

Primer Plano: the popular face of censorship

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PRIMER PLANO: THE POPULAR FACE OF CENSORSHIP

ALBERT ELDUQUE

CRITICISM AS CENSORSHIP

Any discussion of Spanish cinema in the early years of the Franco regime must necessarily include a consideration of *Primer Plano*, given its status as the regime's reference guide to cinema. Founded in 1940 by Manuel Augusto García Viñolas, a Falange member who at the time was the Director of Spain's National Department of Cinematography, the magazine served as the official channel of communication between the film industry authorities of the Spanish State and the general public. Censorship had its place in the magazine in the form of short official notices and lists of the films assessed, with the corresponding determinations. However, this was a negligible part of its content, which was amazingly varied and aimed at many different readerships: the publication included sections typical of any film magazine, such as interviews with actors and directors, reports on film shoots and short reviews,

but its content brought together many other formats at times quite disparate: texts on cinematographic techniques; reports on the recently created *Círculo Cinematográfico Español* (CIRCE), a kind of film club founded to promote quality cinema; contributions by prominent intellectuals of the era, such as Eugeni d'Ors and Camilo José Cela; an attractive repertoire of articles and photo montages on cinematic images, etc. All of this, of course, was in the interests of promoting Spanish cinema, extolling German and Italian cinema, but for the most part paying tribute to the glitz and glamour of Hollywood.¹

In this article it is my intention to explore how *Primer Plano* reflected the censorship of eroticism in the early years of the Franco regime, which coincided with the Second World War, from the first appearance of the magazine in October 1940 through to the end of 1945. To do this, however, I will not examine the brief and colourless official communiques on censorship, but the publication

as a whole, from its opinion pieces to its gossip columns. Indeed, the articles dedicated strictly to censorship occupied a very small space in the 24 pages of the magazine, yet the whole publication could be considered a vehicle for censorship. As can be confirmed from the numerous official regulations documented by Román Gubern and Domènec Font in their book *Un cine para el cadalso*, film censorship in Spain was not governed by any specific rules until the order issued on 9 February 1963, with the explicit prohibition of elements such as “the presentation of sexual perversion as the focal point of the plot,” or “any images or scenes that could provoke low passions in a normal spectator” (GUBERN and FONT, 1975: 347).²

In the face of such ambiguity, *Primer Plano*, owing to its partially official dimension, played an important censoring role. The magazine’s editors were fully aware of this fact, as reflected in the editorial for Issue 46, written by Alfonso Sánchez under the title “*Peligros del espectáculo cinematográfico*” [Perils of the Film Spectacle]. In this editorial Sánchez begins by arguing that cinema is potentially dangerous for the public, both for its captivating and suggestive power and for the lack of spiritual education of its spectators, and he proposes an interesting idea: that the best weapon in this moral battle would not be censorship, but criticism: “[t]o address this peril a stringent preventive strategy is required, which cannot be limited to censorship, because it does not affect the interpretations that each spectator gives to the images he views. Rather, it is the mission of reasoned and stringent criticism, in-depth and independent criticism that dissects the specific case of each film, guiding and directing the reactions of the individual. Only in this way may the image be divested of all of its impressionistic power.” It can thus be a bulwark against all the evils that celluloid brings, but especially eroticism, which according to Sánchez was the most dangerous of all: “where the mission is most arduous, due to the vastness of the battlefield, where a just, unswerv-

ing and definitive criterion must be established with precision is on the subject of love” (SÁNCHEZ, 1941: 3).

Both the ambiguity of the regulations and this decisive declaration of principles suggest that *Primer Plano* was a valuable instrument of censorship of eroticism not only because of its official communiques, but also because of the ideology revealed in its content. In this article I will examine different editorials, opinion pieces, reports and news to consider how *Primer Plano* addressed a topic which, due to its dangerous nature and its frequent presence on film screens, simply could not be ignored. This will make it possible to sketch out the faint eroticism of an ideology, marked by firm convictions about nation, gender and the relationship between art and its audience.

