

WEREWOLVES AND DOCTORS AND ZOMBIES: THE TRANSFORMATION OF
SPAIN THROUGH THE LENS OF HORROR

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DEDICATION

To John Hood and Jeremy Torres, who inspired me.

“what

of the price

of art

twice thirty

three

thousand eight hundred

and twelve

la danse

listen to the

sound of

the colour of a flower

It is enough

listen”

—Tom Phillips

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A NOTE ON FILM TITLES

Most of the films mentioned in this thesis have multiple titles, often changing in every country the film is released. For the sake of consistency and for ease of reference, this thesis uses the title that is listed in the bibliography.

ABSTRACT

Horror cinema illuminates the anxieties of cultures, identities, and desires. Spain, a country whose social and political climate was tumultuous during the 1960s and 1970s, produced a horror industry that emphasizes these anxieties. This thesis aims to elucidate how horror is useful for talking about post-war anxiety and dictatorial trauma by looking at how Spanish monster films from the 1960s and 1970s reflect the social and political anxieties of Spain at the time. First, a proper background of Spain from the 1940s—shortly after the end of the Spanish Civil War—up until the 1950s sets up the major events and cultural attitudes that emerge in 1960s and 1970s Spain. Then, a selection of films is sorted into three major thematic categories to be compared with relevant historical events from the period and “high art” films such as *Spirit of the Beehive* and *The Executioner* that touch on these themes. The juxtaposition of “high art” and horror films emphasizes the complexities and relevance of both genres during the period.

“I beg you, learn to see ‘bad films’;
they are sometimes sublime.” –Ado Kyrrou

Introduction

Horror cinema is useful for talking about the post-war traumas and the anxieties of Spain during the 1960s and 1970s. Spain was a unique country during the period. The country exited a brutal civil war and survived economic isolation, which had nearly led to the country’s ruin. They were willingly ruled by a dictator, who strong-armed them into choosing peace over freedom, and who was slowly dying of a degenerative disease. The country transitioned from Republic to Dictatorship to Constitutional Monarchy in the span of forty years. All this change and instability created various social and political anxieties that the monster movies of the period are excellent at capturing.

Having just fought their civil war from 1936 to 1939, Spain—its leader and its people—was responsible for much violence. During the war, the practice of “dousing women prisoners with volumes [of] castor oil sufficient to cause uncontrollable and humiliating diarrhea” (Rhodes 15) was common among the fascist sects. There was also an instance in which a group of workers “climbed into a truck one day and drove out to the monument to the Sacred Heart of Jesus ... formed a firing squad, and executed the statue of Christ” (15). After the battle of Badajoz, “thousands of Republican, socialist, and communist militias and militiawomen were butchered ... for the crime of defending their Republic against the onslaught of the Generals and the landowners” (14). Wave after wave the victims were “herded into a bullring” and gunned down by machineguns. Jay Allen of the *Chicago Tribune* reported, “Eighteen hundred men [killed] ... There is more blood than you would think in eighteen hundred bodies” (14).

The turmoil for Spain did not end after the war. For thirty-five more years, Spain was ruled by a nationalist dictator whose goal was to model the country after Mussolini's Italy and Hitler's Germany. Thus, the executions continued, primarily targeting Spaniards who promoted the ideals of the Republic that General Francisco Franco—*el Caudillo*¹—had thwarted. It is estimated that 50,000 people were executed from 1940 to 1975 (Ruiz 97). In addition to political executions and incarcerations, the country faced a severe economic crisis that left class groups like the agrarian peasantry—a large majority of the Spanish population—with no money or real hope of prosperity. To make matters worse for the peasantry, the Catholic churches in Spain told the poor that their poverty was a result of some personal or moral failure, and that if they were better Spaniards, they would be more successful. It wasn't until the late 1960s that the church took interest in making the lives of the poor better, but *el Caudillo* really never did.

In a country where hardship and violence was so immediate, audiences and academics could easily wonder why Spanish horror cinema became so prevalent during the 1960s and 1970s. To sell grotesque films as entertainment could seem like a capitalist exploitation of tragedy. Especially considering the low-budget nature of Spanish horror, the films could be perceived, if nothing else, as disrespectful to the memories and experiences of the most oppressed in Spain. However, upon close inspection, Spanish horror has a much deeper relationship to the political and social turmoil in Spain than the cheap glamor of the genre might imply.

¹ A title that means, more or less, "The Leader of Spain." Not unlike the German title *Führer*.

There are a few explanations. First, in the 1960s, Spain had just entered the international film and economic arena, more actively engaging in Europe as a continental culture. One film critic, Katherine Hawkins, therefore suspects that Spanish horror cinema “was born out of financial necessity” (Hawkins 198). The native Spanish film industry was plagued by the high minimum budgets—imposed by *el Caudillo*’s administration—and therefore needed to make films that cost little money but were largely popular and easily reproducible for other countries (Hawkins 198). Horror was cheap, easy to make, and popular enough in the rest of Europe to earn Spanish studios the cash to push out their more “high-quality” films inside Spain. Consequently, and perhaps conveniently, when Franco’s charming grip began to degrade in the 1960s and 1970s, a new film genre for Spain rose, one that was systemically necessary, and one that could be designed to reflect and discuss—with all of Europe—the horrors the Spanish people had experienced.

This financial necessity, however, could also go far in proving that horror is nothing more than a cheap money grab. It can’t be ignored that money is at the root of industry, especially in film. However, audiences can sometimes ignore this reality and make meaning of the films regardless. Diane Nelson, an anthropologist who studied the civil war and post-war Guatemala, writes about a group of young people who worked at a hotel in Guatemala City run by the *Conavigua*—a rebel faction comprised mostly of teens. The Guatemalan Civil War raged from 1960 to 1996, and the young people of the *Conavigua* were “the most daring challengers of military impunity” (Nelson 88). Demilitarized in 1997, many of these same teens cooked and worked various other jobs around the hotel Nelson writes about. In her book on the war, she mentions an

anthropologist who was visiting and hanging around the lounge with the young people on shift, and who was disturbed by the teens' obsession with a particularly gruesome horror movie:

They watched it with relish and several sutured kinesthetically, crying out when a character was killed, jumping in their seats when something unexpected happened. The anthropologist wondered what was going on. She knew these young people had lost members of their family to army violence and had probably seen or enacted very similar things during the war ... She finally burst out, "How can you watch this?!" One of the young men replied, "This is what happened in our country. We have to watch this so we don't forget." (88-89)

It is interesting that young Guatemalans identified with crude, low-production-value horror films. The films didn't have anything to say about what they experienced—the films were primarily American and had no relationship with the war—yet horror was one of the best-selling genres of the theatres in downtown Guatemala City (89). The masses did not flock to something that asked them to think about what they experienced, but instead sought something that mimicked, onstage and in audience response, the horrors they had witnessed. Imagine, then, the power of a native horror genre, tailored to the experiences of the people who made the films—the Spanish Horror industry.

Understanding the anxieties of people is difficult to do through fact alone. Fact is often enlightening and it defines the contexts that surround art, but if people gain emotional significance from it, that's not necessarily part of the fact, just how people interpret it. It is the difference between "the oft cited numbers" and "the individual experience, how each person in his or her context lived and relives what happened"

(Nelson 87). Thus, monster movies become significant. The horror genre, as even a casual viewer might expect, greatly reflects the various anxieties of a nation's people. Monster movies, a subset of horror, are a particularly interesting subgenre because they can embody all the attributes of horror—specifically the genesis from some sort of anxiety—without all the major techniques of horror (gore, character tropes, or weaponized sexuality). Many will, but not all. Take, for instance, *The Spirit of the Beehive* by Victor Erice. The main plot focuses on a young girl's search for Frankenstein's monster, and it personifies the anxieties of early Francoist Spain via rippled reflections of the major techniques of horror. The young girl encounters war violence, but not spectacular gore. The body of the girl is treated as an enigma, even a menace at points, but is never given sexual agency. Many critics do not consider this a horror film, yet it is “mentioned in books treating the horror genre” (Hawkins 199) and could be easily be classified as a monster movie because of how imperative Frankenstein's monster is to the central plot.

This thesis aims to lay the groundwork for the larger argument at hand by showing that Spanish monster movies from the 1960s and 1970s are useful in discussing the political and social anxieties of Spain during the period. Horror films by artists like Jesús (Jess) Franco, Paul Naschy, and Amando de Ossario will be compared to “high-art” monster films of the period—*Eyes Without a Face* (1959), *Spirit of the Beehive* (1975), and *The Executioner* (1969)—and then will be analyzed in a historical context in order to best elucidate the innately Spanish nature of each film. Such an analysis will, if nothing else, prove that Spanish horror films are useful in a broader discussion of this difficult period.

