

Volume 86

Number 3

September 2003

Hispania

A journal devoted to the teaching
of Spanish and Portuguese,
published by the
American Association of Teachers
of Spanish and Portuguese, Inc.

AATSP
The American Association of
Teachers of Spanish and Portuguese



Ehrlich, Linda C., ed. *An Open Window: The Cinema of Víctor Erice*. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2000. Pp. 304. ISBN 0-8108-3766-8

Linda Ehrlich's *An Open Window: The Cinema of Víctor Erice* is the first monograph in English on one of Spain's most important film makers. Erice has only directed three feature-length movies—*The Spirit of The Beehive* (1973), *The South* (1982), and *Dream of Light* (a.k.a. *The Quince Tree Sun*, 1992). However, because of the haunting quality of these films and the ten-year hiatus between each one, Erice's reputation in Spain has gained an almost mythic status. This anthology should help to booster his reputation here in the United States. *An Open Window* contains reprints of pieces written in English and in translation from Spanish and Japanese critics, together with some original essays. The collection of essays focuses on both individual films and on his work as a whole, providing examples of Erice's writings on cinema, interviews with the director, and brief film reviews.

Ehrlich's introductory essay gives an overview of Erice's films, and her interview with the director provides valuable insights into his film-making and the films themselves, which he

believes are characterized by “a search for knowledge” (44). Excerpts from Carmen Arocena’s book on Erice show his adherence to critical realism in which he defines film as a “social act” (69), and she notes the “opposition between reality and ideals” (72) that is a constant in his films.

Regarding *The Spirit of the Beehive*, Fernando Savater offers a philosophical examination of the nature of the monster’s deformity: the metaphorical monsters are the victims of Franco, and Erice’s film is therefore a “staunch allegation against fascism” (96). Luis Arata discusses Ana’s use of imagination while playing and notes that “Ana’s play becomes a process of exploration, of self-discovery, of self-creation” (105). Miguel Angel Lomillos analyzes the parental estrangement that is governed by a “poetics of absence” (118).

The major controversy surrounding *The South* is the fact that the film’s producer cut short the filming, and the result is that Erice believes that his film is unfinished. Angel Fernández-Santos shows frustration over the truncation of the project and provides insights into what might have been. Peter Evans and Robin Fiddian give an excellent close reading of *The South* within the context of Erice’s use of narrative form, questions of gender, and intertextuality. Antonio Santos examines Adelaida García Morales’s novella and its relation to the film. His essay emphasizes the former, and may cause confusion for those who are not familiar with both texts.

Dream of Light is an unusual film that borders the documentary genre, as it records how artist Antonio López paints a quince tree in his patio. William Johnson’s review notes how López’s private life is undramatic, yet “Eric’s meditative appraisal of this unlikely hero generates an extraordinary sense of wonder” (175). Paul Julian Smith notes how the elliptical style of *The Spirit of the Beehive* resides in its political critique, whereas in *The South* the ellipses “come close to formal enigmas” (183). Nevertheless, in comparison with the García Morales novella, the film adaptation also contains political critique, as Erice foregrounds the civil war and its repercussions, especially in the bedroom scene with Estrella and Milagros. Smith also notes that *Dream of Light*, Erice’s “most reflexive commentary yet on the nature of representation” (184) is also his most historical film, since the radio and television newscasts, as well as the presence of Polish workers and Chinese visitors, link the artist’s studio to the outside world and become testimony to “the new cosmopolitanism of Spain” (185). Linda Ehrlich’s essay situates *Dream of Light* in the tradition of Spanish still-life painting, noting that in Antonio López’s painting “the patient accumulation of [...] cinematic images [...], like the seemingly mundane images in Zurbarán’s painting, allows us to ponder the sacred dimension of the human” (196). Marsha Kinder links *Dream of Light* with another Spanish film, José Luis Guerín’s *Innisfree* (1990): “both are reflexive films that extend the exploration of representation issues to media other than cinema” (206). She quotes Erice’s contention that the film is about the “secret relationship between painting and cinema” and that his commonality with painter López is the dream of “the perfect capturing of light” which responds to the “ingrained need to conquer time through the perpetuity of forms; the desire to replace the external world with its double” (207). She believes that the film’s hybrid nature “decenters” it in terms of (documentary) genre, and that there is also a decentering of nationality in the way that the film can maintain and yet transcend elements of cultural specificity.

In the section of General Essays, the contributions by Hasumi Shigehiko, Miyaoka Hideyuki, and Maeda Hideki reflect Erice’s popularity in Japan, emphasizing the importance of time in Erice’s work—and life. Dominique Russell’s incisive essay on the use of sound in Erice’s films builds on the concept of the “aesthetics of silence.” Miguel Marías believes that in an industry where commercial values dominate more and more, Víctor Erice is unique because he is willing to explore the limits of cinema, and that his work has “an attitude of moral and artistic responsibility.” The work also contains several short film reviews, a Filmography, and a “Selected Bibliography” on Erice and Spanish cinema in general.

Hispanists may already be familiar with several of the essays presented here, but the strong point of *An Open Window* is that it brings the work of myriad critics (reviews, critical essays, and interviews) together in this one volume, which will provide access for an American audience to critical writings on Erice in English. This book is altogether a welcome addition to the work on

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this Spanish director, and hopefully, it will stimulate more interest in Erice on this side of the Atlantic.