IMPORTED GESTURES

Primer Plano often associates sexuality with a foreign enemy that must be contained. Erotic liberation and base habits had nothing to do with Spanish identity; they belonged to other nations which, through commercial channels, were trying to attack the spiritual bastion of the Iberian Peninsula. In the second instalment of “*Manifiesto a la cinematografía española*” [Manifesto for Spanish Cinema], a kind of foundational text for the magazine, García Viñolas asserts that “[t]he vices and virtues that we find in American cinema are the vices and virtues of the United States; the charm and the danger that French cinema brought us was the dangerous charm of the whole life of France. No national cinema exists in isolation from the life of its nation; rather, it is an image of it, even when it deals with universal or foreign themes. And it is not out of cynical cost-cutting that our cinema turned to the local colour of Andalusia or sought refuge in the gloominess of rural dramas, but for the supreme reason that all Spanish life was an Andalusian comedy, when it was not a gloomy rural drama” (GARCÍA VIÑOLAS, 1940: 3). Thus, on one

side is foreign cinema, and on the other is Spanish cinema. This idea, which was fundamental for *Primer Plano*, acted as a battle cry for a crusade that was as spiritual as it was commercial. An article published in January 1944, which presented an overview of the films of the previous year, raised this issue with absolute explicitness: foreign films are a moral and economic peril, which threatened to destroy both the principles of public life in Spain and its industrial structures (1944: 5).

In the case of eroticism, this double-edged threat comes, first and foremost, in the form of gestures. Antonio Valencia, in his editorial "*Los modales del cine*" [The Manners of the Cinema], examines two of these, the kiss and the punch, to discuss how cinema, by showing them on its multiplicity of screens, has got spectators around the world trying to imitate them. Valencia thus denounces a homogenisation of the gesture, in which he also sees a strong commercial dimension (VALENCIA, 1943: 3). Along the same lines, although focused only on depictions of amorous exchanges, we find the virulent article "*La enfermedad del cine*" [The Disease of the Cinema] by Tristán Yuste, dedicated to the spectator's gestural experience. Opening with the blunt assertion that the most worn-out topic in cinema is love, Yuste suggests that this phenomenon is harmless when it constitutes merely one of many images of life, but becomes dangerous when it constitutes the main plot of the film. For Yuste, "a film with an exclusively amorous theme, in jiggling its irresistible little marionettes across the screen, bewitches and captivates the masses, a mob of simple humans who are easily excited by the performance of facile flirtations of dashing stars and stunning starlets." These public masses, acritical and easily influenced, receive a bad example from the movie screens: "what these movie spectators want is to seduce the opposite sex for their own pleasure, and here they find it seduced, not due to the proximity of its presence but due to the sight of a screen brought to life by a halo of fashionable

and carefree frivolity." And as noted above, this threat is manifested in the realm of the gesture, as young spectators want to imitate the movements of the stars so that they can seduce members of the opposite sex like those stars do: "readying themselves to catch what so excites them, our callow youth end up spending whole hours in front of the mirror practising affectations and inanities, leading them to produce a lot of foolish gesticulating and gibbering, which they believe to be so very 'interesting', whenever they want to attract attention." (YUSTE, 1942: 6).

These articles do not make an abstract attack against a foreign enemy, but an astute critique of a specific, identifiable phenomenon: gestural education through cinematic images. Yuste goes on to explore this issue by considering different countries and explaining how love is represented in each one. The references to Americans and the French that García Viñolas made in his manifesto give way here to a merciless diatribe, even against Spain's cinematic production: for Yuste, the American film is vulgar, "charming nonsense that appeals to the masses with its coarseness posing as 'straightforwardness,'" whose love stories generally involve two women fighting over the same man; the French film is "a depravity which in its passion for pleasures stops at nothing, not even at Bishop Jansen"; Spanish films are maudlin mush, "the sickly sentimentalism of sagas in instalments, squeezed into four scenes with no substance, in which the characters possess no more personality than that which the narration affords them," while their plots, characterised by villainy and muckraking, generally involve a woman being pursued by a virtuous hero and by a brazen, contemptible seducer; and Mexican films are similar to the Spanish, due to the obvious cultural connection, but without the sentimentality. Yuste ultimately gives his preference to German films, because they avoid exaggeration, sentimentality and immorality, and "speak of a more natural love, which more resembles the love of everyday life" (YUSTE, 1942: 6).

