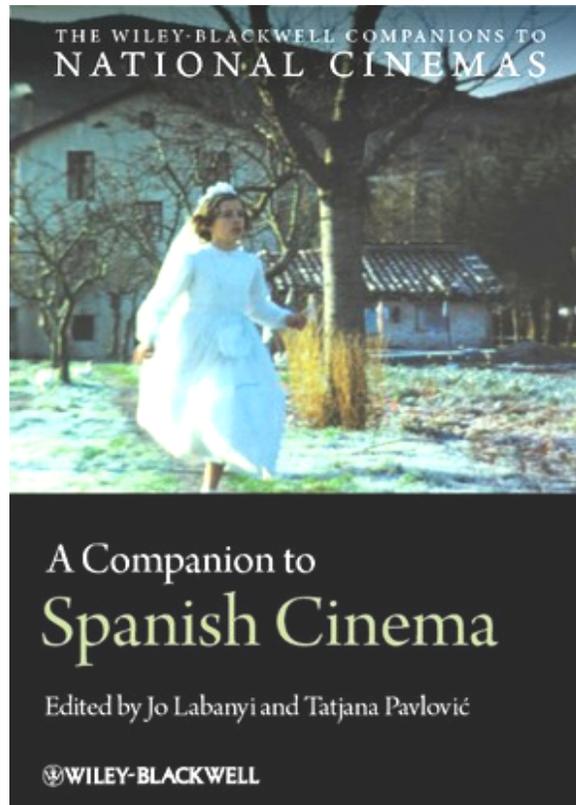


Book Reviews



Labanyi, Jo, and Tatjana Pavlović, eds. *A Companion to Spanish Cinema*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013. 638p.

In 2008, Bernard P.E. Bentley published *A Companion to Spanish Cinema* in the Tamesis monograph series. The title of this new volume should not mislead us; it is, in fact, a new and different “companion.”

Bentley’s *Companion* is his own, single-author chronological study of Spanish cinema from its beginnings (“The Silent Reels of the Photographers [1896-1918]”) to its entry “Into the Twenty-First Century.” Though the overall organization is somewhat canonically chronological,

individual chapters are subdivided as to genre, director, production issues, and so on.

Recent scholarship on Spanish cinema has supposed a sort of paradigm shift away from the chronology of production history and canonical authors. Questioning accepted, privileged histories rooted in entrenched cultural narratives, the shift has been towards the recovery of other film practices, such as the reception and consumption of popular genres (horror films, for example), and the recovery of other filmmakers (Jess Franco, for example); and towards the re-examination of the very construction of Spanish film canon and history; as well as a movement towards the inclusion of other critical models. And, it is this paradigm shift in the scholarship on Spanish cinema to which Jo Labanyi and Tatjana Pavlović's *A Companion to Spanish Cinema* responds.

While editors Labanyi and Pavlović contribute importantly to the new *Companion*, their volume brings together twenty-six of the best scholars currently working on Spanish cinema. The volume organizes its "parts" according to themes consistent with the Wiley-Blackwell series aim to give coverage to dominant themes of films; writers, directors, and stars; key influences; reception, historiography and scholarship.

Twenty-one essays or chapters, most of which are the product of more than one author, are organized into nine different thematic parts which are preceded by an "introduction." This introduction sets the tone for the entire collection in its very first sentence which announces overall dual aims of providing detailed information and questioning existing paradigms.

One of the most interesting parts of the volume is "Part I: Reframing the National." At first blush, this part would seem somewhat paradoxical. This volume is the fourth in the *Wiley-Blackwell Companions to National Cinemas*, adding to extant volumes on German, Chinese, and East European cinemas, and anticipating similar 20-25 essay collections on Latin American, Australia, Scandinavia and the like, yet it questions (reframes) the very notion of a Spanish national cinema. An essay by Gerard Dapena, Marvin D'Lugo and Alberto Elena, for example, reminds the reader that at nearly every moment throughout the development of cinema in Spain, there have been transnational overtones to filmic production, be it in the presence of foreign directors, producers and actors in Spain, the filming of foreign productions in Spain, or in more

recent forms of coproduction. The whole notion of a Spanish national cinema is further put into question when the focus is decentered to include Catalan, Basque, Galician and Andalusian cinemas, the subject of two other essays which "reframe the national."

