

The Mexican Film Bulletin

Special Issue: Summer 2020

We're Back! (Sort Of)

Although at this point we're not ready to resume "regular" publication, there will hopefully be two special issues of **MFB** in 2020, one in the summer and our annual "Halloween Issue" at the end of October.

Sadly, a number of film personnel have passed away since our last issue (December 2019) and so we have a lot of obituaries this time. A number of these individuals are from a certain "generation" who began their film work in the 1960s or early 1970s-- Jaime Humberto Hermosillo, Gabriel Retes, Pilar Pellicer, Aarón Hernán, Óscar Chávez, Héctor Ortega--and thus made films that are particularly well-remembered by those of a certain age (like yours truly). [It also means that two or more of these people often worked on the same film, as some of the reviews in this issue illustrate.]

The COVID-19 pandemic has strongly affected film and other entertainment industries. Normally the summer issue of **MFB** would cover the Ariel Awards, but this year's ceremony has been postponed to an as-yet undetermined future date.

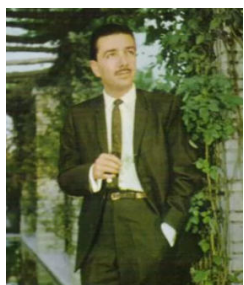
In any case, we're back with articles and film reviews to help get you through the next phase of the pandemic: hopefully all our readers are safe and watching lots of films while "locked down."



Obituaries

Alejandro Algara

Singer and composer Alejandro Algara died on 18 April 2020; he was 92 years old. Alejandro Aurelio Algara de Carlos y Menéndez was born in Mexico City in January 1928. He became a professional singer in 1950 and had a long career singing romantic *boleros*, especially the work of Agustín Lara. Algara appeared in a number of films from the early 1950s into the 1970s, including



Música de siempre, *Una canción para recordar*, and *Nosotros los jóvenes*. He also dubbed the voice of the Prince in the Spanish-language version of Walt Disney's *Sleeping Beauty*. Algara was married to actress Mónica Prado.



Óscar Chávez

Singer-actor Óscar Chávez died of complications from the COVID-19 virus on 30 April 2020; he was 85

years of age. Óscar Chávez Fernández was born in March 1935 in Mexico City. Chávez became interested in acting, studying with Seki Sano and at the Instituto de Bellas Artes school. He also worked in radio, sang, and directed plays before making his screen debut in *Los caifanes* (1966).

Chávez subsequently appeared in a number of popular films, including the remake of *Santa*, but spent much of his time on music, along with political and social activism. In the mid-1970s he was among



the actors who formed the Sindicato de Actores Independientes to challenge the established ANDA union. As a result, Chávez only appeared in a handful of films after the early 1970s--his last film credit was on 2000's *Piedras verdes*, in which he acted and received a shared Ariel nomination for Best Music Score. Chávez had a long and outstanding career as a singer-songwriter, both as a recording artist & live performer.

Óscar Chávez is survived by his wife Raquel Vázquez.



Chamín Correa

Musician Chamín Correa passed away on 14 January 2020; he was 90 years old. Benjamín Correa was born in Mexico City in February 1929. With Roberto Cantoral and Leonel Gálvez, Correa formed the trio Los Tres Caballeros in the early as guitarist and backup vocalist. Correa had a successful career with that group, as a session musician and soloist, and as a producer and arranger for other artists.



Los Tres Caballeros appeared in a number of Mexican films, including *Pecado mortal*, *Sucedió en México*, *Se los chupó la bruja*, and *Bolero inmortal*.



Gonzalo Curiel

Voice actor Gonzalo Curiel died on 29 March 2020; he was 81 years of age. Gonzalo Curiel Larráinzar was

born in January 1939, the son of composer Gonzalo Curiel. He worked steadily in dubbing international films and television programs, and was also a dubbing director and radio announcer. Among the characters he played were Kent Brockman on "The Simpsons" and Tom Selleck as "Magnum P.I." 3 of Curiel's children also became actors, although two of them pre-deceased him.



Rosita Fornés

Actress, singer and dancer Rosita Fornés died of respiratory problems in a Miami hospital on 10 June 2020; she was 97 years of age. Rosalía Lourdes Elisa Palet Bonavia was born in New York in February 1923; her parents were from Spain but emigrated to Cuba (they later returned to Spain and then moved back to Cuba during the Spanish Civil War). Fornés made her performing debut in the late 1930s and moved to Mexico in the 1940s where she appeared in a number of films, both



musical and dramatic. She married comic actor Manuel Medel in December 1947. After her marriage broke up in the early 1950s, Fornés returned to Cuba, although she spent some time in Spain with her second husband, actor Armando Bianchi.

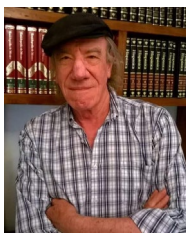
Fornés worked in Cuba even during the Castro administration, transcending politics. Later in life, she lived in both Havana and Miami.

Fornés' Mexican films included *Me gustan todas*, *El mariachi desconocido*, and *No me olvides nunca*--all of which were shot in Cuba--as well as *Cara sucia* (with Medel) and *La carne manda*. In 1987 she appeared with Ninón Sevilla in *Hoy como ayer*, a Cuban-Mexican co-production about musician Benny Moré.



Tino Geiser

The death of composer Tino Geiser in Querétaro was announced on 16 May 2020; no cause of death was given. Agustín Sexto Fagiolani Geiser was born in Argentina in November 1944. It's unclear when Geiser emigrated to Mexico, but he began scoring *telenovelas* and motion pictures in the 1980s (he



also worked extensively with various recording artists as a producer, arranger, and musical director). Among the films he worked on were *La guerrera vengadora*, *Al filo del terror*, *Juan Nadie*, and *Keiko en peligro*.



Jaime Humberto Hermosillo

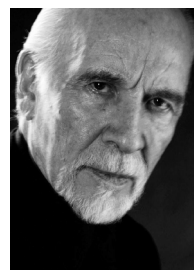
Director Jaime Humberto Hermosillo, one of the most prominent Mexican film directors of the 1970s and beyond, passed away on 13 January 2020; he was 77 years old. Hermosillo was born in Aguascalientes in January 1942. He attended the CUEC film school in Mexico City, where he made his first long-form film, the medium-length *Los nuestros*, in 1969. Hermosillo went on to write and direct more than 3 dozen feature films over the next five decades, many of them dealing with topics rarely touched upon in Mexican cinema prior to that point, especially sexual and interpersonal issues, including same-sex relationships. He also experimented with different aspects of film form, including a film which took place in real time without cuts, and shooting in digital formats.

He was honoured with numerous Arieles: Best Picture, Best Director, Best Screen Story for *La pasión según Berenice*, Best Film (a tie), Best Director, Best Screenplay for *Naufragio*, Best Screenplay for *Las apariencias engañan*, and Best Screenplay for *De noche vienes*, *Esmeralda*. Hermosillo was also nominated for 10 additional Arieles, and performers and technicians in his films won nearly a dozen Arieles.



Aarón Hernán

Actor Aarón Hernán died on 26 April 2020; he was 88 years old. Aarón Hernández Rodríguez was born in



the state of Chihuahua in November 1931. Although he knew from an early age that he wanted to be an actor, Hernán became an accountant to support himself and his wife. He moved to Mexico City and attended the ANDA acting school run by Andrés Soler, making his

professional debut on the stage in the 1950s. Hernán moved into television and then film in the 1960s, working steadily in both mediums until well into the 2010s. Often cast as stern authority figures, sometimes villains, Hernán usually played supporting roles but would occasionally take a lead, as in *Llovizna* (1978). He was nominated for an Ariel for his role in *Kino* (1991).



Héctor Ortega

Héctor Ortega, actor, writer and director, died on 3 June 2020. Héctor Ortega Gómez was born in Mexico City in January 1939 (other sources give July 1936). He enrolled at UNAM to study architecture, but decided to make acting his career. Ortega made his film debut in Alberto Isaac's *En este pueblo no hay ladrones* in 1964, and would go on to appear in a



number of other films directed by Isaac, as well as working for Alejandro Jodorowsky, Luis Alcoriza, Felipe Cazals and others. In the 1970s Ortega was one of a group of actors who formed the Sindicato de Actores Independientes, a short-lived attempt to provide an alternative to ANDA.

Ortega won 3 Arieles during his career: Best Story and Best Screenplay for *El*

Aguila descalza (shared), and Best Supporting Actor for *Mariana, Mariana*. He was nominated 4 additional times: Best Actor and Best Screenplay (shared) for *Cuartelazo*, Best Co-Starring Actor (*El rincón de las vírgenes*), and Best Supporting Actor for *El costo de la vida*.

Héctor Ortega directed two feature films, *La palomilla al rescate* and *La palomilla en vacaciones misteriosas*. He was also a respected director and performer on the stage and worked frequently in television.



Pilar Pellicer

Actress Pilar Pellicer died on 16 May 2020 as a result of the COVID-19 virus; she was 82 years old. Pilar Pellicer López de Llergo was born in Mexico City (some sources indicate the state of Tabasco) in February 1938 (sources differ). She studied acting with



Seki Sano and made her film debut in a small role in *El vendedor de muñecas* (1954). Pellicer appeared in a handful of films over the next

several years, including two for director Luis Buñuel--*Nazarín* and *Los ambiciosos*--then was off-screen until the mid-1960s. She returned to cinema with roles in *Pedro Páramo*, *Las visitaciones del Diablo*, *Los amigos*, and other films. Pellicer won the Best Actress Ariel for the title role in *La Choca*. She continued to

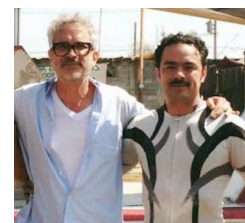
appear in films, on television and on the stage into the 2010s.

Pilar Pellicer was married to James Metcalf; their daughter is actress Ariane Pellicer (who produced and starred in *Marea suave*, in which her mother had a role). Pina Pellicer, Pilar's sister, was a popular actress before committing suicide in 1964.



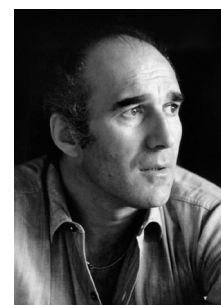
Nelson Pérez Pasillas

Nelson Pérez Pasillas, a circus performer known as the "Bullet Man," died on 20 May 2020 after a motorcycle accident; he was 40 years old. Pérez Pasillas, a member of the Odisseis Circus, appeared in one scene in Alfonso Cuarón's film *Roma*, being shot from a cannon into a net.



Michel Piccoli

Veteran French actor Michel Piccoli died on 12 May 2020 after suffering a stroke; he was 94 years old. Piccoli was born in Paris in December 1925; he made his film debut in 1945, although he had previously appeared on the stage (and would continue to work in plays and on television in addition to his film work throughout his career). Piccoli worked multiple times with director Luis Buñuel, beginning with *La muerte en este jardín* (1956, a Mexican-French co-production shot in Mexico). Later in life, Piccoli formed his own production company; he also wrote and directed several feature films.



Gabriel Retes



Director, actor, writer, and producer Gabriel Retes passed away on 20 April 2020; he was 73 years old. José Ignacio Gabriel Jorge Retes y Balzaretti was born in Mexico City in March 1947, the son of actors Ignacio Retes and Lucila Balzaretti. While barely a

teenager, Retes began to act on the stage, and started appearing in films as an actor in the late 1960s. He also became involved with the Cooperativa de Cine Marginal, a group of young filmmakers working in the Super-8 format; he directed a number of films of varying length in Super-8 before making his "industry" debut with *Chin Chin el teporocho*, which received an Ariel as Best First Work.

In 1978, Retes helped found the Cooperativa Río Mixcoac. He continued to make films until his death, including one (*La Réplica*) which has yet to be released. Retes shared a Best Original Story Ariel for *Bienvenido-Welcome*, and was nominated for Best Director and Best Screenplay Arieles for the same film.

Gabriel Retes was married to Pilar Campesino, Tina Romero, and Lourdes Elizarrarás, all of whom worked on his films. He had three children, all involved in the film industry: Juan Claudio Retes, Gabriela Retes, and Cristóbal Retes.



Héctor Suárez

Actor and comedian Héctor Suárez died on 2 June 2020; he was 81 years old. Suárez was born in Mexico City in October 1938. Although he considered

becoming an architect, in the late 1950s he became involved with a theatrical group directed by Carlos Ancira, and acting became his career. Suárez worked on the stage and on television, including both *telenovelas* and in comedy programs such as "Chucherías," and later "Qué no pasa?" In the mid-1960s he made his film debut, working mostly in supporting parts and then in ensemble casts until the 1970s when he received larger roles, and the 1980s when he starred in a number of pictures.



Although known for his comic roles, Suárez was also well-regarded as a dramatic actor. He received the Best Supporting Actor Ariel for *Mecánica nacional*. Among his other popular films were *El Mil Usos*, *La grilla*, *Picardía mexicana*, and *Lagunilla mi barrio*. His final film was *Mentada de padre* (released in 2019).

Héctor Suárez was married twice, to actress Pepita Gomis and Zara Calderón, his widow: he had two children by each marriage, including Héctor Suárez Gomis, an actor.



Stuart Whitman

Actor Stuart Whitman died of skin cancer on 16 March 2020; he was 92 years old. Stuart Maxwell

Whitman was born in San Francisco in February 1928. He served in the U.S. Army for 3 years after high school, and was discovered by a Hollywood talent scout while attending college in Los Angeles. For most of the 1950s he appeared in minor roles before being promoted to leads late in the decade. He received an Academy Award nomination as Best Actor for his role in *The Mark* (1961).



Whitman had a long and varied career in films and on television, in the USA and internationally. He retired in 2000.

Whitman appeared in several Mexican films aimed at an international market: *Macabra* [aka *Demonoid*] for Alfredo Zacarías, and *Guyana, el crimen del siglo* [aka *Guyana, Cult of the Damned*], *El tesoro del Amazonas* and *Traficantes de pánico* [aka *Under Siege*] for Zacarías's cousin René Cardona Jr.



REVIEWS!

[Reviews this issue are listed in alphabetical order because many of the films feature 2 or more individuals who passed away in the first half of 2020.]



A fuego lento* [Slow Burn] (CONACITE DOS, 1977) *Dir-Scr:* Juan Ibáñez; *Photo:* Javier Cruz; *Music:* Damaso Pérez Prado; *Guitar:* Chamin Correa; *Co-Dir:* Damián Acosta; *Film Ed:* Ángel Camacho; *Art Dir-Décor:* Óscar Rodríguez, Enrique Zavala, Francisco Icaza; *Makeup:* Tony Ramírez; *Sound Op:* Guillermo Carrasco; *Camera Op:* Alberto Arellanos, Adrián Canales; *Music Rec & Re-rec:* Ricardo Saldívar; *Sound Ed:* Rogelio Zúñiga; *Union:* STIC

*a secondary title of *México nocturno* is cited in some sources.

Cast: [please note: due to the large number of performers in this movie and the almost complete lack

of character names, I have refrained from trying to specifically identify every performer with descriptors such as "*third man from left in billiards scene*".] María Victoria (*singer at party*), Óscar Chávez (*Óscar***), Gilberto Pérez Gallardo (*Luis*), María Luisa Landín (*singer in Blanquita*), María Safont (*Guadalupe Palma*), Adalberto Martínez "*Resortes*" (*dancer*), Damaso Pérez Prado (*himself*), Valeria Pani (*?Luz*), Karla, Xóchitl, Fedor Islava, Josefina Echánove (*female gang leader*), Magda Vicaino, Luis Couturier, Martha Zavaleta (*?Concha*), Javier Estrada (*El Enano*), Tina French, Javier Tenorio, José Najera (*gang leader*), René Barrera (*chief henchman*), Xorge Noble (*taxi driver*), Marcelo Villamil, Wanda Seux, Miguel Ángel Rodríguez, Polo Salazar, Erika Carlsson, Yogy Ruge, Guillermo Ayala, Lilián Gay, Luz María Peña, Octavio "Famoso Gómez," Chad Hasting, Alonso Echánove, Leonardo Méndez, Martina Mena, Odilia Flores, Gabriela Araujo, María Clara Zurita, Sergio Acosta, The Dolly Sisters, Guillermo Acosta, Juan Vázquez, Enrique Ontiveros, Ricardo Luna, Jaime Ramos, Ángel de la Peña, Fernando Negrete, Julián Abitia (*artist*), Morris Gray, Roberto Brondo, Sammy Ortiz, Elianne Campillo, Leticia Robles, Alberto Arbizu, Nerinda Ferrer, Bernabe Palma, N. León "Frankenstein," Leonardo Trebole, Janette Mass (*Janette*), Salvador Pineda, René Rene, El Moro, Federico Bermejo, ?-erry Halliday, Princesa Yamal, Jim Habiff, Eugenia Dolores, Christa Walter, Alfonso Kafiti, Fulvio Sotomayor

**the IMDB credits Chávez as "Juan" and this is clearly incorrect. The name credits for Valeria Pani and Martha Zavaleta, also taken from IMDB, are given a "?" accordingly (I could not figure out any names for them!).

Notes: this is an extremely unusual movie, described by some as "Fellini-like." There is no dialogue for the first 24 minutes, and relatively little after that (one wonders if Ibáñez was thinking about making a movie with no dialogue and just chickened out). There are quite a few sequences scored to mambos by Pérez Prado, which are amusing for a while but get rather tedious after the third or fourth time. The plot is very negligible and at the same time inscrutable (deliberately so).

Guadalupe Palma, a dancer at the Teatro Blanquita, works part-time as a prostitute. She's hired by mid-level gangster Luis to attend a party and sleep with one of the guests; afterwards, Guadalupe takes something from the man's jacket and vanishes. Apparently, Guadalupe has stolen papers of great importance to the drug cartels, and various factions tear the city apart searching for her.



Guadalupe's boyfriend is impoverished guitarist and singer Óscar. The couple is reunited at the movie's end but before they can escape, Guadalupe is shot to death by the drug traffickers. Óscar is dumped in a vacant lot.

That's not a lot of plot for around 100 minutes of film, is it? The first 24 minutes takes the audience only through Guadalupe's theft of the documents and her disappearance (the first spoken words are "Where is Guadalupe!?!"), so there are 70+ more minutes devoted to the gangsters' search for her--with occasional digressions, mostly Óscar moping around or singing depressing songs.

It's hard to tell, but there are apparently three drug gangs chasing Guadalupe--one run by El Enano, one by a woman, and one by another man. Each gang has its own "soldiers" and a crowd of hangers-on (especially women), who troop around in amusing fashion, like a gaggle of geese. There are several shots of newspaper headlines referring to corruption and drug smuggling, and a news broadcast on the topic is also heard, but (perhaps deliberately), the gangsters are more or less indistinguishable from businessmen, politicians, their bodyguards, and their wives, mistresses, etc.

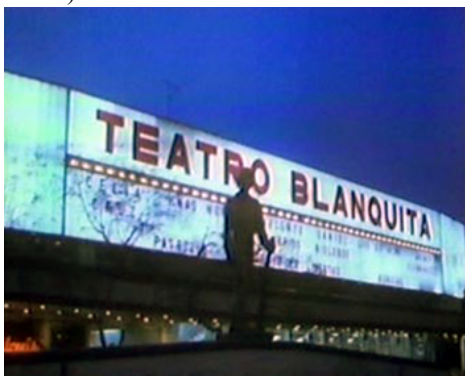
The "other" side of Mexico is represented by Óscar, a friendly cab driver, and the strange denizens of a *cantina* (many of whom are blind or partially sighted). The movie's final scene shows a distraught Óscar stumbling through a passageway towards his apartment and agitating the blind people who (for some reason) line the hall. They begin blindly striking out at each other....probably signifying something profound.

A fuego lento is for the most part extremely well-made, with excellent locations and set design, fine photography (extremely fluid, with lots of tracking shots) and Pérez Prado's fun mambos ("La niña popoff" is a bit over-used, however). But there are some problems. The musical numbers onstage at the Teatro Blanquita are poorly staged and shot, especially the opening sequence which tries to tell a "story" (white-zootsuited dancer *Resortes* gets in an argument with a black-clad villain over a young woman, a fight breaks out, she is killed in the crossfire, *Resortes* carries her off sadly at the end--this roughly foreshadows the movie's conclusion, since Guadalupe is the dancer "shot" in the opening musical number). There are too many people on the stage and, despite frequent high-angle shots, Ibáñez never captures the essential kinetic action.



Other sequences are better-directed and even witty. Several of the gangsters are pursuing Guadalupe through a crowded market in the city; they try to bully their way past some *campesinos*, who quickly pull their pistols! The "Mexican stand-off" (in the truest sense of the word) is defused, but Guadalupe escapes.

The film also gets rather violent in the latter stages. Various people are savagely beaten on screen in an attempt to get them to inform on Guadalupe, and a husky dog owned by two imported *gringo* hitmen is killed (off-screen, but its corpse is shown hanging in an apartment).



One interesting aspect of this movie is its very large cast, which include some performers rather closely associated with Gustavo Alatríste (particularly Gilberto Pérez Gallardo), and many players who would become better-known in a few years (Miguel Ángel Rodríguez, Salvador Pineda, Abril (aka Elianne) Campillo, Alfonso Echánove, and sexy-comedy stalwarts Wanda Seux and Janette Mass). Why María Victoria is top-billed is a complete mystery (other than possibly contractual issues or a belief she was a box-office draw)--she sings one song and is gone, poof! Similarly, María Luisa Landín is on hand for one song and Resortes has two dance numbers, but none of these people have any dialogue at all.

Óscar Chávez is satisfactory but has little to do besides wander around in a kind of daze and sing a couple of songs. María Safont--about whom I know nothing (could she be related to wrestler-actor Jean Safont?)--is attractive except...she has NO eyebrows! I don't know if this was a deliberate attempt to make her look odd or what, but it is certainly off-putting. Gilberto Pérez Gallardo stands out among the other players: his character is a sort of middle-man who is constantly accompanied by his "wife" (ultimately revealed to be a man in drag, which is what I suspected all along) as he attempts to straighten out the mess he (indirectly) made (by hiring Guadalupe). Finally, unable to bear the strain, he commits suicide.

