THE DIFFICULT RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FEMALE AGENCY AND DESIRE: AURORA BAUTISTA AND AMPARO RIVELLES*

JO LABANYI

INTRODUCTION

This essay discusses two Spanish female stars of the 1940s and 1950s, Aurora Bautista and Amparo Rivelles, who worked in two of the major film genres of the time: melodrama and the patriotic epic based on episodes from national history. I will examine performances by each of them in one film from each genre. My focus will be on the tensions between female agency and desire, exploring the different and shifting relations between the two, for it is not easy to make them coincide.

As Christine Gledhill has noted (1991: xv), the concept of desire was introduced into cinema studies by psychoanalysis. Early feminist film criticism, grounded in psychoanalysis, focused heavily on Hollywood melodrama, not only because the genre tends to depict female victims but also because it has been defined as an expression of the repressed. Peter Brooks (1976), studying 19th century melodrama, famously justified the genre's expressive excess on the grounds that it obliged audiences to confront unspeakable emotions. In recent decades feminist criticism—not just in film studies—has tended to talk not so much of female desire as of women's agency. This shift has accompanied a (partial) move away from psychoanalytic frames of reference, which suppose that desire is the expression of an authentic inner self, to the performative notion of identity consecrated by Judith Butler (1990). That is, identity not as inner emotion but as what one does, with actions seen as strategically chosen even in situations of disadvantage. Agency is explicitly foregrounded in the patriotic epic, which, in the case of early Francoist Spain, curiously tends to have female protagonists who occupy major public positions despite the fact that, at the time, women had lost all the rights won under the Second Republic and were subjected to a retrograde ideology of domesticity.[1] In practice, of course, films rarely adhere to one genre alone but mix different generic con-

ventions (Staiger, 2000: 61-76; Neale, 2000). This essay will examine the ways in which melodrama, with its focus on private emotion, infiltrates the patriotic epic. It will also explore the opportunities for agency granted to the female protagonist by melodrama, contravening the genre's association with female victims.

For Aurora Bautista, I will analyze the patriotic epic *Locura de amor* (1948, directed by Juan de Orduña) and the melodrama *Pequeñeces* (1950, also directed by Orduña); for Amparo Rivelles, the melodrama *El clavo* (1944, directed by Rafael Gil) and the patriotic epic *La leona de Castilla* (1951, again directed by Orduña). All four films were produced by Cifesa, to which Bautista and Rivelles were bound by exclusive contract at the time.[2] This choice of films allows me to consider one case of an actress who made her name in the patriotic epic and moved, in her next film, to melodrama (Bautista); and one case of an actress with an established trajectory in melodrama, who subsequently starred in a patriotic epic (Rivelles). I will be interested in how the different star image of each actress carries over into their performance when they move to another genre, producing a disturbance. In one case the disturbance is positive for the representation of female agency; in the other, it is negative. While desire and agency align at key moments (of longer or shorter duration) in the two melodramas studied, in the two patriotic epics analyzed they become increasingly out of sync. Although Rivelles' career began earlier, I will start with Bautista because the second of her films studied precedes that of Rivelles, and because her contrasting roles in what were her first and second films provide the most striking example of the effect on the relationship between agency and desire of an actress's star image created in her previous work.

In analyzing these films, I follow Janet Staiger's notion of «perverse spectatorship» (Staiger, 2000) which recognizes that spectators' responses do not necessarily accord with dominant morality.

AS JACKIE STACEY (1994) HAS SHOWN IN HER STUDY OF BRITISH FEMALE VIEWERS OF HOLLYWOOD MOVIES IN THE 1940S AND 1950S, THE RESPONSE OF FEMALE SPECTATORS TO FEMALE STARS IS ONE OF DESIRE AS WELL AS IDENTIFICATION, WITH IDENTIFICATION TENDING TO BE FOR STARS WHO WERE NOT LIKE THEMSELVES BUT REPRESENTED DESIRABLE POSSIBILITIES THEY DID NOT HAVE

I adopt Staiger's definition of perverse spectators as those who «[find] their own pleasures» (Staiger, 2000: 32). I will be particularly interested in the pleasures that female spectators of these films may have found in responding to the performances of the actresses discussed. As Jackie Stacey (1994) has shown in her study of British female viewers of Hollywood movies in the 1940s and 1950s, the response of female spectators to female stars is one of desire as well as identification, with identification tending to be for stars who were not like themselves but represented desirable possibilities they did not have. This is especially pertinent to Spain in the 1940s and 1950s when many possibilities were denied to women in particular.

AURORA BAUTISTA

Locura de amor was a spectacular box-office success, at least in part thanks to the fact that its patriotic epic format is undercut by its melodramatic plotline. It tells the story of Queen Juana I of Castile, daughter of Isabel la Católica, popularly believed to have been driven mad by the infidelities of her Flemish husband, Felipe el Hermoso (played by Fernando Rey), initially royal consort but ruling Castile jointly with her as Felipe I from 1506, two years after Juana's accession to the throne on her mother's death.[3] While most early Francoist patriotic epics have a (usually fictional)

BAUTISTA BEGAN HER CAREER IN THE THEATER AND HER DECLAMATORY ACTING STYLE SUITED THE POMP AND CIRCUMSTANCE OF THE PATRIOTIC EPIC. IT ALSO SUITED THE EXPRESSIVE EXCESS OF MELODRAMA, EXCEPT THAT IN THIS CASE HER GESTURES DO NOT CONVEY DESIRES THAT CANNOT BE VOICED, FOR JUANA FORCEFULLY DECLARES HER DESIRE FOR FELIPE, TO HIM AND TO OTHERS

romantic subplot—or in the case of the first to be filmed, the 1944 Portuguese-Spanish coproduction *Inés de Castro* (José Leitão de Barros), fuse love story and political drama—*Locura de amor* stands out for subordinating the political drama to the love story.

