

SPANISH HORROR FILM

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Everything comes from someplace; the distinction between new and old, creative and repetitive, or original and plagiarism ("homage" is the preferred term today) is situated on a continuum whose poles exist only theoretically. It is only a question of degrees: in the cinematographic context, there is no film identical to another, and the fact that there is no completely original or "new" film hardly needs to be said. Everything that will exist in the future already exists in some form in the present; creativity is no more than the result, in a certain novel measure, of recombining elements from one's surroundings. Inspiration, that "insight" which suddenly strikes us with a terrific idea (in the best scenario), does not come from a vacuum. As with any other exercise, it depends principally on two things: that which we have lived, and that which we are living now (Pérez, Gutiérrez, García y Gómez, 2005). All that we have done, including what we say, think and contrive, is related to our history, to the country where we grew up, to the books we have read, the films we have seen and -of course- to what is happening to us now.

Consciousness requires intense training. Describing our own behavior and, above all, the historical variables on which it depends is a less common ability than one might think (or than we would like to acknowledge). Unconsciousness is more common, but who we are and what we do are the same thing, and our inability to identify our references does not reduce the control they exert over us. It is for this reason that in art these "references" are frequently incorporated into a work in a veiled manner, without intentionality on the part of the artist. The presumed "subtext" of a film, the metaphoric value of song lyrics, that which is suggested by an abstract painting: these are messages the observer tends to construct unilaterally. Then the work ceases to belong to its author, escapes from his control, and becomes a representation separate from its original

purpose. In the same way that a psychologist analyzes the environment and history of his patients in order to determine the reasons why they do what they do, film critics and analysts relate common filmographic elements, connect themes and artistic interpretations with political realities, discover within the films features of their own culture filtered through the vision of the filmmaker or director. In doing this, they further hypothesize about the "true" message of the creation -and although this may frequently happen unknown by the actual creator- it must probably happen this way (García, 2006).

But there exists one cinematographic genre in which, by its very nature, this appropriation is more heavily criticized than in any other: the so-called "fanta-terror" (Camilo, 1993). In the same way that a technical document leaves less space for the elaboration of different interpretations than a poem replete with metaphors, the more fantastic elements a film includes the more implicit content it suggests. That the author may not be conscious of this content does not imply that it is not present; the perception belongs to the perceiver, not the perceived. In fact, there are cases in which these perceptions end up modeling their own author, awakening his very consciousness or even influencing future works.

One example of this is the "of the dead" series of feature films created by George A. Romero. The first film of the series (*Night of the Living Dead*, 1968) has been analyzed to the extreme, generating a multitude of hypotheses about its intentionality and metaphorical content. It has been argued that the resuscitated beings represent indigents, illegal immigrants, and even soldiers who return from Vietnam with the typical traumas, injuries and psychological disorders. Much has been written about the symbolic value of the black protagonist, about the allegory of fear and the conservatism that represents a defense within the house that serves as their refuge, about the supposed implicit criticism of the traditional family model, and a long etcetera.

When, in the beginning, Romero began to be asked these questions, he always responded that he never had any intention of shaping such messages. According to the director, a large part of the decisions about locations for filming, how to apportion the scenes and even the film's central argument were determined by his low budget. However, in his later offerings (*Dawn of the Dead*, *Day of the Dead* and *Land of the Dead*), the social criticism is explicit; as the series advances, this analysis is increasingly

evident as it addresses themes like the consumerist society, the roles of each social stratum, the military, immigration, and terrorism.

Evidently, this "external interpretation" depends principally on the area of interest and knowledge of the person who realizes it. These are analyzed from the perspective of sociology and as a function of the political context in which they evolved, according to economic conditions or the most relevant social and historical events. Film experts typically immerse themselves in extensive filmographies, searching for potential inspirations and cinematic references: "This is the same as he did...but instead using the same type of plane that is so present in film..." The perspective that psychology has lent to horror film has been principally psychoanalytic, is the latter's eternal search for "hidden fears." This collaboration has not been limited to "*a posteriori*" analysis -rather, during a certain period of time (the most classic period) directors and writers frequently consulted expert psychoanalysts in order to assure themselves of adequate symbolism in their films.

This article seeks neither one thing nor the other. Our intention is to review the history of horror film in Spain, to reflect on certain social characteristics that influenced its evolution, and to bring a different view of horror -and of the cinema that provokes it- from the point of view of behavioral analysis.

