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On: 12 February 2015, At: 15:24

Publisher: Routledge

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## Studies in European Cinema

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rseu20>

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Published online: 03 Jan 2014.

To cite this article: Roger Hillman (2008) Trueba's *La niña de tus ojos* (The Girl of Your Dreams) (1998): the German connection, *Studies in European Cinema*, 5:1, 67-76

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1386/seci.5.1.67.1>

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# Trueba's *La niña de tus ojos* (*The Girl of Your Dreams*) (1998): the German connection

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## Abstract

*Fernando Trueba's 1998 film superficially stages a playful remake of a multi-language version film shot in Berlin during the Spanish Civil War. However, the double time frame is used to subversive effect, not just to create parallels between then and now within Spanish history but also through its links to German history and film history. Trueba provides much more than a gloss on Spain emerging from the post-Franco transition era, and his film dramatizes the application of memory studies to Spanish (and German, and European) identity issues.*

## Keywords

Spanish Civil War  
amnesia  
trans-national  
Trueba  
Riefenstahl

## Context

Where Italy, Austria and France rewrote the script of their very different involvements in the Second World War, Franco's Spain adopted silence about the brutality on both sides during the Spanish Civil War. A leading work on the Franco dictatorship in the post-war period is called *A Time of Silence*, the silencing signifying 'the continuation of (the civil) war as a work of cultural destruction' (Richards 1998: 2). Hence, while the rest of Europe remained convulsed by World War II, the aftermath of the Civil War, for Spain the latter remained *the* example of a house divided, a bogey never to be contemplated again. Once Franco departed, in the period of transition as democracy was being restored, silence was still largely observed in public debate, under what has often been called a 'forgetfulness pact' (Cabrera 2005: 989).<sup>1</sup> A reassessment of the long-taboo years was largely left to the academic sphere, with an outpouring of studies of the Second Republic and the Civil War within Spanish historiography (Cabrera 2005: 1008), and to the creative arts, not least to film. Given all this, the role of historical memory alone makes Spain a special case, with a thin dividing line between amnesty and amnesia (Friedman and Kenney 2005: 9), a concept to which we shall return. In 1993, the Socialists finally broke the unwritten pact, accusing their conservative rivals of direct links with Franco's dictatorship, and this opened the floodgates of debate. Fernando Trueba's film *The Girl of Your Dreams* might be viewed on the surface as a whimsical contribution to that debate.

Alongside these more inward-looking developments, Spain became a member of the European Union in 1986, a Union then having twelve

1 Its sole precedent being the years 1931–1936, the duration of the Second Republic.

members, and one transformed by the unification of Germany in 1990 and the collapse of the East Bloc. By the time Trueba's film was made, European fears about renewed German domination of the EU must have been largely allayed, but that also meant that post-unification Germany could not display the economic wizardry associated with the Deutschmark. Within the film industry, European co-productions, which of course had always existed, were encouraged via funding from Brussels. But it was France, not Germany or Spain, which had managed to defend audiovisual rights for special treatment in trade negotiations with the United States. These three countries, at the time of Trueba's film, led European co-productions (Miller et al. 2001: 84). State subsidies for film producers in Spain ended during the reign of the People's Party (1996–2004) (Chaudhuri 2005: 26), qualifying any view of the tendency to co-productions as the forsaking of national blinkers. To return to the beginning of this introductory arch, the Spanish Civil War itself must, in the parlance of the 1990s, have assumed retrospective trans-national characteristics. Contemporary British commentators had 'made much of the mix of nationalities who found common cause in fighting for the Republic, and of their collective spirit' (Shelmerdine 2006: 114). Rather than looking like some variation of the French Foreign Legion, this cooperative venture alone must by the 1990s have taken on different inflections in the new Europe.

