

RESEARCH

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FIRST APPROACH OF HOLLYWOOD TO THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR: *THE LAST TRAIN FROM MADRID* (1937)

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ABSTRACT

The Spanish Civil War was a tacitly forbidden topic in Hollywood controlled by self-censorship of the Hays Office and PCA. Therefore, American film companies only produced three films about that war while it was taking place (1936-1939). This article analyses the historical content and the ideological discourse of *The Last Train from Madrid* (James Hogan, 1937), the first approach of Hollywood to the war of Spain. This is a minor film, which has been barely studied by film analysts and is still commercially unavailable. Nevertheless, it is so relevant since it was the first view offered to the American public on Spanish belligerency in a fiction film. Such a point of view was the result of the restraint exercised by self-censorship, which took place by way of deliberate impartiality and a distant and apolitical stance. Its filmic effects were absolute ambiguity and confusion. As a result, this feature film is a clear reflection of the official attitudes of neutrality and non-interference shared by both Hollywood's self-censorship system and the United States Government, and it established itself as a prediction of what happened in history: non-intervention of democratic Western powers in the Spanish conflict.

KEY WORDS

The Last Train From Madrid (James Hogan, 1937) – Spanish Civil War –Hollywood – film self-censorship – Hays Office – PCA – political discourse

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LA PRIMERA APROXIMACIÓN DE HOLLYWOOD A LA GUERRA CIVIL ESPAÑOLA: *THE LAST TRAIN FROM MADRID* (1937)

RESUMEN

La Guerra Civil española fue un tema prohibido de forma tácita en el Hollywood regulado por la autocensura de la Oficina Hays y la PCA. Como consecuencia, las productoras cinematográficas norteamericanas sólo realizaron tres films sobre la contienda mientras se desarrolló (1936-1939). Este artículo analiza el contenido histórico y discurso ideológico de *The Last Train From Madrid* (James Hogan, 1937), la primera aproximación de Hollywood a la guerra de España. Se trata de un film menor, apenas estudiado, que sigue sin estar editado comercialmente. Sin embargo, posee gran relevancia en lo que atañe a la visión inaugural que se ofreció al público estadounidense sobre la beligerancia española en una película de ficción. Tal punto de vista fue el resultado de las presiones de la autocensura, que se concretaron en una deliberada imparcialidad, visión distante y apolítica. Sus consecuencias fílmicas fueron la absoluta ambigüedad y la confusión. Así pues, el largometraje es claro reflejo de las posturas oficiales de neutralidad y no injerencia que compartían tanto la autocensura industrial hollywoodiense como el gobierno de los Estados Unidos y se instaure como vaticinio de lo que ocurrió en la historia: la no intervención de las potencias democráticas occidentales en el conflicto español.

PALABRAS CLAVE

The Last Train From Madrid - Guerra Civil española - Hollywood - autocensura cinematográfica - Oficina Hays - PCA - discurso político

A PRIMEIRA APROXIMAÇÃO DE HOLLYWOOD À GUERRA CIVIL ESPANHOLA: *THE LAST TRAIN FROM MADRID* (1937)

RESUMO

A Guerra Civil Espanhola foi um tema proibido de forma tácita em Hollywood regulada pela autocensura da Oficina Hays y La PCA. Como consequência, as produtoras cinematográficas norte americanas somente realizaram três filmes sobre a contenda enquanto esta perdurou (1936-1939). Este artigo analisa o conteúdo histórico e ideológico do *The Last Train From Madrid* (James Hogan, 1937), a primeira aproximação de Hollywood à guerra da Espanha. Trata-se de um filme menor, apenas estudado, que segue sem estar editado comercialmente. Mesmo assim possui grande relevância ao que se refere à visão inaugural que se ofereceu ao público estadunidense sobre a beligerância espanhola em um filme de ficção. Tal ponto de vista foi resultado das pressões da autocensura, que se concretizaram em uma deliberada imparcialidade, visão distante e apolítica. Suas consequências fílmicas foram absoluta ambigüidade e confusão. Assim, o filme é claro reflexo das posturas oficiais de neutralidade e não ingerência que compartilhavam tanto a autocensura industrial hollywoodiana como o governo dos Estados Unidos e se

instaura como vaticínio do que ocorreu na historia: a não intervenção das potências democráticas ocidentais no conflito espanhol.

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The Last Train From Madrid – Guerra Civil Espanhola – Hollywood – Autocensura cinematográfica – Oficina Hays – PCA – Discurso

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1. INTRODUCTION

Although Hollywood has come to shoot around fifty films related to the Spanish Civil War (Porta, 2008)², during the time that war was waged (1936-1939), only three feature films related to it were shot: *The Last Train From Madrid* (James Hogan, 1937), produced by Paramount Pictures, *Love Under Fire* (George Marshall, 1937), Twentieth Century-Fox, and *Blockade* (William Dieterle, 1938), an independent film by Walter Wanger distributed by United Artists.

