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Review: Franco, Jean. *Cruel Modernity.*

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Franco, Jean. *Cruel Modernity*. Durham: Duke UP, 2013. Pp. 296. ISBN 978-0822354567.

Jean Franco's *Cruel Modernity* is a bold and impressively researched account of cruelty in modern Latin America. That cruelty exists will come as no surprise to scholars of Latin America, but Franco's contribution to its discussion highlights just how deeply embedded such cruelty has become in our modern world. *Cruel Modernity* is an intellectually rigorous book that aims to better our understanding of this unpleasant topic and spur us towards finding potential solutions.

Franco argues that what makes modern Latin America different from other episodes of extreme cruelty is "the lifting of the taboo, the acceptance and justification of cruelty, and the rationale for cruel acts . . ." (2). She is critical of the European perspective that focuses almost exclusively on the Holocaust as the "*nec plus ultra*" (4), but without discounting such work, she broadens the discussion and engages with the various complexities that make the Latin American cases unique. Some of the recurring themes throughout the book are familiar (race, gender, indigenous communities, etc.) and some are less so, prompting Franco to come up with her own terms (extreme masculinity, mini-totalitarianism, micro-fascisms, etc).

Franco has published widely on Latin American literature and culture for decades, and has been lauded for her scholarship by various governments as well as professional academic organizations. *Cruel Modernity* is just her most recent work in a long career of bringing the literature and culture of Latin America to an English-speaking audience. Franco's impressive research weaves seamlessly between truth commissions, testimonies, novels, journalism, photography, film, etc., showing with ease how such cruelty has made its way into the Latin American social imaginary.

Cruel Modernity describes various acts of chilling violence with vivid detail. Chapter after chapter confronts the reader with a question that is not unfamiliar to studies of extreme cruelty: Are we all capable of this level of violence? Franco, for her part, keeps her scholarly distance from the content matter but does, at times, directly voice her own moral compass. She states plainly that she is "reluctant to think we are all potential killers" (93) and recognizes the power of the bleak picture she herself has painted of the situation: "Those of us brought up in the humanities, which rest on a certain concept of the human, find it difficult to confront such a divestment of humanity" (55).

The book is unrelenting in its tour through decades of violence, starting in chapter 1 with the "Insignificant Incident" in the Dominican Republic, which sets the tone for the book's overarching theme of modernization. Chapter 2 discusses the indigenous "problem" in Guatemala and Peru. Chapter 3 shows how rape was used as an instrument of war. Here Franco can hardly contain her incredulity: "How much power does it take to conquer a wounded female? What beast would commit such an act?" (81) Chapters 4 and 5 focus on

collaborators and guerrilla groups, and then Franco's perspective shifts slightly. Throughout the entire book, she spotlights the victim, but in chapters 6, 7, and 8, Franco does so more directly, devoting her attentions to those who have survived extreme cruelties or torture, and disappearance.

The greatest strength of this book is the ease with which Franco unfolds the story for us, effortlessly incorporating a wide array of texts that will make this an engaging study for the graduate students—who will no doubt be reading this book for years to come—and scholars already well-versed in Latin American cultural studies. Franco writes with clarity and conviction, assertively challenging major figures like Mario Vargas Llosa and Susan Sontag, and integrating theory and cultural production into a coherent, convincing narrative.

The book's final chapter is appropriately titled "Apocalypse Now," which deals with the Mexico of recent years. By closing with events as recent as 2012, and discussing a novel set in the future (Roberto Bolaño's *2666*), *Cruel Modernity* forcefully reminds us that the problem is now. In her afterword, Franco is clear that "the problem with making the crimes unspeakable is that they become mystical, outside the bounds of political action" (248). *Cruel Modernity* refuses to let the crimes of modern Latin America become unspeakable, exhibiting an ironic sense of hope. The stories Jean Franco tells are grim and disheartening, but it is for this reason that she has written the book. Action can be taken.

Cruel Modernity is not a book likely to be widely read by the general public. Its intended audience is certainly an academic one, but it is an important text that builds on a significant foundation of research, opening a new perspective and challenging the reader to further research and action.

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Grau, Jordi. *Confidencias de un director de cine descatalogado*. Madrid: Calamar, 2014. Pp. 240. ISBN 978-84-96235-49-6.

Jordi Grau (Barcelona, 1930) is the director of one of the biggest success stories of the 1970s in Spanish film. More than two million people waited in line to enter theaters playing *La trastienda* (1975). This was the first Spanish commercial film to show a nude female, even if it was only for a few seconds. By the 2000s, Grau was already retired after having directed more than twenty works, including fiction and documentary-style films. It was at this time that the director realized that his movies were no longer in stock, and perhaps being forgotten in history. From there comes the title of his memoirs, published in April 2014, referring to himself as "an unlisted filmmaker." This memoir gives readers an ironic yet honest overview of Grau's life work. The tone is sincere without the nostalgia sometimes found in the writings of artists of his time. The author focuses mainly on the aspects of his professional life, although many of those situations inevitably intersect with his personal life. This travelog is