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Thomas Deveny

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Bio-Pic/Death Story: Emilio Martínez-Lázaro's *Las 13 rosas*

THOMAS DEVENY

McDaniel College, Maryland

Emilio Martínez-Lázaro's *Las 13 rosas* is a historical bio-pic or docudrama that relates the lives and deaths of thirteen young women from Madrid at the end of the Spanish Civil War. They were members of the Unified Socialist Youth organization, and had not committed any real crimes. In spite of the fact that eight of the women were minors, they were executed (in August of 1939).¹ The ending of the film, which portrays their final hours and their execution, faithfully captures myriad historical details, but omits other important information, thus telling us as much about the Spain of today as that of 1939.

According to Custen, 'a biographic film is one that depicts the life of a historical person, past or present'.² Regarding the somewhat flexible nature of the genre, he notes that bio-pics are 'filmic representations of powerful individuals and the roles they played in history', and that '[t]he well-known or already famous comprise 93 percent of all film biopics', but that

'headliners' from the print media became the subject of biopics, expanding the definition of this genre, which had previously centered on the doings of already famous, often lofty figures.³

1 There is some dispute as to whether all thirteen were executed on 5 August or if two of the women were killed two days later. According to García Blanco-Cicerón, 'entre los fusilados había once mujeres, pero la oposición socialista y comunista las designó como las trece rosas, añadiendo al primitivo número de ejecutadas aquel día dos que lo fueron posteriormente: Palmira Soto y Ana [no sabemos su apellido]' (Jacobo García Blanco-Cicerón, 'Asesinato legal [5 de agosto de 1939]. Las "Trece Rosas"', *Historia* 16, 10:106 [1985], 11–29 [p. 11]).

2 George F. Custen, *Bio/pics. How Hollywood Constructed Public History* (New Brunswick: Rutgers U. P., 1992), 11–29 (p. 4).

3 Custen, *Bio/pics*, 2, 221–22, 6.

Regarding docudramas, The British Film Institute notes that ‘critics and theorists continue to debate the extent to which these techniques “blur the boundaries” of fact and fiction, “dupe” viewers and sacrifice factual accuracy to dramatic storytelling’, and

[o]ne key distinction is that between the ‘documentary drama’ and the ‘dramatised documentary’. The first category labels those programmes which are largely dramas, but have documentary value in terms of research and are shot in a style influenced by documentary. The second describes those programmes which are largely documentaries, with documented journalistic research which could include transcripts, but also contain elements of dramatisation. However, a rigid classification remains elusive.⁴

We choose to use the term bio-pic for its contrast with ‘death story’, which is what Tabea Alexa Linhard calls the myriad narratives of their story, including historical narratives, poems, testimonial documents, a novel, a documentary, and various historical accounts.⁵

Martínez-Lázaro’s *Las 13 rosas* represents the culmination of these narratives, and it constitutes what Hayden White calls ‘historiophoty’, the ‘representation of history and our thoughts about it in visual images and written discourse’, and he notes that film and video are ‘capable of telling us things about referents that are both different from what can be told in verbal discourse and also of a kind that can only be told by means of visual images’.⁶

4 ‘Drama Documentary’, <<http://www.screenonline.org.uk/tv/id/1103146/index.html>> (accessed 23/11/2008).

5 See analyses of these sources and cultural productions in Tabea Alexa Linhard, ‘The Death Story of the “Trece Rosas”’, *Journal of Spanish Cultural Studies*, 3:2 (2002), 187–202, and Virginia Guarinos, ‘Ramos de rosas rojas: memoria audiovisual y género’, *Quaderns de Cine*, 3 (2008), 91–103. Guarinos (94) also notes that in 2005 the dance troupe Arrieritos performed a flamenco dance programme entitled ‘Trece rosas’. Carlos Fonseca, author of *Trece rosas rojas*, was historical consultant for the film. Fonseca based his historical account on myriad previous historical works, newspaper articles, archival documents, letters, as well as personal interviews. Sometimes, however, elements of the film come from other sources: for example, the exchanging of articles of clothing shortly before their death in order to bring good luck is not in Fonseca’s narrative, but in Jesús Ferrero’s novel, *Las trece rosas* (Madrid: Siruela, 2003), 148.

