

# THE MEXICAN FILM BULLETIN

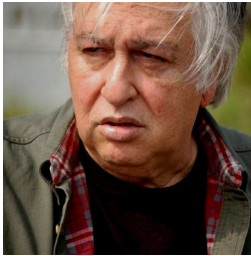
## VOLUME 20 NUMBER 4

### JULY-AUGUST 2014

#### **OBITUARIES**

##### **FERNANDO GOU**

Producer Fernando Gou Emmert died on 12 July 2014 at the age of 69. Gou was born in Mexico City in October 1944. His family owned a number of movie theatres, and although Gou had earned a degree in chemical engineering, he subsequently enrolled in the Centro de



Estudios Cinematográficos (CUEC) as a film student. In 1967 Gou came up with the idea for a television program about film: titled "Tiempo de Cine," the show featured Gou and film critics/historians such as Emilio García Riera, José de la Colina, and Tomás Pérez Turrent.

After directing television and a documentary short, Gou made his feature directorial debut in 1979 with *Palenque sangriento*; he later directed a *videohome* and a theatrical film (*Picardía nacional, La metiche*, in 1989 and 1990, respectively). Gou also taught television and film production at the Centro de Capacitación Cinematográfica in Mexico City.

In later years he became a producer and distributor, working numerous times with his friend Felipe Cazals (*Ciudadano Buelna, Chicogrande, La vueltas del citrillo*), as well as with Jaime Humberto Hermosillo (*Escrito en el cuerpo de la noche, eXXXorcismos*), and Rafael Corkidi (*El maestro prodigioso*).

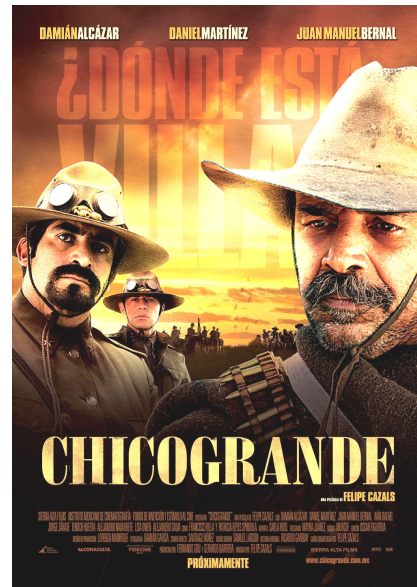
##### **ÁLEX ANGULO**

Spanish actor Alejandro "Álex" Angulo died on 20 July 2014 in an automobile accident; he was 61 years old. Angulo was born in Vizcaya, País Vasco in April 1953, and began acting professionally in the 1980s. He was a popular supporting actor in Spanish cinema, working for Álex de la Iglesia (*Acción mutante, El día de la bestia*), Pedro Almodóvar (*Carne trémula*), and numerous other directors.



Angulo was nominated for a Best Supporting Actor Ariel for his role as the Doctor in Guillermo del Toro's *El laberinto del fauno* (a Spanish-Mexican co-production). He also made an appearance in the Spanish-Mexican co-production *Sexo por compasión* (1999).

#### **FELIPE CAZALS' REVOLUTION**



**Chicogrande** (IMCINE-FIDECINE-Sierra Alta Films, 2009, ©2010) *Prod*: Fernando Gou, Gerardo Barrera; *Dir*: Felipe Cazals; *Story*: Ricardo Garibay; *Orig. Novel/Story*: Rafael F. Muñoz\*; *Photo*: Damián García; *Music*: Murcof; *Prod Dir*: Mario Lemus; *Asst Dir*: Mauricio Lule; *Film Ed*: Óscar Figueroa Jara; *Prod Des*: Lorenza Manrique; *Art Dir*: Tomás Rodríguez; *Sound Design*: Samuel Larson; *Makeup Design*: Carlos Sánchez; *Direct Sound*: Santiago Núñez; *Union*: STPC

\*\* "Vámonos con Pancho Villa" (uncredited), "Los cuerdos de mi general" (credited)

**Cast**: Damián Alcázar (*Chicogrande*), Daniel Martínez (*Major Butch Fenton*), Juan Manuel Bernal (*U.S. Army Doctor Timothy*), Iván Rafael González (*Guánzaras*), Jorge Zárate (*Ciro "Viejo" Resendez*), Tenoch Huerta (*Dr. Terán*), Alejandro Navarrete (*Carrancista colonel*), Patricia Reyes Spíndola (*La Sandoval*), Alejandro Calva (*Francisco Villa*), Lisa Owen (*Janice Holstock*), Bruno Bichir (*Úrsulo*), Gustavo Sánchez Parra (*Saavedra*), Gerald Randall (*U.S. soldier Douglas*), Carlos Saravia (*U.S. soldier*), Pablo Fulgueira (*telegraph soldier*), Luis Reynoso (*U.S. soldier*), María de la Paz Mata, Cecilia Díaz (*whore*), Lizbeth Gómez (*whore*), Elizabeth Fajardo (*Prudencia, whore*), Elizabeth Medina (*whore*), Gerardo Albarrán (*Carrancista captain*), Erick Orozco & Eliseo Gutiérrez (*Apaches*)

**Notes**: since the early 1990s, Felipe Cazals has only made 6 feature films (in comparison, Arturo Ripstein has

made twice that number): *Kino, Su alteza serenísima, Digna...hasta el último aliento, Las vueltas del citrillo, Chicogrande*, and *Ciudadano Buelna*. Five are based on actual people and events (*Las vueltas del citrillo* is fiction), and five are “historical” period films (the sixth, *Digna...hasta el último aliento*, deals with the career of activist Digna Ochoa from the late 1980s until her murder in 2001). The last two films Cazals has made both deal with the era of the Mexican Revolution, although *Chicogrande* focuses on a fairly narrow “sidebar” conflict, the 1916 Punitive Expedition led by General Pershing after Pancho Villa’s cross-border assault on Columbus, New Mexico. The Revolution is present, but as background (Villa versus the government troops of Venustiano Carranza).



*Chicogrande* is based on a story by Ricardo Garibay, previously filmed in 1993 as *La sangre de un valiente* (directed by Mario Hernández, starring Pepe Aguilar and his father Antonio Aguilar). Garibay’s story was an elaboration of an “episode” in Rafael F. Muñoz’s novel “Vámonos con Pancho Villa” (not included in the 1936 film adaptation of that title), in which *Villista* protagonist Tiburcio Maya tries get medical help for a wounded and helpless Villa. Neither *La sangre de un valiente* nor *Chicogrande* acknowledges Muñoz as the source of the original plot, but Cazals’ film curiously does credit a story by Muñoz as the “inspiration” for a flashback sequence narrated by a *Carrancista* officer.

Since they’re both based on the same story, *La sangre de un valiente* and *Chicogrande* have essentially the same plot, but *Chicogrande* pays more attention to other characters than the first version did (possibly because producer Antonio Aguilar wanted to showcase his son Pepe as an actor—didn’t work, since Pepe stayed on the music side of things). In addition to the eponymous protagonist Chicogrande (renamed from Tiburcio Maya), Cazals’ film gives villain Butch Fenton and decent *gringo* Timothy a lot of screen time, and also adds the character of La Sandoval, a *Villista* sympathiser. The production values of *Chicogrande* are also substantially greater than those of *La sangre de un valiente*, with excellent location shooting (in Durango), lots of riders, horses, uniforms, extras, and so forth.

After the *Villista* attack on Columbus, New Mexico (a raid which, in a flashback sequence, is described as more or less a tactical failure—but Villa says he did it to attract attention to the Revolution), U.S. Army troops enter Mexico to pursue the rebel leader. Mexican federal soldiers (the *Carrancistas*) dislike the presence of the *gringos*, but tolerate them for the time being. In one Mexican town, the U.S. Army detachment is under the command of Major Butch Fenton, who resorts to bribes, threats, and—increasingly—torture in his efforts to locate Villa’s hideout. Fenton is rebuffed when he approaches Janice Holstock, a widow with two young sons whose ranch is in Mexico and who considers herself Mexican, although he does get a cryptic clue from her sardonic ranchhand Úrsulo. Later, villager Viejo Resendez tells Fenton that Villa must be injured or he’d be more visible at the head of his troops; Resendez hates war and blames Villa for the death of his sons, who had been impressed into Villa’s forces.



