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NATIONAL CINEMAS



A Companion to
Spanish Cinema

Edited by Jo Labanyi and Tatjana Pavlović

 WILEY-BLACKWELL

A Companion to Spanish Cinema

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Jo Labanyi and Tatjana Pavlović

 **WILEY-BLACKWELL**

A John Wiley & Sons, Ltd., Publication

This edition first published 2013
© 2013 Blackwell Publishing Ltd.

Blackwell Publishing was acquired by John Wiley & Sons in February 2007. Blackwell's publishing program has been merged with Wiley's global Scientific, Technical, and Medical business to form Wiley-Blackwell.

Registered Office

John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, The Atrium, Southern Gate, Chichester, West Sussex, PO19 8SQ, UK

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

A companion to Spanish cinema / edited by Jo Labanyi and Tatjana Pavlović. – 1

p. cm. – (Wiley-Blackwell companions to national cinemas)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-4051-9438-9 (hardback)

1. Motion pictures—Spain. I. Labanyi, Jo. II. Pavlović, Tatjana.

PN1993.5.S7C6595 2012

791.430946—dc23

2012023050

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Cover design by Nicki Averill.

Cover image from *El Sur* (Víctor Eríce, 1983; prod. Elías Querejeta PC). Courtesy of Video Mercury and Filmoteca Española.

Set in 11/13pt Dante by SPi Publisher Services, Pondicherry, India

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Acknowledgments

Our special thanks to Margarita Lobo, Alicia Potes, and Miguel Soria at Filmoteca Española in Madrid for their help with locating and providing graphic material, and with identifying copyright holders. We also thank Elena Baranda of Video Mercury for granting permission to reproduce a significant number of images, including the still from Víctor Erice's *El sur* used on the cover. We are also hugely grateful to Curry O'Day, tech support specialist at Tulane University, for his invaluable technical help with the illustrations. We owe a particular debt to Jayne Fagnoli of Wiley-Blackwell for her faith in our ability to produce an innovative volume, and to Galen Young and Allison Kostka for their efficiency throughout the production process.

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Introduction

Jo Labanyi and Tatjana Pavlović

The aim of this volume is not only to provide detailed information about cinema made in Spain from its beginnings to the present day but also, above all, to question existing paradigms. A key issue that emerges in its chapters is the transnational nature of Spanish cinema throughout its history – even under the highly nationalistic Franco dictatorship. To talk of Spanish cinema is to talk of its relations with other cinemas, through coproductions, through the sharing of actors and technical personnel, and particularly through its drawing on a common fund of formal, generic, and thematic concerns. Several chapters argue against the notion of Spanish cinema’s exceptionalism while also insisting on the importance of considering its historical and geographical specificities. The volume also makes a point of decentering the study of Spanish cinema by stressing the importance of Barcelona as the center of the film industry in its early decades (to our knowledge, the volume offers the first history of cinematic production in Catalonia from its origins to the present available in any book on Spanish cinema) and by giving detailed attention to cinematic production in Spain’s major autonomous communities: not just those that have their own language (Catalonia, the Basque Country, and Galicia) but also Andalusia, which has marketed “Andalusian cinema” as a brand – one that is transnational rather than strictly local, since the aim has been to attract filmmakers from outside the area to film there. The transnational and the local are thus seen as intertwined throughout the history of cinematic production in Spain.

The volume also works against the common concentration on art cinema in much discussion of Spanish film. We have given equal attention to production aimed at a discerning elite and that aimed at the popular audiences to which the film industry – for it is an industry – has always catered, examining the often

political processes that assign certain directors to the canon or exclude them from it. In this respect, cinema is seen as part of a continuum of cultural production involving other media – such as amusement parks, bullfighting and football, popular theater and the musical revue, literature, and television – and as bound up with other forms of cultural practice such as fashion and political activism. Considerable attention is given to the ways in which audiences have engaged with Spanish films, through their active participation in the star system (one of the industry's major marketing devices, but one gladly embraced by spectators) and fandom (particularly for genres perceived as marginal to hegemonic values, such as horror). The volume consequently considers cinema – especially in the case of cult movies and box-office hits – to be a valuable indicator of how cultural tastes have evolved in Spain over the course of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

While most individual chapters adopt a chronological approach, the volume as a whole has been conceived on a thematic basis – something that again distinguishes it from existing histories of Spanish cinema. This allows consideration not just of individual films (though these are considered too, since many chapters focus on particular case studies) but of how these films form part of a cinematic apparatus comprising production companies, film studios, a broad range of film workers (cameramen, screenwriters, editors, as well as directors and actors), film clubs, festivals, archives, and film magazines directed at both specialist and popular audiences. In addition to the making and exhibition of films, the volume also considers questions of state regulation (censorship and subsidies), including the cinema policies of the major film-producing autonomous communities, and of preservation and restoration. We have made a point of including discussion of non-fiction film, often left out of studies of “national” cinemas since newsreels, documentaries, shorts, and animation have their own conventions and – with the exception of the mid-twentieth-century newsreels screened in cinema theaters, such as the Francoist NO-DO – have different exhibition circuits from the feature film. Experimental film is considered together with other forms of non-fiction film, to avoid subjecting it to the same analytical criteria that govern the fiction film. It is noted that some Spanish practitioners of non-fiction film have obtained a level of international recognition rarely achieved by Spanish feature-film directors.

We have also aimed to avoid the analysis of films primarily in terms of their subject matter, which characterizes much existing work on Spanish cinema. We thus have no chapters devoted to films “about” a particular topic (the city, women, or immigrants, to cite some of the favorites with critics), though of course such issues come up in the process of discussing films grouped together under other headings. One section focuses exclusively on cinematic techniques, visual and acoustic: we believe the discussion in this section of the historical evolution of camerawork, production design, editing, and soundtrack (including dubbing and film music) to be unique as well as enormously productive. Our main category for