

CHAPTER 27

Film and Literature in Chile
The Emergence of a Cultural Field

Verónica Cortínez

The study of filmmaking and its relation to literature, particularly in its beginnings, has to cope with a number of objective difficulties. The loss of a great part of the filmic patrimony constitutes a major obstacle to its historical assessment. It is not only caused by ignorance, carelessness, or lack of means (Vega 15), but probably even more so by the frailness of the material (for a long time, highly flammable nitrate). Another aspect not to be disregarded is the commercial use of cinema since its inception, when exhibitors working in poor conditions used the material until it simply fell apart. This is what seems to have happened to *Manuel Rodríguez*, the first feature in Chilean history, written and filmed by Adolfo Urzúa Rozas in 1910. The success of the film, as Urzúa stated in 1915, insisting on the gains made by “the owners,” led to its destruction: “the film is already old due to all its exhibitions” (9).¹ The tendency to favor canonical, “great” works is another factor that restricts possibilities to appreciate cinema in its full context. It tends to exclude or minimize the popular: fairs, songs, and music even during the silent period, circuses, boulevard plays, the burlesque, and music hall, which for decades was to represent the origins of filmmaking.

In what follows, I shall concentrate on two key moments in the chronology of Chilean filmmaking. Given the number of studies devoted to the New Chilean Cinema of the 1960s and beyond, I will focus on the quite neglected silent period (1910–1934) as the foundational epoch and the emergence of a new cultural field. The following years, from 1934 to the end of the 1950s, have been seen as sterile, ignoring the continuity within the greater literary, intellectual, and even political contexts. In consequence, my survey will be divided into two parts:

1. Silent film: From the first feature to the flourishing of the 1920s
2. Crisis, breakdown, and ongoing efforts: 1930–1960

I shall combine overviews of decisive historical developments and cultural trends, giving priority to the cinematic and literary highlights. To the extent

possible, I will underpin more general statements with case studies in order to give a picture with establishing, long, and medium shots, as well as some close-ups.

Silent Film: From the First Feature to the Flourishing of the 1920s

Around 1910, world cinema, as seen from Europe and defined by the French production giants Pathé and Gaumont, entered a crisis due to the loss of interest in an “optical gadget that always presented the same themes, identical melodramas, or clownish comedies, incapable of a mature development or dramatic progress” (Gubern 59).² Looking to guarantee their earnings, production companies turned to theater directors and famous actors for help. The hope was that great classics, the glorious moments of history (national, first and foremost) turned into scripts, would attract the new middle classes in their search for prestige.

The model for this cooperation between cinema and traditional theater was Le Film d'Art, a production company founded in 1907 by the Parisian businessman Paul Lafitte, who managed to unite a group of financiers and well-known playwrights and actors from the Comédie Française – for example, Henri Lavedan, Charles Le Bargy, Sarah Bernhardt, Berthe Bovy, and Mounet Sully. Lavedan and Le Bargy had the idea of “giving cinema its titles of nobility by illustrating through its mediation the masterpieces of classical theater” (Mitry 253).³ In fact, Lavedan, who was at the peak of his career, wrote the script of the company's first success, *L'Assassinat du Duc de Guise* (The Assassination of the Duke of Guise, 1908), based on his novel of the same title, published the same year. This was surely not a classic, but it could be associated with Lavedan's theatrical success of 1905, *Le Duel* (The Duel), a retelling of Cain and Abel at a time when France was divided by debates about the influence of the Roman Catholic Church in a republican state (see, for example, Azéma 156–163).

If we accept the advice of Jean Mitry to write the evolution of film “in its social universal context” (15),⁴ we must necessarily look at Chile's cultural situation at the beginning of the century. *Manuel Rodríguez* offers a perfect example of the early interplay between local and international construction of culture. For Chilean culture, France was an obligatory reference throughout the nineteenth century (Subercaseaux, *Historia de las ideas* 1:233–248), so much so that authors like José Victorino Lastarria and Alberto Blest Gana constantly mocked the use of broken French by the Chilean upper class and show-off *parvenus* (Subercaseaux, *Historia de las ideas* 1:246; Blest Gana, *Martín Rivas* ch. XXI). Furthermore, the French firms mentioned above had a virtual monopoly

on the world market of the new medium. It was thus only natural that Chilean businessmen and artists should look at France for models to adapt to local, national conditions. And that is precisely what two newcomers did when they founded Compañía Cinematográfica del Pacífico in 1909 (Figure 27.1).



Figure 27.1 Compañía Cinematográfica del Pacífico. Digital image courtesy of Memoria Chilena, Biblioteca Nacional de Chile

Julio Cheveney and Arturo Larraín Lecaros thought to exploit the centennial of the Chilean independence from Spain and the foundation of the Republic by filming the various celebrations. As they were distributors for Pathé and Le Film d'Art, they seem to have immediately had the idea to try an adventure similar to *L'Assassinat du Duc de Guise*.⁵ They contacted the then famous playwright and novelist, Adolfo Urzúa Rozas, and asked him if he would be willing to conceive and direct a longer film than usual (twenty minutes), taking advantage of the new materials. He would even be tasked with training young artists to act in front of a camera – Urzúa had published the highly praised *Arte de la declamación* (Art of Declamation, 1900), which aimed to attract young people from the popular classes to the theater. He criticized, in particular, the overacting and screaming of Spanish actors in the *zarzuelas* or *sainetes* of the popular theater, telling Antonio Acevedo Hernández, another playwright of note, that he “had studied in consonance with the French rhythm” (qtd. in Acevedo Hernández 131–132).⁶

While this attitude promised a renewal of the form, the subject Urzúa chose for the film was certainly in accordance with the official programs of the centennial. Yet Urzúa manages to introduce in his film a line of benign critique of the “Autocratic Republic” and the everlasting “religious question” (similar to what happened in France), as well as of the growing problems from the “social question” (see Loveman chs. 4–6, esp. pp. 143–144). In fact, in 1908 Urzúa had published *Un juez campesino* (A Peasant Judge), a reference to Pedro Calderón de la Barca's *El alcalde de Zalamea* (The Mayor of Zalamea, c. 1650) and vigilante justice in the absence of law guaranteed by institutions. Urzúa is associated with a “libertarian spirit” (see Escobar) and as Manuel Rodríguez is said to have left a “libertarian legacy” to modern Chile (Buono-Core), Urzúa could have had room to include a glorification of the “founder of the Republic” as well as a hint to the Authoritarian Republic after the Civil War of 1891. My conclusion is necessarily hypothetical since we no longer have access to this vanished film, but it has become clear that a close look at the interplay between international and national, literary and cinematographic aspects, together with a sociohistorical overview, burnishes an otherwise neglected work of art.

Urzúa continued to play a role in Chilean culture, literary as well as cinematographic. In 1913 he directed the play *En el rancho* (On the Farm) written by Acevedo Hernández, the founder of a socially engaged theater, proving once more his affinity with anarchist thought. In the same vein, his own drama *Un hombre* (A Man, 1913) is the story of the successful career of

a man from the margins of society. In 1915, Urzúa filmed *El violín de Inés* (Inés's Violin), an attempt to find a Chilean type of comedian, beyond the quarrels about North American or European (French) influence, with a heated debate about Charlie Chaplin as its background.