[As an aside, although the English dialogue is translated into Spanish via sub-titles, in the film itself people speak both English and Spanish and everyone seems to understand everyone else. What a wonderful bilingual world!]

Meanwhile, a wounded Villa (shot in the leg in a clash with the *Carrancistas*) takes shelter in a mountain cave. He sends Chicogrande and Guánzaras to procure medical assistance. The two men infiltrate the town and contact local doctor Terán, who refuses to accompany them because his wife and child are being held hostage for his good behaviour: if he leaves to assist Villa, they’ll be killed. Chicogrande learns of the treachery of Viejo Resendez and kills him, but is then caught in a bear trap planted by Fenton’s Apache scouts. He’s tortured viciously, which disturbs U.S. Army doctor Timothy, a staunch opponent of Fenton’s barbarism. Chicogrande won’t talk; when the young Guánzaras is also captured and tortured, Chicogrande kills his friend with a pitchfork before he can reveal Villa’s location.

Chicogrande abducts Dr. Timothy and they ride off to the mountains, with Fenton, his Apaches, and some soldiers in pursuit. Chicogrande is so badly injured that he keeps falling off his horse, so Dr. Timothy constructs a “brace” made of tree branches to keep him in the saddle. They arrive at Villa’s hideout and Chicogrande, his job done, dies. Even in death he helps Villa one more time: his corpse-laden horse gallops off, leading Fenton and the others away from the cave. A printed epilogue says Villa returned to action 3 months later, defeating the *Carrancistas* in battle.

Chicogrande isn’t a very well developed character: he’s an extremely loyal follower of Villa, brave, capable of



withstanding torture, but the film gives us little back-story or character arc for him. As noted above, both Fenton and Timothy have as much (or more) screen time, and reveal more of their thoughts and feelings. Fenton is a racist (of course), who says his Apache scouts were “saved” by religion and now qualify as decent human beings, but Mexicans are beneath contempt. He’s not, surprisingly, depicted as irrational or insane, just brutal and bigoted. Late in the film, to facilitate Chicogrande’s escape, three local little-person whores get Fenton drunk and take him back to their hut—the next day he appears at the head of his troops, his head and beard partially shaved, but this humiliation doesn’t prevent him from leading the pursuit of Chicogrande and Timothy (and the three whores are hung for their patriotism).



Timothy is consistently portrayed as opposed to Fenton’s methods, and several times during the film he writes letters to his grandparents on Long Island,

decrying the way the United States soldiers are abusing the Mexicans and giving his country a bad reputation. He accompanies Chicogrande at gunpoint, but later cooperates with his helpless Mexican “captor” so that Chicogrande can die peacefully, his mission accomplished. While most of Fenton’s soldiers are portrayed as enthusiastically following their brutal superior officer’s orders, the characters of Timothy and Janice Holstock (who only appears in one, rather tacked-on scene) do help offset the anti-*gringo* tenor of the rest of the movie to some extent.

The film also contains a reasonably balanced depiction of the Mexican people and their attitudes towards the Revolution. The *Villistas* and the *Carrancistas* both oppose the U.S. invasion—Mexican patriotism trumps factionalism—but the divisions in Mexican society are plain to see, with members of both groups visible. Villa—who appears only briefly—isn’t a complete hero (as noted, the Columbus raid is explained as a public relations stunt and there’s no detailed discussion of his actual Revolutionary goals) and the *Carrancistas* aren’t blatant villains (although in one flashback sequence, they are shown executing recalcitrant *Villistas*). One suspects a fair number of townspeople are like Viejo Resendez, tired of the fighting and desirous of simply living their lives peacefully.

*Chicogrande* is full of rich details, large and small, and has an excellent *mise-en-scene*. It’s paced well and builds to a satisfying climax. The performances are uniformly good, although it would have been nice if Damián Alcázar had been given some additional character-development footage (and he reminds me more and more of Germán Valdés “Tin Tan” the more I see him—which isn’t to say

he makes me laugh, he just physically resembles the older Valdés).



### Ciudadano Buelna [Citizen Buelna] (Cuatro Soles

Films, 2012) *Exec Prod*: Fernando Gou; *Prod-Dir-Scr*: Felipe Cazals; *Adaptation/Story*: Felipe Cazals, Leo Eduardo Mendoza; *Photo*: Martín Boege; *Music*: Víctor Báez; *Prod Dir*: Mario Lemus; *Asst Dir*: Joaquín Silva; *Film Ed*: Óscar Figueroa Jara; *Prod Design*: Lorenza Manrique; *Art Dir*: Tomás Rodríguez; *Costume Design*: Mayra Juárez; *Sound Design*: Samuel Larson; *Direct Sound*: Gabriel Coll; *Makeup Design*: Roberto Ortiz

**Cast:** Sebastián Zurita (*Rafael Buelna Tenorio*), Marimar Vega (*Luisa Sarria*), Damián Alcázar (*Lucio Blanco*), Gustavo Sánchez Parra (*Álvaro Obregón*), Jorge Zárate (*Heriberto Frías*), Tenoch Huerta (*Emiliano Zapata*), Dagoberto Gama (*Juan Carrasco*), Enoc Leñaño (*Francisco Villa*), Bruno Bichir (*Antonio Díaz Soto y Gama*), Elizabeth Cervantes (*Güera Carrasco*), Paquita la del Barrio (*waitress*), Andrés Montiel (*Martín Luis Guzmán*), Teresa Ruiz, Ramón Medina, Raúl Méndez (*Venustiano Carranza*)

**Notes:** *Ciudadano Buelna* really should be titled *Various, Random Scenes from the Revolutionary Activities of Rafael Buelna*. It’s not really a biography—Buelna’s youth is ignored (the film begins in 1909 when he’s a law



student), his personal life is reduced to a handful of occasional scenes with his girlfriend (later wife) and children (very, very brief), and even his activities during the Revolution consist

mostly of him arguing with others about their commitment to the cause, meeting famous people (and, often, arguing with them), taking unilateral actions against orders (which either earn him praise or condemnation), and from time to time making speeches about a better Mexico. There are significant jumps in time, major omissions (even in Buelna’s personal story), and anyone without a working knowledge of the history of the Revolution will be

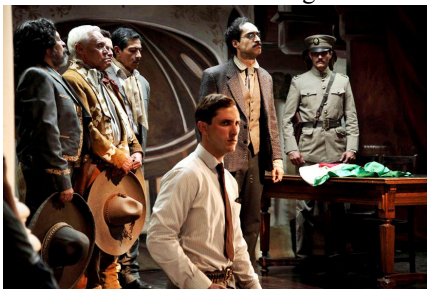
completely lost (unlike, for instance, Cazals' previous film *Chicogrande*, which is mostly understandable to international audiences). *Ciudadano Buelna* feels like a pageant: "Hey, there's Madero! Look, it's Zapata! Now he's meeting Obregón! And Lucio Blanco! Pancho Villa is there! Buelna gives author Martín Luis Guzmán some advice! Now Buelna has an encounter with Lázaro Cárdenas, who'll become a famous Mexican president later! There's Carranza!"

This sort of name-dropping is endemic in historical fiction and films, and in fact since Rafael Buelna was a real person who really did interact with the major figures of the Revolution, many of these encounters are probably true (certainly the Cárdenas anecdote is well-known), but the film still feels rushed and superficial. It simultaneously covers too much ground but little of this in detail. There are isolated moments of dramatic interest, but despite the excellent production values the film provides little insight into Buelna as a man, or the workings of the Revolution itself.



