



Friendship in war cinema: stratification, unfolding of the self and empathy.

La amistad en el cine bélico: estratificación, desdoblamiento del yo y empatía.

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ABSTRACT

This work aims to address the theme of friendship war cinema, understood as one that includes all the variants of the word love, or what is the same, understood as the *philia* of the ancients. These narratives have the advantage that they raise the existence of social conflicts, the most violent is war, which in turn acts as generators of feelings and passions of all kinds. What is intended, then, is to make an analysis of the different philias in borderline situations for modern man.

Keywords: Cinema and Literature. Philia-phobia. Hierarchy. Moral travel. Otherness.

RESUMEN

Este trabajo tiene como finalidad abordar el tema de la amistad el cine bélico, entendida ésta como la que comprende todas las variantes de la palabra amor, o lo que es lo mismo, entendida como la *philia* de los antiguos. Estas narraciones tienen la ventaja de que plantean la existencia de conflictos sociales, el más violento es la guerra, que a su vez actúan como generadores de sentimientos y pasiones de toda índole. Lo que se pretende, entonces, es hacer un análisis de las diferentes filias en situaciones límite para el hombre moderno.

Palabras clave: Cine y literatura. Filia-fobia. Jerarquía. Viaje moral. Otredad.



Introduction

Both cinema and literature are a means for the knowledge of man; and both, in addition to sharing the word as a means of expression to tell stories, share structures and themes, so that the influences between one art and another are constant. From both arises an eagerness to delve into the two faces of human nature, in its two essential principles, that of cohesion or love, and that of dispersion or hatred. We will focus on four unforgettable films —*The Great Illusion* (Renoir, 1937), *Apocalypse Now* (Coppola, 1979), *The Iron Cross* (Peckinpah, 1976) and *The Thin Red Line* (Malick, 2000) — but we will consider others in which the ghost of war is present, albeit indirectly. In *Casablanca* (Curtiz, 1943), *Gilda* (Vidor, 1946), *Crossroads of Hatreds* (Dmytryk, 1947), *The Third Man* (Reed, 1949), etc., due to the military conflict what is exposed is the human conflict related to war. From them we will reflect on the theme of friendship in a broad sense, which has already been dealt with by the most influential thinkers of Hellenism —Socrates, Plato and Aristotle—, of medieval Christianity such as Thomas Aquinas and the modern world, that is, secularized, bourgeois and plural of thinkers such as Kant (Laín, 1986, p. 155).

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Class barriers and friendship: *The great illusion*

In Jean Renoir's film the state of nature has completely disappeared and we only have samples of various social classes forced to live together, or to endure, in a concentration camp. In this work, whose character is markedly pacifist, class barriers are imposed on national barriers, and, this being so, it is not surprising that great friendships arise from such consciousness. Friendship arises apart from socio-economic conditions, because it arises from the distinction of different ideologies, in short, it is a positioning of the self in front of others, a way of understanding and being in the world. Renoir addresses the criticism against the ideological propaganda of the states, which tried to show

¹ P. Macherey takes from E. Dugas this division of the Greeks: "The ancients give the word *philia* the extension that we give to the word love. We say: paternal love, filial love, etc.; they say: paternal friendship, filial friendship. The *philia* it includes all affections: love proper, between two persons of the same sex or of different sexes (*philia erōtiké*), to the love of mankind or *philantrōpia*, and friendship in the strict sense (*philia hetairiké*). The affinity of the elements that recalls the sympathy between people is properly called *philotēs*" (2000, p. 61).



the fraternity between individuals in combat for the mere fact of fighting on the same side. In short, it is a humanist critique of the illusion of war.

For José María Caparrós Lera (1998, pp. 39-40) it is a film of historical reconstitution (not to be confused with historical reconstruction) which makes it a means of historical research and a didactic resource. Apart from the subjectivism of the director, it helps us to know how a specific generation thinks of a historical fact of the past evoking it in an exercise of modern historiography.

The film begins when Captain Boëldieu (Pierre Fresnay) and Lieutenant Maréchal (Jean Gabin) are shot down by some Germans and captured by their captain von Rauffestein (von Stroheim) who politely invites them to dinner. The two French officers are transferred to the Hallsbach camp, where they will share a cell with other prisoners who are planning an escape, but when they are about to finish the secret tunnel they are transferred from a concentration camp. In Wintersborn they meet again with Captain von Rauffestein, and between him and Boëldieu a strong friendship founded on class ties arises. Boëldieu plans an escape in which Maréchal and the bourgeois and Jewish merchant Rosenthal (Marcel Dalio) escape. While Boëldieu is killed by his German friend, Maréchal and Rosenthal hide in the farm of Elsa (Dita Pardo), a German widow who lives with her daughter, and with whom Maréchal will have love affairs. When the two Frenchmen manage to reach Switzerland and the escape, so longed for at other times, becomes forced, and it is at that moment when Rosenthal enunciates the thesis of the film: "You can not see a border. They are an invention of men. Nature gives a damn."

The great illusion avoids directly showing the horrors of war, but suggests its consequences in the behavior of characters full of tenderness. The concentration camp is shown as a space for play in an attempt to escape, rather than from the camp, from everyday reality; oppression is more psychic than physical. The paradox is that prisoners see through the bars children playing soldiers on the outside, while they inside play like children. The apparent frivolity – they make theater, they cross-dress, they sing "La Marseillaise" to celebrate the seizure of the fortress of Douamond, they take their tennis rackets from one field to another, etc. – is the escape valve of human beings locked in a hostile environment in which they only possess their differentiating features, mutual respect,



companionship and friendship. Both prisoners and jailers are members of an artificial community in which nostalgia for a time in peace is not able to override their humanized essence, their feelings.

According to patriotic propaganda the soldier is a symbol of all national virtues, and heroism and camaraderie are something spontaneous and natural among those who wear the same uniform, belong to the same race or even are within the same group of allied nations. But in Renoir's film friendship as a political affinity does not work: the Germans are condescending to their captives; the prison camp is a tower of Babel in which the allies themselves cannot understand each other, the French tell the English that they have almost a tunnel ready for the escape, but the difference in language prevents the generous gesture from having validity; and the French themselves overlook national sentiment.

