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Palindrome and Chiasmus in Medem’s “Arctic Circle”

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It should not in the least surprise us that Julio Medem made a film whose protagonists’ names are both palindromes, for his own family name is a palindrome, and he has a sister named Ana and an uncle named Otto. What should surprise us, however, is that in *Los amantes del círculo polar* (*The Lovers of the Arctic Circle*) Medem succeeded in creating an entire film that is remarkably and completely a single palindrome. Although other critics have noted the palindromic nature of the work, none has as yet demonstrated whether or how the narrative structure might indeed constitute a palindrome, nor discussed either the philosophical and narratological impasse that such a structure might imply. Joan-Lluis Ramisa, for example, laconically notes, “Julio Medem’s fourth feature begins at the end, returns to the beginning before eventually returning us to the final sequence, thus completing the circle. . . . The film is a giant palindrome,” he asserts but makes no attempt to illustrate exactly how this might be so. Indeed, Ramisa tends to use palindrome and circular as synonyms although they have quite starkly different meanings. Palindrome is not, strictly speaking, a geometric idea, nor is it sufficient to suggest that it begins and ends in the same “place.” A palindrome is a very particular construction.

It is the nature of the palindrome to constitute a composite self-sufficient entity (as opposed to other tropes which are almost always contained in larger contextual frameworks). As such its very figuration implies closure and impasse

rather than openness and connection (as for example is the case of chiasmus or metaphor which derive their very meaning from their context, their *insertion* into a line of poetry).

In what is perhaps the most famous palindrome in the English language we can easily discover the mechanics of closure that are endemic to palindrome. “Able was I ere I saw Elba,” reads the same forwards and backwards to be sure. Since the subject of this palindrome is Napoleon, who died in exile on Elba, the phrase concludes with one of the most famous examples of dead-endedness we know. But that impasse is already present in the opening phrase where the past tense of the verb “to be” signifies *the absence of* “ableness”. “I *was* able” signifies that I am no longer able, am disabled, am utterly *ended*. And that disability is chronologically simultaneous with the very act of seeing Elba, as is communicated in the preposition “ere” which gives the phrase the meaning: “as soon as I saw Elba I was disabled.” Thus the first half of the palindrome anticipates (i.e. connotes *identity* with) the second half: seeing Elba = being disabled. The palindrome thus replicates the way that a classical tragedy uses tragic irony to anticipate an ending that is already “present” at the outset of the play. When Racine’s Hippolyte tells his friend Thérémène that “mon dessein est pris et je pars” in the first line of *Phèdre*, he is unconsciously announcing the fatal “design” that will lead him to depart this life in utter agony. In our palindrome “was I” and “I saw” signify a single tragic meaning: impasse and closure. The inversion of “was I” is merely a hyperbole of the loss of self that is signified here: “I” is merely a nostalgic cipher for what is already lost. (It is thus not insignificant that Napoleon, so often represented by the single capital letter “N”, is conspicuously erased from this sentence inasmuch as the letter “n” does not occur anywhere in the line. Nor is it merely a homophonic coincidence that at the very center of this palindrome lies the pun “ere/err”—Napoleon’s tragic “flaw” is always already “at the center” of his demise. In this deadening impasse, the very figure of palindrome communicates a tragic sense of life.

Were it to conform perfectly to such a palindromic structure *Lovers of the Arctic Circle* would thus *appear* to be frozen in this impassive impasse just as the plane that opens and closes the film lies frozen in the arctic ice. Indeed, a first reading of his *Lovers of the Arctic Circle* clearly invites a palindromic or frozen—ultimately immobile view of the film’s narrative, beginning with the image of Otto in Ana’s presumably dead eyes. Such a structure would insist on an entirely tragic reading of his film: the eyes that OPEN and CLOSE the film are ALWAYS ALREADY “dead” and the progress of the film can only be an inevitable movement toward a central point and then a regression backward from that point to the point of departure.

