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Comedy Basque Style: A Recontextualization of Commedia all'Italiana

Zackary Michael Adams
University of Vermont

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COMEDY BASQUE STYLE: A RECONTEXTUALIZATION OF COMMEDIA
ALL'ITALIANA

A Thesis Presented

by

Zackary Adams

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Thesis Examination Committee:

Sarah Nilsen, Ph.D., Advisor
Antonello Borra, Ph.D., Chairperson
Anthony Magistrale, Ph.D.
Cynthia J. Forehand, Ph.D., Dean of the Graduate College

ABSTRACT

Commedia all'italiana, a genre of Italian film satires that emerged in the late 1950s and sustained through the late 1970s, is primarily understood through its close relationship to Italian culture. The evolution of the genre appears to be less tied to the revision of iconography and narrative codes of previous films than it is to the trajectory of Italian society during its years of prominence. The following thesis will attempt to find a definition of *commedia all'italiana* that is discrete from the genre's strong link to Italian culture by isolating the films' common narrative strategies. The aim in constructing this definition, which will be called the "*commedia all'italiana* narrative methodology," is to negotiate the possibility of formal elaboration upon the genre by a modern filmmaker, even outside of the strictly Italian context of the films in question. The viability of this endeavor will be put to the test in the final chapter, a plot outline for a feature film, entitled *Commedia Vasca*, that emulates the narrative approaches assembled in the *commedia all'italiana* narrative methodology.

This thesis begins by presenting the common understanding of *commedia all'italiana*, with a particular focus on the genre's close connection to Italian society. The second chapter tracks the formation of the *commedia all'italiana* narrative methodology by isolating and analyzing distinct and adaptable narrative strategies at play among the films of *commedia all'italiana*. Then the thesis changes course to set up the creative experiment in narrative adaptation, *Commedia Vasca*, which will engage with Basque culture, rather than Italian. The plot outline for the film is preceded by a short summary of relevant Basque history and the ways the cultural specificities of the Basque Country influenced the process of utilizing and adapting the *commedia all'italiana* narrative methodology.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1: ITALY AND COMMEDIA ALL'ITALIANA	1
CHAPTER 2: ADAPTABLE ELEMENTS OF COMMEDIA ALL'ITALIANA	6
2.1 The <i>Arte di Arrangiarsi</i> and Narrative Fragmentation	8
2.2 <i>Commedia dell'Arte</i> and the <i>Commedia all'Italiana</i> Character	14
2.3 Fatalism and Circularity	21
2.4 The <i>Commedia all'Italiana</i> Narrative Methodology	26
CHAPTER 3: BASQUE STYLE	28
3.1 Euskadi	28
3.2 <i>Commedia</i> in the Basque Country	38
CHAPTER 4: COMMEDIA VASCA	44
WORKS CITED	81
BIBLIOGRAPHY	82

CHAPTER 1: ITALY AND COMMEDIA ALL'ITALIANA

“Film genres, like other forms of popular narrative, contribute to the construction of the image of a nation and identity of a social class. We know that every community is structured in reference to a set of symbolic fictions, and a film genre is part of the discourse that sustains it” (Andrea Bini, 5). *Commedia all'italiana* emerged from cinematic movements that negotiated an Italian cultural identity in the wake of two world wars and a fascist regime. The birth of *commedia all'italiana* coincides with a transformative economic boom in Italy, so many of the early films grappled with the rapid modernization of a country seeped in long held traditions and regional codes. But, never static or inflexible, *commedia all'italiana* developed alongside Italy's cultural climate over the course of the genre's lifetime.

In the years following the war, many Italian filmmakers worked to establish a new set of common cultural values and codes, first through neorealist films, which then led into *neorealismo rosa*, or “pink neorealism,” a comedic genre which emerged in the late 1940s and eventually led into *commedia all'italiana*. As Manuela Gieri writes in *Contemporary Italian Filmmaking: Strategies of Subversion*:

The history of postwar Italian cinema itself can be easily described as a journey of discovery and self discovery... The search for identity became an endless “work in progress,” and Italian cinema assumed a fluid form, unmistakably and constantly reflecting and commenting upon the ever-changing shape of society. Italian cinematic comedy has undergone an unlimited semiosis by reworking the

codes, morphology, and syntax of the genre as it participated in and reflected the incessant change of Italian postwar society. (160)

In this way, *commedia all'italiana* can be considered as a crucial movement in Italian postwar cinema, as well as a transformative moment in the evolution of Italian cinematic comedy. But *commedia all'italiana* isn't only the product of the cinematic movements that preceded it: its birth is also tied to the economic boom. As Andrea Bini writes in *Male Anxiety and Psychopathology in Film*, "*Commedia all'italiana* was born after the failure of the neorealist project as a way to create a new set of common values, and it narrates the growth of a specific generation of the urban middle class that experiences desire, competition, and consumerism as the best chance to overcome the past traumas" (92). Economic growth brought along the rapid modernization of Italy's urban areas and the erosion of some of Italy's long held cultural values, which were upheld in the relatively conservative *neorealismo rosa* films of the early 1950s. Bini narrates this dynamic as it is expressed in *commedia all'italiana*:

The symbolic opposition between the big city and the small town stresses the difference between *commedia all'italiana* and *neorealismo rosa*. Neorealist comedy follows the conservative narrative of prewar film comedy in which the ending coincides with the reestablishment of a rigid order – that is, the protagonist is taken back to the social environment in which he or she belongs, and his or her desires are reduced to what is allowed by the law of the community. Not only

does *commedia all'italiana* reject this strategy, but the impossibility of a return to the old, static society is viewed positively. (98)

This is not to say that *commedia all'italiana* rejects cultural distinction in a modern Italy. Rather, these regional differences are frequent sources of comedic and dramatic tension in *commedia all'italiana* films, particularly in the characterization of a modern north and traditional south but also in more nuanced linguistic variation among regions. For instance, Alberto Sordi, one of Italy's most popular actors as well as one of the great figures of *commedia all'italiana*, established a particularly Roman character for his films, which came in part from his Roman dialect. The regional clashes among Italian characters are explored in many of the films of *commedia all'italiana*, perhaps most notably in the films of Mario Monicelli. In his WWI comedy, *La grande guerra* (1959), Monicelli pits Sordi against Vittorio Gassman, who sports a Milanese accent. Rémi Fournier Lanzoni writes in *Comedy Italian Style*, "While the screenplay's primary function... was to promote a *commedia all'italiana*, mainly inspired by the linguistic differences between Sordi and Gassman (Roman vs. Milanese), it also dwelled on their many similarities and common desires: neither of them wanted to be burdened with patriotism or bravery as they stood remotely from any personal or collective commitment" (102). The critical distinction in *commedia all'italiana*'s portrayal of regional traditions and linguistic variation is that they are neither lauded nor harshly criticized, but rather are seen as a possible source of tension and comedy throughout the drastic cultural changes that coincided with Italy's economic boom.

The economic boom began in the late 1950s and lasted several years, although growth slowed into the mid-1960s. An era characterized by political turmoil and politically motivated violence began in the late 1960s and lasted into the 1980s, a period known as the “Years of Lead”. Throughout these changes to the cultural climate in Italy, *commedia all’italiana* adapted: *commedia all’italiana* films of the 1970s became increasingly pessimistic, violent and grotesque in a sort of reflection of the societal chaos of the time. “The most characteristic evolution of the 1970 comedies was the successful insertion of death as a powerful and inspiring theme... Death was no longer an outside element in the comedy subordinated to a collateral role. Now it had a regular presence in many comedies, an unavoidable subject matter upon which the entire sequence of events was built” (Lanzoni, 160-161). *Commedia all’italiana*’s ability to reflect the contemporary cultural landscape caused the genre to transform quite noticeably over its two decades of prominence. Consequently, the genre is often broken up into historically motivated groups: “Boom” (1958-1964), “Post Boom” (1964-1970) and “Years of Lead” (1970s).

Commedia all’italiana’s strong connection to its cultural context is clear, both in terms of the films’ content and the thematic trajectory of the genre. By definition, *commedia all’italiana* is - and must be - Italian. Its birth and evolution are inextricably linked to the evolution of Italian society. Thus, it would be essentially impossible to make a *commedia all’italiana* film excluding Italy. With that in mind, the goal of the following essay is not to assert an ahistorical and acultural definition of the genre, but rather to isolate and assess distinct formal elements and methodological approaches of the genre to

form a model from what *is* adaptable and translatable in *commedia all'italiana*. This model will be called the *commedia all'italiana* narrative methodology.

CHAPTER 2: ADAPTABLE ELEMENTS OF COMMEDIA ALL'ITALIANA

Despite the difficulty in characterizing through Hollywood standards of genre construction, *commedia all'italiana* is not lacking in a cohesive and definitive form. In *Comedy Italian Style*, Rémi Lanzoni tracks the conception and evolution of *commedia all'italiana* from its precursors in the silent era through the genre's golden age to its eventual disintegration in the late 1970s. Within Lanzoni's portrait, several distinct features of *commedia all'italiana* arise. He writes, "As early as the end of the 1950s, the new comedy style regularly included a large collection of different plots all containing the element of quotidian survival, indirectly evoking the pseudo heroism of the art of getting by – inherent in the Italian way of life" (70). Lanzoni posits the art of getting by (the *arte di arrangiarsi*) as a distinct and essential narrative element of *commedia all'italiana*. This comedic expression of daily survival, a narrative tradition rooted in *commedia dell'arte*, is essential in pinning down a *commedia all'italiana* narrative methodology.

In addition to the *arte di arrangiarsi*, *commedia all'italiana* also borrowed from *commedia dell'arte* the employment of stock characters, such as the *zanni* and *servi* (trickster servants) or the *capitano* (braggart soldier). *Commedia dell'arte*, a form of improvised theater that began in sixteenth century Italy, revolves around written scenarios performed by a familiar roster of stock characters. Since its emergence, the influence of *commedia dell'arte* spread far beyond Italy's borders, from Shakespeare to Molière to present day comedies such as *One Man, Two Guvnors* by Richard Bean (adapted from *Il servitore di due padroni* by Carlo Goldoni, an 18th century Venetian playwright who drew from *commedia dell'arte*). In the case of *commedia all'italiana*,

commedia dell'arte's influence can be felt in the common repertoire of personalities among the films and their stars. Alberto Sordi, for instance, spent much of his career portraying a boom-era adaptation of the *zanni*: a scheming and desperate bourgeois or proletariat character who was born out of a rapidly modernizing Italy. *Commedia dell'arte*'s - and later *commedia all'italiana*'s - stock characters provide yet another concrete convention that can be (and has been) adapted outside of *commedia all'italiana*'s Italian context.

Beyond the influence of *commedia dell'arte* - specifically in regard to the *arte di arrangiarsi* and stock characters - there are other common elements among *commedia all'italiana* films that help to form an understanding of the genre outside of its close relationship to Italian history and culture. In "A Master Narrative in Italian Cinema?" Carlo Celli posits a narrative pattern of circularity throughout Italian cinema. In *commedia all'italiana*, this circularity is embodied in the unique, oftentimes brutal, brand of fatalism in the films' conclusions. One of the best known and most lauded contributions to the *commedia all'italiana* canon is Dino Risi's 1962 film *Il sorpasso*, which follows an energetic but seemingly hollow man (Vittorio Gassman) and a meek but thoughtful law student (Jean-Louis Trintignant) on a spontaneous road trip. The conclusion comes suddenly, after Trintignant's law student finally embraces Gassman's care free attitude: Gassman, who drives his small convertible wildly throughout the film, comes face to face with an oncoming truck and swerves off the road. Gassman's character is able to jump out of the crashing vehicle, but Trintignant remains in the car and falls to his death. As Lanzoni writes, "The dramatic ending of *Il sorpasso* became the trademark of the new style of Italian comedy, with the representation of an ephemeral

and superficial present, as Aldo Viganò defined it, a ‘present that burns out without leaving any marks’” (91). The consistency of brutality and pessimism among the films of *commedia all’italiana*, particularly in their closing moments, cannot be understated and is absolutely vital in constructing an understanding of the *commedia all’italiana* narrative methodology.

Ultimately, *commedia all’italiana*, at least as it existed while flourishing as a genre, had little to no agreed-upon narrative structure. Bini writes, “The genre as a whole did not have a narrative pattern, visual style, or setting, and thrived on a few popular actors around whom the movies were created” (190). Be that as it may, in assembling the *commedia all’italiana* narrative methodology, there are clearly unique and tangible characteristics at our disposal: a portrayal of quotidian survival in a changing or changed cultural environment, an approach to satire inspired by *commedia dell’arte*, and a pessimistic brand of fatalism, most notably expressed through brutal conclusions.

2.1 The *Arte di Arrangiarsi* and Narrative Fragmentation

“Unlike Westerns, horror films, musical comedies or melodrama, comedy is in fact a genre without mythological characters and places. Its main referent is never something archaic and universal, but rather is linked to quotidian life and reality” (Aldo Viganò, qtd. in Lanzoni, 10). *Commedia all’italiana* films are based in reality, so that the extreme elements of satire are reflected onto the audience rather than consumed as mere spectacle. Even at their most grotesque, *commedia all’italiana* films never stray into the realm of fantasy. Using an element of social realism, *commedia all’italiana* filmmakers

were able to craft scenarios that put Italian society on trial in front of a captive, entertained audience.

For instance, in *Divorzio all'italiana* (1961), Pietro Germi satirized Italian laws and social customs by pushing the narrative to the point of insanity, thus expressing the absurdity of said laws and social customs. The film follows Ferdinando (Marcello Mastroianni), an unhappy husband who hopes to leave his wife in order marry his beautiful young cousin, Angela (Stefania Sandrelli), but is unable to do so because divorce was illegal in Italy at the time. Ultimately, Ferdinando learns that a cuckolded spouse who kills their partner can receive a relatively light prison sentence, as it would be considered a crime of honor in court (Italians' skewed definition of "honor" being the heart of the film). After repeated efforts to push his loving wife to infidelity, Ferdinando finally succeeds. He subsequently murders his wife, serves a short prison sentence, and marries Angela upon his release. The success of *Divorzio all'italiana* rests on its ability to more or less abide by the rules and logic of reality, even with a character as deranged as Ferdinando driving the narrative. Germi was able to present audiences with a recognizable image of daily life and steer that image out of control without betraying the societal codes they associated with it.