The two essays (chapters) of Part II deal with the concept of "auteur," a label which, though it continues to be strategic, proves to be fragile enough to allow for critique. While the first of the essays treats canonical Spanish auteurs (Buñuel, Saura, Almodóvar, Erice, Medem, Amenábar), it questions many of the common assumptions which enter into the auteurist equation. And, having done this, it is possible to recuperate other lesser known directorial voices (Berlanga, Eloy de la Iglesia). Other questioned tenets of the *politique des auteurs* are its dismissiveness towards filmmaking's collaborative processes and its androcentrism, and a critique of these aspects of auteurist discourse opens the door to considering the "authorial signature" of other collaborators. In this vein, welcome contributions of this *Companion* are the cases made for filmmakers Jess Franco and Pere Portabella, for screenwriters Rafael Azcona and Pedro Beltrán, for film editors Sara Ontañón and Margarita Ochoa, and, to a lesser extent, for women directors Josefina Molina, Pilar Miró, Cecilia Bartolomé and Isabel Coixet, as worthy of auteurist status.

Two of the longer parts of the volume are parts III and VI, dedicated to "genre" and "film apparatus: production, infrastructure, and audiences," respectively. Their six chapters added to those dealing with transnationality account for fully one-half of the *Companion*, and the space dedicated to these topics is deserved and well-spent.

Approaching genre as a flexible, evolving category characterized as much by continuity as by change, each of the three essays in Part III discusses two or three interrelated genres: first, comedy and musicals; second, melodrama and historical film; then, *noir*, thriller, and horror. Consistent with the earlier-established trend of the volume, the approach to genre calls attention to links with other national cinemas and cultures as the development and implications of Spanish film is traced. The evolution of the different genres, often testing limits, seems to parallel political and social change in Spain. Common to the three essays is the idea that each genre, in its own fashion, relies on haptic visual forms which elicit material spectator response.

The three essays which comprise *A Companion to Spanish Cinema's* "Part VI" look at cinema as a medium where political, industrial, and artistic practices intertwine. Because the topic is Spanish cinema, common to all these considerations is the specter of censorship, which helped to produce strategies of resistance as well wise audiences. An explanation of the industrial history of Spanish cinema makes the reader aware of the complexities of financial interests, production models, and tense relationships with other media. An analysis of film clubs, festivals, and magazines shows their importance to the promotion of film, to possibilities for alternatives, to the formation of political dissidence, and to the recuperation and preservation of film history, always with attention to the political function the activities of these agencies imply. Part VI ends by presenting an overview of audience studies, exemplifying both qualitative and quantitative research approaches to reception.

Short, one-chapter parts deal with "Relations with Other Media" and "Beyond the Fiction Film." The first argues for the need to consider film in the context of the culture industry as a whole. This means an examination of relationships between cinema and popular entertainment, literature, and television. In this last case, it is clear that the relationship has been industrial, generic, and artistic. The examination of marginalized practices in Spanish cinema focuses on documentary, experimental, short, and animated film. The most detailed examination is this part of the *Companion* is dedicated to the newsreel NO-DO, a testimony to Francoism's cultural and economic isolationism. In contrast, Spanish experimental, short, and animated film is best characterized by a tradition of hybridization and crossover with other arts.

The examination of any national cinema could not be complete without a consideration of the stars it has produced. "Stars as Cultural Icons" (Part IV), consists of two essays which trace star construction since the 1920's and underscore the importance of transnationality to the star system which owes a huge debt to a material publicity infrastructure.

Also historically organized is the examination of "Image and Sound" (Part V), which follows visual and sound trajectory from the move from silent to sound cinema to the 1990's renewed importance of film composers. Kathleen Vernon's section on dubbing analyzes the controversies and the consequences of a sound practice so central to the development Spanish cinema.

A Companion to Spanish Cinema concludes with "Reading Films through Theory" (Part IX), a synchronic complement to the, though thematically organized, diachronic organization of the rest of the volume. Three essays provide examples of current film analysis practice, offering close readings of filmic texts with each essay informed by a different theoretical model. The theoretical models are in no way exhaustive. In fact, two of the essays use gender theory: the first, looking at two films by Isabel Coixet and their relationship to feminist critical theory; and the second, analyzing the destabilizing gender positions in Pedro Almodóvar's *Todo sobre mi madre* through the optics of queer theory. The third essay is theoretically eclectic as it examines Ivan Zulueta's material/immaterial, seeing/not seeing practices. All three approaches rest heavily on haptic features, echoing a theme often touched on throughout the volume.

With their *A Companion to Spanish Cinema*, editors Labanyi and Pavlović have put together a unique volume with the thematic approach to the history of Spanish cinema. This *Companion* is also provocative, as many of the top international scholars in the field question prevailing assumptions, beginning with the questioning of the very notion of Spanish national cinema. Studying forms that range from art cinema to popular cinema through experimental, documentary, short, and animated film, this collection of essays is valuable reading for students and teachers of Spanish film and Spanish culture, and it is necessary reading for anyone with experience in these fields.

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