Boëldieu is an aristocrat who likes opera and is surprised that his partner Maréchal prefers cycling. The two share a room on arrival in Hallsbach with the son of wealthy Jewish bankers Rosenthal, a worker, two teachers and an actor. Boëldieu does not get involved in the activities of others, in the play, for example, he keeps his distance from some compatriots whom he considers commoners, although he respects them and will be able to make the greatest of sacrifices, die to facilitate the escape of two companions thus demonstrating his sense of honor and duty. However, he does share the pride of caste and the sense of honor with von Rauffenstein with whom, despite the language and being on opposing ideological and political sides, he finds dialogue and understanding very easy. Rauffenstein will be forced to shoot his friend, his classmate, will watch helplessly his agony and realize that continuing to cling to his old code of honor will not free him from suffering after killing his friend. Both Boëldieu and Rauffenstein understand that in the world in which they live the excellence of the aristocratic being, *areté*, no longer works, so they sustain their "being in the world" of which Aristotle speaks in a feeling of intimate character, a friendship based on equality. The geranium flower, the only beautiful and natural thing in the midst of cruelty, that the German cuts for his dead friend is a symbol of everything that war snatches from men.

The captivity of the characters has shades of being more psychic than physical. The best example is Elsa, who being free is the most oppressed. We see the loneliness in which she is immersed



when she contemplates a photograph of her relatives who have died because of the war. Elsa hospitably welcomes Rosenthal and Maréchal into her home: she heals her wounds, sits them at her table and hides them in her home. On Christmas night Maréchal and Elsa become lovers, because for them the important thing is not the language or nationality, but the mutual understanding and ignorance towards the reasons for the conflict. The French, Elsa and her daughter begin a friendship caused by need and interest, but that will end up being a perfect friendship between just beings, loved by herself and generous.

The great illusion in Renoir's film is really tolerance. Boëldieu, despite his initial concept of *areté* as a Homeric virtue, is able to adapt to the *dêmos*, a new transforming force of social relations. The *earring* is no longer available, but can be obtained by any man. This explains his final sacrifice, for he has understood that after the Great War his aristocratic world will have no reason to exist, and so he lets his friend Rauffenstein know, that he is now nothing more than an invalid with the despicable office of jailer, while families like the Rosenthals own half of France. Events have led to the mixing of different social classes, but the natural world ends up overlapping the social, cultural and historical, even annulling it by accepting a universal law.

But not all beings with an elite conscience will end up understanding the law in the same way as in the case of Mrs. Berthol (Marlene Dietrich) and Judge Ernst Janning (Burt Lancaster) of *Victors or Vanquished?* (Kramer, 1961). The first is the widow of a Nazi general hanged by the Allies and the second a judge of Hitler's regime; and both are representatives of the aristocracy of the time of horrors. Both yearn for the national reconstruction of their people, but this implies the oblivion of the lives shattered by their old positive right. For this reason, the friendship between Mrs. Bertholt and the American judge Dan Haywood (Spencer Tracy) fails. Both are like-minded beings who enjoy each other's refined company—they attend concerts together, walk, visit monuments, etc.—and even love desire arises among them, but their vision of how to live is so radically opposed that friendship ceases to be something viable. Mrs. Bertholt will not respond to Judge Haywood's phone calls, because he has not succumbed to immoralism as a superior form of social behavior. For Haywood, natural law predates positive law, and therefore has more value. He is not in favour of



dramas such as those of Irene Hoffman (Judy Garland) or Rudolf Petersen (Montgomery Clift) being overlooked, even if they are perfectly justified by social or racial barriers. Something similar will happen between Janning and Haywood. Among those who will emerge throughout the judicial process a sympathy, that of the wise who recognize themselves, but also called to failure for their discrepancies in the concept of the just and the good.

Friendship conditioned by a class consciousness also has great strength in *The Iron Cross* through two antagonistic characters: the petty Captain Stransky (Maximilian Schell) who embodies the values of the old and closed Prussian aristocracy, while the charismatic sergeant Rolfe Steiner (James Corbun) becomes the standard-bearer of the dignity of man, whatever your social ancestry. Steiner will be the one to tell Stransky about the strength of *dêmos*, reminding him that Schubert's father was a simple schoolteacher and Kant's was a saddler. But the great difference between them, more than in their conception of social classes, lies in the moral perspective with which they approach the world and its actions: Stransky from selfishness and Steiner establishing bonds of friendship with all those around him. The latter possesses the Homeric virtues of the warrior who excels in combat, and the Aristotelian virtues of the good man who needs friendship to be in the world.

Another great film in which feelings and passions prevail over ideologies is *Rome, open city* (Rossellini, 1945) true story of the priest Luigi Morosini, for having collaborated with the resisters of the German occupation. Apart from the real biography that inspires the director, it is a film of historical reconstruction in the sense that it explains the social content, the mentality and the way of living and expressing oneself of an era (Caparrós Lera, 1998, pp. 35-37). The noble characters are moved by universal feelings – love, compassion, piety, friendship – in the face of Nazi torturers and murderers, who are moved by the ideology of hatred. The struggle for morality and honesty manages to overcome barriers that allow friendship between a Catholic priest and a communist militant.

3. Friendship and the Moral Journey: *Apocalypse Now* and *The Heart of Darkness*

Joseph Conrad's novel *The Heart of Darkness* (1902) serves as a plot support for Francis F. Coppola's film *Apocalypse Now* (1979), in which there are also references to the poetry of T. S. Eliot, specifically



to the poem "TheHollow Men" (1925) and Four *Quartets* (1936-1942). The stories of Conrad and Coppola go beyond the imperialist conflict and go to the contradictions that any human being harbors. Both the off-road account ² of Captain Benjamin L. Willard (Martin Sheen) and the final part, that of Willard's encounter with Colonel Walter E. Kurtz (Marlon Brando), are a recreation of the Conradian atmosphere. There are several elements of the film that as it progresses is ceasing to be warlike to be of almost mystical tone, which are identical to those of Conrad's story: the character of Kurtz and his moral speculations about human goodness and evil; the native warriors who guard their refuge; the man hidden in the dark and the skull that looks like ivory.

Marlow's journey and Willard's journey turns out to be twofold, because it is an initiatory journey: it is physical and it is moral. The latter is the result of a progressive identification with the way of understanding the world by Marlow and Willard. The friendship that *appears* in *The Heart of Darkness* and *Apocalypse Now* has its foundation in unfolding. The character of Kurtz is a terrifying being who acts as a mirror of the soul, he is the twin related to death, so friendship consists of a strong attraction to the being that is revealed to be identical to one's own self.