Such scant attention to a war that was having a huge international impact was not, of course, due to reasons of simple "oblivion". The Spanish Civil War was a tacitly forbidden subject in Hollywood governed by the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America (MPPDA), an organization established in 1922 by the studios to censor films and control the morality of American cinema. Both said body, directed from New York by Will Hays --after whom it was popularly known as Hays Office-- and its subsidiary office in Hollywood, the Production Code Administration (PCA) --which was managed with an iron hand since its inception in 1934 by Joseph I. Breen-- were sponsored and controlled by Catholic far-rightists who immediately stood against the legitimate government of the Spanish Republic and in favor of the rebel troops of Franco and did everything possible for the war in Spain not to be plaid on screen (Black, 1998, p 315; Coma, 2002, pp 27, 29, 89; Doherty, 2013, p. 143). Although according to the precepts of the Motion Picture Production Code (1930), known as the Hays Code, censors could not prevent producers from making films about the Spanish Civil War (Doherty, 2013, p. 143) (the document mainly regulated aspects of a sexual nature), they managed to pressure the studios to avoid it, mainly based on three arguments. First, they appealed to the Code clause stating that all nations would be represented without the possibility of offense (Coma, 2002, pp. 28-29, 89). Secondly, they stressed the official policy of neutrality of the US government (Coma, 2002, pp. 29, 89). Third, and most important, they dwelled upon the serious economic losses that this would entail, as such feature films --which Breen, a rightist, a Catholic and pro-Franco, assumed to be loyal to the Republic and democracy--

² For further information in this regard, see the list of films included in Coma, 2002, p 207-220.

could not be distributed in many countries, such as Germany, Italy and much of Latin America (Coma, 2002, p 30; Porta, 2008; Doherty, 2013, p. 138)³. Consequently, the Hollywood majors abided by the "prohibition" and did not shoot any films about the war in Spain, except for the only three mentioned above.

The Last Train from Madrid and *Love under Fire* were B movies, devoid of political ideology and characterized by fairness. *Blockade*, however, was the only significant production with big stars --Madeleine Carroll and Henry Fonda-- that was made in Hollywood in support of the Republican cause (Gubern, 1986, p 54; Porta, 2008). So far, so good, the three of them were intercepted and adulterated by the Hays Office and have the common denominator of ambiguity, confusion and non identification⁴. In fact, Hollywood would not make any openly anti-fascist film until *Confessions of a Nazi Spy* (Anatole Litvak, 1939), Warner Bros. (Coma, 2002, p 36; Doherty, 2013, p. 12).

2. OBJECTIVES AND STATE OF THE ART

This article proposes the analysis of the historical content and the ideological discourse of *The Last Train from Madrid*. It is a minor film in the whole classic Hollywood production, which, however, has great significance as it was first approach of the American film industry to the war in Spain. It stands, therefore, as an exceptional testimony to both the inaugural vision of Hollywood film production on the Spanish Civil War and the first image offered to the public in the United States about the conflict in a commercial film with a narrative plot.

It is an extremely unknown production that, given its low budget, has been completely overlooked by film analysts, both in our country and abroad. Also, such historiographical neglect is because it has never been commercially released and is currently still unavailable in a domestic format, VHS or DVD⁵.

This explains why the analyses of the film are incredibly meager. In fact, the only extensive and detailed analysis we have located dates from 1978 and consists of a chapter of the book *The Spanish Civil War in American and European Films* (Valleau, 1982). Recently, there are two more approaches, although they are much shorter and shallower, included in *The Star-Spangled Screen: The American World War II Film* (Dick, 1996) and *Hollywood and Hitler, 1933-1939* (Doherty, 2013). As regards the Spanish area, references are remarkably few and brief and, in some cases, their authors even recognize they have not seen the film.

For these reasons, errors pervade the few historiographical texts that have been dedicated to it, and sometimes such basic issues as its release date are wrong even in

³ About this, the censor was not absolutely right, since the Twentieth Century Fox tried to shoot the pro-Franco *Siege of Alcazar*, a project it had to give up in November 1936, because of the many protests of groups loyal to the Republic. About this topic, consult: "Anti-Nazi", 1936, "UFA'S", 1936.

⁴ Though, unlike the other two, *Blockade* does have a political stance in favor of the Spanish democratic government, it only appears in the final speech that closes the feature film, from which everything that was seen before makes sense.

⁵ The film was not released in Spain, neither were *Love under Fire* and *Blockade*.

accredited sources such as AFI Catalog of Feature Films (2016)⁶. In turn, there are many inherited judgments, such as the fact that the film is entirely alien to the reality of the Spanish Civil War (Valleau, 1982, p. 19.; Gubern, 1986, p. 58) that the conflict acts merely as a backdrop (Valleau, 1982, p. 19; Smith, 1996, p. 34; Black, 1998, p. 315; Pastor Petit, 1998, p. 200; Coma, 2002, p. 94; Crusells, 2004, p. 166; García López, 2013, p. 181) or that it favors the military insurrection of Franco (Edge, 1977, p. 70; Gubern, 1986, p. 59; Doherty, 2013, pp 143-144).

Our study will demonstrate the inaccuracy of these and other findings. In regard to the first two, it is true that the film considerably distorts the Spanish Civil War but, at the same time, it also contains direct evocations to a large number of real historical facts. Most importantly, it has a close connection with reality through the filmic intertextuality, since Paramount infiltrated in the tape real images of a Soviet newsreel of the bombing by the Nazi aviation in Madrid. The presence of this Russian newscast has remained unknown so far, it is identified for the first time in this paper and belies the assertions that the film ideologically leans toward the rebels. That said, our research specifically pursues the following objectives:

1. Place the film in its historical context in the production of Hollywood and the attitudes of self-censorship of MPPDA about making films about the Spanish Civil War.
2. Historically document the film and correct the errors contained in the preceding bibliographic texts.
3. Identify the origin and provenance of actual images from newsreels that appear in the film.
4. Clarify the dose of realism of the film.
5. Analyze the historical content, in order to differentiate distorted facts from those with a faithful correspondence with the historical reality of the Spanish Civil War.
6. Verify the neutrality of its political discourse.
7. Determine its overall ideological message.