### **The film itself**

In 1938, a Spanish troupe arrives at the UFA studios in Berlin to shoot a dual language version of a film, a musical based on a folktale. Trueba's 'invention' in fact sustains comparison with a co-production of the 1930s, commissioned by UFA and Hispano Films, of Madrid, an assignment imposed on UFA by Goebbels (Kreimeier 1992: 358). The historical model was called *Carmen, la de Triana* (*Carmen from Triana*) in the Spanish version and *Andalusische Nächte* (*Nights in Andalusia*) in the German version. The latter was directed by Herbert Maisch, the former by Florián Rey; both directors appear as characters in Trueba's film, just as musical numbers are shared by both films. The main song ('Wenn du mich heute nicht küsst . . .') is rendered in Trueba's by a heavily accented Penélope Cruz singing in German (an accurate reflection of the performance of Imperio Argentina in 1938). The Spanish version of this version of *Carmen* was completed just ahead of the German; the latter premiered in July 1938, the former in November of the same year. The *Carmen* story in turn of course embodied European border crossing, with French projections of Spain (Mérimée's prose and Bizet's music). Given that Rey's adaptation was the first Spanish *Carmen* film, and that it used traditional Spanish music rather than Bizet's, it provides a promising springboard for Spanish identity issues in Trueba's 1998 film. In the real Spain of 1938, the major film production centres (Barcelona and Madrid) were still held by the Republicans, which meant that the German–Spanish venture of Hispano Films (Jarvinen and Peredo-Castro 2007: 42–43) could be turned to

advantage. Trueba's film within his own film (the staging of *The Girl of Your Dreams*, based on *Carmen, la de Triana*, as part of his own film, *The Girl of Your Dreams*), is anything but an Ivory Merchant kind of historical reconstruction. It is nonetheless a remake of kinds, like a film-historical reconstruction, and more than that it will be claimed; it partakes of the uncomfortable 'truth' quality of the Shakespearean play within a play.

The Spanish crew members are surprised to find Bavarian stage props rather than more geographically suitable ones. Except for a Kristallnacht invasion by Nazi thugs of their eating place in the Jewish quarter, both Spanish and German partners are almost amiably bumbling, except for reminders that the father of the Penélope Cruz figure is still imprisoned. Goebbels himself is captivated by her and sets her up in a chalet, to which her passionless partner, the Spanish director, agrees for the sake of the film. Except for a fiery song and dance routine from Cruz, the film being shot largely languishes, given a particular cast by the presence of concentration camp inmates as extras.<sup>2</sup> The title *The Girl of Your Dreams* comes from the script of the film within Trueba's film and the words are addressed by Cruz to her dead lover.<sup>3</sup> Her first rendition is unconvincing, so the director plays his trump card, conveying to her the news that her father has supposedly died of pneumonia in a Spanish prison; her grief then imparts to the words all the feeling that had been lacking.

Among the extras, a Russian Jew catches the eye of Macarena Granada, played by Cruz, a character who identifies herself as a half-gypsy.<sup>4</sup> This reflects both the Mérimée/Bizet plot and the songs redolent of Gypsy culture in Rey's film. But Trueba's audience is fully aware that the flight of Leo and Macarena at the end is not just dramatically but also historically utopian. She does manage to escape with him to the chalet, where he knocks Goebbels unconscious. Her partner Fontiveros makes a pact with Magda Goebbels – played by none less than Fassbinder's favourite female lead, Hanna Schygulla – to secure escape for Macarena and her Russian, and they indeed fly off to Paris, as the troupe boards their bus home. Left behind are the director, his dictionary and the translator, with the director isolated in a final iris shot. The translator of 1938 is stateless; his 1998 counterpart is no doubt a Brussels embodiment of fluid identities. The masking of the screen plus iris shots were favourite silent film devices to create a more dynamic screen space; the director of 1998 may well have been masked into a corner. The climactic scene plunders *Casablanca*, and the question arises, why this in a film of 1998? Beyond the visual match shots of this final sequence, and certain plot correlations, there is the staging of history as melodrama, starting with the map of Africa and the newsreel-type voice at the beginning of Curtiz' film, where here the film's opening footage is a newsreel that firmly locates the Franco era within the context of European fascist movements in Germany and Italy. In terms of the self-perception of the Spanish troupe, melodrama is particularly apt for a take on Spanish history, not least in the musical that is the centrepiece of their film-script. However, beyond the performative set

2 To preempt a parallel still to be developed, this matches (while eclipsing in quality) the first dance of the Leni Riefenstahl figure in *Tiefeland*, which animates spectators who have been lifeless at that point. Having anticipated this much, the first sentence of the current paragraph might now be reconsidered alongside the fact that the shooting of *Tiefeland* involved 'a mock Spanish village' being 'built in Krün near Mittenwald in the Bavarian Alps' (Tegel 2003: 3).