A scene-by-scene analysis of *The Lovers of the Arctic Circle* will allow us to test whether a palindrome might be possible in such an extended narrative—at

first glance a seemingly insurmountable obstacle. And yet, this is precisely what Medem has achieved.

If we consider as palindromic a structure that includes both direct repetitions of scenes and recreations of scenes in symbolic terms, we can arrive at the following pattern: Beginning from the opening scene and labeling each scene alphabetically, we arrive at the following pattern: reading from A–Z to the middle of the film and then Z–A from the middle to the end.

- A. (00:–2:15) A still image of Otto’s plane frozen in the arctic ice.
- B. (2:40) A newsphoto of Otto’s plane.
- C. (3:16) Otto’s image in Ana’s eyes.
- D. (3:25) The polar sun setting across the horizon and Otto’s voice off saying “It is good that lives have several circles. But mine, my life has only gone around once. Yet the circle isn’t closed, the most important point is still missing. I have written her name inside many times. And here, right now, I cannot close anything. I am alone.”
- E. (4:50) Otto chases Ana through the woods, when she falls he stands looking down at her.
- F. (6:30) An image of the gas gauge in the car.
- G. (6:45) A red car (same lic. Plate as fatal truck later) takes Alvaro away from his family.
- H. (7:20) Otto lurches forward in front seat as his father slams on the brakes to avoid hitting a red bus. (Repeated with Ana and Otto and Olga (23:00))
- I. (9:15) Shot of Otto in the cockpit of the plane.
- J. (10:30) Paper planes fly out window inscribed with a message of love from Otto to Ana.
- K. (12:50) Map of Arctic Circle underlined in red.
- L. (20:00) Otto and Ana discover their names are both palindromes.
- M. (26:00) Story of Otto’s grandfather helping a German parachutist.
- N. (26:49) “Otto el piloto.”
- O. (28) Otto and Ana look at a picture of an elk and hear elk mooing.
- P. Ana’s voice-off stating: “I will stay here as long as it takes. I’m waiting for the biggest coincidence (casualidad) of my life. The biggest of all of them. And I have seen many coincidences. ... Yes, I could splice my life by coincidences.”
- Q. (27:30) Otto in the plane’s cockpit smiles and looks out at water.
- R. (30:00) Ana hands Otto a note telling him to visit her bed at night, he crumples it like a paper airplane.
- S. (36:00) Otto’s mother dies.

- T. The Envelope.
- U. (40:10) A Germanic looking man who can mysteriously ski uphill saves Otto.
- V. (43:00) Otto and Ana's fingers on the map of Lapland.
- W. Otto in his plane.
- X. The red heart.
- Y. The sled accident.
- Z. (54:00) They cross paths without seeing each other in the Plaza Mayor in Madrid.
- Y. (55:00) Ana's version of the sled accident.
- X. Otto visits Alvaro now sick and alone (bleeding heart).
- W. Ana on plane to Lapland.
- V. Ana steps over white line "The arctic circle."
- U. Aki, the Germanic looking man who can ski uphill delivers groceries to Ana.
- T. The Envelope from red mail truck.
- S. Otto tells his girlfriend that his mother died from love.
- R. Paper plane in classroom but no note written on it.
- Q. Otto in cockpit.
- P. "I will stay here as long as it takes. I'm waiting for the biggest coincidence (casualidad) of my life. The biggest of all of them. And I have seen many coincidences. ... Yes, I could splice my life by coincidences."
- O. (1:24) Ana looks at Elk painting in cottage, hears the animal mooing.
- N. (1:28:10) "Otto el piloto."
- M. (1:28:20) Aged Otto talks about finding Spanish wife.
- L. (1:28:45) Aged Otto tells Ana his name is a palindrome.
- K. (1:29) Map of Arctic circle underlined in red.
- J. (1:30) Ana's naked body is seen in the water. Otto's plane flies over and its phallic reflection appears to "enter" Ana as she lies in water.
- I. (1:30:30) Shot of Otto in plane.
- H. (1:35) Otto lurches forward as Aki's car almost hits a bus in Rovaniemi.
- G. A red mail truck takes Ana away from her cabin.
- F. Shot of the gas gauge of the plane.
- E. (1:35) Otto chases Ana through the center of Rovaniemi and, catching up to her looks down at her on the ground.
- D. (1:34) The polar sun setting across the horizon and the quote "It is good that lives have several circles. ... I cannot close anything."
- C. Otto's image in Ana's eyes.
- B. (1:38) A newsphoto of Otto's plane.
- A. A still image of Otto's plane frozen in the arctic ice.