Bautista began her career in the theater and her declamatory acting style suited the pomp and circumstance of the patriotic epic. It also suited the expressive excess of melodrama, except that in this case her gestures do not convey desires that cannot be voiced, for Juana forcefully declares her desire for Felipe, to him and to others. In loving her husband, she is doing what wives were supposed to do. But she is placed in a double bind by the fact that her public role as queen, while giving her political agency, requires her personal desires to be subordinated to reasons of state. In the early Franco period, wives were encouraged—by their confessors and advice columns—to avoid undue expression of desire and to resign themselves to their husband's infidelities. Juana is likely to have struck a chord with many female spectators of the time married to unfaithful husbands for her refusal to suffer Felipe's philandering in silence.

Juana's story is told in flashback from a narrative frame in which her loyal courtier Álvar de Zúñiga, played by Jorge Mistral, recounts her life to her 17-year-old son, the future Habsburg Emperor Carlos V. Newly arrived in Spain in 1517 from his upbringing in Flanders, Carlos has come to take up the throne of Castile and Aragon, to which he had acceded as Carlos I on the death the previous year of Juana's father, Fernando el Católico.[4] Fernando had been appointed regent on Felipe's death, shortly after being declared king, in 1506. We return to this narrative frame—whose opening depicts Juana as definitively demented—at several points in the film, including the end, which has the effect of confirming Juana's madness and thus encouraging viewers to feel that her removal from power was justified. This contradicts the insistence of her supporters throughout the film (echoed by recent historians; see Aram, 2016) that she was not mad but the victim of a political conspiracy as well as of Felipe's infidelities. Indeed, the body of the film, told in flashback, depicts her not simply as a victim but as possessing the agency to impose her authority at key moments.

The flashback starts with Álvar recounting how he took the news of Isabel la Católica's death to Juana in Brussels, cutting to a jewel-bedecked Juana engaged in banter with her ladies-in-waiting about that night's fiesta, in what we are told is Europe's merriest court (Figure 1). Despite the film's reminders of her austere Castilian upbringing, she appears fully adapted to Flemish pleasures. She also shows agency by insisting on going alone to the hunting lodge to tell Felipe the news—only to find him carousing with a lover. We fast-forward to Juana and Felipe's arrival in Spain, with Juana again waiting for Felipe's re-

Figure 1

Figure 2

turn from a hunt, which is revealed to be a cover for an amorous *rendez-vous* at an inn with the innkeeper's alleged niece (Aldara, played by Sara Montiel), who turns out to be the daughter of the penultimate king of Granada, bent on killing Juana as the daughter of the Castilian queen who conquered the Muslim Kingdom of Granada fourteen years before—a fictional subplot in the best melodramatic tradition.[5] Waiting for Felipe's return, Juana recalls the words of love spoken by Felipe to the lover she surprised him with in Brussels. But, when Felipe appears, she switches to ecstatic happiness, the camera closing on her as she declares that she hears her mother at night telling her to think of her duties but «yo pienso en ti» («I think of you»), and to love your people but «yo te quiero a ti» («I love you») (Figure 2). This is not so much melodrama's conversion of politics into a family drama (Elsaesser, 1987) as the patriotic epic's sabotage by Juana's prioritization of private emotion over public duty. Juana is also sabotaging the fascist doctrine of the subordination of individual desires to service of the state that was instilled into Spaniards in the early Franco period (by Sección Femenina in the case of women). Some Spanish women are likely to have relished Juana's refusal to subscribe to that doctrine.

While the film makes it clear that Juana's prioritization of personal desire diminishes her political agency as queen, it does not erode her agency in personal matters: she goes alone at night to surprise Felipe with his lover at the inn, mocking him by catching him out with his own lies. Even Felipe admits her valor. And she remains capable of displaying the appropriate majesty at public ceremonies; it is she as queen, and not Felipe as consort, who from the throne thanks the city of Burgos for its welcome. It should also be noted that Felipe expresses jealousy at Aldara's evident love for Álvar; Felipe too is driven by personal emotion. But Juana's noble supporters abandon her cause, convinced she really has lost her reason, when, having come to plead with her to oppose Felipe's plan to have her declared unfit to rule, which they feel will provoke civil war, Juana dismisses them, concerned only with finding out which of her ladies-in-waiting has written the letter to Felipe that Aldara, the letter's author, has slipped into her possession. In a poignant moment, she colludes with Felipe's public claim that she has gone mad because, if that is true, then Felipe's infidelity is a figment of her imagination (Figure 3)—only to lapse into hysterical sobs. Her pathetic plea to Álvar—«defendía mis derechos de mujer y me han llamado loca» («I defended my rights as a woman and they called me mad»)—must have resonated with many female viewers denied rights under the Franco dictatorship. What finally provokes Juana into asserting her rights as queen by going to the cathedral to challenge Felipe's attempt