In order for *commedia all'italiana* films like the above to function as social satire, it was essential that filmmakers crafted an image and narrative that audiences could easily connect with their own reality. This relatability was achieved in part by maintaining an internal logic based in realism, but it also necessitated characters and storylines that connected with Italian audiences. But there is no strict narrative definition of the *commedia all'italiana* film. To get a picture of *commedia all'italiana*'s narrative

fluidity, one need look no further than three films directed by Dino Risi that were released in the early 1960s: *Una vita difficile* (1961), *Il sorpasso* (1962) and *I mostri* (1963). The first film follows one character (played by Alberto Sordi) for the 15 years following WWII; the second, as previously mentioned, covers a 24-hour road trip and the third is a collection of distinct sketches starring Vittorio Gassman and Ugo Tognazzi. All three films are considered to be essential in the early *commedia all'italiana*. Despite the varying structural approaches to narrative on a macro level, though, there are certainly storytelling elements that are consistent among these three films by Dino Risi (and the other films of *commedia all'italiana*, for that matter). One of these elements is the fragmentation of the narrative: in *Una vita difficile*, we are presented the post WWII trajectory of our protagonist through a collection of scenarios that narrate certain crucial and formative moments in his life; in *Il sorpasso*, the road trip is broken up into a series of stops of varying length; in *I mostri*, the episodic approach is taken much more literally, as the film is comprised of vignettes, separated by titles, which work together to craft a sort of mosaic image of the boom-era Italian persona. Rémi Lanzoni notes this fragmentation of narrative in *commedia all'italiana*:

The structure of the *commedia all'italiana* was also one of many innovative narrations: the linear storyline of the postwar era began a process of disintegration. The change actually occurred with the fragmentation of the narrative. The anecdotal style with gags, episodes, caricatures, sketches, and paradoxes all converged to create a present-day, highly convincing drama with seemingly collateral episodes. (75)

In Lanzoni's portrait of *commedia all'italiana*, the genre's narrative form is defined by this structural fragmentation, the breaking of strict linearity. He sees *commedia all'italiana* as coming from the filmmakers' intention to express the drama of daily life. He continues:

For the filmmakers of the *commedia all'italiana*, to be a protagonist in life was clearly a dramatic experience by essence often inscribed in a scenario of helplessness and degradation. Therefore, in order to observe life with full objectivity and with the required critical distance of the spectator often meant to transform drama into comedy. (77)

This "degradation" is mirrored in the fragmentation of the narrative as well as the content of the films. Filmmakers strove to narrate the drama of boom-era Italy through a collection of comedic episodes that followed a certain protagonist in their attempts to navigate a rapidly evolving society and to negotiate their existence within it. In practice, this took the form of the *arte di arrangiarsi*, or the "art of getting by." In "The Arte Di Arrangiarsi as the Popular Constituent of the Commedia all'Italiana," Lanzoni describes the *arte di arrangiarsi* as:

The phenomenological representation of an individual trying to get by at any cost, even if he/she must make significant moral compromises: examples include outsmarting the legal system, changing political parties, infidelity in marriage, or concealment of identity. Thus, the new *commedia all'italiana*... was as much

illustrating the specificities of Italian society than it was portraying popular audiences themselves. (492)

The *arte di arrangiarsi* gave filmmakers the ability to present prominent and talented film stars in a new light that was less detached from the film going public. By placing actors such as Vittorio Gassman, Marcello Mastroianni, Alberto Sordi, Ugo Tognazzi, and Nino Manfredi in scenarios more recognizable to the average Italian moviegoer, audiences were able to relate more than ever with the stars on screen through the relatable expression of the *arte di arrangiarsi*.

Although the *arte di arrangiarsi* pre-existed *commedia all'italiana*, it took a wholly new form in *commedia all'italiana* filmmakers' use of it. Whereas previous film comedies in Italy shied away from critically evaluating their society's institutions, in which, "Any given individual at the end of the day could potentially be a good person for society," *commedia all'italiana* filmmakers expressed, "Disillusions of a nation poorly or too quickly rebuilt, prey to fast paced industrialization" (Lanzoni, 494). The bourgeoisie are often portrayed as vapid and exploitative, while the proletariat cheat each other to gain access.

Dino Risi's *I mostri*, specifically its opening episode, entitled "*L'educazione sentimentale*," is perhaps the clearest example of the shift in the portrayal of Italian daily life and cultural values that *commedia all'italiana* represented. In "*L'educazione sentimentale*," Ugo Tognazzi plays a father who teaches his young son the rules of life: he teaches his son to circumvent a traffic jam by faking a medical emergency, to eat six cookies at the cafe while only paying for two, and to skip a long line at the amusement

park by impersonating a disabled veteran. When the son comes home from school, the father encourages his son to punch other people before allowing himself to get punched, saying, “He who punches first punches twice as much.” Above all, the father teaches his son to not trust anyone, not even his father. The episode closes with a newspaper headline from 10 years later, reading, “*Uccide il padre dopo averlo derubato* [He killed his father after robbing him],” accompanied by a photo of the father, the victim.

Whereas previous comedies had expressed the possibility for the individual to find harmony in society, *commedia all’italiana* films begin and end in opposition to this sentiment. Beside the fragmentation of the narrative is the fragmentation of the relationship between the individual and society, which is expressed through the shift in the portrayal of the *arte di arrangiarsi* in *commedia all’italiana* films. “*L’educazione sentimentale*” provides perhaps the most literal outline of *commedia all’italiana*’s new rules for the *arte di arrangiarsi*, as Ugo Tognazzi’s character lays them out plainly for his son: the individual’s existence is a constant battle with society and a competition against other individuals hoping to occupy their space in it. Andrea Bini writes, “*Commedia all’italiana*’s ambiguity - funny/dramatic, satirical/celebratory - is therefore crucial in the representation of a society establishing a set of imaginary objects in order to avoid (or to hide) the total disintegration of the social order” (92). Within the comedy and satire of *commedia all’italiana* there is a drama of social disorder and individual survival within an unrecognizable and chaotic society.

In an endeavor to outline the methodology of *commedia all’italiana*, Rémi Lanzoni’s analysis of *I mostri* provides an excellent summary: “The film offered no integration, no inclusion; instead it flirted on a recurrent basis with tragedy and even

entered the realm of the grotesque” (495). Using the *arte di arrangiarsi* as a narrative tool, filmmakers presented audiences with comedic scenarios that fragmented the linear narrative of previous genres and highlighted the drama of the audience’s own daily lives - even at its most absurd and grotesque - in a plausible and relatable way. Any current attempt to elaborate upon *commedia all’italiana* must approach character and narrative accordingly: the comedy must fragment linearity and strive to express the drama of its characters’ daily life and the discord between the individual and society. In the words of Dino Risi, “For me, comedy is just a way of translating tragedy into a spectacle without boring the public” (qtd. in Lanzoni, 500).

2.2 *Commedia dell’Arte* and the *Commedia all’Italiana* Character

Mario Monicelli was one of the major figures of *commedia all’italiana* and directed some of the most important entries in the genre. His film *I soliti ignoti* (1958) is considered by theorists and historians to be either the first *commedia all’italiana* or the definitive film that shepherded Italian popular comedy from *neorealismo rosa* to *commedia all’italiana*. The film, which was initially conceived as a parody of Jules Dassin’s heist film *Rififi* (1955), became much more than that under Monicelli’s guidance. As Lanzoni narrates, “Monicelli offered a very different perspective, as his art direction chose a much more comedic avenue... *I soliti ignoti* went far beyond the scope of traditional satire creating an innovative homage to B series film noir while paying tribute to its serious-minded antecedents to establish an entirely new direction for the comic genre” (37). *I soliti ignoti* follows five men as they organize a pawn shop robbery: Peppe (Vittorio Gassman), a failed boxer in need of cash; Tiberio (Marcello

Mastroianni), a broke photographer and father whose wife is in jail; Mario (Renato Salvatori), a younger thief who was raised in an orphanage; Michele (Tiberio Murgia), a Sicilian who is saving up money for his sister Carmelina's (Claudia Cardinale) dowry; and Capannelle (Carlo Pisacane), an elderly crook. The crew is helped along the way by Dante, a veteran safecracker who is played by Totò, the definitive superstar of the *neorealismo rosa* era. One of the many innovations Monicelli brought to *I soliti ignoti* (and *commedia all'italiana* thereafter) was the influence of *commedia dell'arte*. As Monicelli puts it:

'[*Commedia all'italiana*] is truly part of the Italian tradition; it's something that comes from the *commedia dell'arte*. *Commedia dell'arte* heroes are always desperate poor devils who are battling against life, against the world, against hunger, misery, illness, violence. Nevertheless, all of this is transformed into laughter, transmuted into cruel joking, in mockery rather than wholehearted laughter. This approach belongs to a very Italian tradition that I have always defended.' (qtd. in Lanzoni, 9-10)

Monicelli's words bring to mind the *arte di arrangiarsi*, which certainly came from a long lineage of Italian comedy that can be traced back to the *commedia dell'arte*. Another crucial element of *commedia dell'arte*'s improvised scenarios is the employment of a familiar roster of stock characters, who are generally classified by masks or makeup designated to their character. In the preface to *The Commedia dell'Arte of Flaminio Scala*, Richard Andrews outlines the characters that generally made up an average *commedia dell'arte* company: "Roles in a normal company would include two Old Men

(*Vecchi*); four Lovers (*Innamorati*), two male and two female; a braggart *Capitano*; and as many low-life or Servant masks (*Servi*) as could be afforded” (xx).

The clearest discrepancy between *I soliti ignoti* and the traditional posturing of *commedia dell'arte* stock characters is the ubiquity of *servi* (or *zanni*) and “lower class” characters. This is perhaps most clearly indicated by the title of the film, which translates to something along the lines of “the usual unknown persons,” referring to the yet to be identified perpetrators of criminal activity. Whereas *commedia dell'arte* scenarios generally involve both the servants and their masters, *I soliti ignoti* is almost entirely populated by lower class characters on the fringes of society and fits these characters into roles often filled by higher class characters in their absence. Both Peppe and Mario ultimately pair off with Nicoletta (Carla Gravina) and Carmelina, respectively, thus filling the primary roles of *innamorati* in the plot of *I soliti ignoti*. At closer inspection, the resemblance to *commedia dell'arte* characters is even more directed: Nicoletta, a housemaid, appears to be drawn from the character *Colombina*, an intelligent and down to earth servant character who is often romantically paired with the *Arlecchino*, an agile, witty and resourceful *zanni* character bearing no small resemblance to Peppe. The narrative of a traditional *commedia dell'arte* scenario is generally guided by the coupling of the two pairs of *innamorati* (among other romantic pairings), and the same is true in *I soliti ignoti*: although the initial narrative concern of the film is the pawn shop robbery, the film ultimately becomes much more interested in the romantic arcs of its *innamorati*.

Among the supporting cast of *I soliti ignoti*, various character types of *commedia dell'arte* are represented. The old pickpocket Capannelle appears to be cut from the same cloth as the buffoonish *Pierrot*, for instance. This appropriation of *commedia dell'arte*

stock characters is a recurrent approach among the films of *commedia all'italiana*, though it is perhaps most prominent in Monicelli's work. Whereas *I soliti ignoti* is primarily concerned with society's outcasts - which lends itself well to the *zanni* characters of *commedia dell'arte* - a large portion of *commedia all'italiana* films are centered around the growing middle class in post-boom urban Italy. Perhaps the most iconic *commedia all'italiana* character came from Alberto Sordi, whose scheming, debased and sometimes pathetic character is generally placed safely within Italy's middle class in whatever movie he appears. In *Male Anxiety and Psychopathology in Film*, Andrea Bini's definition of *commedia all'italiana* is limited almost exclusively to Sordi's films. Of Sordi's character, Bini writes, "Sordi's genius was to capture and represent a conflict that was ethical, psychological, and potentially schizoid" (83). In Bini's distinction of what is and isn't *commedia all'italiana*, he excludes the work of Mario Monicelli for the reason that his films are generally focused on lower class characters rather than Italy's urban middle class, which Bini highlights as a major defining characteristic of the genre. Bini also argues the lack of validity in drawing comparisons between *commedia all'italiana* and *commedia dell'arte* for similar reasons: *commedia dell'arte* is concerned with characters on the fringe of society whereas *commedia all'italiana* is focused on the characters at its center. He writes:

Like other neorealist comedies directed by Monicelli, *I soliti ignoti* does not belong to *commedia all'italiana* in its positive representation of social outcasts, whereas *commedia all'italiana* does not focus on the lower classes but on the well-integrated members of the Italian petty bourgeoisie. With *commedia*

all'italiana, modesty and the absence of social hubris are replaced with the narration of the progressive *imborghesimento* (bourgeoisification) of Italian society in a country finally reunited after postwar crisis around the myth of social ambition and consumeristic lifestyle (70).

What is overlooked in drawing this distinction is the adaptive ability of *commedia all'italiana* filmmakers. Although Sordi only occasionally portrayed a lower-class character, his bourgeois character still bears a striking resemblance to the *zanni* of *commedia dell'arte*: he is almost always placed in a servile position - whether it be to a withholding wife, a boss, or the machinations of a modernizing society - and the narratives of his films generally follow his covert attempts to outsmart, best, or impress his master(s). Along with the transformation of Italy's cultural landscape in the wake of the economic boom came the dramatic expansion of its urban middle class and an increased cultural tension between the modernizing cities and tradition-bound rural areas. The filmmakers of *commedia all'italiana* reflected this transformation and adapted their influences - *commedia dell'arte* included – accordingly.

