

The romantic hero in six Spanish post-war films (1944-1951)

El héroe romántico en seis películas españolas de posguerra (1944-1951)



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Abstract:

During the early years of Franco's regime, six films were released in Spain whose main characters lived during the Romantic period: *Lola Montes* (1944), *Espronceda* (1945), *Luis Candelas*, *el ladrón de Madrid*

Resumen:

Durante los primeros años del franquismo se estrenaron en España seis películas cuyo protagonista vivió durante el Romanticismo: Lola Montes (1944), *Espronceda* (1945), *Luis Candelas*, *el ladrón de Madrid*

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(1947), *El huésped de las tinieblas* (1948), *El Marqués de Salamanca* (1948) and *La canción de la Malibrán* (1951). Productions of this type recreated the Romantic period in the light of the shared image of Romanticism held in the 1940s. Thus, as well as transporting audiences to an exuberant and evocative period cinema, what may be termed the *Spanish version of Romanticism*, or “Spanish-style Romanticism” was consolidated. This study focuses on the traits that make up this image of the model romantic hero, analysing traits of the six main characters. The six types defined by Argullol have been adopted as a particular reference: *superhombre, sonámbulo, enamorado, genio demoníaco, nómada and suicida*.

Keywords:

Spanish cinema; early Francoism; biopic; hero; Romanticism.

(1947), *El huésped de las tinieblas* (1948), *El Marqués de Salamanca* (1948) y *La canción de la Malibrán* (1951). Este tipo de producciones recrearon la época romántica al trasluz de la imagen compartida que se tenía del Romanticismo en la década de 1940. De modo que, además de trasladar al público a un cine de época exuberante y evocador, se consolidó la que podemos llamar la versión española de lo romántico o “un romanticismo a la española”. Esta investigación se centra en los rasgos que conforman dicha imagen del modelo de héroe romántico, analizando los rasgos de los seis protagonistas. Como estudio de referencia en particular se han adoptado los seis tipos definidos por Argullol: *superhombre, sonámbulo, enamorado, genio demoníaco, nómada y suicida*.

Palabras clave:

Cine español; primer franquismo; película biográfica; héroe; romanticismo.

1. Introduction

Between 1939 and 1953 twenty-five biographical films were made in Spain, they told the tales of the lives of prominent individuals from Spanish history, preferably from episodes linked to the Middle Ages, the Spanish Empire and the Peninsula War. These films were produced during early Francoism and the period of autarchy.

In the middle of the Spanish Civil War, the journalist Manuel Chaves Nogales foresaw a great post-war famine all over Spain: “a dictatorial government which, weapon in hand, will oblige all Spaniards to work desperately hard and go hungry without complaint for twenty years” (2019, p. 9).

The Spain of the forties was characterised by food shortages and disease, both in the cities and in the countryside. The authorities were aware of the appalling supply situation and introduced rationing cards to limit consumption of basic goods. Moreover, harvests were poor, especially between 1945 and 1949. The Marshall Plan did not come to Franco’s Spain, condemned to international isolation following the Second World War. These were the “years of hunger” (Hernández Burgos, 2020, p. 151-172).

In contrast with this grey post-war atmosphere, there was a proliferation of comedies –by far the most frequently produced film genre–, fruit of the public’s need for distraction (Benet, 2012, p. 181). Spaniards’ spending on cinema tickets was truly significant, as “a particularly impoverished post-war country could enjoy an especially high quality of post-war film”, giving rise to the highest box office figures in the Europe of the time (Faulkner, 2017, p. 84). All this to escape reality. Apart from comedies, scriptwriters and directors looked for characters that filmgoers could dream about, transporting their minds to a faraway past bearing little resemblance to the post-war reality. But, despite all this, we should not see this cinematography as mere “films of escapism”, for, as Zunzunegui put it (1999, p. 36): “Spanish film production during the forties [...] shows the

complexity of meanings which always make an appearance in any work found in the area that Louis Althusser termed cultural superstructure”.

Biopics should be placed in this context, the number of such films being “negligible” (Monterde, 2010, p. 230) when compared to comedies, melodramas, and musicals. Moreover, biopics should be understood as a typology and not as a film genre, if we understand genre to mean, following Altman (2000, p. 35), a formal structure upon which films are constructed, which originates uses and customs and generates expectations. There is therefore no common narrative style in this series of Spanish biopics, some taking a melodramatic approach, others being adventures and yet others being musicals.

Some biographical films are found to be linked to calligraphism, a cinematographic style of Italian origin defined by Cook (1981, p. 379) as “a sort of reactionary formalism which dwelled upon literary subjects of the past”. It reached its peak in Spain in melodramas (fruit of literary adaptations) such as *El escándalo* (Sáenz de Heredia, 1943) and *El clavo* (Rafael Gil, 1944), giving rise to a class of films historiography has termed “cine de levita” (Font, 1976, p. 93). Thus, the art directors of numerous biopics have found in the style of this “cine de levita” their preferred material to shape the historical setting.

We can identify six movies from amongst these titles that are framed in the Romantic period, the chronology of which, in the Spanish case, lacks “a clear consensus on where to place it between 1794 and 1898” (Silver, 1996, p. 15), as the Romantic period is associated with the XIXth century, but it is difficult to pinpoint its beginning and end in Spain.

The main characters of the six films we plan to analyse lived in the Romantic age: Lola Montez¹ (1821-1861), José de Espronceda (1808-1842), Luis Candelas (1804-1837), José de Salamanca y Mayol (1811-1883), Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer (1836-1870) and María Malibrán (1808-1836)².

