
Tatjana Pavlovič. *Despotic Bodies and Transgressive Bodies: Spanish Culture from Francisco Franco to Jesús Franco*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002. vii + 159 pp. Cloth: \$65.50. Paper: \$21.95.

Review by Lynn Walford

The idea of *dos Españas*, two Spains antithetical to each other yet in constant interplay with one another, is nothing new. The tension between an insular, authoritarian, tradition-bound Spain and a Spain characterized by boldness, irreverence, and a hunger for the new dates at least from the time of the Moorish occupation, and has reached varying degrees of intensity throughout the country's troubled history. At no time, however, has this tension been more acute than during the thirty-seven years of the Franco regime following the Civil War, and it is this period and its aftermath that are the primary focus of Tatjana Pavlovič's study.

As the title of her work suggests, Pavlovič uses the trope of the body as the basis for her analysis of popular fiction and films of the period, constructing a framework of two Francos that mirrors elements of the two Spains. The *despotic body* is, of course, Francisco Franco, whose physical presence came to be seen as inseparable from his country's identity. Pavlovič emphasizes this point in the epigraph to the first chapter, a quotation from Ernesto Giménez Caballero, a Franco contemporary and admirer:

¿Quién se ha medido en las entrañas de España como Franco hasta el punto de no saber ya si Franco es España o si España es Franco? (11)

[Who has thrust himself into the heart and soul of Spain like Franco, to the point that one no longer knows if Franco is Spain or if Spain is Franco?] (My translation).

In contrast to this stern, authoritative body in absolute control of himself and others, Pavlovič presents the *transgressive body* of Jesús Franco, a director of low-budget horror and pornographic films whose career began in the 1950s, whose product represents all that was most abhorrent to his namesake, and who still enjoys a cult following today.

Pavlovič organizes the four chapters of her study around this loose Franco-Franco framework. The first chapter, “The Despotic Body,” examines films and novels from 1939 to 1952, the years of oppression and isolation prior to Spain’s admission into the United Nations. All the texts—including one written by Franco himself—are propaganda pieces designed to promote correct Fascist thought and behavior. In them, Spain is portrayed as unitary and self-sufficient, the proud product of a glorious past, while the Caudillo is the embodiment of Spanish virtue—specifically, masculine virtue. Beneath the surface, however, Pavlovič finds signs of pathological weakness: intrigue and infighting at the highest levels of government, and “unmanly” behavior on the part of the Caudillo, who was famous for his high, shrill voice, and his propensity to blush and to burst into tears.

The second chapter, “The Traumatized Body,” analyzes films from the decade of transition (1952-1962), and emphasizes the growing struggle between the two Spains. The longing to become part of modern, progressive Europe is offset by the fear of losing the national identity; the desire to come to terms with the horrors of the Civil War is at odds with the temptation to keep silent and forget the past. The forward momentum continues to gather strength, however, and Pavlovič notes the irony of the fact that as the nation begins to open itself to the rest of the world, Franco starts to drift slowly away from reality, into physical and mental isolation.

In “The Authoritarian Body in Agony,” Franco’s slow, painful decline is juxtaposed to the relative swiftness of the *destape*, the “lifting of the lid” of repression that took place even before he was declared officially dead. Films from this period (1962-1975) include light, racy *comedias sexy* featuring horny Spanish men in pursuit of blonde, bikini-clad foreign women; the bodies on the screen are beautiful and healthy, in stark contrast to the decaying near-corpse of the Caudillo.

“The Perverse Body” examines the first decade (1975-1985) of post-Franco Spain, particularly the cultural phenomenon known as *la movida*, the exuberant celebration of all that had been forbidden under the Fascist regime. Outrageousness—in language, dress, music, drug use, and sexual behavior—is the norm, along with the studied frivolity and deliberate bad taste made famous in the films of Pedro Almodóvar. In her discussion of his films, Pavlovič suggests that the excesses of *la movida* are not innovations at all, that the transgressive body has reemerged from beneath the surface, where the despotic body now lies dormant.

This is a masterful study, in which Pavlovič demonstrates a thorough knowledge of her subject, both from a historical and a cultural perspective, in language that is scholarly and precise, yet lively. Her use—with a few exceptions—of marginal texts not readily available in this country presents an obstacle for the reader who wishes to study further; however, it is not insurmountable, and should prove well worth the effort.

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