

Festivity and other Berlanguian discorsal elements in textual analysis of *¡Vivan los novios!* (1970)¹

Fiesta y estilemas del discurso berlanguiano en el análisis de ¡Vivan los novios! (1970)



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Abstract:

This paper considers those elements of the films directed by Berlanga that operate as hallmarks of his film narrative, taking as its reference the feature film "*¡Vivan los novios!*" (*Long Live the Bride and Groom*) (1970). The Valencian director portrayed recognisable aspects of the Spain of the time: the arrival of mass tourism and the consequent cultural shock, eroticism as a plot device, etc., utilising the aesthetic presuppositions of commercial cinema of the time. However, his recognisable style, related to the grotesque and to fiestas as stages of subversion, prevails, although it is intertwined with the constructs of conventional Spanish comedy. In its application of the method of textual analysis suggested by Text Theory, with the theoretical reference proposed by Jesús González Requena, the present study analyses the symbolic structure of the plot, as well as its narrative thesis, which contradicts the habitual narrative in contemporary Spanish commercial films.

Keywords:

Berlanga; Audio-visual Text Theory; fiesta; grotesque satire; late-Francoist cinema.

Resumen:

Esta investigación profundiza en los elementos del cine dirigido por el cineasta valenciano que operan como distintivos de su narrativa fílmica, y toma como referente el largometraje Vivan los novios (1970). Ciertamente, el director valenciano retrató aspectos reconocibles de la España del momento: la llegada masiva del turismo y el consecuente choque cultural, el erotismo como rasgo argumental, etc., desde los presupuestos estético propios del cine comercial del momento. Sin embargo, sus reconocibles estilemas, relacionados con el esperpento y la fiesta como escenario subversivo, prevalecen si bien se entrelazan con los constructos de la comedia alimenticia. En la aplicación del método de análisis textual que propone la Teoría del Texto con el referente teórico planteado por Jesús González Requena, la presente investigación analiza la estructura simbólica del relato, así como su tesis narrativa, que contradice en su presupuesto a la habitual del cine comercial español coetáneo.

Palabras clave:

Berlanga; teoría del texto audiovisual; fiesta; esperpento; cine tardo-franquista.

¹ In English: "Long Live the Bride and Groom"

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1. Introduction

Luis García Berlanga's work as a film-maker made him a reference in Spanish filmography. This paper studies in detail those elements of the Valencian director's work which serve as distinctive markers of his film narrative, taking the feature film *¡Vivan los novios!* (*Long Live the Bride & Groom*) (1970) as a reference. The director portrayed clearly recognisable aspects of contemporary Spain: the coming of mass tourism, sexual repression, eroticism, etc. At the same time, Berlanga shows a notable change relative to his previous films; the biggest novelty arguably being his adoption of colour film. Simultaneously, his particular line-up of characters, scenery and action is notably affected by the modernising steps he takes in this, his last Spanish film under later-Francoism.

We focus our analytical efforts on the Berlanguian text in the feature film *¡Vivan los novios!* (*Long Live the Bride and Groom*) (1970) as representative of the commercial discourse of Spanish film. In the words of the director regarding his film: "When signing with Cesáreo González for three years, he proposed I dive into commercial cinema, using the ingredients the public finds most easily digestible" (Hidalgo & Hernández, 2020: 149-150). This paper aims to segregate those features of conventional comedy in the Berlanguian style, among which can be found carnivalesque festivities as a hallmark. In order to later focus on the aforementioned story, we first look at those aspects of his filmography which characterise his narrative style over the previous period.

1.1. Style, the absurd and the grotesque

The first half of the 20th century brought considerable change in theatrical representation. "The dawn of the new century brought with it enormous interest in circuses and travelling or street shows. An interest in popular culture which turned away from paternalism to embrace a true appreciation of the ancestral" (Partearroyo, 2020: 38). In his plays, Valle-Inclán offered something as Spanish as it was an example of "esperpento", drawing on carnival tradition and Menippean satire from the perspective of Mijail Bajtín (1974). The 'alienation effect' also termed "distancing" was created by the playwright Bertolt Brecht in his search for a theatre that could offer a critical stance, more than an emotional one, that would make the audience reflect on certain things, personalizing less and dealing to a greater degree with ethical or political aspects of the situations represented. Berroa points to the social influence of Valle-Inclán's work in this sense when he says "there is an extremely evident parallel between this piece by Brecht [*Mother Courage and her Children*, 1941], and one of the key texts of Valle-Inclán's theatre, *Divinas palabras*, published in 1920. (...) Brecht's work owes a lot to the latter" (1998, para. 5). Clearly, the avoidance of emotional identification with the character to thus favour a critical perspective of the situation portrayed, offers considerable points in common between one play and the other.

