

The Leguineche Trilogy

La trilogía de los Leguineche



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Abstract:

The Leguineche trilogy marked a key turning point in the filmography of director Luis García Berlanga. Shot in Spain at the beginning of the socio-political process that would later become known as the Transition (*la Transición*) after Franco's dictatorship, the series of films that comprise the saga, which include *La escopeta nacional* (The national shotgun), *Patrimonio nacional* (National Heritage), and *Nacional III* (National III), reflect diverse historical moments of the time, such as the technocracy of Opus Dei, the celebration of the 1982 World Cup, the attempted military coup on 23 February (23F), and others. Throughout this article, our aim has been to analyse the way in which the screenplays of Berlanga and Rafael Azcona display the social history of the time, as well as to observe the influence of these films on their cinematic production. The characters that comprise the satires exhibit an outdated aristocracy which, in the form of hyperbole, serves as a metaphor for the movements and transformations that were on the verge of taking place in the country.

Keywords:

Aristocracy; Berlanga; satirical comedy; social context; The Spanish Transition.

Resumen:

La trilogía de los Leguineche es un punto de inflexión clave en la filmografía del director Luis García Berlanga. Rodadas en la España que iniciaba la andadura del proceso socio-político que sería conocido como la Transición tras la dictadura franquista, el conjunto de películas (La escopeta nacional, Patrimonio nacional y Nacional III) que conforman esta saga refleja distintos momentos históricos de la época (la tecnocracia del Opus Dei, la celebración del Mundial de fútbol de 1982, el intento de golpe de estado el 23F, etc.). A lo largo del presente artículo, pretendemos analizar cómo el guion de Berlanga y Rafael Azcona mostró la historia social de aquel tiempo, a la par que observar la evolución que estas cintas marcaron en su cine. Los personajes que componen esta sátira exhiben una aristocracia caduca que, en forma de hipérbole, sirven como metáfora de los movimientos y transformaciones que estaban por llegar en el país.

Palabras clave:

Aristocracia; Berlanga; comedia satírica; contexto social; Transición Española.

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1. Introduction

A news report of the film released by Luis García Berlanga (Valencia, 1921-Madrid, 2010) in 1978, described one of the most remarkable cinematic creations in the world of Spanish entertainment. The Valencian filmmaker thus put an end to a five-year absence from film listings and nearly a decade without making an entirely Spanish film (Perales, 1999: 290).

Furthermore, it took place in a country very different from the one in which he had begun his professional career with *Novio a la vista* (Boyfriend in sight) (1954), immersed in a process of change initiated on 20 November 1975 with the death of Francisco Franco Bahamonde, the unquestionable head of a dictatorship that had stayed in power since the 1st of April, 1939.

The returning director's film was *La escopeta nacional* (The national shotgun), which was so well received that it paved the way for the development of a trilogy with its main protagonists being the decadent, aristocratic *Leguineche* family. It was the first time this director had embarked on a film saga.

The fictional lineage would become a hyperbolised reflection of some of the issues that were changing in the debates carried out during the Transition (*la Transición*), which was the transition from an authoritarian regime to a democracy, a historical phenomenon that is still discussed to this day (Morán, 2015).

In the same way that Berlanga's films satirically reflected social issues like the Christmas solidarity campaigns of the 1960s (*Plácido*, 1961), or how they expressed his ironic attitude toward the alleged divine apparitions on the peninsula (*Los jueves, milagro*) (On Thursday, a miracle, 1957), the trilogy being studied herein served as an insight into the Berlanguan vision of a historical period to which he was also a witness.

Fortunately, there are academic publications that delve into the details involved in the making of some of Berlanga's key works, ranging from *Bienvenido, Mister Marshall!* (Welcome, Mr. Marshall!) (Matellano, 2007) to *El verdugo* (The executioner) (Sojo, 2016), although as yet there have been no studies on the fictional *Leguineche* dynasty that focus exclusively on this saga. Nevertheless, we should mention several existing sources and bibliographic references that provide valuable information in this regard.

Starting from this premise, the present article pursues two objectives. Firstly, to analyse the social dissection provided by this film trilogy, converting them into a testimony of a period which, disguised as fictional characters, is full of historical references. Secondly, to highlight the lines of research opening up with regard to the Berlanguan corpus, which is currently being reappraised along with the fictional Leguineche family, as it foreshadows many issues that are still fiercely debated today.

2. Methodology

The sad news of the death of Luis García Berlanga in November of 2010 marked the turning point where bibliographic production and research into his personality began to proliferate. Among others, we would like to highlight the recent compendium by *Notorious Ediciones* (Balmori, 2021), which includes the editorial archive of Enrique Alegrete, as well as unpublished photographs from *Tamaño natural* (1974), provided by Julio Wizuete.

In this regard, Miguel Losada's edition of the notebooks with unpublished annotations and illustrations by the Valencian artist also stands out (2011). As Berlanga himself cultivated a reputation as being chaotic and disorderly in order to make traditional

biographies of him impossible (Franco, 2010), these discoveries over the last decade have revealed previously unknown facts about his filmography (Villena, 2021).

Likewise, film magazines with extensive reach have published dossiers in order to allow a diverse range of specialists to analyse the way in which black humour and absurdity converge in this unique fictional universe (Casas, 2021: 20-68). Obviously, the Leguineche trilogy has not remained untouched by this exploration of hitherto unpublished sources. The opening of box 1034 at the *Instituto Cervantes* during the summer of 2021 was especially fascinating, where the script of *Viva Rusia!* (Long live Russia!) was stored. There had been rumours on many occasions about a possible fourth instalment, but now researchers have an unabridged version of the script that confirms the director's interest in this thwarted epilogue that he maintained until the end.

Our contribution begins by following the main lines that emerged from the *Congreso Mediterráneo, fiesta y carnaval. Homenaje a Luis García Berlanga* (Mediterranean Congress, celebration, and carnival. A tribute to Luis García Berlanga). This scientific gathering included several conferences, papers, and round table discussions that allowed debates to be carried out that focused on the new fields of study that have enabled a better understanding of a film corpus that largely underpins many of the unique characteristics of Spanish society.

