

THE BECOMING-ANIMAL OF ANA BELÉN, AN ACTRESS IN TRANSITION*

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FROM CHILD PRODIGY TO ICON OF SOCIAL CHANGE

"The bride of Spain" (Zabalbeascoa, 2024), "the smile of the Spanish Communist Party" (Montero, 1977: 4) and "the muse of the transition [to democracy]" (Villena, 2016: 102) are just a few of the epithets that the media have attributed to Ana Belén over the course of an acting and singing career spanning more than fifty years, reflecting the truth that "the social history of a nation can be written in relation to its film stars" (Durgnat, 1967: 137). Compared to other actresses considered representative of the period, such as Carmen Maura, Victoria Abril or Ángela Molina, Belén is an especially paradigmatic case for analysing the important role played by actresses in the construction of a new imaginary to respond to the social and cultural changes in Spain during the post-Franco period. When Isolina Ballesteros suggests that "in the cinema of the transition, the woman was

in transition" (Ballesteros, 2001: 15), she seems to be thinking of Ana Belén, who, after the failure of *Zampo y yo* [Zampo and I] (Luis Lucia, 1965), gave up on a career as a supposed child prodigy in the tradition of successful teenage singing stars such as Marisol and Rocío Dúrcal, liberating herself from the production strategies of the Franco regime's film industry and going on to become a symbol of the Spanish transition to democracy, that "space where oblivion was processed, a black hole that drew in and encrypted the refuse of our historical past" (Vilarós, 1998: 48).

One of the reasons why Ana Belén is recognised as the "muse of the transition" was her political commitment, evident in her active membership of the Spanish Communist Party (PCE) from 1974 to 1982, and, as her biographer Miguel Ángel Villena explains, her "republican family origins, working class background and anti-Franco cultural milieu" (Villena, 2016: 85). It was precisely this ideological tradition that shaped the culture

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of the transition, whose objectives, as Juan Carlos Ibáñez recalls, included turning the younger generations into spokespeople for social change, thereby eroding the old patriarchal family structure "with their new customs, free of taboos and traditions" (2016: 70). When the dictatorship ended, spaces of freedom began opening up in all fields, including cinema, laying the foundations for the construction of a new social imaginary that would emerge, just as the PCE leadership envisioned, out of "the decay of the regime" (Rueda Laffond, 2015: 856).

When the critic Diego Galán asked her about her status as an icon of the transition, Ana Belén answered: "I sort of became the lefty girl, rebellious, uninhibited, sort of what was in style at that time. [That] might have been connected to the image I was projecting, despite myself, because I never intended it; that image has always been there despite my own intentions" (Valero & Galán, 1993). This unawareness, this "despite myself", is incontrovertible evidence of a contradictory image: while in some interviews Belén admitted her shyness, her mortal terror of the dark or her insecure and pessimistic personality (Rodríguez Marchante, 1993), her public image, marked by her militant communism, conveyed determination, assertiveness and modernity. Some media outlets emphasised her sweeter and more maternal side, while others ("Belén may have been the girl that everyone has been quietly and desperately dreaming about these years" [Umbral, 1984: 13]) unabashedly highlighted her status as a sexual icon ("Where does the she-wolf end and the shep-

herdess begin?" [Gasca, 1992: 2]), a status that she herself has always flatly denied (Moriarty, 1987).

When Isolina Ballesteros wrote about the woman being *in transition*, she did so thinking precisely about the conflicts arising from a negotiation between two contradictory forces shaping women's identity, which also embody two different eras, "at the intersection between what her Francoist education dictates for her and the social role expected of her in the new democratic society, between the promise of emancipation and the difficulty of fulfilling that promise" (Ballesteros 2001: 15). In 1976, the journalist Rosa Montero declared that "today's Anita [Belén] is the advance guard for a country in evolution [...]. She is an actress for the Spain of tomorrow" (Montero, 1976: 17). She thus placed all her hope in Ana Belén, who had been born into a working-class family in the humble Lavapiés neighbourhood of Madrid and had received a traditional religious education, to resolve this negotiation while erasing all traces of women's repression.

AN EMANCIPATION IN THREE MOVEMENTS

The aim of this article is to examine the nature of this process of erasure and emancipation undertaken by Ana Belén, with attention to the *becomings* that characterise her career during Spain's transition to democracy, culminating in the becoming-animal in *The Creature* (La criatura, Eloy de la Iglesia, 1977), the key film in this analysis. Before identifying the different stages of this process, it is important to define the terms *transition* and *becoming*, as these two concepts are essential to understand the political dimension of Ana Belén's performances in this period.

