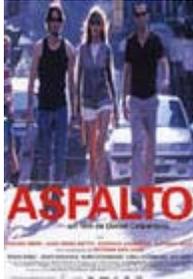


## Spanish films 2.

By Dr. Teresa Fernández-Ulloa

### Asfalto (*Asphalt*) (2000). Spain



**Directed by**  
Daniel Calparsoro  
**Genre:** Action

The script by Calparsoro and Santiago Tabernero underexplains certain subplots, but builds three very charismatic and believable characters and gives them great scenes to play. Najwa Nimri is Lucía, the bad girl that wants to mend her ways, walking up and down the steamy streets of Madrid in the midst of summer wearing skimpy hotpants and high heels. Her Lucía is vulnerable, volatile and lovable. Gustavo Salmerón is Chino, the conventional guy forced to become a policeman, and Juan Diego Botto infuses the threesome with mystery.

### El callejón de los milagros (*Miracle Alley*) (1995). México

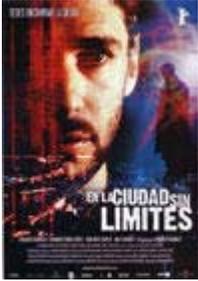


**Directed by**  
Jorge Fons  
**Genre:** Drama  
With Salma Hayek

Based on the Nobel Prize Winner's novel, the Egyptian Naguib Mahfouz. The story, translated from El Cairo to Mexico City's downtown, takes place in a rundown neighborhood where three people's lives meet and intertwine. Rutilio, owner of the local canteen, finds himself frustrated in his marriage with Eusebia and discovers new yet strange personal feelings. The young barber, Abel, along with Don Fidel, are both in love with the beautiful and sensuous Alma (Salma Hayek), daughter of Cata, the tarot reader. Susanita, a dreaming spinster, looks for love but in reality falls prey to a thief. As their paths gradually cross, the characters are temporarily condemned to a tragic and solemn future. The desperate characters are struggling to escape their circumstances in any way they can, but the only one thing they have in common is that, in the end, none of them gets what they really want.

This movie won several awards, among them: the Ariel (the Mexican Oscar) as best movie in 1995, and the Audience Choice Award at the Chicago Film Festival in that year. In Spain it won the Goya (the Spanish Oscar) for the Best Spanish Language Foreign Film in 1996.

## **En la ciudad sin límites** (*City of no limits*) (2002). Spain/Argentina



**Directed by**  
Antonio Hernández  
Genre: Drama/Thriller

Victor is a man who gets to Paris to join his family around their seriously ill father, Max. As the chance of selling the family business begins to disrupt the family relationships, Victor is desperately asked for help by Max. What seems in the beginning mere delusions of an old man losing his mind, begin to show traces of some sort of real 'secret' that is troubling Max's last days. Victor decide to help his father to find that something (maybe just peace) he is searching for.

Awards: Goya (Spain) Best Screenplay–Original and Best supporting actress (Geraldine Chaplin).

## **En la puta vida** (*Tricky life*) (2001). Uruguay / Argentina / Cuba / Spain / Belgium



**Directed by**  
Beatriz Flores Silva  
Genre: Comedy/Drama

Based on a real story. Montevideo, Uruguay. Elisa, 27, dreams of opening her own hairdressing salon in one of the rich districts of the Uruguayan capital. A bit of a rebel, one day Elisa moves out of her mother's house with her two children and breaks up with García, her boss and lover, who has infuriated her by not wanting to get married. So, in the space of twenty-four hours, Elisa finds herself without a roof over her head, without a man, without a job and without money. Her best friend Loulou finds her a job - in the brothel run by Dona Jacqueline. She falls in love with the “perfect” man, and without really being aware of it, Elisa slides into prostitution, which leads her to Barcelona,

Spain. The story does not exaggerate the dramatic tone, with some humorous and romantic parts. This film shows how a woman has to fight against all the barriers she finds, fighting for love, dreams, kids... A critique to the system that always goes against the weakest. It is worth while to fight... aunque sea una vez *en la puta vida*.

This story is about all women from South America (in this case from Uruguay) who, in desperation, go to Europe (in this case to Barcelona, Spain) to find a way out of their precarious economic situation. A story so real... that it is still going on...

