

The Queer Child in the *Nuevo Cine Español*

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Resumen

*El Nuevo Cine Español empleó frecuentemente la mirada de los niños para mostrar los efectos traumáticos de la guerra civil y la postguerra en la sociedad española. La crítica vio en estos niños figuras propicias para construir alegorías políticas en las que esos niños, como la propia España, crecían marcados por el pasado represivo y, simultáneamente, representaban la esperanza de un futuro emergente. Un rasgo prominente de este discurso es que asume que estos filmes son historias de "niños inocentes". En este ensayo, argumento que ese discurso se ha convertido en dominante a expensas de aspectos de la subjetividad de los niños protagonistas como su sexualidad, que queda silenciada al privilegiar el mito de la inocencia infantil. Apoyándome en las herramientas de la teoría queer, analizo tres filmes que cuestionan las implicaciones heteronormativas de este concepto de inocencia infantil. En *Cría cuervos* (1976), Carlos Saura esboza un retrato queer de la "niña inocente" al presentar su sexualidad no necesariamente unida a la lógica reproductiva que sustenta el orden heterosocial. En la última sección, analizo cómo Jaime de Armiñán ofrece en *El amor del capitán Brando* (1974) y *El nido* (1980) un replanteamiento de las relaciones intergeneracionales alejadas del espectro del abuso infantil (y de las narrativas góticas de villanos y víctimas) con las que estas relaciones son típicamente conceptualizadas. Al cuestionar el modelo secuencial de desarrollo sexual, estos dos filmes presentan a los niños como sujetos deseantes con voluntad para expresar y negociar sus impulsos sexuales y sus afectos.*

Palabras clave: niños queer; inocencia infantil; sexualidad infantil; Carlos Saura; Nuevo Cine Español; Jaime de Armiñán; sexo intergeneracional

Abstract

*The Nuevo Cine Español often employed the gaze of children as an effective strategy to show the traumatic effects of events such as the Civil War and Francoism on the Spanish society. Spanish film critics considered children apt figures to be constructed as political allegories. The children, like Spain itself, were haunted by the repressive past and, simultaneously, constituted the hope for an emerging future. This view assumes that these films are stories of "childhood innocence." This essay argues that this scholarly discourse has become prevailing at the expense of overlooking significant aspects of the subjectivity of these celluloid children. One of those aspects is their sexuality, which has been virtually erased to privilege the myth of childhood innocence. Drawing on the critical lens of queer theory, I analyze three films that question the heteronormative implications of this myth of childhood innocence. In *Cría cuervos* (1976), Carlos Saura delineates a queer portrait of the "innocent girl" by*

presenting her sexuality not necessarily tied to the logic of reproduction that underpins the heterosocial order. In the last section of the essay, I examine how Jaime de Armiñán offers in *El amor del capitán Brando* (1974) and *El nido* (1980) a rethinking of cross-generational relationships dislodged from the spectre of child sexual abuse (and from gothic narratives of villains and victims) through which these bonds are usually conceptualized. Questioning the sequential model of sexual development, these two films represent children as desiring subjects in their own right with agency to express and negotiate their affects and sexual impulses.

Key words: *queer child; childhood innocence; infantile sexuality; Carlos Saura; Nuevo Cine Español; Jaime de Armiñán; intergenerational sex*

The *Nuevo Cine Español* employed the gaze of what Marsha Kinder called “the children of Franco” as an effective strategy to show the traumatic effects of the Civil War and Francoism on Spanish society (“The Children” 59). Children were apt figures to construct political allegories in which those children, like Spain itself, were haunted by the past and, simultaneously, constituted the hope for an emerging future. These political allegories are contingent on the assumption that children are innocent and vulnerable. Unable to understand the adult world—including the political and historical events they are presumed to represent allegorically—they are malleable vehicles subjected to the narrative control of adults. Scholars of Spanish cinema have unanimously embraced this appropriation of “the children of Franco” as innocent placeholders of political messages, suitable to stand in for everything except for themselves. This article argues that this scholarly discourse has become prevailing at the expense of overlooking significant aspects of the subjectivity of these celluloid children. One of those aspects is their sexuality, which has been virtually erased by becoming subsumed to a linear model of development that is the *sine qua non* of the notion of childhood innocence. Drawing on the critical lens of queer theory, I want to explore another perspective of this issue by focusing on three key films. First, I will offer a brief theoretical exposition of the heteronormative implications sustaining the myth of childhood innocence. Then, I will analyze *Cría cuervos* (1976), where Carlos Saura delineates a queer portrait of the “innocent child” by rendering infantile sexuality not necessarily tied to the logic of reproduction underpinning the heterosocial order. In the last section, I will examine how Jaime de Armiñán offers in *El amor del capitán Brando* (1974) and *El nido* (1980) a radical rethinking of intergenerational relationships dislodged from the specter of child sexual abuse (and from the gothic narratives of villains and victims) through which these bonds are usually conceptualized. Challenging the dominant sequential model of sexuality, these two films present children as desiring subjects in their own right with agency to express and negotiate their sexual impulses and affects.

