

# The cinematographic portrait of Spain



## A REVIEW OF CINEMA, HISTORY & POLITICS IN SPAIN

---

# Cine con ñ

- 03** Brief history of Spain
- 04** About the portrait
- 06** El espíritu de la colmena
- 09** Bienvenido Mr. Marshall
- 12** Los Santos Inocentes
- 15** La isla mínima
- 18** Grupo 7
- 21** Other interesting films

Here are some events of the  
History of Spain (1939-1999)

# Brief history of Spain

End of the Civil War —● 4 April, 1939

Franquismo first stage —● 1939 - 1949

Repression and Autarchy

Franquismo second stage —● 1950 - 1969

International aperture

Economic Revolution

Late Franquismo —● 1969 - 1977

Death of Franco —● 20 Nov, 1975

Restoring Democracy —● 15 June, 1977

Constitutional Referendum —● 6 Dec, 1978

Alternating political parties —● 1982

Spain's entry into the EU —● 1986

# About the portrait

The history of Spain is too long, complex and significant to explain in a small set of films. In this way, the mission of this cycle is to present, in a brief and explanatory way, some of the changes that the country has undergone since the end of the Civil War of the 20th century (1936-1939).

Let's say that from the year 39 onwards, society, stereotypes, forms, morals... and an endless number of structures, parts, and all, have been mending and weaving towards totally new tasks for the classic development of the country.

That is why the mission of this film series will be to present the constant evolution that Spain has undergone. Starting from the new conjectures and changes produced by a 40-year dictatorship, which devastated the country's freedoms, to the arrival of that hopeful stage in its history -*La Transición*- and with it the arrival of democracy.

There are several stops along the way that have been lived since then. The first ups and downs after a war always revolve around the reconstruction of the country, the assimilation that nothing will be the same, and that, even so, life must go on. There are several films that portray this new but, where the last events of the front, are faithfully portrayed in different processes and actions, which have changed the designs of the national future.

# About the portrait

From here the constant evolution has followed an unstoppable course. The first years of *Franquismo*, which left a society of winners and losers, gave way to the assimilation of new social scales, where the difficulty of those from below contrasted too much with the facilities of those from above.

These were hard times, of corruption, of control, of fear... But the first rays of light seemed to appear. Democracy was already shining in the distance. And with it the abrupt changes, the freedom, the debauchery, the desire, the desire to live... Everything was coming to light, while the political processes continued at the same time. The necessary entry of Spain into the European Union, the arrival of the left and the alternation with the right in power, the opening of a new time to the world, etc.

It was a new, different Spain, with a greater desire to live and to cling to it. This cycle seeks to reflect this difficult and constant boiling. Nearly 60 years shown in a few films, stories and narratives, which explain the effervescence of change.

# El espíritu de la colmena

In a small village in Castilla, in the middle of the 1940s, Isabel and Ana, two sisters of eight and six years old respectively, watch the film *El Doctor Frankenstein* on a Sunday. The vision of the film makes such an impression on the little girl that she keeps asking her older sister questions, assuring her that the monster is alive and hiding near the village.

(Source: *Filmaffinity*)



Year: 1973

Running time: 94 min

Director: Víctor Erice

Screenwriter: Ángel Fernández Santos, Víctor Erice

Music: Luis de Pablo

Cast: Ana Torrent, Fernando Fernán Gómez, Isabel Tellería, Laly Soldevilla, Teresa Gimpera, José Villasante

Genre: Drama

Victor Erice: "The title doesn't really belong to me. It is taken from a book, in my opinion, the most beautiful ever written about the life of bees, written by the great poet and playwright Maurice Maeterlinck. In this work, Maeterlinck uses the expression "*El espíritu de la colmena*" to describe that all-powerful, enigmatic and paradoxical spirit which bees seem to obey, and which human reason has never understood."

## Historical-Political context

Erice's work narrates the reality of the end of the war. A society extinguished, silenced and brought into its own interiorism and also familiar. The war had portrayed a divided society, and the following years came to collect damages from the winning side.