Conrad poses barbarism as the existence proper to the agonizing man, while civilization is nothing more than death, which begins with the end of every ideal. The journey into Marlow marks the insurmountable distance of European and colonizing man from primitive man. When he arrives in Africa and travels the Congo River, he discovers the true ilk of the colonizing companies, and will get rid of the somewhat childish idea prior to his arrival. This is how he begins to take an interest in Kurtz, because he has been able to understand how fuzzy the line that separates Good from Evil is, and the double standard that, those who are like him, practice:

The human mind is capable of anything, because everything is in it, the past no less than the future. After all, what was there? Joy, fear, sadness, devotion, courage, anger, who knows, but that was the truth, whatever it was, a truth stripped of the adations of time. Let fools be

² Eliot wrote of Conrad: "He is, in some respects, the antithesis of Empire (as much as democracy); his characters embody the denial of the Empire, of the Nation, of the Race almost, they are terribly alone with the Savage" (Eliot, 2015, p. 831). That is, it denies the interests that are the source of discord and war.



amazed and trembl, the one who knows can face it without blinking. But he must be at least as manly as those on the shore. He must make that truth know its own intimate truth: its natural strength. Principles? Principles are worthless (Conrad, 1998, 22).

Mrs. Kurtz, has he gone crazy or, on the contrary, is he more lucid than the rest of the whites? He has become king of nearby tribes by participating in their rituals, maintains love affairs with a native and seems to flirt with anthropophagy. In reality, Marlow questions the liberalizing action of white on black, even accepting "a wild spectacle [...] suddenly transported to a dark region of subtle horrors" (Conrad, 1998, 149). Friendly feeling is attraction to someone who reveals himself as equivalent to one's own soul, which is capable of making one discover the truth of oneself with its greatness and misery: "he also struggled with himself. He saw the inconceivable mystery of a soul who knew neither moderation, nor faith, nor fear, but who nevertheless struggled blindly with himself" (Conrad, 1998, 159).

Apocalypse now gives a demystifying vision of war, and in tune with the social crisis that began in the sixties, and which was concentrated, as Gonzalo Muineló (1987, p. 47) points out, in three oppositions: "to the use of weapons, to the myths of progress and to socially constituted power". The heroes of World War II no longer exist, because they have been replaced by soldiers who have abandoned the code of honor and take refuge in drugs. Wars are led by men unhinged by the atrocities committed, and who have nothing worthy of admiration in their conduct. One of these soldiers is Willard, who has not managed to escape the horror experienced in the Vietnamese jungle even under the influence of drugs. He still lives the nightmare of collective madness that resonates in the song by The Doors: "This is the end, beautiful friend, the end, my only friend, the end...". When officers break into his hotel room to entrust him with a special mission, he does not know that his conscience is going to undergo a radical transformation. Willard came to Vietnam with the idea of serving his homeland, of being a useful citizen, because he is a man who lives in society, and who, therefore, accepts friendship as a necessity or exchange. Amicitia is linked to politics, as Cicero understood it in his early period, and is, therefore, an instrumental good, although the final



conclusion is that friendship is based on nature that is perfected in society through ethics (Lain, 1986, pp. 49-55). But Willard will end up deeply disappointed when he becomes aware of the utter lack of morale of the U.S. military, even though he too participates in the prevailing cruelty.

He has to go up the river, until he reaches Cambodia, and there he finds the rebellious Colonel Walter E. Kurtz and eliminates him, because he has ignored a war that he does not understand. He no longer obeys American orders, has sought refuge in the jungle, has put at his service an army, which idolizes him as if it were a god, and has gone crazy in an animal way. This is how Willard begins, as Marlow has already done, a physical and moral journey:

How many people had I killed? There were six of them and I could feel his last breath on my face. But this time it was an American. And an officer. I couldn't believe they wanted to bury that man. Almost a thousand decorations. Convicting someone of murder on this site was as absurd as a speeding ticket in Indianapolis. I didn't know what I would do once the time came (Coppola, 1979).

Willard will make the trip with some young soldiers, but despite the closeness he will not feel friendship towards them, because they have nothing in common. On the contrary, he is increasingly attracted to Kurtz's personality: "The more I started reading, the more I understood him" (Coppola, 1979). Sympathy arises, then, from knowledge, not physical or superficial, but from the one that delves into the innermost part of the human being, although it is not the result of physical contact, but of a kind of epistolary relationship and in only one direction. Also the meeting with the unorthodox Lieutenant Colonel Bill Kilgore (Robert Duvall) provokes, if possible, more doubts about the morality of the mission that has been entrusted to him: ³"If this was the way to make the war of Kilgore, I wondered what was reproached to Kurtz" (Coppola, 1979). And for this reason Willard soon reads, in the letter that Kurtz sends to his family, the justification for his crime, the murder of four Vietnamese double agents: "We act like soldiers. Cruelty is often simply clairvoyance, doing what

³ Willard's knowledge of Kurtz's actions occurs through the numerous documents that the United States Army provides him, and that he will read and decipher during the trip along the river; however, Willard will look for something else that is outside the official prose version.



needs to be done, without hesitation, immediately. I am above his timid morality which, of course, I do not share" (Coppola, 1979).

Kurtz shows him the naked truth, because a mirror does not tell lies, since it is a duplicate of the self, of the other oneself of which Aristotle speaks (Lain, 1986, p. 41). After the unnecessary massacre of the boat Willard fully identifies with him, and finishes off a woman even though the boys want to take her to a relief post: "Holes with a submachine gun and then put a bandage on them. All lies" (Coppola, 1979). The affinity when it comes to focusing actions originates a sympathy, the *philothēs* of the Platonic *Lysis*, between the two men, which is definitely evident in Kurtz's well-known monologue before Willard, the climax of the moral ambiguity of the film, which may be the result of "a historical experience that has not been assimilated" (Caparrós Lera, 1998, p. 107).⁴

The beings that *populate Apocalypse now* are beings so unhinged that, in general, human relationships are annulled, and friendship too, in favor of instincts and passions, or through the evasion of reality thanks to the consumption of drugs. Since the world, that of the persecutors and that of Kurtz, is atrocious, Willard has only one option to find a little peace: to immerse himself in the world of his own intimacy (*proaíresis*). In addition, he knows, unlike his three fellow travelers, that hell does not end with the return home, he has already returned and has seen what is there for the ex-combatants. Willard's friendship with his *alter ego* feeds on mystery, on not knowing exactly what can enclose the human mind; but also on trust, while everyone judges Kurtz crazy, the friend waits for an explanation that justifies his actions.