THIS IS NOT SO MUCH MELODRAMA'S CONVERSION OF POLITICS INTO A FAMILY DRAMA (ELSAESSER, 1987) AS THE PATRIOTIC EPIC'S SABOTAGE BY JUANA'S PRIORITIZATION OF PRIVATE EMOTION OVER PUBLIC DUTY

Figura 3

Figura 4

to have her declared insane is Álvar's pointed observation that, if Felipe repudiates her, he can replace her on the throne with another woman. Although motivated by personal emotion, she proves capable of pulling herself together, making a regal entrance down the cathedral aisle, highlighted by being filmed in a long shot from behind so as to frame her with the cathedral's architectural magnificence, then switching to a full shot, with the camera positioned ahead of her, that tracks her resolute advance (Figure 4). As she reaches Felipe's side in front of the throne, she turns to humiliate the courtiers who have backed Felipe's conspiracy with a brilliant display of sarcastic rhetoric. What prevents her from winning the day is not any political incompetence on her part but the trickery of Felipe's Flemish advisor De Vere (played by Jesús Tordesillas) who has replaced the letter incriminating Felipe, which she produces to clinch her case, with a blank sheet—persuading the assembled nobles, and herself, that she has indeed gone mad.

Desire, then, even when for one's husband, is shown to be inimical to political agency. Although it permits Juana to valiantly confront Felipe with his lovers, it ultimately disables her by making her subservient to his desire, even when that desire is to have her declared mad. The film's final reconciliation, as Felipe, on his deathbed, begs Juana's forgiveness and fantasizes about how happy he could have been with her, plays into the early Francoist rhetoric that encouraged wives to tolerate their husbands' infidelities as a way of winning back their love. While some female spectators may have found this end edifying, others may have found cathartic the moments when Juana throws her unhappiness in Felipe's face. The film is an emotional roller-coaster, requiring Bautista to run through a repertoire of extreme emotions that earned her a three-year contract with Cifesa for the unheard-of sum of one and a half million pesetas.

Her role in her next film *Pequeñeces*, where she plays a callous aristocratic serial adulteress, could

DESIRE, THEN, EVEN WHEN FOR ONE'S HUSBAND, IS SHOWN TO BE INIMICAL TO POLITICAL AGENCY. ALTHOUGH IT PERMITS JUANA TO VALIANTLY CONFRONT FELIPE WITH HIS LOVERS, IT ULTIMATELY DISABLES HER BY MAKING HER SUBSERVIENT TO HIS DESIRE, EVEN WHEN THAT DESIRE IS TO HAVE HER DECLARED MAD

not be more different. But the two films share the use of sumptuous costume to stress the female protagonist's agency. The regal costumes in *Locura de amor*—designed by Manuel Comba, responsible for the costume designs of over eighty historical films, mostly costume dramas like *Pequeñeces* (Gorostiza, 1997: 51)—do much to bestow agency upon Juana as she glides her way through Sigfrido Burmann's spectacular set designs. Building on the same recipe for success, Cifesa's pre-publicity for *Pequeñeces* emphasized her nineteen costume changes, designed down to the underwear by top fashion designer Pedro Rodríguez in fabrics current in the period depicted (1870s). As Cifesa proudly announced, the film's costumes took up four hundred thousand pesetas of its total budget of seven million, compared to the total budget of four million for the already lavish *Locura de amor* (Labanyi, 2007: 244). *Pequeñeces* was approved by the censors, despite its female protagonist's truly shocking behavior, because it was an adaptation of the 1890 novel of the same title by the Jesuit Padre Coloma—a diatribe against the immorality of the late 19th century aristocracy. Female spectators familiar with Aurora Bautista's role in *Locura de amor* as a queen wronged by her faithless husband are likely to have responded with a sense of sweet revenge to the gusto with which, in this next film, she plays the part of an adulteress who toys heartlessly with her lovers (not to mention her husband). At the same time, Bautista's regal role in the previous patriotic epic spills over into her performance in this melodrama, where her agency—enhanced through her power-dressing—is placed at the service of sexual gratification.

The film is marred by an incoherent political backstory to the activities of both the female and male protagonists. Curra is part of the aristocratic conspiracy to remove the liberal Amadeo I from power and restore the deposed Isabel II to the throne; the film covers the period 1873-1874. Her second lover in the film—Jacobo, played by Jorge Mistral at his glamorous best—is involved in an unexplained Carlist plot (the action coincides with the third Carlist War of 1872-1876) in which his paymasters order his death. Viewers are given no historical information to help them understand this political backdrop, whose sole function seems to be to suggest that politics is dirty. The focus is on the business of saving one's soul, through the negative examples of its female and male protagonists whose immorality occupies the whole film until Curra's repentance in the final scene. The sumptuous costumes and the magnificence of Sigfrido Burmann's set designs for the aristocratic interiors offer visual pleasures that work against any moralizing intention—as do the love scenes with Curra and her successive lovers, offering Spanish audiences more passionate kisses than they were used to seeing in Spanish films of the time. The low-necked gowns of Curra and her fellow female aristocrats, and particularly of the French courtesan Monique, played by Sara Montiel, also displayed on screen more female flesh than was standard. It is hard not to conclude that Orduña, who specialized in big-budget spectaculars, took on the film because those moralizing intentions gave him license to depict an eroticized glamor.

