

A CINEMA OF CONTRADICTION: PICAZO'S *LA TÍA TULA* (1964) AND THE NUEVO CINE ESPAÑOL

Even a cursory consideration of the political and industrial contexts of the Nuevo Cine Español (NCE), a movement of oppositional directors whose work was ironically funded by Franco's government, renders apparent its contradictions. Caught in a double bind, these film-makers attempted to reconcile the demands of the regime with their own political beliefs. But this was not simply a case of dissident auteur battling against repressive dictatorship, for in the 1960s the Francoist government itself was struggling to marry the mutually undermining objectives of retaining the dictatorship and at the same time opening up Spain to gradual liberalization, a process termed the *apertura*. In this article I argue that the tensions, or contradictions, of both the historical context of the *apertura* and the industrial context of the government's promotion of a Spanish art cinema were encoded in these NCE films, and focus on one key film of the movement, Miguel Picazo's *La tía Tula* of 1964. Other key films which might similarly be read as 'Cinema of Contradiction' would include Carlos Saura's *La caza* (1965) and Basilio Martín Patino's *Nueve cartas a Berta* (1965). Critics have named Saura's *Los golfos* (1959) as the first film of this movement,¹ which may be justified because of its thematic concerns and aesthetic influences, but, following Santos Zunzunegui, I define the NCE as the films funded by José María García Escudero's legislation from 1962 to 1967.² Drawing on Miguel de Unamuno's 1921 original, Picazo³ adapts this abstract tale to the particular circumstances of Spain in the 1960s and, through the characterization of Tula and Ramiro, scrutinizes the contradictions of Francoist ideology with respect to gender and sexuality. The film, furthermore, recursively examines its own contradictory genesis as part of a government-sponsored movement, especially Picazo's equivocal experience of artistic freedom yet ideological restraint. In this study I thus marry a focus on historical and industrial contexts with close readings of film form, especially the use of off-screen space, and the film's negotiation of the body.

If, in the early years of his dictatorship, Franco had successfully unified disparate elements of his ruling party to govern a country split by the Civil War, first in the FET y de las JONS,⁴ then the Movimiento Nacional, in the 1960s,

I would like to express my thanks to Alison Sinclair for her comments on an earlier version of this article.

¹ Vicente Molina-Foix, *New Cinema in Spain* (London: British Film Institute, 1977), p. 19; Marsha Kinder, *Blood Cinema: The Reconstruction of National Identity in Spain* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), p. 99.

² For further discussion of the problem of defining the limits of the NCE, see Santos Zunzunegui, 'De cuerpo presente: en torno a las raíces literarias del "Nuevo Cine Español"', in *La imprenta dinámica: literatura española en el cine español*, ed. by Carlos F. Heredero (Madrid: Academia de las Artes y las Ciencias Cinematográficas de España, 2002), pp. 103–05.

³ Luis Sánchez Enciso, José Miguel Hernán, and Manuel López Yubero also worked on the script. Further details of credits include: Eco Films and Surco Films (production companies); Antonio López Moreno (producer); Juan Julio Baena (director of photography); Antonio Pérez Olea (music); Luis Argüello (décor), and Pedro del Rey (editor).

⁴ Falanga Española Tradicionalista y de las Juntas de Ofensiva Nacional Sindicalista.

fissures in his government were again apparent. These tensions were now triggered not only by the coexistence of disparate ideologies such as Falangism and Carlism, but also by differing responses to the socio-economic changes consequent on the abandonment of autarky and the process of industrialization initiated by the Opus Dei technocrats' Plan de Estabilización of 1959. The long-term consequences of this economic about-turn would be difficult to overemphasize. As Alex Longhurst has pointed out, 'by the time of Franco's death in November 1975, Spain as a whole was a modern consumer society little different from others in Western Europe.'⁵ Our concern here is how the regime coped with these changes as they began to be felt in the 1960s.

The *apertura*, a period that dates from Manuel Fraga Iribarne's appointment as Minister of Tourism and Communications in 1962 to the cabinet reshuffle of 1969, can be seen as an attempt to counter the so-called 'desfase' which Paul Preston has identified as a characteristic of modern Spanish history. Such a 'lack of synchronization [. . .] between the social reality and the political power structure ruling over it'⁶ potentially describes the situation of 1960s Spain, a developing consumer society ruled by an anachronistic dictatorship. The *apertura* was an attempt to realign 'social reality' and 'political power structure'. It resulted in a contradictory compromise between traditionalist and liberalist tendencies within Francoism, an equivocal exercise in limited social reform by an authoritarian regime.

Arguably, this exercise was as much concerned with altering the image of Spain in the eyes of international observers as changing the lives of Spanish citizens. This was especially apparent in the legislation concerning cinema in this period, as distribution policy meant that, while NCE films toured foreign film festivals, they often had limited, if any, release in Spain.⁷ The contradictions of the NCE were thus clustered firstly around limited liberalization, as film-makers were given some artistic freedom but were still subject to censorship, and secondly around national identity, as this 'Spanish' cinema was destined through restrictive distribution for international, rather than national, audiences. Since *La tía Tula* was one of the three NCE films that were comparatively widely distributed in Spain,⁸ it is the former contradiction that principally concerns me here.

Fraga appointed García Escudero as director general of cinema in 1962, a post he held until 1967, to oversee film policy. García Escudero's background in film is revealing of the new direction the regime wanted Spanish cinema to take. He had held the same position in 1951, but was sacked the following year for

⁵ 'Culture and Development: The Impact of 1960s "desarrollismo"', in *Contemporary Spanish Cultural Studies*, ed. by Barry Jordan and Rikki Morgan-Tamosunas (London: Arnold, 2000), pp. 17–28 (p. 23).

