



## STOCKCERO TEACHING KIT (169)

TEXT: *Campanadas a medianoche / Chimes at Midnight* (film)

AUTHOR / ADAPTER: Orson Welles / Antonio Buero Vallejo

LITERARY EDITORS: [Luis Deltell](#), [Jordi Massó Castilla](#)

## PART 1: CONTEXT & CRITICAL ANALYSIS

(Based on Deltell & Massó's introduction and dossier)

### A “SPANISH” ORSON WELLES FILM: PRODUCTION, STATE, AND SUBSIDIES

#### **A Simulated “World Premiere”:**

On 23 December 1965, *Chimes at Midnight* was officially and “worldwide” premiered in Barcelona. Francoist authorities and the press celebrated the event as a cultural triumph: a major international director shooting a film in Spain. Yet this premiere was largely a bureaucratic fiction. The film had apparently already been screened in Zaragoza, the date was chosen not for commercial strategy but to meet administrative deadlines for state subsidies, and the version shown in Catalan theaters was not the final cut. The screening functioned as a legal requirement rather than a genuine launch.

#### **Financing Difficulties and Coproduction Fictions:**

Spanish producer Emiliano Piedra faced severe financial strain. Shooting had ended months earlier, but bills piled up while Welles continued to re-edit and add lab tricks, raising costs and delaying completion. Spanish law made subsidy classification difficult for a film with a foreign director, mixed cast and crew, and English as the original language. To obtain the status of “Spanish in coproduction,” Piedra created a Swiss shell company, Alpine Films Productions, which he also owned. Thus, a “Spanish–Swiss coproduction” was, in fact, financed by two companies belonging to the same producer.

#### **The Franco Regime and “Prestige Cinema”:**

Under José María García Escudero, the Dirección General de Cinematografía promoted a more “open,” modern image of the regime. The state supported “New Spanish Cinema” and welcomed foreign productions that could function as propaganda. Unlike Hollywood epics merely shot on Spanish soil, *Campanadas a medianoche* was Spanish capital with a Spanish producer seeking full Spanish classification. For the regime, being able to present a major Welles film as “Spanish” at festivals (Cannes 1966) was politically valuable, even if the production process was chaotic and financially risky.

### WELLES, FALSTAFF, AND A TROUBLED MASTERPIECE

#### **Welles’s Career and Exile from Hollywood:**

After the revolutionary *Citizen Kane* (1941) and the commercial failures or studio mutilations of later films (*The Magnificent Ambersons*, *Othello*, *Touch of Evil*), Hollywood saw Welles as brilliant but “unmanageable.” His insistence on creative control and his weak box-office track



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record made major studios wary. By the early 1960s, he had to finance personal projects abroad (*The Trial* in Yugoslavia) and seek European partners.

***Falstaff as Obsession:***

As Esteve Riambau shows, Welles was fascinated by Falstaff from his youth. He had already created and staged a theatrical version, *Chimes at Midnight*, before attempting the film. For Welles, this was not “another Shakespeare film” but the project that finally allowed him to embody Falstaff on screen and to weave together several plays (*Henry IV* Parts 1 and 2, *Henry V*, *Richard II*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*) into a single portrait of betrayal, ageing, friendship, and power.

***A Film Saved by Brilliance and Almost Lost by Circumstance:***

Shooting in Spain began in October 1964 and ended in February 1965, but the planned 12-week schedule stretched to over five months. Official costs rose from 28 million to 87 million pesetas. Welles edited at home on Moviolas, constantly reshaping scenes—the famous battle sequence, a few lines on the page, grew into a nearly ten-minute tour de force of montage. Piedra, repeatedly forced to extend his bank loan, nearly went bankrupt; only a last-minute extension from Banco de Madrid, mediated by producer Alfredo Matas, allowed completion in time for Cannes 1966. The film screened out of competition and received a career-achievement award for Welles, not a prize for the film itself. Initial reception in the U.S. in 1967 was lukewarm; critics saw it as an uneven Shakespeare adaptation driven by Welles’s vanity. Only years later did international criticism and film scholarship revalue *Chimes at Midnight* as one of Welles’s greatest works and one of the finest films ever made in Spain.

## **ANTONIO BUERO VALLEJO’S LOST VERSION: CAMPANAS A MEDIANOCHE**

***From Hamlet to Falstaff: Buero as Shakespearean Adapter:***

By 1965, Antonio Buero Vallejo was Spain’s leading postwar dramatist and no stranger to adaptation and translation. His Spanish version of *Hamlet* (1961) had been a major theatrical success, praised for “sounding like Shakespeare” in Spanish and for clarifying character psychology without flattening complexity. Buero created a Spanish that evoked an older register (endecasílabos, irony, and grandeur) yet remained performable for a contemporary audience. He would later adapt Brecht (*Mother Courage*) and Ibsen (*The Wild Duck*).