These “high art” monster films are useful in identifying the various anxieties of the Spanish people. For example, *The Spirit of the Beehive* beautifully “illustrates the way horror can be used to explore subversive cultural themes,” (Hawkins 199) and directly states those themes are through dialogue and imagery. While all horror can reflect the anxieties of a people, they were not always so direct. *Spirit of the Beehive*, and other monster films like it, can give audiences an idea of what to look for in “lower” monster films, a way to interpret the various creatures, symbols, and cinematographic tropes. The parallels can then be cross referenced with the cultural facts of the period and the history of what happened, and a more complete picture of the Spanish people during the sixties and seventies can be painted.

The term “monster” is what makes the juxtaposition possible. It provides the link between the “low horror” intended to raise money and the “art horror” that intends to directly send a message, between “high art” and “paracinema.” Paracinema is generally considered more pop-culture than art. Often it tends to be written off by academics of film studies as being bad art; they “dismiss populism as intellectually empty, cynically manipulated, mystifying, parasitic, seductive rather than reasonable, cultic, contagious, vague, and imprecise, all of which are horror film tropes” (Nelson 90). Yet, Jess Franco, a master of paracinema—or in his case, “cinema vomitif”²—was considered revolutionary in a “political climate in which explicit depictions of sex and violence really were transgressive, revolutionary, often illegal” (Hawkins 197). This connection between high art and paracinema further suggests that horror can reflect the anxieties of a people in a particular time. While high-art films like *Spirit of the Beehive* connect to the

² Dubbed such by Mikita Brottman.

mind, low-art films connect to the body through visceral reactions like the ones of the young Guatemalans that Diane Nelson chronicles.

The sheer popularity of horror also suggests some sort of significant resonance with people. It draws the correlation between the political turmoil of Spain and the rise of its horror industry closer to causality. When something is as widely popular as horror, it begs the question why. Nelson suggests that “[popular] culture always has its base in the ... traditions of the people. It has connections with local hopes and local aspirations, local tragedies and local scenarios Hence it links with ... the informal, the underside, the grotesque” (Nelson 91). In Spain specifically, the popularity of horror seemed to stem largely from “a society in which ... the graphic depiction of violence is primarily associated with an anti-Francoist perspective” (Hawkins 199). There is, then, a significant relationship between the impending end of the Franco regime and the rise of horror, even beyond the financial incentives. Spain was dealing with a post-civil war society and was struggling to dismantle the nationalist rule of General Franco. Then, after his death, the country established the beginnings of their Spanish Constitution. The quickness, the grotesqueness, and the uncertainty of these decades left Spain with an air of anxiety that, though it certainly has different sources, was not altogether different from the anxieties of Americans during the sixties and seventies: how to welcome home veterans haunted by a war they didn’t want, how to prevent mutually assured destruction, and, parallel to it all, how to move towards equality.

During all this comparison and exploration of Spanish history and cinema, hopefully American audiences can gain an understanding of what another country, plagued by anxiety, experienced while America fought its wars abroad and at home.

There will not be any answers on how to conquer the things people fear, but hopefully it can imbue a greater sense of global community through the idea that terror affects us all, and equip readers with the tools to listen when someone says, “this is what happened in our country.”

What Came Before

Major change began to occur for Spain in the 1960s and 70s: the first bikini appeared on the post-war film screen in *Bahía de Palma*, motor vehicles became prominent, and Franco was losing his grip on the Spanish people. Much of the groundwork for these changes was laid during the 1940s and 1950s, yet there was also a distinct feeling of stagnation amongst the Spanish people during that time. When General Franco took power in 1939, he asserted the Spanish identity as the imperialist: he would conquer, he would work hard, he would depend on no one, and he would provide for his family. His image for a new Spain lay in its traditional past and was defined primarily by masculinity, demanding that women be discrete, prudent, and sensitive, the model of antiquity (Pavlovic 1). He even wrote an autobiographical film, *Raza*, and it was hailed the “prototype and culmination” of the patriotic film genre. The film allowed General Franco to rewrite even his own history to meet the standards of his new Spain. His father was no longer “a gambler who had abandoned his family to live with his common-law wife and illegitimate son” (Pavlovic 30). Instead, his father was now a Spanish war hero who died defending the last colony of Spain, and his mother was now the “virginal, sacrificial,” (Pavlovic 30) woman he wanted her to be. This was the dichotomy that defined Spain, a return to the traditions of its past by erasing the unseemly history, and the holes it left were covered by unrelenting optimism. Indeed, most historical films were produced by CIFESA (La Compañía Industrial Film Española S.A.), a production company “so closely related to the regime’s ideological projects that its [eventual] decline was simultaneously the cause and the symptom of the end of the autarkic period” (Pavlovic 58).

Furthermore, Franco's entire economic system was built on false claims about Spain's self-sufficiency. He was fooled into believing stories about gold being found in Spain and that a new synthetic petrol had been engineered by mixing water with plant extracts. Once these ruses came to light—and the proper people had been punished—the illusion of Spanish autarky was shattered. The fifties, then, were marked by Spain's sudden reliance on outside help and economics. In November of 1952, Spain was admitted into UNESCO; in August of 1953, Franco signed a Concordat; and in December of 1955, Spain was admitted into the UN. Spanish newspapers hailed Franco the "Caudillo of the West," an inflated claim since the foreign aid that was now coming in was limited to "projects of an infrastructural kind with military significance" (Pavlovic 54). Spain's entry into the international arena also signaled major changes to come in his regime; the country was not allowed in without conditions which, in the long term, meant "balancing the state budget [and] restoring confidence in the financial system" (Pavlovic 55). Franco had ushered in the embrace of capitalism in Spain, a technocratic system that changed the belief that Spain is good enough on its own into a need and want for more.

In addition to the economic need for change, Spain's people also began to express general discontent. The 50s generation had lived through the war as children, had often experienced terrible violence, and yet had been taught about a Spain full of greatness and progress. Artists like Antonio Bardem and Ignacio Aldecoa thus demanded that Spanish cinema return to the reality of Spain, because the wanting of historical truth had blossomed into a "considerable emptiness" (Pavlovic 52). Many Spaniards sought not only factual truth, but spiritual truth. Disorientation otherwise reigned; Spain was coming to terms with a civil war that had ended in dictatorship, but was uncertain about what

besides blind nationalism could save them. They wanted the truth about their leader and their nation—whatever that might be—and they wanted it represented in cinema, not hidden or buried by the messages of the regime. The problem remained, however, that what was true about Franco was uncertain. Information was not always readily accessible to the non-political citizens of Spain, and many people chose to see Franco as a war hero doing his best for his country. So, even though the 1940s morality and language was becoming increasingly anachronistic, the Spanish still clung to it. Certainly, it was often in mockery. Cinema of the decade began to “reflect, parody, and rework the pervasive film of the previous decade” (Pavlovic 59). However, what realism was or should be also had not been fully articulated. Their characters, therefore, desired and longed for change but did not take hold of it. Protagonists flirted with truth, evading direct contact but instead glimpsing it through the “indirect expression and displaced obsessions that characterize most of its texts” (Pavlovic 52).

Gender and Sexuality

Post-war Spain saw its first on-screen bikini in 1962, and people loved it, lining the streets to see Juan Bosch's film *Bahía de Palma*. It marked one of the first times the female body—a foreign female body no less—was celebrated and exposed on screen. It marked, also, a new level of sexualization of women in Spanish film. It marked a movement, finally, away from the 1940s perspective of feminine. The 1940s had demanded that women take a more subservient role, one that complements the image of men during the period. Where the man should be soldierly, the female should be “*comedidas*,” the male a provider and the women “*hacendosas*” (Pavlovic 1). In theory, they could be two halves of the same whole; however, there is an air of subservience in the definitions. She was modeled after the Virgin Mary, a woman of power and grace, but a woman whose power came from her service. By the 1960s, however, women's bodies were suddenly becoming objects of a sexual gaze, which was, in some ways, an act of rebellion. In others, it may have been trading old bonds for new. They gain agency, but only through their sexuality. It breaks the mold Franco and the traditional Spanish regime put on women, but it still relies on traditional ideas of sexuality and beauty.

The most pivotal horror of the period would be the Georges Franju's *Eyes Without a Face* and Jess Franco's *The Awful Dr. Orloff*. The former was the key French influence in the Spanish iteration of the horror genre; French films and genres, especially the *fantastique*, become very influential for Spanish films, and *Eyes Without a Face* is no exception. It becomes one of the keystone films for Spanish cinema, a film that Spanish horror auteurs remade like it was a right-of-passage. When the film first came out, it was the new pinnacle of French gore and violence. Films before it had begun to up the ante as

far as gore was concerned, and Franju felt compelled to top it in his newest film. Perhaps Spanish viewers appreciated the way it navigated the European censors while simultaneously increasing the gore beyond what was previously acceptable. Filmmakers like Jess Franco faced strict censorship of their own. One actress, Ana Mariscal, said that her films often were censored solely because the censorship bureau saw an ambiguous intention in her look (Pavlovic 58). While state censorship had certainly begun to loosen by 1959, the people may have nonetheless admired the skill Franju displayed.