The criticism of the foreign and the rejection of gestural excesses are also the key features of the talk “*Plástica del amor en el cine*” [Expressions of Love in Cinema], delivered to CIRCE by Gaspar Tato Cumming, an abstract of which was published in Issue 67 of *Primer Plano*. Tato Cumming rounds out Tristán Yuste’s taxonomy with observations on love in Russian cinema, guided by the blind instinct of the masses, and in Japanese cinema, a vegetative film tradition in which “the actors give the impression of plants.”⁴ However, his core idea can be found in his comparison of Charlie Chaplin, Francesca Bertini and Mae West: “Let us place Chaplin between Bertini and Mae West. Bertini flattens love through exaltation; Mae West, through depravity. They have no expressive force or forms of amorous expression... And this leaves us with Chaplin in this trio. We must

remember that although he makes a caricature of love, he *makes us feel it*: such is the expressive force in that posture of his with both hands gripping his heart, while his tilted head leans towards his beloved with an ardent gaze” (GARCÍA, 1942: 12). Bertini embodies the tragic Italian spirit (which is praised, however, by Nicolás González Ruiz in his article “*Flor al cine italiano*” [1942: 9]), while West is the vulgarity of a certain brand of American cinema. Conversely, Tato Cumming admires Chaplin, and also Valentino, seeing in the gaze of the first and the subtlety of the second the expressions of love that give his talk its title. Indeed, his argument is not an isolated case in *Primer Plano*: in an article dedicated to the cinema’s leading men (Figure 1), Antonio Walls analyses the difference between the exaggerated gestures of the Italian Gustavo Serena and the suavity of Robert Tay-

Figure 1. “Breve historia del galán cinematográfico” by Antonio Walls. *Primer Plano*, Issue 7, December 1st 1940, pp. 14–15.



Up. Figure 2. Elaine Shepard on the cover of *Primer Plano* Issue 271, 23 December 1945.

Down. Figure 3. Advertisement for Lambrequin honey and almond milk. *Primer Plano*, Issue 170, 16 January 1944, p. 17.

lor in *Camille* (George Cukor, 1936) in these terms: "Not so much as a frown on his brow or a grimace on his lips, and yet, his living, throbbing passion is reflected in his face with prodigious intensity. It could be argued that the full expression of his soul emerges from his eyes, clouded by the drama. Here we have the true secret of the cinema and the point of departure for all of its art. Minimum gesture, maximum expression" (WALLS, 1940: 15).

The expressions of love are thus to be found in the gentle gesture or the gaze, which these authors detect in German cinema or in Chaplin (albeit in caricatured form), Valentino and Robert Taylor. There would be no room here for Spanish cinema. While for Tristán Yuste Spanish films are essentially sentimental, for Tato Cumming the Spanish repertoire of gestures hinders a representation of love: "the Southern [European] women are the least fit to achieve a perfect expression of love on the film screen. Why? Precisely because of their temperamental exuberance. [...] So then, is this Southern woman of no use? Or more specifically: the Spanish woman? Of course she is; but for us, in consideration of our borders, one temperament clashes with that of international audiences, and when love is impassioned, it turns into mimicking, which is not expressive" (GARCÍA, 1942: 12). In so characterising Spanish production, Tato Cumming appears to have in mind the "*Españolada*", a genre of films that exaggerate their "Spanishness". While the assessment that *Primer Plano* offered of this genre⁵ falls beyond the scope of this article, it is clear that the view of the Spanish and the foreign was not unanimous: although the subversive gestures apparently came from beyond Spanish borders, other countries also offered models that the Spanish approach to love, now disdained by intellectuals, should be turning to.