These struggles between parts, this silence that the director presents with subtle dexterity and delicacy. His film develops the relationship of innocence with the new country he was trying to build, and the last threads of a very residual struggle to regain the honour lost on the battlefield.

From these small fights the *Maquis* are born. The *Maquis* were the communist guerrillas who tried to fight against the Franco regime. In small nodes, they attacked, fled and above all, they sought to nick the power of the dictatorship.

The *Maquis* defined themselves mainly as *anti-Franquistas*, and their struggle developed across the countryside, where as small links they sought to deconstruct the large tentacles that the system was already building throughout the territory.

The figure of these fighters is essential to understand the fate of the film. That Frankenstein was nothing more than one of these fighters, who used the steppe, the plains and the countryside to develop their struggles.

This grandiose work does nothing but conjugate metaphor, the allegory between several worlds. That of children and innocence. That of the most overwhelming reality of the end of a war and the beginning of a dictatorship. But also that of dreams, of desires and narratives that make all these worlds collide into one. That is what Erice, with warm subtlety, draws on the celluloid.

"In that wasteland, in that gigantic concentration camp that constitutes every dictatorship, a girl (Ana Torrent) discovers cinema. But in *El espíritu de la colmena*, cinema is not a form of evasion, but a form of knowledge, an abrupt and precocious learning about the mysteries of life. After *La Morte rouge* (2006) we know that Erice was talking about her own relationship with cinema. The fact that the filmmaker was born in 1940 confirms to us that the film's temporal arc also corresponds, with his autobiography, to a long learning process in which cinema can become a political weapon of opposition to the regime". (Source: *Caimán Ediciones*)





# Bienvenido Mr. Marshall

The '50s. Villar del Río is a small, quiet village where nothing ever happens. However, the same day folkloric singer Carmen Vargas and her representative arrive, the mayor (Pepe Isbert) receives the news of the imminent visit of a committee of the Marshall Plan (American economic project for the reconstruction of Europe). The novelty provokes a great uproar among the people, who are preparing to offer the Americans a very special welcome. (Source: *Filmaffinity*)

Year: 1953

Running time: 75 min

Director: Luis García Berlanga

Screenwriter: Juan Antonio Bardem, Miguel Mihura, Luis García Berlanga

Music: Jesús García Leoz

Cast: José Isbert, Lolita Sevilla, Manolo Morán, Alberto Romea, Elvira Quintilla, Luis Pérez de León, Félix Fernández, Fernando Aguirre, Joaquín Roa, Nicolás Perchicot, José Franco, Fernando Rey

Genre: Comedy/Satire



Luis García Berlanga: "The first synopsis that Bardem and I wrote was a rural drama, in the style of Indio Fernández's cinema. The producers told us why we didn't do something more fun. So, the first idea we had was to do something about Coca-Cola and wine. Later, following the approach of *La Kermesse Heroïque*, we decided on the history of a people that supports the invasion by flattering the invaders, until it evolves to what is finally the film (...). Once Juan Antonio (referring to Juan Antonio Bardem) and I finished the script, Miguel Mihura, with our acquiescence, polishes the dialogues and writes the lyrics of the songs; Mihura did a great job as a dialoguist."

## Historical-Political context

The film unfolds as a sharp and ruthless critique, at once veiled, during the first years of Franco's dictatorship. Berlanga portrays some of the idiosyncrasies of the end of the war.

One of these circumstances of great significance, not only national, but also international, was the development of the *Marshall Plan* on European soil. The powers were preparing to rebuild the continent with American aid, and Spain did not want to stand aside. In this way, Franco's regime tried to include the Spanish Civil War as one of the initial remnants of the Second World War. A project was designed so that Spain would be seen not as one of the last rales of fascism in Europe, but as one of the allied countries in the fight against communism.

With this historical review of what happened, the isolation of Spain is evident, something that at the end of the day, not many years later, around the 50s, began to change and the USA deposited in the Franco regime, the confidence previously evaded.

