

Martínez Muñoz, Pau. ‘Mateo Santos. Cine y anarquismo. República, guerra y exilio mexicano’

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Until the publication of this valuable monographic research barely nothing was known about the filmmaker who, very early in July 1936, made the inaugural film of the Spanish cinema during wartime, *Reportaje del movimiento revolucionario en Barcelona*, and the most elaborated and stimulating of the first-hour-documentaries produced by the CNT (National Confederation of Labour) during the civil war, *Barcelona trabaja para el frente*. Likewise, the figure of many of the defeated had remained clogged in the haze as well, as that of the anarchist Mateo Santos who accumulated great prestige during the twenties and thirties as the director of the film journal *Popular Film* and several other literary and journalistic activities.

The author, Pau Martínez Muñoz, had already made significant advances on this research with her PhD dissertation on the biographical vicissitudes of the filmmaker: *La cinematografía anarquista en Barcelona durante la guerra civil (1936-1939)*¹, tutored by the Professor Xavier Pérez Torio, and awarded with the Laureate distinction in 2008 at Pompeu Fabra University. However, the track on Mateo Santos had been completely lost after his exile in France and later in Mexico, without any certainty on the place or date of his demise until today.

Mateo Santos Cantero was born in 1890 in Villanueva de Infantes (Ciudad Real) and died in Mexico in 1964. He was married to Felicidad Santacana Perelló, from Igualada (Barcelona), in 1918. The couple had two daughters, Amelia (Barcelona, 1920) and Araceli Felicidad (Barcelona, 1929), and one son, David, who prematurely died in 1928. He wrote some novice poems for *El eco artístico* (1909-1923) and was an assiduous collaborator of the Journal *Vida Manchega, revista semanal ilustrada* (1912-1920). He spent some time in Madrid in 1913 and moved to the Condal City the following year, where he stayed until the arrival of the fascist to Barcelona. His political commitment was clearly exposed in the articles he published in *Los miserables* (1913-1915), an anticlerical weekly paper that proclaimed itself to be ‘insurgent and romantic’ where he sharpened up his furious verb.

During the time of the *pistolero* in Barcelona, he was victim of a frenzied repression by the criminal military governor of the city, Severino Martínez Anido –whose figure would be glorified by naming one of the main streets of the Catalan capital, today the Passeig de Picasso, after him until Franco’s death. However, Santos achieved a prominent career in cinematographic journalism, giving as one of the most outstanding results the foundation and coordination of the long-lived journal *Popular Film* (1926-1937).

The book by Martínez Muñoz offers a nourished and tasty anthology of those stirring articles, together with other memorable pages of the Manchegan writer, where, only to show as one of the possible examples, he adopts an attitude regarding the irruption of the talkies:

‘It might jell, and might even be liked by the majority of the moviegoers, the talkie. But that does not mean that it corresponds to a positive and convenient advance for the future of the seventh art. It could certainly mark a relapse indeed, making it similar to the spoken theatre’² (SANTOS, 1929).

Mateo Santos’ Cinematographic creation was scarce considering many of his projects, such as the Spanish adaptation of the *Cinema del Peuple* French experience of the workers, were not achieved. This experience had encouraged another Spanish anarchist filmmaker, Armand Guerra, to make an exceptional film entitled *La Commune* (Armand Guerra, 1914), where old characters of this revolutionary remote endeavour were shown. Nevertheless, he did complete one first documentary feature film, *Córdoba* (Mateo Santos, 1934) that was supposed to begin a series of films conceived as ‘Spanish Stamps’, and the two productions that were already mentioned –*Reportaje del movimiento revolucionario en Barcelona* and *Barcelona trabaja para el frente*– were completed before the foundation of SIE films, a production house of the literary Union. *El cine bajo la svástica. La influencia fascista en el cine internacional*, one of

the most outstanding of his essays on cinema of the time was published in Barcelona by Tierra y Libertad in 1937. Muñoz collects this paragraph in her anthology:

'And thus, from Krupp to Goebbels, since the years of the armistice signature German cinematography has progressively cultivated poison and discord in the conscience of German people, thus fostering their historical hate against France, and pouncing them into a new a war that, started in Spain, one can not predict which European scenarios it will need to develop the scope of its tragedy, even if the tragedy it represents to the French Republic, the URSS, and more specifically the proletarians of the whole world is already outlined.'

Again, victim of other repression, that of the brutal *Movement* of his first triumphal year, Mateo Santos moves to France through *Le Perthus* on February 6, 1939 and is imprisoned in the camp of Argelès-sur-Mer. He continues to write during his exile in France (1939-1949). From this period it is worth mentioning a book published by the National Alliance of Democratic forces of Spain in 1947, by Editions de La Calanque, with lithographic illustrations by Badía Vilató.

From his definite exile in Mexico (1949-1964) remain both his allegation against Hollywood's domain and his support for Mexican cinema exposed in his weekly collaboration in *Revista de revistas*, where he was in charge of the cinema section between 1951-1958.

To sum up, the research of Martínez Muñoz and this exacting and laborious book, somehow repairs the unfair oblivion in which the abundant cinematographic literature and the few films made by a prodigy of the anarchist Spanish cinema have been kept. The book concludes (before an anthology of essential texts from 1928-1945) with a moving epilogue by Mateo Santos' grandson, Ángel Morales Santos. •