Franju and his writers Pierre Boileau and Thomas Narcejac navigated the straights of censure by writing more humanity into the monster of the film, Dr. Génessier, and by shifting the major focus of the film off him and onto his daughter, Christiane (Kalat). Franju even writes a scene in which Génessier, who kidnaps and mutilates young women to assuage his own guilt, selflessly cares for a young boy at his clinic. There is a spark of goodness that tells the audience that Dr. Génessier wants to help, that he is not all bad. Perhaps the Spanish saw this as a mirror of their leader, of the man who in one moment executed “as many as 8815” people, and in the other wept in front of all Spain after the assassination of Carrero Blanco (Pavlovic 77). He was at once a monster and vulnerable.

Eyes Without a Face also had a certain relationship with the gender issues of Spain at the time. The film primarily focuses on the conflict between Dr. Génessier and Christiane, his daughter. Everyone in the film (except for Génessier and his party) believes Christiane to be dead, that she had been killed in a car accident caused by her father. However, Dr. Génessier was able to save her, but not without potentially irreversible damage to her face. He hid her away and perpetuated the rumor of her death to protect her from shame and compromising her frail health. Furthermore, Génessier, a

leading physician in France, develops a guilt-driven obsession to heal Christiane. The main conflict is centered here, around a father who wants to restore his daughter from the state he believes he put her in. It is a case where the male-savior must rescue the female-victim. However, Franju's shift of focus from father to daughter brilliantly complicates this.

When the film begins, Dr. Génessier's quest, though dark, seems somewhat noble and unappreciated by his scarred daughter; he's breaking the law, doing things he'd rather not do to help restore her. He's a vigilante for her beauty, for her betterment. Yet, when he first incises the face of another woman, to steal it and put it on his daughter, the audience quickly begins to lose support for him. Indeed, some audience members at the Edinburgh Film Festival fainted when they saw what Génessier had done (Kalat). Soon after this first surgery Christiane finds out where the skin for her transplants come from, and the audience realizes that she had not previously known. Suddenly the ends don't as easily justify the means, and the romantic idea of being a criminal for the sake of good transforms into the reality of being an insane doctor. He is committing atrocities against women and hiding the truth from the person he is supposed to be helping. Furthermore, the treatment fails (again), and Christiane's face is not restored. She is left in pain and no more beautiful—by her father's standards. Her father presents her with a plan for another round of treatment, and Christiane says no, refuses to participate, and asserts that she'd rather die than go through this process again. The audience here, after having seen not only the horrors Dr. Génessier commits, but how it affects the woman he is trying to help, finally realizes that perhaps he is not a savior at all.

There is resemblance here to what *el Caudillo* did to the women of Spain, what their own husbands, fathers, mothers did to them when they supported Franco. The emotional movement is similar. General Franco and his supporters start out as heroes, liberating Spain from the tyranny of the Republic, but are later revealed to be more like anti-heroes, using their support of women as a guise to hide their struggle for control. Franju's film is very much about breaking the illusion of the male-salvation—turning the trope into a power-play that only destroys all parties involved—and thus it becomes an important model for Spanish horror.

Enter, now, the first Spanish horror film. Or so it was heralded. Spain had other horror films previously, or at least the tropes had appeared in other films, but there had never been a horror film so blended with “voyeuristic eroticism” (Thrower 67). Jess Franco's *The Awful Dr. Orloff* was the first Spanish film to combine the macabre with other burgeoning horror elements: the gothic aesthetic, German Expressionism, and sex. However, it did not set out with this intent. The film was made in response to his previous film, *Los colgados*, being shut down by the censor. The film was to be based on a book by Bruno Traven, an anti-capitalist and anarchist. However, pre-production was nearing completion—all the actors and equipment had been contracted—when Franco received a letter saying the film could no longer move forward (Thrower 65). He and a few of the other filmmakers on the team went to see *The Bride of Dracula* to blow off some steam when they all came up with the same idea: to make a horror film. Franco said that the project was inspired by “sheer anger” (Thrower 66). He wanted to make another movie, but “one that wouldn't bother those sonofabitches” (Thrower 66). He wanted to comply, but only angrily. His project moves, then, from direct protest to

something quieter but just as volatile. Franco seemed to understand that the regime was threatened by “high-art,” and the censors would put a halt to things they perceived as threats. Films like *The Bride of Dracula*, however, were innocuous, so Franco gave them what they thought they would want.

The Awful Dr. Orloff is often considered Jess Franco’s adaptation of *Eyes Without a Face*. Really, they were shot and released around the same time, one in Spain (*Orloff*) and the other in Paris (*Eyes Without a Face*). Franco claims that thus it was not possible for either to be a copy of the other (Thrower 71), and yet *The Awful Dr. Orloff* has very clear parallels to *Eyes Without a Face*, most notably the madman doctor who disfigured the face of his daughter and wants to restore it by grafting the faces of other women onto hers. Yet it also offers major differences that, especially when taken in comparison to its counterpart, bring forth a more complicated and certainly more Spanish take on gender. First, *The Awful Dr. Orloff* is often considered a sexploitation film. This could be unfair by modern standards—*Game of Thrones* has more nudity in any given episode—but for 1960s Spain it certainly offered a challenge to the censor. Indeed, the Spanish release of the film (*Gritos en la Noche*) did not contain the nudity of the French cut, likely in order to escape the censor’s attention³. Furthermore, there was a sadism to *The Awful Dr. Orloff* that was not derived from Franju’s film and that becomes the most complicating factor for its take on gender.

³ It could be that nudity in the French cut was removed voluntarily for the Spanish edition. Further research at the *Archivo General de la Administración*—where censorship archives are kept—would clarify if the nudity was removed by request of the censor or prior to submission.

Franco's *The Awful Dr. Orloff* retains a similar plot to *Eyes Without a Face*. It even has a similarly split narrative: the audience follows both the doctor and the people investigating him. However, the characters differ in execution and, as such, so do the way the themes function. The first major difference is the daughter herself, Melissa. Though she shares Christiane's silence, Melissa's is more complete because she is unconscious the entire film. She has no autonomy whatsoever, not even much life to speak of. Her thematic function, then, is to highlight the selfishness of Orloff's love for his daughter (Thrower 66). Melissa herself is kept alive only by the machinations of Orloff, and there is no clear indication of what she wants. The audience knows only that Orloff wants her restored and will stop at nothing to achieve this. Furthermore, her silence takes away from the father-saves-daughter dynamic of *Eyes Without a Face* and allows Orloff to become a sadist character driven by his love and devotion for control. While he is a protagonist in the sense that his perspective helps drive the narrative of the film, Franco's Orloff is never allowed the moment of humanity that Franju gave Génessier. At face value, Franco's Orloff and Franju's Génessier are driven by the same love—to heal a daughter. However, Orloff's love is more incestuous. His long gazes at her daughter, as she lies nearly comatose behind the glass cage he built for her, are eerily reminiscent of the way other men gaze at women in the night clubs where he found his victims.

Dr. Orloff's method of kidnapping brings further complications to the table. Orloff, to find women who resembled his daughter, frequents night clubs, usually the same one. (This makes one wonder why anyone let women talk to this man. Those who did never returned.) The women perform on stage, usually some sort of burlesque number, and he sits in the balcony measuring them. He doesn't seem to enjoy the shows

the way other men in the club do, but he is looking for a suitable replacement for his daughter here. Once he finds a woman suitable, he invites her into a private dining room for some champagne, which is drugged to increase the stupor of drunkenness. When the bottle is gone, he asks them to come back with him for more champagne, and when they do, he has them hauled away to his dungeons by his strange servant Morpho. While scenes of women being kidnapped by men all have some overtones of perversion, Dr. Orloff's method mirrors date rape, and this turns the theme most drastically from *Eyes Without a Face*. Franju's film recalls echoes of the Franco regime, but Jess Franco's *Dr. Orloff* is in the spitting image of a culture that kidnaped and perverted the image of women for its own purposes, to serve the image of perfect woman, Melissa, propagated by the men of the culture, Orloff.

A similar theme resurfaces in a later Jess Franco film, *The Erotic Rites of Dr. Frankenstein*, but complicates it even further by turning the woman into a monster herself. The plot centers around Cagliostro—an immortal magician and hypnotist, something from beyond—and Melissa, his half bird, half woman mistress he created by combining the “seed” of a man with the egg of a bird. They are certainly the villains of the film, but they are also in many ways the protagonists: their choices and goals are as important as the scientists trying to stop them, and this is the root of the strange gender roles in Franco's film. It brings into question how a character like Melissa relates to issues of gender and feminism. There are a few ways to talk about Melissa. She can be approached from inside the film itself and the gender roles of its interior world, or from those of the audience—how they view her and the role her character plays for the audience.

