A HISTORY OF SPANISH FILM

CINEMA AND SOCIETY 1910–2010

SALLY FAULKNER

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For Rowan and Cameron McDowell

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List of illustrations

Textual note

A list of abbreviations and a glossary of frequently-used terms is included at the end of the text. All translations from Spanish are my own, unless otherwise indicated. I have included the Spanish original when referring to literary texts and film scripts; I have included the English translation only when referring to secondary criticism.

I have included both original title and an English translation as well as the year of release on first mention of each film; thereafter I have used the English title, occasionally abbreviated. I have taken English titles from the International Movie Data Base (www.imdb.com); when none is available I have indicated this by an asterisk in the index and on first mention of the film in the text; I have followed Bernard Bentley's Filmography for English translations (2008, 353–99), or offered my own.

All audience figures are from the 'Datos de películas clasificadas' link from the cinema section of the Spanish Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport website, www.mcu.es/cine/index; all references to prizes are taken from www.imdb.com.

Introduction: Cinema and Society 1910–2010

This book is a history of Spanish cinema that brings the question of class mobility to the fore. The key term here is 'mobility'. Its opposite, stasis, is the explicit or implicit object of critique of much political film. From Luis Buñuel's denunciation of rural poverty in *Land Without Bread, Las Hurdes* (*Tierra sin pan* 1933), to the multi-authored critique of contemporary democracy, *There's Good Cause!** (*¡Hay motivo!* 2004) – with a series of anti-Franco films in between – Spanish political cinema has proved to be no exception here, predominantly offering a Marxist critique of apparently unassailable class privileges and exclusions.[1] It has been demonstrated that key cultural gatekeepers, both inside and outside Spain, have tended to favour this left-wing political cinema: Spanish prize-giving and subsidy-awarding bodies, along with national broadsheet press critics on the one hand;[2] international film festival programmers and foreign film distributors on the other.[3] Scholars such as Núria Triana-Toribio and Steven Marsh[4] have demonstrated that the preference for this political cinema has led to the exclusion of other tendencies in writing on Spanish film. Challenging these exclusions has led to vital work on the recovery of popular traditions. From the same starting point I take the argument in a new direction. The tendency to highlight the Spanish cinema of 'denunciation', 'critique', and 'anti-Francoism' – to reprise the words I used above – has highlighted films that impugn class stasis. Besides popular film, something else has been lost in this approach. By considering the question of class mobility throughout Spanish cinema's century of existence, *A History of Spanish Film* explores, first, the cinema's representation of upwardly and downwardly mobile groups on-screen, and places this representation, second, alongside class realignments in Spanish society off-screen. It weaves together these strands by arguing for the importance of a thus-far unexplored Spanish middlebrow cinema.

The need to address these areas is all the more urgent if we acknowledge that the single most important social change that has occurred in twentieth-century Spain, in tandem with the existence of cinema, has been class mobility, or, more specifically, a general upward movement of citizens into the middle classes – though by no means has this been uniform, or uninterrupted. The significance of this historical fact is thrown into relief through comparison. Other Western nations, like Britain and the US, became industrialized, urbanized and mesocratized in the nineteenth century.[5] In comparison, then, their cinemas have less of a tale to tell about class mobility. When the first cinematic images were shown in Spain in 1896 they were projected onto a predominantly agrarian nation, with high levels of poverty and illiteracy (one estimate puts the peasant population at 68 per cent; illiteracy at 50 per cent [Pérez Perucha 1995, 22–3]). While the 1920s saw a remarkable economic boom, the Spanish Civil War (1936–9), then the disasterous policy of autarky imposed in the 1940s by the Franco dictatorship (1939–75), led to downward social mobility far more severe than that experienced by nations recovering from the Second World War (Tortella 2000, 229–30). Following the 'hinge decade' of the 1950s, in which autarky was abandoned for capitalism through the 1959 Stabilization Plan, 1960s Spain experienced a boom. Economists have suggested that the period be described as 'Fraguismo', rather than 'Franquismo' (Francoism), owing to the importance of technocrat Minister of Information and Tourism Manuel Fraga's period in office (1962–9) (Pavlovic 2011, 1), which helpfully uncouples this period of prosperity from the person of the dictator who remained in power right up to his death from natural causes in 1975.[6] In 1987 Stanley Payne outlined how a 'new' middle class came into existence from 1950–75 (1987, 463–88), with 'the greatest sustained economic development and general improvement in living standards in all Spanish history', a level of growth only exceeded in this period by Japan (1987, 463). Alex Longhurst's 1995 sociological survey of occupation, education, income and expenditure in the second half of the century adds further detail to this acknowledged mesocratization. Statistics relating to education reveal a striking eightfold increase in secondary education and a fourfold increase in higher education from 1960–80, with women benefitting in particular; a 1993 survey found that 47 per cent of those who had gone to university had a father who had only been to primary school (Longhurst 1999, 114). Employment data is also compelling: 'the agricultural sector has gone from being the largest work provider by a very considerable margin in 1960 to being the smallest by far' (1999, 113); the service sector employed 60 per cent of the population by the 1990s (Longhurst 1995, 4). Consumerism offers further confirmation, with TV ownership at 70 per cent and washing-machine/fridge ownership at 84 per cent of households by 1974; in 1960 1 in 55 Spaniards

owned a car, by 1974, 1 in 9 (de Riquer i Permanyer 1995, 265). Thus while at the start of the 1960s most sociological measures put the working class at 60 per cent of the population, by the 1990s this had decreased to below 40 per cent, even 30 per cent (Longhurst 1999, 113). Spain of the second half of the twentieth century thus experienced accelerated – if uneven – modernization and a period of widespread – if patchy – prosperity. The contours of this map of a rising middle class are thrown sharply into relief at the time of writing (summer 2012) as Spain struggles with the crisis of the Euro.[7]

