

CONTEMPORARY SPANISH FILM

2024-2025

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DESCRIPTION

This course aims to help students develop a cross-cultural approach to Spanish society and history through an overview of Spanish cinema from the early 1970s to the present.

Films offer an exceptional aesthetic experience but also a unique opportunity to reflect on relevant social themes covering the last five decades of the country. These include, among others, the notions of nationality, history and memory, class struggle, political change, unemployment, cultural stereotypes and multiculturalism, youth and generational conflict, gender issues, and terrorism.

The course provides a theoretical framework to facilitate a deep understanding of the cultural relevance of cinema in Spain's society, and to comprehend how the political, social and economic evolution of the country is portrayed through films.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of this course students should be able to comparatively analyse a range of films representative of different contexts and national traditions and critically assess their relevance for both the recent history of the country and in the field of film studies. Students should also be able to appreciate, analyse, and discuss the various ways that the Spanish cinema can serve as a vehicle for examining both international and national concerns.

The learning outcomes of this course are:

- a) Apply theoretical frameworks to the analysis of cinema; comprehend the basic skills of film analysis.
- b) Write fluently and persuasively.
- c) Independently research relevant materials to broaden and deepen the knowledge of the topic.

Other, more specific, learning outcomes include:

- a) Analyse key films and scholarly readings both in discussion and in written form.
- b) Demonstrate and apply knowledge of the historical, industrial and cultural contexts of Spanish film production.
- c) Critically examine the role of 'nation' and national identity in cinema production.
- d) Know the main references (titles, authors, stylistic movements, etc.) in the recent history of Spanish cinema, society and culture.
- e) Reflect on the most relevant conflicts in Spain's contemporary debates.

COURSE SUMMARY (organized in fourteen weeks)¹:

Week 1. Introduction

Introduction to the course: goals, methodology and forms of evaluation. On cinema, history and nation. An introduction to Spanish cinema before 1973: commercial cinema and the New Spanish Cinema of the 1960s.

Reference film: *Surcos* [Furrows], J.-A. Nieves Conde, 1951.

Week 2. Looking back and moving forward: a cinema in Transition during the 1970s

Spain's art cinema during the years of transition to democracy. Films interested in critically examining the present and refocusing the past. Main *auteurs*, subjects and stylistic devices. Metaphorical cinema for a new kind of audiences.

Reference film: *El espíritu de la colmena* [The Spirit of the Beehive], V. Erice, 1973.

Week 3. Filming social change (and its challenges)

A country going from a dictatorship to a democracy: How to address the present and still be commercial? *Cine de la Tercera vía*, or Third Way Cinema; other popular alternatives and genre cinema in the 1970s; 'New Madrid Comedy'; realism and exploitation in the *Quinqui* cinema.

Reference film: *Función de noche*, Josefina Molina, 1980

Week 4. Pop sensibilities and underground

Readdressing the present from the underground. The new liberties of the *Transición*, *La movida madrileña* and the new pop-sensibility in the early films of P. Almodóvar and Iván Zulueta around 1980. 'The best way of dealing with the history of the dictatorship is ignoring it'. From cult classics to museum's pieces.

Reference film: *Arrebato*, I. Zulueta, 1980.

Week 5. Prestige and heritage during the 1980s

What is cinema of quality? And how can the state promote it in years of shrinking audiences? Changing paradigms in the Spanish cinema of the 1980s. Midcult and Middlebrow in the literary adaptations and historical cinema.

Reference film: *Los santos inocentes* [The Holy Innocents], M. Camus, 1984.

¹ 14 weeks is the usual length of academic each term. Each year, this general structure of the course will be adapted according the academic calendar of UCM. Each week's subjects will be distributed in two 90 minutes sessions.

Week 6. The return of the genre in the 1990s

Can commercial be good? New generations of filmmakers (Álex de la Iglesia, Alejandro Amenábar, Julio Medem...) are breaking with decades-old traditions and redefining what *Spanishness* may be. The transformation of the Spanish film culture during the 1990s.

Reference film: *La comunidad* [Common wealth], A. de la Iglesia, 2000.

Week 7. Realist resistances around the turn of the century

The renewal of realist cinema: Fernando León de Aranoa, Achero Mañas, Icíar Boyaín or Benito Zambrano. Late capitalism, social conflict and unemployment in Spanish society at the turn of the century.

Reference film: *Los lunes al sol* [Mondays in the sun], F. León de Aranoa, 2000.

Week 8. New family models

How can motherhood help channel social tensions? Transformation of the Spanish society, changing roles and changing spaces of women. A matriarchal society?

Reference film: *Todo sobre mi madre* [All about my mother], P. Almodóvar, 1999.

Week 9. History and memory

Around the turn of the century, national cinema's growing interest in the past reflected a broader societal concern with questions of history and memory. The course will discuss the different cinematographic alternatives that channel this interest, while it will focus its attention on the new stylistic forms chosen to address these subjects, such as fantasy, horror and other kinds of genre films.

Reference film: *Pan's Labyrinth*, Guillermo del Toro, 2006.

Week 10. Nationalities

What can be done with a *problematic* heritage? Historical nationalities and the structural tensions in the Spanish state have often been portrayed by cinema. Terrorism (and its victims) has been central in some recent productions that will be discussed in the course.

Reference film: *Maixabel*, Icíar Bollaín, 2021.