3 The Spanish title refers to 'the girl of your eyes', but 'niña' means 'pupil (as in 'eye')' as well as 'girl'.

The expression 'La niña de tus ojos' is also often used in comparative contexts to express how dear a person or something is to someone, leading to sentences like 'He takes care of her like the pupil of his eyes', 'She loved him more than the pupil of her eyes'. For these details, author thanks to his colleague Mónica Aznárez (private communication).

4 As concentration camp extra, an anachronism in a film of 1938? And hence already pointing to Riefenstahl's timeframe?

5 See <http://www.riefenstahl.org/director/1954/>

piece, there is always a historical framing – the folklorist film they are making was a genre favoured by the early Francoist regime. But just as the lover rather than the partner boards the plane in Trueba's remake, Fontiveros' apolitical stance in favour of his film, above all, will not take the turn that Rick's does, and has to be, at the very least, a take on Spain's neutrality. And whereas *Casablanca's* ending was dictated by narrative necessity, with the War still open-ended, Trueba's equation of course is different. The most spirited figure leaves both Spain and Germany, possibly even Europe, while the abandoned director Fontiveros has none of Bogie's status, either as self-sacrificing lover or as political convert. The Spanish troupe returns 'home', while the sole escape is made for love, not as resistance – where does this leave the historical possibility of Spanish exile and diaspora? In fact, the sole example of diaspora has been this troupe, not in exile, but in a cooperative venture in the UFA studios, that is far from any Republican safe haven. As they are about to embark for Paris, Macarena's female support utters a rallying cry for the social revolution. Seemingly a validation of Macarena's choice of Leo, it also embodies an ambiguous defence of Spanish Republicanism (not least through the latter encompassing elements of anarchism, perhaps the ultimate social revolution). But in the context of the vaguely farcical tone of this ending, and its quality of everything appearing to be in quotation marks, the slogan is a sign of the vacillation of the masses, rather than any political insights. The bulk of the troupe, on the other hand, are about to return home, where the Republican cause has withered. And so the political ironies proliferate.

Beyond a reconstruction of film history, then, the evocation of *Casablanca* might point towards history filtered melodramatically through film. That possibility is sealed, I feel, when we consider more closely one or two further jigsaw pieces. Historically there was another musical shot in the UFA studios, whose lead actress (not unlike Imperio Argentina) had a problematic off-screen relationship with the real Goebbels, rather than a ludicrous onscreen one with a parodied likeness. This musical had Sinti and Roma extras and featured mountainous landscapes, and the first time we see the female lead perform music, she has castanets in her hands.<sup>5</sup> This was Leni Riefenstahl's *Tiefland*, shot between 1940 and 1944 and premiered in 1954. Its location shots included Spain in 1943 and its studio shots, Berlin and Prague in 1944 (Tegel 2003: 3). The settings of the operetta (by Eugène d'Albert) on which its story was based were the Pyrenees and the Catalan lowlands; it was premiered in Prague in 1903. All this is a kind of inversion of the cardboard Spanish settings in Berlin studios in Trueba's film, whose real shooting location – Prague – must add at least unintentional irony to the 1938 setting, bearing in mind Chamberlain's 'peace in our time' speech. Wholly conscious, on the other hand, was the choice of the Barrandov studios on the outskirts of Prague, which became a branch of UFA after the Nazi occupation of Czechoslovakia, and where Riefenstahl began editing *Tiefland* (Russi 2000: 163). Unlike the Babelsberg studios of Berlin, these had not been modernized, but rather preserved, as a museum piece. There are

further plot parallels; Riefenstahl's marquis hangs a necklace on Marta, who thanks him by interceding for the peasants, while in Trueba's film, a smitten Goebbels makes the same gift; and Macarena champions the cause of the concentration camp extras, not just the one who has caught her eye.<sup>6</sup>