El violín de Inés seems to have been finished, but the French producer and owner of Franco Chilena Film, Victor Fédier Vallade, hesitated to release it. As Urzúa says in an article written for *Cine Gaceta*, Fédier thought the film lacked the “French chic” and “had doubts about whether to qualify it as European or Chilean” (9).⁷ What follows is just another of the “encounters with the Yankee,” as Stefan Rinke puts it in the title of his illuminating study *Begegnungen mit dem Yankee* (2004). In fact, two weeks later, the director of *Cine Gaceta*, Augusto Pérez Órdenes (“Pope”), rejected Chaplin in favor of Max Linder, his French competitor: “our female public, accustomed to the elegant charm of Max Linder, considers silly the eccentric means by which Chaplin seeks to make people laugh” (4).⁸

The general public saw it differently. The complete triumph of Chaplin is well documented by Bongers, Torrealba, and Vergara, who dedicate a whole chapter of their collection *Archivos i letrados* to him (154–176). They include a long review of *Modern Times* (170–175) by Vicente Huidobro, best known as an avant-garde poet, but also one of the founders, in 1915, of the Sociedad de Autores Teatrales Chilenos (SATCh) together with authors such as Acevedo Hernández, Carlos Cariola, Rafael Frontaura, and Armando Mook, all of them attracted to the new medium. The “Chaplin debate” may well serve to illustrate a network of cultural actors functioning throughout the two decades, and in some way even in the thirties.

On June 14, 1920, Pedro J. Malbrán presented his feature *Cuando Chaplin enloqueció de amor* (When Chaplin Fell Madly in Love), first written as a short play, hence the subtitle “Farsa cinematográfica original” (An Original Cinematographic Farse) used in its publicity. Malbrán belonged to the group of young artists affiliated to the SATCh and was also one of the leading members, and longtime president, of the Federación de Estudiantes Chilenos (FECH), both considered left-leaning and even anarchist. He was an important promoter of the Fiesta de los Estudiantes, an event that brought culture to the streets in a festive mood, first celebrated in 1915 when it fused with the Fiesta de la Primavera. His fame as a writer stems from his short plays (*sainetes* and *juguetes*), characterized as “a continuous fiesta of laughter and good humor” (Editorial Nascimento’s Catalog, Jan. 1935, 10–11).⁹ In 1966, Alfonso Escudero added

a further note to Malbrán's works, which "at times allude to current events" (51–52).¹⁰ *Madame Guachacay* (Madame Brandy, 1919) is more of the first brand, *La guerra de don Ladislao* (The War of Don Ladislao, 1921) more of the second, as it refers to the military fraud of Defense Minister Ladislao Errázuriz Lazcano in 1920. Errázuriz had tried to sabotage the election of Arturo Alessandri, who represented the hope for liberal change of the growing middle class and its intellectuals (Loveman 179–181).

Cuando Chaplin enloqueció de amor has been described as "a parody of the great jester" and a harmless suite of scenes framed by the Fiesta de los Estudiantes and its farcical procession (Jara 51).¹¹ Yet farce may address serious problems, and so probably did Malbrán's film. Various items listed in *Las Últimas Noticias* on the day of the premiere, such as "cheap disguises" or "revolutionary desires" (qtd. in Jara 51),¹² can be linked to the politically rebellious stance of the student federation (whose building was destroyed a few weeks later, at government officials' instigation) and an intention to remember the darker side of Chilean society. Sergio Muñoz affirms that "boarding houses," also mentioned in *Las Últimas Noticias*, looked as poor "as the homes Chaplin had shown" (36).¹³ The context of a catastrophic situation in housing (Loveman 172–174) inspired Acevedo Hernández's second play, *Almas perdidas* (Lost Souls, written in 1916, staged in 1917). The play is set in a tenement house in 1915 and for the first time treats the abject living conditions in Santiago. The happy-go-lucky account of the Fiesta of 1915, shown in the documentary *La primera Fiesta Estudiantil de América* (The First Student Fiesta of America, 1916) by Salvador Giambastiani, an important promoter of film production and an indispensable technician who would later be the cameraman of *Cuando Chaplin enloqueció de amor* (using shots from his own film?), may well be due to the vision of a well-off citizen of Santiago (*El Mercurio*, Oct. 23, 2015, qtd. in Vega 61). Chaplin's part in Chilean cinema continued when he reappeared as a character in another filming of the Fiesta de los Estudiantes in *El desfile histórico universal* (The Historic Universal Parade, 1921), by Arnulfo and Bruno Valck. The FECH was absent after the political persecution of 1920 mentioned above, but instead the Asociación Nacional de Estudiantes Católicos (ANEC, Association of Catholic Students) presented its queen, "Señorita Carmen Morandé Campino," member of a powerful family. Students disguised as Chaplin and his Kid – *The Kid* had just been released – appeared in the Plaza de Armas (Vega 76), and it would be interesting to know which images the upper class preferred.

Still another film of the twenties makes use of Chaplin: *Las chicas de la avenida Pedro Montt* (The Girls of Pedro Montt Avenue, 1925), by Alberto Santana, the most prolific screenwriter and director of the period, who would later write the first history of Chilean film. The tragicomedy about hard-working women without any social assistance or protection gave an opportunity to present Chaplin's social awareness. But the critic Catón of *La Estrella* saw him, probably because of the implied "social question," as "a character without justification" (qtd. in Jara 112).¹⁴ The mostly satirical use of Chaplin in Chilean cinema needs to be linked with the spirit of *modernismo*, a term that summarizes efforts of artistic and social liberal renewal in Latin America at the turn of the twentieth century. The eclectic trends of *modernismo* find their typical expression in Chilean culture of the first two decades of the new century. As we have seen, in 1913 Urzúa – a romantic liberal and veteran of the War of the Pacific – wrote the drama *Un hombre* with a protagonist from the margins of society. At the same time he was working on the script of his second film, the comedy *El violín de Inés*, in an effort to explore the new medium, and he also directed *En el rancho*, the first play by Acevedo Hernández, a work he conceived as a counterpoint to the dominant staging of "marquis, counts, dukes, duchesses, and even kings and queens" (68).¹⁵ *La hechizada* (Bewitched, 1916) by Fernando Santiván, less stereotypical than other works of harmless, romantic *criollismo*, is considered the masterpiece of the farmer novel and would be filmed by Alejo Álvarez in 1950. It is noteworthy that Santiván and his wife Elena, daughter of the then already famous writer Augusto d'Halmar, also had links to the world of cinema: both were actors in Jorge "Coke" Délano's *Juro no volver a amar* (I Promise Not to Love Again, 1925). More important for the directly literary context is Santiván's role as chief secretary for the poetry contest Juegos Florales in 1914, organized by the SATCH. The winner was Gabriela Mistral with "Los sonetos de la muerte" (Sonnets of Death); the second prize went to "Rogativas a mi corazón" (Invocations to My Heart), by the future star of Chilean cinema during the silent era: Pedro Sienna.

A closer look at Sienna (born Pedro Pérez Cordero) reveals a career where poetry, drama, cinema, journalism, and politics come together in a profile in citizenship at the very center of the cultural life of his times – Chile from 1913 on – when Santiago could be considered to be in "a certain isochrony with happenings in Paris" (Subercaseaux, *Historia de las ideas* 3:146).¹⁶ The son of an army officer who served in the War of the Pacific, just as Urzúa did, Sienna would not accept a strict education framed by the aspirations of the provincial middle class that arose in the aftermath of the

war and the nitrate boom. His father wanted him to be an engineer, but he chose instead the life of a bohemian in Santiago, where he interacted with a new generation of artists like Gabriela Mistral, Pablo Neruda, Augusto d'Halmar, Víctor Domingo Silva, Vicente Huidobro, Antonio Acevedo Hernández, Fernando Santiván, Daniel de la Vega, and a brilliant group of actors who wrote their own plays, such as Nicanor de la Sotta, Rafael Frontaura, and Alfonso Flores, among others. Most of them were trained by Manuel Díaz de la Haza, the Spanish director of a small but successful theater in Santiago. For example, it was Díaz de la Haza who in 1913 staged *Cuando el amor se vaya* (When Love Leaves), cowritten by Huidobro and the Nicaraguan bohemian Gabry Rivas. Azorín, the renowned intellectual of the Spanish "Generation of '98," called Díaz de la Haza an "incomparable artistic director" (qtd. in Azorín 502).¹⁷

Yet Sienna's early fame comes from his poetry. I have already mentioned his success of 1914 beside Gabriela Mistral. The essential anthology *Selva lírica* (Lyrical Jungle), edited by Julio Molina Muñoz and Juan Agustín Araya in 1917, contains twelve of Sienna's poems. Beyond "Rogativas a mi corazón" and "Esta vieja herida" (This Old Wound), most of his other poems are related to life in the theater and are included in his collection of sonnets *El tinglado de la farsa* (The Uproar of the Farce), first published in Córdoba, Argentina, in 1915. Molina compares the Chilean with Albert Glatigny, a short-lived French Symbolist bohemian. The mixture of romantic nostalgia and modern realism is clear in Sienna's sonnet "La farándula se va" (The Comedians Move on), included in *Selva lírica*:

Three chimes vibrate. Time has come.
Hugs. Farewells. Suddenly
the locomotive blows a whistle.