Unlike Elizabethan theatre –Shakespeare being the chief exponent, who established the dominant narrative proposal for stage performances– Valle-Inclán suggests a bird's eye view of the characters, setting them below the author, thus allowing him / her to ridicule them and to criticize their strife as a part of a larger misguided system: thus giving birth to a particular grotesque satire.

Fiestas and carnival in the Berlanguian universe offer a space for experimentation with stereotypes, with certain initial emphasis on the contrast of rich / poor. Women, if intelligent or capable, show signs of coldness and –with increasing sharpness

as his oeuvre went on- are manipulative and peevish, while the men become increasingly timorous, or confused, unless they hold some position of authority. The synergies established between the different roles are expressed in a scenography that presents a polyphony of characters within a social group. These are subtly structured, to the constant music of a municipal band: minor wind and percussion instruments which are the habitual accompaniment to provincial fiestas, especially on the Mediterranean coast, where there are ports and the chance of trade. In his 50s films, the soundtrack appears as a parallel to those of the Hollywood studios, to sweeten an atmosphere of underlying sarcasm. *Miracles of Thursday* (1959) functions as a criticism of power, humorously showing the corruption of the school master, the doctor, the landowner and the village big-shot. In this story, the folksy, provincial band can be heard in the background, but never seen.

In *Plácido* (1961), the three-wheeler driven by the lead actor, which carries various people or objects, looks as if it has come out of a Christmas parade, as it bears a cardboard and glitter 'shooting star' on top. Allusions to a parade, be they to a carnival troupe or a funeral procession, intrude into the Berlanguian universe again and again, whether implicitly or explicitly. In *The Rocket from Calabuch* (1956), the fireworks scene celebrates the climax of the story. In this text, however, the village band is both seen and heard.

Berlanga defends the creation of group character and collective action. His wandering narrative perspective, which skips with agility from one point of view to another, is one of his most notable techniques.

I'd describe Berlanga's way of filming as a multiple universe full of areas of living dynamics. A sort of global choreography where each segment has its own space, an autonomy that invites the filmgoer to move between them and to join each of them in turn. Few film-makers filmed like that (González Requena, 2021).

In his initial period, his collaborations with Bardem and Mihura mark his style. The former had great influence on the subjects of the films they collaborated on. Mihura, in *Welcome Mr. Marshall!* (1953), for example, "very effectively improved the voiceover" (Rodríguez Merchán & Deltell Escolar, 2013: 128). Later was to come his time with Azcona, before one final stage in democratic Spain. Throughout his career, we encounter an increasingly existential sarcasm, skewered by the humdrum and mundane. Regarding *La Boutique* (1967), González Requena observes how the shots of heart-breaking scenes are swiftly edited to become "a closer and amused look at all those little details that make up the comedy of daily life" (Universidad CEU Cardenal Herrera, 2019), although the characters are usually shown to be conditioned by mutual synergies, unable to carefully reflect on the rapid narrative rhythm, under certain ongoing pressure from one side or the other.

1.2. Narrative in Spanish cinema and the Berlanguian discourse

To speak of national cinema, one needs to have a mixture of particular characteristics which unify the texts. In *Theorising National Cinema*, Rosen observes the nationality of a given cinema not in the acceptance of a certification that identifies the geographical origin of film production, but as intertextual symptomatology which inter-twines a family of stories with a common cultural origin (2006, p. 17). The Francoist regime adopted a notable change of approach and passed from autarky to foreign trade and internationalisation, though, with certain nuances. Late-Francoism was the spur of a certain narrative, which affected, to a lesser or greater degree, the extension of discursive production. The pairing Spanish/indigenous vs. foreign, the

latter represented by tourism or foreign people, was to determine the narrative proposal of the Valencian film-maker from *Welcome Mr. Marshall!* (1953) onwards.

Spanish economic growth in the 60s was remarkable. The opening-up of the economy generated affluence through tourism, among other sectors, and with that intercultural transfer flowing from democracies in which equality and individual liberties were promoted, at least nominally. Viadero points out that “these facts caused a series of incoherencies of which the Spanish themselves were aware” (2016, p. 333). The paradoxes stemming from the ambiguity of Francoist discourse were to be roundly covered by the national film narrative in the diversity of its formulations in the sixties and seventies.