In 1909 Sinaloa, Rafael Buelna urges his fellow students to oppose the candidacy of followers of long-time Mexican leader Porfirio Díaz. He becomes involved in politics and journalism, mentored

in both by Heriberto Frías, and even has the opportunity to meet Francisco I. Madero, soon to become president of Mexico. When the Revolution breaks out, Buelna participates in the fighting, rising to the rank of Colonel. However, afterwards the Madero government asks the various rebels to turn in their arms and resume their civilian lives, and Buelna does so. In 1913, Victoriano Huerta has Madero assassinated and fighting resumes, with Buelna joining the rebellion against the *Huertistas*. He achieves some success as a military leader, although he still strives to remain true to his convictions. This causes him to disobey orders and annoy his superiors, some of whom he views as political opportunists.



At the Convención de Aguascalientes in 1914—a meeting in which various rebel leaders agree to cooperate to defeat Huerta—Buelna urges the inclusion of Emiliano Zapata in the group.

However, adherence to the goals of the Convención puts Buelna, Lucio Blanco, and others in opposition to Carranza and Obregón (the *convencionalistas* vs.

*carrancistas* or *constitucionalistas*). Buelna later joins forces with Villa in the north, but (as usual) argues with his putative commander. Villa orders Buelna to be shot, but Buelna (with his wife) goes into exile instead. [This is unclear in the film itself, an especially egregious example of how an uninformed viewer would be completely lost.] "Four years later" (according to a superimposed title), Buelna is living in Mexico City with his wife and two young sons. His old friend General Enrique Estrada asks Buelna to join him on the side of Obregón, who has broken with Carranza. Estrada vows to fight Obregón as well if he betrays their trust. The film then jumps forward to 1923: Estrada, de la Huerta, and others rebel against Obregón, who has hand-picked Plutarco Elías Calles as the next Mexican president. [This temporal leap eliminates a number of significant events in Buelna's life which occurred in the interim.] Buelna joins Estrada's forces, but in early 1924 he is shot and killed in an ambush.

The Mexican Revolution (actually a series of conflicts that lasted from 1910 well into the 1920s) is a complex subject, and many films choose to personalise it by concentrating on the participation of real or fictional characters, rather than attempting to cover the entire period comprehensively. *Ciudadano Buelna* seems to have started off with this concept, selecting a historical figure who, while important, isn't a household name like Villa or Zapata (although Buelna is remembered, particularly in Sinaloa). Buelna actually did have dealings with many of the major figures of the era, and—if the film is to be believed—was sincere in his goal of creating a better Mexico for all. However, this movie hops and skips through the years 1909-1924, avoids any significant action, and presents both Buelna's political and personal life in brief vignettes that—while often individually



quite good—reveal relatively little about the man or his convictions. Cazals is certainly not the first filmmaker to make a movie like this, but it's a shame that some really excellent locations, performers, costumes, and other production assets couldn't combine to produce a more powerful motion picture.

The performances are generally satisfactory. Sebastián Zurita (son of actors Humberto Zurita and Cristián Bach) is very handsome and earnest as Buelna, while Marimar Vega is good but under-utilised as his long-suffering wife. Most of the supporting players are fine, with Damián Alcázar standing out as Lucio Blanco, but Tenoch Huerta was apparently instructed to play Zapata as a mumbling introvert, and is consequently not very interesting.



*Ciudadano Buelna* is very well-produced but doesn't have much dramatic impact. Perhaps Mexican audiences—presumably more able to fill in the historical gaps than foreign viewers—might appreciate it more.

[Addendum: *Ciudadano Buelna* won two Arieles, Best Production Design for Lorenza Manrique, and Best Costume Design for Mayra Juárez. Sebastián Zurita received a Diosa de Plata as Best Actor, and Martín Boege earned a Diosa de Plata for his cinematography.]



## FORTIES MYSTERY FILMS



**La posada sangrienta** [The Bloody Inn] (José Luis Calderón, 1941) *Dir:* Fernando A. Rivero; *Adapt/Collab:* Mario de Lara; *Dialog:* Fernando A. Rivero, Ernesto Cortázar; *Story:* Ernesto Cortázar; *Photo:* Ross Fisher; *Prod Chief:* A. Guerrero Tello; *Film Ed:* Charles L. Kimball; *Art Dir:* Ramón Rodríguez G.; *Sound Engin:* Enrique Rodríguez

**Cast:** David Silva (*Antonio Lavalle*), Gloria Marín (*Marta*), Miguel Inclán (*Lázaro Gómez*), Alfredo Varela Jr. (*Valentín*), Max L[angler] Montenegro (*Terranova*), M[anuel] Sánchez Navarro (*police chief*), Alfonso Carrillo (*Rodolfo de la Cueva*), Julio Ahuet (*Mendoza*), Carolina Barret (*radio listener*), Manuel Dondé (*waiter in radio play*), David Valle González (*police chief in radio play*), Humberto Rodríguez (*man with wig*), José Ignacio Rocha (*elderly radio listener*), José Elías Moreno (*Tomás in radio play*)

**Notes:** not all Mexican films produced in the “Golden Age” were classics, or even good films. *La posada sangrienta* is definitely one of the odder, not-so-good movies of the era, (barely) redeemed from total failure by



the cast. The script is awful, the music score is terrible, the pacing is off, and the direction is poor: running only 69 minutes, the film seems much longer. This is an “old house mystery” but there is no suspense or atmosphere and the mystery is so muddled as to be pointless.

Nebbishy Valentín and his girlfriend leave a roadhouse and head back to the city in his automobile. Running out of gasoline near Kilómetro 13, they spot an old house nearby. No one seems to be home, but before Marta can use the telephone to call for assistance, they hear a gunshot! Lázaro, the *major-domo*,

comes downstairs at the noise, and they discover a dead man (identified by Lázaro as Mendoza, one of his employer's business partners) in a side room, pistol in hand. Lázaro tells Valentín and Marta that his boss, Rodolfo de la Cueva, passed away earlier (he's in a coffin in another room). He refuses to allow the two visitors to leave. Marta tries to notify the police but her call is cut short. A short time later, Terranova arrives: he's de la Cueva's other business partner.

Meanwhile, police detective Antonio decides to investigate Marta's cryptic call. Once he shows up at the old house (despite the film's title, at no time is it ever called a *posada* or “inn”), he also insists Marta and Valentín remain until the mystery is solved.

Terranova is found upstairs, hung—but Antonio deduces he was murdered. Valentín, Marta, Lázaro and Antonio spend a lot of



time wandering around the old house, together and separately. Marta repairs the severed telephone line and calls the police again. Lázaro is shot and wounded by a mysterious bearded man who lurks in the house's hidden passages.

Reinforcements finally arrive. Antonio captures the bearded man and explains everything: Rodolfo de la Cueva was a bank manager who robbed his own institution, aided by Mendoza and Terranova. Faking his own death, he lured the two men to his home and murdered them so he wouldn't have to share the loot.



Antonio removes de la Cueva's fake beard—the coffin contains a dummy wearing a lifelike (deathlike?) rubber mask of de la Cueva's face. As the film concludes, Antonio and Marta embrace (presumably, her

engagement to the cowardly Valentín is broken).

The above synopsis makes *La posada sangrienta* sound more coherent and organised than it actually is. After the relatively brief opening sequence in the roadhouse, the majority of the film's first fifteen minutes is consumed with footage of people listening to a radio broadcast! Marta turns on the radio in Valentín's automobile to hear a crime program. There are a few scenes recreating the broadcast in an odd fashion (we don't see actors in a radio studio, we see fictionalised scenes from the story itself, with sets and actors and costumes), interspersed with footage of Valentín, Marta, and various other people (in their homes) listening and reacting to the radio play! This is hardly compelling cinema, and the story itself isn't

especially unique or interesting (it deals with a ruthless criminal on the run).

In addition to the generally tedious nature of this sequence—which consumes almost a quarter of the film’s running time—it should be noted that the radio broadcast has absolutely nothing to do with the plot of the film at all. There’s not even a peripheral connection a la *Whistling in the Dark* (1941) or *Who Done It?* (1942), where the protagonists are radio mystery-program writers or performers. It is simply irrelevant filler.