Following previous models (Cañas Pelayo, 2014), we begin the analysis with an anecdote that inspired Berlanga and Rafael Azcona, and then gradually transformed a picturesque scene into an opportunity to provide an in-depth analysis of a turbulent period. Together with the study of the cinematographic language used, we will focus on the historical context, as well as primary and secondary sources that have provided us with revealing data on three fundamental films in the career of this director.

To do so, we will make use of bibliographic resources, newspaper archives, interviews with the director himself (Hidalgo and Hernández Les, 2020), and recent productions for audio-visual markets such as DVD and Blu-ray. In this regard, the release of the *Impala* production company stands out, which has retrieved footage of *La escopeta nacional* hitherto unknown to the general public, as well as first-hand testimonies from participants in the filming (Sainz de Vicuña, 2021).

3. Results: from anecdote to trilogy

3.1. The hunt

As with *El verdugo* (Cañas Pelayo, 2014: 139), the idea for *La escopeta nacional* came to Berlanga's mind after hearing a true story from a friend. During one of the famous hunting excursions carried out by the dictator Francisco Franco, Manuel Fraga, who was Minister of Information and Tourism at the time, failed to shoot a low-flying partridge that passed by his post. To his misfortune, the shot ended up hitting Carmen Franco in the backside (Hernández Les and Hidalgo, 1981: 134).

The minister himself limited the event to a brief biographical reference (Fraga, 1980), praising the good humour with which Franco and his daughter reacted to the accident. In any case, other close sources including journalist Jaime Peñafiel, who covered many of these events attended by the regime's elite, gathered comments by the dictator in which he criticised the lack of hunting skills of some of his guests (Peñafiel, 1992).

There were different versions of the event, some highly absurd, which served as an inspiration for the director, who believed that these meetings could be an ideal microcosm (Villena, 2021: 189-207 for making a satire of the most powerful classes. Obviously, such a project could not be carried out until Franco's death, as censorship was the order of the day, but it was an idea that remained in his project notebook.

As was customary in that phase of his career, he worked with scriptwriter Rafael Azcona, who was crucial in understanding an essential part of Berlanga's filmography. For reasons of space and the nature of this article, although we cannot dwell on the long career of this writer (Herrera and Iglesias, 1991), we at least want to highlight the filmmaker's own reflections on how Azcona transformed his work (Gómez Rufo, 1997: 179-184).

As they began their conversations, it became clear that the shooting gag itself was the starting point for a more complex, ensemble comedy. The first key decision was to forget the actual date of the Fraga incident, as it seemed more interesting to frame a hunt that had taken place in the final days of the Franco regime, especially in the forced, progressive hand-over of power that the Falangist circles carried out to the benefit of the technocratic sector.

Briefly, we can affirm that the technocracy sought to open up the system to a certain extent without questioning it, especially through the figure of Admiral Carrero Blanco (Tusell, 1993), who was closely linked to the thriving Opus Dei group, promoting measures such as the *Ley de Prensa* (Press Law) (1966), the *Ley del Movimiento Nacional* (National Movement Law) (1969), and others.

3.1.1. Fictional characters

When it came to locations, Berlanga's production company, headed by Alfredo Matas, quickly realised how difficult it would be to find a suitable place to shoot *La escopeta nacional*. In fact, the Valencian director began to fear that filming would be greatly slowed down by the specific paradox that the owners of such estates would be the most reluctant to provide land for a production that was going to mock their way of life.

Journalist Jimmy Giménez-Arnau suggested to Berlanga the possibility of his contacting Francis Franco, the dictator's grandson. This potential collaborator not only had first-hand accounts of the period, but he also ran a profitable hunting company, and his experience made him an ideal partner. During the interview, Berlanga did not hide the fact that his work would criticise Franco's system, although he made it clear that the figure of the dictator would not appear directly and there would be no personal attacks (Gómez Rufo, 1997: 379-381).

The help of the grandson was particularly useful, especially after the *Infantado* family refused to allow the film to be shot on their property in Viñuelas. In the end, the production company obtained permission to shoot the film on property that belonged to Paloma Manzanedo (*El Rincón*), which is a magnificent house with grounds large enough to film the hunting scenes. Specifically, its gothic palace style was highly conducive to the atmosphere of the story (Hernández Les and Hidalgo, 1981: 134).

As promised to the grandson, Franco's character would not appear in-person in *La escopeta nacional*. Is it possible that there were ulterior motives other than not offending an advisor on the project? Frankly, the political climate was anything but straightforward in 1978, which journalists such as Carlos Barrera described as a situation that created a difficult path toward democratic elections (Paredes, 2002: 877-889). Issues such as terrorism, the risk of a coup headed by the military leadership, the legalisation of the Spanish Communist Party (*PCE*), the rise of nationalist sentiment, and other matters were being confronted. It is not implausible

that Berlanga's team believed that the general public would be more receptive to a production that used fictional characters and stereotypes of the regime's elite, which would serve as a metaphor without using real names.

This is evident in the poster that promoted the film. There are caricatures of different archetypes, including a militaristic priest, a soldier, a young nobleman in a hunting suit, and so on. Unlike the approach used by one of his prominent cohorts of the same generation, Juan Antonio Bardem, any sign of militancy whatsoever in Berlanga was neutral at best. *La escopeta nacional* is set within the framework of the late Francoist period, yet it seeks a much wider scope: the corruption associated with power (Hernández Les and Hidalgo, 1981: 134-135).

Diverse studies on Berlanga's cinematic vision have underlined the fact that the foundation of Berlanguan cinema is based on the difficulties experienced by a single individual in the face of social pressure by the group (Perales, 1997: 11). In this case, Azcona and Berlanga chose this type of protagonist in the figure of Jaime Canivell, an ambitious Catalan businessman who wants to patent the installation of his automatic door entry systems on a large scale.

Figure 1. Poster of *La escopeta nacional* (1978)



Source: Berlanga Film Museum© Valencian Regional Government

To do so, he has to obtain the support of the government in mandating that old houses with outdated systems must install this technology. José Sazartón, an actor from Barcelona with a long career at the time, was chosen by Berlanga, and the Valencian filmmaker was very satisfied with his performance (Franco, 2005: 177).