3. METHODOLOGY

In order to achieve the above objectives, we have employed a method of historical analysis, where *The Last Train From Madrid* is studied in the light of various film sources related to the war in Spain in two clearly distinct blocks.

The first block documents the process of pre-production of the film and its gestation within the historical context of Hollywood, with special attention to exercise and pressures of self-censorship by the Hays Office and the PCA regarding its shooting and subsequent commercial exhibition. In order to know such restrictions and prohibitions, we have been examined abundant documentary materials, especially primary sources of the time coming from specialized film publications such as *Film Daily*, *Motion Picture Daily*, *Motion Picture Herald*, *The Hollywood Reporter* and *Variety*. The second block consists of a historical analysis of the most important narrative

⁶ AFI Catalog of Feature Films (2016). The American Film Institute Catalog Database 1893-1970. Available at <http://www.afi.com/members/catalog/>. Consulted on 02/21/2016. From here on, cited as AFI Catalog.

passages of the film in order to establish their connection with the real events that took place during the Spanish Civil War, for which we have proceeded to the confrontation of the images on the tape with filmic historiographical texts and historical sources concerning the conflict. Finally, we present the conclusions of our study.

4. DISCUSSION

4.1. Project and preproduction

The Last Train From Madrid and *Love Under Fire* ran parallel and began to take shape in the autumn of 1936⁷. According to AFI Catalog, several major Hollywood studios competed for the original story of *The Last Train From Madrid*, by the spouses Paul Hervey Fox and Elsie Fox, and Paramount acquired it in November 1936 (Dick, 1996, p. 15). At the end of the month, *Variety* reported that, as happened with *Siege of Alcazar*, anti-fascist and anti-war organizations were against its production:

Regarding the Paramount film "Train", there is a feeling that treatment accorded to it will be strictly from the angle of melodrama, without opting for one side or the other. Even if Paramount were inclined to produce a film with a message, the anti [fascist] groups feel that the producer would be deterred because of the incident of Fox ("Anti-Fascist", 1936, p. 3).

The last expressed judgment could not be more successful. If there was any attempt to instill a political stance, it was in vain. In this first period of acquisition of the material, PCA had already focused on the project to eliminate any hint of ideological content from it (Doherty, 2013, p. 143). In addition, the experience of Fox with *Siege of Alcazar* served MPPDA as a magnificent example that partisan stances should be avoided above all. Thus, as anti-fascist organizations suspected, *The Last Train From Madrid* was on its way to become a mere melodrama stripped of any kind of conviction.

When seeing the finished film, there is no doubt that, in *The Last Train From Madrid*, PCA followed the same procedure as it later applied to *Love Under Fire* and *Blockade* (Smith, 1996, p. 23; Coma, 2002, p. 94): the term "civil war" could not be mentioned; uniforms had to be invented, different from genuine ones worn by both warring factions; allusions to loyalists and rebels were also prohibited; it could not be indicated that the insurgents were receiving foreign aid, etc. These impositions were part of the process of impartiality and non-identification of PCA, which meant, in turn, the appearance on the tape of the fictional town of Cardozo⁸. Thus, the phrase "Who's who? What is what? And what reason? ", Written by a contemporary critic regarding *Blockade* (Smith, 1996, p. 27), can be extended to the film in question.

On March 10, 1937 it was announced that the film would be directed by Al Santell ("*2 Spanish Pix*", 1937). But, on day 31, the producer changed its mind and assigned it to

⁷ Actually, *Love under Fire* was the replacement of Twentieth Century Fox for *Siege of Alcazar*.

⁸ *Blockade* also included the imaginary Italianized locations of Castelmare, which some have identified with Castellón, and Montefiore, and the main character's name is Marco, instead of Marcos.

James Hogan, about whom *Variety* said that, this way, his category had advanced in the studio ("James P. Hogan", 1937). This is nothing but far from reality. *The Last Train From Madrid* had already been incorporated as a standard B production. To Coma (2002, p. 93), it is precisely the change of director what shows the decline in confidence of Paramount in the film and its subsequent degradation to low budgets, most likely due to the restrictions of Joseph I. Breen from PCA.

On the other hand, its condition of B movie must currently be properly clarified, especially given its extraordinary cast, composed of Dorothy Lamour, Lew Ayres, Gilbert Roland, Karen Morley, Lionel Atwill, Robert Cummings and Anthony Quinn. However, this magnificent cast of stars was no such a thing in 1937. Actually, *The Last Train From Madrid* starred a group of stars in decline -Ayres, Roland, Morley and Atwill- and emerging actors in the studio -Lamour, Cummings and Quinn⁹. *Motion Picture Herald*, for example, said: "Although the cast does not include any big stars, it does include well known actors, many young people to whom Paramount is giving the opportunity to become the stars of tomorrow" ("Last Train", 1937a, p. 44). *Variety*, meanwhile, called it "weak as regards its cast" (Kauf, 1937, p. 12)¹⁰.