New Spanish Cinema not only gave form to these paradoxes but sharpened criticism. In “its rejection of the official-industrial film it coincided with the non-conformist attitude of the renowned Berlanga-Bardem tandem as well as with the “Salamanca Conversations” (Caparrós & De España, 2018: 84). Among the referential film-makers we find Manuel Summers and *From pink to yellow* (1963), Miguel Picazo and *Aunt Tula* (1964), Basilio Martín Patino and *Nine Letters to Bertha* (1966) or Francisco Regueiro, though Francoist censure supposed a patent threat to the distribution of their work. Towards the late 60s, censorship became slightly more flexible as regards the erotic and/or sexual, therefore “even films with more traditional values wanted to take advantage of the growing desire to exhibit attractive female bodies” (Huerta & Pérez, 2012). International sexual liberation in counterpoint to Francoism and its mission to protect the configuration of national virtue –while gaining the benefits the incipient erotic content could occasion– presented itself as a petri dish for configuring the European, or international in general, as a synonym of debauchery. After all, from its beginnings, the Francoist discourse despised everything foreign and lionised everything Spanish. To vilify and trade on the image of ‘the foreign’ –as in the stereotype of the “sexy Swedish girl”– became a common element of the narrative-cinematographic scene of late-Francoist commercial cinema, and the Mediterranean coast became the backdrop for portraying ‘landista’ eroticism (*Translator’s Note. ‘landista’ / ‘landismo’. refer to the numerous comedies starring Alfredo Landa, epitome of the often-frustrated Spanish male in 60s and 70s commercial cinema*).

Towards the middle of the decade, and although the emerging “Third Way” cinema expressed international relations as opportunities for economic advancement for Spain –and thus responded to common commercial film– there were still comedies in this later Francoist period that railed against neighbouring countries. So it was in the animation at the beginning of *Zorrita Martínez* (Vicente Escrivá, 1975), saying “she’s a bad French woman, also called *loose*”. At the same time, in *Tres suecas para tres Rodríguez* (Pedro Lazaga, 1975) the character played by Florinda Chico unleashes slaps on the foreign tourists for their “shameless” attitudes. In late-Francoist comedy and at the other end of the spectrum, references to international powers are related to economic prosperity, though in detriment to “national” values. In *Celos, amor y mercado común* (Alfonso Paso, 1973) parts of the dialogue maintain that European women work and are not jealous. At the party Irene (Elisa Ramírez) and her husband attend with Caridad’s aunt (Vicky Lusson), the guests use the term ‘European’ as a synonym of promiscuous.

At the beginning of the decade, sexual repression in rural Spain was to remain as a frequent theme in commercial cinema. In *Lo verde empieza en los Pirineos* (Vicente Escrivá, 1973), José Luis López Vázquez plays a forty-something whose romantic inexperience and repression have turned into an obsession with the opposite sex. In the previously mentioned *Zorrita Martínez* (1975), again, José Luis López Vázquez offers a final monologue on the sexual repression of Spaniards.

We have referred to the film-maker Francisco Regueiro as a promise of that New Spanish Cinema which continued in Berlanga's discursive wake. Five years after the opening of *Long Live the Bride & Groom*, Regueiro made *Duerme, duerme, mi amor* (1975), an absurd tale starring José Luis López Vázquez trapped in a dysfunctional, tortuous marriage. The cast includes Laly Soldevilla as his neighbour, who daily wears a wedding dress, veil included, in the hope that someone will propose. The representation of death, typical of the absurd, is also invoked by a local man played by Manuel Alexandre, who plots suicides that make his body disappear, thus keeping his family from cashing in on his passing. These are just a few examples of the battery of stories that follow the narrative trail of *Long Live the Bride & Groom*, a film which joined the ranks of a common and popular discourse in late-Francoist cinema.

2. Method

Film analysis boasts numerous approaches². This study considers proposals developed in Audio-visual Text Theory; a methodology created by Jesús González Requena (2000). This covers both quantitative and qualitative aspects. Elements of the audio-visual narrative such as the shot and the viewpoint, composite parameters such as colour and light, dialogue references and non-verbal language, among others, can be quantified. At the same time this analytical method includes concepts from a transversality of fields of study, such as semiotics, philosophy, psychoanalysis or anthropology, as well as offering certain flexibility as it can cover other fields related to the social sciences or humanities, including, for example, linguistics or iconology. This methodology, among its initial practical steps, allows one to freeze the images and *spell them out* by breaking them down carefully to their elements. Their visual parameters can be identified and described, such as the relationship between figure and background or the size of the configuration in the shot; as well as facilitating analysis of the composite structures (González Requena, 2000). Following the step described, Audio-visual Text Theory frequently invites analysis of a particular shot in the film, one of interest for a detailed examination in comparison with another from a different sequence in the text, which offers significant contrasts or similarities in the symbolic or discursive structures of the story in question. Furthermore, in the textual analysis, "compositional similarities can be found between a frame of the text and an external image, separate from the object of study, which, due to its iconographic elements may establish a dialectic of potential interest for analysis" (Codesido, 2017: 115) when the results bring to light a notable link due to the existence of pertinent inferences.

² For example, Seymour Chatman (1990) offers an interesting dissection of plot in history and discourse, and in form and substance respectively.