⁶ Paul Preston, *A Concise History of the Spanish Civil War* (London: Fontana-HarperCollins, 1996), p. 10.

⁷ Molina-Foix, p. 20; Núria Triana-Toribio, *Spanish National Cinema* (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 81.

⁸ *La tía Tula* was released in both Salamanca (April 1964) and Madrid (September 1964). The other two films that were comparatively widely distributed were *Del rosa . . . al amarillo* (Manuel Summers, 1963) and *Nueve cartas a Berta*. See Norberto Alcover, quoted in José María Caparrós Lera, *El cine español bajo el régimen de Franco, 1936–1975* (Barcelona: Publicaciones Ediciones Universidad de Barcelona, 1983), p. 48; Triana-Toribio, p. 82.

awarding the category of 'interés nacional' to José Antonio Nieves Conde's *Surcos* (1951) over Juan de Orduña's turgid CIFESA (Compañía Industrial Film Español) biopic of Christopher Columbus, *Alba de América* (1951). *Surcos* tells us a great deal about the minister who championed it. While progressive in its adoption of the techniques and some of the concerns of Italian Neorealism,⁹ *Surcos* none the less reinforced reactionary Francoist morals in its vilification of the city, and is as such a contradictory hybrid that Marsha Kinder has described it as 'Falangist Neorealism' (p. 40). It thus projected the limits of García Escudero's own position: he called for a progressive, intellectual cinema, but one contained within the confines of the dictatorship. This characteristically *aperturista* belief in progress with limits is confirmed in García Escudero's 1962 publication *Cine español*, a book Fraga read before offering him the director generalship.¹⁰ The director general-in-waiting underlines in this work 'la necesidad de calidad' in Spanish cinema, and, writing as he was in an intellectual climate that still dismissed film as mindless entertainment for the masses, one is tempted to celebrate his commitment to, and knowledge of, the medium. None the less, he shows his anti-democratic colours in this work by insisting also on the necessity of political censorship in cinema.¹¹

The progress with limits that is expounded in theory in *Cine español* was put into practice in García Escudero's 1960s legislation. In line with the principle stated in his book that Spanish cinema would improve if its practitioners were better educated,¹² the director general's first change was to reorganize the state film school, the Instituto de Investigaciones y Experiencias Cinematográficas (IIEC), renaming it the Escuela Oficial de Cine. In 1963 censorship rules were published which, up to this point, had been unknown,¹³ and the following year García Escudero replaced the propagandist classification 'interés nacional', which proved so controversial in the *Surcos* case, with 'interés especial', meaning 'quality' or 'art' cinema.¹⁴ This alteration was part of a fourth change, the establishment of a new system of government subsidies dependent on the classification of a film according to censors' analysis of script (all Spanish films automatically received 15 per cent of box-office takings, but an 'interés especial' film could be awarded up to 50 per cent).¹⁵ Finally, 'salas de Arte y Ensayo' were established for subtitled foreign films and 'interés especial' films.¹⁶

Núria Triana-Toribio has noted that 'García Escudero's views [were] appro-

⁹ Even though Nieves Conde denied this influence: see Kathleen Vernon, 'Culture and Cinema to 1975', in *The Cambridge Guide to Modern Spanish Culture*, ed. by David Gies (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 248–66 (p. 256).

¹⁰ John Hopewell, *Out of the Past: Spanish Cinema after Franco* (London: British Film Institute, 1986), p. 65.

¹¹ José María García Escudero, *Cine español* (Madrid: Rialp, 1962), pp. 102 and 45–48.

¹² Escudero, Chapter 4.

¹³ This was one of the demands of the Conversations of Salamanca of 1955, in which García Escudero participated.

¹⁴ Pierre Bourdieu's insights are pertinent to interpreting García Escudero's attempt to define 'art' cinema, as Triana-Toribio has noted (pp. 65–69) in her reading of his 'Judgements of Taste'. See Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (London: Routledge, 1986).

¹⁵ All critics give this figure, except Vernon, p. 261, who quotes up to 70 per cent.

¹⁶ For further details on García Escudero's legislation, see Molina-Foix, Chapter 3; Román Gubern, *La censura: función política y ordenamiento jurídico bajo el franquismo (1936–1975)* (Barcelona: Ediciones Península, 1981), Chapter 6; Kinder, p. 4; Vernon, p. 261; Zunzunegui, p. 104 n. 1.

priated without discussion in many contemporary articles, books, encyclopaedias and dictionaries of Spanish cinema' (p. 66), and many critics have observed that his protectionist policy of film subsidy was readopted in democratic Spain by the PSOE Socialist government in the 1980s.¹⁷ This readoption reveals a remarkable divergence of opinion between practitioners of and commentators on Spanish cinema, for, notwithstanding the contemporary sources mentioned by Triana-Toribio, a survey of the subsequent assessment of García Escudero's reforms in scholarly accounts reveals widespread hostility.¹⁸ Vicente Molina-Foix, for instance, quotes one of the movement's foremost directors, Basilio Martín Patino, who, as early as 1968, referred to his sense of being part of a group of 'Court painters [. . .] Worse, individual prisoners, instruments of the interests which keep us alive' (p. 19). Molina-Foix, writing, it should be noted, before 1977 and hence before the abolition of censorship in Spain, decries García Escudero's policies for giving 'fictitious liberty', summarizing his legislation as 'hopelessly inadequate' (p. 17). In a later account, Casimiro Torreiro also dismisses the legislation as an 'operación propagandística y de escaparate exterior'.¹⁹ John Hopewell has furthermore pointed out that, financially, the NCE was seriously misconceived, as, with the exception of Angelino Fons's *Fortunata y Jacinta* (1970), the films were not commercially successful, which led to the state's unpaid debt of 230 million pesetas to Spanish producers by 1970.²⁰ More recently Triana-Toribio has herself argued that García Escudero's policies were elitist and didactic, exposing in her account the ways they rendered Spanish cinema-going audiences 'feminized and infantilized' (p. 67).