Aside from the influence of *commedia dell'arte* character types, *I soliti ignoti* (and *commedia all'italiana* thereafter) also plays with regional types, particularly through linguistic distinction. Lanzoni elaborates:

One of the noticeable comical mechanisms of *I soliti ignoti* was the unique juxtaposition of different regional dialects within the group dynamic: Peppe used a Roman dialect and painfully tried to imitate a Milanese accent to impress his future conquest Nicoletta, who herself spoke with a thick Veneto accent;

Capannelle spoke with a Bolognese accent; Ferribotte and Carmela spoke Sicilian; Mario and Tiberio spoke Roman; and finally Totò spoke in his usual Neapolitan tongue. (42)

In *commedia all'italiana*, regional distinction is a crucial comedic resource, whether it be explored through juxtaposition of dialects or regional stereotypes. In *I soliti ignoti*, for instance, Ferribotte, the Sicilian member of the group, is driven primarily by a strong sense of honor and tradition: he keeps his sister hidden away in their home in order to protect her honor as he raises the money for her dowry. Ferribotte can perhaps be seen as the prototype for the stock Sicilian or southern character in *commedia all'italiana*. A strong (and oftentimes overbearing) emphasis on tradition and honor are associated with the south, which is characterized as backward and stuck in the past. The north is portrayed as a relatively modern and industrial place, and its urban areas, Milan especially, are shown to be the ground zero of the economic boom.

A clash of the northern and southern cultural types – sometimes depicted as an urban/rural divide – is depicted in the first act of Alberto Lattuada's *Il mafioso* (1962), in which Alberto Sordi portrays Antonio, a Sicilian born factory manager in Milan who brings his Milanese wife, Marta (Norma Bengell), and their son to his hometown in Sicily to visit his family for the first time. At the first family meal upon their arrival, the contrast is highlighted: the small, modern, northern family of three sits with Antonio's comically massive, traditionally dressed family. Marta is eyed by matriarchs of Antonio's family throughout the lunch. She struggles to eat the large amount of food they serve, and she is dressed indecently by their standards. The cultural tension comes to a crucial

moment as Marta clears her plate and pulls out a cigarette. The entire table stops and watches as she lights it, still unaware of the disturbance she has caused. When she looks up to aghast faces, Marta asks if the smoke bothers them. Antonio responds, “They’re just not used to seeing a woman smoke.” She explains that she always smokes after a meal, which infuriates the entire family. “End of the meal? Those were the appetizers! The meal hasn’t even started!” After which, to Marta’s horror, one of Antonio’s young cousins emerges with a mountain of squid ink pasta. Although the north/south cultural distinction is prominent among the films of *commedia all’italiana*, filmmakers more often took advantage of the regional linguistic differentiation to aid characterization and comedic tension in their films, exemplified in the linguistic diversity of the band of thieves in *I soliti ignoti*. *Il mafioso* is consistent with the portrayal of Sicilian characters in other *commedia all’italiana* films (perhaps most notably in the work of Pietro Germi and Lina Wertmüller), employing typified characteristics to build a sort of regional stock character.

The characters *commedia all’italiana* films explore are primarily male, and the films ultimately came to be known for their popular male stars. As Andrea Bini writes, “Spectators never went to the movie theater to watch a *commedia all’italiana* but rather ‘a movie starring’ Alberto Sordi, Vittorio Gassman, Ugo Tognazzi, and the like” (190). Although stars such as Monica Vitti, Stefania Sandrelli, Sofia Loren and Silvana Mangano play substantial roles in many films of *commedia all’italiana*, the genre is particularly male dominated behind the scenes and the films are generally oriented around one of their male co-stars. *Commedia all’italiana* films often strive to explore and negotiate man’s place in a post-war, post-boom society, but much less frequently attempt

to depict a woman's with any great detail. What Bini sees as one of *commedia all'italiana*'s most notable characteristics is, "Their depiction of childish and inept men striving to succeed in a society whose traditional moral and cultural coordinates have disappeared" (70). But would a film centered on a female who reacts to similar cultural stimuli still be considered a *commedia all'italiana*? There are certainly moments when *commedia all'italiana*'s female characters take the foreground, particularly in the genre's later years. What is absolutely essential to *commedia all'italiana* is an exploration of an individual's place in society and, within that, a unique portrayal of masculinity. Of Alberto Sordi's famous bourgeois character, Andrea Bini writes, "Sordi gave voice and body to a new Italian male who knows no duties, only desires: he is childish, conformist, cowardly, irresponsible, and sly" (78). This masculine character is one of *commedia all'italiana*'s defining features and the evolving concept of masculinity is certainly at the heart of many of the genre's films. In forming the *commedia all'italiana* narrative methodology, it is absolutely crucial to note the lack of female oriented films, but, in this author's opinion, a modern filmmaker hoping to elaborate upon the genre should perhaps look at it less as an aspirational genre element and more as a symptom of historically poor female representation in *commedia all'italiana*.

2.3 Fatalism and Circularity

I soliti ignoti ends in the failure of the pawn shop robbery, the dissolution of the group, and their subsequent dispersal back into their designated corners of the city. In "A Master Narrative in Italian Cinema?" Carlo Celli traces the recurrence of a certain circular narrative pattern along the history of Italian cinema:

The autarkic backdrop and the socially reactionary politics of the [Mussolini] regime created a climate for cinematic narratives that discouraged the breaching of class boundaries. A recurring narrative pattern of Italian film in the early sound period is a circular storyline in which a protagonist faces an obstacle and then has a series of adventures. This brings him/her back to the same situation and class status that began the story, after having acquired varying levels of wisdom. This circular and somewhat fatalistic narrative pattern, established during the early sound period of the Italian sound cinema as a seeming reflection of Italian society under the fascist regime, is still a staple feature of the Italian cinematic canon.

(82)

Within his treatment of *commedia all'italiana*, Celli also notes *commedia dell'arte*'s narrative circularity: "In the basic plot scheme the interplay between stock characters like Pantalone, Pulcinella, and Arlecchino hampers the successful pair bonding of pairs of unwed youths. When the pairs of young lovers unite in the concluding act, the stock players return to their former state of equilibrium" (86). In the case of *I soliti ignoti*, this equilibrium is maintained after the group's ultimate failure to achieve their goal. Each character returns to their former routine - their previous "art of getting by" - with the exception of Peppe, who, in the final image of the film, is swept up in a crowd of day laborers that are let onto a work site. The group has failed to take their means of escape (and possible opportunity for class mobility) from the pawn shop's safe and so they must return to their rightful places in Italy's lower classes. Bini writes:

As a satire of the economic “Boom,” *commedia all’italiana* shows that the promise of material gratification introduced by the economic “Boom” was not for everybody but only for those who could be quick and cunning enough to acquire the money that the new, advertised lifestyle required. Even though not all comedies Italian style end unhappily, their protagonists lack the ethical resolution that would put an end to social and psychological conflicts. (75)

Whereas pre-*commedia all’italiana* Italian comedies generally end in a positive resolution of their narrative conflicts alongside the protagonist’s return to their place of origin, *commedia all’italiana* rejects this convention. As *I mostri* demonstrated, *commedia all’italiana* offered no opportunity for social harmony. Rather, *commedia all’italiana* films generally end - often quite suddenly - in brutal failure, involving alienation, destruction, death or a combination of the three. Considering Carlo Celli’s assertion of circularity as the master narrative throughout Italian cinema, *commedia all’italiana*’s uncompromising conclusions suggest a pessimistic societal outlook. If the hero returns to equilibrium, it is not celebrated. As Lanzoni writes, “Because the naïve optimism of the postwar era was quickly replaced with a rational pessimism from the posteconomic boom, the role of morality and consensus became gradually obsolete. Interestingly enough, in most comedies *all’italiana*, a final judgmental and moralistic sentencing was absent at the end” (72). In the final moments of *commedia all’italiana*, the hero is rarely rewarded and the villain (if one exists) carries on, practically unaffected by the hero’s actions. If the underlying conflict among *commedia all’italiana* films pits the individual against society, the individual always fails as society remains unchanged.

This could perhaps be understood as a reaction against the strict ethical guidelines previously imposed on society by the Mussolini regime and the Catholic Church, which are exemplified in pre-*commedia all'italiana* comedies.

Although most *commedia all'italiana* films are set in contemporary Italy, many used Italy's past as means to comment upon prescient societal issues. Monicelli's follow up to *I soliti ignoti*, entitled *La grande guerra*, is set in 1916 and follows two Italian soldiers, Oreste (Alberto Sordi) and Giovanni (Vittorio Gassman), and their repeated efforts to avoid combat in World War I. Although the *La grande guerra* functions as a comedy – focused largely on the regional distinctions among the characters that populate the film – it takes a critical look at a crucial moment in Italian history that had been celebrated and mythologized by the Mussolini regime and had consequently avoided a critical filmic treatment. As Lanzoni writes:

La grande guerra offered suggestions that encouraged a new reflection on the consequences of armed conflict and a look at a possible revision of concept for Italy's national history... Monicelli's stance always appeared to be a transparent one: he always intended to make an antiheroic film rather than an antipatriotic one and to undo the false myth of a grand and glorious war celebrated profusely by the Fascist regime and beyond. (103)

In the concluding scenes of *La grande guerra*, Oreste and Giovanni, in yet another attempt to evade their duties, are found by Austrian soldiers and are subsequently executed by a firing squad. The extended sequence leading to their eventual deaths is excruciating: they are killed one before the other and the audience is given no opportunity

to look away. Whereas Monicelli had shown countless faceless soldiers fall in previous battle sequences, he now forces the audience to look the two protagonists in the eyes as they are killed. The scene is followed by yet another large-scale battle sequence, wherein hundreds of faceless soldiers are killed. In the final image of the film, Monicelli shows Oreste and Giovanni's bodies, still where they fell, as hundreds of young soldiers charge past into battle. *La grande guerra* challenges the glorification of war by first showing the agonizing final moments of the film's protagonists in great detail, then showing the tremendous frequency of death in battle from a wider perspective. In the final image, Monicelli cements his point: if one were to witness the pain and trauma of Oreste and Giovanni's end and then consider each of the faceless soldiers we see fall in the wide, sweeping images that are common among war epics, the true loss of life depicted is unimaginable. As Anthony Martire writes:

La grande guerra can be understood as a kind of bridge, a turning point, from the society of the immediate post-World War II period to the society of the economic miracle. Monicelli's recourse to World War I thus performs a double function: it criticizes the use of history as a tool of ideological obfuscation by ironically representing an historical memory that had been closely guarded by various interests intent on preserving the linkage between traditional notions of patriotism and identity, while simultaneously highlighting the function of popular cinema as a tool able to configure and historicize the liberal, male subject in post-fascist Italy. (392)

Thus, *La grande guerra* confronted the glorification of war and challenged the collective memory of WWI that had persisted through Mussolini's reign and the post-WWII period.

The characteristically brutal conclusions of *commedia all'italiana* films are certainly essential in assembling the *commedia all'italiana* narrative methodology, but they are not an end in and of themselves. Rather, the failure of the individual and the lack of resolution to their ethical or psychological conflicts indicate the fatalistic perspective driving *commedia all'italiana* and the genre's filmmakers: the individual has little to no agency in modern society. Although this is communicated most dramatically in the closing moments of *commedia all'italiana* films, it is certainly present throughout the remainder of the runtime.

2.4 The *Commedia all'Italiana* Narrative Methodology

The goal in this investigation has been to isolate unique attributes of *commedia all'italiana* in order to infer a distinct “*commedia all'italiana* narrative methodology” that can be utilized and adapted by a modern filmmaker. As can be clearly seen, *commedia all'italiana* is firmly embedded in Italian history and culture. No modern filmmaker, Italian or otherwise, could possibly hope to label their film a “*commedia all'italiana*,” as the films in question were so clearly made in reaction to a set of societal stimuli that are unique to *commedia all'italiana*'s historical moment. Thus, a successful adoption of the *commedia all'italiana* narrative methodology would result in an intertextual elaboration upon the genre that would engage with society and react to modern stimuli with proper consideration of the tremendous importance of historical and cultural context.

In the following sections I will assemble a film utilizing the *commedia all'italiana* narrative methodology set in the Basque Country of northern Spain during Francisco Franco's rule. I will include a brief overview of the cultural and historical context at play and the ways I plan to adapt the *commedia all'italiana* narrative methodology to that context, followed by a plot outline for the film.

CHAPTER 3: BASQUE STYLE

The process of creating a film today that employs elements of *commedia all'italiana* involves removing the *commedia all'italiana* narrative methodology from its original context and applying it to a distinct cultural and historical framework. Even if a modern filmmaker were to narrate boom-era Italy using the *commedia all'italiana* narrative methodology, they would have to take into account the dramatic shift in the cultural vantage point. In other words, there is no possible way for a modern filmmaker to salvage the unique historical position of *commedia all'italiana* filmmakers in the 1960s and 1970s. Thus, any utilization of the *commedia all'italiana* narrative methodology must involve a process of cultural and historical adaptation and revision, even if Italian cultural reference points remain at play.

The film I outline in Chapter 4 will engage with Basque culture and will be set in the Basque region of northern Spain during the rule of fascist dictator Francisco Franco. In order to highlight the process of adapting the *commedia all'italiana* narrative methodology to this film, I will first provide a brief summary of Basque history and the elements of Basque culture with which I plan to engage. I will then track the creative and adaptive choices I made throughout the construction of the film outline, with particular care to note the influence of the *commedia all'italiana* narrative methodology on said choices.

3.1 Euskadi

The exact origin of the Basque people remains a subject of conjecture and debate to this day. Estimates on their arrival to the Iberian Peninsula range anywhere from

20,000 to 3,000 B.C.E., although even the most conservative projections place them in the Basque Country (called “Euskadi” in Basque) well before any Indo-European speaking tribes made their way to western Europe. With only slight geographical variation since the first written records of the Basques, Euskadi is located in the western Pyrenees and has a coast along the Bay of Biscay. Today, it occupies four provinces in northern Spain (Álava, Biscay, Gipuzkoa, and Navarre) and three in southwestern France (Labourd, Soule, and Lower Navarre). Further distinctions within this broad definition of Euskadi abound: the Spanish provinces are referred to as *Hegoalde*, which means “southern part” in Basque, while the French provinces are referred to as *Iparralde*, which means “northern part.” Further, Álava, Biscay and Gipuzkoa make up a governed autonomous community within Spain referred to as the Basque Autonomous Community (established in 1978), while Navarre makes up its own separate autonomous community.

