



## The Star as Antihero: Ricardo Darín in *Carancho*

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After a decade of premieres, Pablo Trapero's filmography has ineludibly become part of the canon of contemporary Argentine cinematography. Following the success of *Mundo grúa* (1999), Trapero, who comes from independent cinema, began making movies financed through television companies, as in the case of *El bonaerense* (2002).<sup>1</sup> There has been general consensus that *Mundo grúa* was the first film to secure international visibility for the so-called New Argentine Cinema, which emerged in the mid-nineties. This movement, which was anchored in the present of a country in crisis, became the beacon of a new realism using a different aesthetic as well as non-professional actors and actresses, both of which fell far from attracting a mass audience. At first, Trapero's films participated mainly in circuits of national and international film festivals and earned the valuable praise of specialized critics and a small sector of the public which little by little got larger thanks to—among other factors—the construction of stories based around Ricardo Darín, a star actor in Argentine cinema. This success was first confirmed in *Carancho* (2010) and subsequently in *Elefante blanco* (2012), both of which also co-starred Martina Gusmán.

Darín's first participation in a Trapero film generated great expectations and aroused the curiosity of many critics who saw *Carancho* as the unique and powerful conjunction of an industrial cinematography as personified by the main star and an independent cinematography as represented by the director ("No soy"). Independent of such conjecture, the distinction between these conceptions was vastly underestimated by Darín when he was asked about it:

No noto las diferencias. Sí las noto entre cómo hacemos una película en la Argentina a como la hacen en otros países. Acá el equipo está abocado a hacer lo que haya que hacer. Pablo se tira al piso, yo sostengo una luz, cosas así. Eso no ocurre en otras partes, es más gremial, burocrático (Lerer, 2010a).

[I do not see the differences. I do see differences in how we make films in Argentina and how films are made in other countries. In Argentina, the staff works on what must be done. For example, Pablo drops to the floor, I hold a light, and things like this. This is not the case in other parts of the world where things are more labor-union related and bureaucratic].

Besides these claims, what gives little credit to the idea of the film's caliber coming from some sort of cinematographic conjunction is simply Ricardo Darín's performative skills. His naturalistic acting register, based on minimal gesticulation put to the service of the narrative and visual requisites of cinematographic language, plus the inherent virtues of his *persona*, are by themselves the guarantees of the quality of the work. His star status, of which Trapero is well aware and knows how to use, gives the film an added value. Leonardo M. D'Espósito, in reference to Darín's role in *Carancho*, also recognizes Darín's acting talent: "hay que transformarlo en habitante del mundo de Trapero sin que deje de ser Darín, porque Darín es una estrella clásica" (3) ["We must transform him into an inhabitant of Trapero's world, not letting Darín be Darín because he is a classical star"]. From the very beginning, Trapero shaped Sosa's character by taking into account Darín's specific star attributes.

Darín's charismatic image derives from his handsome physical features and his disarming personality, namely a smiling face, light-colored eyes, a recognizable voice, and an undeniable magnetism, on the one hand, and an astute social awareness paired with a modest public profile, on the other. All these traits put together are constituents of a new type of star power which is characterized not by sacredness and unattainability, but rather by a proximity to

and complicity with the audience, who, in turn, sees in the film performer what Ginette Vincendeau calls “a star”:

(...) by stars I mean celebrated film performers who develop a “persona” or “myth”, composed of an amalgam of their screen image and private identities, which the audience recognizes and expects from film to film, and which in turn determines the parts they play (Preface VIII).

