

# The cinematic image of José Antonio Primo de Rivera: somewhere between a leader and a saint

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An intriguing sense of what might have been surrounds the account of the first film shot for the Falange, the Spanish fascist party founded by José Antonio Primo de Rivera in 1933. On 19 May 1935, cameramen Aizpurón and Alfonso Ponce set out to film the rally in a Madrid cinema at which Primo de Rivera would hark in the adulation of the masses as a true popular leader. When they came to edit this unique footage, the photographers were horrified to discover that there had been no film in the camera.<sup>1</sup> Opinion remains divided over whether this was a tragic mistake or a blessing in disguise.<sup>2</sup>

Film footage of Primo de Rivera is very rare, with excerpts from a 1935 Paramount newsreel filmed at his family home in Chamartín, Madrid, used again and again. In this short but striking clip, the leader and founding father of the Falange lays out the party's basic principles. He is dressed in a smart light raincoat, black trousers, white shirt and tie. His brilliantined hair gives him the air of an aristocrat or academic and he moves with confidence. As he approaches the camera, for some unknown reason he suddenly looks downwards but then recovers his composure. The film cuts to a medium-shot and he begins to speak:

We hold firm to the belief that the living heart of Spain is strong and sound. The country has been brought low by three forces that are tearing it apart – regional separatism, party rivalry and class divisions. [CLOSEUP] When Spain can unite around a common purpose, it will rise again as a great nation to recover its former glory.

- 1 'Datos para la historia cinematográfica de la Falange', *Primer plano*, no. 2, 27 October 1940, p. 5. See also 'El primer noticiario de Falange se rodó en noviembre de 1935', *Primer plano*, no. 215, 26 November 1944, p. 9
- 2 The filming of the closing ceremony of the Consejo Nacional held on 17 November 1934 can scarcely be counted a success, given that the footage fell into enemy hands at the outbreak of war.

- 3 Letter from Primo de Rivera to his colleague Julián Pemartín, 2 April 1933, in José Antonio Primo de Rivera, *Textos de doctrina política*, ed. Agustín del Río Cisneros (Madrid: Delegación Nacional de la Sección femenina de FET y de las JONS, 1966), p. 50.
- 4 As correctly noted by Dionisio Hidrucejo, appointed Head of Press and Propaganda by the first Francoist government of 1936, the unification of the party in 1937 was in effect a *coup d'état* since, in contrast to the position in Russia, Italy or Germany, it was not a case of 'a messianic party which had built itself up within the state but rather the Head of State who had built himself up on the foundation of the political parties in order to use them for his own ends': Dionisio Hidrucejo, *Ena hongo y ena raíces: Casi unas memorias* (Barcelona: Planeta, 1976), p. 106. A top-down unification under the banners of the Falange Española Tradicionalista (FET; Traditional Falange Party of Spain) and the Juntas de la Ofensiva Nacional Sindicalistas (JONS; Ruling Committee of the National Syndicalist Programme) was applied to all the nationalist political parties in Spain, despite the gross disparities between, for example, the traditionalist *carlistas* (ultra-conservative and strongly Catholic) and the most radical fascism of the so-called 'old guard' of the Falange.
- 5 The Spanish Civil War, 1936–39, which resulted in Francoist nationalist forces overcoming leftwing, Republican forces and the establishment of Franco's dictatorship.
- 6 Before the enactment of the law establishing the administrative structure of the state, propaganda received scant attention and was consigned to the control of various military personnel (the founder of the Legion Millán Astrucy being the first of those). It was FET and JONS that held the responsibility for propaganda. However, following the Decree of Unification of the Party in 1937 and the resultant installation of the Falange, the state itself took

Primo de Rivera's delivery shows him as a man of conviction and an experienced public speaker. But he is evidently unaccustomed to the camera. He seems wooden and ill at ease, his gaze wanders and he displays a nervous facial tic. It is a curiously unengaging and uninspiring performance. He was evidently aware that he lacked the rabble-rousing qualities necessary for a populist leader: in a letter to Julián Pemartín in 1935, he confessed: 'A populist leader must have something of the Old Testament prophet: equal parts faith, self-belief, zeal and a sense of outrage, none of which is compatible with decorum. I can be many things, but not that.'<sup>3</sup> The true extent of his media potential remains unknown, because he was captured by leftwing Republican forces and executed in the early hours of 20 November 1936. By that time, totalitarian regimes in other European countries had already developed the propaganda skills that would enable them to build up the populist images of their leaders.

In contrast to those countries in which both fascism and media skills were more firmly established, fascism in Spain was a minority movement which actually turned its back on mass agitation as its influence grew.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, in the early stages of the Spanish Civil War, the Falange made repeated attempts to establish its own style of propaganda cinema.<sup>5</sup> In 1937 a forced merger brought together all the nationalist parties – ranging from the rural, traditionalist Carlists to the extreme rightwing Falangists. Now it was General Franco who provided the rallying point for nationalist sympathizers. In an extensive reorganization of the state in 1938, Franco took charge of the National Office of Press and Propaganda, which included the National Department of Cinematography directed by Manuel Augusto García Viñolas.<sup>6</sup> Artists of all types and abilities were pressed into service to foster the Franco personality cult. In 1943 the state-controlled documentary newsreel production company NO-DO (Noticiarios y Documentales) was formed. By then, Falangist hardliners had been forced to abandon hopes of a more combative propaganda cinema. Although the reporting style of NO-DO was always biased towards presenting the nationalist regime in the best possible light, it was a far cry from the hard-hitting propaganda that the Falange had wanted. Franco would remain in power for almost the next forty years until his death in 1975, but his image would always be overshadowed by that of Primo de Rivera.<sup>7</sup>