6 Hayden White, ‘Historiography and Historiophoty’, *American Historical Review*, 93:5 (1988), 1193–99 (p. 1193). Sorlin believes that ‘Emotion and sensitivity, which are central to social relationships cannot but briefly and inadequately be expressed on paper, whereas films, by mixing sounds and pictures, by creating a highly emotional rhythm of editing, merge the spectators inside what is happening and get them to participate in the (supposed) feelings of the screened people’ (Pierre Sorlin, ‘Historical Films as Tools for Historians’, in *Image as Artifact. The Historical Analysis of Film and Television*, ed. John E. O’Connor [Malabar: Robert E. Krieger, 1990], 42–68 [p. 49]). This comment applies to many emotional scenes in the film, such as the chapel scene in which the women write their final letters.

Like all historical narratives, it chooses which narrative threads to include and which to exclude. As a two-hour feature film, it focuses on four of the women in order to better concentrate the narrative. The film has four parts, which depict their life at the end of the war, their arrest, torture, their incarceration in the Ventas prison and their execution.⁷

Their execution is what tragically and ironically gives their lives and their stories importance; indeed, Linhard's coining of the term 'death story' emphasizes this importance.⁸ An analysis of this component of the narrative shows that it seems to have a dual trajectory. On the one hand, there are various elements that underscore the principal concept of the film: to preserve their historical memory. These include a dialogue shot in close-up between Virtudes and Carmen (who was only fifteen, and not executed) in which the former emphasizes the importance of not forgetting her; the metonymic confession of one prisoner (Victoria), which underscores their innocence; the narration in voice-over of the women's final letters that they write in the chapel, which emphasize both their innocence and their idealism; the singing of an ideological song, 'Joven guardia', on the way to the cemetery,⁹ and the solidarity and relative serenity that they show at their execution.¹⁰ On the other hand, there are elements that, by their presence or their absence, seem to diminish the impact of the dramatic events.

The portrayal of the prison director, Carmen Castro, is not unfavourable, thus causing the audience to empathize somewhat with her. The prison

7 The director sees the structure of the film a bit differently: 'La narración está dividida en tres partes. La primera es el final de la guerra y la entrada de las tropas de Franco en Madrid. La segunda, las detenciones sucesivas de nuestros personajes. La tercera, la cárcel' (Emilio Martínez-Lázaro, '*Las 13 rosas*: notas del director', <<http://www.lahiguera.net/cinemanía/pelicula/2766/comentario.php>> [accessed 18/11/2008]). I maintain that the nucleus of their story—when they are taken out of prison to be executed—merits a section by itself.

8 Linhard, 'The Death Story', 188. 'The expression "death story" is a conscious play on two terms: "War Story", as defined by miriam cooke [*sic*], and "life story", commonly used in the field of oral history' (188). 'Deaths, once narrated as a text, critically interrupt—and at the same time, engage in a dialogue with—dominant discourse. Like the study of life stories, the study of "death stories" involves recognizing contradictions and conflicts between dominant myths, narratives and themes and alternatives and resistances to these. Death stories always operate in the terrain of the counterhegemonic' (189–90).

9 Eye-witness Antonia García notes that while the women were in the chapel, 'cantaron canciones revolucionarias' (Fernanda Romeu Alfaro, *El silencio roto: mujeres contra el franquismo* [Oviedo: Gráficas Suma, 1994], 40), and that when they left the prison, '[s]e fueron cantando [...] Lo último que cantaron las condenadas antes de quedarse sin la compañía de sus amigas fue "Joven Guardia" ' (García Blanco-Cicerón, 'Asesinato', 21–22), which Martínez-Lázaro's film includes during the ride to the cemetery.