The Biopolitical Production of Innocence

The post-Enlightenment notion of the “innocent child” has been a suitable figure to construct cultural metaphors based on the assumption that the child lacks any expertise on life, yet is equally immune to evil and guilt. The child can conveniently act as an empty signifier or *tabula rasa*—an extension of Locke’s notion of the child as a blank slate (Bruhm and Hurley xvi)—to which many

values and ideals can be allotted. During the Victorian period, it became linked to a complex construction of sexuality and, more concretely, to a denied access to sexual practices (Bruhm and Hurley ix; Kincaid 101). Apparatuses of control became crucial to shape what Michel Foucault called the “pedagogization of children’s sex” (104), which had to ensure that bodies were inserted in the system of capitalist production underpinning modernity. This insertion was linked to the logic of reproductive temporality, since the erotic impulses of the “innocent child” needed to be delayed to safeguard the interests of the heteronormativity at the core of capitalist modernity (Hocquenghem 49). Even Freud’s views on infantile sexuality ended up reinforcing this logic. Although Freud was recognized for the “invention” of childhood sexuality, for claiming that all children are innately sexual and pleasure seeking, he later mitigated this radical potential of his theory of sexuality by proposing his idea of “the period of latency” in which the sexual impulses of children are suppressed, sublimated or employed “for purposes other than sexual,” and sexual activity becomes deferred, at least until puberty (98). In this way, Freud’s views on infantile sexuality became compatible with the modern production of sexuality.

The notion of childhood innocence is therefore a biopolitical construction at the service of producing “normal” adult subjects; that is, those who will follow the temporal logic of the heterosocial order and the traditional series of life benchmarks including birth, marriage, reproduction, and death with which model citizens are projected to arrange their lives. Lee Edelman addresses the role of the “innocent child” in naturalizing this normative temporality that he calls “heterofuturity.” Edelman considers that society uses the “Child,” in capital letters, understood as a discursive rather than as a historical figure, for the project of “reproductive futurism.” By this he means the dominant ideology of the social order that legitimizes “every political intervention” in favor of a narrative of progress, a historical teleology that offers a positive future epitomized by that non-empirical Child (3). The result of this logic is that children are expected to stay innocent of sexual impulses but are implicitly assumed to be heterosexual. The only sexuality pertinent to childhood would be a projection of the child’s future, once s/he matures into a “normal,” heterosexual adult. Sexual categories can be applied to children only when children cease to exist as such, when they become something else. A plausible counter argument to this is that if sexual impulses are not allowed in the present tense of a child, then s/he cannot be straight either. As Kathryn Bond Stockton cleverly puts it: “If you scratch a child, you will find a queer, in the sense of someone ‘gay’ or just plain strange” (1). All children are somehow haunted by queer temporalities, for they are assumed to be straight, but they cannot yet be straight, since they are not permitted to be sexual in the first place (Stockton 7). In the next section, I explore this point in relation to *Cría cuervos*, a film that takes to task the notion of childhood innocence by presenting a child protagonist with queer desires.