Another major annoyance in *La posada sangrienta* is the canned music. “Canned” music scores—i.e., scores consisting of music not composed specifically for the film—were usually heard in low-budget films (both in Hollywood and elsewhere), although in Mexico in the 1970s and beyond it was not unusual for composers like Gustavo C. Carrión and Ernesto Cortázar Jr. to “recycle” old themes when scoring films. However, *La posada sangrienta* doesn’t even bother to edit the pre-recorded music heard on the soundtrack, instead allowing each musical selection to play out in its entirety, even when (frequently) the music doesn’t match the action on-screen. Music heard in the film includes “Peg O’ My Heart” (swing version, mostly probably the recording by Bunny Berigan), and public domain classical themes “Flight of the Bumblebee,” “The Sorcerer’s Apprentice,” and “Scheherazade.”

There are a number of curious aspects to the physical production of the film. While the old house in which most of the action takes place is a decently-sized set, apparently no one was able to find a satisfactory photo of the exterior of an actual large, old house, and the



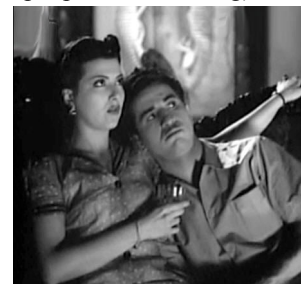
filmmakers opted for a laughably crude and cartoonish painting of a house which is seen for a split-second. Even the lead up to this shot is hilarious: Valentín and Marta get out of their disabled auto and sit down to wait for assistance; after several minutes, suddenly Marta glances up and says “Look!”, at which point the “house” is shown. Neither one of them noticed it before?

This shoddiness is strangely contradicted by the really quite good rubber mask of “de la Cueva” which appears at the film’s climax. The resemblance is uncanny, and one can almost imagine the filmmakers found the mask first, and then hired an actor to match!



Another oddity: during the “radio program” sequence, various radios appear in montages, and every one is a “Stewart-Warner” brand set. Talk about product placement.

Although the script they were handed was hardly worth translating to film (despite three people collaborating), the performers do the best they can to entertain. Alfredo Varela Jr. is the weakest of the 4 leads (Silva, Marín, Inclán, Varela), since he’s saddled with a typical (for him, in this era) milksop role: Valentín whines, complains, repeatedly says “I want to go home,” is afraid of everything, and—unfortunately—does all of this in a not especially amusing manner. Varela could and would do better (and also wrote better scripts himself), but he’s colourless here. Inclán’s part is confusing and ill-defined, but he delivers some bluster and emotion, despite his character being unconscious or off-screen for most of the film (and then getting shot towards the end). David Silva is satisfactory in an early role, although he’s again given little personality or motivation.



The real star of *La posada sangrienta* is Gloria Marín. Sporting a filmy dress (which gets progressively more tattered as the film unreels, exposing her slip), bobby socks and high heels, “Marta” is very attractive and has a feisty persona. It’s unclear why she would even have been attracted to Valentín, let alone become engaged to marry him, because Marta is constantly frustrated by his cowardice and incompetence. She is no shrinking violet, fighting strenuously when Lázaro attacks her, climbing up on a precarious stack of crates to repair the phone line (falling down once, then succeeding with Valentín’s dubious assistance a second time), refusing to be a typical “scream



and faint” heroine-victim. Without Marín, the film would be difficult to tolerate and it seems the filmmakers knew it, since she’s in most of the scenes.

*La posada sangrienta* is directed and shot in a flat, no-style manner, with relatively few closeups (when they do appear, they seem odd because there are so few of them). There is no attempt to generate suspense or mystery, and the script is so muddled that the motivations for the on-screen actions of the characters—who repeatedly dash in and out of rooms, split up and reunite—are completely obscure.

I hadn’t seen this film in many years, and was pleased when it turned up on the web (taken from a television broadcast), but the anticipation was greater than the actual viewing experience, sad to say.



## Crimen en la alcoba [Crime in the Bedroom]



(CLASA Films  
Mundiales, 1946) *Exec*  
*Prod*: Gustavo E.  
Candiani; *Dir*: Emilio  
Gómez Muriel; *Adapt*:  
Rafael Solana, Emilio  
Gómez Muriel; *Story*:  
Jesús Cárdenas; *Photo*:  
Agustín Martínez  
Solares; *Music*: Eduardo

Hernández Moncada; *Prod Chief*: Ricardo Beltri; *Asst Dir*:  
Valerio Olivo; *Film Ed*: Jorge Bustos; *Art Dir*: Jorge  
Fernández; *Decor*: José Llamas U.; *Makeup*: Elda Losa;  
*Sound Op*: Jesús González; *Music Rec*: Manuel Esperón;  
*Re-rec*: José de Pérez

**Cast**: Rafael Baledón (*Óscar Rojas*), Carmen Montejo  
(*Martha*), Ernesto Alonso (*Federico Alarcón*), Andrés  
Soler (*Marcos Ortega*), Carlos Orellana (*don Trinidad*  
*Rojas*), Felipe Montoya (*Sr. Esteva*), José Morcillo (*Sr.*  
*Carbajal*), Carlos Aguirre (*investigator*), Humberto  
Rodríguez (*apartment house concierge*), Ramón Gay  
(*policeman*)

**Notes**: this is a cleverly constructed and slickly-  
produced crime thriller, with a few unusual bits in the  
script and the film form.

Federico receives a telephone call from Martha after a  
period of estrangement. He tries to visit her, but is turned



away by her husband,  
Óscar. That evening,  
Óscar visits Federico's  
apartment and demands  
to know if Martha had  
sent a letter, but  
Federico refuses to talk  
with him. Federico  
later returns to the house

(in Óscar's absence), then emerges, shaken, and drives off.  
A servant discovers Martha's murdered body in her  
bedroom and calls the police (Federico pulls off the road  
and turns off his auto headlights to avoid detection). Óscar  
is arrested and charged with murder—Federico denies



Óscar had come to his  
apartment, and Óscar is  
convicted and sentenced to  
death. Attorney Marcos  
Ortega, who had been both  
Federico and Óscar's  
professor at university, thinks  
Federico is bitter because  
Óscar married Martha, whom

Federico had loved: he says Federico could have lied to  
save Óscar. Federico admits he knows Óscar didn't  
murder Martha, but he tells Marcos why he perjured  
himself at the trial...[flashback]

Federico and Óscar were friends and fellow students.  
Óscar is embarrassed by the arrival of his uncle Trinidad, a  
wealthy man who raised him and still treats his nephew  
like a boy. Don Trinidad buys a factory from Sr. Carbajal,  
who has an attractive daughter, Martha. Óscar proposes  
marriage to Martha and she accepts, telling Federico that  
Óscar "needs" her. Don Trinidad doesn't think Óscar is  
mature enough to marry, and threatens to cut off his  
financial support of his nephew if he insists: Óscar and  
Martha wed and try to survive on their own, but Óscar's  
financial ineptitude brings them to the brink of disaster (he  
has even forged don Trinidad's name on some loan  
documents, and the creditors are demanding payment).  
Swallowing his pride, Óscar returns to work for his uncle;  
he and Martha move into don Trinidad's mansion.  
Federico tenders his resignation, since he can't work in  
close approximation to Martha (whom he still loves) and  
he and Óscar are no longer friends.

Don Trinidad makes Óscar his assistant, giving him the  
combination to a large, walk-in vault in his home. Óscar  
steals some money from the vault to repay his creditors;  
when it appears his uncle will discover the missing funds,  
Óscar locks the older man inside the vault, then claims don  
Trinidad is on a business trip. Over the next several days  
(? It's unclear how long this goes on), Óscar refuses to  
open the vault until urgent business matters at the factory  
require it. In the presence of Martha, Federico, and factory  
manager Esteva, the vault is opened, and don Trinidad's  
body is found inside. He shot himself to death, leaving a  
suicide note which does not blame Óscar (in fact, he leaves  
his fortune to his nephew). However, Martha is aware of  
what her husband has done—she confronted him  
immediately afterwards, and Óscar struck her when she  
demanded that he free his uncle from the death trap.