Table 1. Phases of the analysis

Proposed analytical process		
1	Identification	Contextualization of the piece
2	Examination	Comparison of the image
3	Conceptual application	Drawing up of inferences

Source: created by the author

Identification of the work would imply what Panofsky termed “natural subject matter” (1955) when taking into consideration values such as shape, colour, the whole composition, etc. The subsequent “conventional subject matter”, again proposed by the author, (1955) relates the distinct elements and the formulation of an issue or theme. His method “is not the only one, but it is the most complete when deciphering meaning” (Gila, 2011). The model of iconological analysis for cinematographic analysis can, according to Martínez (2005), “be applied wholly or in part to practically any cinematographic story”. One should not forget the warning given by Zunzunegui concerning the danger in film analysis of “exacerbating the microscopic look, of losing sight of the film as a whole when extracting selected moments for their analytical breakdown” (1996, p.15). Although the compression of the whole of the text is essential, as alluded to herein, intertextual links can be of enormous interest in film analysis, be they from texts drawn up by contemporary film-makers, by earlier ones or even, what could be termed self-quotes, reiterated references in the universe of one particular author.

As pointed out by the Grupo Entrevernes, “therefore, it is not a matter of saying what is the true meaning of the text nor of finding a new or original meaning to the exclusion of other meanings” (1982, p. 15) but of digging deeper into the symbolic structure.

3. Analysis

Table 2. Data

<i>¡Vivan los novios!</i> (1970)			
Director	Luis García Berlanga	Editing	José Luis Matesanz
Script	Rafael Azcona, Luis García Berlanga	Production	Cesáreo González Rodríguez
Photography	Larraya, Aurelio G.	Music	Pérez Olea, Antonio

Length	83 minutes	Opening date	20/01/1970
Cast	López Vázquez, José Luis. Soldevila, Laly. Prada, José Maria. Alexandre, Manuel. Vivo, Francisco Javier. Gisbert, Teresa.		

Source: created by the author using data from the ICAA

3.1. Description of the story

On the eve of his wedding, Leonardo, played by José Luis López Vázquez, has travelled with his mother to meet his fiancée in the coastal town where she lives and works. Although Loli (Laly Soldevilla) is well into her thirties and he over forty, their relationship has been celibate, something that Leonardo wishes to put an end to as soon as possible as he lusts after practically all the attractive women that cross his path, a common event in the tourist resort.

In an atmosphere of liberation where his neighbour, for example, has relationships with two attractive German nurses at the same time, Leonardo feels especially tempted. He tries to buy the affection of a beautiful Irish street artist, portrayed by actress Jane Fellner, paying for her to spend a night in a hotel she cannot afford. Unlucky in his attempted conquest and after an evening of fruitless attempts at seduction with several tourists on the evening before his wedding, Leonardo finds, on reaching the apartment, that his mother has passed away suddenly.

Loli and his future brother-in-law (José María Prada) persuade him to go ahead with the wedding and to postpone the wake. Faced with the contradiction of celebrating the wedding without having mourned his mother, Leonardo feels misunderstood and used by his in-laws, though he gives in to their demands. To escape from his reality, he fanaticises about the lovely foreign artist who is looking for him, outside the church after the ceremony, to return the money,

The day after the wedding, Leonardo's mother's body is found in the sea. After that is dealt with, the burial takes place. At the wake, Leonardo again meets the Irish girl and, with the help of his other brother-in-law (Manuel Alexandre), who, suffers from transitory amnesia, manages to speak to her, the brother-in-law acting as translator.

En route to the burial, Leonardo sees the girl hang-gliding away, while he is in his mother's funeral procession. He tries to escape from the procession and run after her but doesn't manage to catch her.

3.2. Plotlines

Previous films directed and co-written by Berlanga such as *Plácido* (1961), *The Executioner* (1963) or *La Boutique* (1967) –and implicitly *The Rocket from Calabuch* (1956)–, present common themes related to weddings and/or marriages, while repeating the rural and/or coastal scenes. Regarding content (Chatman, 1990), *Long Live the Bride & Groom* stays on the same lines, with characters that clearly correlate to previous ones; although, from *La Boutique* (1967) on, their darker side is more clearly expressed.

Death, explicitly present in Berlanguan films since *Plácido* (1961), holds a key place in this story. Furthermore, in 1970, Berlanga's work includes sexual repression and the figure of the disabled, domineering, castrating mother, emerging as a metaphor for Spain in the domestic cinema of the time. While *La Boutique* (1967) offers us a mother-in-law, and therefore a mother, who is manipulative and Machiavellian, *Long Live the Bride & Groom* (1970) has a mother and future mother-in-law who is key to moving the plot forward though she was, as was common at the time, only a secondary character.

