

Torrente, el brazo tonto de la ley; a late XX Century Quixote?

Antonio Balsón

Torrente, el brazo tonto de la ley (1998) marks a number of milestones in Spanish film: It is Santiago Segura's first full length feature, it became the highest grossing Spanish film in history (until the sequel out grossed it at the box office), the biggest all time national box office record of audience in history¹ and it started the biggest box office franchise in Spanish cinema history with three sequels: *Operación en Marbella* (2001), *El Protector* (2005), and *Crisis Letal (Lethal Crisis)* (2011) – each one of them in the top twenty grossing films. However, remarkably little has been written about this phenomenon.

So as much as the critics do not want to touch *Torrente* with a six foot pole, the numbers tell a different story. There has to be more to the film - and the saga, than the dirty joke everybody wants to be in on, than the movie everyone loves to hate because it is so gross and disgusting. I propose that beyond offering a refreshing relief from historical and Civil War related films, period dramas, and Almodóvar's newer, glossier, stylistically refined films, *Torrente* offers a realistic view of Spanish society, still coping with embracing immigrants after being a country of emigrants for centuries, still very much a "macho" society and overall a country fascinated with all things scatological as far back as the medieval *cancioneros*, and the national hero Don Quixote. José Luis Torrente is a character the Spanish public not only recognizes, but somewhere deep down, identifies with.

In fact I propose the public identifies with Torrente for his Quixotic persona, one blatantly going back in time, against society's norm. A late XX Century Quixote, who believes in his mission, who with a trusty sidekick, Rafi (Javier Cámara) goes forth to right wrongs, in his old trusty mare, a beat up 1970s Seat 1430, and all in part to impress and save his impossible love Amparito (Neus Asensi).

Neither the critics, nor his peers give Segura credit, other than being in the same category as *Airbag* (Juanme Bajo Ulloa, 1997), and *El milagro de P. Tinto* (Javier Fesser, 1998) as a new category: neo vulgar (Oropesa, 173) or “Españolada postmoderna” (Josep Lluís Fecé, 93). The story is an old one for Spanish cinema. The debate of art house and the type of film that reproduces realistically Spanish identity versus box office hits that parody that identity. The lamentation is old and ongoing: Spanish cinema is in crisis, the government measures and subsidies do not help fight Hollywood, audiences are in free fall, the corporate distributors cut the mustard, etc, etc. Nobody is safe from these critics. Alejandro Amenabar is guilty of glossy “realismo a la Spielberg” (realism a la Spielberg) that contrast with the “necessary” *Los lunes al sol* (Fernando León de Aranoa) (Fecé, 93).

The “Españolada” were the late 70s and early 80s comic films representing all the possible stereotypes of “Spanishness”: the Spanish macho (usually comedians Fernando Esteso, Andrés Pajares or Antonio Ozores) trying to seduce Nordic beauties that holiday in the Costa del Sol. Jordan and Allison call them the “popular, sleazy, late Francoist sex comedies... their costumbrismo, camp styles, overblown Spanish stereotypes and focus on sexual repression.” (Jordan, Allison, 31). These parodies also took advantage of the new liberalized laws to include as much nudity as possible, making the films almost soft porn.

The ongoing debate then lies in the representation of “Spanishness”, with the only acceptable form for the critics being the socially realistic model. Pedro Almodovar, long the critic’s darling is now guilty of “papier maché worlds, clay characters and exarcebated Baroque symbolism” (Gómez Tarín, 52) (“sus mundos se nos antojan de cartón piedra, y sus personajes de plastelina; la simbología nos recuerda al barroquismo exacerbado”). The question then spills over into which film makers secure a place in the canon, and where that canon lies and its association with Spanish film as an institution. Fecé argues that:

Es probable que una parte importante de la “Institución Cine Español” comparta, consciente o inconscientemente, la idea según la cual la cultura popular debiera asociarse a las formas de conciencia nacional de las burguesías del siglo XIX, formas que podían encontrarse en obras de intelectuales, poetas, escritores o artistas (cineastas) que reclamaban una cultura popular entendida como cultura nacional, donde el pueblo aparece como una entidad mítica y la cultura popular se equipara a tradición. (Fecé, 86)