In 2010, the year of *Carancho*'s premiere, a large group of specialized critics (Diego Lerer, 2010a, 2010b; Diego Batlle, Luciano Monteagudo, Fernando Bernal, and Juan Manuel Domínguez), as well as the director and the film's protagonists, all agreed that *Carancho* was an exponent of *film noir*, highlighting in all cases the story of love through which the film is carried out. In view of this, the purpose of this article is to analyze the film, taking into account the characteristics that typify the *film noir* genre, particularly those related to character construction and the fate of the main character, on the one hand, and the spaces within which he moves and plays his role, on the other. Particular attention will be paid to Ricardo Darín's *star image* in the construction of the protagonist of *Carancho*, an antihero whose diffuse and opaque nature differs from the classical representation of a cinematographic star. To this end, the concept of *star image* will be used following Richard Dyer and James Naremore, in particular. For Dyer, a *star image* is composed of a series of media texts that could be grouped into promotion, publicity, films, and comments (60), whereas for Naremore, a *star image* is “an intertextual phenomenon born out of the actor's previous roles, various filmic properties and publicity” (158). In my view, both concepts complement the other and allow for a comprehensive analysis of Darín's star role in *Carancho*.

For methodological reasons and in an attempt to thoroughly identify the visual representation strategies in narrative and aesthetic terms as well as in promotional terms, it is convenient to subdivide Dyer's and Naremore's concepts into the *character image*, the *promotion image*, and the *reception*

*image*. The *character image* corresponds to the study of the actor's performance in the film and explores the ways in which the character—his characteristics and his evolution—is constructed to determine if there is overlap between the star attributes and the character attributes. In other words, it is the image that the actor constructs for the camera and that which has to do mainly with his performance. The *promotion image* is that used for the film's promotion and publicity in relation to the protagonist's *star image*.<sup>2</sup> It therefore has to do with extrafilmic elements such as posters, trailers, and advertising regarding the premiere, all of which, as will be shown, affect, in turn, the *character image*. The *reception image* draws on the comments and criticisms emerging from the premiere. Taking into account all the above, *Carancho* proposes a different view of the cinematographic star through a genre in which the protagonist, who is played by the most popular and successful Argentine actor of the time, departs from the classical narrative model, which is centered on coherent and generally irreproachable and morally honest characters, to embrace more erratic, abnormal, and questionable behavior.

### ***A made-to-measure character***

*Carancho* is the vehicle organized around Ricardo Darín. Dyer introduces the term "vehicle" in reference to films that are made around the images and types of characters associated with particular stars (62). When Trapero began to create *Carancho*, he first secured Darín's availability and interest in participating as the protagonist of the film. Thus, from the very beginning, the role of Sosa was imagined to be interpreted by Darín. Dyer claims that iconographic continuities and visual styles of a star can be identified through vehicles as well as through genres. In addition, Paul McDonald highlights other factors that also enrich the development of a star, such as his

interpretations and acting styles in previous films and genres in which he has starred. It is thus inevitable to associate Darín's character in *Carancho* with other characters that he has interpreted during the last decade, particularly his role of antihero in *Nueve reinas* (Fabián Bielinsky 2000). Indeed, if asked to identify a common element in all of Darín's interpretations, the figure of an enigmatic outsider with a vague past would immediately come to mind. Apart from this common feature, however, his characters are all tinged with a variety of colors found within the antihero register: a swindler in *Nueve reinas*, a solitary detective in *La señal* (Ricardo Darín and Martín Hodara, 2007), a thief newly freed from prison in *El baile de la victoria* (Fernando Trueba, 2009), an unlicensed attorney in *Carancho*, and a retired attorney in *Tesis sobre un homicidio* (Hernán Goldfrid, 2013). All of these movies somehow revisit aspects of *film noir* in the setting, in the cinematographic presentation of characters, and in the delineation of stories.

The prolongation of a character beyond the frontiers of a film is what Barry King calls personification (168), i.e. the continuity of the *star image* over the differences of each of the characters interpreted. Similarly, Dyer points out that

The specific repertoire of gestures, intonations, etc. that a star establishes over a number of films carries the meaning of her/his image just as much as the "inert" element of appearance, the particular sound of her/his voice or dress style (142).

Darín's singular interpretation style reveals recurrent acting characteristics, such as a calm and deep look, controlled gesticulation, bodily ease, and speech modes with a certain degree of humor and irony depending on the case. This is indicative of what Luc Moullet calls "the actor policy," "in which the actor is ahead of the performer asserting his interpretation" (in Aumont & Marie 16). This actor policy, therefore, not only conditioned Trapero in calling on Darín for the protagonistic role, but also exposed the film script to new thematic and

stylistic challenges. Many of these challenges played out in the *film noir* conventions found in *Carancho*.