This paper starts from the hypothesis of looking at the celluloid representation of the historical characters, in order to find out if said representation adheres to the norms of the romantic hero, that is, we strive to see if the six movies reflect typical elements of Romanticism through duels, love affairs, tragedies, etcetera. In other words, the purpose of this paper is to show whether the image of them offered by early-Francoist cinema was romantic, that being a national cinematography nourished by the romantic literature of Bécquer and Espronceda, and by the lives of the outstanding figures of nineteenth century Spain, such as the Marquess of Salamanca, as thus was forged the patriotic spirit encouraged by the fledgling State through its films.

1 This is not a typo. The Irish dancer Eliza Rosanna Gilbert adopted “Lola Montez” as her artistic name. For the title (and the identically-named character) of the film, Lola Montes was spelled Lola Montes, substituting the -z for the -s.

2 For our study, we have discarded the film biography of Eugenia de Montijo (1944), because, although it corresponds chronologically to Romanticism, we consider that both the character and the film do not comply with the canon of the romantic hero. This is due to her cheerful and optimistic character, in a plot where royalty and high politics take precedence. On the other hand, the writer José Zorrilla (1817-1893) is represented in the film *Hace cien años* (1952), but he is not the subject of our analysis as he is not the protagonist of the film but a secondary character, and his dramatic function is merely anecdotal. Zorrilla also appears in *Espronceda*, but only accidentally.

2. Methodology

Firstly, it is necessary to look at the administrative reasons that affected the films selected. To do so we turned to the administration's files and reports indicating the reviews, changes and censorship of content corresponding to each production. Secondly, in order to substantiate the film analysis, focused on the modelling of the romantic myth, the classification proposed by Argullol has been adopted, utilizing the six essential types (*Superhombre*, *Sonámbulo*, *Enamorado*, *Genio demoníaco*, *Nómada* & *Suicida*). Parting from this base and bearing in mind that this study does not seek to review the precedents of the heroic model, the profiles of the main characters in the films are analysed. Thus, some observations can be made concerning the assimilation of the romantic heroic profile in the biopics of early Francoism.

3. The romantic hero

This study has proceeded without narratological-functional analysis of the main characters of the six films chosen, with the intention of highlighting only their temperamental and symbolic features: which means their characters are interpreted in the light of the Romantic movement. Understanding of the romantic hero on this point requires a cultural vision of the hero which necessarily involves contextualizing the figure as the representative image of a period: an aspirational ideal, more or less shared. However, from an anthropological point of view, it is difficult to define the matter. In this sense, it is perhaps better to speak of a "model" or "cultural romantic example" than of a *hero*, in general, due to the immediate evocation of a series of attributes such as resistance, bravery and a spirit of sacrifice (Gutiérrez Delgado, 2019). However, we have herein followed the sociological vision which extends use of the term 'hero' to those characters which lead the action, as Argullol's study suggests when establishing categories framed in a cultural movement. Nevertheless, before entering into details of the particularities of the romantic hero, it would be pertinent to turn to the concept of hero. For example, recalling Savater, Gil Calvo (2006) focuses the heroic question on several problematic features such as the necessity to demonstrate virtue, self-improvement and success or, on the contrary, situations of failure (pp. 136-137). In the case of the romantic hero, the tendency towards self-destruction as a revindication of self constitutes a form of debasement of the action. Even more so if that obsession for meeting death for glory is based on a mental fiction. In that sense, it is worth pointing out that the romantic hero is hardly authentic. According to Gil Calvo's distinction (2006), "(...) the great difference between the authentic hero and their media ghost is that the former faces objective reality while the latter only does so in fiction" (p. 138). Scheler (2018) proposes another concept, in which the nostalgic perspective is explicit to the classic heroic model which idealises and redefines it in the figure of the romantic hero. Scheler says that the hero is

That ideal type of human, semidivine (Greek hero) or divine (God of will and power) (...), that at the core of its being is referred to the noble and the attainment of nobility –therefore, of 'pure' and not technical vital values–, whose fundamental virtue is the *natural nobility* of body and soul and the corresponding sensitivity for the noble (p. 103).

Apart from being a model to be imitated, the hero definitively represents, catalyses, an idea of the *pure* noble. Without this purity –embodying the noble–, of transcending the social and political order, there is no heroism. In this moral framework, the romantic hero appears partially linked to the idea –also made explicit by Scheler– of the "overabundance of the spiritual will",

which has certain features: “power”, “vehemence”, “force”, “being at one’s prime” and “interior discipline”. We feel it necessary to nuance Scheler, as the romantic hero lacks interior discipline, which would be equivalent to putting the brakes on his/her emotional outbursts. It is therefore a failing which gives to the romantic profile a touch of downfall and blundering

Romantic heroes are irresistibly drawn towards suicide, a characteristic which immediately converts them into complex and contradictory figures. Coexisting in them is an immense potential for action and desire, with patent weakness that swiftly reveals to the spectator that their destiny is to be marked by misfortune. When this is not so, their horizon is dotted with setbacks and misadventures which hinder them reaching their goals, often romantic ones.

Romantic appropriation often stems from an interpretation predominated by the reinforcement of passion in its most irrepressible form. With this, the romantic vision reinterprets the events and characters’ personalities, painting them with a faint hue of loss. In fact, the romantic is an aesthetic perspective (Clarke, p. 3). This worldview is about having an artistic vision, –contemplating the hero’s actions–, understanding the most poetic dimensions. Nostalgia or, even melancholy, sets a dissonant and dialectic tone when faced with rationalism. As one of the consequences, History is an object of this liberation from rationalist pressures. These idealising visions of certain periods and characters to be honoured generate tales with a spirit that does not directly correspond to the facts that make up real life. The romantic hero is more a conclusion than a starting point. At the base of Romanticism as the cause of the character’s appearance –the oft-termed “romantic hero”– there is an underlying idealising contemplation of reality (Benz, 2016). In other respects, the idealisation which accompanies the romantic portrayal of characters and heroes coexists with the reality of death. Thus, the romantic yearning to become a martyr for a lost or simply impossible cause is realised. This heroic determination is thus a form of extinction and annihilation which gives a style of protest to the portrayals: the gap between the ideal aspired to and the reality one lives with is insurmountable. The romantic hero cannot stand a prosaic setting. That context, moreover, sees the birth of one of the most contentious derivations of the romantic hero: that of romance.