A fuego lento is interesting and not dull, but it is also weird and somewhat pretentious. Of course, that can also be said about *Last Year at Marienbad*, and *A fuego lento* is a lot more fun to watch.

[Reprinted with minor edits from MFB 16/4 (July-Aug 2010)]



Bandera rota (Historia de un crimen)

[Broken Flag]* (Cooperativa de Producción Cinematográfica Río Mixcoac, 1978) *Exec Prod:* Jorge Santoyo; *Prod:* Jorge Santoyo, Abel Woolrich, Manuel Cristino, Tina Romero, Gabriel Retes; *Dir:* Gabriel Retes; *Scr:* Ignacio Retes; *Story:* Gabriel Retes; *Photo:* Genaro Hurtado; *Music:* Raúl Lavista; *Prod Mgr:* Manuel Cristino; *Film Ed:* Eufemio Rivera y R.; *Camera Op:* Andrés Torres; *Sound:* Javier Mateos; *Re-rec:* Jesús González Gancy; *Sound Ed:* Abraham Cruz; *Union:* STPC

*also released as *Chantaje*; video release as *Terrorismo en la ciudad*

Cast: Manolo Fábregas (*Eduardo Vallejo Arizpe*), Aarón Hernán (*Luis Iriarte*), Tina Romero (*Ana Mendizabal*), Jorge Humberto Robles (*Alberto Huesca*), Ignacio Retes (*Ernesto Cabrera*), Jorge Santoyo (*Toño Orihuela*), Abel Woolrich ("*Arry*" *Enrique Olivares*), Ana Luisa Peluffo (*Elisa de Iriarte*), Fernando Balzarette (*Iriarte's aide*), Juan Ángel Martínez (*El 22, truck driver*), Mario Casillas (*police detective*), Carlos Chávez (*Mateo García*), Yogi Ruge (*Alejandra Ortega*), Cristina Baker (*Elisa Iriarte*), Enrique Ontiveros (*?second police detective*), Elpidia Carrillo (*Verónica Rodríguez*), Ángel Aragón (*Bermúdez*), Lucila Balzarette (*Conchita*), Paloma Woolrich (*Verónica's friend*), Juan Felipe Preciado (*Vallejo Arizpe's partner*), Amado Zumaya (*Senator*), Julián Abitia, Mario Díaz Mercado (*reporter*), Salvador Godínez (*Vallejo's henchman*), Rigoberto Carmona (*man who urges Eduardo to run for office*), Esteban Ríos, Gabriela Retes, Juan Claudio Retes,

Gonzalo Lora, Scarlet Quiroz, Alfredo Dávila, Evaristo Liceaga, Alberto Isaac (*investor at meeting*)

Notes: *Bandera rota* was the fourth "commercial" feature directed by Gabriel Retes, after *Chin Chin el teporocho*, *Flores de papel*, and *Nuevo mundo*, all made in the 1975-78 period. After this, he took a break from film directing until 1983-4, when he shot the two-film *Los náufragos de la Liguria* series (period adventures based on a novel by Emilio Salgari) and *Mujeres salvajes*.

Bandera rota is a very good political thriller. It was apparently recently restored and released on DVD (and/or Blu-Ray) and the result is of excellent quality. Retes has a number of his usual collaborators on hand--his father (and mother), Tina Romero, Fernando Balzaretti, Abel Woolrich, Jorge Santoyo, Carlos Chávez (who'd starred in *Chin Chin el teporocho* and would latter appear in *La ciudad desnudo* for Retes)--but adds a few name performers like Manolo Fábregas [director Alberto Isaac can also be spotted in a cameo role] and the crew consists mostly of established veterans of the mainstream film industry. Retes puts his own stylistic stamp on the film, not only in the selection of a group of young filmmakers as the protagonists, but also in the various "philosophical" discussions that occur between characters, and in the extensive use of long-takes.



Ana, Alberto, Toño, Arry and Alejandra are shooting scenes for their independent film in a rural area when, in the distance, they see an automobile pull up: a woman gets out and runs, but is shot to death by a man, who then drives off. The murder is captured on film, but the young people do not immediately notify the police; Alberto particularly doesn't want to get involved. Meanwhile, wealthy businessman Iriarte's wife is missing. He and his family wonder if she's been in an accident, or if she's been kidnapped. They ask the police to investigate discreetly: the next day, they discover Sra. Iriarte's car parked outside an apartment building, and discover she has an apartment there where she obviously has been having an affair.

Sra. Iriarte's body is discovered. Ernesto, Iriarte's right-hand man, says the family was contacted by members of a revolutionary group, "Bandera Rota," who demanded a ransom but never called again. Alberto and the others spot industrialist Vallejo Arizpe (a friend of the Iriarte family) at the funeral and recognise him as the murderer. They send photos of the murder to both Iriarte and Vallejo Arizpe.

Realising the story of the kidnapping is a lie, they argue about what to do. Ana wants to send the film to the police and wash their hands of the matter; Alberto says they can compel Vallejo Arizpe to improve the conditions of the workers at his factory, an altruistic form of blackmail.



Vallejo Arizpe shocks everyone by offering to give his workers more than even their leaders have asked for: "we have to share our wealth!" At the same time, he tells the union representative to find him some men who "know how to obey." Iriarte can't denounce Vallejo Arizpe as the killer because it will reveal that the "Bandera Rota" story was a lie and expose his late wife's infidelity. Meanwhile, the police have discovered that a group of filmmakers was present in the rural area on the day of the murder.

Alberto and his friends are happy that their plan is working, but some of the group want to ask for money for themselves, to finish their movie. Alberto: "You're worried about a lousy little film about a model who wants an abortion to preserve her career?" Ana: "You wrote it!" Some time later, Toño secretly contacts Vallejo Arizpe and demands 3 million pesos.

Vallejo Arizpe's "share the wealth" plan has made him popular and he's approached by a political party to become their candidate for governor. Of course, he'd have to moderate his sudden socialist policies: "we shouldn't promise what we can't deliver." Alberto and Ana (who are lovers and live together) argue about the morality of allowing a murderer to escape punishment because he's contributing to a greater good. Alberto: "His actions should count, not his antecedents...regarding his murder of Señora de Iriarte, we don't have the right to judge him. We don't know his motivations." Ana: "Are you going to claim he killed her in self-defense?"

When Toño tries to collect the money from Vallejo Arizpe, he's trapped and captured by the man's hired thugs. Arry and Alejandra are abducted; Alberto and Ana are lured outside and Alberto is shot to death on the street, while she is captured. The men retrieve the murder film from the house. The surviving young people are tortured in an attempt to discover how they got the film, then murdered.

Iriarte and Vallejo Arizpe watch the film. Vallejo Arizpe says he has all the copies, and asks Iriarte what he wants: "Do you want to put me in jail?" Iriarte realises he can't do this. Vallejo Arizpe tells him,

"Things are going to change. With a little luck, the change will be for the good of all."

Meanwhile, fellow indie filmmakers Mateo and Verónica are going through Alberto's material in their shared workspace. [In an in-joke, they find copies of "Bandidos" and "Los años duros," two of Retes' early movies.] They discover a copy of the murder film with a note from Alberto indicating Vallejo Arizpe murdered Sra. de Iriarte: "If anything happens to us,



he's responsible."

At his office, Vallejo Arizpe tells his board members that his political candidacy means a change in policy, "a

return to order, strict adherence to the law." However, as the film concludes, he gets a phone call from Mateo and Verónica...

Bandera rota is a well-crafted thriller that raises some moral questions, notably: can someone's crimes be overlooked if he or she is otherwise doing good? This ignores the fact that an "evil" person can't be trusted to "do good," even if compelled (or, if not compelled by outside forces, then do they have an ulterior motive?). The dilemma in the film is straightforward--a murder versus socio-economic change--but the issues of how much impact Vallejo Arizpe can have, and that the blackmailers are fairly close to being



identified by the police (but Vallejo Arizpe's thugs find them first) are not addressed, indicating that the scheme is not entirely practical in any case. Furthermore, Toño's ill-advised attempt to obtain some cash not only leads to the scheme collapsing (and the deaths of all involved), it also taints the altruistic nature of the entire plan. Alberto, who comes up with the idea in the first place, is not exactly an idealist: he is willing to overlook the moral ramifications of withholding the film in exchange for a "greater" good. This comes as

something of surprise, since we aren't given any prior hint that he has a political conscience. Ana, on the other hand, initially appears to just fear getting involved, but later takes the moral high ground.

Retes tosses in some amusing views of the independent film scene in Mexico (probably applicable in other countries as well). Although Alberto owns a small art gallery, it apparently doesn't make much money, since the fact that the rent is overdue is mentioned a number of times. In one scene, independent films are presented to an audience of mostly young, enthusiastic people (apparently the filmmakers and their friends). Mateo starts to screen his latest project, but admits he didn't have enough money to complete the sound, at which point everyone gets up and leaves!

Bandera rota cuts between scenes featuring Iriarte, Vallejo Arizpe, and Alberto and his friends, with a minor sub-plot involving two police detectives investigating the murder.

This spreads the focus around, although Aarón Hernán, Manolo Fábregas,

Jorge Humberto Robles, and Tina Romero each get at least one scene to show off their acting chops. Ana Luisa Peluffo, despite her prominent billing, is only on-screen in long-shot for a few seconds as Sra. de Iriarte.

Overall, *Bandera rota* is a consistently fine piece of work.



Cadena perpetua [Life Sentence]
(CONACINE*, 1978) *Prod:* Francisco del Villar (uncredited); *Dir:* Arturo Ripstein; *Scr:* Vicente Leñero, Arturo Ripstein; *Orig. Novel:* Luis Spota ("Lo de antes"); *Photo:* Jorge Stahl Jr.; *Musi Supv:* Miguel Pous; *Prod Mgr:* Mauricio Rojas, Julia Con; *Prod Chief:* Alberto A. Ferrer; *Asst Dir:* Mario Llorca; *Film Ed:* Rafael Ceballos; *Prod Design:* Lucero Isaac, Eli Menz; *Art Dir:* Jorge Fernández; *Set Decor:* Raúl Serrano; *Camera Op:* Cirilo Rodríguez; *Makeup:* Elda

Loza; *Director's Assts*: José Luis García Agraz, Félix Martín; *Anotador*: Miguel Ángel Madrigal; *Sound*: Rodolfo Solís; *Cam Asst*: Salvador de Anda, Damián Beltrán; *Sound Ed*: Javier Patiño; *Re-rec*: Jesús González Gancy; *Union*: STPC *some sources also credit DASA Films but this does not appear on the film or publicity materials

Cast: Pedro Armendáriz Jr. (*Javier Lira "el Tarzán"*), Narciso Busquets (*Cmdte. "Burro" Prieto*), Ernest Gómez Cruz (*Cpl. Pantoja*), Angélica Chaín (*Rosa Martínez*), Ana Ofelia Murguía (*Sra. Romero*), Pepe Arévalo y sus Mulatos (*musical group*), Jorge Patiño (*Muelón*), Pilar Pellicer (*Pantoja's wife*), Julián Pastor (*clerk in delegación*), Ana Martín (*servant*), Roberto Cobo (*El Gallito*), Yolanda Rigel (*Ojitos, prostitute*), Socorro de la Campa, Salvador Garcini (*one-armed robber*), Rodrigo Puebla (*Cotorra*), Yaco Alva (*?robber who is shot*), Antonio Bravo (*Jesús Romero*), Robert Dumont (*bill collector*), Jorge Fegan (*Sr. Poli*), Marta Meneses, Agustín Silva (*police official*), Humberto Vilchis, Rubén Monterrubio, León Singer (*Robles*), Eduardo Cassab, Laura Alfaro, Marta Resnikoff, Eduardo Borja, María Barber, José Luis Avendaño (*bus driver*)

Notes: *Cadena perpetua* won 4 Ariel Awards--Best Film, Best Direction, Best Supporting Actress (Ana Ofelia Murguía), and Best Supporting Actor (Ernesto Gómez Cruz)--and was nominated for Best Screenplay. The film is constructed in a non-linear narrative fashion, with many flashbacks (in some cases, flashbacks within flashbacks) that requires the viewer to pay very close attention (and even then, some things are confusing).

Javier is a former thief and pimp who goes straight after release from prison, working as a collector for a large bank. He's married and has a child. However, corrupt policeman Prieto--who had previously arrested



Javier numerous times--demands a weekly payment, far in excess of what Javier can afford.

Prieto suggests Javier return to his criminal ways, promising to give him protection and saying Javier can keep whatever he "earns" over and above Prieto's payoff. To seal the deal, Prieto and his henchman Cotorra beat Javier severely. Javier decides to tell his supervisor at the bank everything and ask for help, but despite rushing frantically through the city, he can't locate the man. El Gallito, a former acquaintance of the "old" Javier, advises him to return to a life of crime and pay Prieto, noting that the policeman would avenge himself on Javier's family even if Javier fled or went to

the authorities. Although he vows he won't backslide, as the film concludes Javier picks a man's pocket in a crowd.

Although Javier (aka "Tarzán") is the film's protagonist and the audience empathises with him, he's clearly not a "hero." Javier is a criminal who has no sense of honour, especially in his dealings with women. He betrays Pantoja, a guard who befriends him at the Islas Marias penal colony, sleeping with the man's wife (as the guard, Ernesto Gómez Cruz has a big dramatic speech--leading up to him stabbing Javier!-- which probably won him the Ariel that year). He has sex with a maid and robs the family for whom she works. He sleeps with prostitute Rosa, then leaves her, picks up prostitute Ojitos, and takes her to a (different) hotel! Even after Javier's "gone straight" (with an honest job, a wife and child), he continues to womanise, making an assignation with a clerk while collecting the shop's monthly payment to his bank.



Nonetheless, Javier seems sincere about his desire to live an honest life (at least in business), and resists Prieto as long as he can, only to realise in the end that there is no justice in life. The conclusion of the film is somewhat reminiscent of the finale of *I Am a Fugitive from a Chain Gang*: like the hapless James Allen (Paul Muni), Javier is trapped in a life of crime against his will.

As noted earlier, the fractured narrative form is challenging but one sequence stands out. *Cadena perpetua* opens with a failed robbery attempt--an employee of the bank where Javier works is assaulted by two men in a park, but he resists and one of the robbers is shot to death by a policeman. The crime was set up using inside information from Javier, passed to Gallito. This indicates Javier was not a honest man while working at the bank, unless the sequence takes place after the events at the end of the film (when Javier has returned to crime), and this is not at all clear.

The performances are generally good, but Pedro Armendáriz Jr. stands out as particularly fine. Ernesto Gómez Cruz, as mentioned above, won an Ariel as Best Supporting Actor, and one can see why, but Ana Ofelia Murguía has only one brief scene that--while satisfactory--hardly seems worthy of her Ariel as Best

Supporting Actress. Pilar Pellicer appears in two scenes and makes a greater impact than Murguía, but was ignored by the Ariel committee. The rest of the cast is loaded with familiar faces but no one is particularly noteworthy (they're all pros but most are simply support for Armendáriz).

The technical aspects are fine. Most of the film was shot on location--I'm not sure if the Islas Marias footage was done there (probably not), although Ripstein did find some salt flats somewhere.

Cadena perpetua presents an ambiguous--but leaning toward the negative side of the ledger--image of the police. Prieto is depicted as extremely corrupt; his men beat and torture Javier early in the film and do so again later. Several employees of a gas station show no surprise when Javier says he was beaten and robbed by a police commander, suggesting working-class Mexicans are all too familiar with police corruption. On the other hand, a policeman is quick to respond in the opening sequence, pursuing and ultimately shooting a fleeing robber (which seems literal overkill), indicating that the police are not totally useless in combating crime.



Cara Sucia [Dirty Face] (Filmadora Chapultepec, 1949) *Exec Prod:* Jesús Galindo; *Prod:* Pedro Galindo; *Dir:* Carlos Orellana; *Scr:* Ignacio Villareal, Ramón Pérez; *Adapt:* Ramón Pérez; *Story:* Alfonso Sánchez Tello, Pascual García Peña; *Photo:* Víctor Herrera;



Music: Gonzalo Curiel; *Assoc Prod:* Alfonso Sánchez Tello; *Prod Chief:* A. Sánchez Barraza; *Asst Dir:* Ignacio Villareal; *Film Ed:* Charles L. Kimball; *Art Dir:* Ramón Rodríguez; *Camera Op:* Luis Medina; *Makeup:* Sara Mateos; *Choreog:* Pepín Pastor; *Sound Rec:* James L. Fields, Francisco Topete; *Re-rec:*

Galindo Samperio; *Studio:* Churubusco

Cast: Manuel Medel (*Alfonso Mendoza*), Rosita Fornés (*Rosita Terremoto*), Arturo Martínez (*Juan Moreno "El Atravesado"*), Juan García (*Peralvillo*), Lucy del Campo (*Margarita*), Paz Villegas (*director of*

school), Miguel Funes [sic] Jr. (*Clavijero's son?*), José Muñoz (*José Sóstenes Clavijero*), Salvador Quiroz (*theatre impresario*), José Pardavé (*Golondrino*), Edmundo Espino (*Remigio*), Orfeón Infantil del Maestro Rogelio Zarzoza (*Mendoza's students*), Lydia Franco (*committee member*), Rubén Galindo, María Gentil Arcos (*committee member*), Ángel Infante (*town policeman*), Joaquín Roche hijo (*Quique?**), Ramón Sánchez, José Torvay & Victorio Blanco (*hambreadores in cantina*), Manuel Trejo Morales (*policeman*), Jorge Arriaga (*man in audience at school show*), Enedina Díaz de León (*food vendor*), Hernán Vera (*ticket seller*), ?Joaquín Roche Sr. (*detective who arrests Alfonso*)

*although García Riera credits Miguel Funes Jr. as "Quique," it actually appears that Joaquín Roche Jr. has this role; Funes Jr. may play the troublemaking son of local *cacique* Clavijero.

Notes: Manuel Medel is perhaps best known today as a contemporary (and occasional partner, but more often rival) of Cantinflas (he even appears in the *Cantinflas* bio-pic), who failed to achieve the same level of fame. Medel was a product of the *carpas* and appeared in 3 early films with Cantinflas--*Así es mi tierra*, *Águila o sol*, *El signo de la muerte*--but while Cantinflas went on to movie stardom in the 1940s and beyond, Medel worked in only a handful of pictures (and after *Cara sucia* he was a supporting player, not the star), apparently spending most of the rest of his career in live performances.

Medel's most famous film role was as philosophical vagabond Pito Pérez, and many of his other movies also cast him as a somewhat diffident, gentle character, almost the opposite of the brash Cantinflas. *Cara Sucia* is a good example of this: Medel plays a small-town schoolteacher with a young son, allowing for a strong streak of sentimentality in the plot. In fact, *Cara Sucia* isn't even a comedy, it's a melodrama with a handful of musical and/or comedy routines.

Alfonso Mendoza is a mild-mannered teacher in a local school. His first wife having passed away, leaving him with young son Quique, Mendoza married Margarita. The school schedules a



fund-raising event with local talent--including Mendoza, known for his humorous monologues--and members of a traveling troupe. However, the conservative women on the committee decide to bar *vedette* Rosita from performing. Rosita appeals the decision to Mendoza, and is a hit; Mendoza also earns

applause for his act, and dances with Rosita at the concert's conclusion. Rosita bids the schoolteacher a fond farewell.

Juan, a school friend of Mendoza, arrives for a visit. He says he killed two customs officers in the north while involved in smuggling, but Mendoza allows him to stay. Juan and Margarita steal the school's money (entrusted to Mendoza) and leave town. Fearful of being accused of the crime, Mendoza and his son Quique flee. [Despite the fact that his visiting friend and wife are gone and that Juan helpfully left a written confession to the robbery, Mendoza panics and runs away. Since he's just been fired from his teaching job, he'd likely have had to leave anyway, but this precipitous flight is probably ill-advised.] They arrive in Mexico City, where the innocent Mendoza is



befriended by pickpocket Peralvillo. Pursued by the police, the two men (and Quique) take refuge in a theatre where Rosita is performing. Mendoza is warmly greeted by the *vedette* and is pressed into service when comedian "Cara Sucia" doesn't show up for his number. Mendoza is an instant success.

Mendoza falls in love with Rosita. He saves his salary so he can repay the school's money. [Meanwhile, Juan and Margarita are also in the city; Juan orders Margarita to visit Mendoza and get some money so they can flee, but the couple is arrested before their blackmail scheme can be put into action.] One day, he discovers Rosita and Peralvillo are gone, and have taken his savings as well. To make matters worse, Mendoza is arrested and returned to his hometown. But when he arrives, he discovers Rosita and Peralvillo have paid back the money and explained everything. Mendoza is promoted to director of the school (the former director is opening a girls' school). He will marry Rosita and Quique will have a new mother.

Cara Sucia is mostly predictable: Margarita's treachery is telegraphed (she's always complaining to Mendoza, looks humiliated when he's performing at the concert, etc.), and Juan was bad news even when he was in school with Mendoza (and the fact that he's played by Arturo Martínez is a dead tip-off), and we get two examples of Chekhov's Gun (only in this case

it's the stashes of money Mendoza keeps, which are both subsequently stolen from him). Mendoza's instant success as a stage comedian is reminiscent of many other films in which a talented amateur singer/dancer/comedian/musician/athlete becomes immediately popular after their first performance. However, Mendoza doesn't suffer from the hubris that plagues some of these other celebrities--his "downfall" is the (apparent) betrayal by the woman he loves (it should also be noted that Mendoza makes it clear that teaching, not acting, is his vocation; fortunately for the happy ending, Rosita is also desirous of leaving show business and settling down in a small town).

The film is split into two parts, the long opening section set in the small town--which includes 3 long songs by Mendoza's class, a song by Rosita, Mendoza's comic monologue, and Mendoza and Rosita's dance--followed by the Mexico City section (two full musical numbers, one by Rosita and one by Mendoza, plus parts of two other acts). Each section has a nicely distinctive visual look, contrasting the bright provinces with the dark urbanity of the capital (I'm not even sure any of the Mexico City scenes take place in the daytime).

The province/capital dichotomy extends to the various characters and their mode of speaking (Mendoza has a hard time understanding Peralvillo's slang, for example). The town is run by proudly illiterate boss Sóstenes; the school director is a spinster, and the "committee" consists of what seem to be stereotypical *beatas* (religious women, often widows or spinsters, dressed in black). Mendoza is well-regarded by the townspeople and even--for the most part--by his students, though he's a bit of a disciplinarian: when he's fired from his job for punishing the unruly son of Sóstenes, the students assemble and sing the farewell song "La Golondrina."