Faced with such blanket condemnation, it is tempting to write the NCE off as a case study in the wrongs of mixing politics and art. But this would mean dismissing the films themselves as the mere offshoots of an equivocal political experiment. The industrial and political background to the NCE is crucial, but the films also deserve our attention as aesthetic artefacts. This article aims to balance a concern with contexts and an examination of *La tía Tula* as a text, and to combine these twin objectives by analysing this film as an example of a 'Cinema of Contradiction'.

The idea of contradiction has previously led to an impasse. Critics have noted with exasperation the contradiction that the NCE directors who were educated at the state film school and encouraged to make films by government subsidies then found that their work was censored and inadequately distributed in Spain. Readings of the films often become elegies for the parts cut by the censors. Hopewell's interpretation of *La tía Tula*, for instance, is a regretful analysis of the losses suffered by a film 'of such composed understatement every scene counted' (p. 66), while Jorge Castillejo has used the emotive language of 'muti-

¹⁷ See e.g. Vernon, p. 262.

¹⁸ Full discussion of the reasons why García Escudero's subsidy policy was readopted by the Socialists falls outside the scope of this article. The interviews conducted by José María Caparrós Lera with professionals on the question of film protection (pp. 92–116) are a useful starting point. It is revealing that, of the eleven men interviewed, only one, Jorge Tusell Coll, had been consulted about the legislation under discussion, which was to become the PSOE's film policy (p. 94).

¹⁹ '¿Una dictadura liberal? (1962–1969)', in Román Gubern and others, *Historia del cine español* (Madrid: Cátedra, 1995), pp. 295–340 (p. 306).

²⁰ Augusto Torres, quoted in Hopewell, p. 65.

lación' to describe the censoring of the film.²¹ This approach is one encouraged by the statements we have from the directors themselves. The censors cut 4 minutes and 47 seconds from *La tía Tula*, and, with great poignancy, Picazo has subsequently described the removed sequences,²² affirming that, with them, 40–50 per cent of the impact of the film was lost.²³

In the light of such statements, it is tempting to adopt a critical position of lament, whereby an analysis of what remains of the film is eclipsed by a longing for what was cut. I suggest, however, that we may alternatively address a film like *La tía Tula* by focusing on how the contradictions of its historical and industrial contexts may be read within the film text itself. For instance, contradiction may be encoded at the levels of plot, casting, or formal techniques. One might also look for allegories of contradiction in the films, especially the director's equivocal experience of Molina-Foix's aforementioned 'fictitious liberty', or what Román Gubern has termed 'oposición controlada'.²⁴

La tía Tula was Picazo's first, and finest, film. He was a graduate of the state film school in 1960 (then the IIEC), but problems with both censorship and finance²⁵ meant that his earlier work *Jimena*, a corrective version of the Cid myth to challenge the Anthony Mann film,²⁶ was never made. After *La tía Tula*, Picazo became increasingly disillusioned, making only four further films.²⁷ *La tía Tula* was classified as 'interés especial' and thus received the maximum subsidy, enjoyed a degree of commercial success in Spain that was unusual for the NCE, and was critically successful, garnering prizes at such film festivals as San Sebastián (best director and best Hispanic film, 1964) and Prades, France (best foreign film, 1964), and winning the critics' prize in New York (1965).²⁸ The government's Sindicato Nacional del Espectáculo granted the best actress award to Aurora Bautista (1964), but the regime's uncomfortable response to *La tía Tula* is revealed by the fact that this prize was awarded for all of Bautista's work, thus diluting her performance in this film by also rewarding her earlier roles as patriotic Spanish heroines.

La tía Tula is a literary adaptation of Unamuno's novella, but substantially alters the original in ways that signal Picazo's own concerns.²⁹ Tula's sister Rosa and the period following Ramiro's second marriage are removed,³⁰ and we are left with a plot that focuses on Tula taking her brother-in-law, Ramiro, and niece and nephew, Tulita and Ramirín, into her home after the death of

²¹ *Las películas de Aurora Bautista* (Valencia: Fundació Municipal de Cine, 1998), p. 138.

²² Quoted in Castillejo, pp. 138–40.

²³ Quoted in Román Gubern, 'La tía Tula', in *Antología crítica del cine español 1906–1995: flor en la sombra*, ed. by Julio Pérez Perucha (Madrid: Cátedra; Filmoteca Española, 1997), pp. 561–63 (p. 563).

²⁴ *La censura*, p. 211.

²⁵ As he reveals in an interview with Antonio Núñez, 'Unamuno al cine (Miguel Picazo y *La tía Tula*)', *Insula*, 216–17 (1964), 7.

²⁶ Gubern, 'La tía Tula', p. 562.

²⁷ These were *Oscuros sueños eróticos de agosto* (1967); *Los claros motivos del deseo* (1977); *El hombre que supo amar* (1978); and *Extramuros* (1985). He then worked predominantly for television. See Augusto M. Torres, *El cine español en 119 películas* (Madrid: Alianza, 1997), pp. 238–39.

²⁸ Gubern, 'La tía Tula', p. 563.

