

# EN TIEMPOS DE LAS ATADURAS (HISTORIA ET CONSUETUDINES FRANCORUM FEUDORUM) BY JOSÉ ANTONIO “FER” FERNÁNDEZ: FRANCO’S DEATH IN ANIMATION\*

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Franco's death on the 20<sup>th</sup> of November 1975 was the pretext for a massive propaganda campaign to carefully construct a “final image” that would be engraved in the minds of Spaniards forever, after weeks of grisly death throes whose real details were kept a secret. While the entire Spanish media industry came together as one the very next day to take part in this mission, the sector that truly excelled in the task was the audiovisual sector, which turned the event into a grandiose spectacle, both on television (which was enjoying a golden age in Spain at the time) and in cinemas (reflected in a special edition of the Spanish government's NO-DO newsreel). Added to the extensive coverage on public TV networks were a number of audiovisual projects intended to present a final image of the dictator and thus contribute to his legacy. One of these was *El último caído* [The Last of the Fallen] (1975) by José Luis Sáenz de Heredia, who sought to exalt the figure of Franco in

a filmic testament that was to be released on the first anniversary of the dictator's death. A series of obstacles prevented it from being completed as planned, a fact that effectively confirmed the end of an era and of the propagandistic discourse that had defined it. But in those first months after Franco's demise, there was no room in the national public sphere for perspectives that did not contribute to the solemn apotheosis.

Nevertheless, alternative narratives that dared to offer dissenting perspectives soon began to emerge, even if they could not gain access to the mainstream platforms of mass culture. In the documentary genre, the filmmakers Basilio Martín Patino and Gonzalo Herralde contributed to demythologising Franco's image with *Caudillo* (1977) and *Raza, el espíritu de Franco* [Race, the Spirit of Franco] (1977), respectively. After Spain's transition to democracy, fiction films along the same lines would also appear: *Dragon rapide* (Jaime

Camino, 1985), *Wait for Me in Heaven* (Espérame en el cielo, Antonio Mercero, 1988), *Madregilda* (Francisco Regueiro, 1993), and *¡Buen viaje Excelencia!* [Have a Good Trip, Your Excellency!] (Albert Boadella, 2003).<sup>1</sup>

The most extreme cases, however, can be found in the realm of comedy (black comedy, obviously), which aimed to deconstruct the lofty tone of the propaganda surrounding the event. In particular, in the early years of the transition in Catalonia several films were made that depicted Franco's death with markedly carnivalesque tones. *Testamento* (Joan Martí, 1977), a short documentary shot on 16 mm film, attempts to "spew up" (*vomit*) the dictator's death through a sacrilegious montage related to the reading of the dictator's will on the day of his death by his last prime minister, Carlos Arias Navarro. *Hic digitur dei* (Antoni Martí, 1976), a feature-length picture on 8 mm film, offers an outlandish take on the dictator's death in the form of a grotesque tale. In *En tiempos de las ataduras* (*Historia et consuetudines francorum feudorum*) (José Antonio "Fer" Fernández, 1978), an animated short included in the anthology film *Historias de amor y masacre* [Stories of Love and Slaughter] (Jordi "Ja" Amorós, 1978), the demythologising objective is supported by a highly original device for the representation of Franco's death on-screen, founded on the grand tradition of cartoon humour.

This article offers an exploration of how José Antonio Fernández's animated short for adults reconstructs the story of the final moments of Francoism through a cartoon image of the dictator with a unique use of political satire.

### **HISTORIAS DE AMOR Y MASACRE, A PROJECT IN THE TRADITION OF THE GRAPHIC HUMOUR OF THE 1970S**

The first animated feature film for adults in Spanish history, *Historias de amor y masacre*, was a project directed by Jordi Amorós, a cartoonist who

worked under the pseudonym "Ja". The film was supported by one of the most subversive satirical magazines of the time, *El Papus*. According to Amorós himself, "*Historias de amor y masacre* was a by-product of *El Papus*" (J. "Ja" Amorós, personal communication, 20 September 2016), and so to properly understand "En tiempos de las ataduras..." by José Antonio Fernández (referred to below by his pseudonym "Fer"), it is essential to clarify the context of the film's relationship with the magazine.

According to Vílchez de Arribas, the last years of Francoism and the first years of democracy constituted "the brightest period in the history of the satirical press in Spain" (Vílchez de Arribas, 2015). Indeed, as his studies confirm, it was a highly productive sector at this time, with six different publications available nationally in 1974 and 1975.<sup>2</sup> The rise of cartoon humour for adults took its cue from the children's comic book (or *tebeo*), which had enjoyed a golden age in Spain during the post-war period, and was influenced by the French magazine *Hara-Kiri*, which years later would also inspire *Charlie Hebdo*. Freedom of the press, restricted in Spain under the Press and Printing Act (*Ley de Prensa e Imprenta*) of 1966, was established on the 1<sup>st</sup> of April 1977 with a Royal Decree enshrining freedom of expression. This change allowed these magazines to publish humorous content on anything related to Francoism, including the Catholic church and the Spanish military (Vílchez de Arribas, 2015). Nevertheless, although the law now allowed it on paper, in reality there remained a *de facto* control of the press that aimed to restrict freedom of expression in Spain.

