

The Mexican Film Bulletin

Volume 24 Number 2

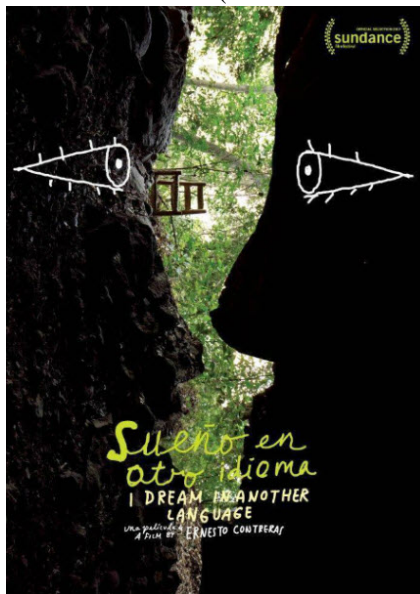
June 2018

2018 Ariel Awards

The 60th Ariel Awards ceremony was held in the Palacio de Bellas Artes in Mexico City on 5 June 2018. *Sueño en otro idioma* won 6 Arieles, including Best Film. *La región salvaje* received 5 awards, including Best Director for Amat Escalante. Lifetime achievement Arieles de Oro went to actress Queta Lavat, whose career dates back to the 1940s, and cinematographer Toni Kuhn.

2018 Arieles (Winners in Bold)

Best Film: *Batallas íntimas* (dir. Lucía Gajá); *La libertad del Diablo* (dir. Everardo González); *La región salvaje* (dir. Amat Escalante); *Sueño en otro idioma* (dir. Ernesto Contreras); *Tiempo compartido* (dir. Sebastián Hofmann).



Best
Direction: Lucía Gajá, *Batallas íntimas*; Everardo González, *La libertad del Diablo*; Amat Escalante, *La región salvaje*;

Natalia Beristáin, *Los adioses*; Issa López, *Vuelven*.

Best Actor: Leonardo Alonso, *El vigilante*; Daniel Giménez Cacho, *Los adioses*; Gabino Rodríguez, *Los crímenes de Mar del Norte*; Humberto Busto, *Oso polar*; **Eligio Meléndez** *Sueño en otro idioma*.

Best Actress: **Karina Gidi**, *Los adioses*; Ángeles Cruz, *Tamara y la Catarina*; Angelina Peláez, *Tamara y la Catarina*; Cassandra Ciangherotti, *Tiempo compartido*; Arcelia Ramírez, *Verónica*.

Best Co-Starring Actress: Simone Bucio, *La región salvaje*; Joanna Larequi, *Las hijas de Abril*; Tessa Ia, *Los adioses*; **Verónica Toussaint**, *Oso polar*; Fátima Molina, *Sueño en otro idioma*.

Best Co-Starring Actor: Emilio Echevarría, *El elegido*; Pedro de Tavira, *Los adioses*; Hoze Meléndez, *Sueño en*

otro idioma; Juan Pablo de Santiago, *Sueño en otro idioma*; **Miguel Rodarte**, *Tiempo compartido*.

Best Supporting Actor: Héctor Holten, *El vigilante*; Hernán Mendoza, *Las hijas de Abril*; Norman Delgadillo, *Los crímenes de Mar del Norte*; **Andrés Almeida**, *Tiempo compartido*; Tenoch Huerta *Vuelven*.

Best Supporting Actress: **Bernarda Trueba**, *La región salvaje*; Vico Escorcía, *Los crímenes de Mar del Norte*; Norma Angélica, *Sueño en otro idioma*; Mónica Miguel, *Sueño en otro idioma*; Mercedes Pascual, *Tamara y la Catarina*.

Best New Actress: Macarena Arias, *Alba*; Ruth Ramos, *La región salvaje*; **Ana Valeria Becerril**, *Las hijas de Abril*; Nicolasa Ortiz Monasterio, *Sueño en otro idioma*; Paola Lara, *Vuelven*.

Best New Actor: Luis Amaya Rodríguez, *Ayúdame a pasar la noche*; Jesús Meza, *La región salvaje*; Máximo Hollander, *Los herederos*; Luis de la Rosa, *Mientras el lobo no está*; **Juan Ramón López**, *Vuelven*.

Best Original Screenplay: Everardo González, Diego Enrique Osorno (*La libertad del Diablo*); Amat Escalante, Gibrán Portela (*La región salvaje*), **Carlos Contreras** (*Sueño en otro idioma*); Sebastián Hofmann, Julio Chavezmontes (*Tiempo compartido*); Issa López (*Vuelven*).

Best Cinematography: Guillermo Granillo (*El elegido*); Guillermo Granillo & Bogumil Godfrejów (*La habitación*); María José Secco (*La libertad del Diablo*); Dariela Ludlow (*Los adioses*); **Tonatiuh Martínez** (*Sueño en otro idioma*).

Best Editing: Francisco X. Rivera, Lucía Gajá, Mariana Rodríguez (*Batallas íntimas*); Paloma López Carrillo (*La libertad del Diablo*); **Fernanda de la Peza**, **Jacob Secher Schulsinger** (*La región salvaje*); Valentina Leduc (*Plaza de la soledad*); Joaquim Martí (*Vuelven*).

Best Sound: Antonio Diego, Jorge Juárez, Omar Juárez, Tomasz Duksza (*La habitación*); Matías Barberis, Bernat Fortiana, Pablo Tamez, Jaime Baksht, Michelle Couttolenc (*La libertad del Diablo*); Raúl Locatelli, Sergio Díaz, Vincent Arnardi (*La región salvaje*); **Enrique Greiner**, **Pablo Tamez**, **Raymundo Ballesteros** (*Sueño en otro idioma*); Emilio Cortés, Martín Hernández, Alejandro Quevedo, Jaime Baksht, Michelle Couttolenc (*Vuelven*).

Best Original Music: Jacobo Lieberman, Leonardo Heiblum (*Batallas íntimas*); Quincas Moreira (*La libertad del Diablo*); Guro Moe (*La región salvaje*); Jacobo

Lieberman, Leonardo Heiblum (*Plaza de la soledad*);

Andrés Sánchez Maher (*Sueño en otro idioma*)

Best Production Design: [tie] **Antonio Muñozhiero** (*El elegido*); **Carlos Jacques** (*La habitación*); Carlos Jacques (*Los adioses*); Bárbara Enríquez (*Sueño en otro idioma*); Ana Solares (*Vuelven*)

Best Costumes: Mercè Paloma (*El elegido*); **Mariestela Fernández, Gabriela Diaque** (*La habitación*); Anna Terrazas (*Los adioses*); Fernanda Vélez (*Los crímenes de Mar del Norte*); Gabriela Fernández (*Sueño en otro idioma*)

Best Makeup: Maru Errando, Carlos Sánchez (*El elegido*); Carlos Sánchez, Itzel Peña (*La habitación*); Nury Alamo (*Los crímenes de Mar del Norte*); Maripaz Robles (*Sueño en otro idioma*); **Adam Zoller** (*Vuelven*)

Best Special FX: Lluís Rivera, Alejandro Vázquez (*El elegido*); Arturo Godínez (*La habitación*); **José Manuel Martínez** (*La región salvaje*); Yoshiro Hernández (*Purasangre*); Alejandro Vázquez (*Sueño en otro idioma*)

Best Visual FX: Lluís Castells (*El elegido*); Radoslaw Rekita (*La habitación*); **Peter Hjorth** (*La región salvaje*); Raúl Prado (*Mientras el lobo no está*); Raúl Prado, Juan Carlos Lepe, Edgar Piña (*Vuelven*)

Best First Work: Ayúdame a pasar la noche, José Ramón Chávez; **El vigilante, Diego Ros**; *Los años azules*, Sofía Gómez Córdova; *Mientras el lobo no está*, Joseph Hemsani; *Plaza de la Soledad*, Maya Goded.

Best Feature Documentary: *Batallas íntimas*, Lucía Gajá; *El maíz en los tiempos de guerra*, Alberto Cortés; **La libertad del Diablo, Everardo González**; *Plaza de la Soledad*, Maya Goded; *Un exilio: película familiar*, Juan Francisco Urrusti.

Best Fictional Short: *Chambelán*, Fabián León; *La Ramona*, Antonio de Jesús Sánchez; *Libre de culpa*, Santiago Arriaga y Mariana Arriaga; *Mamartuile*, Alejandro Saevich; **Oasis, Alejandro Zuno**.

Best Documentary Short: *Artemio*, Sandra Luz López; *Juan Perros*, Rodrigo Ímaz; **La muñeca tetona, Diego Enrique Osorno y Alexandro Aldrete**; *Relato familiar*, Sumie García; *Tecuani, hombre jaguar*, Isis Alejandra Ahumada y Nelson Omar Aldape.

Best Animated Short: *Amor, nuestra prisión*, Carolina Corral; **Cerulia, Sofía Carrillo**; *Nos faltan*, Lucía Gajá y Emilio Ramos; *Poliangular*, Alexandra Castellanos; *Última estación*, Héctor Dávila.

Best Iberoamerican Film: *Aquarius* (Brasil), Kleber Mendonça Filho; *La mujer del animal* (Colombia), Víctor Gaviria; *Últimos días en la Habana* (Cuba), Fernando Pérez; **Una mujer fantástica (Chile), Sebastián Lelio**; *Zama* (Argentina), Lucrecia Martel.

Ariel de Oro: Queta Lavat (actress), Toni Kuhn (cinematographer).



Mexican Cinema in 2018

In an article in the newspaper *Crónica de Hoy* (4 June 2018), Ulises Castañeda reviewed the status of the Mexican film industry, based on information provided by IMCINE and CANACINE.

175 feature films (90 with partial government funding) were produced in Mexico in 2017, an increase over 2016's total of 162. 85 of these movies were released theatrically in Mexico (down from 90 in 2016). The total number of spectators for Mexican cinema in Mexico dropped from 30.5 million (2016) to 21.5 million (2017).

Of every 100 features shown in Mexico, 21 are Mexican and 79 are foreign productions. Less than 10% of the total box-office receipts in Mexico went to Mexican films.

The future is uncertain, but not necessarily bleak. In the first quarter of 2018, Mexican cinema was very successful, with 15% of the total attendance going to productions of the *cine nacional*, the highest percentage in this period in 30 years, with 3 features selling more than 2 million tickets (the comedies *La boda de Valentina* and *Una mujer sin filtro*, and the animated *La leyenda del Charro Negro*).



Diosas de Plata 2018

The 47th Diosas de Plata ceremony took place on 25 April 2018 in the Teatro Metropolitano in Mexico City.

These awards are sponsored by PECIME, the Mexican film journalists' association. Special awards and recognition were given to actress Christiane Martel and director Guillermo del Toro.

There was surprisingly little overlap between the films and people recognised by the Diosas de Plata and the Arieles. The top winners were the horror film *Vuelven* and the comedy *Me gusta pero me asusta*, which each took home 3 prizes.

Best Film:

Vuelven

Acapulco la vida va

La carga

Las hijas de Abril

Los crímenes de Mar del Norte

Mientras el lobo no está

Verónica



THE MEXICAN FILM BULLETIN VOL. 24 NO. 2 June 2018

Best Direction:

Issa López (*Vuelven*)

Alfonso Serrano Maturino (*Acapulco la vida va*)
Alan Jonsson Gavica (*La carga*)
Michel Franco (*Las hijas de Abril*)
José Buil (*Los crímenes de Mar del Norte*)
Joseph Hemsani (*Mientras el lobo no está*)
Carlos Algara y Alejandro Martínez Beltrán (*Verónica*)

Best Actor

Patricio Castillo (*Acapulco la vida va*)

Alejandro Suárez (*Acapulco la vida va*)
Sergio de Bustamante (*Acapulco la vida va*)
Horacio García Rojas (*La carga*)
Gabino Rodríguez (*Los crímenes de Mar del Norte*)
Mauricio García Lozano (*Mientras el lobo no está*)

Best Actress

Arcelia Ramírez (*Verónica*)

Ana Brenda Contreras (*El que busca encuentra*)
Sofía Espinosa (*Los crímenes de Mar del Norte*)
Karla Souza (*Todos queremos a alguien*)
Martha Higareda (*Vive por mí*)

Best Co-Starring Actor

Héctor Kotsifakis (*Me gusta pero me asusta*)

Eduardo España (*¿Cómo matar a un esposo muerto?*)
Gerardo Taracena (*La carga*)
Norman Delgadillo (*Los crímenes de Mar del Norte*)
Alejandro Camacho (*Todos queremos a alguien*)

Best Co-Starring Actress

Vico Escorcia (*Los crímenes de Mar del Norte*)

Alisarine Ducolomb (*La habitación, capítulo La vigilia*)
Patricia Bernal (*Todos queremos a alguien*)
Olga Segura (*Verónica*)
Tiaré Scanda (*Vive por mí*)

Best New Actor

Alejandro Speitzer (*Me gusta pero me asusta*)

Enrique Arrizón (*Las hijas de Abril*)
Jorge Caballero (*Me gusta pero me asusta*)

Best New Actress

Minnie West (*Me gusta pero me asusta*)

Ana Valeria Becerril (*Las hijas de Abril*)
Miranda Kay (*Mientras el lobo no está*)

Best Supporting Actor

Hernán Mendoza (*Las hijas de Abril*)

Bob Isaacs (*Acapulco la vida va*)
Harold Torres (*La carga*)
Alberto Estrella (*Los crímenes de Mar del Norte*)
Joaquín Cosío (*Me gusta pero me asusta*)
Tenoch Huerta (*Vuelven*)

Best Supporting Actress

Luz María Jerez (*Acapulco la vida va*)

Anabel Ferreira (*Cuando los hijos regresan*)
Julieta Egurrola (*El que busca encuentra*)
Joanna Larequi (*Las hijas de Abril*)

Best Music Score

Leoncio Lara Bon (*La carga*)

Rodrigo Dávila (*Camino a Marte*)
Eduardo Gamboa (*Los crímenes de Mar del Norte*)
Daniel Wohl (*Verónica*)
Vince Pope (*Vuelven*)

Best First Work

***Mientras el lobo no está* (Joseph Hemsani)**

Acapulco la vida va (Alfonso Serrano Maturino)
Cometa, él su perro y su mundo (Leonardo Arturo)
La habitación, capítulo La pesadilla (Daniel Giménez Cacho)
Verónica (Carlos Algara y Alejandro Martínez Beltrán)

Best Photography

Emiliano Chaparro (*La carga*)

Claudio Rocha (*Los crímenes de Mar del Norte*)
Miguel Ángel González Ávila (*Verónica*)
Juan José Saravia (*Vuelven*)

Best Editing

José Buil y Carlos Espinosa (*Los crímenes de Mar del Norte*)

Roberto Bolado (*Acapulco la vida va*)
Jorge Márquez (*La carga*)
Jorge Weisz y Michel Franco (*Las hijas de Abril*)
Jorge Weisz (*Mientras el lobo no está*)
Joaquín Martí Marques (*Vuelven*)

Best Screenplay

Michel Franco (*Las hijas de Abril*)

Jorge Patiño (*Acapulco la vida va*)
Alan Jonsson Gavica (*La carga*)
José Buil (*Los crímenes de Mar del Norte*)
Joseph Hemsani y Abe Rosenberg (*Mientras el lobo no está*)
Carlos Algara y Tomás Nepomuceno (*Verónica*)
Issa López (*Vuelven*)

Best Child Actor

Luyani Carazo (*Mientras el lobo no está*)

Paola Lara (*Vuelven*)
Luis de la Rosa (*Mientras el lobo no está*)
Juan Ramón López (*Vuelven*)

Best Documentary

***Guerrero* (Ludovic Bonleux)**

Batallas íntimas (Lucía Gajá)
El maíz en tiempos de guerra (Alberto Cortés)
La luz y la fuerza (Alejandra Islas)
No sucumbió la eternidad (Daniela Rea Gómez)

Best Short

***Getsemaní* (Carlos Trujano)**

Oasis (Alejandro Zuno)
Los ausentes (José Lomas Hervert)
Pañales para Melquiades (Gandhi Ramos)
Polvo de estrellas (Aldo Sotelo Lázaro)
Que vivan los novios (Montserrat Larqué)

Best Song

“Fantasmas” (*Camino a Marte* compositor: Jerónimo Hill, Jerónimo Quintana, Florencia Quinteros, Roderic Picard, intérprete: Celest

“Amigo” (*Cometa, él su perro y su mundo* composer: Ulises Emmanuel y J.J. Silva, performed by: Selma Cherem; “Lado a lado” (*Cometa, él su perro y su mundo* composer: Luis Ponce y Eduardo Cardoza, performed by: Luis P11 y EDCA; “Maldito miedo” (*Me gusta pero me asusta*): composer: Carlos Rivera, performed by: Carlos Rivera y Banda El Recodo

Obituaries

Gregorio Casal

José de Jesús Casillas Rábago, best known as actor Gregorio Casal, died in a Jalisco hospital on 25 April 2018; he was 82 years old. Casal made his screen debut in *Por mis pistolas* (1968), billed as Jesús Casillas. In a



relatively short period of time, the handsome actor became a popular performer in films and *telenovelas*, playing both sympathetic characters and villains.

Casal was born in San Miguel el Alto, Jalisco, in July 1935. He was one of seven siblings, at least three of whom also went

into the entertainment industry: director Jaime Casillas (who died in 2008), and actors Mario Casillas and Alejandro Rábago.

Casal--sometimes billed as Gregorio "Casals"--appeared as comic book hero Chanoc in two feature films (*Chanoc en las garras de las fieras* and *Chanoc contra el tigre y el vampiro*), and was paired with El Santo twice (*Santo contra los jinetes del terror* and *Anónimo mortal*). He also worked for up-scale directors like Felipe Cazals, Emilio Fernández, Alberto Isaac, José Estrada, Luis Alcoriza, and in several of his brother Jaime's movies. In the 1980s Casal appeared frequently as villains in action films such as *Asesino nocturno* and *Yako, cazador de malditos*. In the 1990s he worked mostly in *videohomes* and retired from acting in 2002. [Note: IMDB mistakenly credits him in "Violetta," a 2012 Argentine tv series, when it is actually another actor playing a character named "Gregorio Casal"]

Gregorio Casal co-directed *Mercenarios de la muerte* with Manuel Muñoz, and received solo directing credit for *Tetakawi* (*Aventuras en Sonora*) (both in 1982).