In this article, Spain's transition to democracy is understood not so much as a historical, linear, evolutionary period, but as an intersection of discontinuities, along the lines of Teresa M. Vilarós's theoretical proposal in her pioneering study of this period in Spanish history, *El mono del des-*

encanto. For Vilarós, the transition is obviously marked by a historical process delimited chronologically by three key events: the death of Francisco Franco and the end of his dictatorship; the move towards democracy; and the integration of Spain into the European market. However, the narrative of the transition is perhaps only truly revealed when this timeline is examined from the margins to expose “unexpected digressions and surprising forms [...] strange cracks and narrative holes” (1998: 44). Vilarós refers to “these displaced points” in the writing of history as ruptures or, citing Michel de Certeau, “lapses in the syntax” that render possible what the French philosopher calls a return of the repressed, or “a return of what, at a given moment, has become unthinkable in order for a new identity to become thinkable” (1988: 4).

These “displaced points” or “lapses in the syntax” described by de Certeau are referred to here as *becomings*, in the sense that Deleuze and Guattari first used this term in *Anti-Oedipus* (2005) and *A Thousand Plateaus* (2004). This becoming does not entail a transformation, a *turning into*, because that would imply that it is based on a model that it imitates. Instead, “becomings are relations between multiplicities: movements, processes, passages in a smooth space” (Antonelli Marangi, 2024: 155). In this sense, the philosopher Rosi Braidotti identifies Deleuze and Guattari’s *becomings*, and especially the becoming-woman, as a very productive conceptual basis for defining her idea of the “nomadic subject”: “one needs to emphasize a vision of the thinking, knowing subject, as not-one, but rather as being split over and over again, in a rainbow of yet uncoded and ever so beautiful possibilities” (2011: 150). When a journalist describes Ana Belén as “never one, always several; as herself, who is capable of blurring, growing and being multiple” (Peralta, 1989: 90), she is vindicating her status as this “nomadic subject”, the product of the becoming-woman who is capable of undermining patriarchal structures through the practice of a

sort of molecular feminism, free from the solidity of a molar politics aimed at systematising her achievements in a stable and homogeneous identity. As Deleuze and Guattari suggest, “the becoming-woman is only the beginning” (2004: 253); beyond it is the becoming-animal and, a little further still, becoming-imperceptible. These becomings are expressed in Michel de Certeau’s “lapses in the syntax”, the discontinuities that Vilarós alludes to in her construction of the narrative of the Spanish transition to democracy.

This theoretical framework will be applied to the raw material of certain gestures and attitudes in Ana Belén’s performances during the period from 1974, when she starred in *El amor del capitán Brando* [The Love of Captain Brando] (Jaime de Armiñán), to 1977, with her role in *The Creature*, a film largely ignored by the scholarly literature. This study thus proposes to combine Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of becoming with the feminist theories of authors such as Teresa de Lauretis and Rosi Braidotti in order to explore Ana Belén’s *becomings* in three movements.

The analysis begins with a consideration of becomings that failed and floundered, as seeds of a women’s liberation that needed to turn its back on the Franco regime’s repressive apparatus to confront the nakedness of the female body in Jaime de Armiñán’s films and in *La oscura historia de la prima Montse* [The Dark Story of Cousin Montse] (Jordi Cadena, 1977). The study then turns to *The Request* (La petición, Pilar Miró, 1976), exploring how its protagonist’s amorality leads Belén to perform the role as a becoming-animal that threatens the patriarchal order. Finally, an analysis of *The Creature* identifies how this becoming-animal is consolidated as the possibility of a multiple, disruptive female subjectivity. The ultimate intention of this article is to demonstrate that Ana Belén is of special interest for her representation of sublimated expression, making her an icon of an eccentric female subjectivity “that occupies multiple positions” and is marked

"by discourses and practices that can be—and are—reciprocally contradictory" (Lauretis, 2000: 137). In short, Belén embodies a rupture, a revolutionary becoming whose micropolitical nature makes it no less significant as a symbolic gesture of feminist dissidence during Spain's transition to democracy.

GIVE ME A BODY! OR THE PRELUDE TO THE BECOMING-ANIMAL

In *El amor del capitán Brando*, Ana Belén plays Aurora, a schoolteacher in a small Castilian town who gets caught up in a bizarre love triangle: she is attracted to Fernando (Fernando Fernán-Gómez), a former local who has recently returned from exile, while Juan (Jaime Gamboa), one of her teenage students, is attracted to her. Belén's fleeting partial nude shot in the film, in which she bares her breasts in front of a mirror, occurs at a key moment in the story, in the bathroom of the hostel room in Segovia that she has ended up sharing with the boy after he gets lost on a school excursion. After watching a horror movie together and confessing to him at dinner that as a child she used to fantasise about Count Dracula sneaking into her bedroom ("that's sick" is Juan's reaction), Aurora slips him some money so that he can pay the bill. When they go up to the room, she insists that he must go to bed because it is late. Aurora's attitude is ambivalent: she speaks to Juan as if he were an adult, fuelling a flirtation that legitimises his patriarchal role in a fictitious couple, but ultimately she will adopt the role of the castrating mother.