### **The dark side of the film: *film noir* reminiscences**

*Film noir* emerged during the period of maximum splendor in classic Hollywood cinema, a time defined by a mode of production known as Hollywood studio system with narrative and stylistic resources that later became standard. However, although it emerged from the cradle of the Hollywood industry, *film noir* elaborated an aesthetic and narrative treatment completely antithetical to that of classical cinema. David Bordwell uses the term “non-conformity guidelines” (75-76) for dissident genre rules consisting of “1) a rupture of psychological causality, 2) a challenging male prominence in heterosexual love, 3) an attack on the ‘happy ending,’ and 4) a criticism of the classical technique and style” (75 - 76). Of the several divergent elements identified in *Carancho*, the treatment of the star in this genre becomes particularly relevant. As shown below, the star personifies an antihero whose erratic and dubious behavior contrasts with the power of fascination that the actor exerts on the screen.

The plot of *Carancho* centers on the million-dollar business of filing claims for compensation against insurance companies, i.e. a compensation business that veils a world of unscrupulous human relationships.<sup>3</sup> Héctor Sosa (Darín), an unlicensed attorney, and Luján Olivera (Gusmán), an emergency physician, separately patrol the night streets of San Justo, in the province of Buenos Aires, Argentina, to assist car accident victims.<sup>4</sup> Sosa finds potential clients in these victims while Lujan tends to them as a doctor. Streets and emergency rooms become the places where the two protagonists begin to

connect professionally, while their homes become the private places for their intimate relationship.

From the first images of the film, the stylistic characteristics of *film noir*,<sup>5</sup> particularly a clear and close relationship with the historical present of society, are evoked. According to Frank Krutnik, in the forties, *film noir* and its variants became the habitual response to the convulsions derived from the war and postwar period. Therefore, plots, characters, and visual resources all showed social unrest. In line with this, although planned around a different period of time, *Carancho* is also referential as it depicts—with a pessimistic point of view—the obscure reality of a country in crisis, mainly the decline of public institutions. As to the characters in particular, there is a predominance of isolated, male antiheroes with moral values fluctuating between legality and illegality and impregnating their lives with fatalism (Hereadero & Santamarina 31). In the case of *Carancho*, the term “antihero” refers to the type of character who 1) has no moral values, 2) is antisocial in spite of his attempts to identify himself with the public (Ramos & Marimón in Sangro Colón & Huerta Floriano 196), 3) lives in an undesired present time, and 4) has no future. Darín is the antihero who does not seem to find his place in the world and whose signs of lucidity and desires to change the direction of his life do not prevent him from suffering a tragic fate.

Stylistic *film noir* elements can be identified in *Carancho* at both the visual and the auditory levels. At the visual level, night lighting prevails over almost all of the scenes (Schrader 219). In line with this, Trapero creates a visually and sonorously sordid and obscure atmosphere, within which night streets in the working-class suburbs and hospital emergency rooms in Buenos Aires province are the principal settings.<sup>6</sup> According to Hugo Hortiguera, *Carancho* is constructed in a city in crisis showing a new social-spatial pattern (114) in a “lugar bárbaro, alucinante y abandonado por las élites vernáculas, pero abierto y por donde sólo puede circular la pobreza” (119) [“barbarous and



hallucinatory place abandoned by vernacular elites and open to poverty”]. *Carancho* shows a city whose desolate and dark streets are witnesses to misery and intertwined businesses and speculations revolving around car accident victims. It also depicts a social environment that not only pushes Sosa to commit crimes but also judges and condemns him, thus making of him one more victim of this debased place.

*Carancho* also shows Sosa and Luján’s fatal destiny, which is, in turn, another common trait of *film noir*. In order to highlight such inexorability, the film proposes a circular narrative which is reiterated at the end—though with a slight displacement—as Sosa and Luján become victims of the car accidents that earlier gave sense to their lives. So as to not have pain in the car accident planned by the two of them in order to escape from a crooked deputy police chief involved in compensation affairs, Sosa injects himself with a sedative, just as he has done with his clients. When rescued by Luján, a long take shows both characters in a frustrated attempt to escape from the police chief, ending in the fatal car accident. At the end, the screen turns black while the voice of a paramedic behind Sosa is heard talking to Luján in just the same way as Luján used to do when addressing victims. Such a corrosive ending reaffirms the characters’ impossibility of freeing themselves from a hostile environment and gives them no promising solution.