We have left. How are the hearts doing?
What do I know! . . . The train carries, pompously,
a crazy load of illusions! . . . (214)¹⁸

In 1914, Sienna discovered the theater thanks to his friend, socialist playwright and poet Víctor Domingo Silva, and when Spanish director Bernardo Jambriña invited him to tour Argentina with his troupe, he spontaneously accepted. The next two years were a time of feverish activity. He not only worked as an actor, but also published *El tinglado de la farsa* (a smaller edition than that of 1922) and wrote the play *La tragedia del amor* (Love's Tragedy), first shown on May 8, 1915 at the Teatro Municipal of Santa Fe. His second collection of poems, *Muecas en la sombra* (Grimaces in the Shadows), appeared in 1917, and when Jambriña returned to Spain,

Sienna went back to Chile with the firm intention to “work for his country” (qtd. in Arratia 22).¹⁹ And that is exactly what he did.

Sienna joined two friends, Enrique Báguena and Arturo Bührlé, to form a troupe, La Primera Compañía Nacional, which would present Chilean plays acted by Chilean actors. The repertoire is unknown, but since Sienna worked with Cariola, Frontaura, and De la Sotta, their plays were probably part of it. Indeed, Cariola and Frontaura wrote the script for *El hombre de acero* (Man of Steel, 1917), in which Sienna appears for the first time as protagonist. The film is set not in the habitual surroundings of the urban upper class nor in the countryside (with poor peasants as extras in the background), nor does it deal with patriotic history, but unfolds in a small business: a garage. It is the story of the “self-made man” (Jara 36), a theme that would constantly reappear during the twenties, for example, in Armando Rojas Castro’s *Uno de abajo* (One from Below, 1920), Carlos Borcosque’s *Martín Rivas* (1925), Jorge Délano’s *Juro no volver a amar* (1925), and Alberto Santana’s *Los cascabeles de Arlequín* (Harlequin’s Bells, 1927). Délano’s *La calle del ensueño* (Dream Street, 1929) tells the same story but inverts the roles: it is about a self-made woman. Another curious variation is Juan Pérez Berrocal’s *Canta y no llores, corazón* (Sing and Don’t Cry, Sweetheart, 1925), based on his original script, a film restored by Carmen Brito in 2002. The protagonist, Juan René (played by Pérez Berrocal himself), is a decent farmhand who wants to help his poor family. His reading of Orison Swett Marden’s *He Can Who Thinks He Can* (1908), a bestselling guide to success (shown in extreme close-up at 9:40), convinces him to seek his fortune in the city. But he doesn’t find work. Instead he becomes fond of a poor child who earns his living as guide to a blind lazar. When the old man dies, René takes the boy with him back to the countryside, another mouth to feed. Meanwhile, his sister has been harassed by the shameless son of a rich *arriviste*. René saves her from rape, but loses his life to a gunshot from the scoundrel. He dies as a martyr of his family.

The next three films in which Sienna participated were directed by the Argentine actor Arturo Mario, who had brought his company to Chile. Mario took his chances with the Swiss photographer Hans Frey, who had himself ventured into cinema production in 1917. Curiously enough, the two foreigners made a series of films celebrating Chile: *Alma chilena* (Chilean Soul, 1917), *Todo por la patria* (All for the Fatherland, 1918), and *Manuel Rodríguez* (1920). Sienna was the protagonist of the last two, and also of *La avenida de las acacias* (Acacia Avenue, 1918). Mario’s eclectic choice of literary sources is remarkable in the way it searched for a Chilean public. As Eliana Jara points out (38), *Alma chilena* is an adaptation of the

Argentine film *Nobleza gaucha* (Gaucha Nobility, 1915), in which Mario had been the protagonist. *Todo por la patria* is based on an operetta from 1910, *El girón de la bandera* (The Rags of the Flag), by the Argentine Luis Retana, still remembered for his song “El cimarrón del estribo” (One for the Road, 1929), performed by Carlos Gardel. The film glorifies the War of the Pacific, a fact that could have attracted Sienna because of his father’s past. Finally, *Manuel Rodríguez* adapts episodes from Blest Gana’s novel *Durante la Reconquista* (During the Reconquest, 1897; “Reconquest” refers to the period 1814–1817, when Spain temporarily beat the liberal independents).

Sienna directed his first film in 1921. *Los payasos se van* (The Clowns Leave) loosely adapts a play of the same title written by Hugo Donoso, a youngster of sixteen, and staged by Díaz de la Haza in 1916. In his *Memorias*, Luis Enrique Délano remembers Donoso’s only work for its “bohemian atmosphere” (22).²⁰ Sienna took up the idea of the Fiesta de los Estudiantes but extended the procession through Santiago to a tour of bohemians around the country. This reminiscence of his poem “La farándula se va” is reinforced by the intertitles of the film, written in rhyme by Sienna and adorned by Luis Meléndez Ortiz (qtd. in Jara 58), known as the “draftsman of Art Nouveau” (Undurraga 20).²¹ The end of the story is unusual because the protagonist, a young man from the city (Sienna), finds his love and life in the countryside, inverting the common drive from the country to the city. The film is a tribute to his friends who participated in it: Meléndez, Frontaura, Silva, and, as extra, Moock, who had won the Fiesta prize for the best play in 1917 with *Los demonios* (The Demons). The appearance of “Chaplin” links *Los payasos se van* to the Fiesta de los Estudiantes, when we think of Giambastiani’s *La primera Fiesta Estudiantil de América* and *Cuando Chaplin murió de amor*. Giambastiani is the cameraman and producer of *Los payasos se van*. Chaplin is played by the same actor, Carlos Valsasnini, in both *Cuando Chaplin murió de amor* and *Los payasos se van*, and Mario Godoy remembers that it was Giambastiani who discovered Valsasnini as the “Chaplin” in the Fiesta of 1915 (“En la huella” 46).

The enthusiasm for the Fiesta de los Estudiantes had its roots in the political situation of Chile. The left-wing, anarchical student movement with its links to the growing labor organizations found an outlet for its aspirations in the satirical possibilities of a new genre: street theater. It is paradoxical that an ambiguous politician like Arturo Alessandri, “the Lion,” should embody the hopes of a broad liberal opposition to the oligarchy in power since 1891 (Subercaseaux, *Historia de las ideas* 3:61,

70–71). If there is any remaining doubt about this affinity, Sienna's second film eliminates it. *El empuje de una raza* (The Thrust of a Breed, 1922), with a script by Domingo Silva, was "the first attempt to use cinema to political ends" (Jara 62).²² The simple story tells of the wonders of Alessandri's Chile to a North American reporter visiting the country and, at the same time, he explains why he is called "the Lion" (in 1915 Alessandri was elected senator of Tarapacá province, where he distinguished himself through stout opposition, hence his nickname, which acquired a bloody meaning after the massacres of San Gregorio in 1921 and La Coruña in 1925). *El empuje de una raza* can be seen as an antecedent of Germán Becker's musical *Ayúdeme Ud. compadre* (Help Me, Buddy, 1968), the greatest box office hit of the twentieth century, which is in fact a celebration of Eduardo Frei Montalva's presidency (see Cortínez and Engelbert 360, 372–386).