VIEWERS ARE GIVEN NO HISTORICAL INFORMATION TO HELP THEM UNDERSTAND THIS POLITICAL BACKDROP, WHOSE SOLE FUNCTION SEEMS TO BE TO SUGGEST THAT POLITICS IS DIRTY. THE FOCUS IS ON THE BUSINESS OF SAVING ONE'S SOUL, THROUGH THE NEGATIVE EXAMPLES OF ITS FEMALE AND MALE PROTAGONISTS WHOSE IMMORALITY OCCUPIES THE WHOLE FILM UNTIL CURRA'S REPENTANCE IN THE FINAL SCENE

What definitively undercuts the film's ostensible moral message is the performance of Bautista, who brings to her role as the scandalous

Curra the majesty of her regal role in *Locura de amor*. Like Juana in the previous film, Curra glides through the opulent interiors, but, unlike Juana, she does not lapse into moments of pathos but maintains her haughty arrogance throughout. Her use of her parasol as a prop, emphasizing her resolute stride, is magisterial (Figure 5); she is a woman who knows what she wants and will stop at nothing to get it. As her husband says: «Pero, ¿quién es capaz de parar a mi mujer?» («there's no stopping my wife»). She imperiously gives orders to all and sundry, including her husband. Bautista's histrionic acting style, suited to the emotional extremes of Juana, is perfect in this film in which everyone in Madrid high society is playing to the gallery and hiding their real intentions. The sarcasm that Juana had used against the rebellious nobles in the previous film is here deployed to humiliate others into submission. Her use of a double-voiced discourse whereby viewers can see that her words are insincere, but her lovers cannot (despite the fact that her second lover Jacobo is a scoundrel who also resorts to deceit), is a tour de force. She uses her sexual charms to cajole her lovers into satisfying her whims—including sending her first lover Juanito (played by Ricardo Acero) to a certain death by obliging him to challenge to a duel the editor of a newspaper that had slighted her, remarking callously to him that the editor is known to be a crack shot with a pistol. The editing cuts from her meeting with Juanito on the morning of the duel (feigning concern for him but wheedling out of him her compromising love letters) to her radiantly proceeding to the ball in her honor that night, unmoved by the news of Juanito's death (Figure 6). A similar edit highlighting her callousness cuts from her agreeing, supposedly upset, that her son will be better off back at his Jesuit boarding school than spending the vacation at home—the boy has just surprised her in Jacobo's arms (Figure 7)—to her exaggerated gaiety at another ball, flirting publicly with Jacobo.

Figure 5

Figures 6 (above) and 7 (below)

Figure 8

The film mocks her cuckolded husband with comic music, showing him to be mostly concerned with eating and as uninterested in their son as she is. But it is her lack of maternal love that condemns her, no doubt producing an ambivalence in those female spectators who may have admired her audacity in flouting moral restrictions but for whom maternal feelings would have been sacrosanct. Her lack of interest in her son throughout makes unconvincing her final repentance when she is punished with his death, as he falls into the sea in a tussle with a boy who he has been told (incorrectly) had called his mother a whore. The Curra that stays in viewers' memories is not the Mary Magdalene figure that appears in extreme close-up in the final shot (Figure 8), but the pleasure seeker who does not care what others think and who even her detractors admire for her valor: she fearlessly goes to find Jacobo at the rendezvous to which he has been summoned, having been told by him that his life is in danger. The film's high point is the *noir* carnival scene when Jacobo is stabbed in her presence, with her stole left impaled on the railings in a graphic metaphorical use of *mise-en-scène*. Having up to this point successfully combined agency with desire, from this moment she will lose both, as high society shuns her after this murky episode, and she finds herself bereft of the one man she had truly desired—the two of them perfectly suited in their disregard of moral norms.

Casting as the two baddies of the film (Curra and Jacobo) two leading stars whose good looks are enhanced by glamorous costumes was bound to work against the film's moral message. The powerful agency exercised by Curra throughout—until the Jesuits get her at the end—is enhanced by the imperious performance style that Bautista brought with her from her initiation into film acting in the patriotic epic genre. Paradoxically, going against generic expectations, her role in the earlier patriotic epic was that of female victim, while

her role in *Pequeñeces*—a melodramatic costume drama—is that of a woman who gives orders to everyone and especially to men.

AMPARO RIVELLES

El clavo was Rivelles' eighth film, having starred in comedies as well as melodramas. Together with the earlier *Malvaloca* (1942), the success of *El clavo* would establish her as Spain's leading star of 1940s film melodrama. The film adapts the 1853 gothic novella of the same name by Pedro Antonio de Alarcón, simplifying its narrative structure and making the female protagonist betrothed, rather than married, to the man she murders by driving a nail through his skull—probably because the murder of a husband would be unacceptable to the Francoist censors. The film also softens her guilt by making her betrothed a slave-trader. Her crime is revealed only towards the film's end, at her trial, whose presiding judge is, by a twist of fate, the man she had met five years before on a stagecoach, resulting in an idyllic romance that determined her to rid herself of her loathsome wealthy fiancé (forced on her by her father to pay off his debts). She is in fact two characters in one, not a case of split personality but the same person in two different situations: Blanca, the beautiful young woman traveling incognito who Javier (played by Rafael Durán) falls in love with; and Gabriela, the murderess. The two come together at the trial in a sensational revelation, as Javier discovers that the author of the crime he has been investigating, after spotting a skull with a nail driven through it in the local cemetery, is his beloved, who he wrongly believed had jilted him five years before.