Due to both the meeting of such popular actors in the same feature film and its narrative structure, criticism would later define it as a kind of *Grand Hotel* (*Grand Hotel*, Edmund Goulding, 1932), although low budgeted ("Last Train", 1937b ; Kauf, 1937). Indeed, like the production by Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, *The Last Train From Madrid* is an ensemble film, its leading role being shared by nine characters. With its action set in less than 24 hours in Madrid besieged by the nationals, all the persons involved (some quite incongruous, as we will see) want to take the last train leaving for Valencia, the provisional capital of the Republic. The facts are therefore placed on November 6, 1936, with the start of the Battle of Madrid and the departure of the government towards that city. To *Variety*, this linchpin taken from *Grand Hotel* did not act on behalf of the film and contributed, instead, to its story being confusing:

Its main difficulty is the half-dozen intrigues that it has, within narrow limits; a mixture of "Grand Hotel" and "Shanghai Express". And everything is made so clearly as to annoy the audience. Unfortunately, because the film itself is not so bad. Without this promising premise and title, it would be easier to accept this film as a good premiere of a double program (Kauf, 1937, p. 12).

The date chosen for shooting –March 15, 1937-- was postponed because the Hays Office, after almost half a year of negotiations, had not yet given its approval to the script. Therefore, AFI Catalog is wrong when it mentioned this date as the start of production, which it probably took from an article in *Variety* ("2 Spanish Pix", 1937)¹¹. The favorable verdict of censors finally came on April 6. The next day, *Variety* echoed the consent and noted that "The studio had to remove several situations considered objectionable by Hays" ("Hays Finally", 1937, p. 4). In mid-month, *Motion Picture*

⁹ Dorothy Lamour and Anthony Quinn had made their debut on screen a year ago, while Robert Cummings did it in 1935 with small appearances.

¹⁰ Identical judgments can be found elsewhere in other contemporary articles: "The Last Train", 1937b, "Last Train", 1937c.

¹¹ As a result, many published texts wrongfully include it too.

Herald noted that "many adjustments of thematic content had to be made before it received the approval of the Production Code Administration" ("Finish 7", 1937, p. 55).

According to Doherty (2013, pp. 143-144), Breen marked two passages in the libretto for disposal. In the first, the feet of a loyal soldier trampled a crucifix; in the second, Republican soldiers carried out a mass execution of rebel prisoners. However, the latter sequence was maintained, a reason that motivates our doubts about the fact that the author has actually seen the film, along with other errors incurred in the text. Regarding the crucifix, on the one hand, it is entirely logical that the exacerbated Catholic Breen refused to allow such an affront to religion in an American film; on the other hand, it was a clear reference to acts of violence against the Catholic Church, assassinations of its members and destruction of its buildings, which occurred in Republican Spain in the days and months immediately after the coup d'état of July 17 and 18, 1936, events that shocked the international public opinion and led to its creators including the scene in the script.

Film shooting began just after the approval of Breen, on April 7-9 ("Production Holds" 1937, "Advance Production", 1937) and lasted until the last days of May ("Finish 9", 1937). On May 31, Breen wrote to Hays and communicated his satisfaction with the finished film, while stressing that the studio had been careful to avoid taking sides (Doherty, 2013, p. 144). So much so that the producer, for unequivocal pressures by PCA, inserted the following allegation of official neutrality in the pressbook of the film, intended for display:

During the production of *The Last Train from Madrid*, Paramount put a lot of effort to avoid taking sides on either side of this country torn by war, so it would be a good policy to follow, thus avoiding any possible offense to viewers. *The Last Train from Madrid* is strictly neutral in matters that relate to the current Spanish conflict. If you carry out a campaign in Spanish, make sure that the copy is simple and straightforward and "does not take sides in the current conflict in the country" (Valleau, 1982, pp. 12-13).

As we shall see, such stance is also reflected in the movie. In the end, the National Catholic Legion of Decency ended up authorizing *The Last Train From Madrid*, although he granted it the Class A-2 category of "Acceptable for adults" ("Legion Approves" 1937, "National Decency", 1937). Facing what was asserted by AFI Catalog, which wrongly locates its release date on June 25, 1937, the film was first released at the Criterion Theatre in New York on June 18 ("The Broadway", 1937; "Motion Picture" 1937; "1st Runs" 1937, p. 8; Kauf, 1937).

4.2. Historical analysis of the feature film

After the credits, the film begins with a cannon throwing a bomb. Then come by overprinting three texts that affect the neutrality of the feature film and were imposed by Breen (Doherty, 2013, p. 144):

The biggest dramas in the world that defy the imagination because their base is real have emerged from war.

This is a story of this kind -a representation of fictional characters trapped in besieged Madrid, with one common desire - - Escape.

We neither defend nor condemn any of the factions of the Spanish conflict. This is a story of people -not of causes.

The writings are about real images of a Spanish city devastated by the war, with many buildings in ruins and filled with debris. Although these images represent Madrid, Paramount, in the pressbook, recorded that they belonged to Palencia, where it sent a production unit to shoot the civil war (Valleau, 1982, p. 11). This shocking opening, which refers to the disasters of the war and includes genuine documentary material about the conflict, gives *The Last Train From Madrid* expectations of authenticity that will be frequently disappointed. It should be understood primarily, as a publicity gadget, like the advertisements and promotional texts distributed by the studio that related it to the topical issues at the time: "The first film about the Spanish Civil War" ("The Last Train ", 1937a, pp. 18-19) or "The Last Train from Madrid "-the latest word about films taken 'from newspapers' ("That's Out! ", 1937, p. 3).

Then starts the argument itself, with a radio broadcaster making a statement:

An announcement of vital importance. It is informed that the last train from Madrid will leave tonight at twelve o'clock. For governmental reasons, the railway communications of Madrid with Valencia and the coast will be destroyed, they will be destroyed immediately after the departure of the last train. The municipal defense office will issue the special passes. But here is a citizen alarm. These special passes will be issued only to accredited persons with significant business outside Madrid and some military, not others. Applications must be submitted at the provisional headquarters of Captain Ricardo Alvarez, the military escort of this train, at the National Hotel.

