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**Canine Colloquium:**  
**Skeuomorphism and the Transitional Dog in**  
*La criatura, Solas, and Recuerdos de perrito de mierda*

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## ABSTRACT

This article applies Jean E. Veevers's tripartite schematisation of the social meaning of pets to an interpretation of canine protagonism in three Spanish texts. The functions of domestic pets identified by Veevers—projection, sociability, and surrogacy—are mapped onto *La criatura*, directed by Eloy de la Iglesia (1977), *Solas*, written and directed by Benito Zambrano (1999), and *Recuerdos de perrito de mierda*, written and illustrated by Marta Alonso Berná (2014). Animal companions are made central in my analysis which fuses ethological cinematic theory with a review of critical reception to produce new readings of the texts. These uncover deconstruction of heteropatriarchy, gendered neo-liberalism, and speciesism, loci hitherto unexplored in detail with respect to the corpus of material. The article posits the dog as an analogue skeuomorph and as a register of transformation that marks a shift in canine rhetorical value from psychopomp in the 1970s to remnantal residue of cultural memory in the 2010s.

## KEY WORDS

Dog

Skeuomorph

Transition

Eloy de la Iglesia

Benito Zambrano

Marta Alonso Berná

קיינער וויל ביי מיר ניט קויפן  
אויסגיין וועל איך מוזן ווי אַ הונט

Herman Yablokoff

Ahora, que tan sin pensarlo me  
veo enriquecido deste divino  
don de la habla, pienso gozarle  
y aprovecharme dél lo más que  
pudiere.

Miguel de Cervantes<sup>1</sup>

## 1. Introduction

The first of the three narratives I examine here is *La criatura*, a feature film made in 1977 by one of the *enfants terribles* of transitional and post-Francoist cinema, Eloy de la Iglesia.<sup>2</sup> Its story, about a woman's intense relationship with a German Shepherd, has largely been read through the prism of sex and bestiality, despite the critique of the heteropatriarchal family that, as I will argue, de la Iglesia articulates through his dog-centred view of kinship. The second text, *Solas* also a film, dates from 1999.<sup>3</sup> In this uncompromising turn of the century tale, Benito Zambrano returns to the site of the heteropatriarchal family—now a structure whose gender bias and inequities are laid bare—and proposes an unlikely alternative, one where the singular canine actor

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<sup>1</sup> Herman Yablokoff, 'Papirosn'

<<http://www.iddish.co.il/SongsShow.aspx?isHoliday=true&songID=196>> (accessed 6 August 2015). Miguel de Cervantes, 'Coloquio de los perros', in *Novelas ejemplares*, ed. Francisco Alonso (Edaf: Madrid, 1999), 489-548 (p. 491). I am glad to take this opportunity to thank my former MA student, Mark Taylor ■■■■ ■■■■■■ for sharing with me his enthusiasm for an ethological approach to Spanish cinema.

<sup>2</sup> Eloy de la Iglesia, *La criatura* (Madrid: Alborada, 1977).

<sup>3</sup> Benito Zambrano, *Solas* (Seville: Canal Sur, 1999).

mediates the human communication and interaction that leads to the film's unlikely conclusion.

Whereas the dog actor in *La criatura* has been over-read as a sexualised protagonist, in *Solas*, the dog has been almost ignored. Critical interpretations of Zambrano's film simply overlook the dog as a member of the post-Franco Spanish family. The third text on which I focus, and the most recent, is Marta Alonso Berná's graphic novel, *Recuerdos de perrito de mierda*.<sup>4</sup> Published in 2014, Berná's novel has received little critical comment to date but warrants attention within the perspective I set out here since, like *La criatura* and *Solas*, it makes the relationship between an adult woman and a dog the crux of its narrative. I see its dog-centred narrative as belonging to the arc described by the earlier filmic texts, and the migration to the graphic novel form as consistent with the genre's emergence in Spain as a platform for social critique in the last decade. In the course of the shift from the late 1970s to the 2010s, the narrative or skeuomorph dog shrinks from a German Shepherd to a vestigial Chihuahua and my approach will ask if this diminution reflects the transposition of the dog from man's best friend, on film, to precursor of digital deletion in the abyss of anti-social media.

To lend the closer approximation to these three texts an approach informed by social science I have recourse to a seminal contribution to the literature on interspecies kinship, Jean E. Veevers's essay, 'The Social Meanings of Pets: Alternative Roles for

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<sup>4</sup> Marta Alonso Berná, *Recuerdos de perrito de mierda* (Madrid: Dibbuks, 2014).

Companion Animals'. Veevers asked a question as relevant today as it was in 1985: 'What do companion animals do to earn their keep?' She summarised her findings as follows:

They provide a medium of expression for the personality and preferences of the owner; they facilitate sociability; and under some circumstances they provide supplement to human companionship, or an alternative to it.<sup>5</sup>

Veevers's essay condenses these provisions into three functions: the projective function, the sociability function, and the surrogacy function. In order more effectively to illustrate how the three texts I interpret here uncover these three social meanings and functions of canine companions (as well as a transit between them corresponding to progress through time) I map Veevers's structure onto mine and will examine *La criatura* as a film in which the canine actor projects an oppressed human subjectivity before looking at *Solas* as a text in which attention to the sociability function of the canine actor opens up a new reading of the film. And, finally, I will look at *Recuerdos de perrito de mierda* in terms of Veevers's definition of the surrogacy function of animal companions. This attention to canine substitutability will facilitate a reading of Berná's graphic novel attuned to its story of grief marked by political upheaval and repression.

Before looking at the individual texts in more detail, I want briefly to expand on the notion of skeuomorphism, the transformative concept that I use to link the three texts that form the object of my analysis. Skeuomorph is most often used to refer to

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<sup>5</sup> Jean Veevers. 'The Social Meanings of Pets: Alternative Roles for Companion Animals', *Marriage & Family Review*, 8: 3-4 (1985), 11-30 (p. 27).

the carrying over into digital format of simulated aspects of physical design. For example, an audio player on a graphic user interface pops up looking like a turntable. The term is also used to apply to a cognate process wherein references to a previous physical form are transferred to the ornamentation or design of objects.<sup>6</sup>

Situating *Canis familiaris* within the semantic field of the skeuomorph may seem far-fetched and yet, if we look at recent and not so recent representations of the mutability of the dog—the species famed for stretching from the diminutive proportions of the Chihuahua to the immensity of the St Bernard—it is precisely an emphasis on the skeuomorphic potential of the dog that we see. For example, in David Brunner and Sam Stall's *The Dog Owner's Manual: Operating Instructions, Trouble Shooting Tips, and Advice on Lifetime Maintenance*, illustrations first show the reader a prototypical dog with parts of its body labelled like the interfaces and controls on an electronic device and then present the range of different breeds as packaged modules resembling boxes of soap flakes.<sup>7</sup> The surface form varies but the essential control mechanisms and characteristics of the original design are unaltered.

Going back 100 years and to an item in the paper print collection of early film at the Library of Congress we find a short Edison film entitled *Dog Factory*.<sup>8</sup> It depicts two men operating a device labelled as a Dog Transformator (figure 1). The machine

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<sup>6</sup> Caetlin Benson-Allott's *Remote Control* (Bloomsbury Academic: London, 2015) provides an absorbing overview of skeuomorphism and identity.

<sup>7</sup> David Brunner and Sam Stall, *The Dog Owner's Manual: Operating Instructions, Trouble Shooting Tips, and Advice on Lifetime Maintenance* (Quirk Books: Philadelphia, 2004), 30-31.

<sup>8</sup> Thomas A. Edison and Edwin S. Porter, *Dog Factory* (New York: Edison, 1904).

can produce a dog of the required breed, temperament, and abilities by inserting the correct material in the device and cranking it, and, conversely, it can reduce a fully formed dog to an archive ready to be reassembled into a functional dog later on. The action of the film describes the work of the Dog Transformator in matching customers with the sort of animal that will correctly suit them. The plasticity of the dog form serves to locate and fix the human beings' social status, place, and tastes. The transformed dog is the skeuomorphic skin on the applications of human gender, class, and privilege.

John Homans writes in *What's a Dog For?* that '[T]he dog world is in the throes of political and ideological convulsions of a kind not seen since Victorian times, when the dog as we know it was invented. Put simply, the dog is now in the process of being reimagined'.<sup>9</sup> Leaving aside for a moment their similarities, *Dog Factory* and *The Dog Owner's Manual* nicely illustrate how the ways in which we conceive of our relationship to dogs mirror social adaptation and change. The Edison film reflects the novelty of industrialisation, emphasising the impersonality of the factory-made item through applying its logic to man's best friend. It also plays out some ideas about how mass production, for all its uniform mechanisation, nevertheless creates in consumption the same class distinctions that prevailed before its advent. On the other hand, *The Dog Owner's Manual* tries to re-familiarise the dog in the context of a post-industrial developed society where the new owner is as alienated from a shared

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<sup>9</sup> John Homans, *What's a Dog For?* (Penguin: New York, 2012), 1.



culture of animal husbandry as s/he is from the means of production that have delivered to the family home any number of other devices and gadgets that must be interfaced through operating systems and instructions.