Contemporary journals judged and found wanting all cinematic attempts to capture the spirit of the Falange in films such as *Raza/Race* (José Luis Sáenz de Heredia, 1942; the script was written by Franco himself under a pseudonym), Carlos Arévalo's brave but ill-fated offering *Rojo y negro/Red and Black* issued in 1942 and withdrawn soon after, and the whole genre of *cine de cruzada* with its glorification of Nationalist victories and military campaigns in North Africa.<sup>8</sup> The actor and Falange supporter Fernando Fernández de Córdoba gave an interview on 'The Falange in Spanish cinema', in which his conclusion

charge of propaganda, although it left outstanding officials from the preceding administration in some of the most important posts. The reorganization took some time, as documented in Rosa Álvarez Barriena and Hamán Sala Naquer, *El cine en la zona nacional* (Bilbao: Mensajero, 2000).

- 7 For a panoramic overview, see Vicente Sánchez-Bosca (ed.), 'Materiales para una iconografía de Francisco Franco', in *Archivos de la Filmoteca*, nos 42–43 (2002), pp. 8–21, 140–61.
- 8 This was the term used to denote a group of films that emerged at the start of the 1940s, eulogizing the Spanish armed forces that had experienced their finest hour in the uprising (reclared a 'crusade' by the Catholic Church) of July 1936.
- 9 *Primer plano*, no. 94, 2 August 1942, p. 16.
- 10 'Cómo cree Ud. que debe ser el cine español', *Primer plano*, no. 92, 19 July 1942, pp. 3–19.
- 11 George L. Mosse drew attention to the importance of ritual and liturgical aspects of German National Socialism in a penetrating analysis now considered a classic, *The Nationalisation of the Masses: Political Symbolism and Mass Movements in Germany from the Napoleonic Wars through the Third Reich* (New York, NY: Howard Fertig, 1975). In a different setting, Emilio Gentile carried out a similar analysis of Italian Fascism as a religion of the people in *Fascismo. Historia e interpretación* (Madrid: Alianza, 2004).
- 12 An example of this opposite tendency is the film *Trophy of the Will* (Eini Hietenstahl, 1935), based on the Nazi rally of 1934 in the city of Nuremberg. Although Hietenstahl's filming may seem to be the ritualized documentation of an encounter between the Führer and the serried ranks of his followers, the shooting was the result of meticulous advance planning by Hitler's architect, and later Minister of Defence, Albert Speer, whose greatest work was the so-called 'Cathedral of Light'.

was that 'from the point of view of a Falange supporter . . . we still have no Spanish cinema worthy of the name'.<sup>9</sup> A survey by the film magazine *Primer plano* in July 1942 generated a mixed response, with frequent reference to the need for firm control by the state and a focus on present-day reality rather than historical events.<sup>10</sup> Rereading this material leaves the impression of a sense of discontent which never got beyond the level of polite complaint and which, in any case, became irrelevant after the events of 1945 swept away fascism in much of the rest of Europe.

A cinema of the Falange was destined to remain an unrealized aspiration.

Despite this, the Franco regime carefully cultivated the image of Primo de Rivera in a way which differed significantly from the approach adopted by other European dictatorships. Whereas other countries used the media, specifically cinema, to highlight the charisma of their current leader, the Franco regime concentrated on building up a posthumous image of Primo de Rivera as a fallen hero. For decades to come, Spaniards would be subjected to a funerary cult. There were clearly some advantages to this tactic of diverting attention away from the actual leader, not least for Franco himself.

The persona reconstructed around Primo de Rivera underwent a morbid transformation from politician to prophet, from agitator to martyr and saint, conceptually embalmed as a votive deity. There is much more that could be said on the contrast between this essential undercurrent of National Catholicism in Spanish fascism and its distinction from more innovative and radical varieties of European fascism, such as the fundamentally pagan ideology of German Nazism.<sup>11</sup>

How did the Franco regime create, from its very earliest days, a culture of suppression and rigidity? Clearly cinema is an ideal instrument for a dictator who seeks to rouse the masses; less obvious is how such a modern invention could be pressed into service as part of a ceremonial process of beatification. Part of the answer must lie in the fact that emergent Spanish fascism could never have produced propaganda of the type associated with other contemporary European dictatorships, which allied themselves with progress, mass movements and a species of mystical identification between leader and people. The Spanish version has much more in common with the mediæval Passion or Mystery play, a depiction of sacrifice and martyrdom whose evocation of mourning and grief does not readily lend itself to a call to arms.

I propose to concentrate on the development of this Spanish model of specifically religious charisma and how it contrasts with the projection in other totalitarian states of the leader as a figure whose Promethean attributes owe more to mythology than to Christianity.<sup>12</sup> I will draw on the earliest cinema footage produced by Spain's National Department of Cinematography dating from November 1938, when the Nationalist brigade decided that its hold on the reins of government was now sufficiently secure to allow it to break the official silence which had until then concealed news of the execution of their founding father, Primo de Rivera. I suggest that this documentary evidence, originating as it does

from an era in which the control of propaganda was in the hands of the most combative elements of the Falange, reveals that the roots of Spanish fascism go back far beyond the time of World War II to a much older Spanish literary and dramatic tradition – the Baroque tragedy whose pathos stirs the audience through pity.