Examples of the dying mother as a symbol of Francoist Spain are to be found later in *Un casto varón español* (Jaime de Armiñán, 1973) and in *Las señoritas de mala compañía* (José Antonio Nieves Conde, 1973), in which Doña Íñiga (Milagros Leal) is the convalescent but lady-like mother of the middle-aged Don Joaquín, who is emotionally and sexually immature –again, portrayed by López Vázquez–, while she is extremely conservative and anchored in the past, being controlling, judgmental, provincial and holding certain social status. If there was any doubt about the metaphorical function of the character of the mother, in the autumn of her days, as a national symbol, *Ana and the Wolves* (Carlos Saura, 1973) makes it patent. But in *Long Live the Bride & Groom* (1970) we do not see a convalescent or dying mother, but one who drops dead all of a sudden. The extreme rawness can also be seen as a Berlanguan flourish.

Debauchery and even partner-swapping are recurring features of late-Francoist commercial cinema. However, the originality of *Long Live the Bride & Groom* stands out when a child's dummy is used as an element of fetish, something dissonant in the genre, as well as distinctively Berlanguan. If a dummy is withdrawn between the ages of two and four, we can deduce that the perspective of these libidinous characters regarding their desire stems from a parallel mindset, paradoxically with no possibility of execution.

Looking at the transvestitism in *Long Live the Bride & Groom*, we should note that in films of the late 60s and early 70s this device is so common as to merit attention. For example, in *A Lady Called Andrew* (Julio Buchs, 1970), the couple played by Carmen Sevilla and Juan Luis Galiardo exchange bodies, so that each has their soul trapped in the body of the other. Later, *El calzonazos* (1974), starring Paco Martínez Soria, presents the lead character's transvestitism as part of the central plot.

Spanishness in its Andalusian variant –as one of the key elements in Berlanga's first major success *Welcome Mr. Marshall* (1953)– is hinted at not only through the flamenco music heard at the wake, but by means of the folkloric singer drunkenly throwing up over the side during the party held on the yacht. The 'Andalusian' is again offered as a show for tourists. The Valencian film-maker's universe generally shows us characters who trivialise their profession with such naturality that it seems to be a disguise.

3.3. Aesthetic-symbolic elements

3.3.1. Berlanguan eroticism

Given the psycho-analytical slant of Berlanga's cinema in the late 60s and 70s³, the absence of phallic symbolism in the object of our study – *Long Live the Bride & Groom*– seems curious. The text is invaded by elements of infancy in the latency of its

3 The presence of phallic symbols in *La escopeta nacional* (Luis García Berlanga, 1978) could probably be analysed. In the story, the characters are driven by an eroticism that, though it continues to present psychoanalytical notes, and to evoke phases noted by Freud, refers to a later age; a stage of development that allows certain independence and greater awareness than corresponds to kindergarten pupils.

eroticism. In González Requena's words, the films directed abroad by Berlanga offer all the characterology that psychoanalysis identifies with the anal-sadistic phase (Universidad CEU Cardenal Herrera, 2019, 25m57s); that is, from the ages of two to four. We suggest that *Long Live the Bride & Groom*, Berlanga's last film made under Franco's regime, structures its erotic symbology on this selfsame supposition. When Leonardo sees a chance to seduce a woman, who is crying disconsolately due to jealousy, on the bow of a boat while the others occupy the cabins –those others, one deduces, having succumbed to romantic temptation–, the protagonist tries to console the exotic lady by feeding her forkfuls of paella, as if he was feeding a recently weaned baby. This coincides with the comments of González Requena, on *La Boutique* (1967), in which feeding during early infancy also constitutes an erotic base (Universidad CEU Cardenal Herrera, 2019, 20m25s). In *Long Live the Bride & Groom* (1970), the protagonist accompanies the feeding with kisses, which move steadily closer to her mouth.

Leonardo repeatedly yearns to be a suckling babe again or to be an infant comforted by the object(s) of his desire. But it is not him alone, so too does his boss, a sort of alter-ego of Leonardo's who manages to do that which is beyond the main character: set limits on Loli and her brother, exercising his authority and, finally, seducing his playful and attractive German neighbours. The sign of a night of passion having taken place is none other than a dummy, hanging from the boss's belt as he waves a sleepy goodbye to the pretty girls who watch him knowingly from the window as he stumbles towards his car. Thus, the dummy, an unmistakable symbol of the under-fours, acts as a kind of synecdoche to tell us that an evening of eroticism has taken place, a further strengthening of the symbolic structure alluded to by the text substitutes sexual activity for playful scenes typical of a baby's day and therefore asexual. The paradox lends the story a latent erotic surrealism, as well as something of the grotesque.

