many moments of The Spirit of the Beehive, what she says to her remains hidden, omitted, merely suggested, so that the viewer can imagine or complete the words.

In this second part of the scene, Erice centres on Ana’s perspective towards her sister: she, the younger one, waits until Isabel goes to the well [5] and then looks inside the outbuilding. We see Isabel’s action through Ana’s eyes: Erice films and assembles shots of her face and reverse angle cuts of her gaze [6, 7]. There are twenty-six shots making up the scene as a whole, with eleven of Ana’s face and her gaze. What she sees is as important as the effects shown on her face by the images (the outbuilding, the well, the footprint).

After the girls run outside, a fade-out moves on to the third block in the scene: the same frame returns, along with the music (a slower variation), but this time Ana comes back alone, approaching the well without hesitation. This effect of rhyme or resonance, in which the same space returns with a temporal variation, is very characteristic of the film: through this montage, the viewer connects the instants of time and observes Ana’s process of change, learning and maturing, as she moves towards a greater understanding of the world that surrounds her. Without the need for dialogue, Ana’s psychological transformation is filmed: her bravery and curiosity to explore by herself this place, which, after her sister told here about the “spirit” that lived there, had frightened her so much she stopped far away. Thus by means of visual and sound simile between the shots, Erice creates a wonderful ellipsis of the scenes that must have occurred between the two instants (during which Anna must have made the decision to return alone to the outbuilding) [8, 9, 10].
From here on, Ana’s gaze alone makes up the whole of the experience of the scene, with her curiosity and uncertainty gradually progressing: she observes four empty spaces (the well [11], inside the outbuilding [12], the footprint [13], the landscape [14]). In this emptiness, the space is open to speculation, fiction or stories: what story could possibly connect the footprint to the well, the outbuilding and that particular field? It is a space for imagination and storytelling (originally activated by the discovery of film), but also a space for touches of what is real: the footprint from a foot much bigger than Ana’s, which may suggest to her the size and presence of the monster, a giant to the child but to the viewer a sign that an adult has been in the outbuilding recently. This idea that the absent can make present is one of the film’s most beautiful poetic ideas.

The scene lasts almost five minutes, and its sustained rhythm reflects Ana’s cautious assessment of this new place. This is why it is so important that the shots of Ana’s gaze return, emphasising and intensifying what she sees, as each one is a step forwards: first she sees the well and looks for an answer to the echo [15]; then she throws a stone (which we hear with great intensity, to make us even more sensitive to Ana’s point of view towards each physical detail of this space) [16, 17].

Then she approaches the threshold of the outbuilding and looks all around it, shown by a panoramic shot, going as far to the zone in shadows [18, 19, 20]; then she goes outside and notices the footprint (after two shots of the empty footprint, in the third we see the slow movement of Ana’s foot until she places it inside) [21, 22, 23]; from there her gaze reacts or connects this footprint with the place, looking towards the landscape (first we see her remove her foot from the print, and then following the horizon).

While the footprint is very large compared to her, so is the landscape and the world. What is beyond what we see, what secrets or stories are hidden in this footprint, this outbuilding, this field and these horizons? This is just the reverse angle of the landscape frame that opened the scene, within the shot: the child has moved on to become involved in an experience.
COMPARING IMAGES

Lady at the Virginals with a Gentleman
Johannes Vermeer (c. 1660)

The Geographer, Johannes Vermeer (c. 1668-1669)

Woman Holding a Balance, Johannes Vermeer (c. 1662-1664)

The Spirit of the Beehive (1973)
IV - CONNECTIONS

The Spirit of the Beehive (1973)

Interior, Vilhelm Hammershøi (1901)

Open Doors, Vilhelm Hammershøi (1905)

Interior with a View of an Exterior, Vilhelm Hammershøi (1903)

The Spirit of the Beehive (1973)

The Spirit of the Beehive (1973)

GROWING UP: BETWEEN THE INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL WORLDS

*O sangue* (1989), by Pedro Costa, tells the story of Vicente and Nino, two brothers whose sick father is often away from home and with whom they have a difficult relationship. When their father dies, Vicente hides the fact from everyone except Clara, the young teacher with whom he has fallen in love and in whom he trusts. It is a film about complex family relationships (the good and the bad), learning and the two brothers growing up after the disappearance of their father figure.