Queering the Innocent Child

Most interpretations of *Cría cuervos* regard it as a story of childhood innocence. Despite growing up in a family representing the “winners” of the Civil War, Ana (Ana Torrent) exemplifies the hardship suffered by Spanish women during Francoism. For many critics, she embodies the

capitulation to the authoritarian forces that have shaped her identity (Deveny 220; Medina 136; Thau 136). Other critics would have us read her story in positive terms as suggestive of a metaphorical emancipation of post-Franco Spain from the repressive past (Stone 101). Jo Labanyi links the “happy end” of the film to a “modernization narrative” in the broader national context (98). By leaving the family house to go back to school, Ana is also leaving the environment causing her trauma, which ultimately provides a cure for that trauma (98). Whether they view the film’s ending as pessimistic or hopeful for Ana’s (and Spain’s) future, these critics agree that Ana’s path is devoid of agency. Although critics identify Ana’s gaze as the narrative authority, they describe her as gullible and her naïveté “equated at once with the passivity and innocence of the spectator as well as with the social ingenuousness of the Spanish audience of Francoism” (D’Lugo 128). Ana is both an innocent focalizer and yet accountable for the film’s political allegories regarding the collective fate of the country. In view of this contradiction, I cannot help but wonder if we are asking too much of the “innocent child” and her presumed ignorance. Above all, critics consider that Ana personifies disempowered women under Franco. Several readings of this film have been attentive to gender issues; however, none of them has explored in depth the dimension of sexuality. Or rather, it is precisely because they have relied so much on the concept of childhood innocence, they carry with them the assumptions about childhood sexuality that underlie the notion of the innocent child.

Mid-way through the film, an adult Ana (played by Geraldine Chaplin but dubbed by Julieta Serrano) addresses the camera for the second time in a voice-over scene in which she tries to make sense of the family album twenty years later. In a decontextualized studio setting that looks almost as somber and enclosed as her parents’ house, she confesses: “No creo en el paraíso infantil, ni en la inocencia, ni en la bondad natural de los niños. Yo recuerdo mi infancia como un periodo largo, interminable, triste.” This scene is all the more significant in tandem with the previous one in which Ana as an eight-year-old girl declares to her Aunt Paulina (Mónica Randall): “Yo creo que Amelia es muy guapa, ¿verdad?” Ana’s statement about Amelia is a punch at her aunt, whom she dislikes. But the editing suggests that there is more to it. The child Ana’s fascination with female beauty is juxtaposed with her skepticism about “childhood innocence.” This sequence encourages us to analyze this character away from the contours of the innocent child and linked to a queer depiction of childhood.

Other scenes bring to the fore a sense of queer sexuality. There is a second occasion in which Ana confesses to be physically allured by Amelia (Mirta Miller). When recalling a visit to Amelia and Nicolás’s (Germán Cobos) country house, adult Ana confesses that visit to be one of the few happy memories of her childhood. The mostly dismal recollection of her childhood confers significance on a joyful moment like this one. That weekend gives her the opportunity to closely observe Amelia: “Ahora comprendo por qué aquella mujer fascinó a mi padre. Amelia era una mujer cálida, afectuosa, sensual. Cuando sonreía se le iluminaba el rostro, tenía la piel muy morena y daban ganas de tocarla.” It would be unreasonable to render this confession trivial. Especially if we recall that, meanwhile, her sisters Irene (Conchi Pérez) and Maite (Maite Sánchez) discuss their interest in boys and adult men. Irene confesses that she sent a love letter to a boy in the neighborhood and

then tells Ana, referring to Nicolás's presence in the house: "¿Sabes quién está abajo? Ese amigo tan guapo de papá." No response comes from Ana, not even the slightest curiosity about the father's handsome friend. Nicolás goes unnoticed by Ana, while his wife occupies her full attention.

These details from the film are not definitive enough to draw conclusions about Ana's sexual identity. But they do evoke an aura of same-sex desires that prior assessments of this film have ignored or have mentioned only in relation to Ana's problematic relationship with her mother.¹ Critics disguise Ana's interest in the female body as the curiosity of an innocent girl in search of female role models in a patriarchal society. In so doing, they deliver too narrow a perspective for such a complex character; or perhaps quite the opposite, too wide-ranging a vision to make the character fit in the heteronormative framework sustaining the notion of childhood innocence. The queer undertones of the character, the signs of a pleasure-seeking and non-reproductive sexuality are assimilated into a coherent, future-oriented view of her sexuality. Critics frame the character within a normalizing impulse that takes for granted that the "innocent child" is straight and her sexuality dormant as a prefix to adult sexuality.