By hypostasising the dog as skeuomorph and juxtaposing canine modularisations from the beginning of the twentieth and the twenty-first centuries like this my intention is to show that Homans's assertion that 'dogs are a kind of mirror species' can be true across the passage of time as well as in a given moment.<sup>10</sup> As Homans goes on to write 'The politics of dogs are a reflection, distilled and distorted, of the politics of people' and indeed, the Dog Transformator, seen as a device with chronological as well as material dimensions, seems to bear this out.<sup>11</sup>

Having proposed a skeuomorphic context for *Canis familiaris*, I want to turn my attention back toward a period of film and visual culture in Spain that spans the last four decades (1977-2014). Spanish culture has invested dogs with social and political meaning since the early seventeenth century, at least, when in 1613 Cervantes published his extraordinary exemplary novel 'Coloquio de los perros'. Cipión and Berganza spoke for and about the social preoccupations of Cervantes's age and in my approach to more recent Spanish culture I also look to canine actors as sites of social representation and significance.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> John Homans, *What's a Dog For?*, 12.

<sup>11</sup> John Homans, *What's a Dog For?*, 17.

<sup>12</sup> John Beusterien goes further into the role played by dogs in the *Novelas ejemplares* in his monograph *Canines in Cervantes and Velázquez: An Animal Studies Reading of Early Modern Spain* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013).

In 1956 Nelson Foote wrote that '[T]he most significant others in one's development are the members of his family, among which the dog has been neglected to the loss of understanding'.<sup>13</sup> Foote's remarks seem just as pertinent today, when applied to socially informed interpretation of contemporary Spanish social culture, as they were in the 1950s. In family narratives from the 1970s, the turn of the century, and the 2010s, the dog, even when centre stage, has been critically overlooked as a family member, and, therefore, as a register of social meaning, development, and change. With this in mind, my focus in this article will be on three texts that foreground human relationships with dogs and that derive from markedly different episodes in recent Spanish social history. Taking the underlying formal content, *Canis familiaris*, as a constant vessel of significance, how will the dog's import as iterative skeuomorph register changes to normative social values and family arrangements over time?

## 2. Projection: *La criatura's* Per(r)orations

The skeuomorphic potential of the dog is well illustrated by the global interest in pictures of Greg Cook being reunited with his dog Coco, when in 2012 both survived a tornado in Alabama.<sup>14</sup> A picture of Cook hugging Coco found an audience around

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<sup>13</sup> Nelson Foote, 'A Neglected Member of the Family', *Marriage and Family Living*, 18: 3 (1956), 213-18 (p. 216).

<sup>14</sup> See Erica Buist, 'That's me in the picture: Greg Cook, 59, hugs his dog Coco after a tornado destroys his home in Alabama, 2012', *The Guardian*, 27 February 2015. <<http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2015/feb/27/greg-cook-coco-photograph-tornado-alabama-2012>> (accessed 6 August 2015).

the world, the intimacy between the owner and his dog illustrative of a testing and transitional moment. In his 1977 film, *La criatura*, the Spanish director Eloy de la Iglesia similarly conjoins a background of transition with disruption of species and gender hierarchy within a nuclear family.

The film takes us inside the domestic and work spaces of Marcos and Cristina, a Spanish couple in their early thirties. Cristina is a housewife, apparently bored of the home she shares with her husband, a TV presenter. Whilst centred on domestic spaces, the film is infused with party politics: indeed, the narrative has a documentary feel to it since it references the Atocha massacre of 1977 when a group of employment lawyers advising transport unions and the Spanish Communist Party were slain in an office in central Madrid (figure 2). The atrocity came in the wake of the death of Franco at the end of 1975 and at a moment when Spain's transition to a new democratic political model was still tenuous.

The dog in the film, a German Shepherd played by canine actor Micky III, is made coterminous with the leftist political opposition several times through the language used to decry socialists in political speeches.<sup>15</sup> In the first of these, Marcos's mentor, Professor De La Nova, leader of the fictional Spanish National Alliance party, says 'La libertad es la paz, el orden, la seguridad [...] En esa convicción seguiremos

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<sup>15</sup> The fact that both Eloy de la Iglesia and Bigas Luna (in *Caniche* [1979]) turned to narratives centred on canines in the immediate aftermath of Franco's death may reflect 'the traditional role of dogs as threshold creatures' and psychopomps. See Susan McHugh, *Dog* (Reaktion: London, 2004), 42.

cabalgando, *por mucho que los perros ladran*' (emphasis added).<sup>16</sup> Later on, when Marcos has been persuaded to take on a role as spokesperson for the same party, he echoes his mentor in a speech to the faithful: 'No podemos oír *los ladridos* de los que propugnan un proceso constituyente como si aquí, señores, en nuestra patria, no hubiera todo desde hace tiempo perfectamente constituido' (emphasis added). It would be overly simplistic, however, to make the dog in *La criatura* correspond exclusively with the leftist political parties in Spain during the transition. As I will go on to elaborate in this section, the political and semantic value of the dog is more complex, not least because as a transitional skeuomorph he is the narrative pivot between personal and party politics.

The dog in *La criatura*, and his disruption of the domestic heteropatriarchal space, makes the title one of the earliest films of the transitional era in Spain to deconstruct the family structure and its reproduction of a right wing Church and state. Yet, strangely, from criticism contemporaneous with the film's release to more recent retrospectives, the potent overlay of a critique that disassembles speciesism and patriarchy is largely overlooked or, when noticed, not developed. Writing in 1977 in *ABC* Pedro Crespo dismissed the film as sensationalist. He adds, furthermore, that 'De la Iglesia destaca por la irrealidad de sus observaciones eróticas, especialmente en las relaciones heterosexuales.'<sup>17</sup> This may have been a roundabout way of saying that Eloy

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<sup>16</sup> The dialogue quoted from *La criatura* here (and elsewhere in this section) is transcribed by the author from the film soundtrack.

<sup>17</sup> Pedro Crespo, 'La criatura de Eloy de la Iglesia', *ABC*, 9 December 1977, 53.

de la Iglesia, as a homosexual, had little of worth, in Crespo's estimation, to say about heterosexuality. But the overall import of Crespo's article is that the film is flawed on account of its suggestion of a sexual interspecies relationship between Cristina and her German Shepherd dog.

Laureano Montero's thorough survey of the film's critical reception on its release in Spain illustrates that critics writing for publications across the range of political opinion—from *ABC* to *Diario 16*—took exception to the film's ambiguous dalliance with zoophilia. Even those, like Marcelo Arroita-Jáuregi, who were prepared to countenance the film's proposition of elements of parity between women's and animals' domestication, found this critical device to be a perverse one, intellectually zoophilic if not indicative of tolerance of physical bestiality.<sup>18</sup>

In 2010, the reviewers for Spanish radio's *La transversal* read the film in much the same way as critics in the 1970s. Paco Tomás and Xisca Tangina are rendered almost speechless by paroxysms of hysterical laughter as they work through the film's plot, from Cristina's meeting with the German Shepherd to what they read as her nuptials with him and the potential of hybrid progeny. Like Crespo, they assume that the child implied by the film's title, *La criatura*, must be half-human, half-dog, and is therefore the *criatura* or future offspring being carried by Cristina.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Laureano Montero, 'Le cinéma d'Eloy de la Iglesia: marginalité et transgression' (doctoral thesis, Université de Bourgogne, 2014), 126-133.

<sup>19</sup> Francisco Tomás Vera and Xisca Tangina, *La transversal*, Radio nacional de España, 31 May 2010.

Returning to Veevers's model of the social meaning of pets, I would link the areas where the film signifies more than bestial sensationalism to the role of projection, one of three singled out in her schema. Within the narrative, Cristina projects onto the dog some of her frustrations and aspirations, and, for the director and screenwriter, projecting through the dog provocative queries about the hierarchical nature of the family dislodges heteropatriarchal structures. The polysemic quality of the word *criatura* in Spanish invites this more open interpretation of the film. *Criatura* can be a foetus, a young child or infant, an offspring of any sort that can be reared, as well as a protégé fashioned in the likeness of an overweening master. The fact that *criatura* could be an animal or a human offspring does tease viewers with the idea that Cristina's second pregnancy could be a most unusual one. However, the title could also be referencing Marcos as a creature of Cristina's family connections and of his authoritarian political mentors; or, it could refer to Cristina as one who is rendered childlike by dint of lack of autonomy within her marriage and subservience to a sexist husband.

*La criatura* opens in a gynaecologist's consulting room. Cristina learns that she is pregnant and is far from delighted by the news. Her husband's response is much less muted. He tells his wife 'Era lo que necesitábamos. ¡Por fin mis oraciones han tenido eco!' Cristina is impatient with her husband's appeal to faith and religiosity and her retort underscores that *La criatura* is also a film about a woman's authority over her own body and reproduction: 'La criatura está dentro de mí. Y yo no he rezado.' Faith,

and Catholic devoutness, are exposed as expressions of subordinating oppression. Her husband wishes upon Cristina a pregnancy that she does not want and uses his investment in a politicised Catholicism to legitimise this. The focus on the intimation later in the film that Cristina and a dog may have enjoyed some kind of sexual congress distracts from something that audiences today and in the 1970s seem to find still more shocking, the idea that a woman might recoil from reproduction and motherhood.