Like *The Spirit of the Beehive*, *O sangue* is a film full of ellipses and silences, where many successive narratives, such as the death of the father, are enigmatic and never made clear. Both Víctor Erice and Pedro Costa are less interested in the facts than in the emotional world and what it hides and how it shows in the faces. Both filmmakers explore the light on faces, isolating them and projecting the characters’ emotions: what they see, what touches them and what they listen to. The characters are opaque and reserved, introspective and uncommunicative.

The introspective and reserved characters of Vicente and Nino, who are lost in their thoughts and inner world, in a tense, dysfunctional and claustrophobic family situation, are shown in shots that isolate their figures, in rigid positions, using light and shadows to capture their emotional chiaroscuros and what their faces do not show.

The editing is extremely elliptical, leaving us in suspense about many points in the story, which are barely implied or sketched out. The story of the family is full of past events that affect Vicente and Nino’s attitude, but which are left unsaid and barely explained (such as the history of their father’s illness, or the troubled past with their uncle). When they lose their father, Vicente and Nino have to learn to live without him, which is both a burden and a release. They are forced to discover themselves and their relationship with others: this gives rise to affinity, understanding, trust and the love between Clara and Vicente. It is a relationship they have chosen, arising out of their mutual understanding with barely any need for words, as shown by the gesture when Vicente takes her hand. The frames bring them together in the shots of their shared paths, on the streets or in the woods; the editing connects their faces through their gazes, and what is said without words.

Another very interesting cinematographic parallel can be drawn between the two films: the contrast between internal and external spaces. In both films, the family space is kept closed and oppressive: the uncle’s house in *O Sangue* can be compared with the house in *The Spirit of the Beehive*.

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*O sangue*, variations on Clara’s face in different sequences of the film

*O sangue*: in the first two photograms, Nino (the younger brother); in the third, Vicente

*O sangue* (1989)
In contrast, the films almost magically transform the outdoor landscapes through filming: nature, woods or river. In the case of O sangue particularly, the discomfort and repression felt by Vicente and Nino at home contrasts with the lyrical openness of nature for the characters: a marvellous and mysterious world, open to the imagination and the ethereal (e.g. mist, wind, moonlight), and to adventure and imagination. In The Spirit of the Beehive nature also becomes almost ghostly and fantastic, when Ana runs away and dreams of the monster.

Both Pedro Costa and Víctor Erice are film-loving filmmakers. Costa grew up with screenings at the Cinemateca Portuguesa, and reinvents shots from his cinematographic memory. O sangue has certain resonances that are particularly relevant: Jean Cocteau and his dreamlike atmospheres, the silent cinema of Carl Theodor Dreyer and Friedrich W. Murnau, echoing the expressionist landscapes of the woods at night and the plastic work of the shadows. There are also shades of The Night of the Hunter (Charles Laughton, 1955) in Nino’s experience and They Live by Night (Nicholas Ray, 1948) in the story of Vicente and Clara and their flight. These are leading examples of an intense black and white cinema, which also shows its power in O sangue, where the exploration of light and darkness, and of faces and landscapes, opens a gateway from reality to other worlds. Something similar happens in The Spirit of the Beehive, in the girls’ encounter with the film Frankenstein (James Whale, 1931) and the subsequent nocturnal sequences, which are loaded with mystery.

A similar parallel can also be drawn with Rentrée des classes (Jacques Rozier, 1956). In Rozier’s film, especially in the long sequence of the child in the river, the openness to the landscape in relation to the proportion of the figures in many of the outdoor shots can be seen as an escape from daily life to exploration of the world, through light, shadows and sounds, and its beauty and mystery.