Un grito en el mar (A Cry at Sea, 1924), Sienna's third film, has been praised for its coherent and balanced construction (Jara 88), and won the gold medal at the International Festival in La Paz, Bolivia, in 1925. An unknown Carlos del Mudo wrote the play *El espía* (The Spy) in a competition organized by Andes Films to find the best starting point for the film. The producer, Alfredo Wolnitzky, needed a success after the financial catastrophe of Santana's *El monje* (The Monk, 1924), which drew significantly on the emblematic modernist poem by Pedro Antonio González (Subercaseaux, *Historia de las ideas* 3:139, 144). Andes Films invested an important sum to engage Sienna as director, the excellent cameraman Gustavo Bussenius, and Camilo Mori, who was to become a great Chilean painter. The story is of a "patriotic kind" and develops within "an international conflict and the fleet has to exercise certain maneuvers" (Jara 88).²³

Sienna made his fourth film in 1925, the most fertile year of the Chilean silent period. *El húsar de la muerte* (The Hussar of Death), restored in 1962 by Sergio Bravo with Sienna himself, is one of the nine films he made based on an original script, the remaining seven having been adapted from literature. Sienna insists that *El húsar de la muerte* is based on "my story" (341)²⁴ without any relation to a literary work, in particular not to Blest Gana's *Durante la Reconquista*. Two reasons may have influenced his claim of originality, beyond the implication of national history. First, *Durante la Reconquista* had been recently used by Arturo Mario in his *Manuel Rodríguez*. Already in 1911 Carlos Mondaca and Max Jara, two prestigious poets, had presented to great success a dramatization of Blest Gana's novel, so this way of approaching the national hero could have been judged as trite. Second, a film adapted from another emblematic novel by Blest

Gana, *Martín Rivas* (1862), was then in production by Carlos Borcosque, which may have confirmed Sienna in his search for a character of his own.

Blest Gana's *Martín Rivas* tells how, in the words of reviewer Barros Grez for the liberal *La Voz de Chile*, "the man of the most modest social condition may attain a good position among his peers by good behavior" (Aug. 9, 1862, 1).²⁵ According to Jara, director and playwright Borcosque adapted the novel "to the years around 1925" and created "an ode to work and effort, symbol of the progress of that time" (101–102).²⁶ Thus, together with Délano's *Juro no volver a amar* and Borcosque's *Diablo fuerte* (Strong Devil), there were three films telling the same story in 1925 alone.

In his article "La aventura y la patria: *El húsar de la muerte* (1925) de Pedro Sienna," Jorge Ruffinelli highlights as "one of the most admirable traits" of the film its "lack of solemnity" (48).²⁷ The constant changes between the vanity fair of the nobility and the simple solidarity of the peasants, between tears and laughter, between ironic and earnest situations as well as the blurring of legend and historical truth leave no place for resounding nationalism. Indeed, the triumphant parading of soldiers with an image of Rodríguez in dissolve at the end immediately stands out as an addition to the original, done in 1942 (Bravo 99–101).²⁸ Rodríguez as an historical character transforms into the legend he has become in Chilean reality when he falls in love with the fictitious Carmen or when he fights side by side with Sienna's most original invention, El Huacho Pelao (The Lone Rookie, similar to Victor Hugo's Gavroche in *Les Misérables*).

The lighthearted and sprawling spirit of the film reminds us of *Cuando Chaplin enloqueció de amor* and *Los payasos se van*. One of the best expressions of Sienna's cinematographic writing is the gallery of photos showing Rodríguez as a rogue in various disguises imagined by the helpless (historical) bloodhound Vicente San Bruno (16:09–16:37; see also Figures 27.2–6). Yet shadows darken the sun of a free Chile, mainly because of the enemy within its ranks. A peasant traitor is discovered and lynched. Bernardo O'Higgins, commander in chief of the liberation army, is shown as a monumental fighter and fleeing soldier during the catastrophic defeat at Rancagua. The cowardly murder of Rodríguez – tolerated if not instigated by O'Higgins – appears only as "other news." Rodríguez's fellow patriots get the news from a drunken soldier, who paints a pitiful image illustrating the vile attitude of the conspirators. Most impressive is the long final sequence showing the poor patriots giving a pious burial to their comrade. The simple cross they leave atop the improvised tomb can be seen not as a final end but as a sign of resurrection and that the fight for liberty will go on.



Figure 27.2 Sienna as a pirate (*El búsar de la muerte*)

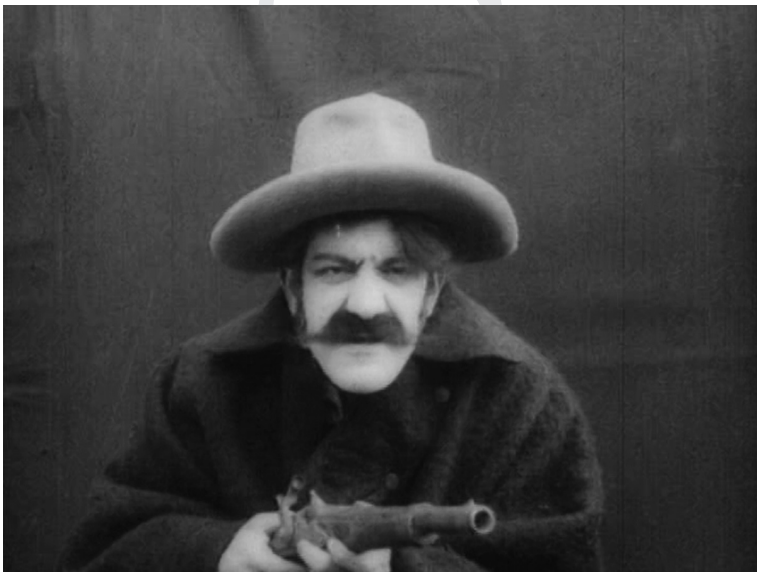


Figure 27.3 Sienna as a cowboy



Figure 27.4 Sienna as a silly soldier



Figure 27.5 San Bruno in despair



Figure 27.6 Synthesis: Sienna is San Bruno's nightmare

Ruffinelli does not like the contrast between the short murder and the long burial scenes (58). This opinion is striking given his observation about the possibility of projecting “a similar spirit of rebellion facing one’s own political, social or economic present” (54).²⁹ In light of the development of Chile’s political situation from Alessandri’s liberal attitude to his quarrels with conservative colonel Carlos Ibáñez del Campo, the spurious candidacy of Vicente Huidobro for president in 1925 and the turn to a dictatorial regime under Ibáñez in 1927, Sienna’s insistence on “my story” can be interpreted precisely as an expression of his skepticism concerning his own time – in political (liberal) as well as social (economic) terms – and the possibility of being oneself. In fact, his last film, *La última traspachada* (The Last All-Nighter, 1926) based on Frontaura’s play *La oveja negra* (The Black Sheep, 1920), seems to be a sad goodbye to the free bohemian life and hopes of liberal progress, which were fundamental to his life and art.

Perhaps *El húsar de la muerte* is not the peak of Chilean filmmaking of the silent period. A comparison with *Canta y no llores, corazón* could be interesting, since they were filmed in the same year and by the same cameraman, Gustavo Bussenius. But *El húsar de la muerte* surely is an



Figure 27.7 A famous model: *The Great Train Robbery*

example of how Sienna – a poet, actor, scriptwriter, and director of theater and film – created an art of his own, cinema: the legendary Rodríguez meets *The Great Train Robbery* (Edwin Porter, 1903) if we look at his portraits with the last shot of Porter in mind (11:17; see Figure 27.7).

