

FLAMENCO FLAMINGOS AND PELICANS. FROM PURIST FLAMENCO TO QUINQUI FUSION. *DUENDE Y MISTERIO DEL FLAMENCO* (EDGAR NEVILLE, 1952) Y *DAME VENENO* (PEDRO BARBADILLO, 2007)¹

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When analysing the way popular music from Andalucía comes together with Spanish cinema, whether we distinguish or not between film musicals and films with songs, we inevitably come up against the concept of *españolada*, that is as complex and hackneyed as it is in need of revision by historians of cinema and culture. As is well known, the *españolada* has come to be considered as a kind of transversal genre that finds expression in literature, the performing arts, painting, popular music and, practically from its inception, the cinema. As such, it has been accused of exaggerating and falsifying a range of features of what is thought to be «Spanish», driven in films by facile plots dominated by the most visceral passions involving stereotypical characters—gypsy girl, sentimental singer, bandit, flamenco dancer and bullfighter—and converting the mythology of Andalucía and its music into a synecdoche for Spain as a whole. Its roots in popular culture stretch back to the sixteenth century, but it was the European Romantics and in particular the French Romantics—*Carmen* (1845), by Prosper Mérimée, is usually considered to be the first *españolada*—, who coined the term *espagnolade* in the middle of the nineteenth century to refer to aspects of culture based on popular culture and characterized by Andalucía, gypsies and flamenco dances, etc. The term has been used in Spain usually with pejorative intent, though many of the features that nourish it, like flamenco or the *copla* ballad, have enabled works to be created that have been assimilated by high culture. It would, for example, be difficult to understand much of Federico García Lorca's work without either musical genre.

¹ This article was written within the framework of the research project HAR2011-27750, 'The interaction between Spanish cinema and tourism: historical and thematic development: cultural, political and economic drivers; and future perspectives'; financed by the Spanish Ministry for Innovation and Science.



It is also true that if a large part of Spanish musical cinema has used elements traditionally identified with the *españolada*, it has rarely bothered to analyze them. The latter is attempted by both *Duende y misterio del flamenco* and *Dame veneno*. While the former reviews the different ‘palos’ or varieties of flamenco at the beginning of the 1950s, the latter focuses on its evolution, on the new paths the popular genre will take after the death of Franco, when it combined with other equally popular music, like blues or rock, with Rafael and Raimundo Amador and Kiko Veneno. Using documentary and flamenco music both films evoke two different moments in Spanish history: the early 1950s when the country was sunk into autarky, governed by the iron hand of the dictator and locked into the ‘purity’ of its difference, and the end of the 1970s, the end of Francoism and the definitive opening up to the outside world. If Neville’s film echoes that first era, the second is presented in the mixing and fusion of tradition and modernity embodied in the music of the Veneno and Pata Negra groups and Camarón de la Isla’s record *La leyenda del tiempo*. At the same time, this evolution from purity to fusion cannot be understood without reflecting on the opening up to mass culture that began in the sixties when many Spaniards, especially young Spaniards, begin to identify more keenly with quiffs and jeans rather than the kiss curls on the forehead of the folkloric diva, flamenco flounces or bullfights, with pop and rock rather than romantic ballads. Basically, they preferred cultural models and products imported from outside to anything indigenous. The fruits of this radical cultural change ripen in the seventies, particularly after the death of Franco.

The originality of *Duende y misterio del flamenco* is its bold wager against the tide in its attempt to break with the *españolada* and the ideas of the day that bound documentaries to a strict representation of reality. The first break is characterised by its analytical and informative treatment of flamenco music, mostly far removed from folkloric stereotypes, through different musical numbers performed in exceptionally good locations that help chart a distinct geography of flamenco music. The second is much sharper and avoids the close link between image and reality, that was the NODO

model, conceived at least originally as able to create faithful documentation that historians would then use to write history, as expressed in the recently imported Italian neo-realist perspectives —fleshed out in the film pages of two magazines, *Índice* and later, *Objetivo*—. According to these, any approach to aspects of popular culture must reflect an ethical position favourable to the classes generating the culture. Neville goes along with neither approach and uses highly elaborate *mises en scène* that play with short fictions developed in shot/counter shots within the musical performances or in the transitions between them. The choices made by the director reveal his links to the «other generation of 1927», in the intelligent way he combines popular culture with intelligent «*humorismo*» —a new «ism» coined for its avant-garde by the members of this generation, and understood broadly as a mixture of humour and surrealism—. It is also possible to read them within a minority conception of documentary cinema that uses it as ‘construction’, and not simply as a reflection, as outlined in texts that critic and film director José López Clemente published in the *Cine Experimental* magazine in the 1940s.