If ever there was a pivotal millennial figure for exploring issues of amnesty and amnesia, it must have been Leni Riefenstahl, long off limits in her own country. In the same year in which Trueba's film premiered, the first German retrospective of her films was held at the Filmmuseum Potsdam, very close to the Babelsberg studios of UFA. In the German contribution to the Centenary of Cinema series, Leni Riefenstahl, though not interviewed, was among the directors gathered by host Edgar Reitz. Riefenstahl's consistent stance that she had only been aesthetically interested in filmmaking never exonerated her in the eyes of post-war reception, though the Allies' denazification committee did absolve her of more than a fellow-traveller status under Nazism. An amalgam of biographical pointers to her is to be found in Trueba's film. For the director Fontiveros the film is everything, blinding him wilfully to political links, while Magda Goebbels warns him that he will be unable to make films after the War. The star of *Carmen, la de Triana/Andalusische Nächte*, Imperio Argentina, shared some of Riefenstahl's talents, profile, longevity (her dates being 1906–2003) and connections to Hitler and Goebbels. With an eye to Trueba's double time frame and the unanswered questions with which he teases the present, it is worth noting that Argentina 'was seen in the 1930s, and as late as 1988 when she was awarded an honorary Goya award for lifetime achievement, as [. . .] the incarnation of pure Spanishness . . .' (Triana-Toribio 2003: 31). By the late 1990s, and even more so in the last decade, Cruz becomes the ideal person to play her role, at least as viewed from outside Spain. And the combination of Macarena/Cruz' attachment to the Russian Jew, plus the Argentina/Riefenstahl link established above, makes Trueba's film a more critical and certainly less ambivalent vehicle than its model in film history.

### The opening sequence

*La niña de tus ojos* opens with the words 'El Departamento Nacional de Cinematografía presenta Noticiario Español' on the right-hand side of the screen. It is succeeded by newsreel footage alongside the credits to his own film, a split-screen effect that creates a confluence between the production team of 1998 and the documentary rendition of events of 60 years earlier. Credits for the film which we are about to see, stand in a false relationship to the 'Spanish newsreel' on the right of the screen. The latter appears to be documentary footage backed not only by a voice over commentary, but also by music that belongs to Trueba rather than these images. It is in fact genuine newsreel footage from the *Noticiario Español* (1938–1941), but the compilation has been edited by Trueba; the content of the voiceover comment is authentic.<sup>7</sup> Simply as a commentary on the editing power of historical collage, Trueba's conceit here mimics the No-Do newsreels, 'that had a monopoly on archival footage of the Spanish Civil War and its aftermath, on

- 6 A recent analysis of the film makes the intriguing point that 'Goebbels and Russian Leo [. . .] bring with them an obvious national/ideological representation that functions in tandem with Macarena to mimic the Spanish Civil War, fascism and communism fighting over the body of Spain, and the larger European context of the impending Second World War' (Hardcastle 2007: 22). The further undeclared warrior 'over the body of Spain' is the translator Václav, with his restrained infatuation; in one of the most striking scenes of the film his translations of Goebbels' sweet nothings while dancing with Macarena oblige Václav himself to join in their dance rhythm as he circles the couple.
- 7 My thanks to Professor Román Gubern (private communication) for details in this sentence.

- 8 Packing a far more open punch than Trueba's film, Wertmuller's (not least via its links to Benigni's *Life is Beautiful*) covers somewhat similar ground, examining the national wartime psyche through a pathetic picaro (played by Giancarlo Giannini), who also tries to subvert camp life through music (addressed to the proto-Nordic female commandant). Even more arresting is the dramatically comparable opening to Amelio's *Lamerica* (1994), a film creating a direct link across fifty years between Italian Fascism and neo-colonialism in Albania.