As Antonio Altarriba explains, the comic book "ceased to be the mouthpiece (a little rebellious perhaps, but ultimately well-behaved) for official thought and acquired an image of 'marginal avant-gardism', a 'cool' product connected to the concerns of youth" (Altarriba, 2001: 17). In other words, the new generations of democrats appro-

priated this effective medium to reshape an official reality that until then had been distorted in accordance with the whims of the Franco regime. The press played a cathartic role, helping the public to digest the intensity of current events and offering an alternative discourse to that of the State. According to Vílchez de Arribas, publications of this kind turned into “another instrument to bring an end to General Franco’s dictatorship and achieve the long-awaited democracy” (Vílchez de Arribas, 2015).

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### THE PRESS PLAYED A CATHARTIC ROLE, HELPING THE PUBLIC TO DIGEST THE INTENSITY OF CURRENT EVENTS AND OFFERING AN ALTERNATIVE DISCOURSE TO THAT OF THE STATE

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*El Papus* was a Barcelona-based weekly magazine founded in 1973. It was sponsored by Javier de Godó, son of the Count of Godó, and the main shareholder in Elf Editores, a subsidiary of Tisa, the group that owned the national newspaper *La Vanguardia*. With the decline of *Bocaccio 70*, a publication targeting Barcelona’s *gauche divine*, Javier de Godó lobbied the editors of his satirical sports magazine *Barrabás* to create a similar weekly publication, but with a socio-political focus (Iranzo Cabrera, 2014: 275-286). Its founders included Xavier de Echarri, Carlos Navarro and the cartoonists Ivà, Oscar, and Gin. As Iranzo Cabrera explains, “Ivà’s dream was to intimidate the forces of Francoism, and this was the purpose behind the magazine’s title and icon: the *papu*, a monster in Catalan folklore that terrorises children” (Iranzo Cabrera, 2014: 280). From its earliest days, the magazine thus displayed a political commitment that would be made clear in *Historias de amor y masacre*. The magazine had an average print run of around 230,000, reaching a peak of 400,000 copies at one point (Iranzo Cabrera, 2013). In ad-

dition to its founders, some of the most renowned cartoonists of the era contributed to it, including “Perich”, “Fer”, “Ja”, “Chumy-Chúmez”, and “Gila”. Each issue offered a mixture of panels and images that dealt with different aspects of Spanish society, ranging from political affairs to pseudo-pornographic touches.

During the first years of Spain’s transition to democracy, despite the greater freedom resulting from the repeal of the aforementioned *Ley de Prensa*, it was not yet possible to adopt an openly satirical discourse on political issues, as the transition was being managed on the terms of the governing Francoists in an atmosphere of extreme repression (Baby, 2018). The publication of *El Papus* proved particularly uncomfortable for a regime—now with king Juan Carlos as its figurehead—that was moving towards democracy but still maintained some of the machinery of a dictatorship. Indeed, humorous takes on the events unfolding during the transition were not welcomed by certain sectors of society. Already in the twilight of Francoism, the magazine *El Papus* had been suspended for four months by order of the Council of Ministers in June 1975, and it suffered a similar fate a year later (Vílchez de Arribas, 2015). In addition to being directly sanctioned by the authorities with fines, the editors’ office received constant threats from right-wing extremist groups that sought to silence it.

On the 20<sup>th</sup> of September 1977, one of these threats was carried out and the *El Papus* editorial team suffered an attack at its headquarters. The attack, which resulted in the death of the building’s porter, Juan Peñalver, was attributed to a right-wing extremist youth group named Juventud Española en Pie. Those responsible were given the minimum sentence of six months and one day for possession of explosives, a decision that even the Supreme Court recognised was extremely mild when the magazine’s publisher Ediciones Amaika appealed against it.<sup>3</sup> The documentary *El Papus, anatomía de un atentado* [El Papus, Anat-

omy of an Attack] (David Fernández de Castro, 2010), broadcast for the first time on Spanish public television in February 2011, attempts to clarify the details of an incident that continues to be shrouded in mystery. Ernesto Milá, a writer with fascist sympathies who was arrested on several occasions in relation to right-wing extremist activities during the transition, asserts in this documentary: "In my opinion, the attack on *El Papus*, and not only the attack on *El Papus* but a lot of other attacks that took place in those days, reeks of the cesspools of the State."

It was in this context that Jordi Amorós made *Historias de amor y masacre*. In effect, "taking advantage of the moment of prosperity that *El Papus* was enjoying, he proposed to the publisher the idea of financing an animated film that would feature eight of the best-known cartoonists at that time" (Manzanera, 1992: 123). In addition to his activity as a cartoon humourist, Amorós, who learned about animation at the Buch-Sanjuán studios (Manzanera, 1992: 123), founded the advertising studio Equip in Barcelona with Víctor Luna in 1975. It was there that most of the sketches for the film were animated. Each cartoonist provided him with the script and some drawings, and a team led by Amorós and his partner used these to make the film. "Fer" was the only contributor who had to make his own film himself, as will be discussed below. The project, which began in 1975, took three years to complete, as progress was affected by the workload of the advertising jobs received by the studio.

According to Amorós, it was a largely self-financed film, although it benefited from an investment from the magazine's publisher. "*El Papus* financed it; I asked them for three million pesetas and it cost around 30 million. I paid for it myself with what I earned from the advertising" (J. "Ja" Amorós, personal communication, 20 September 2016). However, he admits that he is unsure of the exact amounts, and in fact Manzanera lists the budget as 5 million. "Ja" also states that the

publishing house holds the rights to the film. In the database of the Institute of Cinematography and Audiovisual Arts, Ediciones Amaika is listed as the film's producer, which, added to the fact that it was to be distributed to commercial theatres, would have disqualified it as an underground work if it were not for the fact that "Ja" was not a mainstream figure in the film industry and the film itself was not associated with any other names in the sector.