In any case, any approach to *Duende y misterio del flamenco* must involve an examination of the perception Neville had of his art and his practice. By the time he started shooting this film in 1952, the director had been interested in flamenco singing for more than thirty years, from 1922 when he was invited to attend the first Cante Jondo Competition organized in Granada by Manuel de Falla in collaboration with Federico García Lorca, Andrés Segovia, Manuel Jofré and Miguel Cerón. It was his fascination for flamenco that led him to pay homage in the form of a film text, the meaning of which he himself described in the *Primer Plano* magazine: «My film is a rhapsody to flamenco song and dance. It isn’t a documentary but the history of singing and dancing in Andalucía, the genuine folklore of this land, where all the stars of the genre have performed and perform». Among other ambiguities, Neville denies that his film is a documentary and refuses to slot it into the hegemonic models mentioned above; at the same time he voices his intentions as the creator and, by using such words as *rhapsody*, *history* and *genuine*, emphasizes what interests him most; namely, he wishes to demonstrate the value of an art he admires and to delineate didactically a history of flamenco song and dance that centres on what is genuine or authentic, and leaves out of account anything that might connect them to a commercial spectacle or tame singing for clubs.

Ten years later, Neville has changed none of his views and reasserts them in his essay *Flamenco y cante jondo*, that was published in 1963. He states there that «flamenco was never a show, and was never conceived of as a show: it was the form of expression of a rather inarticulate people, poems that were mournful cries from illiterates who could express themselves in no other way, love laments of a crude, primitive kind sung by those who can hardly speak but who express themselves in this way when they feel aggrieved». And it is by observing this genuine primitivism that he comes to value the poetry of flamenco and conclude that it is deeper, purer, more subtle and closer to great contemporary poets and Japanese *haikais* [sic] than the later popular forms developed to make it commercial. This attitude aligns him with a filmmaker like Carlos Serrano de Osma, whose film *Embrujo* (1947) salvaged through fiction the best tradition of flamenco song and dance and avoided the clichés exploited by the *españolada*.

This personal perception as explained by Neville is enough to elucidate the discursive strategy he uses in *Duende y misterio del flamenco* and clarify the intentions behind the images that he creates. Conceived as a sequence of scenes that are disconnected except for the narrative voice describing them and what we might call intra-diegetic labels—for example, the names of streets like «La Siguiriya»—, the film comprises thirty sequences that stage the different strands of flamenco. The order is determined by the narrative voice that places them in a hierarchy and describes them precisely. The voice begins the narrative by setting out the chronological coordinates of flamenco and its two main categories, «*cante grande*», comprising mainly songs unaccompanied by guitar, including musical forms such as *la siguiriya*, *la caña*, *el polo* or *la soleá*, and «*cante chico*», made up of forms deriving from the first like *la liviana*, *la serrana*, *las peteneras*, *los caracoles* and other kinds that spring up for use in dancing: *bulerías*, *tanguillos*, *zapateados*, *fandangos*... The voice explains methodically and seriously the musical forms in a strict cadence that recalls the classification established by the first Spanish folklorist, Antonio Machado Álvarez, in his pioneering text, *Colección de cantes flamencos recogidos y anotados por Demófilo*, that being the pseudonym used by the father of the brother poets Antonio and Manuel Machado.

Neville's narrative drive is not content to associate each type of song with its original geographical space, but invests them with dramatic weight by linking them to short anecdotes that, like theatre backdrops, lend a human form to each piece of music and the stories linking the lines of their lyrics. If the melancholy *siguiriya* allows us to glimpse the tortured love of a couple sentenced to be always at odds, the pleasure of listening to *soleares*—in a very Nevillesque move— enables a handcuffed criminal clapped in prison to share music and tobacco amicably with his jailors. If the sound of the *taranta* is the musical accompaniment to a house move by a couple of newly weds, the bitter *petenera* accompanies the woman who renounces love and shuts herself up in a convent. Thus, each story lays bare a life experience that beats alongside the sorrow or bliss in the songs and dances, although Neville remains true to himself and dots the narrative with visual jokes, in apposite, characteristic bursts of humour. In this way, he can associate through his editing a young woman swaying to *alegrías* with the suspicious face of a goat or to subvert in the midst of *bulerías*, the cliché of *la española* of the «handsome Andalusian» by a barred window through which he is talking not to his beloved betrothed but to a seller of fountain pens.

However, these dashes of comedy don't take away from Neville's critical perspective and allow him to maintain the same level of artistic authenticity that he grants to the most genuine forms of flamenco. This explains the existence of sequences in which he links classical bolero with the sonatas of Padre Soler and the classical music that inspires the work of Albéniz or Granados. And it is Neville's flamenco purism that creates the counterpoint with the project of *Dame veneno* that is intent on reflecting the most radical fusions with this music. Moreover, while the time zone of Neville's narrative and the date when it was made are the same, Barbadillo's film stands as a glance backwards from which to approach the heterodox music-making factory that was the Amador brothers, Kiko Veneno and the striking slice of life surrounding them at the end of the seventies. To that end, he bases his discursive strategy on the conventions of factual documentary, which he is always ready to subvert. This would explain why he does without the omnipresent third-person narrative voice that is so typical of the genre,

and allows the protagonists to speak for themselves in a series of exchanges that create a more open style of discourse that appears to be less controlled by the director.