By a decree of 16 November 1938, the date of 20 November was henceforward declared a day of national mourning, thus converting Primo de Rivera's death into a symbol for all the fallen of the nationalist uprising. The initial ceremonies to honour the slain hero had to be held without the presence of his body: Primo de Rivera was first buried at the site of his execution in Alicante, which at that time was still behind Republican lines. With the ending of the war, the prison in Alicante became a sacred memorial site at which devotional objects, relics and inscriptions commemorated the martyr. Now victorious, the Falange organized one of its most spectacular events.

Almost as soon as the city of Alicante was occupied, a party of Falange soldiers exhumed Primo de Rivera's body from the common grave to which it had been consigned and conveyed it to a specially prepared crypt. On the third anniversary of his execution, over a period of ten days (20–30 November), his mortal remains were borne from Alicante to the monastery of El Escorial outside Madrid. The funeral procession was met with unprecedented displays in every town and village it passed through. Ian Gibson may well have a point when he cites as a possible inspiration the procession which, in 1478, carried the body of Felipe El Hermoso from Brujas to Granada led by his grief-crazed widow Juana la Loca.<sup>13</sup>

If Alicante prison evoked the bitter association of its leader's ignominious execution by Republican forces, the Escorial stood for all that was great and glorious for the Falange. The monastery-palace, founded by King Phillip II, was the burial place for Spanish monarchs. Resting in such illustrious company, Primo de Rivera would thus partake of the royal lineage.<sup>14</sup> His memory, recent but already mythical, would be incorporated into the legendary Spain of Faith and Empire to which the victors of the Civil War so fervently aspired.

But it was not to be. In 1959 the founding father's remains were once again exhumed and then borne on the shoulders of the Madrid Old Guard of the Falange, this time to the newly constructed monumental site of the Valle de los Caídos (Valley of the Fallen) at Cuelgamuros in the Sierra de Guadarrama, which would be his last resting place. In this final removal, much less splendid than the previous one, Primo de Rivera was effectively separated from any association with Monarchy and Empire and instead installed as merely the First of the Fallen, a more modest designation than that implied by his former regal mausoleum.

There must have been a certain sense of unease among the more sober and restrained elements of the population at the overblown splendour of these ceremonies. The handful of contemporary documentaries produced between 1938 and 1941 by the National Department of Cinematography

<sup>13</sup> Ian Gibson, *En busca de José Antonio* (Barcelona: Planeta, 1980), p. 248.

<sup>14</sup> This provoked repeated complaints on behalf of the Royal Family from Juan de Borbon, who considered the mixing of royalty with the political to be quite improper.

marked the apotheosis of a cult that would first stagnate then fossilize in the endless ritual repetitions so characteristic of Francoism. The first newsreel reports of Primo de Rivera's execution on 20 November 1936 are in the tenth edition of *El Noticiero Español* (The Newsreel of Spain), which first went out in December 1938, soon after the official announcement of his death. It shows the funeral ceremony in Burgos, the capital of Nationalist Spain. Judging by the sudden cuts the surviving footage is evidently incomplete, but it clearly shows the extent to which the memory and image of Primo de Rivera had been appropriated alongside other symbols of the Franco regime. A Moorish guard of honour flanks the arrival of Franco who, in accordance with the Decree of Unification, now wears the uniform and red beret of the Falange as he enters Burgos Cathedral, the holy of holies for the upper echelons of Nationalist military, politicians and clergy and the very site where Franco's own installation as Head of State had been filmed by the same cameras in October 1936. All the key figures in the new Nationalist Spain are present at the event, including Franco's wife Carmen Polo, the Head of Propaganda Dionisio Ridruejo, the State Adviser Jesús Suñer and the Portuguese ambassador Pedro Teotónio Pereira.<sup>15</sup> It is noteworthy that Primo de Rivera, the father of the Falange, is treated both as a soldier, to whom the army offers its tribute, and as the founder of the political ideology which Franco now takes over as the national leader of the party.

Franco himself is the central focus of the event. Entering the Cathedral beneath a *palio* – the ceremonial canopy normally reserved for the monarch or for processions of the Body of Christ in the form of the Eucharist – he symbolically places a crown on the memorial stone and barks out the ritual address, his oration captured in live sound recording. In the surviving copy of the film, there then follow the opening bars of the national anthem of the Falange, *Cara al sol* (Face to the Sun), which are interrupted by an announcement in voiceover:

On the morning of 20 November an address to José Antonio Primo de Rivera is read out in schools, factories and fields throughout the land.

Thus, significantly, a recital of political ideology gives way to the expression of grief and loss.

*El Noticiero Español* produced newsreel reports of several other commemorative and funeral ceremonies, such as the procession carrying the remains of General Sanjurjo,<sup>16</sup> and the dedication of the monuments to Mola<sup>17</sup> and to that other early martyr for the cause, José Calvo Sotelo;<sup>18</sup> but none of these bears comparison with the homages to Primo de Rivera.<sup>19</sup> It is to his memory that the newsreels would repeatedly return in the decades to come.<sup>20</sup> The footage in *El Noticiero Español*, no. 17, dated March/April 1939, is particularly striking because it appears to be quite out of temporal sequence with contemporary events: Miguel Primo de Rivera is shown alighting from a plane in Burgos to make the 'first public announcement' of his brother's death, an event which had, in

15 For identification of the various individuals mentioned, see Alfonso de Amo and María Luisa Ibáñez, *Catálogo general del cine de la guerra civil* (Madrid: Cátedra, 1996), p. 667.

16 *El Noticiero Español*, no. 27.

17 *El Noticiero Español*, no. 1.

18 *El Noticiero Español*, no. 3.