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### **THE IRREVERENT AND SUBVERSIVE TONE, PROPELLED BY THE CREATIVE FREEDOM OF ANIMATION, TAKES THE TRADITION OF SPANISH MAINSTREAM CINEMA OF THE 1960S AND 1970S TO A WHOLE NEW, WILD DIMENSION**

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*Historias de amor y masacre* is made up of six shorts, authored by "Oscar", "Fer", "Ja", "Chumy-Chúmez", "Gila", and "Ivà", with transitions in the form of little gags by "Perich". Despite its nature as an anthology, certain elements give the film a kind of unified cohesion. The title, to which was added the subtitle "*Un filme de gran aparato*" ["a well-endowed film"], constitutes a somewhat provocative announcement of the general tone and establishes a common thread vague enough to connect a series of stories that are highly diverse in both style and theme. In a kind of prologue, whose form parodies Walt Disney's typical greetings in his short productions, the strip cartoonist Manuel Vázquez Gallego, like a master of ceremonies, announces the program to the spectator: "Cojoncio Cabretas presenta: The fantastic world of Cojonland" (the second part of the title appearing this way, in English). The irreverent and subversive tone, propelled by the creative freedom of animation, takes the tradition of Spanish mainstream cinema of the 1960s and 1970s to a whole new, wild dimension. According to Jordi Amorós,

his film introduced a brand of humour that would become popular in the 1990s with hits like *Torrente, el brazo tonto de la ley* [Torrente, the Dumb Arm of the Law] (Santiago Segura, 1997) (J. "Ja" Amorós, personal communication, 20 September 2016). The explicit sex and full frontal nudity, the use of disability and divinity as objects of humour, and the distancing strategies of fable and of the historical film to comment on contemporary society are some of the characteristic features of this forgotten work of Spanish cinema.

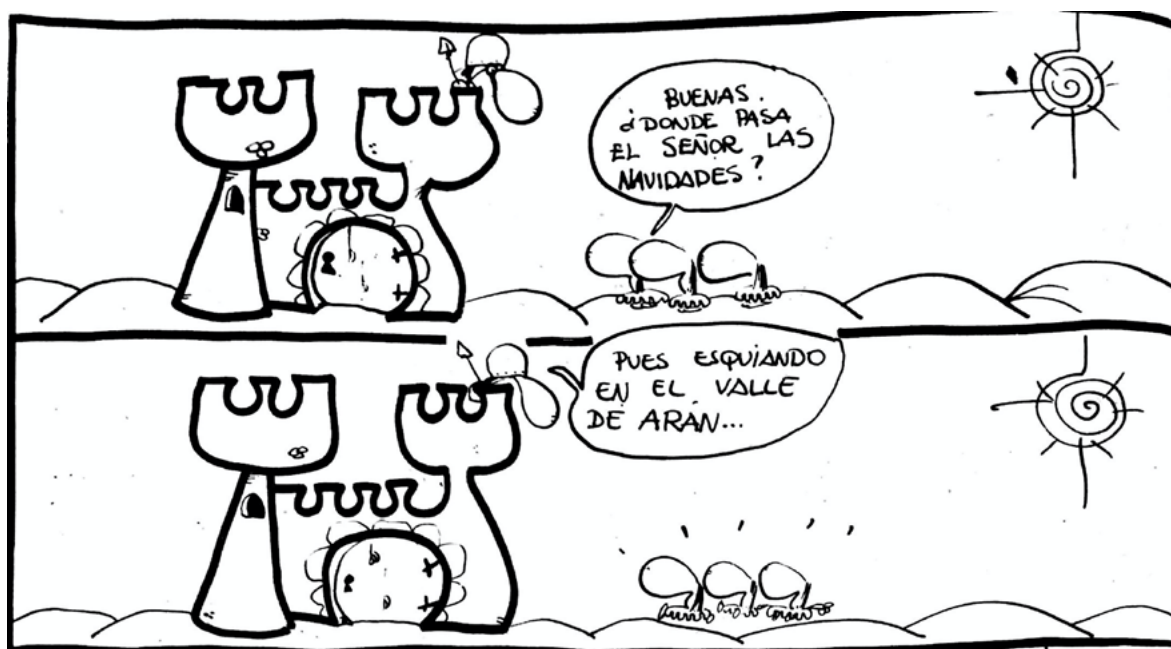
### **EN TIEMPOS DE LAS ATADURAS (HISTORIA ET CONSUETUDINES FRANCORUM FEUDORUM): FRANCO'S DEATH TRANSPOSED TO THE MIDDLE AGES**

*En tiempos de las ataduras* (*Historia et consuetudines francorum feudorum*) is the second of the six stories included in this anthology film (located in the film at minutes 00:17:28 to 00:23:18<sup>4</sup>). Seven shorts were originally planned, but due to time constraints it was decided to leave out José María Vallés' contribution. "Fer's" and Vallés' shorts are

the only ones that caricature the dictator and offer their own version of his death. The fact that "Fer's" story was chosen for inclusion and not Vallés' apparently had nothing to do with the content, according to Amorós, but was due to a question of the personal preferences of the magazine's editorial team. It was Jorge "Gin" Ginés, a well-known cartoonist with influence at the magazine, who suggested that "Fer" participate in the film. "Fer's" cartoon was the only one that was not animated in the Equip studio, a fact that the cartoonist attributed to his lack of experience with the medium at the time. "They made the film for all the cartoonists. Four drawings were delivered, and [they did] the rest. But because I didn't have as much of a name, I had to do it myself," recalls "Fer" (J. A. "Fer" Fernández, personal communication, 21 September 2016). To draw all the transitions and poses, "Fer" had the help of his brother-in-law, Josep Maria Rius i Ortigosa ("Joma"), another well-known humorist.

