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MODES OF REPRESENTATION OF THE CHURCH IN REPUBLICAN CIFESA: SISTER ST. SULPICE AND THE HAMLET PRIEST

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ABSTRACT

This article is an outlook of the modes of representation of the ecclesiastical structure during the first stage in the production of CIFESA (Industrial Company of Spanish Filmmaking, S.A.). The early years of the Spanish production company coincided with the end of the republican period, where some of the most important works of Spanish cinema such as *The Festival of La Paloma* (Benito Perojo, 1935) or *Light Brunette*. (Florián Rey, 1936) were made. Modernity in the content of some of the films of this period Spanish filmmaking serves to show the ability to display, based on literary works, the evolution of the Church, which then, with the arrival of Franco's regime, would vary toward more conservative positions. The films that best reflect this renewal of the shaping of the clergy are *Sister St. Sulpice* (Florián Rey, 1934) and *The Hamlet Priest* (Francisco Camacho, 1936). The analysis of the most important characters in these movies (priests and nuns) will be carried out through the functions of opponent and helper, the influence in narrative inflection points and contextualization in the period of making. These actants show the actions of the characters regarding the rest of the cast and the fundamental position they had in the film. The role of the characters belonging to the Church will wane in the later stages of CIFESA production company.

KEY WORDS

CIFESA - Church - Actant - Cinema - Spanish - Republic - Priest - Nun

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MODOS DE REPRESENTACIÓN DE LA IGLESIA EN LA CIFESA REPUBLICANA: LA HERMANA SAN SULPICIO Y EL CURA DE ALDEA

RESUMEN

El presente artículo realiza una visión de los modos a través de los cuales fue representada la estructura eclesiástica en la primera etapa de producción de CIFESA (Compañía Industrial del Film Español. S.A.). Los primeros años de la productora española coincidieron con el final de la etapa republicana, donde se crearon algunas de las obras más importantes del cine español como *La verbena de la Paloma* (Benito Perojo, 1935) o *Morena Clara* (Florián Rey, 1936). La modernidad en contenido de algunas de las películas que ocupan este periodo fílmico español, sirve para poner de manifiesto la capacidad de mostrar, basándose en obras literarias, la evolución de la Iglesia, que luego, con la llegada del franquismo, variaría hacia posiciones más conservadoras. Las películas que mejor reflejan esta renovación de la plasmación del clero son *La Hermana San Sulpicio* (Florián Rey, 1934) y *El cura de aldea* (Francisco Camacho, 1936). El análisis de los personajes más importantes de estas películas (curas y monjas) será llevado a cabo a través de las funciones de oponente y ayudante, influencia en puntos de inflexión narrativos y contextualización en el periodo de realización. Estos actantes muestran las acciones de los personajes respecto al resto del reparto y la posición fundamental que tenían en la obra. El papel de los personajes pertenecientes a la Iglesia irá menguando en las posteriores etapas de la productora CIFESA.

PALABRAS CLAVE

CIFESA - Iglesia - Actante - Cine - España - República - Cura - Monja

1. INTRODUCTION

The present of the analysis of the narratives in the history of Spanish cinema cannot ignore the figure of CIFESA production company for over 25 years. The first stage of the production company, from 1934 to the end of the Spanish Civil War in 1939, a series of films which represented milestones in terms of production techniques and distribution terms (Fanés, 1989).

The goal of this article is to carry out an analysis of the modes of representation of the clerical society through social progressivism making up people like priests and nuns in the first Republican stage of Spanish cinema. The main characters of this piece of research are Gloria, the main character in *Sister St. Sulpice* (Florian Rey, 1934) and Father Juan, a vital character to the functioning of the story in *The Hamlet Priest* (Francisco Camacho, 1936). Both productions are based on the homonymous works written by Armando Palacio Valdes and Enrique Perez Escrich respectively.

Through the current collective imaginarieness, we understand forms of representation of the Church that determine the function of the clerical character in the story. In this sense, we must understand that main goals of the popular movies CIFESA production company intended to produce through its "ten commandments" were "to honor the show and art and to please the public above all things" (Fanés, 1989 , p. 52). These two objectives are found in both films. In *Sister St. Sulpice*, the Spanish star system appears in its whole splendor, with the figures of Imperio Argentina and Miguel Ligeró, who would later star *Light Brunette* (Florian Rey, 1936). *Sister St. Sulpice* tells the story of Gloria, a strong-tempered person who breaks with the stereotype of a women subjected to high office (a family of high society, Church, male figure), renouncing her vows for an adventure that will end with her falling for Ceferino Sanjurjo. The struggle of the protagonist, that breaks the shackles of the established power, will find obstacles in the family-related characters and in the senior members of the congregation to which she belongs. For its part, the most important supporting role of *The Hamlet Priest* is Father Juan, who helps the protagonist of the story to regain his father's love and the respect the people. This character, closely linked to the parishioners, has a socialist stance as regards society and is the chief architect of the happy ending, something that reminds us of another commandment of the Valencian production company "not to kill the resigned public with boredom." These happy endings reconsider the role of a clergy respected by and empathetic with viewers. The chosen films belong to completely different genres. On the one hand, we find romantic comedy and, on the other hand, rural drama.