19 Sanjurjo, one of the generals who took part in the 1932 uprising against the Republic, was invited to take over the leadership of the Movement in 1936 but was killed in a aeroplane accident on his return to nationalist Spain (he was in exile in Portugal). Emilio Mola, who died in similar circumstances, was the head of the Northern Army and in his day had a more prestigious reputation than Franco. José Calvo Sotelo, the political leader of the Spanish Right, was assassinated in July 1936, just five days before the uprising; in the official Francoist rhetoric his death at the hands of a group of assault troops was considered to be state-sponsored murder.

20 The removal of the mortal remains of Julio Ruiz de Alda from Navarra to Madrid was also the subject of a news item in *El Noticiero Español*, no. 23. This provided ample confirmation that the position of the Falange was quite on a par with that of the highest military commanders and, in the case of the Founder of the party, much superior.

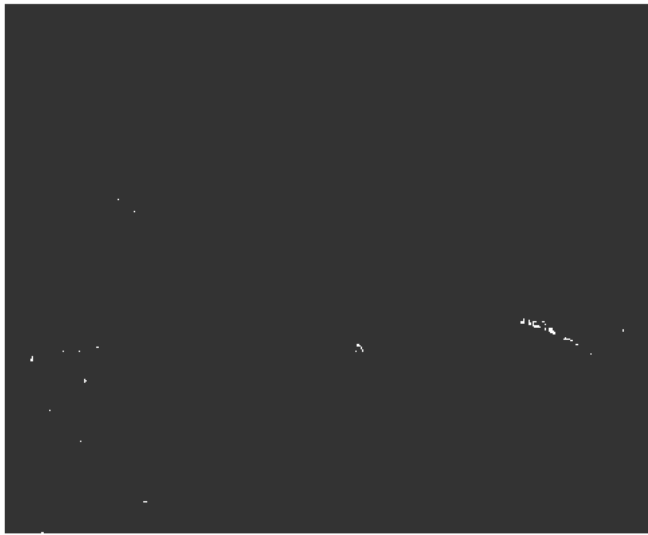


Fig. 1.  
The funeral procession. *¡Presente!  
En el enterramiento de José  
Antonio Primo de Rivera* (1938).

21 See del Amo and Ibáñez, *Catálogo general del cine de la guerra civil*, p. 677.

fact, been publicly announced and ceremonially commemorated months beforehand. To Alfonso de Amo, this suggests that Miguel's announcement was most likely recorded in March 1938 but then held back for some unknown reason probably connected with the timing of the decision to break the official silence over Primo de Rivera's execution.<sup>21</sup> The status of the announcement as an eyewitness account of the final moments in the life of the founding father more than compensates for whatever it may lack in news value. Miguel is filmed in a blizzard of snow, evidently in mourning for his brother, with just one cut from medium-shot to closeup which may coincide with a pause in his discourse. The emotional charge of the footage is heightened by its rarity value as one of the few contemporary newsreel accounts whose content and symbolism do not refer to Franco. But, once again, the statement of Falange ideology to which Miguel makes reference is coloured or overshadowed by sorrow. In the very moment of his death, Primo de Rivera is raised to a higher plane where the personal charisma of the ideologue and political leader is exchanged for the halo of the saint. Who could fail to be inspired by this heartfelt eulogy from a grieving brother?

If there is one film which captures the heartbroken, lyrical, yet monumental vision of the fallen leader – and therefore expresses something of the very soul of Spanish fascism – it is the film produced by the DNC in 1939 under the title *¡Presente! En el enterramiento de José Antonio Primo de Rivera* (Present! At the funeral of José Antonio Primo de Rivera).<sup>22</sup> Seldom does Spanish Nationalist propaganda cinema achieve such high production values as in this eighteen-minute and twenty-second film whose camerawork, editing, soundtrack and misc-en-scène rise to match the ceremonial splendour of the procession of Primo de Rivera's body to the Escorial. This may be the only occasion on

22 In advance of this, *El Noticiero Español*, no. 18 carried the news of the exhumation in the cemetery at Alicante of the body of Primo de Rivera, which was identified by the medals pinned to his chest.

which the image of another leader is permitted to eclipse so completely that of the chameleon-like Francisco Franco.

The film is announced in suitably mournful fashion:

The National Department of Cinematography, united in grief with the Spanish nation, presents the documentary '¡Presente! En el enterramiento de José Antonio Primo de Rivera'.

The words of the title appear on the screen as the camera tracks the solemn advance of the funeral procession. The photography of Enrique Gaertner (Guerner) is in high contrast, the voiceover of Ignacio Mateo emphatic to the point of theatricality (he would moderate his style in later years as a narrator for NO-DO newsreels). The music, derived from Wagner's *Twilight of the Gods*, lends a distinctly Germanic, mythic and legendary dimension to the proceedings. Evidently just as much care has been devoted to the formal aspects of the work as to its political significance. The coverage of the ten-day march seems underpinned by a mathematical structure that makes striking use of the natural rhythms of day and night, dawn and dusk, to suggest a cosmic trajectory by the fallen hero towards the future. It is a truly majestic example of finely wrought propaganda unique in the annals of Spanish fascism.

Structurally, the documentary falls into nine sections, mostly separated by fades to black. I will attempt to convey the articulation of the verbal and visual discourse, highlighting those points at which the imaginative construction of the dramatic character Primo de Rivera seems to be especially evident. The film opens with the words:

20 November 1936. As triumphant Nationalist forces marched towards victory, in the prison at Alicante the leftists shot our José Antonio Primo de Rivera.