The case of the truly romantic hero is framed in the universe of ideal, prescriptive figures, not necessarily the leader, limited to the sphere of their being and highly conditioned by socio-political circumstances (Scheler, 2018). However, some aspects relative to the revolutionary character of the romantic hero cause them to descend to the sphere of leadership, turning them thus into a *model* of an intrepid and radical leader. Tormented, truncated lives and platonic desires, such as an impossible love, make up the attributes and personality of the romantic hero. After them, idealism has a tragic tone.

Their ascendance links them to the Greek tragic hero. In the Greek conception of the tragic hero, according to Rodríguez Adrados, we are presented with “the man faced by the most terrible situations, alone before the greatest of decisions, at risk of error or of triumph” (1962, pp. 11-35). Bear in mind that this coincides perfectly with the historical need in which that spirit reappears, just as set out in the context: a world riven with hunger and moral destruction which needs to dream and find escapist figures. However, the image of the romantic hero of the audio-visual period analysed makes apparent how, in Spain, death was unnecessary as an end. Therefore, as well as softening the heroic testimony, that process of “making Spanish” disconnects the hero from mystic Romanticism, truer to the German tradition. The image of the Spanish romantic hero is thus brought up to date in a lyrical key –at most “tragicomic”– and not tragic.

Thus, the termed “liberation” of the passions, as one of the characteristic notes of the romantic spirit, finds its particular cinematographic home in these films. Such a materialisation consists of removing all taxing loads and gravitas from the main characters. Therefore, Romanticism assumes a slant adapted to the idiosyncrasy and historical circumstances in which its reappearance is set. Within this framework of lightness and continuous “wit” in form and conduct, the presence of tragedy (as an extreme and causal way of facing destiny) is softened in a mannerism of forms; at the same time, what is “romantic” is the evocation of a series of locations, times (preferably the XIXth century) and dilemmas associated with the *idea* of a singular melancholy. Therefore, the tragic sentiment of loss is supplanted by a recuperation of hope. The images provided by these movies represent several ideals integrated in a single consideration of Spanish Romanticism, that is: the bravery of the adventurer who dreams of building a better world, following his/her ideal of justice and peace; perfect devotion to the beloved and other forms of commitment to diverse causes.

4. A brief description of the films

4.1. *Lola Montes*

Antonio Román directed *Lola Montes* in 1944, adapting a story by José María Pemán. The chance of recreating Lola Montez had been fermenting for some time. During her time in Germany, Imperio Argentina and the film director Florián Rey received a proposal from Goebbels to film her life, responding:

We could make a historical account of Lola Montes' life, and present it as an Irish dancer marrying Montes, a Sevillian, half-gypsy dancer, who immediately abandons him to reappear in Bavaria as a lover of King Ludwig I (Argentina & Vllora, 2001, p. 105).

But he wanted “her to become a propagandist of Hitlerian policy”, and to “incorporate the character into the modern world to propose to students a convenient model of rebelliousness against the world”. Florián Rey turned it down as “nobody in Spain knew Lola Montes” and the project never saw the light of day (Argentina & Vllora, 2001, pp. 105-108).

In 1942 Benito Perojo tried to relaunch the project, but it never came to fruition (Pérez Núñez, 2018: 221). Two years later, Antonio Román took it up through his production company Alhambra Films. The director recognised it was a film “that follows a fantasy, taking two or three facts from a person's life and imagining from that base, weaving a plausible, novelesque life” (Coira, 1999, p. 99).

The film follows the steps of an Irish woman living in Seville, María Dolores Gilbert, who, helped by a dandy –an undercover revolutionary agent– takes dance classes from the master Pepe Montes, crossing Europe performing for him. However, Lola displaces her master and, alone, boosts her reputation while going through a series of lovers. She ends up settling in the Bavarian Court, where she becomes mistress to King Ludwig I and interferes in the politics of the kingdom, contributing to the student revolt of 1848 (Amador, 2010, p. 15).

It would seem that, in the first draft of the script, Lola could have redeemed herself, retraced her steps and joined Carlos Benjumea. But the film administration, without really meaning to, added a romantic component to the story's outcome:

The most sentimentally pleasing ending has been chosen, though it is the least logical and dramatic. Just turning over a new leaf is not an option, Lola must die a violent death, though she first regrets her errors and sins in a scene analogous to that herein presented³.

The film is placed half-way between the proposals of Florián Rey and Goebbels. On one side, it incorporates that desire to weave a politico-social plot, as the rebellion against Ludwig I is portrayed, but it is neither the main story –it only takes up the last third of the film– nor does it have the ideological take that Hitler intended. Moreover, it has the folkloric tone that Florián Rey and Imperio Argentina wanted, but Lola’s Spanish character disappears in the international setting (Seville, Paris, Munich...), perhaps because of “certain desires to open up to the outside world or to establish foreign links” (Pérez Núñez 2018: 221), seeking to market the movie abroad.

4.2. *Espronceda*

In 1945, Fernando Alonso Casares directed a biopic of the poet José de Espronceda, with a script inspired by the author’s *Canto a Teresa*. Unfortunately, the film has been lost, making it difficult –though not impossible– to gather information about its story and characters. Hueso described the plot as follows:

A vision of the life of the poet José de Espronceda, his family problems and their influence on his literary activity. It tells us of his love for Teresa Mancha during his journeys to London and Paris, until their return to Madrid where she, obeying her father’s wishes, marries a rich, older merchant. After that, the poet, pressured by his mother, marries Bernarda. However, the memory of his beloved Teresa will forever remain in Espronceda’s work (Hueso, 1998, p. 157).