With this actor, the comic sketch of what was destined to become a saga began: Canivell is aware that he must curry the favour of a Francoist minister, who will send his request to *El Pardo* (Franco's residence). To do so, he seeks out the agent Cerillo (played by

Rafael Alonso), who tells him about a noble family in financial straits who are willing to host a hunt with political personalities on their estate, if the Catalanian businessman finances the event.

This is used to pose the paradox that is omnipresent throughout the film. The real host is the industrialist, who has financed the entire affair. However, he is forced to defer honour to the Marquis of Leguineche, the long-standing owner of the residence, who does not hesitate to flaunt his status. Moreover, the aristocrat must conceal the fact that he has been paid to host the party. The Marquis is one of the most relevant characters in the entire saga, played by Luis Escobar.

Of all the cast, he was Berlanga's personal choice. Luis Escobar Kirkpatrick, Marquis of Marismas of the Guadalquivir, a multi-faceted man of letters, who had no previous experience in this artistic medium. Yet the filmmaker was convinced that Escobar's status as a nobleman made him the perfect candidate to play an anachronistic, feudal lord.

His arrogance in the way he treated Canivell along with his despotic manner toward the servants reflected a merciless dissection of a privileged man who enjoyed his status. In his detailed memoirs, the Marquis of Marismas recalls both the interest and concern he felt toward the script that Azcona and Berlanga had brought to him on 18 October 1977 (Escobar, 2000). He was especially repulsed by the fact that his character had a fetish for the pubic hair of his mistresses.

However, the 400,000 *pesetas* offered by the production company in the negotiations tempted him, as well as his own curiosity to try acting on film. On 31 October of the same year, the definitive agreement was signed, with the Marquis still doubting whether he had made the right decision (Escobar, 2000).

As for the rest of the cast, Berlanga turned to names that had appeared frequently in his films. Amparo Soler Leal would play Chus, the unhappy daughter-in-law of the Marquis, who is married to Luis José, the incompetent heir to the Leguineche estate. The importance of this dysfunctional marriage would grow in the subsequent instalments. José Luis López Vázquez was chosen to play this perverted aristocrat, and he was satisfied with the way in which this satire allowed him to showcase Franco's backroom (Llorente, 2010: 237-238).

Both the marquis and his first-born son are channels through which Berlanga leaks some of his own preferences in the field of eroticism, a forbidden terrain during the harshest phase of censorship during the dictatorship, which was now slowly coming to the surface. Researchers have recently provided interesting monographs on this facet of the filmmaker, who even directed publications such as *La Sonrisa Vertical* (The vertical smile) (Royo-Villanova, 2021).

The most obvious metaphor for the ecclesiastical establishment is found in Father Calvo (Agustín González), the irascible chaplain of the Leguineche family who appears in the sequels. Figures very similar to him can be found in future Berlanguian films, such as *La vaquilla* (The heifer) (1985) and *París-Tombuctú* (1999).

There would also be a greater abundance of female roles than in previous works by this creative duo, with the figure of his secretary, Mercedes, standing out alongside Canivell. Characterised by Mónica Randall, Berlanga recalled that she was the pseudo-intellectual companion with aspirations, as well as the extra-marital affair of the businessman (Franco, 2005: 180). This adultery would be relevant in the third act of the film.

Also worthy of mention is an attractive, aspiring actress (Bárbara Rey), the affection of whom is contested by the influential minister Álvaro (Antonio Ferrandis) and Luis José himself. At the other extreme is a former star, Soledad (Conchita Montes), who is now left with only the memory of her past fame and the favouritism that remains.

La escopeta nacional makes no secret of its intention when it starts with the guttural sounds of farm animals. In all likelihood, when it comes to validating its social dissection, the fact of using these fictional characters rather than genuine, historical figures has allowed the fable of Azcona and Berlanga to maintain interest by having a more generic scope.

3.1.2. *A banquet without partridges*

Scholars of the trilogy (Perales, 1999: 77-81) stress that there are a number of established ideas that are already firmly in place in the first instalment: an outdated aristocracy; absurd narration, and protagonists who resort to roguish behaviour.

Essentially, this structure is consistent in a film in which we see Canivell trying to win favours from the influential Álvaro at all costs. Nothing will dissuade the businessman from doing so, including trying to help him with difficulties in his love life, given that Luis José has sequestered Vera, the young artist with whom he has become infatuated, in the storehouse of the estate.

During the outlandish mediation, an extravagant aristocrat with the title of Prince Volkonski, played by Fermín Rotaeta, is introduced. His character is important in the plot, as he pretends to be Vera's fiancé in order to safeguard the minister's reputation, especially in the eyes of the Opus faction. Paradoxically, Luis Escobar recalled that Rotaeta was a person who was committed to communism, to the point of giving lectures to the staff serving the marquise about their right to vindicate themselves during the filming that took place in the month of November, 1977 (Escobar, 2000).

Luis José's intentions with his mistress imply another nod from the director's own sensual tastes. In fact, during the *Transición*, Berlanga released the first strictly erotic collection in Spain: the aforementioned *La Sonrisa Vertical*. We refer to a scene in which Vera is tied up, on her knees, and naked in front of the bed. This is a completely unsubtle allusion to sadomasochism. The director was quite insistent to Carlos Suárez, his main camera operator, about the importance of this moment (Franco, 2010: 179-186), even though these sensual scenes were somewhat diluted by the wily, preposterous antics taking place around them (Villena, 2021: 194-207).

Without blushing at the humiliating situation that includes loud arguments between the priest and Luis José in front of everyone, Canivell accepts the farce of posing as a film producer who promises Vera a role if she leaves the aristocrat. It is during this speech that he meets Segundo (Luis Ciges), one of Luis José's most faithful, extravagant servants.

Bearing in mind the complaints by Berlanguian scholars about his notoriously poor memory in interviews (Galán, 1999), one of the few certainties we have about his early years is the strong relationship with Ciges that he developed in his youth, as both had participated as volunteers in the Blue Division (*la División Azul*), a clear attempt by these young men to lessen Franco's pressure on their families, given their Republican background (Franco, 2005: 13-37).