After confessing to Juan that she lied twice for him that night ("and I don't like to lie," she tells him), Aurora unbuttons her blouse in front of the mirror (Image 1) and looks briefly at her breasts, before lowering her eyes and covering them up again quickly (Image 2). Jaime de Armiñán uses Belén's image as a liberated, modern independent woman and then challenges it in this brief gesture, lasting barely two seconds; a moment that

itself is a breakdown of a becoming, a "lapse in the syntax" that fails to create the new. "The gestus," explains Deleuze, "is the development of attitudes themselves, and, as such, carries out a direct theatricalisation of bodies, often very discreet, because it takes place independently of any role" (1987: 255). While the gesture disrupts the person within and without, provoking a digression that could result in a becoming, Aurora's becoming ends up being frustrated. A true becoming leaves no room for regret; it is never a return journey. When Juan comes out of the bathroom, Aurora screams and rebukes him aggressively; seconds later she calms down and admits to her feeling of guilt. In *El amor del capitán Brando*, the theatricalisation of the body described by Deleuze has a high symbolic value: when Belén bares and then covers her breasts, she contributes to what Vilarós describes as "the unthinkable repressed" that de-

Images 1 and 2





Image 3

finishes the end of the Franco regime, that “monkey on the back” that cultural critics identify as a dark space, “a cleft intersection” (1998: 44) that reveals the continued weight of the past.

This gesture would receive a response in *Emilia, parada y fonda* [Emilia, Food and Shelter] (Angelino Fons, 1976), in which Ana Belén plays one of her favourite characters (Rodríguez Marchante, 1993). Emilia is married to Joaquín (Paco Rabal), a widowed businessman with a son, with whom she shares a monotonous small-town life. She dreams of her first love, Jaime (Juan Diego), who emigrated to France to escape the precariousness of Franco's Spain. At one point in the film, after projecting her romantic fantasies with Jaime onto a film being shown on television, Emilia looks at herself in the mirror and sensually traces the contour of her breasts over her nightgown with her hand (Image 3). The fleeting glance in *El amor del capitán Brando* now becomes a fixed stare of desire. Ana Belén's becoming-animal in *The Request*, and especially in *The Creature*, needs the expression of an awareness of the body that lingers on its own pleasure, even if it is only potential pleasure. “The gestus,” writes

Deleuze, “is necessarily social and political” (1987: 258). This is how we need to understand the subjection in Emilia's gaze, which contrasts with an expression of repentance, the “return of the repressed” (Certeau, 1988: 4) identified by Certeau, prior to the creation of a new identity in *El amor del capitán Brando*. The dramatic arc of some of the characters played by Ana Belén in this period of her career reconstruct the narrative of female liberation that young women raised in the patriarchy of the Franco regime needed: the housewife who seeks to kindle the desire of her alienated husband in *Vida conyugal sana* [Healthy Married Life] (Roberto Bodegas, 1974); the Spanish Madame Bovary in *Emilia, parada y fonda*; and

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the bourgeois social worker who falls in love with a prisoner in *La oscura historia de la prima Montse*, a film that includes a full nude scene in front of a mirror that seems a sort of extended update to María José Cantudo's pioneering full frontal nude scene in *Blood and Passion* (La trastienda, Jorge Grau, 1975). Before getting into bed with her lover, a relationship that her wealthy family vehemently disapproves of, Montse (Ana Belén) undresses in front of the mirror, first with her back to the camera and then turning around (Image 4), pulling her hair back from her face in order to *see better*. Her gaze lingers on her body, in an image whose role is to “uncover what had yet to be uncovered [...] to make the invisible visible” (Ballesteros, 2001: 177). It is a gaze that seems to tear apart the heteropatriarchal scopic drive that articulated the essence of the erotic film movement of the period known as *cine del destape* (literally, “uncovered cinema”), as here the woman asserts ownership over her own body and recognises herself as liberated from the legacy of the Franco regime (the bourgeois family), in a gesture identical to Emilia's expression when she escapes to Perpignan in search of her first love and enjoys a one-night stand, or Teresa's expression in her sadomasochistic relationships in *The Request*.

Image 4



AN INFECTING MOUTH

Teresa in *The Request* is a unique character. She is the product of a tension rooted in the vision of the filmmaker, Pilar Miró, who was known for her rejection of orthodox feminism—“I would never make feminist cinema. I imagine I'd end up going crazy making films only with housewives” (quoted in García de León, 1994: 170) or “[Feminist movements] seem awful to me” (quoted in García de León, 1994: 171)—yet who, in her free adaptation of Émile Zola's short story, refused to morally condemn her heroine, whom she considered a product of a hypocritical society: “There is an exaltation of evil [...]. I told Ana Belén when we were filming it that the situations would be presented as evil in its purest state [...]. She understood very well. The character is ‘evil’ because that's how she is; not because she decides to be evil, but because that's her morality” (Pérez Millán, 1992: 74). As the only daughter of a wealthy conservative family in the late 19th century, Teresa's *evil* seems to be a disproportionate expression of rebellion against a society, represented by her parents, that adheres to the behavioural patterns of a Roman Catholic upbringing (she was educated in a religious convent in France), and that silences her when she

asks uncomfortable questions concerning the dubious moral conduct of her uncle, who has been expelled from the family.