In their analysis of the plot’s circularity, Nadia Lie and Silvana Mandolessi claim that while the car accident motive is a new element introduced in the film, fatality is the inherent feature of *film noir* within the context of contemporary Argentina, where car accidents are not only daily newspaper headlines but also the main reason why Argentina has suffered a high number of roadway fatalities. Impunity, absence of control to secure rule compliance, and corruption in Argentina—under the form of bribery of traffic police—are all indeed delicate issues that are difficult to deal with, thus dramatically increasing the number of car accidents. Within this context, this



*film noir* pessimism could therefore be understood as the disenchanting though naturalized view of a present in which the deaths from car accidents, apart from being alarming, are inherent to the national road safety system. As to the ambiguity that characterizes many endings in *film noir*, Lie and Mandolessi claim that death in *Carancho*, rather than representing a closure or restoration of equilibrium, prolongs ambiguity and unrest (109). Everything seems to be indicative of the antihero's impossibility of getting rid of the vicious circle surrounding him, thus confining him to the sentence of his fatal destiny. In addition to the elements of *film noir* in *Carancho*, many filmic and extrafilmic resources are also used to create Darín's role of an antihero.

### **Construction of a star**

A formal analysis of *Carancho* allows us to see how representation strategies are used all along the story to construct the antihero character. On account of the fact that the concept of cinematographic *star image* used in this article corresponds to that of an image that can be understood through *media texts*, I propose the notions of *character image*, *promotion image*, and *reception image* for the analysis of this film.

In the analysis of the *character image* it is necessary to disentangle the character constructed by Darín, taking into account his interpretation—acting register, compromise with the role and his evolution, and facial and bodily expressions—as well as the staging strategies used—plane size and angulation, illumination, setup. Dyer reminds us that originally film stars “were gods and goddesses, heroes, models - embodiments of ideal ways of behaving” (21-22) because they symbolically sustained the set of values of society during a certain period of time. At the iconic level, shots were intended to highlight the beauty and physical qualities of the protagonists. In *Carancho*, it is exactly the opposite because the film is anchored in a present in which

values are devalued and State inefficiency is translated into corruption which, in turn, destroys public services, such as those related to health and justice. Therefore, the character that Ricardo Darín constructs is that of a corrupted and solitary antihero who does not reach redemption, although he does try to do so. His character forms part of and is the product of a deteriorated social environment within which he is a victim of the mafia that lives on lawsuits against insurance companies. At the beginning of *Carancho*, statistical figures are reported that illustrate the environment within which the antihero moves and clearly locate the story in the reality of a country shown in terms of road insecurity and fraud, thus putting “las condiciones de producción de la enunciación en un espacio ambiguo en el que se enturbian algunas reglas implícitas de la ficción pero también de lo informativo” (Hortiguera 118) [“the production of the story-telling conditions in an ambiguous place in which some implicit rules of fiction and information get blurred”]. The opening text of the film is the following:

22 muertos por día, 683 por mes, más de 8.000 por año, 100.000 muertes en la última década. En la Argentina los accidentes de tránsito son la principal causa de muerte en menores de 35 años. Esto sostiene un millonario negocio de indemnizaciones.

[22 deaths per day, 683 per month, more than 8,000 per year, 100,000 deaths in the last decade. In Argentina, road traffic accidents are the leading cause of death among individuals younger than 35 years. This is what feeds the million-dollar compensation business.]