We can thus discern that Medem has, incredibly and uncannily, been able to create within the larger narrative of *The Lovers* a perfectly palindromic structure. To be sure, the director has woven other elements into this primary one, the most obvious being the alternation between Otto's and Ana's points of view. We will return later in the essay to this series of chiasmic pairings and the very different meaning they (as opposed to the palindrome) might have for Medem's film. For the moment, however, we should explore more fully the implications of the dominant palindromic structure.

Many of the film's themes contribute to this "deadening" structure. The most insistently repetitious of these is the series of automobile "crashes" or near-crashes that punctuate the film. This series is first introduced (at minute 6:00 of the film) during a conversation between Otto and Alvaro as they are driving to school. Alvaro tells his son, "Life has to have its cycles. Everything is born and dies." Otto objects, "Not everything," so his father asks, "Do you know something that lasts forever? ... Life is implacable. Happy and sad. Everything withers with time. ... So does love. The gas in the car for example, if you forget you're going to run out, you'll get stuck on the way." Medem cuts to a shot of the gas gauge and the needle falls to zero. A dissolve brings us to a shot of Alvaro holding a gas can standing near a stalled blue Citroen 2cv. We see Otto sitting on the hood facing his mom, who says, "You have to take things in good humor ... Because they come and go. Things can't last forever." A red car pulls past, and Alvaro runs by holding the gas can shouting, "I'll be right back!" and jumps into the car. There is a young, dark-haired woman at wheel. The last thing we see is the car's license plate: M4568 DV. Uncannily and inexplicably we are to see this same license plate again.

At minute 14:40, Ana's mother comes to pick her daughter up at school. We see Ana shouting, "No, no!" as she backs away from the camera. In a voice-over, Ana recalls, "That day my mother went to pick me up at school with the most terrible news." Medem cuts back to Olga with her hand over her mouth as she moves toward Ana. Ana yells, "No. And stop crying so it won't be true." She runs off to her left along brick wall and as she runs we again hear her voice over saying, "You can run backwards. Hours backwards. A whole life. It was my father's life. And if his daughter didn't run who would?" Now she's running in the woods and Otto is running after her. She falls and Otto looks down at her. In a voice-over we hear, "Where did that boy come from? From my father's death? At the time I thought it was a gift from him, ashamed of dying so young. I even thought it could be him."

At 16:20 Medem cuts again and this time we see Ana's father's hands on the steering wheel of his car as he pulls out from behind a large truck and attempts to pass it on a two-lane road. As another huge semi appears in the passing lane dead in front of him, the camera cuts to a shot of his gas gauge, the needle on Empty. The camera cuts back to the huge truck bearing down on the now stalled car. The

last thing we see before the sounds of the crash is the license plate of the Magirus Deutz truck: M4568DV—exactly the same plate as that of the car that whisks Otto's father away. This uncanny repetition of the license plate cannot but certify that there is a pattern in these events that defies logic, reason and intelligence. Since these events seem to be linked on some other level (Destiny? Dream? The Unconscious?) they become unavailable for any conscious "correction" of course. "I always start with an image," Medem has said in terms that seem to confirm this other inaccessible level. "I do not start with an idea or a discourse but a very internalised image. ... Sometimes you have to look closer to the fantastic than the real to be able to see things."¹