It is easy to identify Teresa with Barbara Creed's notion of the “monstrous-feminine” (1993) in her discussion of the role of women in horror cinema, insofar as she threatens the patriarchal order by triggering man's primal fear of castration. It is therefore unsurprising that Deleuze and Guattari associate the becoming-animal with the mythical figures of the vampire and the

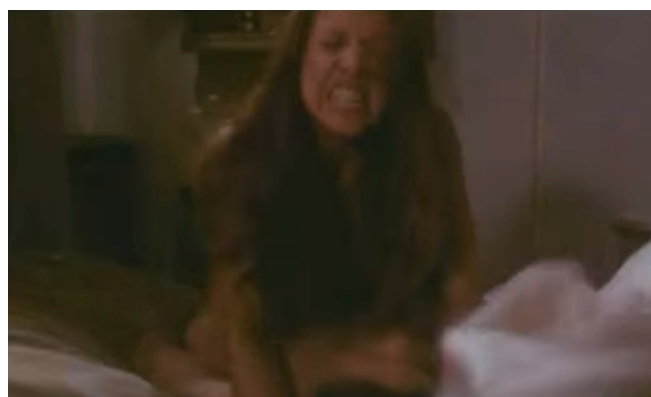
werewolf, because Teresa's monstrosity is associated with contagion rather than filiation. "Becoming produces nothing by filiation; all filiation is imaginary. Becoming is always of a different order than filiation. It concerns alliance" (1987: 238). Contagion stands in opposition to heredity and sexual reproduction. It is therefore allied with desire, either through pleasure or through pain. In the first sequence of *The Request*, when Teresa and the housekeeper's son Miguel are children, we see an example of this contagion: after riding on the boy's back, Teresa bites his ear, drawing blood. She concludes the scene with a sardonic smile on her infecting mouth.

That mouth is what mobilises the emotions of a becoming-animal that needs to involve "a pack, a band, a population, a peopling, in short, a multiplicity" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 239). It is Ana Belén's unique mouth, wide and generous, with those prominent teeth that she had no interest in having surgically straightened (Moriarty, 1987), which becomes the singular *dental vagina* that regulates the speed of her sadomasochistic relationship with Miguel (Emilio Gutiérrez-Caba). In *The Request*, Belén exploits this characteristic physical feature with particular expressiveness. The "carnivorous laughter of a violent and optimistic woman" (Umbral, 1984: 13) manifests itself again in the first sexual contact with Miguel in the greenhouse, after her orgasm.

It is the erotic sequences in *The Request*—which inevitably incited objections from the censors, who only lifted the ban on the film under pressure from the press and prominent members of the Spanish film industry—that reveal this becom-

ing-animal that would launch Ana Belén's career during the country's transition to democracy. As noted above, while the becoming is of the order of contagion, the becoming-animal is of the order of alliance. In the sexual encounters between Teresa and Miguel, in which they trade slaps, punches and insults, use the other's skin to put out a candle or seal their lips with hot scissors, the two constantly exchange roles as sadist and masochist, translating desire into a system of signs marked by

Images 5, 6 and 7



IT IS THE EROTIC SEQUENCES IN THE REQUEST THAT REVEAL THIS BECOMING-ANIMAL THAT WOULD LAUNCH ANA BELÉN'S CAREER DURING THE COUNTRY'S TRANSITION TO DEMOCRACY

a scattered combination of hysterics and emotions that constantly alters their relationship.

This becoming-animal culminates in the sequence where, in the midst of a particularly violent act of sexual intercourse, Miguel strikes his head against the bedhead and dies without Teresa realising it until a few seconds later. If “the categories of life are precisely the attitudes of the body, its postures” (Deleuze, 1987: 251), in this scene Ana Belén develops a whole catalogue of body gestures that project the human towards the animal, especially in the lengthy shot that captures her nakedness while she reaches orgasm, where she seems to push her body to its own figurative limit in a convulsive tension of movements and frictions, and the moment she discovers that Miguel has accidentally died, when she grabs his hair violently, bites her lip, rests her head on the corpse with her back hunched over, and looks wildly around her while screaming, growling and panting (Images 5-7). In short, Belén acts like an animal. However, this should be understood not in metaphorical or analogous terms, but as a potential contamination, because “you become-animal only if, by whatever means or elements, you emit corpuscles that enter the relation of movement and rest of the animal particles, or what amounts to the same thing, that enter the zone of proximity of the animal molecule” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 274-275). It is no coincidence that after her act of unwitting necrophilia, and after giving herself to the mute Julian (Frédéric de Pasquale) in exchange for helping her dispose of Miguel’s corpse, Teresa behaves like a hybrid creature, a witch emerging out of the body of a vestal virgin. On the fog-cloaked lake, before she mercilessly kills Julian with an oar, she resembles a vampire or a siren, some otherworldly creature serenaded by the songs of the night.