We can relate the three films, for example, through the way we film forests and trees, clouds, day and night landscapes, endless horizons, rivers... The filming of reality creates wonderful effects through visual stylization, to the point of transforming the characters’ experience into a lyrical, magical and even fantastic adventure.
The reference to The Life of the Bee is made explicit in the character of Fernando, both beekeeper and scholar of the world of bees, whom we will see twice write in a notebook a text which is in reality an exact quote from Maeterlinck, specifically the chapter on founding the beehive:

« Someone to whom I recently showed my glass beehive, with its movement like the main gear wheel of a clock; someone who saw the constant agitation of the honeycomb, the mysterious, maddened commotion of the nurse bees over the nests, the teeming bridges and staircases of wax, the invading spirals of the queen, the endlessly varied and repetitive labours of the swarm, the restless yet ineffectual toil, the fevered comings and goings, the call to sleep always ignored, undermining the next day’s work, the final repose of death far from a place that tolerates neither sickness nor tombs... someone who observed these things, once the initial astonishment had passed and quickly looked away with an expression of indescribable sadness and horror. »

Clearly, this type of text, and others such as the poem by Rosalía de Castro that the children read at school (“I am going to fall where / he who falls never rises”), includes many references to death throughout the film, foisting on it a very specific tone which corresponds to the quotes from Frankenstein, and of course, in the plot itself, to Ana’s adventure.
In addition to these literary citations, there are pictorial references. The director of photography, Luis Cuadrado, had this to say: “I remember that Erice (...) took me to see a brewery (...) so we could go together to see certain lights and colours. He brought me engravings of Vermeer and Rembrandt to show me some yellow lights and greenish shadows which interested him.” The influence of the 17th century Dutch painter, Vermeer de Delft, can be clearly seen in everything to do with the representation of the mother, Teresa, within the home, especially when we see her at the beginning of the film writing a letter beside the large window with the characteristic glasswork which simulates the hexagonal shapes of the beehive grids or when she unenthusiastically and carelessly plays a few notes on the piano without even sitting down.

While it is true that Vermeer is known for his warm and light ambiences, with apparently happy characters, some paintings, such as *Woman Holding a Balance* (c. 1662-1664) [see “Comparing images”, pp. 27-28], *Women with a Lute near a Window* (c. 1664) or *A Lady Writing a Letter* (c.1665-1670), show more tenebrist atmospheres, in which the direct light highlights the characters against a dark background, with shadows that sometimes reach the close-up of the image. Vermeer’s work undoubtedly constitutes an inexhaustible source of iconography not limited to Teresa, who could be one of these characteristic women by the Delft painter who write or read love letters or play the harpsichord. Possibly we could also connect Fernando locked away in his study with the scientists portrayed by Vermeer for *The Astronomer* (1668) or *The Geographer* (1668-1669) [see “Comparing images”, pp. 27-28]. Moreover, the iconography in a painting by a contemporary of Vermeer, Emanuel de Witte, *Interior with a Woman at the Virginal* (c. 1665-1670), is disturbing in its premonition: a woman playing the virginal (harpsichord) beside a window; in an adjoining room, at the end of corridor formed by two open doors, the maid is sweeping: effectively, it looks like a scene from *The Spirit of the Beehive*.
RECEPTION OF THE FILM

Many of the earliest interpretations of The Spirit of the Beehive focused on its alleged political message, something very common to many Spanish films of the time, particularly those with the greatest international impact, such as those by Carlos Saura. One of the most significant of the texts to emphasis this model of interpretation, although with certain nuances, was by Fernando Savater, called Risks of Initiation to the Spirit; it was originally published in 1976 as prologue to the published version of the screenplay by Víctor Erice and Ángel Fernández-Santos. Erice himself considered it one of the best texts about the film he had read:

“The beehive in which Erice’s spirit is debated is undoubtedly Spain. It would be as absurd to decontextualize the film and forget this fact, downgrading it to non-specific allegory, as to make its whole meaning dependant on the particular historical messy situation of Spain at the time. The spirit loves the concrete, but takes its strength from it to go beyond any anecdote; it is historical, and accounts for and is aware of history, but is not closed in by it in its situation of need. This is a decisive speech against fascism with an aesthetic and ethical plausibility that fortunately makes him go beyond the strictly political, that is to say, strategic, theme of antifascism.”