(It is probable that an important part of the “Institution of Spanish Cinema” shares consciously or unconsciously the idea that popular culture should be associated with the national consciousness of the bourgeois of the XIX C which could be found in the works of intellectuals, poets, writers, artists (film makers) that asked for a popular culture understood through a national culture where Spanishness appears as a mythical entity and popular culture equals tradition) (All translations are mine, unless otherwise specified)

All this puts Segura smack in the middle of the debate. *Torrente* is as low brow as they get, but at the box office it beats records. What does this say about the Spanish audience and their “Spanishness”? Antonio Lázaro-Reboll defends the first two *Torrente* films “As cultural landmarks of the turn of the twenty-first century, the two Santiago Segura vehicles invite us to engage with other ways of judging the cultural significance of a film, and to be more open in our understanding of the pleasures of popular forms and of audience investments in specific texts.” (Lázaro-Reboll, 226). Still, there is a condescending tone in that defense, the patronizing distance needed between critic and public.

It would be interesting to time travel – speaking of film, maybe in Doc’s *Back to the Future’s* (1985) De Lorean – to see how the culturati, the intelligentsia reacted to Jorge Manrique’s almost obscene (circa 1476) poem “Un combite que hizo don Jorge Manrique a su Madrastra” (A Banquet that Don Jorge Manrique Held in Honor of His Stepmother) where “the meal begins with a salad of wild onions, tow and frog heads” (Domínguez). This is not unlike Torrente feeding his father the restaurant’s leftovers put through the blender, cigarette butts included, or for that matter the reaction to the outright obscene *Carajicomedia* (1519) or *Don Quixote* (1605). So while there will always be high, lofty art, it seems to be that the Spanish public enjoys their everyday, dirty humor. This is also evident in the very Spanish genres of “costumbrismo” and the “esperpento” as is also mentioned by Jordan and Allison.

The artistic portrayal of everyday life in Spain, *costumbrismo*, has had a huge literary and artistic impact even up to the XX C. The *costumbrismo* movement strived to portray everyday actions, originally in Madrid but soon around Spain and the Spanish speaking world. Part of the *costumbrismo* tradition is its precise portrayal of life in a barrio (neighborhood) like Carabanchel, a traditional working class neighborhood across the Manzanares river from downtown Madrid. Carabanchel was long known primarily because of the infamous prison (not unlike Alcatraz or Folsom) – closed in 1998, its greyhound racing track (also long closed) and a cemetery (San Isidro). Curiously, *Torrente* here crosses paths with *Manolito Gafotas*, Elvira Lindo’s childrens’ book written from the point of view of Manolito a boy growing up in Carabanchel, which also spawned off two films and suffused *costumbrismo*. Not coincidentally, Carabanchel was Santiago Segura’s home growing up and well into adulthood, which he took pride in living in even after his early success. Núria Triana-Toribio credits Almodóvar’s *¿Qué he hecho yo para merecer esto?* with reinstating the *costumbrismo* tradition.

But Segura goes beyond the *costumbrismo* tradition in making *Torrente*, to embrace the *esperpento* genre. *Esperpento* was born of the *Generación del '98*, an intellectual group questioning Spain's final loss of the Empire with Cuba in the Spanish American war of 1898. Ramón del Valle-Inclán with his play *Luces de Bohemia (Bohemian Lights)* (1920), spearheaded the movement to portray Spain through the grotesque, distorted and warped viewpoints, and absurd characters and situations not unlike the later theatre of Brecht and Beckett. It is interesting that Segura relies on the *esperpento* tradition as he portrays a Spain that is not unlike exactly one hundred years before, questioning its identity. In the late XX C Spain was coming to terms with being a country receiving immigrants rather than one of emigrants, as well as with youth unemployment and an unstable economy.

Segura can be compared to the British star Sacha Baron Cohen, not only because of his over the top, racist, chauvinist, politically incorrect characters (Ali G., Borat, Bruno, or the Dictator) but more importantly because of the blending of the person and the character which takes place for the promotion of the films. David Denby describes Baron Cohen's marketing plan as "When Baron Cohen finishes a film, he struts around in the guise of his peacocking dolts for months at a time, turning routine promotional events into provocation and performance art" (Denby). Although Segura pre-dates Baron Cohen by a couple of years the similarities abound, as the critics question if these characters (Torrente and Baron Cohen's) simply provide a platform for white bourgeois males to feel safe in their stereotyping (Gibson).