The Request ends with Teresa’s engagement party. As Deleuze and Guattari explain: “Families have always warded off the demonic Alliance gnawing at them, in order to regulate alliances among themselves as they see fit [...]. But this spells

the death of the sorcerer, and also the death of becoming” (1987: 248). It might be argued that Teresa’s becoming-animal is ultimately annihilated by the apparatus of the State, by the family institution, which has absorbed her creative (or destructive) potential. However, nothing seems to end at that party, because all that belongs to the order of reality is that Teresa has deceived her parents and outwitted the system, and that she continues orchestrating a fiction in which time is suspended (the shot freezes) and the *becoming* is set loose from the confining cage of the closing ceremony. Mauricio (Manuel Sierra), her fiancé, will be the next to be bitten. The becoming occurs because it is open to a possible future, to a multiplicity.

“BARK” IS A POLITICAL VERB

In a column titled “La impotencia del macho” published in the magazine *Vindicación feminista* in the wake of the belated Spanish release of films such as *Last Tango in Paris* (Ultimo tango a Parigi, Bernardo Bertolucci, 1972) and *Emmanuelle* (Just Jaeckin, 1974), Montserrat Roig dismissed the supposedly revolutionary nature of the arrival of eroticism in the society of the Spanish transition: “This revolution has not been made by our bodies, by all bodies. This ‘revolution’ has been made by marketeers”, who had begun selling “paper women, always alone, and in increasingly doglike positions” (1978: 19). Roig uses this adjective pejoratively to signal the relegation of women to the degrading status of a non-human animal associated with submission, obedience and passivity. In the iconography of erotic and pornographic cinema, Roig perceived a strategy to control women’s bodies by perpetuating the patriarchal gaze of a “feudal fascism” that revealed men’s fear of sex. If the woman loses her verticality, she becomes a quadrupedal animal in the absence of its model, merely imitating it. And all imitation, as Deleuze and Guattari point out, is contrary to the agitation represented by a becoming-animal.

Roig wrote her article just three months after the release of *The Creature*, a film in which Eloy de la Iglesia proposes a counter-discourse to this animal imitation, first, because the protagonist's character arc, which basically traces the sexual affective relationship established between her and the dog she adopts as a pet, is not aimed at arousing erotic desire in the (male) spectator, and secondly, because any sign of imitation appears under what Deleuze and Guattari call "involution", or the "form of evolution between heterogeneous terms" (1987: 238).

Of all the protest films directed by Eloy de la Iglesia in the years immediately after Franco's death, *The Creature* is the least known and the least studied. Made between *Hidden Pleasures* (*Los placeres ocultos*, 1976) and *The Priest* (*El sacerdote*, 1978), it can be understood as one of the most radical chapters in a creative project that charts a rough genealogy of all the themes that the dictatorship had silenced (homosexuality, terrorism, political corruption, drug addiction, sexual repression, labour exploitation and juvenile delinquency), which the Basque filmmaker explores using the discursive strategies of popular cinema. "The fear of didacticism, that is, the fear of ingenuousness, is a petty-bourgeois fear" (Delclós, 1977: 6) argues de la Iglesia. And it is precisely the fragile ecosystem of a petty-bourgeois couple plunged into a crisis by the taboo of zoophilia. The protagonist's husband, Marcos, is a television presenter who is advancing in his profession by selling his soul to a Francoist party ("Alianza Nacional de España", a hybrid of two real right-leaning parties of the period: Fraga Iribarne's Alianza Popular and Blas Piñar's Fuerza Nueva). His wife, Cristina, is a sexually frustrated housewife from a well-to-do family.