Except with respect to the sense of panic and disorder existing in Madrid on November 6, 1936 with the sudden governmental decision to move to Valencia (a flight in every way, showing that the executive was convinced that Madrid was about to fall), the rest of the message is pure fiction. In fact, at that time there was not even a direct Madrid-Valencia rail line of communication, which *The Last Train From Madrid* ignores completely¹².

Likewise, it should also be noted that the unawareness of the makers of the film about the idiosyncrasies of the Spanish Civil War leads them to place people with significant business outside Madrid as privileged passenger in the train, when the fact is that many of the industries and means of production in the Republican area

¹² Madrid-Valencia railroad was in a stage of construction when the war broke, through the Cuenca-Utiel section (which was not completed until 1947). With the departure of the government to Valencia, the Republic considered it necessary to be a top strategic priority to keep communications of the new capital with the front in Madrid, mostly after the Battle of Jarma, on February 1937, in which the rebel forces tried to cut the communications between both cities. To do so, an alternative railroad named "Negrin Railroad" or "Train of the 100 days" was quickly built, its former designation alludes to the minister and later president of the Republic Juan Negrín, who gave impetus to its construction, and the latter refers to the time it took to build it. It was finished in June 1938.

passed into the hands of the workers and entrepreneurs in no case enjoyed privileges in Republican Spain, it was rather otherwise. This is a historical error in which they insist just afterwards, at the National Hotel, where hundreds of desperate people do their best to get passes for the convoy and it includes an employer vehemently demanding the authorities to protect his factory.

The military governor of Madrid, Colonel Vigo (Lionel Atwill), and Captain Ricardo Alvarez (Anthony Quinn) deal with the highly critical situation of the Republic regarding the bitter battle being waged in Cardozo. Valleau (1982, p. 13), he is completely mistaken in taking this fictional town for Avila, an assimilation he does when considering that the city was being subjected to national attack at that moment. Avila, however, like most extremely conservative cities in Castile and Leon, surrendered to the rebels almost without any fight, on July 19. Judging by the action of the film, Cardozo cannot be anything but the front of Madrid. Moreover, the film faithfully follows the story in relation to the siege Madrid was undergoing at that time. On October 15, the putsching troops were nearby. On November 4, Getafe fell and the next day Alcorcón and Leganés. On day 6, the rebels were at the gates of the capital. The Battle of Madrid would not end until November 23¹³.

Since reinforcements are needed, prison inmates have been offered to get involved in the conflict. The question arises whether allow also political prisoners to contribute to the war effort. "Why not?", says Ricardo, "Their only crime is disagreeing with us." We share the view of Valleau (1982, p. 16) when he says that, with his comment, he reveals himself as being politically naive. However, the mere possibility raised by the film that political prisoners participate in the defense of Madrid is both amazing and absurd, a real historical nonsense. Moreover, in reality, it happened otherwise. On November 7 and 8, 1936, there were the massive sacks of political prisoners and the Republicans shot fascist, fifth columnists and rightists in Paracuellos del Jarama and Torrejón de Ardoz towns near Madrid. The executions were motivated by the statements of General Mola from the national side, who, in a radio interview, had said that he had four columns prepared to enter Madrid, but the attack would be started a "fifth column" that was already inside (Preston, 2013, pp. 399-400). He was referring to the followers of the insurrection who lived in the city and, above all, to the political prisoners who thronged its jails, totaling almost eight thousand. On November 7, with the rebels about to enter Madrid, the Republicans panicked at the possibility that members of the national army and supporters of the military uprising in prison could organize the offensive, so it was decided to evacuate them to jails away from the front. However, during the trip, around 1,200 were killed.

However, the first question is quite true: both in Madrid and in many republican cities, common convicts were set free if they joined the CNT and fought with the Republic; other times, the militias just entered prisons and freed the ordinary criminals, who were considered victims of the bourgeois society (Preston, 2006, p. 136; Preston, 2013, p. 309, 347, 357, 372, 387-388, 398). The fact that this event so close to reality and, in turn, the absurdity of inviting political prisoners to defend Madrid

¹³ The Republic could keep Madrid, but the city became an open front during practically the whole civil war, until its fall on March 28, 1939.

appear. In the same sequence leads us to think that this last remark might be suggested by Breen in an effort to provide the film with maximum neutrality.

Finally, Vigo decides that only common prisoners can join the battle and gives Ricardo a list with volunteers. Ricardo inspects it and is shocked to discover a name: Eduardo de Soto. The camera focuses on his forearm with a cross-shaped scar and then a chained molten gives way to another character performing the same action in jail, who has the same scar on his arm: Eduardo (Gilbert Roland). So we learn they are blood brothers. The latter explains to other inmates that the scar is related to the "Violent Five," a group of five who fought in the colonial war in Morocco or Rif War (1909-1927), of which now there are only two alive, and says that one day he will tell them the story of Damon and Pythias. This way, the film connects Ricardo and Eduardo with the deepest and most loyal friendship that may exist, because the classic story supposedly taking place in the fourth century BC in Syracuse, Sicily is about that matter. Shortly afterwards, Ricardo contrives to free Eduardo and releases him from taking part in the front at Cardozo, thus breaking his allegiance to the Republic. To these two characters, nothing is really important, neither politics nor ideology, not even death (neither love, as we shall see); nothing except their friendship. Moreover, as in the classic story, the character whose life was in danger, Eduardo / Pythias, becomes free, and the one who was safe, Ricardo / Damon, is endangered for saving his friend.