The Friendship Between Officers and Soldiers: *The Iron Cross*.

Power or leadership?

Sam Peckinpah's masterpiece presents us with a vision of soldiers in combat if sweetened. The action takes place in the Second World War, specifically in 1943, during the withdrawal of German troops from the Russian front. In *The Iron Cross* men fight without knowing why they do it; they are victims of

⁴ This dialogue is the first literary document that investigates love and friendship and that somehow fixes traditional ideas about these concepts. (Plato, 1981, p. 275).



higher instances for which they have the function of simple puppets and feel out of place. It is, in short, a story about the demoralization of men at the front. It is not surprising, then, that these, in very harsh living conditions and in a deplorable psychological state, need the friendship and loyalty of their companions. And it is in this brutal context that men need leaders, who are not necessarily the ones in power.⁵

Corporal Rolfe Steiner is the undisputed leader in *The Iron Cross*, because he is intelligent, charismatic, responsible, offers confidence and security, keeps his promises, and his power is not exercised coercively; so much so that even his superiors—Colonel Brand (James Mason) and Captain Kiesel (David Warner)—esteem and respect him, because they are aware of its value. On the contrary, for Captain Stransky, he represents a danger, since he sees him capable of stripping him of an authority that he cannot really have, because true authority cannot be sustained by deception and psychological manipulation. Steiner is the *vir bonus* that gives meaning to his life with a moral and coherent attitude in two guidelines: his respect for women and children, and his attachment to friendship. Despite the orders he refuses to execute a Russian child who falls prisoner, paradoxically it will be the Russians who kill him, because for Steiner childhood represents hope. With this child he establishes a special relationship of friendship, and so much so that when they say goodbye he gives him the only thing of value he has, a small harmonica. It exerts the force of what in Maori is called ⁶*ho*, which is, as Bruno Karsenti points out, "the spirit of the given thing, which makes the present have

⁵ In war cinema there are two types of officers – those who care about their men and those who use them in order to thrive – and with regard to this question there is a topic that occurs very often: how much the greater the number of stars of the warrior, the less they care about the fate of the soldiers. But there are also officers, usually of low rank, who go out of their way for rank-and-file soldiers by despising promotions and decorations; one could even speak of another type, that of those who think that necessarily the power of the offices corrupts the soldier, so they refuse to accept officer positions.

⁶ The issue of children is of crucial importance in *The Iron Cross*, as reflected in its circular structure. The film begins with the songs of the Nazi fry and with archival images of Hitler, to end with those same songs, with images of grisly massacres much more recent and with a quote to Bertolt Brecht's poem: "Do not rejoice in his defeat because, although the world resisted and stopped the bastard, the dog who conceived him is back in heat.". Children embody love/friendship to the human race or *philantrōpia* and for that reason all those who respect them, like Steiner, are able to feel friendship; but Peckinpah warns us that those who represent hope can later be the executors of the violence they have witnessed. Dietz's (Michael Howka) children's play of the sunbeams will be one of the few things that make Steiner smile in the chaos in which he is immersed. Also in respect for the dignity of Soviet women, despite experiencing the crudest violence, it



something of the donor, and whose transfer represents a spiritual influence on the beneficiary of the gift" (2000, p. 104). The gift of the child to Steiner should not be understood as a social commitment, but as a proof of respect and recognition of a friendship that arose in the most painful conditions.

Steiner possesses an innate authority that he employs as a tool for the common good; it does not instill fear, but it does instill respect; it is not inaccessible, but it has a psychological space of its own; and has great self-confidence. He is a cynical and anti-Nazi man, who lives the war at the foot of the cannon and only for that reason he can be a leader who, just wants to survive with his battalion; he has made risking his life a trade, a way of life, although it does not give it any patriotic meaning, he could even be accused of nihilism: "The German soldier no longer fights for the culture of the West, nor for that hateful party. Struggle to survive" (Peckinpah, 1976).

On the contrary, Stransky constantly praises his correct and groomed image at all times that he is not aware of his megalomaniac delusions. He is an unworthy man whom others cannot love, because he does not love himself, but a false image of himself built with a decoration – the Iron Cross awarded by the Third Reich – that to his shame he intends to steal from those who truly deserve it.

Stransky is one of the officers who conceive of human relations as an abuse of his power, who will not be the only one who shoots at his men like General Paul Mireau (George Macready) from *Paths of Glory* (Kubrick, 1957) who will not hesitate to do so either. Colonel Nicholson (Alec Guinness) will make his men work as slaves, whom he orders to build a bridge over the River Kwai (Lean, 1957), in order to fill their vanity and grotesque selfishness. Colonel Tall (Nick Nolte) of *The Thin Red Line* leads them on a suicide mission, because he knows perfectly well that he has to please those above him and that he fears: "the closer you are to the greater Caesar is the fear" (Malick, 2000). Tall has a Machiavellian idea regarding this subject, in the event that the doubt arises as to whether it is better to be loved or feared by his subordinates, he will opt for the latter; moreover, their distrust of others is proverbial:

highlights the upright attitude of the leader and those who are his friends, in clear opposition to those who exclude themselves from the ethical world of the *philia*.



[...] men are less afraid of offending the one who makes himself loved, than the one who makes himself fearful; because love is maintained by a bond of obligation, which, given human malice, is broken with any motive of its own usefulness; but fear is maintained thanks to the fear of punishment that never abandons us. (Machiavelli, 1999, 136).

And Captain Dana Holmes (Philip Ober) of *From Here to Eternity* (Zinnemann, 1953), will have as his adversary Sergeant Milton Warden (Burt Lancaster), who will defend his friends from the relentless machinery of the army, although he also makes it clear that the military system can be a home for wayward young people.