Mendoza is a typical fish out of water in Mexico City--which is depicted as full of eccentric, often crooked but mostly good-hearted characters--and is easily (and unwittingly) sucked into a criminal scheme, but things generally go well for him: Peralvillo turns out to be a "good" crook (even assigning his henchman Golondino to babysit Quique--



there's a running joke about Quique wanting to watch "Snow White" and "Donald Duck" at the movies, while Golondrino tries to convince him to see "Scarface" or "The King of Gangland"), he easily gets a well-paying job, and so on.

The performances are all good. Manuel Medel is excellent in essentially a straight role, reserving his comic aspects for his "stage" appearances. Rosita Fornés (who was married to Medel when they made *Cara Sucia*) is attractive and lively but doesn't have much dramatic work to do; her musical numbers are fine, especially "Un poquito de amor," which is her only solo work shown in its entirety. The rest of the cast--loaded, as usual for this period, with screen veterans in supporting roles--turns in professional work. Production values are good. Carlos Orellana was a character actor who would appear in nearly 70 feature films, and who occasionally turned his hand to writing (over 50 screen credits) and direction (16 features). He had previously directed Medel in *Loco y vagabundo*. Orellana's direction is smooth and seamless, albeit with no particular visual style.

Cara Sucia is predictable but generally entertaining.



La carne manda [The Flesh Commands]



(Calderón Films, 1947)
 Prod: Eduardo Quevedo;
 Dir-Adapt: Chano Urueta; Orig. Novel: Dr. don Mariano Azuela ("La marchanta");
 Photo: Ignacio Torres; Music & Arr: Antonio Díaz Conde; Prod Chief: Enrique

Morfin; Asst Dir: A. Corona Blake; Film Ed: Carlos Savage; Art Dir: Jorge Fernández; Makeup: Noemí Blanco [Wallace]; Camera Op: Andrés Torres; Sound Rec B.J. Kroger, Luis Fernández; Re-rec: Enrique Rodríguez; Studio: Azteca

Cast: Esther Fernández (*Fernanda Sánchez*), David Silva (*Santiago "Juan Cocolito"*), Rosita Fornés (*Lhinda Palma*), Emma Roldán (*Sra. Sánchez, la marchanta*), José Morcillo (*don Cosme*), José Pulido (*Fermin*), José Eduardo Pérez (*El Jarocho*), Pepito Martínez (*Moisés Rotenstein*), Eva Calvo (*Lhinda's roommate*), Alma Delia Fuentes (*Fernanda as a girl*), Juan Pulido (*opera fan*), Manuel Trejo Morales, Max Langler (*inspector*), Elodía Hernández? (*doña Rosa*)

Notes: *La carne manda* was based on "La marchanta," a novel by well-known writer Mariano Azuela, author of other works adapted to cinema including *Los de abajo* and *Mala yerba*. However,

sources indicate Azuela wrote "La marchanta" as an original screenplay (he had worked on the scripts of both *Los de abajo*--directed by Chano Urueta--and *Mala yerba*) before eventually publishing it as a novel in 1944. At this point the property was purchased by Eduardo Quevedo and eventually released as *La carne manda*.

Emilio García Riera, in the second edition (1993) of his *Historia documental del cine mexicano*, indicated he had only been able to see a "very defective" copy of this film at the Filmoteca de la UNAM, with very poor sound. Unfortunately, the only copy I have been able to find of *La carne manda* is also quite bad, taken from a Canal 22 broadcast at some undetermined time but apparently copied multiple times until the video is very soft and dark and the sound is quite poor (muffled, and even out of sync at times). Also, although García Riera cites the running time as 100 minutes, the extant version is just short of 82 minutes (and apparently removes at least one musical number featuring Rosita Fornés, since she only does one musical performance, a duet).

Santiago, known as Juan Cocolito, is a homeless street boy in a working class neighbourhood of the capital who earns his living by running errands. He's taken in by storekeeper don Cosme. Santiago becomes friends with Fernanda, the daughter of La Marchanta, who runs a stall selling fruits and vegetables. When they grow up, Santiago and Fernanda fall in love and are married. Santiago helps La Marchanta and Fernanda renovate their stall and business improves. Don Cosme, elderly and ailing, gives his shop to Santiago, then dies. Santiago, Fernanda and La Marchanta turn the shop into a success, but Santiago, not satisfied with what he has, becomes ever more ambitious and greedy.



Santiago and Fernanda move to a fancy apartment but she is uncomfortable; Santiago continues to be preoccupied with making money, and ignores her. He meets Lhinda, a young woman from the old neighbourhood whom he once protected from the advances of El Jarocho: she's now a famous performer. They begin an affair. Fernanda finds out but La

Marchanta urges her not to confront Santiago. Santiago wants to marry Lhinda, complaining that Fernanda hasn't given him a child, but Lhinda isn't interested in a serious relationship. La Marchanta dies. Santiago takes a shot (but misses) at El Tapatío, who's singing a romantic duet with Lhinda. Fermín, a longtime friend of Fernanda and Santiago, urges her to dump Santiago, who has abandoned her and is now involved in smuggling with El Jarocho. When a deal goes bad, Santiago returns to Fernanda to hide out and they briefly reconcile; she offers to sell the shop to pay for his defense but he refuses to give himself up, instead fleeing the country. Some time later he returns, and is horrified to discover Fernanda has a child (his? or Fermín's?). Santiago goes to Lhinda's apartment and is told she has another lover; she is isn't home, but he has a long "conversation" with her (in his own mind), and finally commits suicide. At Santiago's funeral, Lhinda gives Fernanda a wallet belonging to Santiago; Fernanda discards the money but keeps the wallet. She returns to the shop and her infant child.

For a certain period of time--from the mid-1940s until the early 1950s--David Silva was a popular leading man in Mexican cinema, often cast as a working-class "everyman." Perhaps because of his role in the popular *Campeón sin corona*, Silva often played flawed, self-destructive characters with whom it is difficult (at least in retrospect) to sympathise. *La carne manda* is one of these instances: Santiago is ambitious and while he doesn't overtly exploit others, he is extremely single-minded in his efforts to become rich and (by extension) "respectable." He is rude and dismissive to Fernanda & cheats on her with Lhinda; he drinks to excess and has an unruly temper. This is not an anomaly: filmmakers continually cast Silva in such roles (eventually, he "aged out" of leading man roles, shaved his head, and spent the rest of his career as a villain). I've never calculated how many of Silva's films in this era had unhappy endings (or even ended with his character's death), but it's substantial. In 1947 alone, Silva's character dies in all three of his films (*La carne manda*, *Señora Tentación*, and *De pecado en pecado*)!



La carne manda isn't a crime film or cabaretera picture, despite what one might expect (and the film's poster). It's an urban melodrama like *Nosotros los*

pobres (minus the music)--made the same year--but darker and more grim. None of the characters is particularly sympathetic, even Fernanda, who is excessively passive-aggressive and long-suffering.

Although it's difficult to see considering the poor quality of the extant print of the film, Chano Urueta works in a few of his directorial flourishes. In a strange dream sequence, Santiago, on a spooky set, is confronted by both Lhinda and Fernanda, each desiring him, along with a shot of a stack of coins floating up into the air. There are some nicely composed shots otherwise, although the murky images are frequently difficult to discern. The film seems quite claustrophobic, shot mostly on sets at the Azteca studios.

Until a decent and uncut copy of the film surfaces, *La carne manda* is not very entertaining to watch.



El corazón de la noche [The Heart of the Night] (CONACINE-Estudios Churubusco Azteca, 1983)* *Dir:* Jaime Humberto Hermosillo; *Adapt:* José de la Colina, Jaime Humberto Hermosillo; *Orig. Story:* José de la

Colina; *Photo:* Gabriel Figueroa; *Music:* Joaquín Gutiérrez Heras; *Prod Mgr:* Georgina Balzaretti; *Prod Chief:* David Prieto; *Asst Dir:* Miguel Ángel Madrigal; *Film Ed:* Rafael Ceballos; *Prod Des:* Lucero Isaac, Elly Menz, Daniel Varela; *Art Dir:* Xavier



Rodríguez; *Decor:* Carlos Grandjean; *Camera Op:* Andrés Torres; *Lighting:* Fernando Calvillo; *Makeup:* Margarita Ortega; *Sound Op:* Cruz Carrasco; *Re-rec:* René Ruiz Cerón; *Sound Ed:* Javier Patiño; *Sound Supv:* Ramón Moreno; *Union:* STPC

*[the American Cinevideo print of this film carries this copyright notice: ©1985 CONACITE DOS, which would make it STIC-affiliated, which this isn't the case. Jorge Ayala Blanco says this was the "first" IMCINE production.]

Cast: Pedro Armendáriz [Jr.] (*El Ciego* [*Domingo*]), Jorge Balzaretti (*El Muchacho*), Marcela Camacho (*La Muchacha*), Graciela Lara (*mother of El Muchacho*), Manuel Ojeda (*Leyva*), Martha Navarro (*woman in wheelchair*), Carlos Castañón, Luis Rábago (*earless man*), Antonio Rangel (*Joaquín*), Miguel Gómez Checa (*hunchback*), Abel Woolrich and Armando Martín (*young men*), Sofía Álvarez (*wheelchair woman 2*), Iaco Alva (*man in wheelchair*), Roberto Sosa (*party guest*), Roberto Cobo (*armless man*), Ana Ofelia Murguía (*student driver*), María Rojo

(*interpreter*), Evangelina Martínez, Alma Levy, María Guadalupe Delgado

Notes: this is a very bizarre and unusual movie, generally considered one of Hermosillo's lesser efforts (Ayala Blanco is especially harsh in his judgement) but--aside from a telegraphed final *frissón*--I think it is an intriguing and generally entertaining effort. Other viewers may have different reactions: for instance, some will not appreciate the heavy doses of full male and female nudity (which, frankly, are not all required by the plot), even though they are mostly in non-sexual situations. Others might think the film demonizes disabled people, depicting them as freakish villains or at the least, objects of suspicion.

[While the screenwriters chose not to give two of three main characters personal names (and Armendáriz is referred to as "Domingo" only after he is off-screen), for the purpose of my synopsis I have dubbed them "Jorge" and "Marcela," rather than typing "the young man" and "the young woman" over and over again.]

In Guadalajara, driving instructor Jorge, on his lunch break in a park, spots a beautiful young woman accompanying a middle-aged blind man. Captivated



by the woman, he follows them and discovers the man is a massage therapist. Jorge takes treatments

from the man, Domingo, who subsequently asks Jorge to teach "someone" to drive in exchange for massages. Jorge knows it is Marcela, who is unable to hear or speak, because she had earlier confronted him with a note reading "Stop following us." Jorge is not sure of Marcela's relationship with the older man. Jorge arrives at Domingo's apartment to begin the lessons. As Domingo talks, Jorge stares at Marcela (who shocks him by dropping her robe and revealing her nude body to him).

Domingo accompanies them during the lessons. In an amusing bit, Domingo says blind people can "see" better than sighted individuals, because they make use of their other senses: Jorge, who has been fondling Marcela as she drives, hurriedly moves away from her! Jorge later follows Marcela, Domingo, and another man to a cemetery: he spies on a ceremony where various disabled individuals (including a man bandaged up like the Invisible Man who solemnly beats on a drum) listen to Domingo eulogize one of their departed companions (apparently represented by a small wooden box about the size of a pack of cigarettes--exactly what is in the box is never revealed). Jorge is caught by one of the mourners (a man with no legs) and exposed to Domingo and the

others. Domingo says nothing secret is going on and Jorge is welcome. However, as they leave the cemetery, Domingo's associate tells Jorge the driving lessons are over.



Some time later, Jorge is kidnaped at gunpoint as he leaves work: it is Marcela, who forces him to drive to a park. But instead of shooting him, she opens her raincoat (she's nude underneath it, which is turning out to be a real motif in this movie) and they make love. Jorge becomes infatuated with Marcela, shirks his job and is fired. He practices sign language and sleeps in the park across the street from the apartment she shares with Domingo. Finally, Jorge sees Domingo depart, and he goes into the apartment. He surprises Marcela (who has just gotten out of the bath and is wearing a robe with--you guessed it--nothing underneath). They have sex on the kitchen floor but are surprised by the sudden return of Domingo. After an interesting struggle between the blind Domingo and the totally nude Marcela and Jorge, Domingo accidentally falls out a window to the courtyard far below. Marcela and Jorge flee (still nude) to the roof. Pursued by some neighbors, they manage to steal clothes from a clothesline and escape.

They are chased by some legless people on those little wheeled carts, sneak into a birthday party (for a man in a wheelchair), try to get help from Jorge's friend Joaquín (who isn't home), and finally wind up in Jorge's apartment, which he shares with his mother. His mother isn't too friendly to Marcela (she asks Jorge if his girlfriend is a *gringa* or a French girl, since she apparently doesn't speak Spanish!) but lets her stay. A short time later, Jorge discovers Marcela missing. He searches through the night for her, finally getting a clue by "eavesdropping" when two hearing-impaired men "speak" to each other using sign language. Jorge follows them to a large construction site (disguising himself as a one-armed man by tucking one arm inside his jacket).

A "trial" is under way. A huge crane lowers a platform to the ground: a nude (of course) Marcela steps out. She testifies in sign language that Domingo (reported to be gravely injured and in the hospital) was

accidentally hurt in a dispute with her and her lover. Marcela refuses to identify Jorge as her lover, but Jorge is caught in the crowd, stripped (of course) and knocked out. He and Marcela are put on the platform and raised high into the air to await the verdict. They learn Domingo has died, but the crowd acquits Marcela and Jorge of murder. Marcela tells Jorge (using sign language) that they are free to go, but can never see each other again--unless he becomes "one of us." Do you see where this is going? Jorge gouges out his own eyes. Some time later, a blind Jorge strolls through the park with Marcela...



El corazón de la noche is a very well-made film, shot on location and put together in a slick and professional manner (I make a point of this because a number of Hermosillo's films, both before and after this one, were made independently and on low budgets; he even later shot some features on videotape). The cameo roles by Ojeda, Navarro, Murguía, Cobo, and Rojo are amusing in-jokes, since these performers had all previously been in films (often more than one) directed by Hermosillo.

As mentioned earlier, some viewers may be put off by the central premise of the movie, i.e., disabled people are all members of a "secret society" which, apparently, could have condemned Jorge and Marcela to death. Throughout the film, Jorge encounters disabled people: an armless man asks him to dial a pay phone, then engages in a long conversation while Jorge has to stand and hold the receiver to the man's ear; Leyva, Jorge's boss, walks with a cane; the guest of honor at the birthday party Jorge and Marcela crash is in a wheelchair; Jorge's own mother, while not a member of the "society," is completely bald and wears a wig. There are also the hearing-impaired men in the restaurant, the people at the cemetery, the pursuers on their wheeled carts, and the crowd at the "trial" (which includes conjoined twins, the bandaged man, numerous people in wheelchairs, using crutches, and so forth). The most unusual member of this group--perhaps their leader--is a veiled woman in a wheelchair, who is shockingly revealed to have two faces (one in front of her head, one in back). [This is shown in only one brief shot, and the woman's role is never explained. Guillermo del Toro, later to direct *Cronos* and *Mimic*,

is thanked on the credits, and since he got his start in films doing special effects makeup, I am wondering if this was his work.] In any event, Jorge seems to constantly encounter differently-abled individuals wherever he goes (he even remarks on this, later in the movie), and his relations with them are not very pleasant. Hermosillo handles some of these scenes deftly (Leyva, Jorge's boss, is seated throughout his meeting with Jorge; only after Jorge, now fired, departs, does Leyva get up and use a cane to walk around his office) while others (the armless man scene) are a little heavyhanded and obvious.

Armendáriz and Balzaretti are both good here: Marcela Camacho is quite attractive and manages to make a definite impression despite not speaking a word during the movie (she doesn't even do much signing), but I could swear there are a few scenes where she reacts as if she could hear, which sort of spoils the illusion. The rest of the cast is adequate.

One point regarding what I consider a fairly surprising aspect of the movie: the nudity. Hermosillo has probably shown more male nudity in his movies than any other Mexican director (from *El cumpleaños del perro* onward). And we're talking the full monty: while Balzaretti isn't nude for as long as Jorge Rivero was in *El pecado de Adán y Eva*, he shows a lot more. Maybe it's just payback for the fairly one-sided situation (= only female nudity) in most other films.

However, let's make a list and see if the nude scenes were necessary to the plot or overall effect of the film or not: Jorge is nude while getting a massage (not necessary); Marcela flashes Jorge in the apartment (necessary); Marcela flashes Jorge in the park (could have gone either way, but Jorge keeps his pants on during sex in this scene); Marcela and Jorge make love in the kitchen (necessary); Marcela and Jorge fight Domingo (necessary) then flee to the roof naked (illogical--they aren't cut off from reaching their clothes, they just run off without grabbing them; however, this does make them a little more vulnerable during the first part of their flight); Marcela and Jorge nude during the "trial" (unnecessary; you could say this was to humiliate them



and make them more vulnerable, but really the plot didn't require it). Anyway, I am not saying this ruins the film, it just seems like overkill.

Overall, a surprisingly good thriller, albeit no classic.

Reprinted from MFB 8/4 (Nov 2001) with minor changes.



Flores de papel [Paper Flowers] (CONACITE UNO, 1977) *Dir:* Gabriel Retes; *Scr:* Ignacio Retes, Rosa Delia Caudillo; *Orig. Plays:* Egon Wolff; *Photo:* Daniel López; *Music:* Raúl Lavista and Mario Lavista; *Prod Mgr:* Eduardo de la Bárcena; *Prod Chief:* Carlos García Flores; *Asst Dir:* Valerio Olivo; *Film Ed:* Eufemio Rivera y R.; *Prod Des:* Felida Medina; *Decor:* Carlos Grandjean; *Camera Op:* Felipe Mariscal; *Lighting:* Horacio Calvillo; *Script Clerk:* Carlos Falomir; *Sound:* Javier Mateos; *Sound Ed:* José Li-Ho; *Makeup:* Ana Guerrero, Elvira Oropeza; *Re-rec:* Jesús González Gancy; *Union:* STPC

Cast: Ana Luisa Peluffo (*Eva*), Gabriel Retes (*El Dientes*), Tina Romero (*Toli Toli*), Claudio Brook (*Héctor Trejo*), Adriana Roel (*Piedad Trejo*), Ignacio Retes (*China*), Silvia Mariscal (*Marlena Trejo*), Juan Ángel Martínez (*Alí Babá*), Lucila Balzaretta, Enrique Ontiveros, Abel Woolrich, Luis Cuturier [sic], Ángel Aragón, Evaristo Liceaga, Salvador Godínez (*Ruco*), Alejandro Tamayo, Ivet Reyna, Hernán Ibarra, José Solís, El perro Simón (*dog "Blackie"*)

Notes: this film was unusual from the very ground up. Made by "old school" technicians of the STPC union [CONACINE and CONACITE UNO were government production companies affiliated with STPC, while CONACITE DOS was the STIC union's bailiwick], with a well-known star of "commercial" cinema (Peluffo), the film was at the same time

directed by a young, "independent" director and was "experimental" in form and content. *Flores de papel* is an interesting picture with some arresting images, but the filmmakers are never able to reconcile and meld two completely different plays ("Flores de papel," 1970, and "Los invasores," 1964, by the Chilean playwright Egon Wolff) into a coherent narrative--and the repeated cutting between the two stories, the deliberate overlapping of dialogue from one story with images from the other story, and the inclusion of yet another third "sub-plot" make *Flores de papel* rather frustrating to watch.

The following synopsis is not faithful to the order in which the scenes appear in the film: undertaking that task was too onerous to contemplate. Instead, I'll summarize one sub-plot and then the other, with the reminder that these two threads are constantly interwoven in the movie.

"Flores de papel"--Eva hires a young man, El

Dientes, to carry some of her packages home from the store. Once inside her apartment, he refuses to leave, claiming there are people outside waiting to kill him. El



Dientes says he has "known" Eva for a year--he and some of his homeless friends saw her painting one day. Eva gives him some soup, but when El Dientes becomes agitated once more, she leaves. When she returns, she discovers he has made a number of birds, baskets, and flowers from old newspapers, hanging them on the walls (and from the ceiling) of her apartment. El

Dientes spends the night in Eva's apartment, waking up early the next morning to take a shower and make breakfast for her. He seems to have settled in, but



says his ragged pants aren't presentable--if she'd like him to stay, Eva needs to purchase some for him (blue, with a white stripe). While Eva is out buying the pants, El Dientes wanders around her apartment, accidentally killing her canary. Eva returns but with gray pants, which sets off her "guest" once more. However, they eventually have sex on the floor of the apartment, but when Eva later discovers the dead bird, she becomes enraged and orders El Dientes out (again). However, his will is stronger than hers, and as the film concludes

he dresses her in a wedding gown and they emerge from a large sewer pipe (!) to join the procession of homeless people led by China (see below).

The “Flores de papel” section is quite interesting, with particularly involved *mise-en-scene* (although in both this section and the other sequences, too much of the photography is soft-focus, possibly to lend a “dream-like” quality to the images, but not to my taste, anyway.) The newspaper “creations” of El Dientes gradually take over Eva’s apartment, turning it into something which resembles an unearthly cave (El Dientes also uses a hammer and saw to “modify” Eva’s furniture and walls). It’s easy to recognize the theatrical origins of this work, but Retes’ direction is not static or stagey. As an actor, Retes is very good, but then the role of “El Dientes” is a flashy one, allowing him to switch from pensive to enraged at the drop of a hat. Ana Luisa Peluffo is a satisfactory foil, although her part is more of a reactive one. [Nudity report: both Peluffo and Retes have full frontal nude scenes.]