Segundo is one of the townsmen who is convinced that "the marquises have done nothing but good for him!", confirming the perception left by the script that Spanish society is accustomed to people being either tyrants or lackeys (Franco, 2005: 175-176), victims of a fragile memory with no middle ground. His voluntary servitude could be likened to his counterparts in *Los santos*

inocentes (Delibes, 2013). The only difference is that in the novel by the same name, as well as in the film adaptation by Mario Camus in 1984, this is portrayed as a dramatic reality, whereas Azcona and Berlanga always sought a vision of acidic humour.

Throughout the hunt, Canivell is able to bear humiliation without abandoning his fraudulent politeness, be it with a deposed South American leader or when dealing with complaints from Father Calvo, who suspects him of being a separatist, as he is Catalanian. His only ostentatious insults are directed at Castanys (Pedro del Rey), a bank representative who once refused to give Canivell a loan. Now closely linked to Ricardo, an influential member of Opus Dei, he will suffer various put-downs from his acquaintance.

Rumours about the content of the film aroused misgivings. In his diary, Luis Escobar stated in November that personal friends such as the Duke and Duchess of Cádiz spoke unfavourably of his participation in *La escopeta nacional* (Escobar, 2000). Meanwhile, he himself claimed to feel overwhelmed by the exorbitant amount of dialogue in the script.

With curious irony, Elsa Zabala was the mute marquise who accompanied Leguineche on the estate, although Escobar regretted the fact that she was a very talkative person in the breaks between scenes, something that made it difficult for him to memorise his lines for the following takes.

The film touches superficially on relevant issues such as freedom of the press, an example of which is a dinner party where it is jokingly mentioned that journalists are out of control and should be sent to prison. In keeping with the shocking realism and burlesque nature of the film, the evening is cut short by a rat that invades the Leguineche's dining room. It is quickly killed by Father Calvo, although the shots were difficult to film, as the rodent bit the actress Rossanna Yanni.

Just when Álvaro and his investors are most intensely seduced by Canivell's project, including released shares and dubious commissions, a telegram arrives announcing the success of Ricardo (Fernando Hilbeck), who is called to an emergency cabinet meeting. This places men like his detested Castanys in a position of pre-eminence and makes the industrialist's progress useless.

Diverse criticism highlights the complete failure of Canivell's venture on the estate (Perales, 1999: 288). In any case, we can minimise this issue. Bearing in mind the critical situation in which he finds himself after the dismissal, he skilfully plays his remaining cards to forge an agreement with his former rival, the fellow countryman who dared to deny him a loan, by attending a morning mass where he improvises as a clumsy assistant. He also forces Mercedes to go to confession and promises Castanys, who advises Canivell to always speak in Spanish, that their extramarital affair is over.

It is not clear whether the influential Opus Dei banker will keep his word after the religious ceremony, but he seems sincere in promising Canivell that he will give due praise to his superiors for his negotiating skills.

As in other works by Berlanga (Cañas Pelayo, 2014: 152), the filmmaker seems to put details of his own biography into his characters. He later admitted that the question of ministerial changes (Franco, 2010: 200) was one of the issues that most infuriated him about Spanish politics. Any change in the organisational structure of power dragged down not only the incumbent minister, but all the projects as well, and especially the staff involved, who were comfortably settled in their jobs. In connection with the film, the fall of Álvaro forces Canivell to start the operation all over again from square one.

All things considered, there were several regrets on Berlanga's part, especially for unnecessarily highlighting the message that Jaume and Mercedes would not live happily ever after, thereby satirising the happy endings of children's stories. Together with the

Christmas carol inserted at the end of *Plácido*, it was one of the scenes in which he admitted to having gone too far in his films (Hernández Les and Hidalgo, 1981: 181).

Specialists such as Diego Galán stress that the key to understanding the Berlanguan film corpus is to see it as a defence of individualism in opposition to the group (Alegre, 2009: 41), without referring to any particular ideology (Alegre, 2009: 41).

The movie theatres *Real Cinema* and *Proyecciones de Madrid* premiered the film on 14 September. The reception by the public was the most satisfying that Berlanga had obtained until that time, and the film remained in the cinemas for three months (Perales, 1999: 291).

Literary personalities such as writer Francisco Umbral stressed that *La escopeta nacional* reflected the transition of the Falangist elite, which was handing over the baton to Opus Dei in a tasteless way, initiating the escape of the ruling social class from the old regime (Hernández Les and Hidalgo, 1981: 9).

3.2. End of the saga: *Patrimonio nacional*

The strong box-office results of *La escopeta nacional* convinced Berlanga that it was possible to make a sequel. However, this time he would dispense with the character of Canivell, although his figure would be mentioned. The sequel would focus entirely on the Leguineche lineage, and the title would be *Patrimonio nacional*.

Moreover, critics such as José Luis Guarner, in his column in the magazine *Nuevo Fotogramas*, affirmed that this aristocratic family had the potential to become a television series (Perales, 1999: 292). Nevertheless, the Valencian director had a feature film clearly in mind, with which he could explore the realities of the time through his characteristic style of comic sketches.

3.2.1. Openness to the sepia monarchy

As on the previous occasion, the script was co-written with Rafael Azcona, and it was clear from the first page that the intention was to represent a social reality: the reaction of an aristocracy that had been stagnating in its outlying possessions during the Franco regime, and was now trying to recover its courtly splendour with the reestablishment of the monarchy of Juan Carlos I of the Bourbons.

The film is set in the spring of 1977. We see a light Citroën 11 and a Land Rover exiting the M-30 to enter one of the accesses to the City of Madrid. Segundo is the character we previously met in the first film. He is one of the Marquis's most helpful servants who looks after the livestock on the Leguineche estate (Hernández Les and Hidalgo, 1981:141).

The purpose of this brief introduction is to quickly immerse the viewer in the new dynamic of this instalment, where the Spanish capital is the key. The Leguineche family wants to reopen their old urban palace. However, it took Berlanga's team a long time to find an appropriate residence.