Each of these allusions to "running out of gas" is linked to other symbolic and narrative streams in the film. The first discussion of running out of gas, for instance, is syntactically linked to the next scene (7:20) in which Alvaro nearly crashes into a red bus and Otto is thrown forward against the dashboard. That event is repeated (22:50) when Olga actually does hit a bus and both Otto and Ana are thrown forward in their seats. A third "repetition" occurs when Ana rushes onto the road near her cabin in Lapland and is nearly hit by the postal woman in a red van. All of these point to the final figure in this series: at 1:44 Aki is driving Otto into Rovaniemi and has to screech to a halt to avoid hitting a passing bus. But this time it is Ana who is actually hit by the bus and whose body seems to slide along the pavement like a plane landing as life ebbs from her body. Thus it is that Medem adds to the tragic weight of the palindrome, a series of repetitions that seem to catch up everyone in the film into a network of eerily similar events. These incidents take place not only in this horizontal configuration but are repeated symbolically on a vertical one. The Mensajero Aéreo plane will run out of fuel and fall onto the arctic ice as we know, and its fall is anticipated chronologically and followed narratively by the downward spirals of the paper airplanes that Otto made as a child and launched from the school window. But falling real planes generate parachutes, and the film thus recapitulates the series of horizontal crashes by a set of vertical ones: the German bomber Otto, will be tangled in his parachute lines at the top of a tree near Guernica (26:30), and his Spanish namesake will reenact this scene in the Arctic near the end of the narrative (1:32:00). This vertical series would also include Otto's flight on the sled off the top of a cliff (41:30) and his rescue by the same actor who plays the German Otto and the grocery delivery man in Lapland.

The palindrome in *Lovers* seems, moreover, to be reinforced by the geographies of the film. At the very center of this figure, as we can see from the alphabetical arrangement above, Otto and Ana cross paths, but maddeningly do NOT meet on the Plaza Mayor in Madrid. As any Spaniard knows, Madrid lies at the exact geographical center of the country, and the Plaza Mayor lies at the center of

Madrid. Hence, from this moment "forward" Ana will begin to fulfill the words she speaks in her first encounter with Otto: "You can run backwards. Hours backwards. A whole life. It was my father's life. And if his daughter didn't run who would?" If her father's life were to grow to adulthood and be killed by a speeding vehicle, then this "running backwards" in imitation of his life would lead her exactly to the film's already projected end.

The other geography is the "Polar" one. The North Pole happens to be one of two points on the planet from which one can travel any distance due South, turn 90 degrees and travel any distance, the turn due North again and end up in exactly the same place from which one had departed. It is, uncannily, a kind of geographical palindrome!

The apparent *deadness* of this series of repetitions could be explained by the Freudian theory of the repetition compulsion (that early traumatic losses need to be endlessly and unconsciously and masochistically repeated as an ironic form of "mastery")—a theory that subtends Freud's entire thesis in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* that "the aim of all life is death." Paul Russell has argued that the repetition compulsion is an experience felt to be entirely determined by the present, but which can only be fully comprehended by the past, that is, "a memory which masquerades as a present-day event." What sets the repetition compulsion in motion is "some original and prototypic trauma," whose complexity and power give the impression that they possess an intelligence superior to our own, and that they function rather like "a doom, a nemesis, a curse ... some fatal flame" that seems "governed by some malignant attraction which one does not know and cannot comprehend or control." This description of the repetition compulsion inherent and implicit in the palindromic structure applies remarkably well to the events of Medem's film with what Russell would term "its deadly destructiveness."² As *esthetically* satisfying as the palindrome in *Lovers* may be, to circumscribe Medem's entire film within this single vector, however, seems to very seriously betray other aspects of this work.