The beginning sequence of *Carancho* provides the information necessary to learn about the characters and their surroundings. It centers on the description of environments, the characters' employments, and the narrative and aesthetic treatment of both the characters and their milieus. As to the plotline in this opening sequence, it ends with the protagonists' meeting, which operates as the driving force of the film and is thus central to its development. At the visual level, this opening sequence constructs the antihero

image which Darín interprets from outside of the classical concept of star. Far from highlighting the figure of the actor, the close-up shots enclose him in obscure spaces, thus showing him in his vulnerability, injured and corrupt. Traces of a sort of instrumental use of Darín's image at the narrative level as well as a performance fully integrated to dramatic action can therefore be identified (Maltby 256). Darín's performance is fully committed to the role, as shown, for example, by his facial and bodily expressions that reveal true discomfort both in the narration and in the way in which he is filmed—unlike classic film stars.

The film begins intercalating black-and-white pictures of a car accident and initial credits ending with the statistical figures. Then, a shot at ground level shows someone severely beaten up who is later recognized as Sosa, the protagonist. He has been beaten up by two men and has fallen down to the floor. One of them has furiously insulted him: “¡Hubieras esperado que lo entierren, hijo de mil putas!” [“You could have waited until he was buried, you son of a bitch!”]. After a straight cut, there follows a close-up of a foot receiving an injection and then a mirror reflecting the face of a woman, Luján, who will have a central role in the story. The fates of these characters imbricate until the end of the film. This imbrication is initially shown in the story through an alternating montage. A close-up shot of Sosa kneeling down with pain trying to recover from the blow he has received and a close-up of Luján weave in with others showing both of them getting nearer to the place where an accident has taken place. The siren of the ambulance in which Luján is traveling intensifies the action and adds urgency to the situation. These first minutes of the film are only fully elucidated as the plot progresses. Nonetheless, they are key to understanding the configuration of the genre and the way in which the audience can approach the characters and determine their place in the plot.

The first general close-up of Sosa shows him sitting down in his car waiting to go to an accident site, in front of the “Cocherías velatorias” [“Wakes



and Funeral Services”] signboard which synthesizes the environments in which he moves. The protagonists finally meet each other, converging in the same shot showing an accident site with a victim in need of assistance. After this opening sequence, Sosa’s *character image*, which begins to be constructed with details about his public, private, and professional life, is the first aspect to be delineated with maximum sharpness and information: Sosa, an attorney whose license has been confiscated, works for a company that overcharges car accident victims for filing questionable car accident insurance lawsuits, thereby cheating low-income clients. “Le dan dos gambas por el dato y si el caso es bueno después le dan trescientos más” [“They pay two *gambas* for the tip and if the case is good they pay three hundred more”], one of Luján’s workmates explains to her.<sup>7</sup> Luján is a young emergency physician, newly arrived to Buenos Aires, who is regularly on duty for several hours at a time because she needs to accumulate working hours. Both protagonists live alone, there are neither references to nor traces of a family throughout the film, and they have no social relations except those of the workplace. The only social event to which they go, in fact, is the fifteenth birthday celebration of the daughter of one of Luján’s patients.

As to their public life, from the dialogues and the composition of shots—e.g. the opening shot at ground level showing the body of Sosa, beaten and bleeding, forced to occupy the place of the victims on whom he has regularly preyed—, the audience may infer that the protagonist has a bad reputation: that he is known as “Carancho” and is regarded as a bad person because he takes advantage of the vulnerability of car accident victims to cheat them. Luján knows about his bad reputation. The mistrust and distance with which she regards him at first leads Sosa to ask her, “¿qué tengo que hacer para que no me mires así, con miedo?” [“What do I have to do for you not to look at me that way, with fear?”]. In attempting to change and do things the way they should be done, Sosa angers his boss (Casal), who does not hesitate in



threatening them (Sosa and Luján) if they spoil his business. Sosa's negative public image starts to affect that of Luján, who begins to be questioned by her boss as a result of her relationship with Sosa and who is ultimately beaten up by Sosa's boss.