BODIES DISPLAYED, BODIES DESIRING

Along with the idea of the gesture, or within it, is the human body and its physical display. However, in spite of the occasional vehement reaction (like Antonio Fraguas Saavedra's, when he decries the fact, with reference to the rise of cinema, that "our major newspapers publish wonderful pictures of the dogs and legs and other anatomical features of Mabel Normand, Musidora, Crawford, West, Realston" [Fraguas Saavedra, 1943: 3]), the main concern in *Primer Plano* with respect to eroticism was not what body parts were shown: the magazine itself was able to include a joke about the supposed censorship of Goya's *Maja Vestida* (1941: 18), a cover with the actress Elaine Shepard as a pin-up girl (1945: 1) (Figure 2), and an ad for the Lambrequin brand of honey and almond milk (Figure 3) in which a woman with a visible cleavage raises her naked arms behind her head while staring into space (1944: 17).

The problem was not really how much skin was shown, but how the characters' experience of love and sexuality was depicted, and the fact that foreign film industries were profiting from that depiction at the expense of Spanish morality. Obviously, a film like *Ecstasy* (*Ekstase*, Gustav Machatý, 1933), famous for its full nude shots of Hedy Lamarr, was condemned and deemed a dirty trick that fate had played on the actress, although the article also indirectly attacked the Venice Biennale, where the film received an international award (DEL REAL, 1942g: 9-10). The attack, in general, was always against the morality more than the images, against the behaviour more than the body. Thus, while Sol del Real jokes about the Hays Code when explaining how it had forced the makers of *Destry Rides Again* (George Marshall, 1939)⁶ to eliminate the line "There's gold in them thar hills" spoken by Marlene Dietrich while she stuffed a bag of coins between her breasts (DEL REAL, 1941: 15), Luis Gómez Mesa described the films that the actress made in the

United States with Josef von Sternberg as "fundamentally passionate works, showing contempt for the most basic moral principles", viewing them as epilogues to *The Blue Angel* (*Der blaue Engel*, Josef von Sternberg, 1930) which appeared "now in Hollywood, in the ambitions and interests of its Jewish producers" (GÓMEZ MESA, 1942b: 15). In this way, the author's condemnation combined moralising, anti-materialism and anti-Semitism.

The criticism of immorality and profiting commercially therefrom was thus a bigger target than what body parts were shown on screen. The clearest case of this is another article by Gómez Mesa on the film *Flesh and the Devil* (Clarence Brown, 1926), which contains no criticisms of specific images in the film; in fact, the author praises the quality of the cinematography and the performances, and notes unreservedly that "its love scenes acquire a provocative expression on the screen." The attack comes from a moral angle, when the author points out that the reality depicted in the film is "bleak, distressing and lacking in morality or exemplariness", and that its plot is "substantially and entirely negative—duels, infidelities, forbidden loves and all the emotional excesses characteristic of the passionate serial dramas of the end of the last and the beginning of this century." As in the case of *The Blue Angel*, Gómez Mesa's criticism is aimed at the "materialistic erotic aspect" used as a commercial strategy, as "the Publicity Department takes advantage of the occasion to announce it as 'the most passionate story ever brought to the big screen'. And for the first time the terms 'sex appeal' and 'vamp' are used" (GÓMEZ MESA, 1942: 23). The condemnation is thus not of love, nor of its images, but of the narratives of desire and their commercial exploitation. It is therefore amusingly paradoxical that Edgar Neville, one of the key filmmakers of the period and a regular in the pages of the magazine, should respond in an interview that his awakening to his vocation as a filmmaker came precisely upon seeing this film: "that extraordinary film



Figure 4. "¿En qué aspecto de la mujer ha influido más el cine?" by Fernando Castán Palomar. *Primer Plano*, Issue 237, 29 April 1945, pp. 8-9.

made me understand what cinema was and what it was going to be" (FERNÁNDEZ BARREIRA, 1943: 11).

Moreover, Gómez Mesa considers that *Flesh and the Devil* marks a turning point in the history of Hollywood, which until then had been characterised by a certain ingenueness of its plots, and its depictions of love. On this point, he contrasts Hollywood with Italian silent cinema, in which "love was already the protagonist of its biggest films. But it was a romantic style with women who sinned and, reconciling with honour and duty, repented and mended their ways in an act of sacrifice and of renunciation of their wayward behaviour." For Gómez Mesa, Clarence Brown's film marks the beginning of a new era of Hollywood characterised by "immoral love that forgets all else and subordinates all else to the fulfilment of

desire" (GÓMEZ MESA, 1942: 23). Thus, the perceived threat from without, both spiritual and economic, is located not only with geographical coordinates, but also with historical ones; especially, beyond any doubt, for the female sex.