Evolution of the genre

When speaking of Spanish cinema, the public normally tends to associate it with dramatic films (principally set during the years of the dictatorship) or with comedies -considered the Spanish cinematic genre par excellence (Matellano, 2009). Today, to say Spanish cinema beyond our borders is to say Pedro Almodóvar, a director whose films navigate between these two genres.

However, cinema of the fantastic and terror is a genre with a deep tradition in our country, one that is more frequently lauded by foreign critics. If it is true that its evolution during the last fifty years has had ups and downs, both in the relative sense (the level of productions) and in actual number, today it is enjoying a new attention comparable to its golden age (the 1970's), but surpassing that age in quality and influence. Among the evidence that supports this resurgence of the genre in our country, we might

point to the following:

- The creation in 2000 of *Fantastic Factory*, a Catalan label lead by the producer Julio Fernández and the director Bryan Yuzna, dedicated exclusively to producing horror films. Although the results have been uneven, one must recognize that during its seven years of existence it has contributed enormously to increasing the presence of this genre on marquees. Among the nine films produced, noteworthy titles include *Dagon* (2001) by Stuart Gordon and *Beyond Re-Animator* (2003) by the same Bryan Yuzna, in which they continue developing their obsession with the Lovecraft universe.
- The annual celebration, now more than a decade old, of the Sitges Festival of Horror Film and the Fantastic, whose offerings have grown each year in number and quality, and which is now an international reference and a prime showcase for films of the genre.
- The recognition of films of the genre as our greatest sources of exportation: *Abre los ojos* (Open Your Eyes, 1997) by Amenábar had its adaptation as *Vanilla Sky*, and more recently, *Los cronocrímenes* (The Chronocrimes, 2007) by Nacho Vigalongo and *REC* (2007) by Jaume Balagueró and Paco Plaza.
- Spanish terror's powerful muscle at the box office and the level of its productions: titles such as *El espinazo del diablo* (The Devil's Spine, 2000) and *El laberinto del Fauno* (Pan's Labyrinth, 2006) by Guillermo del Toro, *Los otros* (The Others, 2001) by Alejandro Amenábar, *Darkness* (2002) by Jaume Balagueró, *La casa de cera* (The House of Wax, 2004) by Jaume Collet-Serrá, *28 semanas después* (28 Weeks Later, 2007) by Juan Carlos Fresnadillo, or *Los crímenes de Oxford* (The Oxford Crimes, 2008) by Alex de la Iglesia, are clear examples of this dominance.
- The important growth in production of genre feature films. In the first eight years of the new century, more horror films were premiered than in the twenty years previous. Figure 1 shows the number of films of the genre produced in Spain during the last 50 years.

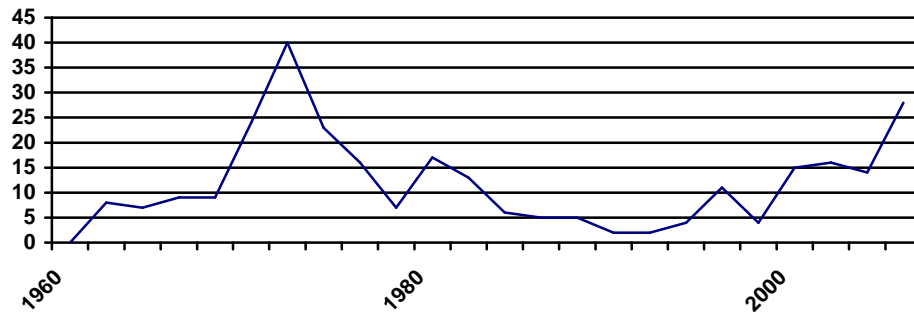


Figure 1. Number of horror films produced in Spain.

The current Spanish horror genre is one more stage in its own evolution, as with all cinematic genres; and these stages display a real distinction in the type and thematics of the titles that compose them.

1. A Slow and Interrupted Beginning (1900-1965)

Although it could be argued that horror film did not begin in Spain until the 1970's, in fact, certain precedents existed from the dawn of the twentieth century. Elements of fantasy and terror already started to be included in short films like *El hotel eléctrico* (The Electric Hotel, 1906) by Segundo de Chomón, *El beso de la muerta* (The Kiss of Death, 1916) by Alberto Marro or *El doctor rojo* (The Red Doctor, 1917) by Ramón Caralt. One cannot forget Luis Buñuel's masterpiece, *Un perro andaluz* (Andalusian Dog, 1929).