For Martín Camacho, *Espronceda* belongs to “‘period cinema’ due to its starched attire and upmarket character” (2010, p. 736). His study turns to film magazines to consider the movie’s production and filming, as well as gathering the reviews following its opening. Nevertheless, for questions relative to its story, we rely on the cinematographic novel *Espronceda*

Some of the romantic notes from the story “were patent to the censor’s eyes, commenting: “I find it really difficult in every aspect: there is adultery and a revolutionary atmosphere”. Despite this, trust in the moral criteria of the film-makers permitted its approval: “warning the director that such circumstances could give rise to a censor’s qualms but authorizing its filming as both the director and his consultant [...] and scriptwriter Don Eduardo Marquina deserve credit for dealing with the affair with the dignity of the necessary morality”⁴.

4.3. *Luis Candelas, El ladrón de Madrid*

After *Espronceda*, Fernando Alonso Casares directed his second film, a biography of bandit Luis Candelas. He trusted that “this popular, adventure story will resonate with the national public and may also be apt for export” (Cañada, 2000, p. 83). Méndez-Leite praised the care taken with “the visual details and the aesthetic, chiefly in the ensemble scenes and in the

3 Censorship report on *Lola Montes*. File. 44-44. AGA 36. 046664.

4 Censorship report on *Espronceda*. File. 314-44. AGA 36. 04673.

outdoor sequences, many of them perfect and well-organised” (1965, p. 10), though Pérez Núñez categorised it as “an attempt at ‘bandit movies’ that [...] didn’t turn out too convincing” (2018, p. 300).

There had been three previous versions of the film, two in 1926 and the other in 1936. The 1947 piece had an original script, penned by the director, but the character’s popularity had been clear from the proliferation of biographies and plays written by José Conde Souleret (1893), José Silva Aramburu (1927), Antonio Espina (1929 and re-edited) and Nicolás González Ruiz (1946).

The film by Fernando Alonso Casares was “a major production employing up to two thousand extras and top names” (Cañada, 2004, p. 84). He shows us Luis Candelas born in the neighbourhood of Lavapiés in Madrid, where he and his gang of thieves lift wallets, disguise themselves to steal from private parties and seduce aristocrats to steal their jewels. His lovers Pepa *la Malagueña* and Lola *la Naranjera* compete for his love, but he ends up marrying a lady of spotless reputation, pushed by his mother’s insistence that he be honourable. However, Candelas does not leave his life as a bandit and his lovers, leading to periods in prison. During the robbery of a stagecoach, disguised, he meets and falls for María. She is equally enamoured, loving him even though she knows he is a bandit, trying to turn him to the path of righteousness. Candelas tries to redeem himself, but María finally leaves him when she finds he is already married. Betrayed by a member of the gang, Candelas is arrested again and condemned to die by strangulation. Before his execution, he confesses his sins to a friar.

The censor’s reports indicate the film administration’s sensibility towards the film’s content. They could show the main character’s villainy, but “the fact that the story has a tragic ending is sufficiently chastening. There is no wish to make an example of the figure or actions of Luis Candelas”. The tragic ending, in this sense, would fulfil a more didactic than aesthetic function. Similarly, they warned that “Luis’s love for María must display a certain desire by the thief to truly redeem himself”. Following this didactic line, the romantic lead’s search for redemption must be manifest, which implies his recognition that his life has not been a happy one⁵.

4.4. *El huésped de las tinieblas*

Antonio del Amo directed this 1948 film about the poet Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer. He did not intend to give a thorough historical account, something made clear in a poster: “this film is not a biography of Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer, but a fantastic interpretation of the sublime and tormented dreams of the great Sevillian poet”. Gómez Mesa thought similarly, defining the movie as “a biography rather more imagined than true –interpretative of the poetic meaning– of Bécquer” (1978, p. 49).

Two producers took on the project: ERCE and Sagitario Films, who three years later were to also produce *La canción de la Malibrán*. The script was the work of Manuel Mur Oti and Antonio Gimeno. Though we have not found an explicit link between the two films, it is worth noting that in 1946 *El gran amor de Bécquer*, directed by Alberto de Zavalía had opened in Argentina, with a script written by María Teresa León and Rafael Alberti.

5 Censorship report on *Luis Candelas, el ladrón de Madrid*. File. 45-46. AGA 36. 04683

The movie starts by showing the poet saving the life of a young revolutionary, not knowing that he is the brother of Dora, with whom he falls in love. His conversations with Dora provide the inspiration for his poems, but their marriage is made impossible by the opposition of her aunt, who intends to wed her to Arthur. Bécquer, afflicted by illness, withdraws to the monastery of Veruela, where he rests and writes stories and legends inspired by the dreams he has there. On his return, his relationship with Dora is still impossible, as she has married. They meet again some time later, Bécquer still poor and sickly. But it is Dora who passes away first, the poet bidding her farewell at her bedside.

Doubts were raised by the censors concerning the duel, a poisoning and the illicit love between Dora and Bécquer. However, several of these realities were resolved by presenting it all under a cape of fantasy, as the poisoning “is admissible as a nightmare”, and (cutting one shot of “romantic effusion”), the illicit relationship of the lovers could have taken place in “Bécquer’s dream in a cell in the monastery”⁶.