Thanks in large part to the geographic fortifications of the Pyrenees and the Bay of Biscay, the Basque people evaded foreign occupation for a significant portion of European history. Perhaps due to this relative isolation, the Basque language (called “Euskera” in Basque) is unrelated to any other known living language. Although the exact origin of Euskera is met with great uncertainty, it is agreed that it dramatically predates the Romance languages that geographically surround the Basque Country and that it is the last remaining pre-Indo-European language in western Europe. The difficulty in tracing the history of Euskera is compounded by the strong emphasis on orality in Basque culture and the consequent lack of Basque historical writings at scholars’ disposal. Whatever its origins, Euskera has remained the absolute center of the Basque cultural identity. As Mark Kurlansky writes in *The Basque History of the World*, “In the

Basque language, which is called Euskera, there is no word for Basque. The only word to identify a member of their group is *Euskaldun* - Euskera speaker. Their land is called *Euskal Herria* - the land of Euskera speakers. It is language that defines a Basque” (19).

The erosion of Basque governance began slowly in the early modern period and came to a crucial turning point in the late 19th century, when long held laws of determination and taxation (called *fueros*) were destroyed and Euskadi experienced an industrial boom, tied largely to the area’s rich iron deposits, access to the sea and proximity to the United Kingdom, with whom a profitable trade relationship was formed. Of the industrial boom’s effects in Bilbao and San Sebastián, Robert P. Clark writes in *The Basques: The Franco Years and Beyond*, “Henceforth, the business classes of these cities would be tied tightly to the fortunes of the Spanish government... These bourgeois gentlemen were not separatists, or even advocates of autonomy. They maintained representatives in Madrid to insure the favorable treatment of their interests” (37). This mutually beneficial relationship between the Spanish government and the Basque industrial elite exists to this day, and the Basque provinces remain some of Spain’s most productive industrial contributors. The economic shift in Euskadi had a detrimental effect on Euskera, as Clark writes, “For reasons that seem both linguistic and social, the Basque language as it was spoken during the 18th and early 19th centuries was apparently ill suited to a modernizing and industrial region... Use of Euskera came to be regarded as symbolic of one’s lower class or peasant origins” (133-134). Parallel to the fortification of the bond between the Basque bourgeoisie and the Spanish government, Euskadi saw both an influx of migrant workers from Spain’s poorer provinces and an establishment of a strong labor movement among the growing Basque working class.

“The majority of Basque nationalists saw their movement as the intersection of two historical lines: the resurgence of an interest in the ethnic characteristics and language of the people, despite efforts to suppress such characteristics; and the driving personality of the founder of Basque nationalism, Sabino de Arana y Goiri” (Clark, 40). Modern Basque nationalism was born at the end of the 19th century and owes its existence in large part to Sabino de Arana y Goiri (also referred to as “Sabino Arana”), whose writings stressed the importance of Catholicism, Euskera, Basque political unity and Basque racial purity. Although many of his ideas have been abandoned over time, his influence on the current state of Euskadi is profound: he worked to bring Euskera back into the realm of politics, designed the Basque flag and founded the Basque Nationalist Party (PNV, or *Partido Nacionalista Vasco*), which currently controls the parliament of the Basque Autonomous Community. One of Sabino Arana’s doctrines that was not abandoned by the PNV was the insistence that nonviolence be only the possible route to success in the struggle for eventual Basque independence. As Clark writes, “The true value of a culture is seen, he thought, in its ability to survive the centuries, and to defeat its antagonists by simply outliving them” (47).

This notion of Basque resilience and longevity was dramatically put to the test over the course of the 20th century. Following the dictatorship of Miguel Primo de Rivera, tensions heightened and eventually erupted into a civil war that lasted from 1936 to 1939. The war divided Euskadi and ravaged its left leaning provinces. Both Navarre and Álava quickly fell to Franco’s Nationalist army, as Franco’s rhetoric won the sympathy of the relatively large population of traditionalist Carlists in the two provinces. Among the various horrors seen on the northern front, the bombing of Guernica looms

large. Guernica is a market town in Biscay that is home to Gernikako Arbola, an oak tree that symbolizes Basque freedom, and under which Basque political assemblies had been held and the *fueros* had been negotiated since the 14th century. On the afternoon of April 26, 1937, the town was decimated in an aerial operation carried out in collaboration among Franco's nationalist forces, the Nazi Condor Legion and Fascist Italian aviation forces. Although Franco's records claimed a small number of casualties, the numbers continue to be the subject of debate, with some estimates reaching around 1,700 (although most historians now believe the actual number is closer to 300). PNV activist Joseba Elozegi was part of a Republican unit that was on leave in Guernica at the time. They were the only active soldiers in Guernica when the attack took place. He reflects on the effect the attack had on Basque soldiers:

The Basque... could not easily forgive, and certainly not forget the serious wrong inflicted on his people... We understand that there is always slaughter in war, but genocide, the methodical destruction of an entire people, fully enters the realm of crime and barbarism... It was not difficult to see... changes in disposition and vigor among the *gudariak* [Basque soldiers], after suffering the bombardment of Gernika; some reported depression and disinclination, others rage and desperation that made them more fearsome in the struggle. (qtd. in Watson, 163)

The attack left an indelible mark on the Basque people, due to the immense physical destruction of Guernica, the realization that it was a full scale military attack targeting a civilian population and the artistic immortalization of its brutality through Picasso's masterpiece named for the town.

When the Basque army surrendered in 1937, the Basque government subsequently went into exile and Franco imprisoned a large portion of the surrendering Basque troops. After the war, Franco's approach to regional identities within Spain was that of extreme cultural suppression accompanied by rhetoric of a "united Spain." Clark describes Franco's immediate actions in Euskadi following their surrender:

The occupation forces of General Franco descended upon the Basque country determined to erase forever all signs of a distinctive Basque culture, as well as the remnants of the incipient Basque nationalist political organization... Property of known Basque nationalists was confiscated. Small shops, restaurants and taverns were taken for the rebels, and the major industrial centers in Bilbao were turned immediately to the manufacture of weapons to be used against the Republic... Of all the acts of suppression, however, symbolically the most damaging was the attempt of the occupation authorities to destroy the Basque language as a functioning communications medium... The use of Euskera was prohibited in all public places. (80-81)

These measures, particularly in the suppression of Basque language and culture, continued beyond the immediate postwar period and into Franco's subsequent reign. Cameron J. Watson writes of the end of the civil war in 1939 in *Basque Nationalism and Political Violence*:

General Franco's triumph in 1939 marked a victory for violence as a central instrument of political action. In other words, violence came to define the

functioning of everyday society. Francoist mythology sought a regeneration of Spain along the lines of Castilian expansionism, through aggression, power, and Spanish nationalism expressed as self-sufficiency... It was, as one commentator has suggested, a physical repression based on metaphysical concerns: Franco sought a systematic means to repress and eradicate *ideas*, above all else. (167)

Euskera (in addition to Gallego and Catalan) was strictly prohibited in the first decade or so of Franco's rule. All evidence of it was erased from public view. Basque signs were changed to Spanish, Basque names had to be changed in official records to their Spanish equivalents and any Euskera that was engraved on gravestones or monuments was filed off. Publishing anything in Euskera would be treated as a treasonous offence and even speaking it in public could result in jail time. The Guardia Civil, Spain's military police force that enforced Franco's regional suppression, had and continues to have a particularly heavy presence in the Basque provinces of Spain.

The strict regulation on Euskera eroded slowly over Franco's long reign, as many Basques refused to conform to his immovable image of a "united Spain". Basque language schools called *Ikastolas* continued to run clandestinely in many towns and Euskera continued to be spoken in private settings. *Txokos*, gastronomical cooperatives which were male only at the time, became a safe place for men to use Euskera and celebrate Basque culture. Basque music was recorded in France and was smuggled back into the Spanish provinces to be sold. Basques also formed mountain climbing societies, many of which became fronts for resistance groups, as resistance activities could be discussed more freely. In the early years, these resistance activities were nonviolent and

were often carried out by or were associated with the PNV government in exile. Clark writes, “Seen today in retrospect, the actions seem timid and insignificant: planting the flag of Euzkadi on inaccessible but highly visible locations, such as atop church steeples; painting revolutionary slogans on walls; and the most daring of all, the detonation of a bomb under the statue of General Mola in one of Bilbao’s most public and visible areas” (103). For much of this time, Basque nationalist propaganda was the foremost objective of resistance groups, though later generations would become impatient with these relatively benign measures and would organize to take much more aggressive measures in the fight for Basque independence.

The history of ETA (*Euskadi Ta Askatasuna*, meaning “Basque Homeland and Liberty”) and the Spanish government’s retaliatory efforts to combat the organization are much more complicated than can be faithfully portrayed within such a small scope, though even an oversimplified summary such as this is necessary in understanding the current state of Euskadi. ETA initially began as a student activist group called Ekin, which began meeting in the 1950s to discuss the dispersal of pamphlets and the necessity for direct action in the struggle for Basque independence. In 1956, Ekin joined forces with EGI, the youth branch of the PNV, but a fundamental ideological divide caused a split in 1959, at which point ETA was born. Perhaps the most significant factor in this split had to do with differing understandings of the necessary approach to resistance, with the eventual goal of Basque independence in mind. The PNV largely operated under the concept of quiet resilience that Sabino Arana had outlined, wherein “during times of repression Basques could retreat to the mental sanctuary of their ancient culture and outlive any Spanish political force which chose to range itself against them” (Clark, 50).

In contrast, ETA was born out of a generation of young Basque activists who felt a greater necessity for active confrontation and possible armed conflict.

Watson writes that from the young activists' perspective, "the PNV leadership remained anchored in the past, unable to move beyond the rupture that war and defeat had caused. Perhaps more than any other single factor, this marked the chance for occasion to fashion the formation of ETA" (200). ETA's first assembly was held in France in 1962, after which it carried out politically motivated acts of nonviolent resistance until their first killing in 1968, when an ETA member shot a Guardia Civil during a routine traffic stop. While the initial formation of ETA highlighted the need for its political branch to direct its less active military branch, as the years wore on, its military branch took on a more and more active role in ETA operations. Perhaps the most famous ETA operation was the assassination of Luis Carrero Blanco, then Franco's prime minister and second in command, in 1973. ETA carried out bombings, street killings, kidnappings and extortions, losing much of the support of the Basque people along the way. The Spanish government took a variety of measures to combat ETA. Infamously, in the 1980s Spanish officials illegally established GAL, a paramilitary anti-terrorist group that employed ETA tactics on the Basque people (kidnappings, torture, etc.) with the goal of weakening the terrorist organization. ETA declared a ceasefire in 2011, gave up their armaments in 2016 and officially disbanded in May of 2018, although the treatment and placement of ETA prisoners remain pertinent issues in Euskadi to this day.

Today, the Basque Autonomous Community is officially recognized as a nationality within Spain, alongside Galicia and Catalonia. Euskera, which has seen a tremendous revival since Franco's death, is co-official in both the Basque Autonomous

Community and Navarre. Young students in all of Euskadi now have the option to attend *Ikastolas*, which operate predominantly in Euskera, for primary and secondary school. Iñigo Urkullu of the PNV currently holds the seat of *lehendakari* (president) in Basque parliament, which has relatively extensive governing power for an autonomous community. But in the current state of Spanish politics, the possibility of total Basque independence appears unlikely. With Spain's reaction to the 2017 Catalan independence referendum, which the PNV officially supported, the Spanish government made their stance on regional autonomy clear. Beyond the deterrent of backlash from the Spanish government, there is also a feeling among many Basques that their current relationship to Spain is positive in some ways: they benefit from Spain's economic partnerships and their standing in the European Union while maintaining much of the autonomy that would be rewarded to an independent nation (though the reach of this self-governance is dictated by Spain). Some see this dynamic as reminiscent of earlier times, when Spanish control of Euskadi was pacified by the Basque bourgeoisie who benefited economically.

Similarities between Euskadi today and Euskadi under Franco are numerous, though of course the Spanish suppression of Basque culture has presently disappeared in its official capacity. The Guardia Civil maintains a significant presence in the Basque provinces of Spain and the stigma toward Basques in many regions of Spain remains unchanged, thanks in large part to the shadow ETA casts over the public's perception of the Basque people. In addition, much of Franco's nationalist rhetoric continues to echo throughout the country, and with growing enthusiasm. Former members of Spain's most powerful right-wing party, Partido Popular (which was originally formed by former members of Franco's cabinet), recently formed Vox, an extreme right-wing populist party

that rejects Basque and Catalan independence and is beginning to gain support among Spain's voters. Santiago Abascal Conde, the current president of Vox, is from Álava and formerly represented Partido Popular in Basque Parliament. Most notably, in the December 2018 regional elections of the (usually Socialist leaning) autonomous region of Andalusia, Vox became the first far-right party to win parliamentary seats since Franco's death and Spain's subsequent return to democracy. Some fear that this will mark the beginning of far-right radicalization in Spanish politics, in a pattern repeated throughout Europe and abroad.

3.2 *Commedia* in the Basque Country

The film I outline in Chapter 4, entitled *Commedia Vasca*, will be set in a fictional town on the coast of Gipuzkoa during the summer of 1963. In my utilization of the *commedia all'italiana* narrative methodology, the drastic societal differences between boom-era Italy and Franco-era Basque Country must be taken into account. Whereas by 1963 Italy had experienced a socioeconomic transformation that introduced a new culture of capitalist excess to its urban areas, Spain remained under the control of a fascist dictator, although the regime's grip on cultural suppression was beginning to show signs of weakening. Consequently, while many *commedia all'italiana* films explore individual existence (and its possible meaninglessness) within a materialist culture, *Commedia Vasca* engages with a culture experiencing violent repression and cultural annexation. In both cases, though, the central existential crisis is the same: how does an individual assert personal agency?