In my view, Ana is a child that experiences what Kathryn Bond Stockton calls a "sideways growth," in the sense that she seems to grow to the margins of the normative social sphere and to seek connections that may not necessarily be reproductive (13). Rob Stone contends that adult Ana breaks the pattern of "cyclical victimhood" of women in her family since her presence "offers a warm and delicate portrait of a lovely and confident woman" and, moreover, the "suggestion that Ana will come of age in a world where self-determination is possible" (101). Yet the ambiguity surrounding adult Ana makes it hard to draw any outright conclusion about this character as the outcome, good or bad, of her childhood. The kind of celebratory reading that Stone proposes should be reconsidered, since it projects wishful thinking for the successful completion of a coming-of-age allegory for post-Franco Spain. As Yeon-Soo Kim argues, far from having resolved her emotional issues, adult Ana conveys a sense of a "psychological status of ambivalence, uncertainty, and insecurity" (77). If anything, the adult Ana looks just as confused as the "innocent" eight-year-old Ana and, even more crucially, just as "immature." If immaturity has been taken, at least since Freud, as indicative of an unsuccessful completion of one's sexual development—and linked to homosexuality in conservative discourse—then it is not clear if adult Ana has reached the final destination in her route towards "mature" sexuality. For all we know, she is still trying to figure things out. And that is all we know, because Saura's indirect style leaves here a convenient ellipsis that furnishes no verdicts about Ana's development.

¹ María José Gámez Fuentes alludes to several scenes of the film that may question "los límites de los roles sexuales" and even mentions in passing the possibility that Ana's obsession with his dead mother might have some "connotaciones homo-eróticas" (160-61). As we can see, the development of Ana's sexuality again remains largely limited to Ana's relationship to her mother. Gámez Fuentes seems to suggest that the effect of the absent mother on the girl may elicit these flirtations with homoeroticism, but only as a stage in the process of negotiation of her own (hetero)sexual self.

In fact, Ana is not the only character in the film whose trajectory potentially bypasses the vectors of linear development connected with normative temporality. Her grandmother (played by Josefina Díaz) is a specter from the past immobilized both in a physical and existential way, confined to a wheelchair and to a mute existence. Her only leisure activity is looking at a pin board of photographs that seem to retell her life story. Interestingly enough, when Ana tries to invent a version of that life story following the expected heterosexual trajectory—she interprets one of the pictures as belonging to her honeymoon trip—the grandmother gets upset. Instead, the grandmother fixates on a picture of a female friend, whose identity is never revealed, but which points toward untold female bonds that surpass her official biography. Also, each time her grandmother nostalgically contemplates the photographs, she wants Ana to play the same song, “Ay Mari Cruz,” a 1930s *copla*. The song dramatizes the lament of a man over his lost object of affection, a beautiful woman who broke her promise of love. In the context of this film, the song may help to express Ana’s grandmother own lament over her lost object of affection, which is unclear whether it is a man or a woman.

The grandmother is taken by critics to represent a model of female submissiveness to male patriarchy (Deveny 219), one repeated by the next generation and that Ana will also presumably imitate. But Ana’s grandmother shows hints that would diverge from the “meek wife” stereotype. This is why the connection between Ana and her grandmother is not coincidental. Ana is the only person who pays any attention to her and the only one who seeks her grandmother’s protection. During her father’s vigil, Ana finds refuge behind her grandmother when Aunt Paulina reprimands her. There is even a moment in which her grandmother seems to align with her granddaughters and reprove Aunt Paulina’s call for order and manners at the dining table. Instead of the transfer of a passive model of femininity, I read the bond between Ana and her grandmother as an unspoken comradeship between two female subjects who may feel at odds with their existence, including their expected gender and sexual roles.

What I am suggesting is that these two characters sidestep any fixed presupposition about sexual identity that one may attempt to sketch around them. It is in this ambivalent terrain, in the enactment of potentialities that are not explicitly articulated that the queer edge unfolds. The narrative offers enough hints to prevent us from falling on what Alexander Doty calls the “heterocentric trap”, referring to the fact that we take for granted that all characters in a film “are straight unless labeled, coded, or otherwise obviously proven to be queer” (2-3). Any viewer could fill in the ellipses and make an interpretation of Ana’s character as not inexorably heterosexual. That queerness is not simply a question of “reading against the grain,” but already inscribed in the text in Ana’s desiring gaze at other female characters, along with her deviation from heteronormative models of development tied to linear temporality. *Cría cuervos* connects temporal dissonance to queer sexual alterity, since adult Ana remains unassimilable to the meaning-making system of the heterosocial order. With the scarce information Saura delivers, no certitudes can be drawn other than the sense of a radical instability of her sexual identity. She is still trying to figure out her past as a way of making sense of her present and, in so doing, she remains outside of the

logic of identity. Ana, both as a child and as an adult, is haunted by a queer temporality that makes her grow sideways.