Even so, it was not until 1944 with *La torre de los siete jorobados*, by Edgar Neville, that Spanish horror film found its first point of reference. *La torre de los siete jorobados* (The Tower of the Seven Hunchbacks) constitutes, together with *El crimen de la calle Bordadores* (The Crime of Bordadores Street, 1946) and *Domingo de Carnaval* (Carnaval Sunday, 1945), a famous trilogy set in Madrid at the end of the 19th century and the beginnings of the twentieth in which Neville mixes the story of crime and intrigue with popular purism (Zavala, Castro-Villacañas and Martínez, 2007). Concretely, *La torre de los siete jorobados* includes fantastic elements (the underground city, ghosts, etc.), and it is an homage to German

Expressionism.

The genre was completely abandoned in the following fifteen years and returned in the form of a co-production by the most prolific filmmaker in Spanish history: Jesús Franco. *Gritos en la noche* (Cries in the Night, 1961) by Jesús Franco is a gothic horror film that represents one of the best exponents of Spanish horror film. In it are shown the doings of the mad scientist Orloff and his servant Morpho. Two more Doctor Orloff films would be made: *El secreto del Doctor Orloff* (The Secret of Doctor Orloff, 1964) and *Los depredadores de la noche* (Predators of the Night, 1987).

2. The Golden Age (1966-1975)

In the late 1960's and early 1970's, Spain experienced a Golden Age with respect to the production of horror films, producing eighty titles between 1971 and 1973 (Camilo, 1993). Many authors waged their own small war against oppression, filming pictures from abroad, using pseudonyms and overcoming the paucity of resources with large doses of creativity. Among this great production, the following can be distinguished:

- *La marca del hombre lobo* (Mark of the Wolf Man, 1967) by Enrique Eguiluz, which initiated the continuation of production of Spanish horror film. It is a film that includes all the topics of the subgenre: vampires and wolf-men, struggles, or silver bullets.
- With *La residencia* (The Residence, 1969) by Narciso Ibáñez Serrador arrived one of the great triumphs of Spanish horror film. In fact, it is the third-most-watched Spanish horror film in all of Spanish history. Employing a fastidious aesthetic, Ibáñez Serrador recounts a morbid story of the relations in a young ladies' residence amid disappearances and crimes.
- *La noche de Walpurgis* (Walpurgis Night, 1970) by León Klimowsky is the film that opened the way for the association of different producers and directors with the genre (Matellano, 2009) and provided the definitive takeoff of Paul Naschy's career. It narrates the story of two young people who search for the tomb of a witch-vampire and their later encounter with a werewolf. The film resolves with a fight to the death between a werewolf and the witch-vampire that includes elements of sex, gore and comedy.
- *Pánico en el transiberiano* (Panic on the Transsiberian, 1972) by Eugenio Martín, with Christopher Lee, Peter Cushing and Telly Savalas, is the story of

a group of travelers locked inside a train with a corpse that infects people, turning them into the living dead.

- *No profanar el sueño de los muertos* (Do Not Profane the Dream of the Dead, 1974) by Jorge Grau is a zombie story with ecological overtones. Two young people discover a strange abnormality occurring in cemeteries, caused by a strange agricultural machine that makes the dead return to life, thirsty for blood.
- *La saga de los templarios* (The Saga of the Templars) by Armando de Ossorio, is composed of *La noche del terror ciego* (The Night of Blind Terror, 1971), *El ataque de los muertos sin ojos* (Attack of the Dead Without Eyes, 1973), *El buque maldito* (The Cursed Ship, 1974), and *La noche de las gaviotas* (The Night of the Seagulls, 1975). Ossorio tells how Templar witch-warriors return from the dead in order to massacre those who accidentally stumble upon their property, generating a small army of the living dead.