10 Julia's address to the firing squad ('Vosotros no sois hombres. No tenéis corazón. No tenéis alma. Si tuviérais, no estaríais aquí') is reminiscent of Laurencia's famous speech at the beginning of Act III of Lope de Vega's *Fuenteovejuna*, but without the same positive consequences.

was terribly overcrowded—designed for 450 prisoners, it held more than 5,000—and she looks at the teeming gallery and exclaims: ‘Eso es imposible’, thus showing sympathy for their plight.¹¹ After mass, she tells Blanca, ‘[n]o me tengas miedo. Que no me como a nadie’. After the women are condemned to death, she sits with them as they write their letters asking for clemency. In a gesture of compassion, she puts her hand on Virtudes’ shoulder, and she tells Blanca: ‘Voy a añadir mi informe favorable sobre ti. Y tu marido, claro’. When the guards escort the women out of their cells to be executed, Victoria runs away to Doña Carmen and implores her, ‘[n]o quiero morir’; the warden’s reaction is to embrace and kiss her. And when the women are escorted out of the prison to their execution, they file past Doña Carmen, and a close-up shot shows her crying, a detail that Virginia Guarinos calls ‘desconcertante’.¹² According to Carlos Fonseca,

En la mesa del despacho de Carmen Castro permanecían las solicitudes de indulto que cada una de las condenadas había redactado el día 3 [...] para pedir clemencia al Caudillo, y que la directora había declinado tramitar. Quién sabe si porque apenas había dado tiempo a nada desde que les notificaron la pena de muerte, o porque consideraba que no eran merecedoras de tal medida de gracia.¹³

Another version simply states that Carmen Castro ‘llamó al viejo capellán y le obligó a entregarle las pobres instancias. Quedaron sobre su mesa, jamás las cursó’.¹⁴ The somewhat sympathetic portrayal of Castro constitutes part of the non-Manichaeian aspects of the film.¹⁵

The narrative eschews an overtly negative portrayal of the clergy. The priest’s role could be seen as callous at best when he bribes the non-religious women into going to confession, telling them that they will not receive any paper to write a final letter home unless they do so. However, the chapel scene has a much more negative tone in the version narrated in the testimony by Antonia García, which portrays an angry confrontation between the priest and one of the girls: ‘nos parecía que todo aquello era una injusticia ya que los curas eran colaboradores del franquismo. Una de las

11 All quotes from the film are from Emilio Martínez-Lázaro, *Las 13 rosas* (2007), Madrid, Enrique Cerezo Producciones Cinematográficas, S.A., Pedro Costa Cerezo Producciones Cinematográficas, S.A.

12 Guarinos, ‘Ramos de rosas rojas’, 101.

13 Carlos Fonseca, *Trece rosas rojas* (Barcelona: RBA, 2005), 237.

14 Tomasa Cuevas, *Cárcel de mujeres* (Barcelona: Siroco, 1980), 20.

15 The portrayal of the cold-blooded murder of the civil guard, his daughter, and his driver is another. Fonseca’s portrayal of Castro paints her as cold-blooded: ‘“El que derrama sangre, con sangre debe morir”, había dicho Carmen Castro a las internas cuando las hermanas Guerra Basanta, Manuela y Teresa, fueron fusiladas dos meses antes, en junio, y se inició con ellas la ejecución de rojas’ (Fonseca, *Trece rosas rojas*, 241).

chicas le llamó hijoputa un montón de veces'.¹⁶ Likewise, the role of nuns is omitted or diminished. This is in telling contrast to Jesús Ferrero's novel, *Las trece rosas*. This narrative interweaves the lives of the women, and almost all of the chapter titles have a character's name; tellingly, the chapter that narrates their execution is named 'María Anselma' after the nun who is the eye-witness to their deaths.¹⁷ Historical documents indicate that her real name was María Teresa Igual. Eye-witness María del Pilar Parra notes: 'María Teresa Igual, funcionaria de prisiones perteneciente a la orden teresiana, asistió a la ejecución'.¹⁸ Although these narrative threads show a greater complicity of the Church in this barbarity, they are both excluded from the film narrative.