In addition to the characters mentioned above, it is necessary to highlight the figures of the other ecclesiastical characters in the chosen films and make reference to some characters belonging to this stratum that also appear in this cinematic stage.

2. OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this article are:

- Recognition of the role of ecclesiastic figures in the Republican filmmaking of CIFESA production company.
- Understanding of the social and political context of the time and relationship with the way of production in Spain.
- Explanation of the ecclesiastic characters in *Sister St. Sulpice* and *The Hamlet Priest* through the actantial model.
- Understanding of the ecclesiastical characters in the chosen films through the points of core and satellite events in which they appear.

- Recognition of the stereotype of priest and nun at that time and comparison with the later stages of CIFESA production company.

3. METHODOLOGY

The methodology for the analysis of the characters depends on four factors.

First, the social, political and cinematic context. Let us recall that it is the stormy period prior to the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War. For this reason, we must understand the concept of religious stereotype embodied in the Republican movies of CIFESA. To do this, we understand that the makeup of the archetypes of Gilbert Durand helps us understand the need to differentiate the purpose of each of the characters in the story. In this case, the stereotype of progressive priest and a progressive nun contrasts with the high reactionary clergy.

Secondly, the study of characters stands out through the actantial roles of the main selected characters. The actantial method developed by Julius Algirdas Greimas (1966) is necessary to understand the role they play in the actions of the characters that revolve around them. Let us recall the following sentence from the author in order to better understand why this election: "the functional unit of a statement is what it means" (p.278).

Third, it is necessary to know the narrative turning points where the chosen characters act to understand the role they play in the work and to draw conclusions about the modernity intended to be demonstrated in popular filmmaking where the goal was to convince the public through issues having to do with their own lives. These turning points are called core events and satellite events. As Chatman (1990) explains "the cores are narrative moments that give rise to critical points in the direction the subjects take[...] The satellite events, not occasional elections, but only the development of the elections made of cores necessarily entails the existence of cores, but not vice versa" (p. 56-57).

Finally, the analysis of characters according to the concept of round and flat helps to understand their evolution in the story. Also, we know if there is a direct relationship between flat and round characters and a developed actantial function. This requires understanding the method of analysis proposed by Edward Forster in *Aspects of the Novel* (1927).

4. DISCUSSION

4.1. The helper ecclesiastical character in *The hamlet priest* vs. the opponent character in *Sister st. sulpice*

In *Sister St. Sulpice* there are two types of characters according to the character belonging to the Catholic Church. The protagonist of the film, Gloria, is a liberal nun whose character contrasts with that of Mother Superior and her accompanying novices in the spa where the beginning of the story takes place. In *The Hamlet Priest*, there is only one ecclesiastical character, Father Juan, a kind man who worried about his neighbors.

Considering the classification of actantial functions proposed by JA Greimas which, unlike characters depending on whether they are subjects, objects, helpers, opponents, senders or recipients, and based on the theory that matching of functions can only be empirical to condense the story (Greimas, 1966, p.297) it is understood that the ecclesiastical characters in these two films perform a actantial function of opponent and helper. The exception at some times in *Sister St. Sulpice* is Gloria, who functions as the subject of the film at certain points of inflection or core events of the film.

Sister St. Sulpice begins with the presentation of the story in the spa where Gloria and her future husband, Ceferino, meet. Here are differences in the behavior of the protagonist in relation to the abbess and the novice nuns, who should not take the most brazen and modern nun of the congregation as an example. This cinematic instant shows the power of the clergy as an opponent to the life of freedom of the protagonist. The dismay because of the attitudes of Gloria such as her talking to other men or her constantly singing songs contrasts with the role of Father Juan in *The Hamlet Priest*.