A heavily pregnant Cristina leaves her husband behind the wheel of the larger of their two cars at a filling station. She wanders around the forecourt and seeks out a large black German Shepherd chained to the wall. Like her pregnancy, she has no control over the dog as it thrusts towards her, barking viciously. Cristina doubles up in pain and shock and is bundled into the car to be driven to the nearest hospital by her husband. Shots of the dog at the garage still barking and straining to break free from its chains are intercut with those of Cristina's contractions, emphasising the connection between the pregnancy and the black dog. Rendered as a Gothic monster, the dog becomes the visual correlate of a woman who rejects maternity and seeks through termination release from a role as mother and wife that she does not want.

While they are on a convalescent beach holiday recommended by doctors, another seemingly vagabond German Shepherd enters the couple's lives. Cristina decides to adopt it and takes it into the marital home in Madrid. She calls the new family member Bruno, giving the animal the same name that the couple had planned

to bestow on their first male child. Bruno thus becomes the projection of Cristina's willed childlessness, and of her rejection of maternity.

Marcos is horrified by Cristina's choice of name for the dog and rebukes her strongly for it. In answer to his expressions of indignation she says: '[El niño] no existió jamás. Se esfumó.' Through this scene, Bruno becomes pivotal in the struggle between Marcos and Cristina over further attempts to conceive a child. By fussing over Bruno as if he were their child, Cristina riles Marcos with the idea that their nuclear family is already complete, and by rejecting the dog's place in the family, Marcos insists that Cristina's role as a woman will not be fulfilled until she has produced an offspring for him: the dog must be subordinate to a human child for the family hierarchy to be normative.

Bruno's intromission in the household sufficiently disrupts the status quo for Marcos to feel the need to reassert his patriarchal authority as householder and to put the dog, and his wife, in their places. As we discover later in the film, Marcos is quite prepared (with the blessing of the Church) to assume his spousal rights and to rape his wife. The film's linkage of domestic violence towards an animal and towards women anticipates recent research that demonstrates a strong correlation between abuse of household pets and mistreatment of women and children.<sup>20</sup> This is another projective function of the film's canine character occluded by a focus on bestiality.

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<sup>20</sup> See, for example, Clifton P. Flynn, 'Battered Women and Their Animal Companions: Symbolic Interaction Between Human and Nonhuman Animals', *Society and Animals*, 8: 2 (2000), 99-127.



In a scene where Marcos and Cristina prepare to go out to a political rally organised by the National Spanish Alliance, and to hobnob with its leader and his wife, Bruno's disruption of the hierarchy of the family structure is particularly clear. Cristina says she has never been sympathetic to Professor De la Nova's politics, nor to his way of thinking, if, she says, it can even be held that De La Nova thinks at all. Marcos disputes his wife's ability or entitlement to wade in on questions of men and their intellects and attempts to put her back in her place. He praises her for her looks, prompting her to remark: 'Esa es mi obligación: ir bien vestida y ser idiota.' In their dialogue in this scene, Cristina and Marcos establish between them (and dispute) the basics of the family hierarchy: the head of the household is the thinking man, followed by his pretty but unthinking wife, and beneath them both are dependent children and animals, in that order. The more Cristina (and the filmmakers) reposition the animal from the lowest possible rank to the status of a child, and perhaps to the head of the household, the more the hierarchical foundation of the family is itself queried.

Before speciesism was being extensively articulated as such, the film anticipates its challenges to the human-animal hierarchy and, I would argue, does so as a way of domesticating feminist politics before these were played out in more conventional terms in Spanish film of the 1990s and 2000s.<sup>21</sup> When Marcos and Cristina visit a development of second homes in the outskirts of Madrid, the realtor advises them that the plans allow for an outhouse for the dog, either in the garage or separately. Cristina

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<sup>21</sup> The popularisation of speciesism as a political concept is frequently dated to the publication of Peter Singer's *Animal Liberation: A New Ethics for Our Treatment of Animals* (London: Cape, 1976).

corrects him by saying that this will not be necessary because Bruno will be living indoors. Bruno's achievement of a place inside the domestic sphere, then, can also be read as indicative of gender politics gaining a foothold in the Spanish domestic space. As Cristina enthuses in as yet undecorated and empty rooms about the cosy colours she plans to use for the walls of Bruno's nursery, her own wish for greater purchase on decisions taken in the domestic space also becomes clear, much to Marcos's annoyance and embarrassment.

The proxy role played by canine characters in *La criatura* is further illustrated when Marcos's co-presenter encourages him to reassert his authority at home by introducing another, female, dog in to the family structure. He arrives at the couple's new countryside chalet with a white Labrador bitch concealed in a large box. Cristina's disappointment when she sees it mirrors her expression in the gynaecologists' consulting room when she learned she was pregnant. Her observation of Bruno and the new dog copulating gives Marcos a chance to school his wife in reproductive teleology. He instructs her that what the canines are doing is inevitable: 'Hay que dejarles. Al fin y al cabo están cumpliendo una misión fundamental. Dentro de poco tendremos cachorros.' Marcos taunts his wife with the loss of control entailed in the outcome of sexual reproduction: '¿De qué color crees que saldrán? ¿Blancos, negros, o blancos y negros? ¿A ti cómo te gustaría?' Cristina moves away in silence with an expression of disdain.

Driving alone back to the country home from Madrid, Marcos listens to the radio in his car. We hear a government spokesperson attempting to absolve the administration of responsibility for the Atocha massacre, claiming that it is not about a lapse of authority but rather an inevitability: 'Allí donde hay un criminal dispuesto a matar, existe la posibilidad de que se cometa un crimen.' Marcos returns to find a possible domestic crime scene. The dead body of the white Labrador is in the garage where Cristina says she found it that way. Did she kill it? Whether or not the death was from natural causes or provoked deliberately, the question of reproduction has again been projected onto the family pets: there will not be any puppies. The close editing of the government denial of responsibility for political crimes and the domestic scene of an unexplained death also invites us to find an overlay between personal and party politics. As the far right has sought to slaughter its political opponents in union offices, so the gender politics of the home have been acted out in animal sacrifice. In 1970s Spain, a woman who rejects her sexist husband's politics and her role as reproductive unit is cast as a criminal, a domestic terrorist.

With the death of the white Labrador, uppity disruptions of the family structure evidenced in Bruno's closeness with Cristina are unhindered. Seated next to her animal companion, she talks him through her albums of family and wedding photographs. Reaction shots of Bruno tipping his head to one side are supplemented by Cristina filling in his interjections in the audio track of a shot/countershot sequence that is otherwise edited normally with eye line match, as if both actors were human.

In what is effectively Cristina's monologue, the screenwriter plays on dialogue place holders filled only with the sounds of Bruno's panting or salivation, to underscore the emptiness that would have been supplied by the husband. 'Pobrecito', Cristina remarks to Bruno. 'No entiendes nada de lo que te digo, ¿verdad? Pero no te preocupes. Marcos tampoco lo habría entendido.' As Laureano Montero remarks: 'La relation de Cristina avec le chien [est] présentée comme la conséquence d'un processus de marginalisation, dû à un contexte de frustration et de grande solitude.'<sup>22</sup>

Cristina puts on her bridal gown and re-enacts her wedding for Bruno, before they sit down in front of the television and an advertisement for Frenax, a female hygiene product. Over scenes showing ocean spume grazing a rocky cliff face where a naked woman is recumbent, a female voice reads copy telling women viewers: 'Tu atractivo y tu fragancia deben durar todo el mes. Tú, durante, todo el mes debes ser integramente mujer, absolutamente atractiva.' Within the reading I propose here that sees the canine character as pivotal in the projection of Cristina's frustrations within heteronormativity, it makes sense that this advert for Frenax comes at the moment where Cristina's relationship with Bruno is most intimate. Following the projection through Bruno of her disappointment with Marco's shallowness and his vulgarity, the commercial then pinpoints the double bind for the woman in Cristina's position. She must always be available for her husband's appetites and for reproduction, but she must also be uninterruptedly fragrant and seductive. When she conceives, her role as

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<sup>22</sup> Laureano Montero, 'Le cinéma d'Eloy de la Iglesia: marginalité et transgression', 127.

mother is socialised, but when she cannot conceive, what is perceived to be her individual failing is personalised.