This was a film which used the same framework as many contemporary Spanish films, but gave it a new meaning, a fact which did not go unnoticed the most intense criticism of the time, even intellectuals, such as Savater himself, from fields such as philosophy, Eugenio Trías said the same in his text Close your Eyes, dated from the same year as the film was released, 1973:

“Of course it is all about symbols, the poisonous mushroom is a symbol, the girl, the flower and Frankenstein are symbols, and the cat, the well, the skeleton, the Maqui... But these symbols are not found divided into two, they do not extend to meanings, they do not refer to great words like Evil or Prohibited. They are those words truly embodied and, therefore, pervasive, as is the case with respect to the poisonous mushroom, or resplendent, as is the case for the honeycomb. It is better to talk about signs, footprints, like the one beside the well, like the fact that the delightful Don José [cardboard model for teaching anatomy], has no eyes (...). We follow these signs that are there. on view, visible for anyone who knows where to look; we follow these arrows (...) and then a cosmos really appears.”

However, to a large extent the international criticism fell into the trap of interpreting it this way. It was the last few years of the Franco dictatorship, and everything that came out of Spain and proved to have a minimum critical slant was interpreted according to these symbols and parables, in some cases reaching feverish overinterpretation (a letter with a stamp showing the effigy of Franco being burned on the bonfire as allegory for the end of the regime, for example). Fortunately, some Spanish critics were immediately able to see the real virtues of the film, and the correct outcome, and over the years these interpretations have come to be accepted. For example, in a text by Juan Miguel Company, The Silence and the Myth, also from 1973:

“I have the seen the film more than a dozen times, more than any of my other favourite films. I never tire of it: every time it enriches me even more. The film reveals its secrets slowly. It is a secretive and enigmatic work, which handles the deepest mysteries, of creation and death. It is also about family relations, between husband and wife, parents and daughters, sister and sister, and each character’s attempt to communicate, along with the characters’ isolation and eventual solitude. Finally, it is a film about cinema itself, and the power of cinema to invade our dreams, and awaken our lived experiences and our fears.”

Inevitably, a film which puts cinema itself at the centre of its story, and makes it the driving force for its dramatic mechanism, ended up becoming a cult film for many filmmakers. Such filmmakers include the American Monte Hellman, who not only included Erice’s film in the plot of one of his films (Road to Nowhere, 2010), but also tends to name The Spirit of the Beehive as his favourite film of all time. He wrote the following about his experience as a film viewer:

“Néstor Almendros told me to watch The Spirit of the Beehive by Víctor Erice because he knew that I needed a Spanish director of photography and that he thought Luis Cuadrado’s work was the best he had ever seen. He knew Cuadrado had been responsible for the film’s photography when he was almost blind, recurring to instructions from an assistant telling him where to place the lights. Almendros didn’t know he had died from a brain tumour shortly afterwards.

“Erice’s work brings us a new type of vision, of film reality. An open, poetic and musical structure replaces the closed narrative and the normal storytelling mechanisms, so easy for the viewer and inherent to North American cinema. This is no longer fiction, in that there are no psychologically defined characters based on the classic pre-existing moulds. At the same time, the film space becomes a symbolic space (...) and this is used as a sound board for a central focus that could be provisionally defined as a recurring theme of presence-absence.”

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V – LEARNING ACTIVITIES

BEFORE THE SCREENING

It could be interesting to give a brief introduction to Victor Erice, as one of the great Spanish and European filmmakers of modern times.

It is useful to situate the film in its historical context: the first few years of Francisco Franco’s dictatorship after the end of the Spanish Civil War. What do you know about this time in history? Do some research before watching the film.

You can look at posters for the film and students can come up with hypotheses on what it might be about or how they imagine it.