4.5. *El Marqués de Salamanca*

In 1948, Edgar Neville presented this film related to the centenary of the construction of the first railway in Spain, with a script by Tomás Borrás. The opening credits describe the Marquess as “the romantic native of Málaga, Don José de Salamanca. This was the man who spent money he didn’t have and had money it was almost impossible to spend”. Thus, his adscription to Romanticism is beyond all doubt.

The story begins just before the Marquess dies, when Alfonso XII tells a friend of Salamanca’s life. When he had come to Madrid in 1835, he had surrounded himself with influential people, his admired María Buschental and general Narváez, and had started to make money trading in salt. He projected the building of the first railway, became Narváez’s enemy, went into exile in France and on his return to Madrid refurbished a theatre and built the Madrid neighbourhood that bears his name. The film takes a costumbrist and farcical tone.

4.6. *La canción de la Malibrán*

Luis Escobar directed this film about María Malibrán in 1951. She was a Parisian opera singer –of Spanish parents– who soon achieved international fame and worked with Bellini and Rossini. She died of illness at 28. Compared to the five previous films, María Malibrán’s character is the least *romántico*, although it does conserve certain heroic characteristics, as we shall see below.

The film starts in the XXth century, when two dancers notice a painting of María Malibrán on a corridor wall in the opera. A flashback takes us to the XIXth century, when a young María Malibrán, under the strict tutelage of her father, becomes famous when stepping in by pure chance for the leading actress in the *The Barber of Seville*. An unhappy marriage sees her travel to the US, where she continues singing, but is not content. When her husband is incarcerated, she goes to Paris, where she renounces her dreams and sings in variety theatres to make easy money and free her husband. A noble gentleman, Carlos, falls for her and

6 Censorship report on *El huésped de las tinieblas*. File. 272-47. AGA 36. 04697.

helps her return to the stage. Her husband's arrival interrupts her adultery, although he dies in a card game and the two lovers are united again. The adultery is only hinted at, as the censor emphasized the risk of making it explicit:

There is however a certain sympathy towards the love, then illicit, between María and Carlos, and which can only be realized after the death of Malibrán. [...] it must be made clear that, before his death, there is no adultery between Carlos and María. With this stipulation, its authorization may proceed⁷.

Unlike *Lola Montes*, which had no qualms in showing the character's liberality, Escobar whitewashes María Malibrán's life, giving the persona a naive aura, far from libertine, who had only one lover –as opposed to the many in real life– and showing no signs of the disease that brought about her premature death. The film is weakened by not exploiting the romantic components –arrogance, lovers, illness, tragic death– that characterised the real woman.

5. Argullol's romantic hero and the protagonists of biographical film

5.1. *El superhombre*

Compared to the classical and medieval hero, the romantic hero presents a different archetype. In the words of Sánchez García, he/she presents

A new concept concerning the importance of individual subjectivity as a means to interpret society and nature [...]. Assuming the challenge of being what one really is, beyond conventions, and facing the derivations that this decision brings with it serves to distinguish the superior individual. Neither birth nor wealth, but personal worth (Sánchez García, 2018, p. 46).

The Marquess of Salamanca built his subjectivity in the business world. In 1835 he arrived in Madrid with a suitcase and no money, but he did have an objective: "I'll be rich in a few days". His ambition was the means of forging his identity, as well as his faith in his abilities: "put me in touch with the most powerful people and I'll take care of the rest". Moreover, another trait of the romantic hero is the breaking with tradition, the transgressing of norms, due to his/her drive to innovate, to be original and to seek new horizons. José de Salamanca started his adventure towards the status of "multimillionaire" in the salt business, but after that he decided to build the first railway line in the country and a modern neighbourhood similar to those in Europe's great cities, as well as doing up a theatre to make it the finest of the time.

In the case of Lola Montez, Hueso underlines the reaffirmation of "her individual character over and above the vicissitudes she came up against and the affairs that marked her turbulent life" (2009: 161). She did not accept the advice of others concerning her future, it is she who decides where and when to dance, who seeks out and turns down lovers and who pulls the strings of the King of Bavaria. As the character of Walter puts it: "although her ambition is great, she is enough in herself to satisfy her wishes". Lola Montez is also an innovator, as during the student uprising in Bavaria, her dancing is accused of being "revolutionary" as it defies classical norms.

⁷ Censorship report on *La canción de la Malibrán*. File. 12-51. AGA 36. 04723

The love that Espronceda feels for Teresa makes her proclaim: “There is no world beyond us” (Ediciones Puerto, 1945, p. 11). Regarding Luis Candelas, the price he has to pay for his liberty and individualism is the constant struggle against the forces of order. María Malibrán, finally, moves like a robot during the first half of the film, obeying her parents, then her husband and finally her sister-in-law. Only later does she gain a “romantic awareness,” as, on being reprimanded by her sister-in-law, it is she who, of her own free will, decides to leave home and take up the reins of her life.

5.2. *El sonámbulo*

The great romantic revolution in the consideration of dreams lies, precisely, in not being limited to their pure –and still analytical– passive perception: the romantic reveals to the somnambulist, in the oneiric act, an itinerary of freedom and creativity which is denied in daily life (Argullol, 2008, p. 420).

Bécquer finds in his dreams the inspiration necessary for his work. In Veruela monastery, he dreams the song of a miserere, and on leaving his cell sees the monks walking around a corpse, his corpse. Dora appears in the same dream, walking with him in the surroundings of the monastery until he comes across an open-air dance, all bathed in darkness, as “for the romantic, the journey to the forbidden, into the darkness, is the greatest of human adventures” (Argullol, 2008, p. 360). Finally, they come across Dora’s betrothed, who makes Bécquer dig a grave, although, after drinking from a poisoned cup, it is he who occupies it.