Confusing sexuality with maternalism, a perspective from which femininity –that is, a woman– is observed as a baby perceives its mother, turns her into a being in a situation of threatening power. In other words, Berlanga's portrayal of womankind – moreover, with increasing emphasis in each film– stems from the point of view of a child who loves and fears his/her mother, not that of an adult of a mature and assimilated sexuality. With this approach, we understand that the Berlanguian female characters transmute in the narrative from all-powerful and threatening beings, such as those played by Sonia Bravo and Ana María Campoy in *La Boutique* (1967), to sexualized dolls⁴, not only in his sole incursion into French cinema, *Lifesize* (1974), but also in *La Escopeta Nacional* (1978)⁵. The truly Berlanguian feature in this moment of his oeuvre is how the male characters submerge themselves into the fragility of a child in matters of the heart, though they are shown to be in their thirties or forties, the gag lies precisely in the grotesqueness conjured up by the insistence on this point.

3.3.2. Absurdity and grotesque festivity

When Leonardo meets the object of his desire at the wake, before declaring his love, he shows the girl his mother's body and cries disconsolately before her, just as a small child would on losing its mother. He cries not only for his loss, but is appealing for an immediate maternal substitute, as would be natural in the case of a small child. Thus, Leonardo, more than seducing the girl, seems to be focusing his efforts on her cradling him, though this does not come to pass in the end.

4 These plot devices respond simultaneously to aesthetic-narrative currents of the time, thus the fetishist representation of the doll, and of women as dolls, can be traced to other contemporary Spanish films, such as *No es bueno que el hombre esté solo* (Pedro Olea, 1973).

5 It has been said that characters such as the aspiring actor in this choral tale “go beyond caricature and become a mere object, with little difference between this woman and the doll in *Tamaño Natural*” (Deltell, 2012, pp. 115-116).

Little time passes before the funeral rites start to offer a more festive atmosphere when flamenco music starts to play. In a corner, young foreigners are seen listening intently to an enthusiastic account of a legendary bullfight while others are consuming something illicit, all this to the sound of handclapping and the singing of both foreigners and locals. In this way, the mother's wake, sharing physical space as it does with other dead bodies, becomes a fiesta. This scene, one of several parallelisms with carnival, seems a kind of hidden "burying of the sardine" (T/N: *the 'burial of the sardine' is an annual ceremony marking the end of Carnival in Spain. It takes place in hundreds of towns and villages as an act of ending/renewal. It often involves a cardboard sardine, funereal clothes and a mock burial followed by festivities*).

The brother-in-law arrives with alcoholic drinks while Leonardo, once again, finds himself in the driver's seat of the hearse. As mentioned previously, the character finds himself on numerous occasions in a festive situation, without being able to join the party himself. It is the *others*⁶ who do so, while the protagonist and his in-laws stoke the festivities by providing nourishment (paella), drinks ("aniset liqueur and brandy") or, simply, a reason for the ritual (mourning); however, although they contribute with their service, they behave neither as participants nor guests. Given the intertextuality with parallel films and a staging of the wake that emphasises its Spanishness versus foreign-ness, this aspect could well refer indirectly to Spain's longed-for entry to the European Economic Community⁷, the anxieties of which were constantly reflected in the narrative of contemporary commercial cinema, an approach in which the mother's cadaver would represent the twilight of Francoist Spain.

Moreover, it is not only death as a plot device which is intrinsic to the 'esperpento', but its banalisation. The grotesque component accentuates the deformation of the mortuary and has a bearing on in the subtle, though perverse, comicalness; it functions to highlight the lower emotions in life's transcendental moments. In *Long Live the Bride & Groom*, the Irish artist tells Leonardo, both honestly and innocently, that his dead mother's face has been deformed to the point that she cannot render her likeness, as to do so would be prejudicial to the aesthetic of her work. Thus, the sweet youth favours us with an improvised sketch of the loss and orphanhood that the protagonist is feeling at that moment; paradoxically, the youth's thoughtlessness stems from her goodwill and gives another drop of absurdity to the story's underlying grotesqueness.

3.3.3. *Symbology, rhetoric*

The questioning of matrimony as an institution is a common theme in late-Francoist commercial cinema as well as into the first stage of the Spanish Transition. Such aspects as infidelity, the difficulty of marital bliss or the conventional role of women are treated from different perspectives in an endless number of contemporary films⁸. The bride's gown can be considered to be a symbol of the theme. *Long Live the Bride & Groom* offers us significant shots of the bride's dress: the foreign tourist who enters Loli's shop slips it on quickly and carelessly, as if it were just any old rag, or even a disguise.

6 In an earlier scene, when Leonardo and his brother-in-law carry the paella on board, something similar happens, they are at the party, but not really taking part. In fact, they seem to be late, when the guests are already in their cabins, so that the main character is an observer overcome by conflict, immersed in the absurdity of it all.

7 Spain requested membership of the EEC in 1977. The previous decade had been a period of a wish to join, and a sentiment of marginality as regards continental privileges.