From the interior perspective, Melisa has quite a bit of agency; she is the right hand of Cagliostro, executing his will. She is, however, also phenomenally sexualized, “wearing feathers, talons, a cape, and little else” (Thrower 297); she is hypnotized to do Cagliostro’s bidding; and she was even created by Cagliostro. The latter factors are really the most complicating. Her sexuality (from the interior perspective of the film) is a symbol of perfection. She never operates as a sex object for Cagliostro. They each go to sources outside each other for erotic fulfillment. There is, however, a dichotomy in her position of power: she has the influence and abilities of Cagliostro, but is subservient to him. It seems willing. She never rebels against him or even seems to doubt his authority. But because she is his creation, it’s difficult to determine her capacity for rebellion. Furthermore, he gives her everything she wants: authority, food, protection. The need and desire for these things could easily outweigh the consequences of rebellion. If she is content with him, feeling no perceivable reason to rebel, then it is arguable that from the internal perspective of the film Melissa is a fully realized woman. She serves but is respected, given autonomy, and appreciated as an equal. If, however, she serves because she must, because she has not been given the ability to know anything better than service, suddenly everything becomes more complicated.

Frankly, the argument for either side (from the interior perspective) begins to fall apart because the audience doesn’t know all the necessary information. The world is haphazardly developed, meant to be more of an impetus for the images on screen than for a fully realized universe. This is not realism, or even magical realism. To understand the feminism of the film, then, the relationship between the film and its audience must be considered. From this exterior standpoint, Melissa’s function could certainly be

pornographic, intended to arouse the audience and provide the loose fun Spain's youth often sought from film in the 1970s. *The Erotic Rites of Dr. Frankenstein* borrows unabashedly from various horror influences: the characters of Frankenstein, characters from Franco's previous films (Melisa, Madame Orloff, Morpho), Cagliostro—a European legend turned horror and pulp trope—and the Italian *fumetti*⁴ comics. *The Erotic Rites of Dr. Frankenstein* is a primarily image-based story, a series of bits and tableaux that all strike a particular feeling: erotic tension.

Erotic horror became popular between the 1960s and 1970s after the pornography industry took off, and horror “began to go kinky” (Tohill and Tombs 5). Thus, like porn, eroticism in horror is easily taken one of two ways—sexploitation or rebellion, perhaps, sometimes both; this seems to be the case for Jess Franco. On the one hand, *Erotic Rites* was a low-budget film fully produced in about two weeks, designed to be a film version of the Italian *fumetti* he admired. There was no internal message to “justify” the erotic elements. Yet, making such a sexually charged film, with full male and female nudity, was an act of rebellion in and of itself. It challenged the idea of censorship, questioning the abolition of sex from the screen. It challenged the idea that female beauty is tied to conservatism. It forces audiences to acknowledge the body, male and female, as sexual. It embraced the idea that female sexuality could be empowering. In the context of 1960s and 1970s Spain, the film represents a push against repression, and a very hard push at that.

⁴ The word *fumetti* technically describes all Italian comics. However, many English sources on horror use the phrase *fumetti* to refer to the erotic-horror comics of the 1970s and 1980s. This is how the term is used here as well.

It cannot be ignored, however, that this film—and others like it—are written by men for a primarily male audience. For modern audiences especially, this can be difficult to accept as any degree of feminist, more easily construed as exploitation hiding under a mask of feminism. *The Erotic Rites of Dr. Frankenstein* doesn't develop any of the women in the film fully. Most women who make clothed appearances on-screen also make nude ones, and some women only make nude appearances. This theme represented here, the balance between embracing bodies and sexualizing them, is the very struggle for women of the time. This film represents Spain beginning to uncover the difference, deliberately pushing the boundaries of sexual liberation for women. It is successful in some ways, in others not, and therefore is important: it is as tumultuous as the time that bore it.

The movement of Spanish horror through the 1960s and 1970s tracks the progress of the role of women in society. More accurately, it tracks how men's perception of women and themselves changed. The majority of directors and writers of Spanish horror, and of film and general, were male. Women rarely depicted themselves in horror, and while this detracts from the ability to encompass the female identity in celluloid, there is still a major anxiety at play worth addressing and a consistency with the social perception of women during the period. No matter how hard they resisted, women would always be in the clutches of Francoist Spain, or their escape would always be scarred by it.

Faith and Morality

Spain had a unique relationship with the Catholic church that, like many other aspects of the 1960s and 1970s, was steeped in change. After the Civil War and even up until the 1960s, the catholic church worked in support of *el Caudillo*. Primarily, this meant supporting his moral position—or at least not openly opposing him. Often, homilies focused on degrading the poor, blaming them for their own economic troubles. And the poor often agreed with the criticism. The Spanish public in general, and their government, held the belief that the people who should benefit from Spain's new peace was the middle class (Cazorla Sánchez 135).

This moral oppression of the poor extended to gender as well. There was a pamphlet distributed in 1943 called *Do You Want to be a Good Girl?* and it explained that being good meant loving the Lord because of the good things he's done, like creating beautiful flowers to look at in the garden (Cazorla Sánchez 140). This pamphlet was distributed to girls regardless of class, but has a message that tells young girl they cannot be good if they don't have access to things like a garden—a luxury only affordable to the middle and upper classes. Furthermore, it assumes that good young girls have time to go look at a garden, and thus that the time spent working or taking care of siblings was time not spent appreciating God for what he's done.

This moral approach to social standards was based in a tradition of needing to prepare people for heaven, helping them cleanse their spirits of the sinful constraints of the world. Starting in the 1960s—even in the late 1950s—however, the Spanish church began to shift its focus from preparing people for the afterlife to improving Spain on earth. The transition was catalyzed by the election of Pope Paul VI in 1963 because the

Catholic church as a whole began to focus more and more on its relationship to the modern world. Spain's Catholicism, though perhaps slower than some to adjust, was no exception.

In Spain, this shift started with the rise of younger Catholics who had not seen the Civil War but the Spain it had left behind. They saw the suffering of the Spanish people, and they began to speak out about it. Though change in the church had begun to take hold, those who sought it were in minority until the 1970s. Some self-criticism and dissent in the church had always existed, but it was never openly oppositional to the government until the 1960s, and even then, it was only a small portion of the church speaking up.

Furthermore, even when this movement for change was strongest, the church never really removed itself from association with the Franco Regime. In 1971, a proposal was brought forward by an assembly of bishops and priests, urging the church to ask forgiveness for "its one-sided role in the Civil War" (Cazorla Sánchez 139). The request, however, failed to get enough votes to carry, and the Catholic church, throughout the entire duration of the dictatorship, never formally renounced "its role in the tragic events and shameful social policies of the past" (139). At the same time, the Catholic church was seeing a major, global shift in the role of the priesthood and the sisterhood. They were searching for a simpler spirituality, one focused on social reform—especially the needs of the poor—and preparing all members of the church to deal with the modern world. In Spain, preparing for the modern world meant the church needed to reevaluate the outcomes of the war, and what exactly its position had entailed for the losing side.

This liberalizing of spiritual leaders meant abandoning a moralizing approach to social problems; the poor were no longer poor because they were amoral.

There was, then, a dichotomy that the Spanish people had to bridge in the 1970s. Despite the church's official position, the people had seen many priests be laicized, join militant social reform groups, and become members of the working class. This was the new brand of evangelism that allowed the priest to participate in the workplace and better understand the needs and perspectives of the working-class people, but that also directly stood in contrast to the moral stance of the church's political affiliations. This conflict left the millions of Catholic practitioners morally confused and disoriented as Spain transitioned to Constitutional Monarchy in 1977.

The Spirit of the Beehive (a 1973 film by Victor Erice) does not speak directly to the Catholic struggle in Spain, but it is useful, especially for non-Spanish audiences, in conveying the atmosphere of the world young catholic priests and sisters would have grown up in. It establishes the need for faith or truth during the rule of General Franco—especially for those on the losing side of the Civil War.

The Spirit of the Beehive was Erice's major film debut, the first of only three feature films that he developed in his thirty-year career (Julian Smith). Upon first release at the San Sebastián Film Festival, the film received mixed reviews. Some were bored by its slow pace and criticized it for its lack of an overt message regarding the Franco Regime. Others, however, marveled at its subtle reference to the trauma of the Civil War, and believed it personified "domestic distress, what one reviewer called 'the war behind the window'" (Julian Smith) better than any film before it. Indeed, the film has a myriad of beautiful methods that present an overwhelming sense of melancholy and existential

isolation, but the two that stand out most are the use of the beehive trope and the references to James Whale's film *Frankenstein* (1931).