The film crew was convinced that it would not be possible to recreate the Leguineche's house as a set. To achieve the desired effect, they would have to find a royal palace that would be suitable for this purpose. There were various properties that met the requirements, but the aristocracy that owned them were diametrically opposed to allowing the production of a film that would be a continuation of the severe criticism against their social class (Perales, 1999: 296), and they did not want to fall into the same trap of *La escopeta nacional*.

Berlanga himself acknowledged that he felt profoundly discouraged in those initial weeks, as they were unable to obtain permission to produce the crucial scenes from the first act of the film. Everything changed when they discovered the Linares palace, located in the heart of Madrid, the characteristics of which were ideal. However, the negotiations for the permits were delicate.

Juan Hernández Les and Manuel Hidalgo have provided the best data in this regard, as they interviewed the filmmaker very soon after he obtained authorisation (1981:143). In the interview, Berlanga gave exclusive details about some noteworthy support from public figures of the time, such as Ricardo de la Cierva (Minister of Culture), Javier Tusell (Director of Artistic Heritage), and Marcelino Oreja (Minister of Foreign Affairs).

The entire situation, together with the backing of Alfredo Matas, was fundamental in allowing the director to establish his team at the palace. Part of the agreement included ensuring that the rich marble and artistic works in the palace's rooms would be looked after properly.

In total, a budget of 70 million *pesetas* was granted to the Valencian filmmaker, who took advantage of the economic endowment to incorporate a video camera that would be connected to the film camera; this advance allowed him to observe the results of the filming through a small screen, frequently noting down the ideas that arose as the project developed (Hernández Les and Hidalgo, 1981: 146).

Once again, writer Francisco Umbral pointed out that the Berlanguian parody of the Leguineche family was an analysis of a contemporary moment: in this case, the yearning dream of the old nobility, courtiers of rigaudon (Balmori, 2021: 92-95), of which the new Crown would give rise to a sepia monarchy, thereby restoring privileges (Hernández Les and Hidalgo, 1981: 9-13).

Obstacles soon appeared. The beginning of *Patrimonio nacional* would not be that of a triumphant Leguineche family returning to the palace. In fact, they find themselves rejected at first by the unexpected (for the audience) owner of the place, Eugenia (Mary Santpere), Countess of Santagón, who is nostalgic for the Francoist period. It is revealed that the Marquis's partner in *La escopeta nacional* was his mistress, and that his wife stayed in Madrid while he remained in the outskirts.

3.2.2. *Dysfunctional nobility in a democracy*

Patrimonio nacional is founded on the internal conflicts of the lineage (Casas, 2021: 59). It soon becomes clear that the marquis's wife has not been idle in her romantic life either, as she has a lover who is an former aviation officer, Nacho (Alfredo Mayo), and another affair with one of the servants, Goyo (José Lifante), which causes a scandal among those close to her.

As an actor, Luis Escobar found himself more comfortable in this sequel, as he was already quite familiar with the type of dialogue used in the saga, and he was satisfied with the greater number of scenes in which he would star. Despite his initial fears, he reflected in his memoirs on how happy he had felt when in June of 1978, during a reception organised by Giscard D'Estaing, King Juan Carlos and Queen Sofia of Greece themselves congratulated him on his performance as the Marquis (Escobar, 2000).

He was also familiar with being in the spotlight, as he was one of the prominent personalities who attended the funeral of María José Villapadierna, a descendant of the heirs to the Linares palace, on 25 October 1979.

We can observe various allusions to key events in contemporary Spanish politics. The Marquis and his son go to one of the main gathering places of the jet set. It is no longer about hunting grounds. Now, it is the era of golf courses. They will be looking for support to turn their palace into a social attraction. Politicians, bankers, and businessmen are now the new elite (Villena, 2021: 198-199).

Accused of having had a beneficial relationship with the Franco regime, the marquis boasts at the meeting that Luis José had participated in the famous *Contubernio de Munich* (Concubinage of Munich). This is a reference to the meeting in which all the anti-Franco forces participated in the German city, with the exception of the Spanish Communist Party (which refused to participate), where leaders such as Salvador de Madariaga stood out.

Naturally, in line with the immoral character of Luis José, it takes no time at all for the viewer to forget about the mistake when it is revealed that he deceived his father and spent the money that was sent to him on other pleasures, like travelling to Paris, rather than thinking about political activism. Ironically, Berlanga did indeed have a more direct link with some of those responsible for the meeting, including names such as Satrústegui and Raúl Morodo (Gómez Rufo, 1997: 205-206).

He met them on the flight back to the Barajas Airport, and even feared that he would be included in the detentions for interrogation that took place at the airport upon landing. However, it must have been known that the filmmaker was returning from several festivals in Europe and had not taken sides in the sessions of the IV Congress of the European Movement, which was the real name of the event, as the pejorative title of *Contubernio* (Concubinage) was merely Falangist propaganda.

As on many other occasions in the trilogy, we see the characters wandering in diverse circles with a monothematic position that is neglected, as the focus is now being placed on the historical significance resulting from the return of the monarchy (Perales, 1999: 77-81).

López Vázquez emphasised that both he and Luis Escobar had a much greater role in the sequel than in *La escopeta nacional* (Llorente, 2010: 243), highlighting the despicable deeds of both characters. During tours of the palace, despite claims by the Marquis that he had never made a pact with the dictatorship, his Carlist military uniform is discovered in one of the chests, which he justifies by saying that it was the only way you were able to smoke in those days.

In the end, the two must join forces to regain control of the house, as Chus soon conspires with the Countess to demand that Luis José return to their marital life. Capitalising on her affair with Goyo, father and son consider the idea of having the aristocrat declared incompetent due to senility.

This wretched scheme to obtain the income of a relative would be repeated by Azcona and Berlanga in *Moros y cristianos* (Moors and Christians) (1987). A recent study on the role of Law in their films focuses on how the law in the Leguineche trilogy ironically reflects public and private corruption (Rivaya, 2019: 293-294).

Moreover, this statement is contrasted in the films. *La escopeta nacional* uses Franco's decrees as a reflection of the use of ministerial influence and chicanery to obtain perks. Here the false testimony of Luis José and his father is an attempt to appropriate Eugenia's money, although they need the approval of a family council to do so. Even though they boast of having connections with the Queen of England herself, they will only be able to convince one relative.