²⁹ As my focus here is on the film as an example of a 'Cinema of Contradiction', my aim in the present context is not to offer an analysis of it as a literary adaptation.

³⁰ Cf. Miguel de Unamuno, *La tía Tula*, ed. by Carlos A. Longhurst (Madrid: Cátedra, 1996).

her sister. To summarize, Tula's understanding of 'aunthood' means that while she enthusiastically embraces the role of mother to the children, she rejects all physical contact with Ramiro. After Tula rejects his marriage proposal, Ramiro becomes increasingly frustrated and attempts to rape her, but Tula succeeds in fighting him off. On another occasion, aroused by Tula's apparent advances, he does violate her cousin Juanita. The girl falls pregnant, Ramiro marries her and takes the children with him, leaving Tula alone.

As well as pruning the plot, Picazo makes the temporal and geographical settings of Unamuno's abstract original concrete,³¹ stating in interview that, on reading the text, Tula reminded him of two women he actually knew.³² Thus the film is a tale of a woman in provincial Spain, shot in Guadalajara and Brihuega, in a period contemporary to its production. It is typical, though not inevitable, that film should render the abstract concrete, as cinema is, in a sense, the medium of the specific. Picazo further explains his intentions in the same interview in *Insula*:

Unamuno crea un ser de excepción, desorbitado. En la película se ha intentado lo contrario; es decir, acercar el personaje al público actual, para que lo reconozca y se sienta próximo a él, tome conciencia del problema en su dimensión real y, al mismo tiempo, le haga pensar en las consecuencias que se derivan del comportamiento de Tula y de Ramiro.

Unamuno's original abstract study thus becomes a specific denunciation (a 'problema' in 'su dimensión real') into which audiences are drawn ('reconocer' and 'sentirse próximo'). Though in a climate of censorship the target for that denunciation must remain unspoken, it is clearly the gender ideology of Franco's Spain. The comment made by Picazo's interviewer about the ending of the film reveals the effectiveness of this critique of contemporary society, and the use of the word 'algo' again indicates that the target cannot be named: 'Dan ganas de arremeter contra *algo*, para que tales cosas no ocurran.'

To explore these coded critiques, I shall examine three contradictions dealt with by the film—femininity, masculinity, and childhood—and refer in particular to the manipulation of *mise en scène* (particularly claustrophobic settings), cinematography (especially the use of off-screen space), editing (in particular the long take, as one of the remarkable features of this film is that the average take is an unusually lengthy two minutes), and, finally, sound (notably the significance of the switch between diegetic and non-diegetic sources).

While we must attribute the exploration of the Virgin/Mother dichotomy to Unamuno, Picazo responds to the way the Franco regime, especially in its neo-Catholic phase, enshrined the divorce between motherhood and sexuality, or sanitized motherhood, through the figure of the Virgin Mary. It is important to note the ways in which the gender ideology of the regime evolved, however. While Helen Graham has noted that, in the 1940s, the 'many incarnations of the Virgin provided the perfect role model' for women,³³ economic development

³¹ One aspect of Unamuno's art of the 'nivola' was to break with nineteenth-century realism, in which time and place are concrete, in favour of abstract settings and a focus on philosophical questions. See Alex Longhurst's introduction to *La tía Tula*, pp. 13–58.

³² Quoted in the Núñez interview.

³³ 'Gender and the State: Women in the 1940s', in *Spanish Cultural Studies: An Introduction*.

in the late 1950s and 1960s saw the incorporation of middle-class women in the labour force (working-class women had of course always been part of it) with concomitant revisions to the regime's official discourse on gender. In her study of this transformation of the discourses of femininity in the regime's Sección Femenina magazine *Teresa* in the 1960s, Rosario Coca Hernando demonstrates that, parallel to the tentative legal reforms in favour of women's rights, there appeared 'the image of the "modern" or "new" woman'.³⁴ Just like the political *apertura* I examine above, this figure was another contradictory reconciliation of old and new values, a woman who was, in the words of the Sección Femenina, 'antigua y siempre nueva' (Coca Hernando, p. 7), or, as Coca Hernando summarizes, representative of 'an ambivalent femininity which combined both the traditional and the modern' (ibid., p. 13). Picazo's treatment of Tula's aunt-hood, or attempt to be a Virgin Mary, or sexless mother, is therefore in part a *reductio ad absurdum* of the demand that women be 'pure' yet mothers, which highlights the absurdity of this contradictory expectation. The director also explores a contradiction between 'tradition' and 'modernity' through Tula's characterization, especially the consequences of her adherence to gender ideology that was outmoded and anachronistic by 1964.³⁵

One way that the film conveys such contradictions is its treatment of the body, specifically Tula's transcendence of her own body. The credit sequence, which follows Rosa's funeral wake, brings this to the fore. Tula sits on her own in a room and background activity can be glimpsed through a crack in the door. The viewer recognizes that this is not a freeze frame, and is led to believe that Tula is motionless for over two minutes, thus exercising incredible restraint over her own body.³⁶ Thus ideas of restraint and repression are linked both to the treatment of the body and to editing, as we assume that this is a long take with no cuts. The soundtrack is also crucial in this sequence as it expresses the emotions that cannot be found in the actress's face or body.³⁷ It is important also that this sound is non-diegetic, which looks forward to a central theme in the film: that emotion and desire are located off-screen, be that off-screen space or an off-screen source of music.

In this credit sequence, Tula transcends her body in terms of expressing emotion, but is in another sense trapped in it by the static camera and trick long take. In later sequences the treatment of Tula's body is similar. She is defined,

The Struggle for Modernity, ed. by Helen Graham and Jo Labanyi (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 182–95 (p. 184).