Born in 1949 in Mansilla de las Mulas in the Spanish province of León and based in Catalonia, José Antonio Fernández was appointed artistic

Fig. 1. *El Papus*, no. 188, 24 December 1977. Excerpt from a comic by "Fer"



director for *El Papus* and also for the magazine that replaced it, *El Jueves*, which is still in print today. In those days, “Fer” combined his journalistic work with his job as a high school history teacher. The series he published in *El Papus* were *Historias hermosas* and *El castillo* (fig. 1), and his content often had political themes, rather than the sexual overtones typical of other contributors to the magazine.

By setting his comic strips in the Middle Ages, “Fer” was able to address contemporary issues more freely. The site of connection between sender and receiver is located here in the transposition of supposedly medieval characters and situations to the present. “Fer” describes this process, which made him feel less exposed: “If soldiers were shown beating people, well, it was the Middle Ages... but it was perfectly clear that it was now” (J. A. “Fer” Fernández, personal communication, 21 September 2016). Despite this precaution, both “Fer” and “Ja” acknowledge that the upheavals of the period had them running risks that they could not foresee. “We were unaware,” explains “Fer” (J. A. “Fer” Fernández, personal communication, 21 September 2016), while “Ja” observes: “We weren’t afraid; it was a party” (J. “Ja” Amorós, personal communication, 20 September 2016). Although the passage of time may have affected their perspective, it was clearly that naivety that gave them the courage to challenge the censors with an innovative language.

When “Fer” was invited to take part in the film, he thought of adapting the historical universe of *El castillo* and *Historias hermosas*, which he and the audience were already familiar with, to film format: “Franco was dead. The Middle Ages, little soldiers... ‘I’m going to do Franco’s death, transposed to the Middle Ages’” (J. A. “Fer” Fernández, personal communication, 21 September 2016). With a duration of 5 minutes and 49 seconds, the film could be considered a kind of expansion of his comic strip stories, with sound and moving pictures. It uses the same protagonist, a feudal

lord living in a medieval castle, surrounded by his faithful troops. Aesthetically, the cartoon takes up some of the elements used by United Productions of America (UPA) to revolutionise animation in the 1950s (clearly defined contours, simple shapes, basic backgrounds, a limited chromatic palette), while also establishing a certain continuity with the Spanish comic book tradition. This formal austerity contributed to the reinforcement of the symbolic dimension of the film.

In *En tiempos de las ataduras...*, the story begins *in medias res* with the depiction of the cruelty of a ruler at the end of his reign. The ruler orders the execution of his subjects, whose severed heads fill him with evident delight, until he suddenly falls ill. This leads to a second sequence, in which the tyrant is literally kept alive by the blood of his people, which is injected into him with a giant syringe. Finally, the lord dies, and the final sequence of the short covers his funeral and resurrection by means of an injection of pig’s blood. The soundtrack is minimalist: simple music marks out the pacing of the story, and pig squeals made by the feudal lord serve for what could be deemed to resemble dialogue.

Román Gubern points out that the term “caricature” (the raw material of the cartoon humour in *El Papus* and *Historias de amor y masacre*) comes from the Italian *caricare*, meaning to fill, accentuate, or exaggerate the features (Gubern, 1994: 215). Altarriba (2001) compares caricature to the reflection of the mirrors on Callejón del Gato in Ramón María del Valle-Inclán’s *Bohemian Lights*, as it turns reality into an *esperpento*.<sup>5</sup> The low level of iconicity of the caricature, i.e., the lack of similarity to the individual represented, leaves room for the sender’s and the receiver’s imagination. It is in this space that the artist acts. The interpretation of the message by the reader/spectator thus requires an intimate understanding of the context. This is the strength of the medium, and at the same time it is what triggers furious reactions that other art forms rarely manage to arouse.



**Fig. 2.** A soldier salutes his lord with his arm held high. *En tiempos de las ataduras...*

Although the world portrayed in "Fer's" film is explicitly medieval, many elements invite us to identify parallels with Franco's dictatorship. The first is the title itself, whose Latin subtitle, "*Historia et consuetudines francorum feudorum*" alludes to the set of feudal laws compiled in the *Consuetudines feudorum* (lit. "feudal customs"). But by including in this expression the genitive form *francorum*, the ironic allusion to the "kingdom" of Franco leaves no room for doubt as to the parallels the spectator will be invited to make.

In this universe, Franco holds the highest rank in the hierarchy, and thus assumes the role of a feudal lord. Various elements enable us to identify him, beginning with how he is dressed: a showy uniform that mimics the style of the *Generalísimo*. An anachronistic element introduced at the beginning of the film, the feudal lord's sunglasses, serves to evoke what in the 1970s had become a kind of identifying sign of dictators throughout the Spanish-speaking world. Moreover, several of the characters who address him—and the feudal lord himself at the moment of his death—raise their hands in imitation of the fascist salute (fig. 2). In relation to the background, the presence of a crucifix and a bishop at the ruler's sickbed serve as clear allusions to one of the major pillars of the defunct regime:

the Catholic church. The army, represented by a line of soldiers at the feudal lord's beck and call, also plays a prominent role in the film. At one point, one of the soldiers removes his helmet—grey in colour like his uniform—in order to approach a dissenter incognito and thus quell him more easily, an image that seems to allude to Franco's secret police.