Although *Torrente* was Segura's first full length film, it was not his first, neither as a director nor as an actor, in fact I suggest that many factors went into making *Torrente* the huge success it has become and it has to do not only with Segura's experience, but with numerous factors, from the cast and crew, the mise en scene, the filmic references and commonplaces, the soundtrack, the promotion, even the cameos form an important part of

making *Torrente* the unparalleled success it has become. Speaking at the Rencontres du cinema espagnol de Nantes in 2003, about the time span between Segura's last short and first full length movie, José Luis Rebodinos had this to say:

Il faudra attendre quatre ans pur que Santiago se décide a tourner son premier long- métrage, *Torrente, le bras gauche de la loi*. Et en voyant le film, on comprend parfaitement pourquoi il a tant tardé, car le premier long- métrage du réalisateur est un produit pensé, plein de gags intelligents et élaborés. Ce n'est pas un hazard s'il a fait fureur...

(Rebodinos, 76)

“Four years would be the wait for Segura to decide to roll his first full length film, *Torrente, el brazo tonto de la ley*. And upon seeing the film one understands perfectly why he took so long, because the first full length movie of the film maker is a well thought out product, full of intelligent and elaborated gags. It is not by luck that the film was a success....”

Santiago Segura's biography is part of Spain's TV and Film's recent history. Born in Madrid in 1965, he made his first short at 14. He studied fine arts at the Complutense University in Madrid where he continued acting and making low budget Super 8 shorts, which he transferred to home VHS before publishing, Segura called them “cutre-cortos” (“cutre” lacks a good translation but it is a combination of seedy, greasy, dirty, cheap, dodgy, and shabby. It is an important and frequent word used to describe *Torrente's* world), one of which won the Goya award (Spain's Oscars) for Best Short in 1993. His business savy is evident in that in 1994, when he was still making shorts he registered a production company “Amiguetes Entertainment” (Riambau, 50) as a platform to produce and promote his work. At the same time he was acting as an extra in films and participating in many TV game

shows, becoming a familiar, instantly recognizable face. His break came with *Acción Mutante* in 1993 with Alex de la Iglesia who would then give him a film stealing, tailor made part in *El día de la bestia* in 1995. It would be with those earnings and his TV game show winnings that Segura would amass the million Euro budget needed to finance *Torrente*, which coincidentally received no government money as opposed to the majority of Spanish films that seek government subsidies.

Another key factor in *Torrente*'s success is the simplicity of the storyline. José Luis Torrente was fired from Madrid's police force, presumably for his dim wit, incompetence with weapons, or lack of personal hygiene, among others, so he becomes a vigilante. He is a dirty, selfish, racist, sexist, cowardly, poor, right wing Franco supporter, fueled by cheap Spanish whisky. A character that would make any Sacha Baron Cohen character appear politically correct by comparison. The first scene sets the tone for the whole film and removes any doubt about what sort of film the audience has walked in to see. An empty bar, a dive, the entrance curtains are pushed aside and our hero is briefly illuminated by a single zenithal light, the first visual joke, for the audience does not see a screen "God": strong, tall, handsome, but seedy and potbellied Torrente. He walks to the bar, unshaven, in his dirty, stained polyester leisure suit, cheap aviator sunglasses and greasy comb-over. He then proceeds to drink half a bottle of whisky, shot by shot, until midnight, when he stops drinking because he is now "on the beat". The old barman is Luis Cuenca, a renowned and familiar veteran character actor, who immediately gives credibility to what would otherwise seem a weak opening scene.

After that, Torrente "patrols" the less glamorous neighborhoods in his car, listening to El Fary (a popular flamenco singer and Spanish icon that Segura revived from obscurity), mixing a gulp of soda with a gulp of whisky (as he calls it: "instant "cubata" – cocktail"), while he patrols, the audience sees that he drives by multiple crimes in the making: A gang

breaking into a jewelry shop and a beating. Torrente's response? "Kids these days", a pimp slashing a prostitute's neck? "love birds". Finally he stops at a North African immigrant, accuses him of selling sandwiches and sodas on the street, which is illegal, breaks his little finger and "confiscates" the sandwiches before letting him go. The audience now has no doubt of how low this "detective" is willing to go, who he is willing to pick on, and what his *modus operandi* is. During the day he sends his paraplegic dad – masterfully played, and like El Fary – rescued from obscurity by Segura: Tony Leblanc, an icon of Spanish film, who won the Goya for Best Supporting Actor in this role, to panhandle for money at the subway entrance, which together with his pension accounts for the family's income. Forbidden to eat lunch at his regular neighborhood bar until he pays his debt, Torrente goes across the street to the Chinese restaurant where he discovers a drug dealing mafia. Together with his new neighbor Rafi and his haphazard group of friends: Malaguita (Julio Sanjuán), Toneti (Jaime Barantán), and Bombilla (light bulb) (Darío Paso), they eventually disarticulate the gang and take the money, leaving the door open for a sequel.