Hours later, Eduardo visits his former upper-class girlfriend, Carmelita Castillo (Dorothy Lamour). After two years of captivity, she was moved to see him. However, he informed her that he leaves Madrid that night with the last train. Although he wants to go with her, it cannot be: there is another man. The first love triangle of the plot is then established with melodramatic added complications, as Carmelita's partner and current fiancé is precisely Ricardo. Eduardo will retire gallantly to not interfere with each other.

Moreover, it should be noted that it is highly unlikely that Eduardo is a common criminal, because of his manners, economic position and impeccable dressing. However, according to the decision finally adopted that only the common prisoners can participate in the defense of Madrid, we must assume that he is. Now, as Valleau (1982, p. 15) suggests, it would make much more sense if he were a political prisoner, especially considering his past during the Rif War, since Franco began his meteoric military career there, and from northern Africa and with the Moroccan Army, he set in motion -on July 18, 1936- the uprising that led to the Spanish Civil War. Consequently, almost without exception, those who participated in the Rif War swelled the ranks and / or favored the insurgents. Exactly the same is likely to be applied to Ricardo, of whom nothing is explained about why he is captain of the Republic. However, returning to Eduardo, the character cannot be a political prisoner for various reasons, denoting the poor construction of the script of this subplot. On the one hand, if he were, he would not have been out of jail along with other common criminals; on the other hand, his two-year detention is necessary in prison (since 1934, before the civil war) to justify the fact that Carmelita, alone and without hope to see him again, delivered herself to another man. Under the slogans of PCA,

she is registered as a wealthy, distinguished and morally upright lady, -for this, Dick (1996, p. 16) suggests that she could be a fascist- thus marking a clear differentiation from other types of women who will appear in the plot. Thus, without Eduardo's prolonged absence of two years, reinforced by other sufferings like the death of her father, we could not explain her new engagement. However, and although the film necessarily means that Eduardo is not a political prisoner, he was announced that way in the publicity of the film supplied by the producer ("Paramount's" 1937). Hence, too, the error of numerous historiographical texts mentioning it as such, so we assume that they documented themselves from such announcements or synopses (Edge, 1977, p 70; Doherty, 2013, p. 144).

Another line of the plot concerns the militiawoman Maria Ronda (Olympe Bradna) and the American journalist Bill Dexter (Lew Ayres). It is one of the most reliable ones to the war waged in Spain, since it begins with a group of militiawomen in the vicinity of Madrid heading for the front. The militiawoman is the iconic image of the Spanish woman during the civil war, voluntarily fighting against fascism, which was spread worldwide through photography and the international press. *The Last Train From Madrid* no doubt incorporates her and thereby demonstrates greater understanding of the conflict that what could be assumed a priori. In addition, adherence to the historical reality is complete, since, according to Thomas (1962, p. 267), an exclusively female unit actively participated in the defense of Madrid in Segovia Bridge.

The militia is attacked by an air bombardment and its members run for cover. Maria takes advantage of the opportunity to desert and stops the car driven by Bill. She begs him to take her to Madrid to see her father, a political prisoner who will be shot that day. But why would Maria need the influence of Bill if she is a Republican? Even more incongruous is the fact that she fights for the Republic and her father belongs to the national side. According to Dick (1996, p. 16), in the original story, Maria had no political convictions and only enlisted in the militia out of starving. However, this data is not in the film and, therefore, her membership and that of her father are imposed as inconsistent and contradictory.

After a brief visit to Mary's father in prison, both of them leave the enclosure while Mr. Ronda and other national prisoners are executed. Although it is risky to connect the scene with the already alluded shootings of national political prisoners occurred on November 7 and 8, 1936 in Paracuellos del Jarama and Torrejón de Ardoz, because, in its day, everything possible was done to silence them (Preston, 2013, p. 493), its location in the film is because the echoes of mass executions of prisoners by the Republicans had a major impact on Western democracies because of the presence of substantial foreign journalists in the loyal area. However, the systematic atrocities and killings of the rebel troops were barely known because, along with the rebels, there were no war correspondents who could bear witness to them (Preston, 2013, pp. 401-402).

In the firing squad, a soldier refused to pull the trigger: Juan Ramos (Robert Cummings). "If the film were realistic," explains Valleau (1982, p. 15), "he would have been killed with a shot at that very moment." However, his superior only admonishes him and takes him to Colonel Vigo. Indeed, the total lack of credibility as

to the way to proceed of the army and other senior military officers is another particular trait of *The Last Train From Madrid*. Vigo, in fact, merely reproached his cowardice with some benevolence and imposes a punishment: he will be transferred to Cardozo. But in an equally implausible way, he granted the soldier two free hours and gave him money for his enjoyment.

While Juan walks among the ruins of Madrid, a prostitute, Lola (Helen Mack), says goodbye to her last customer. Suddenly and for no reason, a sniper kills the man. The scene is a faithful reflection of Madrid under siege in 1936 where, as the rebel troops came are closer and closer, Falangists and conspirators went out at dusk and fired randomly from roofs and windows (Preston, 2006, p 190; Preston, 2013, pp. 400, 472). *The Last Train From Madrid* offers a terrifying image of Madrid as uninhabitable, where dangerousness and arbitrary crimes abound, all of which correspond to the historical reality of the city during the Battle of Madrid. Another notable aspect of the production for its faithfulness, which intensifies in this fragment, is the constant noise of artillery fire and bombs. In this, *The Last Train From Madrid* is completely true, since the noise of national attacks was heard in the capital since mid-October (Thomas, 1962, p 253; Preston, 2006, p. 174).