³⁴ 'Towards a New Image of Women under Franco: The Role of Sección Femenina', *International Journal of Iberian Studies*, 11 (1998), 5–13 (p. 5). I am grateful to Alex Longhurst for pointing out the relevance of this article to me.

³⁵ In her blind adherence to ideology, there is certainly scope for an Althusserian reading of Tula as an 'interpellated' subject. See Kinder, pp. 19–20, on the usefulness of Althusserian theory for interpreting oppositional Spanish cinema under Franco.

³⁶ Picazo has subsequently revealed how he created this credit sequence: by suturing five frames together again and again. See Castillejo, p. 136.

³⁷ Similarly, Asunción Gómez has noted that in *Calle Mayor* (Juan Antonio Bardem, 1956) the soundtrack expresses Isabel's emotions. See 'La representación de la mujer en el cine español de los años 40 y 50: del cine bélico al neorrealismo', *Bulletin of Spanish Studies*, 79 (2002), 575–89 (p. 588). Such a displacement of female emotions from diegetic voice to non-diegetic soundtrack is also typical of 1940s Hollywood melodrama.

or trapped, by her body in her new domestic role as mother. To indicate this, the first three sequences in her flat begin with close-ups of Tula's hands attending to domestic labour: first we see her hands clearing the table, then ironing, then sewing. The way these close-ups replace establishing shots also contributes to the sense of claustrophobia in these scenes. It is contradictory that Tula is also shown to transcend her body in a sexual sense. When Ramiro kisses her hands, for instance, we see her wash them in disgust. There is a visual echo between the close-ups of her hands completing household chores, which tie her body to domesticity, and the close-up of Tula washing those hands, and denying her body in a physical sense.

We might approach the scenes cut by the censors, and in particular one in which Tula's voluptuous enjoyment of her body is suggested, with the thesis of off-screen space in mind. Tula is shot in lacy black underwear, adjusting the suspender on her provocatively arched right leg.³⁸ For the viewer of the film as it stands, such a vision of Tula's body is never seen, but may be imagined, and thus becomes a potent aspect of unseen off-screen space. This apparently lamentable censors' cut actually enhances, therefore, the association of off-screen space with repressed desire, which is central to *La tía Tula*.

A sequence that takes place towards the end of the film when the family is on holiday in the country further demonstrates this thesis of off-screen space as the site and source of sexual desire. There are similarities and differences between this sequence and the rest of the film. The long takes are similar, indicating entrapment and claustrophobia, as is the use of the mirror, which by this point in the film we have come to understand as a symbol of entrapment within the frame. The music, which we at first assume is non-diegetic, points to desire and emotion as it has throughout the film. The difference in this sequence is our discovery that the music is diegetic, as Tula later tells Ramiro that it has woken her up. Literally and figuratively awoken then, Tula seeks her object of desire, Ramiro. Just as the music shifts from non-diegetic to diegetic, so Ramiro emerges from off-screen space to on-screen space, gliding into our field of vision when Tula has her back turned in the kitchen. The sexual tension of this sequence is more palpable here than elsewhere in the film. Tula drinks a glass of water, and the sexual connotations of drinking and eating are not accidental. This is especially the case since in the rest of the film Tula's maternal relationship with Ramiro is articulated through her repeatedly feeding and watering him.

While this sequence hints at the resolution of repressed sexual desire, the film ends with repression. In the final sequence, Ramiro leaves on a train, and is thus lost to Tula for ever in off-screen space, while she remains at the station trapped in the frame. This important ending intertextually cites that of *Calle Mayor*, in which Isabel also remains in a provincial station, refusing to board the train and leave her life of frustration,³⁹ and looks forward to the celebrated

³⁸ See Castillejo, p. 48, where a still of this prohibited sequence is reproduced.

³⁹ A further similarity between these films is that they both start and end with funerals. Each features an actual coffin in the first sequences (Rosa's coffin in *La tía Tula* and the joke coffin in *Calle Mayor*) and each a figurative entombment of their female protagonists, Tula and Isabel, in their conclusions.

ending of *La casa*, whose protagonist is likewise figuratively trapped in the frame through a freeze-frame shot.

This thesis of off-screen space also enables us to account for the way the casting against type of Aurora Bautista contributes to the exploration of contradictory femininity in the film. Critics have previously noted that Bautista's role as a repressed aunt contrasts with her embodiment of the energetic historical heroines of Juan de Orduña's CIFESA epics *Locura de amor* (1948) and *Agustina de Aragón* (1950), which were her most famous roles.⁴⁰ Her more recent incarnations are also significant. In *La gata* (Margarita Alexandre and Rafael Torrecilla, 1956), for instance, Bautista played the title role of the sexually active woman (the meaning of 'gata' in Spanish). Susan Martin-Márquez has argued that Bautista's character María 'is humanized through association with the feline animal: her re-baptism as "la gata" frees her from the immobilizing Marianist pedestal upon which women of the era were expected to maintain an other-worldly transcendence of the flesh'.⁴¹ These connotations of active historical heroines, and lusty contemporary women, all contribute to Bautista's star image, which is harnessed by Picazo to contrast with her role as Tula in fruitful ways. Even if not planned, another dimension adds to the sense of tension and contradiction conveyed by *La tía Tula*. When playing the character, Bautista was herself a newly-wed, as she subsequently recounts: 'Ese personaje es el mejor que he hecho en mi vida, aunque lo hice *con tensión bastante fuerte*, porque tenía que interpretar a una solterona cuando en realidad estaba en luna de miel.'⁴² Even if audiences were unaware of this, Bautista's portrayal of the frigid old maid encourages them to compare this character with her previous roles. It underpins the contradiction of femininity explored by the film, because the very presence of Bautista highlights the pointed absence of sexuality that forms part of her earlier roles.⁴³