The Spirit of the Beehive follows young Ana, named for the actress that played her (Ana Torrent), as she tries to find the spirit of Frankenstein's monster. The opening scenes put the audience in an impromptu theatre where a travelling reel of James Whale's film is being screened. Ana and her sister Isabel (named for her actress, Isabell Tellería) are in attendance, and Ana is fascinated by the monster Dr. Frankenstein creates. Three scenes catch her eye: when the monster gives a flower to a little girl, when the monster kills the little girl, and when the town destroys the monster. By the end of the film, the Ana is in tears and asks Isabella why all this could happen. Isabella answers—deceitfully—that it doesn't matter because neither the monster nor the little girl are dead. She even insists that the monster lives in an abandoned hut just outside the village. This possibility becomes Ana's obsession and her hunt for him, the focus of the film's limited plot.

It is worth noting this limited plot because it draws further connection between the intent of *The Spirit of the Beehive* and horror films. *The Spirit of the Beehive* is built around moments that strike a particular mood, in the same way that horror films are built around moments that strike a particular anxiety. Thus, in form, *The Spirit of the Beehive* is not altogether different from a film like *The Erotic Rites of Dr. Frankenstein*, which was built primarily upon images of the erotic that established tension between sexual oppression and liberation. Erice's film also uses imagery to build tension, and in this way, engages the audience in the tension between childhood limitlessness and death,

the natural limit of life. Furthermore, these images, when thought about thematically, have a significance that is not altogether different than that of the zombie.

One such image is the recurring beehive motif. The audience is first introduced to the motif via a beekeeper at work. There is a lengthy scene of him pulling out a comb from its container, and the camera focuses on the seemingly countless bodies crawling over one-another, tirelessly working. The significance of the moment, however, is not revealed until the beekeeper (now known to be Ana's father) sits at his desk beneath a portrait of St. Jerome (depicted as a writer with a skull placed on his desk) and writes in his diary:

Someone to whom I recently showed my glass beehive ... who saw the constant agitation of the honeycomb, the mysterious maddened commotion of the nurse bees over the nests, the teeming bridges and stairways of wax, the invading spirals of the queen, the endlessly varied and repetitive labors of the swarm, the relentless yet ineffectual toil, the fevered comings and goings, the call to sleep always ignored, undermining the next day's work, the final repose of death far from a place that tolerates neither sickness nor tombs Someone who observed these things, after the initial astonishment had passed, quickly looked away with an expression of indescribable sadness and horror.⁵

Erice thus establishes his first major trope: the beehive as a symbol of the restless exhaustion of the Spanish people. Like the beehive, the Spanish are trapped without agency in a world where even death holds no escape because it is ignored or forgotten in the name of progress.

⁵ This quote is based on the English subtitles in the Spanish version of the film.

For those who lost the Civil War especially, this symbol was significant because the countless deaths of friends, neighbors, and family members were remembered (if at all) as traitors to the regime, and those who survived were forced to work toward the success of a Spain they did not believe in. The resulting hopelessness is likely what the young clergy of Spain—who grew in the time and environment Ana would have—wanted to alleviate. They saw it in themselves and the working-class people who had long been forgotten, and so when the Vatican began to push for Catholic reform, these clergy men and women worked to push against the Francoist ties of the Spanish Catholic church and allow healing to begin.

Erice compliments his beehive symbol by referencing James Whale's iteration of *Frankenstein* and his monster. The monster, as the object of Ana's obsession, becomes essential to the plot of the film and appears to Ana at the climax in a mutation of the very scene Ana was obsessed with: the monster giving the young girl a flower. Understanding the purpose of the monster, how it functions to frame Erice's atmospheric recreation of 1940s Spain, requires some understanding of Whale's film.

Whale's *Frankenstein* is famous for deviating from the themes of Mary Shelly's novel⁶. Instead of a story about the dangers of science, of playing god, Whale gives a story about the plight of immigrants, how they're transformed by the countries they travel to. Specifically, his monster was garbed like an Irish immigrant, and thus the creature's inability to speak, his criminal brain, and his eventual destruction become symbolic of the treatment of Irish immigrants in Europe. While the relationship to the Irish is not

⁶ *Frankenstein* is famous for many things, but this is the most significant to *The Spirit of the Beehive*.

significant for *The Spirit of the Beehive*, the symbolic theft of the monster's agency by muting him and giving him the brain of a criminal is essential to the monster Erice creates for Ana. He represents a disenfranchised Spain, and the restless death of the beehive.

Ana's encounter with the monster, and subsequent illness, then, are analogous to the death of the little girl in Whale's film. She loves the monster and treats him with kindness, but he is so corrupted and haunted by fear and danger that he destroys her. Ana's interaction with the monster is the same. She encounters the monster, treats him kindness, and then falls stricken with an illness that leaves her mute and bedridden for some time. Ana met with the symbol of Spain's end and then understood what happened in the country, which leaves her, for a time, silent—as though dead. When she rises, then, and calls out “*Soy Ana*,”⁷ she is revitalized as opposed to resurrected. This moment is Erice's gift to the audience, the small escape from all the prior dread. Ana's small, defiant declaration of her identity is the hope that the youth of Spain can escape the curse of the war.

Where *The Spirit of the Beehive* deals with the atmosphere that potentially inspired the liberalizing of the church, Paul Naschy's film *Exorcismo* (1975) deals with the tension that came afterward. This film, and many of Naschy's others, represent an important opposite to many of the films from the period—films that are not attempting to subvert Francoist ideals, but merely to present Spain as it is. In fact, to some degree

⁷ This can be translated as either “It's me, Ana,” or “I am Ana,” and this quantum state in the Spanish is essential. Ana, in one small line, both calls out to the monster and asserts that she is herself, thus defying the spirit of the beehive.

Naschy's *Exorcismo* opposes the liberalization of Spain and posits instead the reservations of conservative Catholicism.

There are a few obstacles in interpreting *Exorcismo*'s relationship to Spain during the 1960s and 1970s. The first, and perhaps largest is its similarity to the American film *The Exorcist* (1973). Naschy allegedly wrote *Exorcismo* three years before the release of *The Exorcist* (Willis 124), but his film was not completed and released until 1975. However, as film critic Andy Willis points out in his essay on *Exorcismo*, Naschy's script predating the American film would explain why plot elements like the exorcism of feel tangential to the murder mystery revolving around a Satanist cult, a plot structure that feels more like other Paul Naschy films from the period (123).

The second obstacle in interpreting *Exorcismo* is the deliberate removal of its characters and plot from Spanish culture. This, however, is a more easily mountable obstacle. When the shift away from national Catholicism began, the Franco Regime began to tighten its hold on the censors, wanting to optimize the image of the Spanish government and Spanish Catholicism in the rest of Europe. Anything that might even be misconstrued as criticism was liable to be censored. Therefore Naschy, to protect his work, often set his films in another country—though the settings might look “suspiciously like Spain” (124) regardless. *Exorcismo* was placed in London, and the religion of its characters became Anglican. It is via this transmutation that *Exorcismo* is able to have something to say about the role Catholicism was attempting to assume in Spain.

Prior to 1973, the transition in the Catholic church was still very much underway, and conservatives who held to *el Caudillo*'s national Catholicism were hesitant to accept

changes in the roll of the church. Cinema, in order to present Catholic and middle-class conservative values as preferable, also presented an alternative standpoint, even though it meant “misrepresentation and denegation” of the alternative (123). In *Exorcismo*, Reverend Adrian fulfills the role alternative to conservative, national Catholicism.

Adrian is a priest who is generally unconcerned with spiritual matters. It is not that his faith is shaken—as is the case for Damien in *The Exorcist*. Instead, Adrian is simply a well read, university professor in addition to his clergy position. He is aware of the world outside the church, familiar and versed in the texts of other religions, and when the daughter of the middle-class family begins to act strange, he is ready to accept almost any explanation but possession. It is not until Adrian is face-to-face with the demon inside Layla (the possessed woman) that he truly believes evil forces are involved (Willis 127). This denial of evil is part of the conservative anxieties of Spain at the time: the fear that, in liberalizing the church, evil begins to be overlooked and forgotten. To put it differently, the “moral purity” of Spain, which had been one at a high cost by the conservative side, would be sacrificed, and the losses suffered would be forgotten in the name of progress.