With the tacit approval of his clerical advisors, and advice that he has the right to sexual congress with his wife within their marriage, Marcos rapes Cristina after coming home, drunk, to find her in what looks like a compromising position with the family dog. Marcos displaces Bruno from the marital bedroom, the dog's banishment representing Marcos's attempt to reassert his role as hetero-patriarch and to put Cristina back in position as a subordinate. As Jonathan Burt sets out in *Animals in Film*, forces of constraint and liberation often coagulate around issues of animal representation and this dynamic can clearly be seen at work in *La criatura*.<sup>23</sup> Bruno can be both the projection of Cristina's wish to be liberated from the heteropatriarchal structure that can conceive of her only as a reproductive conduit *and* the embodiment of the forces of oppression that oblige her to submit to her husband's wishes. The persistent tendency to read the film as one that culminates in bestiality, rather than rape is also, perhaps, a function of this ambiguity. But if we see Cristina's second pregnancy as the outcome of this rape within marriage and not as part of a story about bestiality, Bruno is brought back into focus as a projection of Cristina's struggle for liberation against the forces of constraint that her husband represents both within the domestic sphere, and, politically, as the new populist face of the reactionary right.

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<sup>23</sup> Jonathan Burt, *Animals in Film* (London: Reaktion Books, 2002), 12-14.

This reading also makes sense of the decision, endorsed by the Church in the shape of Marcos's priest, that Bruno should be re-homed, and sent to live with an unmarried and single teacher who is therefore perceived to have space in her life for a dog. However, when Cristina learns from her gynaecologist of her second, miraculous, pregnancy she speeds in her small car to the teacher's home, repossesses Bruno, and drives to the house in the country, where, from a terse dialogue with Marcos, it is clear she intends to live alone, with her dog and, eventually, her new born. Marcos's reassertion of his dominance over his wife is undone and Bruno again becomes a projection of Cristina's wish for independence. Just as Marcos assumes his new role as a political spokesperson for the forces of conservatism, promising a political landscape where the *status quo ante* is tightly secured, in the realm of domestic politics his wife has broken out of the constraints of marriage, *her* reassertion of her preference for an animal rather than a male companion indicative of a definitive shift in the balance of power between the husband and wife.

Cristina also has a chance to make an extended political speech towards the end of the film. Unlike her husband's speech, Cristina's is a reflective peroration both to her own experiences of loss and to the film's exploration of an animal character's disturbance of the hierarchy of the Spanish family. As the fulcrum of the screenplay, it is worth quoting from the scene where Cristina attempts to explain to Marcos what she has been living through since she approached the raging dog on the garage forecourt:

Es como si de repente descubrieses que esa imagen grotesca que se ve en los espejos deformantes de las barracas no está en los espejos, sino en las personas que se reflejan. Cuando estás convencido de que eres un monstruo, rodeada de monstruos, en un mundo hecho para monstruos, te resulta apasionante la idea de llegar a una monstruosidad aun mayor por lo menos ser un poco distinta.<sup>24</sup>

In this reflective peroration, we hear reverberations of Homans's assertion that the dog is a 'mirror species'. For instance, making a connection between Bruno's entrance into the family's life and the distortions of circus mirrors echoes Burt's assertion that in cinema 'the animal image is a form of rupture in the field of representation'.<sup>25</sup> The canine skeuomorph has ruptured the narrative and also opened up fissures in the technology of cinematic story-telling, allowing the audience to see the mechanisms at work in heteronormative editing when, oddly, a dog occupies a place in a shot-reverse-shot dialogue. Cristina's speech illustrates, furthermore, that Bruno has functioned not only as a projective device for her wishes and frustrations, but for those of the filmmakers. They have taken the established boy-and-his-dog story and made of Lassie a growling monster who undermines platitudes about the safety and security of the family instead of facilitating comforting morality tales. In place of the homing canine super nanny Eloy de la Iglesia gives us a gender-queer displacement device

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<sup>24</sup> The emphasis here on the deforming effect of circus mirrors on the perception of embodied identity inevitably brings to mind the peculiarly Spanish aesthetic of *esperpento* and the work of Ramón del Valle-Inclán. *La criatura's* animalization of its human characters could also be seen as a form of representation that is consistent with *esperpento*.

<sup>25</sup> Jonathan Burt, *Animals in Film*, 11.

that tears at the underpinnings of the home.<sup>26</sup> It is because the underlying critique of the nuclear family is so withering, perhaps, that critics latch on to the suggestion of interspecies sexuality and bypass the dissection of domestic politics.

Uppity pets in Spain continue to trouble conservative pundits. Writing in 2010, Alberto Gómez identifies the failure of people in Spain to know and to police within their homes the correct place for their animal companions as indicative of the way in which post-Franco politics has become a space where value is only ever assigned to that which negates the past. He sees as symptomatic of this defective state of affairs television programs about trainers' help for owners who need to reassert control over presumptuous pets:

[S]i históricamente se valoraban la autoridad, el valor, la lealtad y la educación, se concluye por un silogismo implacable que todas esas cosas son malas o despreciables. No es extraño que los terroristas vayan ganando la guerra y hasta las mascotas manden a sus anchas por las casas.<sup>27</sup>

### 3. Sociability: *Solas* and The Mystery of the Disappearing Andalusian Dog

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<sup>26</sup> On Lassie as super nanny, see Peter Haining, *Lassie: The Extraordinary Story of Eric Knight and "The World's Favourite Dog"* (Peter Owen: London, 2006), and Henry Jenkins, "'Her Suffering Aristocratic Majesty": The Sentimental Value of Lassie', in *Kids' Media Culture*, ed. Marsha Kinder (Duke UP: Durham, 1999), 69-101.

<sup>27</sup> Alberto Gómez, 'La rebelión de las mascotas', *Libertad Digital*, 11 August 2010 <<http://www.libertaddigital.com/opinion/alberto-gomez-corona/la-rebelion-de-las-mascotas-55841/>> (accessed 14 February 2014).



Some 22 years after the release of *La criatura*, Andalusian director Benito Zambrano achieved international and domestic acclaim with his first feature, *Solas*. But whereas critics in the 1970s, like their counterparts today, were fixated on the interspecies relationship in *La criatura*, the significance of the animal character in *Solas* has gone largely unnoticed, and this despite the dog being called Aquiles, after the central character in Homer's *Iliad*. If *Un chien andalou* is the film with a dog in the title and no dog in the picture, *Solas* must be the film with a dog in the picture but no dog in the criticism. Donapetry, Leonard, Faulkner, Rutherford, Olid González, Smith, and Wheeler all concentrate to some degree or another on the relationships described by Zambrano's film, and yet missing from their analyses is any attention to the human characters' relationship with the film's animal protagonist, or to the centrality of the human-animal binary that articulates some of the film's sharpest political critique.<sup>28</sup> Previous criticism also tends to overlook the degree to which the dialogue and the *mise en scène* in *Solas* are informed by reference to animals and to animal sensibilities. This leads to characterisations of the film that are perfectly cogent, yet incomplete. For

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<sup>28</sup> María Donapetry, 'Cinematernidad', in *La mujer en la España actual: ¿Evolución o involución?*, eds. Jacqueline Cruz and Barbara Zecchi (Barcelona: Icaria, 2004), 373-96. Sally Faulkner, 'Solas (Zambrano, 1999): Andalusian, European, Spanish?', in *Spanishness in the Spanish Novel and Cinema of the 20th-21st Century*, ed. Cristina Sánchez-Conejero (Newcastle: CSP, 2007), 237-46. Evangelina Olid González, 'Solas: El conocimiento de la realidad a través del cuidado', in *España en su cine. Aprendiendo sociología con películas españolas*, ed. Álvaro Rodríguez Díaz (Madrid: Dykinson, 2015), 195-209. Candyce Leonard, 'Solas and the Unbearable Condition of Loneliness in the Late 1990s', in *Spanish Popular Culture*, eds. Antonio Lázaro Reboll and Andrew Willis (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2004), 222-36. Jennifer Rutherford, 'Living with the Spectre of The Traditional Family: Mothers and Daughters in Benito Zambrano's *Solas* (1999)', in 'Sites of Struggle: Representations of Family in Spanish Film 1996-2004', (doctoral thesis, University of St. Andrews, 2010), 106-44. Paul Julian Smith, 'Solas', *Sight and Sound*, 11: 7 (2001), 56. Duncan Wheeler, 'The Representation of Domestic Violence in Spanish Cinema', *Modern Language Review*, 107: 2 (2012), 438-500 (pp. 458-63).

example, Candyce Leonard maintains that the film's female characters look to reproduction rather than politics for transcendence and that there are no loving relationships between a man and a woman shown in the film except those implied obliquely involving secondary characters.<sup>29</sup> Lending more attention to the non-human character in the film modifies the reading of it sufficiently for the degree of the protagonists' politicisation, and the extent to which loving relationships are absent from the narrative, to be re-evaluated.

In this section of my article I aim to shift the focus so as to bring these neglected aspects of *Solas* into view. To do this, and as intimated in the introductory section, I align my reading of *Solas* with Veevers's identification of a sociability function in her three part schematic of the social meaning of pets, and I also follow Deborah Tannen's work in structuring and transcribing interpersonal discourse where pets act as an interactional resource or triangulation point.<sup>30</sup>

At first glance *Solas* may seem like an unlikely place to look for sociability functions, either of pets or of humans. But since the film is precisely about the breakdown and restoration of social nexuses, the narrative is in fact usefully informed by Veevers's work. While the film's title encodes solitude as female, male characters in the film also express anxieties about loneliness and, I would argue, 'solas' could also refer to the isolation from each other of human and animals species. Veevers

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<sup>29</sup> Candyce Leonard, 'Solas and the Unbearable Condition of Loneliness in the Late 1990s', 230-32.