The treatment of masculinity in *La tía Tula* allows Picazo to explore a related set of contradictions. Studies of masculinity in Western Europe and the United States cite the period after the Second World War as a time of 'crisis' over male roles, because a military definition of masculinity had to be reconciled with the peacetime situation, and women were seen to have 'taken over' male jobs. Labanyi has noted that, in Franco's Spain, 'the enforced return of women to the hearth after the war made such anxieties unnecessary', but that none the

⁴⁰ Gubern, 'La tía Tula', p. 562; Castillejo, p. 2. Jo Labanyi notes that the famous image of Bautista firing a canon in *Agustina de Aragón* 'passed into the popular imaginary through its reproduction in children's storybooks and on postage stamps, calendars and brand labels' ('Feminizing the Nation: Women, Subordination and Subversion in Post-Civil War Spanish Cinema', in *Heroines without Heroes: Reconstructing Female and National Identities in European Cinema 1945–51*, ed. by Ulrike Sieglöhr (London: Cassell, 2000), pp. 163–84 (p. 176)). A still of this image is reproduced on the cover of this book.

⁴¹ *Feminist Discourse in Spanish Cinema: Sight Unseen* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 255.

⁴² Quoted in Castillejo, p. 46 (emphasis added).

⁴³ These may have been some of the artistic reasons for Picazo's decision to cast Bautista. This choice of a popular actress also indicates Picazo's concern to attract Spanish audiences to *La tía Tula*, as Torreiro notes (p. 314), and may explain why the film's producer López Moreno felt the film might be successful 'como cine popular' (see the Núñez interview). This counters the frequent claim that the aloof, auteurist NCE directors viewed their audiences with disdain and felt themselves to be above commercial concerns.

less a 'demilitarization' of male roles had to be performed.⁴⁴ She has also argued that this transition of roles was played out in films of the late 1940s (specifically 1945–51), which tended to contrast strong heroines with weak heroes, and in this regard the aforementioned *Agustina de Aragón* is exemplary. In her instructive survey, Labanyi argues that 'the year 1951 marked the end of this focus on the family and the feminine, as the development of an oppositional cinema led to a new stress on the political with plot lines consequently focused on the male'.⁴⁵ In the NCE of the 1960s, plots still tended to focus on the male, e.g. *La caza* and *Nueve cartas a Berta*, but it is worth making the point that this was in order to expose and explore male ineffectuality and angst.⁴⁶ I suggest that *La tía Tula* is a film that bridges these two tendencies and reveals the connections between them. On the one hand, like the popular late 1940s cinema analysed by Labanyi, it contrasts a strong female with an ineffectual male protagonist, and, on the other, like contemporary NCE films, it depicts a crisis in masculinity. If the conclusion that *La tía Tula* shows that these are just two sides of the same coin is obvious, the connections this reveals between popular cinema of the 1940s and auteurist cinema of the 1960s are not.⁴⁷

In *La tía Tula* Ramiro is set up as a counterpoint to Tula in every sense. Her authority in the domestic realm is opposed to his weakness. This opposition is portrayed through characterization and plot, which derive from Unamuno, but is underscored by filmic means such as casting and the depiction of the body. Ramiro is played by the little-known Argentine actor Carlos Estrada (and he retains his accent in the film)⁴⁸ in contrast to the famous Spanish star Bautista. Male disempowerment is also underpinned by the film's negotiation of the male body, which symbolically infantilizes the male character.

At the start of the film there seems to be an equivalence between Ramiro and Tula: both are figuratively trapped within the frame and, for both, desire is relegated to off-screen space. For example, a daytime sequence and a nighttime sequence allow us to appreciate Ramiro's sense of entrapment in Tula's flat through locating the source of sound in off-screen space. In the first scene, we hear children playing outside in the street, an off-screen space, and then share a point of view shot with Ramiro as he gazes longingly at their childhood

⁴⁴ 'Masculinity and the Family in Crisis: Reading Unamuno through *Film Noir* (Serrano de Osma's 1946 Adaptation of *Abel Sánchez*)', *Romance Studies*, 26 (1995), 7–21 (p. 21 n. 11 and p. 12).

⁴⁵ 'Feminizing the Nation', pp. 164–65.

⁴⁶ Furthermore, a current of films in the early 1970s returned to the opposition of 'heroines without heroes', as I have argued in my reading of Emma Penella's roles in *Fortunata y Jacinta* (Fons, 1970) and *La Regenta* (Gonzalo Suárez, 1974). See *Literary Adaptations in Spanish Cinema* (London: Tamesis-Boydell & Brewer, 2004), Chapter 4.

⁴⁷ We might also speculate here that Picazo was influenced by his former IIEC professor, Carlos Serrano de Osma, who adapted Unamuno in his *Abel Sánchez* (1946). This film, Labanyi has demonstrated in 'Masculinity and the Family in Crisis', foregrounds issues of gender and, in particular, problematic masculinity.