AFTER THE SCREENING

THE VALUE OF THE FACE

As explained in the various comments, faces have an essential presence and value in The Spirit of the Beehive. Many sequences are structured around close-ups, and many times during the film the filmmaker pauses on the face of Ana or other characters, who are almost always silent. In a way, time seems to stand still when showing the faces, and we have the impression we are coming close to the intimacy of the characters and at the same time we feel they are impenetrable.

Together you can start remembering and listing all the particularly moving facial expressions (e.g. Ana and Isabel in the cinema, Teresa when the train on which she has left the letter leaves, Ana when Frankenstein appears, Ana at night on the balcony at the end of the film). Try to be as exhaustive as possible. You will realise what a high presence of faces there is in the film!

Then you can choose some of the moments you particularly remember and, still without going back to view them, try to describe them in detail from your memories. What kind of light fell on the face? And the background of the shot? What expression was on the face? What emotional state do you associate with this shot? Note down your descriptions based on what you remember.

Subsequently, go back and watch the fragments again. You will see how they have taken form in your memory, possibly quite close to the reality of the film, or possibly generating a second image in your mind. The important thing is not whether or not the memory is accurate, rather the aim of the exercise is to talk about the impression the film has made on you and at the same time, when watching again, paying closer attention.

After the viewing and comments, you can explore the close-ups during the film “capturing” specific moments on the faces throughout the film: it is about stopping the image at the moments you consider most interesting or intense and extracting the corresponding photograms. It is useful to try to be exhaustive and capture all the film’s close-ups (for example, split into groups and each group finds the close-ups for one character or one part of the film), so that the screenshots can be used for a transversal and accurate analysis of this aspect of the film.

The “collection” of faces can be used to analyse relationships, common aspects, etc. One of the elements you will probably observe on the screenshots is the play of light on faces.

LIGHT ON FACES

Whether through the screenshots or by viewing fragments of the film directly and stopping on the close-ups, observe and analyse the light. It is very important to find the words to describe the light and its effect on the faces. You will see that often, to refer to light, we use words from other fields (i.e. synaesthetically) and by binomials, such as: light is soft or hard; warm or cold; direct or diffuse. You can also refer to the direction: side, front, 3/4 or counterlighting. Two forms of light are repeated over the course of the film in a particular relevant way: the characters beside the window (e.g. Teresa writing the letter to Ana or in the father’s office) and the reflections and shadows on the faces (e.g. Ana under the trees or beside the lake at night).
After observing the shots in the film you can also try to create shots or photographs of faces in light. For example, you can use characters beside the window, so the light falls on their face (film them with counterlight); look at how it falls, and change the position of the characters compared to the light source (making them move away from it, changing the position of the face, etc.), and observe the light at different times of the day.

**THE GAZES**

The same collection of screenshots of faces can also be used to observe that many of the film’s sequences are built up on the basis of gazes: looks exchanged between the characters, who mostly remain unspeaking while they look at each other, and looks (especially by the girls) at the world. This is a fundamental editing method in filmmaking, known as shot/reverse angle shot, and applying to looks between people and when the characters look into space or at a landscape.

You can analyse some of these sequences, particularly observing the direction of the looks and the camera position with respect to the character who is looking and the person or thing they are looking at. You will see that to create relationships through editing, the direction they look in and the axis from which the characters are filmed is fundamental; if they do not correspond, as viewers we do not establish the relationship between shots. For example:

You can also play with the screenshots to create new relationships.

It is also interesting to carry out an editing exercise: you can use the video camera and editing programme or, to make it simpler, use photographs. It is useful to do this in groups. Each group takes one to three shots or photographs of a character looking, and several shots or photographs of what they could be looking at (people and spaces). You can then share your materials and create a short sequence based on gazes (shot/reverse angle shot).