- 9 Altogether, Aguilar's magisterial text is obligatory background reading to the dual timeframe of Trueba's film.

its narrativization through editing, and on its distribution as the official "truth" (Kinder 2003: 209, n.3). The vertically split screen is altogether suggestive. The Republican and Nationalist zones of Spain were roughly equal at the outbreak of war, while after it, 'Spain was forced to face a panorama of divided memories' (Aguilar 2002: 32). The documentary footage in the right-hand side of the screen establishes a close connection between Franco's Spain, Hitler's Germany and Mussolini's Italy, as a kind of political co-production of the European far Right. This newsreel signals from the outset its clear ideological component, not least through its allusion to the surreal opening to Wertmuller's *Seven Beauties* (1975).<sup>8</sup> It also encapsulates much of the balancing act of *The Girl of Your Dreams*. It combines the style of the 'noticiario', the forerunner of the No-Do, the official Francoist medium, 'which was compulsorily shown in all commercial cinemas between 1943 and 1975 (and voluntarily between 1976 and 1981)' (Aguilar 2002: 27).<sup>9</sup> But footage of the Nuremberg rally already evokes Riefenstahl. And the fact that 'the Departamento Nacional de Cinematografía relied on Berlin, Lisbon and Rome' (Triana-Toribio 2003: 32) already qualifies the Spanishness of the 'Spanish newsreel', which we are to be regaled with.

Beyond the gloating soundtrack voice of the newsreel commentator, the whole sequence – including scenes outside Spain – is underpinned by folkloric music that reappears during the dance performance(s) later in the film. Images and rhetoric are not always balanced: commentary about outstanding riders under Spanish officers accompanying Franco on official occasions is actually matched to a shot of a horse and rider falling on a steep sand-dune. And there is no clear dividing line between the film's fiction (based on fact), and this faux documentary at the start (historically probably 'faux' from the start, and certainly for Trueba's audiences). When the title of Trueba's film appears, finally in colour, the right-hand side of the screen shows swastikas, and then Nuremberg of the 1930s. Black and white footage segues the troupe of Spanish players with the performers on the political stages of Europe, and their story is superimposed on the historical stage with the legitimizing gesture of documentary. The subsequent film, almost exclusively in colour, implies a similar process for a late-twentieth-century viewer of extricating outright fiction from any implications of contemporary 'fact', or resonance.

For a viewer of 1998, the immediate outcome of the political posturing is admittedly known, while the No-Do has a potentially nostalgic quality of a theme park. German newsreels, with Spanish subtitles, circulated in Spanish cinemas up till the outbreak of the Civil War, and represented a significant corner of the market (Paz and Montero 2007: 255). An ongoing presence of UFA's newsreel in Spanish cinemas was of vital interest to the German side of negotiations in May or June 1938, while Spanish partners were interested in their own self-legitimation through the same channel. The agreement reached 'allowed for the production, with German aid of a Francoist weekly newsreel (*Noticario Español*)' (Paz and Montero 2007: 257–258). And this imprimatur on the right-hand side of the screen and the only section not vying with Trueba's own credits on the left-hand side

provides the outer frame for all that is to follow, not just the newsreel: 'El Departamento Nacional de Cinematografía presenta Noticiario Español'.