Plunged into depression by her secret, Martha writes  
Federico a letter in which she describes what occurred.  
She indicates she's going to commit suicide but frame  
Óscar for her murder, so he will face justice. This was the  
letter Óscar was trying to retrieve from Federico on the  
night of her death. [end flashback] Federico hands the  
letter over to Marcos, but  
the lawyer sees it is too  
late, Óscar has already  
been executed. He burns  
the document.

*Crimen en la alcoba* is  
one of a number of films  
which uses the plot twist  
of "someone gets away  
with murder but is subsequently convicted of a crime  
he/she didn't commit, so ultimate justice is served." The  
script is effective, at first leading the viewer to suspect  
Federico of Martha's murder, only to (at the very end)  
reveal she killed herself but arranged to have her husband  
be blamed. The flashback structure is handled  
effectively—there is even a bit of flashback-within-  
flashback, as we're shown Martha witnessing Óscar





locking don Trinidad in the vault as her flashback (within Federico's flashback).

The characterisation of Óscar is slightly odd: he first seems surly and jealous of Federico, then turns desperate after he's convicted of murder, but in the flashback sequence he is portrayed as anti-social and bitter from the start, for no particular reason. Why Federico would have befriended him in the first place is a mystery. We're also shown Óscar's predilection for violence, as he attacks and nearly kills a fellow student who'd mocked his subservient relationship with his rich uncle. Don Trinidad repeatedly tells everyone that Óscar is immature, which suggests the older man knows his nephew is unstable but won't openly admit it. In turn, Óscar behaves in a churlish (and at times, childish) manner to don Trinidad and Federico, although not to Martha (still, her acceptance of his marriage proposal is shocking—it is not as if he was suave and debonair in her presence, he's awkward and petulant all the time, and later becomes insanely jealous to boot!). As Emilio García Riera noted in his *Historia documental del cine mexicano*, Rafael Baledón hams it up throughout the film, displaying an array of eye-popping and other over the top gestures.



There are a number of other interesting facets to the film. Carmen Montejo, as Martha, doesn't appear until the 25-minute mark (of a movie running just over 80 minutes). She looks rather different—her face seems markedly thinner than usual—and doesn't have a lot to do. Neither her "corpse" nor that of don Trinidad is shown on-screen. Curiously, when the vault is opened to reveal the latter's body, the characters react as if there is a horrible stench of decaying flesh (no one verbally mentions it, but their actions—covering their face with a handkerchief, for instance—and facial expressions make it clear), which is definitely not usual for the time period.



The film also includes some subtle touches. For instance, don Trinidad has a loyal dog who, after his master is locked in the vault, sits outside the door and howls. This is mildly Hitchcockian, since at this point the audience doesn't know don Trinidad has been locked inside, and—as mentioned above—Óscar is being very stubborn about opening the vault door. Later (chronologically in the plot, although shown earlier in the film itself), this dog indirectly contributes to Óscar's conviction: the *conciERGE* of Federico's apartment building takes the dog (apparently staying with Federico now) for a

walk, and thus isn't at his post when Óscar arrives to confront Federico. Subsequently, during the trial he can't confirm Óscar's alibi.

Óscar also claims that when he visited Federico, he broke the wall plate for the buzzer to Federico's apartment, but the plate is undamaged when the police arrive. We later see that Federico switched the wall plate with one inside his apartment.

*Crimen en la alcoba* utilises a number of slick (for the period) film techniques, including rear-screen projection (Federico driving), and a composite shot showing Federico's car driving up to the gate of don Trinidad's mansion (which is represented by a rather obvious matte painting). The painting of the mansion is shown several times—in both day and night shots—but only once do the filmmakers insert live-action elements into the shot. There are also several effective tracking shots. The film mixes both in-studio (set) sequences and location shooting (for example, don Trinidad's arrival at the airport and Federico's "hidden car" trick). The "university steps" scenes are either a very impressive set or were shot on location somewhere.

The film opens with a printed title which says "This film could take place in any Latin American country where they have the death penalty." And thus, the film presumably does not take place in Mexico, which had not executed any civilian since 1937. Óscar's trial is brief and depicted in a somewhat impressionistic manner, with lots of closeups of Óscar, Marcos, and various witnesses, but it does appear to follow Mexican trial procedure reasonably well (i.e., the "trial" takes place in a sort of office rather than a courtroom).

Well-made and generally entertaining, *Crimen en la alcoba* is a minor but pleasant film.



## ARCHIBALDO BURNS FILMS



**Juan Pérez Jolote** (V. Fuentes, 1973) *Prod:* Víctor Fuentes; *Dir/Adapt:* Archibaldo Burns; *Orig. Book:* Ricardo Pozas; *Photo:* Eric Saarinen, Alexis Grivas, Armando Carrillo; *Music:* Richard Alderson; *Prod Chief:* Jesús Frago; *Dir Collab:* Juan David Burns, José Luis



Urquieta, Sergio Jara, Gilberto Rojas, Luis Urquidi; *Film Ed*: Rafael Castanedo, Bill Sagaona; *Sound*: Roberto Muñoz, Manuel García, Elías Martel; *Re-rec*: Paul Jaeger;

**Cast**: Cándido Coheto (*Juan Pérez Jolote*)

**Notes**: this is not a documentary, but since it was shot on location with a cast of non-professionals, it may be considered a fairly accurate depiction of some aspects of the life of the indigenous people in Chiapas (in this case, the Tzotzils). Most of the dialogue is in their native language, although Juan narrates in Spanish and speaks it in some sequences (in fact, when he returns to his home village after a long absence, he says he's lost much of his ability to speak to his family). The production values of such a film are almost irrelevant, but the technical aspects are all satisfactory.

Juan Pérez Jolote returns to his family home after an



absence of some years. In flashback, he remembers how, as a boy, his father beat him for not working hard enough. Juan ran away, working as a shepherd, in an orchard, and on a

ranch, until his father came to take him home. A short time later, Juan leaves again--but this time, with an advance paid him by a labor contractor, he gives some money, liquor, and food to his parents. [To elude his father, Juan Pérez Jolote changes his name--to *José* Pérez Jolote!] As a young man, Juan serves in the army, and works on a plantation, but eventually comes home.

The rest of the film depicts the social lives of the people in Juan's village (aside from a brief scene of him as a boy, we don't see the Tzotziles engaged in any sort of agriculture or productive work on their own, although there are references to them working outside the community to earn cash). Juan eventually takes a wife and has a son, and is later chosen first *mayor* of the village. At the annual religious festival and *fiesta*, he makes a speech (that came to him in a dream; afterwards, one of his friends says he has a book that he'll lend to him, "in case you need to make another speech"). Juan's father dies. Life goes on.

The lives and customs of the Tzotziles are interesting, but the film goes on a little too long and contains too much detail for my taste. For example, when Juan is chosen *mayor*, he is given a *bastón* (cane) signifying his office. The secondary *mayores* also get *bastones*, and these all have to be ritually washed (which we see, in great detail). The arrangement for Juan's marriage, the Tzotzil equivalent of the Day of the Dead, etc., are also all depicted at some length.

Curiously, this anthropological tone is interrupted several times by what can only be described as exploitation-style sex scenes! In one, Juan (during his

army service) is approached by an older woman who takes him back to her house to initiate him into the ways of sex. Later, Juan is working on a plantation and observes as three other workers, drunk, return to the dormitory with three women (their wives, according to later dialogue, but they seem to be whores at first). Juan has another flashback (or dream?) to his army days--in a pastoral setting, a very beautiful young woman strips in front of him, then dashes off across a field, finally diving into a river. Juan removes his uniform and follows. I don't really understand the inclusion of these scenes--although the movie is sort of "about" Juan, it is really a portrait of his people and their customs--which are tonally at odds with the rest of the film.



The performances in *Juan Pérez Jolote* are uneven. Coheto, a non-actor (apparently in real life a professor at an institute for indigenous culture or something of the sort) is fine, and his "father" is also pretty good, but there are too many scenes in which people awkwardly gaze at the camera [Juan narrates and in one or two instances actually looks at the camera and talks, but this is different] or speak in a stilted, unnatural manner. Of course, there are other scenes which are fine, and overall the "acting" doesn't harm the movie at all.