Week 11. Thrilling present

Recent (since 2010) *quality thrillers* that combine auteur sensibilities with mainstream fiction paradigms embrace a revisionist approach to the recent Spanish history. They offer a good chance to explore how mainstream fiction dialogues with the challenges that democracies face in twenty-first-century Europe.

Reference film: *La isla mínima* [Marshland], A. Rodríguez, 2014.

Week 12. Something is changing: Spain's new wave of female filmmakers

Over the last few years, films directed by young women such as *Las niñas*, by Pilar Palomero; *Cinco lobitos* by Alauda Ruiz de Azua; *El agua*, by Elena Lopez Riera; *20000 especies de Abejas* by Estibaliz Urresola Solaguren and *Libertad*, by Clara Roquet, have achieved general critical and public recognition. While different in their themes and style, they all share some similarities that the course will address while questioning the idea of a female perspective on subjects that are central in the Spanish contemporary public debate (family relations, social inequality, identity and gender, etc.).

Reference film: *Alcarrás*, Carla Simón, 2022.

Week 13. Rethinking the country beyond its urban centres. *Empty Spain*

Based on some questions pointedly summed up in the essay *La España vacía* (Sergio del Molino, 2016), some recent Spanish films have turned their attention to the country's problematic relation to its rural areas. In a way, focusing on this aspect closes the circle of the course, as it connects with questions originally posed by Furrows during the first week; at the same time, it opens the eyes to a debate that today still feels very alive in the public arena.

Reference film: *As bestas* [The beasts], R. Sorogoyen, 2022.

Week 14. The diversity of the present.

Critical evaluation of the course and conclusion.

METHODOLOGY

In each session the teacher outlines the general characteristics of each historical period and points out the most representative authors, genres, cycles and themes.

Each week's reference film will be commented in depth, focusing on its most paradigmatic aspects, with the help of texts provided by the teacher. At most class meetings, students will participate in informed discussion activities related to the day's topic and assigned reading, which are also related to class assignments.

Every week students will present a specific topic. These presentations may be individual or in small groups (2-3 people) and are related to the subjects discussed each week. The presentation will be followed by a class discussion. The teacher will provide topics, literature and references in advance.

The structure of the class is always open to the suggestions of the students.

Required Readings: Assigned readings for each class will be provided during the first week. This syllabus also offers a list of general references for the whole course.

Reference films for every week: Students are asked to watch a film in preparation for each week's classes. The titles have been selected according to their relevance for the contents of the course but also their accessibility for English-speaking students. As this may change, some of the titles may also change; the final selection may be communicated to all students by the beginning of the course.

ASSESSMENT

The final grade for this course will be based on:

- Weekly active participation and short assignments 20%
- In class presentation 30%
- Final paper (a 10-12 page paper) 20%
- Final oral test on the content of the final paper 30%

ATTENDANCE

This is an interactive class with structured daily discussion activities and workshops related to group assignments. Students are expected to attend class, though in-class activities and assignments can be made up if they need to miss class.

GENERAL BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES (in English)

Bentley, Bernard, *A Companion to Spanish Cinema*, Woodbridge: Tamesis, 2008

Canet, Fernando (ed), *Special Issue Contemporary Spanish Cinema*. *Hispanic Research Journal*, Volume 15, Issue 1, 2014

Delgado, Maria and Robin Fiddian (eds) *Spanish Cinema 1973 - 2010: Auteurism, Politics, Landscape and Memory*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013

Dennison, Stephanie (ed), *Contemporary Hispanic Cinema: Interrogating the Transnational in Spanish and Latin American Film*, Woodbridge: Tamesis, 2013

Ehrlich, Linda C. (ed), *An Open Window: The Cinema of Víctor Erice*. New Jersey: Scarecrow Press, 2000

Evans, Peter W. (ed), *Spanish Cinema. The Auteurist Tradition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999

Faulkner, Sally, *A Cinema of Contradiction: Spanish Film in the 1960s*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006

Faulkner, Sally, *A History of Spanish Film: Cinema and Society 1910-2010*, New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013

- Fouz-Hernández, Santiago & Martínez-Expósito, Alfredo, *Live Flesh: The Male Body in Contemporary Spanish Cinema*. New York: I. B. Tauri, 2007
- Hopewell, John, *Out of the Past. Spanish Cinema after Franco*, London: BFI Publishing, 1987
- Jordan, Barry, and Mark Allinson, *Spanish Cinema: A Student's Guide*, London: Hodder Arnold, 2005
- Kinder, Marsha, *Blood Cinema: The Reconstruction of National Identity in Spain*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993
- Labanyi, Jo and Tatjana Pavloviic (eds), *A Companion to Spanish Cinema*, Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013
- Marsh, Steven & Nair, Parvati (eds), *Gender and Spanish Cinema*. Oxford: Berg Publishers, 2004
- Pavlovic, Tatjana and others, 2009, *100 Years of Spanish Cinema*, Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009
- Perriam, Chris, *Stars and Masculinities in Spanish Cinema: From Banderas to Bardem*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003
- Perriam, Chris, *Spanish Queer Cinema*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013
- Thomas, Sarah, *Inhabiting the In-Between: Childhood and Cinema in Spain's Long Transition*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2019
- Triana-Toribio, Núria, *Spanish National Cinema*, London: Routledge, 2003
- Wright, Sarah, *The Child in Spanish Cinema*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013
- Yarza, Alejandro *The Making and Unmaking of Spanish Cinema. From Raza to Pan's Labyrinth*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018