In general, all those who abuse their power boast of instilling respect, and believe that they make it clear that they are acting in the interests of all; in short, they naively understand that their resentment others will understand as the popular saying that "who loves you well will make you cry". They alone construct their own discourse, but it cannot convince anyone who has a remote idea of what friendship and companionship are. They are such insecure beings that they are incapable of trusting any fellow man, and yet they do so in the emblems of their vanity and lack of authority: firearms, batons and rods. No wonder they see in these false attributes the badge of an excellent being, to be morally perfect, from which they are far away. General Mireau's false paternalism and false interest in soldiers when he fulfills his "unpleasant obligation to go to the trenches" (Kubrick, 1957) is pathetic, where he will say: "I see that you are cleaning up your fúsil. Do not forget that he is the soldier's best friend. If you take care of him he will take care of you too" (Kubrick, 1957). Holmes who thinks "that in the army it is not the individual who counts", and that, although a man can "have convictions and defend them", in the army "you can only obey" (Zinnemann, 1953), he has exactly the same idea of friendship as Mireau so he will give the following advice to the company: "The fúsil is your best friend; if you are pigeonholed in combat it can mean death" (Kubrick, 1957). For them, instruments of force respond perfectly to what they expect from a friend, as Ballin Mundson (George Macready) says of his cane before Johnny Farrell (Glenn Ford).



The "friendship" of arms will, however, prove very dangerous turning against those who have praised their virtues. This common place is very present in Lucio Anneo Séneca (1984, L. 1^o, XII):

Undoubtedly, as I have said, clemency makes a profound difference between the king and the tyrant: although both are surrounded by the same weapons, the former uses them to ensure peace, the other to suppress intense hatred by means of immense terror. He does not even fearlessly contemplate the very hands to which he has been entrusted, and excesses lead him to opposing excesses; because he is hated, because he is feared and wants to be feared because he is hated, quoting that execrable verse that has precipitated so many princes: *Oderint, dum metuant...* Unfortunate of the one who does not know how far the rage goes when hatreds exceed the cup! (Anneo, 1984, XII).

As an example, the case of the instructor of *The Metal Jacket* (Kubrick, 1987), to whom the supposed "brotherhood of the Marines" based on a forced authoritarianism that is born of extreme military brutality (Roch, 2008, pp. 195-197) did not free him from dying at the hands of his beloved fúsil to whom he dedicated a passionate prayer: "This is my fúsil. There are many others, but this is mine. My fúsil is my best friend and it's my life..." (Kubrick, 1987).

And in the face of villains, those who possess innate authority act, at the same time, as protective parents and friends transgressing the orders of their superiors or confronting them. Captain Staros (Elias Koteas) of *The Thin Red Line* will not send all his boys against the bunker and will ask for something as basic as water to prevent them from becoming dehydrated. Many times the search for concessions for those of lower rank is a real moral dilemma. Such is the case of Colonel Dax (Kirk Douglas) of *Paths of Glory*, who finds himself in the middle of two irreconcilable camps, in which war is seen from opposite worlds: that of the palaces where opulence reigns, and that of the trenches where there is only the fear of death and misery. "The soldiers' duty was to obey. If this order was impossible, the only proof would have been their corpses at the bottom of the trenches" (Kubrick, 1957), the perverse Mireau will tell you. Dax respects the army and loves his men, but he will realize the high-sounding farce in which he is immersed: in the trial in which he defends three of his men, the alleged



cowardice is not judged, but the power, of course physical, of the commanders over whom they make trench warfare is evident.

Ignorance about what the real causes of the fighting are, feeling completely out of place, and the emergence of conflicts with hierarchies leads to condemnation of war. One of the consequences of anti-war is antimilitarism, projected towards the high commands, and towards those who flatter and serve them in order to achieve personal benefits. But the coexistence between comrades and the prolongation of conflicts encourages that for many the nightmare of war is a way of life. Undoubtedly, this is the case of Steiner, to whom Eva, with whom he has maintained an intense relationship of love and friendship, asks him, lucidly, if he is so afraid of life as to hide in war. When he abandons Eva and agrees to voluntarily return to the front, he will be more critical of a barbarism that disgusts him, even if he cannot get away from her.

Man, wolf or god for man

[...] that man is a kind of God for man and that man is a real wolf for man. The first is true if we compare some citizens with others; and the second, if we compare cities. In the first case there is a certain analogy of similarity with the Deity, namely: justice and charity, who are twin sisters of peace. But in the other, good men have to defend themselves by adopting as a sanctuary the two daughters of war: deception and violence, or, to put it in clearer terms, a brutal rapacity (Hobbes, 2000, pp.33-34).

This text from the famous work *Of the Citizen*, included in the dedicatory epistle to the Earl of Devonshire, perfectly illustrates the crossroads at which men find themselves when the vicissitudes of politics break the theoretical balance of the *day*. The paradox, as Jacqueline Lagrée (2000, p. 124) points out. it lies in the very essence of democracy, because, although solidarity among all citizens is possible only in it, rivalry gives it an unstable character. In war cinema this dilemma of *homo homini*, or *deus*, or *lupus*, is resolved, and so thought Bergson (Lagrée, 2000, p. 124), as a general rule, selecting the former for compatriots, and the latter for foreigners. Politics in wars is the turning point between



the two extremes that man can choose. Now, politics does not limit the possibility of being kind only to those who are politically related; individual freedom allows the person to establish friendly bonds of various kinds as had manifested the pitagorismo: man – man (of the same city), but also, man – man (foreigner) and man – family (identical physical or moral features). Seneca will also be a supporter that every human being, whatever his or her ancestry or class, can help others:⁷

[...] will give as a man to a man of the common heritage. [...] But he will do all this with tranquility of spirit and unalterable countenance. Thus, the wise man will never be merciful, but he will be charitable, he will be useful to others; because it was born to serve as a support for all, to contribute to the public good, of which it offers a part to each one: its goodness reaches even the wicked, who, when there is an opportunity, rebukes and corrects (1984, L. 2º, VI).