Juan helps Lola to take the man into her home. Soon they find that he is dead. But he had a pass for the last train and Juan plans to use it and desert to Valencia. Although initially Lola does not want to give Juan the pass and calls him a coward, when she finds out they are from the same village, near Burgos, she agrees to give him the pass. Both will end up falling in love and plan to run away together to Valencia. Juan is described as a sensitive pacifist. However, as Dick (1996, p. 16) suggests, his unwillingness to fight for the Republic may be related to his roots in Burgos, the capital of the national side and a very reactionary and pro-rebel area.

If an execution perpetrated by the Republicans is previously shown, the film balances it now with a bombing on the civilian population of Madrid carried out by German aircraft at the service of the nationals. Thus, the declared neutrality of the movie is effective.

The connection with reality reaches its peak in this passage because these are the aforementioned Soviet images of the Spanish Civil War that Paramount, surprisingly and despite the censorship of PCA, managed to insert into the film. There are several texts that have pointed out the inclusion of real images from a newsreel in *The Last Train From Madrid* without indicating anything about their origin (Valleau, 1982, p. 15; Gubern, 1986, p 58; Coma, 2002, p 92), as well as others who erroneously have attributed these images to material filmed by the studio for its newscasts (Pastor Petit, 1998, p 201 items; Doherty, 2013, p 145). Now, as we advanced, it has not been until this piece of research that they have been identified. They belong to the Soviet newsreel *K Sobitiiam v Ispanii (About the events in Spain)*, by Soiuzkinochronica producer, filmed by operators Roman Karmen and Boris Makasséiev, and the images specifically correspond with issue No. 10, shot in November 1936 in Madrid, ie at the exact moment portrayed in the feature film¹⁴. Undoubtedly, the presence of this

¹⁴ This piece of research is indebted to Dr Rafael Rodríguez Tranche since, thanks to his lecture at the International Congress "Images of a war. Posters, photography and filmmaking in Spain", Madrid, on October 26-28, 2015, we could establish the connection of the images with *The Last Train to Madrid*. For

footage, where you see women, children and old people running across the streets towards the shelters, trying to escape the air bombardment of the Nazis, was what motivated that *The Last Train From Madrid* remained prohibited during Franco's regime (Pastor Petit, 1998, p. 200), which simultaneously refutes the theory that the film leans toward the rebels.

The remaining characters of the story are the sophisticated baroness Helene Rafitto (Karen Morley) and her gigolo lover Michael Balk (Lee Bowman), both foreigners. With them, the film establishes its second love triangle, which includes Eduardo, this story line being the only one that is related to a previous one.

Edward and Helene meet in a night club, she offers him to go together in the last train and assures him that she will get a pass for him. Under the watchful eye of the republican police, he adopts the false identity of Jose Vallejo, quite unnecessary if we assume that he is not a political prisoner and, therefore, he is not wanted. We oppose the thesis of Valleau (1982, pp. 18-19) when he links the search carried out by the authorities in this scene to a criticism of the Republican side. In our view, with the nationals so close and the city crowded with spies and conspirators, the inspection of the nightclub is part of the normal situation of the defense of Madrid. Without going any further, *Blockade*, a clearly Republican-leaning film, has a similar sequence. The difference is that here the viewer identifies himself with Eduardo and wants him to escape, something in which he succeeds.

When Vigo knows the performance of Ricardo, again implausibly, he simply arrests him. He asks Ricardo who Eduardo De Soto is and it is thus confirmed that the latter is a common criminal, because Vigo does not know him. Ricardo says he is a friend and poses the argument that, to Coma (2002, p. 94), summarizes the film ideologically; this subplot, no doubt: "To me, there is something bigger than patriotism -friendship."

Another serious historical distortions in the film is the subsequent expulsion of Bill from Madrid by the authorities, as is well known that Republicans, unlike what happened on the national side, willingly welcomed all kinds of foreign correspondents, writers, photographers and journalists, especially because the Republic wanted the world to know what was happening in Spain to get international support and intervention.

The climax of *The Last Train From Madrid* comes at the railway station with the characters trying to get on the convoy. Since melodrama prevails, requiring complications and not all achieve their objective, some die, others are arrested and only the "good" ones manage to flee to Valencia. Intrigue and suspense increase markedly in the final sequence, since Vigo indefinitely stops the train departure because Ricardo and Eduardo are traveling there. Helene is arrested by the police for the murder of Michael, whom she shot to get his pass for Eduardo. While Juan and Lola, on their way to the station, are attacked by saboteurs and she dies. According to the moral standards of PCA, it is quite understandable that Lola and Helene see their plans frustrated; the former for being a loose woman; and the latter because she is a

further information about the images, see Rodríguez Tranche, 2007, p. 67; Rodríguez Tranche, 2012, pp. 121-124. Consult also: Sánchez-Biosca, 2007, pp. 77-78; García López, 2010, pp. 35-37; García López, 2013, pp. 60, 79-80.

femme fatale and guilty of murder. Ricardo also dies, in a completely heroic, romantic and unreal way, he gives his life for his best friend and his girlfriend to go together to Valencia. Carmelita and Eduardo, Maria and Bill and also Juan leave in the convoy.