<sup>30</sup> Deborah Tannen, 'Talking the Dog: Framing Pets as Interactional Resources in Family Discourse', *Research on Language and Social Interaction*, 37: 4 (2004), 399-420.

demonstrated in her work that a strong motivation for having a pet can be the creation of openings for human contact around a shared interest in animal companions.<sup>31</sup> In *Solas* we see a group of estranged characters whose interaction with a pet dog allows them to come closer together. Extending Veevers's interpretation I would add that in reference to *Solas* we can also see in Zambrano a director and screenwriter who uses an animal protagonist not only as a conduit for sociability within the narrative but also to socialise questions about poverty, the family, and gender inequality. The narrative outcome in *Solas* cements the sociability function of a pet—through a relationship mediated by a dog a woman becomes a mother—in a way that is not at all suggestive of bestiality as was the case in *La criatura* but which has nevertheless concerned critics in an ending that can be read as regressive in terms of gender and sexual politics.

Whereas *La criatura* was set among the moneyed middle classes who prospered under dictatorship, *Solas*, set in a de-gentrified part of Seville, gravitates more towards the have-nots. There are four protagonists, three human, and one canine. María, at the centre of the film, is a woman in her thirties who would like to have more education but whose old-fashioned and abusive father was against it. She has left Carmona, a rural town peripheral to Seville, to seek a living in the bigger city where she scrapes by on income from work as a cleaner. She has a perfunctory relationship, mostly limited to mutual sexual gratification, with a truck driver. Her mother, Rosa,

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<sup>31</sup> Jean E. Veevers, 'The Social meaning of Pets: Alternative Roles for Animal Companions', 15-19.

temporarily moves in with María when she is told by hospital staff that she cannot camp out in the hospital room where her husband has been admitted for surgery. Named only as Madre in the film's closing credits, Rosa is shown to embody maternal qualities.

Down the stairs from María's flat lives Emilio, referred to in the film as Don Emilio, the honorific marking him out as belonging to a different class and also emphasising that he belongs to an older generation. A widower, Emilio also lost his only son at a young age. Faulkner stresses the distinctiveness of his accent and of his geographical origins in the north of Spain.<sup>32</sup> His discourse, however, is also strongly marked by rhetorical structures such as anadiplosis and parallelism and I would argue that this is a more significant feature in the film's social critique than Emilio's accent. María Donapetry notes that the older man's modalities are quite distinct from those of the other male characters who figure in the film, although she does not connect this with Emilio's attitude towards animals, and she suggests that he and Rosa meet purely by happenstance (a conclusion I disagree with, for reasons I outline in this section).<sup>33</sup> Emilio's command of language contrasts with Rosa's illiteracy, although, as I will also go on to detail, her access to folkloric facets of the Spanish language illustrates that knowledge is not the exclusive preserve of the better off. The fourth protagonist is the canine Aquiles. An Alsatian owned by Emilio, he can let himself out of the old man's

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<sup>32</sup> Sally Faulkner, '*Solas* (Zambrano, 1999): Andalousian, European, Spanish?', 238-39.

<sup>33</sup> María Donapetry, '*Cinematernidad*', 390.

flat and is shown, through editing that gives dialogic value to his vocalisations, to take a keen interest in the comings and goings of his human neighbours.

Indeed, Aquiles seems not only to notice but to somatise some of the developments in the building. At the beginning of the film, María uses a home pregnancy test and discovers, to her great chagrin, that she is pregnant. In the next scene, it is the dog that has regurgitated, as if he anticipates the morning sickness María will later develop. Before Rosa arrives, there is no communication between the neighbours. With her presence, the set becomes redolent of Buero Vallejo's *Historia de una escalera*, or of Lauro Olmo's *La pechuga de la sardina*: as in these plays from the 1940s and 1960s, Zambrano uses the exchanges that take place over the thresholds between compartmentalised spaces in a microcosm of Spanish society to dramatize conflicts, inequalities, and affections.<sup>34</sup> Many of the scenes are shot on the stairs, a device that allows for dialogue between the compartments whilst also emphasising the distance between them. *Solas*, however, depicts María's habitat not only as confining but as scarcely fit for human habitation. It is damp because members of the rentier class—exemplary specimens in their entrepreneurial greed—have bricked up windows to divide the property into smaller and more profitable units.

María lives like an animal and, when her mother notices the damp smell and suggests trying to ventilate the flat, she says '¿Para qué? El olor se impregna las

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<sup>34</sup> Antonio Buero Vallejo, *Historia de una escalera* (Madrid: Austral, 2000). Lauro Olmo, *La pechuga de la sardina* (Madrid: Centro dramático nacional, 2015). The first performance of *Historia de una escalera* was in 1949. *La pechuga de la sardina* was first performed in 1963.

paredes. Hasta yo apesto a humedad.’<sup>35</sup> This is one of the many organoleptic references included in the film’s dialogue: throughout there is an emphasis on the senses, especially on smell, a form of perception associated more, perhaps, with animal cognition than with human reasoning. María’s father complains when Rosa visits him that she smells of a man; María tells her mother, when they have grown closer towards the end of the film, that she likes the way she smells. Emilio expresses shame regarding the odour of elderliness in his flat. Not only are the human characters’ sense experiences reordered to prioritise olfaction, but their nourishment also seems to put them on the same level as animals.

At one of her night-time cleaning jobs in Seville's Architecture College, security staff instruct María and her co-workers as they tidy up after a catered function that they can consume any of the leftovers on the table but nothing in the kitchen. For these women, then, eating habits have come to resemble those usually associated with pets or with yard animals. The congruence between animals and people is impressed upon us in one of the first scenes of the film: a doctor tells Rosa that her husband has the constitution of an ox.

Furthermore, it is Aquiles, the canine protagonist, who facilitates dialogue across the thresholds that spill out onto the staircase. His indigestion gives Emilio a pretext for being on the stairs when Rosa returns from a hospital visit and Emilio’s rebuke to

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<sup>35</sup> The dialogue quoted from *Solas* here (and elsewhere in this section) is transcribed by the author from the film soundtrack.

the dog, said as much for Rosa's benefit as for the dog's—'La próxima vez límpialo tú. Los vecinos dirán que somos dos viejos guarros'—allows Rosa to be framed as an interlocutor. The negotiation of greater closeness is transacted around a conversation in which Aquiles is triangulated as a discursive correspondent and confidante. Rosa seems wary of the dog and Emilio tells her: 'Es un viejo amigo, el único que me queda en el barrio.' Winning the dog's trust gives Rosa and Emilio an excuse to make physical contact. Emilio tells Rosa to touch him on the shoulder to demonstrate Aquiles's bodyguard response and then he touches her to demonstrate that henceforth Aquiles will recognise her as a friend.

As in some of the examples Deborah Tannen outlines in her study of discursive triangulation around pets, this human transaction is based on a performance of canine comprehension and the agreement that the dog's participation in the three way conversation can be inferred. 'The very act of speaking for an animal constitutes a claim and a demonstration of an intimate relationship with that animal', Tannen writes, and in this scene Rosa's willingness to act out an introduction to Aquiles breaks the ice between the neighbours.<sup>36</sup> Rosa becomes affectionate towards Aquiles and *Solas* shows us a burgeoning affection between the older man and the older woman too. Unlike scholars, some viewers have seen here 'A tender, but "proper" relationship [that] is a piece of rare and subtle film-making.'<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Deborah Tannen, 'Talking the Dog: Framing Pets as Interactional Resources in Family Discourse', 411.

<sup>37</sup> See Peegee-3, 'A Rare, Deeply Moving Film', *Internet Movie Database*

Part of that subtlety, I would argue, has to do with the triangular communication between Rosa, Emilio, and Aquiles. In the scene I have described above, Zambrano shows Rosa and Emilio both looking down at Aquiles (out of shot) and their gestures and facial expressions in response to interactions with the dog also communicate to the viewer the nature of the relationship developing between the two older people. The editing and use of camera angles is different here than it was in *La criatura*. There is not an eye line match between the dog and the human characters. The montage does not use the dog's point of view to parody shot-reverse-shot editing. Instead, the invitation for the viewer to fill in for the responses of the implied dog when Aquiles is only seen in the reactions of his human interactors, engages the audience with the process of trust building so that the often unspoken relationship between Rosa and Emilio becomes credible.

The trust between all three characters is put to the test when Emilio suffers digestive problems. Going up the stairs, Rosa is alerted when Aquiles lets himself out the door of Emilio's flat and barks at her. She follows the dog back inside to find the old man in a sorry state. Despite his protestations, she bathes and cleans him and tells him not to make such a fuss about smelling of excrement:

Más apestan los cochinos y sin embargo los limpio y los doy de comer. Arreglo las pocilgas, los ayudo a parir y duermo con ellos si hace falta.