The image of the laboring peasant listening to the *guerrillero* (18:46; Figure 27.8) reminds those who know French culture – and Sienna, like others of his generation, did – of *L'Homme à la houe* (The Man with the Hoe) painted by Jean-François Millet in 1862 (Figure 27.9). And the reader or friend of cinema surely recognizes the encounter between Marguerite Gautier and Armand Duval in *La Dame aux camélias* (*The Lady of the Camellias*, Alexandre Dumas fils, 1848) when Carmen de Aguirre and Manuel Rodríguez meet in front of the church, Carmen's missal replacing Marguerite's falling camellia (12:44–13:13).

From the very beginning, filmmaking in Chile was embedded in a large cultural field where an ardent curiosity and a search for change marked the prevailing mood of mostly young artists, born around 1900. Their desire to create a national, progressive, original culture did not blind them when



Figure 27.8 Peasant listening to the *guerrillero*



Figure 27.9 *L'Homme à la houe*. Digital image courtesy of the Getty's Open Content Program

faced with different cultures (French, Anglo-American, German) nor were they unaware of the ongoing sociopolitical movements. Out of the eighty-three silent films listed by Jara, only six are based on foreign literature, three of them from 1925, bearing the books' titles: Santana's *Mater Dolorosa* (Sorrowful Mother) by Argentine Pedro E. Pico, Rafael Arcos's *Donde las dan las toman* (Tit for Tat) by Spaniard Carlos Arniches, and Rosario Rodríguez de la Serna's *Malditas sean las mujeres* (Damn Women) by Spaniard Manuel Ibo Alfaro. The remaining three are Roberto Idiaquez de la Fuente's *Bajo la mirada del Cristo Redentor* (Under the Gaze of Christ the Redeemer, 1924) adapted from a Norwegian short story, Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson's "Synnøve Solbakken" (Synnøve Sunhill); Rosario Rodríguez's second film *La envenenadora* (*The Poisoner*, 1929), inspired by the 1879 French feuilleton *L'Empoisonneuse* by Paul d'Aigremont (i.e. Jeanne Thérèse Ninous); and Santana's *Madres solteras* (Single Mothers, 1927), based on the German erotic novel *Tagebuch einer Verlorenen* (*The Diary of a Lost Girl*, 1905) by Margarete Böhme, previously filmed by Fritz Bernhard (1912), Richard Oswald (1918), and in 1929 by Georg Wilhelm Pabst, and most probably based on Oswald's film, known in Latin America as *Hijas perdidas* (Lost Daughters) or *Almas perdidas* (Lost Souls). Santana and communist exhibitor Amador Pairoa are said to have acquired a copy in Germany in 1924 in exchange for *El odio nada engendra* (Hate Begets Nothing, 1923) (Godoy, *Historia del cine chileno* 42). Forty-six films were made from scripts adapted from national literature, mostly by contemporary authors, primarily dramatists, who often used their own works or adapted them into scripts for the occasion. For instance, De la Sotta adapted his play *Sanción* (Sanction) to make *Juventud, amor y pecado* (Youth, Love, and Sin) in 1926 (Jara 122).

From a national and social standpoint, the very presence of, for example, French culture justifies its critique. In the first place, the nation was imagined by progressive Chileans as independent, not only in political but also in economic terms. In the second place, the presence of a foreign (French) culture contradicted the notion of a culture of one's own. The difference between a conservative and a progressive conception lies, of course, in the economic problem, where conservatives had no arguments against international imperialism and the resulting dependence.³⁰ Sincere critique, however, always presupposes knowledge. Santana's *Como don Lucas Gómez* (Like Don Lucas Gómez, 1925) clearly illustrates the paradox of creating a national culture and cultural nationalism from a society imbued with foreign (French) culture.

Santana's source was the enormously popular play *Don Lucas Gómez*, written by Mateo Martínez Quevedo in 1885. Don Lucas is a simpleminded peasant (*huaso*) who visits Santiago for the first time, and his surprised reactions to what he finds are actually satirical attacks "against the decadence of an upstart and trivial society" (Santana 39).³¹ Genaro, Lucas's younger brother who sought his fortune in the city, confesses that he had been as "irreducible" as Lucas, but that ultimately "contact with decent people has tamed me (*with irony*) and had their way with me" (Santana 42).³² For his part, Don Lucas complains, alluding to the waltz, about "those dances where they grip each other and swing round like apes" (Santana 40).³³ The play ends with a defiant *cueca*.

The play's premiere in Curicó on July 14, 1885 was dedicated, without explanation, to the "French community" (Figure 27.10).³⁴ During the 1880s, French culture was still the model of civilization for the establishment, and the play must be seen as a confrontation precisely between this model and the "barbarism" of the people from the countryside (Donoso 714–716). The dedication to the French community might have been meant as a nod to true culture, but it obviously betrays his intention, displaying the same "taming" as the characters. Santana adapted the play to 1925 (as Borcosque does with *Martín Rivas*), which explains the film's title. The change of epoch and the satirical intention necessarily required a change in the original.

As a result, following the general trend in the 1920s to reject French culture as superior, Santana needed elements of French verse and music considered as outmoded or decadent in contrast with the proud national *cueca*. Therefore, he presented a sequence where the protagonist, seen through conservative eyes, appears ridiculous because he has no understanding of "modernist poetry and music by Debussy" (*La Nación*, Jan. 6, 1925, qtd. in Jara 93).³⁵ Of course, Debussy's first works were still unknown in Chile in 1885. Santana's adaptation reveals not only a change in culture, but also the importance of poetry and especially music, even in the silent era, a cultural field thoroughly documented by González and Rolle.³⁶

The prevailing mood of the years around 1925 was optimism. Yet pessimistic touches begin to mark films from 1924 onwards, most notably in Carlos Pellegrín's *Los desheredados de la suerte* (Fortune's Dispossessed, 1924) with an unusually sharp social critique. Films adapted from literature reflect the same spirit, as in Santana's *El monje* (1924); Luis Romero y Z's *La tarde era triste* (The Afternoon Was Sad, 1924), inspired by anonymous popular verse; Santana's *El caso GB* (The GB Case, 1925), adapted from Gustavo Balmaceda's *Al desnudo* (Unveiled); or Rosario Rodríguez de la Serna's

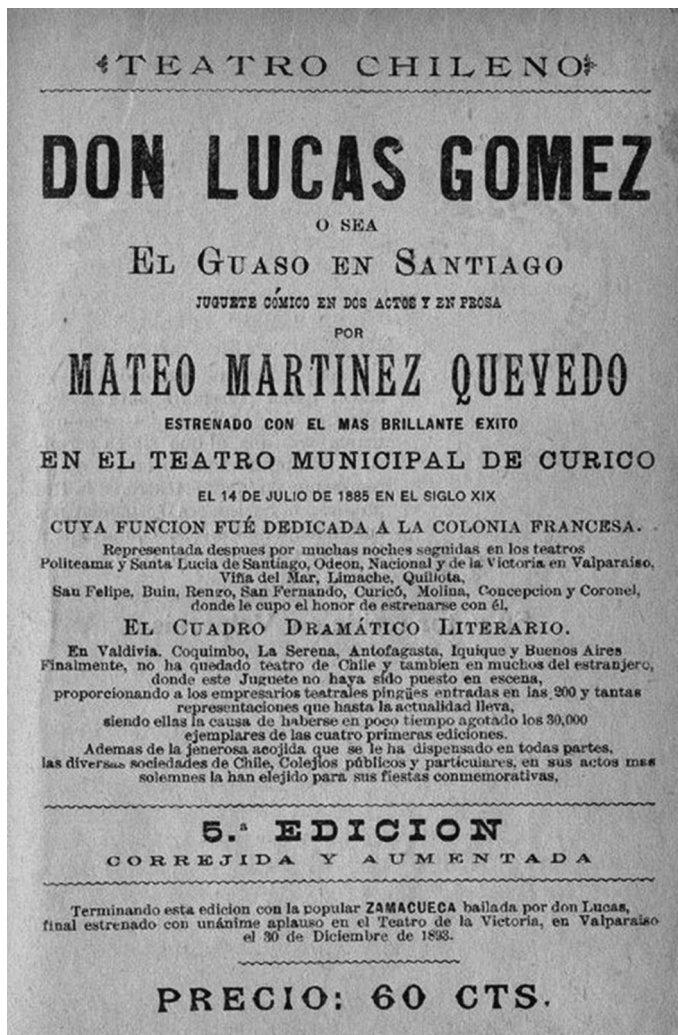


Figure 27.10 *Don Lucas Gómez*. Digital image courtesy of Memoria Chilena, Biblioteca Nacional de Chile

Malditas sean las mujeres (1925). Already in 1917, Gabriela de Bussenius had the courage to address the difficult subject of the Mapuche natives driven from their lands by Europeans (mostly Germans) in *La agonía de Arauco* (The Agony of Arauco). Rosario Rodríguez makes another daring step when

she introduces the theme of the *femme fatale* into Chilean film. And she continues to provoke with her second film in 1929, when she adapts Jeanne Thérèse Ninous's *L'Empoisonneuse*. *La envenenadora* is the story of a reckless woman who poisons her husband, captures his fortune, and goes to live in freedom with her lover.