Exploring Intergenerational Desire

Intergenerational sex has been portrayed in cinema, media, and, more broadly, by the public imagination, almost exclusively as pedophilia, especially since the discourse on child sexual abuse gained traction in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Becoming what Jon Davies calls “a kind of black hole” in which concepts such as pleasure, desire, and consent are not tolerable, the issue of adult-minor relations has been restricted in cinema to constructions beyond representation (370-71). The post-1980s cultural obsession and panic with child abuse has led film producers to avoid legal problems by staying away from intergenerational relationships or by controlling their depictions to abide by a socially acceptable framework. James Kinkaid has shown that the framework of horror, in the form of Gothic scapegoating narratives, is the most common pattern to deliver child-molesting stories that cast the abuser as a villain and the child as an innocent victim (11-12). The Gothic narrative is so appealing because it “explains everything” and “tells us to look no further” (12), so the roles of evil and good are firmly and indefinitely delineated, and there is no room for ambiguity leading to legally muddy waters.² While certainly helping to protect children’s rights, an unfortunate outcome of this regulated representation has been the virtual obliteration of child sexuality. Steven Angelides explains that a huge shift occurred in the late 1970s and the 1980s with the advent a dominant discourse of child sexual abuse which reinterpreted child-adult sexual relations exclusively in terms of adult (male) power and child subjugation. The adult-minor sexual encounter became redefined “not as a sexual act but as an act of violence and an assertion of power” (147). This conceptual shift rested on the notion that children were unable to give informed consent.

Made before this shift, Jaime de Armiñán’s *El amor del capitán Brando* and *El nido* challenged the assumption that children are always in a powerless position in any intergenerational relation. In both films, children are the “aggressors” who pursue adult objects of desire. In *El amor*, Juan (Jaime Gamboa), a twelve-year old child who lives in a Castilian village, spies his teacher Aurora (Ana Belén) at night, draws her naked in his diary notebook, and declares his love for her. While she never reciprocates Juan’s advances, she lets him know that falling in love with an older person is perfectly normal. Editing and framing devices contribute to this respectful treatment of the child’s desires. The first interaction between Juan and Aurora after she sees his diary is edited as a shot/reverse shot conversation in which Jaime’s gaze appears from a high angle perspective, while the reverse shots from Aurora’s perspective are shot in low angles. Armiñán consciously employs a

² Even an iconoclastic filmmaker like Pedro Almodóvar employs the Gothic child-molesting story in *La mala educación* (2004), although he reformulates that predictable format by somewhat redeeming the villain, Father Manolo (Daniel Giménez Cacho/Luís Homar), “casting him as a victim of blackmail,” and “by granting the abused child, usually rendered as a helpless victim, some degree of agency and, most polemically, the ability to consent to the sexual contact” (Pérez 151).

widespread convention in cinema (the use of camera angulation to connote relations of power) to question commonplace conjectures regarding this encounter. Juan's mother takes for granted that Juan is reacting to the teacher's provocations. But the camera work in this conversation suggests otherwise, visually placing Juan in a position of agency, while Aurora is the one who appears vulnerable.

Aurora asks him a personal question and she gets up to position herself at the same level as Juan. A medium close-up of Juan with the camera at the shoulder level is followed by a tracking two shot of the two characters walking and conversing. The symmetrical framing confers equal prominence to both subjects indicating that they have equal input in the conversation. Further instances of two shots happen when Juan gets lost in the school excursion to Segovia, and Aurora stays to find him. While Juan's mother imagines a situation of sexual abuse, both characters are framed in symmetrical two shots in the streets of Segovia and having dinner in a restaurant. Back home, accusations of abuse against Aurora mount until she gets suspended from her job. But again a two shot of a conversation between Juan and Aurora while walking down a snowy road is employed to visualize the equal nature of their connection. The whiteness of the surrounding snow symbolically connotes the purity of their friendship, far from the allegations of debasement.