Trivia note: Eric Saarinen, one of the photographers of this film, is the son of famous Finnish architect Eero Saarinen (and the grandson of another famous Finnish architect, Eliel Saarinen).

This is fascinating stuff, but gets just a little tedious at two hours in length.



**El reventón** [The Wild Party] (CONACITE Dos, 1975) *Exec Prod*: Rubén Broido; *Dir-Scr*: Archibaldo Burns; *Orig. Novel*: Jesús Camacho Morelos ("Cuando los perros viajan a Cuernavaca"); *Photo*: Antonio Ruiz; *Music*: Gato Barbieri; *Prod Mgr*: Juan Antonio de la Cámara; *Asst Dir*: Javier Durán; *Film Ed*: Federico Landeros; *Art Dir*: Octavio Ocampo; *Makeup*: Antonio Ramírez, María de los Ángeles Rico; *Sound*: Consuelo Jaramillo, Ricardo Saldivar; *Camera Op*: Febronio Teposte; *Union*: STIC

**Cast**: Ana Luisa Peluffo (*Adriana*), Juan David [Burns] (*Diego "Gato" Ulloa*), Lucifer de los Santos (*Laura*), Fernando Balzarette ("dog" guy #1), Tito Novaro (*Adriana's husband*), Ignacio Retes (*don Rodrigo Ulloa*), Eduardo Casab (*Frank*), Lucila Balzarette (*doña Amalia*), Pilar Climent (*Lilian*), Nerina Ferrer (*Estela*), Octavio Ocampo (*Salvador*), Leonardo Matz, Roberto Brondo, Roberto Martínez, Javier Esponda (*gay man at party*),

Zully Keith (*Perla*), María Cardinal (*friend of Gato & party guest*), Flor Trujillo, Joaquín Luján, Jorge Rubio, Vicente Álvarez, Luis Enrique Fernández, Jorge Cosío, Roberto Ballesteros, Arnaldo Coen

**Notes** after working on two films (*Refugiados en Madrid*, 1938, and *La noche de los Mayas*, 1939) in the late Thirties, Archibaldo Burns turned away from the film industry for two decades, concentrating instead on writing. In the late 1950s and early 1960s he made several short films, and in 1967 directed his first feature, *Juego de mentiras*, based on a short story by Elena Garro. Although this won a prize in the Second Experimental Film Contest, it wasn't commercially released until 1972 (as *La venganza de la criada*). Burns followed with *Juan Pérez Jolote* (1973), another literary adaptation (of a book by Ricardo Pozas). Both of these films had indigenous protagonists, but the director jettisoned this theme with his first "commercial" feature, *El reventón* (his final movie, *Oficio de tinieblas*, dealt with the topic of relations between indigenous people and the white-dominated society in which they live).

*El reventón* is vaguely about hedonistic young people having sex, looking for sex, dancing to loud music, drinking, and using drugs. There's not much plot and no particular point of view. It's all very tedious and boring, despite the loud music and frequent nudity (male and female, although there's no full-frontal male nudity). *El*



improved the final result.

Don Rodrigo confiscates his lazy son Gato's credit cards and automobile, also indicating he wants the young man to move out of the family mansion. Gato instead steals some cash from his sleeping mother's purse, then wanders off for a day or two of random womanising. He convinces his virginal girlfriend Laura to have sex in a park, visits an apartment where he sees two female friends in bed together and (presumably) joins them, then visits Acapulco with his older, married lover Adriana. However, he immediately drives back to Mexico City (in Adriana's auto) to wish Laura a happy birthday. The irked Adriana picks up a couple of young men, gets drunk in a nightclub, then goes with them to her hotel and (perhaps) has sex with them. [She later tells Gato "they raped me and I liked it," but in the film itself we only see the 4 or 5 men undress her on the bed, then Gato shows up and everyone hastily departs.] Gato runs into Lilian, who invites him to a party at her home in the capital. Adriana and Gato leave Acapulco, and Adriana makes it clear (sort of) that her

*reventón* was reportedly censored before release (since it was produced by a government-run company, this wasn't hard to do), but it is difficult to imagine that the cut footage contained material that would have significantly

relationship with him is at an end; unfortunately for her, she is then told by her wealthy, middle-aged husband that he loves someone else and wants a divorce.

The guest list at Lilian's wild party includes Laura (seen in bed with another man), at least one of the women from the apartment, Adriana, the horny guys from Acapulco, a flaming gay stereotype, a jealous lesbian, an artist, a depressed guy, and so on. For some reason, Gato shows up wearing a large cat-mask (even though no one else is wearing a costume of any sort--to be fair, the mask is awesome). He's drunk and depressed and eventually takes a pistol and shoots his reflection in a mirror. To cheer him up (I guess), some of the guests (including a couple of the horny guys from Acapulco and Adriana) inform Gato that they're planning to kidnap a rich person. Gato suggests his own father.



Don Rodrigo is carjacked and he (and his chauffeur) are held hostage in an old house. Gato is with his mother at their house when she receives the ransom demand. Gato picks up the cash at a bank and pays off his accomplices. Don Rodrigo is released and goes home; his wife says Gato was very brave but the older man stares at his son with hostility (there's no suggestion that he knows Gato was involved in the abduction, he apparently just doesn't like him). Gato departs but is arrested as soon as he reaches the street, and put in a police van with the rest of the "gang." Meanwhile, don Rodrigo suffers a heart attack and tumbles down the staircase of his palatial home.

The "kidnap" plot doesn't occur until late in the film (as does the eponymous "wild party"), with most of the previous footage being devoted to Gato's aimless wandering and almost pathological serial womanising. But the major problem with *El reventón* isn't the sketchy plot, it's the manner in which Burns deliberately prolongs almost every single scene far longer than necessary.



One of the most egregious examples occurs when Adriana wanders into an art gallery (?) after Gato has suddenly deserted her in Acapulco. The walls are covered with giant murals, and the only other people in the room are two young men, who immediately begin barking at her like dogs?! (One assumes this somehow comes from the original novel, titled "When the Dogs Travel to Cuernavaca.") She inexplicably finds this amusing rather than shocking or stupid or frightening.



They try to explain the meaning of one of the murals to her, first by goose-stepping across the room and giving the fascist salute, then by having an actual “dog fight” (literally, they get on the floor and imitate dogs fighting), which (eventually) makes her laugh. This scene feels as if it goes on forever. Another, equally protracted but slightly more varied sequence is the actual *reventón*, which consists of repeated shots of people dancing to discordant jazz music, along with random scenes of people talking or smoking dope or sitting on the toilet while spraying a shirtless man with a hand-held shower attachment as two fully dressed people sit in the bathtub.

These are not isolated examples. However, it’s clear



this was intentional on the director’s part (as opposed to just incompetence), because a scene like don Rodrigo’s abduction is staged, shot, and edited briskly (although after the car-jacking, it takes forever for the cars and motorcycle involved to reach their hideout—so

long, in fact, that the kidnapers are shown falling asleep during the ride!).

Because so little actually happens during *El reventón*, reducing these sequences to conventional length and pacing would result in a running time of about 45 minutes rather than 90, but padding out the movie to feature-length probably wasn’t the filmmaker’s intention: Burns just liked long sequences, apparently. Even in the context of arty Seventies cinema, *El reventón* feels odd, because there is very little attempt to be overtly profound: there aren’t any long, philosophical discussions—some people make strange pronouncements which could be construed as philosophical, but these are all quite brief and aren’t elaborated upon—nor sequences which are deliberately artistic and abstract (in fact, there is one scene in which a pretentious artist splashes paint on hanging sheets of plastic, then slashes them, all the while spouting ridiculous non-sequiturs).

