



Schwartz, Ronald. *Great Spanish Films Since 1950*. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, INC., 2008. Print.

In *Great Spanish Films Since 1950*, Ronald Schwartz presents a compendium of his favorite Spanish films from the beginnings of the Franco era through the Spanish New Wave of the 1980's and 1990's and on into the present day. In each film selected, Schwartz provides background information about the cultural and/or political significance, key plot points, and social commentaries. In addition to the selection of key movies from six decades of Spanish cinema, Schwartz also provides the reader with a chronology of the Spanish film tradition highlighting significant waves of innovation and political trends during the different eras of film production since 1896.

The organization of *Great Spanish Films Since 1950* divides films into six sections by decades, and Schwartz provides basic information,

background and plot discussion, and commentary through critical prose. The background of each film has a write up which places emphasis on the social significance and cultural importance of each film. Schwartz is a self-proclaimed fan of this genre of film and, as retired professor his passion for Spanish film is very apparent from the beginning of the volume.

Through the introduction Schwartz makes a personal statement on the basis of his love for Spanish film. Additionally, he gives a background to the time period studied by painting a picture of pre-50's Spanish cinema as escapist and stereotypical by emphasizing the superficial themes and self-stereotyping *españoladas*. As Franco's dictatorship and censorship set-in, Spanish film begins to grow in new directions and to present political statements that are often in contradiction with the iron rule.

In the beginning of the Franco regime Spanish national cinema was subjected to the scrutiny and will of a politically directed censorship. The stifling of the voice of protest only lasted so long, and by the 1950's a new wave of film and directorship began to move away from the conformist ideals and to offer a bold brand of Spanish realism. Among the directors in the 1950's and early 1960's, filmmakers like Juan Antonio Bardem, Luis García Berlanga, and Luis Buñuel proposed their liberal image of Spain to the world in such films as *Muerte de un ciclista*, *Bienvenido Mister Marshall*, and *Viridiana*. This tradition of new directors continued with the emergence of the likes of Víctor Erice, Carlos Saura and others during the 1960's and 1970's.

These films are full of anti-government sentiment and barely or occasionally don't, escape the censoring eye. Schwartz accents the relevance of these films with background information that serves to explain these social statements and cultural contexts that help to shape the significance of these films as political statements. For example, in the selection of *Bienvenido Mister Marshall*, Schwartz highlights the political importance of the title and how it relates the Marshall Plan and its exclusion of Spain. Schwartz also comments on the satiric humor Berlanga used to deliver his message and the film's reception at various screenings including the Cannes Film Festival.

The year 1975 marked the death of Franco and the abolishment of censorship, and in turn, Spanish cinema, slowly but surely, began to explore many formerly taboo subjects such as sexuality, drugs, the Catholic Church,

the army, suicide and the Civil War. Schwartz asserts that such new explorations were not only managed by the mainstay directors, like Berlanga, Bardem or Saura, but also by young and emerging directors in the “new wave” of Spanish film, like Imanol Uribe, Pedro Almodóvar, Fernando Trueba, and Alejandro Amenábar. In reference to Almodóvar movies, such as *Todo sobre mi madre*, Schwartz touches on the fresh taboo subject matter present, such as transvestite prostitutes and homosexuality. Schwartz also comments on the new insights into feminine psychology and the subject of the sexually liberated woman presented through the quartet of man-chasing sisters in *Belle époque* by Fernando Trueba.

Schwartz also includes a section of “other notable films,” presented in chronological order along the same development of the decade’s sections. Schwartz goes on to give background and plot information for these films as well. For one reason or another, these films were relegated to their own section, but their relevance is hardly understated. The appendices catalogue the nominees and winners of the Academy, Cinema Writers Circle and Goya Awards in Spanish cinema. In the “Chronology” section, Schwartz provides the reader with a reference guide that outlines major events and films in the evolution of Spanish cinema from 1896 to the present.

In conclusion, *Great Spanish Films Since 1950* is great introduction to Spanish cinema; Schwartz’s passion for these films is apparent and provides the reader with an ample amount of information that will peak anyone’s interest in the subject of Spanish film. As a chronological reference guide, it stands as an invaluable resource to scholars, students, and fans alike. As a textbook, *Great Spanish Films Since 1950* would be perfect in an introductory course of Spanish film. The main decade sections provide the most essential material for a survey in socially and politically relevant Spanish films while the appendices and “other notable films” sections provide supplemental material.

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