“Los invasores”—wealthy industrialist Héctor Trejo and his wife Piedad return to their luxurious home after a party. China, the putative leader (he later says “among us, no one gives orders”) of a horde of homeless

people, breaks into the house. Héctor, brandishing a pistol, confronts the intruder and says “What do you want?” “Bread, a piece of bread,” China replies. “You wouldn’t shoot someone over a piece of bread, would you?” Héctor indeed cannot kill another human being, and China is soon joined in the house by the nubile Toli Toli and then countless others. When Toli Toli comes in, China says she’s cold, and strips off her



outer garment to reveal her nude body—Héctor gives her his robe (a short time later, one of the other homeless people offers Héctor his ragged coat; when his offer is spurned, the man yanks down some curtains to make a cloak

for the homeowner). When Toli Toli accidentally breaks a lamp, China orders her to dance for Héctor to make amends (and, during her subsequent flailing performance, she breaks another lamp!).

The intruders begin to systematically loot Héctor’s home. When his daughter Marlena comes home, she is horrified to watch as they kill the family dog. She screams and attacks the homeless people and is eventually seized and carried off. The assumption is

that she is repeatedly raped, since she’s later seen, nude, reclining on a kind of throne as various men embrace her. Héctor, seemingly more upset when his trees are chopped down for firewood, offers China a wad of cash to go away. China asks his people what they want to buy with the money and the replies include “a real leg!” (from a one-legged man), “my teeth” (a toothless man), “my grandchildren,” and “Whores! All the whores in the world!” (this is a popular choice).

Piedad is enraged when her jewels are stolen, and demands Héctor do something to stop the looting. “They’re human beings,” he tells her. Finally, the horde of invaders packs up everything they haven’t destroyed and sets off down the street; Héctor is handed a rope so he can help pull the wagon bearing the remnants of his worldly goods (Marlena is sitting on top of another pile of loot, wearing a dazed expression). As the procession winds through the streets, they are joined by Eva and El Dientes.



“Los invasores” is relatively free of overt political content, surprising given the basic premise of the plot—homeless people vs. rich industrialist—and the behavior of the “invaders” is so outrageous that the viewer has little sympathy for them (China’s request for “a piece of bread” hardly correlates with the wanton destruction of Héctor’s home and possessions). Héctor himself is portrayed ambivalently—his wife and daughter react a little more normally to their predicament—rather than as an overt villain. There are some comments about personal and corporate greed and so on, but less than one might expect.

Actually, the interpolated “third plot” sequences would seem to carry the most political message. Periodically throughout the film we are shown scenes of shacks at a garbage dump (implying the “homeless” people are actually squatters and possibly *pepenadores*—who make their living sorting through trash for recyclable items), then the arrival of troops (or the police) and bulldozers who destroy the shacks (some are also blown up) and drive the residents away. The suggestion is that the “invasion” of the homeless people was caused by the destruction of their homes and livelihood.

“Los invasores” is quite fascinating due to the scenes of anarchy and destruction—Héctor’s house and yard are quickly converted into an incredible

wasteland, impressively depicted. The performances are all very good, although Claudio Brook's character reacts to the events in an unusually restrained fashion (he's upset but not enraged). Nudity report: Tina Romero and Silvia Mariscal both have full nude scenes which are really not necessary for the plot, not that I'm complaining.

Trivia note: the Retes family took home a wide selection of paychecks for their participation in this movie. Gabriel Retes directed and starred, his father Ignacio co-wrote and starred, and Ignacio's wife (and Gabriel's mother) Lucila Balzaretti had a supporting role (Tina Romero would later wed Retes, but at the time *Flores de papel* was shot he was apparently still married to his first wife).

Flores de papel is unfortunately less than the sum of its parts—the formal construction of the movie is too “avant garde” and the dramatic impact of the separate stories is weakened by the constant cutting between them. The production design is excellent and the acting is strong but the film as a whole is not satisfying.

Reprinted with minor changes from MFB 10/3 (June 2004)



Guyana: el crimen del siglo* [Guyana: Crime of the Century] (Re-al Prods.--CONACINE--Ízaro Films-Care Prods., 1979)** *Prod/Dir:* René Cardona Jr.; *Scr:* Carlos Valdemar, René Cardona Jr. (Mexican source also credits Julián Esteban Gómez); *Addtl. Dialog:* Roberto Schlosser, David Silvan, Linda O'Hanlon; *Photo:* Leopoldo Villaseñor, Miguel Arana; *Music:* Jimmie Haskell, Alfredo Díaz Ordaz (*U.S. version:* Nelson Riddle, Bob Summers, George S. Price); *Assoc Prod:* Adolfo López Negrete; *Prod Mgr:* Miguel Ángel Gómez; *Asst Dir:* Roberto Schlosser; *Film Ed:* Earl Watson; *Art Dir:* Salvador Lozano Mena; *Dialog Supv:*

David Silvan; *Sound:* Rodolfo Solís; *Wardrobe:* Christa Von Humboldt; *Union:* STPC; CFI Color * [U.S. version: *Guyana, Cult of the Damned* (Universal, 1980)]

** [Mexican-Spanish-Panamanian co-prod]

CAST: Stuart Whitman (*Rev. James Johnson*), Gene Barry (*Lee O'Brien*), John Ireland (*Dave Cole*), Joseph Cotten (*Richard Gable*), Bradford Dillman (*Dr. Gary Shaw*), Jennifer Ashley (*Anna Kazan*), Yvonne de Carlo (*Susan Ames*), Nadiuska (*Leslie Stevens*), Tony Young (*Ron Harvey*), Robert Doqui (*Oliver Ross*), Erika Carlsson (*Marilyn Johnson*), Hugo Stiglitz (*Cliff Robson*), Carlos East (*Mike Sheldon*), Ricardo Carrión (*Bert Powers*), Jack Braddock Johnson (*Alex Dressler*), Deloy White (*Ambassador Philip Banks*), Eduardo Noriega (*Albert Kazan*), Tito Junco (*Thomas, commune member*), José Najera (*William Hudson Sr.*), Leonor Llausás (*Lida, commune member*), Carlos Riquelme (*Cliff's father*), Rojo Grau (*Stewart, Johnson's son*), Anaís de Melo (*Rebecca, commune member*); *Commune members who want to leave:* Yogi Rouge, Alberto Arvizu, Edith González, Alejandro Ciangherotti, Ricardo Noriega; *Lorraine Chanel (woman shot while escaping)*, Fernando Yapur (*man who tries to stab O'Brien*), Robertha (*commune member who sings*), Enrique Lucero (*commune member with long gray hair*), Julián Bravo (*Rebecca's boyfriend*); *Guards:* Carlos Suárez, Miguel Gurza, Humberto Gurza, Mario Arévalo, Orlando Urdaneta, David Silvan, J.J. González, Miguel Ángel Gómez, Tirso, Badi Yapur, *Reporters:* Eduardo Bea, Armando Calvo, Oscar Lancer, Juan Luis Gallardo, Adalberto Menéndez, Humberto Vilchis; *Commune members:* Jorge Zamora, Esteban Noriega, Ernesto Rosa Jr., León Berio, Jacqueline Evans, Leopoldo Frances, Gerardo Castell, Yolanda Ponce, Liza Willert, Armando Martín "Pecas"

NOTES: After the international success of his fact-based *Supervivientes de los Andes* (aka *Survive!*) and films with non-Mexican stars like *Tintorera*, *Ciclón*, and *Triángulo diabólico de las Bermudas*, René Cardona Jr. combined both of these in *Guyana, el crimen del siglo*. Based on the case of Rev. Jim Jones, his "People's Temple," and the "Jonestown Massacre" of over 900 people in November 1977, *Guyana...* is a fairly somber retelling of the facts, although for some reason (probably legal) the names of the protagonists were altered (Jim Jones becomes "James Johnson," and Jonestown is subsequently "Johnsontown"; Leo Ryan is "Lee O'Brien," and other names are similarly changed ever so slightly). One of the remarkable aspects of *Guyana...* is the manner in which the film adheres to the facts and faithfully recreates the visual aspects of the actual case. Does it matter to the audience that the typeface of the "Guyana Airways" company name on the plane that brings the visitors to "Johnsontown" matches the real plane's logo? Or that Gene Barry actually resembles Congressman Leo Ryan? Or that

Enrique Lucero is made-up and costumed to resemble an actual cult member? Probably not. However, the sets and the recreated scenes in

Johnsontown/Jonestown are very close to the original (if one compares them with news photos) and while most viewers probably wouldn't have been able to tell



the difference, this shows Cardona did intend to make a docu-drama, not just a quickie rip-off.

There is some actual footage of Georgetown, the Guyanese capital, but

it is just travelogue-style and features no actors, so it may have been shot by a second unit or even been stock footage.

One aspect which is not entirely accurate, however, is the racial makeup of Jones' followers: while nearly two-thirds of those who died in Jonestown were African-American (although most of Jones' confidants were white), the cast and extras in *Guyana, el crimen del siglo* are mostly (but not entirely) white, [Note: I haven't seen the 1980 TV mini-series *Guyana Tragedy: The Story of Jim Jones*, which does use the real names of Jones, Ryan, and some other people. This film delved into Jones' life in more detail—especially his relationship with "Father Divine" (James Earl Jones), a famous black preacher—but is not necessarily considered any more "accurate" than Cardona's movie by People's Temple experts.]

Unfortunately, unless one is willing to go to a certain amount of trouble and expense, Cardona's original version of the film is very difficult to see.* Universal picked up the movie for the U.S. theatrical release and cut nearly half an hour (115 minutes down to 90 minutes) of character development. They also replaced the music score, and added voiceover narration: the narrator is allegedly a young man who joins the Johnson cult with his mother and sister, but manages to escape with his life; this means the narration is told in the first-person rather than impersonally, but since the narrator's character is never actually seen, it comes off as a little odd. The U.S. version concludes with some red-tinted footage and stills (intercut with flashbacks to earlier scenes from the movie) which may be actual news photographs of the suicide's aftermath, whereas the original version ends with Johnson's death. The film was cut again (the most noticeable omission was Anaís de Melo's nude scene, apparently present in the U.S. theatrical print, since she is prominently featured on the poster) for U.S. television, and the U.S. theatrical version has not been officially released on video. Those—like me—who are dissatisfied with the TV print can obtain bootleg copies of a Japanese-subtitled version which seems to be more or less complete. *[2020 note: it

appears that both the Mexican and U.S. versions are now more readily accessible.]

Ironically, the material missing from the U.S. version is not the exploitative sections—which aren't that numerous anyway—but scenes which flesh out the characters of Johnson, Ryan, the reporters, and the cult members. Even with this footage, the film still just hits the highlights, but the cut version is pared down to the bone, with only Johnson receiving more than passing attention.

The exploitation scenes include the torture of three young boys caught stealing food: one is staked out and covered with snakes, another is repeatedly dunked in water, and the third is stripped and has electrical cables connected to his genitals (shown from behind). A worker who flees the fields is caught and whipped, and another malcontent is thrown in solitary confinement and emerges a drugged zombie. The most notorious scene takes place after Julián Bravo and Anaís de Melo are caught having sex. They are both stripped in front of the other cult members, and Johnson orders de Melo to have sex with a large African-American man, and shouts at Bravo—"You will perform a sex act with a man. The entire community will be your witness!" However, not even in the "uncut" Japanese print is anything further shown. The final mass-suicide sequence is disturbing but not especially graphic (surviving uncut on TV).

James Johnson preaches to his congregation in San Francisco, and says he wants to take them all to a new land where they can worship in peace. The nation of Guyana gives him some worthless jungle and Johnson and his followers build

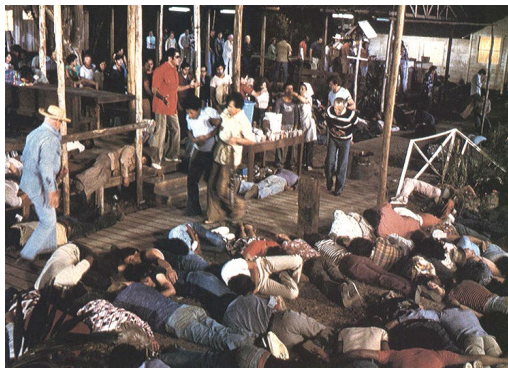


"Johnsontown." Meanwhile, William Hudson—whose son was a former cult member and whose body is mangled by a passing train—asks Congressman Lee O'Brien to investigate.

Johnson runs his village like a prison camp. While he eats well, takes drugs, and sleeps with any woman who suits his fancy, his parishioners—who signed over all of their worldly possessions to their leader—eat rice three times a day, are worked to death in the fields, and are forbidden to have sex.

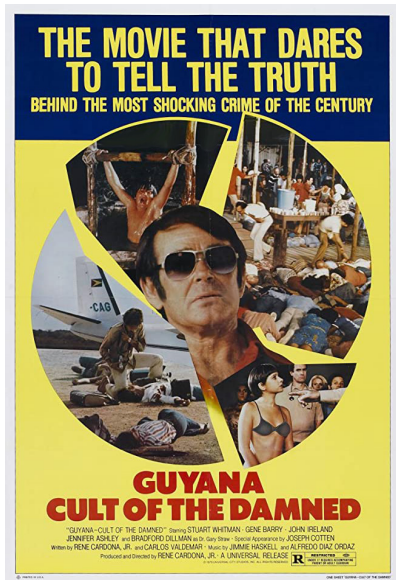
Johnson hires attorneys Cole and Gable, and public relations expert Susan Ames to front for him. However, enough stories get out to prompt O'Brien to demand the right to visit Johnsontown in the company of some journalists. Johnson tries to stop them, but finally has to give in. O'Brien and his group are shown a happy,

prosperous side of Johnsonstown. However, O'Brien demands that any U.S. citizen who wants to return to the USA be allowed to leave. Johnson, fast losing his grip on reality, agrees, but the Congressman, the reporters, and the "defectors" are ambushed on the airstrip as they prepare to leave. O'Brien and several others are killed.



Johnson realizes that Guyanese army troops will soon arrive in Johnstontown in response to the killings. He forces all of his followers to drink poisoned punch, although Cole and Gable manage to sneak off. Johnson himself is shot to death by an unknown assailant.

Of the large cast, Stuart Whitman comes off best as Johnson. Although the script does not even make an attempt to explain the origins of his ideology or the bizarre workings of his mind, Whitman still has the chance to make some speeches and engage in dialogue with his subordinates. He is also good when being



he and Whitman do strongly resemble the real Jones and Ryan). Old-timers Cotten, Ireland, and deCarlo turn in satisfactory cameos, while Bradford Dillman and Jennifer Ashley (who looks like she might have been pregnant during filming, since she always wears bulky blouses or shapeless dresses) are adequate as Johnson's chief lieutenants.

One of the most entertaining aspects of this film for me is playing "spot the Mexican performers." Erika Carlsson is prominent as Johnson's wife, but Hugo Stiglitz, who had major roles in many of Cardona's movies, has a very small part as a photographer, and Carlos East is barely glimpsed as another one of O'Brien's assistants. Eduardo Noriega has one scene, while Leonor Llausás and Tito Junco get a fair amount of face time as members of the commune. Singer Robertha not only gets to perform a song, but she also has a flashy death scene, screaming "I don't want to die!" Other familiar faces include a young Edith González, the afore-mentioned Julián Bravo and Anaís de Melo (although they are all but invisible in the cut TV print), Armando Calvo, Jorge Zamora, Fernando Yapur, Ricardo Carrión and Enrique Lucero.

Guyana, el crimen del siglo, star-spotting aside, generally holds one's interest but the subject matter is grim, the "plot" is predictable (we know what's coming) and the lack of any sympathetic protagonist reduces the audience's empathy. Nonetheless, the film is a serious and well-crafted of an exploitation topic.

Reprinted with minor changes from MFB 7/6 (March 2001)



Llovizna [Drizzle] (CONACINE-DASA Films, 1977) *Exec*

Prod: Rafael
Pérez Grovas;
Dir-Scr:
Sergio
Ohlovich;
Orig Story:
Juan de la
Cabada ("La
Ilovizna");
Photo: Rosalío
Solano;
Music: Raúl
Lavista; *Prod*
Mgr: Pablo
Buelna; *Prod*
Chief: Fidel
Pizarro; *Asst*
Dir: Felipe
Palomino;
Film Ed:



Alberto Valenzuela; *Art Dir*: Xavier Rodríguez; *Decor*:
Jorge Morales; *Makeup*: Margarita Ortega; *Sound Op*:
José García E.; *Sound Ed*: Abraham Cruz; *Spec FX*:
Marcelino Pacheco; *Asst Ed*: Saúl Aupart; *Union*:
STPC

Cast: Aarón Hernán (*Eduardo*), Salvador Sánchez (*indigenous man*), Delia Casanova (*Luisa*), Amado Zumaya (*father*), Silvia Mariscal (*Patricia*), Carlos Chávez (*campesino*), Martín Palomares (*campesino*), Ramón Menéndez (*Eduardo's friend*), José Nájera (*Eduardo's boss*), Isabel Vázquez (*grandmother*), Luis Couturier (*Martín*), César Sobrevalls [sic] (*corrupt*

policeman), Sandra Sánchez Parra, Teatro Guinol; Mario Esteban Barbieri, Cecilia Leger (*Patricia's aunt*)

Notes: *Llovizna* has many "typical" attributes of 1970s Mexican cinema. It was co-produced by one of the government companies (CONACINE), directed by an "independent" director (i.e., not someone who came up through the ranks in the industry; Ohlovich graduated from the Moscow Film Institute in 1968), has no name "stars," and deals with social issues.

Businessman Eduardo is sent to collect a payment in a provincial town (the film was shot in the state of Morelos); he takes his mistress Luisa along on the trip. After collecting the money (100,000 pesos in cash), Eduardo and Luisa argue and she leaves him. Rather than spend the night, Eduardo decides to drive home to Mexico City in his VW van, although it's a rainy night. The van runs off the road and gets stuck. Four indigenous men approach and help extricate the vehicle, asking for a ride to the capital where they work as bricklayers. Eduardo reluctantly agrees. During a brief stop, he transfers the cash from a briefcase to his coat pockets, and one of the workers sees it. The men later talk among themselves, but since they're speaking an indigenous language, Eduardo doesn't understand it and thinks they're plotting to rob him. He stops in a town and tries alert the police, but they're dubious about his story and try to rob him themselves.



Eduardo later stops in a roadside cafe for cigarettes, and pays with a bill from one of the large packets of money; this attracts attention and he quickly leaves. Later, he pulls into a Pemex station for gas; his passengers get out to stretch their legs and Eduardo removes a pistol from his briefcase and puts it in his waistband. A highway patrol car arrives but speeds off on a call before Eduardo can speak to the officer. As they enter the main highway to the city, the oldest member of the group of workers (the father of the others), who is drunk, suddenly awakes and seizes the steering wheel. The van swerves wildly and has a flat tire. As the men are changing the tire, the father suddenly grabs Eduardo, speaking drunkenly: Eduardo violently pushes him away, and when the man's sons protest, Eduardo panics and shoots them all (except the

father, left crying in the road) then speeds off. He later stops and burns their belongings in a vacant lot.

Eduardo is greeted warmly by his wife and delivers the money to his boss. As he leaves the office, he buys a newspaper with a story about the murdered *campesinos*. When he arrives home, his 7-year-old daughter is hosting a birthday party, complete with a



puppet show and a piñata. Eduardo confesses to his wife: "they were just bricklayers." However, he decides his wife, home, and daughter are what are important. "The newspapers didn't follow up on the story. The police never investigated. After all, it was just some *indios*. It wasn't worth remembering."

Llovizna straddles the line between subtle and didactic in its treatment of racism and racist attitudes in Mexico. The protagonist, Eduardo, is not a sympathetic character--he's cheating on his wife with Luisa, has ingrained racist attitudes about *indios*, is sullen and angry much of the time--but his racism isn't overt and doesn't seem to occupy much of his time and attention (unlike some portrayals of *gringos* in Mexican cinema, who are hyper-racist and deliberately go out of their way to attack people of colour). This seems to be the point: in Mexico, racism (and classism) lurks just beneath the surface, and if "white" Mexicans don't act like the Ku Klux Klan, this doesn't mean they don't consider the *indios* as inferiors.

Even before Eduardo encounters his ill-fated fellow travelers, the film makes his feelings clear: he rejects a woman (with a baby) begging in a restaurant and asks the waiter to eject her, and refuses to allow a street child to wash his windshield (both instances making the point that indigenous people are economically disadvantaged). He and Luisa watch some indigenous dancers perform for tourists, another way of stereotyping them as the "other." Government efforts at inclusivity are represented by a radio program Eduardo hears as he's driving, the "Mexico Hour," which lauds the nation's cultural heritage, and by an (ironic) billboard reading "We Are All the Solution," seen in the background as Eduardo has his deadly confrontation with the *campesinos*.

The four men traveling with Eduardo are not given character names in the script--which may be intended to suggest that "white" Mexicans think all *indios* are indistinguishable--but they are given a back-story. Intercut with scenes of Eduardo in the first section of *Llovizna* are scenes of these men--a father and 3 sons--attending the funeral of a young daughter of the family.

The grandmother of the deceased is inconsolable throughout the wake and the burial even though she is surrounded by her family and neighbours. The men have to take their leave so they can return to their jobs in Mexico City: the father repeatedly talks to Eduardo about the rain being good for the soil, suggesting he and his sons are *campesinos* who've been forced to seek employment in construction rather working the land (when Eduardo returns to Mexico City, he gazes at a building under construction and sees a group of workers looking back at him, or so he imagines).

The men are polite to Eduardo, referring to him as *patrón*, and only intervene when he treats their father roughly (irritated by the man's drunken repetition of the same phrases). They speak among themselves in Nahuatl (one assumes, although it could be a different language), which fuels Eduardo's paranoia, but do not appear to be mocking him or plotting against him. Eduardo's final violent outburst results from his mounting anger and frustration rather than racial hatred: he's angry at Luisa (for leaving him, which resulted in his departure for home, rather than waiting until the next morning), at the flat tire, at the elder *campesino*'s maudlin, annoying and drunken behaviour (caused by grief, but Eduardo isn't aware of this). He lashes out and when the man's sons protest, Eduardo pulls his pistol and shoots them all. The film is sporadically narrated in flashback voiceover by Eduardo: when he takes the pistol out of his briefcase and puts it in his waistband, he says "I was feeling insecure," and had no plan at that time to kill his passengers. Guilt makes him confess his crime to his wife, but he very quickly decides to keep silent, realising that the death of 3 *indios* is not something that will be taken seriously by the authorities.