One need only turn to the novels of Spain's great nineteenth-century realist writer, Benito Pérez Galdós, to give nuance to this description of a largely agrarian nation awaiting the implementation of capitalism by the 1950s technocrats. Galdós memorably portrays the new members of Madrid's bourgeoisie in his great 'Contemporary Novels' of the Spanish capital, though such class mobility was confined to a few urban centres in this period.[8] If limited in reach, this uneven, or patchy, modernization in the nineteenth century had interestingly distorting and disruptive effects on culture, which have been addressed by cultural historians of the period (Moreno Hernández 1995; Valis 2002). The term 'cursi', which describes the affected performance of a cultural sophistication one does not possess, emerged as a result of this uneven modernity, where old and new coexist in uneasy proximity.[9] *A History of Spanish Film* turns to the twentieth century (more properly, a 'long' twentieth century to 2010) for its historical focus, and to the new medium of cinema for its object of analysis, but asks similar questions about the relationship between culture and society: what is the impact of social mobility, which occurred piecemeal prior to the 1960s, but on an unprecedented national scale from that decade onwards, on the domestic cinema?

In answering this question, I aim to do more than adjust our critical focus in order to fill in the gaps of previous accounts. Moving the question of mobility from background to foreground seeks to innovate in two areas of writing on Spanish film history. First, this book brings mobility to the fore through textual analysis. In order to achieve this, I have organized the book into seven chapters that proceed chronologically and each offers six close readings of exemplary films. The reader will not find here, then, an encyclopaedic coverage of all Spanish films – surveys of this type already exist in both Spanish and English – but close analysis of some 42 fiction films.[10] This number of close readings allows me to explore the plural ways Spanish filmmakers, working in genres as diverse as the folkloric film, comedy and melodrama, with both contemporary and historical settings, have reflected, critiqued, celebrated and compensated for upward and downward social mobility over the long twentieth century.[11]

Chapter 1, 'Questions of Art and Questions of Class in Early Film', explores

the national cinema's first bid for upwardly mobile audiences through adaptations of literary texts (both novels and theatre), and through technological prestige, with examples drawn from the silent and early sound eras, and from political contexts that include Primo de Rivera's dictatorship and the Second Republic. The Spanish Civil War was a rupture in every sense of the word, shattering these connections I explore between cinema and society. *A History of Spanish Film* does not, therefore, focus on this period,[12] and Chapter 2 begins in the 1940s to explore the films with, by, and through which Spaniards endured the post-war depression and economic deprivation that lasted well into the 1950s. The 'Consolation and Condemnation' of the chapter title refer to some of the uses audiences made of these films as downward social mobility and frustrating stasis were endured. As upward social mobility gathered pace from the 1960s onwards, I increase the intensity of my focus to select six films from each of the decades of the 1960s-2000s. While convenient, these decade breaks help disassociate the narrative of this national cinema from the 'key dates' approach, which necessarily yokes films to politics by stressing, for example, whether they are pre-1975 and thus 'Francoist', or post-1975 (the democratic constitution was passed in 1978) and thus 'democratic'. This leveling effect of the decade-divisions is particularly helpful in Chapter 4 on the 1970s, allowing me to uncover continuities between the beginning and end of the decade, rather than repeat the truism of the transformation of Spanish film following the dictator's death. Chapter 4 also puts forward my thesis concerning a new type of film. While the six close readings of the preceding Chapter 3, which I call 'Charting Social Mobility', map the presence of both the middle classes and middle-class culture on-screen, I describe the films as either art cinema or popular cinema. In the 1970s there is a crucial shift: the films often continue to portray the middle class, but they also seek Spain's new middle-class audiences: they are middle-class cinema.

The second innovation of this book is to argue, then, that from the 1970s onwards a whole new category of film comes into existence, which has thus far never been fully explored. The denomination 'middle-class film' foregrounds the audience at which such films were aimed, but I argue that the pursuit of this new audience also transformed the films' aesthetics. Textual analysis reveals that these films charted an original terrain that was in-between previous 'art' and 'popular' alternatives: I argue that the best way of analyzing this in-betweenness is with the term 'middlebrow'. The description and analysis of this as yet unstudied and unnamed area of cinematic activity in Spain will occupy my final four chapters, from the 1970s to the 2000s.[13] As in the first three chapters, I proceed by close textual analysis, and like these three, my close readings include bold revisions of films that frequently

occur in accounts of Spanish national cinema – including Luis Buñuel's 1970 *Tristana*, which is discussed here for the first time as a middlebrow film – and work that has never received scholarly attention before in any language – like Roberto Bodegas's frequently-mentioned but never analysed 1971 *Spaniards in Paris* (*Españolas en París*). Chapter 4, 'The "Third Way" and the Spanish Middlebrow Film', maps the early manifestations of the middlebrow, through producer José Luis Dibildos's 'Third Way' and the 'Madrid Comedy'; Chapter 5 connects this to the early films of the re-established democracy financed by the controversial legislation of the PSOE government, 'Miró Films'; Chapter 6 argues that the 'Third Way' also re-emerges in the social-realist 'cine social', while Chapter 7 brings the argument to the present day with a new reading of 'heritage' as middlebrow. The focus on social mobility – upward, downward and stalled – knits together all seven chapters to offer a dynamic new reading of this national cinema.