The film in and of itself pulls no punches, there is no amazing new camera work or lighting technique, there is no trendy narrative thread, there are no layers of plot stories. This is again a factor in Segura's success. He understands film and gives the audience a no frills, straight up, good guys vs. bad guys story. Segura leverages the tools of the police/crime film: high contrasts, close ups of the bad guys, intense and loud scenes, etc. To do this Segura relies on many film references: from Rafi imitating Robert De Niro's *Taxi Driver*'s Travis Bickle, to *Psycho*, *Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, *Halloween*, *Friday the 13th* (Alberto Mirá, 224), and *Death Wish*, the *Lethal Weapon* series, plus Tarantino's *Reservoir Dogs* (Jordan, Allison 113). The importance of *Torrente* is not in the technical aspects of the film, on the contrary, as Gómez Tarín expounds: "Ya hemos visto que la capacidad técnica permite buenos resultados formales, pero nos encontramos ante películas mediocres, cuando no nulas,

que son sistemáticamente aplaudidas por espectadores y crítica. Mientras tanto productos tan relevantes como *Amic*, *Amat* o *Flores de otro mundo*, pasan desapercibidas” (Gómez Tarín, 2), (We have already seen that technical capacity allows for good formal results, but we find ourselves in front of mediocre if not null films that are systematically applauded by viewers and critics. While such relevant products as *Amic*, *Amat* or *Flores de otro mundo* pass by unnoticed). If it is an aspect beyond the technical that makes these movies “click” with audiences, it should be the plot. So then it is Segura’s talent to draw out the connections and humor at his own expense, to make the film work. Josep Lluís Fecé continues this discourse pointing to *Torrente* as “exhibía sin tapujos toda una colección de referencias y guiños a las “españoladas” (Josep Lluís Fecé, 93) (he exhibits shamelessly a full Collection of referents and winks to the “españoladas”).

The debate then seems to boil down to the definition and difference between “Españolidad” ie Spanishness, and “Españolada” ie a spoof and satire on the “Españolidad”. Núria Triana-Toribio quotes Santiago Segura as saying that there is no such thing as “Spanish film” (“El cine español no existe”) (Triana-Toribio, 146). Segura, like Trueba, Alex de la Iglesia or Almodovar before him, have an encyclopaedic knowledge of film both Hollywood, Spanish and in general, so a quote like that makes sense even when applied to any national film, as it is very much and always has been an international/transnational industry. Triana-Toribio also mentions the necessary history needed for films like *Torrente* to be made “There is no doubt that in order to arrive at films like *Torrente* or *Airbag* in the late 1990s, a road must have been travelled in the articulation of Spanishness (Triana-Toribio, 152).

According to some critics like Fecé the neo-vulgar or the new “Españoladas” work at degrading and eroding Spanish identity in cinema, or what Fredric Jameson defines as “an elaborated symptom of the waning of our historicity”. On the contrary, it is my opinion

that these films – as much as some might hate to say it – enhance our historicity. An example of proof of this lies in *Don Quixote* which in setting out to parody and spoof “canonical” tales of chivalry such as *Amadis de Gaula* or *Tirant lo Blanc*, set not only a new level of chivalric tale, but reset the canon. Of course many years would pass before Cervantes’ acceptance into the critical, scholarly fields of study. On a more modern note we could mention the *Harry Potter* series of books which has spawned such academic studies as *The Politics of Harry Potter*, *Heroism in the Harry Potter Series*, *Harry Potter and History*, *The Law and Harry Potter*, *The Psychology of Harry Potter*, or *Females and Harry Potter: Not All That Empowering*, and more, all from a children’s book, which of course is considered innocent and politically correct to study, it might even be cute.