3. Democracy Arrives; Terror is Finished (1976-1990).

With the arrival of democracy in Spain, a new and autochthonous comic-erotic genre arises: "el cine del destape" ("permissive film"). In a society deprived of liberty and desperate to update itself in relation to its immediate environment -France, Italy, Germany and the United Kingdom- this new genre eclipsed all others for more than a decade, thereby reducing the number of productions of horror film. Even so, there are several representative titles of that era:

- *¿Quién puede matar a un niño?* (Who Can Kill A Child? 1976) by Narciso Ibáñez Serrador, a pseudo-ecological fable that uses children as protagonists. On the famous isle of Ibiza, a group of children initiate a movement to protect the planet from human degradation that has worldwide repercussions. The solution turns out to be the elimination of adults. Claustrophobic and unyielding, the film had a huge impact and has become a classic of European terror.
- *El retorno del hombre lobo* (The Return of the Wolf Man, 1980) by Jacinto Molina is probably the best of Spanish films featuring the legendary werewolf. Although the plot once again pits the wolf-man against the Countess Bathori, the aesthetics are much more fastidious.

- *Angustia* (1986) by Bigas Luna, which is about cinema within cinema. An ophthalmologist who has gone blind dedicates himself to assassination and extracting the eyes of his victims. We discover afterward that it is really a film that two friends are watching in a theater in which an assassin enters.
- *Slugs, muerte viscosa* (1988) by Juan Piquer, is based on the novel by Shaun Hutson, and tells the story of a small American town menaced by a plague of carnivorous slugs.

4. Eliminating Complexes, Searching For an Identity of Its Own (1991-1999)

Spaniards are by now used to democracy; freedom of information is an everyday right and censorship just a bad memory from the past. By the early 1990's, there were already millions of adolescents who had never lived through the repression of the dictatorship and millions of adults who did not remember it. "El destape" is an irrelevant movement in a society accustomed to pornography. Spain has been European for nearly a decade, and in 1992 it achieves a level of international recognition never before seen, thanks to the Seville Expo and the Olympic celebration in Barcelona. It was the perfect moment to open up Spanish cinema to other genres badly neglected in previous decades. However, an important obstacle remained: Spanish heroes were not credible.

One cannot forget that the Spanish public was accustomed to seeing their actor compatriots primarily in comedic roles or, as in many cases, tragicomic roles. A great number of Spanish horror films from the late 1960's through the mid-1970's contained a multitude of Anglo-Saxon elements, from their titles to the settings. The actors themselves, when not actual foreigners, used pseudonyms and their characters were usually Americans. Even Jesús Franco used the name "Jess" for a long time when signing his works. Many of the principal works of Spanish horror film from this golden era respond to this structure: *Pánico en el transiberiano*, *Descanse en piezas* (Rest in Pieces), or *No profanar el sueño de los muertos* are some examples; another is *¿Quién puede matar a un niño?*, which, although set on a Spanish island, has two English tourists as its protagonists.

With action heroes, the situation was, if possible, even more extreme. The action genre in Spain was practically nonexistent, and many European productions would hide their origin in the same way that Spanish horror film

had done. A special mention goes to Italian genres like the so-called "spaghetti Western" and the films of Bud Spencer and Terence Hill (both born in Italy in spite of their Anglo-Saxon stage names).

The first hint of change in Spain came from the hand of director Alex de la Iglesia and his film *Acción mutante* (Mutant Action, 1993), in which acid humor mingles with scenes of violence in a futuristic environment. The director's greatest contribution was to make an action movie at the level of any U.S. blockbuster, but without renouncing the "Made in Spain" elements, even going as far as parody. The lead actor, Antonio Resines, a comic actor with a physique totally alien to the canons of the genre, became the first believable Spanish hero in our history. But the efforts of the director toward this change did not stop there; two years later he premiered the film that initiated a new era of glory for national horror film, both at the box office and for the critics: *El día de la bestia* (Day of the Beast).

From this title forward, a career was born in Spain that led to a new golden age, coinciding with the new millennium:

- *El día de la bestia* (1995) by Alex de la Iglesia, still in a humorous tone, tells of the arrival in the world of the Antichrist -right in the middle of Madrid's historic center- and the adventures of the inevitable Three Kings. A story replete with symbolism and critiques of the societal corruption at millennium's end.
- *Tesis* (Thesis, 1996) by Alejandro Amenábar, the first opus of one of the most acclaimed directors of contemporary Spanish cinema, is the story of a student in Information Sciences who researches the production of snuff films. All the elements in this film appear to be everyday for the spectator, from the professors to the students and the environment in which it is set (the Universidad Complutense in Madrid) -and yet the roles of heroes and villains seem as credible for the spectator as those of any foreign production. Things are already changing.
- *Los sin nombre* (Those Without A Name, 1999) by Jaume Balagueró shows us a hero in the purest Harrison Ford style, but without losing even an iota of its Spanish idiosyncrasy. Balagueró relates, in this film, the misadventures of the protagonist in his enthusiasm at discovering a child-kidnapping plot that will take him to an organization whose motives are far more sinister than he could have imagined.
- The death trilogy of Nacho Cerdá, composed of *The Awakening*, *Altermath*, and *Génesis*, revolutionized the world of short horror films. The

rawness of the imagery (saturated in the most brutal style of gore) and its hypnotic effort have a tremendous impact on the spectator.