The 'middlebrow' in Spanish cinema studies

The application of 'middlebrow' to post-1970 Spanish film looks unpromising: not only is it an English term, but it originates in the even more specific context of 1920s and 1930s Britain. Scornfully applied to mass Anglophone culture from the 1920s (including mass-produced novels, Hollywood cinema and BBC television), the early uses of 'middlebrow' (first recorded in the Oxford English Dictionary in 1924) tell us less about the objects of denigration than about the denigrators, the artistic elites whose role as arbiters of taste was threatened by these mass-cultural developments (Hess 2009, 330). Cultural historians publishing from the 1990s onwards have helpfully shifted attention away from the anxieties of these elitist denigrators to re-evaluate the objects of their denigration (Rubin 1992; Radway 1993; Fowler 1995; Hess 2009; Hinds 2009). Two characteristics of middlebrow culture emerge as especially important for this study: first, its irreverent mixing, blurring or fusion of 'high' and 'low' (the scare marks indicate that these are also contested categories);[14] second, its especial ability to 'work through' or 'handle' change.[15] While there is no direct equivalent of the term 'middlebrow' in Spanish, I will argue that these two characteristics are especially pertinent to its post-1970 cinema. Spanish middlebrow films also mix and fuse at the level of form; on a thematic level, they also tend to 'work through' change.

The example of 'cursilería' discussed above reveals that modern Spain is not just interested in, but fascinated by, questions of class and questions of taste, as any reader of its nineteenth-century novels will confirm. That an

equivalent of the term 'middlebrow' did not emerge in Spain in response to mass culture in the early twentieth century may be explained by vastly different context. Different literacy levels in the period are crucial, with Spain considerably lower than Britain at 60 per cent in 1931.[16] Language is another key distinction. The response of the British cultural custodians to American mass culture from the 1910s onwards has everything to do with the common tongue. The success of Hollywood films in the Spanish market was also a deep cause of concern (it became deeper still when the Franco regime introduced blanket dubbing of foreign films into Spanish in 1941, which damages the national industry to this day), but in the British context it posed nothing less than the threat of annihilation. Events preceding and succeeding the Civil War constitute a further distinction. While the economic boom of the 1920s led to limited social mobility, the fragile new middle class scarcely had time to generate a middlebrow culture before the ruptures of the 1930s (though films like José Buchs's 1925 adaptation of Galdós's *The Grandfather** [*El abuelo* see Chapter 1] indicate its beginnings). Civil War and dictatorship then meant that questions of politics, rather than questions of class, became the immediate preoccupations of Spanish culture and Spanish cultural theory.[17]

Historians concur that from the 1960s onwards Spain possessed an increasingly substantial middle class, which enjoyed a standard of living comparable to contemporary Western nations. The impact of this new class can be traced in politics, for new political parties like Alfonso Suárez's UCD were created in the 1970s to represent it (Torreiro 1995a, 360). This book traces the cultural impact of this new class on the national cinema. Owing to the particular circumstances of its early twentieth century, Spanish cultural commentators could not retrieve a previously-coined autochtonous term to describe this phenomenon, though the labels I will now briefly explore all share the twin characteristics of the 'middlebrow': formal fusion and thematic 'working through'.

Responding to the change in the market, José Luis Dibildos, who had begun his career as a scriptwriter and in 1956 established his own production company, Ágata Films, produced a series of films in the early-mid 1970s that sought to steer a middle course between the cerebral arthouse and crass commercial tendencies that dominated the market in the period. The films I analyse in Chapter 3, which range from aesthetic preoccupations of *Summer Night* (*Noche de verano* Grau 1963), with its tiny audience of 141,000, to the popular pranks of Marisol in blockbuster *Marisol's Four Weddings** (*Las cuatro bodas de Marisol* Lucia 1967), with an audience of over 2.5 million, demonstrate this polarized market. Dibildos described his efforts as 'popular cinema with critical bite' (quoted in Hopewell 1986, 82), while the film writing collective Marta Hernández proposed it was 'commercial cinema plus auteur

cinema divided by two' (quoted in Torreiro 1995a, 361), but the label that stuck was 'Tercera vía' (Third Way). While Dibildos's particular formula for the fusion of accessible genres like comedy with the serious social issues faced by a rapidly changing Spain faded fast, the principle of fusion proved influential on large and small screens from then on.[18] I trace this influence first in the Madrid Comedies of the late 1970s and early 1980s, which similarly adopt an in-between formal approach to negotiate the vertiginous changes of the Transition from dictatorship to democracy. José Luis Garci, who directed the first of these Comedies, *Unfinished Business* (*Asignatura pendiente* 1977; analysed in Chapter 4), and thus established a blueprint for the formula, referred to the approach as '*auteur* cinema for majorities' (Triana Toribio 2003, 114). Dibildos reappears as producer and scriptwriter for an early 1980s film that, again, brings together a formal fusion of 'high' and 'low' culture in a transitional context of change: Mario Camus's 1982 adaptation of complex Modernist novel *The Beehive* (*La colmena*) through the familiar actors and conventional linear narrative of the mainstream. Moving away from the much-quoted interpretation of 1970s efforts as 'Third Way', Esteve Riambau coined a new term to describe the films funded by the new Socialist government's 'Miró' legislation that followed the *The Beehive* model. Cited with similar frequency, 'cine polivalente' (multipurpose cinema) (1995, 421; translated in Jordan and Morgan-Tamosunas 1998, 33) would be the label that stuck to 1980s Mirovian film. All of these terms tiptoe around a middlebrow that they fail to name.[19] Alberto Mira explains this failure through the Marxist inheritance of the Spanish cultural establishment examined above: 'The notion of solid entertainment on a middle point between art and trash had no place in critical discussions. Films, for critics brought up with the left-wing ideas of the 1960s and the 1970s, were either profound or worthless' (2005, 6).