The first part of the film shows Blanca's gradual transformation from aloof mysterious stagecoach traveler—her eyes shaded by her wide-brimmed hat and stiffly refusing Javier's overtures, believing herself doomed to lovelessness (Figure 9)—to vivacious young girl with a thirst for life. Her initial rigid posture gives way to fluid body movements, as she starts to take the initiative in the relationship with Javier after he rescues her from assault by night-time carnival revelers, though stiffening up again when Javier asks about her life. We cut from this night-time scene to brilliant sunlight, with Blanca—now in a bright gingham dress and her hair down—having packed a hamper for a picnic with Javier in the countryside (Figure 10). When they take refuge from a sudden

Figures 9 (above) and 10 (below)

storm in a nearby farmhouse, she gaily changes her soaking dress for the peasant clothes offered by the farmer's wife, in the same room as Javier does the same (we only see the closed door to the room); the scene ends with her putting her head on Javier's shoulder, the peasant clothes freeing her from her inhibitions. Up to this point, Blanca's gradual acceptance of desire has given her a growing agency.

However, when Javier asks to marry her so she can join him in his new position as judge, she freezes, her eyes turned to the camera; retrospectively, we realize this is the moment she decides to rid herself of her betrothed. Having promised to meet Javier in a month's time, when she will accept his offer of marriage, Blanca disappears out of the film till Javier bumps into her five years later in Madrid, where he has come (unbeknown to Blanca) to ratify the warrant for Gabriela's arrest as presumed murderess. Although Blanca is able to explain the misunderstanding that led Javier to think she had jilted him, she is now presented as a forlorn figure waiting for Javier's unlikely return. She has given up on both desire and agency.

Cut to the courtroom as Gabriela's trial for murder begins. She enters veiled and, standing before Javier as judge, throws back her veil, triggering a series of dramatic close-ups as Javier recognizes her and she confronts him directly with her gaze. At precisely the moment when, facing the death penalty, one would expect her to lapse into helplessness, she asserts her agency by turning her public confession into a lengthy self-defense: «Antes de morir, quiero que me oigan [...] Mi confesión será mi defensa» («Before I die, I want to be heard [...] My confession will be my defense»). When her narrative gets to her murder of her fiancé, we switch to a dramatized flashback, introduced by her announcement that she had decided to «defender mi felicidad» (defend my happiness). Eliding the moment of the crime, the film cuts from her angry confrontation with the fiancé, in which she voices her hatred for him, to the morning after as she is awoken by a servant saying her fiancé is dead. In a glamorous satin nightdress, hair draped over her shoulders, she is the perfect Hollywood image of desirability, awakening to a new life ahead (Figure 11).

Her spirited courtroom confession casts her as triumphant at the moment of being sentenced to death, the unspeakable having been spoken. The confession is directed to Javier, as a declaration of love (Figure 12). Her spirit remains unbroken as she awaits execution in jail. Javier secures a commutation to life imprisonment just in time and, as she is taken off to prison, promises he will stay nearby to ease her plight. One has to ask how female viewers, at a time when marriage was a life sentence with the dictatorship's repeal of the Republic's divorce law, would have responded to Gabriela's unrepentant confession of her crime, committed to «defend my happiness». The repeat-

Figure 11

Figure 12

ed close-ups of Rivelles' delicate facial features make it impossible not to identify with her. The realization of desire is no longer an option for Gabriela at the film's end, but she has the satisfaction of having made her case in a public court of law.

The casting of Rivelles in the patriotic epic *La leona de Castilla* as María Pacheco—the widow of the leader of the 1520-1521 Comuneros' Revolt against the centralizing measures of Habsburg Emperor Carlos V, who takes on the revolt's leadership on her husband's execution—must have been found incongruous by spectators who had followed her career as a star of melodrama, known for her image of vulnerability mixed with erotic passion. Her performance received negative criticism for her strident oral delivery, contravening the intimate acting style for which she was known.[6] Rivelles herself later said she should not have accepted the role, expressing her discomfort with the director Orduña's insistence that she shout her lines (De Paco, Rodríguez, 1988: 49-50). The undermining of the film's primary political drama by its melodramatic subplot, in which she falls in love with a nobleman on the enemy side, causing the death of her son and her own downfall as well as that of Toledo, is the fault of the source text on which the film is based: the modernist poet Francisco Villaespesa's 1915 verse drama *La leona de Castilla*, which invents this romantic storyline.[7]

The film begins with a prologue that—like the narrative frame of *Locura de amor*— makes it clear that the female protagonist will lose all the agency she had previously enjoyed as a political leader.[8] We move from the stone plaque commemorating her prowess as «Lioness of Castile» in a ruined graveyard (in reality, she was buried in Oporto Cathedral) to the moment of her death in a poorhouse, prostrate with unkempt long gray hair. At her deathbed are loyal retainer Lope who had accompanied her into exile in Portugal and, newly arrived, the enemy nobleman to whom she was attracted, the Duke of Medina Sidonia (played by Virgilio Teixeira). As Lope reminisces with Medina Sidonia about the Comuneros' Revolt, we transition to the film proper, whose narrative starts the night before the battle of Villalar at which Padilla (played by Antonio Casas) is defeated.