Aurora fails to establish her own intergenerational relationship with Fernando (Fernando Fernán Gómez), an older political exile who has recently returned to Spain. Juan is scared of their age difference and of his capacity to sexually satisfy her. This ultimately prevents him from embracing Aurora's proposal of a life project together. For Catalina Buezo, *El amor* introduces "tres generaciones diferentes que se aman a destiempo" (179), which implies that any intergenerational relationship is bound to fail. In my view, the film delves into the psychological and sociopolitical obstacles that get in the way of these two couples, but it does not seek to draw a universal conclusion regarding all cross-generational relationships as unviable ventures. In fact, both the narrative and the visual style of this film suggest that intergenerational romance is a perfectly feasible option, even if failed here.

Produced at the peak of the sexual liberation and child emancipation movement of the 1970s, which was "a banner decade for youthful sexual autonomy" (Levine 95), *El amor* echoes an era in which the right to sexual pleasure in children, including relations with adults, had many supporters in educational and political circles. As Steve Angelides documents, "various interests groups in the United States, England, and western Europe also advocated intergenerational sex and agitated for the lowering or abolition of the legal age of consent" (146). Although this sexual liberation movement manifested in late Franco Spain in a diluted fashion, this film was representative of the agenda of progressive platforms hoping Spain would follow western European social trends. That is how one should interpret the symbolic force of the figure of Juan's absent father, a French man who separated from his tyrannical wife (played by Amparo Soler Leal). Throughout the film, Juan's rebellion against his mother, who becomes an instrument of sexual repression and guarantor of traditional morality, is in part fueled by his idealization of the figure of his absent father, representing freedom. Fernando, the returning Republican exile, is a surrogate figure of sexual

liberation—which explains Juan’s deep connection with him. He is a hinge figure to associate the defeated Republican side with Europe and an ideal of modernity, even if he ultimately fails to provide a hopeful model for the new generation. Juan’s French father is the absent dad a whole generation of Spaniards like Juan yearned for, a symbol of the European modernity to which they aspired.

The post-censorship environment of 1980 allowed Armiñán to take the adult-minor relationships in *El nido* into a territory that was unthinkable when he made *El amor*³: a story of a successful intergenerational romance. Don Alejandro (Héctor Alterio) is a widower in his sixties whose wealthy yet dull existence in a village near Salamanca is disturbed by Goyita (Ana Torrent), a thirteen-year-old girl who seduces him. Alejandro is soon captivated by her maturity and beauty, and starts complying with all her demands, including a blood oath of allegiance and love. Once word gets around in the village about their non-conventional bond, Goyita is sent away by her tyrannical mother to spend time with some relatives in Salamanca. To set her free, and also to meet the terms of their oath, Alejandro agrees to fight the local civil guard sergeant (Agustín González), Goyita’s father’s superior and a figure of oppressive patriarchal authority for her.

The tragic resolution of the contest (Alejandro is killed by the civil guards) has been interpreted as the inevitable ending for this impossible relationship between a child and an adult (Buezo 184). Some scholars have pigeonholed this bond as platonic, innocuous play (Rodríguez and Tejada 70), and Goyita’s sway over Alejandro as “primarily based on a precocious intelligence, authoritarianism and intensity” instead of “being sexual in nature” (Kinder, “El Nido” 36). The rationale is that their relationship is never sexually consummated on screen (35), and the sexual undertones are codified as Goyita’s Oedipal attraction to Alejandro as a father surrogate that may liberate her from her weak father and the despotic sergeant (Kinder, *Blood Cinema* 281). I believe that reducing Goyita’s sexual agency to an unresolved Oedipal conflict decontextualizes the story. Rather than interpreting Manuel (Ovidi Montllor) as a weak paternal figure—who for Kinder subjugates Goyita by not allowing her to resolve her Oedipal conflict—one could regard him, along with the priest don Eladio (Luis Politti), as two figures embodying the major social changes taking place during the transition to democracy in Spain. Both represent a modernized version of two institutions heavily tied to the Franco regime: the Catholic Church and the *Guardia Civil*. The priest is open minded to not judge Alejandro for his behavior, while Manuel sabotages his wife’s despotic methods of educating their children.