Indeed, post-Freudians tend not to see the repetition compulsion as leading so inevitably to such terrifyingly deadening extremes. Is Ana's death in Rovaniemi really already so "visible" in the events that surround her encounter with Otto as to eliminate any possibility of escape or redemption? Gil Noam, for example, has argued that what he calls the "encapsulation" inherent in the repetition compulsion is not *necessarily* a fixed or unchanging structure, precisely because it functions in a dynamic with other aspects of the self, both inter- and intra-personal. Noam calls the enduring aspects of the self "core themes" that are inevitably based on ongoing relationships with others and thus help the individual organize his life into a "biography of meanings" which help transform elements that have previously been compulsions to repeat into a "*reworking with important changes*."³

Ultimately, no matter how much the palindrome *appears to capture* the film's narrative in its tragic structuration, it is, at every turn, counterbalanced by the similar but paradoxically opposing structure of chiasmus. For, unlike the palindrome, chiasmus is a *contextual trope* whose function is to link two apparently opposed elements in a structure that reveals (in their mirrored position) an underlying dynamic that we might otherwise have missed. However much the "tragic" end of *Lovers* may appear to be already set in its beginning, one cannot escape the sense that there is an overpowering and mysterious beauty to this film that cannot be vitiated by the apparent finality of its pattern.

Chiasmatic structures, contrary to the palindromic one, invite us to see powerful connections between *the seen and the unseen*, between the *immanent* and the *transcendent*, between two versions of reality whose combination allows for degrees of creativity and growth that suggest what is transcendent in our mortal lives.

When we take another look at the various *pieces* of the palindromic structure from this perspective, we begin to feel that there is another force at work in *Lovers*. There is NO stasis in this film, only kinesis (to play on the word for the cinema). The film does NOT just stagnate in a narrative that cannot avoid returning to its origins, it *evolves* through powerful emotional explosions each of which brings the viewer and the characters into new relationships with their worlds.

If we now examine the context in which the palindrome exercises its tragic impasse, we see other, more hopeful signs. Ana's and Otto's opposite sex parents are "fated" to come together—or are they? When Otto's father picks up one of the paper airplanes his son has thrown out the school window to attract Ana, he muses, "How romantic, it's what we always wondered." That is, Otto has actively offered his father this message to contemplate. Correspondingly, Ana takes one of the planes, reaches toward her mother and says (17:09), "Take this mom." Her mother opens it, smiling. "How beautiful," she muses. "And who is it from?" Ana then looks around dreamily and points at Otto's father: "It's from ... that man!" Ana's mother does not let this possibility pass and shouts across the schoolyard, "It's cold isn't it!" He answers "Very!" She shouts, "My name is Olga" "And mine Alvaro."

There are several meanings here that must not be overlooked. First, we recall that Alvaro has prepared himself for this meeting, by telling his son (5:40) "I'm glad it's cold ... Winters have to be cold so we can appreciate green and beautiful springs ... Life has to have cycles." But in Alvaro and Olga we see something very different from the palindromes of their children's names. Alvaro begins with an A and ends with an O. Alpha and Omega. Progression. Olga's name begins with an O and ends with an A. Omega and Alpha. This arrangement is not palindromic it is chiasmic: A. O.: O. A. In these two names we have a mirroring arrangement in which the equation suggested by the chiasmus suggests the union of mysterious and fulsome possibilities, not the deadening repetition of a route already traveled.

Alvaro and Olga will come together to create the environment necessary to house the love that their children will discover. And when that union is no longer fruitful to the two children it will be replaced by another chiasmus: the very Spanish Alvaro will give way to Alvaro Middleman (!)—the son of a German pilot named Otto, who married a Spanish woman and brought her to Lapland, and this older Otto will offer Ana the environment necessary to house her adult love for his namesake. These other figures seem to operate outside of and in counterweight to the palindrome. They offer transcendent possibilities to offset the tragic loss that might otherwise entirely overwhelm the entire film and introduce the idea of donation.

Gifts

There are a number of scenes in which the word "gift" is used. To that extent, the scenes mimic each other. The notion of "gift" emerges as an important motif, and will also have important implications for chiasmus.