Exorcismo also acknowledges another side-effect of the church’s moral shift: the schism between the middle class and the church. When Catholic leaders felt a need to focus on the poor agrarian and proletarian classes, the middle class lost the attention of the church. To counteract this drop in importance, organizations like Opus Dei tightened their grip in the Spanish government, and the result was an entrenchment in traditionalism meant to oppose the Catholic church’s liberalization (126). In *Exorcismo* this disparity between the Catholic church and the middle class is represented by the

distance between Adrian and the film's central family. When he is first asked to come see Layla, there is mention that it had been some time since he was last around; Layla was quite young the last time he saw her. What exactly caused the rift between the family and Adrian is left unsaid the whole film, but there is an extra formal air to their interactions, as though something is being danced around so that, perhaps, relationships could be repaired. It isn't until Adrian accepts a "more simple, unproblematic faith in God" (127) that the differences between the family and Adrian are settled, and he is able to help Layla.

Naschy's *Exorcismo*, beyond directly opposing the liberalizing of the Spanish clergy, also shares themes with his 1972 film, *Vengeance of the Zombies*. Spain, like the rest of Western culture, was experiencing a rise in youth-led countercultures. As a result, in many of his films, Naschy depicts youths as reckless, naïve, and even (occasionally) as outright evil. *Vengeance of the Zombies* is an excellent example of how conservative Spain, and indeed many horror films from the period, reacted to this shift in youth culture.

Naschy's *Vengeance of the Zombies* represents youth culture like *Exorcismo* represents the liberal priest: as an alternative to Spanish Catholicism that paints the church in a better light. The film's direct ties to Catholicism are not as strong; *Vengeance of the Zombies* is not about an exorcism or slips in faith. That said, the representation of alternative beliefs (specifically, Indian culture and religious systems⁸) draws connections between their practitioners and the devil, and thus compromises the validity and safety of

⁸ This film is in no way accurate to Indian culture or Hindi practices, but it is certainly trying to imitate—for the sake of criticism—this culture and religion.

these alternative religions. Furthermore, the idea that some cinema misrepresented Catholic alternatives deliberately is more strongly present in *Vengeance of the Zombies* than it is in *Exorcismo*. The most accessible example is Paul Naschy's role as an Indian guru (Krisna) and his usage of brown face to pass as Indian. While not necessarily done with the intent of mockery, the use of brown face certainly implies a lack of concern for cultural sensitivity that sets a precedent for the treatment of the culture through the rest of the film.

Vengeance of the Zombies also combines aspects of counterculture with facets from multiple religions to create a catch-all version of black magic and rituals. Collapsing counterculture and un-Christian activities into one overarching act aligns things that might otherwise seem innocuous with dangerous evil. For example, in *Exorcismo*, the inspector associates protest and sexual liberation with insanity brought on by magic possession. In *Vengeance of the Zombies*, this is accomplished in a variety of scenes, but it starts in the first few seconds of the film. The first scene is of a poor husband and wife who run the cemetery and rob the graves of the rich people they bury. Within the next ten minutes, they are killed by a woman who is resurrected by Krisna's brother, and the old tradition of criminalizing and punishing the poor is resurrected with her.

This is not to say that films like *The Spirit of the Beehive* are anti-Franco and films like Naschy's *Exorcismo* or *Vengeance of the Zombies* are pro-Franco. In fact, *Vengeance of the Zombies* shares certain anti-Franco symbols. The zombie, for example, could be interpreted similarly to the beehive motif in Erice's film. However, these are two sides in what would become a major conflict in Spain. While Europe saw university protests and student activism in the mid to late 1960s, Spain did not see its first student

protest until 1972. With their doors newly open, and faith in General Franco's regime waning, there was a desire to catch up, re-assimilate with the culture of the continent, as seen by the push towards Catholic liberalization. On the other hand, however, the country—via its government and its church—had spent years trying to build a national identity. Giving that up, in many ways starting over, likely seemed counterintuitive to some Spaniards. These three films well represent and discuss that schism, giving insight to the religious anxieties of Spain during the 1960s and 1970s.

Politics

The 1960s and 1970s heralded a whole new economic system for Spain. The country had begun receiving international aid and had entered the UN only a few years prior. Then the border was opened, and tourism began to increase significantly⁹ (Glaser 29). Citizens bought cars, and Spanish popular media began to celebrate the new consumer way of life, excess becoming paramount to success and wealth and happiness. However, parallel to all this, political turmoil was beginning to reach new heights. In 1973, Carrero Blanco, the Spanish Prime Minister, was assassinated by members of a radical Basque separatist group, Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (ETA). The embrace of consumerism—of middle class culture—and the imminent end of the dictatorship likely helped Spain feel like there was a glimmer of freedom in the periphery.

With freedom, however, also comes a certain responsibility that Spain was uncertain how to handle. General Franco had for years preached the danger of America and “free” countries like it, and while their new economic success began to discredit him—proving him the false prophet of autarky—they still had to cope with the weariness that he had planted. Furthermore, freedom from tyranny does not breed much trust in government. Spain was led by a government that authored the truth, spinning what meaning it needed to justify the choices of a dictator. This same government had control over what came into the country, what went out of the country, what names were allowed, what art was made, what art was seen; very little was put in the control of the people directly. Then when Spain opened—a political move Franco only reluctantly allowed—and people saw certain personal success and freedom, they began to doubt

⁹ Between 1959 and 1974, the number of tourists increased by over 26 million people.

where the self-proclaimed captain and navigator of Spain was taking the country. After years of doubt and oppression, a new government—though it could mean progress—would be something to approach wearily.

The Executioner, a 1963 film by Luis García Berlanga, captures another important layer: complicity. The film focused primarily on the death penalty in Spain, which was a major form of punishment for Spain at the time; it is estimated that 50,000¹⁰ people were executed from 1940 to 1975 (Ruiz 97). *The Executioner* follows José Luis Rodríguez, an undertaker turned executioner, and thus is able to capture the strange perspective the Spanish had about capital punishment.

The opening scene of the film happens at the entrance to a prison, as two guards fret over the arrival of someone—presumably the executioner. One of the guards goes on and on about his terrible luck, having to be here the day of an execution. When the executioner finally arrives, in walks a man so old, he looks like could be near death himself—scarred by wrinkles, hunched, and with a voice not unlike that of a death-rattle. With him, he carries a tool bag that rattles slightly as it waddles with him up to the guard's desk. The executioner is, despite the guard's obvious loathing, jovial and casual—unable to be deterred by the poison looks from either guard. He is admitted into the prison, which brings about a monologue from the guard about what a terrible man the executioner is; how dare he be so casual when he is about to go end a man's life? This is his general reception throughout most of the film, loathing and fear by anyone he is around. When José first meets the aging executioner (Amadeo) he is trying to deliver his

¹⁰ To give this some perspective, 1,448 people were executed in the United States between 1977 and March 2017 (DPIC).

tool bag to him. Amadeo had left it in the undertakers' truck when they drove him home. José asks a woman for directions to Amadeo's apartment, and she curses the man, saying that her family does not associate with people like him. Later, after José and Amadeo's daughter, Carmen become friends, they go on a picnic in the park. There is music playing so the two get up to dance, talking and laughing about how their association with death has always plagued their love life. The couple whose radio is playing overhears the conversation and storms off, saying that if they want to dance they can bring their own radio. This sort of offhand cursing happens frequently throughout the first part of the film.

Then, when Carmen gets pregnant, José is forced to marry her to avoid public humiliation. In theory, this could have been a simple solution: once they are married they can move in together and start a new life. However, Carmen can't bear to abandon her father, the ancient reaper of souls, so one of her stipulations for the marriage is that Amadeo live with them, wherever they go. The only way José could afford large enough housing would be through the government subsidized apartments, so his now father-in-law suggests that José take up the mantle as executioner. He assured José that he would rarely have to do it, that it really wasn't as bad as people made it sound, and that if José just couldn't stand the job, he could resign before having to execute anyone. Even Carmen, who says she would support him "no matter he did," thinks he should be an executioner.

This begins the second major section: José as the executioner. Simply put, he brushes with having to execute a prisoner over and over, each time getting closer to the inevitable fate of taking a life. Furthermore, people around him seem to be less and less

concerned about him having to do his job. They even become exasperated because he so badly does not want to do his job. The first time he is summoned, José reads the letter, goes still for a second, then dramatically picks up a pen and paper and begins to write his letter of resignation. Carmen loudly weeps about how happy they had been, looking around the apartment at the life they had built together. José is aware of this, and at first feels it is his moral obligation to resign. However, Amadeo is certain that he will not have to kill the man, and urges José to go anyway, saying that soon the charges will be dropped. It often happens. This becomes the pattern of the rest of the film: José is called in, the execution is stalled, though never cancelled. There is even a moment in the film when José is waiting at the prison, hoping that the prisoner's pardon will come through

The major tension in the film is about whether José will ever have to kill a man, and on the one hand, such an act would socially condemn him as a murderer, a dealer of death worth avoiding. On the other hand, there is also an economic imperative for him to do this: he must do his job to keep his apartment and support the traditional views of family and success. Of course, José does execute the man. He has no choice. The trap is so great, so alienating and condemning, that José is dragged through the courtyard between the prison and the execution chamber, constantly attended to by the guards and the priest and the director of the prison—all while the prisoner himself walks to his fate with dignity, embracing his fear. Berlanga also brilliantly captures this action from a distance, creating a courtyard so large it swallows José and offers no option for escape. It is comedic, but damning. After the execution and he gets home to his family, he tells them he'll never do it again, he couldn't it was so awful. His father-in-law says to him, "I said the same thing my first time."