**Some awards for “En la puta vida”:** 2001, “Colón de Oro” del Festival de Huelva (España), 2001, Premio Especial del Jurado del Festival del Cinema Latinoamericano de Trieste, Italia; 2001, Premio Radio La Habana Cuba en el Festival del Nuevo Cine Latinoamericano. “Premio Especial por ser la película que mejor refleja la realidad latinoamericana”; 2002, Bogotá (Colombia), Círculo precolombino de oro, mejor directora; 2002, Lleida (España) Festival de cine latinoamericano. Premio de la audiencia y premio a la mejor actriz.

## **Entre las piernas (*Between your legs*) (1999). Spain/France**



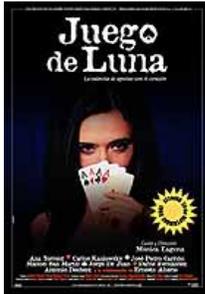
Directed by  
Manuel Gómez Pereira

With Victoria Abril (Átame) y Javier Bardem.

Genre: Drama / Mystery / Romance / Thriller

Miranda is a crew member of a nightly radio program. She and her husband Felix, a cop, are parents of a girl. Miranda's daily dog walking strolls are excuses to pursue sexual encounters with men, who she readily discards afterwards. In order to deal with her sex addiction, she signs up for therapy. Also in the group is Javier, a successful scriptwriter and producer who is a sex-phone junkie. The two misfits hit off and a steamy affair ensues. But things get a little complicated when Javier finds out that this phone sex trysts have been secretly taped and being distributed all over Madrid, and that his ex-wife is living with his business partner. Elsewhere, while investigating a murder case, Felix discovers Miranda's affair with Javier.

## Juego de Luna (*Luna's game*) (2001). Spain



Directed by Mónica Laguna

Genre: Drama

Following in the footsteps of thrillers such as *ROUNDERS* and *HOUSE OF GAMES*, *LUNA'S GAME* (*JUEGO DE LUNA*) centers around gambling and poker as the site of dramatic action. Luna has grown up surrounded by the gamblers and hustlers who cared for her after her father's murder. Now an adult, she survives the only way she knows how, by playing high-stakes poker. Things begin to come to a head, however, when she agrees to play in a game with the biggest wagers ever seen. But at the same time Luna meets Juan, who shows her that she can get more out of life than chips won at the card table, and must decide how to deal with the events of her past and whether to continue with her itinerant lifestyle. *LUNA'S GAME* was co-written by Jorge Guerricaechevarría, author of several films by cult director Alex de la Iglesia's (*La comunidad-Common wealth*). This is a film about the freedom to choose in life, following your instinct.

Awards: "Silver Biznaga", Málaga (Spain) to the Best Director.

## La hija del caníbal (*Lucía, Lucía*) (2003). México



Directed by  
Antonio Serrano

Genre: Comedy / Drama / Mystery / Romance / Thriller

Antonio Serrano fuses comedy and suspense in this story of children's book author Lucía (Celia Roth, of *ALL ABOUT MY MOTHER* fame), who becomes the center of a big mess of intrigue when her husband mysteriously disappears. Coming to her aid are two neighbors in her Mexico City apartment building: Felix, an old man who used to fight alongside Castro, and handsome young Adrián, who may be working for the terrorists who kidnapped her husband (if in fact they did). After lots of suspense and snooping, the three become close friends and decide to take an *Y TU MAMÁ TAMBIÉN*-style trip into

the desert. Adrián and Lucía fall in love, though their age difference is a cause for concern. Of course nothing turns out to be as it seems, even Lucía (in her off screen narration) admits she is not always truthful; outcomes of events are changed --as is her character's hair color and apartment layout-- several times over the course of the film.

## **La niña de tus ojos (*The girl of your dreams*) (1998). Spain**



Directed by  
Fernando Trueba.  
With Penélope Cruz.  
Genre: Comedy/Drama

A company of Spanish movie makers leaves Franco's Spain and moves to Hitler's Germany to make a film in co-production. Soon some problems start to arise.

11 awards, among them Goya to the best film and best actress.