The cast and crew of *El reventón* are a mix of industry professionals and newcomers. Gato Barbieri was a popular jazz performer and composer, born in Argentina, whose work in the cinema was relatively sparse (he had done the score for *Last Tango in Paris*, 1972, perhaps his best-known film work): his music for *El reventón* is modern jazz, loud, sometimes experiment and atonal, but not especially memorable. The protagonist of the picture is played by Juan David Burns, the director’s son, who (aside from the fact that he had no problem appearing fully nude in several scenes) turns in a mostly flat, affectless performance. [He subsequently went on to have a substantial career as a television producer.] Despite the male-sounding name, “Lucifer de los Santos” is an actress

(whose professional name was reportedly chosen by Archibaldo Burns)—she’s adequate. Familiar faces in the cast include top-billed Ana Luisa Peluffo, who has a fair amount of footage and appears fully nude for part of it, Tito Novaro (one scene), Fernando Balzaretti (the most prominent of the “dog guys,” but not personalised or even given a character name), and Maria Cardinal (fully nude in one scene, topless in part of the *reventón* sequence). Most of the supporting players do well enough in roles which don’t require much effort.

Production values are adequate, with virtually the entire film having been shot on actual locations. The cinematography is satisfactory without deviating from a standard, flat, high-key no-style style.



## MOVIES BASED ON MEXICAN PLAYS, SHOT IN GUATEMALA

**Sangre derramada** [Spilled Blood] (Peligatex, 1973) *Assoc Prod*: Enrique Vidal H[errera], Sally de Perete; *Dir-Scr*: Rafael Portillo; *Orig. Play*: Wilberto Cantón (“Nosotros somos Dios”); *Photo*: Marcelo López; *Music*: Raúl Lavista; *Asst Dir*: Ralph E. Portillo; *Film Ed*: Sigfrido García; *Asst Camera*: Lizardo Martínez; *Makeup*: Ernestina Quintero; *Sound Engin*: Salvador Topete; Eastmancolor

**Cast**: Irma Lozano (*Diana*), Fernando Larrañaga (*Octavio*), Victor Junco (*don Justo Álvarez del Prado*), Alicia Encinas (*Laura*), María Martín (*Clara*), Augusto Palma (*Carlos*), Jorge Russek (*Col. Páez*), Francisco Almorza, Luis Domingo (*Capt. Aguirre*), María Teresa Martínez, Spencer Vanus, Vicky Barbosa, René García, Antonio Soto



**Notes**: although the title and advertising are rather exploitative, *Sangre derramada* is actually a serious drama (with a few, very brief, exploitative moments). Based on the 1962 play “Nosotros Somos Dios” by Yucatecan author Wilberto Cantón, the film was shot in Antigua, Guatemala, probably for economic reasons. [Antigua is a “colonial”-era city with numerous old buildings, but there were undoubtedly many places in Mexico which could have supplied similarly appropriate settings.]

The film’s plot follows the play fairly closely, omitting one negligible character (the youngest son of the family)

and “opening up” the action in several sequences (the opening scene of soldiers pursuing demonstrators, the



torture scenes, and the *ley fuga* execution scene).

In 1913 Mexico, Victoriano Huerta is president. His soldiers, under the command of Col. Páez, break up a student demonstration, killing some protestors

and arresting others, including Diana and her brother. Octavio barely escapes. Octavio is in love with Laura, the daughter of don Justo, a member of Huerta’s cabinet. Laura’s brother Carlos is Diana’s boyfriend. Laura and Carlos ask their father to intervene to save Diana and the other detainees; instead, without their knowledge, he orders Páez to torture the prisoners and learn the names of their leaders. Diana’s brother has his eyes gouged out and Diana is gang-raped by soldiers, but no one talks. Carlos visits the prison and discovers what has occurred: he overhears his father instructing Páez to apply the *ley fuga* (the rebels will be “shot trying to escape”). This massacre is carried out.

Octavio asks Laura to elope with him, but Laura’s mother Clara convinces them to talk to don Justo first. At the same time, Col. Páez arrives with news that Carlos has been arrested as a revolutionary activist; he’s in Páez’s



custody because it would embarrass the government if it became known that a member of the cabinet had a son involved in the rebellion.

Don Justo tells Páez to escort Octavio and

Carlos to Puebla and release them unharmed. He says if Octavio and Laura really love each other, they can be reunited later.

Time passes. Huerta has been deposed. Venustiano Carranza is Mexico’s new leader. Octavio is a government official, and Carlos is in the military. Octavio and Laura are married and expecting a child. Don Justo is a fugitive, accused of fomenting counter-revolution. He returns to his home briefly, and asks for a safe-conduct out of the city from Octavio, as payback for sparing the younger man’s life earlier. Carlos protests, still bitter against his father’s previous activities and Justo’s refusal to agree to abstain from counter-revolutionary activity if spared, but eventually agrees not to reveal his father’s presence.

However, don Justo decides his family would be adversely affected by his future political actions—Octavio and Carlos are already under suspicion because of their association with him—so he makes an anonymous call to

the military police. When he emerges from the house they are waiting for him; he pulls a pistol and is shot to death.

*Sangre derramada* is less talky than some adaptations of stage plays. There are a few obvious stage-derived conversations, but they’re shot and edited so as not to be boring or tedious. Rafael Portillo (whose son Ralph served as assistant director) seems like



an odd choice to handle a period drama, since his career was mostly spent making genre and exploitation films, but his work is satisfactory here. The exploitative elements are minor, and chiefly limited to the torture scenes, but even these are relatively tasteful (we do see Col. Páez holding two eyeballs in his hands, and the bloody eye sockets of his victim, but that’s the worst of it). Diana’s rape is not shown in a prurient manner at all, and she is only depicted nude afterwards, lying face-down on the floor (Carlos covers her with his jacket): this is much more realistic than some films, which show rape victims more or less fully clothed after the assault, and yet it doesn’t titillate the audience.

The performances are all good. The billing is rather skewed, since Víctor Junco is in many ways the film’s protagonist and Irma Lozano appears in only a handful of scenes (getting captured, getting raped, getting shot, and several romantic flashback montages with Carlos), so logically Junco should be credited first. Yucatán native



Augusto Palma gets an “introducing” credit (apparently he’d previously worked as an “actor” in *fotonovelas*) but doesn’t seem to have done much else in his career. Fernando Larrañaga was a Peruvian actor who emigrated to Mexico in the ‘70s (where he is still active), while María Martín was Spanish, so this is a “typical” pan-Latin Mexican movie cast (ironically—given where the film was shot—the most prominent Guatemalan performer here is Luis Domingo Valladares, who has a solid but brief supporting role).

Production values are adequate. It’s not known if the interiors were all shot on real locations or if some sets were created, but there are a few lighting issues, and at times it almost seems as if cinematographer Marcelo López is using a very mild fisheye lens, since the interiors feel very crowded. There is a neat, if obvious, aspect to the decor: a portrait of Huerta is prominent in various



locations during the first section of the film, whereas in the latter part this has been replaced by a painting of Carranza.

The budgetary limitations might perhaps have contributed to the very small “demonstration” seen in the



opening sequence (maybe a dozen people, and half a dozen soldiers?), the automobiles used by don Justo and Octavio don't look like 1913-era cars (I'm not an expert, however), and I'm slightly suspicious

about the seemingly too-modern electric lights in don Justo's home (again, not an expert), but generally there aren't too many anachronisms or production faults. The transition between the Huerta and Carranza sections is achieved through a grainy stock-footage montage, which is aesthetically and dramatically acceptable.

Overall, *Sangre derramada* is solid dramatic film with a good script and performances, and is paced effectively. The political content is mild—the film (and presumably, the play) deals with moral decisions made by different members of a family, and it's almost irrelevant that in this case the decisions are specifically in reference to the Mexican Revolution.