This emotive, and clearly partisan presentation is accompanied by a succession of images showing the lines of battle superimposed over the front page of the daily newspaper *Heraldo de Aragón*, which carries announcements of Nationalist military advances. The first fade to black makes the transition to an establishing shot of daybreak over the fields around Alicante and the first images of the funeral cortege bearing the coffin with the hero's body (figure 1). The dissonance between the leader's prediction of victory and his death at the hands of the enemy is unexpected. However, we should distinguish between the Francoist rhetoric of the opening and the solemn funeral rites which follow. The dawn, a repeated image in Falange anthems for the glorious daybreak of Spain's great destiny, also references the deathwatch of that other fateful sunrise at which Primo de Rivera faced the firing squad. The transition to the solemn, rhythmic images of the funeral procession implies an ellipsis that somehow bypasses the dreadful moment of the execution, but also presents the countryside itself as portentous of the tragedy whose consequences are then seamlessly presented.

The voiceover continues, dispelling the initial impression of an immediate resort to mourning:

They hoped that by killing him they would destroy the resurgent spirit of Spain and silence the voice of conscience that cried out to them from the annals of history. For more than three years he lay buried, awaiting the dawn of this new victorious November day in which the Falange and the whole Spanish nation will release him from the soil of Alicante to bear him aloft on the shoulders of his warriors, their most dearly-won prize of battle, towards the lofty walls of the monastery of Saint Laurence of the Escorial.

Thus the Falange is explicitly cast as the backbone of the New Spain and the voice of Primo de Rivera as the heartfelt protest of Spain itself, a protest which traces its roots back to the literary generation of 1898 and further back to the entire history, or imagined history, of the nation. The voiceover now takes a melancholy turn, away from the poetic heights to which it has borne us, to the inevitable expression of a directionless grief, but tinged with the ranting tone which Francoism had already acquired:

Today we lower a memorial stone into that same Mediterranean sea which was the last scene to pass before his eyes and one of the innumerable sites in which Spain now commemorates him. The cortege passes through the city which expresses its grief at this last farewell in which men of the land and of the sea share alike. Arms raised high in salute, yokes and arrows [the symbols of the Falange] on display at the docks, sailors stand to attention on the decks and masts of naval ships. All pay homage to the founder of the Falange. Flags are flown at half mast, soldiers present arms. It was here that he was brought to the place of his death, to the prison at Alicante which now bears his name in commemoration, where his family and comrades offer prayers for him next to the cross placed on the spot where he fell, a victim of savagery and ignorance.

The exalted sentiments of the phrases pale into insignificance beside the superb shots of the sunrise over the Mediterranean, gleaming through the mists of the port of Alicante where the memorial stone was ceremonially dropped into the sea. The sparkle of the light, the slow camera movements following the point of view of the funeral procession which passes while sailors and townspeople alike raise their arms in salute, as still as statues in carefully-posed cinematic groupings, create a desolate and oppressive effect; but the overall impact on the spectator is curiously uplifting, thanks to the mastery of the lighting, editing and mise-en-scene. The excerpt recalls another famous revolutionary cinematic masterwork, the sequence of the morning mists in the port of Odessa in Eisenstein's *The Battleship Potemkin* (1925). This comparison merits more detailed analysis.



In that sequence, Eisenstein presents the confusion which follows the mutiny on the battleship and which ends with the betrayal and murder of the sailor, Vakulinchuk, who had incited his comrades to rebellion. The celebrated images are seen through the mists which swathe the port of Odessa, captured quite by chance by the cameraman Eduard Tissé and utilized by Eisenstein to suggest that nature itself is grieving, as if a funeral veil clouded the gaze of the men who rally round the dead sailor's body, overcome by respect and compassion. A boat bears Vakulinchuk's body to the quay where the people of Odessa will bid him farewell. The mournful effect of the scene itself precedes the images of actual mourning. The same funereal atmosphere provides the backdrop for both films. But while in *Potemkin*, the uncontainable grief bursts out in a fury of revolutionary hatred, *¡Presente!* remains mired in grief, even though its opening words, and those which follow, seem to presage action.

It may seem difficult to consider these two films as comparable, given the ideological gulf that separates them. It is therefore worthy of note that *Potemkin*, together with Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will* (1935), was perhaps the propaganda film most admired by those in Spain who clamoured for a cinema of the Falange, as referenced by Bartolomé Mostaza in the journal *Primer plano*.<sup>23</sup> A supporting cinematic reference appears in *Rojo y negro*, perhaps the only postwar example of unquestionably Falange cinema. The film uses two scenes from *Potemkin* to illustrate the rising tension and hatred which preceded the Civil War – the proletarian clenched fist in the sequence described in the last paragraph, and the masses scrambling down the stairs as the soldiers fire on the people. In both cases, the aim of the Spanish director Arévalo is to invert the ideological message of the original material, illustrating a recurrent tactic of Francoist cinema during the Civil War, the reutilization of enemy material.<sup>24</sup>

Returning to my consideration of *¡Presente!*, another fade to black marks the transition to the third sequence, which concentrates on the long journey of Primo de Rivera's body through the Spanish countryside in a singular version of the Stations of the Cross. The most outstanding feature of this solemn section is the typically Falange concern with demonstrating the extent of popular devotion which Primo de Rivera inspired. The faces of authentic country folk are the expression of this revolutionary fascist sentiment, which would soon be sidelined by the Franco regime. The force of these images in their aspiration to an ancestral Spanish identity bring a radical documentary feel to this exercise in fascist aesthetic; the motionless labourer who gives the fascist salute as he stands by his donkey beneath an archway, the rough-hewn shepherd who raises his arm skyward, caught like a statue in silhouette next to his flock against the backdrop of the arid landscape of the plains, are scenes of breathtaking intensity, perhaps unrivalled in propaganda cinema (figures 2 and 3).<sup>25</sup> In this sequence, it is not the heavens that are clouded by the hero's death but rather the countryside and the country folk who most authentically typify that Spain for which Primo de Rivera

<sup>23</sup> Bartolomé Mostaza, 'El cine como propaganda', in *Primer plano*, no. 10, 77 December 1940, p. 3.