In 1963 the use of Basque was still technically illegal, but it was highly unlikely for someone to be arrested for speaking in public, as Franco and his Guardia Civil were much more focused on stamping out resistance networks and policing the publication and distribution of Basque nationalist propaganda. This resulted in many resistance members being forced into exile, many continuing to operate out of the French provinces of the Basque Country. At the time, propaganda and nonviolent acts were still the primary mode of Basque resistance, though this would only last until the first ETA killing in 1968. ETA was formed and had had its first assembly by 1963, but its activity hadn't yet reached the level of violence it would in later years. In fact, their only known operation to that point was the derailing of a train headed for San Sebastián in 1961, which resulted in no injuries or fatalities, but received a severe retaliation from the Franco regime.

Although a full-fledged film industry hadn't been established in the Basque Country prior to the civil war, a few feature films and documentaries had been produced that dealt with Basque social and political issues. Once Franco took power it was prohibited to make any film portraying Basque culture. Basque film production practically disappeared. Following the Basque defeat in the north, the Basque government in exile, located in Paris, produced several propaganda films, which were, as Santiago de Pablo writes in *The Basque Nation On-Screen*, "directed to audiences in the Western democracies, urging them not to abandon the Republic to its fate at a time when Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy were supporting Franco's rebels" (51). Elsewhere in Spain, film production was greatly affected by Franco's censorship. Despite this, some subversive films in the vein of *commedia all'italiana* were able to sneak through during Franco's rule, most notably the films by Valencian director Luis García Berlanga and

Italian director Marco Ferreri. *Ama Lur* (1968), a documentary focused on Basque customs, geography and folklore, marks the first feature length Basque film to be produced in Spain following the war. Today, the Basque film industry is composed of a handful of small production companies. Films' funding primarily comes from broadcast network sponsors and some government endowment. Recently, *Handia* (2017), a Basque language nineteenth century drama that tells the true story of a man who suffered from gigantism, won ten awards at the 32nd Goya Awards.

Commedia Vasca will tell the story of four friends and their act of resistance during the summer of 1963. I chose to set the film in the Basque Country under Franco's rule because it belongs to a period that has been relegated to history books for some but presents many dynamics that are still resonant – if not fully present – today. The wealth inequality, social stratification and far-right political rhetoric that masks racist and anti-immigration sentiment as a fight for national unification are still pressing issues today.

The narrative structure of *Commedia Vasca* will emulate the linear fragmentation of *commedia all'italiana* films. As the film follows a group of characters, rather than a single protagonist, I looked to group films such as Ettore Scola's *C'eravamo tanto amanti* (1970), which follow the interweaving narratives of the films' protagonists and shift point of view throughout the narrative. Rather than the strictly episodic fragmentation of films like *I mostri*, *C'eravamo tanto amanti* takes a more fluid approach, blending each character's individual plotlines in with a larger group arc. Similarly, I will break *Commedia Vasca* up into a collection of interweaving episodes that center on each of the four protagonists. These individual narratives will eventually funnel into each character's participation in the film's final act of group resistance: the robbing of a wealthy francoist

veteran that lives on the outskirts of their town. Each episode will outline a protagonist's daily life and will highlight their unique art of getting by under fascist rule.

In the fashion of *I soliti ignoti* - and like the *servi* characters of *commedia dell'arte* - the protagonists of *Commedia Vasca* will primarily be part of the working class. The film will follow a factory worker, a taxi driver, a construction worker and a bartender, all of whom were born just after the war. They are the last members of their *cuadrilla* that still remain in their small town. *Cuadrillas*, which are essentially groups of long term friends that date back to early childhood and routinely meet at their "spots", are a crucial element of the Basque social environment. The bond of friendship within a *cuadrilla* is practically unconditional, no matter the personal conflict among its members. The *cuadrilla* of *Commedia Vasca* meets at a small bar that has a pool table in the back room.

Like *commedia all'italiana*, the film will use *commedia dell'arte* character types to populate the world and highlight the power dynamics of its society. The *capitano* type of *commedia dell'arte* (the elderly braggart soldier) will be particularly significant in the context of 1963 Basque Country. The time aligns in such a way that a *capitano* could be a veteran of the Spanish Civil War. The embellished war stories he recites to no apparent end (a characteristic of the *capitano* type) will narrate the defeat of the Basque people that led to the prevailing fascist regime. Further, it would be feasible that a francoist veteran would go on to the Guardia Civil, Franco's military police that have maintained a particularly heavy presence in the Basque Country since the fall of the Basque front in 1937. Thus, the *capitano* of my film will be both a francoist veteran and an officer of the Guardia Civil.

As previously mentioned, *commedia all'italiana* worked with both *commedia dell'arte* stock characters and regional Italian cultural and linguistic types. In a Basque context, particularly during Franco's rule, the tension between Spanish and Basque cultural and linguistic codes reaches a point of conflict. The suppression of Basque language and culture was consequent with Franco's goal to establish a single, concrete image of a unified Spain. This included the imposition of cultural elements considered desirable by Franco on regions of Spain (such as the Basque Country) with no relationship to them. Certain of these elements, such as flamenco and bullfighting, were taken in by Spain's burgeoning tourism industry during the 1950s and 1960s and many have since lived on as stereotypical images of Spain. In *Commedia Vasca*, I plan to explore (and satirize) the cultural conflict that came as a result for Franco's push for a unified Spain, while also drawing comparisons to the present day anti-immigration rhetoric of far-right populist politicians.

Beyond the clear cultural and linguistic conflict between Francoist Spain and the Basque Country, there is also some linguistic variance between the Spanish spoken in the Basque provinces of Spain and the Spanish spoken in Madrid, colloquially referred to as *madrileño*. Although both are considered Castilian Spanish and can be easily understood by speakers of each, the accents are in fact distinct. In *Commedia Vasca*, this will help to distinguish characters from the Basque Country and Madrid, and it will function as a means for the Basque characters to mock the Spanish (and vice versa).

By the time of the surrender on the Basque front in 1937, much of the Basque male population had been killed, imprisoned or forced into exile. In the following years, it was largely up to Basque women to rebuild what had been lost over the course of the

war and to clandestinely maintain Basque culture under the harsh retaliatory actions of their wartime enemies. And they did. But by 1963, this dynamic was beginning to repeat - albeit at a much smaller scale - as (primarily male) resistance fighters were being forced into exile for acts as seemingly insignificant as distributing pamphlets expressing Basque nationalist sentiments. Many members of the resistance would escape to one of French provinces of the Basque Country and would continue their work there, but along the way they were either forced to abandon their families or, at the very least, put their families at risk of scrutiny from the military police. Through the ultimate failure of my (male) protagonists' act of resistance, I hope to highlight the burden left on those that are left behind and the debt Basque culture owes to the people who have truly sustained it. In this way, although *Commedia Vasca* will, like a *commedia all'italiana* film, center primarily on male protagonists, I attempt to cast a wider net and consider more diverse perspectives.

Finally, *Commedia Vasca* will emulate the circularity and fatalism exhibited in the closing moments of *commedia all'italiana* films. The protagonists' act of resistance will be a heist of sorts, as they attempt to rob the wealthy francoist veteran who lives on the outskirts of their town. The implications of this act are twofold, as it will express both the political and class conflict in the Basque Country of past and present. Of course, the heist cannot succeed: the group is punished for the robbery, treated as political subversives and the stolen goods are returned to the mansion without much disturbance in the social order. In other words, in the final moments of the film, the potential threats to the social order of Gipuzkoa under Francoism are removed and the equilibrium they had hoped to disrupt is maintained.

CHAPTER 4: COMMEDIA VASCA

We open on a Dos de Mayo parade that marches through the center of a coastal town. Guardia Civil on horseback lead marching soldiers and carry large Spanish flags. At the back of the parade, standing and waving in the backseat of a long black convertible, is an elderly **General**, in his civil war military attire, who graces the town with his presence. In the passenger's seat sits the **Capitán** (50s), who excitedly praises the General through a loudspeaker system attached to the car.

We move away from the center of the parade to a trio of friends who push through the crowd. They are **Antxon, Bittor and Aitor**, all in their mid 20s. They make their way to *Dolores*, a warmly lit bar that overflows with celebrators. A portrait of Franco hangs behind the bar. Small wooden tables line the opposite wall. While the others wait outside, Aitor pushes through the crowd and makes his way to the bar, where **Nino** (also in his mid 20s) is busy pouring beers for the overflowing crowd of patrons. Aitor asks Nino if he can come. Nino looks to his father, **Juan Carlos**, the only other person behind the bar. Juan Carlos shakes his head and Nino turns to Aitor and shrugs. Aitor makes sure Juan Carlos is occupied, leans over the bar and grabs one of the beers Nino had placed on a serving tray. He puts a coin on the bar as other patrons groan angrily. We stay with Nino.

Later in the afternoon, the bar is more populated by Guardia Civil than civilians. The Capitán struts into the bar accompanied by his wife, **Camila** (50s). The Capitán clears his throat. The celebrating Guardia Civil quiet down and look his way. Camila joins the other Guardia Civil wives in the bar, who have formed a group of their own, playing cards at one of the bar's tables. The Capitán announces the General, who promptly enters,

brimming over with patriotic energy. The Capitán leads by example, clapping and celebrating the General. **General:** “Thank you Capitán.” As the soldiers take over, the Capitán glides over to the bar and hands Nino a bill.

Capitán: “A round for my men. Quickly, quickly.” He claps at Nino.

The General smiles and receives his applause for a moment, then begins his speech, a speech about the power of Spain, defended on Dos de Mayo and the *guerra civil*, and now held strong by Franco’s vision of Spanish unification. **General:** “But it is a changing world, I know, and one must remain vigilant in stamping out the threats to our great country, coming from far and near... And for that, I applaud you. Arriba España!”

Meanwhile, Nino frantically pours beers into pint glasses and hands them to his father, who carries them on a tray into the crowd of Guardia Civil. As the General finishes his speech, the Capitán takes one of the beers and hands it to him. The General holds his drink up and toasts to Franco and to Spain. He leads them singing the “*Tenemos Un Caudillo*,” a song celebrating the Generalísimo. Nino’s father joins in and nudges Nino to do the same.

Later: Nino cleans up after everyone has left. He looks at the clock. He locks the bar, brings down the iron gate. He runs off.

Nino arrives outside Antxon’s family apartment out of breath. It is on a street of simple, humble apartment buildings, all blandly colored and squarely designed. Antxon’s younger sister, **Maite**, arrives late as well - she is a maid at the General’s mansion. They greet each other in Spanish, as Nino doesn’t speak Basque. She is bundled up and shivers

in the night air. He laughs at her. **Nino:** “You’re cold?” He is panting and sweating from running from the bar. She scoffs and leads the way in.

Inside the apartment is a meeting of two families: Antxon’s parents and the parents of his fiancé, **Lore**. The apartment is barely decorated, aside from a small corner of Catholic imagery. There are the *cuadrillas* of both of the engaged: the men from the opening and a group of four or five women, friends of Lore’s. Everyone is drunk and celebratory, particularly the engaged couple, who are fed alcohol by their loving friends and families. Music plays from a portable record player that has apparently been brought out for the occasion. Everyone cheers when Nino and Maite arrive; some go in to greet them. Bittor, speaking with another girl at the time, double takes at Maite. She sees it.

Antxon and Lore sit at the head of the table, in the center of boisterous celebration and talk among their parents of marriage and negotiations (most significantly, that Antxon will get a job driving at the airport with his father-in-law-to-be, **Xavi**). Meanwhile, Nino and Maite are swallowed up into the group standing in the connected kitchen, who hug them and hand them drinks from the ice box and fix them plates of food from the pans on the stove. When Bittor kisses Maite’s cheeks to greet her:

Bittor: “How long has it been?”

Maite: “I don’t know...”

Bittor: “You’ve grown.”

Maite: “So have you.” She pats his belly and turns to face other people.

To **Nino and Aitor**, who speak about the General showing up at the bar and how much the Guardia Civil ate it up. Bittor jumps in with his nose pinched and does his best Franco impression.

Bittor: “One State! One Country! One Chief!”

Aitor, mimicking the Capitán but much less cartoony: “Yes Generalísimo - Gipuzkoa will tremble at your feet.”

Antxon busts through the crowd in the kitchen to one of the back rooms, then comes back with a guitar. He stands on a chair. **Nino** (mocking): “He’s a performer, you know!” Someone takes the needle off of the record player. Antxon sings a Basque song, really hamming it up. As he begins to play, the group quiets down. People join in. By the end of the chorus the entire group of guys band together with Antxon, except Nino, who hums along. Aitor looks to the celebrating family. Bittor unwaveringly stares across the room at Maite, who tries to avoid his gaze. By the end of the song she reciprocates, shyly. During this, Nino also looks at Maite (he catches her looks at Bittor but mistakes them as looks at him).

Nino, Antxon, Bittor and Aitor drunkenly stumble out of the apartment building. The town seems asleep. A kind of moment of “Where to now?” among them. The lights from the mansion atop the hill shine gold. The lights catch Aitor’s eye and he walks up the street that leads to the mansion.

Bittor: “Where are you going?”

Aitor: “To piss.” He points to the mansion.

A look among the remaining three. Bittor is the first to follow, eagerly. Antxon next. **Nino:** “Seriously?” But he goes too.

The group stumbles up the hill to get to the mansion. It is built into the top of a steep hill that descends into town. The town is situated on the coast and is surrounded by

mountains. The mansion has floor to ceiling windows in the front that look down at the ocean and the town.

Aitor leads the way carelessly. Bittor is entertained by all of this. Antxon is extremely drunk and is pretty quiet aside from the occasional mumble to himself. Nino voices caution regarding the entire endeavor. As they approach the mansion, we see in through the large living room windows. A celebration goes on inside: wealthy looking elderly men and servants standing at the ready. Music plays - some sing along, some laugh, some socialize.

Aitor plods along, through the driveway (which is filled with high end cars) and around to the side of the mansion, which is not lit. He unzips his pants and pees against the house. Antxon stumbles next to him and starts peeing as well, against an adjacent window.

Antxon (mumbling): “Ha! My sister works here, you know...”

Bittor crouches and looks in on the party in the living room, entranced. Nino looks around nervously. **Bittor**: “Look at all of those paintings ...”

From Bittor’s vantage point, we get our first clear look inside the mansion: oil paintings, gold trim, tailored suits, cigars, wines poured by obedient servants. It all screams “luxury” in the most excessive way. We zoom in on the General, who still wears his military uniform. He mingles and laughs and puffs on his cigar. His gold wristwatch glimmers in the warm indoor light.

