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Tormento (Torment) (SPANISH - COLOR)

Madrid, Sept. 12.

Jose Frade P.C. production. Directed by Pedro Olea. Features Ana Belen, Francisco Rabal, Javier Escriva, Conchita Velasco, Rafael Alonso, Ismael Merlo, Maria Luisa Sanjose, Amelia de la Torre, Milagros Leal, Analia Gade, Maria Isbert. Screenplay. Ricardo Lopez Aranda, Jose Frade, Pedro Olea, Angel Maria de Lera: camera (Eastmancolor), Fernando Arribas: music, Carmelo Bernaola: editor, Jose Antonio Rojo. Reviewed at Cine Velazquez (Madrid), Sept. 11, '74. Running time: 88 MINS.

Over the past few years Spaniards have repeatedly filmed pix based on Benito Perez Galdos yarns. The results so far have ranged from terrible (Angelino Fons' "Fortunata y Jacinta") to fair (Rafael Gil's "La Duda" at last year's Basque fest); but now a distinguished item has been helmed by Pedro Olea, with a stellar thesping performance by Conchita Velasco, excellent sets and decorations, and a script which, thanks to touches of humor, is an improvement over the original story.

Item will be commercially limited due to relatively unknown cast and ultra-Spanish turn-of-the-century background against which story is spun. It might nonetheless do brisk biz with discriminating audiences. Olea, who has been in filmic eclipse since his "The Wolves Forest" demonstrates that he hasn't lost his artistic touch after having cranked out several poor films over the past two years. No concessions to cheap commerciality are made here, however, and the result is an extraordinary vignette, limned with good taste, which beautifully captures the characters of Galdos and expertly probes into their lives and problems.

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Tormento

Yarn concerns a bourgeois Madrid family which has a pretty servant girl, Ana Belen. They are visited by an elderly relative who has made his fortune in America (Francisco Rabal), who falls in love with the servant and finally leaves with her to another country, after she puts an end to an unhappy romance with a priest.

What might have degenerated into a meller is made fully convinc-

ing thanks to high calibre thesping. Ana Belen gives an excellent portrayal of the timid servant girl, caught in the vise of 19th century morality; Javier Escriva as the young, tormented priest (hence the title of film) puts in a splendid performance and shows the capability of Spanish actors when well directed; Rabal is competent in his role, though as usual his diction leaves much to be desired. But the one really stealing the show is Velasco, usually cast in inconsequential femme roles. Here she has transformed herself into a gossipy, bigoted mother anxious to marry off her own daughters. Her performance is a tour de force which will doubtless win her many kudos in

Spain and perhaps abroad. Supporting cast is excellent as well, with appropriate music by Carmelo Bernaola.

Only hitches are somewhat limited locations (a railroad station, the Retiro Park, some streets in Old Madrid) which should have been expanded for fuller effect. Also there are moments when pacing is too pondrous. But barring these minor shortcomings, Spain's official entry at San Sebastian could not have been more auspicious. Though critical acclaim may fall short of last year's "Spirit of the Bee-Hive," item is well worth seeing. There is nothing new in it. It is just a very well told story of 19th century Madrid. — *Besa*.