THE DANGERS FOR WOMEN

While *Primer Plano* viewed the masses as impressionable and fickle, lacking any critical capacity, the preventive measures to be taken were much greater in the case of women. In "El cine como propaganda" [Cinema as Propaganda], Bartolomé Mostaza explores how cinema determines the way women act: "And what can we say of customs, of fashion, of art? Women walk, look, laugh, dress, and make themselves up in the style of their

favourite film actresses. It is pitiful, but even in their way of making love—something as private and personal as that—many women put on an act in their obsession to imitate what they have seen or heard in the cinema” (MOSTAZA, 1940: 3). This is an argument that Fernando Castán Palomar attempts to refute when, in the survey article “¿En qué aspecto de la mujer ha influido más el cine?” [What Aspect of Women Has the Cinema Influenced Most?] (Figure 4), he compiles the responses of different female professionals (a writer, an actress, a draughtswoman, a showgirl and a journalist) and concludes that “the influence of the cinema on women goes no further than outfits and hairstyles.” However, the article is positioned entirely from the same perspective: not only because of its approach, which already reveals a gender bias, but because of some of the responses given, which contradict the moral catastrophe but continue to place the woman in a subaltern position: for example, according to the writer interviewed, Mercedes B. de la Torre, women have become more hard-working because they hope to be called into the office of their manager, whose face they hope will resemble Robert Taylor’s (CASTÁN PALOMAR, 1945: 8-9).

From this perspective, several articles in *Primer Plano* identify the cinema as responsible for a historic change in the social role of women. The most significant example, with a broad historical scope, is the article “*Influencia del cine en la mujer*” [Influence of the Cinema on Women] by José Juanes, who argues that “within the realm of factors that place considerable pressure on women, the cinema occupies the largest role.” According to Juanes, the cinema has brought about a transformation unprecedented in the centuries before it: “With a few small differences of dress and forms of expression, the female identity remained unchanged throughout history. A lady of the twelfth century was morally similar to our young ladies of 1900. Nothing in history managed to change their form of behaviour like that great legend of

images that the Lumière brothers unleashed on the world, which, upon turning to human customs, with its false conceptions of love, sacrifice and ways of feeling, drastically changed the thitherto passive role of the woman, transforming her into an active subject of the interminable sentence of life. [...] The danger of this influence does not lie in the cinema itself, but in the expansion of ideas that the woman develops afterwards. With the chains of her secondary place in society now broken, the woman has completely taken over the foreground, to the point of outdoing what we see on the screen, turning modern life into the most unbelievable film of all” (JUANES, 1942: 19).

Ángel Zúñiga, on the other hand, takes this idea to the extreme when he identifies the amorous passions of American cinema with violence, and suggests the potential effects that this could have on female spectators. Drawing on Waldo Frank, Zúñiga contrasts the woman of the Western genre, the man’s companion, against the independent woman of the romantic drama, highly influenced by the female characters of Henrik Ibsen. Thus, he compares the woman in Frank Borzage’s *Secrets* (1924/1933⁷) with Norma Shearer in *The Divorcee* (Robert Z. Leonard, 1930), because between the two “there are abysses of dissolution in which the woman breaks every female obligation, to be dragged by the current of the cult of might”, something from which comedies like *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town* (Frank Capra, 1936), *You Can’t Take It with You* (Frank Capra, 1938) and *Holiday* (Edward H. Griffith, 1930)⁸ “attempt to escape”. According to Zúñiga, the woman’s quest for independence, represented by the characters portrayed by Norma Shearer, Joan Crawford and Tallulah Bankhead, ends up leading her into an orbit that is not her own and, ultimately, doing her harm: “The woman, in her quest for independence—Ibsen has had a profound influence on American reality and on American fiction—loses her halo. As a result, aggressive impulses towards her are no longer contained. Her old personality is

diluted in the new world in which it is immersed. And as a defence mechanism, the female will become bolder, shrewder, with an astonishing understanding of the laws: Jean Harlow, Joan Blondell, Hedy Lamarr..." (ZÚÑIGA, 1942: 21).