Both the director and the scriptwriters create an acidic satire, which not only attacked the waterline of the first Franquista policies, but also, with great talent, managed to avoid the censorship of the dictatorship.

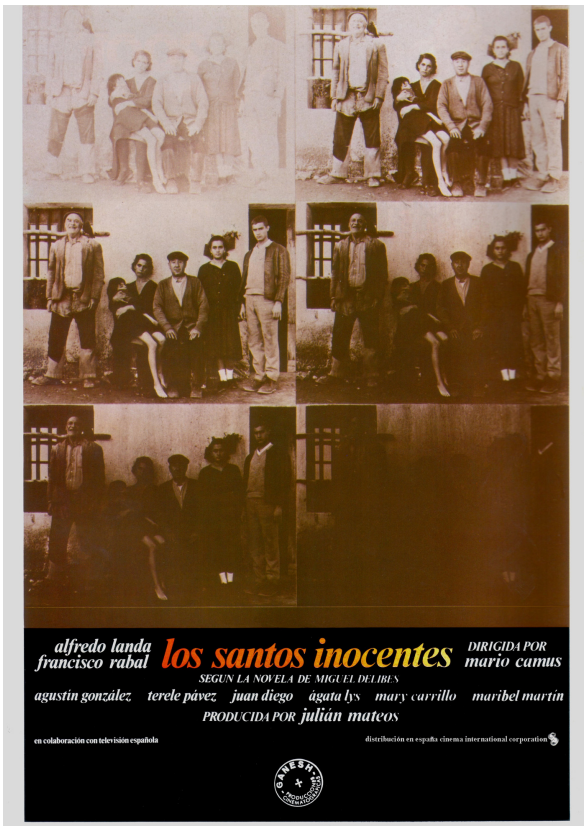
"On a reduced scale, the dreams of Villar del Río and its inhabitants are the dreams of a country in misery, which believes that, thanks to this new political situation, its vacant fields would also flourish after a rain of dollars. The success of the film consists in reducing this general synthesis to a set of forceful images: the backwardness of the people, the perplexity of the authorities, the tricks with which they seduce the new invaders, etc.".

(Source: *CineHistoria* by Tomás Valero)



# Los Santos Inocentes

Franquista Spain. During the sixties, a family of peasants lived miserably in a farmhouse in Extremadura under the splint of the landowner. Their life is renunciation, sacrifice and obedience. Their destiny is marked, unless some unforeseen event allows them to break their chains. Adapted from the novel of the same name by Miguel Delibes. (Source: *Filmaffinity*)



Year: 1984

Running time: 103 min

Director: Mario Camus

Screenwriter: Mario Camus, Antonio Larreta, Manuel Matji (Novela: Miguel Delibes)

Music: Antón García Abril

Cast: Alfredo Landa, Francisco Rabal, Juan Diego, Terele Pávez, Belén Ballesteros, Juan Sanchez, Ágata Lys, Agustín González, Manuel Zarzo, Mary Carrillo, José Guardiola

Genre: Drama

Miguel Delibes: "[...] y, ahora ya no, pero en tiempos se oía también el fúnebre ulular de los lobos en el piornal las noches de primavera pero desde que llegaron los hombres de la luz e instalaron los postes del tendido eléctrico a lo largo de la ladera, no se volvieron a oír, y, a cambio, se sentía gritar al cárabo, a pausas periódicas, [...]" (*Los Santos Inocentes*)

## Historical-Political context

Perhaps *Los Santos Inocentes* is the crudest of the films in this cycle. The cinematographic work, as well as the literary genius written by Miguel Delibes, gather with cartesian intelligence and, visual and literary majesty, the complexity, and at the same time simplicity, of a society such as the Spanish of the late 1950s and early 1960s.

As the film shows, we are talking about a class society, rooted in monastic vestiges and, above all, strata. Because that, and nothing else, was the Spain of that time. That of a country that until a few years have passed, I can't get rid of the nonsense in which the differences between those at the top and those at the bottom were made clear.