## Historical memory

Although by 1998 Germany and Italy had addressed their wartime legacies, Trueba seems to be posing the question of the degree to which Spain has, not least through the evocation of Riefenstahl. And this not just in a national context – the return to a decade of multi-language film versions, as well as Trueba's invention of the Russian translator (who can speak twelve languages), on top of the pro-filmic EU presidency falling to Spain and Germany at different stages of the late 1990s, all lend reference to the earlier German–Spanish co-production a status paralleling that of so many historical novels (as *romans à clef*), in which ostensibly past events are thinly disguised allusions to the present. And unexpected links are suggested between past and present – not least via the translator Václav, this film functions as a multi-language version film itself, while Václav's often sly distortions of translation are undoubtedly a wink in the direction of present-day Brussels diplomacy. In no sense is Trueba implying a recurrence of the fascist threat in Europe of the late 1990s. This film is not an example of what Ricœur calls 'repetition-memory', a 'compulsion to repeat' which, drawing on Freud, eclipses 'the true recollection by which the present would be reconciled with the past'. Ricœur opposes to 'repetition-memory' what he calls 'recollection-memory' (Ricœur 2004: 79), a category capable in critical vein of 'the work of remembering'. In the labour that is memory, one can deduce that Trueba views Spain of the late 1990s as risking 'not enough memory [. . .] hence an abuse of forgetting' (Ricœur 2004: 81). It is as if Trueba's script was itself vindicated by *Casablanca* – 'you must remember this', above all 'as time goes by'. But this cultivation of memory work does put Trueba's film at odds with the assertion in a recent book on Spanish Cinema that 'since then [1996], Spanish film-makers have barely touched on contemporary social issues or even a political theme' (Stone 2002: 130). Trueba does, indirectly, and challenges the accepted discourse of 'a uniform and non-problematic collective memory of both war and Francoism' (López 2006: 81). The strong presence of Riefenstahl in the wings not just enables, but also demands this problematization. It instantly poses an arresting question mark against the 'reinvestment of Republican memory in the Spain of the new millennium', which otherwise 'could be read [. . .] as its illegitimate recycling' (López 2006: 80). Recycling, the remake of a film within this film, is central to the dramatic constellation here. The implication of López' assessment is that it may well be crucial to Spain's political stars as well, and that the very indirectness of Trueba's gesture in that direction is symptomatic of the tightrope walk of the Spanish Transition.

None of all this reduces history to being an old movie. *The Girl of Your Dreams* is not particularly innovative. But by 'tell[ing] the past self-reflexively' (Rosenstone 2006: 19), where history is also film history, it immediately demystifies the 'look' of the past, and hence any vestiges of the fascinations of fascism, such as were still attributed to Fassbinder's *Lili Marleen*, for instance,

- 10 The second part of Nichols' study is headed 'Documentary: A Fiction (Un)Like Any Other'.
- 11 In relation to the model, Rey's *Carmen*: 'the film concerns the seduction of a brigadier in the Spanish army by a captivating gypsy' (Jarvinen and Peredo-Castro 2007:47). Trueba seems to be indulging in a winking nudge towards the notion of any voyeuristic gaze bypassing Cruz, and possibly to the ripples created by Almodóvar in contemporary Spanish cinema. But the film also winks at the biographical detail of Imperio Argentina's role in 1933 alongside Carlos Gardel, in *Melodia de arrabal* (*Suburban Melody*), shot in the Joinville studios near Paris – Gardel was commonly considered to be homosexual.
- 12 Kreimeier sees Jannings and others as actors deemed to be of value to the State in their characterizations, semi-involuntary, but also semi-conscious, collaborators (1992: 48).
- 13 Anyone still on the sets of UFA in the late 1930s, of course, has historical resonance. Kreimeier sees Leander's stylization as filling a vacuum created by Marlene Dietrich's departure for Hollywood, and Garbo's refusal to be involved with German films (1992: 351).

in the early 1980s. What 60 years ago, in the opening of Trueba's film, was purportedly 'genuine' documentary – a fiction unlike any other, to use Bill Nichols' (1991: 105) phrase – is now equally exposed as a visual and verbal costume drama.<sup>10</sup> In *Tiefland*, the resistance of the Leni Riefenstahl figure to the predatory tyrant provided a plot that made the real life Riefenstahl into the girl of her own dreams, a fantasized embodiment of a no longer misunderstood role. The question arising from Trueba's film is the extent to which he views Leni as the Girl of Spain's Dreams. Was the historically neutral Spain just as suspect as Riefenstahl's claims for herself, and also equally resilient? By the scene clarifying the film's title, Cruz' dramatically varied address to her dead lover, the 'hero' himself has been exposed as not having been significantly wounded in glorious battle, but having an insignificant surface wound, no doubt one styled to spare him from further combat [cf. d'Albert's opera, where the main figure is genuinely wounded]. For the viewer with a long screen-time memory – a viewer addressed throughout in relation to the *longue durée* of historical memory – this has to impact on the 'heroically wounded General Millán Astray' from the opening newsreel. Trueba's false Civil War 'warrior', Julián Torralba, whose injury was supposedly inflicted by the 'Reds', creates a disjunction between both partisan views of the historical struggle itself. This is echoed in the dramatically false chemistry between the towering Aryan main lead and the Spanish male lead, rather than Cruz, the female lead in both language versions.<sup>11</sup> The German is injured not in war but during rehearsals. He is doubled by the Russian Jew, functioning as a stuntman.