[*Llovizna* also takes a shot at the Mexican police, although that's low-hanging fruit in Mexican popular culture. Eduardo pulls into a small town and pounds on the door of the local *sub-delegación* (police station), but no one answers. Following the sound of music, he finds a *cantina*, with two uniformed policemen inside. Eduardo claims the men in his van intend to rob him, but the police seem more interested in what Eduardo

has to steal. He flees and drives off quickly, leaving the policemen in his wake (they do shoot ineffectually at the van).

Llovizna is quite deliberately paced and tends to drag a bit. It's chiefly Aarón Hernán's show, and he's fine, spending much of the film with an angry scowl on his face. As noted above, he's the protagonist but the film doesn't do much to make him a sympathetic character. He seems more irritated than fearful or angry; he makes several half-hearted attempts to get rid of his passengers but doesn't have the nerve to actually confront them and order them out of his van.



The four actors playing the *campesinos* are fine, although for the audience they're basically "the old man," the older son (played by well-known actor Salvador Sánchez), and "the other two guys," who aren't really differentiated. José Nájera overacts as Eduardo's unpleasant boss, Delia Casanova is satisfactory as Luisa, and Silvia Mariscal is adequate (in a small part) as Eduardo's wife.

The technical aspects of *Llovizna* are alright, although available prints are muddy, soft and dark (perhaps intentionally so, but hopefully not to this extent). The film was released commercially in 1978: one wonders how it fared at the box-office, since it seems almost deliberately anti-commercial. The publicity materials tried to sell it as a thriller—"In this van are traveling four *campesinos*, a traveling salesman, a revolver, a machete, and one hundred thousand pesos." [note: Eduardo's pistol is actually an automatic, not a revolver; *pistola* would have been more accurate] The photos on the lobby cards actually make it appear that Aarón Hernán's character was being legitimately threatened by the indigenous men, which contradicts the main theme of the film!



Manuel Saldívar el Texano (Productora Fílmica de México-Rodolfo de Anda, 1970) *Dir-Scr*: René Cardona Sr.; *Photo*: Javier Cruz; *Music*: Enrico C. Cabiati; *Prod Mgr*: José L. Murillo, Enrique Rosas Ballestegui; *Asst Dir*: Javier Durán; *Film Ed*: Felipe Marino; *Art Dir*: Raúl Cárdenas; *Camera Op*: Alberto Arellano; *Makeup*: Graciela Muñoz; *Dialog Rec*: Francisco Guerrero; *Re-rec*: Heinrich Henkel; *Union*: STIC; Eastmancolor; Mexiscope

Cast: Rodolfo de Anda (*Manuel Saldívar*), Pilar Pellicer (*Olga Velázquez*), Jorge Russek (*Ruy Vega*), Khaterine [sic] Ridell (*Teresa Michel*), Juan Gallardo (?*Refugio Pérez*), Aarón Hernán (*Marcos Gutiérrez*), René Cardona Sr. (*Juan Velázquez*), Hernán Guido

(Mario Sánchez), Miguel Suárez (Rocha), Alfredo Gutiérrez (comisario), Adán Guevara (Brendez), Eduardo [sic = Gerardo] Cepeda (*Pedro el Gringo*), José L. Murillo (doctor), Jorge Fegan [billed but does not appear], Guadalupe Peruyero, Gustavo del Castillo, Raúl Hernández "Pin," René Barrera (*shotgun guard*), Jesús Gómez (*bartender*), José Luis Avendano (*Pedro, stage guard*)

Notes: this was the last (it was shot more or less back-to-back with *Siete muertes para el Texano* in



April 1970) of 8 films in the "El Texano" series, which had begun in 1963 with *El Texano*--6 of these starred Rodolfo de Anda, with Rogelio Guerra taking over for 2 pictures in the middle of the series. There is nothing especially distinctive about the movies, particularly when compared with other Western pictures also starring de Anda in virtually identical roles. Manuel Saldivar doesn't have any special traits: he's basically just another cowboy hero. The plot of *Manuel Saldivar el Texano* is not especially interesting and the production values are mostly TV-Western level, but--perhaps deliberately--director/writer René Cardona Sr. includes a surfeit of action, with fist-fights and gun battles breaking out every few minutes.

Manuel Saldivar receives a letter from a concerned citizens' committee in a Western town. His companion on the stagecoach is attractive and flirtatious Teresa, who goes to work in the Rojo Diablo saloon, owned by Ruy Vega.

The committee--consisting of newspaper editor Marcos, banker Rocha, hotel owner Olga, mine owner Brendez and Sánchez--says bandits have been repeatedly robbing the stage carrying gold from the

mines. They suspect Vega is the mastermind, and bandit Refugio Pérez is his henchman.

Manuel is immediately and repeatedly attacked by outlaws, but defeats them all. With Teresa's help, he discovers Olga is the real culprit, aided by Sánchez and some outlaws. Olga hates Vega because he caught her father cheating at cards and shot him to death in self defense.

Manuel Saldivar el Texano tries to be something of a whodunit: Ruy is the logical suspect, the ill-tempered Marcos is another possibility, and Olga is extremely secretive (plus she has an axe to grind); Rocha, Sánchez and Brendez are non-entities so we can rule them out. At one point Manuel has a long, running chase and then a fight with the masked stage robber, who never loses his mask; the outlaw seems to be rather short and slight of frame (in this sequence only), which points to Marcos or Olga, but this is never resolved. Presumably the actual robberies were carried out by Refugio Pérez.

Curiously, Emilio García Riera points out that he could not spot 5 of the credited performers in the copy he watched--Gallardo, Fegan, Peruyero, del Castillo, and Hernández. I can't say I'd be able to identify the latter 3 myself, but Fegan is definitely absent and I wouldn't want to swear it's Gallardo as Refugio Pérez (whose face is only seen very briefly).

The *Historia documental del cine mexicano* lists no running time for the film, but the *Diccionario del cine mexicano 1970-2000* gives a running time of 85 minutes (although some of the other information, such as the cast list, is incorrect). The print I saw is only 67 minutes long, suggesting cuts were made at some point. (*Siete muertes para el Texano* is cited as running 80 minutes).

The performances in *Manuel Saldivar el Texano* are satisfactory, although mostly one-note. Alfredo Gutiérrez is the comic relief *comisario* who blusters but immediately backs down when Manuel calls his bluff; Aarón Hernán is grumpy, Pilar Pellicer is suspicious, and so on. Katherine Ridell does not appear to have made any other films: she seems to have been speaking Spanish but her dialogue sounds post-dubbed. Aside from a horrible hairstyle in several scenes, she's attractive and her character is spunky and assertive. As Manuel Saldivar, Rodolfo de Anda is rather surly and irritated at the double-dealing he experiences (he was hired by the committee to clean up the town, suggesting he's a sort of trouble-shooter or



bounty hunter; in the film's opening sequence, he recaptures an escaped prisoner).

As noted above, action sequences occur at the drop of a hat. These are generally well-done (in fact, Cardona's direction is slick throughout), although some of the punches in the fist-fights miss in a conspicuous manner, and only occasionally does a bullet actually hit its mark (surprisingly, Manuel shoots Refugio in the



head and the outlaw's hat almost literally explodes in a gory manner). The exteriors seem fairly authentic and the "Western town" set and

interiors are adequate. The music score by Enrico Cabiati is extremely loud and energetic, if not especially good.

Trivia notes: Rodolfo de Anda splits his pants in the opening fight scene. "No retakes!"

Not bad, but without any particular distinction.



Mentada de padre [Damned Father] (Alazraki Films-Traziende Films-Lemon Studios/Videocine,



©(2019) Exec Prod: Moisés Chiver; Prod: Leonardo Zimbrón, Mónica Vargas, Gaz Alazraki, Mark Alazraki, Moisés Chiver, Alexis Fridman, Fernando Rovzar, Billy Rovzar; Co-Prod: Flipbook, CTT, Dinamita Post, Joceline Hernández, María de Jesús García; Assoc Prod: Gonzalo Ruíz de Velasco, Alexis

Weinberg; Line Prod: Mariana Aceves; Dir: Fernando Rovzar, Mark Alazraki; Scr: William Sutcliffe ("The Brothers Huffington-Ffyne"), Fernando Rovzar, Mark Alazraki, Moisés Dayán Schneider; Photo: Isi Sarfati; Music: Benjamín Shwartz; Prod Mgr: Adrián Flores; Asst Dir: Manuel Hinojosa; Film Ed: Jorge Macaya; Prod Des: Carlos Lagunes; Art Des: Sandro Valdéz; Makeup: Karina Rodríguez; Supv Visual FX: Raúl Prado; Sound Des: Luis Sumano; Stunt Coord: Gerardo Moreno Flores, Erick Delgadillo

Cast: Héctor Suárez (*don Lauro Márquez Castillo*), Osvaldo Benavides (*Fausto*), Antonio Gaona (*Abel*), Mauricio Barrientos (*Iker*), Mauricio Isaac (*Tadeo*),

Sofía Sisniega (*Lily*), Ximena Romo (*Rosa*), Hernán del Riego (*Jaime Velasco*), Carlos Arau (*Cabeza de Vaca*), Víctor Hugo Martín (*Mauricio Lagunas*), Liz Gallardo (*Frida [Kahlo]*), Carlos Aragón (*doctor*), Gerardo Taracena (*rebel general*), Mario Filio (*don Mancera*), Claudia Álvarez (*Esperanza*), Manolo Caro (*Gustavo Villaseñor*), Tomihuatzl Xelhuantzi (*Godínez*), Rocío Verdego and Carlos Corona (*bourgeois couple listening to radio*), Regina Reynoso (*Lupita, servant*), Luis Maya (*Marcelino*), Luis Alberti (*Peña*), Norma Reyna (*Tomasa*), Fernando Alonso (*Tilman*), Donagh Gordon (*Byrd*), Roger Cudney (*Williams*), Carlos Macías (*Diego [Rivera]*)

Notes: the final film appearance of Héctor Suárez--in a flashy cameo role--was in *Mentada de padre*, a glossy period comedy released in August 2019 that made about \$2.6 million dollars (not exactly a major hit).

The film was based on an original screenplay by British writer William Sutcliffe, presumably converted to a Mexican setting by Fernando Rovzar, Mark Alazraki, and Moisés Dayán Schneider. Word is that Sacha Baron Cohen was originally attached to the project (before it crossed the pond to Mexico). Sutcliffe's novel "Whatever Makes You Happy" was filmed in Hollywood in 2019 as *Otherhood*, and he has written a number of other novels as well.

Mentada de padre is in some ways an old-fashioned film, with a plot that wouldn't have been considered unusual in the 1940s, but there are a few aspects which are certainly 21st-century in style and content ("reality radio," multiple gay references, and explicit jokes about sex, vomiting, and urination).

Wealthy don Lauro is disappointed in his four grown sons, and stipulates in his will that only one of them will inherit his vast fortune: the one who wins a "contest" of his own devising. His lawyer Cabeza de Vaca arranges to have the contest broadcast live over a period of 4 days on don Lauro's radio station--creating a "reality radio" series--by installing scores of microphones in don Lauro's mansion.



The sons are: failed actor Fausto, failed explorer Abel, failed artist and "Communist" Iker, and failed athlete Tadeo. They were united as children after the death of their mother, but must now compete head-to-head for their father's money. The rules do allow them

to opt out at one point if they can come to an agreement (in 3 minutes) about dividing the inheritance, but the brothers fail to achieve this goal.

The contest has four parts. (1) The brothers are each given a rifle and sent out to shoot something. Tadeo wins by accident: he shoots a large boulder that tumbles down and squashes two deer. (2) The brothers have to alternate taking shots of tequila. Fausto refuses to participate, considering tequila a "common" drink. Abel wins after Tadeo and Iker both vomit profusely. (3) Taken to a local *cantina*, the brothers have to fight over a rubber ball: whoever can hold it for 30 seconds wins. Fausto wins by pretending to have a seizure. (4) The brothers are each given an axe and told to take alternate swings at a tree: the tree was the favourite of the boys and their mother, and they all refuse to participate, ending the contest. They renounce their father's money and urinate on his grave.

In between the actual "contests" (one per day), various other things occur. After Tadeo wins part 1, his brothers hire prostitute Lily to distract him; Tadeo's



prodigious masculine endowment sends Lily to the hospital, but she doesn't hold it against him. Abel and maid Rosa fall in love, but at one point he decides to quit the contest and

she objects (for his sake): he thinks she's a gold-digger and they argue. The brothers are contacted by Mauricio, who says the story they were told of their mother Esperanza's death--she was depressed and drinking and crashed her car--is a lie. Lauro thought Esperanza was having an affair with Gustavo, so he tampered with the brakes of her auto, causing Esperanza and Gustavo to die, and Lauro covered it up. Mauricio says Gustavo was his lover. The brothers are angry at their father's murder of their mother. Abel tosses a huge portrait of Lauro in the fireplace, and the entire mansion is engulfed in flames.



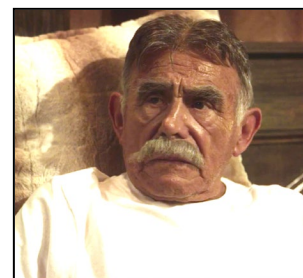
As the film concludes, Fausto achieves success on the stage, cheered on by his brothers in the audience. Tadeo gives up trying to become a *jai alai* player, instead serving as the team's manager; he also reunites

with Lily, even though he knows she was a prostitute. Iker, who has long had an unrequited crush on Frida Kahlo--who likes him as a friend but questions his dedication to the Communist cause because he's a millionaire--is welcomed to a Communist Party luncheon since he "refused" to accept his inheritance, and Frida grabs his leg under the table (as does Diego Rivera, seated on the other side!). Abel and Rosa prepare to sail off on a scientific voyage of discovery with an old sea captain/oceanologist.

Mentada de padre is quite slick and well-made (with a few clunky CGI shots but not too many), and the performances are overall very good. The humour varies in style and tone--some subtle, some broad, some physical, some verbal--but nothing seems wildly inconsistent or out of place. The pacing is generally good, although the film may be slightly over-long (about 1 hour and 45 minutes, although the end credits account for about 5 minutes of this).



The main actors have all been around for a while, with Osvaldo Benavides probably the best-known. Mauricio Isaac is made up to look remarkably like Cantinflas (although his performance is not modeled on him). Press reports indicate that Luis Gerardo Méndez was scheduled to appear in *Mentada de padre* and perhaps that's why I think Antonio Gaona looks like Méndez. Mauricio Barrientos has perhaps the flashiest part and he's also quite satisfactory in the role of the wanna-be Communist in love with Frida Kahlo. Longtime "professional *gringo*" Roger Cudney has a cameo role as an aged member of an "explorer's club" that roundly rejects Abel early in the picture.



As noted above, there are a number of "modern" touches despite the film's 1940 setting (which is, for the most part, recreated admirably). For instance, there are a number of gay references. In addition to Mauricio admitting that he and Gustavo were lovers, it is strongly implied that Fausto is gay: in one scene, Fausto and flamboyant radio announcer Jaime Velasco have a long conversation using "code" words about mutual friends, etc. Fausto is the only brother who doesn't have a girlfriend (or, in the case of Iker, a woman he lusts after).

The concept of "reality radio" (*realidad radiofónica*) is clearly an anachronism inspired by the

21st century concept of "reality television," and would probably have not been technically or economically feasible in 1940, but it's handled here in a clever manner, with frequent cutaways to various groups of people listening intently to the broadcast (a rebel general and his men, a bourgeois family, a doctor and nuns in a hospital, servants in don Lauro's kitchen, customers in a *cantina*).

Certainly well-made and ambitious and generally entertaining, but no comedy classic.



El Mil Usos* [Jack of All Trades] (Impulsora Filmica Independiente-Televisine, 1981) *Exec Prod-Dir:* Roberto G. Rivera; *Scr:* Ricardo Garibay; *Photo:* Francisco Bojórquez; *Prod. Mgr:* Mauricio Rojas Muñoz; *Asst Dir:* Javier Durán; *Film Ed:* Federico Landeros; *Camera Op:* Salvador Zerecero; *Makeup:* Marcela Bravo; *Sound Op:* Manuel "Caballito" Rincón; *Script Clerk:* Lourdes Álvarez; *Sound Ed:* Enrique Murillo; *Union:* STIC

*some sources list the title as *El Milusos* (one word); the film itself and the publicity materials are somewhat ambiguous.

Cast: Héctor Suárez (*Tránsito Pérez or López, el Milusos*), Rafael Inclán (?*Tira, Tránsito's "manager"*), Roberto Cañedo (*licenciado in prison*), Doña Isabela Corona (*Tránsito's mother*), Don Miguel Manzano (*man in pulquería*), Manuel "Flaco" Ibáñez (*Margarito*), Alberto "Caballo" Rojas (*Chava*), José Carlos Ruíz (*Macizo, man in pulquería*), Juan Ángel Martínez (*man in pulquería*), Gina Moret (*Tránsito's wife*), Eugenia Avendaño (*landlady*), Alejandra Meyer (*Chuchita*), Pedro Weber "Chatanuga" (*El Mayor*), Raúl Padilla Jr. "Chóforo" (*prisoner*), Alfredo Solares (*Mosco, El Mayor's henchman*), Charly Valentino (*truck driver*), Las Kúkaras [Hortensia Clavijo, Lucha Palacios], Gerardo Zepeda "Chiquilín" (*union representative*), Lizzeta Romo, Arnulfo Benavides (*Tránsito's brother*), Leandro Espinosa (*irate man in car*), Cristal Rubí, Harry Karasik, Federico González (*man at brothel*), María Luciano, Lourdes Salinas, Rodolfo Alexander, Ramiro Ramírez (*Tránsito's brother*), María de Jesús Rodríguez "Chuty," Héctor Pizano, José Luis Moreno, José Luis Avendaño

(*vendedor*), María del Pilar Ibarra, Rigoberto Carmona (*soccer goalie*), Guillermo de Alvarado (*convict*), Agustín Gómez, Xorge Noble (*man unloading truck*)

Notes: *El Milusos* was not the first (nor the last) Mexican film to deal with internal migration from the provinces to Mexico City, but it was a considerable success and even spawned a sequel, *El Milusos Dos*, in which the title character emigrates to the USA (another frequent theme in Mexican cinema). Despite the presence of numerous comic actors (Suárez, Rojas, Inclán, Ibáñez, Chatanuga, Chóforo, Condorito, Pelón Solares, Charly Valentino), the film is not a comedy (although there are a few funny bits), but a rather depressing drama intended to dissuade Mexicans from leaving their rural homes for the capital. Although it has some similarities to *chilango* films of the 1970s and 1980s--like *Picardía mexicana*--*El Milusos* doesn't depict Mexico City as a vibrant place filled with eccentric characters, but as a metropolis populated by those who look down on the *indios* who arrive hoping for a better life.

In the state of Tlaxcala: after the death of his father --who had seven children and numerous grandchildren --Tránsito says the estate (such as it is) can be split up among his 6 siblings. He's leaving his wife and children and going to the capital, because there's "work and money there." However, Tránsito runs into trouble even before he reaches Mexico City: hitching a ride on a truckload of bananas, he's beaten and insulted by the driver, who calls him *prieto* (dark) and *pata rajada* (a perjorative term often heard as *indio pata rajada*, or a raggedy indigenous person). Arriving at the city market--where the crowds and noise practically overwhelm him--Tránsito is unaware of the conventions controlling casual labour and is treated roughly by the other workers.



He eventually picks up occasional work. In response to one market vendor who says people should work the land and make it produce, Tránsito agrees but says without water, machinery, seeds, loans, nothing can be done, and the *campesinos* are still waiting for those things. Tránsito is "befriended" by hustler Tira who gets him a job as a Santa Claus who has his photo taken with children. However, when costume-rental man Chava short-changes him on his pay, Tránsito sells the suit to an old-clothes vendor. Tira offers Tránsito another job: selling roses to drivers in traffic. However, the "special" bouquets (that go for a higher price) contain drugs and Tránsito is nearly arrested. He escapes but loses all the money he's earned when his pocket is picked on the crowded subway.

Tránsito is arrested while drunk and sent to prison. He goes to work for convict boss El Mayor, selling soft drinks, sandwiches, drugs, liquor, and so on to the



other prisoners. Tránsito gives his "salary" to El Mayor, who promises to use the money to buy Tránsito a taxi that he can take back to his hometown on his release (this is a

lie). Tránsito is taken before a judge who makes a long speech which delineates the film's main theme:

"Why do you all come to the city? And precisely to the capital of the republic? I don't say you live well on your land, but you're much worse-off here. You're *campesinos*: one doesn't plant seeds in asphalt, you don't raise crops in the streets and trash heaps. You're free, but for how long? How long before they bring you here again? Think about it a little. You don't fit in here. Go back to your home [*pueblo*]: you're someone there. Here you're nobody. The city for you is hunger, servitude, jail. You've lived it--you know I'm telling the truth! Think it over. Think it over. Return to your own."

Nonetheless, Tránsito begs to stay in prison where he's decently fed and housed, but is ejected (still wearing his prison overalls because he has no other clothes). Out on the street, he's selling newspapers in traffic, but is then hired by Chuchita for her bath house. The work is tedious and non-stop, and after working all day Tránsito is expected to be Chuchita's "boy toy." He quits. Margarito, one of the bath house clients, is an itinerant bricklayer and takes on Tránsito as his assistant. However, when Tránsito botches a job (due to his lack of training), he's fired. Hired as a *barrendero* (a street sweeper), Tránsito is fired when he clashes with a "union" official who demands "dues." He then works as a fire-eater (once again in traffic) and then a night-watchman, losing both of these positions.

Tránsito wanders into a *pulquería* (a shop selling *pulque* to mostly lower-class men). He overhears two men talking about how great it is to work in the USA: "they pay in dollars and treat you very well."

However, a third man chases them away and tells Tránsito bluntly: "They work you to death, steal half your salary, feed you like animals. They despise you, humiliate you, exploit you. *La Migra* will throw you in jail." He urges Tránsito to "go home to your wife and children." As the film concludes, Tránsito runs out of the city, heading for home.