This new character, a nephew of the Leguineche family, would be none other than José Luis de Vilallonga, IX Marquis of Castellbell, a suitable choice because of his familiarity with the aristocratic world, yet problematic as well due to his relationship with some members of the cast. Luis Escobar had been reluctant to work with him after he had read some statements made by Vilallonga at the end of 1979 in the magazine *Interviú*. The statements criticised Carmen Martínez Bordiu, who was Duchess of Cádiz at the time, and a personal friend of Escobar.

Vilallonga played the part of Álvaro, a playboy with a certain reputation abroad who came to Madrid looking to get his piece of the pie from the declaration of incompetence. He was accompanied by Solange, his French wife. Berlanga agreed that Vilallonga's wife in real life, Syliane Stella, would play the role, which was nearly an opportunity for the couple to recreate their previous lifestyle, as they were accustomed to the world of exclusives in publications such as *Hola!*

The procedure to file for guardianship of the Countess leads to a transcendental moment in the script where the transition of power that has taken place in Spain is clearly presented. The protagonists go to a luxurious financial institution (filmed at the *Banco Internacional de Comercio*) where they try to gain access to Mrs. Leguineche's accounts.

There the Marquis will meet again with an old acquaintance, who has now become the bank manager. The old aristocrat will be dismayed by the fact that the men of high finance have taken everything, while he has remained "faithful to the land". Alejandro Araoz, who would later become a member of Parliament and Director of the Bank of Spain, gave his authorisation for a sequence to be filmed at the location, which is a satire of financial coldness.

Any minimal progress in these shoddy negotiations is slowed down by the new fiscal reality, which his guileful nature does not take into account. As noted by Rivaya (2019: 293), within the Berlanguian corpus there are only a few scenes more absurd than the outrageous interview of the marquis and his son by the tax inspectors after decades of not paying taxes. The countess argues that in Franco's time, she was never troubled by such questions.

This is a climactic moment in the second instalment. With the entire family ready to leave by car to go to a bullfight, where the king is expected to attend, the Leguineche family receive a visit from Father Calvo, whom the Marquis has summoned, "because it's always good to have a priest nearby". Along with him, there is an unwelcome visit by two inspectors, who claim that they have been trying to contact the family for a long time.

This new relationship with the tax authorities was one of the most caricatured themes in the Spanish popular imaginary of the time. One example that comes to mind is Manuel Vázquez's comic strip that embodies all existing fears in the tax collectors (Vargas, 2011: 262); the fear of civil servants, red tape, and bureaucracy are typical of Berlanga (Cañas Pelayo, 2014: 155).

The Leguineche family claimed not to have contributed between 1931 and 1936 because of their aversion to the Second Republic. After the civil war, their refusal to help the state coffers was due to a feeling of panic that Franco would end up supporting the Axis Forces, due to the clan's links with the Queen of England. It goes on and on with an outlandish monologue by Escobar in which they learn that a good part of these tax evasion crimes were hindered by the statute of limitations. Instead of paying the remainder, Luis José resorts to bribery.

Finally, the son of the marquis is briefly imprisoned for taking part in a demonstration, yet in reality, he was only trying to seduce one of the activists. While the attempt to bribe public officials does not result in any legal consequences, a brief protest against private property does. As a reprimand, his father informs him that the girl he tried to seduce is unbalanced, and even worse, she is the daughter of a man who shared his love life with a doll for years. Here Berlanga pays tribute to the character played by Michel Piccoli in *Tamaño natural* (1974).

3.2.3. Funeral services

During the month of September 1980 (Escobar, 2000), one of the final scenes of *Patrimonio Nacional* was filmed in the palace stable. We refer to the duel between the Marquis of Leguineche and Nacho, as both feel obligated to carry out the fight due to pressure from the Countess. Outraged at the attempt to be declared incompetent, she forces her lover to challenge her husband to a duel.

With Luis José as the master of ceremonies and Father Calvo warning that they will be denied a sacred burial, the parody of the duel takes place in which both men shoot into the air to “safeguard” their honour, but with the extreme misfortune that a stray bullet hits the priest in the backside. This is the second accident of its kind, as we discover that in *La escopeta nacional*, Chus has problems in one eye because of an incident involving Luis José, clearly hinting at the Fraga incident previously mentioned (Villena, 2021: 150-151).

From their respective balconies, the Countess of Santagón and Álvaro observe the situation, bewildered. While the latter states to Solange that “in this country, you can’t come from abroad even to inherit”, the proprietress of the palace takes out her own shotgun to finish off both men, but with the misfortune that the weapon is defective and explodes, killing her on the spot.

Segundo goes to the monarchs’ palace to report the news of the death. There he is attended by one of the guards, a character who reveals to the audience the fate of Jaume Canivell. According to this Royal House worker, the Catalan industrialist is installing automatic doors to modernise the palace. In other words, he has finally achieved his goal. For this reason, we have affirmed that the defeat bestowed on him by the critics in *La escopeta nacional* is questionable. It would be different on a moral level, which is something that Berlanga himself emphasises in the way in which a businessman is forced to be flattering (Franco, 2010: 181-182).

On a stylistic level, Berlanga experiments with sequence shots, highlighted by the way he places the camera on a wheeled platform to slide it anxiously through the nooks and crannies of the palace during the funeral (Perales, 1999: 298).

One of the plot devices used to keep the spectator’s interest is the doubt as to whether the Spanish monarchs will attend the funeral. The arrival of a helicopter arouses hopeful expectations in the palace, with the Marquis at the front line to receive the guests. The frustration is evident when they discover that the visitor is Nacho, who has come with flowers for the deceased. As in *La escopeta nacional*, the satire is equally distant from real individuals. From the late-Francoist vision that exalts him as the guarantor of orderly continuity (López Rodó, 1977), through the classics of foreign historiography (Carr, 2003, pp. 251), and finally arriving at the current strict revisionism of his figure (Quintans, 2016), the role of Juan Carlos I during the *Transición* is not directly addressed in the trilogy. Instead, the focus is on mockery aimed at outdated court circles who make an atavistic document in the style of the *Manifiesto de los Persas*, which the Marquis of Leguineche signs.