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<<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0190798/reviews?start=0>> (accessed 25 December 2014).



Rosa then uses a children's rhyme to put Emilio at his ease:

El gato se lava con la lengua. La vaca lava al ternero. El niño que no se lava se le pone cara de rana. Ahora tiene usted que decir '¡Croac, croac!' ¡Vamos! ¡Diga 'Croac'!

As I intimated previously, Emilio is here shown not to have a monopoly on rhetoric and we see Rosa diffusing a tense situation with her knowledge of traditional refrains. There is also a neat parallel in that by obliging Emilio to imitate a frog she replicates the trust building gesture earlier in the film where Emilio had asked her to speak to Aquiles. The discourse between Rosa and Emilio, then, is one filled with animals, and with reference to animals. This takes on added significance when seen in light of the fact that it is this relationship that will allow María to find non-abusive companionship too. Through her neighbourly acquaintance with Emilio and Aquiles, Rosa begins rebuilding social networks.

Mariá's father recovers from hospital treatment and Rosa prepares to return to the countryside with him. As María accompanies her out of the apartment building, Rosa stops at Emilio's flat to say goodbye, a detour that surprises a daughter who has had no previous interaction with her neighbour. While it is clear that Rosa creates this opportunity for an introduction between Emilio and María deliberately, another motivation is also perceptible. The relationship between Emilio and Rosa continues to be triangulated through Aquiles as Rosa's earlier fear of the dog is here replaced by her embrace of him, a gesture that communicates the tenderness between the two older characters.

After clearing up around Emilio's digestive mishap, Rosa had instructed Aquiles: 'Si hay algún problema ladra fuerte, ¿eh? Eres un buen perro.' Now her imperative is repositioned as a valedictory remark, this time addressed to a human companion. In response to Emilio's expression of regret that she is leaving, Rosa says 'Sus palabras me llegan muy dentro'. Emilio's words, in answer to Rosa's invitation to expressivity—conveyed through an instruction to Aquiles—find acknowledgement in this reference to interiority that also speaks of intimacy and affection. Throughout the scene Aquiles's mewling and whimpering acts as a chorus registering the emotional current of a conversation, the tone of which, by itself, would betray little feeling.

A surfeit of food—the sea bass Rosa had prepared and had then not been able to eat before her husband's recovery—gives Emilio a pretext to call at María's flat. And just as Aquiles had mediated between Rosa and Emilio, he does so again between the older man and María, although in this instance the mediation is of a rhetorical nature inasmuch as it is an argument over the worth of dogs and other animals that breaks the ice between the two characters. María fills in her neighbour on the potential dilemma she faces as a single mother. Her furious rebuke of Emilio when he then seems to minimise the responsibilities of having a child sparks the film's most dramatic and politically charged exchange:

*María*                      Un niño no es cualquier cosa. No es un perro.

*Emilio*                      Aquiles no es cualquier cosa.

*María* Pero un perro no es un niño. No soporto la gente que trata a los perros como si fueran personas, Hay mucha gente muriéndose de hambre y perros que comen mejor que uno.

*Emilio* También hay perros con son más nobles y más amigables que las personas.

Nowhere else in the film does either character express feelings so vehemently as in this exchange where humans and dogs become the measure of each other's worth. This most fraught scene revolves around the question of how the pecking order demarcating superiority or inferiority is apportioned to living creatures known by species. For *María*, an inverted hierarchy of species is one where animal existence is the measure both of misallocated wealth and of poverty and of material misery. For her animals are, or should be, the signifiers of Hiedeggerian *weltarm* that when transposed to humans marks people out as excluded, marginal, and disregarded, whereas for *Emilio*, animals are associated instead with nobility and positive characteristics that individual humans may or may not share.

As I mentioned previously, I see in this discursive dogfight the transposition of a politicised critique of class-based inequalities. *María's* protest is against the trap of poverty and lower class status that seem to be without issue (in all senses of that word). Her father's paternalistic delimitation of her education has been replaced by an equally oppressive and alienating neo-liberalism with its utterly false and deceitful illusions of choice and of self-realisation. I would argue that emptying this moving picture of its dog is also to empty it of its class consciousness, and class protest.

In Paul Julian Smith's review of the film, for example, *Aquiles* is not mentioned once. While this review certainly does recognise, in spite of itself, the non-verbal communication—or 'mute resistance'—that runs through the film and which is embodied in *Aquiles* and in the protagonists' triangulation of this fourth interlocutor, the possibility that class order might be invoked by species order is disregarded.<sup>38</sup> Instead, the review reads *Solas* as a neo-liberal morality tale about a woman who has squandered her putative freedom to be as rich or as poor as she wants in order to make personal mistakes, ignoring the film's political message that someone can no more simply decide not to be poor than a dog can on a whim decide to become a cat. The neo-liberal perspective that grounds Smith's reading of *Solas* seeps to the surface where the critic remarks that accessible hospitals and public transport are read as entitlements by the film's characters: the poor should be demonstrative of their gratitude for public services, as domesticated animals are for their chow. Not recognising the other species in the film permits denial of the species-like ruts of class and wealth inequalities, divisions that, as *Solas* shows, are no less evident in Aznar's Spain than they were in Franco's. In Smith's view, the ordinariness of the lumpen is read as surfeit, as if the masses were being laid on—offensively for refined sensibilities—with a trowel: '[B]uses seem packed with punks and every street corner has its retinue of junkies and homeless.'<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Paul Julian Smith, '*Solas*', 56.

<sup>39</sup> Paul Julian Smith, '*Solas*', 56.

An earlier scene, where both María and Rosa recriminated the father figure for his brutality was low-key, despite the gravity of the issues at stake. By contrast, in the scene described above between María and Emilio, with its querying of the speciesist hierarchical order, there is the precipitation of a new alliance between neighbours and of an entirely different kind of male-female relationship where platonic qualities are paramount. María tells Emilio she wants to hear him reassure her that her life will change. And it does, albeit through a denouement that stretches credibility. Emilio and María move to the country, the old man assuming the role of adoptive grandfather for a child who will not after all be aborted. Arguably, it is the rhetorical reordering of the animal-human binary that permits such an unusual outcome: if a speciesist order can be challenged, so too can the order of relationships between people, and between men and women, no longer subordinates or superiors, but equals.

If we make the dogs in *Solas* and *La criatura* speak to each other across time as dogs in colloquy, we do indeed see that while outwardly they look the same, there is a skeuomorphic transformation. Aquiles goes from being an elderly man's companion to a family dog. Unlike Cristina in *La criatura*, María in *Solas* is able to live with her dog and a human companion who does not beat her, rape her, or expect her to salivate in gratitude over table scraps. On the other hand, there is a recognisable form of dog-enabled critique that is carried through from one film to the other: Eloy de la Iglesia's trenchant deconstruction of heteropatriarchy has, underneath the familiar skin, wrestled itself into another sort of family-critical dog. This one facilitates a critique of

the family values that have been repackaged as Thatcher-Reagan home-economics in a doctrine of absolutist self-sufficiency. *Solas* bridges the unspeakable solitude of species with its quietly signifying humans and an eloquent dog alongside a storehouse of rhetorical animal companions. Between *La criatura* and *Solas*, we move from a mistaken locus of bestiality (that should pertain to men, not dogs) to an extended remit for anthropomorphism: a better society depends on attributing the capacity for humanity to human beings, among other species.

#### 4. Surrogacy: À la recherche du temps *perruno* in *Recuerdos de perrito de mierda*

Published in 2014, *Recuerdos de perrito de mierda* is Marta Alonso Berná's first book. Drawn with a clear attention to detail that uses colour schemes and style to evoke and quote from other genres, this graphic novel is unusual in many ways. Despite, or perhaps because of the fact that other graphic artists, like Paco Roca, were disciplined for drawing the elderly, this narrative's human focus is on seniors.<sup>40</sup> Not only has the family-querying dog migrated to the Spanish graphic novel from film, but he has brought with him many cinematic features. Berná references *Mars Attacks!* in a surreal dream sequence featuring space dogs and alien canines and uses a grammar of shots recognisable from film as when, in the first pages, a wide-angle panorama of a Madrid neighbourhood progresses through a series of closer views to one particular dwelling

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<sup>40</sup> See Ryan Prout, 'Mapping Neuro-diverse Alterity in "Social and Sensitive" Comics from Spain', *International Journal of Comic Art*, 15: 1 (2013), 84-99.



first seen through a window and from an angle that would only be available with the use of a crane or a drone. If one ran *The Loved One*, *Mars Attacks!*, *I Love You Alice B. Toklas*, and Rafael Azcona and Pilar Bardem's biopic about María Zambrano through the dog transformator, together with a German Shepherd, perhaps something like *Recuerdos de perrito de mierda* would come out of the mixing machine in this new century.<sup>41</sup> The book's narrative style, then, as well as its appeals to popular film culture recall cinema, and with it, perhaps, the history of dogs and other animals in film.