Carmen's/Cruz' performance itself is described by onlookers as Garbo-like, and from our historical perspective that too is far more than just an aesthetic judgement. Garbo signified the path not taken by filmmakers like Florián Rey, nor by Spain – Garbo's only film on German soil was made in the mid-1920s. She remains an absent legend in Trueba's film, whereas we see an impersonation of Emil Jannings<sup>12</sup> on set (male lead in *The Blue Angel*), and hear references to Murnau and the sets of *Caligari*, as well as to divas Zarah Leander,<sup>13</sup> billed as the new Garbo (Swedish-born, but a very different cultural object to Garbo) and Marika Röck (whose UFA films included *Die Frau meiner Träume/The Woman of my Dreams* (1944), in which she performed a Spanish dance that Goebbels found frivolously provocative). Beyond that, Cruz' performances, not just in this film, provide a star vehicle capable of challenging Hollywood domination, while also holding at a distance the glorification of Spanish masculinity in popular films of the Franco era. The performative aspects are a major departure from the source of Rey's film, 'fashioned [. . .] according to Francoist ideology, with its emphasis on military duty, glory, and submissive women' (Powrie et al. 2007: 12).

Because films like *Casablanca*, *Tiefland* and even *Carmen, de la Triana/Andalusische Nächte* can be meaningfully reused, then film history certainly does not belong to a completed past, and via the iridescent connections between film narrative and contemporary Spanish history, neither does history. At the outset of the brief era of multi-language versions, Erich Pommer's ideal was, in the words of Jan Distelmeyer, 'a "Film-Europa",

characterized by its free exchange of personnel, content and techniques and therefore able to compete with Hollywood' (*FilmEuropa* 2005: 11). Debates about trans-nationalism and Pan-European film resurface in a different guise in a progressively globalizing Europe of the 1990s. Trueba's film illustrates that the images and stories have not necessarily changed substantially, and remakes can prosper. It even duplicates the standard neighbourhood theatre fare of 'two movies, in addition to NODO' (Paz 2003: 362), with the No-Do look-alike at the beginning, and Trueba's film building explicitly on the multi-language version of 1938, as well as ghosting the double of Riefenstahl's *Tiefeland*.

The sound dimension is crucial for Trueba's film of 1998, both in the musical set pieces and the dual languages operating on the studio floor, mediated by the translator Václav. For its contemporary audience resonances suggest themselves immediately with the Babel of Brussels, and the new spectrum of the national and the trans-national. The statelessness of the translator in the plot of 1938 parallels the situation of burgeoning EU membership in tension with regional and national identity. Trueba's film then asks to what degree the historical players, on both the political and the film industry stages, have changed in 1990s Europe. It continues the theme of 'an emergent concept of national cinema in the 1980s, examined by directors including Trueba and Almodóvar, a renewal of 'Spanish cinema', ethically and aesthetically, its genres, its star system, its locations and soundtracks (both in terms of music and language). They succeeded as a consequence in changing the meaning of the words 'Spanish cinema' and what was perceived as Spanishness for future audiences, nationally and trans-nationally' (Triana-Toribio 2003: 134).<sup>14</sup> As part of the trans-national perception of Spanishness, the German connections of 1938 and 1998, bridged by Argentina and Riefenstahl, establish co-players of varying degrees of willingness.

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- 14 The foregoing argument converges with Anne E. Hardcastle's conclusion that in this film 'Spanish identity is constructed from within a framework of European imagery' (Hardcastle 2007: 16). But via the added complexity of the German connection, both to the Spanish past and present, I am less inclined to find Trueba's film 'naïve and somewhat simplistic in the past that it recreates' (Hardcastle 2007: 29).

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### Suggested citation

Hillman, R. (2008), 'Trueba's *La niña de tus ojos* (*The Girl of Your Dreams*) (1998): the German connection', *Studies in European Cinema* 5: 1, pp. 67–76, doi: 10.1386/seci.5.1.67/1

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