Jordan and Allison point that Segura’s

“appeal was based on it’s hybridity, its attractive combination of classic American genre conventions with certain Spanish filmic traditions such as vicious black humour, surrealism, explicit violence and crude, grotesque stereotypes. It also aggressively reaffirmed its deviation from and negation of Mirovian norms of quality cinema, presenting itself as an “anti-establishment” film on the basis of its unashamed commercialism and celebration of “trash” cinema.

(Jordan, Allison, 31).

Unfortunately, Jordan and Allison’s theory loses its punch when they miss-represent the film: “...the macho cop hero stealing deodorant from a convenience store during a robbery”, but this is precisely what we get in *Torrente: El brazo tonto de la ley*.” (Jordan, Allison, 95). In fact *Torrente* puts the deodorant back on the shelf – after using it, and instead steals a couple of bottles of alcohol. Heredero and Santamaria also point to the

“progresiva mixtura genérica...aunque los géneros tradicionales casi nunca han existido en estado puro dentro del cine español, la ruptura actual de las fronteras entre ellos y el grado de permeabilidad que muestran para intercambiarse y compartir códigos se hace visible en la hibridación generalizada” (Heredero, Santamaria, 63)

(the progressive mixture of genres... although traditional genres have rarely occurred in a pure state in Spanish film, the present day breaking of barriers between them and the degree of permeability that they show to exchange and share codes is visible in a generalized hybridization”)

It is important before proceeding to mention that Torrente does have some sort of moral compass, albeit well hidden. The North African immigrant with the broken finger appears with a group of immigrant friends to haunt Torrente’s drunken dreams. And at the final shootout, when he is about to leave with the stash he has stolen from the drug lord, he returns – albeit cursing - to save Rafi, in a shootout that gets Torrente wounded. This morality is key in understanding that deep down Torrente is not a bad person, but maybe a product of his environment, time and history, therefore somewhat alleviating the character of his lacks (Sacha Baron Cohen’s *Borat*, also shows his redeeming qualities at the end of the film).

Another key leveraging point for sympathy for Torrente is his patriotism. Although this has many references to Franco, the Franquista flag is displayed prominently on his old TV set, his car’s bumper sticker and on Amparito’s panties when she does an erotic dance for Torrente in one of his dreams. When motivating the kids to go ahead with the operation after Toneti kills himself jumping out of the window to escape the crooks, he impels them to do it “¡Por España!” (“For Spain!”), and Torrente’s final words to Rafi as he is wheeled into an

ambulance: “Recuerda que en la vida hay algo más importante que ser policia, ¡ser español! (“Remember that there are more important things in life than being a cop, being a Spaniard!”). While this might be a cheap tug on the heartstrings, it is a tug nonetheless and one that a Spanish audience would appreciate, even if in a *Torrente* like moment, they would deny it.

A similar patriotism is displayed obliquely with *Torrente*'s affiliation to the Atlético de Madrid football club. The “Atleti” is perceived as second to Real Madrid. The stadium, budget and trophy case is smaller than their cross town neighbors and it is considered a working class club, occasionally dropping into second division. But the fan base is renown as the best in Europe, sticking out the rough times and celebrating the good ones. *Torrente*'s affiliation thus separates him from the Franco theme (Real Madrid was the “official” club) and marking him with authentic working class roots.

These details could be interpreted as superficial, but they are weaved as part of a meticulously planned film, indeed it could be said that *Torrente* is a labor of love. As Segura thanks his friends in the final credits for listening to him for five years talking about *Torrente*, it is evident that he has taken care of every detail. Columnist and film critic Paco Navarro describes it as “una cuidada estética cutre” (a detailed and cared for *cutre* aesthetic) (Navarro). In fact, in describing his own films (specifically *Torrente IV*), in his introductory, presentation monologue for the *Goya* ceremony in Spain in 2012, Segura explains that his films are a labor of love and are “preciosista” in nature (a Spanish term describing preciousness as a genre, that involves careful, painstaking, and loving attention to detail). In that monologue he also jokingly complains about not being nominated for a single of the twenty nine possible categories by the Spanish Film Academy.