Told in sequences that cut abruptly between analepsis and prolepsis, the plot's structure is cinematic, its zig-zags emphasising the continuities between then and now in a canine Spanish history spanning the period from the aftermath of the Civil War to the 2010s. Berná told RTVE that she conceived the text as having four temporal strands—the 1940s, the 1960s, the near present, and the present—alongside a short departure into a surreal moment outside time.<sup>42</sup> The use of colour, from the fluorescent blues of the sci-fi surreal episode, to the sepia tones that correspond to the 1940s, helps to orient the reader around the narrative's time scale. In Berná's text the reference to the dog's protagonism is hardly oblique, figuring as it does in the title, and yet, at the same time, this centrality is undercut by the canine being labelled from the outset as a 'perrito de mierda'—small, fecal, and worthless. As a memorial catalyst, it is

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<sup>41</sup> Evelyn Waugh, *The Loved One* (London: Folio Society, 1993). Tim Burton, *Mars Attacks!*, (Los Angeles: Warner Brothers, 1996). Hy Averback, *I Love You Alice B. Toklas* (Los Angeles: Warner Brothers, 1968). Pilar Bardem, *María querida* (Madrid: Cameo 2004).

<sup>42</sup> Victor Gómez, 'Recuerdos de perrito de mierda' [interview with Marta Alonso Berná], *Viñetas y bocadillos*, RNE Radio 5, 15 March 2014.

significant that, skeuomorphically, the dog has been reduced to a pocket sized entity, as if the legacy of previous generations were equally remnantal and fragile.

As in *Solas*, the dog protagonist in *Recuerdos de perrito de mierda* occupies a space also marked by loss. Aquiles is not a replacement for the son lost to Emilio in *Solas*, but his presence and his protagonism underscore the fact that if Emilio's options as a grandfather are adoptive ones, it is because the son he would have brought up died as a child. In the 2010s there is even more concern in Spain with vanishing memories of an inadequately documented post-war period than there was in 1999, when *Solas* was released, and, in some senses, perhaps *Recuerdos de perrito de mierda* tries to put that era into focus from an unexpected angle — from the viewpoint of a shitty little dog.

Berná's dog, Sartre II, acts as a surrogate for the human companionship a woman now in her later years might have enjoyed with a husband who, like Emilio's son, belongs to a silenced generation. Berná leaves us in no doubt that the perspective belongs to the dog. The reader initially sees the human protagonist, María Fuencisla Escribano, from the angle that would belong to the eyes of a very small animal or child. We do not see her face until eighty pages into the text as if Berná were forcing us through perspective to identify with the degree to which the human character's sense of self has become entangled with that of her animal companion. As in *La criatura*, the representation of an animal is connected with rupture — from the past, and



from intimate relationships—though here the author creates the sense of dislocation by denying the reader sight of the human protagonist’s face until well into the text.<sup>43</sup>

For María Fuencisla the Chihuahua Sartre II has replaced a missing human and, in that sense, of the three texts I discuss in this article, this is the one that most closely corresponds to Veveers’s identification of a surrogate function in the social meaning of pets, although, as the story unfolds, it also becomes clear that an earlier dog, Sartre I, was a triangulated pet in the meeting of María Fuencisla with Romualdo, her late soul-mate. As a flashback sequence illustrates, his parents encouraged him to have a dog and to walk a Chihuahua round the streets of Madrid—an uncommon and faintly ridiculous sight in 1960s Spain—in order to humanise him: ‘[S]u perrito diminuto llamaba la atención: en Madrid no se veían esas razas extranjeras.’<sup>44</sup> Photographing the dog and taking an interest in it gave María Fuencisla a pretext to get to know Romualdo. They become engaged and shortly afterwards Romualdo dies in a freak accident when María Fuencisla falls on him. From that point on, she abandons photography and, decades later, her friends know that the circumstances of Romualdo’s death represent ‘[un] suceso innombrable’.<sup>45</sup>

The flashbacks tell us enough about Romualdo to know that he was involved in the intellectual counter-culture under Franco and that walking the dog was sometimes

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<sup>43</sup> In her conversation with Victor Gómez on Radio 5, Alonso Berná said that the idea for concealing María Fuencisla’s physiognomy came from David Feiss’s cartoon *Cow and Chicken*.

<sup>44</sup> Marta Alonso Berná, *Recuerdos de perrito de mierda*, 45.

<sup>45</sup> Marta Alonso Berná, *Recuerdos de perrito de mierda*, 19.

a cover for time spent printing leaflets and organising action intended to subvert the regime. In María Fuencisla's universe, if not in Berná's narrative, this social history has been filed away in keeping with an extreme mechanism for coping with long term grief. Berná posits the relationship between visual culture and commemoration in another flashback where María Fuencisla's father tells her, as photographs of the dead Romualdo are covered over, that there is 'algo del "imago" y de la representación que no hemos entendido'.<sup>46</sup> The pet as a substitute for a long-dead partner, then, is also a signifier for the social traumas of the post-war period that have not been properly worked out.

The comic book's studied preoccupation with a tiny dog character, like María Fuencisla's, describes other pictures in absentia, intangible and inapprehensible in the grief they would narrate. Albeit brief, María Fuencisla's time with Romualdo changed her life: she studied philosophy and became a professor, a far cry from her childhood in the country as the daughter of a butcher. In her old age, she is working on a manuscript entitled *Hacia una percepción nonageneria de la realidad* in an effort to uncover geriatric psychology. The indomitable writer contemplates her dog and thinks 'Tengo mi cátedra en filosofía [...] y sin embargo tú eres un chihuahua'.<sup>47</sup> A reminder of the quotidian for the philosopher, the dog is in the narrative a mediator between species of culture, the hub for spokes that reach out to references to Tim

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<sup>46</sup> Marta Alonso Berná, *Recuerdos de perrito de mierda*, 105.

<sup>47</sup> Marta Alonso Berná, *Recuerdos de perrito de mierda*, 53.

Burton and Jean-Luc Godard, to Jean-Paul Sartre and El Puma.<sup>48</sup> In its transformation as Sartre II, the dog skeuomorph in Berná's text has shifted its shape to register a post-modern social culture that is also confronting the post-human.

Berná does not claim any documentary significance for *Recuerdos de perrito de mierda* but she does identify the gestation of the idea for the story in a real event—her fascination with seeing a comely older woman weighed down with shopping and accompanied by a diminutive dog. She wondered what would happen to one or both in an accident, as if the micro-dog embodied the frailties and vulnerabilities of a woman whose avoirdupois concealed them.<sup>49</sup> Fleshing out the consequences of this what if scenario, in the graphic novel Sartre II dies when María Fuencisla trips and she and her accoutrements land on the small dog. The animal named for the philosopher who theorised the hazardousness of love has fallen victim to his human companion's affection in a tragi-comic repetition of the circumstances that led to Romualdo's death. The death of Sartre II is the narrative nexus that orients present time in the comic and it also serves as the catalyst for the commemoration process. María Fuencisla's reconciliation with her childhood, with the loss of her significant human other, and with the loss of a significant animal other all stem from this moment so that the allocation of memory both to and of the 'perrito de mierda' in the title is apposite.

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<sup>48</sup> *Mars Attacks!* is referenced on p. 62. A copy of Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* is illustrated on p. 110. Godard [sic] is referenced on p. 89, where María Fuencisla readies a TV dinner for herself and Sartre II as an instalment in a cycle of the filmmaker's works is about to be shown. The lyrics from 'Dueño de nada', a song released in 1982 by Venezuelan artist José Luis Rodríguez (El Puma) circulate through pp.120-21.

<sup>49</sup> Victor Gómez, 'Recuerdos de perrito de mierda', 15 March 2015.

In the order of the narrative, if not in the chronological order of María Fuencisla's life, the obsequies attendant on the death of Sartre II prefigure similar scenes and rites around the death of Romualdo. The death notices, the covering over of photographs, the grieving process all shadow the same rituals María Fuencisla had witnessed around the loss of her significant human other. She is only able to remember the human loss and to admit it within her biography after the death of an animal in which she has invested much of her love and companionship.

The skeuomorphic nature of the dog drawn and narrated by Berná is closely allied, I would argue, with the temporal flux that characterises the novel's chronology. Ironically, it is the death of an animal that allows for time in the course of María Fuencisla's life to begin to be experienced in the Bergsonian sense of duration—a viscous dimension of discrete yet inseparable moments that the human protagonist has sought to keep at bay either by closing down memory or elevating it to a fetish. The animal—fleeting in its size, in its lifespan, in its movements, and even in its spectral death—glues the discrete parts of María Fuencisla's life together so that they begin to form a whole rather than compartmentalised segments rigorously held apart from each other.<sup>50</sup> The death of the *perrito de mierda* (so named by youths in the park who first taunt María Fuencisla with this epithet, and then come to her aid when she

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<sup>50</sup> David Lulka develops queries about time provoked by photographic animal portraiture in 'Animals, Daguerreotypes and Movement: The Despair of Fading and the Emergence of Ontology', *Journal of Material Culture*, 19: 1 (2014), 35-58.

falls) creates an aperture that allows the older woman's life to be informed by her past, and for the Spain of the 2010s to be informed by the previous seven decades.