8 Weddings as farse can be found in Fernán Gómez's comedy of that same year: 1970: *Cómo casarse en siete días*.

Figure 1. Moment in which Leonardo and Loli pose for the photographer after the wedding



Source: *¡Vivan los novios!* (Luis García Berlanga, 1970)

Figure 2. Leonardo looks on the bodies of a couple in the mortuary



Source: *¡Vivan los novios!* (Luis García Berlanga, 1970)

Following the wedding –in which Loli, for practically the first time, does not stop smiling, although it be falsely–, the story gives us a fleeting image, symbolizing what the marriage means to Leonardo. On arriving at the wake, he finds the object of his desire rendering in charcoal the image of a couple who have committed suicide together: from the protagonist's perspective, marriage is a deadly sacrifice, a sort of funereal romanticism.

Figure 3. After identifying the cadaver, Leonardo is transported in an image of pain



Source: *¡Vivan los novios!* (Luis García Berlanga, 1970)

When the mother's body is discovered in the sea and Leonardo is summoned to identify it, his reaction, unable to process the loss emotionally, is that of a baby who has to be carried in his pushchair. However, the vehicle is akin to a throne, and with bearers on each side, looks similar to the images of a holy procession in Easter week. His facial expression, eyes closed, and his jaw displaced in a silent scream, is a vision of pain and sacrifice, when it is partly a pantomime as the character knew beforehand where the body was, and thus his sad reaction is fruit of exaggeration and theatricality.

Leonardo will later declare his love to the Irish tourist, not only in front of his mother's corpse, but with her face uncovered, at the girl's request, as she is distracted sketching it. "As old carnival teaches us, you have to 'bury the sardine' to proclaim the birth of something new" (Partearroyo, 2020: 70). Leonardo asks his brother-in-law, who has amnesia and cannot betray him, to act as translator. If the character played by Manuel Alexandre, with his memory deficit, represents the bureaucracy that goes from a hegemonic discourse to one diametrically opposed to that during the change from dictatorship to democracy, and the allegory is eminently political in its allusion to domestic aspirations in the international context –as had been the pressure on Francoism since the post-war–, bearing in mind the staging of the mortuary scene previously mentioned, the metaphor seems quite evident.

Figure 4. Just before declaring his love, Leonardo is asked to reveal his mother's lifeless face



Source: ¡Vivan los novios! (Luis García Berlanga, 1970)

We should emphasise here the mourning of the mother as a representation of the regime linked to carnival rites and the burying of the sardine: “a female sardine, mother and origin of all” (Barreto, 1993: 254-255) in which mockery and the disambiguating of established concepts act as catharsis.

As with the ritual alluded to, the wake is followed by a masked funeral march. In the film, contrasts are set before us throughout the procession: those of the sombre funereal symbology as a counterpoint to the colourful bikinis on a sunny day on the coast. However, the act does not culminate with the burial as the story finishes earlier. In this sense, late-Francoist commercial cinema can be seen as a great cinematographic carnival, which was not to end, with a renewed discursive approach, until the Spanish Transition.

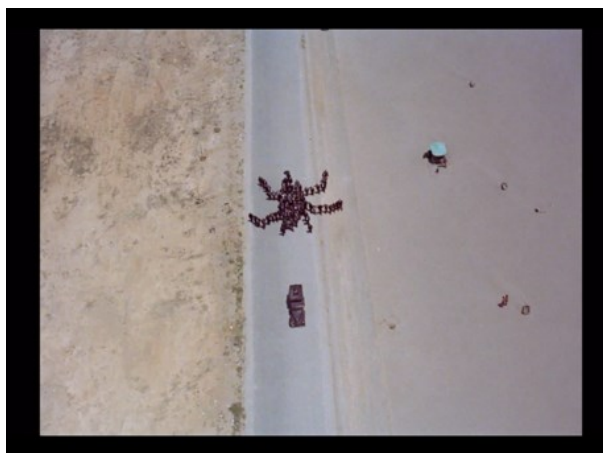
Figure 5. Funeral procession before the colourful indifference of the holidaymakers



Source: *¡Vivan los novios!* (Luis García Berlanga, 1970)

We wish to point to the story's final allegory, the shot in which the text is closed, and which shows the funeral march that, from above, is similar to the silhouette of a threatening spider, as the greatest narrative irreverence in the whole text. As described above, the film takes its main compositional keys from late-Francoist commercial cinema, such as the work of film-makers like Ozores and Lazaga, responsible for the *landista* phenomenon. *Landismo* offers nothing less than a fable of late-Francoist Spanish stereotypes: a sort of catharsis that allows for the overcoming of complexes –considerable ones in the decline of Francoism– by means of the character's exhausting sexual activity, or by self-acceptance; with the idea, in both cases, of ensuring a 'happy' ending.