The final closing is an eloquent scene in which Goyo allows Japanese tourists to enter the palace to have their photographs taken with the Marquis. Together with his son, they are heralded as the “end of the saga” in a compelling epilogue where the old nobility is confined to the role of a tourist attraction (Gómez Rufo, 1997: 383-385).

The film received fairly modest reviews, although the reception by the public was once again high. It remained in cinemas from 30 March 1981 to 4 June of the same year, (Perales, 1999: 298).

In his notes from May of 1981 (Escobar, 2000), the Marquis of the Marismas mentioned feeling uncomfortable with the scene in which Amparo Soler Leal’s character momentarily wins Luis José back by performing fellatio on him in the style that Solange had

taught her, thereby obtaining his promise to go with her to *Extremadura*, the region from which she hails. Nevertheless, the film was selected to participate in the prestigious Cannes Film Festival, even though it did not win an award. Luis Escobar received the second highest number of votes just after the trans-alpine actor Ugo Tognazzi.

3.3. *The rise of the socialist party: Nacional III*

Along with his artistic work, Berlanga combined his profession during those years with a post as Director of *Filmoteca*. He remained there until 1982, although what lingered in the popular imaginary was the peculiar way in which he learned of his dismissal.

Shortly after the premiere of *La escopeta nacional*, José García Moreno, Director of Cinematography during the UCD government, invited him to be in charge of *Filmoteca*. Even though there were complications and problems, on different occasions Berlanga claimed to have enjoyed the experience, and he hosted different projects for the revival of regional films and the organisation of festivals before his unexpected dismissal (Gómez Rufo, 1997: 215).

With the triumph of the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE), a series of changes took place in the organisational chart of *Filmoteca* that ended up affecting Berlanga himself, especially due to the innovative focus sought by Pilar Miró, who was the new General Director of Cinematography (Franco, 2005: 190-193). At a public event, Minister Javier Solana greeted the Valencian filmmaker effusively and casually told him that he had signed something in the director's name, but he could not remember exactly what it was. According to the director himself, it was Pilar Miró who affirmed that the document Solana had signed was Berlanga's own dismissal (Gómez Rufo, 1997: 23).

He could not resist recreating this misunderstanding in *Todos a la cárcel* (Everyone to jail) (1993), though without any direct political references. Contrary to the widespread, long-standing opinion of analysts such as Jorge Semprún, a new school of thought insists that Berlanga's work always aims at costumbrist comedy and reflections of everyday life rather than political issues (Morán, 2017: 620). In any case, the fear that existed among the old ruling elite regarding the triumph of the PSOE at the polls (Paredes, 2022: 932-947) was exploited by Berlanga and Azcona for what would be the final adventure for the Leguineche family.

3.3.1. *Failed coup attempt*

At the beginning of *Nacional III*, the Leguineche family no longer live in their palace, but in a flat with more modest dimensions, where they still keep relics such as the urn of *Santa Irena de Roissi*. The film crew found a location for the protagonists' new home at 26 *Alfonso XII* Street. Luis Escobar recalled the scenes filmed there in May of 1982, pointing out that the property was owned by Marita Morbecq (Escobar, 2000).

The first act is set on the morning of 24 February 1981, in the final moments of Lieutenant-Colonel Tejero's failed coup attempt on the Congress of Deputies in an effort to restore the old Francoist model of government (Perales, 1999: 300). Father Calvo watches the attempted coup with great enthusiasm, while Luis José is seen in an X-rated cinema (Casas, 2021: 61).

Again, this was no coincidence. Berlanga perfectly depicted the uncertainty that he had personally felt as a result of the events in the Congress of Deputies on 23F. Curiously, he was dubbing *Patrimonio nacional* when his production manager burst into the room to tell them the news (Gómez Rufo, 1997: 209-210). The Valencian director stopped all activity, picked up his wife, and headed home, recalling the strange calm and vacuum of power that seemed to preside over the Spanish capital.

Nevertheless, his portrayal of the failed coup attempt is utterly superficial, as it was only used in the plot to open the film. There is a gag about Chus's father having died shortly after getting his hopes up about the alleged return of the old regime. The Leguineche family decide to go to *Extremadura* for the funeral of Luis José's father-in-law, seeking to profit financially from the inheritance, despite the fact that on his last visit, the son-in-law fled in a truckload of pigs.

As previously seen in *Patrimonio Nacional*, the financial pressures are obvious, as the viewer sees how Chus coerced the servant Goyo into revealing where the servants had hidden the family jewels during the assault on the palace by "the reds" during the civil war.

When they reach *Extremadura*, the chicanery starts again. Luis José achieves his long-awaited reconciliation, something that Father Calvo takes advantage of to attack the divorce movement. The clergyman reflects a controversial issue of the time, which was the acclaimed law that allowed marital separation (Caballero Gea, 1982).

However, the reconciliation takes place for spurious reasons. Luis José wants to be able to sell all his father-in-law's possessions for cash, and we later learn that Chus is pregnant from another relationship.

3.3.2. *The great flight*

The capital flight by former elites was not a new issue for the members of the cast. Luis Escobar recorded in his notes on April of 1978 the sadness he felt at the episode involving Carmen Villaverde, who was discovered at the Barajas Airport checkpoints with gold medals and diamonds, which were gifts that had been given to Franco by various town halls (Escobar, 2000). Her purpose was to take the precious stones to Geneva.

Nacional III tries to place the Leguineche family in this endeavour, as they are determined to find a tax haven for the money they have left. Even Father Calvo is involved in a preposterous negotiation with a religious order that allegedly conceals such matters.

Technically speaking, Berlanga's approach on this occasion is to make extensive use of the Steadicam with a tendency to look for wide open spaces. The choreography of the successive ensemble dialogues was specifically revealed to the cast in order to facilitate the camera work (Valdés, 1982: 26-31). The film reprises the situations of its predecessors (Perales, 1999: 300-307).