As a final stop in Chilean silent film, *La envenenadora* is highly significant. It illustrates perfectly the scope of the new medium in a small country and its ties with a wide cultural world. In their "Introducción" to *Chilefilms, El Hollywood criollo*, Peirano and Gobantes summarize the cinematography of the 1920s as a phenomenon in which intellectual elites, local avant-garde artists, and political interests come together to probe cinema as a "modern activity par excellence": "In consequence writers, playwrights, actors, poets, painters and photographers, among many others, entered the world of cinema" (37).³⁷ We can add musicians, such as Osmań Pérez Freire, a well-known pianist and composer praised for his "musical adaptation" in De la Sotta's *Golondrina* (Swallow, 1924; qtd. in Bongers et al. 236), and Roberto Retes, who composed the music for *Como don Lucas Gómez*. Even a specialist in classical Latin, Egidio Poblete ("Ronquillo"), translator of Vergil and novelist (e.g. *La avenida de las acacias*), joined the united artists of Chile.

Crisis, Breakdown, and Ongoing Efforts: 1930–1960

This entire cultural field seems to vanish at the end of the 1920s. The nitrate crisis, scarce capital, and the monopoly of American cinema coupled with the invention of sound left practically no room for domestic films. In addition, the happy bohemia of the early years was decimated by death. Hugo Donoso died in 1917, Giambastiani in 1921, Bührle and De la Sotta in 1927. José Bohr (not yet mentioned because his scarce production during the silent era is unrelated to literature) went to the United States and then to Mexico, Borcosque to the United States and later to Argentina. Coke Délano acquainted himself with sound in Hollywood during 1929/1930 and returned to Chile, where he made the first talkie, *Norte y sur* (North and South) in 1934. During the 1930s, both dedicated themselves to creative journalism, Borcosque as cofounder (with Enrique Kaulen and Roberto Aldunate) of the now-indispensable *Ecran* (1930), Coke as cofounder and later owner of the satirical *Topaze* (1931, the title taken from Marcel Pagnol), to which he contributed brilliant caricatures. His most famous creation is "Juan Verdejo Larraín", who became the icon of the picaresque figure of the *roto chileno* – in 1941 Verdejo acquired

cinematographic life in Eugenio de Liguoro's *Verdejo gasta un millón* (Verdejo Spends a Million). Santana looked with some success for ways to make films in Peru and Ecuador, but never again in Chile.

Sienna, once again, is something like a close-up of the dissolving silent community. The sudden death of his friend and fellow theater actor Arturo Bührlé as well as that of Nicanor de la Sotta in 1927 may have affected him deeply. If so, he knew how to hide it because *Un disparo de revólver* (A Revolver Shot, 1929) is a one-act comedy staged by Frontaura. It is a joke on melodrama: the shot that seems to signal the suicide of the unhappy lover of a dominant woman leaves her in despair, but it was a shot in the air, with a happy ending. The play seems to be a special tribute to Bührlé. Sienna's kind biography, *La vida pintoresca de Arturo Bührlé* (The Picturesque Life of Arturo Bührlé, 1929), speaks volumes about his love for theater and modern, witty art. In the chapter "El Bufo Bührlé = Dadá," Don Pedro writes about his friend: "His whole being was a 'Dadaist Manifesto'" (Sienna, *La vida pintoresca* 93).³⁸ Sienna cites in French Tristan Tzara and Max Jacob, both stressing the playful character of art (93). One of the twenty-five drawings by the multitalented Víctor Bianchi actually refers directly to Dadaism, imitating the style of Joan Miró (94; see Figure 27.11). After the publication of *Recuerdos de "El Soldado Desconocido"* (Memories of the "Unknown Soldier," 1931), Sienna disappears from the history of cinema.

It is true that the production of fiction films made in Chile stopped completely between 1934 and 1939. However, that does not mean the end of a cultural field dense enough to withstand a temporary failure of one of its components. The renaissance of cinema in 1939, with the release of Eugenio de Liguoro's *El hechizo del trigal* (The Wheatfield Spell), Carlos García Huidobro's *Dos corazones y una tonada* (Two Hearts and a Ballad), and Juan Pérez Berrocal's *Hombres del sur* (Men from the South), is a mixture of tradition and innovation. De Liguoro and García Huidobro were newcomers betting on the popular *criollo* scheme, as does Pérez Berrocal. At the same time, the three of them introduced actors who came from traditional theater, new variety shows, and the increasingly important radio broadcasting (Horta 176–177).

Entre gallos y medianoche (In the Dead of Night), written by Carlos Cariola in 1919 and adapted to the screen in 1940 precisely by De Liguoro, illustrates the formula well. Alejo Álvarez got his second chance as an actor after *El hechizo del trigal* and in 1949 he directed his own first film, *La hechizada*, based on the novel by Fernando Santiván (for Álvarez's career, see Cortínez and Engelbert, ch. 8). Most importantly, De Liguoro



Figure 27.11 El Bufo Bührlé = Dada

succeeded in hiring the young radio star Ana González, who had already won fame as the maid “La Desideria” in the program *Radiotanda* of Radio del Pacífico. González became a celebrated actress in cinema and theater, invited by Pedro Mortheiru to the Teatro de Ensayo of the Universidad Católica, founded in 1943. Together with the Teatro Experimental of the Universidad de Chile (1941) and the Teatro de la Universidad de Concepción (TUC, 1944), these theaters developed into centers of cultural renewal which formed a new generation of actors who would excel in films of the late 1960s by Raúl Ruiz, Miguel Littin, and Helvio Soto (Cortínez and Engelbert 59, 96–97, and *passim*).

That Delfina Guzmán, Jaime Vadell, and Nelson Villagra acted in the theatrical version of *Entre gallos y medianoche* under the direction of Pedro Sienna at the TUC in 1962 (Sienna, *Obras completas* 23, 40; see also

Albornoz 452–454) is part of a special cultural density from 1920 to 1970, as Manfred Engelbert and I have already noted in our book *Evolución en libertad* (60–61), against Bernardo Subercaseaux's argument about Chile's lack of cultural density (1993). When I asked Villagra about his experience with Sienna, the preeminent actor, an icon of Chilean cinema since the 1960s, sent me an "emblema" of his master, which invites us to go back to the very beginnings of cinematographic fiction in Chile: "our invited director considered it to be of vital importance that the actor should know how to 'declaim,' declaim with the appropriate tone and feeling in the given situation."³⁹ This statement is an astonishing echo of Adolfo Urzúa's *Arte de la declamación*, the handbook for young actors of the 1910s.