As to the moral dimension of the character that Darín interprets in *Carancho*, he embodies a contradiction that gives rise to the conflict of the film. However, this contradiction only arises when Sosa meets Luján, i.e. when a feeling of remorse and an urgent need to leave his job emerge in himself. Sosa wants to leave things in order, but, in keeping with his antiheroic role, he inevitably sinks down more and more. His last commitment for the company goes wrong. After Luján is severely beaten, Sosa ends up brutally killing his boss by beating him in revenge, thus triggering the final, characteristic outcome of *film noir*. "Algo tenía que salir mal ¿no?" ["Something had to go wrong, hadn't it?]," he asks in a resigned tone, somehow anticipating his inexorable fate.

In terms of character evolution, the audience first comes across an obscure person with a suspicious profession and it soon becomes clear that although Sosa is not happy with his current job, he must keep on doing it. Though he is familiar with the world of law and lawsuits, it is forbidden for him to work as an attorney because his license has been suspended. Without a license, his work field is quite limited. When Sosa meets Luján, however, he wants to stop working for the corrupt company to begin working on his own to recover his license. He tells her that before meeting her, he wanted to just leave and live somewhere new, but when he began to see her more frequently, he decided to stay where he was and attempt to better his life. Trying to delve into his past and learn why he was tempted to have such a crooked job, Luján asks him why his license was suspended, to which Sosa simply replies, "tuve mala suerte" ["I was not lucky"]. He is thus a controversial antihero, an upholder of the law who must have done something wrong.

The physical qualities instilled in Darín's *star image* are functional as well as favorable to the construction of his character. For Sosa, to have star charisma is necessary in order to convince car accident victims that they can trust him with their cases. When he tries to stop working for Casal, i.e. when he wants to do things properly and legally, Casal openly says to him that he needs him in the company: "a vos te creen, a mí no" ["They believe in you, not in me"]. It could thus be possible to think in terms of a full identification between the actor's image as a star and the *character image*, which refers to the relationship between the attorney and his clients, on the one hand, and the relationship between the actor and his audience, on the other. While the *character image* depicts Darín (the star) as Sosa (the antihero) in *Carancho*, it is the *promotion image* that is the means through which the audience first makes contact with the star and his character in a particular film.

### ***Promotion image***

The production highlights the actor's *star image* through different mass media, namely advertisements, radio and television interviews, websites, and promotional posters distributed along the streets. Discussing publicity, Dyer claims,

It is thus often taken to give a privileged access to the real person of the star. It is also the place where one can read tensions between the star-as-person and her/his image, tensions which at another level become themselves crucial to the image (*Stars* 61).

Argentine films starred by Darín have massive diffusion in spite of the difficulties of Argentine cinema in circulating among different environments and in attracting spectators. As an exception to the general rule, newspapers anticipated *Carancho*'s premiere with promising headlines, such as "Llega Carancho, la nueva película de Ricardo Darín" (Irigoyen) ["Here comes

*Carancho*, Ricardo Darín's new film"], attributing authorship to Darín, the protagonist, rather than Trapero, the director.

The elements that have to do with the *promotion image* directly affect the construction of the *character image*. In interviews with the director and the actors of the film, reference was made about the way in which characters were constructed and, in several cases, they also spoke about the motivations underlying such constructions. They also discussed the duality and complexity of the characters as well as the acting work. For example, Trapero remarked that in the film, Darín shows a new facet as an actor and interprets a more visceral and tormented character compared to other roles he had interpreted. In his view, this role requires a more intense bodily work that makes Darín pass through a variety of acting hues infrequently seen along his cinematographic career (Bernal). As to the title of the film, Trapero explained that thanks to its size and shape, the carancho is also an attractive bird, thus being possible to extrapolate its characteristics to Sosa's character whose duality lies precisely in its obscure—though attractive at the same time—side. Darín also highlighted this duality in an interview about his interpretation in the film:

-Es su papel más físico, ¿no es así? Más visceral que intelectual.

-Animal, diría yo. Los caranchos son pájaros muy hermosos pero a la vez muy peligrosos. Yo quise actuar como un carancho, resultar carismático y amenazante a la vez. De todos modos, mi personaje empieza siendo el depredador y acaba siendo la presa. Dibujar esa evolución no fue fácil. Casi acaba conmigo ("No soy").

[- It is your most physical performance, isn't it? More visceral than intellectual.