War cinema is full of tough guys, but they are capable of the greatest considerations when it comes to the defense and well-being of the soldiers they are in charge of, but inclement to the contrary. They will spare no means, even risking their own lives, to pick up the wounded, or simply to give them some morphine to mitigate the final pain. "It is fortunate that he is our lieutenant" (*Forrest Gump*, Robert Zemeckis, 1994), will be what the naïve *Forrest Gump* (Tom Hanks) affirms of his lieutenant, Lieutenant Dan (Gary Sinise), because he is an officer in whom his own can trust, even if with the enemy he has no mercy. Welsh (Sean Penn) from *The Thin Red Line* allows the sick boy not to continue advancing towards the bunker, in front of Sergeant Keck (Woody Harrelson) who had been less compromising. However, when the latter is seriously injured, Witt (Jim Caviezel) will comment: "Everything will be fine, even if he dies he has not failed his men. If he hadn't taken us to the embankment we would all be dead" (Malick 2000). The unhinged Lieutenant Colonel Kilgore of *Apocalypse now* puts during the bombings to villages of Vietnamese civilians *The cavalcade of the*

⁷ With regard to this issue we have already seen that there are exceptions, they are those men who do not even respect themselves — Stransky, Mireau, Tall, Dana Holmes, etc. — so it is not expected that they recognize the dignity of their compatriots, much less that of their adversaries. These would be placed at the extreme limit of the animality of the wolf, they would therefore be completely dehumanized beings.



walkirias of Wagner commenting "my men are crazy", and he still has time to worry about the waves that originate the projectiles, so that his boys can *surf*. This peculiar officer dressed in a wide-brimmed hat, emblem of the Seventh Cavalry and yellow scarf around his neck understands the friendship only between compatriots, and that is why Willard affirms of him: "I think he was not a bad officer. He loved his people and you felt safe with him. He was one of those guys who flashes a mysterious light and senses that you will not receive a scratch" (Coppola 1979). He will not blink when it comes to persecuting those who harm his friends, to whom everything that reminds them of the lifestyle of the country; but towards those who are strange to him he will not feel friendship, not the slightest sympathy, not even a little compassion.

Friendship in the political sense, understood as a general good of humanity, is imposed in extreme situations on personal interests making unfortunate, although with a clear conscience, those who sacrifice even what they most desire. An example is that of the cynical and practical, although deep down he is an idealist, Rick Blaine (Humphrey Bogart) and the determined Ilsa (Ingrid Bergman) in *Casablanca*. When Rick helps Victor Laszlo (Paul Henreid) save himself, he is once again a man committed to justice. Against the background of a Europe torn apart by Nazism, Ilsa stars in a triangular story that will make her debate between duty and particular well-being. Rick and Ilsa overcome their own nature, they superhumanize, reaching the nature of the *daímōn*, which Victor had already reached before with his self-denial.

Rome, open city is the story of great friendships between men and women who are judged neither by their religious beliefs, nor by their political militancy, but by a being in the world that is ethical. Manfredi (Marcelo Pagliero), the leader of the Italian communist resistance, the exceptional Doña Pina (Anna Magnani) and the priest Don Pietro (Aldo Fabrizi), will pay with their lives, without giving in to blackmail and torture.

The struggle to free the poor from misery becomes spatially sad and dramatic, because it unmasks the hypocrisy of the law. Aristotle had already warned of the danger posed by a radical defense of passions or of the law, *éthos* or *nomos*. In *Tierra y libertad* (Loach, 1994) men and women fight for the liberation of an exploitation that has the complicity of the laws. David (Ian Hait), and



those in his situation, have no romantic conception of war, because he is a young unemployed worker who has no expectations. This adventurer understands friendship as a perfect balance between the god and the wolf, which can only be reached through mutual understanding. He puts the good of the universal community before his own by enduring dirt, cold, lice, hunger, difficulties in having sex, fatigue and even disappointment.⁸

The altruism generated by friendship does not necessarily end with the death of the "other self"; but the feeling can continue to develop, although deprived of activity: Forrest Gump realizes without his beloved Buba the dream he had devised before he died. Other times, death does mean the end of any position that tends towards the essence of the angel, socially repudiating the friendly feeling: Marlow, on his return to Brussels, maintains the lie and the good tone that the "civilized world" demands of him; and there are no guarantees that Willard will explain the unaltered truth to Kurtz's son.

On many occasions the political and the personal are mixed in such a way that it is impossible to delimit the border between the one and the other, and it is in such situations, where the virtuous act is violently confronted with the most intimate passions. Steiner and his companions are pained by the death of the very young Dietz at the hands of a Russian girl, but they will not avenge his death, and not only because they respect the will of Dietz himself, but because a retaliation would not have been just. However, they will not hesitate to leave in the hands of Soviet women and defenseless, the member of the Zoll party (Arthur Brauns), who has previously humiliated them. Of an overwhelming drama is the reaction of Steiner when he contemplates, without being able to prevent it, how Triebig (Roger Fritz), Stransky's henchman, shoots at his friends after having managed to cross the enemy

⁸ In *Land and freedom* women, and this is strange in war cinema, maintain a relationship of camaraderie and friendship with men on an equal-peer. The woman in this type of film, when she appears, has another kind of friendly relationship with the man because it symbolizes the world before the war. With regard to this question, it should be clarified that there are different levels of idealization of the female figure: incarnation of the Golden Age as Jack's wife (*The thin red line*); or of a peaceful world represented by Eve (*The Iron Cross*) and by Elsa (*The great illusion*), and by the transvestites of the prison camps (*The great illusion* and in *The bridge over the River Kwai*). But when men are so unhinged that they fail to distinguish goodness from evil, friendship with women becomes impossible, so only those who are degraded beings are related: prostitutes (*The metal jacket*) and the girls *Playboy* (*Apocalypse now*).



fire. Steiner will not hesitate for a moment to shoot Triebig, and to take Stransky "to the place where iron crosses grow" (Peckinpah 1976).

Lee Prewitt (Montgomery Cliff) in *From Here to Eternity* will refuse to box which will lead to numerous arrests and humiliations, although his denial is not only the result of his opposition to the brutal methods of Dana Holmes; but to the deep remorse of conscience for having blinded a friend during a fight. The Marines Lee Prewitt and Angelo Maggio (Frank Sinatra) will have in Milton Warden their best defender of the despot Holmes, who has a passionate romance with Karen Holmes (Deborah Kerr), but that will not be what makes him despise the petty captain.