Fela Fábregas

Fela Fábregas, theatrical producer and the widow of actor Manuel Fábregas, died on 10 May 2018; she was 87 years old. Rafaela Sánchez married actor Manuel Fábregas (real name, Manuel Sánchez Navarro) in 1951, and they remained a couple until his death in 1996. Manuel Fábregas was from a theatrical family (his grandmother was actress Virginia Fábregas, his mother was actress Fanny Schiller and his father was actor Manuel Sánchez Navarro), and in addition to his acting career he became interested in stage and television production and

directing. Fela Fábregas was her husband's partner in these endeavours, helping found several Mexican theatres and an acting school. After her husband's death, Fela continued her activities in the theatrical world.

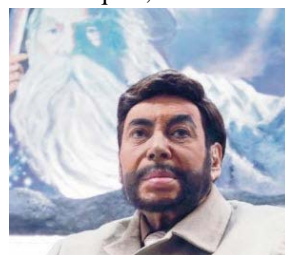
Manuel and Fela Fábregas had five children who survived to adulthood: actors Rafael Sánchez Navarro and Mónica Sánchez Navarro, as well as Manuel, Virginia and Martha Sánchez Navarro.



Esteban [Márquez] Mayo

Esteban Mayo, a popular astrologer in Mexico, died on 3 June 2018 in a Mexico City hospital; he was 87 years old. Mayo was born Esteban Márquez in the Distrito Federal in January 1927. His mother was Carmen Covarrubias, a writer and later a businesswoman.

Márquez, who studied medicine at UNAM but never



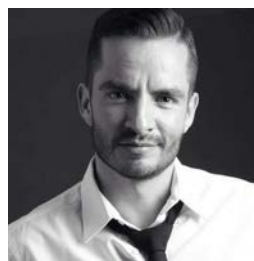
practiced, had a relatively brief acting career in Mexican cinema, working in a handful of films in the later 1940s and early 1950s--his most memorable role was in Luis Buñuel's *Subida al cielo*, in which he had the male lead.

[Some sources credit him as acting in *Los novios de mis hijas* in the 1960s and--as Esteban Mayo--in 1999's *Las pasiones de Sor Juana*, although the latter may be another person with the same name.]

Márquez also worked as a clothing designer, and took the name "Esteban Mayo" for this facet of his life. He is credited with costume design on *Claudia y el deseo* and *Tres noches de locura*. In the 1970s Mayo turned to astrology and appeared frequently on television and radio making predictions.



Juan Carlos Olivas



mini-series "El Chapo."

Actor Juan Carlos Olivas died on 26 April 2018; he had been suffering from cancer. Olivas appeared in at least two feature films--the science fiction film *2033* (2009) and *180°* (2010), but was best-known for his role in the 2017





Political Cinema



Mi candidato [My Candidate] (Prods. ARB*, 1937)

Dir: Chano Urueta; *Scr:* Emilio Gómez Muriel;
Dialog/Treatment: Chano Urueta; *Story:* Ernesto Cortázar;
Photo: Gabriel Figueroa; *Music:* Manuel Esperón; *Prod*
Chief: Luis Sánchez Tello; *Asst Dir:* Miguel M. Delgado;
Film Ed: Emilio Gómez Muriel; *Art Dir:* Jorge Fernández;
Makeup: Dolores R. de Frausto; *Sound:* José Rodríguez;
Sound Ed: Lupe Marino

*Adolfo Rivas Bustamante

Cast: Esther Fernández (*Rosario Cortina*), Pedro Armendáriz (*Pancho García*), Joaquín Pardavé (*Prócoro*), Elena D'Orgaz (*Emma Robles*), Domingo Soler (*Valentín Vaca del Corral*), Emma Roldán (*doña Eduviges*), Valentín Asperó (*Máximo Cienfuegos*), Rafael Icardo (*don Atiliano*), Hernán Vera (*judge*), Pedro Galindo (*director of PPP*), David Valles [sic] González (*police chief*), Gerardo del Castillo, Enrique Gil, Paco Martínez (*head of elections commission*), Manuel Esperón (*pianist*), José Ignacio Rocha (*don Filemón*), Manuel Pozos (*don José*)

Notes: A reasonably entertaining comedy-drama, *Mi candidato* has a thin plot but a surprisingly large dose of political commentary (albeit “safe” commentary: anti-*caciquismo* and pro-populist). The film was shot on location in a picturesque but unidentified Mexican town (the plot suggests it’s a silver-mining location like Taxco) with interiors done in a Mexico City studio. The locations are quite effective and are a good historical record of...whatever town it is.

Mi candidato veers from drama to comedy and back again. Domingo Soler as villain don Valentín is bumbling, pompous, vain and cowardly; he poses a threat chiefly due to his wealth, power, and the backing of the political establishment in Texcolapam, rather than because he’s a competent, evil schemer. His comeuppance is therefore mild: he’s merely defeated and humiliated at the climax. Joaquín Pardavé gets a disproportionate amount of screen time as a political operative and comic relief of sorts, and

even performs a musical number featuring a song he wrote (“Yo me llamo Robespierre”).

In contrast, romantic leads Pedro Armendáriz and Esther Fernández are rather colourless. Top-billed Fernández is meek and insipid, while Armendáriz as Pancho is basically a straight man: his character is reactive rather than active, as he’s manipulated both by



Valentín’s forces and the rival political party that nominates Pancho for the municipal presidency. Emma Roldán essentially repeats her sinister role from 1936’s *Allá en el Rancho Grande*, trying to coerce Esther Fernández into marrying a rich man.

In Texcolapam, out-going municipal president don Atiliano and the Partido Conservativa Progresista (PCP) choose the town’s wealthiest man, don Valentín, as their candidate for the presidency. Don Valentín has airs of aristocracy and ruthlessly exploits the town’s economy for his own benefit. Social climber Eduviges wants her niece Rosario to marry the much-older don Valentín, but Rosario prefers Pancho, who owns a silversmith shop. Pancho complains that don Valentín buys the whole output of the town’s silver mines, leaving no silver for Pancho and the other artisans.

Valentín’s election campaign is managed by Prócoro. After Máximo’s newspaper prints an article critical of



Valentín, Prócoro threatens to have the newspaper suppressed. Máximo agrees to run favourable coverage of

Valentín, and also prints campaign flyers free of charge.

The local mine workers, *campesinos*, and small businessmen unite to form the Partido Político Popular (PPP) and nominate Pancho as their candidate for municipal president. Máximo reverses his position and supports Pancho: his offices are trashed by the police and his newspaper prohibited as a result. Pancho is arrested but later freed. Valentín hires a woman from the city (i.e., a prostitute), Emma, to pose as Pancho’s wife, causing Rosario to break off her relationship with Pancho and agree to marry Valentín.

[This is the only major action Valentín takes during the film, and notably it is in the furtherance of his personal goals (marrying Rosario), rather than his political

ambitions. Otherwise, the PCP dirty tricks come from the party (and Prócoro), and are not Valentín's own ideas (although he supports them).]

Prócoro defects from Valentín's party and campaigns for Pancho, who wins the election. However, the police chief intervenes and declares Valentín the winner. Prócoro and the head of the election board appeal to the governor and obtain an *amparo* (a writ) nullifying the results and ordering a



new election. Pancho and his followers crash the wedding of Valentín and Rosario at the last second: Emma explains everything to Rosario and Rosario and Pancho reconcile.

Mi candidato runs about 80 minutes but feels longer because there simply isn't much plot and certainly no surprises. The production values are fine and the performances are solid. The most interesting aspect of the film is its depiction of the political process.

The film sets up a clear distinction between Valentín's PCP and Pancho's PPP: even the names are reflective of their ideological orientation, one "conservative" and the other "popular." Both PCP and PPP hold election-night celebrations: PCP invites "*personas conspicuas*" [eminent people] to a "*gran baile aristocrático*" [grand aristocratic



dance], while PPP says its sympathizers can attend a "*baile democrático*" [democratic dance] in their meeting hall. At PCP's event, well-dressed guests

waltz to a phonograph record, while PPP has a live band playing "typical" Mexican music for party members (including miners who apparently always wear their helmets, even in meetings, on the street, and at a dance!). Before he changes sides, Prócoro refers to the PPP as "socialists" and says their political platform promotes "destructive anarchism."

Mi candidato is careful to suggest that corrupt politics is limited to the local level--the state governor agrees with Prócoro's allegation that Valentín's party has stolen the election, so he justifiably nullifies the results and orders a new

los personajes
y hechos de esta película
son ficticios y no tienen
relación alguna
con la vida
política del
país.

election. In Texcolapam, the police chief is in the pay of PCP: he arrests Pancho, he and his men wreck Máximo's newspaper offices then ban the paper's publication, and when an angry crowd approaches the municipal building after the election, the police chief, his armed men, and a squad of soldiers prepare to repel them. Only Prócoro's timely arrival with news of the governor's actions prevents a violent clash.

To cover themselves (but almost certainly tongue-in-cheek), the filmmakers append a printed title to the beginning of *Mi candidato*, promising "The characters and events of this film are fictitious and have no relation to the political life of the country." Sure...



Ay, Palillo...no te rajes! [Oh Palillo, Don't Back Down!] (CLASA Films Mundiales, 1948) *Exec Prod:* Jorge Elizondo; *Prod:* Salvador Elizondo; *Dir/Scr:* Alfonso Patiño Gómez; *Photo:* Jorge Sthal; *Music Score/Dir:* Rosalío Ramírez, Federico Ruiz; *Prod Chief:* Ricardo Beltrí; *Asst Dir:* Felipe Palomino; *Film Ed:* Jorge Bustos; *Art Dir:* Jesús Bracho; *Makeup:* Carmen Palomino; *Dialog Rec:* Luis Fernández; *Music/Re-rec:* José de Pérez



Cast: Jesús Martínez "Palillo" (*Palillo Delgado*), Rosita Quintana (*Rosita Soto*), Roberto Soto (*don Timoteo*), Fanny Schiller (*Tía Isadora*), Felipe de Alva [sic] (*Nicolás*), Arturo Soto Rangel (*Prof. Atenógenes Soto*), Ma. Teresa Barcelata (*María Luisa*), Antonio R. Frausto (*Andrés Huesca*), Arturo "Bigotón" Castro (*don Saca, police chief*), Victorio Blanco (*townsman*), Magdalena Estrada, Ramón Gay (*Alejandro*), Pepe Hernández (*townsman*), Isabel Herrera (*wife on bus*), Rubén Márques (*townsman*), Francisco Pando (*doctor*), Polo Ramos (*bus conductor*), Ignacio Peón (*townsman*), Alicia Reyna (*woman on bus*), Héctor Mateos (*Huesca's aide*), Lupe Carriles (*woman on bus*), Joaquín Roche (*voter*), Humberto Rodríguez (*don Atenógenes supporter*), Nicolás Rodríguez (*don Zenobito Rebollado y Pereda*)

Notes: Jesús Martínez "Palillo" is something of a cult figure in Mexico, based on his work in *carpas* and variety theatres--he only made 3 feature films, meaning most people today never saw him perform live and can only

base their opinions on secondary sources. Palillo became a stage star in the 1930s and continued to be extremely popular into the 1960s (he died in 1994; actress Ana Martín is one of his children). He made his reputation on the political nature of his comedy, which resulted in frequent clashes with the authorities--his shows were closed and he was jailed, multiple times.

Ay, Palillo...no te rajes! is perhaps the most political of his films, and may give a reasonable impression of his stage persona. Based on his appearance in this movie, Palillo has no particular comic *shtick* or persona. He's not much of a physical comedian: although he does a couple of slapstick bits, he doesn't seem particularly adept at them. His comedy is also not really based on his "personality"--his character is not especially well-defined, and--the political speeches aside--one could rather easily imagine another contemporary performer (Resortes, Clavillazo, Manolín, even Tin Tan) in the role. The script slots him into the familiar role of earnest young man in love with an attractive young woman who likes him but loves another.

In fact, the most notable thing about Palillo in *Ay, Palillo...no te rajes!* is the content of his dialogue, not his delivery of it. Cantinflas was famous for his rambling, nonsensical speeches, Clavillazo, Resortes, and others had particular vocal traits and catch-phrases, but Palillo talks in a relatively normal tone of voice and his commentary is over-elaborate and sometimes pompous, but not especially funny (except in context): he doesn't tell jokes or even funny stories, he makes miniature speeches, both political and romantic.

One amusing sequence in *Ay, Palillo...no te rajes!* has Palillo "coaching" Felipe de Alba as the latter professes his love to María Teresa Barcelata (who, in a "Romeo and Juliet"-like situation, is standing on a balcony above them). De Alba parrots Palillo's flowery praises, unfortunately including Palillo's stage directions as well (such as "stop waving your hands").

There is one curious and not especially effective sequence fairly early in the film, playing on Palillo's slim stature: fleeing from the police, he "hides" behind telephone poles twice, courtesy of an optical trick. This isn't funny the first time (and it's very obviously done), and even less effective a few seconds later when it's repeated. This is the only "surreal" moment in *Ay, Palillo...* and doesn't really fit.

Later, don Timoteo has a fierce bull released into the street to disperse a crowd of his detractors, and Palillo goes into a fairly long bullfight routine. This is mostly accomplished in long shot (probably using a double), but there are several apparent opticals towards the end which don't look quite right. This does lead to one good joke: Palillo does a *teléfono* (resting his elbow on the bull's head, as if making a phone call) and pretends to call don Timoteo--from inside the municipal building, Huesca sees

this and tells Timoteo "you've got a call." The *cacique* picks up the telephone, then hangs up in disgust and Huesca shrugs.

I've gone on record saying I don't find Clavillazo inherently funny (although both he and his films can be amusing at times), and yet Clavillazo (with his catch-phrases, iconic costume, gestures, etc.) is a more obvious "comedian" than Palillo. This is not to say Palillo is bad, nor that *Ay, Palillo...no te rajes!* is without entertainment value: he is fine in a role that was clearly tailored for his specific talents and reputation and the movie itself is actually pretty decent.

Palillo, protesting a failure to receive his salary, quits a *mariachi* group (absconding with the money collected



from a crowd listening to them play) and boards a bus out of town. He agrees to deliver some political signs to don Timoteo in the small town of Tepexpan. Timoteo, the corrupt *cacique* of the region, wants his *compadre*

Andrés Huesca to be elected municipal president; elderly Prof. Atenógenes is brow-beaten into running as Huesca's straw-man opponent. Palillo is hired by Timoteo to bring "supporters" to a Huesca speech (which he does by agitating people on the street so they pursue him angrily into the meeting hall) but quits when he isn't paid immediately for his "recruiting."

Favourably impressed by Rosita, the attractive daughter of Prof. Atenógenes, Palillo changes sides, and essentially becomes the campaign manager for the elderly educator. Several side-plots are shoe-horned in: Palillo's unrequited romance with Rosita (he tells her that he loves her, but using the third person, and she thinks he's relaying



messages from Alejandro, whom she really loves); a romance between *charro* Nicolás and María Teresa, the niece of don Timoteo (this figures in a couple of early

scenes and is then mostly dropped). There's also a short sub-plot in which don Timoteo's widowed sister Isadora claims she loves Palillo. Don Timoteo has Palillo tied to a railroad track but the railway workers go on strike just before the train runs over him. There are several misdirection scenes which result in don Zenobito (an aide to Timoteo) and Isadora forming a couple.

Palillo and Huesca campaign against each other. In one scene, Palillo's former *mariachi* group and Palillo (assisted by Alejandro and town band) have a musical "duel," with various song parodies featuring political comments. One of the songs is the famous "Ay, Jalisco, no te rajes," which is changed to "Ay, Palillo, no te rajes," and concludes with the lyric:



the lyric:
"Sufragio efectivo
y no re-elección!"
(in the place of
"Qué lindo es
Jalisco, palabra de
honor!")

Don Timoteo,
Huesca, and their
henchman create

false ballots in advance. Apprised of this, on election day Palillo and his friends pull a double-switch, replacing the fake ballot box with the one containing actual votes, and Prof. Atenógenes wins unanimously. However, don Timoteo and his gang refuse to certify the results, and are trapped inside the municipal building by Palillo, don Atenógenes, and the rest of the townspeople. Eventually the villains get so hungry that they surrender. Palillo thinks he's going to get a kiss from Rosita as a reward, but she rushes into Alejandro's arms instead. Palillo leaves Tepexpan in a hurry, with don Timoteo's henchmen in hot pursuit.

Ay, Palillo...no te rajes! has a number of pop culture and societal references. There's a brief scene between Palillo and "Bigotón" Castro in which they exchange verbal insults, then Castro rips Palillo's shirt and Palillo tears one of the lapels from Castro's jacket. This doesn't go on very long, but is seemingly inspired by Laurel and Hardy's "tit for tat" routines. Palillo, making an impassioned declaration of love to Rosita, says he'd even become "a school teacher in Río Escondido" for her, a



reference to *Río Escondido* (1947). Later in the movie, when Palillo urges a "hunger strike" to unseat don Timoteo (although it's the villains who'll go

hungry), the *cacique* says "Remember Gandhi!"

The political content of Palillo's various speeches is mostly standard Mexican populist stuff, with references to the well-being of the people vs. the exploitation of the *cacique*. It's not aimed at any particular party or politician but, as noted above, this didn't mean he didn't offend the political establishment, especially Ernesto P. Uruchurtu, the "regent" of Mexico City (before it had a mayor). Uruchurtu, notorious for banning things he didn't like

(such as professional wrestling, nightclubs, and the Beatles), instituted a "Crusade for Theatrical Decency" and Palillo was one of his targets. Mexico is not unique in this regard: countries decide what is offensive and what is not, and some more strongly censor socio-political commentary, others censor matters of sex & morality, others dislike depictions of violence, and so on.