My approach to the 'middlebrow' foregrounds its connection to social mobility and also forms part of the recent critical drive in cultural studies and film studies to rehabilitate the term.[20] It is instructive to compare this process to the recovery of the 'popular' in critical work of the 1990s and 2000s. Despite insistence that popular culture may be aesthetically mediocre and politically conservative, critics tend to focus on previously-overlooked examples to uncover unexpected aesthetic accomplishment and decode political critique.[21] Critics of the middlebrow culture may also stress its potential to be formally interesting and politically oppositional; in this vein I read films as varied as *Tormento* (Olea 1974), *Mambrú Went to War* (*Mambrú se fue a la guerra* Fernán Gómez 1986) or *The Dog in the Manger* (*El perro del hortelano* Miró 1996) as questioning of their contemporary contexts of Francoism, Socialism and patriarchy. It is crucial to point out, however, that scholars of middlebrow culture often explore formal mediocrity and political

conservatism. In this vein, I analyse films like *The Grandfather* (*El abuelo* Garci 1998), *Alone* (*Solas* Zambrano 1999) and *Lope* (Waddington 2010) and stress in particular their conservative approaches to gender. Scholars of middlebrow culture thus avoid the critical obsession with the subversive, the radical and the oppositional, an approach that may ultimately speak more of the critics' own fetishization of dissent, than of the texts themselves and the ways they were consumed by audiences.[22] Through close reading, *A History of Spanish Film* pays attention to films as texts and, through a consideration of context, addresses the ways audiences may have consumed them. In Chapters 4–7 it highlights the in-betweenness of the middlebrow film, which often fuses high production values, serious – but not challenging – subject matter, high – but not obscure – cultural references, and accessible form.[23] The qualifications I typographically emphasize here are a reminder of contingency: there are different middlebrows at different moments and in different contexts, each one requiring its own particular analysis.[24] By linking up the middlebrow in the 1970s Third Way, the 1980s Mirovian Cinema, the 1990s 'cine social' and the 2000s 'heritage', my intention is thus not to flatten the field, but draw out the fascinating continuities of Spanish film from the 1970s to the present day.

Notes

1 The production context of *Land Without Bread* cautions against any straightforward application of 'Marxist', 'left-wing' or 'political': it was commissioned by the first government of the left-wing Second Republic, then banned by it when the government entered a new phase (D'Lugo 1997, 6). Buñuel, whose politics, like his films, defy easy categorization, went into exile during the Spanish Civil War, but Marxism became the key channel for expressing opposition to the dictatorship, as is evident in work produced from the 1950s onwards, though Francoist censorship meant knowledge of Marxist texts was partial (Graham and Labanyi 1995, 3–4). Marxist positions were adopted by the 32 directors of the collective film of protest against José María Aznar's right-wing Popular Party *There's Good Cause!*.

2 If some of the anti-Franco work produced during the dictatorship is today dismissed as naïve (including by its authors), post-Franco, as Jo Labanyi has shown, 'the largely Marxist inheritance of the anti-Francoist opposition' has proved highly influential. 'Its members played a major role in shaping cultural policy and habits, as well as in revitalizing the university system, […] particularly under the Socialist government of 1982–95 when many of them held political positions' (2002a, 11). Focussing his attention on cinema under dictatorship, Steven Marsh has insisted that the films that criticized the Franco regime, or, in the words of the title of his book 'weaken[ed] the state' (2006), were not limited to those made by filmmakers associated with the

Spanish Communist Party. Núria Triana-Toribio notes that these anti-Franco directors associated with the Communist Party became the architects of film policy in the 1980s and 1990s (2003, 113). This promoted a broadly Marxist 'quality' cinema through subsidies in the 1980s (2003, 113–42), then a left-wing 'cine social' (social-realist cinema) through the Goya prizes in the 1990s (2003, 155–63) – both to the exclusion of popular film. Influential film critic of Spain's leading daily *El País* for over twenty years before his death in 2004, Ángel Fernández-Santos had been scriptwriter of the key oppositional film of the dictatorship, *The Spirit of the Beehive* (*El espíritu de la colmena* 1973); his daughter still writes for the film section (Smith 2003, 147).

3 Triana-Toribio traces the connections between the type of films distributed outside Spain and the slanted version of the national cinema that arises. Marsha Kinder's *Blood Cinema* (1993), whose 'shrewd analysis' Triana-Toribio stresses, is an example of a study that ignores popular film (2003, 9–10).

4 I choose Triana-Toribio and Marsh as the authors of book-length analyses with contrasting emphases on popular culture in the Franco (Marsh 2006) and democratic periods (Triana-Toribio 2003), but would stress that these studies build on the pioneering work of film scholars such as Peter Evans (1995; 2000; 2004) Jo Labanyi (1995; 1997; 2000; 2007b); Paul Julian Smith (1994 and 2000) and Katy Vernon (1999).