There is another fact that proves our thesis about the consistency and continuity of Chilean culture. Ana González acted with Delfina Guzmán, Jaime Vadell, Luis Alarcón, and Nissim Sharim (director of the independent theater ICTUS) in *Julio comienza en Julio* (Julio Begins in July, 1979) and *Historia de un roble solo* (Story of a Lonely Oak, 1982), both by Silvio Caiozzi. Through Caiozzi's close teamwork with José Donoso, this popular actress of humble origins – her mother was a seamstress – finally rose to the honors of a Chilean diva. González started her career as a poor player in 1934 acting on the stage of a workers' theater. We must remember that this situation was not necessarily a handicap. Workers had a theater of their own from the beginning of the century with, for example, Acevedo Hernández as their playwright. Anarchist circles were eager to read and to act, as Manuel Rojas describes in a gripping passage of his novel *Sombras contra el muro* (Shadows against the Wall, 1964). Juan, one of the protagonist's poor companions, wants by all means to be an actor, and among his readings of Ibsen, Benavente, Echegaray, and Strindberg is "a Norwegian with a strange name, Biorson Bjorson or Bhjrson Jiorson or something like that" (ch. 1, 29).⁴⁰ It is not too difficult, for the academic reader today, to recognize Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson as the inspiration for *Bajo la mirada del Cristo Redentor* (1924) and the actor Manuel Rojas in *La calle del ensueño* (1929). We should note that our forgotten Sienna continued to create theater for workers and for children, as Marta Brunet, yet another leading figure of Chilean literature, states in 1939 when she mentions him along with María Bührlé, the daughter of Arturo Bührlé and Elena Puelma (II).

Together with Elena Puelma and Ana González, Eugenio Retes formed a trio of cinematic comedians finally consolidated after the Chaplin debate. "La Desideria" and "Verdejo," played by Retes in *Verdejo gasta un millón*, the greatest box office hit of the forties, would embody this laughter. A fourth name must be added, Lucho Córdova, who created "Father

Pitillo,” a Don Camilo *avant la lettre*, in *El padre Pitillo* (Father Cigarette, 1946) by Roberto de Ribón, the Colombian director with experience in France, Spain, Italy, and Argentina (see Torreiro 420–429). Córdova still appeared, as a shrewd priest, in Álvarez’s *Tierra quemada* (Burned Land, 1968), the first Chilean color feature film (Cortínez and Engelbert 761, 774), thus tracing an additional line of continuity. *El padre Pitillo* proved to be one of the few successes in the short history of Chile Films (1942–1949), the state-sponsored production company conceived as a Hollywood-like studio. The film certainly benefitted from the enormous interest aroused by the play *El padre Pitillo* by Carlos Arniches in Buenos Aires in 1937, where he had fled from the upheavals of the Spanish Civil War. One year later, Argentine director Mario Lugones tried to repeat the achievement, again for Chile Films, with *El último guapo* (The Last Tough Guy, 1947), adapting the play *Es mi hombre* (He Is Mine, 1921). But despite the script by César Tiempo, a key figure of the Boedo group of left-leaning avant-garde artists of the 1920s, the film was a flop. Tiempo opposed Juan Perón’s politics and in particular his anti-Semitism. During his stay in Chile, Tiempo wrote scripts for *La dama de la muerte* (The Lady of Death, 1946) by Carlos Hugo Christensen, adapted from Robert Louis Stevenson’s *The Suicide Club* (1878), and *La dama de las camelias* (The Lady of the Camellias, 1947) by José Bohr, based on Dumas’s novel, both produced by Chile Films.

The four films represent the two main policies of Chile Films. On the one hand, the local fascination with *criollo* culture should not be abandoned, and Arniches would serve that goal; on the other, Chile Films aspired to have a role in international filmmaking, hence the adaptation of Stevenson and other high-brow stories (Horta 174–189). In fact, out of a total production of nineteen films, ten derive from literary sources. Only three of those ten have a national origin: Francisco Coloane, who appears twice, and Olegario Lazo. We may add the dramatist and short story writer Carlos Vattier, who cowrote, with Coloane, the script for Luis Moglia Barth’s *Romance de medio siglo* (Half a Century Romance, 1944) and was the author of the screenplay for Délano’s *El hombre que se llevaron* (The Man They Took Away, 1946), with Bohr as producer. Among the remaining seven, two were adapted from Arniches. Jacques Rémy’s *La fruta mordida* (The Bitten Fruit, 1945), also known as *Le Moulin des Andes* and *Françoise*, is an example of international teamwork in times of Nazism and Popular Front politics. The remote source of the film was a successful play by French author Jean-Jacques Bernard, *Martine* (1922); the adaptation came from Alejandro Casona and Jules Supervielle, the Spanish dramatist

and the French poet, in exile in Argentina and Uruguay, respectively. Chile Films offered an opportunity to work unimpeded by Nazis or Peronists in the Chile of socialist presidents Pedro Aguirre Cerda and Juan Antonio Ríos (1938–1946).

It may be surprising that in the effort to create an internationally attractive cinema appeared two adaptations of the German Hermann Sudermann by Argentine directors, Carlos Schlieper's *La casa está vacía* (The House Is Empty, 1945, from *Die stille Mühle*, The Silent Mill) and Hugo del Carril's *Surcos de sangre* (Furrows of Blood, 1950, from *Frau Sorge, Dame Care*). While Sudermann is today outside the canon (like Bjørnson), his works were still a fertile source for the German *Heimatfilm* of the 1950s and even beyond (Cortínez and Engelbert 87, 121). In the Americas, the author of *Die Ehre* (Honour, 1889) and *Heimat* (Magda, 1893) was celebrated as a major literary figure, on a par with Gerhart Hauptmann and Henrik Ibsen. While Sudermann's fame as a writer began to fade after his death in 1928, his work as a source for film scripts became more important. *Frau Sorge* (1887), for example, was filmed by Robert Land in 1928, long before *Surcos de sangre*. *Sunrise: A Song of Two Humans*, Friedrich Wilhelm Murnau's first American movie (1927, three Oscars in 1928) and shown everywhere in the Spanish-speaking world as *Amanecer*, was based on Sudermann's *Die Reise nach Tilsit* (The Excursion to Tilsit, 1917). In 1933, Rouben Mamoulian filmed Marlene Dietrich in *The Song of Songs*, adapted from *Das Hohe Lied* (1908). And in 1939, Nazi director Veit Harlan made a new version of *Die Reise nach Tilsit* (his emblematic anti-Semitic *Jud Süß*, Süß the Jew is from 1940).

In this context, it is not at all surprising that Sudermann should find an audience in Argentina and Chile. *La casa está vacía* is a typical melodrama about two brothers, Carlos and Jorge, played by Alejandro Flores and the newcomer Horacio Peterson. It is a retelling of the story of Cain and Abel, and its greatest virtue probably lies in the opportunities it gave to a new generation of actors and technicians. Chela Bon, who would become the star of Chile Films, had her first major role as María Cristina, the unhappy rival of Ruth, played by María Teresa Squella. She had trained with Pedro de la Barra, the promoter of experimental theater and as such a founding father of the cinema of the 1960s. At the camera, Ricardo Younis, who would later be called "master of the light," directed for the first time, and his assistant and future cameraman of the New Chilean Cinema, Andrés Martorell, continued to grow.

Chile Films' bad reputation does not correspond to reality. As Manfred Engelbert and I have shown, the cooperation with Argentine producers,

directors, and artists was much more fruitful than detrimental (73–80). Patricio Kaulen, one of its chief executives responsible for production, gained experience and recognition as administrator and director (*Encrucijada*, *Crossroads*, 1946), culminating in *Largo viaje* (*Long Journey*) in 1967, which won an “extraordinary prize” at the Karlovy Vary Film Festival in 1968 (Cortínez and Engelbert 135–144). Lautaro Murúa appeared in Fred Matter’s *El paso maldito* (*The Cursed Pass*, 1949, with Chela Bon), Francisco Mugica and Eduardo Boneo’s *Esperanza* (*Hope*, 1949), a remake and Argentine counterpart to José Bohr’s *Si mis campos hablaran* (*If My Fields Could Speak*, 1947), and *Surcos de sangre*. Jorge di Lauro arrived from Argentina and would be the outstanding sound engineer of the sixties.