***A Complex Cinematic Relationship:***

Buero had prior experience with film: he co-wrote the screenplay for *Historia de una escalera* (1950) and intensely supervised, through correspondence, the adaptation of *En la ardiente oscuridad* (*Luz en la sombra*, 1956), even proposing camera movements, shot sizes, and editing patterns. These experiences taught him both the possibilities of cinema and the pain of seeing his work altered for “commercial” reasons. He had already gone to the Spanish authors’ society (SGAE) once to protest a distorted film ending; this history shaped his sensitivity when dealing with Welles’s project.



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### ***The Commission: Not “Just a Translation” but a High-Literary Version:***

In early 1965, with shooting almost complete, producer Emiliano Piedra and collaborator Gustavo Quintana approached Buero. The contract (8 March 1965) promised him 200,000 pesetas—an unusually high fee—for “translation and adaptation of the dialogues from the English version of Orson Welles’s original script,” plus credit in the film titles as responsible for the “dialogues,” an exceptional prominence for a translator. The explicit brief was to produce a version in Spanish “with the flavor of the Picaresque and the Golden Age,” equivalent in literary quality to the English script based on Shakespeare. Buero received the English dialogue script and an earlier Spanish version deposited with the censors; structurally they were similar, but the existing Spanish was a careful contemporary register. Buero’s task was to elevate this into a stylized, archaizing Spanish that would evoke the Siglo de Oro without becoming incomprehensible.

## **A “TRANSUBSTANTIATION” ACROSS LANGUAGES — AND A REJECTION**

### ***Translation as Transformation:***

Echoing Jean-Luc Nancy’s idea that translation is less a linear transfer than a “transubstantiation” across an abyss between languages, Buero attempted not a literal transposition but a deep stylistic recreation. He carefully reproduced the rhythm of Shakespearean blank verse, often using incomplete or full endecasílabos, and worked to preserve puns, irony, and shifts between prose and verse. He also had to respect the strict technical constraints of dubbing: lip-sync, timing, and on-screen movement. His “Advertencias generales” (General Notes) show acute awareness of these constraints, indicating alternative words in parentheses for use where the image (voice-off, backs, distance) allowed looser sync.

### ***A Text Different from the Final Spanish Dub:***

The resulting *Campanas a medianoche* is much more than a translation: it is, in Deltell & Massó’s terms, a genuine “transubstantiation” of Welles’s script into a distinct Golden-Age-flavored Spanish text. It includes three scenes not present in the final film cut (but visible in censorship scripts or production stills), preserves longer dialogue passages later shortened or removed, and reorganizes some dialogue. Literarily, many of Buero’s monologues—especially Henry IV’s laments and the final speech of the newly crowned Henry V—rank among the best Spanish versions of those Shakespearean passages.

### ***“Too Cultured” for the Market: Buero Erased from the Credits:***

After delivering the finished version in April 1965 and receiving his final payment, Buero waited to be called to assist with dubbing sessions, as promised. That call never came. In September, Piedra phoned to report difficulties with the verse in dubbing and, crucially, to suggest that the elevated poetic register might be “unsuitable for mass audiences” and needed to be rendered into prose. In October, Buero was invited to a screening of a fully dubbed version. He discovered that his text had been freely altered, simplified, and replaced without consulting him, though his name still appeared in the credits as author of the dialogues. Feeling that the final Spanish dialogues “no longer belonged to him,” he wrote to the producers asking that his name be removed, arguing that advertising a “prestigious author” for the dialogues would only make perceived defects more damaging for the film. Receiving no meaningful reply, he appealed again to the SGAE. On 24



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November 1965, Piedra wrote to confirm, “with deep regret,” that he had ordered Buero’s name removed from credits and publicity. From that point on, no released print or promotional material bore Buero’s signature. The text remained in his personal archive, effectively invisible to scholars until after his death.

## LITERARY AND HISTORICAL VALUE OF CAMPANAS A MEDIANOCHE

### **A Unique Hybrid Text:**

*Campanas a medianoche* is not a standard dramatic script, not a pure screenplay, and not a simple translation. It is a rare hybrid: a high-literary Spanish recreation of a film’s dialogue track, anchored in Shakespeare’s plays but constrained by already-shot footage. Its language deliberately evokes the Spanish Golden Age and picaresque tradition, giving Falstaff, Prince Hal, Henry IV, and others a Spanish voice that resonates with Cervantes, Quevedo, and Lope without collapsing into pastiche.