1. Ana believes her father inhabits Otto's body. In the scene in which she shows her mother the airplane message, her mother asks her who wrote the message and Ana points randomly to a man (one of the other parents) with long hair, learning later that this man is Otto's father, Alvaro. Ana says to herself that now she knows that **Otto is a gift from her father**. The reason she says this is that the apparently random (chance) choice of the man with long hair was not random. For her, this choice is destined. For this reason she believes that her dead father is guiding her towards this man. It does not seem to her mere coincidence.
2. Otto tells the story that he was named after the pilot whom his grandfather saved in a tree during the Spanish Civil War, Otto. When Alvaro introduces his German girlfriend to his father, his father says explicitly **that she was a gift from the German pilot** whom he had saved during the war.
3. When Ana flies to the Arctic and meets this older Otto, he tells her that the day his wife died his son, also named Alvaro, like Otto's father's name, told him that that same day he had met the woman he was going to marry, Olga, Ana's mother. The word "gift" is not used in this case, but it certainly, in the context of the other scenes, Ana's mother constitutes a kind of gift from (the German) Otto's dead wife. The idea of the gift in relation to this scene will be confirmed in #4 below.
4. Medem includes a scene at a gift shop in which **Otto is buying a gift** for his mother (the big red heart). When Ana's mother leaves the store, Otto buys the red heart and gives it as a gift to Ana. When Ana's mother returns,

Otto asks her for money (he's just spent his money on the heart for Ana) to buy the red heart for his mother. This is the same scene in which Ana's mother meets the German Alvaro (who tells her she has a good voice and should audition as a newscaster). There are thus three gifts in the scene: 1-Otto buys a heart for Ana. 2-Otto buys a heart for his German mother (with money borrowed from Ana). 3-Ana's mother receives the gift of the German Alvaro (son of German Otto) as the necessary "Middleman" in this sequence. This last example can be compared to #3 above. The word "gift" is not used, but this too is an obvious "gift" scene.

Gifts and Chiasmus (Exchange)

Gifts are often exchanged (not necessarily, but often). The symmetrical (or reciprocal) crossing over of terms in chiasmus suggests the notion of exchange (in palindrome, however, there is no sense of exchange). The giving of gifts in the film involves the same elements that are involved in chiasmus in the film (male/female, German/Spaniard).

The Genealogical Tree: el Árbol genealógico

There are two scenes that stand in chiasmic relation to each other: the German Otto hangs from a tree at the beginning and the Spanish Otto hangs from a tree at the end. A tree is, of course, a likely place for a pilot, who has just parachuted, to be suspended. But most commonly, family members find themselves in trees for another reason—a quick look at the film's "images" as forms of a genealogical tree makes this clear. In the film, the two scenes of a family member in a tree suggest the chiasmic genealogy that occurs in relation to nationality and gender: the German Otto (**saved from a certain death** by the Spanish Alvaro) finds a Spanish wife (possible only because of the recent death of her father). This pairing of male German with female Spaniard leads to the following: the **German** Alvaro (son of German Otto) finds a **Spanish** wife (who gave birth to Ana) whereas the **Spanish** Alvaro finds a **German** wife (who will give birth to Otto).

Palindrome, Chiasmus and Meaning

While palindrome is fixed and closed, chiasmus is open. Palindrome is fixed and closed precisely in relation to meaning. What makes a palindrome a palindrome

is that it reads the same forwards or backwards. And read forwards or backwards, it will have the same meaning: "Able was I ere I saw Elba," When one reads "s-a-w" it will always have the meaning it has (the past tense of see), and cannot, for instance, mean something one uses to cut down a tree.

This is not the case with chiasmus. Chiasmus involves the inversion of pairs of terms, such as in the sentence "Do you eat to live or live to eat?" If it is thought of in linear (horizontal) fashion, its description (ABBA) resembles the structure of palindrome. One could say that the ABBA structure of chiasmus "mimics" palindrome, but with significant differences. To avoid confusion, it should be thought of as an x-like crossing over of terms (chi is the Greek letter x).