Thus, according to Gómez Mesa, Juanes and Zúñiga, the rise of the Hollywood romantic drama can be viewed as a turning point in film history and in the role of the woman in society. The narratives of desire offer a bad example to spectators and, above all, spur on the female to abandon her traditional position, thereby endangering social stability and even her physical well-being. These narratives of desire, as commercially successful as they are morally hazardous, constituted the main double-edged threat—economic and spiritual—against which *Primer Plano* had to react.

GOOD LOVE AND THE HAVEN OF HOLLYWOOD

In opposition to these narratives of desire, *Primer Plano* advocated a conception of love as commitment and sacrifice. In his article discussed at the beginning of this paper, Alfonso Sánchez distinguishes between representations of love that are harmful to youths and those that are beneficial, placing under the first heading the Austrian-Czech film *Ecstasy*, the German films *Girls in Uniform* (Mädchen in Uniform, Leontine Sagan and Carl Froelich, 1931) and *Eight Girls in a Boat* (Acht Mädels im Boot, Erich Waschneck, 1932), the American film *Back Street* (John M. Stahl, 1932) and the French film *Amok* (Fyodor Otsep, 1934), and under the second, the American films

Figure 5. "El beso ante la cámara", interview conducted by Lily Wobes. *Primer Plano*, Issue 51, 5 October 1941, pp. 12-13.





Figure 6. Mae West's "favourite animal", beckoned to from outside the frame by the supposed hands of the actress. "Su animal preferido", *Primer Plano*, Issue 8, 8 December 1940, p. 6.

The Sign of the Cross (Cecil B. DeMille, 1932) and *Cavalcade* (Frank Lloyd, 1933), in which love can lead to being sacrificed in the Roman circus or constitute "the only refuge from the whirlwind of the times" (SÁNCHEZ, 1941: 3). Based on this morally edifying model of love, the editors had no qualms about publishing articles that dealt with the topic, like compiling artists' opinions on marriage (provided that it is not presented as a problem or an institution to be destroyed) (1941: 4), or characterising the balcony as an ideal space for poetic declarations and the final kiss (PEDREÑA, 1940: 4).

This is the type of love promoted in Spanish cinema, of which an emblematic example would have to be an advertisement for Rafael Gil's film

Lessons in Good Love (*Lecciones de buen amor*, 1944), which presents, in comic-book form, the story of a married couple in crisis who, after watching the film, learn how they should live together (1944: 16). The format of survey-style reporting is, in this sense, an ideal medium: the Spanish actors are questioned about kisses and love scenes in "*El beso ante la cámara*" [A Kiss on Camera] (WOBES, 1941: 12-13) (Figure 5) and "*El amor en la pantalla*" [Love on Screen] (DE LA TORRE, 1942: 4-5), but in neither case does desire go further than a simple, innocent joke. In the first, actors were asked about the sensation of kissing while being filmed, whether they preferred romantic kisses or fatal kisses, who they would prefer to film a kissing scene with, which kiss left the biggest impression on them and which one was the worst, and whether they ever deliberately messed up a take in order to be able to repeat the kiss. In the second, respondents answered when, where, how, why and with whom they would like to perform a love scene. In both cases, the answers to these questions are oriented towards the character/actor dichotomy, ranging from absolute professionalism (Luchy Soto: "[kissing] is an obligation like if you had to open or close a window") to emotional surrender (Luis Peña: "it's the same [sensation of kissing] that you'd have if the camera wasn't there [...] When you're working you have to give yourself up to the role"), and the disappearance of any hint of desire that goes further than choosing a fatal kiss because it is longer (Alfredo Mayo). The restraint is demonstrated by the lack of specificity about the kind of kisses or the kind of love scenes, and by the absence of graphic details or allusions to physical reactions. Rather bolder, however, is the survey "*¿Qué pecados ha cometido usted en pantalla?*" [What Sins Have You Committed on Screen?] (DE LA TORRE, 1941: 12-13), in which actors and actresses confess to all manner of amorous betrayals and adulterous acts they have committed as characters. The content of the stories is not exactly a reflection of pure love, but

their virulence is mitigated by the distance that the actors assume, tinged in most cases with innocent humour. Their reality as good people thus eclipses their acts on the screen. As Consuelo Nieva puts it, “just look at me: so bad, so bad, and yet I can’t even break a dish.”