5 I take the term 'mesocratization', a movement to the middle class, from Longhurst 1999.

6 Even though Fraga was a Francoist minister, this neologism helps disassociate the economic boom from the dictatorship. In 1995, Helen Graham condemned the 'conservative orthodoxy' by which 'developmental dictatorship, rising from the ashes of the 1940s, authored the [economic] "miracle" and through it the democratic transition itself. By this sleight of hand, political democracy and cultural plurality become the legacy of a benevolent dictator' (1995, 244). Paul Preston reports that to this day Franco receives a good press, owing in part to this 'carefully constructed idea that he masterminded Spain's economic "miracle" in the 1960s' (2012, xii).

7 In this context Gabriel Tortella's observations in 2000 are prophetic and reassuring: Spain's 'economic evolution is now advanced enough to sustain that center that was lacking in the nineteenth century – a socio-cultural middle class – that will probably serve well as keel, ballast, and rudder for whatever stormy passages may lie ahead in the oceans of the twenty-first century' (2000, 458).

8 The facts that this small middle class was 'still largely marginalized' and 'increasingly internally fragmented', 'permit[ted] the old regime to continue holding sway over what was still a predominantly rural country' (Graham and Labanyi 1995, 9).

9 This lengthy description of the adjective confirms Noël Valis's insightful summary that, 'cursi' 'is hard to define since all the English synonyms typically given in dictionaries to explain it – "in bad taste, vulgar," "showy, flashy," or "pseudo-refined, affected" – merely point to its symptoms, not its underlying condition, cause, or context' (2002, 3).

10 In Spanish, see Román Gubern et al.'s 1995 *Historia del cine español* (expanded and updated in 2009), in English, Bernard Bentley's 2008 *A Companion to Spanish Cinema*, which includes children's films, animation and documentary. Dictionaries include D'Lugo 1997 and Mira 2010. *A History of Spanish Film* does not focus on cinema of Spain's autonomous communities: as Triana-Toribio points out, Catalan and Basque cinemas, for instance, deserve separate coverage, rather than being 'shoe-horned' into books concerned with Spanish examples (2003,12).

11 This book therefore hopes to explore, if only through cinema rather than culture as a whole, Labanyi's observation that 'given the huge social changes that have taken place in twentieth-century Spain, there is important work to be done on the ways in which upwardly and downwardly mobile groups have charted their social realignment through their modes of cultural consumption,' which include 'the forgotten issue of the "middlebrow"' (2002a, 2).

12 For an analysis of Spanish cinema during the Civil War, see Gubern 1986.

13 Paul Julian Smith 'Pubic Service, Literarity, and the Middle-brow' in a chapter on the Classic Serial in Spanish TV (2006, 27–57).

14 I am drawing on Pierre Bourdieu, author of the now classic study of the co-dependency of class and taste (1999), in stressing the formal 'fusion' of the middlebrow. In Bourdieu's hostile approach, however, 'middle-brow culture' offers not 'fusion' but 'confusion', as in 'accessible versions of avant-garde experiments or accessible works which pass for avant-garde experiments, film "adaptations" of classic drama and literature, "popular arrangements" of classical music or "orchestral versions" […] [these combine] two normally exclusive characteristics, immediate accessibility and the outward signs of cultural legitimacy' (1999, 323).

15 Lawrence Napper, whose study of the denigrated 'quota quickies' of the British inter-war period vitally reassesses the term in British film studies, chooses 'handle' (2009, 9). I take 'work through' from TV historian John Ellis (2002, 2).

16 Álvarez Junco 1995, 50. Literacy improvement was a central objective of the Second Republic through programmes like the 'Misiones Pedagógicas' (Pedagogical Missions) (Cobb 1995).

17 See Graham and Labanyi's invaluable survey of the attempt to establish cultural theory in twentieth-century Spain (1995).

18 Beyond the scope of this book lies the question of the middlebrow in Spanish TV, on which see Smith 2006, 27–57, though throughout this text I indicate where overlaps between film and TV work occur.

19 In Spanish sociology, 'middlebrow' culture may be rendered as 'pretenciosa' (pretentious) 'burguesa' (bourgeois), 'mediocre' (mediocre) and 'el gusto pretencioso de la pequeña burguesía' (the pretentious taste of the petite bourgeoisie) (Busquet 2008, 96–104). 'Cultura pretenciosa' is the translation offered for the 'culture moyenne' of Bourdieu's *Distinction* (1999) which was translated as 'middlebrow' in the 1984 English version (1999, 323).

Colloquially, diminutives of 'cultura' like 'culturilla' and 'culturetas' may be used. These equivalents unsatisfactorily stress either class ('bourgeois', the derogatory equivalent of 'middle class') or scorn ('pretentious', 'mediocre', or the diminutive), failing to capture the ways 'middlebrow' may refer to both class and aesthetics.

20 In addition to the studies published in the 1990s and 2000s mentioned above, note the activities of the 'Middlebrow Network', established in 2008 (www.middlebrow-network.com). The proceedings of a symposium I hosted on 'Middlebrow Cinema' at the University of Exeter, UK, in July 2012 are in preparation.