The director's stamp on the film is of a different kind and is connected to the kind of rhetoric employed to structure the narrative. This consists in using the discursive strategy of the *macrocollage* that is able to create meaning by integrating the most heterogeneous elements. Consequently, by drawing on such variegated audiovisual materials as fragments of musical performances by a member of the Veneno group, photographs and personal film, notice-boards connecting the sequences, as well as the physical presence and voices of the interviewees themselves interspersed with snatches from their best-known songs, Barbadillo elaborates a narrative frieze he divides into four sections. And, making the most of it, he introduces each with short *collages* that follow a video-clip aesthetic and comprise a dynamic array of cut-out silhouettes of buildings and objects with the animated faces of people competing to come out on top. These connecting devices work not only as irreverent, uninhibited comic salvos, but also as witty visual metaphors that point up the film's possible meanings. Thus in the first segment, we get the background to the name Veneno and are told about the encounter with José María López Sanfeliu, Kiko to his friends, and the Amador brothers. In the introductory *collage*, the animated head of Arias Navarro announcing the death of Franco is treated like an exploding pressure cooker that throws into the air a series of images that herald in comic vein the social and cultural changes that are round the corner, of which Veneno and their imitators will be a key element. Similarly, the *collage* introducing the second segment, devoted to the group's short existence and the making of its one and only record, shows Kiko's electric guitar climbing the Giralda in Sevilla and displacing the sculpture of the emblematic Giraldillo in order to crown the tower in a visual joke that explains graphically what the recording of Veneno meant to the extent that its pioneering fusion of themes represented a farewell to traditional flamenco music. In the third part, the collaboration between Veneno and Camarón that led to *La leyenda del tiempo* is introduced by a different *collage* prompted by ideas that allude to the conquest of space in which the cut-out of La Giralda is transformed into a kind of spaceship that lands violently on the moon, in what is perhaps an allusion to the stratospheric novelty of the record that, at the time, very few managed to grasp. Of course, in 1979 the flamenco fusion music at the heart of *La leyenda del tiempo* was seen by most people as being music from another planet. Finally, the fourth and final segment of the film contrasts the success of Pata Negra with Kiko's solitary journey, a Kiko by then re-baptized Kiko Veneno, and once again is preceded by a *collage* where in this case a shower of pills and syringes falls on the buildings in the city, in reference to the destructive appearance of hard drugs in the early eighties.

With such flourishes Barbadillo continues the exploration of the musical and cultural scene in Seville in the last years of the Franco regime and the Transition that his production company, La Zanfoña Producciones, had begun to trace in *El Underground. La ciudad del Arcoiris* (Gervasio Iglesias, 2003). From the sixties, Seville, alongside Barcelona and Ibiza, were the points of entry for cultural and counter-cultural movements from the United States, like the hippy movement and all it implied. The eruption of anything new and foreign collided head on with the Spanish society of the time that was traditional and cloistered, and sparked contradictions and new forms of life on the margins, the breeding ground for new musical groups like Smash, to which

Gervasio Iglesias dedicated his film, emphasizing its timid striving towards a fusion of so-called «progressive rock» and flamenco. A musical and cultural fusion that is forged radically in *Dame veneno* and represented by a journey in the reverse direction: if *Underground* described how Smash, a group that began as a rock group, moves towards flamenco, Barbadillo's film portrays the itinerary from flamenco to rock followed by the Amador brothers led by Kiko, who had just returned from his wanderings in the United States, where he had not only discovered hippies and the best rock music but also the best flamenco. In fact, the fusion practiced by Veneno works on three fronts: interclass, intercultural and inter-musical. Because if the Amador brothers are marginal gypsies from the outlying suburbs of Seville weaned on traditional flamenco, José



María López Sanfeliu, *Kiko*, is middle class, has a university degree and is an out-and-out hippy. The alliance of the three young men, representing such different worlds and cultures, symbolized all manner of interchange that was taking place in Spanish society and facilitated the powerful and original creative fusion that resonates on every front in *Dame veneno*.