"The film, far from going back to a specific episode of the 1960s, reveals the survival of two antagonistic social models, which, however, did not represent the whole territory, but only one part: the "caciquil" domain, in the countryside, and the incipient industrial development, in the city. The model presented in the film reproduces, through the cortijo, the suffocating relationship between the landowners and their servants".

(Source:*CineHistoria*)

The work reliably portrays how differences could be seen as faithful portraits, in the contaminated laughter of its protagonists, laughter of superiority or cowardice, laughter that in the words of Catalina García García-Herreros, collected in her essay *Los Santos Inocentes, entre Miguel Delibes y Mario Camus*, exhibits as follows:

"Delibes relates the lazy welfare of the ruling class to laughter. They boast of their superiority with a mocking and arrogant laugh, celebrating the fate of their rested and placid life, which is opposed to the early morning effort and work of the peasants. The rest-work opposition illustrates the injustice of a social structure that allocates wealth to people who do not strive to earn it: [...] *antes de amanecer, así que surgía una raya anaranjada en el firmamento delimitando el contorno de la sierra, el Azarías ya andaba en la trocha [...] y el señorito tal vez andaba en la cama, descansando, [...] aunque ya se sentía al Azarías rascando los aseladeros o baldeando el tabuco del Gran Duque y arrastrando la herrada por el patio de guijos [...]* (Los Santos Inocentes)".

The crude thing about those circumstances is that what was called the Spanish miracle, speaking in economic terms, still had a face too bitter and crude. In particular, this world would be anchored to feudal reminiscences and, where only the sprouts of equality that cities seem to bring, would be the only escape valves for the fuse of a future democracy to sprout in every corner.



# La isla mínima

Spain in the early 1980s. Two policemen, ideologically opposed, are sent from Madrid to a remote village in the south, located in the *Guadalquivir* marshes, to investigate the disappearance of two teenage girls. In a community anchored in the past, they will have to face not only a cruel killer, but also their own ghosts.

(Source: *Filmaffinity*)



Year: 2014

Running time: 105 min

Director: Alberto Rodríguez

Screenwriter: Alberto Rodríguez,  
Rafael Cobos

Music: Julio de la Rosa

Cast: Raúl Arévalo, Javier Gutiérrez,  
Nerea Barros, Antonio de la Torre,  
Jesús Castro, Mercedes León, Manolo  
Solo, Jesús Carroza, Cecilia  
Villanueva, Salva Reina

Genre: Thriller

Alberto Rodríguez: "The film begins in an exhibition of photographs by *Atín Aya*, a Sevillian photographer, to which I went in 2001 with *Álex Catalá*, who has finally been the director of photography of *La isla mínima*. They were photos of the landscapes of Las Marismas and portraits of the people who live there, and we left that exhibition with the idea of one day shooting a film on that stage [...] The idea of going back to that script started when someone left us two documentaries by the *Bartolomé* brothers, *Atado y bien atado* and *No se puede os solos*. They were documentaries about the *Transición*, but made and edited during the *Transición*. In other words, they didn't have the historical filter or the official history of the *Transición*, when they were made, things weren't clear. And when we saw them, it gave us the feeling that the Spain of 2012 and that of 1980, in one way or another, were very similar."

## Historical-Political context

As the director himself remembers, his film reflects the Spain it was, what it is and who knows if, maybe it will be.

We find ourselves with the classic metaphor of duality, of the departure to return with a transformation behind our backs. That thin layer that underlies everything is the constant evolution of a life and a history that seems to repeat itself, and that has a special roots in Spain; friend/enemy.



The plot takes place in Andalusia, specifically in the Sevillian marshes, where life and death, as *Jorge Manrique* will say, are like rivers. On this occasion the one who undoes everything is the Guadalquivir, who gives and who takes away. Opening what doubt there is, another door towards the salvation.