The cast of *Ay, Palillo...* was filled with familiar performers. Like Palillo, Roberto Soto was a major star of *carpas* and variety theatre, and--like Palillo--he had a



reputation for politically-oriented comedy. Soto (the father of comic actor Fernando Soto "Mantequilla"), appeared in supporting roles in just a handful of films (more than

Palillo, though). Rosita Quintana made her film debut in Mexico in 1948: born in Argentina, she was a musical performer there before moving to Mexico in 1947, allegedly at the urging of Jorge Negrete who saw her while on a South American trip. She's attractive and competent here, but was soon to go on to greater stardom. Although unbilled, Ramón Gay has a substantial role as Alejandro. Felipe de Alba appeared in a number of films from the mid-1940s through the mid-1950s, and was married to Zsa Zsa Gabor for one day in 1982 (the marriage was annulled when it was discovered that Gabor wasn't legally divorced from her previous husband). De Alba returned to films before his death in 2005, appearing in *Real Women Have Curves* and *El sueño de Elías* in 2002-2003.

Production values are good, with a fair amount of the film having been shot on location in an unidentified town.



As discussed earlier, there are a couple of mildly ambitious opticals which don't entirely work, but otherwise the cinematography, sound, editing, etc. are satisfactory.

Alfonso Patiño

Gómez was a reporter on the cinema beat who started writing scripts in the late 1930s and later became a producer, director, and studio executive (at Estudios América). 14 of his 15 directorial credits came in the 1941-55 period; his last film was made in 1959 (he died in 1977). His work on *Ay Palillo, no te rajes!* is competent but unspectacular.

Trivia note: the secondary villain played by Antonio R. Frausto is named "Andrés Huesca," which was also the

name of a popular musician of the era who specialised in *jarocho* music (music from Veracruz), and helped popularise “La Bamba.” However, no one makes any reference, joking or otherwise, to this name coincidence in the movie.



El señor gobernador [Mr. Governor] (Prods. Yazbek, 1950) *Exec Prod:* Alberto Zacarías, José Yazbek; *Dir:* Ernesto Cortázar; *Scr:* Ernesto Cortázar, Jaime Luis Contreras; *Photo:* Enrique Wallace; *Music:* Manuel Esperón; *Songs:* Esperón & Cortázar; *Prod Mgr:* Carlos Abdo Herrera; *Prod Chief:* Guillermo Alcaide; *Asst Dir:* Jaime L. Contreras; *Film Ed:* Gloria Schoemann; *Art Dir:* José Rodríguez G.; *Makeup:* Noemí Wallace; *Cam Assts:* Carlos Martel, Manuel Luna, Luis González; *Script Clerk:* Guillermo de la Parra; *Sound Supv:* James L. Fields; *Dialog Rec:* Ramón Moreno; *Music Rec/Re-rec:* Galdino Samperio; *Spec FX:* Jorge Benavides

Cast: Luis Aguilar (*Fortunato Pastrana*), Rita Moreno (*Margarita Hermosillo*), Mauricio Garcés (*Gerardo*), Armando Velazco (*don Baltasar*), Salvador Quiroz (*don Juan de Dios Hermosillo*), Amparo Garrido (*Tachita*)*, Emilio Brillas (*Mauricio*), Emilio Garibay (*Ventura*), Hernán Vera (*don Serafín*), José Muñoz (*political fixer*), Héctor Mateos (*investigator*), Ignacio Peón (*don Jilemón*), Idelfonso Vega, El Trío Tamaulipeco, Humbert Rodríguez (*don Tijeras, tailor*), Ramón Bugarini (*car salesman*), Chel López (*man in restaurant*)

* García Riera credits Nora Veryán but is mistaken; the actress in this role looks nothing like Veryán and does clearly resemble early photos of Garrido.

Notes: *El señor gobernador* is not exactly a hard-hitting political exposé, but it does contain a number of criticisms of Mexican politics along with its romantic comedy plot. As usual, the politics depicted here are local rather than national scale—even though Luis Aguilar’s character is the governor of an unidentified state, his actions in the film take place on a very local level, as if he were a municipal president or something. Because he’s a governor, this elevates him to a position of prominence which is relevant to the plot.

The film opens with a long (1:50) speech by governor Fortunato Pastrana, delivered directly to the camera. He

says he’ll defend the people of his state from *caciques* like don Juan de Dios Hermosillo, who dispossessed Fortunato’s parents from their property when he was a child, leading to their deaths and to Fortunato growing up in poverty. Fortunato says he fell in love with the *cacique*’s daughter Margarita, but now she’s complicit in her father’s corruption and greed.

Don Juan de Dios and Margarita are outraged when the speech is reported in a newspaper. Margarita travels to the state capital to remonstrate with Fortunato in person. Fortunato treats her brusquely but admits he still loves her.

He shows her the Hermosillo family home, now converted into a school. When landowner don Jilemón refuses to provide water for his impoverished neighbours whose corn crop is



threatened by drought, Fortunato has the older man tied up in the hot sun until he changes his mind. He also runs two crooked businessmen out of town.

Fortunato refuses to allow Margarita to leave town or even telephone her father. Don Juan de Dios tells reporters Margarita must have been abducted. Fortunato’s political enemies, led by don Baltasar and Ventura, tell don Juan de Dios where she is. Margarita’s fiancé Gerardo travels to the state capital to “rescue” her and loses a fight to Fortunato: this is also reported in opposition newspapers. Finally, Fortunato’s enemies bring in a political fixer to ruin Fortunato’s reputation with a negative public relations campaign: don Baltasar is promised the governorship and Ventura’s businesses will be free of government “interference.” Don Juan de Dios and Gerardo don’t agree to the plan but are overruled.



Fortunato decides to resign but first punches the fixer and chases Baltasar and Ventura out of town. Margarita and Gerardo realise Fortunato should retain his post because he’s an honest man and is doing good things for the people of the state. Margarita and Fortunato are reconciled.

El señor gobernador does a good job of depicting the

expectation of corruption that is automatically imputed to elected officials. Ventura, Fortunato's *compadre*, complains that he supported Fortunato's gubernatorial campaign in the expectation that his businesses would be given preferential treatment: Fortunato says "just because I'm your child's godfather that doesn't mean the rules don't apply to you." When a representative of a car dealer offers Fortunato a fancy new car for just 100 pesos, Fortunato says he'll take 3 at that price, turning the man's attempt to bribe him into a financial disaster for his firm. The political fixer hired by don Baltasar and Fortunato's enemies sets out his price clearly: he'll force the governor to resign, and then he'll be freely allowed to make a fortune via corruption.

Unlike some other films of this sort, there is no higher authority who provides a moral compass and helps suppress crooked politics: Fortunato decides to give up the fight against "the system," although it's suggested at the end that he'll change his mind.

Luis Aguilar is satisfactory as Fortunato, mostly playing the part straight (he does sing a couple of songs though) and delivering his populist message with sincerity. Rita Macedo, not necessarily known for comedy, also seems to be taking things seriously. Mauricio Garcés gets an "introducing" credit (although he'd previously had a small role in *La muerte enamorada*, also produced by his uncle, José Yazbek). The role of Margarita's fiancé Gerardo is not played—as one might expect—as a foppish or self-centered caricature: Gerardo seems to be a decent person, refusing to countenance the attacks on Fortunato's reputation (and by extension, Margarita's), standing up to Fortunato in a (poorly-staged) fight, and repudiating the crooked politicians and their plan at the climax. The rest of the cast is made up of veterans who handle their roles professionally.

Although *El señor gobernador* was shot at the Estudios Churubusco (with a few actual exteriors done on location), it doesn't look particularly luxurious or slick. One nice point is the inclusion of some classic *ranchera* songs by Manuel Esperón and Ernesto Cortázar, including "Traigo un amor" and "No volveré," sung by El Trío Tamaulipeco and Luis Aguilar.

Trivia note: Luis Aguilar wears a cowboy hat for 90% of this film's running time. He takes it off once (while dining with Margarita in a restaurant), but I'm fairly sure that's the only scene in which he does.



Si yo fuera diputado [If I Were a Deputy] (Posa Films, 1951) *Dir:* Miguel M. Delgado; *Adapt/Dialog:* Jaime Salvador; *Addtl Dialog:* Carlos León; *Story:* Mario Moreno; *Orig. Idea:* Rogelio Barriga Rivas; *Photo:* José Ortiz Ramos; *Music:* Raúl Lavista; *Prod Chief:* Luis Busto; *Asst Dir:* Ignacio Villareal; *Film Ed:* Jorge Bustos; *Art Dir:* Gunther Gerszo; *Camera Op:* Manuel González; *Lighting:* Luis García; *Makeup:* Ana Guerrero; *Sound Supv:* James L. Fields

Cast: Mario Moreno "Cantinflas" (*Cantinflas*), Gloria Mange (*Sarita*), Andrés Soler (*Tío Juan*), Emperatriz

Carvajal (*Lucía*), Alejandro Ciangherotti (*Juliano Fraschetti*), Ernesto Finance (*don Próculo L. de Guevara*), Rafael Icardo (*don Melquiades*), Eduardo Alcaraz (*doctor*), Cristina Lesser (*Fatima*), Edmundo Espino (*schoolmaster*), Armando Velasco (*prosecutor*), Humberto Rodríguez (*don Remigio*), Armando Arriola (*don Próculo's lawyer*), Lupe Carriles (*evicted woman*), Pedro Elviro "Pitouto" (*neighbour*), Jorge Arriaga (*stagehand*), Salvador Quiroz (*druggist*), Regino Herrera (*delivery man*), José Pardavé (*customer*), Ignacio Peón (*man on podium*), Víctor Alcocer (*detective*), Roberto Meyer (*comisario*), Jesús Gómez (*policeman & voter*), Alberto Catalá (*González*), José Ortiz de Zárate (*judge*), José Escanero



Notes: Although the title and advertising imply that this Cantinflas vehicle is "about" politics, this topic isn't raised until the 62-minute mark of the 96-minute running time. The first two-thirds of *Si yo fuera diputado* instead depict the misadventures of Cantinflas as a neighbourhood barber and apprentice lawyer. The film as a whole is entertaining, but the narrative is definitely fractured.

Si yo fuera diputado is a good example of mid-period Cantinflas. It's well-produced and generally amusing



(although not hilarious), rather self-indulgent (or one could say it knows the strengths of its star and utilises them the greatest extent possible), and continues the trend away from "Cantinflas as *pelado*" ["a certain class of urban 'bum' in Mexico," as defined by Carlos Monsiváis] towards "Cantinflas as

bourgeois" (he's a small business owner and trainee lawyer here). [This trend was discussed many years ago in MFB Vol. 2 #10--"The Changing Image of Cantinflas."]

It was a tradition in early Cantinflas films that the main character was rarely referred to by a personal name (either one specific to the particular film or "Cantinflas"), and in *Si yo fuera diputado* this is only violated in the election

posters urging people to vote for “Cantinflas, the Friend of the People” [*amigo del pueblo*]—which posters, by the way, feature an older photo of Cantinflas in his *pelado* costume. Otherwise, he’s just referred to as “him,” or “our friend,” or “the barber” (his shop is “El Barbero de Sevilla” and Tío Juan calls him “Figaro” once).

This film does reverse the usual comedy film trope “comic hero’s unrequited love for a young woman” by having Gloria Mange’s Sarita pining for Cantinflas; he likes her but doesn’t appear aware of the depth



of her feelings (in one scene he stubbornly refuses to take her hint about getting married, although his responses are distracted and impersonal rather than a rejection of her specifically). In a courtroom scene he does make lascivious remarks about (and advances to) a woman accused of murdering her husband, but otherwise shows no particular interest in women.

Cantinflas runs a barber shop in a working-class *barrio* dominated by the wealthy don Próculo. In exchange for



his haircutting services, Cantinflas receives tutoring in the law from the elderly Tío Juan. Cantinflas applies his lessons and prevents a woman and her children from being evicted

from one of Próculo’s apartment buildings. Juan, who is elderly and in poor health, offers Cantinflas the opportunity to form a legal partnership: Juan will do the background work and Cantinflas the leg work. This results in the acquittal of an attractive woman accused of murdering her husband. Cantinflas is hired by don Melquiades to ascertain if his wife Lucía is having an affair with her vocal coach, conductor Fraschetti, which leads to Cantinflas locking the two alleged lovers in a dressing room at a concert hall, and then conducting the orchestra himself.

Juan and several other prominent members of the community propose Cantinflas as their candidate for congress, running against don Próculo. The rich man tries to stop his populist opponent in any way possible: he buys IOUs for barber shop equipment signed by Cantinflas, changes the due dates, and has the equipment repossessed; his men also put up campaign posters for Cantinflas in prohibited areas, leading to the arrest of Cantinflas for damage to public property. Juan’s niece Sarita, who not-so secretly loves Cantinflas, uses money given to her as a deposit for sewing work to pay his fine; the people of the *barrio* rally to pay back the money, everyone contributing what they can.

[This latter sequence is interesting. First, where Sarita got the money is not clearly stated, and really requires the viewer to connect a lot of dots.

After the call goes out for contributions, there is a montage sequence (children breaking piggy banks, etc.) which strongly resembles images



of the Mexican people supporting the 1938 nationalisation of oil properties by Lázaro Cárdenas by paying indemnities with their personal savings, objects of value, and so on. *La Rosa Blanca* (1961) includes such a montage.]

On election day, residents of the *barrio* arm themselves with clubs to prevent don Próculo’s henchmen from stealing the ballots, and Cantinflas wins!

The opening sections of *Si yo fuera diputado* are curiously slow and rather pointless. Cantinflas is introduced in his barber shop, practicing his mandolin: this seems to go on forever, as he strums a few bars, hums, strums some more, flips the pages of sheet music, and so forth. The mandolin has no bearing on the plot (Cantinflas does mention it much later, saying it was repossessed along with his barber shop equipment). This leads into another long sequence of Cantinflas roughly shaving a customer (a routine repeated later, as an irate Cantinflas takes out his anger against don Próculo while cutting the hair of hapless José Pardavé). A woman brings her two children—a boy and a girl—asking Cantinflas to curl the girl’s long blonde hair for her first communion, and shave the boy’s head. Then, unwisely, she leaves. [At this point the film finally cuts away, introducing Juan and Sarita.] When she returns, her daughter is completely bald and her son has curly hair.



The film’s main narrative finally gets under way. Cantinflas is given a number of showcase scenes, including a courtroom sequence, conducting the orchestra, giving a political speech, etc. Some of these are better

than others: the trial of accused murderer Fátima is quite amusing, but the orchestra scene--underplayed and mildly amusing at best--goes on far too long (the bulk of the footage is a low-angle medium close-up of Cantinflas, with occasional cutaways to long shots of him in front of the orchestra as well as closeups of audience members and musicians). A debate between Cantinflas and don Próculo is good: Próculo (candidate of the PPU party) makes a standard stump speech that gets tepid applause, while the remarks of Cantinflas (who "is just like you and knows your problems," as a banner proclaims) receive wild acclaim.

In general, Cantinflas is good throughout, neither too abrasive and cocky nor too bland. He only occasionally overdoes his trademark *shtick* (talking in circles, breaking off in the middle of sentences, etc.) and gets in some good puns and zingers in "normal" conversation. For instance,



leaving the *delegación* after Sarita has paid his fine, Cantinflas objects to the *comisario*'s abrupt dismissal, and is mollified when the man sarcastically says

"Would you be so kind as to leave?" Cantinflas signs a document and walks off with the fountain pen, claiming--when the *comisario* objects--he thought it was a "souvenir."

The politics of *Si yo fuera diputado* are populist but muted. Wealthy don Próculo exploits the people of the *barrio* (raising their rents illegally, for instance) but there is no discussion of his party's ideology (we don't even know what "PPU" stands for). Cantinflas, notably an independent candidate affiliated with no party, campaigns as the *amigo del pueblo* but his speeches don't really focus on specific goals and--with the exception of his defense of a woman facing eviction--he is not depicted in the film as an altruistic, dedicated do-gooder (the other two legal clients we see--Fátima and especially don Melquiades--are apparently wealthy individuals).

The supporting cast is filled with familiar faces that make Mexican cinema so enjoyable. Gloria Mange had a short but prolific career (23 films in 4 years, 1949-52); she's cute and personable, tagging along after Cantinflas and gazing at him adoringly. Andrés Soler and Ernesto Finance have the other main roles, playing mostly to type: Soler is the kindly, mildly eccentric senior citizen, while Finance embodies the unscrupulous & greedy urban *cacique*.

Production values are substantial. Virtually all of the film was shot at the Estudios Churubusco, although the concert scene looks as if it was done in an actual auditorium, with a full orchestra and numerous extras in the audience. There aren't any notable flourishes such as special effects or elaborate gags however. *Si yo fuera*

diputado was made to showcase its star, Cantinflas, and it does that in an effective and generally entertaining manner.