5. CONCLUSIONS-RESULTS

Confusion, ambiguity and disorder are the keynotes of *The Last Train From Madrid*. Throughout this paper, we have alluded to the Spanish Republic and to the existence of two opposing sides because our analysis would otherwise have been unintelligible. However, it should be noted that such specific features do not appear in the film, among other reasons because it was conceived with a will of impartiality and non-prefixed identification from the start. The film only allows us to distinguish that there is a war going on in Spain, but no one even knows who or what has caused it, why they fight or which the warring factions are. Everything must be deduced, interpreted and figured out by the viewer.

Our examination has shown that *The Last Train From Madrid* includes unsustainable elements and elements that considerably deviate from the historical reality of the Spanish Civil War, in addition to others that are entirely true and stick to true facts. Referring to the latter, as a synthesis we could specify:

1. The recruitment of common prisoners to contribute to the defense of the Republic.
 2. The presence of militiawomen involved in the Battle of Madrid.
 3. The mass execution of political prisoners by the Republicans, which could allude to the executions of November 7 and 8, 1936 in Paracuellos del Jarama and Torrejón de Ardoz.
 4. The air bombardments by Nazi aviation of civilians in Madrid, reliably reflected by the intertextual insertion of a fragment of a Soviet newsreel.
 5. The danger and insecurity of citizens in Madrid in November 1936, with many snipers and saboteurs.
 6. The marked realism in the description of Madrid as a city under siege, especially from the point of view of sound, via the incessant rumble of bombs and artillery fire.
- All these issues linked to belligerence contradict previous texts that have stated that the film has no connection with the war in Spain. However, we note that the number of distorted and incoherent events is much greater, since we should emphasize:
1. Entrepreneurs are considered priority passengers and one is included who requests the republican authorities to safeguard his factory, these event being rather than improbable in the Spain ruled by the Popular Front.
 2. From the historical point of view, the dilemma of the fascist prisoners being involved in the defense of Madrid falls into the realm of the absurd.
 3. Given the past of Eduardo in the Rif War, it would have been consistent for him to be a political prisoner. But, out of deficiencies of the script, he is registered as a common criminal.
 4. The military career of Ricardo would ascribe him logically to the national garrison. However, he is a captain of the Republic and no explanation in that regard is provided.

5. Maria belonging to the ranks of the Republican militia and his father belonging to the coup side is another incongruous circumstance, which is further accentuated because he has been sentenced to death by the Republicans.
6. Maria would not necessarily need any help to see her father before he died and, at least, should have more influence than a foreigner.
7. The expulsion of Bill, an American journalist, from the Republican area is completely distanced from the historical reality of the Spanish Civil War.
8. The important and last train from Madrid to Valencia (a railway that did not exist in Spain in 1936) is about to be canceled because of two insignificant individuals who have not committed any political betrayal: Ricardo, who freed an ordinary convict, and Eduardo, the prisoner in question.
9. The behavior of the army is felt to be unlikely because they are greatly benevolent and sentimental during the war.
10. In an extremely unjustified way, all the characters want to get passes for the convoy and go to Valencia, because that is the driving force upon which the plot is developed according to the genre of melodrama. However, many are deserters and / or persecuted by the Republicans --Ricardo, Eduardo, Maria and Juan-- and, therefore, should want to stay in Madrid, as the city is about to fall under Franco's power.

Such vast numbers of misleading and impossible events responds to a combination of factors, among which we must consider: the exercise of PCA; the absence of thorough understanding of the nature and uniqueness of the Spanish Civil War; and emphasis to be attached to the generic conventions of melodrama and introduce elements of excitement, adventure and suspense in a city under siege. Consequently, *The Last Train From Madrid* leaves aside logic and becomes an unintelligible film from a historical perspective.

As for its ideology, it is deliberately neutral. The Hays Office imposed such a stance and the film generally managed to remain impartial, as we believe has been shown in the analysis of how the film compensates for the reprehensible acts of one side or the other. It is therefore useless to try to extract from it some kind of political or ideological bias. However, we must consider some unintended implications of the movie.

The main thing is that, by locating the action in Madrid surrounded by the nationals, the Spanish Civil War is portrayed from the Republican side and the film presents a tragic image of Madrid as a suffocating, claustrophobic city dominated by terror due to the lurking invaders. Also, actual images appearing in the film --the initial images of Madrid in ruins (in truth, Palencia) and the air bombardment-- have a great emotional impact and result from that unknown external danger. Finally, and most important, the fact that we never see the nationals --only when bombing-- makes them a more frightening and threatening presence, making them appear as the enemy. So much so that Valencia, a Republican area, is equated with freedom, the place where everyone wants to escape to get away from the looming horror, even though some of the characters have every reason not to continue in the loyal area, since the authorities are after them. But still, they prefer to flee.

Although the latter elements would hint at a favorable tilt toward the Republican side, it fades away when we notice that not one of the protagonists feels any loyalty or desire to fight for the Republic. So ambiguity is imposed again.

Summing up, the relevance of *The Last Train From Madrid* lies in its being the first representation of the film industry in Hollywood about the Spanish Civil War in a fiction film with full staging in Spain, performed also simultaneously to its activity. It acts therefore as a historical document and clearly shows the official stance of neutrality and non-interference shared by both the Hays Office and the US government. And, in this sense, it predicts what would finally happen in history: non-intervention of Western democratic powers in the war waged in Spain.

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