When he wakes, Bécquer tells the prior of his dreams and insists he wants to keep on dreaming, as the dream is preferable as there is nothing for him in this world. Here is romantic idealism: the dream is preferable –fruit of his subjectivity– to reality. Something similar happens to María Malibrán, who lives a fantasy after abandoning her sister-in-law and living independently, smitten with her lover and rehearsing for her promising return to the stage. The unexpected appearance of her husband, precisely when she is performing Bellini’s *La sonámbula*, makes for a bitter awakening.

Dreams can connect the hero to the transcendental, but not to earthly transcendence –tragic destiny impedes it–, but to the transcendence of his work after death. For Espronceda, “a writer’s time does not come till after his death. Immortality comes not to the living” (Ediciones Puerto, 1945, p. 28). In Salamanca’s case, “for things to start on the right foot, they always have to be clothed in a little poetry”, as it is art –ingenuity– that is the tool for transcendence.

Argullol states that “the romantic poet, beyond pain, celebrates; as he knows that his only real hope, above death’s triumph, is to make the triumph of the word prevail” (2008, p. 455). Again, it is Salamanca who confesses that, more than money, what he wants is to leave his mark on Spain; therefore, regarding his work: “the pleasure of creating it, is payment enough”.

5.3. *El enamorado*

González Ruiz wrote that “the romantic movement, in its reaction against the world around it, boldly broke with intellectualism, and raised the flag of sentiment” (1941, p. 63). Perhaps love is the romantic sentiment par excellence. Espronceda proclaimed in the film that “life and love are above everything else” (Ediciones Puerto, 1945, p. 22).

However romantic love is not platonic,

but it contemplates, with all their consequences, pleasure and sensuality. 'Platonic' love is totally anti-tragic as it renounces pleasure to prevent pain, whereas romantic love, takes one and the other as inseparable siblings (Argullol, 2008, pp. 409-410).

These characters love and suffer because of that love, a poisoned love that causes their misfortunes and those of their beloved. Thus, "Teresa too deserves to find peace but will not find it until she abandons Espronceda" (Ediciones Puerto, 1945, p. 34).

For Lola Montez, the accursed love is that of Carlos Benjumea, a young Spanish officer. His goodness, as well as his identification with order and tradition, are the contrary of the protagonist's immoderate lifestyle. Carlos will continue with his adventures across Europe, and she falls for him, but their love is condemned to fail due to Lola's liberality, unable to give up her independence or her success on the stage; as the character of Walter says: "winners cannot have a heart, their fame would fall to pieces before the heat of inefficient sentimentalism". Paradoxically, it is one sentimentalism –a desire for glory and independence– which displaces another –falling in love–.

The romantic lover unable [...] to be happy even in situations that apparently should cause happiness, aspires to such wealth that he loses himself in the spaces of desire. Insatiability is his sentence, and the more he sates his thirst for infinity, the emptier he finds the glass of his serenity. That is why, he inevitably loves and hates at the same time (Argullol, 2008, p. 416).

María Malibrán's misfortune is to have married, naively taken in, a wealthy gambler whose bad luck at the table sees him imprisoned for debt. The marriage is a barrier to her union with her lover, although their adultery is finally consummated. With her husband's reappearance, unhappiness returns to her life.

In Bécquer's case, his misfortune is to fall for Dora being "a poor starry-eyed poet". The two lovers swear that they will fight against all odds, but Bécquer proves unable to improve his social standing and impose his will on Dora's aunt and fiancé. Bécquer not only suffers separation from his loved one, but because he is unable to stifle his feelings and forget. Finding her again years later, he confesses: "I have lived only for your memory and for you".

We also find in Bécquer another characteristic of romantic love. His trysts with Dora take on an artistic-literary aspect, such as when she recites some of her own verses in a park; those same verses later serve as inspiration for the poet's work. Concerning women in Romanticism:

The attractive thing in them is their intellectual capacity and that they offer themselves as companions in a dialogue for spirits whose restlessness calls for communication and friendship. These are women with a great sense of their own dignity and self-awareness [...], experienced in life, and who therefore can be, and in fact are, ideal companions in a relationship that has as much of «logic» as it does of eroticism (Hernández-Pacheco, 1995, p. 115).

Something similar occurs between Espronceda and Teresa, as the director himself pointed out: "before meeting her, Espronceda was a poet lost on Olympus. Once she became his muse, he was seated in the salon of the chosen ones" (Centeno, p. 1945).

We can also consider José de Salamanca's love for María as romantic, she being the spouse of the magnate Buschental. If in the case of Espronceda and Bécquer the *romantic muse* inspired their literary work, Salamanca is inspired in his projects and buildings. But *El Marqués de Salamanca* adheres even more to Romanticism when we consider that the protagonist got

married in 1835 to Petronila Livermore, with whom he had two children. Edgar Neville, nonetheless, presents a Marquess who is apparently single and unable to consummate his union with María.

The love between the two characters is born of their mutual admiration and their conversations deal more with business than with desire, something only Salamanca confesses to explicitly when he is ruined in the film: “you’re worth more than all the friends and all the money in the world. If you would but listen to me now...”. At María’s insistence, the two characters never consummate their adultery, though she always hides their meetings from her husband.

Finally, Luis Candelas is also a romantic hero for the love he professes for María, but we must bear in mind that this is not only true of the fictional character, but that this archetype would also fit the real-life Luis Candelas. He wed Manuela Sánchez in 1823 and abandoned her, he had numerous lovers such as Lola *la Naranjera* –a character in the film–, Paca, *la Maja*, and Mary Alicia, but “his true love was Clara or Clara María, an eighteen-year-old orphan, beautiful, humble and loyal” (Gómez del Val).

Thus, taking the true affairs of Luis Candelas as a basis, the movie highlights his romantic love through the redeeming role of young María. In this sense, the character shares traits with Zorrilla’s Tenorio, in that a woman’s purity moves his heart to remorse.