In her rendering of Sartre II, Berná gives him boggling eyes, reminiscent of the strigine stare in Bill Viola's documentary film *I Do Not Know What It Is I Am Like*.<sup>51</sup> The coupling of this graphic feature with the narrative device that centres recall on the dog's ontology brings to mind Jonathan Burt's observation that animal focussed narratives often fetishize the eye 'effectively turn[ing] the animal into a camera, a non-human recording mechanism'.<sup>52</sup> Alongside the putative reduction of the animal to a lens, however, Berná's narrative also incorporates reflection on the visualisation, visibility, and display of animals.

As a child, María Fuencisla's proximity to animals was what made her unable to accept her parents' work; as a young adult, the visibility of her future lover's animal companion was what brought them together. In later life, she blames herself for allowing Sartre II to become 'pastor de la industria del espectáculo' when she agrees for him to feature in a commercial for vitamins for dogs.<sup>53</sup> And Sartre II's antics at the zoo where he lands in the Howler monkey enclosure draws attention to the invisible membrane that separates humans from other species in such displays. The commotion created by the Chihuahua upsets the zoo's economy of seeing in which, as John Berger

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<sup>51</sup> Bill Viola, *I Do Not Know What It Is I Am Like* (Quantum Leap, 1986).

<sup>52</sup> Jonathan Burt, *Animals in Film*, 54.

<sup>53</sup> Marta Alonso Berná, *Recuerdos de perrito de mierda*, 84.

put it, 'all animals appear like fish seen through the plate glass of an aquarium'.<sup>54</sup> Berger goes on to say that 'Nowhere in a zoo can a stranger encounter the look of an animal', a remark that is queried at this point in the novel where, since María Fuencisla's features are still occluded, it is the human's look for which we search in vain, rather than the animal's.<sup>55</sup>

The visit to the zoo is itself another memory triggered by animals as spectacle. The misadventure with the Howler monkeys is brought into view by a wildlife documentary dedicated to the same species that Sartre II landed among in the zoo. If Berná uses animals as metaphorical viewfinders, this must be set alongside evidence in the narrative of a considered, and humorously critical view of an unethical 'industria del espectáculo', the faultiness of which can be grasped in its mistreatment of animals. The ambiguity around the question of animals and seeing can also be felt in the character of María Fuencisla herself. On the one hand, she represents urbane postmodernism as an independent woman who has overcome both her own past, and Spain's, to succeed as a trailblazing philosopher; on the other, her attachment to animals, borne out of a rural and relatively impoverished heritage sets her alongside those John Berger identifies as having a healthier, pre-modern conception of animal-human relationships. She is not the naïve metropolitan woman ridiculed by Berger for wanting 'to kiss and cuddle a lion', but her dog seems also to be the residue of an

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<sup>54</sup> John Berger, 'Why Look at Animals?', in *John Berger: Selected Essays*, ed. Geoff Dyer (London: Vintage, 2003), 259-73 (p. 267).

<sup>55</sup> John Berger, 'Why Look at Animals?', 273.

incompletely absorbed dislocation from the countryside.<sup>56</sup> The discontinuities and paradoxes of a lifespan that has seen such dramatic shifts are condensed in this woman's apparently irrational attachment to a tiny dog, and to the exaggerated performance of grief that attends its death. If Waugh used the death of a pet to play out the absurdities of grotesque wealth inequalities in America, Berná turns this device to a reflection on the paradoxes of a Spanish society that has catapulted from a mainly agrarian economic base to a post-industrial one in record time.

Animals and people are reconciled in a somewhat grisly fashion at the end of the book. María Fuencisla's friends take her away from her cares on a Nile cruise, but when their boat capsizes, the passengers are eaten by crocodiles. Berná employs a two page spread to show the protagonist become an interspecies Mermaid-like creature reunited with Romualdo and a winged Sartre II. The author leaves the story open-ended, however, and here we can see another skeuomorphic effect of the narrative Spanish canine. Reproduction, and the later generations brought into being by it, are referenced not through the childless María Fuencisla but through her dog. In an unguarded moment, Sartre II had coupled with a poodle, the owner of which turns up looking for redress, with a Chihuahua-Poodle puppy in a basket. As in *La criatura* and *Solas*, the narrative resolves (incompletely) around the question of the offspring arising from relationships triangulated between humans and dogs. Indeed, Berná told

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<sup>56</sup> John Berger, 'Why Look at Animals?', 268.

interviewers that a sequel to *Recuerdos de perrito de mierda* would be one that took up the story of the dog's progeny.<sup>57</sup>

## 5. Conclusion: Walkie Talkies

John Homans argues that 'The politics of dogs are a reflection, distilled and distorted, of the politics of people' and indeed, dog transformation—as sketched in the sections above in my analyses of Spanish films and a novel spanning between them four decades—seems to bear this out.<sup>58</sup> Bruno, Aquiles, and Sartre II are equally recognisable as dogs and yet, as pre-digital skeuomorphs their canine form—and their relationships with their human companions—adapt to illustrate shifting concerns and political evolutions. All three canine protagonists are both central to, and yet at the margins of, a family structure subject to query. The semantic content of the familiar dog form mutates from a disruptor of sexist heteropatriarchy in *La criatura*, to a catalyst of class consciousness and signpost of broken social relations in *Solas*, to a fragile repository of memories of the interstices between personal and political memory in *Recuerdos de perrito de mierda*.

Berná's emphasis on the dog as a device that queries representation and memory in an environment that borders the post-human points towards the avant-garde role memories of dogs play in some of the post-analogue world's first confrontations with digital decay. For example, the erasure of dogs from the cloud memory is used to

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<sup>57</sup> Victor Gómez, 'Recuerdos de perrito de mierda', 15 March 2015.

<sup>58</sup> John Homans, *What's a Dog For?*, 17.



prefigure and imagine the loss of electronically stored human history in *Digital Amnesia*, a documentary made by Dutch television in 2014. The film looks at the indifference shown by the Dutch state to the fate of millions of discarded library books alongside the randomised and volunteer efforts to preserve digital cultures made by organisations, like archive.org, and enthusiasts working in a private capacity. One such individual, Jason Scott, describes his efforts to collect the millions of dog accounts threatened with extinction by the closure of Dogster's website. As Scott puts it in the film: 'We only learn and become better by knowing our history. Like it or not, these websites are our history. They are where our photographs, our memoirs, our expression of humanity are: they're all going online.'<sup>59</sup>

The human companions of the dogs I have focussed on here also register social and political transformations. Figured as a domestic terrorist, Cristina in *La criatura*, through her projection of a stymied identity on Bruno, expresses the frustration of a society emerging from a tyranny that made sexism and the infantilization of women normative. In *Solas*, a working class woman politicises her marginalisation, poverty, and oppression, driven in part by a dog that negotiates the social fissures occasioned by post-Cold War neo-liberal triumphalism. In *Recuerdos de perrito de mierda*, María Fuencisla Escribano embodies Spain's rapid development and industrialisation alongside a dog whose fragility anticipates the tenuousness of progressive gains in the

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<sup>59</sup> Bregtje Van der Haak, 'Digital geheugenverlies', VPRO *Tegenlicht*, 7 September 2014.

face of threats from a voracious post-analogue amalgam of pseudo-communities and pseudo-societies.

Just as human and dog skeletons are often found in proximity in archaeological digs, so it seems that in the archaeology of cyberspace, the remnants of canines and people will also be found together.<sup>60</sup> As dogs, alongside people, barrelled towards the mechanical eye in the first ever film, Louis Lumière's *La sortie de l'usine* (figure 3), so they are also with us as humans and dogs alike recede or disappear from view in the digital amnesiac abyss.<sup>61</sup> To Veevers's three functions of the socially meaningful pet—projection, sociability, and surrogacy—we could add a fourth, testimonial, function in the realm of cultural representation. Faithfully mute witnesses to periods of transition, skeuomorph dogs, and the ways in which their human companions interact with them, nevertheless register critical aspects of social, cultural, and political flux.

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LIST OF FIGURES (supplied as separate TIFFs, included on p. 50 below for illustration only)

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<sup>60</sup> Susan McHugh, *Dog*, 38.

<sup>61</sup> Louis Lumière, *La sortie de l'usine* (Lyon: Lumière, 1895).

**Figure 1** Frame capture from *Dog Factory* (1904)

**Figure 2** Monument (made by Juan Genovés) to the Five Union Lawyers Murdered in Madrid on 24 January 1977

**Figure 3** Frame capture from *Sortie de l'usine* (1895)



Figure 1. Frame capture from *Dog Factory* (1904)



Figure 2. Monument (made by Juan Genovés) to the Five Union Lawyers Murdered in Madrid on 24 January 1977



Figure 3. Frame capture from *Sortie de l'usine* (1895)