This allows us to see María before she is widowed, passionately kissing her husband and with him kneeling adoringly at her feet (Figure 13). At the film's start, she can express desire fully and enjoys the (relative) agency of being the beloved wife of the man who is Regidor of Toledo and leader of the Comuneros' army. After Padilla's execution, she will dress in a series of simple but elegant black costumes and headgear (commissioned from top fashion designer Pertegaz), with her movements becoming stiff and majestic. She insists on riding to witness Padilla's execution, flinching when his head is held up to the crowd but not fainting. Her capacity to assume risk is demonstrated when she and her male traveling companions stop at an inn. On hearing that one of the imperial soldiers who enters the inn is the Duke of Medina de Sidonia, to whom she had seen Padilla entrust some letters just before his execution, she removes her outer garments and

Figure 13

Figure 14

Figure 15

flirtatiously lures him to her room (Figure 14). Repulsing his advances, she poses as María Pacheco's lady-in-waiting sent by her to retrieve Padilla's last wishes; impressed by her boldness, Medina Sidonia hands the letters over. Their mutual respect and attraction is clear.

From this moment, she assumes control of the city of Toledo, refusing to surrender to the imperial army. Finding the city undefended on her return, she orders the troops to their posts with the rallying cry «Cobardes, ¿Dónde están los hombres de Padilla?» («Cowards, where are Padilla's men?»), echoing Agustina de Aragón's famous call to arms in Cifesa's patriotic epic of the previous year, starring Aurora Bautista. Like Agustina, also defending a city under siege (Zaragoza in the War of Independence), she is braver than the men. Only once she is inside her palace, out of public view, does she allow herself to weep. This sets up the contrast between her public role (elected Regidora of Toledo by its council) and her private role (as grieving widow). The spectacular scene of her election as Regidora by the Council of Toledo emphasizes her majesty as she takes up the seat of authority, the camera closing on her as she insists that «solo una mujer» (only a woman) remains faithful to Padilla's cause (Figure 15). Back in her palace, she admits to her son, taking off the chain of office, that she is no longer free to be herself.

When Medina Sidonia is wounded in combat outside Toledo's gates, he is brought into her palace to recover. Her treacherous adviser Ramiro—played by Manuel Luna, whose habitual roles as baddie had included *Locura de amor*—persuades the nobles to demand Medina Sidonia's death (Ramiro has his own designs on María). But she orders Medina Sidonia to be spared, provoking her son's protests. When she reveals her identity to Medina Sidonia, it is clear that both are enamored but she tells him to forget about their meeting at the inn. Her agency as leader of the Comuneros—her authority derived from being Padilla's widow—requires the sacrifice of desire. At this point, the camerawork, focusing on her face when she is alone, shows that she is becoming unsure of herself, torn between love and the demands of political office. Although she will never voice it, desire beings to interfere with her political judgement: rejecting advice, she issues a series of orders that lose her the nobles' loyalty. As Ramiro says to the protesting nobles: «Pensad que es una mujer» («Remember she's a woman»). Rumors circulate among the populace that she is having an affair with Medina Sidonia. Her adolescent son, believing the rumors, rushes

out to fight the imperial troops to avenge his father, with fatal consequences (as in *Pequeñeces*, a mother who departs from her maternal role—or, in this case, is rumored to have done so—is punished with the death of her only son). She now loses her composure and begs Ramiro's help, who responds by trying to rape her (Figure 16). In the nick of time (true to melodrama), Medina Sidonia rescues her, kills Ramiro, and she flees the palace on horseback with him and the only faithful retainer left, Lope (who we saw in the film's prologue). The film ends with her farewell to Medina Sidonia, as she refuses his offer to accompany her into exile, fulfilling her role as Padilla's widow to the last.

María is a complex character. She is undone by the melodramatic romantic subplot, which interferes with her previous political competence. But she never abjures her public position as Padilla's successor by giving in to love. She may have lost political power, but she retains agency in that she herself is responsible for renouncing desire. On one level, the film's message is misogynistic: a woman can't be trusted to exercise power judiciously. But on another level, she fulfils the fascist imperative to subordinate personal desire to public service—something that Juana in *Locura de amor* had signally refused to do. In this respect, *La leona de Castilla* is the less subversive film. In both films, the heroine is ultimately undone not by her emotional flaws but by male treachery: that of Felipe and De Vere in *Locura de amor*; that of Ramiro in *La leona de Castilla*. That partly exonerates their female «weakness», but it could also be read as the films needing to compensate for showcasing heroines who exercise political power by punishing them. Rivelles' star image as heroine of film melodramas predisposes viewers to identify with her in the moments when she is tempted by desire, rather than the moments when she renounces it. In this respect her star image undercuts the agency granted by her political status in the film and by the historical reality of María Pacheco's defense of Toledo.