Even the exclusively Chilean films produced in the studios have been reevaluated (see Machuca). José Bohr and his prolific film work is the most interesting case. His long career in Chile, the United States, and Mexico culminated in 1940s Chile. His two films of 1947, *Si mis campos hablaran* and *La dama de las camelias*, can be seen as a synthesis of the *criollo* genre and the cosmopolitan tendency of Chile Films, even if *Si mis campos hablaran* was an independent production made in the studios. *Si mis campos hablaran* is a sort of historical epic about the colonization of southern Chile beginning in the mid-nineteenth century. At the center of the story is a group of Germans who settle in the Lake Region near Lake Llanquihue and south of Puerto Montt. Their efforts are considerable, and Christmas carols or Wagnerian notes – motifs mainly from *The Valkyria* and *Siegfried* – try to create the corresponding moods. The film is narrated by voice-over, supposedly by Vicente Pérez Rosales, whose monument is shown at the end. In a way, the adventurer Pérez Rosales organized the arrival of German settlers, and his autobiography *Recuerdos del pasado* (*Memories of the Past*, 1886) contributed significantly to the creation of the myth of the south. The so-called civilization of the Araucanía was a process of occupation and violent expropriation of the Mapuche people. In Bohr’s film not a single Mapuche is ever seen in a completely virgin wilderness. It is true that some shots of the volcano Osorno and Petrohué Falls, before receding glaciers and massive tourism, still impress today and probably did more so in 1947.

La dama de las camelias, a considerable success at the box office, was immediately destroyed by critics. In *Ecran*’s “Crónicas de Cine,” the anonymous “DOS” called the film “antinational” since it “throws vernacular cinema into an abyss” (Jan. 28, 1947, 21).⁴¹ According to him, this bad imitation of European cinema reaches the summit of vulgar farce when

Ana González as the maid Desideria tries to imitate Margarita Xirgu.⁴² Alonso Machuca, on the contrary, vindicates the farcical mixture of trite pretentious culture and the practical jokes drawn from popular surroundings (Figure 27.12). The inexorable exploitation of film production and the witty resistance of poor comedians in the shabby theaters of metropolitan suburbs are at the heart of the satire (Machuca 227–231). Bohr's vision implies a critical dig at the program of Chile Films, whose studios are seen



Figure 27.12 Publicity photo: *La dama de las camelias*

in a shot at the beginning of the film. The long sequence around the shanty used for cheap shows and film screenings, El Salón las Delicias (8:50–14:09), is a hilarious and simultaneously sad picture of theaters in the suburbs (which Machuca does not mention). The appearance of La Desideria is ridiculous, but the mixed public wants an encore while the fictional director of the future star is appalled at what he sees. Bohr's parody of Chile Films is obvious since an important part of the scene takes place in front of a curtain covered with posters announcing upcoming films, all of them produced by Chile Films: *Romance de medio siglo*, *La casa está vacía*, and *La dama de la muerte*, all three adapted from literature.

Bohr would play with the same tongue-in-cheek comedy in 1955, when he created a picture of Chile as a great circus, *El gran circo Chamorro*. The protagonist Juan Chamorro, played by Eugenio Retes, the eternal Verdejo, is in search of his son and has to make a journey across most of Chile. After losing his money, he works as a bus driver and, of course, has to cross many troubled waters. At times, the film recalls *Subida al cielo* (Ascent to Heaven, aka Mexican Bus Ride, 1952) by Luis Buñuel, whom Bohr had known in Mexico. But Bohr's satire is friendly, somewhat resigned, fighting possible sadness with laughter and never-ending energy. It was Bohr who found an expression for Chilean comic art, not so far from the "Chaplin" of former days. In some ways, Raúl Ruiz would be the follower of this caustic humor when he filmed *Tres tristes tigres* (Three Sad Tigers) in the symbolic year 1968. His adaptation of the homonymous play by Alejandro Sieveking perfectly illustrates the spirit of a different time.

Notes

1. "La película ya está vieja a fuerza de exhibirla." All translations are mine.
2. "Juguete óptico que siempre ofrecía los mismos asuntos, idénticos melodramas o payasadas, incapaz de una evolución madura, de un progreso dramático."
3. "Donner au cinéma ses lettres de noblesse en illustrant par son entremise les chefs-d'œuvre du théâtre classique."
4. "Son contexte social universel."
5. www.memoriachilena.gob.cl/602/w3-article-350374.html.
6. "Yo he estudiado de acuerdo con el ritmo francés."
7. "El chic francés"; "duda entre si darla como europea o como chilena."
8. "Nuestro público femenino, acostumbrado a la gracia elegante de Max Linder, encuentra que son leseras los excéntricos resortes con que Chaplin quiere hacer reír."
9. "Una continua fiesta de risa y buen humor."

10. "A veces alusivas a la actualidad."
11. "Una parodia del gran bufo." On the history of the Fiesta and its cinematographic sequels up to the sixties, see Cortínez and Engelbert, ch. 5.
12. "Disfraces baratos"; "ansias revolucionarias."
13. "Casas de pensión"; "como las viviendas que mostrara Chaplin."
14. "Un personaje sin justificación."
15. "Marqueses, condes, duques, duquesas y hasta reyes y reinas."
16. "Cierta isocronía con lo que ocurre en París."
17. "Incomparable director artístico." Originally published in "El teatro en España," *La Prensa*, Apr. 3, 1927.
18. "Tres campanadas vibran. Ya es la hora. / Abrazos. Despedidas. De repente / suelta un pitazo la locomotora. // Partimos. ¿Cómo van los corazones? / ¡Qué sé yo! . . . Lleva el tren, pomposamente, / un loco cargamento de ilusiones! . . ."
19. "Hacer patria."
20. "Atmósfera de la bohemia."
21. "Dibujante del Arte Nuevo."
22. "El primer intento de utilizar el cine con fines políticos."
23. "De corte patriótico"; "un conflicto internacional y la Escuadra debe partir a ejecutar ciertas maniobras."
24. "Argumento mío."
25. "Con una buena comportación, puede el hombre de más humilde condición social llegar a adquirir una buena posición entre sus semejantes."
26. "A los años 25"; "un canto al trabajo y al esfuerzo, símbolo del progreso de esa época."
27. "Uno de los rasgos más admirables"; "su carencia de solemnidad."
28. Bravo, the great documentary filmmaker, describes in detail the restoration of the original ending. See also www.memoriachilena.gob.cl/602/w3-article-96716.html.
29. "Un ánimo similar de rebeldía ante el poder político, social o económico de su propio presente."
30. For the paradoxical use of "the national" in Chile, see Engelbert 94–98; Peirano 42–43.
31. "Contra la decadencia de una sociedad advenediza y trivial."
32. "El trato con la gente decente me ha amansado (*con sorna*) haciendo de mí cera y pábilo."
33. "Esos bailes en que se llevan agarráos y dándose güeltas como monos."
34. See www.memoriachilena.gob.cl/602/w3-article-9748.html.
35. "Versos modernistas y música de Debussy."
36. See ch. 1 on formal dancing and ch. 3 on cinema.
37. "De este modo se incorporaron al mundo del cine escritores, dramaturgos, actores, poetas, pintores y fotógrafos, entre tantos otros."
38. "Todo él era un 'Manifiesto Dadá.'"
39. "Nuestro director invitado consideraba de vital importancia que el actor supiera 'decir,' decir con el tono y sentimiento adecuados en la situación determinada" (email communication, Nov. 26, 2019).

40. “Un noruego que tiene un nombre raro, Biorson Bjorson o Bhjorson Jiorson o algo así.”
41. “Antinacional”; “precipita al cine vernáculo en un abismo.”
42. In 1941, “la Xirgu” had founded the Escuela de Arte Dramático (see Rius Xirgu).

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