⁴⁸ Manuel Villegas López is wrong to state that Estrada is 'netamente español' (*Nuevo cine español* (San Sebastián: XV Festival Internacional del Cine, 1967), p. 74). This is an assimilative, nationalistic remark. Estrada's foreignness is in fact part of the point of his casting, and intersects with the ways other Spanish film genres contrast famous female Spanish stars with unknown foreign male actors, such as the *folklórica* and the costume drama: see Labanyi, 'Race, Gender and Disavowal in Spanish Cinema of the Early Franco Period: The Missionary Film and the Folkloric Musical', *Screen*, 38 (1997), 215–31, and Faulkner, Chapter 4, respectively.

fun. In the night sequence we similarly share Ramiro's perspective as he hears drunken revellers return home, a sound that also emanates from an off-screen space, and we again appreciate his longing to join them.

However, the difference between Tula and Ramiro is indicated by the differing treatment of the female and male body. As mentioned above, from the start of the film Ramiro is infantilized by Tula, who attends to his body as a mother would a baby. For instance, she feeds his body, and one of the first things we see him do is burp like a baby after a meal. She also dresses his body, and in one carefully composed sequence she checks what Ramirín is wearing, then what Ramiro is wearing, Picazo ensuring that both characters stand in the same place and in the same way so that we notice the parallel. Finally, Tula nurses Ramiro's body when he is ill. This process of infantilization is reinforced by language, when Tula addresses Ramiro as a child using babyish terms like 'rey' and playful scolding like 'qué Ramiro es ése'. An early sequence is telling in this regard. Tula serves Ramiro lunch and insists he wear a comically oversized napkin over his suit, which she has him tuck into his collar so that the viewer cannot miss that it is meant to recall a baby's bib. Notwithstanding this infantilizing attire, Ramiro is at his most assertive in this sequence, questioning Tula about why she is avoiding marriage with Emilio. The argument that ensues between the two significantly results in a challenge to Ramiro's manhood. 'Pero soy un hombre,' he pleads, still wearing the bib, then adds the telling '¿o qué si no?'

Tula's attempts to desex Ramiro's body by infantilizing him are doomed. But even though he emerges as a potent sexual force who attempts to rape Tula and does rape Juanita, Ramiro in fact remains infantilized as he is still defined exclusively in terms of his body. The need of an infant to be fed, clothed, and nursed simply transfers to that of a man for sex. It is important that Ramiro's body is on two occasions displayed in *La tía Tula*, as this further indicates that he is defined by it. In an early sequence he strolls down the corridor of the flat in a vest, and Tula draws our attention to his body by asking him to cover it up. In a later sequence, when the family are in the country, Ramiro bathes with the children and we see him in swimming trunks. This contrasts with Tula, who is fully dressed in black as she looks on from the river bank, and even her eyes are covered by sunglasses. As a male character who is defined by his body, Estrada's Ramiro therefore takes on the role that, according to feminist film critics, women are typically assigned on screen. In *La tía Tula*, we have a dominant female lead, and a secondary male character whose role is that which Laura Mulvey famously claimed mainstream narrative cinema gives to women on screen: 'to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness*'.⁴⁹

If Tula's mothering of Ramiro infantilizes and feminizes him, what effect does it have on the infants themselves? Picazo's *La tía Tula* implicitly blames Tula's repression on the poverty of her education, but explicitly demonstrates that this situation recurs in her education of Tulita, whose destiny to become another Tula is made clear through her diminutive name. *La tía Tula* figures

⁴⁹ 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', in *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*, ed. by Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen, 5th edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 833–44 (p. 837).

maternity as suffocation: under Tula's care both Ramiro and Tulita fall ill (Ramirín remains healthy as he does his best to ignore Tula). She promotes illness rather than growth; her nurturing is symbolic smothering.⁵⁰ This depiction of child-rearing allegorizes Picasso's own contradictory creative experience.⁵¹ While on the one hand the state, like a nurturing mother, promoted artistic growth through subsidy, on the other it stifled that growth through censorship. In this sense we may see Tulita as Picasso's on-screen surrogate. Her experiences therefore become doubly representative, of both childhood under Franco and the director's stunted creativity.

Two sequences are of particular interest in this regard. First, there is the disturbing sequence of Tulita's self-imposed muteness. We learn through Ramirín that she has promised to be silent for two hours a day for a month, presumably in training for her future role as an ideal silent woman and to please her aunt. In the sequence when the two hours of one day come to an end, we can hardly read her cry '¡ya puedo hablar!' as anything but ironic. It is straightforward to read this scene as an allegory of Picasso's position as an NCE director. If Francoist censorship gagged Spain's artists, its promotion of art cinema through García Escudero's legislation in the 1960s gave directors only an illusory freedom to speak.

The second sequence is more complex to read. It takes place when Tulita is at home sick and plays at dressing up. Decked out with exaggerated symbols of femininity (hat, shawl, ostrich feathers, and high heels), she sings a religious song in practice for her first communion to a family portrait of a dead female cousin.⁵² Next, her aunt discovers her brother Ramirín's naughty photographs of women in underwear. Meanwhile, two *colchoner*s toil in the background, beating the stuffing of Ramiro's mattress. Rather convoluted on the page, this sequence is dense and layered on the screen also. One layer is the exploration of female identity formation in a repressive society. Tulita's adult women's clothes, together with Ramirín's underwear pictures, point to her future societal role, and mean that her holy communion looks forward to her marriage not to Christ, but to a man. Furthermore, it is telling that these references to femininity exaggerate female sexuality. Recalling the censored images of Tula's saucy underwear, Tulita dresses in the clothes of a hooker, and Ramirín's photographs

⁵⁰ This is doubtless the background to both the symbolic revenge visited upon mother figures in Spanish films of the 1970s, like *Pascual Duarte* (Ricardo Franco, 1975) and *Furtivos* (José Luis Borau, 1975), and to the psychologically disturbed children who populate other films of that period, like *El espíritu de la colmena* (Víctor Erice, 1973) and *Cría cuervos* (Saura, 1975). I am grateful to Rob Miles for drawing my attention to this first point.