David Cairns, a film critic who wrote the essay on *The Executioner* for the Criterion Collection edition of the film, argues that the film has “the narrative structure of a garrote,¹¹ not incidentally the preferred method of execution for Spain in the sixties” (Cairns). As the film progresses, the reality of what José must do begins to set in, and the moments of absurdity rapidly give way to breathless discomfort while waiting for the film to end, for José’s torture to cease. This aids in the feeling that the state of Spain is inescapable, and is what ties the film to horror. The film is very funny to begin with, but as we progress and get closer and closer to the moment of execution, we fear for José because he is turning into the monster of the film. Berlanga pulls this off by consistently taking away José’s agency, putting him into a series of circumstances where the decisions are made for him, either by general social pressure or by particular characters in the film. The people who looked down on José (by extension of how they looked down on his predecessor) looked down on him because of his job. People assumed he willingly chose the job he had and thus believed him to be morbid. Perhaps they believed the executioner was a willing creation of the fascist regime that controlled him. The irony, however, is that José fell into government work because of the situations around him, and is now doomed to become the callous executioner. José did everything he could to resist, even stopped fights that he feared could end in someone getting executed, but in the end all he could do was faint and cry as he was taken to the room to do his job. Berlanga’s film feels claustrophobic, and though there are moments of wit and hope—of a newlywed

¹¹ An execution and torture device that strangled the victim. Some versions of the device had a metal rod design to sever the spinal cord, killing the prisoner more quickly. For images, see Appendix C.

couple sailing away on a boat—they are shadowed by the accidental fall of José Luis Rodríguez.

José's transformation, this far fall from man to monster, is the primary relationship between *The Executioner*—a dark comedy—and horror. Without it, the film might have references to the horror, to the anxieties found in the genre (i.e. the garrote narrative structure), but it would still be far from a monster film. Berlanga, however, structured the film so that José starts as an undertaker (caretaker for the dead) but ends as the executioner (reaper of the living). It is this transition, from serving the dead to taking life, that makes *The Executioner* a monster movie and a tragedy.

In 1974—the year before el Caudillo died and when he was at his most unpopular—Jorge Grau echoes the theme of political tension in his film *The Living Dead at Manchester Morgue*. Grau uses environmental catastrophe to kick off the story, emphasizing the tenuous relationship between various government officials and citizens. Perhaps the most important question to ask about the film: why do the zombies walk? The raising of the living dead can change the symbolism of the thing—some zombies walked because they were communist, others because they were mind-controlled, others still simply because they could (Smith 131). In this film, it is the incompetent government who creates the zombie, albeit (fittingly) by accident. In an interview about the film, Grau stated a straightforward political message: “We’ve been poisoned by progress that is unconcerned about its consequences” (Olmo Ramón 108). The zombie in *The Living Dead at Manchester Morgue*, then, seems to represent a fear of the future and, at the same time, symbolizes General Franco’s decay—his body and his regime.

The Living Dead at Manchester Morgue, like *The Executioner*, is plot heavy, and thus unfamiliar audiences can benefit from a brief summary before getting too involved in the criticism. The film's main protagonist is a young man named George—an abrasive, hippie shop-keep who is going away for a vacation in the country when the film begins. His plans are cut short, however, when his bike is hit by Edna at a refuel station. The two agree to drop her off at her sister's house so he can keep the car over the weekend, but after finally arriving at her sister's, George and Edna find out that her brother-in-law has been murdered and Katie (Edna's sister) is the primary suspect. After inspecting photographs the husband took as he was attacked, George and Edna learn that the attacker was a local vagrant who had recently drowned. They go to the cemetery to investigate, but are attacked by a trio of resurrected dead, and manage to escape by burning the bodies of the dead. The sergeant finds these bodies and decides Edna and George are devil worshipers and therefore his prime subjects. Their escape leads Edna and George back to the hospital, where the autopsied bodies of the dead are killing patients, who are in turn resurrected. George and Edna try to escape, but she is killed and resurrected. George, left with no choice but to burn the hospital, makes an attempt but is shot by the sergeant before he can stop the spread of the dead.

The most important feature of Grau's living dead is that they are resurrected very shortly after death, vivified by ultrasonic radiation from an experimental pest-control machine. Thus, his zombies are reborn looking no different than they did at their moment of death, walking memorials of their demise. This was a new portrayal of the dead, inspired by Grau's research into forensic photography (Olmo Ramón 109). This depiction of the zombie—walking around, frozen in their moment of demise—suggests that, should

government or societies find no antidote for their poison, they will be doomed to live perpetually cursed by the inevitable consequences of progress. There is a sort of doom that prevails at the end: the machine can send out a signal that is miles wide, affecting the dead in more and more places.

The catalyst for such a spread is ignorance to the problems it creates, and the police chief is its major source. Essentially, because the officers were unwilling to yield on the impossibility of what George said was happening, was unwilling to even investigate his idea a little, everyone ended up a victim. However, the officer's views on the situation cannot be forsaken either. He is hesitant to believe what George—portrayed as a hippie—is saying because to him, the evidence points to the contrary. Frankly, the idea of the dead rising and murdering the living would be difficult to believe. Grau's style stands in contrast to how other Spanish horror films treat the supernatural. For example, Paul Naschy's films (almost any one of them) always leave room for the characters to jump on board with the supernatural aspect. When investigating the unknown, the possibility of powers beyond human control is always nearby. Not so in Grau's film. This is not a world where the unnatural can happen at the drop of the hat. This is a world in which the living dead are a bad horror trope, a penny dreadful, merely entertainment. Even George, the model of awareness, says to Edna, "Corpses only walk in really, really bad paperback fiction." It isn't until he sees them himself in the church that he's willing to accept that zombies are walking about, terrorizing the countryside. This doubt allows for a certain amount of verisimilitude in the film, and allows the investigator to reasonably assume that George and Edna had something to do with the murder.

It's important to note that the opposing side is reasonable because it emphasizes the anxiety here: progress was being pushed by people who believed mind altering substances were the future, but the past was a totalitarian regime. For Spain, who was new to the hippie scene, forward could seem like the direction to go, but extremists on the side of progressiveness could be as intimidating as those on the opposite. Yet, the middle was not better. Moderate Spain put its head down and said, things are improving, leave it there. This could be where the sense of doom came from. Progression meant a careless government meddling in affairs without enough concern for the potential side-effects. Moderation meant allowing the government to do that. Going back meant embracing the regime. Thus, the dead walk as they fell, but they all fall.

The scenic imagery in the film does a good job of conveying this idea. The opening shots are all of metropolitan London: George's shop with the naked women vinylled on the window, selling art and statues from foreign lands and religions. A woman streaks across the street, holding what is either a peace sign or an obscenity, but either way no one pays attention. Machines ooze smoke into the air, and trash clutters every cranny that could have housed beauty. Undoubtedly this is the beginnings of progress' toll on a nation: the waste that comes with consumer lifestyle and the liberalizing morality that national Catholicism targeted as a danger.

These shots are quickly contrasted by George's escape into the British countryside, where the rest of the film takes place.¹² Primarily, this setting represents peace; however, there are a few different contexts for peace. First, the countryside

¹² While set in London and its surrounding countryside, *The Living Dead at Manchester Morgue* was filmed primarily in Italy.

represents a pastoral nirvana for people like George, a haven away from the city and the insanity that goes on there, a place untouched by modernity. Such virginity also means that the countryside resembles a place dangerously removed from the present, ignorant, perhaps willfully, to the dangers progress and science can bring. Not long into the film, George encounters a farmer who is working with some men from the department of agriculture to test a new pesticide machine. Without much pause, George scolds the farmer he encounters for letting the government pollute the land with their machines. However, the farmer sees no reason to protest the machines, nor to fight with George, so the farmer placates George by giving him what he wants and sends him on his way.

The countryside is also a haven for the recovering. Shortly after George's exodus, the audience is introduced to Edna. She runs over George's motorcycle while he is parked at a gas station. He demands she give him a ride, and she agrees to lend him the car so long as he drops her at Southgate to see her sister, Katie. She does not reveal that Katie is a relapsing heroin addict, but the audience quickly finds out in the following scene. Katie's husband, a photographer, has tried to help her get clean by isolating her in nature, but it has only caused her to resent him. Once he discovers that she is using again, he mentions sending her away to the hospital, which functions both as a mental asylum and normal hospital.