MARÍA IS A COMPLEX CHARACTER. SHE IS UNDONE BY THE MELODRAMATIC ROMANTIC SUBPLOT, WHICH INTERFERES WITH HER PREVIOUS POLITICAL COMPETENCE. BUT SHE NEVER ABJURES HER PUBLIC POSITION AS PADILLA'S SUCCESSOR BY GIVING IN TO LOVE. SHE MAY HAVE LOST POLITICAL POWER, BUT SHE RETAINS AGENCY IN THAT SHE HERSELF IS RESPONSIBLE FOR RENOUNCING DESIRE

Figure 16

CONCLUSION

By bringing together these four films, I hope to have shown that the relation between female desire and agency can take many forms and that their alignment is unstable. It was particularly difficult to achieve such an alignment in the early Franco period, when women were not supposed to express desire overtly and, if they did succeed in exercising the limited agency available to them, had to con-

ceal it via a cloak of submission to male authority. In the four films discussed we find female behavior that has little to do with how Spanish women were expected to behave at the time. The performances of Bautista and Rivelles offered female spectators a complex range of vicarious emotional experiences that provided outlets for agency and desires that could not be realized in real life, or conversely allowed identification with real-life frustrations. Following Stacey's finding (1994) that female spectators identified with female protagonists who were not like themselves, I suggest that these vicarious emotional experiences were enhanced by the fact that the circumstances of the female protagonists of these four films—a queen, an aristocratic serial adulteress, a murderess, a political leader—bore no resemblance to the everyday lives of female viewers, permitting full imaginative engagement on their part precisely because they knew there was no risk of ever finding themselves in the same predicament. At the same time, as Stacey also found, it was necessary for such protagonists to be embodied by stars who could create the emotional intensity that made such cathartic experiences effective. ■

NOTES

* This article is part of the Spanish Government Ministry of Economy, Industry and Competitiveness research and development project "Representations of Female Desire in Spanish Cinema during Francoism: Gestural Evolution of the Actress under the Constraints of Censorship" (REF: CSO2017-83083-P).

1 Fanés (1989: 254-255) attributes the prevalence of female protagonists in the early Francoist patriotic epic to Cifesa's need to offer leading roles to the female stars on its payroll, but the epics made by Hollywood studios, which had a much larger roster of female stars, have male protagonists.

2 Rivelles left Cifesa to sign up with Cesáreo González's Suevia Films in 1945, returning to Cifesa in 1949 (De Paco, Rodríguez, 1988: 31, 34).

3 The film's plot follows that of the 1855 theatrical melodrama of the same title by Manuel Tamayo y Baus, including the addition of a fictional Moorish princess as Juana's main love rival. In 1868, newly discovered documents revealed the conspiracy by Juana's husband Felipe and her father, Fernando el Católico, to have her declared insane so as to remove her from the throne (Aram, 2016: 1). Orduña's film dramatizes this political conspiracy, but attributes it solely to the ambitions of Felipe and his Flemish courtiers, as foreign usurpers.

4 The film simplifies historical events, presenting Juana and Felipe as traveling to Spain for her to take up the throne of Castile on her mother Isabel la Católica's death in 1504. In real life, she and Felipe had traveled to Castile in 1502 for her to be sworn in as heiress to the Castilian throne, with Felipe as royal consort. They did not return to Spain till 1506 (Fernando el Católico having acted as regent since Isabel's death), when Felipe, after a battle for political control with Fernando in which the two men signed a pact to have Juana declared unfit to rule, succeeded in getting himself declared king of Castile, but ruling jointly with Juana (Fernando remained king of Aragón). In the film, Felipe is called «king» throughout. The film implies that Felipe's 1506 accession to the throne of Castile meant Juana's dethronement but, in reality, she legally remained queen. After Felipe's death that year, she ruled jointly with her father Fernando as regent, refusing his attempts to get her to renounce the throne. In 1509 Fernando had her confined to a castle in Tordesillas, definitively excluding her from the political power to which she was entitled; she would die there in 1555. Although Carlos was in 1516 appointed joint ruler of Castile with Juana, he maintained her confinement to Tordesillas. The film elides the ignominious treatment of Juana by both Fernando el Católico and Carlos V. Details of Juana's life given in this article are taken from Aram (2016).

5 Aldara voices her desire (for Álvar, secretly in love with Juana who he knows is beyond his reach) and exercises a truly masculine agency in attempting to stab Juana and finally stabbing the Flemish villain De Vere (to stop him killing Álvar). Montiel's expression-

less acting makes an improbable character even more unconvincing.

6 See the notes accompanying Video Mercury's 2009 DVD release of the film. Rivelles' casting in the (minor) role of Isabel la Católica in the 1951 patriotic epic *Alba de América* (Juan de Orduña), made immediately after *La leona de Castilla*, is even more discordant with her association with melodrama.

7 Villaespesa departs from history also by making her son an adolescent who is killed during the Comuneros' Revolt (in reality, he was 4 years old when the revolt broke out).

8 The prologue also reneges on the film's representation of the Comuneros' revolt from the rebels' point of view, by criticizing their parochialism in not accepting Carlos V's imperial authority. This political incoherence probably explains why the film was not awarded the expected top category by the Sindicato del Espectáculo.

REFERENCES

Aram, B. (2016). *La reina Juana. Gobierno, piedad y dinastía*. Madrid: Marcial Pons Historia.

Brooks, P. (1976). *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Butler, J. (1990). *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge.

De Paco, J., Rodríguez, J. (1988). *Amparo Rivelles, «pasión de actriz»*. Murcia: Filmoteca Regional de Murcia.

Elsaesser, T. (1987). Tales of Sound and Fury: Observations on the Family Melodrama. In C. Gledhill (ed.). *Home is Where the Heart Is: Studies in Melodrama and the Woman's Film* (pp. 43-69). London: British Film Institute.