Aristotle in his first ethics affirms that only friendship allows man to be happy (Aristotle, 1988, pp. 369-393) and that it is the best incentive for the development of thought and to act virtuously. Friendship that is beautiful has its full development in the wisdom of the good man, but to reach it is necessary the effort on the part of man to avoid evil (Aristóteles, 1993, p. 361). And the path to full wisdom is nothing more than a process, which consists in removing the obstacles between the animality of the wolf and humanity, and between humanity and the superhumanity of the god. It is a question of men, who live in society, being able to dominate the rivalry existing in the *polis*, in which discord is, as Heraclitus understood it, the origin of everything. If man succeeds in abandoning the scourge of passions—anger, greed, desire for superiority, authoritarianism, etc.—in favor of a compromise, that of the *logos*, which fosters cosmic harmony, as understood by Stoicism, he will achieve the greatest happiness. The result that is achieved is a man friendly to himself, or to those who are like oneself (Kilgore, Willard, Dan, Milton Warden...); or, better yet, neighbor of other men (Steiner, Marechal, Von Rauffenstein...); and in exceptional cases, friend of God (Witt, Staros...).

Philo of Alexandria and Friendship with God, and The Pitagoric Friendship Toward Nature: *The Thin Red Line*.

Philo of Alexandria's treatise *Every Wise Man Is Free* is an example of stoic dialectic sifted by Christian thought. In it the author speaks of a first part complementary to this and that today has been lost,



Every foolish or evil man is a slave. Humanity appears divided into wise men and fools, but freedom is a privilege of the former and is forbidden to the latter.

For the members of the Estoa, and in general for all classical Stoicism, the wise is a self-sufficient being, free, rich, without deficiencies, contemplator of all goods and immediately united to the gods and the rest of the sages. Friendship among the wise is founded on the common and constant search for truth, so it cannot be sustained on passionate elements. However, the great paradox lies in the very fact that the sage not needing friends always has them. Seneca even goes so far as to affirm that the wise man is somehow superior to the gods, since his perfection is due exclusively to himself and his effort, but not thanks to nature as in the case of the gods.

For Philo, however, the sage is not independent of God, but both coexist in a friendly relationship that is evident thanks to human virtue. Nor does the morality of the wise depend exclusively on himself, since, in order to attain freedom, which is happiness, he must also be guided by the laws of nature: "..., an oracle higher than Zeno commands us to seek a life concluded or carried out in accordance with nature" (Philo of Alexandria, 1962, p. 86). Contact with God and with nature, which is ultimately, following Plato, a reflection of divinity, is the only thing that can lead man to the good of happiness, understood as *eudaimony* or state of inner peace or serenity:

[...] the wise man is happy, burdened and burdened with his high morality, which confers upon him a dominion over all things, and thus, beyond all doubt and out of all pure necessity, the good man is free. Moreover, no one would deny that God's friends are free. (Philo of Alexandria, 1962, p. 37).

The great contradiction in which Philo incurs appears when he addresses the subject of the loneliness of the sage. He is not surprised that he "does not appear to be swept away in large crowds," away, as far as possible, from "the mob of the thoughtless" because foolishness is seen as contagious. He will constantly insist on the topic of the slavery of passions and on that of the opinion of the crowd, since the political and religious community is prior to human friendship. Thus obedience to the parents or that of the soldier cannot be considered states of slavery. For him the paradigm of a wise man is



Moses, since he is a friend of God and obedient to the laws. But ultimately, freedom is the place of asylum of virtue once burdens such as money, fame, and pleasure have been disdained. After freeing himself from the remoras of the perverse the good man will already be able to live in community and enjoy divine friendship: "since he had God as a friend, he was bound to possess absolute happiness, since it was not a weak defender that he had, nor a person forgetful of the rights of friendship, in He who is the god of friends and carefully observes the demands of friendship" (Philo of Alexandria, 1962, p. 38).

Man achieves full happiness when in his soul sanity, self-control, strength and justice stand victorious in the face of ignorance, incontinence, cowardice and greed. Philo refers to solitude as a psychological and not a physical space, although sometimes retreat is the way in which man learns to govern his soul. For this reason the good men who appear in *The Thin Red Line*, even though in the company of their fellowmen, achieve spiritual solitude.

Witt (Jim Caviezel) will be the character in which these mixed feelings are best observed. On the one hand, he says that he loves the Charlie company, because it is his family, and on the other he relapses into deserting it by hiding on an island inhabited by natives. That is where Witt becomes wise because he learns to get rid of everything that is trivial thanks to the coexistence with the good savage, who is able, unlike Western man, to live in harmony with his peers and with nature. What is most striking to Witt, who finishes escaping the horrors of war, is that the adults of the island paradise retain the candidness of the children. The natives know how to accept Witt, because for them *philia* is born from the fact that men are physiologically equal, and able to live harmoniously with animals in an environment capable of providing them with everything they need: it is the relationship of union and Pithagorean understanding. Witt has a noble heart, but he will need contact with beings who do not know evil to be aware of the double aspect of human nature: man is good at birth, but he also has an instinct of destruction that emerges when he does not dominate the passions, and that will make him reflect as follows:

What does this war mean in the heart of nature? Why does nature compete with itself? Is there any avenging force in nature or not just one, but two? [...] Where does this terrible



cruelty come from? How has it taken root in the world? From what seed, from what root has it sprouted and from whom is it work? Who kills us, takes away our life and life and light; makes fun of us by showing us what we could have known? Does our destruction benefit the earth, help the grass to be born or the sun to shine? Also in day there is this darkness, you have lived this black night (Malick, 2000).

Witt knows that the cause of misery and evil is the abuse of the faculties that God has given to man. He perceives the need for men, as Rousseau said in *The Emilio*, orforeducation, for there to be no opposition between nature and culture. The good savage has a simple and uniform life; and its only ills are old age and disease. On the contrary, in his world, vitiated by war, confusion and disorder predominate. Before he is forced to leave the island he will have the will to be free because, although he does not have the capacity to execute it, he will always enjoy the power to love freedom. He is a civilian man by force, but he feels like a natural man. Witt has discovered that inequality is based on the following Roussenian distinction of ThePitagoric basis:

The natural man is everything to himself; he is the numerical unit, the absolute integer, which is only related to itself or to its fellow. The civil man is nothing more than a fragmentary unit that depends on the denominator, and whose value is related to the whole, which is the social body. Good social institutions are those that best know how to denaturalize man, take away his absolute existence to give him a relative one, and transport the self to a common unity; so that each individual no longer creates one, but part of the unit, and is only sensitive to the whole (Villar, 1996, p. 63).