Image 8

The action in *The Creature* takes place between two pregnancies. In the film's first scene, Cristina's gynaecologist informs her that she is pregnant, after four years of unsuccessful attempts. She communicates this to her husband at a moment when the couple's relationship is deeply troubled, in a scene showing Ana Belén in front of a hand mirror, removing her make-up while wondering aloud whether having a child will serve to save her marriage. "I don't think so," says her reflection in an extreme close-up. The pregnancy ends in a still birth after a stray dog barks at her and attacks her at a petrol station. This arbitrary canine rage unleashed against Cristina results in the first form of contagion, hindering filiation and instilling indecision in both the character and the actress. The animal represents multiplicity ("a band, a pack") and confronts us with our own multiplicity, with the population that wavers within us. What does the dog, now given the name of Bruno, represent by the end of the film? Cristina is pregnant again, but we do not know whether the father is her husband, Marcos (Juan Diego), or Bruno, her pet dog, with whom she has had sexual relations that de la Iglesia leaves off screen. Cristina breaks up her marriage and is finally happy in her house in the mountains, sharing her life with Bruno. She

answers the dog's barks with barking of her own (Image 8), as if human language were old and outdated. Emerging between these two moments is the "involution" described by Deleuze and Guattari as the antithesis of regression. Communicating like a dog is the consequence of a becoming that is always involutionary, and "involution is creative" (1987: 238). This barking should be understood not as an imitation but as one of the most significant symptoms of the alliance established between the human and the animal, and between Cristina's becoming and Ana Belén's becoming as an actress. In a shot/reverse-shot between Cristina and the dog, Belén laughs again like she did in *The Request*, before letting out a bark that is not the bark of a human imitating a dog, but of a dog that has possessed the voice of a human. It is the mouth that has let itself be infected. The smile of the Spanish Communist Party barks.

BARKING IS THE LAPSE IN THE SYNTAX THAT PROPOSES A DIFFERENT DIMENSION OF FEMALE DESIRE, LIBERATED FROM THE CONSTRAINTS OF PATRIARCHAL REAFFIRMATION

Barking is an expression of symbiosis and is therefore not a sign of filiation. It was astute of Eloy de la Iglesia to dismiss his initial idea of revealing Cristina's child's appearance at the end, like the fleeting shot in *Rosemary's Baby* (Roman Polanski, 1968), which would have rendered explicit the suggestion that her offspring was a monster—perhaps the "creature" referred to in the title. Barking, then, is "the effectuation of a power of the pack", an expression of "these animal sequences" that are "a fearsome involution calling us towards unheard-of becomings" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 240). Barking is the lapse in the syntax that proposes a different dimension of female desire, liberated from the constraints of pa-

triarchal reaffirmation. For Eloy de la Iglesia, "the only thing she [Cristina] can do is become bestial" (Delclós, 1977: 6). The Basque filmmaker therefore believes that "bestialising" is a political verb, and that barking is its conjugation in the present.

But this becoming-animal always occurs through the variable overlapping of the multiple layers that make up Cristina/Belén's identity in relation to the dog, which sometimes contradict the very notion of becoming. After the still birth, Cristina becomes infatuated with a dog that is identical to the one that attacked her, and ends up adopting him and even calling him Bruno, the name she had planned to give her son. In her first scenes at home with the dog, Belén's tone of voice sounds like what a mother would use to speak to a baby who has barely learnt to walk. The Freudian phantom of filiation, suggesting the animal is a substitute for the son who was born, quickly disappears; it is merely a red herring that distracts from the authentic, rhizomatic becoming-animal: with Bruno Cristina is first a mother, then a jealous girlfriend, newly-wed, playful lover and mistreated woman. Ana Belén traverses all these levels of the female condition, embracing the intrusions, ruptures and vibrations experienced by the character of Cristina, in what Deleuze and Guattari refer to as *anomal* ("anomalous") (1987: 243).

Every animal that manifests itself in a band or a pack, in multiplicity, has its *anomal*. Deleuze and Guattari are concerned with distinguishing between the *anormal*, which they describe as "that which is outside rules or goes against the rules", and the *anomalie*, designating "the unequal, the coarse, the rough, the cutting edge of deterritorialization" (1987: 244). It is this space of deterritorialisation that leads to the presence of Bruno, who could be described as the *anomal* that Cristina, representing a woman of the transition with ideological leanings similar to those of the actress who portrays her ("Father Anselmo said I was unbelieving, shameless, that I would come to a bad end with those friends at the faculty," she



Images 9, 10 and 11

confesses in the film), needs as an ally for becoming-animal. The most interesting aspect of the depiction of the becoming-animal is that it ultimately becomes difficult to distinguish whether the *anomal* is Bruno, Cristina or both, due to an exchange of positions that makes the becoming even more powerful. In the culminating scenes of the becoming-animal, Belén's performance is the camera's focus of attraction, as she controls the mise-en-scène in what seems to constitute a fe-

male subjectivity centred on the experience of her own pleasure. This is exemplified in the circular movement of the camera as it follows her in close-up while, dressed as a bride, she dances wildly around the room to the tune of Felix Mendelssohn's "Wedding March" (1842), and in the slow zoom in on her face from a wide shot when Bruno is on her lap. With her eyes half-closed, humming "Al alba"—a song recorded by Luis Eduardo Aute in 1975, which, as Carlos Gómez Méndez recalls in his thesis on De la Iglesia, "alludes to the last executions of the Franco regime, but got past the censors because it was disguised as a melancholy love song" (2015: 207)—while gazing vaguely towards the dog and her open hand (Images 9-11), stroking him in a dreamy state, Cristina/Belén and Bruno collectively constitute a sublimation of the space of feminist discourse, that *other place* "which is not a mythical or distant past or a utopian future history; it is the other place of the discourse here and now, the blind spot, the off-screen space of its representations" (De Lauretis, 2000: 62).