-Animalistic, I would say. Caranchos are beautiful birds but very dangerous at the same time. I wanted to behave as a carancho. I wanted to be charismatic and menacing at the same time. Anyway, my character begins as that of the predator and ends up being the prey. Drawing this evolution was not an easy task. It almost ends with me as well]



When asked about the research he carried out, Darín answered with his direct and sagacious style:

Yo no hice investigación... ¡Conozco cada carancho hijo de puta! La investigación me la pasó Pablo y el equipo que armó la historia. Martina hizo algo muy diferente, que valoro mucho y que habla de una dedicación al trabajo admirable. Yo, llegado el caso, lo haría, pero no me pasó. Los actores tenemos distintas formas de aproximarnos a nuestros personajes y todas son válidas. Podés meterte para adentro y encontrar cosas en común con alguien aparentemente tan alejado. Yo trato de no ser juez con mis personajes porque te encorseta (Lerer, 2010a).

[I didn't carry out any research... I know caranchos that are such sons of bitches! Pablo and the team, who worked on the plot, passed on to me the research they carried out. Martina did something different which I greatly appreciate and which shows an admirable dedication to work. I would have eventually done so but in this case, I didn't. We as actors have different ways of approaching our characters and they are all valid. You can get inside yourself and still find things in common with someone apparently too far from you. I try not to be a judge of my own characters because doing so puts you in a straitjacket].

As to Luján's character, Martina Gusmán claimed that her duality lies in the strength and coldness of her profession, on the one hand, and the vulnerability and fragility that oblige her to be somehow anesthetized so as to be able to tolerate the reality within which she works, on the other hand. The duality of both characters does make a complementary fusion: Sosa tries to redeem himself through Luján and wants to stop doing what he is doing to live with her, whereas by means of her relationship with Sosa, Luján awakens from the lethargy in which she feels herself trapped as well as from her relentless work routine.

Image trailers are the first extrafilmic elements through which spectators get in contact with the film and anticipate the protagonists' characteristics. For example, the trailer for *Carancho* begins with Luján accusing Sosa: "se acaba de morir un tipo por tu culpa, ¿vos entendés?" ["A guy has just died because of you. Do you understand?"]. In parallel, the promotional poster iconically

delineates the protagonists by means of a close-up shot of Sosa's and Luján's injured faces while Sosa is wielding a gun. All of these resources regarding the movie help guarantee the presence of a large number of spectators and at the same time arouse audience expectations, securing one more time the promising performance of a consecrated figure of the artistic medium. According to Barry King, extrafilmic discourse, rather than performance itself, is key to enlarging the audience's knowledge about movie stars (174). The *promotion image* contributes to the evolution of Darín's *star image*, as does the *reception image*.

### ***Reception image***

Although criticisms and comments are based—albeit peripherally—, according to Dyer, around a *star image*, they evidence the response to such image and ratify the general opinion of the audience about it. Film critics have put Darín's work within the framework of the police movies in which he has starred, and there has been unanimous consensus that he is a leading movie star of Argentine cinema. Diego Lerer associates the actor with the character, remarking that the face of the character expresses “agotamiento ante el mundo: es como si el actor y el personaje estuvieran pidiendo por alguien que los saque de allí, urgentemente” (2010b) [“exhaustion before the world: it is as though both the actor and the character are asking for someone to urgently remove them from the world”]. Likewise, Diego Batlle declares in *Otros Cines* that in this film, the actor fully involves himself in Trapero's universe (in his characters, in his codes and scenarios), not letting the plot “se adapte al estilo que el astro cultivara, por ejemplo, en el cine de Juan José Campanella” (“Golpe a golpe”) [“be adapted to the actor's typical acting style, as in, for example, Juan José Campanella's filmography”]. In more or less similar terms to those of Batlle, Luciano Monteagudo claims, “Ricardo Darín aprovecha un

guión que trabaja a partir de la personalidad cinematográfica construida por el propio actor —el porteño sinuoso pero finalmente querible—y se adapta muy bien al mundo más crudo y menos sentimental de Trapero” (“Poner el cuerpo”) [“Ricardo Darín takes advantage of a script whose progress is based on the cinematographic personality that the actor proper constructs himself—the sinuous but finally loving *porteño*—and adapts himself perfectly well to Trapero’s most crude and least sentimental film”]. All of these comments contribute to elucidating the expectations derived from the premieres in which the actor participates. That is, Darín’s *character image* is evaluated and his versatility to adapt himself to the director’s style instead of being the other way around is highlighted. At the same time, the idea of a “constructed cinematographic personality”, i.e. a recognizable acting pattern along a series of films, a phenomenon for which King has coined the term “personification,” is also highlighted.