Strident political statements regarding the Republic and communism made by the women are omitted, thereby diminishing this important aspect of their lives. One eye-witness recalls:

Las jóvenes, dando pruebas de una serenidad admirable, distribuyeron sus ropas entre las reclusas y tuvieron el valor de lavarse y peinarse, se pusieron sus más bonitos vestidos y esperaron con firmeza y sangre fría a que vinieran a conducir las a la capilla. Consolaron a las otras reclusas que lloraban, asegurando que se sentían felices de dar su vida por una causa justa. Cuando los verdugos falangistas vinieron, las 13 jóvenes menores salieron gritando 'Viva la República'.¹⁹

As Linhard points out,

The narrative here is coherent and heroic, the women are clearly the strong victims of a repressive political system in the making. There is no time for tears or fears, and more than anything the women's sacrifice is the dominant note. In this particular narrative, the fact that the women's last deed is to give away their belongings suggests that their political consciousness does not decrease in the face of imminent death.²⁰

Eye-witness Agripina Moreno was allowed to say goodbye to the women in the chapel. Her account underscores the political nature of the women:

16 García Blanco-Cicerón, 'Asesinato', 19. Linhard, 'The Death Story', 198, cites this testimony from José Manuel Sabín's book *Prisión y muerte en la España de la postguerra* (Madrid: Anaya & Mario Muchnik: 1996), 263, but he, in turn, takes it from García Blanco-Cicerón's article. This testimony continues: 'El primer domingo después de los fusilamientos dedicó su homilía a los bienaventurados que padecen hambre y sed de justicia. Las presas se pusieron en pie y comenzaron a patear' (García Blanco-Cicerón, 'Asesinato', 19).

17 Ferrero, *Las trece rosas*, 191–99.

18 García Blanco-Cicerón, 'Asesinato', 24.

19 Romeu Alfaro, *El silencio roto*, 40.

20 Linhard, 'The Death Story', 195.

Pilar Bueno [...] me dijo: ‘Camarada Agripina, si tienes la suerte de salvarte, cuídate y vive para que nos hagáis justicia. Somos inocentes. Y si algún día ves a nuestra Dolores [Ibárruri], le dices que moriremos como dignas discípulas tuyas’ [...] Carmen Barrero me decía [...] ‘Nos matan porque somos comunistas’ [...] [y Julia] Conesa exclamaba: ‘Moriremos como comunistas, no permitiremos que nos venden los ojos, nos matarán de cara a nuestros asesinos. Somos inocentes’.²¹

Moreno also remembers the Teresian nun who witnessed the execution:

Cuando regresó [la monja] de presenciar aquel crimen parecía otra persona. Pasó a la galería y empezó a contar a las presas lo que había visto: las muchachas no se dejaron vendar los ojos, murieron a cara descubierta, mirando al pelotón. Pilar Bueno, con el puño en alto, murió gritando: ‘Viva la Juventud Socialista Unificada!’²²

As Linhard notes, ‘In this particular narrative the sacrifice in the name of the Unified Socialist Youth [...] is worthwhile and heroic’.²³ In the film, however, at the moment of execution, there are no political words or gestures, only gestures of solidarity among the women who hold hands and embrace each other. Pathos takes precedence over political defiance.

The Civil Guard is notably absent from the culminating section of the film, which contradicts eye-witness accounts. María del Pilar Parra states: ‘[Yo] Estaba asomada a la ventana cuando las vi salir [...]. Las presas iban de dos en dos: tres guardias civiles escoltaban a cada pareja’.²⁴ In addition, the firing squad that executed the women consisted of Civil Guards.²⁵ Indeed, García Blanco-Cicerón’s article in *Historia 16*, which prompted much of the modern interest in this case, not only notes the presence of Civil Guards, but includes an artist’s rendition of the execution in which the famous tri-cornered caps of the Civil Guard are prominent. However, in Martínez-Lázaro’s film narrative, soldiers, not Civil Guards, constitute the firing squad. Why this change?