5. A New Golden Age (2000-2009)

The path opened by De la Iglesia, Amenábar and Balagueró permitted other filmmakers to offer their visions to a broken-in audience desirous of new ways of experiencing terror, which would be set in a more intimate context (in counterpoint to films about American fraternities and those about Eastern terror), but which would maintain the already-familiar structures of the genre. Films like *El arte de morir* (The Art of Dying, 2000), *School Killer* (2001), *Tuno negro* (Black Rogue, 2001), *Pacto de brujas* (Witches' Pact, 2003), *Ouija* (2003), or *La monja* (The nun, 2004) are the national responses to films like *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (1974), *Halloween* (1978), or *Friday the 13th* (1979). Putting aside supposed subtexts, there is a succession of fantastic crimes in a limited community composed principally of adolescents.

But with the arrival of the new millennium, high-quality titles appeared as well, with more elaborate plots and greater critical recognition:

- *Los otros* (2001) by Alejandro Amenábar is the most-seen Spanish horror film in our country. Its director presents us with a Gothic tale of terror along Anglo-Saxon lines, including all the childhood fears. It features a woman on the Isle of Jersey, locked with her children -victims of photosensitivity- in a mansion where strange beings pursue them.
- *Frágiles* (The Fragile Ones, 2005) by Jaume Balagueró, in which the ghost of a tormented child persistently harms the patients in the children's wing of the hospital where he died. It enjoyed international distribution and first-class production.
- *El laberinto del Fauno* (2006) by Guillermo del Toro, is a fable that takes place in the middle of the Spanish Civil War, in which a child escapes from her daily drama, inventing a fantasy world full of magical and sinister creatures. As the story unfolds, the ingenuity of the protagonist's dream-worlds form a stark contrast with the cruel reality she tries fruitlessly to escape.
- *El orfanato* (The Orphanage, 2007) by Juan Antonio Bayona is the second Spanish horror film in terms of the number of viewers, and it shares

numerous elements with the first: ghosts, children, tall blonde mothers, confinement in a mansion, etc.

- *REC* (2007) by Paco Plaza and Jaume Balagueró begins with a “reality” broadcast in which a local reporter accompanies firemen on a workday. When they go to rescue an old woman who is trapped, she is discovered to be the victim of a strange virus that unleashes a wave of violence within the isolated building.
- *Aparecidos* (2008) by Paco Cabezas, in which a pair travels to Argentina in order to authorize the removal of their father from his life-sustaining machine. One day, they discover a diary that relates crimes committed twenty years before: a family is persecuted, tortured and exterminated, following step by step the facts described in the diary in front of the brothers’ impotent gaze.

Some other jewels

We have reviewed some of the most influential films in our particular history of horror, but we could not leave the list without adding a few more titles -not only for their historical relevance and cinematic quality, but also for being a *rara avis* within a genre replete with clichés and repetitive structures.

- *La cabina* (The Phone Booth, 1972), by Antonio Mercero who as later responsible for mythical television comedies like *Verano azul* (Blue summer) or *Farmacia de guardia* (Pharmacy on Call), terrorized the entire country in the midst of the genre’s golden age with this short film -almost a mid-length film- without dialogue, in which a well-known comedic actor (José Luis López Vázquez) is locked inside a phone booth. Its impact was such that for many years, it was common to see callers leaning heavily against phone booth doors to avoid the same fate. Rumors suggested that in some towns popular outcry led to the dismantling of booths, leaving phones unenclosed.
- *Vampiros en la Habana* (Vampires in Havana, 1985) by Juan Padrón is an animated feature film co-produced with Cuba in which various vampire gangs compete with each other to create a revolutionary invention: a solar protector that allows them to walk around in sunlight. An original treatment of vampires was realized for the first time in this film for adults, similar to the pioneering spirit of later films like *Blade* or *Underworld*, among others.
- The director of the short film *Aftermath* (1994), Nacho Cerdá, tells of the tremendous disturbance to which a young woman’s cadaver is subjected by

the worker charged with performing the autopsy. The realism and rawness with which the scenes are portrayed contributed to its being considered responsible for the famous false video of the autopsy of the Roswell extraterrestrials.