The countryside also houses the dead, their final resting places, which allows the plot to take place both mechanically and symbolically. The first is simple: it provides the plot with the dead to animate, it removes the likelihood of witnesses, and it facilitates the unknown (rural settings are notoriously good at this). Symbolically, this place of peace,

of rest—for all parties—also acts as the terrain for which all peace to be disturbed. Sacred ground becomes a battlefield, and all are damned for its desecration.

The image of the monster itself—in *Living Dead at Manchester Morgue* and in other films like *Vengeance of the Zombies*—is also representative of the Franco regime in other ways. The most obvious is the decaying body of the dictator himself. Especially for a film made and set in 1974 (a year before his death), General Franco's body, wracked by illness, certainly was some source of inspiration for the Spanish zombie. *El Caudillo* of Spain was dying, and those who admired, who believed, and who followed him were about to lose power. The zombie was a symbol of this imminent demise and the curse to live the way they'd had fallen, disfigured and defeated. However, the body's return to life also represents the threat General Franco and his supporters were for Spain, even after their fall from power and Franco's gruesome death. Another like him could rise and if people followed this new leader—like they followed General Franco—Spain was headed for its own perverse death and resurrection. Thus, the zombie's meaning returns to the fear of moving into a new political era.

Even in 1972, before Franco was so ill and before Grau created the creature in *el Caudillo*'s image, this theme persisted in a different zombie. While Americans and parts of Europe feared the Cold War zombie, tainted by communist rhetoric, Spain feared its own mind-controlled zombie, exemplified in Paul Naschy's¹³ film *Vengeance of the Zombies*. The film has its own brand of symbolism and relevance to Spanish culture¹⁴,

¹³ León Klimovsky—an Argentinian filmmaker—directed the film, but Naschy (as Julian Molina) wrote the screenplay and story. Thus, he is credited with the creation of this Spanish zombie.

¹⁴ See the Faith and Morality section.

but it is worth briefly mentioning. Naschy's undead are resurrected by a satanic magic (which vaguely resembles voodoo) that strips the subjects of whatever personality they had and converts them into agents of death, doing the bidding of whoever resurrected them. This method of reanimation evokes a very Spanish mentality of peace over morality.

When General Franco took power, the Spanish people who didn't support him and his regime were vaguely aware of the atrocities he committed, and many may not have wanted him in power. However, they had also seen the lengths he went to win the Civil War and were exhausted of war themselves. They knew that to protest General Franco would mean a disturbance of peace at home and in the streets, and would mean the loss of even more of their family, friends, and fellow Spaniards (Cazorla Sánchez 4). Furthermore, Franco worked to sell his Spain as a "normal European regime with a specific Spanish nature" (Cazorla Sánchez 4). In a continent of democratic prosperity, this supposed normalcy was likely attractive to the Spanish people—especially the agrarian peasantry who had gained little but peace from the war. Much of Franco's atrocities were hidden from the general public, but the little that was known was enough to inspire fear. Often, then, the Spanish people chose to believe that Franco was a mostly good ruler, dedicated to improving Spain through his unique methods, and that to rebel would be against the best interests of their country. Thus the zombie is an important symbol for Spain: a picture of Spaniards battled into submission and ruled by trickery.

APPENDIX SECTION

Appendix A: Supplementary images for the “Gender and Sexuality” Section

Top Left: French poster for *Eyes**Without a Face* (1960)Bottom Left: French poster for *The**Awful Dr. Orloff* (1962)

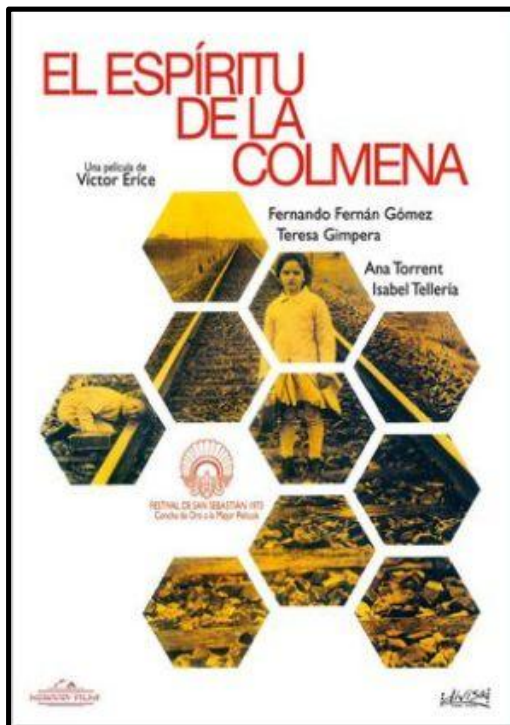
Bottom Right: Spanish poster for

The Erotic Rites of Dr. Frankenstein

(1973).



Appendix B: Supplementary Images for the “Faith and Morality” Section



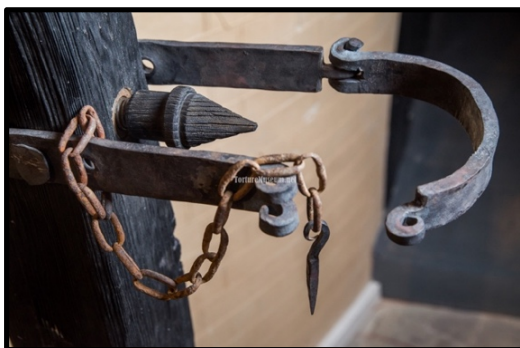
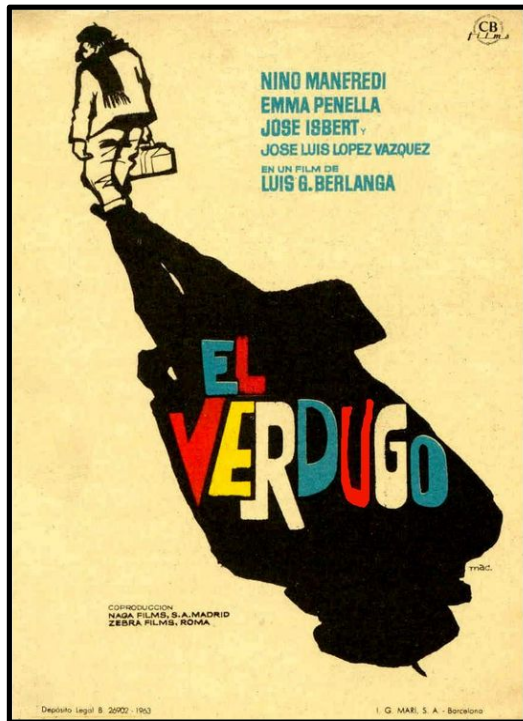
Top Left: Spanish poster for
Spirit of the Beehive (1973)

Top Right: Spanish poster for
Vengeance of the Zombies
(1972)

Bottom Right: American DVD
cover for *Exorcismo* (1975)



Appendix C: Supplementary Images for the “Politics” Section



Top Left: The Spanish film poster for *The Executioner* (1963).

Top Right: The Spanish film poster for *The Living Dead at Manchester Morgue* (1974).

Bottom Left: A replica *garrote* from the Torture Museum.

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Cannibals. Directed by Jess Franco, Blue Underground, 1980.

Count Dracula's Great Love. Directed by Cassandra Peterson and Eric Gardner, performance by Paul Naschy, Shout Factory, 1981.

Erotic Rites of Dr. Frankenstein. Directed by Jess Franco, Redemption, 1972.

Executioner, The. Directed by Luis García Berlanga, Naga Films, 1963.

Exorcismo. Directed by Juan Bosch, performance by Paul Naschy, Sinema Diable, 1975.

Eyes Without a Face. Directed by Georges Fanju, Janus Films, 1959.

Female Vampire, Directed by Jess Franco, Eurociné, 1973.

Frankenstein's Bloody Terror. Directed by Enrique López Eguiluz, performance by Paul Naschy, Independent-International Pictures Corp., 1968.

Living Dead at Manchester Morgue, The. Directed by Jorge Grau, Stars Film S.A., 1974.

Lorna ... The Exorcist. Directed by Jess Franco, 1974.

Night of the Werewolf. Directed by Jack Molina, performance by Paul Naschy, Victory Films, 1980.

Spirit of the Beehive, The. Directed by Victor Erice, Janus Films, 1973.

Tombs of the Blind Dead. Directed by Amando de Ossario, Blue Underground, 1971.

Vampyre. Directed by José Ramón Lloraz, Essay Films, 1974.

Vampyros Lesbos. Directed by Jess Franco, 1971.

Vengeance of the Zombies. Directed by León Klimovsky, performance by Paul Naschy, Victory Films, 1972.