After Bruno has been taken away, when Marcos suggests to Cristina that they should start over and try to have a son again, she confesses to him: "When you're convinced you're a monster, surrounded by monsters in a world made by monsters, it's exciting to think of becoming even more monstrous just to be a little bit different." To be "different" is also to be *anomal*, to occupy an unstable, peripheral position, which could be identified with that eccentric subject that De Lauretis describes as "self-critical, distanced, [and] ironic" (2000: 154). Cristina and Bruno's anomaly, which will produce a dynamic variation—a becoming-animal—of the family institution when they are reunited and embrace an uncertain future alone, con-

TO BE "DIFFERENT" IS ALSO TO BE ANOMAL, TO OCCUPY AN UNSTABLE, PERIPHERAL POSITION

trasts with the static nature of masculinity, which remains unchanging throughout the process. It is this anomalous aspect that accentuates the film's queer dimension, which Francina Ribes identifies with the "futuristic feminism" (2024: 138) of Donna Haraway's *Companion Species Manifesto*.

Cristina and Bruno's becoming-animal thus places the focus of the story on the unfolding of a female subjectivity that deconstructs patriarchal gender technologies through resistance (De Lauretis, 2000). In this sense, Marcos embodies "the impotence of the male" referred to by Montserrat Roig, which manifests itself in direct proportion to his ascent in the world of right-wing politics that explicitly extends the imaginary of the Franco regime. While Marcos feels marginalised in the bizarre love triangle he unwillingly shares with Cristina and Bruno, the political discourse of his party seizes on the opportunity to demonise the canine in an obvious attempt by De la Iglesia to turn Bruno into a symbol of the popular left, in one of those "lapses in the syntax" that Vilarós (1998) argues illuminate the possibility of the new. In the presentation at the conference held by Marcos's political party, it is proclaimed that "freedom is peace, order and security, and that is what the real Spanish people are looking for, and that is the direction we will continue to walk in no matter how much *the dogs may bark*." In his acceptance speech upon becoming a member of parliament, Marcos declares that "we do not want to hear *the barking* of those calling for a new constitution, as if everything here in our country was not already tied up and tied up perfectly." It is fitting that the scene that follows this speech is of Cristina's definitive awakening, the recovery of her temporarily abandoned becoming-animal (Marcos forced her to give up the dog) that now, in a dream, from that *other place* required by the feminist narrative, translates into an amalgam of images of Bruno, with extreme close-ups of his eyes and his panting tongue, interspersed with images of the political meeting, to the sound of distorted groans

and cries celebrating Franco and culminating in the depiction of a zoophilic ritual. While rape was the only response to Cristina's sexual rejection that Marcos was capable of, Cristina responds to his speech by pushing him out of her life, claiming a new space of female subjectivity where the becoming-animal crystallises in a political gesture.

CONCLUSIONS

If we bark, we are revolutionaries. Ana Belén's barking in *The Creature* concentrates the poetics of the philosophy of resistance advocated by Deleuze and Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus*, which she continued to put into practice until the end of the first stage of Spain's transition to democracy, with the electoral victory of the Spanish Socialist Workers Party in 1982 (it was no coincidence that this was the same year that she left the Spanish Communist Party due to disagreements with its leadership). Thus ended a process which, as this article has sought to show, Belén began tentatively with *El amor del capitán Brando*, consolidated in *The Request* and culminated with *The Creature*.

If feminist female subjectivity is a "nomadic subject" defined on the basis of "the subversion of set conventions" (Braidotti, 2011: 26), feminism can no longer focus on "Woman as the complementary and specular other of man but rather a complex and multi-layered embodied subject" (Braidotti, 2005: 25-26). The conclusion drawn from this analysis is that Ana Belén's objective was thus to resist a becoming-major, which would be the opposite of a becoming, the static constitution of a state, an order or a system. This is why Ana Belén's barking in *The Creature* is, like any good becoming-animal, a *becoming-minor*. She does not seek to gain power, but to establish herself through a kind of micropolitical gesture, in a horizon line that runs through the structures of domination to mobilise or deterritorialise them. Desire, argues Guattari, "which tends, by its very nature, to leave the subject, and to drift away" (1995: 158), is one of these destabilis-