- *Gritos en el pasillo* (2007) by Juan José Rodríguez Mascaró. A young person arrives at the office of a shady psychiatrist to work as a temporary nurse. There he discovers secrets hidden in the institution that must not see the light of day. A tremendously claustrophobic film, with a carefully detailed ambience and scenography that recalls the milieus of Poe or Lovecraft. Oh, an animation film done entirely with real peanuts!

Reflection of the U.S.A.

While it is taken for granted that the imagery of classic monsters (ghosts, vampires, wolf-men, and Frankenstein's Monster, principally) originate in European literature, still -despite the fact that the first representations on celluloid come from German Expressionism: *Nosferatu* (1921) by Murnau or *Vampyr* (1930) by Dreyer- it is undeniably Hollywood that forged the image and personality that we associate with these characters. Films like *Dracula* (1931) by Todd Browning, *El doctor Frankenstein* (Doctor Frankenstein, 1931) by James Wale, or *El hombre lobo* (The Wolf Man, 1941) by George Wagner, among others, have exported their interpretation of literary classics to the remaining European productions of the era, principally English, which have relied on such characters.

In Spain, as well, these characters have been approached from the "Hollywood" version, but much later. While horror film in the U.S., already immersed in modernism, had set aside these classic characters and was exploring new monsters, less supernatural and romantic (*La semilla del diablo* -The Seed of the Devil, 1968-; *The Other*, 1972; *¡Estoy vivo!* -I Am Alive!, 1974; *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, 1974; *Jaws*, 1975; *Carrie*, 1977; *The Hills Have Eyes*, 1977; *Halloween*, 1978, among others), in the midst of Spain's golden age for the genre many filmmakers dedicated themselves to spreading the stories they grew up with twenty years earlier. In this vein, we find Spanish national versions of:

- The wolf man: *La marca del hombre lobo* (Mark of the Wolf Man, 1968) by Enrique López Eguiliz, *La furia del hombre lobo* (Rage of the Wolf Man, 1971) by José María Zabalza, *La noche de Walpurgis* (1971) by León

Klimovsky, or *El retorno del hombre lobo* (Return of the Wolf Man, 1981) by Jacinto Molina.

- Dracula: *El conde Drácula* (Count Dracula, 1970) by Jess Franco, *La saga de los Drácula* (The Saga of the Draculas, 1972) by León Klimovsky, or *El gran amor del conde Drácula* (The Great Love of Count Dracula, 1972) by Javier Aguirre.
- Frankenstein's Monster: *Drácula contra Frankenstein* (Dracula Against Frankenstein, 1971), or *La maldición de Frankenstein* (The Curse of Frankenstein, 1972), both by Jess Franco.

But this tendency, which -save for a few exceptions (*Licántropo*— The Hunchback by Francisco Gordillo, in 1966, and *Killer Barbys vs Drácula*, also by Jess Franco, in 2002)- vanished forever with the dawn of the 1980's, did not prevent Spain from adding to the list of those who exploited American blockbusters. There are two clear examples: the first draws directly from *The Exorcist* (1972) by William Friedkin. A film that not only has motivated various sequels (and prequels), but also served as inspiration for numerous productions inside and outside of the United States, curiously all within two or three years of its premiere, such as *El anticristo* (The Anti-Christ, 1974) by Albert de Martino, *Abby* (1974) by William Girdler, *Chi sei?* (Who Are You?, 1974) by Ovidio G. Assonitis, *El medallón ensangrentado* (The Bloody Medallion, 1975) by Máximo Dallamano and, of course, the Spanish *Exorcismo* (1974) of Juan Bosch.

The second example is *The Night of the Living Dead* (1968) by George A. Romero. To extend our discussion to all the films that grew out of this phenomenon (principally in Italy) would require an entire article, but we will at least mention that four years before the sequel's premiere, Spain, in coproduction with England, released its own version: *No profanar el sueño de los muertos* by Jorge Grau. A film that, in spite of containing much less gore than its Italian step-siblings, demonstrates a far greater interest in telling a self-sufficient story rather than being a mere dependent product of the original.