El Mil Usos apparently wanted to illustrate every possible menial job taken by immigrants from the provinces to Mexico City, but it does this in a very episodic way, with little or no connection or

progression between sequences. The viewer has little or no insight into Tránsito's life in the city: where does he sleep, how does he get each new job, and so on. In one scene he's shown trimming his beard while sitting at a fountain in a park, suggesting he's homeless (at least at that point), but otherwise he's only depicted "at work." While Héctor Suárez does a fairly good job of giving Tránsito a personality, in many ways he's more of a symbol or a *campesino* Everyman (even his last name is vague: he doesn't seem to know what it is, and is variously called López or Pérez--sources vary, but these are certainly two of the most common last names in Mexico). Again, the pattern in the film--Tránsito gets work, is exploited, loses work--may be deliberate and not necessarily a reflection of how inept Tránsito is as an individual. In other words, the film may be saying--as the judge does--that *campesinos* have a skill set that is not useful in a big city. [I use Chaplin's *Modern Times* in my film class; one minor irritation I have with this picture is that Chaplin's character



repeatedly finds work (despite the Depression setting) and then repeatedly loses it, but usually because he is incompetent or careless, not because capitalism is unfair to the working man.]

The longest sequences (Santa Claus, prison, bath house attendant) are not necessarily the best. The prison section is particularly confusing. First, it's unclear why Tránsito has been sent to prison: he's picked up for being drunk but this hardly seems worthy of a prison sentence. Additionally, his transition from a new, confused prisoner to a savvy (in some ways) hustler with a *chilango* accent (as compared to his previous provincial accent) is too abrupt and disconcerting. Furthermore--as Tránsito makes clear--prison doesn't seem like such a bad place after what he's been through, and this tends to undercut the film's basic theme (unless what they're saying is "life in Mexico City for a *campesino* is so bad that you'll want to be put in prison," which isn't exactly logical).

Although there are numerous and varied situations, the pacing of the film isn't consistent: some of it drags, while other sections are quite short and almost throwaways in the grand scheme of things. The running time of 113 minutes seems slightly long as a result.

Roberto G. Rivera was an actor and singer whose film career dated back to the 1940s; in the late Fifties and early Sixties he added writing & production manager chores to his toolbox. In the 1980s he generally gave up acting for directing and producing. *El Mil Usos* was his first feature directorial effort, and

he's a competent if not particularly stylish director. There are a number of shots which are evocative, such as the image of Tránsito walking up to the Monumento



de la Revolución (signifying, perhaps, that the Revolution did not achieve its goal of *tierra y libertad* for the *campesinos*), and numerous shots of horrible Mexico City

traffic (which Tránsito--despite his ironic name--has to dodge at the risk of his life).

Most of Rivera's later films were urban dramas or comedies (which in vogue at the time) but it's slightly curious because his acting & singing careers were largely in the *ranchera* and Western genres. There are two songs in *El Mil Usos*, a sad one that opens the film (as Tránsito's father is buried), sung by Rivera and Job Morel, and "Ya no vengan para acá" (Don't Come Here), a "tropical" sounding tune, which is heard twice.

El Mil Usos was shot largely on location, which adds verisimilitude (although occasionally passersby stare at the camera, which isn't helpful). Héctor Suárez, although a well-known performer by this time--he had already begun to play widely divergent characters, both in film and on television--does an excellent job as the hapless Tránsito. The rest of the cast is satisfactory, more or less simply required to perform their usual *shtick* (and the vast majority of the performers appear in only one sequence).

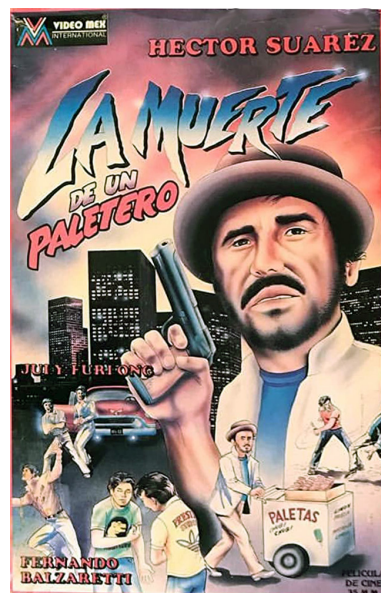
Interesting and worth watching, especially as an example of "private" (but government-approved) anti-emigration propaganda.



La muerte de un paletero [Death of an Ice Cream Vendor] (Cooperativa Río Mixcoac, ©1989)* *Prod/Dir:* Gabriel Retes; *Scr:* Pilar Campesino [aka Pilar de Retes], Gabriel Retes, Lourdes Elizarrarás; *Story:* Gabriel Retes, Pilar Campesino, Jorge Balzaretti; *Photo:* Gabriel Retes [and Marcelo Segberg, uncredited]; *Music:* Carlos Martínez; *Assoc Prod:* Juan Balzaretti; *Prod Mgr:* Gonzalo Lora; *Film Ed:* Gabriel Retes, Pilar Campesino, Paul Jasiukonis; *Camera Op:* Alberto Martínez, Luis Manuel Serrano; *Sound Op:* Eugenio Cobo, Jorge Santoyo; *Asst Dir:* Lourdes Elizarrarás; *Sound & Rec:* Alberto Castro, Paul Jasiukonis, Luis Schroeder; *Credits for Sur:* *Dir-Film Ed:* Gabriel Retes; *Scr:* Pilar Retes; *Photo:* Alberto Martínez; *Music:* Benito Navarro
*shot beginning December 1970 as *El paletero*; includes footage from *Sur* (1970) and *El asunto*.

Cast: Héctor Suárez (*Antonio N.*, the ice cream vendor), Fernando Balzaretti (*Ciego*), July Furlong

(*servant*), Ignacio Retes (*irate shopkeeper; robbery victim*), Pilar Campesino (*Pilar*), Juan Balzaretti (*traitor*), Eugenio Cobo (*agent*), Pedro Schneider (*boy 1*), Jorge Gallardo (*boy 2*), Alejandro Almaguer (*boy 3*), Alfredo Gutiérrez (*boy 4*), Juan Gutiérrez (*boy 5*), Roberto Sordo & Abel Woolrich (*robbers, cops*: Rolando de Castro, Roberto Hernández, Mario Castellón [Bracho], Pindaro Pérez, Alberto Namur; Isabel Quintanar & Esther Guilmain (*mothers*), Esteban Rios (*Esteban*), Maiti Rivera (*Maiti*), Jaime Rivera (*Jaime*), Gabriel Retes (*Armando*), Luis M. Serrano



(*buyer*), Mauricio Balzaretti (*Mauricio*); **Cast for Sur:** Fernando Balzaretti (*sheriff*), Ricardo Fernández (*indio*), Pilar Retes, Alejandro Miranda, Gloria Fernández, Enrique Capetillo

Notes: the creation of the home video market in the 1980s resulted in a desperate search for product. Eventually, direct-to-video productions became a significant source of films for home viewing, but companies still tried to find any possible existing film that could be released on VHS tape. And so it was that a number of Super 8mm films made by Gabriel Retes in the early 1970s were dusted off, re-edited, and sold/rented to unsuspecting customers. Fortunately for Retes, several of the performers in his amateur productions had become major names in the Mexican entertainment industry by the time he got around to marketing these old films. *El nacimiento de un guerrillero*, compiled from two long Super 8 films, *Los años duros* and *Los bandidos*, featured Manuel "Flaco" Ibáñez in a leading role. *La muerte de un paletero* was based on the short *El paletero* and also has a significant amount of footage from at least 2 (probably 3) other shorts (*El asunto* and *Sur*) to stretch it out to feature length (about 81 minutes). Héctor Suárez, already a veteran film and television performer in 1970 when the film was shot, was a much bigger star by the mid-to-late 1980s. It's not entirely clear when *La muerte de un paletero* was re-edited: the videotape itself has a 1989 copyright.

La muerte de un paletero is virtually incomprehensible because four different stories are intercut with no particular rhyme or reason. It would have been infinitely preferable to acknowledge that this

"feature film" was composed of 4 different episodes, and shown each part in sequence, with perhaps some sort of thematic linking narration, "stories of the city," or something like that (except for *Sur*, which is a complete outlier in style and theme, and perhaps because of this is shown mostly complete and in one chunk).

"El paletero" is the best-looking and most coherent of the stories. Antonio is a *paletero* who sells ice cream cones and popsicles from a pushcart. He's not an especially beloved figure, but he doesn't insult or cheat anyone. Spotting a cute servant girl exiting a shop, Antonio chats her up and she's not averse to his friendly advances. Suddenly, they are accosted by



several plainclothes policemen, apparently just for the hell of it (or perhaps they're planning to extort money from Antonio). Antonio

suddenly makes a break for it (still pushing his ice cream cart). The police agents are angry, especially one who tore his pants when Antonio knocked him down. They enlist 3 of their colleagues and an extended chase ensues. Antonio eventually abandons his cart; he's cornered by one of the agents, but



manages to steal the man's pistol. Another detective shoots Antonio and is shot in return; Antonio also kills a second agent, but a little boy is accidentally shot to death by the police. Antonio is finally

gunned down. A newspaper story claims Antonio was a berserk, drug-addicted criminal who was assaulting a young girl when the police happened by. In the ensuing gun battle, Antonio killed two detectives and a boy before committing suicide.

The second story deals with a group of "revolutionaries" who are planning to do something about drug dealers (it's quite vague). However, they know there is a traitor in their midst, although they don't know who it is or even who he (or she) works for. There's talk about buying guns, robbing a bank, or something...One of the group, Pilar, is wounded and nursed back to health by a fellow gang member. He turns out to be the traitor and she shoots him to death.

The third story focuses on five boys who live on the street. They deal drugs for El Ciego. He gives them a

chance to make more money by murdering a competitor and they do. They then go on a crime spree, committing various burglaries and robberies on the street.

The final story is a bizarre, surreal Western. A band of outlaws robs a "bank" (I guess, it's represented by a table and two chairs in front of a sheet hung on the wall). A Native American alerts the sheriff and they pursue the gang. After a long pursuit, the outlaws are wiped out, but the sheriff is wounded. The Native American then kills the sheriff and leaves with the stolen money. This section is Gabriel Retes' first short, *Sur*, and is included almost in its entirety (11:59); only the original short's spoken and printed credits have been removed. *Sur* anticipates *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* by having the outlaws and the sheriff "riding" horses that don't exist--the actors just prance along as if they are riding! In the original short, there are no "hoofbeats," but perhaps in *homage* to Monty Python, the revised version has "comical" hoofbeats added to the soundtrack (but nobody trotting along with coconut shells). The rock music soundtrack of the original has also been replaced.

As noted above, these 4 stories are intercut, although the "revolutionary" episode comes to an end in the middle of the film and the Western is shown mostly intact in the first half of the picture; the other two stories are spread over the whole length of the picture. However, no real attempt is made to connect the various stories, and the result is at times incoherent. It's not as if *La muerte de un paletero* was a quick cash grab by Río Mixcoac--someone actually took the time and effort to edit the various shorts into a "feature," (presumably) re-dub some dialogue, replace some of the original music, etc. And yet the end result is worse--both for the viewer and for Retes' reputation--than just splicing the shorts together and calling it a feature-length film.



Sur is a very amateurish product, but the other shorts show a definite improvement in film form, although technically they are still quite rough. The best of the batch is *El paletero*, which while far from slick is shot and edited in a fairly professional fashion, with some ambitious shots and editing, and the "look" is far superior to the other footage (possibly because it's almost entirely shot outdoors, in the daylight, and on location). [Unfortunately, a fair amount of the footage is slightly marred by dirt and hair either on the lens or film gate.] Oddly enough, while *El paletero* went into production in December 1970, *El asunto* is listed as a 1972 production and if *Fragmentos* is the other short cannibalised for *La muerte de un paletero*, that one was

apparently made in 1971--so it seems as if Retes regressed in his film technique after *El paletero* (without knowing the circumstances, this can only be speculation).

One amusing bit: Gabriel Retes appears in the "revolutionary" story but most of his footage is shots of him walking around Mexico City with a very young girl (his daughter? It isn't Gabriela Retes, who was



born in 1970), as he buys a newspaper, talks on a pay phone, and so on. The little girl is extremely cute and lively, and may not even have been aware she was being filmed.

La muerte de un paletero is a curiosity piece of historical interest, but it's not by any means an actual "film" in most senses of the word.



El mundo de los muertos [The World of the Dead] (Cin. Sotomayor, 1969) *Exec Prod*: Heberto Dávila Guajardo; *Prod*: Jesús Sotomayor Martínez; *Dir*: Gilberto Martínez Solares; *Scr*: Rafael García Travesí; *Story*: Rafael García Travesí, Jesús Sotomayor Martínez; *Photo*: Raúl Martínez Solares; *Music Dir*: Gustavo César Carrión; *Supv*: Miguel Sotomayor Martínez; *Prod Chief*: Julio Guerrero Tello; *Asst Dir*: Mario Llorca; *Film Ed*: José Bustos; *Decor*: José Tirado; *Camera Op*: Cirilo Rodríguez; *Lighting*:

Horacio Calvillo; *Makeup*: María del Castillo; *Sound Supv*: Jaime L. Fields; *Sound Dir*: Galdino Samperio; *Sound Ed*: Raúl Portillo; *Dialog Rec*: Javier Mateos; *Union*: STPC; Mexico City release: 1 October 1970; 2 week run; Authorization: A

CAST: Santo (*Caballero Enmascarado de Plata; himself*), Blue Demon (*Caballero Azul*), Pilar Pellicer (*doña Damiana Velázquez; Alicia*), Carlos León (*executioner; party guest*), Antonio Raxel (*Inquisition leader; don Alfonso*), Guillermo [Alvarez] Bianchi (*bishop; Padre Francisco*), Carlos Suárez (*Inquisition member; Lopez's corner man*), Mary Montiel (*tortured woman; party guest*), Betty Nelson (*Aurora*), Eduardo MacGregor (*priest*), Ramiro Orsi [sic] (*Alberto, Santo's trainer*), Marcelo Villamil (*party guest and ring announcer*), Fernando Yapur (*tour guide*), Juan Garza (*wrestling opponent*); Fernando Rosales? (*cemetery caretaker*), Amelia Rivera & Isabel Vázquez "La Chicimeca" (*wrestling spectators*)

NOTES: Rafael García Travesí worked on the screenplays of the four Santo films for Vergara, which could be considered dry runs for *El mundo de los muertos*. 2 of the 4 Vergara pictures contain colonial-era sequences with Santo's predecessor "El Caballero Enmascarado de Plata," and the plot of *Atacan las brujas* also deals with reincarnation or at least an individual in the contemporary period who is the double of



someone from a previous time, and whose life is predestined by events that occurred in the past. *El mundo de los muertos* contains all of these elements, integrated reasonably well into a coherent plot, and adds an interesting sequence in the eponymous "world of the dead."

Unfortunately, the imaginative script is hampered by some clumsy execution: whether this should be blamed on the Sotomayors (whose films notoriously promise more than they deliver) or Gilberto Martínez Solares (whose best films were pretty far behind him by this point) is difficult to say (his direction is not really that bad, although the overall "style" is pretty flat). The crude inclusion of footage from other films can be attributed to the producers, who did this from at least *La nave de los monstruos* (1959) and continued through the Santo and Blue Demon films of the late '60s. Occasionally the stock footage was utilized effectively, and often the scenes "quoted" from other pictures were better than the Sotomayor films themselves: *El mundo de los muertos* fails on the first count (the inserts are blatant mis-matches) and achieves the second, dubious result (which is to make

this film look worse than it is, in comparison to the atmospheric stock scenes).

For example, in an early scene, there are some red-tinted night shots (from *Hercules in the Haunted World*) of strange figures leaving their tombs, intercut with daytime footage (alright, it could be day-for-night but it's not very dark at all) of Pilar Pellicer in a graveyard, and then one wrestler exiting a tomb. This footage is repeated at the end of the film, with the addition of shots showing these creatures flying through the air, then some shots of whitish, bald, ghost-like creatures. What do we get in the new footage? 4 bare-chested wrestlers in black tights with dish-towels over their heads, looking like demented drag-queen bridesmaids!

But the cheapjack inclusion of extraneous footage cannot completely ruin *El mundo de los muertos*, and



except for Blue Demon fans who might feel cheated by his small, mostly villainous role, the picture should hold one's interest. Pilar Pellicer is not the type of actress one expects to find in a film like this, but she looks right for the part and turns in a good

performance, not slumming at all. The rest of the cast is satisfactory, although the only person besides Santo and Pellicer to have a really substantial role (actually, dual roles) is Guillermo Alvarez Bianchi. The production values aren't bad (the colour photography is nice, and the Churubusco interior sets are decent, if rather bland); the music is by Gustavo César Carrión during his "chord organ" period (which actually gives the score a rather campy feel).

Like *Santo y Blue Demon contra los monstruos*, a "nude scenes" version of *El mundo de los muertos* may have been shot. At least one still exists (showing a nude woman being whipped) that appears to be from this alternate version, but a "naked" version of the film itself has not been located to date. The still may represent an alternate take of the opening sequence of *El mundo de los muertos*, in which Mary Montiel is whipped by the Inquisition.

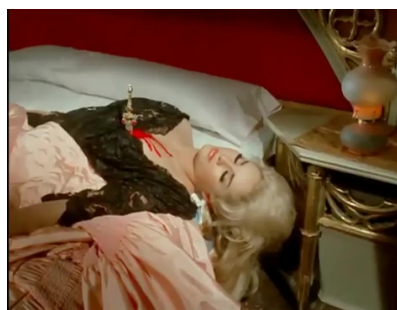
In 1676, the Inquisition in Mexico is trying to eradicate a cult of devil-worshippers. Four members (all burly wrestler-types) are burned at the stake (one's face and chest actually start to blister in the flames, a nice touch), as Damiana, their Satanic high priestess, looks on from afar. Returning to the graveyard where her followers await, Damiana prays for assistance from Satan. Suddenly, the Caballero Azul (Blue Demon) appears: he's been sent to help her carry out her

vengeance (later it is revealed that he is a good person whose soul has been captured by the devil).



Meanwhile, the Caballero Enmascarado de Plata (Santo, wearing his regular mask, pants and boots, but a silver jacket with frilly cuffs, and a silver cape with red lining) meets his beloved, the buxom blonde Aurora. He wants to marry her, but doesn't want to expose her to the danger that threatens him. Later, the Caballero talks with the Bishop: they suspect that the rich doña Damiana is in league with the Devil but can't prove it. The Bishop visits Damiana at her house, and when she tries to dissemble, he holds up a cross and watches her cringe. The Caballero is her next visitor, at her invitation. Damiana offers him her love, riches, power, and so forth, if he will pledge his soul to Satan. He refuses; she tries to stab him, and the dagger leaves a triangle burned on his hand when he stops her. This irritates the Devil, who takes away her magic powers (although she is later able to "pop" into Aurora's room), and the Caballero Azul is now the boss.

The Caballero Enmascarado de Plata is later attacked by three of the cult members who were burned at the stake (they look normal now, except that their skin is a little grayish), but they flee when he brandishes a crucifix. The Caballero Azul shows up a short time afterwards for a (slightly under-cranked) knock-down fight (a lot of furniture is over-turned), but disappears in a puff of smoke when (a) the sun rises, and (b) the Caballero Enmascarado de Plata whips out his crucifix. [This sequence is quite nicely directed, shot, and edited, and even has some overhead shots!]



But in the meantime, Damiana has a paid a visit to the sleeping Aurora, stabbing her to death. [Aurora is played by Betty Nelson, not to be confused with Bety

González, who had previously played Santo's girlfriend in *La hacha diabólica*--and who was murdered in bed in that one too!]) The Caballero arrives in time to find his lover in bed, covered in blood, with the dagger in her ample chest (the dagger then vanishes). Damiana is caught and sentenced to be burned at the stake. As she burns, she says her descendant, in 300 years, will kill all of their descendants (Carlos León, as the Inquisition's executioner, has a broad smile on his face as he lights the fire--in the opening sequence whipping a woman, he was also smiling; this man enjoys his work).

Voiceover: "And 300 years later, the curse was carried out." Alicia, who is the image of doña Damiana, wakes up screaming. She has had another nightmare. Her father, don Alfonso (a dead ringer for the head of the Inquisition who executed Damiana--looks like Alicia has some father issues), comforts her. In a rather odd scene, Santo and Alicia visit an old convent with a group of tourists (Fernando Yapur is their guide, but his voice is dubbed). They see some mummies (!) and Alicia says she feels she's been there before; it just happens to be the spot where Damiana was burned at the stake.



Santo and Alicia are engaged to be married, but haven't set the date. At a party, where half the guests are exact doubles of people from the colonial sequence, Padre Francisco (whose ancestor was the Bishop--what a demotion) tells another guest that Alicia has been sleepwalking and having hallucinations. So much for clerical confidentiality.

Later, after everyone has gone, Alicia follows a figure veiled in black (Damiana); in the basement, she finds the dagger, hidden in an old dresser. Taking it up to her room, she puts it away. Then, in double exposure, Damiana takes possession of Alicia's body. Wearing a black slip, she can now walk through walls. Santo is preparing to wrestle at the arena; his assistant Alberto thinks he sees something (Damiana). As the bout goes on, Damiana can be seen (in double exposure) in the audience. Santo's opponent goes wild, trying to strangle Santo with a towel, hitting the referee, and kicking Santo (and the referee!) out of the ring. [This is almost identical to a scene in *El hacha diabólica*, and in fact in both films the possessed

wrestler is Juan Garza! Also, although there's a bit of actual footage of Santo being carried into the ring, surrounded by adoring fans, the rest of the match seems to have been shot in the studio.]

Padre Francisco is reading about the death of doña Damiana in 1670 (I thought it was 1676?); the shadowy figure of Damiana tries to stab him, but is repulsed by the crucifix on his desk. Santo's assistant Alberto isn't so lucky. He hears noises in his apartment, and then the lights go out. Grabbing a pistol, he calls Santo on the phone; he shoots at Damiana without effect and is killed. [This scene is also lifted from *El hacha diabólica*, although it was Santo's girlfriend who was on the other end of the line in that picture.]

Santo, leaving to help his friend, is attacked by three ghost wrestlers. The battle continues outside, but the wrestlers flee when a rooster crows, signifying the imminence of dawn. Saved by a chicken. [This sequence is extremely irritating: the set of the interior of Santo's house is fairly luxurious, but when the combatants go outside, they are suddenly on the (unpaved) "old-West town" street on the Churubusco studio backlot! Very jarring. I didn't know Santo lived in Dodge City.]