At the end of the film, the appearance of a stylised map of Spain contextualises the story even more clearly. "Fer" says he had planned to include more identifying elements, but the censors forced him to make changes. The day he went to the Equip studio to make the required cuts was the very same day that the bomb exploded at the offices of *El Pápus*, in September 1977. He was unhappy about being forced to cut out some of the more obvious elements identifying the dictator. "I never wanted to cover up the fact that the film was about Franco. They made me cut the hand of Saint Teresa and the cloak of the Virgin of Pilar [both sacred Catholic relics], which appear so briefly you hardly see them" (J. A. "Fer" Fernández, personal communication, 24 September 2016) (fig. 3). This suppression of information effectively broadens the range of interpretations and requires more effort and contextual knowledge on the part of the receiver.

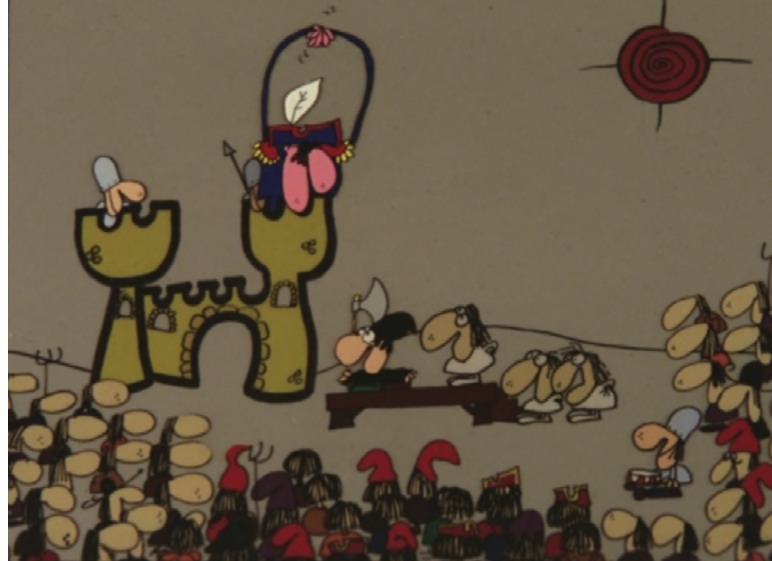
**Fig. 3.** The bishop waves the relic of the Hand of Saint Teresa at the dying man. *En tiempos de las ataduras...*





Some critics avoided explicitly identifying the feudal lord and limited their reviews to general statements. Among these was the reviewer for *La Vanguardia*, who wrote: ““Fer” continues with his castles and offers a fierce and surrealistic parody of historical dictators” (Bonet Mojica, 1980: 55). However, the satire of Franco was not limited to these visual elements, as it was also (and especially) expressed in the story, which is very clearly related to the last moments of the dictator’s life in the autumn of 1975.

The short begins with one of the most important events of Franco’s last days: the execution of five political prisoners in 1975 that triggered an international campaign to call for their sentences to be commuted. Neither the protests nor the intervention of the Pope and of Spain’s future king managed to convince Franco to relent, and the executions, carried out on 27 September, were seen as a final cruel and gratuitous act of an ageing dictator whose senility was becoming increasingly obvious, as revealed by the images of his last public appearance on the balcony of the Royal Palace of Madrid on 1 October 1975. In “Fer’s” film, the first minute of the story (00:00:00–00:01:08) offers an extremely grotesque allusion to the executions, depicting the excitement that the spectacle of the beheading of innocent victims elicits in the gesticulating ruler, whose pig squeals express his joy to a crowd gathered around the foot of one of the towers of the castle (fig. 4). Power is exercised graphically by means of a whip, a symbol of violence and oppression, used by one



**Fig. 4. The feudal lord attends the public executions. *En tiempos de las ataduras...***

of his henchmen to incite the audience to cheer the feudal lord, who during the executions first waves a white handkerchief (in a clear allusion to bullfighting), and then makes a thumbs-down gesture like a Roman emperor. Put simply, he watches the executions like a spectator at a circus show or a bullfight, reflecting his lack of concern for human life and the individual importance accorded to him. As noted above, the only sounds he is capable of articulating are pig noises, and from the outset it is clearly the author’s intention to identify the dictator with this animal, which in the Spanish lexicon carries a connotation of filthiness, rudeness and savagery. George Orwell drew on the same metaphor in his novella *Animal Farm* (1945), in which a pig named Napoleon represents Josef Stalin and, of course, Napoleon Bonaparte; in 1954, John Halas and Joy Batchelor introduced this dictator-pig to the world of animation in their film adaptation of Orwell’s book.

The second part of the film alludes to the period from the onset of Franco’s fatal illness around mid-October up to his death on 20 November 1975. This period, ironically labelled by Manuel Vázquez Montalbán as the “survival ceremony” (Vázquez Montalbán, 2005: 89), was a period of media silence. The reality of Franco’s condition, after initially being denied, was effectively concealed so that the public could never be certain of what was really happening. In a therapeutic frenzy to keep him alive at any cost, from one