La sombra del caudillo [The Shadow of the Leader] (Técnicos y Manuales del STPC, 1960) *Dir of* Prod: Rogelio González Chávez; *Dir:* Julio Bracho; *Adapt:* Julio Bracho, Jesús Cárdenas; *Orig Novel:* Martín Luis Guzmán; *Photo:* Agustín Jiménez; *Music:* Raúl Lavista; *Prod Coord:* José Rodríguez Granada; *Prod Chief:* Ricardo Beltri; *Asst Dir:* Julio Cahero; *Film Ed:* Jorge Bustos; *Art Dir:* Jorge Fernández; *Collab Art Dir:* Roberto Silva, Ramón Rodríguez G., Jesús Bracho, Salvador Lozano; *Decor:* Ernesto Carrasco; *Lighting:* Gabriel Castro; *Makeup:* Sara Mateos; *Sound Supv:* James L. Fields; *Sound Ed:* Raúl Portillo G. ; *Union:* STPC



CAST: Tito Junco (*General Ignacio Aguirre*), [rest of starring cast in order of appearance] Roberto Cañedo (*president of legislature*), Tito Novaro (*delegate*), Tomás Perrin (*Axkaná González*), Bárbara Gil (*Rosario*), Miguel Angel Ferriz (*El caudillo*), Ignacio López Tarso (*General Hilario Jiménez*), Carlos López Moctezuma (*Emilio Olivier Fernández*), Víctor Manuel Mendoza (*General Elizondo*), Fernando Mendoza (*Juan Manuel Mijares*), Agustín Isunza (*Remigio Tarabana*), Prudencia Grifell (*madam of bordello*), Kitty de Hoyos (*La Mora*), José Elias Moreno (*Catarino Ibáñez*), Víctor Junco (*General Domínguez*), Narciso Busquets (*agrarian legislator*), José Luis Jiménez (*doctor*), Manuel Arvide (*General Protasio Leyva*), Noé Murayama (*Major Segura*), Luis Aragón (*officer*), Xavier Loyá (*reporter*), Antonio Aguilar (*Colonel Jáuregui*), Carlos León (*Rosas*), Ernesto Finance and Víctor Torres (*opportunistic officers*), Carlos Escaler, Ramón Pandal, Pedro Padilla, Manuel Alvarado (*politician*), Norma Navarro, Guadalupe Carriles (*Cástula, maid*), Bertha Salgado, Bárbara Montalvan, Aida Casablanca (*singer in stage show*), Manuel Ramos, José Castillo, Madgaleno Barba, Jesús Cárdenas, Jorge Chesterking, Ignacio Villalbazo, Salvador Arriola, Arturo Soto Rangel (*director of cooperative*) Jorge Arriaga (*Colonel Saldívar*), Ángel Merino, Elodia Hernández (*Axkaná's mother*), Rodolfo Villalba, Joaquín Roche, Salvador Vázquez (*Cahuama*), Fernando Rivas, Ernesto

Ramirez, Manuel Espinoza, Jesús Pérez, José Salas, Francisco Beal, Martín Guevara, Miron Levine, Jesús Gómez, Martín Luis Guzmán (*himself*), Julio Bracho (*himself*)

Notes: *La sombra del caudillo* probably holds the record for the longest-suppressed Mexican film—made in 1960, it was not released commercially until 1990, when it had a very brief run (and in fact, as Emilio García Riera



notes, apparently the only remaining print was in 16mm; the video copy I have has some noticeable problems, particularly in the soundtrack). Why? Because the film depicts political intrigue and violence in Mexico in the early 1920s, after the fighting of the Revolution

had ceased, but before the political situation settled down. And even though—in a rather Brechtian scene (described below)—author Martín Luis Guzmán explicitly says that contemporary Mexican politics are stable and the “system” works, the Mexican government did not issue an authorization for the release of the film for 30 years, and only then through the explicit intervention of President Carlos Salinas de Gortari (who doesn’t have a very good reputation in Mexico, but at least he did this one thing).

As the presidential elections in Mexico draw near, General Aguirre—Secretary of War—considers becoming a candidate. However, things are not that easy in Mexico in the early 1920s. The political power is still held by “El Caudillo” (based on Alvaro Obregón), who favors the candidacy of General Jiménez, currently Secretary of Internal Affairs (*Gobernación*). Unwilling to go against the wishes of El Caudillo, Aguirre decides not to run, and even goes to Jiménez and offers to publicly renounce any intentions, but Jiménez demands too many other



concessions. Aguirre is convinced to run (despite the displeasure of El Caudillo) by the Radical party leader, Olivier Fernández. A heated political war breaks out. Word comes that El

Caudillo has ordered the arrest of Aguirre, charging him and his supporters with planning a coup. Aguirre and his closest advisers seek refuge with General Elizondo in Toluca, but Elizondo betrays them. Aguirre and the others are taken to a remote spot and executed by Major Segura and his troops.

Well into the film itself, there is a very odd sequence: Martín Luis Guzmán, author of the 1929 novel upon which

the film was based, makes a long speech in a lecture hall about the meaning of the book and its relation to Mexican history to an audience comprised of the cast of the film (not in costume). When he concludes, he hands a copy of his novel to director Julio Bracho and wishes him luck in transferring the book to screen. Then the “fictional” portions of the film resume. As odd and distancing as this sequence is, it would have been less obtrusive had it been placed at the beginning or even the end of the film, rather than—so it seems—at a rather arbitrary spot in the middle.

La sombra del caudillo, produced by a section of the STPC union, has a very strong male cast (the female roles are quite brief, including Bárbara Gil as Aguirre’s mistress, and Kitty de Hoyos as a prostitute) and the acting is uniformly good. Similarly, Bracho’s direction is quite assured, with fluid camerawork, careful setups, and smooth transitions.

The production values are substantial, and the ambiance of the period is satisfactorily preserved.



However, the film is not entirely successful as a drama—the large and varied cast actually works against a clear identification with Aguirre (Tito Junco) as the protagonist, and there is no indication that the audience is supposed to think he is morally superior to Jiménez, another point which makes it rather difficult to become emotionally involved in the plot. Perhaps Mexicans find the film more interesting, since it is based on historical events in their nation. Furthermore, the machinations of politics in Mexico are so different than those in the U.S. (at least at the national level), it is harder for a non-Mexican to fully grasp what is happening during the course of the film.

reprinted from MFB Vol. 4 # 1



La presidenta municipal [The Lady Municipal President] (Diana Films, 1974) *Prod:* Fernando de Fuentes [Jr.]; *Dir:* Fernando Cortés; *Scr:* Alfredo

Varela Jr., Fernando Cortés; *Addtl Dialog:* Carlos León; *Story:* Marco A. Almazán; *Photo:* Fernando Colín; *Music:* Sergio Guerrero; *Asst Dir:* Fernando Durán; *Script Clerk:* Damián Acosta; *Film Ed:* Sergio Soto; *Art Dir:* Raúl Cárdenas; *Camera Asst:* Agustín Lara, Salvador Zerecero;



Dialog Rec: Consuelo Jaramillo; *Makeup:* Tony Ramírez;
Union: STIC

Cast: La India María [María Elena Velasco] (*María Nicolasa Cruz*), Pancho Córdova (*Mr. Peppermint*), Adalberto Martínez “Resortes” (*Corporal Melquiades*), Fernando Soto “Mantequilla” (*Chepito Domínguez*), Joaquín García “Borolas” (*Sec. López*), Raúl Meraz (*Mario Nicanor Cruz*), José Chávez [Trowe] (*Pedro*), Polo Ortín (*Lic. Hugo T. Topillo*), Chis-Chas (*Pablo*), Alfonso Zayas (*Sec. Rodríguez*), Rosa Furman (*La Seca*), Diana Ochoa (*La Meca*), Manuel [Flaco] Ibáñez (*Lic. Cástulo Barrenillo*), Antonio Bravo (*priest*), Rosita Bouchot (*Chencha*), Lupita Palles (*Epigenia*), Armando Arriola (*don Casimiro Buenavista*), Iván de Meriche [aka Iván Lipkies] (*Rosendo*), Carlos Bravo “Car-Hillos” (*band leader*), Queta Carrasco (*Queta*), María Andrea Cantú, Angelina Cruz, Yolanda de Fuentes (*illegitimate daughter*), Gabriela de Fuentes (*Gabriela*), María Fernanda de Fuentes (*María Fernanda Martínez*), Gerardo Zepeda (*druggist*), José L. Murillo (*don Salustiano*), Rolando Barral (*himself*), Lina Montes (*Lolita, wife of druggist*), Juan Garza (*Juan Garza, townsman*)

Notes: a number of La India María’s films contain political commentary, but *La presidenta municipal* and *Las delicias del poder* are probably the two which focus most explicitly on Mexican politics. The cast of *La presidenta municipal* is loaded with comedic talent: in addition to María Elena Velasco, we get Resorts, Pancho Córdova, Mantequilla, Borolas, Polo Ortín, Chis-Chas, Alfonso Zayas, and Flaco Ibáñez, each of whom had or would star or at least co-star in one or more comedy films from the 1940s through the 1980s.

Although set in the fictional “Chipitongo el Alto,” *La presidenta municipal* was filmed in Tlayacapan, Morelos. Other films shot in this picturesque location include *Yo...el aventurero*, *La Valentina* (1960s version), *Lucio Vázquez*, *Lauro Puñales*, *OK Mister Pancho* (another India María vehicle), and international productions *Two Mules for Sister Sara* and Oliver Stone’s *Salvador*.



Through a printer’s error, the ballots for municipal president in the small town of Chipitongo el Alto read “María N. Cruz” instead of “Mario N. Cruz,” the local *cacique* who wishes to legitimise his power via elected office. Since there happens to be an actual María N. Cruz in the *municipio*--an illiterate *india* pottery maker--she is named president. María is aided by town clerk Chepito and (to the extent possible, given his chronic drunkenness) town

policeman Melquiades. Don Mario utilises corrupt lawyer Topillo to undermine María’s administration. Rumours spread that María bewitched *gringo* Mr. Peppermint to finance her campaign (even though there was no “campaign,” with only one name on the ballot), but she defuses a crowd of protesting women by promising to support the local church (so much for separation of Church and state), and to force their husbands to bring home more of their pay by taxing drinking and gambling.



[One major aspect of *La presidenta municipal* is María’s support of the church. It’s not clear, but apparently the church has been closed for some time: it’s dusty and abandoned-looking, and there are numerous local couples living without benefit of (church-sanctioned) matrimony. However, the priest is still living there in Chipitongo, so why the church was so run-down is confusing. In any case, María supports the local saint’s day celebrations, donating the drinking & gambling “tax” money; she also sells a “concession” for archeological excavations to Mr. Peppermint and donates that money.]

The saint’s day celebrations include a procession, an outdoor concert, and a bullfight. María is smitten with a *güero* outsider, Rolando Barral: he’s a singer imported from the capital by Lic. Topillos. Whenever María looks at him, one of her braids springs upright. During the concert, Rolando sings one song, then María does a song and is joined in a sprightly dance by Cpl. Melquiades. The bullfight is nearly cancelled when the *torero* refuses to participate, claiming the bulls are too *toreado* (a bull who survives a bullfight has “learned” about the event and is more dangerous if it fights again). María--to avoid having to refund the ticket money and to impress Rolando--enters the ring and triumphs. However, Rolando later reveals himself to be in the pay of don Mario and is thrashed when he enters María’s home one night.



Don Mario’s henchmen abduct María and keep her in a cave, demanding one million pesos in ransom. María wins all of their money (and their pistols) playing poker, and is rescued when bumbling municipal employees López and Rodríguez accidentally dig into the cave from above. Melquiades and other townspeople arrest don Mario and his two assistants. The cave also contains an ancient native burial chamber; María gives Mr. Peppermint the

“concession” to open a tourist hotel, which will finance a new school for Chipitongo.

María arranges a religious wedding ceremony for all of the local parents living out of wedlock, including her cousin Chenchá. The father of Chenchá’s illegitimate infant is revealed to be...Melquiades. After the weddings, party official Barrenillo asks María to run for governor. María turns to the audience and says “Please, people, never get involved in politics. Don’t do it!” then tells Barrenillo and the others--“I accept!”



Juárez, Morelos and Hidalgo watch over María

The actual “political” aspects of *La presidenta municipal* are mostly limited to the opening sections. As the credits roll, we see don Mario’s henchmen reminding the inhabitants of Chipitongo el Alto to vote, and it’s later stated that María was the only person on the voter rolls who didn’t vote (she fears she’ll be fined for not voting, which might explain why everyone else did). Don Mario is the candidate of the “R.I.P.” party (the initials aren’t explained) and no one is running against him for municipal president (there is no mention of his predecessor). Curiously, the argument that María should be named president is made by Lic. Barrenillo, the R.I.P. representative--why? He’s going against the interests of his own party and candidate, don Mario. Perhaps Barrenillo personally dislikes don Mario, and/or his ideals about the “sacred” rights of the people override his party affiliation (except: María’s election was clearly a mistake and if anything the election should have been re-done, rather than installing a municipal president that not a single voter intended to take office).

María’s actions as president are populist and feminist, but most of her actions in the film are focused on the renovation of the local church, which is very popular with the townspeople. The Mexican Constitution of 1917 contained a number of anti-clerical articles which were enforced or not over the years (and many of these articles were revised in 1992 to lighten the burden on churches somewhat). These included the prohibition of holding religious services outside of church, a prohibition on priests wearing clerical garb in public, and the

nationalisation of church property (which, presumably, means the church building in Chipitongo el Alto was owned by the government and thus María had the right to support it with public funds).

María does devote some time to public works, assigning López and Rodríguez the arduous make-work task of moving a large pothole “out of town.” This means they dig a hole and use the dirt to fill in the pothole, then another hole to fill the first one they dug, and so on, until they are outside the town limits. This pays off at the climax, when the two men’s final hole is the *deus ex machina* that results in María’s rescue.

The theme of political corruption is almost absent from *La presidenta municipal*. Don Mario’s seemingly desires respect rather than money: he says once he’s president, he’ll pass a law making it a crime to refer to him as a *cacique*. By all evidence, Chepito is a loyal public servant and while Melquiades is an alcoholic, he does his duty once María orders him to sober up. López and Domínguez, on the other hand, do have a reputation for petty corruption (María says they pestered her with fines) but they don’t participate in don Mario’s campaign to remove María, and actually carry out their new roles in the “public works department” more or less as ordered.



The role of *gringo* Mr. Peppermint is significant. [Some sources list his name as Pepperman, and he’s also called “Mr. Peterman,” “Mr. Superman,” and “Mr. Pipirín” at other times, but when he says his name it is clearly



Peppermint.]

Peppermint is an eccentric *gringo* who’s been living in Chipitongo for 10 years but still speaks stilted Spanish. He buys the bogus “artifacts” María makes, then sells them for a profit to other

(unseen) tourists, and negotiates concessions to dig for relics and to construct a hotel, typical business-oriented behaviour for *gringos* in Mexican cinema. Peppermint is a comic figure but he’s not depicted negatively: he’s María’s friend, even leaping into the bullring when she’s apparently in danger (she doesn’t need his help), supports the town’s businesses and projects, and is well-liked by the residents (who view him as a soft touch rather than an exploiter). Peppermint sometimes dresses more or less normally, but also has a weakness for outlandish outfits, including a Spanish costume (at the bullfight) and a wacky “umbrella hat” when María is saved at the cave. He has a

typical tourist fascination with taking photographs. “*Raza de bronce muy fotogénica*,” he tells María. [In one scene, López and Domínguez see Peppermint in church and ask “Aren’t you a Protestant?” to which he replies, “No, I’m a photographer.”]

All of the performances in *La presidenta municipal* are very satisfactory. María Elena Velasco is at her peak here, combining character comedy, jokes, and physical comedy effortlessly. The bullfight scenes were most likely done with a double for the long shots, but this isn’t too obvious. María has a distinct personality and everything she does in the film is consistent with the character. The supporting comedians mostly hold back on their *shtick*, with only Resortes getting a real opportunity to perform his specialities (mugging, physical comedy, eccentric dancing). Pancho Córdova is a comic actor rather than a comedian, and plays his role, as opposed to Polo Ortín, whose “role” is pretty much the same as most of his other screen appearances.

Production values are substantial. As mentioned above, much of the film was shot on location and the town and its people are utilised effectively. Fernando Cortés was an old pro at comedy and the overall product is slick and entertaining.

Trivia note: Future director Iván Lipkies, the son of María Elena Velasco and actor Julián de Meriche, appears in the film as a village boy, billed as “Iván de Meriche.”



Cuartelazo [Barracks Revolt] (CONACINE-DASA Films, 1976) *Dir:* Alberto Isaac; *Scr:* Alberto Isaac, Héctor Ortega; *Story:* Alberto Isaac, Héctor Ortega, María Antonieta Domínguez; *Photo:* Daniel López; *Music:* Raúl Lavista; *Prod Mgr:* Luis Bekris; *Film Ed:* Alfredo Rosas Priego; *Prod Design:* Lucero Isaac; *Art Dir:* Jorge Fernández; *Decor:* Ernesto Carrasco; *Makeup:* Margarita Ortega; *Sound:* Javier Mateos; *Sound Ed:* Abraham Cruz; *Union:* STPC

Cast: Héctor Ortega (*Belisario Domínguez*), Bruno Rey (*Gen. Victoriano Huerta*), Arturo Beristáin (*Sebastián Quiroga*), Eduardo López Rojas (*Villista general*), José Ángel Espinosa (*Manuel Gutiérrez Zamora*), Ignacio Retes (*rebel colonel*), Alejandro Parodi (*José Ma. Iglesias Calderón*), Carlos J. Castañón (*Lt. Díaz*), Delia Casanova (*soldadera*), Manuel Dondé (*Jesús Fernández*), Ramón Menéndez (*Venustiano Carranza*), Ricardo Fuentes (*judge*), Roberto Dumont (*Lind*), Mario Castellón Bracho (*Aldape*), Armando Pascual (*hotel manager*), Armando Pacheco (*senate president*), Edmundo Domínguez Aragonés (*man in coach*), César Sobrevals (*man at funeral*), Francisco Llopis (*senator*), Francisco González (*translator*), Miguel Ángel Ferriz [nieto] (*Ricardo*), Ernesto Bañuelos (*Lucio Blanco*), José Nájera (*Senator Calero*), Emilio González (*Espinosa*), Ricardo Fuentes (*judge*), Enrique Muñoz (*captain of prison*), Héctor López (*tall man in cape*), Guillermo Ayala (*Félix Díaz*), Inés Murillo, Rubén Hernández Monterrubio (*soldier*), Roberto Ruiz (*sub-lieutenant*), Alfredo Lara (*Maderista senator*), Lucila Retes (*woman at wake*), Agustín Silva, César Sobrevals (*man at funeral*), Florencio Castelló (*banker*), Victorio Blanco (*banker*), Adriana Taffan (*María Hernández*), Jesús Duarte (*Ramírez*), David Arellano, Jesús Juárez (*general*), Jaime M. Chaires (*lieutenant*), Héctor Sáez (*de la Garza*), Martín Palomares (*Huerta's son*), Juan Antonio Marroz (*doctor*), Carlos Vendrell (*Mondragón*), Matías Corona (*young man in prison*), Gonzalo Lara (*policeman*), Ángel Morales, Fernando Pinkus (*Capt. Braceda*), Fabio de Jesús Ramírez (*Márquez Sterling, ambassador*), Humberto Johnson (*sentry*), Eduardo Borja (*representative*), Adriana Rojo (*Huerta's wife*), Antonio Leo (*Matarrratas*), Christa Walter (*Mrs. Lind*), Juan José Martínez Casado (*old man at graveyard*), Abel Woolrich (*Captain*), Tamara Garina (*Russian woman*), Luciano Hernández de la Vega (*don Urbano*), Victorio Blanco and Ignacio Peón (*old men*), Jesús Gómez (*Villista officer*), Ramón Menéndez (*Venustiano Carranza*), Carlos Aguilar (*Col. Heriberto Jara*), Lorenzo Aguilar (*chief of protocol*), Salvador Garcini (*Huerta's barber*), Fernando Gaxiola (*Música*), Ernesto Juárez (*photographer*), Ildefonso Téllez (*mayor*), José Alcalde (*Bernardo Reyes*); ; Guillermo Hernández "Lobo Negro," Claudio Isaac; *ambassadors:* Jaime Humberto Hermosillo, Arturo Ripstein, Gilberto Martínez Solares, Alberto Isaac, Ludwik Margules

Notes: *Cuartelazo* is a fascinating historical and political film, but it is a failure as a dramatic narrative picture, if indeed that was of any concern to director Alberto Isaac. In a newspaper interview during production, he said "I know the formula for commercial success, although *Tivoli* exceeded the calculations. If I wanted to make films that would make money, I would right now be filming *Wakiki* [the name of a nightclub] or something like

that." (quoted in Emilio García Riera, *Historia documental del cine mexicano*, vol. 17, p. 243).

