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## FACULTY RESEARCH NOTE

### Leora Lev

For many of us the link between art and politics is usually not terribly clear; we see the work of artists, poets and movie directors as forms of entertainment and beauty rather than politically-charged productions. But for Professor Leora Lev of the Foreign Language Department exploring the connection between aesthetics and politics is at the core of her research interests. Professor Lev, a specialist in Romance Languages who comes to Bridgewater from the University of Northern Arizona, has turned her attention at Bridgewater to examining the impact of avant garde artists and filmmakers in 20th century Spain. Building on her dissertation work at Harvard, Professor Lev is investigating the ways in which artists and filmmakers represent images of gendered bodies and link those images to the body politic.

Professor Lev is particularly interested in pre-Civil War Spain and the work of noted Spanish poet Federico García Lorca whose work, both trenchant and lyrical, gave voice to the repressed and alienated of Spain and eventually led to his execution. Lorca wrote about women, gays and gypsies and the travails of being different in a fascist environment. Professor Lev has explored the work of Lorca to better understand the political climate for poets whose work is permeated with an

awareness of oppressive social-political ideologies in proto-Francoist Spain.

Professor Lev is also interested in avant garde filmmakers such as Luis Buñuel and Pedro Almodóvar. She is concentrating on how these filmmakers portray the rituals or spectacles of Spanish national life such as the bull fight, the religious procession and the flamenco dance, thereby casting light on the official governing ideology of the times. Buñuel and Almodóvar are masters of parody and black humor as they coyly skewer the practices of the establishment and the governing elite. Needless to say, Professor Lev is a movie buff, a cinefile who has spent endless hours not just watching films, but analyzing the message that filmmakers



like Buñuel and Almodóvar are making in their work.

At present Professor Lev is in the process of preparing a book length manuscript on the impact of artists on national identity. Tentatively titled, *Exterminating Vanguard Angels: Transgressing Spanish Cultural Spectacles of Gender and National Identity*, the book will explore the linkage between art, cultural practices and political ideology in contemporary Spain. In order to complete this book Professor Lev plans to travel to Spain this summer to see

how these spectacles have changed over time and interview some of the avant garde poets and filmmakers whose work has become an important facet of contemporary Spanish culture. Professor Lev is especially interested in interviewing Augustín Villaronga, a filmmaker whose radical critique of fascism is essential to her work on gender identity and repression during the rule of Franco.

Professor Lev's interest in Spanish literature and filmmaking has carried over to the classroom. Besides her usual work as a Spanish language instructor, she will be teaching a course on avant garde filmmaking and Hispanic cinema in the coming semesters. She has also developed an interest in the Gothic mode in literature and film and will be working on a course that incorporates the work of Shakespeare, Bram Stoker and Angela Carter and explores the Gothic mode within the context of European intellectual history and cultural studies.

In the months to come Professor Lev will be presenting a paper at a Romance Language conference at Purdue University on Augustin Villaronga and another paper on "Modernism and Modernity in Spain" at an international symposium at Brown University. Professor Lev is excited about her research on 20th century Spanish literature and film, but she is equally excited about the prospect of making her work part of the classes she teaches at Bridgewater. It is evident that Professor Lev enjoys the classroom experience and bringing her background in literature, film and social commentary to the campus. ❧