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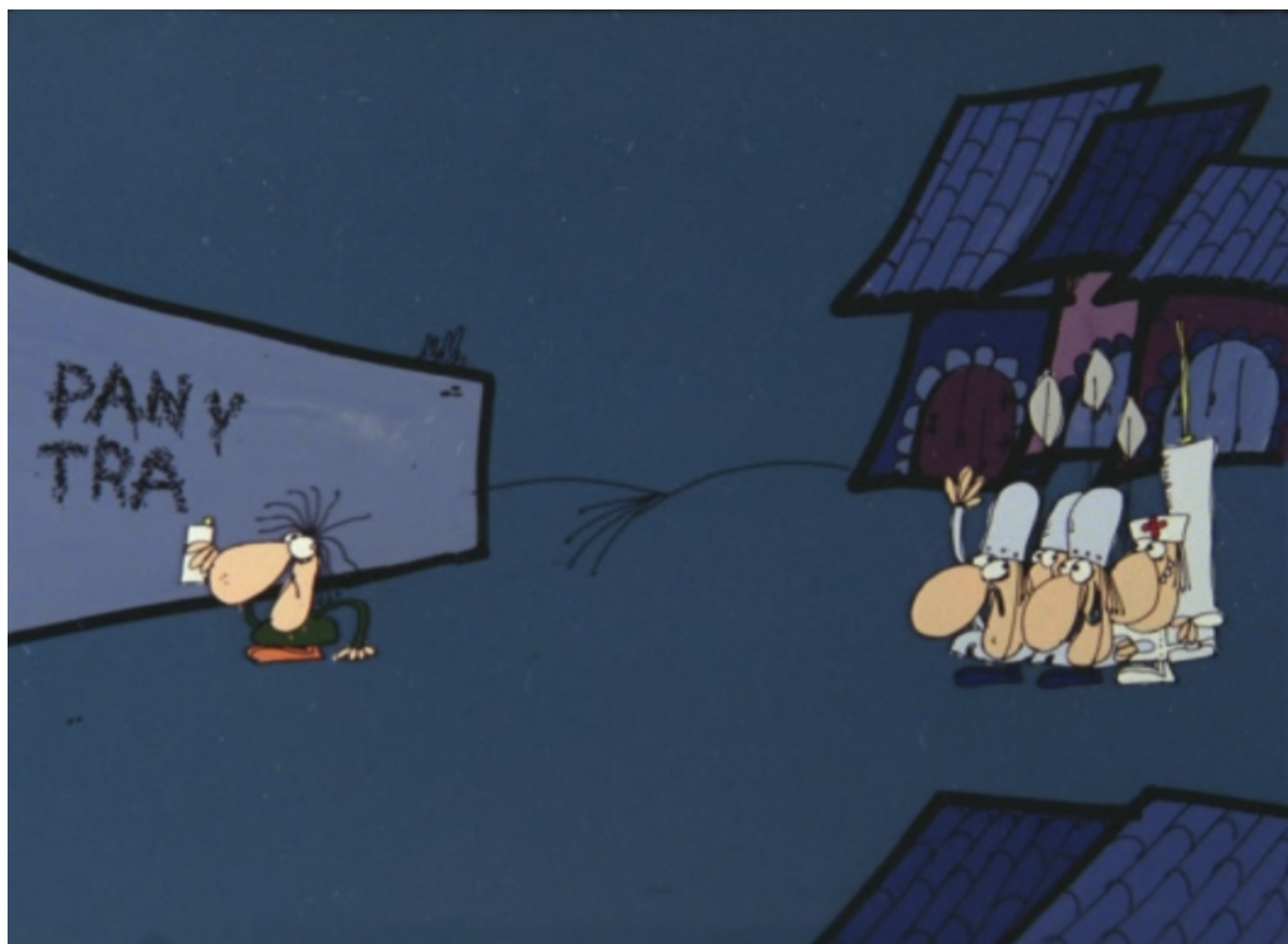
week to the next the Caudillo turned from a man into a kind of cyborg. His condition was revealed years later with the release of pictures taken by his son-in-law, the Marquis of Villaverde, who as a physician followed the operations closely.<sup>6</sup> However, at the time no images were made public and Franco's illness was kept off-camera. Given that the Spanish people had become accustomed to the constant media presence of the *Generalísimo* for nearly forty years, his sudden absence created the sensation of a gaping void.

"En tiempos de las ataduras..." depicts this moment when the dictator's illness was rendered invisible in its own grotesque and ludicrous way. When the film was made, the details of the intensive therapy that Franco was subjected to were still unknown. However, the numerous press releases by the "usual medical team",<sup>7</sup> despite the use of scientific terminology that "pasteurise[d] the language of death" (Vázquez Montalbán, 2005:

89), particularly the final report announcing his passing, offered a glimpse into a grisly reality, quite apart from the numerous rumours that had begun circulating at the time: "Parkinson's disease. Coronary heart disease with acute anteroseptal myocardial and diaphragmatic infarction. Recurrent acute digestive ulcers with repeated massive haemorrhaging. Bacterial peritonitis. Acute renal failure. Left ileofemoral thrombophlebitis. Bilateral aspiration bronchopneumonia. Endotoxic shock. Cardiac arrest."<sup>8</sup>

"Fer" represents the period of the macabre intensive therapy at the end of October and early November through a series of scenes in which the Caudillo's underlings go in search of fresh blood to keep the dying man alive. The magic fluid is taken from the subjects, sowing terror among the people, especially dissidents, who are embodied in particular in the anachronistic form of a character painting political graffiti on a wall ("*Pan y tra...*"

Fig. 5. A dissenter is held down to extract his blood. *En tiempos de las ataduras...*



meaning “bread and work”) (fig. 5). The deteriorating health of the feudal lord, who has now turned into a kind of vampire, is reflected in the increasing rate of the blood infusions, until at last there is not a single living soul left in his fiefdom. The blood is injected using syringes as big as the characters’ bodies, their disproportionate size serving as a metaphor for the magnitude of the repression and abuses of power. The dictator is kept alive thanks only to a band of minions who bleed the population dry, in a campaign of terror that is depicted graphically in the film. The sky grows darker as the landscape fills with bloodless corpses. The image turns blue to underscore the twilight of a dark age. “Fer’s” imagination has filled the void left by the forbidden image of Franco’s dying moments with this grisly depiction.