With its exceptional heterogeneity and the *macrocollage* with which he welds his diverse material, Barbadillo creates a documentary, driven by a well-ordered, didactic narrative that aims to salvage and highlight a musical fusion that has not received sufficient recognition until recently, leaving no space for the apparent improvisation found in other kinds of non-fiction cinema. For example, each interviewee introduces new information that allow the history to unfold, without broaching the contradictions and debates that one can assume accompanied the coexistence of such talented musicians as the Amador brothers or Kiko Veneno. It is precisely through incursions into the byways of video-clip, with markedly surrealist «pop collages» that structure the narrative, visually symbolizing the ruptures and

changes experienced by Spanish society in the late 1970s that Veneno's and their imitators' music depicted in visionary fashion, capturing what happened at the time and anticipating the interculturality that was about to appear on the horizon.

From this perspective, in quite unforeseen ways, the films *Duende y misterio del flamenco* and *Dame veneno* reveal undeniable parallels that stem from a common desire to describe and promote the best flamenco music in their respective periods. Both exploit innovative formal techniques to structure their discourse and play with humour, to undermine the so-called logic that is supposed to determine the discourse of a documentary and to scatter around comments that are more or less meaningful or irreverent. In this manner the anarchist spirit of Neville the aristocrat connects with the free spirit of the gypsies and life philosophy of hippies. Although the films and their directors seem to walk together, they never collide. Neville creates a portrait of flamenco song and dance captured in all its purity, simplicity and subtlety, as if he wanted to freeze it in time. *Duende y misterio del flamenco* is a dish for refined, demanding palates, for spectators able to appreciate the beauty and sensibility of unique cultural forms, that were being degraded in their essential being, according to Neville, by the emerging tourist market. Surprisingly, by selecting attractive scenarios as backcloths for the musical performances, Neville himself turns *Duende y misterio del flamenco* into the highest quality tourist publicity. It is the ideal publicity to attract refined elite tourists, the only sort able to distinguish and appreciate the beauty of what is genuine and authentic. The minority tourist that is demanding and curious and refuses to think of himself as a tourist, who prefers to see himself as a traveller. Thus, and even though it is critical, Neville's film seems to flirt with the original *espagnolade* of the Romantics in their search for essences and authenticity.

Equally, *Dame veneno* represents another kind of approach to popular music, because Barbadillo links his film to reality, to the new freedom that Spain begins to enjoy after the death of Franco, and also to the darker side of the Transition, the barrios of 3000 Homes in the outer suburbs of Seville, the rebelliousness in the shanty towns and the dramatic eruption of heroine at the beginning of the Eighties. In a way, his film is more than an approach to the impact of Veneno, Pata Negra or *La leyenda del tiempo*, because it can also be seen as a description of a substantial slice of the soundtrack to «*quinqüi-delinquent culture*». Although it avoids the largely idealizing portraits of petty criminals in films directed by other filmmakers that focusing on characters such as El Vaquilla, El Torete or El Jaro, the protagonists of films like *Perros callejeros* (1977) by José Antonio de la Loma, *Navajeros* (1980), *Colegas* (1982) or *El pico* (1983) de Eloy de la Iglesia and *Deprisa, deprisa* (1981) by Carlos Saura. In contrast, the aim of *Dame veneno* is to try to put things in their rightful context through the frank, honest way the protagonists speak, never avoiding their own mistakes or contradictions.

FLAMENCOS Y PELÍCANOS

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DUENDE Y MISTERIO DEL FLAMENCO

1952 España

Director: Edgar Neville

Production: Producciones Edgar Neville

Script: Edgar Neville

Photography: Enrique Guerner

Music: José María Franco

Actors: Roberto Ximénez, Alejandro Vega, Manolo Vargas, Alberto Lorca, Elvira Real, Dorita Ruiz y Rosario Escudero forman parte del Ballet Español de Pilar López

Length: full length - 75 minutes

Category: suitable for all ages

Sinopsis: A review of the history of flamenco song and dance. The film relates the different styles that have developed from the original forms to the present. A variety of male and female singers sing, and dancers, either singly, or in groups, perform all the different Andalusian schools. All framed by landscapes and scenes in keeping with each style of singing.



DAME VENENO

2007 España

Director: Pedro Barbadillo

Production: La Zancoña Producciones

Script: Luis Clemente Gavilán, Pedro Barbadillo

Photography: Alex Catalán

Actors: Rafael Amador, Rafael *Manglis* Cobo, Rafael *Bizco Eléctrico* García, Raimundo Amador, Antonio *Tacita* Moreno.

Length: short - 55 minutos

Category: not suitable for under thirteens

Sinopsis: The film is a history of encounters: rock with flamenco, Camarón with Veneno and Pata Negra, and of individuals misunderstood at the time who knew they were changing the direction of Spanish music in the last quarter of the twentieth century. The film highlights a rich fragment of Spanish musical history that is virtually unexplored to date. It is a documentary based on three central figures in Spanish music who opened flamenco up to other dimensions in the fraught second half of the 1970s: Camarón, Veneno and Pata Negra. Music provides the narrative line for the documentary and reinforces its universal spirit aimed at a wide public.