The light turns on in the room connected to the window Antxon pees on. A child peers out the window, awoken from their sleep. Everyone runs back down the hill. Aitor

hoots wildly. Antxon pees on himself a little as he frantically tries to finish up and get away. He holds his pants up as he runs after the rest of the group.

Once they have slowed down to a walk: **Bittor:** “How much do you think one of those paintings in there goes for?”

They sit along the pier, drunk, tired and mostly silent. Some people (but a dwindling number) still celebrate in the couple bars that line the pier. A group of fishermen drunkenly leave a bar on the pier and stumble onto a fishing boat. Bittor and Aitor smoke cigarettes. Bittor seems lost in thought. Antxon, with pee stained pants, struggles to roll his cigarette, as he is still extremely drunk. Aitor takes it from him and rolls it for him. They talk about his engagement.

Antxon: “And they got me a job driving with him at the airport. Real nice cars, too.”

Aitor: “What about acting?”

Antxon: “No, just driving.”

Silence.

Bittor: “You think the General ever drove taxis?”

Antxon: “They’re not taxis, they’re nice cars.”

Silence.

Bittor: “I bet it’d be pretty easy taking one of those paintings.”

Nino: “Oh come on!”

Bittor: “Someone like us could live off of just one of those for –”

Nino: “And what would you do with the painting once you took it? Sell it on the street?”

Bittor: “I bet Aitor’s brother knows some people who can get it into France. Right?”

They look to Aitor, who shrugs it all off. The church bells mark the hour.

Nino: “That’s my cue.” He gets up and walks back to his home.

Bittor: “Doesn’t he?”

Nino: “Goodnight.” The others bid him goodnight. He walks away.

Aitor checks his watch, stands up. **Aitor:** “So you’re a smuggler now?”

Bittor: “Why not?” Aitor laughs. Antxon groans.

Aitor: “I should take him home.” He stands Antxon up. **Aitor:** “See you tomorrow.”

Bittor stays, tosses the butt of his cigarette in the water and watches it sink, then gets up and walks off.

Juan Carlos wakes **Nino** up. They have two twin beds in the same room. He immediately bombards Nino with lectures and orders, rants about current events. Nino mutely goes to the bathroom, splashes his face with water and brushes his teeth. The entire apartment is bare, almost Spartan. Nino gets changed and walks downstairs to the bar, *Dolores*. Juan Carlos unlocks the front door and puts a sign out on the sidewalk. They drink *café solos* from the bar’s coffee maker and eat sliced oranges for breakfast.

The first customers to enter are the Capitán and his wife, Camila. Juan Carlos goes over to “their table” and gives it a quick wipe down as they sit. The Capitán puffs

out his chest as he walks in. Juan Carlos pulls out Camila's chair for her. The Capitán takes a seat across from her. Camila pulls out a newspaper and gets to work on the crossword puzzle. Juan Carlos pulls a chair up to their table as the Capitán gets ready to tell a story.

Capitán: "Have I ever told you why they called me Viento del Fuego?"

Juan Carlos: "Last week, yes."

Capitán: "Really?"

Juan Carlos: "I think so, yes."

Camila doesn't take her eyes off the crossword: "You did."

Capitán: "What about why they called me el Cocodrilo?"

Juan Carlos, apologetically: "Yes."

Camila: "Yes."

Capitán: "Are you sure you're not thinking of Matamonos?"

Juan Carlos shrugs and smiles shyly. The Capitán shifts in his seat. Nino arrives with the couple's coffee and breakfast. The Capitán takes a sip, burns his tongue and shrieks slightly. **Capitán:** "That's hot!"

Nino returns to the bar. Maite stops in, flustered.

Maite: "Quickly, please. I'm late." Nino jumps into action.

Back at the table, the Capitán has launched into his story.

Capitán: "It was our hour of glory on the northern front and the Germans and Italians had come to our aid...."

Nino finishes up Maite's coffee and places it in front of her. **Maite:** "Thank you." She blows on it and downs it as quick as she can.

Capitán: “We did not *need* their help, no! It was their honor to take part in our righteous victory. Need their help... ha! With one move of my finger, I could have swept the insurgents out of our cities and back to their mountain hovels where they would tremble with fear at our almighty power. With these hands,” the Capitán slams his fists against the table, “I can rip the beard off of the Devil himself! I answer to one man only, our beloved Generalissimo, and with him, the people of Spain.” He closes his eyes, puts his hand to his heart and lowers his head solemnly.

Maite rolls her eyes in his direction, finishes her coffee. She leaves a coin on the bar. “Thanks.” We leave with her.

Maite leaves *Dolores* and walks up the hill to the General’s mansion, where she works. She greets a few people she passes. She gets catcalled by someone in a passing truck. The driver/catcaller is Bittor. Maite speeds up her walking, doesn’t look at Bittor. We stay with him.

Bittor laughs and shrugs at the passenger, another construction worker, who shakes his head. Bittor parks at construction site: it is the skeleton of what will one day be a multi-story apartment building. Even in its unfinished state it rises above every other building in town. Bittor takes the construction elevator up to top floor. He looks out over the town and looks over to the mansion at the top of the hill.

Later, Bittor waits for Maite outside the mansion. A different maid leaves first. He looks at her legs. She quickens her pace. Then Maite leaves. She is flustered by Bittor’s gesture but agrees to walk down with him nonetheless.

Maite: “I don’t need an escort.”

Bittor: “What if I do?”

Maite: “Cute.” They walk to her apartment building. He tries some pretty weak attempts at wooing her. She doesn’t give into this but doesn’t reject him entirely either. When she enters her apartment, he is left with a feeling of things to come.

Later that night, Bittor, Aitor, Nino and Antxon play pool and drink in the back room of a small bar. We leave with Aitor.

Aitor wanders toward the pier alone. The town is asleep - only the occasional passing Guardia Civil to be seen. He sees an elderly man rooting through trash bins. There is a bike and a large backpack next to him. He pauses.

Aitor: “Pintxo?”

The old man sticks his head up from the trash. **Pintxo:** “Aitor!”

Pintxo brings his bike and backpack over and rests them near Aitor. He holds half of a sandwich that he found in the trash. Pintxo is an elderly gypsy magician who performs in town. He shares his flask with Aitor, offers a bite of his sandwich and tries a card trick on him. Aitor pulls a card, Pintxo shuffles it back in, adds some performative flourishes, pulls out a card.

Pintxo: “Is this your card?”

Aitor: “No...”

Pintxo frowns at the card. **Pintxo:** “This card isn’t so bad.” He hands Aitor the card and it has transformed back into the card he initially pulled. After the trick, Pintxo packs up and bikes off and out of town. Aitor waits another moment, then heads home.

Aitor's younger sister, **Nerea**, and mother, **Itxaso**, are up waiting for him to return. Itxaso hugs him, then slaps him on the back of the neck. Nerea shakes her head and goes to her room. Itxaso lectures Aitor a bit, warning him about how dangerous it still is to be out late with the Guardia Civil, "No matter how much better it seems." She talks about all of the men (including Aitor's brother) that the family has lost to "stupid games." Aitor goes to his room and goes to sleep.

The factory's whistle wakes him up. He gets out of bed and gets dressed. Itxaso opens his door to make sure he's getting ready. He goes out into the living room and splashes his face with water. Itxaso finishes up packing lunches for herself, Aitor and Nerea. They leave the apartment and march toward the factory. People from neighboring apartments are doing the same. Along the way, more and more factory workers join their group, until they are lost within the mob. We stay wide as they enter the front gates.

Antxon gets ready for his first day of work like an actor before a play. He adjusts his cheap *traje de luces* (bullfighter's suit) in the mirror and applies last minute touches with makeup. A car honks outside. He pokes his head out of the window. His father in law waves him down.

Antxon gets into the passenger's seat. His father-in-law-to-be, Xavi, is wearing the same *traje de luces*. They go on their way. Xavi looks over, double takes.

Xavi: "Are you wearing makeup?"

Antxon: "Just a bit of foundation to cover the bags." He points under his eyes. "A little theater trick."

Xavi laughs: "You'll fit right in in Bilbao."

Xavi reaches into the back seat and gives Antxon a *montera* hat (bullfighter's hat), which bears a striking resemblance to the Guardia Civil's *tricornio* hat. Antxon tries it on and checks himself out in the car's side mirror, rubs the foundation in. Xavi gives Antxon a bit of personal advice, including to go by his official name rather than his "real" one: Antonio rather than Antxon. **Xavi:** "The Boss will explain it all better than I can."

The **Boss**, a fat, sniveling character, spits orders to eight or so drivers, who are lined up like soldiers at boot camp. They stand in a parking lot in front of the Bilbao airport's exit. The Boss paces back and forth like a drill sergeant as he gives them their morning "pep talk." He talks about the image his drivers must project to their passengers: they are their client's first point of contact and their job is to put the travelers at ease, particularly the Spanish ones. "We must give them the image of Spain they are comfortable with. It would be wrong of us to let them be exposed to anything else." He gestures toward the bus stop, which is located adjacent to the airport's exit. At the end, he introduces everyone to Antonio (Antxon), the new driver.

The others leave to where travelers will exit the airport. The Boss puts his arm around Antxon and slowly walks with him.

Boss: "Xabier tells me you used to do plays."

Antxon: "Yes sir."

Boss: "Great, great."

Antxon: "I actually --"

Boss: "Because, aside from the driving, of course, the service we provide here is a lot like a performance." He gestures to the costume Antxon wears and smiles. "This is

what we give that they cannot get on the bus. What is it they say about acting and reacting?”

Antxon: “Acting is reacting?”

Boss: “No. But that works too. Our work is a performance of reaction. You must assess the needs of the client and interpret these needs into a performance which satisfies them. Understand?”

Antxon: “Yes sir.” They’ve reached the other drivers, who attempt to win over passengers who wait at the bus stop.

Boss: “Fantastic... How good is your *madrileño*?”

Antxon drives an eccentrically dressed elderly woman who appears to be asleep in the backseat. Antxon speaks for a while in an overly enunciated *madrileño* accent, speaking about the beautiful Spanish countryside they are driving through and the beautiful flamenco she can hear on the streets of San Sebastián. He asks her a question but gets no response other than a deep snore.

Bittor walks with Maite in the evening. He leads the way over a fence onto the apartment building construction site. Maite follows. They take the elevator up to the top floor and look down over the town. She wanders around the skeleton of a penthouse.

Maite: “What’ll this room be?”

Bittor: “The study, I think.”

Maite: “The study?”

Bittor shrugs.

They pretend the apartment is finished and it is theirs. They mime their way through the beginning of a romantic dinner. Bittor pulls out a *Bota* (wine sack) and they

pass it back and forth as they talk. Some drunks down in the street start loudly arguing with each other. Bittor gets up from the “table”, pokes his head through the empty space where a window will one day be and yells down at the drunks. **Bittor:** “Shut up down there!”

Maite walks into *Dolores* the next morning on her way to work. **Nino** has a newspaper laid out across the bar as he enjoys his morning coffee. Camila and the Capitán are at their table. Juan Carlos listens to one of the Capitán’s war stories like a giddy schoolboy. Maite sits by Nino, who gets to work on her coffee. She asks about Bittor, what Nino thinks of him. The Capitán finishes his story and looks to Juan Carlos, who wears an earnest, eager look. The Capitán invites Juan Carlos to get drunk with “the boys” that night. The Capitán and Camila leave and Juan Carlos tells Nino that he’ll have to close alone that night.

Back at the airport in Bilbao, **Antxon** is given a sort of orientation by his new group of coworkers. Their main line of business is persuading people waiting for the bus to take one of their taxis, but the best way to make a big tip is to land a wealthy customer. Many of these are foreign tourists or wealthy Spaniards. **Xavi:** “They look different from the other people. Weirder, maybe. They require a different approach.” Antxon’s coworkers tell him about how to catch potential customer’s eyes and talk them into taking a taxi. Antxon goes in to a few people who exit the airport and he is either rejected or fails to make a compelling sales pitch (only to have a coworker land the customer after). Then, just as things are looking bad for him, Antxon marches directly over to the airport and

approaches someone that nobody else does: an enormous, pale, sick looking man.

Everyone goes silent.

Cut to Antxon flooring it while the passenger vomits out of the open window.

That evening, Antxon's car is parked on the street outside his apartment. He finishes cleaning the exterior and throws the last of his cleaning supplies in a trash bag. He brings the trash bag to a communal bin on the corner of the street. Two Guardia Civil stand idly nearby. They watch silently as Antxon tosses the trash bag in. But some of the contents fall out. He nervously smiles at the Guardia Civil. They give him nothing in return. He quickly picks up the fallen trash, deposits it in the bin and walks off hurriedly.

That night at *Dolores*. The bar is empty aside from the *cuadrilla*, who sit at the bar. Bittor mentions the idea of stealing from the mansion again, with little interest shown by any of the others. A bit of silence.

Antxon: "Pool?"

Aitor: "Yeah." He looks to Nino. "Sorry."

Nino: "All good." He holds up the beer he has behind the bar. The three guys file out and Nino is left alone for a moment. He puts his beer on the bar and unfolds his newspaper. Movement outside catches his eye. He looks to the bar's entrance. Nothing. Back to the newspaper. The door opens - it's Camila. Nino quickly hides his beer behind the bar, puts down his newspaper and goes over to the table her and the Capitán generally sit at with a rag to wipe it down.

Camila: "No, no. I'll sit at the bar." Nino goes back to his spot, a little confused. Camila sits in the barstool in front of Nino's newspaper. **Camila:** "Do you have sherry?"

Nino rifles through some bottles, finds one and pours it for her. They talk a bit. She steers the conversation completely. She asks increasingly intimate questions. He gets a little uncomfortable. An awkward silence. Eventually Nino asks where the Capitán is, she says he's with some other Guardia Civil, that he goes out with them most nights. **Camila:** "Your father's there too, you know." They talk a little more. She finishes her glass and goes.

A dark figure moves through the empty streets of the town. It moves quickly and quietly in the shadows. Eventually, in the factory housing area, it climbs up to a window on the second floor and tap against it.