<sup>24</sup> Joaquín Hogg, product of a German upbringing, member of the German Nazi party and director of propaganda in the early days of the Civil War, was arguably the greatest exponent of the art of which *España heroica/Helden in Spanien/Spanish Heroes* (produced by Hispano-Film-Produktion and co-directed with Victor de la Serna in 1938) was probably the finest and most effective example of rationalist film propaganda.

<sup>25</sup> Perhaps the sole exception, at least from the point of view of a less obvious ideology, is a curious news item entitled 'Romance de Puebla de Sanabria' ('Romance of the People of Sanabria'), included in *El Noticiero Español*, no. 12, which provides an unparalleled example of a popular epic style and manages to avoid completely the traps of caricature and folklore.

Sharp realism: two visions of the rural Spain. *¡Presente! En el enterramiento de José Antonio Primo de Rivera* (1939).



Fig. 2.



Fig. 3.

26 Pedro Lain Entralgo (1947). *La generación del 98* (Madrid: Espasa Calpe, 1997).

so fervently longed, the land of simple honest folk. It would not be an exaggeration to detect in this traverse of the plains of Castile an idea of the eternal authentic Spain which the founder of the Falange had inherited from the literary generation of 1898, that same generation to which Pedro Lain Entralgo dedicated an essay expressing similar sentiments in the 1940s.<sup>26</sup> The mastery of *¡Presente!* lies in the way in which it captures possibly the very last cinematic images of what might be described as 'primitive' Spain.

27 These curious cross-fertilizations were not uncommon in the 1930s and had a decisive influence on the development of the artistic and cinematic avant garde. The path trodden by Buñuel, from provocative surrealism (*Un chien andalou* [1929], *L'âge d'or* [1930]) via anthropological documentary (*Las hurdes* [1933]) to political propaganda in the service of the threatened Republican government (*España 1936* [1937]), is a striking example.

This version of photographic realism is clearly not exempt from ideological bias. But it does indicate a distinctly different approach from the Italian attempts at synthesis of experimental Futurism with the glories of Imperial Rome or the mixture of national folklore and monumental architecture so characteristic of Nazi Germany.<sup>27</sup> The style of *¡Presente!* has little in common with the conventional military approach more customary in representations of uprising or victory; instead it seems to be rooted in the movement of the avant garde, already heavily politicized by the 1930s. It is an altogether different vision which underpins the images of *¡Presente!*, one which comes close to the attempts of the originators of the Falange to unite popular appeal with the heroic spirit – all beneath the shadowy wings of the angel of death. The voiceover continues:

And so the funeral procession of Primo de Rivera takes to the winding highways of Castile, drawing the country to it at every step. Supporters from every province come out to greet him in a dawn of recognition. And as the cortege wends its way from the shores of the Mediterranean, through the rich farmlands of the Levante, over the stony ground of La Mancha and the ancient fields of New Castile, crossing the olive groves and the mountains, by day and by night, under the sacramental light of clear November skies, passing by the still-visible battle trenches, by the military encampments, the people are touched, roused by his death as they were by the vigour of his life, stirred to fraternal love, the true spirit of Spain in its most unflinching aspect.

The text continues:

From fields and towns he is greeted by farm labourers, by women, by the Falange youth who have travelled long miles to mark the passing of Primo de Rivera. The towns are filled with crowds dressed in blue shirts who decorate their houses in remembrance and build triumphal arches. The people sense the importance of the occasion and appreciate the legacy of this new Caesar, founder of the ideals of the new State which Franco has won by force of arms. And so the procession crosses the territory which for three long years was the encampment of the International Brigade and dominated by Marxist terror, now won back through the military genius of Franco and incorporated into the unifying mission of national syndicalism.

Anyone familiar with the unchanging complaint of Marxism as disunity, which soon became the hallmark of traditional Francoist rhetoric, cannot fail to be surprised by these initial attempts to overlay a constructive spirit of nation-building on the pervasive atmosphere of loss.<sup>28</sup> The theatre of the Civil War, which it is sobering to recall had ended only six months earlier, now becomes the setting for the passage of a great crusading army which will unknowingly reopen wounds still unhealed in its march through the dusty plains of a country not yet accustomed to considering itself united. The documentary does not allow its ideology to conceal the nature of this

28 That *¡Presente!* represented a work of outstanding quality, a classic worthy of imitation, was evident from the fact that DNC included five minutes of its footage as the third and final news item in *El Noticiero Español*, no. 28.

reality, readily evident in the faces of the farm labourers, in the towns, in the ramshackle settlements and in the wartorn land itself. Rather the film revisits and incorporates these scenes without attempting to soften their brutal intensity or force them into a conventional narrative. Franco is presented here as little more than the armed fist in the service of Primo de Rivera's ideology.

One more fade to black brings this dramatic journey to a close, to open the fourth part in which the funeral party enters Madrid. Here again, there is no attempt to disguise the uncomfortable reality; the most bloodstained sites of the recent past are subjected to inspection as the cortege solemnly halts its progress. The Model Prison and the City University both became emblems of nationalist propaganda, the first cast as a place of bloodthirsty Republican reprisal, the second as the site of the most prolonged and ferocious battle of the whole Civil War.