At the same time, while this good, wholesome love was proclaimed in the opinion pieces and exemplified in the innocent stories on Spanish actors, the narratives of desire could find a place very occasionally in the social news or gossip columns, whether real or invented. And whenever this happened, Hollywood was there as a possible setting: on the very few occasions when the magazine spoke of sexuality in a fun, playful, carefree way, the actors and situations chosen were from the American film industry. Mae West, who, as noted above, could be viewed as embodying a depraved love, was the protagonist of a few of these: in a photo report in which the stars are shown alongside their favourite animals, in West’s case all we see is a man being beckoned by a pair of hands in the corner of the frame, while the caption reads: “Mae West, who has hidden behind the curtain because she is too embarrassed to make certain confessions, declares blushing that of all the animals her favourite is man” (1940: 6) (Figure 6). In another case, in a brief news item titled “*Dos explosivos en una película*” [Two Explosives in One Film], we are told that “the alarm has been set off in Hollywood, with the news spreading like a bombshell that Mae West and John Barrymore—the two hottest heads in Tinseltown—are going to work together on a film titled ‘Not Tonight, Josephine’. It is reported that the studio that will be shooting the film has taken the necessary precautions, bullet-proofing its interior walls” (DEL REAL, 1941: 14). In reality, I have not found any reference to this film, or to any collaboration between these two actors; no doubt it was merely a rumour or a piece of invented news intended to reinforce the image of Hollywood as a place where forbidden desires can be imagined.

Along the same lines are the commentaries on the tribute that Hollywood’s fire fighters, described as “highly flammable”, wanted to give Joan Blondell, making her honorary president of their institution, although when they asked her to allow them to rescue her in a fire drill she instead gave them a wax dummy with her features (SANZ RUBIO, 1943: 14). And also worth noting are two news items about supposed scientific experiments related to the stars: one story was about a device that records the physical reactions of university students to pictures of Marlene Dietrich, Lana Turner and Hedy Lamarr, to determine which one has the most sex appeal (DEL REAL, 1941e: 16); the other was about a lie detector that measures the intensity of the kisses between different stars (Greta Garbo and Melvyn Douglas, Marlene Dietrich and Gary Cooper, etc.), revealing that the man always comes out the loser: “the results show that the so-called stronger sex is the one that reveals more signs of weakness in this kind of competition...” (DEL REAL, 1941d: 16). In all of these sporadic and anecdotal pieces published in different issues of *Primer Plano*, playful sexuality infiltrates the magazine using Hollywood as an excuse, while at the same time offering a vision of a sexually strong and dominating woman that is quite absent from the rest of its pages.

These examples, however, are no more than anomalies in a publication that was closely tied to the principles of the regime, in which amorous and sexual desire is condemned as a foreign danger that threatens the economy, spirituality and gender roles of the Spain of the time. Firmly establishing itself as an authoritative source of moral guidance, and therefore essentially of censorship, *Primer Plano* was able to give, through its opinion pieces and reports on the stars, a popular dimension to the secrecy and ambiguity characteristic of official censorship, while at the same time combining it with the glamour of American cinema, of which it was not a great admirer. In a way, the magazine walked a fine line between what society was expected to learn and what society wanted to see, between moral ped-

agogy and popular gossip, condemning while virtually succumbing. While CIRCE, like the sorceress in Homer's *Odyssey*, was the name of the Falangist film club, the editors of *Primer Plano* operated in a manner similar to the Homeric story of the sirens: not so much plugging their ears, but certainly tying themselves down tightly, listening to the sirens' song but ensuring that desire would not push the new Francoist society off its chosen course. ■