³ *El amor del capitán Brando* had a tough time with the censorship board. One point of contention was the major’s speech in the main square of the town, for it seemed a parody of Franco’s own speeches (Rabal 28). The fact that a group of school children occupied the streets in protest was also problematic, because it pointed to the real protests taking place in Spanish university campuses, and it aligned young generations with sociopolitical change. But the main controversy was over the scene in Segovia when Aurora and Juan have to spend the night in a hotel. The board ruled that they could not shoot the scene with the characters sleeping in one bed. So Armiñán had to shoot two versions, one with two beds as mandated by the censorship report, and a second one with a single bed that finally managed to be approved because there was no physical contact between both characters (Rabal 28; Crespo 38).

Also, interpreting *El nido* only through the lens of the Oedipal framework mitigates much of its dissident potential. Armiñán dismantles, in this film, the dominant notion of childhood as a stage in the path toward adulthood and the frequent dissolve of the dimension of sexuality into that of age. The Oedipal scenario favored by Kinder follows a linear model of sexuality that frames Goyita's seduction of her adult object of desire as unconscious yearnings, a mere stage in her psychosexual development on her way to becoming a mature sexual adult. But Goyita's seduction of Alejandro is anything but unconscious. She calculates every move and every word so that Alejandro will bow to her demands. And one of her most important demands is to be treated as a woman. After spending the day together, Goyita asks him if he fancies her as a woman. Since he insists on infantilizing her, she threatens to never see him again. A close-up shows Alejandro grabbing her hand while admitting that he is physically attracted to her. "Puedes besarme," Goyita says approving of his confession. Alejandro only dares to kiss her in the cheek, and this is the boldest scene in terms of physical contact afforded to spectators.

Although this lack of explicit sexual contact is the main reason why critics categorically deem the Goyita-Alejandro relationship strictly platonic, there is another factor stimulating that assumption: the influence of Ana Torrent's own child star persona. As Eric Thau argues, Ana Torrent's acting career has been haunted by the impact of her "innocent, questioning gaze" from her child films (131). Ana Torrent's eyes have had an iconic meaning since her debut in *El espíritu de la colmena* (1973), which made her "the poster child of the opposition" in late Franco Spanish cinema (136), to the extent that Torrent's star persona has become, according to Sarah Wright, a palimpsest, since it "promises the erasure of her past incarnations with every new character in each new film, but which simultaneously contains the trace of her first iconic performance" (118). From Goyita's first appearance, Armiñán plays with the iconic significance of Torrent's eyes. Alejandro finds Goyita in the theater where she is rehearsing a version of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. Alejandro sits at the back of the theater mesmerized by Goyita's performance and intense gaze directed at him. Goyita's sustained look at Alejandro is hardly the innocent gaze reviewers expected to find in the child Ana Torrent. Costume also contributes to uphold this initial impression: Goyita's red sweater connotes passion and blood, thus foreshadowing their later attachment, their blood oath, and Alejandro's own tragic ending.

But this presentation is not enough to obliterate the specter of the innocent child, for it takes Goyita a while to convince Alejandro to stop seeing her like a sexless girl. Each time Alejandro says anything that makes Goyita feel infantilized, she shows her disgust and starts to walk away. And given that *El nido* borrows from Torrent's star persona, it is almost as if her threats were also directed at the spectators/reviewers of the film who persevere in not seeing her as a woman. Torrent's palimpsest here would not be the innocent gaze continually invoked by scholars of Spanish cinema, but the traces of the desiring gaze and infantile sexuality of her earlier films. If, as we have seen in the first part of this essay, *Cría cuervos* depicts an eight-year-old with signs of same-sex desires that are not fully articulated, *El nido* takes that one more step by presenting a thirteen-year old female subject who is in full control of her sexuality, even wielding it to manipulate others. *El nido* thus challenges the assumptions of the child abuse movement by

presenting a child-adult relation that is not based on abuse. Armiñán does not shy away from addressing the dynamic of power at play in this intergenerational couple. But he reverses the predictable scenario, since it is the child who claims a position of power and the adult the one who complies with her demands. In so doing, *El nido* sketches a post-Foucauldian understanding of power relations in intersubjective affairs: power asymmetries are always present in any given relationship between two people, but not necessarily as permanent positions. And this includes intergenerational bonds, in which there is typically not a relation of equivalence between adults and children, but which does not mean that children are always disempowered. Power is something that people exert—as Goyita here—and not solely own.