Cuartelazo is nearly two hours' worth of political speeches and monologues, scrupulously recreated on a grand scale. Curiously enough, only the villain of the piece, Victoriano Huerta, seems like a real human being, as opposed to Belisario Domínguez or Sebastián Quiroga, the nominal "heroes" of the picture, who are fairly one-dimensional (Quiroga has a "romance" with a *soldadera* but this is not developed at all). Additionally, the picture has an extremely complex narrative structure, repeatedly leaping back and forth in time, sometimes with helpful captions identifying the date and place, sometimes not. The viewer who knows nothing of Mexican history or fails to pay very close attention to the screen can easily be left behind.



Belisario Domínguez is a doctor and an alternate senator from Chiapas, elevated to the Senate after the death of his predecessor. Victoriano Huerta has seized control of the government from Madero, who is arrested and later murdered. Domínguez and some of the other representatives protest against Huerta's dictatorship: freedom of the press is suspended, those who oppose the new administration are arrested or murdered, revolts break out across Mexico, and foreign powers--especially the United States--are threatening to intervene and "stabilize" Mexico. After making a speech condemning Huerta and



demanding the president's resignation, Domínguez is arrested, taken to a cemetery, and shot. His body is only discovered a year later, when one of the killers

confesses. Sebastián Quiroga, Domínguez's nephew, joins the revolutionary forces of Lucio Blanco. Under the leadership of Venustiano Carranza, the rebels unite and Huerta has to resign, going into exile with his family.

The preceding synopsis is, obviously, a linear narrative but the picture itself, as noted earlier, is not. The picture opens with a printed quote (an Isaac trademark)--"The only

thing history teaches us is that man learns nothing from history"--and the unearthing of the skeleton of Domínguez in 1914. There is a flashback to 1913, just after his disappearance, and from this point on, the film moves freely between various periods and settings, with no clear rhyme or reason. The picture concludes with Huerta's abdication and the aftermath of an unsuccessful "summit" meeting between Carranza and other rebel leaders--the viewer is expected to know this presages at least six more years of warfare between various factions. There is also a printed epilogue stating that Sebastián later held a number of political posts, including senator and governor, prior to his death in 1953.

A fair amount of the running time of *Cuartelazo* consists of didactic scenes where characters discuss political issues. Sometimes this is in the context of an actual speech, but in other scenes the "speeches" are inserted into "dramatic" scenes between characters. For example, a druggist airs his views of Madero's failure while talking with Domínguez; later, Sebastián's commanding officer reads a long statement from Sebastián's journal about the goals of the Revolution, concluding with a quote by Mikhail Bakunin. Huerta holds forth on his views, Domínguez speaks, and so forth. The most interesting of these sequences, in a stylistic sense, is Domínguez's fatal speech condemning Huerta. Isaac cuts between shots of Domínguez composing the speech (in front of his son and nephew), Domínguez delivering the speech in the Senate chamber, and scenes of Huerta's atrocities (people are shot to death, a man is set on fire, another is hung up and tortured).



One interesting aspect of *Cuartelazo* for U.S. viewers are the scenes featuring the American representatives. In an early sequence, Huerta summons the foreign diplomatic corps and has his photo taken with them (among the ambassadors, in cameo roles, are directors Gilberto Martínez Solares, Arturo Ripstein, Jaime Humberto Hermosillo, and Isaac himself). Later, Huerta corners the new U.S. ambassador Lind (replacing Henry Wilson) and tries to convince him to recognize his government: "I guarantee to the United States tranquility and magnificent relations of good neighbors, of friends. Only in this way are secure investments possible in our country." Later, Lind remarks to his wife, "I don't know if I must admire this man or scold at him [sic]." The U.S. occupation of

Veracruz is represented by some newspaper headlines; Domínguez says, "It is [Huerta's] personal interests and not, as he says, the national dignity that is at stake."

Despite its complex structure and the stilted nature of the political statements expressed by the characters, *Cuartelazo* is a highly interesting and very well produced movie. Shot in black and white, the film often resembles actual photographs and newsreels of the era (the opening sequence, among others, is also reminiscent of *El automóvil gris*, one of the most famous Mexican silent movies). Isaac obviously had a decent budget and considerable official assistance making the movie, shown by the numerous extras and other production frills, as well as the location shooting. There aren't too many touches which can be identified with Isaac the *auteur*--for once, the director's native state of Colima isn't central to the movie--but since it deals with historical events and characters, the director didn't have too much leeway in this area. Héctor Ortega, Isaac's favorite actor, is of course featured, as are Arturo Beristáin (whose resemblance to Miguel Ángel Ferriz nieto is highlighted here, since they play cousins and share a number of scenes together), and some other supporting players (such as Juan José Martínez Casado) who had worked with Isaac before or would appear in some of his later pictures. In one scene, the *soldadera* played by Delia Casanova washes her feet and puts on the shoes of her late protector, killed shortly before. The shoes look very similar to Anacleto Morones' shoes, which played an important part in *El rincón de las vírgenes*, but this could just be a coincidence.



Cuartelazo was nominated for 8 Ariel Awards: Best Film, Best Director, Best Actor (both Ortega and Rey), Best Screenplay, Best Editing, Best Music Score, and Best Set Decor. However, it was shut out and did not take home a single statuette. However, Lucero Isaac did win a Diosa de Plata for her work on the picture (she was actually nominated twice for Arieles in this category, losing for *Cuartelazo* to herself for *Foxtrot*!).

Cuartelazo is an unusual entry in Isaac's filmography, and not a film which can be watched casually, but it is nonetheless a fascinating movie and political document.

A version of this review was posted on my Alberto Isaac website in 2001: <http://terpconnect.umd.edu/~dwilt/isaac.htm>



Renuncia por motivos de salud [Resignation for Reasons of Health] (CONACINE-STPC, 1975)

Dir of Prod:

Maximiliano Vega

Tato; *Dir:* Rafael

Baledón; *Scr:* Josefina

Vicens; *Story:*

Fernanda Villeli,

Josefina Vicens;

Photo: Miguel Arana;

Music: Gustavo César

Carrión; *Prod Mgr:*

Luis Bekris; *Film Ed:*

Alfredo Rosas Priego;

Prod Des: Enrique

Estevez; *Art Dir:*

Javier Torres Torija;

Décor: Carlos Arjona;

Makeup: Elda Loza;

Sound: Rodolfo Solís; *Sound Ed:* Abraham Cruz; *Union:* STPC

Cast: Ignacio López Tarso (*Gustavo Sánchez Campero*), Carmen Montejo (*María*), Silvia Mariscal (*Yolanda*), Aarón Hernán (*Pascual Tamayo Chávez*), Juan Antonio Edwards (*Alfredo*), Jorge Victoria (*Raúl Ramos*), Lilí Garza Ruiz (*Martha*), Adriana Roel (*Silvia*), César Sobrevals (*Lic. Padilla*), Carlos León (*construction co. engineer*), Enrique Gilavert (*construction co. director*), Regino Herrera (*old man interviewed*), Guillermo Herrera (*Tamayo's secretary*), Armando Acosta (*bureaucrat in lobby*), Marcelo Villamil (*staffer of don Gus*), Blanca Lidia Muñoz (*Padilla's maid*), María Prado (*secretary of don Gus*), Cecilia Leger (*clothing vendor in don Gus' office*), Rubén Márquez (*bureaucrat*), Alicia González (*wife of official*), Fernando Pinkus (*construction co. adviser #3*), Freddy Fernández (*Benítez*), Jaime Manterola (*Lic. Bernal*), Francisco [Paco] Muller (*personnel chief*), Víctor Jordán (*adviser #2*), José Luis Avendaño (*street cleaner*), Lucía González, Victorio Sosa (*don Jerónimo*), Paco Sañudo (*man interviewed on street*), Gaspar Henaine (*construction co. adviser #4*), Yolanda Rigel (*attractive woman*), employees: Socorro Juárez, Rocío Fernández, Yolanda Marel

Notes: *Renuncia por motivos de salud* expresses its point of view in a somewhat didactic fashion, but manages to be consistently entertaining and interesting despite this. It's neither excessively pessimistic nor optimistic in its depiction of the corruption endemic in Mexican politics



and society. Josefina Vicens won an Ariel award for her screenplay (she and Fernanda Villeli were also nominated for Best Screen Story but lost to Jaime Humberto Hermosillo for *La pasión según Berenice*; Adriana Roel was nominated as Best Supporting Actress but the award went to María Rojo for *Las poquianchis*).

Gustavo Sánchez Campero is a career mid-level bureaucrat in the Mexican government, as was his father. His fellow workers call him “Don Gus,” which he believes is a term of endearment but is actually short for “Don Gusano” [Worm], due to his scrupulous honesty and refusal to enrich himself via the entrenched *mordida* [bribe] system. He and his family--wife María, son



Alfredo, daughter Martha--live in an unfashionable *colonia* in Mexico City, in the house he inherited from his parents. His oldest daughter Yolanda is married to Raúl, a low-level

employee in Gustavo's secretariat; they have two children and a third is on the way.

Gustavo's immediate supervisor Padilla asks him to change a report recommending that a certain company receive a lucrative government construction contract: he wants Constructora Internacional to win the deal. Gustavo argues that Internacional's low bid was part of their standard procedure: they get the contract, then demand more money halfway through construction. Padilla says the public doesn't care about this, they'll just see that Internacional didn't get the contract despite their low bid, and think the government is wasting money, but Gustavo knows someone has been bribed. When Gustavo turns down money to revise his recommendation, Padilla warns him that he'll be punished for his recalcitrance.

However, a short time later the Minister of the secretariat resigns “for reasons of health,” and is replaced by Pascual Tamayo. Gustavo is surprised to recognise Tamayo as a friend from elementary school. Tamayo is friendly but clearly doesn't remember Gustavo; however, word gets around that Gustavo is the new minister's intimate friend and thus highly influential. Gustavo's staff and the other bureaucrats suddenly treat him with respect. On his birthday, he's given numerous gifts (in previous years, only elderly clerk don Jerónimo remembered Gustavo's birthday) in an attempt to curry favour.

The Internacional company fears their contract may be revoked by Tamayo, so they double down on their previous bribe, this time targeting Gustavo's son-in-law Raúl. Raúl eagerly goes along with the deal and trades on his father-in-law's supposed influence with others as well.

He and Yolanda make a down payment on a house, buy a new car, etc. Gustavo refuses the money Raúl offers him and a family argument ensues. Raúl says “that's how it is in the whole country...everyone's in the game...” and Yolanda says “You can do it with complete discretion, no one will know.”

When Gustavo continues to refuse to be bribed, Yolanda says her family shouldn't suffer because of his conscience and if Raúl goes to jail it will be Gustavo's fault.



Gustavo asks Tamayo to disown their alleged “friendship,” saying the pressure of being “influential” is more than he can bear, especially since he refuses to take bribes. Tamayo admits he can't remember Gustavo from their childhood at all, and wondered when Gustavo was going to start requesting favours from him. Tamayo says he's also honest (earlier, he ordered close surveillance of the Internacional contract, to make sure the government wasn't being cheated) and needs someone he can trust. They leave the office together to go on an inspection tour of various projects--even taking Gustavo's car--which only reinforces the impression of the other workers that Gustavo is Tamayo's “close friend.”

A secondary thread runs throughout the film: Gustavo's conversations with his son Alfredo, who has dropped out of university and has an apathetic, even cynical view of society. Towards the end of *Renuncia por motivos de salud*, the film cuts between Gustavo and Tamayo and



scenes of Alfredo interviewing Mexicans about corruption. Some are angry, others are resigned. One elderly man says “I fought in the Revolution and here I sit on a park bench in

the sun, remembering my ideals...” The film concludes as Gustavo and Alfredo discuss the future and Alfredo suggests his generation might be the one that breaks the chain of corruption...or perhaps his own children will...

Renuncia por motivos de salud is a fairly uncompromising yet not exploitative or sensationalistic depiction of the *mordida* system. Tamayo says “There's corruption everywhere. The public knows it, accepts it, participates in it.” Alfredo tells his father: “We all *mordimos* in one form or another.” Gustavo has his principles, but ironically he loses the respect of his co-workers because he's not corrupt. He can't keep secretaries very long because they soon discover there will be no

opportunities to supplement their income by selling favours or access. "Nobody believes in honesty...I'm a perfect imbecile and I'll continue to be one," Gustavo says. His wife María tells her children Gustavo "is capable of starving to death rather than stain his conscience," but Yolanda won't accept this. Her father is not merely hurting himself, he's preventing her family--which includes his 2 ½ grandchildren--from achieving upper-class (or at least upper-middle-class) status (they currently live in a cramped apartment and Yolanda and Raúl sleep on a fold-out sofa bed).

At the film's conclusion, Gustavo retains his honour but his relationship with his oldest daughter may have been shattered (there's no suggestion he'll denounce Raúl's



corruption, but he doesn't embrace it, either). He'll still be perceived as Tamayo's close friend, and will therefore be the subject of repeated attempts at bribery. However, Gustavo's actions have won the respect of

Alfredo, and some hope is expressed for the future.

The film is certainly not *pro-mordida*, but it doesn't necessarily demonise the people caught up in the system, and there is no extensive discussion of the financial (as opposed to moral) damage such pervasive corruption causes; although it's suggested that Internacional will make a larger profit on its government contract than it deserves, the film doesn't go the extreme of saying they'll build a bridge that will collapse or something of this sort (unlike 1983's *Corrupción (La corrupción somos todos)*, in which adulterated drugs purchased by a bribed government official result in the death of the man's own daughter!).

The depiction of government workers is mixed. Some are lazy, some are corrupt, and some seem to be competent. Elderly don Jerónimo is a long-time employee--possibly a friend of Gustavo's father--who is portrayed favourably; Tamayo claims he is honest, and from what the audience sees is apparently conscientious about his duties. Raúl, on the other hand, practically leaps at the opportunity to take bribes, seeing this as his ticket out of genteel poverty. The script also makes a point of expressing the futility of denouncing corruption: Padilla says Gustavo can go to the press, or on television, or walk around with a sign, but nothing will change (later, when Alfredo is interviewing people about corruption, he says he's from a radio station, and one man refuses to talk because it's not TV!). A *barrendero* (street sweeper) tells Alfredo that he protested corruption in his previous job and

was fired; he suggests Alfredo do the protesting, since he's young and has no family to support.

Renuncia por motivos de salud is quite well-written and -acted. Ignacio López Tarso is one of Mexico's best actors (still active in 2018 although in his 90s) and has played a wide range of characters during his long career, from heroes to villains, poor *indios* to wealthy *caciques*, hobos to professionals.

Gustavo doesn't flaunt his incorruptibility but he stubbornly defends it. Pleased at first by his connection to Tamayo, he's plainly



discomfited by it later, particularly when it's clear Tamayo doesn't remember him. Out of obligation, Tamayo invites Gustavo and María to his home for dinner, but is delayed at work and Tamayo's wife is forced to entertain them, awkwardly.

The rest of the cast is also fine, although it's a bit puzzling why Adriana Roel's one-scene role as Sra. Tamayo merited an Ariel nomination--she's good but doesn't really stand out. Carmen Montejo is Gustavo's wife, satisfied with her peaceful life, content to watch *telenovelas* in the evening, is proud of her children and grandchildren, and conflicted when Gustavo's principles cause a rift between Yolanda and her father and siblings. Aarón Hernán, Juan Antonio Edwards, Silvia Mariscal, Jorge Victoria, etc., handle their roles effectively.

The film begins with actuality footage of the annual May Day march in Mexico City, in which workers from all sectors participate (it's humorous to see marchers carrying a banner for STIC, since *Renuncia por motivos de salud* was co-produced by rival union STPC). It appears Ignacio López Tarso and Marcelo Villamil are in the real march, although this might just be inserts shot especially for the film (if so, they're well done). Technical aspects and production values are good, with much of the film shot on location.