NOTES

- * This article forms part of the research project of the Ministry of Economy and Competitiveness *El cuerpo erótico de la actriz bajo los fascismos: España, Italia y Alemania (1939-1945)* (CSO2013-43631-P).
- 1 I am not aware of any publication that offers an in-depth analysis of the magazine as a whole, although there is research into its ideological approach in the period 1940-1945 through its editorials (MONTERDE, 2001), its high-brow orientation in the earlier issues (MINGUET BATLLORI, 1998), its views on Italian neorealism (ORTEGO MARTÍNEZ, 2013) and its reaction to Mexican cinema (GARCÍA PASTOR, 2016).
- 2 The closest thing to such regulations is a talk given by the screenplay censor Francisco Ortiz Muñoz in the assembly hall of the Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, in Madrid, on 21 June 1946, and subsequently published (ORTIZ, 1946). Although in this talk the censor stresses that the views offered are his own, he sets out a series of criteria that seem in keeping with the unwritten rules of Spanish censorship. His model is the U.S. Hays Code, which he adapts with certain modifications (TUÑÓN, 2011: 19-20). According to Rosa Añover Díaz, there were also internal instructions, like the ones approved by the Censorship Board of Salamanca in 1937 (AÑOVER DÍAZ, 1992: 22). But none of these were documents with official recognition.
- 3 It is worth noting, however, that *Primer Plano* also contains references to censorship in the United States; in this respect, I have identified an allusion to "Yankee puritanism" (DEL REAL, 1941b: 15) and the news story "El nuevo film de Greta Garbo irrita a la Censura" (DEL REAL, 1941f: 14) about

the banning of the film *Two-Faced Woman* (George Cukor, 1941) in three U.S. states.

- 4 Two short pieces on Japanese cinema, "El Japón prohíbe los abrazos" [Japan Bans Embraces] (1941: 16) and "En el cine japonés no existe el beso" [In Japanese Cinema There Are no Kisses] (1943: 19), underscore, with irony and amazement, the emotional restraint of Japanese culture.
- 5 It is worth mentioning here the article on the film *The Bandolero* (Tom Terriss, 1924), made in Hollywood and set in Spain, which presents (and to some extent challenges) foreign clichés about Spanish kissing (GÓMEZ MESA, 1941: 19).
- 6 The film was released in Spanish theatres with the title *Arizona*.
- 7 Zúñiga doesn't specify whether he is referring to the silent version from 1924, with Norma Talmadge, or the sound version from 1933, which was Mary Pickford's last film.
- 8 Zúñiga expressly states that he is referring to this version, starring Ann Harding, and not George Cukor's film with Katharine Hepburn (1938), which in Spain was titled *Vivir para gozar* [Live to Enjoy], which according to Zúñiga is "incomprehensibly distorted".

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PRIMER PLANO: THE POPULAR FACE OF CENSORSHIP

Abstract

During the early years of Franco's dictatorship, the film magazine *Primer Plano*, a publication aligned with the Falange, was an important instrument for the promotion of the regime's ideas about the construction of a national film industry and about the film production of other countries. In the case of depictions of love and sexuality, the double-edged threat (spiritual and economic) represented by foreign films could be seen, according to the magazine, in the invasion of alien gestures which the Spanish people sought to imitate and in the proliferation of films whose thematic focus was sexual desire, which threatened the stability of Francoist society, especially where the role of the woman was concerned. In opposition to these narratives of desire, *Primer Plano* advocated a chaste and morally edifying conception of love.

Key words

Primer Plano; film magazine; fascism; censorship; Eros; desire.

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PRIMER PLANO: EL ROSTRO POPULAR DE LA CENSURA

Resumen

Durante los primeros años del franquismo, la revista de cine *Primer Plano*, alineada con la Falange, fue un instrumento fundamental de canalización de las ideas del régimen sobre la construcción de un cine nacional y sobre el cine de otros países. En el caso de las representaciones del amor y la sexualidad, la doble amenaza espiritual y económica que suponían las películas extranjeras se concretaba, según la revista, en la invasión de gestos ajenos que los españoles querían imitar y en la difusión de películas que se articulaban a partir del deseo sexual, amenazando así la estabilidad de la sociedad franquista, especialmente en lo que concierne al rol de la mujer. Ante estas narrativas del deseo, *Primer Plano* defendió un modelo de amor casto y edificante.

Palabras clave

Primer Plano; revista de cine; fascismo; censura; Eros; deseo.

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