*Carancho*’s popularity through Darín’s *star image* transcended the artistic world. Interestingly, after its premiere, the film promoted the issuing of an “anticarancho” act in Argentina to protect victims against car accidents and to prevent them from being cheated by attorneys eager to take advantage of them by filing crooked compensation lawsuits (represented by Sosa). It is thus interesting to see how in spite of his role of antihero, Darín is successful not only in depicting a highly topical issue but also in making society aware of it, inducing legal mechanisms that could protect families and victims against accidents and against the “caranchos” that fly over them.

### **Final considerations**

The study of Ricardo Darín’s performance in *Carancho* lets us see his star power. He is characterized by his proximity to and complicity with the audience, acclaiming him both in Argentina and in Europe, and he is recognized as the ideal middle-class *porteño*. The character constructed in the film not only alters the traditional concept of a star in terms of classical

narrative, but also cancels its mythical aura by presenting a *film noir* antihero. This characterization allows the actor to adapt himself to the poetry of Trapero, whose filmography initially associated with non-professional actors does not condition Darín's work but, exactly the opposite, makes it flow in a perfect symbiosis.

For these analytical purposes, a methodological approach similar to that followed in other studies on stars of the last decades was used to examine the phenomenon that results from different texts (filmic, promotional, critical) and that is constructed around star figures at a certain moment. *Film noir* discourse can be identified in *Carancho* following a non-conventional treatment of the filmic strategies through which Darín, an outstanding star, interprets the role of an antihero.

Through the analysis of the *character image* of the role interpreted by Darín, as well as through the examination of the character's evolution and development, it can be observed that Darín's *star image* is subordinated to Trapero's narrative and visual poetic requirements. This subordination is achieved by altering the classical concept of cinema that highlights both the figure and the beauty of the star over the plot development and by promoting not the physical features of the star but the instrumental utilization of Darín's image fully integrated into the dramatic action. On the other hand, at the visual level, the actor-star personifies a beaten-up and punished antihero unable to save himself and confined to shots that are mainly obscure and, on certain occasions, focused at the ground level.

Based on all of the above, the conclusion is that there is a strong identification between Ricardo Darín's *star image* and the *character image*, which is influenced by both the *promotion image* and the *reception image*. That is, Sosa, the antihero that Darín constructs all along the film, does indeed need the actor's charisma to convince potential clients. It is this charisma and



magnetism that consolidates his star power and strengthens, film after film, his relationship with the public.

Translated by Viviana Soler

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## Notas

1 This film was produced by Pol-Ka, one of the most important TV production companies in Argentina.

2 Dyer makes a distinction between film promotion and film publicity. The former is related to the texts that are produced as part of the construction process of a *star image*, such as announcements, press reports, photographs, public presentations, etc. Publicity refers to interviews for the radio and TV and society columns. It is mainly based on press releases and journals, whose content is not necessarily restricted to the films themselves but may also include personal issues (60-61). The *promotion image* herein considered indistinctly covers *Carancho's* promotion and publicity.

3 A "carancho" is a bird of prey that lives in South America and feeds on carrion from, for example, the animals run over on roads.

4 San Justo is in the La Matanza district in the province of Buenos Aires.

5 Darín had already worked in this genre as the main character in *La señal* (2007), a film he also directed.

6 The sound of ambulance sirens is recurrent in the film. There is one scene that takes place in a hospital emergency room rife with gunshots and verbal aggression.

7 Monetary system. In the Lunfardo dialect, "two *gambas*" means two hundred Argentine pesos.

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# Argus-a

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