## **La virgen de la lujuria (*The virgin of lust*) (2002). Spain/Mexico/Portugal**



Directed by Arturo Ripstein  
Genre: Drama

This film takes patience on the part of the viewer: not only is it two and a half hours in length, it requires a working background in Spanish history of colonization of the Americas and Franco's Spanish rule during WW II, magical realism, and surrealism to fully appreciate how truly unique this story is.

Arturo Ripstein is Mexico's premiere film director and for those who have followed his output, his works reflect his apprenticeship with Luis Buñuel and his preoccupation with recurring themes of loneliness and his somber, slow style of directing. The convoluted story of LA VIRGEN DE LA LUJURIA at first watching seems to contain information overload that gets in the way of this opera/ballet art piece. That may put some viewers off: it is work to follow this storyline on that level.

But if the viewer can reduce the story to its symbolism and focus on that alone, then this is a fascinating film that takes all manner of chances (crude language, aberrant sexuality, fantasies, main characters breaking into song from Gilbert and Sullivan's 'Mikado' to

patriotic ditties and romantic swooners, bizarre camera effects such as raining inside a room, etc).

Apparently it is important to understand the disparity between the Spanish colonialists and the native South American/Mexican peoples: power vs subjugation, cultural vs peasant mentality, the concept of dichotomy of Spanish exiles in the land of Spain's colonies with the superimposition of escaped Spaniards from Franco's rule and the opposition of Franco devotees. At least it helps to explain the odd love story that unfolds here in Vera Cruz.

Nacho (Luis Felipe Tovar) is a Native Mexican cum supplanted Spaniard waiter in a hotel café Ofelia run by Don Lázaro (Julian Pastor) who is a devote Francophile. Don Lázaro keeps Nacho in his servitude place, demands he serve the freeloader Spaniard guests who plot to kill Franco, and reinforces Nacho's low esteem. Enter Lola (Adriana Gil), a drunken, opium addicted prostitute whose only preoccupation is with the perfect sexual partner of her life, on Gardenia Wilson (Alberto Estrella) who happens to make his living as a masked wrestler. Lola accepts protection from Nacho, eventually abusing the frightened soul who has fallen in lust with her. Lola dreams of killing Franco and it is this avenue that Nacho decides is his entry into Lola's love - killing Franco for her. Working with a photographer Gimeno/Mikado (Juan Diego) who spends his hours creating *retablos* of history using actors on sets for his strange photographs, Nacho ultimately is given the 'role' of the exterminator of Franco. It is unnecessary to say that the ending of the story does not match Nacho's dreams, but instead surrealism and magical realism enter to provide a twist that is most entertaining. San Marco Prize - Special Mention to Arturo Ripstein. Venice Film Festival.

## **Plenilunio (=Luna llena) (*Full moon*) (2001). Spain**



Directed by Imanol Uribe

Genre: thriller.

Based on a novel by the well-known writer (and member of the Royal Academy of the Spanish Language) Antonio Muñoz-Molina, this nerve wracking thriller describes a crime in a small provincial city, where a young girl's body is found brutally murdered in the woods. Obsessed by the grizzly murder, the lead inspector searches throughout the city for a glimpse of the killer's gaze that might explain the crime. Just as in real life a murder does not stop with the crime itself, but it affects all the people related to the victims and the murderer. The discovery of the young girl's body proves to be the key that unleashes a series of events that include a man and a woman's first meeting, why the

man is forced to face his dark past, and why the woman falls in love with him. Nominated for 5 Goya Awards (Best Cinematography, Best Lead Actor, Best Lead Actress, Best Original Score and Best Sound)

**Mar adentro** (*The sea inside*) (2004). Spain/France/Italy. In Spanish, Catalan and Galician with subtitles.



Directed by  
Alejandro Amenábar (*The others*).  
With Javier Bardem

Genre: Biography / Drama

Life story of Spaniard Ramón Sampedro, who fought a 30-year campaign to win the right to end his life with dignity. Film explores Ramón's relationships with two women: Julia, a lawyer who supports his cause, and Rosa, a local woman who wants to convince him that life is worth living. Through the gift of his love, these two women are inspired to accomplish things they never previously thought possible. Despite his wish to die, Ramón taught everyone he encountered the meaning, value and preciousness of life. Though he could not move himself, he had an uncanny ability to move others.