And so at the end of ten days of grief bravely borne, the capital of Spain where he lived and struggled now receives him back in an unforgettable act of reverence. Those same streets and squares which bore witness to the courage and force of his convictions now see him return. If then it was only a few supporters who heeded his words, now his voice will resound down the centuries.

The final journey of Primo de Rivera must take him through this emotionally charged spot of the Model Prison where he spent so many unhappy hours and whose crumbling walls now seem to resound with the salutes of fallen comrades.

The cortege passes through the ruins of the City University and the government now presides at the funeral ceremony itself. The army, honouring him as its Commander in Chief, files past his body. Passing over the enemy trenches, as though in a final solemn act of redemption, the casket is borne towards the monastery of the Escorial.

The people of the countryside had turned out to salute Primo de Rivera in the heartlands of Spain, scarred by the still evident battle trenches. Now the city where he lived did the same, the camera recording public response and shown in counterpoint to the images of the cortege (figure 4). Shots of the faces of women and children increase the sense of popular devotion because, as the voiceover tells us, 'now the whole of Spain is for the Falange' to such an extent that the Armed Forces lay their tributes to Primo de Rivera in the manner normally reserved for the most distinguished military commanders. It is hard now to avoid a sense of the fundamental split in the foundations of the ideology that the film proposes: on the one hand the feeling of loss turning to a paralyzing melancholy, on the other hand a convulsive change born of an unstable mood of euphoria.

With another fade to black, the screen images bring us to the journey's final destination, the most redolent historical site for Francoists and Falange alike, bearing as it does the seal of the Spanish Empire.

Fig. 4.

The reception of the hero in Madrid. *¡Presente! En el enterramiento de José Antonio Primo de Rivera* (1939).



In the monastery of the Escorial, now awaiting the arrival of the body of Primo de Rivera are His Excellency the Head of State and of the Party, the government, the senate, the diplomatic corps, foreign delegates, the hierarchy of the Church and the Army, State counsellors and 100,000 members of the Falange who are grouped around the monastery to form a final guard of honour to their fallen leader.

At the going down of the sun, Primo de Rivera is borne to the monastery on the shoulders of his comrades, just as when he left Alicante and as throughout the entire five hundred kilometre journey. [LONG PAUSE]

And now the body of José Antonio Primo de Rivera is reverently deposited in the monument which commemorates our ultimate victory. Thus the promise of the new dawn is fulfilled, banners unfurled in the triumph which was his dream.

These last phrases evoke associations with stirring verses composed in the epic style, in which the new dawn hailed in the Falange national anthem is associated with the historic victories of the Spanish Empire's glory days. Death is transformed to triumph, and at the day's end we hear captured on the soundtrack the evening prayers. The realization of this prophetic vision leaves no room for doubt or uncertainty: the nation's victory heals the breach in a dream come true. This forms the link with the sixth part in which we hear the long-awaited message of Franco in his capacity as Head of the Falange as well as Chief of State. His words are eloquent:

José Antonio, symbol and example for our youth, in this moment in which we commit you to the earth of this land which you so loved, as over Spain we glimpse that bright new dawn which was your dream, I recall your own words:

May God now grant you the eternal rest which we can share only when we have safely gathered in for Spain that harvest which your death has sown

José Antonio Primo de Rivera! [THE CROWD RESPONDS: Present!]

The dawn of the new day is here equated with the victory of Nationalist Spain in that apocalyptic spirit so characteristic of fascism. The fact that Franco is singled out for live recording in direct speech both acknowledges his key ceremonial function and confers a special quality on his words. It is as though the cycle which began with grief for a leader denied a decent burial has now come full circle with the ceremonial entombment which will convert Primo de Rivera from ideologue and founder of a political ethos to the status of fallen hero.

However, what follows seems to contradict the preceding sense of closure, particularly given that the founding father has now received a decent Christian burial. The next shot takes us into cosmic realms, up into the night sky whose points of light give a daringly literal sense to the metaphor in the lines of the Falange national anthem which hails the fallen as 'guardians of the stars' (figure 5). His heroism now takes on superhuman proportions:

Your presence leaves an indelible impression. We can never forget how your words and your resolve inspired Spanish youth to prepare for that decisive moment.

Despite the astrological references in the preceding passages, this cinematic ascension to the heavens is a voyage of sanctification. Primo de Rivera's successors will in future interpret his words more as the allegories, parables or predictions of a visionary than as the prescriptive ideology of the founder of a political party.

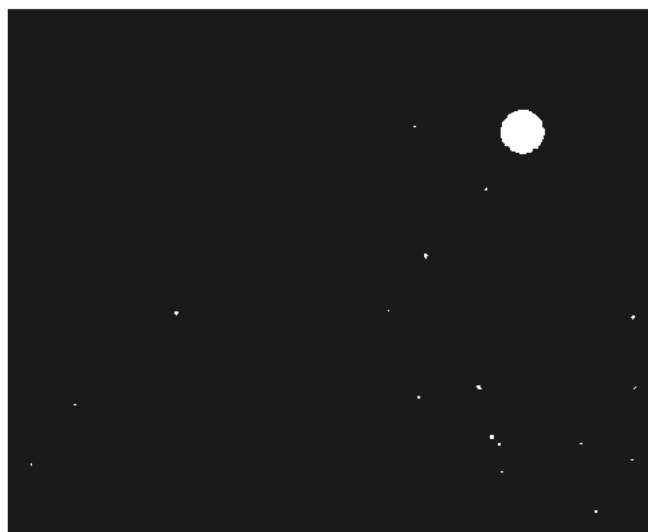


Fig. 5.  
The starry firmament where the fallen live. *¡Presente! En el enterramiento de José Antonio Primo de Rivera* (1939).