## Derecho de asilo (*Detrás de esa puerta*) [Right of Asylum (Behind That Door)] (Panamerican



Films, 1973)  
Prod-Dir-  
Scr: Manuel Zeceña Diéguez;  
Orig. Play: Federico Inclán  
(“*Detrás de esa puerta*”);  
Photo: J.M. Herrera;

*Musical Theme:* Manlio & D'Esposito (“Anema e core”);  
*Prod Chief:* Salvador Zeceña; *Asst Dir:* Damián Acosta;  
*Film Ed:* Alfredo Rosas Priego; *Asst Ed:* Saúl Aupart;  
*Camera Op:* Eduardo Danel, Amado Ambris; *Makeup:* Antonio Castañeda; *Re-rec:* Salvador Topete; *Sound Ed:* Abraham Cruz

**Cast:** Rossano Brazzi (*Francisco Lara*), Flor Procuna (*Eloísa*), Cameron Mitchell (*MacPherson*), Ricardo Blume (*Armando Barreiro*), Emilio “Indio” Fernández (*Gen. Salino*), John Kelly (*Goodrich, U.S. Ambassador*), Raúl Ferrer (*Mauricio Rodríguez*), José Yedra (*Major Jiménez*), Carhilllos (*Ortega*), L[uis] Domingo Valladares (*Ramón Hernández García*), Dick Smith (*Minister of Exterior Relations*), Alfonso Milia [sic] (*General Villagrán*)

“*Rositas*”), Janine [Maldonado?] (*female revolutionary?*), Damián Acosta, Marion Inclán, Carlos Valdés, Claudio Lanusa [sic], Hugo Sánchez, M.R. Álvarez, ?Jorge Arvizu (*dubs Cameron Mitchell*)

**Notes:** Manuel Zeceña Diéguez produced more than a dozen films in the 1960s and 1970s, most of them shot outside of Mexico in his native Guatemala (although some included footage filmed in Venezuela, Spain, the USA, and El Salvador). He also wrote and directed a significant number of these pictures, and his wife Flor Procuna starred in three of them. In 1977, Zeceña Diéguez produced and directed the obscure *The Hughes Mystery* in Hollywood, featuring Broderick Crawford, José Ferrer, and Cameron Mitchell, apparently his last project.

*Derecho de asilo*—also released as *Detrás de esa puerta*, which sounds more like a mystery than a political drama and perhaps sold better to audiences—was one of Zeceña Diéguez's more “serious” films (which otherwise tended towards romantic melodrama and comedy) and is in fact fairly well-made and interesting. It's an adaptation of “*Detrás de esa puerta*,” a play by Federico S. Inclán. Zeceña Diéguez had adapted Inclán twice before, *Una mujer para los sábados* and *El deseo llega de noche*.

There are a few minor flaws. The dialogue seems to have been entirely post-dubbed, which gives the film a distinctive sound. Cameron Mitchell's voice sounds (to me) a lot like Jorge Arvizu did the dubbing, and the lip movements aren't always synched with the dialogue (I'm still not sure if Mitchell was speaking Spanish on set or not). Rossano Brazzi, on the other hand, appears to have spoken his lines in Spanish, since the dubbing (whether it was his voice or not) is spot-on. Emilio Fernández was almost always dubbed by someone else (often Narciso Busquets) in his later acting roles, but I can't identify the voice artist here.

Another minor annoyance is the over-use of the “theme” music, a popular Italian song entitled “Anema e core” (apparently 3 different sets of English lyrics were written and several of them became hits in the USA in the Fifties and early Sixties). The version heard over the credits is a jaunty instrumental—not exactly appropriate for the suspense/action on the screen—and then the tune reappears every few minutes (in various permutations) for the first half of the film! It is as if Zeceña Diéguez bought the rights to this one song and decided it alone would represent the music “score” of his movie. Later, fortunately, a little bit of different music is heard, although “Anema e core” crops up again at the very end.

*Derecho de asilo* is set in an unidentified Latin American country, and most of the action occurs in the embassy of a different, unidentified country. We can assume the host nation is Guatemala and the embassy is that of Mexico (in fact, a printed/spoken epilogue congratulates Mexico for its support of the right of asylum), but the actual names aren't ever used (although the USA is named). A flag of the second country is shown twice during the film: the first time, it is green, white, and

red (the colours of the Mexican flag), but lacks the eagle-and-serpent motif in the center (white) section. Later, as the ambassador drives to the airport, he fastens a flag to the roof of his car, and this one is clearly blue, white, and red (resembling the French flag). Emilio García Riera, in his *Historia documental del cine mexicano*, suggested poor photographic quality for the discrepancy—however, the copy screened on television is not bad at all and the colour is definitely different in the two scenes.

Armando Barreiro and Mauricio Rodríguez assassinate retired General Villagrán (called “Rositas” because he loves roses) on the street, then flee on a motorcycle. Mauricio switches to a car, is pursued by the police, and is killed in a fiery crash. Armando, picked up by his fellow



revolutionaries, pole vaults (!) over the back wall of an embassy, and asks for political asylum. The ambassador is Francisco Lara, a staunch advocate of the right to asylum; he is married to Eloísa, a native of

the country where the film takes place. Her father and uncle were killed by the repressive government of which Villagrán was once a part; she is also an “old acquaintance” (wink, wink) of Armando. General Salino, head of the security forces, threatens to storm the embassy unless Armando is ejected. Lara visits the country’s Minister of Foreign Relations and asks for a safe conduct for Armando; he’s told it might take some time to obtain this document. The U.S. ambassador urges Lara to protect his wife and employees by forcing Armando to leave, but Lara refuses. With an attack by Salino’s men imminent, Lara’s friend, journalist MacPherson, calls the U.S. embassy and says he’s written an exposé of the American ambassador’s dealings with Salino and the local government, and this will be printed if he (MacPherson) is killed in an assault on the embassy. Salino’s men back down, and Lara is given the safe conduct pass for Armando. He personally drives Armando to the airport, where they are surprised to see Eloísa waiting. However, she is just there to support her husband, and tells him she is pregnant with his child. Armando congratulates them and his plane departs. However, Lara and Eloísa are shot by a sniper as they watch the aircraft leave. The film ends with the government blaming the rebels for the assassination and the rebels blaming the government for the killings.

*Derecho de asilo* doesn’t flaunt its stage origins, aside from the familiar format of “various people successively visit a fixed location” (in this case, the embassy). However, Zeceña Diéguez even breaks up the embassy scenes into different interior and exterior locations, so not

every dialogue scene takes place in one spot. The opening sequences of the assassination and Armando and Mauricio’s attempted escapes are obviously additions to the screenplay that weren’t in the play, and Ambassador Lara also leaves the embassy on two occasions to visit government offices, which gives us something different to look at as well. Since I’m unfamiliar with the original work, I don’t know how the final sequence was



constructed on the stage, but the film’s “trip to the airport” sequence is quite suspenseful. The double-twist regarding Eloísa and Armando is effective (it seems as if she’s going to leave Lara and fly off with Armando, but Armando explains that they weren’t really lovers earlier, she just had a teenage crush on him), and the killing of Lara and Eloísa comes as a surprise (sorry if I spoiled it for you).

The assassination of Lara and Eloísa is carried out by a young woman, a member of Armando’s revolutionary group, previously seen aiming a sniper rifle at a member of the police force outside the embassy. It’s unclear why she killed the ambassador and his wife, except as a provocation so Salino’s police force (and by extension, the government) will be blamed. [As an aside, it should be noted that wearing a very short mini-skirt is not perhaps advisable if you’re going to carry out a political assassination, since in this scene the young woman exposes a bit more of herself than one would expect!).

The performances are overall very good. Italian actor Rossano Brazzi (best known in the USA for his role in *South Pacific*, 1958) is solid as the ambassador and Flor Procuna is fine as his wife. Ricardo Blume is a Peruvian actor who had a brief fling as a leading man in Mexican cinema in the early ‘70s but has since made his mark on television and in films in more mature roles. He’s alright here, although after the opening sequences he doesn’t take center stage very often. Cameron Mitchell, wearing oversized eyeglasses and smoking a pipe, overacts a bit (but not as much as usual), while familiar screen *gringo* John Kelly has a substantial role as the U.S. ambassador. Emilio Fernández is appropriately brusque and sinister as the head of the secret police. Also of note is Carlos Bravo y Fernández “Carhilllos,” a veteran Mexican film journalist and bit player, who has a larger than usual role as the ambassador’s secretary.



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