**TRANSFORMATIONS OF LIGHT IN SPACES**

Like the exceptional use of light on faces in *The Spirit of the Beehive*, the use of light on spaces is also exceptional, both indoors and outdoors. Additionally, throughout the film the passing of time is repeated in the same space or landscape, which appears transformed by the light, whether because filmed at very different times of the day (first thing in the morning, midday, afternoon, evening, night) or because the weather affects the light (a sunny day is completely different from a grey or cloudy day).

You can also observe your surroundings and choose a place from which to create your own “Diary of Light” or “Diary of the Seasons”. After analysing the characteristics of this space, choose what might be the best frame to show the passing of hours and days. Maintaining the same frame, photograph the space at different times in one day (if possible nightfall, night and dawn) and/or on different days over a long time period (e.g. from autumn to spring). The linear display of the series of photographs, situating the photographs in a line, one beside the other, will be a good demonstration of how light and the seasons transform spaces.
MAGIC, MYTH, MYSTERY
As always, start with what has most impressed, affected or captivated the students. There is an air of mystery throughout the whole film, and reality and unreality do not seem to be very far apart. Which moments were particularly magical or mysterious?
You can identify and analyse certain elements, figures and symbols of both mythology and the world of romanticism which is extended to later fantasy literature: which of the film’s themes can be connected to mystery? Which themes have we read, heard or seen in stories, books or films? You can draw up an initial list: the wood, the full moon, the lake, the well, etc.
It would be nice to conduct some research into literary, pictorial and cinematographic works where these elements are present, joining an immensely rich tradition.

FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS AND SILENCES
One of the most characteristic and possibly most concerning traits of the family life of the film’s characters is the silence and lack of communication. Only the sisters appear to maintain more or less flowing conversations, almost always initiated by Ana (who is also drawn into silence after the mysterious night in the woods). The parents barely talk to each other (do you remember any conversations?) and not much with the girls (what conversations do you remember?). The adults, so sparing with their words and so silent, seem to need to turn to writing to say something (Fernando with his notes on the beehives, Teresa with her letters).
You can start by talking about the sequences or moments when these silences or the inability to communicate with each other is particularly uncomfortable, tense or even incomprehensible.
The silence generates many questions. Why do they not talk to each other? What is happening to them? What do these silences say to us without saying it? You can start by asking you know or imagine about each of them, what you feel is happening inside them, what their emotions are and why they do not share them with those close to them.
Sometimes in families not everything is said, and many things are kept inside. You can discuss and deliberate about this.

Of course, all of this deliberation goes much further than the possibility of silence about the historical context of the characters (the Civil War, exiles, the resulting silences). Use this opportunity to reflect on the emotions, communication difficulties, what is not said and not questioned, etc.

ELLIPSES
One of the fundamental official and narrative elements in the construction of The Spirit of the Beehive is ellipsis, a technique also introduced very directly in the “show-hide” theme [see « A sequence. The house: exploring the world, building time» and «Showing what is hidden. About faces, silences, ellipses », p. 5 et pp. 25, 26].
You can consider the temporal and narrative ellipsis of Ana’s return to the outbuilding after the first visit. Erice keeps us in the same position, with the same framing. We do not know how much time has passed or what has happened between the first and the second visit. Just as happens with the empty spaces and the characters’ silences, this choice by the filmmaker questions us as viewers, and makes us active, almost into creators who use our imagination to fill in what the film hints at or suggests without showing anything.
Do you remember other ellipses in the film? What do they contribute to the narrative? How do they situate us as viewers?
Try to come up with hypotheses about what happens during some of the film’s ellipses.

SHARING EMOTIONS. A POSSIBLE LETTER FROM ANA
After the night in the wood, Ana remains silent, without saying a word. Imagine she writes a letter to someone to explain what has happened to her over the last few days: the film showing, school, the visits to the outbuilding by the well, the days and nights at home (and outside). Use your imagination and decide who she would write to: her sister, her father, her mother, all of them, the fugitive, her teacher? What would she write? Try to write this letter in Ana’s name.
Visual credits


Graphic design

Graphic design: Benjamin Vesco / Garphic adaptation: CinEd coordination (Institut français)

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