Rastro de muerte [Trace of Death] (CONACINE, 1981) *Dir:* Arturo Ripstein; *Scr/Orig Novel:* Mercedes Manero; *Photo:* Jorge Stahl Jr.; *Music:* Leonardo Velázquez; *Asst Dir:* José Luis Ortega; *Film Ed:* Rafael Ceballos; *Prod Des:* David Antón; *Art Dir:* José Rodríguez Granada; *Set Decor:* José Méndez; *Makeup:* Elda Loza; *Asst to Dir:* Luis Estrada; *Sound:* Manuel Topete; *Dubbing:* René Ruiz Cerón; *Re-rec:* Jesús González Gancy; *Union:* STPC

Cast: Pedro Armendáriz Jr. (*Alberto Villamosa*), Ernesto Gómez Cruz (*Julio Torres*), Juan Luis Galiardo (*José Majul*), Gina Morett (*Lilí*), Aline Davidoff (*Diana*)

del Valle), Julio Aldama (*Gen. Gómez*), Tito Junco (*don Emilio Fernández*), Rosa Carmina (*Rosa Argüelles*), Fernando Balzaretti (*Luis Argüelles*), Miltón Rodríguez (*Governor*), Humberto Zurita (*Genaro*), Sara Guasch (*Sra. del Valle*), Leandro Espinosa (*del Valle*), César Sobrevals (*Lorenzo*), José Estrada, Cheto Herrera (*hotel clerk?*), Julio Monterde (*Olmedo*), Abril Campillo (*prostitute*), Armando Duarte, Agustín Silva, Rubén Calderón (*Colonel*), Inés Murillo (*Lilí's maid at theatre*), Mauricio Peña, Gerardo Moscoso, José Antonio Marroz (*driver*), Luis Guevara (*governor's aide*). Abel Casillas, Jaime Reyes (*man in jail with governor*), Marco Antonio Arzate, Paco Ledesma, Alfonso Kafitti, Arturo Ripstein (*portero at Alberto's apartment bldg in Mexico City*), Marcos Román (*Licio*)



Notes: this is generally not considered one of Arturo Ripstein's better films. In fact, some critics call it his worst movie. That may be so, but if it is, then Ripstein's worst is better than many other films. *Rastro de muerte* does have a confusing script (adapted from her own novel by Mercedes Manero) and a terrible ending, but it makes up for these flaws to some degree with excellent location shooting in Yucatán and a strong cast.

The 1920s: Alberto Villamosa leaves his mistress Lilí (whom he shares, unbeknownst to him, with General Gómez) in Mexico City and goes to Mérida in Yucatán as a federal government representative. The entourage of the current governor mistrusts Alberto; they are busy filling their own pockets with money obtained from graft and corruption. Alberto eventually shows he can be trusted, and when the governor is removed in a coup, politician Torres offers Alberto the post. Alberto, in love with Diana del Valle, the daughter of a landowner who has fallen on hard times, accepts. The politicians and their allies, including José Majul, a businessman who also covets Diana, plan to take over the del Valle's *henequén* [hemp] plantation. They have Genaro, Diana's cousin who has been serving as the administrator, murdered. Diana blames Alberto, but he goes against the cabal and returns the plantation to the del Valle family.

Torres, Majul, and the others plot to remove Alberto. Diana is warned of this by Rosa Argüelles, whose son Luis is Alberto's secretary, and Diana makes a deal with Majul:

if Alberto's life is spared, she will give herself to him. Alberto is sent back to Mexico City, although Majul arranges to have him arrested when his train arrives. Alberto is freed from prison by General Gómez, who advises him to go back to Mérida and fight for his rights. On the other hand, Alberto's mentor, don Emilio, urges him to accept a job in his bank and forget about politics. Alberto says that once a man tastes power, he can never return to normal life. Lilí also warns him not to risk his life by returning to Yucatán, but Alberto ignores her.

Back in Mérida, Alberto tries to enlist Majul in his attempt to regain his post, but Majul betrays him to the new governor--General Gómez! Alberto is thrown into prison. Torres and Gómez want to get rid of Alberto but keep their own hands clean; they tell Luis Argüelles to deliver him to the del Valle plantation, where Majul is living with Diana. Majul will do their dirty work. But Luis, grateful for Alberto's assistance earlier, gives his former boss a pistol, and Alberto shoots Majul. Diana picks up Majul's pistol, but instead of killing Alberto, she embraces him.

Although it is nearly two hours long, *Rastro de muerte* still seems like an abridgement of a longer work. There are a lot of loose

ends and unexplained occurrences and relationships. Alberto, as far as the audience can see, falls in love with Diana after about 10 seconds. [The film presents



Diana as a woman who drives practically every male wild with desire, which is a little difficult to swallow. Aline Davidoff, director Ripstein's protégé for a time, is not unattractive but she isn't a raving beauty and her screen personality is quite bland. Ripstein also cast her as the romantic focus of rival males in *El otro* (1984), with about as much success.] The details of the plot to seize the del Valle plantation--and in fact, the whole sub-plot about speculation in *henequén*--is not clear. Del Valle and his mentally-ill wife disappear halfway through the movie, with no explanation. Gómez's ascension to governor comes as a surprise, but even more puzzling are his actions prior to this revelation: why didn't he leave Alberto in prison, or--upon having him released--why did he encourage him to go back to Mérida?

These problems aside (and they are major, no doubt about it), *Rastro de muerte* is certainly well-produced and well-acted, with a few exceptions. Pedro Armendáriz Jr. is fine but rather miscast: he just doesn't look like someone who would be ambitious and scheming, yet still somewhat weak, vain and incompetent. The problems with Davidoff have already been noted, but everyone else is satisfactory.



Overall, a nice-looking film which is let down by its script.

Added note: Probably for political reasons (rather than the quality of the movie), *Rastro de muerte* never got a substantial commercial release in Mexico. According to the *Cien años* CD-ROM, the film was shown at a film festival in 1981, at a Ripstein retrospective at the Cineteca Nacional in 1984, and then was shown theatrically for less than a week in 1987 (which is presumably when the above lobby cards were produced).

Reprinted (with minor corrections) from MFB 8/2



La víspera [The Day Before] (Cine Códice-Difusión Profesional-Cooperativa Mixcoac, 1982) *Exec Prod*: Patricia Weingarther; *Dir-Scr*: Alejandro Pelayo Rangel; *Photo*: Federico Weingarther; *Film Ed*: Luis Kelly; *Sound*: Fernando Cámara; *Music*: Ricardo Pérez Montfort, José Amozurrutia; *Asst Dir*: Sigfrido Barjau; *Sound Asst*: Alfonso Cuarón; *Makeup*: Irene Chavira

Cast: Ernesto Gómez Cruz (*Manuel Miranda*), María Rojo (*Margarita*), Alfredo Sevilla (*Óscar Castela*), Fernando Balzaretta (*Roberto Vidal*), Ana Ofelia Murguía (*Irma*), Ignacio Retes (*Rubén Rocha*), Salvador Sánchez (*Villegas*), Martha Aura (*Eloísa*), Luisa Fernanda Lecuona (*Sara Montaña*), Gerardo Vigil (*Mauricio*), Aurora Cortés, Ofelia Núñez, Carlos Pouliot (*Ing. de la Serna*), Jorge Santos, Humberto Valdepeña, Trío "Los Caminantes"

Notes: *La víspera* was the first feature film directed by Alejandro Pelayo, a graduate of the CUEC film school. Although it received no commercial release (it's only 75 minutes long, was shot in 16mm and is in black-and-white), the film won 4 Arieles: Best Actor (Ernesto Gómez Cruz), Best Original Story (Pelayo), Best Co-Starring Actor (Alfredo Sevilla) and Best First Work (Pelayo). Also nominated was María Rojo as Best Actress (she lost to Beatriz Sheridan for *Confidencias*).



[Curiously, no Best Picture prize was awarded this year.] Pelayo didn't direct another feature until 1988's *Días difíciles*, and has only made a handful of pictures since then--although he's done TV work including "Los que hicieron nuestro cine," a long series about Mexican cinema history, which occupied much of his time between *La víspera* and *Días difíciles*--spending much of his career in various posts such as head of the Cineteca Nacional, head of IMCINE, and teaching at film schools CCC and CUEC.

La víspera takes place over the space of a few hours, and all of the action occurs in a single house and (briefly) its garden. A new president has been elected in Mexico, and Manuel Miranda has reason to believe he'll be appointed to a cabinet post. Miranda, an engineer by profession, worked for Adolfo Ruiz Cortines (president from 1952-58) and served in the cabinet of his successor, Adolfo López Mateos (1958-64), but was involved in some sort of scandal and has been out of politics since then (it's suggested he's been teaching). He sees the new administration as his "last chance" to participate in government.

Manuel is joined at his home by his secretary/mistress Margarita, his estranged wife Eloísa, his friend Óscar,



protégé Vidal, sister Irma, nephew Mauricio, and associates Rocha, de la Serna, and Sara Montaña. They are all eager to reenter political life at Manuel's side.

Although Eloísa and Manuel live separate private lives, Eloísa agrees to be his "public" wife on official occasions. Vidal and Sara are promised posts in Manuel's secretariat, and de la Serna sees an opportunity for his companies to obtain lucrative government work. However, Manuel's hopes are dashed when party functionary Villegas arrives with bad news: the new president is going with younger men, educated overseas, and Manuel will not get a cabinet post. Villegas says the president may find work for Manuel at some later point, in a lesser position.

Manuel dismisses his guests with a vague statement that preserves his pride, but everyone is aware the celebration has been cancelled. Margarita and Óscar remain; then Óscar departs, and finally Margarita leaves when it's clear Manuel won't relinquish his dream and move on with life (and divorce his wife to marry Margarita). Manuel is



left alone, repeating the acceptance speech he'll never give.

In an interview included in Alejandro Medrano Platas' book *Quince directores del cine mexicano: entrevistas*, Pelayo says *La víspera* was inspired to a certain extent by his father, actor and television host Luis Manuel Pelayo, whose popular TV show had been cancelled and spent time sitting in his house waiting to be called back to fame by Televisa. Manuel, like Luis Manuel Pelayo, experienced some "time in the sun" and wants to go back, and can only wait patiently for a summons that may never arrive.

La víspera indicates Manuel doesn't view a cabinet post solely as a chance for fame, enrichment or even

vindication. He wants to reward his friends, of course, but he seems sincere in his desire to help the country progress through his public service.

In a long monologue discussing his entry into politics, Manuel credits both Ruiz Cortines and López Mateos with having the welfare of the country as a primary goal of their presidency. Now, however, Mexico has fallen on hard times--there is talk of the devaluation of the currency, the pernicious influence of "foreign" culture, and so on--and Manuel believes he can help reverse this trend. He wants to return from political "exile," and cherishes the trappings of power that come with high political office, but is not depicted as wholly cynical or greedy.

The film was shot in two weeks on a budget of about \$50,000 (according to Pelayo in *Quince directores...*, and the sum was quoted in dollars). The version I've seen is from YouTube (bookended with an interview with Pelayo at a presentation at Mexico's El Colegio Nacional) and the

photography is somewhat murky and dark, but it's not known if this is how the original prints looked or a function of time and other technical issues. There are some directorial flourishes: after the credits sequence featuring newspaper headlines and articles, the film proper opens with a tracking shot from right to left, entering Manuel's home. At the conclusion, this shot is reversed, as the camera tracks from left to right, leaving. The concluding sequence of Manuel weeping, then getting his emotions under control, smiling, and resuming his "acceptance" speech, features actor Gómez Cruz in deep shadows and against a black background.

Ernesto Gómez Cruz is not the whole show but *La víspera* is definitely a showcase for his talents. He makes



Manuel Miranda a believable and sympathetic character, albeit one who is somewhat delusional and obsessive. The other two main characters are María Rojo as Manuel's mistress-secretary Margarita, and Alfredo Sevilla as his friend Óscar, and both are fine. Margarita is a familiar character, the long-suffering mistress who keeps hoping her lover will make an honest woman of her. Óscar's character and background are not very well-defined: he's portrayed as Manuel's sidekick and as a (failed) womaniser, but his particular antecedents and ambitions aren't clearly stated.

The rest of the cast features various "serious" actors of the period (as opposed to popular stars) like Salvador Sánchez, Fernando Balzaretti, Ana Ofelia Murguía, and Ignacio Retes (a sort of mascot of the newer generation of filmmakers and the father of director-actor Gabriel Retes). No one is given a great deal to do, but the whole ensemble cast is effective.

La víspera doesn't really feel exceptionally critical of the Mexican political system: in most countries with a democratic system, the incoming chief executive appoints his supporters to government posts, hopefully finding those who are reasonably honest and competent. Party functionary Villegas seems honestly disappointed that Manuel wasn't selected for a cabinet post, but the rationale (the new president is going with younger "technocrats" rather than party retreads) isn't unreasonable. As noted above, the guests at Manuel's party all want him to return to political power for their own personal benefit, but they aren't depicted as wholly mercenary and calculating, only a bit selfish and self-centered: it'd be hard to swallow if they were all completely altruistic.

Overall, an interesting drama and character study.



Lázaro Cárdenas* (Medea de Novara Prods. Filmicas, 1985, ©1988) *Exec Prod:* Marcos A. Russek; *Prod:* Medea de Novara, Juan José Pérez Padilla; *Dir-Scr:* Alejandro Galindo; *Photo:* Daniel López; *Music:* Manuel Esperón; *Prod Co-ord:* Fabela Quiñones; *Prod Mgr:* Benjamín Amezcuita A.; *Prod Chief:* Joaquín Garrido; *Co-Dir:* Jesús Marín; *Film Ed:* Joaquín Ceballos, Sifrido García M. (collab); *Art Dir:* Fernando Ramírez; *Makeup:* Magdalena de Anda; *Sound Engin:* Roberto Camacho
*aka *La guerra del petróleo* [The Petroleum War], DVD-case title

Cast: Adalberto Martínez "Resortes" (*Carana*), María Teresa Sanders (*Margarita*), Víctor Junco (*Ambassador Castillo Nájera*), Ramiro Orci (*Lic. Navarro*), Benjamín Amezcuita A. (*policeman*), Rodrigo Puebla (*Reyes*), Gilberto Román (*Leonardo*), Carlos East (*oil company executive*), Salvador Godínez (*don Pedrito*), Samuel Mastache, Eduardo Noriega (*Prof. Canales*), Agustín Fernández (*man at outdoor meal with Cárdenas*), José Luis Avendaño (*Cancino*), Ramiro Ramírez (*Porfirio*), Jorge Russek (*Pemex oil foreman*), Polo Salazar (*school employee*), Abel Casillas (*Menocal, oil worker*), Genaro

Zárate, Luis G. Padilla, Rubén Gondray (*campesino*), José Olivares, Roberto Ruy (*campesino*), Susana Contreras, Roel de la Serna (*Pemex oil worker*), Carlos González, Arturo Muñoz, Juan Barahona, Andrés Méndez, Alfredo Gutiérrez Quintanilla, Carlos Martínez, Lourdes Escobar de Quintanilla, Olga Millán, Ernesto Shwartz (*man helping with festival décor*)



Notes: this is a fascinating movie but by no means an especially good one. Basically it is a hagiography lauding the achievements of Lázaro Cárdenas as president of Mexico (1934-1940), composed of newsreel footage and newly-shot scenes (filmed at Cárdenas' former home, now a school) featuring Resortes as a rabble-rouser who disrupts a "Corn Festival" at an elementary school, insisting that the students learn about Lázaro Cárdenas instead. There are also a number of "flashback" sequences showing events from the (political) life of Cárdenas; the president himself is portrayed by an unknown performer (Mastache?) shown only in shadows, silhouette, and profile.

The new scenes are occasionally amusing and boast a surprisingly strong cast, but the picture is rough technically: the documentary footage varies widely in quality, and the editing is often abrupt, with some of the



images (both new and old film) appearing scratched and dirty. Lázaro Cárdenas is also a good example of cinematic overkill, with the same points belabored repeatedly. 84 minutes seems a lot longer.

At the school in Palmira, the former home of President Lázaro Cárdenas, director Canales is organizing the annual "Fiesta de maíz" (Corn Festival). But vagabond Carana appears, seizes a microphone, and begins to tell the children about Cárdenas (it is the anniversary of the man's death), over the objections of the school official. Canales summons the local police, who refuse to arrest Carana; Navarro, a state cabinet official, is

called and comes to the school with two "union officials," who threaten the impromptu speaker, but he continues his tale.

In flashback, we see Cárdenas receiving support from an army officer, who says the Mexican military will back his decision to expropriate foreign oil properties in Mexico. Later, a *gringo* executive of the "Petroleum Company of Mexico" meets with his workers. He says the government decree is unjust and Mexico won't be able to run the oil wells without outside help. The workers refuse an offer to ignore the advice of their union and the Mexican government, and are fired for their patriotism. A filmed "history of the Mexican oil industry" follows, beginning with "the first oil well" in 1860 and "the first refinery" in 1880. However, around the turn of the century, foreign oil companies receive concessions from Porfirio Díaz, and soon dominate the oil fields. Armed henchmen of the oil companies murder Mexican workers who try to organize a union. In 1935, "the union is born," and the workers go on strike in 1937.

Schoolteacher Margarita backs up Carana's assertions, and her boyfriend--truck driver Leonardo--agrees. Canales says Leonardo isn't even Mexican: he came to Mexico as a



child refugee from the Spanish Civil War. This prompts Carana to talk about (with accompanying stock footage) the more than 20,000 Spanish immigrants welcomed to

Mexico by Cárdenas in this period. However, after this brief digression, the film veers back to the subject of the oil expropriation (18 March 1938) and the subsequent world boycott of Mexican oil. A "flashback" scene which seems a little out of chronological order depicts Cárdenas and Castillo Nájera, Mexico's ambassador to the USA. The ambassador says the United States will intervene militarily if Mexico expropriates the oil fields (he got that one wrong), but this doesn't daunt Cárdenas at all.

Carana tells the students there have been great men in Mexico who should be emulated. Another brief flashback shows Cárdenas at an outdoor gathering with various *campesinos*, one of whom is induced to tell a funny story about a zebu. Cárdenas is offered a plate of tacos and turns down a knife and fork--he tells the others the taco is a part of Mexico history and doesn't require utensils to be eaten.



Newsreel footage of the aftermath of the expropriation (some of which was also used in *Rosa blanca*, 1961)

depicts the Mexican people contributing their own possessions and money to pay off the foreign oil companies. The scene then shifts to contemporary Mexico, where a Pemex (the national oil company) employee threatens to quit over his low pay and bad working conditions. The foreman and his fellow workers convince him to stay, saying the union is working to improve things (after all, it's only been more than forty-five years since Mexico took control of its own oil!). The oil industry was "given" by Cárdenas to Mexico: "we have to work harder, for Cárdenas and for Mexico!"