The last part of the film, dealing with the feudal lord’s funeral, is presented as a parody of the parade of propaganda that followed Franco’s death. Given the Caudillo’s condition after so many weeks of intensive therapy, the “final image” in reality was not that of the traditional *belle mort* showing the man on his deathbed. Instead, it was transferred to a moment *post mortem*, with the spectacle of the body on display on the 21<sup>st</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> of November in the Royal Palace’s Hall of Columns.

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### **THE LAST PART OF THE FILM, DEALING WITH THE FEUDAL LORD’S FUNERAL, IS PRESENTED AS A PARODY OF THE PARADE OF PROPAGANDA THAT FOLLOWED FRANCO’S DEATH**

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“Fer” portrays the moment of death (00:04:08–00:04:25) with some traditional, generally placid medieval representations, which tend to include a representative of the Church who can ensure that the deceased will obtain his passport to paradise. The most significant elements of this cliché are

parodied here. A simple shot with a green background shows a canopied bed decorated with a crucifix in which the dying man, still dressed in his uniform and sunglasses, covered with a red and yellow cloth (the colours of the Spanish flag), succumbs to his pain with his uniquely pig-like squeals. His final gesture is a military salute. A caricatured bishop watches over him and makes the sign of the cross while three guards and a nurse bear witness to the supposedly tragic event. A fade out ends the scene.

In the next shot, a funeral procession made up of representatives of the church and the army makes its way through hilly terrain that serves as a stylised image of the landscape of Cuelgamuros, where the Caudillo was buried on 23<sup>rd</sup> November (00:04:26–00:04:50). The propaganda pronounced at his memorial ceremonies emphasised Franco’s place in history for all eternity. The discourse reached a fever pitch at the time of his interment behind the high altar of the basilica at the Valley of the Fallen, particularly evident in the special edition of the NO-DO newsreel (Sánchez-Biosca & Tranche, 2005: 370). The newsreel’s final scene is revealing in this sense: a shot of the heavy (and supposedly unmovable) granite slab that covered the grave, which only bears the name Francisco Franco, is linked through the editing to an image of Christ on the cross, serving to conclude the report, while the gloomy voice-over remarks solemnly: “Francisco Franco, a name for history.” The suggestion is thus that although Franco’s “natural body” has succumbed, his “political body” would go on living, in a kind of symbolic resurrection.

The last part of “Fer”’s film parodies this idea in its unique style by concluding with an image of an unholy resurrection. Along the road taken by the procession towards the gravesite, the presence of an innocent pig (00:04:50) gives one solidier the idea to draw its blood with a syringe and inject it directly into the coffin. The pig was the only creature still alive, apart from the feudal



Fig. 6. The feudal lord's resurrection. *En tiempos de las ataduras...*

lord's faithful servants, who harbour no doubts as to the animal's compatibility with their master. And the injection does indeed revive the dead man, who rises out of his coffin like a macabre and terrifying Snow White. His servants welcome his resurrection joyfully, in a clear allusion to those Francoists nostalgic for a dying regime; in this counter-history, their wishes are fulfilled. The vampire-lord raises his hand in a victory sign, wearing a disturbing smile and making his usual squeals, reinforcing the pig-like nature of the character revived by the blood of the unfortunate animal. The final shot (00:05:30) affirms this victory over death by porcine resurrection with a map of Spain, upon which the character descends, landing in the very middle and stepping firmly on Spanish soil (fig. 6). In the context of its creation, prior to the advent of democracy, this last sequence, offering a carnivalesque depiction of the historical reality with an absurd happy ending for the character (albeit unhappy for his subjects), reflects the apprehension felt by many over a political situation that was still uncertain, seemingly founded on the continuity of the dictatorship with a project for a future that was "tied up and well tied up", as one of Franco's well-known sayings goes.

## CONCLUSION

The audiovisual appropriation of Franco's last days in "Fer's" short film, and more generally in the context of the Catalan counterculture of the period, reflects Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of the carnivalesque; on both the critical and subversive levels, founded on the principle of abasement and the world upside down, and on the level of its joyfully regenerative nature, representing "the popular corrective applied to the narrow-minded seriousness of the spiritual pretence" of the dominant order (Bakhtin, 2003: 22). Against the solemnity of the official images of Franco's death condensed into an idealised "final portrait", "Fer" offers us a form of counter-factual history that acts as a kind of felicitous albeit fictitious "corrective". "En tiempos de las ataduras..." ties in with what the historian Jacques Le Goff refers to as *enjeu-mémoire*<sup>9</sup> to designate the democratic role played by alternative and marginal memories by virtue of the liberation they offer from the official, dominant memory (Le Goff, 1988: 175-177). Against the narrow-mindedness of the official images and the symbolic repression of anyone who does not subscribe to their discourse and is unable to express it, "Fer's" short offers a different vision, which, given its limited circulation on the margins of the film industry, has no objective other than to deconstruct (or "untie") the official narrative, overwhelming it with ludicrous fantasies.