Halloween (1978) and *Friday the 13th* (1979), which delineated the basis for the new postmodernist monster -the psychopath- also had a great following in Spain. However, the historical context complicates their assimilation on the part of the national filmmakers of that era and, once again, their influence on Spanish horror film went unseen until twenty years later, probably aided by the twist on the concept seen in *Scream* (1996) by

West Craven. Films like *Nadie conoce a nadie* (Nobody Knows Anybody, Mateo Gil, 1999), *El arte de morir* (The Art of Dying, Álvaro Fernández Armero, 2000), or *Tuno Negro* (Pedro L. Barbero, 2001) are some of the descendants of this old-new villain.

¿Signs of Identity?

In that case, is there nothing original in Spanish horror film? One response to this question would require a return to the concept of originality (on which we commented at the beginning of this article), but, above all, we would need an analysis of the very nature of terror, or rather of what provokes fear in us (Pérez and García, 2005).

One of the major obstacles in any science is, at least at the beginning, confronting the existing body of knowledge relative to the object of study. This knowledge, significantly consolidated in the oral tradition, tends to arise from non-systematic observations that derive from explanations in the natural world (often animist). In the case of psychology, a very recent science, the very object of study inherently adds a greater difficulty owing to the problem of distancing oneself for objective research.

The result? A great quantity and variety of words to define supposed psychological phenomena, naturally with ambiguous semantics and dependent on cultural, historical and even geographic variables. Many psychologists have found themselves in the crucible of having to explain forms of conduct that, even with traditional linguistic distinctions, do not effectively demonstrate their independent nature, even their very existence. What is understood to be "emotion" is a clear example (García and Pérez, 2005).

Scientific psychology's treatment of the study of emotions has been overturned mainly in three ways: 1) its typification (centered in physiological or gesture variables), 2) its verbalization, and 3) its prediction and control. This last objective includes the identification of the causal variables for those reactions that we label as emotional (and let us not forget that language is a consensual artifice).

Emotion, in this way, can be considered a reflex reaction -that is, a behavior, a state of being, a predisposition touched off by some earlier event (stimulus). This reaction might be innate or learned as a function of whether those stimuli affect us from birth (unconditioned stimuli or EI's) or require

some association with these stimuli (conditional stimuli or EC's), the famous classic or "Pavlovian" conditioning.

Two different types of emotional reactions touched off by unconditioned stimuli have been identified: happiness (enticing, positive or agreeable unconditioned stimuli) and fear (aversive, negative or disagreeable unconditioned stimuli). Some other learned reactions such as hope (when stimuli appear that have been associated with enticing EI's), deception (stimuli that signal the non-appearance of an enticing EI), relief (stimuli that predict that non-appearance of an aversive EI), and anxiety (stimuli that have been associated with aversive EI's).

Readers should forgive this lengthy dissertation, so apparently unrelated to the cinematographic, but we consider it necessary in order to respond to the question with which we began this aside, and that is whether "there is nothing new under the sun." If fear is an innate reflex (in contrast to learned or acquired behaviors), the events which most startle us -that make us jump out of our chair (or thus we refer to the cinematic experience)- are, and have always been, the same. But which are they? Mainly, stimuli which are intense (loud noises, sudden movements, pain, etc.) or novel, with the exception of those that refer to evolutionary dangers specific to our species (like the sight of an owl to a small bird). These elements (in whichever of their possible variants) are those that make spectators scream, and have been present in horror film since its beginnings (Has anyone ever tried to watch a horror film without sound? It is simply not the same).

Where, then, is the element of creativity? Fundamentally, in three aspects:

- 1) The way in which you present, distribute, and abuse such aversive unconditioned stimuli. It is very common to distinguish between a "fright" movie and a "psychological terror" movie (a term that strikes us as redundant, as all terror is psychological), and in certain measure it all depends on the director's ability to shock the spectator -not to inure him to such stimuli.
- 2) The selection and presentation of anxiety-generating stimuli. It is the responsibility of the story's creators to seek out elements that awaken the learned fears of its spectators. Generating anxiety with a

film requires the identification of those stimuli that in a given society (with the variation this implies) have acquired this property.

- 3) The subject matter and general interest of a story. Seeking to "hook" the spectator with a story helps to relax and involve that viewer, avoiding a single-minded focus on frightening events that might then lose their impact.