A key factor in the success of *Torrente*, and the sequels is the brilliant casting. Apart from the previously mentioned Tony Leblanc (who died on November 24 as I was writing

this article), and Javier Cámara in his first big break that would later lead him to act in Almodóvar's *Hable Con Ella* and *Mala Educación*, and with Viggo Mortensen in *Alatriste* the cast includes such household names as Chus Lampreave, Rafi's fishmonger's mom, Neus Asensi, or Espartaco Santoni as the evil drug lord Mendoza. In the case of *Torrente*, the cameo appearances are just about as important as the cast itself. With such participation as Jorge Sanz and Gabino Diego as the convenience store robbers, Javier Bardem as a pool playing thug, Policarpio Diaz "El potro de Vallecas" professional boxer as himself, comedians El Gran Wyoming, and Faemino y Cansado, nightshow host Andreu Buenafuente, even Oscar winning director Fernando Trueba (*Belle Époque*) appears briefly as a priest. The importance of these cameos is twofold. First it shows that Segura has the friends and connections to get them to appear in his film and second and more subtle is the Spanish obsession with star gazing at every level. This is evidenced by the multimillion business that is the "prensa rosa" (the tabloids and tabloid format TV shows). In fact the *Torrente* sequels exploit this and are populated by bona fide actors and comedians (José Mota, José Luis Moreno, José Luis López Vázquez, Carlos Latre, etc. and many of the characters that are professional participants in this gossip industry. Sergi Sánchez points to "una lluvia de cameos – algunos de ellos fetichistas y/o nostálgicos (Marisa Medina, Cañita Brava, Barragán), otros realmente insólitos (Oliver Stone)" (Rodríguez, 140) (a rainfall of cameos – some fetishistic and/or nostalgic (Marisa Medina, Cañita Brava, Barragán), others, truly extraordinary (Oliver Stone). It is Sergi Sánchez who rightly explains that *Torrente* does not and can not form part of a filmic discourse, at least not in the art house or social realism way, although it does portray more social realism than we would like to acknowledge.

Some authors like Jose Luís Castro de Paz, Jamie J. Pena Pérez or Heredero and Santamaria only cite the film to mention its phenomenal box office success, as if that was the only remarkable feature to mention about it. Some critics, like José María Latorre would not

see the film, even if a gun was pointing at his chest (“Pero nadie me haría ver cosas como *Torrente, el brazo tonto de la ley* ni aun apuntándome con una pistola”) (Rodríguez, 254). Emilio de la Rosa does address the film and recognizes the political ideological confusion it represents (“uno de los casos más extraños de confusión ideológica producida en los últimos años) (Rodríguez, 178), mentioning the production of the film under the conservative government of the Partido Popular, but supported by leftist intellectuals. According to Caparrós the new generation of Spanish film is in mourning after *Torrente* (el Joven Cine español está de luto) (Caparrós, 91)

Antonio Lárázo-Reboll starts his essay on *Torrente* with the question: “What would be the (popular) appeal of a fascist, racist, sexist and alcoholic protagonist for Spanish audiences? Of a filthy, petty, loathsome, despicable character?” (Lárázo-Reboll, 219). While this description is certainly correct and precise, it misses the mark. All those attributes are precisely what makes *Torrente* appealing. Caparrós explains that the success of *Torrente* is as a sociological phenomenon, not an artistic one, which begs the question of how to separate those two factors in film, or any art form for that matter. This leads to another very Spanish expression not unlike *cutre*, which is *morbo*. While technically *morbo* stands for morbid curiosity, it is widely used in Spain to explain any “seedy” or hidden lust. This *morbo* can be applied to anything with a quirky or imperfect beauty. *Morbo* is part of the popular success of *Torrente*. The curiosity factor together with the word of mouth marketing was a key factor at the box office, leveraging the curiosity like the “rubber neckers” who strain to look at car accidents on the road, or the hoards of tourists walking around Amsterdam’s Red Light District.

