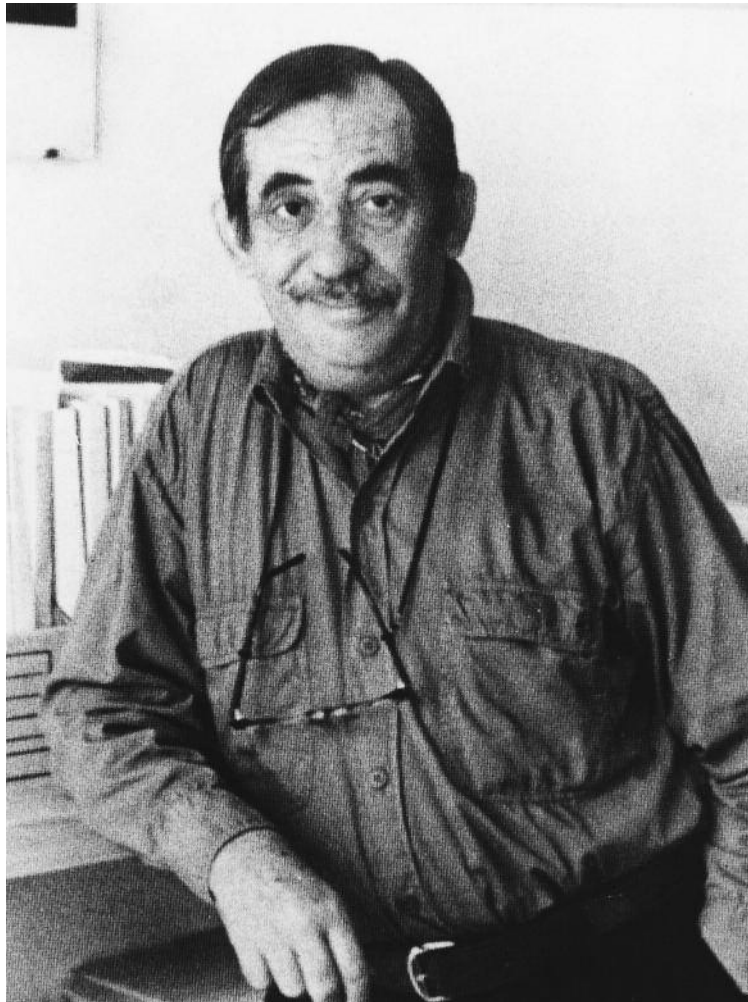


Emilio García Riera (1931-2002)

The Mexican Movie Industry Has a History

Leonardo García Tsao*



Courtesy of Leonardo García Tsao

For once, the cliché of “an irreparable loss” just might be true. When Emilio García Riera died Octo-

ber 11, 2002, not only did we lose a great friend and a marvelous person, but, I fear, an entire project of documenting the history of Mexican film as rigorously as possible.

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Without García Riera, Mexican film runs the risk of amnesia. I doubt very much that anyone else shares that penchant for the absolute and that mania for complete information, joined with an incredible capacity for work, which spurred him to write *The Documental History of Mexican Cinema* not once but twice. Emilio felt obligated to repeat his review of our film industry when technology allowed him to reexamine films at home on television and make notes on each movie on his PC. The result was the 18 volumes of the second edition of his history, a feat that seems not only impossible, but inconceivable for a single person. No other cinema has the privilege of such a detailed review of almost 50 years of production.

cinema. It also showed that analysis is not necessarily at odds with humor and enjoyment.

If there was anything Emilio praised in his admiration for classic Hollywood film, it was the sense of fair play, because he put it into practice himself. Irony and sarcasm were frequent in his writing when he did not like a film, but he never used them to insult the film makers. In contrast with other critics, personal attacks and defamation were foreign to him, and he continues to be a rare example of professional ethics in these times of endemic dishonesty.

For all these reasons, I like to think of García Riera as my teacher, even though I never took classes from him. Toward the late 1970s, I met him, and,

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One shudders to think what would have happened if García Riera had given himself over to that national pastime, using the excuse of "It can't be done," "It's too much work," or "There's no budget for it." The history of Mexican cinema would have been left to partial, inexact publications, some even colored by malice or resentment. That was the prospect for production from 1977 on.

But García Riera not only carried out irreplaceable research. As a critic, he was also a fundamental figure in Mexico's cultural milieu. He himself tended to underestimate his criticism, perhaps his only unfair judgment. In my view, his writing from the 1970s was exemplary and formative in its lucid, perceptive and informed interpretation of

in contrast with the image of a profession where pedantry is common, he was very affable and accessible. From that time on, I collaborated with him on different projects without ever feeling that he was "the boss," but rather, a friend. In the twenty-odd years that our friendship lasted, the invariable optimism with which he faced all adversities always surprised me. Even in his last years, when he was suffering from the disease that finally brought about his death, he maintained the same enthusiasm for classic cinema, women, food—as high in cholesterol as possible— literature, politics, soccer, talks with friends...for life itself. We are going to miss Emilio García Riera much more than we could have foreseen. **NMM**