21 The recovery of the popular has characterized cinema studies of the 1990s and 2000. In European cinema the key text is Dyer and Vincendeau 1992b; in Spanish cinema, Triana-Toribio 2003 and Lázaro Reboll and Willis 2004b. Richard Dyer and Ginnette Vincendeau stress that the popular is not always subversive (1992a, 5), but rarely do studies of popular culture linger on conservatism (though there are important exceptions, like Leonard 2004). My own published work on popular film under Franco, for instance, stressed unexpected formal accomplishment and political critique (in connection, for example, to *The Big Family* [*La gran familia*] [2006a 27–48]); in Chapter 2 of this book I emphasize the plural uses of popular cinema by audiences under dictatorship.

22 Paul Julian Smith has argued that cultural theory, like the work of Bourdieu, may 'side-step' this 'exhausted debate' of consent and dissent, or 'hegemony and resistance' (2003, 6).

23 In this blurring of high cultural references and accessible form there are some points of continuity between the 'middlebrow' and the contested aesthetic descriptor 'pretty'. Rosalind Galt hints at these continuities in her study of the subject, with references to the 'discomfort with a style of heightened aesthetics that is too decorative, too sensorially pleasurable to be high art, and yet too composed and "arty" to be efficient entertainment' (2011, 12).

24 Deborah Shaw makes this point in 'The Emergence of Mexican Middlebrow Filmmaking: From the National to the Transnational', unpublished paper presented at the 'Middlebrow Cinema' symposium, University of Exeter, July 2012. Beyond the scope of this book, which locates particular films in their historical context, lies the movement of films between categories over time. Lázaro Reboll and Willis offer the example of *Welcome Mr Marshall!* (*Bienvenido Míster Marshall* Berlanga 1952), as a text that shifts 'from "popular" to "middlebrow" dependent upon the taste formations of those watching' (2004a, 6).

1

Questions of Class and Questions of Art in Early Cinema

Only 10 per cent of pre-Civil War Spanish films are extant,[1] and considerable, though diminishing, challenges of availability hamper efforts to engage with them.[2] Alluding to problems of preservation, David George, Susan Larson and Leigh Mercer name the study of early Spanish film 'a shadowy game of hide and seek with images whose traces grow dimmer with each passing day' (2007, 73) – but stress that the game is as important as it is difficult. If High Modernism was occasionally sceptical of cinema as a mass cultural form,[3] while the Avant-Garde, on the other hand, was frequently stimulated by its formal novelty,[4] scholars of early cinema stress that the influence of the new medium of film – much like the new form of transport of the train – stretched far beyond artistic elites to contribute to nothing less than the whole-scale reconceptualization of time and space in the modern era.[5] Film could at once replicate real time in its succession of 24 frames a second, could manipulate 'contingent, unpredictable, and unknowable instants' (an especial source of stimulation for early audiences [Woods 2012, 32]), and, as the technology advanced to allow montage, control time through editing (speed it up, slow it down, even still its inexorable flow).[6] Film, at the same time, was spatially promiscuous, able to represent both the reassuringly familiar (like *La Puerta del Sol* [Promio 1896], Madrid's central square) and the excitingly exotic (like *The Life of Mexican Gauchos* [*La vida de los gauchos en México* 1898]) (Woods 2012, 35). The camera could also break down the barrier between the public and private with shocking directness, making private spaces public, the invisible, visible. What Larson summarizes as a 'new experience of space' (2007, 112) extended to the material viewing context too, for the movie theatre constituted a 'significant new social space' (George, Larson and Mercer 2007, 74).

For Spanish film history, the insights provided by the study of its early cinema offer both salutary correctives to and productive connections with later periods. Even if the Franco regime's control of cinema was uneven (as I explore in Chapter 2), common knowledge of its repressive deployment of censorship and dubbing has led to a truism that associates Spanish cinema prior to the 1970s Transition with the political state. Eva Woods dissolves this association:

> Despite the Franco regime's grip on the cinema after the war, the Spanish national industry began not because of the state, but [...] in the realms of the popular and eventually private capital interests, even though these sectors would succumb to nationalist control after the war. (2005a, 49)

Another myth challenged by the study of Spanish film pre-Franco is that of national audiences' rejection of their own cinema. During the Second Republic (1931–6) and prior to Francoism's 1941 imposition of dubbing of foreign films (the crippling effect of which on the national cinema can still be felt today), audiences were particularly loyal to the domestic product (Fanés 1989, 148), which enjoyed nothing less than a golden age.[7]

Transnationality is an important point of connection between early cinema and later periods. Many of the pioneers were especially cosmopolitan. Segundo de Chomón, for example, worked for both Pathé in Paris and Itala Film of Turin, founded the first Spanish film production company, Macaya y Carro, and claimed other firsts, like the tracking shot and colouring techniques. Mercer shows that de Chomón developed an experimental film language that looks forward to European Surrealism (2007, 80). Moving from the experimental to the mainstream, another example is politician, writer and filmmaker Vicente Blasco Ibáñez, whose *Blood and Sand* (*Sangre y arena*) I analyse below, who was the most widely-read Spanish writer outside Spain in the 1920s (Sánchez Salas 2007, 79). Ibáñez and his work crossed both borders and media: to date, his name features as director, scriptwriter or author of the original novel of 29 films and TV series, made in Spain, France and the US from 1913–2008. The incipient star culture of the 1910s and 1920s also confirms internationalization, with Zaragoza-born Raquel Meller (Francisca Romana Margués López) working in multiple countries and media (Woods 2012, 74–100). Spain also hosted international creative personnel, including French and Italians directors seeking a neutral country in the First World War (Herrera 2005, 327). Julio Pérez Perucha negatively interprets this internationalism by summarizing it as 'emigrées and colonizers' (1995, 73–80); I inflect it positively as a process of transnational enriching of film cultures. Early Spanish film itself also frequently travelled beyond its borders. Bernard

Bentley stresses the international success of Catalan serial films in the 1900s and 1910s (2008, 22), while Woods notes of the 1920s that 'transportability and translatability (lack of sound), enabled [Spanish cinema's] massive dissemination throughout the West, demonstrating Spain's arrival to the world market' (2005b, 297). CIFESA, a leading production company of the Second Republic, also successfully exported Spanish films to foreign markets in the mid-1930s.