In chiasmus words that are identical need not have the same meaning. Take the example given above: eat to live: live to eat. The two instances of "live," though they appear identical, do not have the same meaning. In the first instance, "live" refers to being alive (as opposed to dying); in the second instance, it refers to a state of enthusiastic anticipation ("I can't wait for dinner!").

In chiasmus, as opposed to the palindrome, an apparently identical word can refer to different things. This structure can be found in the film in the use of names. To say that Ana's mother meets Alvaro, is to say that she meets Otto's father and Otto's son, and then becomes intimately involved with "him." In John 12:24 we read: "Verily, verily I say unto you, except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit." In this text, we find confirmation that that good things (gifts) can come from a person's death, that ends are also beginnings. In the film the German Otto is saved from dying, and finds the Spanish woman he then marries. This is probably only possible because her father has recently died. In chiasmic response, the German Otto's wife dies the same day his son Alvaro says he's met the Spanish woman (Ana's mother) whom he's going to marry. From the film's chiasmic pairings we understand how ends may be beginnings in a sense dramatically opposed to the deadness of the palindrome.

Ultimately, then, what might otherwise be considered merely oedipal repetitions (Ana plays Otto's mother and Otto replaces her father) could in the light of the chiasmic structure be seen as powerful introjections of the most positive pieces of lost parental figures—introjections which, as Freud himself indicated, allow us to move beyond the impasse of melancholy to the growthfulness of mourning and renewal.

To return to the opening and closing images of Medem's film, the image of Otto in Ana's eyes might be seen merely as the confirmation that this tragedy is predestined. But in the light of the chiasmic rebirths in the film, we might read this same image as a symbol of cinema itself. It both "sees" and replays an image that challenges us to rethink everything. Perhaps Ana's eyes are not dead, but are

open in shock—the shock of recognition that everything she ever wanted has NOT vanished, crashed, run out of gas or disappeared. Perhaps these should not be called the “opening” and “closing” images of the film. Perhaps Ana’s eyes—like the eyes of the film’s spectator—are always already open to ongoing creative possibilities. Do not Ana’s and Otto’s names suggest openness, surprise and wonder: a chiasmus composed of an open vowel, a lingual-palatal “caress” followed by an open vowel: Ah ... Ah! and “Oh ... Oh!” an alpha and an omega that invite inclusiveness—the beginning and ending of all things as a knowledge of their transcendence—rather than mere closure?

Notes

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CHAPTER 10

Where the Wolf Sleeps

The Representation of Spain’s Anti-Fascist Guerillas in Montxo Armendáriz’s Film *Silencio roto* (2001)

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“Míralos. Se creen héroes. Pobres ilusos. Piensan que van a arreglar el mundo.”

—TERESA, AFTER THE GUERRILLAS HAVE TAKEN THE TOWN

“Las personas fallamos, Lucía. Lo importante son los ideales que se defienden.”

—DON HILARIO, FORMER TOWN SCHOOLTEACHER

“No pierdas la esperanza. Es lo único que nos queda.”

—DON HILARIO

“¿Qué esperanza? Es una mentira, y Ud. lo sabe.”

—THE PROTAGONIST LUCÍA

When the camera first opens its eye in Spanish director Montxo Armendáriz’s 2001 film *Silencio roto*, it looks, from a distance, at clouded gray mountains. Clouds partially dissipate, then return. Suddenly, gunshots punctuate the stillness. First far off, they quickly move close. The camera views trees close up, red with autumn color, then rushes in among them, taking the viewer along. Shots are close, then farther off, then close again. A short round of submachine-gun fire, loud and very near, places the viewer unmistakably, dangerously, at the heart of the exchange, almost a witness, though no human form appears. The camera then moves slowly in a travelling tilt-up shot from halfway up the mountain to its top as two more