When he returns to the company, to the world of the civilian man, he is arrested to work in the stretcher-bearer corps, but seeing his companions fall on the battlefield makes him return to the fight bravely. However, despite the fact that his actions are aimed at the destruction of the Japanese enemies, he has learned that "the faces are one man, one being" even though each one seeks salvation for himself, "like a separate ember from the bonfire". Witt is free because he does not hate,



because he has managed to get rid of anger and fear and because he judges all men equal, because when they are born they are identical:

We were a family. We had to separate and we distanced ourselves. And now we are on opposing sides, we snatch the light from each other. How did we lose the goodness that was bestowed upon us? We let it escape, we spread it unceremoniously. What prevents us from reaching out and attaining glory? (Malick, 2000).

The soldiers of *The Thin Red Line* are ordered to occupy a hill on which the enemy, the "Japs", have installed a bunker. The boys are moved by love for themselves and their friends, but the moment the "enemy" is shown with his face they feel disgusted by their suffering. One of the soldiers exclaims "I have given him! I've killed a Japanese, one less!" but quickly his joy turns to horror when he realizes that the being he has shot had the same nature, and he reflects: "I have killed a man! There is nothing worse, it is worse than rape, but no one will condemn me for it." Witt looks in horror at the corpse of a Japanese man who will explain his ending in a *voiceover*: "Are you honest, kind, this is what your trust is based on? Does everyone love you? They loved me too. Can you imagine that your pain will be less intense because you loved kindness?"

In *The Thin Red Line* all men participate in the social conflict of war, but not all will see it in the same way: the wise reject it, while the fools see in it a way of growing at the expense of the suffering of others. In addition to Witt there are other characters who take refuge in friendship with God, which in turn is projected on other men, to achieve the moral excellence of which Philo speaks capable of giving them happiness such as Sergeant Welsh (Sean Penn), Captain Staros (Elias Koteas) or Jack. Welsh will tell Witt that "in this world a man in itself is nothing" and that people in his situation "simply close their eyes so that nothing affects them," and yet he will not lose sight of his soldiers demonstrating their sanity, their strength and the justice of their spirit. The sergeant loves the whole of his company, but, in addition, establishes with each of the boys, and especially with Witt, a relationship of individual character based on the topic of the *Iliad* when Diomedes speaks of himself to Ulysses "For going two together, one perceives before the other / how to take advantage; on the



other hand, those who think alone / slower have the weakest mind and ingenuity" (Homer, 2012, p. 527) and that Aristotle collects in his *Nicomachean Ethics*: "Two marching together", because with friends men are more capable of thinking and acting" (Aristotle, 1988, p. 333). Welsh only believes in "the shattering world" in which he lives, even though Witt tells him about the other he has seen. With the death of his friend, who has immolated himself in favor of the company, Welsh fully understands the meaning of his friendship and sacrifice:

Where were we together? Who are you who were by my side? Who walked with me? The brother, the friend. The darkness after the light, the conflict after the love are the product of a single mind or the features of the same face.

[...]

This is a coffin, a mobile coffin. They want us dead, or living their lie. The only thing a man can do here is to find something that is his own, to create an island for himself. If I don't get to know you in this life let me feel your presence. A look from your eyes and my life will be yours (Malick, 2000).

Captain Staros will take advantage of the solitude of the night to talk to God whom he refers to as "my light, my guide," and that friendship with God is manifested in friendship with his boys whom he will abandon even at the cost of his own sacrifice. Jack, for his part, identifies divine friendship with the love he feels for his wife whom he will keep in mind in all situations, because he knows that: "War does not ennoble men, it turns them into beasts, it corrupts their spirit." For Jack, life before the war was a golden age in which time passed happily, and in which his soul came out strong enough to adapt to the worst situations:

Who are you who take such different forms? No one escapes from your death, but you are also the source of what is to be born. You are glory, mercy, peace, truth, you bring karma to the spirit, understanding value and fill hearts.

[...]



How can we reach other shores, the blue hills? Love, where does it come from? Who fans his flame? No war can put it out, or steal it. I was a prisoner and you freed me (Malick, 2000).

In front of the righteous men, who despite the war are able to live in peace, are the perverse incapable of feeling friendship even towards themselves. Colonel Quintard (Jonh Travolta), Captain Bosche (George Clooney) and, above all, the authoritarian, unfriendly and frustrated Colonel Tall (Nick Nolte) are slaves to passions such as greed, ignorance, cowardice and incontinence, so their peers, even those closest to them, cannot be their friends. Colonel Tall is a character completely assimilated by the worst idea of civilization, and so much so, that he does not hesitate to state contemptuously in a conversation with John Staros: "Look at this jungle, those vines that get entangled between the trees and engulf everything. Nature is cruel..." The deep contempt he manifests towards nature is proportional to the one he feels towards all those who are a stumbling block on the way to his egoistic ends. Tall belongs to the group of ignorant men, and therefore to that of slaves, of whom Philo speaks capable of making others die for "a garland of wild olive or celery", but not for a greater glory: "to die for freedom, the love to which it is in truth much more rooted in the soul than anything else, not as a casual accessory, but as an essential part of its unity, and it cannot be amputated, without the whole whole being destroyed as a consequence" (Philo of Alexandria, 1962, p. 67).

Conclusion

In the films, although there are many more examples without leaving the genre, the archetypal heroes and their antagonists stand out. The first are those capable of sacrificing themselves for their own, who on numerous occasions pass on to the brothers. The latter are governed by the ethnocentric principle in which their own are the "chosen people" and those who oppose it must be annihilated through discord-combat. But in a scenario of historical ruin resulting from a moral degradation, an epic of violence prevails and, therefore, the impossibility of heroism.



War as a social fact that has been present in all organized societies makes it hierarchically organized humans. Those who participate in it do so from two positions: that of those who consider it connaturally bad, destructive of society and disintegrator of morality; and that of those who consider it the effective means of demonstrating the worth of the best nations, capable of progressing, in the face of the inept ones that can only be subdued by violence by the right ones. In the works analyzed some characters start from this second position heir to romantic nationalism and social Darwinism, but after the loss of innocence, Wilard is a good example, they deny the old conceptions of heroism and progress. They initiate an inner journey from emotion to the rational in which they delegitimize violence against other humanbeings.

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