Lázaro Cárdenas then jumps into rather murky political waters (the oil expropriation is universally praised in Mexican history). Over footage of Fidel Castro and his men entering Havana, Carana says "General Lázaro Cárdenas was always faithful to his democratic convictions...his aid to the Cuban Revolution when it dispossessed the *latifundios* [big landowners] and gave land to the *campesinos* is a clear demonstration of the faith he always had in the *pueblo* [the people], independent of their nationality." Cárdenas was invited to Cuba as Castro's honored guest, and footage of the two men together, and Cárdenas speaking to a Havana crowd, follows.

The support Cárdenas gave Fidel Castro and the Cuban Revolution was a rather touchy subject in Mexico in the early 1960s, since the Mexican government at the time was anti-Communist although officially "non-aligned." Newspapers and broadcast media were forbidden in some cases to report on the political activities of Cárdenas (such as his protest over the U.S.-sponsored Bay of Pigs invasion), who was considered too leftist. Alejandro Galindo was also rather left-leaning but it is still mildly surprising to see this aspect of Cárdenas's post-presidential career openly lauded.

The final bit of documentary footage is an overlong sequence from the early 1980s showing Mexican President Miguel de la Madrid participating in a ceremony in Spain during which a statue of Lázaro Cárdenas is unveiled (and both de la Madrid and a Spanish politician make long speeches).

Carana concludes his peroration by telling the students that instead of celebrating the "Fiesta de maíz," the schoolchildren should plant corn, so Mexico can become self-sufficient in food (as it is in oil). (Ironically, the sack of corn delivered for the festival is marked "from Wyoming USA"). The students, Margarita, Carana, and the others march across a conveniently-plowed field singing and planting corn. Shots of the Pemex oil foreman and various oil installations wrap up the movie, as a voice on the soundtrack says "It is the heritage Cárdenas left us--we can't fail him!"

Lázaro Cárdenas is dedicated to the memory of director Miguel Contreras Torres, the late husband of producer Medea de Novara. On-screen thanks are given to the widow of Lázaro Cárdenas, his son Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas (a politician), and Jorge Russek.

As the previous paragraphs indicate, *Lázaro Cárdenas* is constructed in an unusual (not to say slipshod)

fashion, with no particular concern for chronological order. The bulk of the documentary sequences deal with the oil expropriation--again, not necessarily in chronological order --with the occasional digression into the treatment of Spanish Civil War refugees and Cárdenas' relations with Fidel Castro.

The contemporary scenes at the school are only a framing story but they are fairly coherent and well-done. Resortes rants and raves (but in a nice way) as the outside agitator, and Eduardo Noriega is good as his foil, the irate school administrator. The influence of Juan José Pérez Padilla can be spotted in the casting of María Teresa Sanders, Ramiro Orci, Benjamín Amezquita, and Salvador Godínez, all present in other movies of the '80s from this producer.



Lázaro Cárdenas is not what one would call an entertaining movie. It's really more of a political tract, but even as such it is assembled in such a clumsy fashion that it is something of a chore to sit through. However, the historical and political aspects make it interesting after a fashion.

Reprinted (with minor changes) from MFB 16/2



Político por error [Politician By Mistake] (Prods. Siman*, 1991) *Prod:* Ricardo Martínez; *Assoc Prod:* Jorge Simón, Jorge Guzmán; *Dir:* Alejandro Todd; *Adapt:* Blanca & Isabel Samperio; *Story:* Roberto Lozoya; *Photo:* Javier Cruz Jr.

Cast: Roberto "Flaco" Guzmán (*Ruperto Sánchez* "El Mosquito" & *Lic. Andrés Torreblanca*), Silvia Pasquel (*Elena*), Rojo Grau (*Juan Ortega*), Óscar Traven (*Jorge Fuentes*), Patricia Alvarez (*secretary*), Bruno Rey (*don Mario*), Alfredo Gutiérrez "El Turco" (*boss*), Gerardo Zepeda "Chiquilín" (*henchman*), Gustavo Aguilar "Manotas" (*hot dog vendor*), ?José Luis Cordero "Pocholo" (*bodyguard*), Sergio Sánchez (*regent*), Elvira Pedroza?, María Prado (*woman on bus*), Sergio Sánchez (*politician*)

*some sources also credit Cinelite but this is not on the print I have seen

Notes: a surprisingly decent little *videohome*, *Político por error* is predictable but earnest, well-acted, and generally well directed and produced (albeit on a miniscule budget). One note: the version available on the web has all of the profanity removed, yet doesn't seem to have come from a television broadcast (at least, there is no on-screen watermark). The end credits--if there were any--are also missing.

Two thugs confront a man and accidentally kill him when he pulls a pistol. The next day, *barrendero* (street cleaner) El Mosquito finds a complete suit of clothing in a plastic bag, and dons the suit, shirt, and tie (the shoes don't fit, so he gives them to his fellow worker Juan). El Mosquito discovers



"clothes make the man," as everyone greets him respectfully and a hot dog vendor gives him free food. However, a limousine suddenly pulls up and the chauffeur says "your wife is inside." Rather than make a scene, El Mosquito gets in. He discovers that he's being mistaken for *diputado* (congressman) Andrés Torreblanca. His wife Elena chastises him for his frequent absences. We later learn she's having an affair with Jorge, her husband's assistant. However, El Mosquito and Elena eventually fall in love, although he scrupulously avoids sleeping with her.

Torreblanca was a corrupt politician, and this is what precipitated his death: in flashback, we see that he accepted a bribe from a businessman and refused to deliver on his promises. The businessman only wanted Torreblanca roughed up, but decides the man's accidental death was propitious. However, when El Mosquito starts appearing in public as Torreblanca, the businessman is outraged. He sends his two thugs to murder his enemy, but they fail once more, shooting to death a waiter who strongly resembles Torreblanca, and who was wearing the politician's jacket (given to him by El Mosquito). The two men try a third time in a *pulquería*, but are beaten up by the customers and arrested.

Meanwhile, *barrendero* Juan discovers the corpse of



Torreblanca in some bushes and thinks it's his friend El Mosquito. Juan is arrested for murder but when El Mosquito learns of this, he uses his influence to have Juan released and the two friends are reunited.

El Mosquito tosses away his speech at a press conference and instead speaks extemporaneously, urging residents to stop polluting the city and cooperate with their neighbours. He's wildly popular and seems likely to win a senate post. In love with Elena, El Mosquito confesses the truth to her, but she doesn't care because she loves him. Torreblanca's party is also informed of the imposture, but they don't care either, since the voters support him. "Torreblanca" is elected to the senate.

The idea of doppelgangers has been used in popular culture for nearly two centuries. Edgar Allan Poe's 1839

story "William Wilson" served as the inspiration for multiple versions of *The Student of Prague* (the earliest was 1913), and one episode of *Spirits of the Dead* (1968), and the concept remains a popular one (*Enemy, The Double, Dead Ringers*, etc.) There are even previous examples of political doppelgangers, including *Dave* (1993).

Político por error glosses over some logical errors. If Torreblanca was so well known, wouldn't El Mosquito be aware of their resemblance? Wouldn't someone El Mosquito came across in his daily life say "you look like that politician?" Also--and this is very minor but still mildly annoying-- in one scene El Mosquito writes comments and instructions on letters



sent to him by constituents (asking for a tractor, complaining about a lack of water in their *barrio*), signing them "Andrés Torreblanca." Wouldn't someone notice that the signature was different? This doesn't even begin to address the issue of El Mosquito's total ignorance of Torreblanca's person life & habits, his job, and so forth. The film mentions this once: Jorge arrives at Torreblanca's home and says "I'll meet you at the office," but El Mosquito insists upon riding with Jorge, muttering to himself "If I don't go with you I won't have any idea where I'm supposed to be going."

[The film makes a point of indicating--several times-- that El Mosquito's feet are larger than Torreblanca's. I don't know if this is supposed to be some sort of sexual reference or not, but it isn't played that way at all. In fact, given Flaco Guzmán's frequent appearances in *sexy-comedies*, his character in *Político por error* is surprisingly celibate, although this is mostly attributed to his "decent" love for Elena: he fends off the advances of his secretary (obviously Torreblanca's mistress), but does express appreciation for the beauty of various other women, including Torreblanca's maid.]

The political aspects of *Político por error* are not very prominent. Torreblanca is apparently corrupt, but this is only mentioned once, and this is in the context of cheating a crooked businessman, so he's not blatantly depicted as evil. [Guzmán is almost never on-screen as Torreblanca, with the camera being careful--for some reason--not to show his face (even after the doppelganger surprise has been revealed). There is just one shot of Torreblanca's corpse in which Guzmán can actually be seen in his dual role. This tends to minimise what the audience knows of Torreblanca's character.] El Mosquito is depicted as a man of the people, socialising with passengers on a bus, in

a restaurant, a *pulquería*, etc., and using working-class slang. His secretary congratulates him for this, believing it's part of an act to attract voters. In the aforementioned scene where El Mosquito is reading letters from people, he approves the requests of those he deems sincere, and rejects those which seem to be from *lambiscones* (boot-lickers).

Towards the end of the movie, El Mosquito holds a press conference and delivers a speech in which he certainly appears to be channeling Cantinflas, talking in a popular manner about problems faced by everyday Mexicans (especially *chilangos*). The other politicians sitting with El Mosquito appear disconcerted but are not actively hostile, and eventually El Mosquito retains the backing of "his" party despite his populist statements.

Flaco Guzmán does a good job as working-class El Mosquito, adapting quickly (perhaps too quickly for

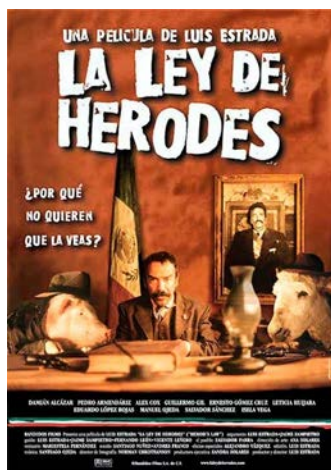


verisimilitude) to a life of wealth and power. Silvia Pasquel is fine as Torreblanca's wife, although she changes from an unfaithful shrew to a decent, love-struck woman practically overnight. Rojo Grau and Alfredo Gutiérrez are solid professionals and Óscar Traven

does the best he can with an underwritten role. Bruno Rey is sympathetic in a two scene cameo as a friend of El Mosquito and Juan.

Político por error appears to have been shot entirely on location (on the streets, in various homes, offices, and businesses) but there aren't any technical issues with the photography, sound, etc. This is about as slick as a *videohome* will get.

Short (76 minutes) and generally entertaining.



La ley de Herodes

[Herod's Law]

(Bandidos Films, 1999)

Exec Prod: Sandra Solares; Prod-Dir: Luis Estrada; Scr: Luis Estrada, Vicente Leñero,

Jaime Sampietro; Story: Luis Estrada, Fernando Javier León Rodríguez, Jaime Sampietro; Photo: Norman Christianson;

Music: Santiago Ojeda; Asst Dir: Martín Torres;

Film Ed: Luis Estrada; Art Dir: Salvador Parra, Ana Solares; Makeup: Alfredo Mora, Felipe Salazar; Prod Mgr: Marc Bedia, Carlos Estrada

Cast: Damián Alcázar (*Juan Vargas*), Pedro Armendáriz Jr. (*López*), Delia Casanova (*Rosa Morales*), Juan Carlos Colombo (*Ramírez*), Alex Cox (*gringo Robert Smith*), Guillermo Gil (*Padre Pérez*), Ernesto Gómez Cruz (*Governor Sánchez*), Leticia Huijara (*Gloria*), Luis de Icaza (*Alfredo García*), Eduardo López Rojas (*Dr. Morales*), Manuel Ojeda (*cantinero*), Salvador Sánchez (*Carlos Pek*), Evangelina Sosa (*Perlita*), Isela Vega (*doña Lupe*), Miguel Ángel Fuentes (*Pancho*), Jesús Ochoa (*Jesús Canales*), José Manuel Poncelis (*Filemón*), Jorge Zárate (*Tiburón*)

Notes: *La ley de Herodes* (originally announced as *La ley de la pistola*) began shooting in summer 1999, partially financed by IMCINE. When the movie was ready for release, the administration of IMCINE (which is, after all, a Mexican government agency) had second thoughts and attempt to "dump" the picture, booking it into a handful of theatres with little or no publicity. Luis Estrada, aided by other members of the film community, took his case to the press, which responded with numerous articles decrying the "censorship" of Estrada's movie. Eventually, IMCINE sold Estrada back the rights to *La ley de Herodes*, and it became a box-office and critical success, winning Arieles for Best Film, Director, Actor (Alcázar), Co-Starring Actor (Armendáriz Jr.), Co-Starring Actress (Isela Vega), Supporting Actor (Juan Carlos Colombo), Original Screenplay (Luis Estrada, Jaime Sampietro, Fernando León, Vicente Leñero), Art Direction (Salvador Parra), Makeup (Alfredo Mora, Felipe Salazar), and Costumes (María Estela Fernández).

What was the fuss about? Although set in 1949, the movie dares to use real names--the political party PRI, then-president Miguel Alemán--and depicts the Mexican political process as hopelessly corrupt. Since PRI was still in power when *La ley de Herodes* was made (although Vicente Fox would soon become the first non-PRI president of Mexico since the 1920s when the party was formed), these "revelations" (not that anybody was unaware of political corruption) were deemed sensitive and insulting. If the movie had been set in an "imaginary" country and had used a fictitious name instead of PRI, the controversy would probably have been muted (as would the film's popular and critical impact).

As the movie opens, small-town municipal president García frantically stuffs a suitcase full of cash (hidden, among other places, in a hollowed-out book of Mexican laws and behind a formal portrait of President Alemán), as his outraged constituents draw near. García tries to flee, but has his head hacked off by a machete! The news reaches the state government offices; Governor Sánchez orders López, his secretary of internal government, to fill the post promptly with a party stalwart who won't make waves. López asks his assistant Ramírez for some names, dismissing one as "too honest" and one as "too corrupt."

Finally they choose the not-too bright Juan Vargas (who "looks like Tin Tan"), currently in charge of a garbage dump.

Vargas and his wife depart for San Miguel de los Saguaros, confident this will be the first step in Juan's political career--if he performs well, he might even become a national legislator. Their hopes are somewhat dashed when they arrive in the squalid hamlet that is San Miguel, learn the last three municipal presidents have been killed, and discover that the town budget consists



of just seven pesos. Juan's constituents are mostly *indio campesinos* who don't speak Spanish--his secretary, Carlos Pek, has to translate--but he is also soon introduced to venal priest Padre Pérez (who dreams of having a nice Packard like Juan's), brothel madame doña Lupe, and the bitter Dr. Morales (who, as the perennially unsuccessful PAN candidate for municipal president, immediately becomes Juan's enemy).

Juan visits the state capital to ask for assistance, and López provides it--he gives him a pistol and a book of laws, saying Juan can make his own way if he uses them properly. Back in San Miguel, Juan tries to close doña



Lupe's brothel and, in a scuffle, accidentally shoots her in the leg! Juan panics but is stunned when a repentant Lupe appears at his office and pays her "fine." Eventually, the municipal

president's use of the "law and the pistol" have the whole town cowed. He hires *gringo* Roberto Smith (played by filmmaker Alex Cox) and announces plans to modernize the town, promising President Alemán himself will come to inaugurate the new public works.

However, doña Lupe becomes tired of Juan's constant demands for money (and his gratis use of her three young prostitutes), and hires the burly Pancho to give the corrupt politico a thrashing. That night, Juan confronts Pancho and Lupe and shoots them both to death, but loses his PRI badge in the process. Eventually, Juan is forced to frame town drunk Filemón for the crime and then kills the man. Dr. Morales tries to complain to the governor but is given the runaround; in his absence, Juan uncovers "evidence" that Morales sexually abused his servant girl, and forces Morales to leave town forever. Juan also learns his wife has been unfaithful to him with Robert Smith; he beats her

and keeps her chained up for a time, but she finally escapes and steals most of his ill-gotten gains.

Juan's rampant corruption is bad enough, but matters also turn bad at the state level. López learns the party has chosen another candidate (certain to be elected) to succeed Governor Sánchez. Sánchez decides to form a new party, one more "loyal" to the Revolution, but López can't wait and sends his henchmen to assassinate his rival Terrazas. The attempt fails and López has to flee, with his henchman Tiburón. They stop in San Miguel in an attempt to obtain some of the money



Juan has extorted from the townspeople, but (as noted above) it's all gone. Juan shoots both López and Terrazas, just as his constituents--again--storm his office to rid themselves of their corrupt municipal president. To escape, Juan climbs the (sole) electrical pole erected as part of his plan to modernize San Miguel, just as a convoy of police and soldiers arrive.

Some time later, a new municipal president and his wife arrive in San Miguel. What happened to his predecessor, the new man asks the faithful Carlos Pek? The scene cuts



to the Mexican Congress, where a cleaned-up Juan Vargas, now a Congressman, makes a speech about the part he played in smashing the "plot" of López. And Ramírez? He now has Juan's old job running the garbage dump.

La ley de Herodes is an excellent, funny movie, very nicely shot and acted. There are a few extraneous characters (Rosa and the *cantinero*, for example) and sequences (the speeded-up sequence of Juan and the three prostitutes in bed is amusing but stylistically rather out of place), but nothing that seriously harms the overall impact. The entire cast is good, especially Alcázar, Salvador Sánchez (in a change of pace role) and Isela Vega.

The "Herod's Law" referred to in the title is a rhyme which roughly translates to "screw the other guy before he screws you." Another good line is "el que transa, avanza" (he who cheats, gets ahead). I also laughed (but nobody else did) when Juan meets *gringo* Robert Smith--who charges him an outrageous amount to "repair" Juan's car (i.e., to replace a loose spark plug wire)--and agrees to pay later, telling Smith his name is "Emilio Gabriel Fernández Figueroa" and to look him up in (the wrong) town. I guess the rest of the audience didn't recognize the names of the most famous Mexican movie director and cinematographer. A top-notch movie.