Aitor is stirred awake by the tapping. He gets up and opens the window. The dark figure startles him as it jumps inside. It is **Koldo**, Aitor's older brother.

Aitor: "Holy shit!"

Koldo shushes him, jumps into Aitor's bed. **Koldo:** "Thank god. I'm freezing."

Aitor gets into bed next to him. Eventually – **Aitor:** "What're you doing here?"

Koldo: "Found a ride back for a few days."

Aitor: "Yeah, but why?"

Koldo: "In the morning, Aitor... I'm tired."

Koldo takes up a lot of space in Aitor's bed. **Aitor:** "Why didn't you go to Ane's?" Koldo shushes him again and falls asleep.

The factory's whistle wakes **Itxaso** up. She jumps out of bed, gets dressed, splashes water on her face, puts on a pot of coffee and opens Nerea's door, turns on the lights.

Nerea rolls over in bed, eyes shut. Itxaso nudges her awake and tosses her some clothes. Then she goes to Aitor's room, opens the door and turns on the lights. Aitor has one leg in his pants and Koldo pulls the sheets over his head.

Itxaso: "You brought someone into my home?!" She stomps over and pulls the sheet off Koldo. She jumps back in surprise. He sits up and smiles at her. She looks to Aitor. **Itxaso:** "What is he doing here?" Aitor shrugs.

Koldo: "I thought I'd surprise you!" He laughs.

Itxaso: "Go surprise your wife and child."

Koldo: "Guardia Civil will be looking for me there."

Itxaso: "Well then they should be looking for you here, too." She goes to leave the room.

Koldo: "Mom..."

Itxaso: "I want you gone by the time we're home from work." She closes the door. Aitor continues to get ready in the silence of the room.

Koldo: "Still work at the factory, then?"

Aitor allows this to fall on silence. **Aitor:** "Where'll you stay?"

Koldo: "I'll figure something out."

Aitor, Nerea and Itxaso walk to the factory with the same crowd of workers at their side. Nerea walks over to Aitor and asks about Koldo. The workers walk into the factory. The repetition of the machines inside takes over. A cyclical rhythm. We go to Aitor, who looks around at the other workers performing repetitive actions all day. He looks at the foreman barking orders at them. He looks at his own repetitive motion on his machine.

Nino works the coffee maker in *Dolores*. The same morning routine as every day. The door opens. He turns to see the Capitán and Camila enter. Everything is eerily identical to any other morning: no difference from Camila after what Nino thought was an odd, if not slightly romantic, moment they shared. The Capitán gets buddy-buddy with Juan Carlos and boasts about the festival coming to town. There will be a torero (but he's not allowed to say which). Camila almost seems to be avoiding eye contact as Nino serves their breakfast and talks with Maite once she arrives. After the Capitán and Camila leave, Nino clears their table. Camila left a message for him in her crossword.

Bittor waits outside the mansion again. The same maid he ogled the first time sees him and gives him a sour look. He waits longer, but Maite doesn't appear to be leaving. He gets impatient and goes inside through the maid's exit. It leads to a dark, cellar type of area. He wanders around. There doesn't seem to be many people downstairs. A maid walks spots him and asks who he is.

Bittor: "I'm here for Maite."

Maid: "Maite?"

Bittor: "Oh, um... Maria?" The maid frowns and goes off. Bittor snoops around a bit more.

Maite: "What the hell are you doing here?"

Bittor tries to look cute. **Bittor:** "Huh?"

Maite: "You can't be here."

The maid from before walks by, watches them. Maite takes Bittor's hand and leads him down a dark hallway with a door at the end. They stop by the door.

Maite: “What do you want?”

Bittor: “What do you mean? I want to see you. Why aren’t you off work?”

Maite: “He has guests tonight so everyone’s upstairs. We’re always short staffed down here when there are guests... I need to get back. And you need to go.”

Bittor: “No. I need you now.” He takes her wrist and tries to lead her in through the door. It’s locked. He really looks at it for the first time. It looks thick, almost like a bank vault. **Bittor:** “What’s in here?”

Maite: “I don’t know.” Maite tries to get away but Bittor won’t let go of her wrist.

Bittor: “Who has the key?”

Maite: “I don’t know! Probably the General” She breaks her wrist free, rubs it. He hurt her. “Don’t ever come back here.” She leaves.

Bittor breaks the rack at the pool bar. He is joined by Aitor and Antxon. Bittor mentions the heist again. He asks Aitor if he knows anybody through Koldo that might be able to get them over the border with the stolen goods.

Antxon: “Are you crazy?”

Aitor: “I’ll see.” Bittor looks up, surprised he agreed.

Bittor: “You will?”

Antxon: “You will?!”

Aitor: “Yeah.”

Bittor: “So you want to do this?”

Aitor: “I didn’t say that.” Antxon looks relieved.

Bittor: “If we do this we’ll need everyone.” He looks at Antxon. They go back to the pool game.

Antxon: “Where’s Nino?”

Nino checks the address written on the crossword Camila left that morning. This should be the place. He looks up at the house, the one lit window on the second floor. He rings the doorbell. It takes a minute for her to come down and let him in. They kiss cheeks awkwardly. She is slightly flustered, he is bumbling. Not the most graceful. She brings him to the living room, pours them some drinks. He scans the room: lots of Franco and Catholic decorations. Like the General’s mansion but on a quarter of the budget. A grandfather clock. They talk a bit. Again, she drives the conversation. She edges closer to him and gives him a clear opportunity to kiss her, but he sits still, twiddles his thumbs, turns his head away. She withdraws but becomes much more forward.

Camila: “Why are you here?”

Nino: “Uh...”

She softens slightly. **Camila:** “Do you know why I invited you?”

Nino: “Yeah, yes.”

Camila: “Okay. I’m going to go into that room over there and I want you to wait two minutes, then follow me. Sound good?” Nino nods, takes a gulp of his drink. She goes. He waits in silence. The clock ticks loudly. He looks around the room, to the exit, to the room she’s in, then to the grandfather clock. He finishes his drink, chokes on it slightly, then gets up and hesitantly enters the room.

Aitor bikes up to a *baserri* (traditional Basque country home) outside of town. He knocks on the front door. A pause. An old man answers. The two recognize each other.

Aitor: “Is Ane in?”

The old man turns into the house, calls Ane and closes the door on Aitor. A woman in her late 20s opens the door. A young child clings to her leg. **Ane:** “What is it, Aitor?”

Aitor: “Have you seen my brother?”

She studies him silently for a moment, pokes her head out and checks to see if Aitor came with anyone else. **Ane:** “Come.”

A large extended family seems to occupy the house. Aitor follows Ane to a room at the back of the house that fits a bed and the child’s crib. Ane opens the back window, which faces out into the farmland behind the house. **Ane:** “Koldo!”

Koldo stands up from the bush he was hiding in. He brushes himself off and hops in through the window. They sit down on the bed and talk. Koldo plays with the toddler. Aitor tells him the plan - he is a little skeptical of saying anything in front of Ane but Koldo vouches for her. Aitor tells him about the plan, that they need someone that can help them get the truck across the border. Koldo’s first reaction is excitement at Aitor’s newfound revolutionary spirit. **Koldo:** “I always knew you had it in you!” As Aitor continues with the plan, Koldo’s expression grows a little more worried. He looks to Ane, who takes the toddler into the other room. Koldo looks as if he’s going to tell Aitor to scrap the idea just as Aitor starts to list the valuables Bittor says are in the “secret room.” **Koldo:** “Stop, stop. I’ll help you. It has to be soon, though. I’m needed up north. Let’s all go on a hike. Bring everyone. We can really talk about it there.”

Antxon fails to convince a passenger to take a taxi. He returns to the group of taxi drivers, dejected. The Boss eyes Antxon. A fellow taxi driver puts a hand on his shoulder. Xavi is over at the bus stop speaking with a **Well-Dressed Man**. He and Antxon make eye contact for a moment and, as the Well-Dressed Man goes to pick up his baggage, Xavi directs him to Antxon. Antxon quickly regains his composure and glides over. He takes the Well-Dressed Man's baggage for him.

Xavi whispers: "Americano."

Antxon, in heavily accented English: "Right this way, sir." He leads the way to the car.

In the taxi, Antxon tries to ask questions in English, but the Well-Dressed Man can't understand him.

Antxon: "Spanish?"

Well-Dressed Man: "Si, un poco."

Antxon asks the man about America, but the man answers shortly. They sit in silence for a bit. The man looks out the window. Then he asks questions about the Basque Country and Franco with distant, academic interest (as well as he can with simple Spanish). He sensationalizes the situations with the Basques and Franco. He asks "Antonio" his real name. Eventually, in asking these questions, Antxon sheds his torero affectation. After a brief moment of silence, Antxon tells the man that he is an actor. The man loves this.

Well-Dressed Man: "But why are you driving a taxi? Are there movies here?"

Antxon: "No. It's not so simple..."

Well-Dressed Man: “It seems simple enough to me. You just have to find your movie!”

Bittor snoops around the General’s mansion during the daytime. He tries to sneak around the back to find a way into the cellar. Inside, the General sits across from his wife, drinking cocktails and playing a game of *escoba* (card game). The General sees Bittor out of the corner of his eye. He stands up from the game and looks toward the window. His **Head Butler** quickly comes to his side.

Head Butler: “Sir?”

General: “I saw something out there.”

The Head Butler quickly kicks into action (while retaining his composure). He spots Bittor outside. **Head Butler:** “Excuse me, sir.” The General sits back down to his card game.

The Head Butler busts through the cellar kitchen, which is bustling with dinner preparations. He passes Maite, who looks up from her work briefly to watch him leave. Outside, the Head Butler comes upon Bittor, who, on all fours, peers into the cellar through a small window near the ground. Too late, he sees the Head Butler approach and tries to scurry away. Instead, he falls over himself. The Head Butler grabs him by the jacket. Inside, he drags Bittor through the kitchen. Maite looks up in horror. After a moment she drops her work and runs after the butler and Bittor.

Maite reaches the Head Butler and Bittor once they’re already upstairs. She pleads with the butler to let him go but the butler ignores her. And it’s too late. The General has seen her and Bittor. The Head Butler drags Bittor into the living room. **Head**

Butler: “He was snooping around out back, sir. What would you like me to do with him?”

General: “Bring her.” He points to Maite.

Head Butler: “Maria?”

The General nods. She comes in. The General questions her and reprimands both Bittor and Maite, then threatens her job.

Bittor: “No!”

The General stops, then smiles almost. **General:** “No?” He laughs. “Why not?”

Bittor: “You can’t...”

General: “Can’t I?” The General’s wife tries to pull him back to their card game, tells him to leave it be. **General (re: Bittor):** “Play me for it.”

An *escoba* sequence. High tension. Some highs, some lows. Maite is furious with Bittor, the General’s wife is annoyed with the disturbance to cocktail hour. The General is a much better player but is cocky, Bittor is not as great. He looks to Maite for approval on certain moves - she subtly helps him make some decisions that lead to him winning. The General swears loudly and his wife slaps him on the back of the neck. He shrieks. Everyone pauses, quiets down. Bittor cracks up laughing and Maite slaps him on the back of the neck. He also shrieks. The General’s wife applauds her form. **Wife:** “I like to cup my hand, like this.” She slaps the General’s neck again. “Gives it a nice, loud crack.”

Maite: “Oooh!” She slaps Bittor.

Bittor: “Hey!”

Maite: “I try to get it with the tips of my fingers.” The General’s wife tries this out on her husband. He shrieks.

Nino returns to Camila's house that evening. She answers the door. He is a little more comfortable now, even going in to kiss her on the lips when they greet. She is taken aback by this, tells him to come in quickly and that the Capitán just left. **Camila:** "We have to be more careful than this, Nino." They go inside. He starts undressing right away, is much more eager than Camila appears. She stays fully clothed and tries to slow him down. Then the doorbell rings. They both stop in their tracks.

Camila: "Shit."

Nino: "What's that?"

Camila: "I don't know. You have to get out of here." She throws his clothes back at him and makes herself presentable. She opens the second story window in the bedroom and looks at him.

Nino: "Seriously?" She nods. He shakes his head. She nods. He goes out the bedroom door into the living area. He hears footsteps coming up the stairs, so he slides into the living room and hides behind the grandfather clock. The Capitán enters the apartment.

Capitán: "Camila?"

Nino holds his breath. He looks down at his feet: he's only wearing one sock.

Camila, from the bedroom: "Yes?"

The **Capitán** enters the bedroom: "What're you doing in here?"

Camila: "Laying down, I got a headache."

The sock is on the bed near her.

Capitán: “Oh, okay. I forgot my wallet.” He rifles around in the bedroom. He tosses the sock off the bed as he looks. Nino starts to sneak toward the front door. The Capitán looks as though he’s going to give up in the bedroom – him turning around would mean catching Nino.

Camila, quickly: “Have you checked your other pants?”

Capitán: “Huh? Oh, right.” He goes to the pocket of the pants hanging in the closet. Nino slips out the door. **Capitán:** “Not there. Hmmm...” He goes out into the living room.

A mountain trail. Koldo leads Bittor and Aitor. They talk over the preliminary bits of planning. They’ll use Bittor’s construction truck to transport the goods. Koldo will help them get to *Iparralde* – he knows a good fence in Bayonne. They speak freely, almost loudly, in Basque.

Koldo: “So we’re working with this... room?”

Bittor: “It’s more like a vault.”

Koldo: “Okay. And how are we supposed to get in?”

Aitor: “We?”

Koldo looks back at him: “What are you two going to do it alone?” Bittor looks to Aitor and shrugs.

Bittor: “There’s a key.”

Koldo: “Who has it?”

Bittor: “The General.”

Koldo: “You’re sure he has the only one?”

Bittor: “Pretty sure.”

They hike in silence for a bit, Koldo in thought. **Koldo:** “We need more people.”

The Pool Bar that night. Nino and Antxon play in the back room. Nino misses a shot just as Koldo, Aitor and Bittor bust in. Koldo quickly shuts the door behind them.

Nino: “Koldo!” He goes in for a hug, as does Antxon. Koldo shushes them.