There is another important omission regarding their execution. The death by firing squad occurs off screen in the film: we only see the soldiers

21 Manuel Vázquez Montalbán, *Pasionaria y los siete enanitos* (Madrid: Planeta, 1997), 186–87.

22 Vázquez Montalbán, *Pasionaria*, 187. One witness notes that the Teresian order was ‘una orden que iban [sic] vestidas de seglar’ and that this woman, who was a government employee (*funcionaria*) ‘[n]os dijo cómo murieron. Una de ellas dijo: “Viva la revolución, que no muero”’ (Cuevas, *Cárcel*, 82).

23 Linhard, ‘The Death Story’, 196.

24 García Blanco-Cicerón, ‘Asesinato’, 23.

25 According to Agripina Moreno, one of the victims, Mary, was the daughter of a Civil Guard in the firing squad, and when the leader of the squad realized it, another guard took his place (Vázquez Montalbán, *Pasionaria*, 187).

shooting their rifles, and then the film cuts to Carmen and the other young women who are lying on the floor of the prison, and who hear the shots. This leaves out one gripping and horrifying detail: not all of the women die when the firing squad shoots.²⁶ Regarding María Teresa Igual's witnessing of the execution, Begoña Jiménez states that the Teresian nun 'contó que Blanquita no murió por la descarga y estuvo pidiendo auxilio antes de que la remataran'.²⁷ According to other accounts, this victim is Anita López. Agripina Moreno states that the nun said: 'Anita no murió de los primeros disparos y exclamó: "¡Matadme, criminales y no me enterréis viva!"'²⁸ María del Carmen Cuesta's version of events also refers to Anita: 'María Teresa Igual, la funcionaria que las acompañó, se presentó en nuestra sala para decirnos que habían muerto muy serenas y que una de ellas, Anita, no había fallecido con la primera descarga y gritó a sus verdugos, "¿es que a mí no me matan?"'²⁹ Including this in the film would have added to the horror of the scene. Instead, there is simply a metonymic displacement of this horror: when Quique leaves the prison with his mother's letter, a group of children play at being a firing squad—a game that was very popular, as Victoria Sierra notes in her recent book, *Palabras huérfanas*.³⁰ The leader of the make-believe firing squad says: 'Ese todavía se mueve', and he administers the *coup de grâce*.

The letters written by the women in the days and indeed final hours of their lives constitute both an important narrative as well as a fundamental historical component underpinning of the film.³¹ During the chapel scene, we hear the words to letters by Adelina, Blanca, and Julia in voice over, and Julia looks directly at the camera in close-up, and the voice-over of her letter is a decisive statement: 'Que mi nombre no se borre de la historia'. However,

26 Guarinos observes that 'la película ahorra al espectador la visión sangrienta del fusilamiento, más detallado en la novela' ('Ramos de rosas rojas', 96) and she notes that in the latter, 'quedan grabados en la retina del lector [...] el relato del fusilamiento y los tiros de gracia cuando dos de ellas no mueren a la primera' (101).

27 García Blanco-Cicerón, 'Asesinato', 24.

28 Vázquez Montalbán, *Pasionaria*, 187.

29 Fonseca, *Trece rosas rojas*, 243. Fonseca also notes that '[a]lgunos textos memorialísticos señalan que fue Blanca Brisac quien no murió con la primera descarga y fue rematada con el tiro de gracia' (243). Ferrero's novel (197–98) portrays both women as survivors of the initial discharge.

30 Tereixa Constenla, 'Historias bélicas de niños viejos', *El País* 27 March 2009, <http://www.elpais.com/articulo/cultura/Historias/belicas/ninos/viejos/elpepucul/20090327elpepicul_1/Tes> (accessed 27/3/2009).