Through its intrinsic materiality, animation can contribute to the expression of political concerns and enrich the language of the printed comic strip, thanks to the addition of sound and movement. The leap made to the big screen by the worlds of the cartoonists of *El Papus* could have enhanced their visibility, but its delayed release (due to the precarious production conditions) robbed *Historias de amor y masacre* of its timeliness. Indeed, both "Fer's" short and the film as a whole went largely unnoticed at the time of

its release—1978 according to the ICAA database, and 16 April 1979 in the Peñalver and Rosales theatres in Madrid, according to Manzanera. Its distribution was impacted by the lack of support for a project made on the margins of the film industry.<sup>10</sup>

After the advent of democracy marked by the adoption of the Constitution of 1978, Franco's death seemed a thing of the past, and it would be some time before interest in it would be rekindled. Moreover, in the time it took to complete the film, the room for freedom of expression had expanded, and what might have seemed provocative three years earlier seemed tame in the context of subversive artistic movements like the *Movida*. The effect of the film's political satire, whose success always depends on its relevance to current affairs, had lost its power. Despite these circumstances, this atypical production in the context of the transition to democracy and of the history of animated film in Spain is extremely valuable for the new perspectives it offers on this historical period, which explains why it has been arousing a resurgence of interest in recent years. ■

## NOTES

- \* This article is dedicated to the memory of "Fer", who sadly left us in September 2020. We are profoundly grateful to him for the help he provided to complete this study and we regret that he did not get the chance to read it. His huge generosity and kindness allowed us to gain a better understanding of the specific circumstances in which his short film was made. We would also like to thank Jordi "Ja" Amorós for his invaluable contribution to this research, as his testimony has been essential to our analysis of this key feature film in the history of animation in Spain. This paper has been executed as part of the research project "Film and Television in Spain in the Times of the Digital Turn and Globalization: (1993-2008): Identities and Practices of Production and Consumption"

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- 1 For further information, see Berthier (2003, 2012, 2020, 2012).
- 2 Vílchez de Arribas mentions *La Codorniz*, *Barrabás*, *El Papus*, *Por Favor*, *Hermano Lobo*, and *El Cocodrilo Leopoldo*.
- 3 See "Rechazada la querella" (1981).
- 4 For this article, we have referred to the edited version of the film on the compilation DVD *Del trazo al píxel. Un recorrido por la animación española* (2015).
- 5 "Some have wanted to see cartoons as the most obvious expression of those concave mirrors on Callejón del Gato described by Valle-Inclán to define *esperpento*. And it is true that in the comic strip the drawing tends towards stylisation or distortion, or in any case towards exaggerations of the characteristic features" (Altarriba, 2001: 12).
- 6 See *La Revista*, 29 October 1984.
- 7 56 reports and 115 press releases.
- 8 Reproduced in *Arriba*, 20 November 1975.
- 9 The French term *enjeu* has no exact translation in English. Its closest equivalent would be "what's at stake".
- 10 As Manzanera points out: "The film had no publicity campaign organised by its distributor, Filmax, which would go bankrupt sometime later, and it was screened in only a few Spanish cities. On the other hand, the producer, Editorial Amaika S.A., which owned *El Papus*, continued to take an interest exclusively in its publications, which were what it was making a profit out of, and it did not concern itself with the commercial exploitation of the film" (Manzanera, 1992: 125).

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## **EN TIEMPOS DE LAS ATADURAS (HISTORIA ET CONSUETUDINES FRANCORUM FEUDORUM) BY JOSÉ ANTONIO "FER" FERNÁNDEZ: FRANCO'S DEATH IN ANIMATION**

### **Abstract**

This paper presents the animated short film *En tiempos de las ataduras* (*Historia et consuetudines francorum feudorum*), made during the early years of the Spanish transition to democracy by the cartoonist José Antonio "Fer" Fernández, and included in *Historias de amor y masacre* (Jordi Amorós, 1978), the first animated feature film for adults in Spanish history, produced with the support of the satirical magazine *El Pápus*. Inspired by a series that "Fer" published in *El Pápus*, which made use of a medieval imaginary to talk about current events, the short film depicts Franco's death in the form of a tale about a feudal lord with recognisable allusions to the Caudillo. This humorous satire forms part of a series of stories about Franco's death created in the context of the Catalan counterculture of this period, taking a carnivalesque view of the event ("world upside down").

### **Key words**

Spanish Cinema; Franco; Transition to Democracy; Animation; Satirical Press; Humour.

### **Authors**

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## **EN TIEMPOS DE LAS ATADURAS (HISTORIA ET CONSUETUDINES FRANCORUM FEUDORUM), DE JOSÉ ANTONIO FERNÁNDEZ «FER»: LA MUERTE DE FRANCO EN ANIMACIÓN**

### **Resumen**

Este texto presenta el cortometraje de animación realizado durante la primera Transición por el humorista gráfico José Antonio Fernández «Fer», al amparo de la revista satírica *El Pápus*, «En tiempos de las ataduras (*Historia et consuetudines francorum feudorum*)», incluido en *Historias de amor y masacre* (Jordi Amorós, 1978), primera película de animación para adultos del cine español. Inspirado en unas series que «Fer» publicaba en *El Pápus* y que se inscribían en un imaginario medieval para hablar de la actualidad, el corto narra la muerte de Franco en forma de un cuento protagonizado por un señor feudal con reconocibles alusiones al Caudillo. Esta jocosa sátira forma parte de un conjunto de relatos de la muerte de Franco en el ámbito de la contracultura catalana de la época, desde una visión carnavalesca del evento ("mundo al revés").

### **Palabras clave**

Cine español; Franco; Transición; Animación; Prensa satírica; Humor.

### **Autoras**

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