The bicephalia of the actors show the Spain that was still in existence since the Franco regime. Democracy, youth and ecstasy had to deal with the stagnant vestiges of a dictatorship that in certain aspects refused to die.

The two policemen who present this reality are the faces of thousands of Spanish citizens who in the eighties looked back with uprooting of the past, while the other side still had some unease for a regime that gave them so much.

*La isla mínima* presents the least seen Spain in the 80s, that of the day labourers, that of the village worker, that of the arcane history, moralized, frightened, but at the same time the brave, the hard-working, the tireless. Because there are not only those discrepancies between countryside/city, but also those between the very corpus of these social nests.



# Grupo 7

The city of Seville is preparing to host the 92 Expo. Ángel (Mario Casas), an intelligent and ambitious young man, aspires to be a police inspector, and entered the body trying to respect the law. Rafael (Antonio de la Torre), on the other hand, is an expeditious, forceful and arrogant policeman. Together with Miguel (José Manuel Poga) and Mateo (Joaquín Núñez) they form Group 7, a group of unscrupulous policemen, ready to do anything to achieve their objectives in the anti-drug department. (Source: *Filmaffinity*)



Year: 2012

Running time: 95 min

Director: Alberto Rodríguez

Screenwriter: Alberto Rodríguez,  
Rafael Cobos

Music: Julio de la Rosa

Cast: Antonio de la Torre, Mario Casas, Joaquín Núñez, José Manuel Poga, Inma Cuesta, Estefanía de los Santos, Julián Villagrán, Alfonso Sánchez, Carlos Olalla

Genre: Thriller

Alberto Rodríguez: "The film comes from a summary of a case that we received [...] Seville, which had been cut off from the world, opens when a bestial economic injection like the one that the Expo meant arrives and everything is revolutionised and changed. It was something that had to be done, either actively or passively, passing over whatever was necessary."

## **Historical-Political context**

The work is based on a true story and events that occurred in Seville in the late 80s and early 90s. It is no less true that acts like the one told in the film, play again with certain metaphors of the country's situation. Spain came out of a dictatorship in an exemplary way, established democracy and gave way to exchange between political forces, which would accommodate the party system that was perpetuated for several decades.

The country had to move forward and to do so it had to change, improve and clean up what was dirty and damaged. In 1982, Spain organised the Football World Cup, an indispensable date to understand that decade. From 1982 to 1992 Spain managed to establish democracy, enter the European Union and offer itself as a new alternative within Europe.

The socialist governments, presided over by Felipe González (1982-1996), draw the accelerated wake of the changes we have to undergo in Spain.

The coming years of alternation with the right, presided over by José María Aznar (1996-2004), end with the subsequent entry into the *€uro* and the country's rise to the highest economic level to date.

But to know this future 1992 becomes indispensable, mainly by two events: the Olympic Games of Barcelona 92 and the International Expo of Seville 92. Both events serve as a shuttle for the country, and allow the economic crisis of the first 90, to be delayed a little in arriving in Spain.

Group 7 seeks to represent the ups and downs of a country that was still being made and that for that, the first thing it had to do was to continue building the future. The film presents some basic aspects to understand some of the intricacies of Spanish history. Police corruption, class differences, political advances and changes or even the drug problem, are some of the aspects most present at that time.



# Other interesting films

Handia (2017)

Carmina o revienta (2012)

Primos (2011)

No habrá paz para los malvados (2011)

Celda 211 (2009)

El cielo gira (2004)

El día de la bestia (1995)

Amanece que no es poco (1989)

El viaje a ninguna parte (1986)

El sur (1983)

Después de... (1981)

Pepi, Luci, Bom y otras chicas del montón (1980)

La escopeta nacional (1978)

La cabina (1972)

El verdugo (1963)

El ángel exterminador (1962)

El cochecito (1960)

Un perro andaluz (1929)





Made by Ignacio-Jesús  
PhD student of the University of Granada  
Contact: [nachosc@correo.ugr.es](mailto:nachosc@correo.ugr.es)

Cine  
con ñ