This film tells the misfortune of Diego, the protagonist, along his life, since he has been despised by his father and sentenced to family ostracism, a fact that has led him to being addicted to the game and feeling displaced by the society. Father Juan, a priest who is completely devoted to his parishioners, is responsible for straightening his life and talking the father of Diego out of going to the Carlist War. The control of the situation and the conviction of the need to help others, exerting an act of humility regarding the power of the father of Diego, place him as the chief helper. These two films show the functions, not only actantial but vital as well, of representative levels of the ecclesiastical society.

The power of Gloria as a subject and as an example of a modern character and helper is observed as a child never leaves her, Gloria being an attractive character for the needy, like Father Juan.

4.2. The non-ecclesiastical character as an opponent in *The hamlet priest* and *Sister St. Sulpice*

If the ecclesiastical character is the protagonist of the study, it is necessary to compare his activity with the character that does not belong to the Church establishment. Both in *Sister St. Sulpice* and *The Hamlet Priest* the opponent is relevant as an actantial function as seen through figures like the families of Gloria and Diego, the protagonists of both films.

In *Sister St. Sulpice*, the modernity of the protagonist contrasts with the stereotype of archaic family to which she belongs. Remembering Jung (1970), "the life of the collective unconscious has almost entirely been captured in the dogmatic archetypal representations and it flows as a stream channeled and tamed in the symbolism of creed and ritual flow" (p.18).

These words introduce the viewer into the knowledge of a classist and conservative family, Gloria's, with a transcendental perception of decorum for the representation of established canons. Therefore, Gloria, must convince the characters of the upper social strata, which in turn are her family, like Tula, her aunt, and also the house landlord, Oscar, a very recurrent figure in the films of CIFESA, when characters with large territorial possessions are shown. The break with the conventionalism of Gloria before renouncing her vows and her subsequent infatuation with Ceferino place both characters as main opponents of the film. Both Tula as Don Oscar subject Ceferino to tests to be convinced that Gloria has made the right decision. These tests refer to the concept of hero and especially to the supporting character who acts as an opponent or helper. Sanchez Brioso (1987) states that "the friend with his fidelity ensures that the values of the distant family are still in force" (p.62). The application of these words in the context of *Sister St. Sulpice* insists on maintaining a certain status and concern for Gloria. However, the actantial role of both characters continues being that of the classic opponent, a stone on the way to achieving the goal of Gloria and Ceferino.

In *The Hamlet Priest*, the actant opponent is only the non-ecclesiastical figure. The life of the protagonist, Diego, is marked by the uncompromising education given by his father, angry with him for his quarrels in the past with his deceased mother. This character was the only one who understood the weakness of Diego and stood as the chief helper until the arrival of the priest. Diego's father, Gaspar, only gets to recognize his son through the helping function of Father Juan. Throughout the play, the parent-child relationship is the head wound to be closed to conclude the action with the moral tone according to the moment.

4.3. The evolution of round characters in the religious context

The ecclesiastical character in *The Hamlet Priest* and *Sister St. Sulpice* stands out for their constant evolution throughout the story, adapting to the surrounding circumstances, whether positive or negative. The latter are formally most important to understand if a character is flat, that is, free from personality changes when facing a particular event, or conversely, if the character has an ability to improve, not only their way of understanding the environment, but to change it while making it become their imaginarieness. Therefore, Edward M. Forster (1983) points out the need to differentiate the characters according to their psychological development in the plot, in two blocks, round and flat. The former have the ability to surprise the viewer and evolve along with the story. "It is the result of a true character destined to play important roles in the narrative and dramatic universes" (Garcia Jimenez, 1996, p.304).

The characters belonging to the Church who evolve when facing the vicissitudes of the environment are Sister Gloria in *Sister St. Sulpice* and Juan in *The Hamlet Priest*. The female main character of the work of the first production by CIFESA completely changes the meaning of the clergy, as might be understood (serious, closed and intolerant). Firstly because, during the scene in the spa, she is the only nun who is not in need of the baths but of helping the destitute, a fact that for the first time gives the characterization of commitment to the poor. Secondly, because when she meets Ceferino Sanjurjo, her subsequent boyfriend, and later when she meets Daniel, the rogue character who lives at the expense of others, she does not move backwards but, instead, takes the initiative and impacts with her way of being.

We also find in Gloria, when she is still a nun, a certain mastery of her relationship with Ceferino through the phrase "*So you want to know if I intend to renew my vows?*". A phrase that highlights the essence of the movie and where we find the evolution of an ecclesiastical character that should be flat should she follow the dynamics of performance of the environment she comes from. At this point and by acting as a heroine, we remember the quotation "let the listener shudder and feel compassion in the wake of events" (Aristotle, 2011, p.58). In this sense, the elements of fear and compassion keep the viewer guessing, arouse emotional acuity and lead the viewer's thoughts to what will happen. As the movie belongs to the genre of romantic comedy, we understand the final union of Ceferino and Gloria as something intrinsic to it.