31 Custen, *Bio/pics*, 8, notes that '[u]nlike other films, almost all biopics are prefaced by written or spoken declarations that assert the realities of their narratives'. Here the declaration appears at the end of the film: 'El 5 de agosto de 1939, en las tapias del Cementerio del Este de Madrid, fueron fusilados 43 hombres y 13 mujeres, casi todas ellas menores de edad, a las que se recuerda como "LAS 13 ROSAS". Los documentos y cartas citadas en la película están históricamente contrastados'. Fernanda Romeu Alfaro, in her *El silencio roto*, includes photocopies and transcriptions of three of Julia Conesa's letters

of greater importance, due to its length and positioning at the final moments of the film, is Blanca's letter to her son. This narration starts in voice-over as her son Quique leaves the prison with her letter, and continues with Blanca's image in close-up superimposed, then in split screen, and finally in full screen. Her letter is the most conciliatory of them all:

[...] Sólo te pido que seas muy bueno. Que quieras a todos y nunca guardes rencor a los que dieron muerte a tus padres. Eso, nunca. Las personas buenas no guardan rencor [...]. Que te hagan hacer la comunión, pero bien preparada. También que te enseñen la religión como me enseñaron a mí [...]

Both the conciliatory tone and the importance that Blanca gives to religion also contrast with the attitude of the other women, so her positioning here is quite significant.

The director defends his rendition of the historical events, and admits that '[t]odas las películas terminarán expresando, lo quieran o no, sus ideas, su visión de la realidad'. He rhetorically asks:

¿Deberá nuestra historia ser primordialmente la denuncia de un hecho histórico, de un terrible, arbitrario y cruel acto de venganza ejercido por unos vencedores arrogantes sobre trece muchachas inocentes, o más bien deberemos esperar que, en todo caso, la denuncia caiga por su peso al reinventar y hacer vivir en la pantalla los últimos días de las chicas, con su juventud recién estrenada, sus proyectos e ilusiones, sus primeros amores, su idealismo combativo y su valor cívico y personal? Dicho de otra manera: ¿vamos a centrar la película en los hechos históricos, o en los personajes? Sin duda, la segunda opción es la buena.³²

He also admits that 'en dos horas es imposible hablar de todo lo que rodeó aquel suceso' and that he used 'soluciones elípticas que insinúan más que dejan ver los horrores'.³³ Is the dichotomy that he makes regarding the historical events *versus* the characters a fair one?

John O'Connor notes that 'each choice [by a director], combined with all the others, constitutes an interpretation of the evidence, the construction of a historical point of view'.³⁴ And Pierre Sorlin believes that an analysis of a historical film should consider factors such as 'selective use' ('what sorts of

(280–85), including the final letter, which concludes with the gripping words: 'Que mi nombre no se borre en la historia' (285). Carlos Fonseca's *Trece rosas rojas* includes the transcription of letters (as well as photocopies of the manuscripts) by Dionisia Manzanero, Julia Conesa, and Blanca Brisac (275–99).

32 Martínez-Lázaro, 'Las 13 rosas: notas del director'.

33 Martínez-Lázaro, 'Las 13 rosas: notas del director'.

34 John E. O'Connor, 'The Moving Image as a Representation of History', in *Image as Artifact*, ed. O'Connor, 27–41 (p. 30).

information dealing with factual aspects of the past, or with mentalities, are to be found on the screen?') and 'indirect use', that is,

[h]ow can historical pictures tell us more about the context in which they were produced and viewed thus helping us to understand how societies conceive their past, and therefore their present?³⁵

The point of this article is not to nitpick about historical details,³⁶ but rather to reflect on what this particular historical narrative tells us about Spain's past and present, since as Teresa Vilarós reminds us:

La narración histórica requiere de una sintaxis—es sintaxis, como nos dice Michel de Certeau—y toda sintaxis tiene lapsus y fisuras que son precisamente el espacio de lo reprimido [...] [Pero] lo reprimido retorna no sólo porque nunca ha cesado de estar sino también porque ofrece en su retirada un nuevo espacio de reflexión.³⁷

We thereby follow George Custen's suggestion:

Instead of questioning a film's 'truthfulness', one might ask, 'What factors shape the construction of history in these particular mediations, and how are they similar to or different from other constructions of biography in film? In literature? In magazines?' The pattern of these lives, the narrative and other devices used to construct these lives as parts of an institutional machinery of making film narrative, are of greater interest than the distortion of a single film, book, or folk tale.³⁸

Concerning film and historical memory in the case of Argentina, Salas believes that 'no se trata de observar si las películas construyen una memoria, sino de cómo esta se gesta y se transforma en discurso, en otras palabras, como es su "política de memoria"'.³⁹ And as Guarinos notes, in this regard, 'el caso argentino es parecido al español'.⁴⁰

35 Sorlin, 'Historical Films', 43.

36 However, we agree with Lee that 'the question of historical accuracy, accuracy in detail as well as fidelity to the spirit of events, cannot be avoided in material which claims to be based on fact' (Patricia Ann Lee, 'Teaching Film and Television As Interpreters of History', *Image as Artifact*, ed. O'Connor, 96–107 [p. 101]).

37 Teresa Vilarós, *El mono del desencanto. Una crítica cultural de la transición española* (Madrid: Siglo XXI, 1998), 13.

38 Custen, *Bio/pics*, 11.

39 Jorge Salas, 'Políticas de la memoria y política cultural en el "cine de la democracia"', *Afuera. Estudios de Crítica Cultural*, 2:2 (2007), <<http://www.revistaafuera.com/NumAnteriores/pagina.php?seccion=Articulos&page=02.Articulos.Jorge.Sala.htm&idautor=35>> (accessed 14/1/2009).

40 Guarinos, 'Ramos de rosas rojas', 94.

The choices that Martínez-Lázaro makes in the final section of the film show that he both selects and omits historical details. The result is a film that softens the denunciation of two important institutions in Spanish society (the Church, the Civil Guard), eschews mention of the more radical components of the Spanish political spectrum (communism), and thus walks the fine line between historical memory and denunciation. Although Linhard contends that ‘this death story [...] allows for the construction of a resistant narrative’, the film is a mitigated one.⁴¹ In contrast with a recent effort by judge Baltasar Garzón to hold Franco and his regime responsible for crimes against humanity, the film shows us that Spain conceives its past while still coming out of the ‘pacto del olvido’, as it seems to follow the basic tenant of ‘forgive but not forget’.

The film, as part of ‘history from below’⁴² does a great service in informing the public of these events, since as Custen notes: ‘While most biopics do not claim to be the definitive history of an individual or an era, they are often the only source of information many people will ever have on a given historical subject’.⁴³ Thus, the names of Julia Conesa and the other women will not be erased from history.

41 Linhard, ‘The Death Story’, 190.

42 Jim Sharpe notes that Edward Thompson coined this term in an article in *The Times Literary Supplement* in 1966. See ‘History from Below’, *New Perspectives on Historical Writing*, ed. Peter Burke, 2nd ed. (University Park: Penn State U. P., 2001), 25–42 (p. 26). This concept contrasts with the traditional notion of ‘history from above, in the sense that it has always concentrated on the great deeds of great men, statesmen, generals, or occasionally churchmen [...] [and deals with] the views of ordinary people and with their experience of social change’ (Peter Burke, ‘Overture. The New History: Its Past and Its Future’, in *New Perspectives on Historical Writing*, ed. Burke, 1–24 [p. 3]).

43 Custen, *Bio/pics*, 7. According to the Ministerio de Cultura, 861,934 saw this film in theatres; thousands more, such as this writer, have seen it on dvd (Ministerio de Cultura: Base de datos de películas calificadas, *Las trece rosas*. <http://www.mcu.es/bbddpeliculas/buscarDetallePeliculas.do?brscgi_DOCN=000041526&brscgi_BCSID=55869b09&language=es&prev_layout=bbddpeliculasResultado&layout=bbddpeliculasDetalle> [accessed 15/12/2008]).