Cultural critic James Wolcott comparing British (and by extension European) humor with American explains that “It was once an inviolable platitude that the English still reveled and excelled in firing off a gassy round of the old Chaucerian gusto, appreciating bathroom

humor and saucy bits far more than we tight-bungholed Yanks with our Puritan consciences and caressable toilet paper” (Wolcott, 38). Maybe *Torrente* takes us back to those honest Chaucerian, medieval, raunchy times and we blush at the thought that we do enjoy our “caca, culo, pedo, pis” (“poop, butt, fart, pee) jokes. Accepting that low brow humor means sacrificing centuries of work at refining our tastes, at elevating art, only to have Jose Luis Torrente, wash it all off with a bottle of *DyC* Spanish whisky. Like Sancho Panza learning from Don Quijote, Rafi learns from Torrente a very basic set of values – being Spanish, enjoying traditional Spanish music instead of generic electronic dance music and the value of a good kick in the testicles over any martial art. But Santiago Segura pushes us to question how art dresses itself and how society portrays – or wishes it was portrayed. *Torrente* is an honest work of art and social realism, as much as any comic, graffiti, or stand up comedy monologue. The disagreement of the critics only brings Segura’s work into artistic relevance. Would a work that all critics agreed was a masterpiece make it a masterpiece? Is an Andy Warhol less a work of art than a Picasso? a jazz piece less of a work of art than a symphony? I propose that *Torrente* is a Spanish work of art that has made its mark on Spanish cinema history and will stand the test of time.

Chapel Hill, NC

December 2012

Notes

1. Spanish cinema a students guide

Works cited

- Caparrós Lera, José María. *La Pantalla Popular: El cine español durante el gobierno de la derecha (1996-2003)*. Madrid: Akal Ediciones, 2005.
- Castro de Paz, José Luis. *Cine español, otro trayecto histórico: Nuevos puntos de vista: Una aproximación sintética*. Valencia: Ediciones de la Filmoteca, 2005.
- Davis, Kyle Brandon. *Ramón del Valle-Inclán, Luces de Bohemia (Bohemian lights), and the development of the Esperpento*. Weatherford: Southwestern Oklahoma State U., 2001.
- Denby, David. "Strongmen, *The Dictator* and *The Untouchables*". The New Yorker. May 28, 2012.
- Domínguez, Frank and Greenia, George D. *Castillian Writers, 1400-1500 Dictionary of Literary Biography*. Detroit: Gale, 2004.
- Evans, Peter Williams, ed. *Spanish Cinema, The Auteurist Tradition*. Oxford: Oxford U P, 1999.
- Festival du cinéma espagnol de Nantes (2003 : Nantes, France). *Le Cinéma Espagnol des Années 90*. Nantes: CRINI, 2003.
- Gibson, Janine. "Comics find Ali G is an alibi for racism". *The Guardian* (London), 11 January 2000.
- Herederó, Carlos F. *Semillas de futuro : Cine español, 1990-2001*. Madrid: Sociedad Estatal España Nuevo Milenio, 2002.
- Huerta Floriano, Miguel Ángel. *Análisis fílmico del cine español: Sesenta películas para un fin de siglo*. Salamanca: Caja Duero, 2006.
- Jameson, Fredric. *El posmodernismo o la lógica cultural del capitalismo avanzado*. Barcelona: Paidós, 1991.
- Jordan, Barry, and Mark Allison. *Spanish Cinema : a Student's Guide*. London: Hodder Arnold, 2005.

--- and Morgan-Tamosunas, Rikki. *Contemporary Spanish Cinema*. Manchester:

Manchester U P, 1998.

Martín Velázquez, José. *Una Década Prodigiosa : El Cortometraje Español De Los Noventa*.

Alcalá de Henares: Festival de Cine de Alcalá de Henares-Comunidad de Madrid,
2000.

Mira, Alberto. *The Cinema of Spain and Portugal*. London: Wallflower, 2005.

Navarro, Francisco. Electronic interview. November 2012.

Riambau, Esteve. *Productores en el cine español: Estado, dependencias y mercado*. Madrid:

Cátedra, 2008.

Rodríguez, Hilario J. *Miradas Para Un Nuevo Milenio: Fragmentos Para Una Historia*

Futura Del Cine Español. Alcalá de Henares: Ayuntamiento de Alcalá de Henares,
Fundación Colegio del Rey, 2006.

Segura, Santiago. "Monologo de Santiago Segura en los Goya 2012." YouTube.com

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KFZmaXDOeMA>

Triana-Toribio, Núria. *Spanish National Cinema*. London: Routledge, 2003.

Wolcott, James. "Of Thee I sting! With the Internet flattening out national differences,

American and British comedy have all but merged – e.g., BBC America, *The Office*,
Coupling, etc. The U.S. is even closing the bathroom humor gap. The Brits still excel
on one front, however: the savage, unprintable takedown." Vanity Fair. January 2013.