However, we observe the evolution of the two main characters and the cast who generates the conflict. Both Tula and Oscar, especially the latter as he is an employee of the former, have a negative view of Gloria exiting the convent. Being characters closely related to the Catholic Church, the mission of the protagonists is to make them evolve. Therefore, we find in Tula and Oscar two examples of round characters, as they will accept that Gloria's feelings are what matters most. However, we found a

reference to flat characters in the abbess and the novices, thus demonstrating that not all ecclesiastical characters or characters directly related to religion evolve. The interesting thing about this film is the need to show the above in a humorous tone, being in turn an element of entertainment, respecting the commandments established by CIFESA production company. Comedy is a vital asset in the first stage of the production company and the moment when Gloria goes back to the convent, laughing about the Puritanism of the congregation, breaks the stereotype of sacred respect for religion in the Spanish filmmaking (remember we are in Republican era) and, in turn, shows the involution existing in the monastic group. These not only get scared and cover their eyes but they are also protected by the abbess, who evokes the vision of a demon.

The Hamlet Priest is structured differently from *Sister St. Sulpice*. The temporal ellipses ranging from Diego's childhood until he is an adult about to join the army proposes another part of those commonly established as beginning, plot and outcome. However, only an ecclesiastical character appears in the movie. Father Juan breaks the trend of characters coming from an unadvisable world: bandits, smugglers, gamblers, broken families, poverty and abandoned children. This character is the nexus of the entire population of the hamlet and therefore his evolution as a round character is so effective in achieving the objective of the protagonist, be loved by his father, and also meet the secondary objective, not to engage in the Carlist war. Juan appears for the first time at the town square at the exit of the church, where he is surrounded by parishioners. From that moment on, we behold his continuing helping the villagers, being the first one to help the abandoned baby. When he appears in the life of Diego, Father Juan has the fundamental role of helping him to straighten out his life. In the words of Sanchez Brioso (1987): "relative and friend, they seem to be two sides of the same social and ethical ideal" (p.61-74), we understand that, when referring to the characters in the works of ancient Greece, the helper needs not be is a blood relative. In fact, it is the father himself who acts as opponent, being a supporting character that will be able to develop while being in contact with the Church. Exceptional power is seen in the figure of Father Juan, who gets Gaspar see reason, highlighting not only the power of an ecclesiastical figure but also the socialism of the Church that does not appear in *Sister St. Sulpice*. Father Juan helps Diego, as the main character and protagonist, and Gaspar, the main opponent, to evolve as round characters, causing the change in the interpretation of the essence of the character by the viewer.

4.4. The action of the ecclesiastical character in the core and satellite events

The characters that are within the hierarchy of the Church in *Sister St. Sulpice* and *The Hamlet Priest* are Father Juan Gloria, the abbess and the novices. These make up the clerical fabric of the selected works and they are part of the most important narrative moments in the film, which are those that represent turning points in the play, better

known as core events, according to Seymour Chatman (1990). These moments are characterized by changing the continuity of the film and its main characters in another direction and also by helping to achieve the objectives, that is, continuing the path but adding more narrative elements complementing the story. In turn, we found those satellite events, ie narrative moments that have the function of complementing the work but do not have a capacity for change either in the action of the character or therefore in the story itself. Absence of these events "would impoverish the story" (Prosper, 2004, p.12). The explanation for these events helps to understand the significant role of ecclesiastical characters in the play. They all are part of the core events and even, in the case of Juan and the abbess, without being protagonists, they redirect the story.

The major turning points in *Sister St. Sulpice* are the meeting between Gloria and Ceferino, their falling in love thanks to the search of the male protagonist and his arduous task of convincing the family of Gloria. Therefore, we find that Gloria is a character belonging to the clergy and also to a family highly rooted in Catholic traditions within these matters. Accordingly, we understand that Catholicism is a constant in the core events of the film. In addition, the arrival of Gloria to the convent once she has a relationship with Ceferino is an event that could be categorized as satellite, as it has no power to change the life of the protagonists too much, but it is a point turning as regards the conception of the Church as an untouchable establishment. In a tone of comedy, the abbess and the novices are being considered, in a humorous tone, as being weak to the prevailing social change and to the social relationships of young people.