Oscar to the Best Foreign Language movie, and another 52 wins & 27 nominations.

**María, llena eres de gracia** (*Maria Full of Grace*) (2004). USA/Colombia



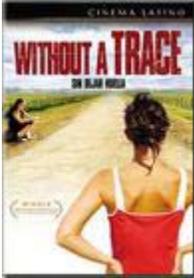
Directed by  
Joshua Marston  
Genre: Drama/Thriller

A pregnant Colombian teenager becomes a drug mule to make some desperately needed money for her family.

Among all the awards received and nominations: nominated for the best actress, Oscar Awards, 2005. The film won the Silver Condor award in Argentina for the Best Foreign Film in Spanish Language in 2005. In 2004, the actress won the Golden Berlin Bear (the German Oscar). In 2004, the New Generation Awards to the director and main actress at the Los Angeles Film Critics Association Awards; the Best First Film award at the New

York Film Critics Circle Awards; the Best Foreign Language Film award at the San Francisco Film Critics Circle, and the Audience Award at the Sundance Film Festival.

## **Sin dejar huella** (*Without a trace*) (2000). Spain/Mexico



Directed by  
María Novaro

Genre: comedy/drama

The opening shot depicts one of the protagonists, literally crossing the fence from the Arizona desert of the USA into the Sonora desert of Mexico. From there the notion of border is at play metaphorically throughout this story of two strong willed women, who meet during their respective flights from pursuers, and become unlikely companions fleeing their past. Ana, a Spanish woman in her thirties, is a specialist in Mayan prehispanic art. She is being pursued by a tenacious police officer who knows of her involvement in smuggling stolen archeological artifacts. Aurelia, a Mexican working class mother of two, is being pursued by her boyfriend, whose supply of cocaine she has stolen. Their journeys are as much about escaping their pursuers as they are about freeing themselves from the internal demons that have lead them to their current predicaments. The film is intriguing and original in its inclusion of Mayan characters and settings. It showcases some memorable examples of Novaro's expressionist flourishes, such as a startling sequence in which out of nowhere we see a red car dive into a transparent lake and, in vertical paralysis, gradually sink south. The film is an exploration of an unlikely friendship and solidarity.

**Sin Dejar Huella** was shown at the 2000 **San Sebastian Film Festival**, where it earned the title of "Thelmita y Luisita" in the Spanish press.

María Novaro is widely considered to be the most successful director to have emerged out of a flourish of female talent in the Mexican film industry since the 1980s. With four features and eleven short films to her credit, she is certainly the most prolific. This film won the Audience award at the Guadalajara Mexican Film Festival in 2001, and the Latin America Cinema Award at the Sundance Film Festival in 2001.

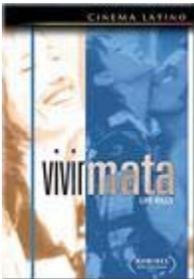
## **¿Tú qué harías por amor?** (*What would you do because of love?*) (2001). Spain/Italy/Denmark



Directed by Carlos Saura Medrano  
Genre: Drama / Romance

A story of two brothers who live at the outskirts of Madrid: the older works with two great friends for a drug dealer, and the tragedy begins when one of the friends dies in one of their drug affairs; then the other friend gets hooked on drugs and the girlfriend of the older brother forsakes him. The younger brother likes to do graffiti against war with his best friend, a black boy. He is growing up and wants to be cool, handsome, admired by the ladies and feared by all mankind, particularly his older brother Louis.

## **Vivir mata (*Life kills*) (2002). Mexico**



Directed by  
Nicolás Echevarría  
Genre: Comedy/Drama/Romance  
A couple has to deal with its own problems, while living in a city like Mexico City, where everything seems chaotic.

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## **CLASICS**

## **El perro del hortelano (1996). Spain/Portugal.**

**In Spanish without subtitles.**

Directed by Pilar Miró  
Genre: Comedy

Based on a Lope de Vega play characterized by the most baroque and exquisite use of Spanish.

It won 5 Goyas in Spain and the Best Film Award in the Mar de Plata Film Festival.