Pachito Rex: Me voy, pero no del todo

[Pachito Rex: I'm Going, But For Good]

(CONACULTA-IMCINE-CENART-Estudios Churubusco



Azteca-Centro de Capacitación Cinematográfica, 2000/©2001)
Exec Prod: Ángeles Castro Gurria; *Director of Production:* Hugo Rodríguez; *Dir:* Fabián Hofman; *Scr:* Flavio González Mello; *Photo:* Alberto Anaya; *Music:* Pablo Flores, Rodrigo Alton Miralda; *Prod Mgr:* Emilio Portes, Alejandro Gerber; *Film Ed:* Francisco Rivera Águila; *Art Dir:* Antonio Plá;

Creation of Virtual Spaces: Eduardo González; *Digital Composition:* Daniel Dávila; *Sound Design:* Rogelio Villanueva; *Direct Sound:* Gabriel Coll

Cast: Ernesto Gómez Cruz (*Guadalupe Sobrino*), Ana Ofelia Murguía (*Rosa María*), Fernando Torre Lapham (*don Genaro*), Pedro Altimirano (*Enrique Estrada*), Carlos Cobos (*Machado*), Alejandro Calva (*Alfonso Romo "el Chueco"*), Yuriria del Valle (*Rumania*), Damián Alcázar (*Abel Mejía*), Lisa Owen (*María*), Arturo Ríos (*Enrique Piña Román*), Jorge Zárate (*Francisco "Pachito" Ruiz*), Marco Antonio "Mochi" Camacho (*young Sobrino*), Mónica Huarte (*souvenir vendor*), Juan Carlos Vives (*tomb night watchman*), Rodrigo Vera (*Chuy*), Mariana Vega (*Pachito's mistress*)

Notes: this is a unusual "experimental" film, shot mostly on digital "sets" and rather short (82 minutes including credits), but is still interesting and entertaining. The film's *mise-en-scene* at times tends to overwhelm the plot and actors--in addition to the stylized sets, the color scheme of the movie is very muted--and the two (or three) "alternate reality" plots require a certain amount of intellectual investment on the part of the audience.



Pachito is a popular singer and an anti-corruption candidate for president. As he's leaving a rally, a young man asks for an autograph and then assassinates Pachito, saying it was "for Rosa María." Years later, Guadalupe Sobrino--the assassin--is released from prison.

[Amusingly, he moves into an office and practically recreates his prison cell layout!] He's a lawyer but as an afterthought tacks up a hand-written sign on his door

adding "Televisions repaired." Years before, Sobrino was employed in the TV repair shop owned by don Genaro and his wife, Rosa María. He visits them now: Genaro, an elderly man dealing with the after-effects of a stroke, accuses Sobrino of having an affair with his wife. Sobrino protests, saying he didn't write the book claiming to be his "memoirs," which indicated he shot Pachito "for Rosa María" (he was actually just asking for the candidate's autograph for her). In a flashback to the assassination, we see Pachito accusing his aides of using real bullets, indicating it was a put-up job gone wrong.

Police detective Estrada, who had been instrumental in torturing a confession out of Sobrino after the shooting, is now summoned to the late star's masoleum/museum. Someone has stolen Pachito's body! Estrada, a fan of the singer, questions Pachito's daughter, his lover Rumania, and his drummer Chueco (each time asking for their autograph!). Chueco claims there is a black market which will pay millions for body parts from famous people.

In a storeroom of the tomb, Estrada finds Pachito's death mask, and steals it for himself. He's fired from the police force to placate the irate Rumania. Later, Chueco is shot to death and Pachito's body is recovered, but Estrada thinks it is a set-up. A police agent breaks into Estrada's apartment to recover the mask; Estrada is mortally wounded in the struggle, but manages to make it to Pachito's tomb before he expires. The star's body is now back in its place of honor.

Another flashback to the original assassination shows Pachito on the way to the hospital; the ambulance radio states he was shot in the back, which means Sobrino was innocent. Chueco was the real assassin, in complicity with Rumania and security chief Machado.

The second story begins with "Había una vez..." (Once Upon a Time) on the screen.

Failed architect Abel refuses to sell his designs cheaply, although his wife (referring to their unique, globular



house), says "who's going to pay 500 thousand pesos for a home in the shape of a meatball?" Abel furiously insists his home is modeled after ancient Guaruba Indian designs. One day, Abel runs into his former partner, Enrique Piña Román, now a government minister. In this alternate reality, Pachito did not die when he was shot by Sobrino, and has become a sort of "dictator for life." However, the aging president is ill and wants a masoleum to impress the world. Enrique hires Abel, who demands 500 thousand pesos for the design (only to have Enrique say "I was thinking of a half a million...dollars.").

Abel only accepts the job at the urging of his wife, who says they'll lose their home if they don't pay their debts. He is unable to come up with a design (despite smoking a lot of marijuana), until he discovers a Guaruba figure in a book. His wife and everyone else feel it resembles a pile

of dog feces (!) [It also looks like a swirl of soft-serve ice cream.] but Pachito recognizes it as the Guaruba design symbolizing the soul's ascent to heaven, and approves the concept! [Pachito also admits he has 22 bullets lodged in his body, the result of many assassination attempts.]

Some feel Abel has sold out ("Death to Traitors" is painted on the side of his house). His wife leaves him. Enrique Piña Román is murdered and Abel is appointed to his ministerial post. Finally, the grand day arrives, and Abel gives Pachito a tour of the gigantic masoleum (the same one seen in the first story). Pachito insists it's perfect but Abel demurs: "It's missing one thing...you, sir." As he leaves, Abel, his work done, is killed (off-screen).



Pachito Rex is certainly not a serious look at politics: it's an ironic black comedy, in which everyone betrays everyone else. In the first story (or, if you count Sobrino's story and Estrada's story separately, two stories), Pachito is a favorite of the people and an idol even after his death. Pachito's speech refers to "cleaning up the sewer" and says "blood must flow to stop the violence." He asks if the "patient is able to stand the operation" and the people cheer. However, the fake assassination scheme suggests he's not above deceit and dirty tricks himself, although he's double-crossed by Rumania and the others (for reasons not exactly clear, although Pachito says they needed a "martyr"). In the second section, graffiti refers to Pachito as a "murderer" (Abel himself adds horns and fangs to a caricature of the dictator on a wall). The principle of "no reelection" (of the president) helped foment the Mexican Revolution, yet Pachito has managed to get himself reelected many times (it isn't clear, but he's apparently been president for nearly 30 years, based on one comment). We don't see much evidence of corruption (Pachito has a mistress, Piña Román has a limo and snorts cocaine), but it appears Mexico (or whatever fictional country the film may be set in) has become a sort of police state.

The production design of *Pachito Rex* clearly calls attention to itself, but in only a few instances do the digital sets seem obviously fake. One quickly gets used to the almost colorless, contrasty, noir-like photography (the movie was also shot in a widescreen process, and fortunately the video version is letter-boxed, although it appears a bit of the picture is missing at the left edge, at least). The performances are very good.

The first feature film for director Fabián Hofman (he has since made one more, 2010's *Te extraño*), *Pachito Rex*

is rather "experimental" in form, but not pretentious and generally good entertainment overall.

Reprinted from MFB Vol. 13 #2



Guerrero* (Cin. Guerrero, ©2001) *Prod/Dir:* Benjamín

Escamilla; *Co-Prod:*

Angélica Ochoa Estevez;

Scr: Félix Salgado

Macedonio, Gabriel

Vergara, Benjamín

Escamilla; *Photo:* Gregorio

Chávez; *Prod Mgr:* Carlos

García; *Prod Chief:*

Agustín Gómez; *Asst Dir:*

Israel Pasco; *Editorial Dir:*

Karina Escamilla Luján;

Skull Cycle Design: Bruno

Pastrana B; *Stunt Chief:*

Carlos Rodríguez;

Makeup: Georgina Miranda; *Sound:* Abel Flores; *Sound*

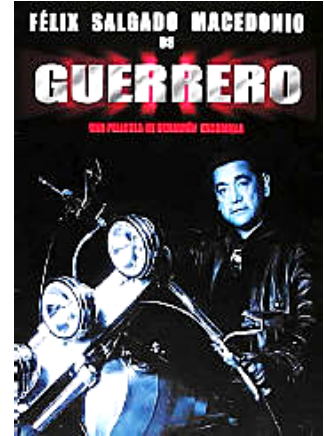
Des: Carlos Aguilar; *Union:* STIC

*this can be translated as "Warrior," but it also refers to the state of Guerrero where most of the film takes place

Cast: Félix Salgado Macedonio (*Félix*), Jorge Reynoso (*Perro Chato*), Lina Santos (*Mariana, wife*), Manuel Ojeda (*El Tigre*), Víctor Carpinteiro (*Edmundo Mejorada*), Andy Valdez (*young Félix*), Roberto Brondo (*Roberto Ladrón de Guevara*), Joseba Iñaki (*Justo Reyes*), Roberto Ruy (*Benito*), Dacia Alcaraz (*Mariana, girlfriend*), Andrea Torre (*Flor*), Viviana Oliva (*Emma*), Diane Samperio (*Laura*), José Gómez Parcero (*Juan*), Yossi Salazar (*secretary*), Jaime E. Alejo (*young Perro Chato*), Eugenia Cabrera (*Yadira*), Virginia Cabrera (*Perla*), Justino Carvajal (*Félix as a deputy*), Wulfano Sálgado (*father of Félix*), Eva Vargas (*mother of Félix*), Emanuel Mujica (*baby Félix*), Luis M. Onofre (*Félix as adolescent*), Benjamín Escamilla (*minister*)

Notes: a vanity project for politician Félix Salgado Macedonio, *Guerrero* is slick enough in terms of production but is ultimately rather pointless and uninteresting dramatically. Salgado's life and career are sketched out (although anyone unfamiliar with the facts would have a hard time following what's going on, since it's more or less a "highlight reel" rather than a coherent narrative), with some fictional (one assumes) elements added.

Salgado was born in a rural area of the state of Guerrero in 1957, and graduated from university as an agronomical engineer. The film takes pains to depict Salgado as politically aware from a fairly young age, but his active participation in politics apparently dates from 1987. He ran for Congress in 1988 and lost, but after he emptied sacks of stolen & burned ballots bearing votes for him on the floor of the Mexican legislature, was awarded a seat



due to the electoral fraud. Salgado was a founding member of the left-leaning PRD party, lost a race for governor of Guerrero in 1993, was elected a national senator in 1994, then lost the governor's race again in 1999. He returned to the lower house of Congress in 2000, and served as mayor of Acapulco from 2005-2008. He's currently active in the presidential campaign of Andrés Manuel López Obrador.

Guerrero begins with Félix as a toddler, eating a scorpion! (This is apparently a cherished family memory, and is ironic because one of his sisters later dies after being stung by a scorpion.) His father is a farmer and his mother works for a wealthy family, taking their dinner scraps home for her children. As a child, Félix is exposed to the poverty of the rural population and exploitation and abuse at the hands of the *caciques* of the region, notably governor El Tigre. The film cuts between scenes of earnest Félix--attending the Universidad de Guerrero, courting his future wife Mariana, and his first cherished motorcycle--and footage of El Tigre's spoiled son Perro Chato, who wastes food, drives fancy cars, and is a womaniser.

Félix becomes radicalised after participating in a student demonstration in Acapulco: the police viciously beat the students, including Félix, and



shoot and kill others, including his friend Laura. Félix is released from jail by the intervention of activist lawyer Justo, but the police won't be punished for their actions.

El Tigre's police abuse the *campesinos*, burning one man alive (a long "fire gag" stunt), and murdering various



people who organise against him or refuse to sell their land. El Tigre tries to bribe Justo but the lawyer refuses, so the corrupt governor has Justo video-taped with a prostitute. Justo doesn't give in to the blackmail

attempt. Only when the president of Mexico rebukes El Tigre (via telephone), does the governor back off somewhat.

Félix, now married to Mariana, works for the "Acción!" newspaper, which is attacked by the police. He joins the "Partido Blanco" (White Party) and runs for Congress. Although he loses, Félix exposes fraud by dumping stolen ballots and ashes on the floor of Congress. [News footage is used here, although the voice-over by a newscaster is not original: he refers to "Félix," without using his full name--

which is in fact the way Salgado is referred to throughout the film.]

Time passes and Félix runs for governor against Perro Chato, the grown son of El Tigre, but loses. He becomes a senator.

Meanwhile, a subplot is introduced. *Campesino* Benito has to go into hiding because he opposes abuses by local *caciques*, especially concerning timber



rights. He sends his wife and daughter Flor to live in Acapulco with his sister. Flor gets a job as a maid in Perro Chato's house and starts dating Edmundo, a young photographer who works for Perro Chato. However, they later break up when Flor sees Edmundo bring a video to Perro Chato while the latter is enjoying himself with several prostitutes.

Félix and his family narrowly escape when their house is firebombed by political opponents. He later jumps his motorcycle over a police roadblock. When a car deliberately runs him off the road and Félix is badly injured, newspapers accuse him of being drunk and/or drugged. Later, police abduct Félix, beat him up, then pour liquor down his throat. He's charged with being drunk and disorderly. [There is actual video footage of a surly Félix being interviewed after this incident.]

In June 1995 near the town of Aguas Blancas, police ambush a truckload of *campesinos* on their way to a protest march. The *campesinos* are massacred and guns placed next to their bodies to justify the police shooting. Edmundo video-tapes the massacre (on Perro Chato's orders), but turns the tape over to Flor because he's outraged. The tape causes a scandal and Mexico's president calls Perro Chato to complain (like father, like son). Flor and Edmundo reunite. Félix, who knows Flor, rides up on his motorcycle and shakes Edmundo's hand. The film concludes with voiceover of Félix vowing to continue the struggle, as signs reading "RIP Chiapas," "Mientes Salinas!" [Salinas Lies], "Fraude Electoral 1988," and "Justicia! Matanza Aguas Blancas" [Justice! Aguas Blancas Massacre] are shown.

The actual Félix Salgado Macedonio doesn't have a lot of footage in *Guerrero*, and very little of this is "dramatic." He's impersonated at various ages by at least 4 different people, and these are the scenes where he grows up, gets politically aware, marries Mariana, etc. Salgado himself is shown several times making speeches (he's really not a good orator at all), riding his fancy motorcycle into towns where adoring crowds cheer him, etc. You have to give him credit for not giving in to the temptation

to play himself as a younger man, since he looks every bit of his 40+ years.

As mentioned above, the events of the film more or less represent Salgado's actual political career up to 2000, but this is only obvious if you know his background. After Félix reaches manhood, the film stops giving hints about how much time has elapsed between various scenes, so that his stints as *diputado* and *senador* and his first campaign for governor blur together. Although the Aguas



Blancas massacre took place in 1995 and the film seemingly concludes shortly after that, there are two later scenes which apparently take place in 1999 and 2000: a woman is denied the right to vote (Salgado's

second run for governor in 1999) and Félix's arrest for drunkenness (which took place in 2000). So apparently Edmundo and Flor didn't get back together shortly after the Aguas Blancas massacre, but not until 5 years later? This is just one example of the vague chronological nature of the narrative which would be puzzling to anyone who doesn't have a cheat sheet of Salgado's political career.

Guerrero tries to be a hagiography of Salgado but fails. The film attempts to portray him as a macho man of the people who hates *caciques* and fights for the rights of the common man, but we are shown very little of this on-screen. He makes brief and awkward speeches, rides his motorcycle, gets beaten up and injured (a lot) and that's about it. The Félix impersonators make some brief stabs at conveying political fervour, but these are scattered and inconsequential. A large amount of screen time is spent on El Tigre and Perro Chato and their minions, who come off as sinister and greedy but at least sincerely sinister and greedy.

One surprising aspect of *Guerrero* is its depiction of police brutality in the service of the political establishment. There is no equivocation: we see police murder people in six separate scenes, not to mention several beatings and the arson of Félix's house. There are no good politicians in the film (other than Félix): they are all complicit in the killings and abuses, either before or after the fact.

The performances in *Guerrero* are generally satisfactory. Even the real Félix Salgado Macedonio is



adequate, although he has little to do. Manuel Ojeda, Jorge Reynoso, Roberto Brondo, Roberto Ruy and (to a lesser extent) Lina Santos are better (Santos doesn't have much footage), but that's because they're seasoned pros. Technical aspects are mostly fine, although the boom mike shows up in several scenes, but the effects and stunts are good enough. The score is library music except for a catchy *corrido*--"Jinete de acero" [Steel Rider]--near the end of the movie.

Guerrero isn't a terrible film but there's no reason to watch it unless you are intensely interested in Mexican politics of the 1980s-early 2000s. And even then you won't learn much and you won't be entertained much.



Some Other Political Films Reviewed in Previous Issues of MFB

This issue of MFB focuses on films about politics, just in time for the 2018 Mexican presidential elections. There are numerous Mexican movies dealing with politics and politicians, some of which have been reviewed in **MFB** before (list not comprehensive):

Ante el cadáver de un líder (1973) 5/7

Arráncame la vida (2007) 15/2

El atentado (2010) 17/1

Ciudadano Buelna (2012) 20/4

Colosio el asesinato (2012) 19/3

Corrupción!! (1983) 10/6

Crisis--crimen organizado (1996) 13/2

...De que lado estás? (2001) 16/6

Distinto amanecer (1943) 15/3

La dictadura perfecta (2013) 20/6

El Infierno (2010) 17/1

La madre (1979) 14/5

Maten al león (1975) 13/2

Las pasiones del poder (1994) 1/11

Playa azul (1991) 18/3

Rosauro Castro (1950) 5/5

Sangre derramada (1973) 20/4

El sexenio de la muerte--Primera parte: el asesinato de un presidente (1997) 6/3

La sucesión (1978) 13/2

Su excelencia (1966) 5/10



The Mexican Film Bulletin is published 4 times a year by David Wilt, 6803 Dartmouth Ave, College Park MD 20740 USA. dwilt@umd.edu
Contents ©2018 by David E. Wilt except for material already copyrighted, which appears under the Fair Use provisions. Read MFB online: <http://terpconnect.umd.edu/~dwilt/mexnews.html>