5.4. *El genio demoníaco*

Argullol uses the term *genio demoníaco* for the romantic hero who embodies “man’s destructive drives” and who “makes an appeal to the devil” (2008, p. 429). This second characteristic is difficult to find among the Spanish romantics, who lived a full but different Romanticism from that of other European countries. Lista, for example says, “the only ‘good’ romanticism was the spiritual, nationalistic, catholic, and medieval, in short, a historic romanticism” (Silver, 1996, p. 42). Thus, the catholic stamp on the Spanish romantics hindered the artistic development of a current of *demoníaca stricto sensu*.

Having said that, the Spanish romantics did cultivate a hero who was libertine and dedicated to vice, proud of his moral dissolution and absolutely not a model of virtue. For Wordsworth:

The born poet is distinguished from other men particularly by his gift of intense sensitivity and susceptibility to passion, [...which] is not incompatible with vice, and... vice leads to misfortune –more acute due to those sensibilities typical of a genius (Abrahams, 1975, p. 154).

So much is this so that Teresa recriminates Espronceda: “I would be ashamed to see the slightest weakness in a man who taught me to ride roughshod over everything” (Ediciones Puerto, 1945, p. 23). Espronceda is described as “arrogant, intelligent, resolute. But together with these qualities, there are many defects: a reveller, spendthrift, inconsistent and prone to falling in love” (p. 10). Opposed to him, we find he who is his rival for Teresa’s love, Bayo: “serious and formal; possesses great capital [...] getting on in years” (p. 11). This contraposition reaffirms Espronceda’s characterisation as a romantic hero, in that Bayo is his opposite. Against the poet’s defects, Bayo is “serious and formal”; against poverty: “great capital”; against the cult of youth: “getting on”.

Lola Montez “is only moved by money and luxury” (Jurado, 2015, p. 327), and her condition as a sinner does not change until the end of the film, when she confesses to a priest. She is, moreover, conscious of her ability, and does not hesitate to use both

her artistic talent and her beauty –a true *femme fatale*– to achieve her ends. Thus, faced by the revolution that causes her fall, she does not hesitate to seduce one of the young revolutionaries, without success.

Concerning Candelas, his trade is to stimulate his *genio demoníaco*. He and his gang rob in different ways, are pursued and defy authority. To make his mother happy, he weds a woman who he does not hesitate to abandon, and continually lands in jail. Candelas is no virtuous hero or defender of good.

Edgar Neville presents us with a truly complex José de Salamanca. Salamanca does not live, like the others, a life of excess, and even has honourable aspirations, like the building of the railway and the refurbishing of the theatre. But this romantic hero does not hesitate to disregard virtue to achieve his ends. He speculates and participates in corrupt deals, bribes, uses confidential information to trade on the stock market and ruins the competition to then gain popularity by paying off their debts.

5.5. *El nómada*

Following Argullol, “the romantic hero is, in dreams or reality, an obsessive nomad. He needs to range over wide spaces –as wide as possible– to liberate his spirit from the stifling airs of limitation” (2008, pp. 439-440). To this end, some of the characters roam abroad.

The film *Espronceda* begins in London, during the poet’s exile. It is there that he falls in love with Teresa –another exile– and where his character is reaffirmed by the contrast between his Spanish character as opposed to that of foreigners. María Malibrán’s first performance of *The Barber of Seville* also takes place in London. From there she travels to the United States, where she sings in Washington, Boston, Philadelphia and New York. Tired of the States, she begs of her husband that they move to Paris. In one of her performances there she is presented as an artist “who comes to us from the youngest of countries, America”.

Lola Montez leaves Spain to triumph as a dancer, and after a stay in Paris travels to Berlin, Prague, Saint Petersburg, London, Dresden and Brussels, until she settles in Bavaria, under the protection of King Ludwig I.

In the Marquess’s case, we are told that he “went to London and what the government didn’t get, he did, a loan”. His servants mention that he has houses in seven European cities, including Paris and Rome. Following a business failure, he did not get discouraged, but travelled and built the Danubian railways and those of California, moreover he established a rail network in the Papal States.

5.6. *El suicida*

González Ruiz wrote in 1941 that “the romantics often [give] us, in literature and in life, a note of hopeless melancholy, the shattering of our moral brake, and in more than one process, of rigorous and implacable logic, suicide”. Following Argullol, we should understand suicide not as a single act that culminates in our death, but as that process of ‘self-destruction’ that brings the actor to “the full dominion of his identity” (2008, pp. 446-447).

This process of self-destruction, a consequence of their dramatic actions, bears with it a tragic destiny, from which the characters cannot escape. The suicidal hero accepts that destiny, and so refuses to change his/her actions.

Lola Montez sees the progress of the student revolution in 1848, she being the cause, but she refuses to give in. Even when the revolutionary victory is a fact, she proudly defies them and stares death straight in the eye. Only when she has lost all she had does she repent her sins, but we must remember that the tragic destiny has already been consummated. As a consequence of her behaviour, the revolution triumphed and she lost everything, but during that process she refused to modify her convictions, such that her transformation takes place a posteriori.

Tragic destiny is inseparable from loneliness and melancholy. Faced with the impossibility of being with Teresa, Espronceda “feels sadder and more desolate every day” (Ediciones Puerto, 1945, p. 20). Furthermore, he will never be happy, as tragic destiny imposes on them only one alternative: a wretched love in life, or death, Teresa admits: “I want you to understand that I live only for your love. But neither can you live if you leave me, because I shall know how to make anguish accompany you to the end of your days, for having ruined my life” (p. 39).