Fanés, F. (1989). *El cas Cifesa: Vint anys de cine espanyol (1932-1951)*. Valencia: Filmoteca de la Generalitat Valenciana.

Gledhill, C. (ed.) (1991). *Stardom: Industry of Desire*. London: Routledge.

Gorostiza, J. (1997). *Directores artísticos del cine español*. Madrid: Cátedra / Filmoteca Española.

Labanyi, J. (2007). Negotiating Modernity through the Past: Costume Films of the Early Franco Period. *Journal of Iberian and Latin American Studies, 13*(2-3), 214-258.

Neale, S. (2000). *Genre and Hollywood*. London: Routledge.

Stacey, J. (1994). *Star Gazing: Hollywood Cinema and Female Spectatorship*. London: Routledge.

Staiger, J. (2000). *Perverse Spectators: The Practices of Film Reception*. Albany: New York University Press.

THE DIFFICULT RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FEMALE AGENCY AND DESIRE: AURORA BAUTISTA AND AMPARO RIVELLES

Abstract

The essay will discuss four films produced in Spain between 1944 and 1951, two starring Aurora Bautista and two starring Amparo Rivelles. The two films by Bautista involve a move from the patriotic epic genre to melodrama; the two films by Rivelles, a move from melodrama to the patriotic epic. It will consider how their performance style in their earlier work spills over into the later film, producing a disturbance in generic expectations. Following Janet Staiger's notion of «perverse spectatorship», the essay will consider how these four films may have allowed female spectators of the time pleasures that did not coincide with dominant ideology. In doing so, it will pay particular attention to the different, shifting relations between female agency and desire in each film.

Key words

Agency; desire; Aurora Bautista; Amparo Rivelles; patriotic epic; melodrama; early Francoist cinema.

Author

Jo Labanyi is Professor Emerita in the Department of Spanish and Portuguese at New York University. A specialist in the cultural history of modern Spain, her fields of research are literature, film, gender studies, popular culture, memory studies and the history of emotions. Her most recent monograph is *Spanish Culture from Romanticism to the Present: Structures of Feeling* (Legenda, 2019). Her coedited volumes include *Companion to Spanish Cinema* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2012) and *Engaging the Emotions in Spanish Culture and History* (Vanderbilt University Press, 2016; Spanish translation 2018). She is currently completing a coauthored oral history of cinema-going in 1940s and 1950s Spain and preparing a monograph on Spanish cinema of the early Franco period entitled *Reading Films under Dictatorship*. Email: jo.labanyi@nyu.edu.

Article reference

Labanyi, J. (2021). The Difficult Relationship between Female Agency and Desire: Aurora Bautista and Amparo Rivelles. *L'Atalante. Revista de estudios cinematográficos*, *32*, 19-34.

LA COMPLEJA RELACIÓN ENTRE LA AGENCIA Y EL DESEO FEMENINOS: AURORA BAUTISTA Y AMPARO RIVELLES

Resumen

El presente ensayo analiza cuatro películas producidas en España entre 1944 y 1951, dos de ellas protagonizadas por Aurora Bautista y las dos restantes encabezadas por Amparo Rivelles. Las dos películas de Bautista se desplazan del cine patriótico al melodrama; las dos de Rivelles, del melodrama al cine patriótico. El ensayo tendrá en cuenta la manera en que el estilo interpretativo de las actrices en sus primeros trabajos influye en sus siguientes películas, trastocando las expectativas del género. En línea con la noción de «espectador perverso» de Janet Staiger, el ensayo estudiará la forma como estas cuatro películas permitieron a las espectadoras de la época sentir placeres que no coincidían con la ideología dominante. Para ello, prestará especial atención a las relaciones diferentes y cambiantes entre la agencia y el deseo femeninos en cada película.

Palabras clave

Agencia; deseo; Aurora Bautista; Amparo Rivelles; cine patriótico; melodrama; cine del primer franquismo.

Autora

Jo Labanyi es profesora emérita del departamento de Español y Portugués de la Universidad de Nueva York. Especialista en la historia cultural de la España moderna, sus campos de investigación son la literatura, el cine, los estudios de género, la cultura popular, los estudios de la memoria y la historia de las emociones. Su monografía más reciente es *Spanish Culture from Romanticism to the Present: Structures of Feeling* (Legenda, 2019). Sus volúmenes coeditados incluyen *Companion to Spanish Cinema* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2012) y *Engaging the Emotions in Spanish Culture and History* (Vanderbilt University Press, 2016; traducción al español 2018). Actualmente está coescribiendo una historia oral de la asistencia al cine en la España de los años 40 y 50 y preparando una monografía sobre el cine español del primer periodo franquista titulada *Reading Films under Dictatorship*. Correo electrónico: jo.labanyi@nyu.edu.

Referencia de este artículo

Labanyi, J. (2021). La compleja relación entre la agencia y el deseo femeninos: Aurora Bautista y Amparo Rivelles. *L'Atalante. Revista de estudios cinematográficos*, *32*, 19-34.

Edita / Published by

Licencia / License

ISSN 1885-3730 (print) /2340-6992 (digital) **DL** V-5340-2003 **WEB** www.revistaatalante.com **MAIL** info@revistaatalante.com