Figure 6. Final metonymy of the swallowing (spider) of freedom (winged insect)



Source: *¡Vivan los novios!* (Luis García Berlanga, 1970)

Condemning the protagonist's repression from the beginning to end of *Long Live the Bride & Groom* and stepping up the criticism in the final shot betrays the –commercial, *landista*– convention invoked in the film. This could be the reason, perhaps sufficient reason, why the movie has been repudiated over the years. With this metaphor, the Valencian film-maker favours an international perspective –the point of view is that of the Irish tourist as she flies away from Leonardo and his desire– to reduce and perhaps belittle that which underlies the national culture, contradicting Berlanga's own discourse: that of an earlier and crucial stage of his career, even in its darker facets; in which the protagonists were portrayed as victims of circumstance.

The metonymic approach offered produces a clearly negative story, a sharp criticism not of a privileged and politicised class –as was typical of Saura's stories in the 70s and 80s– but of the average provincial Spaniard, that is to say, “the boy next door”. In spite of the grotesque codification –confused at times as it intertwines with the usual conventions of the typical conventional comedy of those years–, taking the slight with humour, as the director possibly wanted, may have been asking a lot, especially at the box office.

4. Results

With a script written in collaboration with Rafael Azcona, *Long Live the Bride & Groom* (1970) encompasses a series of plot devices representative of commercial cinema in the later years of the Francoist regime, among which we find European culture and the growth of tourism, sexual liberation and repression, the questioning of matrimony, as well as personal freedom vs social conventions. *Long Live the Bride & Groom* (1970), not only due to the subjects it raises but to how it does so, constantly refers to contemporary commercial film, and yet simultaneously presents features characteristic of the Berlanguan universe. First among these must be the fiesta as a characteristic element as it sits as a subversive element and responds to the carnival-like atmosphere. In this way, the funeral, which in this case alludes to notable aspects of a sort of “burying of the sardine”,

becomes an improvised flamenco party. The funeral procession, both for its context and esthetic configuration, answers more as a parade for the entertainment of tourists than as a conventional ritual. However, the protagonists attend the party, but do not enjoy it –something common in Berlanga's previous movies, such as *Plácido* (1961)–, as they have to work, as happens to the brother-in-law, or are greatly afflicted or overcome with guilt, as in the case of Leonardo.

Furthermore, although the *landista* characters and others typical of Spanish commercial cinema of the time were particularly immature, as a part of the gag, the emphasizing of the infantile in the make-up of the lead role supposes a Berlanguan touch which was exacerbated at this late stage of his filmography. The eroticism of the story is built, oddly, over this same aspect –an underlined sensuality which seems to be, one way or another, practically inevitable in films of those years, which witnessed the “erotic wave” which had suddenly arrived in Spain–. The configuration of the psychoanalytical notes in the erotic approach which hark back to the early stages of childhood development make for a differentiating element with respect to parallel texts of contemporary national cinema.

The convalescent or dead mother as a representation of the decline of Francoism at the time would not be an isolated narrative device in text analysis but responded to a greater configuration stemming from the symbolic convention of late-Francoist popular cinema. Moreover, her sudden death and the carnival-like treatment of the funeral rites do offer an extra touch to the author's distinctive style.

5. Discussion and conclusions

In 1970, *¡Vivan los novios!* (*Long Live the Bride & Groom*) opened against stiff competition. *En un lugar de La Manga* (Mariano Ozores), *¿Por qué pecamos a los 40?* (Pedro Lazaga), *Verano 70* (Pedro Lazaga), *El señorito y las seductoras* (Ramón Fernández), *Cómo casarse en siete días* (Fernando Fernán Gómez) presented similar themes in the conventions of commercial cinema of the time and were ahead of *Long Live the Bride & Groom* at the box office, occupying the ninth, fourteenth, twenty-eighth, thirty-third and thirty-ninth places respectively. Although Berlanga's film was aesthetically and narratively similar to contemporary commercial films, we hold that his thesis subverted the ideas of the genre, as commercial cinema is fundamentally optimistic and condescending, while *Long Live the Bride & Groom* sharply criticizes utilizing its metaphors to offer a final story leaning towards the Dantesque.

Concerning this work directed and co-written by Berlanga, drawing a line between the end of the politically/socially critical metaphor and the beginning of the emotional/personal catharsis is a difficult task of analytical dissection. 1970 represented a point of inflection in late-Francoist cinematographic discourse, as well as being a time of aesthetic and narrative renewal both nationally and internationally. In this context, Berlanga seems to be searching for a new authorial perspective, to reposition himself as a film-maker. In this sense, *Long Live the Bride & Groom* is a stylistic exercise, a bridge between the creative phases of an artist of reference for Spanish cinema from the 50s onwards. Despite staying true to certain presuppositions and styling forged in his previous work, the twist in his discourse here is dizzying and arguably necessary for the advance of his later phase, now in democratic Spain.

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