⁵¹ Marvin D'Lugo has developed the concept of 'allegories of authorship' in detail in his *The Films of Carlos Saura: The Practice of Seeing* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), p. 9.

⁵² The importance of the female portrait in Spanish cinema, which no doubt echoes its prominence in 1940s Hollywood *film noir*, deserves further attention. It plays a significant role, for instance, in *Harka* (Carlos Arévalo, 1941), where Carlos's final embrace of nationalistic masculinity is conveyed by his ripping up of the photograph of his fiancée. Conversely, in *Balarassa* (Nieves Conde, 1950), the portrait of the dead mother watches over the family and acts as a transmitter of traditional and religious values, and the portrait of another dead matriarch, Antonia, plays a similar role in *La ciudad no es para mí* (Pedro Lazaga, 1966). On the role of the portrait in 1940s Hollywood film, see Helen Hanson, 'Painted Women: Framing Portraits in *Film Noir* and the Gothic Women's Film in the 1940s' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Southampton, 2001).

also point to prostitution. This seems to indicate that a distorted version of femininity and gender difference arises from a repressive context, like that of Franco's Spain. Noteworthy also is the way this sequence clearly influences Saura's treatment of the same subject a decade later in *Cría cuervos* (1975), where the three sisters also dress up and act out adult scenarios, and Irene cuts out photographs of female pop stars and models, which recall Ramirín's underwear pictures, and pastes them into a scrapbook.⁵³

Picazo's sequence is also an ironic commentary on the plot of *La tía Tula*. Tulita sings of 'la virgen concebida sin pecado original' as the workers beat the mattress, but this does not just register a disjuncture between the worldly and the other-worldly. We know from an earlier sequence that Ramiro cannot sleep on that mattress owing to his sexual frustration, and Tula, refusing to recognize this cause, decides that the solution is to have it beaten to plump it up again.

The detail of the mattress-beating may do more than comment on the plot. Given that it obviously reminds us of a bed, it may be instructive to consider the sequence as a dream scenario, even though in terms of narrative it is not signalled as such.⁵⁴ If it is the representation of a dream, we may read it as the projection of Tula's fears. Tulita embodies a series of irreconcilable contradictions that govern Tula's character. The child is the fruit of the carnal union of Ramiro and Rosa, yet she sings of conception without original sin, and thus projects Tula's inability to reconcile sexuality and maternity. The activity of beating the mattress would underpin this denial of the flesh as it recalls the practice of self-flagellation. According to this interpretation, the clothing, portrait, and religious song might all be seen as symbols of the societal expectations that also rule Tula's life. The sequence depicts the way the individual must fall into line, a process that is startlingly interrupted by the fact that Tulita falls over. This sequence of a child, ludicrously dressed in adult's clothes that cause her to trip up, holding a portrait of a dead female relative that obscures her vision and also causes her to stumble, and singing a religious song that absorbs her concentration and also contributes to her fall, is perhaps one of the most evocative representations in Spanish cinema of the coercion of the individual in a repressive society. As such it may also therefore be interpreted as an allegory of the compromised artist, labouring, like Picazo, under overbearing ideologies.

The contradictory nature of *La tía Tula*, a film that arose from the equivocal historical context of the *apertura* and industrial context of an art cinema funded by the dictatorship, is revealed on examination of the formal techniques employed by Picazo, especially in relation to gender and sexuality and the experience of childhood, which I argue may be read as an allegory of the director's own contradictory creative position. This thesis of contradiction is thrown into relief when we consider the characterization of Tula, the film's protagonist. *La tía Tula* does not give us a female character who rebels against societal expectations as we might expect in dissident cinema, the most famous instance of which is the ending of Luis Buñuel's *Viridiana* (1961). For Tula, 'aunthood', or the equivocal combination of motherhood and virginity, is an entirely logical interpretation of society's expectations. However, the development of the plot

⁵³ For a reading of these sequences in *Cría cuervos* see D'Lugo, pp. 132–33.

⁵⁴ My thanks to Stephen Forcer for suggesting the idea of the dream to me.

of the film alerts us to the contradictory, and disturbing, consequences of Tula's position. The first is the existence of prostitutes, and in this regard the censors' decision to cut images of Tula's body, yet leave those of prostitution, seems to indicate the double moral standards of a society in which brothels were legal until 1956 and their prohibition was never enforced.⁵⁵ Particularly telling is a remark made by Núñez, Picazo's interviewer in *Insula*, with respect to prostitution. He asks why Ramiro insists on pursuing Tula, when he could simply use prostitutes as a 'válvula de escape'. The second consequence of Tula's position is a very troubling justification of rape.⁵⁶ The plot of the film details Ramiro's growing sexual frustration, which renders his attempted rape of Tula, and actual rape of Juanita disturbingly logical. Through its treatment of gender and sexuality, *La tía Tula* thus reveals that beneath an apparent surface coherence lies contradiction. Ramiro's aggressive sexuality, and the future exaggerated sexual behaviour of Ramirín and Tulita, are paradoxically triggered by Tula's understanding of femininity as based on repression of the flesh.

UNIVERSITY OF EXETER

SALLY FAULKNER

⁵⁵ John Hooper, *The New Spaniards* (London: Penguin, 1995), p. 166.

⁵⁶ Martín-Márquez notes (p. 150) that a number of films of this period justify rape, such as Summers's *Adiós, cigüeña, adiós* (1971), which passes it off 'as intimacy'.