A unique love triangle develops between the Marquis, Viti, and Segundo, who is Viti's husband. Chus Lampreave had been playing the part of this servant from the first instalment of the trilogy, yet she takes a much more prominent role in this film. After living together for a year, she becomes the aristocrat's real administrator and caretaker. Nevertheless, the nobleman tries to make a deal with Segundo so they can avoid a divorce.

By making use of old friends (most notably Paulita, played by María Luisa Ponte), the Leguineche family have an interview with a courier (Francisco Merino), who agrees to take their undeclared income to Miami.

Beforehand, there are inferences to the period, such as the business that Luis José wants to set up to take advantage of the 1982 World Cup by trying to patent the "World Cup Menu", which is nothing more than a simple dish of *paella*. This is a continuation of the ideas he had already been pursuing in *Patrimonio nacional*, including the outlandish use of Goya's portrait, *La familia de Carlos IV*, in order to convert it into the picture of a football team (Villena, 2021: 198).

Unable to understand the workings of the black market, the family tries to take advantage of the steady stream of pilgrims to Lourdes in order to hide the clan's precious stones in plaster. On this occasion, they cannot rely on the support of Segundo, who is in a new relationship and has set up a sleazy sex shop with a partner, which also reflects the mentality of "taking the lid off" during those years.

Berlanga had not touched on the phenomenon of apparitions and miracles since *Los jueves, milagro*. However, the satire and mockery in these scenes, filmed in the Estación del Norte of Madrid (Perales, 1999: 302-303), is always directed at the Marquis and his son, who are capable of taking advantage of religious faith for selfish ends. Meanwhile, Chus carries other goods in the car, and is hardly flustered by a brief police check, which reflects the fact that all the efforts of her father-in-law and husband have been in vain. López Vázquez would later recall the difficulty of filming in that situation (Llorente, 2010: 247-248).

Once they arrived in France, they tried to contact Álvaro, who at the time was separated from Solange and living with his mother. The place chosen to shoot this part of the film in the summer of 1982 was the town of Biarritz. The plot benefits from this situation in maintaining continuity, as the Marquis had managed to enlist his nephew in declaring Eugenia incompetent in *Patrimonio Nacional* by promising him the possessions she has there.

The Crystal Palace in *El Retiro* Park became an improvised French casino during the filming (Perales, 1999: 303). There the Leguineche family would see that their tragic political destiny was going to continue, as it is announced to the delight of the waiters that François Mitterrand has won the elections.

A tragi-comic diaspora ensues in which the marquis hopes to return to Madrid with Viti's help, while Luis José and Álvaro pretend to be in an accident to hide the money and jewels on their way to Florida. This time, the reviews and box office takings were the lowest of the saga (Gómez Rufo, 1997: 387-388).

Be that as it may, the film was the most satisfying for Luis Escobar at the end of the shooting, as he stated that Berlanga had carried out a production on a par with Fellini (Escobar, 2000). The first installment, *La escopeta nacional*, was also distributed abroad in November of 1983, and was well received at the New York Spanish Film Week.

4. Results and discussion: a thwarted sequel and lines of research

Berlanga and Azcona wrote a fourth script about the Leguineche saga with the provisional title of *Nacional IV*. What is known about this instalment is that the protagonism of the marquis would be even greater than in the previous films, so the death of Luis Escobar in 1991 was a big setback for the project. Key collaborators such as Sol Carnicero, the competent head of production, had already been informed about the situation (Villena, 2021: 202-203).

In spite of this, producer Andrés Vicente Gómez expressed interest in rewriting the script in which Jorge Berlanga, one of the director's sons, would perform. Manuel Hidalgo was offered the job of creating an adaptation, which included several meetings with Luis Berlanga himself at the *Hotel Suecia* (Alegre, 2009: 57-58).

The potential film was renamed ¡Viva Rusia!, as it was intended to link the Leguineche family with the fraudulent, aspiring heirs to the Tsar, who were trying to take advantage of the dissolution of the USSR. New characters were to be added, such as one of the nieces of the marquis, who had served as a missionary in Africa, in addition to having the main characters take part in a safari.

Even so, production of the fourth instalment never materialised. No matter how many changes were made, the absence of Escobar as the Marquis of Leguineche affected at least one of the characters that made up the core of the plot. Moreover, problems could be foreseen, such as the high cost of the production, scheduling difficulties due to the large ensemble cast, and the ups and downs of the Berlanga-Azcona collaboration.

Later, Hidalgo recalled that the afterword to all of this was the refusal by the ministry on two occasions to grant a subsidy for the film, even though the plot received positive reviews (Lamet, 1996: 12-14).

Nevertheless, this universe would be alluded to once again in Berlanga's subsequent filmography. Thus, he developed another project, *La vaquilla* (1985), which would have been impossible to screen during the dictatorship, in which soldiers from the Republican Zone infiltrate the Nationalist Territory during the war. It was a satire about the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939), which included different characters, including an old marquis.

The role of this antiquated aristocrat, who was putting pressure on the Francoist commanders in his area to recover his lands, would be played by Luis Escobar. Yet in the end, it was not possible. Nevertheless, it is easy to envision his imprint on Adolfo Marsillach's characterisation. In fact, one wonders why they did not try to foster the sense of a shared universe by connecting his trilogy with *La vaquilla*, which is something that would have been easy to do if they had related this nobleman to his bloodline.

We must lament this circumstance, given the fact that without denying at any time the relevance of the Marquis, played unforgettably by Luis Escobar in *La escopeta nacional*, we had already observed that the saga might be ceding protagonism, as Canivell ends up passing the torch to his aristocratic hosts. A continuation of the Leguineche lineage over time would have allowed Berlanga to maintain these characters within his social dissection, which was proven not to depend on the miseries of Franco's regime, but instead found ironic accommodation in Spanish society during the Transition (Casas, 2021: 35-38).

For some time now (Galindo, 2012: 152-162), new research has focused interest in comparing Berlanga's films during the Franco regime with the presumed softening of his works after the dictatorial period. Nevertheless, the interrelation of these cinematic plots with the socio-political context of the time not only shows that he maintained his validity, but also that he anticipated many problems and dilemmas that linger in Spain today.

5. Acknowledgements

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