Spanish horror film, therefore, is not differentiated from other manifestations of the genre in terms of the innate frightening elements that it employs or has employed. And, also as with other manifestations, it is unique with respect to the themes and learned fears to which it has repeatedly returned, at least before globalization erased these differences. For this reason, the era in which our own idiosyncrasy has been most evident coincides with the era of greatest production -that which we have denoted "the golden age." Leaving aside films that approach classic terror, mentioned in the previous aside, the most recurrent subject matter during these nearly three decades was witchcraft and the devil. Spain is a country with a broad tradition of religion, legends, wood creatures, witches, and run-ins with the devil (whom in Spain is recognized by dozens of names). Over centuries, its geography has been replete with small towns and villages with little access to culture or information from the outside world. This insular brew has enormously favored superstition and respect for supernatural forces, which are reflected in one of the world's most varied folklores.

Many of the films made between 1960 and 1980 employed these learned fears: the occult, invocations of the devil, witchcraft, human sacrifices, etc.; the most frequent settings were the solitary, isolated villages of northern Spain.

Some examples are *Fata Morgana* (Vicente Aranda, 1965), *El enigma del ataúd* (The Enigma of the Coffin, Santos Alcocer, 1969), *El perfil de Satanás* (Satan's Profile, Juan Logar, 1969), *El proceso de las brujas* (The Witches' Method, Jess Franco, 1969), *Una vela para el diablo* (A Candle For the Devil, Eugenio Martín, 1970), *Las amantes del diablo* (The Devil's Lovers, José María Elorrieta, 1971), *El monte de las brujas* (The Witches' Mount, Raúl Artigot, 1972), *La campana del infierno* (The Bell of Hell, Claudio Guerin Hill, 1973), *La noche de los brujos* (Night of the Witches, Amando de Ossorio, 1974), *La perversa caricia de Satán* (Satan's Perverse Caress, Jordi Gígó,

1975), *Inquisición* (Inquisition, Jacinto Molina, 1976), or *El juego del diablo* (The Devil's Game, Jorge Darnell, 1978).

That Which Is to Come

Fortunately, it seems that the genre in our country continues to gain force. The recent circumstances that support this phenomenon are numerous:

- The growing interest of a public free of old complexes, which paves the way for thousands of young people to go to the movies for a good scare without having to ponder the protagonist's origin or the historical context of a city.
- The cost reductions of digital moviemaking, which facilitate modest productions that maintain a standard of quality.
- Hollywood's crisis of ideas, which has diverted its best scriptwriters into television series and has enormously reduced the risks that cinematic productions are willing to assume. Never before has the genre been more wrapped up in repetitive sequels and remakes, both of current films from other countries (from the East and Europe, primarily) and of older movies (some of which are not even fifteen years old).
- A generation of authors raised on short films, a format that is currently enjoying a respectability and dissemination unique in its history (thanks to numerous festivals and the Internet), and which has expanded to include a broader cinematic offering than ever before.

Leaving aside for now the multiple rumors (we are in the midst of a "fake-generation"), we would like to conclude this summary by commenting on some of the most promising films whose release dates are confirmed throughout 2009:

- *REC2*: The greatest current exporters of the genre in our country, Jaume Balagueró, and Paco Plaza, both first-class directors, return to the most successful terror story of recent times. While the sequel of its "remake" (*Quarantine*) is being prepared in the U.S., in Spain *REC2* is already ready: more "survival-horror," more contagion, more zombies.
- *Imago Mortis*, a new story from the scriptwriter of the first part of *REC* (Luis Alejandro Berdejo) which tells of the return of a terrible technique discovered in the 17th century, "tanatography," which permits the dissemination of the last images witnessed by a recently deceased person.

- *Paint Ball*, by Daniel Benmayor. The latest response to rural terror, exploited more heavily in France and the U.S., in which a group of paint-ball players (who do not know each other) are left in the woods with provisions to last a weekend. The game becomes complicated when they discover that someone is using real bullets.
- *No-Do*, by Elio Quiroga. A ghost story in which a young woman who has just lost her newborn son begins to suffer visions in the country house where she has cloistered herself to overcome her trauma. From appearances, it seems that the answer to the mysterious business lies in old recordings of the Franco-era newsreel *No-Do*.

Long live horror film...in Spain!

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