The 20th-century incarnation of the Inquisition's executioner and the 20th-century version of the woman whipped in the opening sequence--previously seen dancing happily together at a party--are on a date when Damiana appears in the back seat of the man's Mustang. He tries to flee but is beaten up by two ghost wrestlers and drowned in a horse-trough. Let's see you smile now, sucker. The two women vanish.

Alicia/Damiana comes home, wearing a black slip; her father watches her walk through a locked door into her bedroom. He can't get in, so he doesn't see Damiana's spirit emerge from Alicia's sleeping body.

Padre Francisco, Alicia, don Alfonso and Santo talk at her home. Santo says his friend (Alberto) was murdered, and also a guard at the convent he and Alicia had visited--the second murder is not shown, even though Alicia says she dreamed of those "crimes," which suggests something was cut here. There's an abrupt cut and suddenly Alicia's father and the priest are alone in the priest's office: don Alfonso expresses disbelief that his daughter is possessed (even though he saw her walk through a locked door). Padre Francisco reads the story of the Gadarene swine from the Gospel of Luke. They put a crucifix around Alicia's neck, but while she sleeps, Damiana puts a spell on don Alfonso and he takes it off! The possessed Alicia/Damiana gives the dagger to the ghost wrestlers and tells them to kill Santo.

Santo is at the arena: his opponent, suspiciously, comes into the ring with a towel completely covering his face. The bell rings, and Santo realizes it's a ghost wrestler. Then a second, and a third appear! Santo is held down and stabbed in the chest! [This sequence is, to be fair, nicely shot from a variety of angles and

effectively edited.] But, he's taken to the hospital, and after considerable (gross) stock footage of an actual



heart operation (seriously, who thought this was a good idea?), is pronounced as good as new.

Later, Damiana drops a big tarantula on Santo as he's reading; he

flicks it off. Padre Francisco and Santo confront Damiana and the ghost wrestlers in a graveyard; when shown a crucifix (man, nobody should make a move without one of those), the wrestlers vanish. Damiana/Alicia faints. Taken home, a doctor says she is dying. Padre Francisco, always willing to share good news, says that if she dies while possessed, her soul is lost forever. Santo agrees to try and save her. By staring real hard (that's all it takes, apparently), he enters the red-tinted "world of the dead."

This sequence is fairly imaginative: in addition to the red tint, there are odd wailing sounds and music on the soundtrack, in addition to stock footage of bubbling lava, and the aforementioned weird creatures. Santo (wearing a suit and tie) catches up with Alicia, who passes out. He tries to take her back, but they are attacked by the ghost wrestlers. Suddenly, the Caballero Azul shows up and helps Santo defeat them. [To be fair, some effort was made to match the borrowed footage: Santo and Blue Demon toss big logs and a large piece of rock at their opponents, and these land on the monsters in the Italian shots.] Damiana vanishes in a pillar of fire. Suddenly Santo, Blue Demon and Alicia are located in the Inquisition's torture chamber (from the opening sequence, but red-tinted



now): Santo thanks the Caballero Azul, who replies: "No need to thank me. With this, I earned my liberation after more than 300 years." He warns Santo that he must cross the (rope) bridge between life and death with Alicia before time (an hourglass) runs out, or be

trapped for eternity. Although nearly surrounded by fire, Santo makes it across the bridge with Alicia.

As the film ends, Santo and Alicia are walking hand in hand. The narrator says the forces of evil have been defeated, yadda yadda. And then the opening credits are repeated (over a different background), except the main title has been crudely cut out (one screen reads "Pilar Pellicer en--").

In balance, this is a decent fantasy film that could have been much better. I think the two things that bug me the most are the use of the exterior Western street and the towel-headed wrestlers in the final sequence, but I'd still rate this as reasonably entertaining.

Note: most easily-accessible versions of this film run just short of 80 minutes (the "Nuestro Cine Clásico" double-feature DVD of *Santo en el museo de cera* and *El mundo de los muertos* is 80 minutes, online versions may be a few seconds shorter); *Historia documental del cine mexicano* gives the original running time as 85 minutes. It's unclear what might be missing, and my original notes from over 20 years ago suggest that the 80-minute version is the one I saw then, as well.



El oficio más antiguo del mundo [The World's Oldest Profession] (Estudios América-Cima Films, 1968) *Prod:* Mauricio Walerstein; *Dir-Scr:* Luis Alcoriza; *Photo:* Fernando Álvarez Garcés; *Music:* Enrico Cabiati; *Additional Music:* Nacho Méndez; *Prod Mgr:* Jesús Frago; *Asst Dir:* Tito Novaro; *Film Ed:* Sergio Soto; *Art Dir:* Octavio Ocampo; *Union:* STIC; Eastmancolor

Cast: Maricruz Olivier (*Libertad*), Gloria Marín (*La Señora*), Isela Vega (*Yolanda*), Jacqueline Andere (*Graciela*), Óscar Chávez ("*Padre*" Aurelio Lara), Pancho Córdoba (*doctor*), Jaime Fernández (*Lt. Julio Ávila*), Lupita Ferrer (*Estela*), Heidi Blue (*Lilián*), Sandra García (*Norma*), Jayne Massey (*Corinne*), Eduardo López Rojas (*Roberto*), Lina Marín (*Gumersinda*), Sandra Boyd (*aspiring prostitute*), Miguel Maciá (*fake "cruel detective" client*), Manuel

Sosaya [sic] (*priest?*), Miguel Gómez Checa, Carlos León (*false "colonel," client*), José Luis Carol (*client driving car*), domino players: Ricardo Adalid, Carlos Henning, Jorge Fegan; Ángel di Stéfano [sic] (*?men's shop clerk*), Miguel Ángel di Stéfano [sic], Leonor Gómez (*Teresa, lavandera*), Carlos Suárez (*rejected client*)

Notes: a spate of feature films dealing with groups of prostitutes appeared in the latter half of the 1960s, including *Casa de mujeres*, *La casa de las muchachas*, *La casa del farol rojo*, *Las chicas malas de Padre Méndez*, *Las golfas*, and *El oficio más antiguo del mundo*. These were not the first nor the last Mexican movies about prostitutes, or even groups of prostitutes, but they were right on the borderline between older, more sentimental and melodramatic films and those later productions which took advantage of relaxed censorship to include nudity and other explicit "adult" themes. *El oficio más antiguo del mundo*, although rated "C" (roughly equivalent to an "R" in the USA today), has no overt nudity (there are some hints, shots of bare backs in the shower, and so on), but it does obliquely refer to homosexuality, abortion, bdsm, and so on.



El oficio más antiguo del mundo in some ways resembles a filmed play: it takes place almost entirely in few rooms in a large mansion, and the scenes are staged as individualised dialogues between two or more characters. Alcoriza's direction tries to make this "cinematic," and the photography and editing keep it from being static and boring. There is one curious technical aspect which was slightly annoying: Alcoriza moves his camera but in a number of shots the image is shaky or floating, almost as if it were hand-held (but it probably wasn't) or the camera dolly had one flat tire! There is also a curious motif of battling cats in an alley outside the brothel which seems irrelevant rather than heavy-handed (there is one major "cat-fight" between Estela and Libertad, but for the most part the residents of the whorehouse get along with each other).

The film deals with seven prostitutes in a brothel, and this is almost too many, with everyone getting a tiny bit of character development in turn. Curiously, Corinne vanishes and reappears throughout the film for

no particular reason. She's absent in a number of the group scenes, and at one point is seen packing her dominatrix gear; later, an aspiring prostitute shows up at the door, saying she heard there was a vacancy, and so I thought Corinne had left for good. However, she reappears later: she apparently goes out on "house calls," but her absences are still somewhat disconcerting.

An injured man is discovered outside a large house which is actually a brothel run by La Señora. Taken inside, it's discovered that he's a priest. La Señora doesn't want trouble, but sends for the doctor who treats the prostitutes. The man has various wounds, including a serious one in his leg, but he will survive. La Señora closes the brothel and tries to convince the priest--Padre Aurelio--she runs a "boarding house," but he isn't fooled. As he recovers, most of the seven prostitutes working there spend time with him, talking about their lives; he is kind and understanding.



The seven women are: Libertad (the oldest, cynical, she doesn't succumb to the priest's charm); Graciela (sad and depressed, hates her work); Corinne (French dominatrix, neurotic about her hair); Norma (works as a whore to earn money so her fiancé Miguel can buy a business); Estela (injects insulin against the doctor's orders because her father died of diabetes); Yolanda (has been a prostitute for 12 years, calculates she's slept with 20,000 men); Lilián (a *gringa* who's a "Seventh Day Adventist" but tells Padre Aurelio she respects all religions). Also living in the house are La Señora, gay waiter Roberto, and busty maid Gumersinda (who repeatedly urges La Señora to let her become a prostitute).

La Señora and the others listen attentively to Padre Aurelio's advice. He urges them to quit their profession and start their lives anew. Most of them agree (even La Señora considers really opening a boarding house), but Libertad scoffs at them: she says they're impressed because Padre Aurelio is young and handsome, and they never paid any attention to their local priest, who is an old man.

Lt. Ávila, a police detective friend of La Señora who uses her as a source of information, accidentally discovers "Padre Aurelio" is a wanted conman who works for a large criminal organisation that collects money "to build churches" under false pretenses. Aurelio confesses the truth: he did have a religious vocation, but was ejected from a seminary for stealing money. He swears everything he told the women was sincere, but they reject him violently and rush upstairs for

to prepare for the brothel's re-opening. Only Libertad has a different attitude: since Aurelio isn't actually a priest, she empathises with him and offers to wait for him to get out prison so they can be together. But Aurelio says he actually lives like a priest (i.e., he's celibate), and Libertad storms off. Lt. Ávila and Aurelio depart. Aurelio says he'd like to enter a monastery to live a life of contemplation and peace. The policeman says he'll put in a good word for



Aurelio if the conman reveals the names of those in his organisation, but Aurelio doesn't feel he can betray his superiors. As the film concludes, the

prostitutes happily get dressed, put on makeup, etc.; only Graciela seems tormented by her disillusionment.

There are some clever touches in the script of *El oficio más antiguo del mundo*. The final twist isn't telegraphed ahead of time (although there are a couple of hints that Padre Aurelio isn't all he appears to be), and is slightly different than one would expect: he isn't a bad person who's been deceiving the women for his own ends, he doesn't have a plan to rob them or have sex with them, and he honestly tries to give them good advice. While the various prostitutes have more or less stereotyped life stories, the film even remarks on this: by the time the third or fourth woman has entered Padre Aurelio's room to confess to him, he's bored of their stories about being raped, growing up in poverty, being exploited or deceived by men, etc. Lilián brings him a Bible and appears ready to tell her story, but Aurelio rushes her out of the room before she can even start!



The film's depiction of prostitution is not noticeably different than many other movies: it's hardly realistic or hard-hitting. The prostitutes are all young

and attractive, live in a luxurious mansion, constitute a sort of "family," and none seem to want to go elsewhere (in fact, Graciela cries when La Señora initially fires her for bringing the wounded man into the house, and Gumersinda views prostitution as a promotion from her position as housemaid). The clients are well-dressed, middle-aged men, some of whom role-play as "cruel detective" or "military

officer," a rather familiar "humourous" aspect of movies about prostitutes. Most of the women have sad back-stories, but only Graciela makes a point of telling Padre Aurelio she bitterly hates being a prostitute (this is a very good, touching scene). In contrast, Estela says she became a whore because she wanted a pair of gloves she couldn't afford, so she found a man to buy them for her, and it escalated from there. Apparently Corinne is the "specialist" in bdsm activity, although Norma is physically abused by a client in one sequence. There is a passing allusion to one of the prostitutes being a lesbian, but this is never expanded upon.

The performances in *El oficio más antiguo del mundo* are solid. Jacqueline Andere and Maricruz Olivier get a bit more attention--and have more extended "drama!" scenes--but everyone is more or less fine. Óscar Chávez is quite good as the false priest, very sincere and believable. His acting career took a back seat to his musical work, partly out of personal choice and partly for outside reasons (his involvement with a failed rival actors' union in the mid-1970s and his political viewpoints), but his performance in this film is excellent. It's interesting to see Heidi Blue (best known, to me at least, as Santo's girlfriend in *Santo y Blue Demon contra los monstruos*) in a different sort of role; Sandra García had only a brief Mexican film career but is rather good here. Jayne Massey was a "Hollywood actress and dancer" (mostly on television) who wandered down to Mexico briefly, appearing in this film and an episode of the "Tarzan" TV series. Apparently she married a Mexican musician and had a son (Pepe Arellano) in 1968, who also became a musician. This probably explains why her acting credits seem to end at this point.

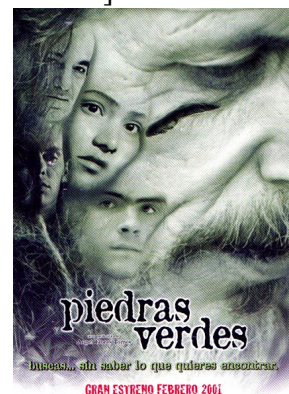


Overall, interesting if not especially profound.



Piedras verdes [Green Stones]

(FloresdelValleFlores-Videocine-De Cuernos al Abismo-CONACULTA-IMCINE, 2000) Prod: Ángel Flores Marini; Dir: Ángel Flores Torres; Scr: Ángel Flores Torres, Ángel Flores Marini; Collab: Ofelia Medina, Silvia Torres, Pablo Osorio, María del Pozo, Alfredo Joskowicz; Story: Ángel Flores



Torres; *Photo*: Eduardo Flores Torres; *Music*: Café Tacuba, Óscar Chávez, El Gran Silencio, Botellita de Jerez, Resorte, Taquío; *Co-Prod*: Francisco del Valle; *Assoc Prod*: Miguel Camacho; *Prod Mgr*: Emilia Arau; *Asst Dir-Second Unit Dir*: Gabriela Retes; *Film Ed*: Damián Mendoza, Ángel Flores Torres; *Art Dir*: Mirko von Berner

Cast: Vanessa Bauche (*Mariana*), Osvaldo Benavides (*Sebastián*), Juan Claudio Retes (*Gallardo*), Gabriel Retes (*father*), Alicia del Lago (*Aurora*), Ignacio Retes (*comisario*), Óscar Chávez (*José Santana*), Blanca Sánchez (*Dolores*), Dagoberto Gama (*Cruz*), Damián Delgado (*Antonio*), Norman Sotolongo (*Max*), Marisol del Lago (*young Mariana*)

Notes: the first feature directed by Ángel Flores Torres (he'd previously done music videos, and his father Ángel Flores Marini is a veteran producer), *Piedras verdes* has a few stylistic flourishes but is generally a straight-forward, well-acted drama. Although Vanessa Bauche, Osvaldo Benavides and Juan Claudio Retes occupy the spotlight, the supporting cast is also strong, though most of the performers appear only briefly (Blanca Sánchez has the most prominent role aside from the three leads).



In the desert town of Magnolia, Tamaulipas (the film was shot in San Luis Potosí, the D.F., and Veracruz, however), a pregnant woman is struck by a train and fatally injured. Her husband, in despair, runs away and is never seen again. The woman's baby is delivered and later adopted by the wealthy José Santana and his wife Dolores. The girl, Mariana, is sent to a boarding school, returning home for the funeral of her father (who drowned after being playfully pushed into a swimming pool by his wife during a costume party). Dolores is cool at first to Mariana; when the young woman borrows one of the family cars and it's stolen in the city, Dolores becomes enraged. Drug dealer Gallardo offers Mariana his assistance in recovering the auto; they have an affair and move in together.

Mariana begins to use drugs and has an abortion. She and Gallardo argue and she accidentally pushes him out of the second-floor window of their apartment. Fleeing the scene, Mariana twists her ankle and is aided by Sebastián, a young man who lives nearby. They fall in love but part when Mariana heads to Magnolia in search of her real father, and Sebastián

goes to the jungles of Veracruz to help a friend search for UFOs (!).



In Magnolia, Mariana learns the appearance of water in the dusty town's well is a major event. She meets Aurora, the widow of the town's *comisario* (similar to a mayor), who remembers the death of her mother and how her father ran into the desert and was never seen again. Mariana sets off in the same direction her father took, 18 years earlier. She loses her way and is rescued by a strange, nomadic figure (do you think it might be...?) who tells her "If you take the road, you won't get lost; but you won't find yourself, either." She decides to stay in Magnolia for a time and open a school.

However, one night Gallardo appears (he learned where Mariana was from Dolores, who is dying). He survived the fall from the window but was hospitalised for several months (and still walks with a cane and has a scarred face), and all of his belongings (including his stash of drugs) were stolen. He wants Mariana to return to Mexico City with him and claim her inheritance, to repay him for the trouble she caused. In town, Mariana sees the train arrive; Sebastián is aboard, having returned from the jungle because he loves her. As she runs away from Gallardo, Mariana is struck by the train, just as her mother was. [It's unclear if she survives or not: the last shot of the movie is the reflection of Sebastián in her eye.]

Piedras verdes is an interesting character study. Mariana apparently has little idea of her past--when she arrives in Mexico City, she stares briefly at the sign directing "Mexicans" one way and "Extranjeros" [Foreigners] elsewhere. She remembers her adopted father affectionately, though he took her to the boarding school (probably at the behest of Dolores), but there is little love lost between Mariana and her adopted mother. A quick glimpse of her birth certificate tells Mariana where she was born, but she doesn't immediately go in search of her roots. Instead, she goes shopping in the city (Dolores wants her to get an apartment if she isn't returning to school, claiming the family home will soon be sold), visits a nightclub, has her car stolen, meets Gallardo, and gets side-tracked for a time.

Although she is, unknowingly, reunited with her father (who saves her life by giving her water in the desert and warning her of a nearby rattlesnake),

Mariana finds the difficult life in Magnolia less stressful and potentially more rewarding than life in the crime-ridden, corrupt Mexico City.



In fact, *Piedras verdes* has a clear sub-text that one may find peace and meaning in nature, whether it is the northern desert or the southern jungle. Mariana's father doesn't kill the snake threatening Mariana (he says "quiet, my beauty"), preferring to live in harmony with the desert creatures. Sebastián and his friend Cruz admire the beauty of the jungle, spending time with a sort of guru and his followers there. In contrast, the Mexico City scenes are full of crime, strange street denizens, hip young people who use drugs, indifferent and/or ignorant and/or incompetent police, and so on.

As noted above, there are a few "stylish" touches--quick cuts, flashbacks, distorted visuals, "music video"-style sequences--but nothing too radical. Flores Torres seems to understand that the drama carries the film with the aid of the audio/visual components, not vice versa. The performances are all satisfactory, and the overall production values are fine. The script isn't perfect and some of the aphorisms seem deliberately calculated to be used in the trailer (which they are), but there are also some funny bits and other scenes which are painfully real in their emotions.

Overall, certainly worth a look.

Reprinted from MFB 16/1 (Jan-Feb 2010)



El tesoro del Amazonas [Treasure of the Amazon] (Productora Filmica Real--Starworld Prods.--Televisine**, 1983) *Prod/Dir:* René Cardona

Jr; *Scr:* René Cardona Jr., Jacques Wilson; *Story:* René Cardona Jr.; *Photo:* Daniel López; *Music:* Mort Garson; *Prod Mgr:* Fidel Pizarro; *Asst Dir:* Roberto Schlosser, Miguel A. Madrigal; *2nd Unit Dir:* René Cardona III; *Film Ed:* Earl Watson; *2nd Unit Ed:* Alfredo Rosas; *2nd Unit Photo:* León Sánchez; *Spec FX:* Sergio Jara; *Makeup:* Elvira Oropeza; *Sound:* Roberto Camacho; *Asst to Prod:* Alfredo Zacarías; *Script Girl:* Patricia Luke

**Televisine is credited as an associate producer

Cast: Stuart Whitman (*Gringo*), Donald Pleasence (*Klaus*), Bradford Dillman (*Clark*), John Ireland (*priest*), Emilio "El Indio" Fernández (*Tacho*), Pedro Armendáriz Jr. (*Zapata*), Ann Sidney (*Barbara*), Jorge Luke (*Jairo*), Clark Jarrett (*Dick*), Hugo Stiglitz (*Francisco Orellana*), Sonia Infante (*Morinba*), René Cardona Sr. (*dubs voice of Pat*), ?Mario Arévalo (*Tacho's man*)

Notes: I've seen both the English and Spanish language versions of this film, and there are a couple of points of interest to note.

First, Sonia Infante spends 99% of her screen time topless (I remembered that from before), but her chest is optically censored in the TV version! Some other Amazon "natives" are also seen topless, and once again a magic, traveling blur spares us the corrupting sight of bare female breasts. Also, Pedro Armendáriz Jr. and Jorge Luke dub their own dialogue, and the unmistakable voice of René Cardona Sr. can be heard on the soundtrack, dubbing another character.

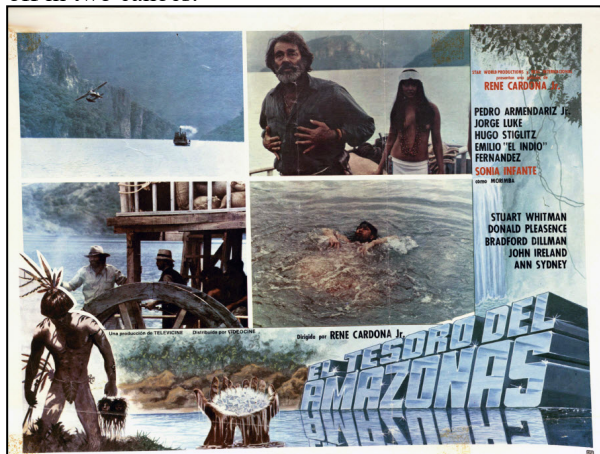
Regardless of which version you see, *El tesoro del Amazonas* is a top-notch adventure film, with some marvelous scenery (the only clearly studio-shot scenes are those in the diamond grotto, which looks suspiciously like a Churubusco soundstage--and probably



was) and a solid cast. The biggest problem I have with the script is the disconnect between the scenes with the ex-Nazi Klaus--who has a hidden gold mine--and the rest of the movie, which revolves around a diamond mine. After a few threats and confrontations between Klaus and Gringo, the two go their separate ways and up until the very end I kept waiting for the two threads to be linked, but they never are.