Fig. 6.  
Primo de Rivera before the  
cameras of Paramount News  
(1935).



It is at precisely this point in the film, with the founding father newly laid to rest, that he reappears in a true moment of epiphany. The words of the resurrected leader are no longer a statement of political principles but rather a prophecy. They are the lines from the Paramount interview of 1935 quoted at the outset of this essay, and the images are the familiar shots at the doorway of the family home from the same footage (figure 6). Placed in this very different context his message acquires a new significance, one which appears to grant the favour his brother Miguel claimed to have asked of him: Primo de Rivera now returns to speak to us from another world and another time.

The film seems to insist that his destiny lies beyond this world. The camera takes us back up into the stars from which we descended only long enough to savour the closing words of the reanimated hero. Now we are returned to the starry firmament, the narrator's voice is stilled, perhaps by the impossibility of putting any kind of full stop to the utterance of a saint. The resulting silence marks the authentic canonization of the fallen leader.

In 1932 the distinguished radical Spanish fascist Ernesto Giménez Caballero theorized that 'for Spain, fascism is really Catholicism'.<sup>29</sup> This may find an echo in theories of the distinctive nature of leadership in Spain (by Francisco Javier Conde and Juan Beneyto, among others<sup>30</sup>) and may also have created a climate of expectation in which the media contributed to the creation of a religious persona for Spain's only real fascist hero, Primo de Rivera. What we do know for certain is that it was only after his death that this cinematic image became fully formed, forged from conflicting emotions of partisan fervour and crushing sorrow, and he emerged somewhere between a fallen hero and a saint. It is possible that the very scarcity of images of the leader may have

29 Giménez Caballero, *Genio de España. Exaltaciones a una resurrección nacional y del mundo*, 5<sup>th</sup> edn (Madrid: Jeraquía, 1939), p. 725.

30 Juan Beneyto, *El Nuevo Estado Español. El régimen nacional-sindicalista ante la tradición y los sistemas totalitarios* (Madrid: Biblioteca Nueva, 1939); Francisco Javier Conde, *Contribución a la doctrina del caudillaje* (Madrid: Vicesecretaría de Educación Popular, 1942).

31 As made clear by Musse in *The Nationalization of the Masses*, ch. 1, the devotional ceremony was common currency in fascist movements, building on a long tradition of commemorative memorials, a proliferation of national symbols and the cult of the master race. The tributes to the fallen of World War I in Germany constitute one of the outstanding examples of such ceremonial events.

32 Francisco Moret-Messerli, *Commemoraciones y fechas de la España nacionalsindicalista* (Madrid: Vicesecretaría de Educación Popular, 1947).

33 El Valle de los Caídos (The Valley of the Fallen), located in the heart of the Sierra de Guadarrama on the outskirts of Madrid, was a fascist mausoleum *par excellence*, raised in memory of the Nationalist victims of the Civil War (although official publicity always insisted on the possibility that Catholic Republicans could also be buried there). The idea first occurred to Franco in 1940 but construction works were repeatedly delayed. When it finally had its official inauguration in 1959, many of the spaces, especially those designed for mass rallies, clearly belonged to a vanished age. The era of fascism in Europe had ended fifteen years earlier; however, it was maintained as a site for special religious events.

fostered his cult, a phenomenon well-recognized in the Catholic tradition.<sup>31</sup>

*¡Presente!* is the one real example of a cinematic text on Spanish fascism. Its post-mortem nature makes it undeniably morbid, as indeed was the fetishization of Primo de Rivera which took place during his life. That the leader who was for so long referred to as *El Ausente* (The Absent One) should finally be reclaimed with cries of *¡Presente!* has a certain irony. In the homonymous film, Primo de Rivera is indeed physically present, though dead, but he is raised up before our very eyes to undergo a hurried canonization which makes him both morally untouchable and politically unusable.

In 1942 that specialist in rituals, Moret-Messerli, proposed and sanctioned a calendar of Francoist celebrations. His *Breviario nacionalsindicalista* (National Syndicalist Prayer Book) was a response to a national competition organized by the Under-Secretary for Education of the People.<sup>32</sup> Two dates acquired a particular significance for the Falange: 29 October commemorated the day in 1933 on which the Falange party was founded and held its first public event in the Teatro de la Comedia in Madrid, while 20 November commemorated the death of Primo de Rivera in 1936. It is a curious detail that 29 October was described by Moret-Messerli as being both a 'celebration of the foundation of the Falange' and a 'day of commemoration for the fallen' while 20 November is described as a 'day of national mourning'. The commemoration of the doctrinal event, the foundation of the Falange, was already becoming confused with, and soon was completely overshadowed by, a ritualistic mourning for what had been lost. In this sense the Spanish variety of fascism was very different from German Nazism, in which the imperative to action had superseded the pathos of grief.

Fate had one last cruel trick in store for Primo de Rivera and it occurred when Francisco Franco died in the arms of his family – on 20 November 1975. Once again Franco robbed him of what was rightly his, only this time unintentionally. For years Franco had basked in the inherited glory of the title of Head of the Falange as well as the symbolic firepower of Primo de Rivera's memory. Three days later, on 23 November 1975, Franco's remains were deposited in a new tomb occupying most of the small space in the chapel of the Valley of the Fallen, formerly allocated to the tomb of the founder of the Falange.<sup>33</sup>

Translated by John Shanks