In *The Hamlet Priest*, the figure of Father Juan is a reference character in core and satellite events, especially in the past, thanks to which we can understand what his relationship with the residents of the town is. The core events of the film are first the parents of Diego and the death of her mother, a fact that leaves the protagonist with the contempt of his father for many years. Subsequently, we observe moments of weakness in Diego, wasting money in gambling and not being able to get the respect of his father. Then the figure of Father Juan appears to understand how a character belonging to the plain Church acquires the necessary power in the narrative to transform the story and the characters.

In terms of most representative characters of core events, there is an interesting difference in both films as the supporting characters are very different in what refers to beliefs. For example, Gaspar does not have any relationship with the Church has since he has gained power by his economic position within the hamlet. However, the religious union and the beliefs of Tula turn the religious context into another element to be considered in the development of events in the narrative.

Both in *Sister St. Sulpice* and *The Hamlet Priest*, the characters that revolve around the protagonists end up evolving to a greater or lesser extent, except for the abbess and the novices. This fact makes us think about the evolution of the actantial opponent function of both Tula and Gaspar which, after the appearance of a character directly related to the church (Gloria and Juan), changes and improves the life of the main character, finally achieving the desired goal.

4. 5. The evolution of the representation of the ecclesiastical character in CIFESA after the civil war

Besides the two analyzed films, the only movie that has an ecclesiastical component through a physical character in the earlier stage of production before the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War is *Aragonese Nobility* (1935, Florian Rey). In this film, Father Juanico is a character who represents the opposite of the figure of Father Juan in *The Hamlet Priest*. However, he does not have such an important role in the development of events, he just supports the landlord of town, Eusebio, who is the father of the protagonist, María del Pilar, also starred by Imperio Argentina. Juanico reflects the power of the church in the village without helping the most disadvantaged, as proposed by its counterpart in the film by Francisco Camacho.

When CIFESA produces again at a national level, once the Civil War has ended. we find out there is lack of ecclesiastical characters who have been replaced by the development of a strong patriotic and military character as in the case of *Harka!* (Carlos Arevalo, 1941), *Because I Saw You Weep* (Juan de Orduña, 1941), *To Me, Legion!* (Juan de Orduña, 1942), a fact that places the filmography of CIFESA from the decade of the forties on as a faithful reflection of patriotic and religious values, but from a moral point of view, a priest or a nun are absent but there are comments on the values to be maintained, for two reasons: maintaining appearances as in the case of *Countess Maria* (Gonzalo Delgrás, 1942), where the death of the alleged son of the protagonist leads to the arrival of a woman who says she had married him and has a child. Later, we will see

We had to wait for the relevant figure of a character from the clergy till the chaplain pursuing the death penalty in the movie *The 13-13* (1944, Luis Lucia). Then we see a strong presence of characters from the clergy in the block of films describing historical periods of Spain as *The Lioness of Castile* (Luis Lucia, 1949) *Madness of Love* (Juan de Orduña, 1948) and *The Princess of Ursinos* (Luis Lucia, 1947).

Understanding the importance of films once the Civil War was over, with Franco's dictatorship acting as an engine constantly ideologizing the masses, the government, unlike the Republic that in that decade showed no interest in moviemaking as an ideological and production instrument, saw a fundamental key to represent different values through characters who did not belong to the clergy. (Fanés, 1989).

5. CONCLUSIONS-RESULTS

The ecclesiastical character in *Sister St. Sulpice* and *The Hamlet Priest* is a reference till the arrival of the high priestly offices of the final stage of CIFESA. We note that there are no apparent criteria for dealing with the Church during the Republican period, since the objective of CIFESA was to entertain and not to indoctrinate, as regulated by its "Ten Commandments". Thus, modernity is seen in the first film of the Valencian production company: *Sister St. Sulpice*.

Analyzing the characters according to their relevance in the story in the core and satellite events, according to their evolution in the plot and also through their role in the actantial model, the ecclesiastical character is affirmed to be able to evolve in such a way that the opponent object or antagonist character can arouse public sympathy, especially in *Sister St. Sulpice*, which was a comical movie. Regarding *The Hamlet Priest*, the adaptation of this rural drama to a film entails the demonstration of a new

way to understand what is tragic as trade, this film being one of the latest movies to be plaid before the Civil War and where the production company had freedom of movement as regards political issues.

It is also necessary to emphasize the figure of the ecclesiastical character as a main and a supporting character. Glory in her role of focal point of the movie demonstrates the evolution of a character and the freedom of social and political moment that existed in the early years of the thirties. The rest of the clerical cast remains as a set that helps the main characters develop the action or objective that was marked during the narration.

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