ANA BELÉN MOBILISES HER DESIRE WHEN SHE EXERCISES THAT DELEUZIAN MOLECULAR FEMINISM THAT SHE CONSOLIDATED IN HER CONDITION OF "NOMADIC SUBJECT", BECOMING MINOR AND, THEREFORE, REVOLUTIONARY

ing forces, as it questions the discursive strategies of the apparatuses of power, "opposing repressive habits, bureaucracy and the simplistically dualistic moralising that currently contaminate revolutionary movements" (1995: 158). During this period of Belén's career, this desire was expressed in films as diverse as *Somámbulos* [Sonambulists] (Manuel Gutiérrez Aragón, 1978) and "Tiempos Rotos", the episode directed by Emma Cohen for the collective film *Cuentos eróticos* [Erotic Stories] (1980). In the first, which metaphorically predicts Belén's break with the Communist Party, she plays Ana, a woman who rediscovers her sick body as a space of pleasure and then turns to political action, defusing the party's obsolete, rigid machinery. In the second, she reconstructs the erotic games she played with a childhood friend, naked together in the middle of a field, behind the back of the latter's husband (Juan Diego), the patriarchal authority that they hide from and make fun of. In both cases, as in *The Creature*, Belén mobilises her desire when she exercises that *Deleuzian* molecular feminism that she consolidated in her condition of "nomadic subject", becoming minor and, therefore, revolutionary. Like Deleuze, Ana Belén believes that "revolutionary becoming is the only thing that can exorcise shame or respond to the intolerable" (1999: 268).

NOTES

*This research forms part of the project PID2021-124377-I00 funded by MICIU/AEI/10.13039/501100011033 and ERDF/EU.

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THE BECOMING-ANIMAL OF ANA BELÉN, AN ACTRESS IN TRANSITION

Abstract

Ana Belén was one of the most representative actresses of Spanish cinema during the country's transition to democracy. She embodied the prototype of the emancipated, modern, politically engaged woman, becoming the symbol of a new democratic society that needed to bury the moral codes of the Franco regime. In this context, women's sexual freedom found a space for representation in the actress's body, marked by impulses of rupture and dissent against the rigid heteropatriarchal logic of the dictatorship. This article investigates certain gestures and attitudes in Ana Belén's acting work during the final years of the Franco regime and the period of the transition, drawing on the philosophy of becoming by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, as well as the feminist theories of Teresa de Lauretis and Rosi Braidotti, with special emphasis on *The Creature* (*La criatura*, 1977), a film by Eloy de la Iglesia that has been largely overlooked by the academic literature. This film, which tells the story of love and desire between a housewife and her dog, serves as an emblematic example of the emergence of new female subjectivities in Spanish cinema during the transition, embodied in micropolitical gestures that challenged the hegemony of the phallogocentric gaze.

Key words

Ana Belén; Becoming-animal; Spanish transition; Feminism; Star studies.

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EL DEVENIR-ANIMAL DE ANA BELÉN, ACTRIZ EN TRANSICIÓN

Resumen

Ana Belén fue una de las actrices más representativas del cine de la Transición. Encarnó el prototipo de la mujer emancipada, moderna y comprometida políticamente, que se convirtió en el símbolo de una nueva sociedad democrática que necesitaba enterrar los códigos morales del régimen franquista. En ese contexto, la libertad sexual femenina encontró un espacio de representación en el cuerpo de la actriz, atravesado por pulsiones de ruptura y disidencia con la rígida lógica heteropatriarcal de la dictadura. En este sentido, este artículo investiga determinados gestos y actitudes del trabajo actoral de Ana Belén durante el periodo del tardofranquismo y la Transición, a la luz de la filosofía del devenir de Gilles Deleuze y Félix Guattari y las teorías feministas de Teresa de Lauretis y Rosi Braidotti, poniendo especial énfasis en *La criatura* (1977), película de Eloy de la Iglesia virtualmente ignorada por la literatura académica. El film, que cuenta la historia de amor y deseo entre una ama de casa y su perro, es un modelo ejemplar para ilustrar la aparición de nuevas subjetividades femeninas durante el cine de la Transición, encarnados en gestos micropolíticos que hicieron tambalear la hegemonía de la mirada falocrática.

Palabras clave

Ana Belén; Devenir animal; Transición española; Feminismo; Estudios actorales.

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Article reference

Sánchez Martí, S., Adell Carmona, M. (2025). The Becoming-Animal of Ana Belén, an Actress in Transition. *L'Atalante. Revista de estudios cinematográficos*, 40, 65-80. <https://doi.org/10.63700/1234>

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Referencia de este artículo

Sánchez Martí, S., Adell Carmona, M. (2025). El devenir-animal de Ana Belén, actriz en transición. *L'Atalante. Revista de estudios cinematográficos*, 40, 65-80. <https://doi.org/10.63700/1234>

recibido/received: 18.11.2024 | aceptado/accepted: 08.06.2025

Edita / Published by



Licencia / License



ISSN 1885-3730 (print) / 2340-6992 (digital) DL V-5340-2003 WEB www.revistaatalante.com MAIL info@revistaatalante.com