Framing and editing contribute to visualize Armiñán's take on the power dynamics in this child-adult kinship. As in *El amor*, the two shot is the preferred framing device to establish the nature of the interaction between these two subjects. In their first conversation, Goyita and Alejandro are framed with an "American two shot," with both heads facing each other in profile to the camera. This symmetrical framing presents the characters in an initial position of equivalence, which will be shortly modified. Alejandro escorts her back home and Goyita enters the building and walks up the stairs while whistling in joy. The whistling intrigues Alejandro and, instead of leaving, he walks toward the entrance door. An editing cut takes us to a high angle shot from Goyita's point of view that shows Alejandro as a dark silhouette at the door. The use of the silhouette reinforces the visualization of the power dynamic that will soon develop between both characters. The silhouette treatment serves to concentrate on the subject's outline and to suppress all surface details. It neutralizes any individual features of Alejandro's figure, as if metaphorically suggesting his imminent submission—losing his individuality—to Goyita's demands. The point of view and high angle of the shot further insinuate that Goyita will be the one holding a superior position in this relationship.

Yet rather than an inversion of the abuse scenario, Armiñán tries to represent unequal power relations as a natural component of any given romantic relationship between two subjects. Several aspects of the *mise-en-scène*, along with editing and framing choices, are crucial to convey this idea of "naturalness." Most of the scenes with Goyita and Alejandro take place in an outdoors and bucolic setting, with plenty of natural light, and are shot predominantly through two shots in which both characters are symmetrically placed in the frame, whether it is while playing games outside, sitting in front of each other at the dining table, or inside the car. The abundant use of sequence shots further suggests that this is a cinematic relationship that develops organically, freely, without the intervention of editing cuts that intercede in the "natural" course of things. Even Alejandro's death, as tragic and gratuitous as it may seem, is accepted by Goyita as the natural cycle of nature. This visual impression of naturalness and freedom is especially conspicuous by comparison with all the scenes in which Goyita interacts with her family members. These are shot in dark interior spaces that need artificial light, thus contributing to convey the sense of confinement that Goyita feels within her own family. The authenticity and intensity of this unconventional love story challenges assumptions about what is considered natural and acceptable. At odds with social precepts and the judgment of film scholars who have considered this adult-minor relationship "a deviant romance"

(Kinder, *Blood Cinema* 281), Armiñán ultimately suggests that what is aberrant is the perpetuation of the patriarchal family structures inherited from Francoism that prevented Spaniards from living and loving openly.

Conclusions

Cría cuervos, *El amor del capitán Brando*, and *El nido* belong to a pre-child sexual abuse movement era when child sexuality was amply recognized, even if with competing definitions and meanings. *Cría cuervos* shows a character with hints of same-sex desires and the disruption of a linear and heteronormative model of sexual development. Although the two films by Armiñán focus strictly on heterosexual desires, they are relevant for this study from a queer angle because they also present stories that disregard the teleological scheme that ensures the stability of the cycle of heterosexual reproduction linked to the system of capitalist production. These two films touch upon a taboo subject—intergenerational bonds—with an openness and naturalness that is unthinkable in contemporary films which are subjected to much stricter laws and social codes regarding the representation of children's sexual desires. As I have shown, scholarly work on these films has been heavily influenced by this major shift in the discourse on child sexuality and, in this manner, has constructed their child's protagonists by silencing, circumventing or uncomfortably explaining their sexual desires. Any potentially disreputable sexual aspect has been ironed out by framing it through the easily digested narratives of childhood innocence and the Oedipal trajectory. My analyses of key scenes of these films have revealed that these all-embracing narratives are externally imposed upon the films by critics' own aspiration to make them fit into a socially acceptable (and heteronormative) view on child sexuality. Certainly, the narratives and the visual styles of these films (through the tactical use of editing, framing, and lighting conventions) invite us to reexamine the critical discourse on the *Nuevo Cine Español* to make room for the crucial dimension of childhood sexuality beyond the supremacy of childhood innocence.

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