Koldo: “Quiet.”

Nino pieces together why Koldo is there, looks to Bittor suspiciously.

Nino: “You’re actually doing this? ... Aitor?”

Aitor shrugs. Nino looks to Antxon.

Antxon: “Why not?”

Nino: “Well... well okay.”

After making sure everyone is in and that the pool room is safe to speak in, Koldo guides them through the remainder of the plan. He has Bittor map out the mansion and all of the other moving parts (including members of the heist) using beers, pool balls and other objects. We see some of the preparation via montage during this back and forth: Bittor pocketing the keys to the truck after work, Aitor and Koldo looking down at the mansion from a distant hilltop. Koldo walks them (and us) through all of the moving parts: they have Bittor’s truck and Koldo’s fence in Bayonne. They have the locked room, so they need the key. They need to be able to safely carry goods out of the cellar, so they need as few people in the cellar as possible, which means it must be during one of the General’s parties. Most of all, they need the key. As they empty the room, they need someone to locate the key, steal it, and replace it afterward.

Koldo: “Without the key, there is no robbery. Unless one of you is a safecracker.”

Nino and Antxon look at each other. “So we need someone to steal the key during one of the General’s parties.”

Nino mentions the upcoming fiesta as a possible time when the General would have a party. **Nino:** “There will be toreros and everything. Very Spanish.”

Some silence. Antxon nods to himself, leaves the pool room, goes out to his car, pops the trunk and grabs his bag out of it. He enters the pool room dressed in his torero garb, in character as a torero. **Antxon:** “Olé!”

Some laughter. He had never divulged the true nature of his new profession. It dies down.

Nino: “So what?”

Antxon gestures to his costume. **Antxon:** “I’ll get in with this! I’ll be... Alejandro... Rodriguez. An up and coming torero from the south.”

Bittor: “Up and coming?”

Antxon self-consciously feels the wrinkles in his face.

Aitor: “Why would he let you in?”

Antxon thinks on that. **Antxon:** “I grew up hearing tales of his conquests in battle. It inspired me to become a torero.”

Bittor snickers.

They hammer out the rest of the plan: before the fiesta, on a night when the General has a party, Antxon, as Alejandro Rodriguez, will infiltrate the party, find the key and hand it off to the others. Nino will pose as Alejandro Rodriguez’s driver. Their goal is to hand off the key and occupy the attention of the General and his Head Butler

for as long as possible. During this, we see some of their end of the preparation: Koldo, Aitor and Bittor staking out the mansion, Antxon getting the car ready, Nino getting dressed into a driver's suit. As Koldo finishes, we fall back into the normal pace of the pool room.

Antxon: "How will we look for the key?"

Koldo: "You'll have to sneak away from the party. Or ask the General to show you around."

Bittor: "Won't he give you a tour of his mansion? Don't rich people do that?"

Nino: "Yes. They all do."

Aitor walks back through the door with as many beers as he can carry.

Later. **Aitor** stumbles out of the pool bar. He makes his way to the pier and sits on a bench that looks out at the ocean. He almost drifts off to sleep but is awoken by a familiar voice: Pintxo. They talk. Pintxo asks what's up. Aitor asks if he can keep a secret, then tells him the basics of the plan - most specifically, that Antxon will have to dress up as a torero. They laugh. Pintxo starts doing a card trick for Aitor. While he does this, he tells Aitor the story of the Lamiak: Basque sirens, more or less, who brush their hair by the river and (it is believed) build bridges overnight. **Pintxo:** "That is how we first got here. A deal made with a Lamia."

They go through the trick. A Guardia Civil sees them and approaches them. Aitor is taken aback by this, but Pintxo continues with the trick, includes the Guardia Civil, who introduces himself as **Jose Luis**. He looks on in awe at Pintxo's trick. Aitor looks at Jose Luis for a long moment, then decides to leave.

Antxon gets into character. He does his final brush ups in the mirror of his room, just like his first day of work. A honk from outside. He looks out the window: Nino, dressed as the driver. Antxon takes one final looking in the mirror and leaves his room.

Bittor hops the fence to his construction site. Aitor breaks the chain to the construction site. Koldo waits and smokes a cigarette.

Antxon and Nino approach the mansion in the car. Nino parks somewhere among the other cars and looks back to Antxon as he makes his final mental preparation. One of the General's servants comes out to meet them.

Bittor unlocks the truck and gets in. He drives it to the entrance just as Aitor swings open the gate. Koldo and Aitor get in the back and hit the side of the truck.

Antxon and Nino enter the mansion. They are greeted by the General's Head Butler, who makes a comment on the torero suit.

Head Butler: "I didn't know you wore them out of the bullring."

Antxon: "Aha, yes. Sometimes, yes."

The Head Butler leads them Antxon into the living room, which is populated by elderly, wealthy looking men. Servants are poised to serve them wine and cheese. The Head Butler gestures for Nino to remain on the edge of the room with the other servants. Antxon's performance as the torero is under constant scrutiny, by the General, the Head Butler and the other partygoers. The Head Butler brings Antxon to meet the General.

General: "Hello, welcome." The General double takes at Antxon. "I'm sorry, I'm afraid I've forgotten your name."

Antxon, in thick, overdone *madrileño*: “Alejandro Rodriguez, the matador de Malaga. Up north for the upcoming games.” He bows.

The General eyes Antxon for a long moment. **General**: “My apologies, I must have forgotten. Welcome.”

Antxon: “Thank you.” The General smiles, nods and goes to mingle with other partygoers. “Actually, I was hoping you could show me around your beautiful home. Your art is too magnificent not to be appreciated.”

The General, slightly taken aback by this request, obliges. A few other partygoers join the tour. Nino trails behind obediently, along with one of the General’s servants. As they go, Antxon comments on how beautiful the General’s art is, pointing to a particularly celebratory Franco portrait.

Bittor, Aitor and Koldo bring the truck to a hidden spot adjacent to the mansion. Bittor kills the engine. They look up at the mansion.

Antxon on the General’s house tour, with Nino close behind. While the General believes Antxon is greatly appreciating all of the expensive art and furniture, he is really frantically looking for the key. Nino is also scanning but is under some scrutiny by the other servant. He tries to make sure his posture is as perfect as possible. The General brings them to his study, which has cigars and some bottles of wine on shelves. The old men “ooh” and “ahh.”

General: “And this is only where I keep the cheaper stuff!”

While Antxon picks up a bottle of wine and tries to form a remark about it, Nino spots the key hanging from a wall. He goes over to Antxon and pretends to inspect the wine, while he lets him know he found it. Antxon walks over to the other side of the

room and recites a loud and nostalgic anecdote, drawing the others' eyes as Nino grabs the key. Antxon says he's about ready for that drink in the other room. The General, now warming up to him slightly, leads the way.

Nino leaves the mansion with the key. He runs over to the construction truck. The others get out as he arrives. They slip through the small window Bittor had been inspecting when the Head Butler caught him days earlier.

Antxon speaks with the General and some others in the living room, all beginning to get drunk as they plow through bottles of wine. Antxon really indulges in his torero character and the General is won over: he listens giddily to Antxon's stories of the bullring. Other partygoers happily join the audience of Antxon's performance.

Back down at the pier, **Pintxo** does some magic tricks to a small crowd. The crowd's attention is pulled in another direction: the torero for the upcoming fiesta has come early and is walking along the pier. Pintxo looks up to the mansion. He wraps up his performance and quickly goes around with his hat outstretched.

Bittor, Aitor, Nino and Koldo get to the door. A moment of hesitation before Bittor tries the key with the door. It fits. He turns the lock. He looks excitedly at the others, who are almost shaking with anticipation. He opens the door. The room is full of shelves, which carry large wheels of cheese and crates of red wine. Bittor is frozen in place. The others peek in and are similarly distraught. People start blaming each other. The only one unfazed is Koldo, who goes over and inspects the wheels of cheese. He smiles.

Koldo: "Quiet, quiet." The others look over. "This is better than I could've imagined. I can get a fortune for these in Seville."

Everyone else: “Seville?”

Koldo: “And it’s so much easier to offload than art and gold.” He checks one of the bottles of wine, laughs and rubs his hands. He goes and grabs a plank of wood that’s in the room. **Koldo:** “Nino. You bring the wine.” Nino kicks into action. “Aitor, Bittor, take off your shirts.” They are confused, but eventually go along with it. Koldo ties the shirts around the plank of wood, then points to them. “Put the cheese in these.” Koldo grabs a wine crate and walks out with it confidently toward the maid’s entrance.

Pintxo finishes packing up his performance area, hops on his bike and starts biking up the hill to the mansion.

The General asks **Antxon** for his most exciting bullfighting story. He and the other partygoers are giddy with anticipation. Antxon goes on a long, winding story – not dissimilar from one of the Capitán’s boasts – making it up as he goes. Meanwhile, the bottles of wine they are drinking get emptier and emptier.

Bittor, Aitor, Nino and Koldo carry wine and cheese out through the maid’s door and load it into the truck. Maite passes by as Aitor and Bittor carry a load of cheese out. They stop in their tracks. She goes toward them in a state of disbelief. She looks to the open door at the end of the corridor. She goes down to it and looks inside the room. They leave. Maite speed walks back to the kitchen, then upstairs to the living room to tell the Head Butler. As she walks into the living room, about to say something, she sees Antxon performing for the partygoers. She looks at him, they make brief eye contact and she withdraws on her statement.

Head Butler: “What is it Maria?”

Maite says she’s finished her work and asks if she can leave early.

Head Butler: “You may leave when I tell you so.”

Maite apologizes and goes back down.

Head Butler “How rude.”

The Head Butler fills Antxon’s glass of wine. The bottle is almost finished.

Pintxo arrives outside the mansion just as Aitor and Bittor finish loading their wheels of cheese into the back of the truck. The sound from the commotion in town is growing. Pintxo warns them that the real torero is in town. They look up to the mansion - they see Antxon in character as the torero inside. Nino comes out with another crate of wine.

Aitor: “Nino, bring the key back up and get Antxon out of there.”

Bittor looks to him, frustrated.

Aitor: “We’re done.”

Aitor and Bittor take their last load of cheese, Koldo takes his last case of wine, then Nino locks the door behind them up goes to head upstairs. He pauses for a moment and looks to Aitor and Bittor - this is goodbye. He heads back upstairs.

The Head Butler pours the last of the bottle of wine into the General’s glass.

Head Butler: “Shall I grab another bottle from the study?”

General: “Yes, thank you.”

Nino is upstairs, making his way to the study. He trips on the rug.

General: “Wait.” The Head Butler turns to the General. **General:** “Take a bottle from the... reserves.” The Head Butler smiles, nods and makes his way to the study.

Nino, in the study, quickly hangs the key back up and gets out just before the Head Butler arrives. The key still swings on its hook when the Head Butler gets to the study. He takes it off its hook and looks at it suspiciously. He heads down to the cellar.

Bittor, Aitor and Koldo secure everything in the back of the truck and lock it up. Aitor takes one final look up at Antxon.

In the living room, **Antxon** is showing signs of losing the focus of his story. He takes a long sip of wine. During this lull, the noise from the town's celebration can be heard. The General gets up. **General:** "What could that be?" He goes to the window and looks out of it. Others join him. Nino scurries in, gets Antxon's attention and leads him out. Antxon stumbles slightly behind him.

In the cellar, the **Head Butler** stares at the ravaged state of the secret room. He turns and runs upstairs. He sees Antxon is gone.

Head Butler: "Where is he?"

The General turns with a drunken look on his face. **General:** "Who?"

Head Butler: "There's been a robbery." He runs out to the driveway. Nino and Antxon peel out of the driveway, heading into town, and the truck lumbers past and over the other side of the hill. He watches it go.

A phone rings in darkness. The **Capitán** turns on his bedside lamp and answers it.

Inside the **Guardia Civil Barracks**. Soldiers mobilize. Among them is Jose Luis, the Guardia Civil who watched Pintxo's trick.

Koldo drives the truck. Aitor and Bittor sit with him in the cab. They descend the other side of the hill that the General's mansion is on, but a mountain looms ahead.

Nino and Antxon drive down into town. Guardia Civil vehicles speed up in the opposite direction with their sirens blaring.

Koldo kicks the truck into a low gear as they start the steep climb up the mountain road. It is slow going - the truck struggles. It slows almost to a stop. Koldo tells Aitor and Bittor that they have to get out and push. They do.

The **Capitán** leads the Guardia Civil convoy past the General's mansion and toward the truck.

Aitor and Bittor push the truck. It's nearing the top of the climb. Aitor looks back and sees the Guardia Civil descend the hill behind them.

The **Capitán** and the other Guardia Civil reach the truck just at the top of the hill. He gets out of his vehicle, weapon trained on Aitor and Bittor.

Capitán: "Hands up!"

They do as they're told. The truck idles. Some of the other Guardia Civil get out of their vehicles and aim their guns at them as well. Jose Luis is among these. A long moment of indecision among everyone.

The truck's engine spits loudly. Jose Luis twitches anxiously and squeezes the trigger of his gun. It hits Aitor. The Capitán shrieks and shrinks into a ball. Aitor falls. Bittor trembles, closes his eyes. The other Guardia Civil look at each other for another long moment. The Capitán slowly stands back up and regains his composure. He clears his throat.

Capitán, in a high-pitched squeal: "Arrest them!" He points in the direction of the truck and retreats to his own car. Two soldiers cuff Bittor and another two walk past

Aitor's body to the cab of the truck. Koldo's hands are up. They cuff him and shove him and Bittor into the back of separate vehicles.

Antxon sits up in bed next to Lore, who is asleep. Police lights play against the ceiling of their room. A loud bang at his door.

The **Head Butler** guides Guardia Civil, who carry wheels of cheese and crates of wine, back to the General's secret room. They replenish what was briefly lost.

Juan Carlos opens the door to their apartment. Guardia Civil bust into their apartment, grab Nino from his bed and drag him into the back of their vehicle. They drive through town. They pass –

Itxaso and Nerea walking alongside other factory workers. Itxaso turns and watches the Guardia Civil car drive away. She and the other workers file in through the front gates of the factory, which close behind them.

THE END

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