Turning to historical context, when the Lumière brothers' cinematograph was first screened in Spain in 1896,[8] its flickering images were projected onto a country that still clung on to the last vestiges of empire (the loss of Cuba and the Philippines to the US, known as the 'Disaster', was just around the corner in 1898), had an illiteracy rate of 50 per cent,[9] endured a corrupt political system of constitutional monarchy with rigged elections ensuring that two main parties took it in turns to be in power (the 'turno pacífico'), was predominantly rural at 68 per cent (Pérez Perucha 1995, 22) (though industrial labour unrest lay around the corner in 1900s Catalonia), and endured both entrenched class positions and a repressive Catholic Church. Luis Buñuel's autobiography has been cited elsewhere for its pithy summary of this situation, but it bears repetition. Referring to the Aragonese village of Calanda where he was born in 1900, he makes a remark that has widespread application to a country that was still predominantly rural: 'the Middle Ages lasted until World War I' (1994, 8).

Weakened by the Disaster, by labour unrest in industrial Barcelona, and by the continuing struggle to retain control and influence in Morocco,[10] Spain was neutral in the First World War. It abandoned the 'turno' system in 1917, but endured its first military dictatorship of the twentieth century between 1923 and 1930 under General Miguel Primo de Rivera, who fell, in part, owing to the worldwide repercussions of the 1929 Wall Street Crash. Military government continued under General Belanguer, but electoral gains in 1931 by Republicans led to the declaration of the Second Republic (the short-lived First Republic only lasted from 1873–4) and King Alfonso XIII left Spain. In a context of economic problems and industrial strife, politics became increasingly polarized over the 1930s, and on 17–18 July 1936 rebel Republican army General Francisco Franco led an uprising against the democratically-elected government; there followed a Civil War that ended with Franco's declaration of victory on 1 April 1939.

Against this historical backdrop film developed in fits and starts. Pérez Perucha, whose work has been widely quoted by subsequent historians, writes dismissively that, in the period 1896–1905 'fiction film in Spain totalled all of 2 comic scenes and 4 "trick" films' (1995, 29; translated in Jordan and Allinson 2005, 5), and that prior to 1910, Spanish cinema went through a

period of 'prolonged pioneerism' (1995, 28; quoted in Gubern 1996, 12).[11] Early film scholars have more recently questioned the tendency to date the birth of narrative film at 1910, querying the use of terms like 'primitive' cinema, and probing the shift from what Noël Burch named the 'Primitive Mode of Representation' to the 'Institutional Mode of Representation' in the 1910s (see Kember and Popple 2004, 34, who note that Burch himself later revised these terms). In this spirit, Mercer's study of Segundo de Chomón's pre-1910 work (2007) highlights the importance of visual spectacle before narrative became the dominant fictional form. In this book I nonetheless return to 1910 as a starting point as I focus on the intertwined questions of art and questions of class in the narrative feature film. I select six films from the 1910s-1930s (a selection of a selection, of course, with only 10 per cent availability) to explore, for example, the ways the off-screen pursuit of middle-class audiences for the new medium was conducted through an on-screen appeal to artistic respectability in the form of literary and historical references.

While the first films screened in Spain were viewed in the Spanish capital, cinema initially failed to lure Madrid audiences away from established diversions like popular theatre, and Barcelona, with its small but established bourgeoisie and its proximity to France, became the context for the shift from fairground spectacle to seventh art. This shift is illustrated by the launch of the Barcelona-based journal *Arte y Cinematografía* (Art and Filmmaking), which ran from 1910–36. (Riciotto Canudo published *The Birth of the Seventh Art* in 1911.) Pérez Perucha gloomily dismisses Barcelona-based production of the 1910s as an effort based on 'enthusiasm and volunteering rather than means and possibilities' (1995, 47), hampered by severe industrial instability (most production companies only lasted four years, making an average of 4/5 titles [1995, 48; Bentley 2008, 18]); a Catholic church that dismissed cinema as 'a spectacle likely to dilute morals and provoke insanity, idiocy and blindness' (1995, 50; translated in Triana-Toribio 2003, 16);[12] exacerbating factors like the lack of celluloid in the First World War (1995, 53); and a conservative Catalan bourgeoisie uninterested in the new medium (Jordan and Allinson 2003, 173). This chapter nonetheless focuses on the attempt – rather than the overall failure – to recruit the middle classes to the cinema through artistic respectability. This attempt was already evident in the 1900s, in the theatre references of *Lethal Love** (*Amor que mata* Frutuós Gelabert 1908) for example (Pavlovic et al. 2009, 5), and by the 1910s even the largely indifferent state was briefly persuaded of film's artistic worth and invested in American Charles J. Drossner's expensive historical biopic *The Life of Christopher Columbus** (*La vida de Cristóbal Colón* 1916), which was treated with enthusiasm by contemporary commentators, indifference by contemporary audiences and disdain by subsequent critics (Pérez Perucha 1995, 79–80). From this period I

analyse Vicente Blasco Ibáñez's bid for respectability through the adaptation of his own novel *Sangre y arena* (*Blood and Sand* 1916), which even hostile critics acknowledge was successful (Pérez Perucha 1995, 8).