Bécquer affirms: “I’ve never felt more alone”. Tragic destiny means that he can never consummate his love for Dora in this world. Bécquer attends her on her deathbed, now married, and sometime after it is he who abandons this life. When he dies, Dora’s ghost appears to gather up his body and says “at last”; therefore, their love triumphs, but is only possible after death.

A caption tells us in the *El Marqués de Salamanca*: “Here is the story of a man who admits his melancholy: ‘The worst deal... my life!’”. José de Salamanca was an ambitious, intelligent and ingenious man –el *genio romántico*– in business, and achieved great things which brought him popularity, but he died poor. Every time he triumphed, he was ruined; like a phoenix, he regained his wealth, completed a project and went broke again. A tragic destiny denied him happiness. He achieved the wellbeing of others through his buildings –the railway, the theatre...–, but he was unable to enjoy his own work; trapped on the wheel of destiny, he spun it again and again to escape from financial ruin that was always waiting around the next corner.

Finally, Candelas’s destiny was doomed to failure. His idea of redeeming himself and changing his ways –initially false, but later sincere– was frustrated by the weight of his past, by the pressure of his accomplices and by the incomprehension of the authorities. The only thing aiding Candelas towards a good life is the purity of María’s love, but his skills, habits, friendships and objectives are not suited to that end. He feels:

the formlessness of the world around him. A world in which ideals, ends, situations, and even adversities are not defined; one in which the hero does not feel guided by the call of a vigorous moral collective nor driven by grand Promethean objectives (Argullol, 2008, pp. 380-381).

Candelas is firm in facing death, and redemption is not possible in life, there is no place in this world for a repentant bandit: only death –following the confession of his sins– will permit his redemption.

6. Conclusions

Amongst the past ages that serve as a framework for the adaptation of biopics, there are six films with a protagonist who lived during Romanticism. The proliferation of novels and novelised biographies during the XXth century influenced the popularity and the form of representing these characters, as, as we have seen, *Lola Montes* “chased her fantasy”, *El huésped de las tinieblas* is a “fantastic interpretation” of the poet’s “sublime and tormented dreams”, and *El Marqués de Salamanca* omits the entrepreneur’s real-life marriage.

As seen above, the interpretation of Romanticism through the characters selected gives a particular tone to the idea of the natural nobility of the hero, as expounded by Scheler. While the six main characters in these films embody the noble during their lives, in their biopics their tragic, ill-fated destiny is softened giving to these versions a certain triumphalist and costumbrist air. Professionally, four of them cultivated noble arts: Espronceda and Bécquer, poetry; Lola Montez, dance; and María Malibrán, singing. José de Salamanca built magnificent buildings for posterity, and Luis Candelas saw his nobility blossom when he found true love. The lack of interior discipline, together with a self-destructive feeling due to the sentimental excesses of their behaviour cause the characters’ misfortunes.

Their loves (Lola Montez, Espronceda, Bécquer), profession (Salamanca) and social reintegration (Luis Candelas) are ultimately fatalistically cut short. We can see, in their attitude, their way of facing their fatalist destiny; nostalgia and melancholy (Bécquer, Espronceda, Malibrán), and also arrogance (Lola Montez), fruit of impotence before irreversible events. One perceives a romantic touch in their rebelliousness against a rationalism and order impossible to change that seems to banish freedom from their lives. However, the characteristic note by which Romanticism is modulated in Spain, leaving a ‘Spanish version’ of Romanticism, is the emphasis on the greatness of their work from a national point of view: they are heroes due to their feats which inspire and reinforce national pride. Moreover, their incontinent spirits are a didactic revelation of a moral character one can sympathise with and ‘learn’ from.

The six characters from these films display the characteristics of the romantic hero defined by Argullol “a la española”. It is important to highlight that the Spaniards who flocked to the cinemas between 1944 and 1951 saw as the defining traits of these heroes a pernicious subjectivity and an individualism corresponding to the *superhombre* which resulted in miserable lives. Therefore, in these six films “the work” is separate from “the author”, with the purpose -unconscious or not- of recognising merit but discarding the genius’s moral blundering. The suggestive capacity of the oneiric world of the *sonámbulo*, the radicalness of love -even its destructiveness- as an exponent of romantic sentiments, the compatibility of vice and heroism for the *genio demoníaco*, the fascination of travel -adventure and a lack of roots- typical of the *nómada*, as well as the self-destructive character, unable to transcend during his earthly existence, consubstantial to the *suicida* reveal an aesthetic patina with which to superficially interpret fatality; while the decided, lively air of the costumbrist and folkloric atmosphere -with a hue of religiosity- offers an ending open to hope of eternal life for these passionate “poor souls”.

Thus, the six characters find themselves as inserts in the peculiarities specific to Spanish Romanticism. In short, whilst still sharing traits of European Romanticism, these traits are softened, due -mainly- to the catholicity -religious and cultural- diffused by Spanish intellectuals and writers. These characters will not contend with the devil *stricto sensu*, but limit themselves

to extolling vice; their process of destruction will give off a ray of hope; and their radicality in love is to be understood as a loyalty *in aeternum* despite their separation.

These films allow an adequate approach to Spanish Romanticism, in both its acceptations: chronological (the first half of the XIXth century, the setting for the films) and intellectual (the specific way in which Romanticism was assimilated in Spain). These film-makers probably filmed the six movies drawn by the first acceptance: escaping to the past, costumes, recreated scenes, duels and frock coats. The second acceptance –analysed in this paper– was nothing but the obligatory consequence of having recreated that period.

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8. Specific contributions of each author

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Conception and design of the work	Pablo Úrbez-Fernández
Methodology	Ruth Gutiérrez Delgado
Data collection and analysis	Pablo Úrbez-Fernández
Discussion and conclusions	Pablo Úrbez-Fernández y Ruth Gutiérrez Delgado
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