### **A Document for Welles Scholars:**

Because Buero worked from an earlier version of the English dialogue and was updated during editing, his text preserves scenes and variants that Welles shot but later discarded, such as:

An assembly of nobles after Richard II’s death, with Bishop Carlyle publicly accusing Bolingbroke (future Henry IV) and prophesying England as a “field of Golgotha,” followed by a macabre procession with Richard’s open coffin.

A grim execution ground with scaffold and gallows, echoing that prophecy and partially visible only in the film’s opening credits.

A brief negotiation scene at the rebel camp (Worcester, Hotspur, Blunt) omitted in the final cut. These fragments make the text a valuable source for reconstructing the evolution of Welles’s script and editing decisions.

### **Buero’s Silence and Posthumous Recovery:**

The bitterness of the experience led Buero to efface *Campanas a medianoche* from his public record. In later interviews (e.g., 1982, on the occasion of his Ibsen adaptation), he lists only *Hamlet* and *Mother Courage* as his previous “versions,” omitting the Welles project altogether. Only the systematic cataloguing of his archive by his family after his death allowed the recovery of this “lost” work. Its publication now invites a reassessment of Buero’s relationship to Shakespeare, cinema, and translation—and opens a new window on one of Welles’s central films.



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## PART 2: TOPICS FOR CLASS DISCUSSION

### **A Spanish Falstaff: National Cinema or International Auteur Film?**

Given the financing, crew, locations, language, and political context, to what extent can *Campanadas a medianoche* be considered a “Spanish film”? How does its status complicate definitions of “national cinema” in the Franco era?

### **Translation vs. Adaptation vs. Version**

Compare Buero’s work on *Hamlet* with his commission for *Campanas a medianoche*. In what ways is *Campanas* closer to translation, and in what ways is it an original literary creation? How do dubbing constraints (lip-sync, timing) transform the nature of “faithfulness” to Shakespeare and Welles?

### **Censorship, Commerce, and Literary Quality**

Discuss the producer’s fear that Buero’s elevated, partially versified Spanish was “too cultured” and not “commercial” for mass audiences. How does this tension between literary ambition and market expectations echo broader patterns in Spanish film and theater under Franco?

### **Buero’s Tragic Vision and Shakespeare’s**

Drawing on Buero’s anti-romantic reading of *Hamlet*, how might his own conception of tragedy (rational, hopeful protagonists confronting systemic constraints) align with or differ from Shakespeare’s more ambivalent or pessimistic outlook? How could this affect the way he renders characters like Falstaff, Hal, or Henry IV in Spanish?

### **Archival Discoveries and the History of Film**

How does the recovery of Buero’s *Campanas a medianoche* alter our understanding of *Chimes at Midnight*? What does this case tell us about the importance—and limits—of archival work in reconstructing the history of a film and its multiple “versions” (scripts, cuts, dubs, subtitles)?

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## PART 4: QUIZ BANK (Multiple Choice)

### ***Why did Emiliano Piedra create the Swiss company Alpine Films Productions?***

- A) To move the entire production to Switzerland
- B) To avoid paying Spanish actors
- C) To simulate a foreign coproduction and obtain Spanish state subsidies
- D) To sell the film directly to U.S. television

Correct Answer: C

### ***What was the main goal of hiring Antonio Buero Vallejo for the Spanish version of the dialogues?***

- A) To produce a quick, literal translation into contemporary colloquial Spanish
- B) To create a high-literary Spanish version with a Golden-Age / picaresque flavor equivalent in quality to Welles's English script
- C) To simplify Shakespeare's texts for children
- D) To write an entirely new plot unrelated to Shakespeare

Correct Answer: B

### ***Why did Buero ultimately ask that his name be removed from the film's credits?***

- A) He decided he no longer liked Shakespeare
- B) The producers refused to pay him
- C) The final Spanish dub had extensively altered and replaced his text without consulting him, so he no longer recognized it as his work
- D) The censors banned his participation

Correct Answer: C

### ***Which of the following best describes the status of Campanas a medianoche within Buero's oeuvre?***

- A) A standard stage play he later adapted to film
- B) A simple prose translation of *Henry IV*
- C) A unique, hybrid text: a high-literary Spanish recreation of Welles's film dialogues, constrained by already-shot footage
- D) A novelization of *Chimes at Midnight*

Correct Answer: C

### ***What is one of the reasons Campanas a medianoche is important for scholars of Welles's film?***

- A) It contains the complete shooting script of *Citizen Kane*
- B) It preserves scenes and dialogue (e.g., after Richard II's death, the execution ground) that were filmed or planned but cut from the final version of *Chimes at Midnight*
- C) It shows Welles's handwritten notes in Spanish
- D) It replaces Falstaff with Don Quixote

Correct Answer: B

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