Film production shifted from Barcelona to Madrid in the 1920s, partly due to the difficulties outlined above, partly to the centralizing policies of new dictator Primo de Rivera, and partly to a new receptiveness to film among the capital's audiences (especially when it adapted popular theatrical forms like the zarzuela and sainete). The shift coincided with the economic boom that saw a staggering increase of 40 per cent in industrial activity over the decade (Barton 2004, 207),[13] with a concomitant programme of public investment and a doubling of Madrid's population over three decades to a million by 1930. If Spain as a whole possessed 1,497 cinema theatres by 1925, some 10 per cent of the European total (Pérez Perucha 1995, 88), Madrid in particular possessed only 26 in 1907 (Mercer 2007, 83), but the figure almost tripled by 1936.[14] Bentley distinguishes between the tendency for the 'Catalan pioneers' pre-1910 to be photographers and the four prominent Madrid-based directors (José Buchs, Benito Perojo, Fernando Delgado and Florián Rey) to be former actors (2008, 28), which may point to a shift of interest from visual spectacle to narrative and characterization. This is apparently confirmed by another shift over the 1920s from popular operatic adaptations (zarzuela and sainete) to novel adaptations, which Daniel Sánchez Salas dates at 1925 with Manuel Noriega and Alejandro Pérez Lugín's *College Boarding House* (*La casa de la Troya* 1925) (2007, 408; Sánchez Vidal 1991, 29), though zarzuela and sainete adaptations increased their appeal in the 1930s and 1940s. From this period I analyse the de Baños brothers' adaptation (1922) of José Zorrilla's famous 1884 play *Don Juan Tenorio*; then turn to the novel, with José Buchs's version (1925) of Benito Pérez Galdós' *The Grandfather** (*El abuelo*, first published as a novel in 1897, then as a play in 1904), and finally to Francisco Elías's *The Mystery of the Puerta del Sol** (*El misterio de la Puerta del Sol* 1929), an original comedy (not an adaptation) that was Spain's first sound film. All three attest to cinema's pursuit of new upwardly-mobile audiences in the 1920s, through both intermedial and international references.

The coming of sound was disastrous for this developing Spanish cinema. The first talkie, *The Jazz Singer* (1927), was screened silently in Madrid in 1929 as the technical equipment for exhibition did not exist (Gubern 1977, 14). Its installation was patchy, appearing in Barcelona in 1929 (Gubern 1977, 15), though the incompatibility of various systems meant that the only cities able to exhibit *Puerta del Sol* were Burgos and Zamora (Colorado 1997, 80). With insufficient exhibition equipment, the emigration of film personnel abroad to make Spanish-language versions of Hollywood film (for example for Paramount at Joinville in France [Gubern 1977, 10n. 1]), and the ever-increasing

dominance of Hollywood cinema (aided by the slow-down in production among those nations who fought in the First World War), only one Spanish film was made in 1931.[15] However, as audiences grew accustomed to sound and personnel returned with technical knowledge acquired abroad, Spanish cinema under the Second Republic enjoyed a golden age that perhaps glitters all the more brightly today given our knowledge that the Civil War lay ahead. From this period I analyse *The Cursed Village* (*La aldea maldita* Rey 1930), which I interpret as a watershed piece not only for its acknowledged position as one of the best – but also one of the last – Spanish silent films. The film also misogynistically aligns upward social mobility with female moral decline, which is evident in earlier features like Buchs's *The Grandfather* and *Pilar Guerra* (1926), and looks forward to the treatment of social mobility to be discussed in later chapters of this book. A study of economic deprivation, *The Cursed Village*'s portrait of rural exodus in Castile also encapsulates the way the whole world was plunged into crisis following the Wall Street Crash, with political polarization and the outbreak of Civil and World Wars at the end of the 1930s its devastating corollaries. With such events in mind, it is impossible not to view the optimistic films of the Second Republic as poignantly backlit by the imminent crisis. I analyse *The Fair of the Dove* (*La verbena de la paloma* 1935) as a conciliatory vision that manages to combine entrenched class division with reconciliation between the classes through its breezy narrative of cross-class love affairs and communal festivities (a similar approach has been adopted to Rey's *Dark and Bright* (*Morena clara*) of the following year).[16] It was enjoyed over 1935–6 by a huge national audience loyal to domestic films precisely in the moment before such cross-class alliance and communality were catastrophically to shatter with the outbreak of the Civil War.

Blood and Sand (*Sangre y arena* André and Ibáñez 1916)

Eminent philosopher Miguel de Unamuno was unfortunately to declare in 1923 that 'Literature has no role to play in the cinema' (quoted and translated in Morris 1980, 30); popular author, journalist and distinguished Republican politician Vicente Blasco Ibáñez stands at the other end of the spectrum. Ibáñez does not just use cinema as a narrative subject in his work (like Ramón Gómez de la Serna's *Cinelandia* [1923] [Parsons 2003, 90–2]), or just incorporate film techniques like visual blurring in his literary approach (as in *Cinelandia*, again, or in Ramón del Valle-Inclán's in *Luces de Bohemia*