Fortune-hunters Zapata and Jairo meet hunter and trader Gringo as they are traveling up the Amazon on the boat operated by Orellana (Hugo Stiglitz in a nothing role). A priest tells the two men that, six years earlier, Gringo led an expedition hunting for treasure, but later stumbled out of the jungle with only a bag containing the shrunk heads of his companions. Nonetheless, Zapata and Jairo try to hire Gringo to

guide them in their quest, but he refuses. However, when he learns the boat carries mining supplies for Klaus, an old enemy of his, Gringo changes his mind. The two groups meet up at the village run by Tacho, who warns them not to try to leave the jungle with anything of value unless they pay him "taxes." Klaus and his native consort Morinba depart on horseback, while Gringo, Zapata, Jairo and a couple of natives set off in two canoes.



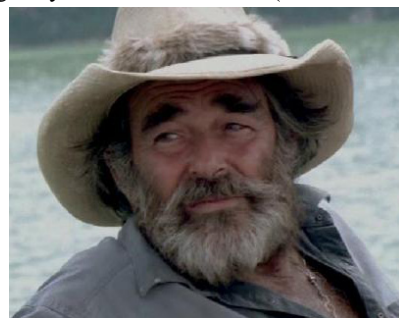
Meanwhile, oil prospector Dick and seaplane pilot Clark discover a headless skeleton buried in the jungle. Although Dick's contract has been cancelled and his wife Barbara is excited about returning to civilization, the presence of a pouch of uncut diamonds on the skeleton changes their minds. Dick and Barbara set off to search for the source of the gems, while Clark departs in the plane, planning to pick them up later. However, he has engine trouble and makes a forced landing on the river. He pays Orellana to tow the craft to town, but it will be some time before another airplane can be secured.

Dick and Barbara, meanwhile, have taken shelter in a cave. Dick is wounded by a Jivaro blowdart and falls ill. Barbara, hearing a gunshot, runs into the jungle and meets Gringo, Jairo, and Zapata. However, when they return to the cave, they find Dick's headless corpse. A pool of water in the cave is the mother lode of diamonds. Jairo and Zapata refuse to share the wealth with Gringo and Barbara, so Gringo leaves without them (meanwhile, he's found his old camp and a sack of the gems anyway). Barbara goes with him. Jairo tries to double-cross Zapata, but the latter has taken the bullets out of Jairo's pistol. He steals his partner's diamonds and leaves him tied up in the cave (later, Jairo is eaten by a lot of little land crabs). Zapata catches up to Gringo and Barbara and agrees to "share everything," but when he takes this too literally and grabs Barbara, Gringo steps in. Zapata is ready to smash Gringo's head with a big rock but Barbara shoots him. Gringo and Barbara get cosy and float downriver in a canoe.

Klaus, who is planning on using the gold from his mine to revive the Third Reich, ambushes some Jivaros, mowing them down with his submachine

gun. Morinba saves him from being shot in the back, and takes a bag from a dead warrior: it contains Dick's shrunken head. Later, Klaus cold-bloodedly shoots Morinba so piranhas will eat her corpse and allow him to ford a river. When he reaches Tacho's village, Klaus tries to smuggle his gold past the leader in bags of wheat, but is caught and hung up on a meathook. When Gringo and Barbara show up, Tacho points out Klaus's body and suggests they pay their "taxes." He takes most of their diamonds, but Gringo had hidden a large quantity in his shotgun barrel. He and Barbara make plans to spend the fortune together, but as they head upriver on Orellana's boat, Clark appears in his plane and picks her up. Barbara, who apparently has been having an affair with Clark (this has never been hinted at before), thinks she's stolen the diamonds, but Gringo fooled her and has retained the gems. As the film concludes, Gringo is getting friendly with three topless native girls.

As mentioned earlier, the cast of *El tesoro del Amazonas* is very strong. Although Stuart Whitman is made up to resemble Gabby Hayes, he's still an eccentric, assertive hero type. Armendáriz Jr. and Luke are both good, and Emilio Fernández has a large, flashy role he seems to enjoy. Sonia Infante should get some kind of award for running through the jungle wearing only a kind of loincloth (Clark Jarrett and Ann Sidney wear shorts, which must have also been uncomfortable), and Donald Pleasence is relatively restrained as the sneaky Klaus.



Bradford Dillman is OK but John Ireland looks aged and unwell in his brief scenes (Whitman, Dillman, Ireland, and Stiglitz had all worked together in Cardona Jr.'s *Guyana, el crimen del siglo*).

The exploitative elements of the movie--of course there had to be some--are limited to the gory scenes of head-chopping, the shrunken head concept (although only a couple of reduced heads are shown), and the bare-breasted Sonia Infante. You might also include some "eewww" scenes--Gringo gives a live tarantula to a native, who promptly eats it, and Gringo himself later buys a snake from a vendor and eats that--which are thrown in to show how "savage" and "weird" the jungle is. There are plenty of wildlife shots but, to be fair, many of these were probably not stock footage (although some probably were), and so the filmmakers should be given credit for using their time on location wisely.

The location shooting, as I said before, includes some awe-inspiring shots of jungle and river. The photography and editing are quite slick, and the theme music is excellent. One curious note: a printed prologue claims the movie was based on a "real story," and also takes pains to point out that the film takes place in an "imaginary" country (so as to avoid offending Brazil or any other Amazonian country, I guess).

A fun adventure film, quite good all around.

Reprinted from MFB 9/1 (Feb-Mar 2003)



Traficantes de pánico [Panic Makers]*

(Productora Filmica Re-al & Filmadora Panamericana, 1979**) Exec Prod: Pedro Galindo Jr.; Prod/Dir: René Cardona Jr.; Co-Prod: Lotus Films (Spain), Herald Films-Angelo Iacomo (Italy), Poleo Urdaneta (Venezuela); Assoc Prod: Filmadora Chapultepec, Cinematográfica Jalisco, Rodgers International, CONACINE; Adapt: René Cardona Jr., Carlos Valdemar; Story: René Cardona Jr., Santiago Moncada; Collab: Angelo Iacomo; Photo: Leopoldo Villaseñor; Music: Manuel de Sica; Assoc Prod: Alfonso López Negrete; Prod Mgr: Miguel Angel Gómez, Tito Bonilla; Asst Dir: Roberto Schlosser, Film Ed: Alfredo Rosas Priego

*this film appears in some reference books under two titles (as if it were two different movies): *Fabricantes de pánico* and *Traficantes de pánico*. Oddly enough, the video copy I have is titled

Traficantes de pánico but it has an English sub-title ("Panic Makers") which is actually a translation of *Fabricantes de pánico*. *Traficantes...* appears to be the "official" title that the film was released under in 1980. It is also known as *Under Siege* and *Hostages*.

** as *Fabricantes de pánico*, this film allegedly began shooting in November 1978; however, *Traficantes de pánico* is usually listed as a 1979 film.

CAST: Stuart Whitman*** (*Inspector*), Antonella Interlenghi (*Lisa Lombard*), Marisa Mell (*Kim Lombard*), Hugo Stiglitz (*Lt. Silvestre*), Francisco Rabal (*William Lombard*), Gianni Macchia (*Franco*), Mario Almada (*Pedro*), Sonia Viviani (*Laura*), Victoria Vera (*female robber*), Fernando Almada (*Carlos*), Orlando Urdaneta (*Orlando*), Tito Bonilla (*Ricardo*), Roberto Schlosser (*Sgt. Benítez*), Edith González (*Jessica Lombard*), Michele Wagner (*Maria*), Moraima Piccolo (*Sandra*), Guillermo Ferran (*Engineer González*), Alberto [sic] Arvizu (fake "Dr. González"), Corali Betancourt, Miguel A. Gómez (*Ernesto*)

***[Whitman's dialogue sounds like it was dubbed by Narciso Busquets]

#[this character is listed in the credits as "Lisa" but is called "Elisa" in the film]

Notes: this is a decent action film, one of René Cardona Jr.'s "international" productions. Although it was less successful than another Cardona-Stuart Whitman collaboration, *Guyana, Cult of the Damned*, it still received considerable international distribution. Oddly enough, most of the publicity tries to pawn this off as a political thriller about terrorists, which is quite misleading.

In addition to Whitman, the cast includes Mexicans (the Almadás, Stiglitz, Edith González in an early role, Adalberto Arvizu and assistant director and sometimes actor Roberto Schlosser, Spaniards (Francisco Rabal, Victoria Vera), and Italians (Interlenghi, Macchia, etc.; Marisa Mell was born in Vienna but made mostly Italian films). Presumably some of the extras and bit players are Puerto Ricans, since the film was made there.

Traficantes de pánico is reasonably well-produced, with a decent number of car chases, stunts, explosions, gun battles, and the use of airplanes, boats, etc., contributing to the mix. The violence is generally rather antiseptic "movie" killing, although the death of Victoria Vera's character (see below) is cleverly done. Vera has a brief topless scene, as does Marisa Mell, but the sex and gore content is relatively mild.

A well-organized gang of criminals robs a luxurious Puerto Rican casino. They hide out in a large abandoned building, but are discovered by Lt. Silvestre. The police raid the hideout while Franco (the gang leader), Pedro, and Carlos are away. In the ensuing gun battle, a number of policemen are killed, along with some of the robbers. However, in addition to Franco, Pedro, and Carlos, four other gang members

escape. These are all eventually captured or killed. The only female member of the gang hijacks a schoolbus to escape, but dies as she leans out of the moving vehicle's door (to try and shoot at Silvestre, who is on top of the bus) and smashes into a truck parked beside the road.



Franco, Pedro and Carlos force their way into the palatial home of industrialist William Lombard. They take Lombard, his wife Kim, their daughters Elisa and Jessica, and the maid and cook hostage. Lombard calls in sick to his factory. Laura, a friend of Elisa, arrives and is taken prisoner. She tries to flee and is shot dead. Elisa retrieves her father's pistol and shoots Carlos. Kim calls for a doctor (ostensibly for Jessica), but she really contacts González, her husband's plant manager. González realizes something is wrong and notifies the police.

The police surround the house. One detective goes inside posing as "Dr. González," but Franco uncovers the deception and kills the undercover agent. He demands access to an airplane. The three criminals and their hostages go to the airport, but Carlos dies of his wounds. Pedro, Carlos' brother, opens fire on the assembled police and is shot to death; Lombard escapes but is wounded. Franco and his three remaining female hostages leave in the plane. Franco is tricked into drinking a drugged soda, but before he collapses he shoots and kills the pilot and co-pilot. Kim has to land the airplane—with radio help from Silvestre (and no help from her screaming daughters)—and the Lombard family is reunited.

There isn't much character development in *Traficantes de pánico*, although when Carlos is wounded, he and Pedro demonstrate some brotherly

affection, but otherwise the script is very workmanlike, wasting little time. However, there are still some slow spots and plot inconsistencies. Stuart Whitman is around for name value only, spending most of his time in his office; Hugo Stiglitz is also shunted off into a subsidiary role.

Reprinted with minor changes from MFB 7/6 (March 2001)



Vals sin fin* [Endless Waltz] (Estudios Churubusco, 1971) *Exec Prod:* Angélica Ortiz; *Dir-Scr:* Rubén Broido; *Photo:* Alex Phillips hijo; *Music:* Eduardo Mata; *Prod Mgr:* Ygnacio Bonillas; *Prod Chief:* Enrique Morfin; *Sub-Dir:* Manuel Muñoz; *Film Ed:* Eufemio Rivera; *Prod Des:* Julio Alejandro; *Art Dir:* Javier Torres Torija; *Decor:* Adalberto López; *Makeup:* Elda Loza; *Sound Rec:* Javier Mateos; *Re-rec:* Ramón Moreno; *Sound Ed:* José Liho; *Studio:* Churubusco; *Union:* STPC; Eastmancolor

*some sources list the title as *El vals sin fin*, but "El" does not appear on the screen or on publicity materials. It is also occasionally cited as *Un vals sin fin por el planeta (la vida de López Velarde)*, which might have been the working title. The phrase comes from López Velarde's poem "La sangre devota" and is the last line heard in the film.

Cast: Carlos Bracho (*Ramón López Velarde*), Ana Luisa Peluffo (*"Fuensanta" aka Josefa de los Ríos*), Patricia Aspíllaga (*Magdalena*), Yolanda Ciani (*Virginia*), Félix González (*Manuel Aguirre Berlanga*), José Gálvez (*Salvador Díaz Mirón*), Elsa Cárdenas (*Susana Jiménez*), Héctor Ortega (*Francisco Madero*), Dunia Saldívar (*Clara*), Patricio Castillo (*Pedro Antonio de los Santos*), Pancho Córdova (*bookseller*), Lina Montes (*Ramón's mother*), Alejandra Mora (*Lupe*), Antonio Alcalá (*Enrique Ledesma*), Ángel Martín, Guillermo Vázquez (*don Juan*), Claudio Sorel, Salvador Sánchez (*Pedro de Alva*), Mario Castellón Bracho (*newspaper editor*), Beto el Boticario (*lotería man at carnival*), Juan Ángel Martínez (*Orestes*), Pascual García Peña (*Ramón's father*), Erika Carlson (*fortune teller*), Marcelo Villamil & Mirón Levine (*card players*), ?Ángel di Stefani (*card player*), ?Jorge Arriaga (*soldier who arrests Madero*), Margarito Luna (*don Simón Puente*), Susana Pardal, Pascual García



Peña (*Ramón's father*), Lucy Tovar, Gloria Morel, Ricardo Adalid (*Padre Romero*), Octavio Ocampo, Carlos León (*man at Madero's party*), Cecilia Leger, Mauricia Peña (*literary critic*), Armando Acosta (*Marcos Galván*), Enrique Novi (*Juan*), Malena Doria, Jorge Winer, Alfonso Meza, Hilda Zibar, Arturo Fernández, Rubens Medel, Alejandra Fernández, Francisco Meneses, Leo Villanueva, José Antonio Marros, Angélica Fernández, Pablo López de Castillo, Alberto Gavira, Alma Rodríguez, Rubén Márquez, Gregorio Acosta, Salvador Pérez, ?Narciso Busquets (*dubs Pascual García Peña's voice*)

Notes: *Vals sin fin* was the first and only feature film directed by Rubén Broido, a stage director, teacher, and CUEC film school graduate. Broido worked in the film industry for years in other positions, including head of production at Estudios América, executive director of CONACITE DOS, head of Películas Mexicanas and Azteca Films, etc. Broido submitted the script for *Vals sin fin* to a contest honoring the 50th anniversary of poet Ramón López Velarde's death, and was given the chance to bring his script to the screen. *Vals sin fin* was a prestige film aimed at the intelligentsia (somewhat similar to *En busco de un muro*, about muralist José Clemente

Orozco).

The film is told in flashbacks as López Velarde lies dying of pneumonia in 1921 at the age of 33. The flashbacks are not strictly



organised in a chronological fashion, although they generally begin with the protagonist leaving the seminary to become a lawyer, followed by his involvement with a literary magazine, work as a small town judge, participation in the campaign of Francisco Madero to unseat Porfirio Díaz, and his post as private secretary to a government official in the administration of President Carranza. In between, Ramón writes poetry and pursues various women.

The love of Ramón's life is "Fuensanta" (Josefa), who is older than he and dies of heart trouble. Ramón also courts Clara (in his literary period), Magdalena (who refuses to marry him because her parents don't approve), and Virginia, his fiancée at the time of his death.

Other than the flashbacks, the film is mostly told in conventional style, albeit with a lot of tracking shots and relatively few closeups. There is a fair amount of voice-over narration of López Velarde's poetry, as well as scenes in which he or someone else is shown reading it aloud. There are only two notable departures from standard film form. In one scene Ramón and

Clara are posting advertisements for their literary magazine and flirting with each other; there is a brief sequence of the paper banners becoming "ropes," falling from the sky like snow, even covering Ramón like a mummy. The last 10 minutes or so of the film, as Ramón is dying, become increasingly surreal with jump cuts, a 360-degree vertical pan, and surreal images including a funeral coach racing down a country road, all accompanied by poetry in voiceover.



Vals sin fin is extremely well-produced: it was shot in various locations, has a significant number of period-costumed extras in numerous scenes, boasts a number of antique autos on the streets, and is lavishly designed and executed. The performances are all generally fine, although everyone is basically just support for Carlos Bracho, and even his character is not very well developed: López Velarde expends more time and energy on his multiple girlfriends than on poetry or politics.

The film does hold one's interest, but chiefly thanks to the excellent period recreations and, to a lesser extent, Broido's direction (as opposed to the screenplay). To be fair, one wouldn't expect a biopic about a poet to be especially action-packed, so the placid pace and overall lack of drama is not surprising.



La verdadera vocación de Magdalena

[Magdalena's True Vocation] (Cin. Marco Polo, 1971) *Exec Prod:* Anuar Badín; *Prod:* Leopoldo Silva, Marco Silva; *Dir-Scr:* Jaime Humberto Hermosillo; *Photo:* Rosalío Solano; *Prod Mgr:* José Llamas [Ultreras]; *Prod Chief:* Alfredo Chavira Nieto; *Sub-Dir:* Mario Llorca; *Prod Adv:* Sergio Ohlovich, Luis Carrión; *Music:* Sergio Guerrero; *Film Ed:* Rafael Ceballos; *Art Dir:* Salvador Lozano Mena; *Decor:* José González; *Makeup:* Elda Loza; *Sound:* Eduardo Arjona, Francisco Alcayde; *Sound Ed:* Sigfrido García; *Union:* STIC; Eastmancolor

Cast: Angélica María (*Magdalena aka Irene Durán*), Javier Martín del Campo (*Emeterio*), Carmen Montejo (*Zoyla*), Farnesio de Bernal (*Armando*), Sofía Josko [aka Sofía Joskowicz] (*Berta*), Emma Roldán (*lottery ticket vendor*), Lourdes Canale (*Tere*), María

Guadalupe Delgado (*Armando's mother*), Ricardo Fuentes (*Sr. Núñez*), Mario Casillas (*television interviewer*), Guillermo Castillo (*Guillermo*), María Montejo (*girl*), Pedro Reiguero (*hippie*), Marcelo Villamil (*man in bank*), La Revolución de Emiliano Zapata [Javier Martín del Campo, Antonio Ruiz, Óscar Rojas (*Roberto*), Carlos del Valle (*Miguel*), Francisco Martínez (*Francisco*), Antonio Cruz (*José Luis*)], Leticia Robles (*Gloria*), Rafael Baledón (*Sr. Almazán**), Roberto Jordán (*actor*), Alfonso Arau hijo, Luis Terán, Mauricio Peña; *female singers with band*: Marylú Bano, Pati McLean [Ayala]



* does not appear in 85-minute version, although he's referred to as a movie producer

Notes: *La verdadera vocación de Magdalena* was Jaime Humberto Hermosillo's first film made within the Mexican film industry and his first actual feature-length

film (*Los nuestros* was just short of an hour). It's a bit surprising that he got an actual movie star for the leading role, given his status as both a novice director and a "independent" filmmaker.** Angélica María had literally grown up on film, but in the latter half of the 1960s she appeared in some more "modern" films--in both style and content--such as *Cinco de chocolate y una de fresa* and *Alguien nos quiere matar*. *La verdadera vocación de Magdalena* was rated "C" upon release, roughly an equivalent to "R" in the USA and contains considerably more "adult" material than her previous (and, in fact, subsequent) films.

**Of course, Hermosillo's second feature was even more bizarre at least in retrospect: *El señor de Osanto*, a period adventure film based on Robert Louis Stevenson's "The Master of Ballantrae!"



All versions of *La verdadera vocación de Magdalena* I have seen are clearly censored and probably cut. They run about 85 minutes, compared to the 90 and 94-minute running times cited in print sources. In the first 10 minutes of this version of the film there are some obvious examples of censorship, replacing whatever was on the film image with exterior shots of an apartment building (the soundtrack is unaltered, so the substitution is obvious)! A DVD version was released in Mexico but this is the 85-minute version. An online announcement for at least one screening indicated it was "*sin censura*" so perhaps the full film does exist, somewhere.

Hermosillo, like Rainer Werner Fassbinder and Pedro Almodóvar, examined interpersonal relationships in all of their facets--sex, politics, economics--and while all three men are known for their films featuring gay characters, in fact the majority of their movies focus on heterosexual relationships (*La verdadera vocación de Magdalena* has one minor gay character, a somewhat predatory lesbian). This is, perhaps, a function of the marketplace, but it may also be a way of indicating that relationships between individuals are not pre-determined by gender: gay romance and straight romance are still human romance, functional or dysfunctional.



Virginal secretary Magdalena, having broken up with her boyfriend Armando, attends a party and winds up sleeping with musician Emeterio. When her mother Zoila finds out, Magdalena and Emeterio are forced to marry--but only in a civil ceremony, which neither Magdalena nor Zoila feel is enough. Zoila constantly criticises Emeterio and Magdalena will only have sex with him once a week, in the dark (they sleep in separate beds).

Armando returns, claiming he has a well-paid job, houses in New York, Switzerland, and Panama, etc., and proposes to Magdalena. Zoila says she'll put her house in Magdalena's name as her daughter's "dowry." However, when the two women get home, they suddenly remember Emeterio (who, ironically, has just signed a recording contract). Zoila says she'll



"fix everything." Meanwhile, it turns out Armando was lying--he's unemployed, and lives with his mother. He promises her that she'll soon have a house of her own.

Magdalena learns the only way to get a quick divorce is if both parties agree, and--quite to the contrary--Emeterio now offers to marry Magdalena in the Church. Zoyla decides to murder him: "we'll all come out ahead, even the world of music." She rigs his guitar to electrocute him, but he's only stunned. Zoyla hatches another plan: Emeterio will agree to divorce Magdalena because he will want to marry another woman. What woman? "Irene." Zoyla and Magdalena leave on a trip, then Magdalena shows up at the house wearing mod clothes and speaking Spanglish, telling Emeterio she's Magdalena's "black sheep" twin sister Irene who lives in Los Angeles and is a singer.

Emeterio is impressed and takes Irene to his band's concert [stock footage of the famous Avándaro rock festival is inserted here--in real life, La Revolución de Emiliano Zapata did not play at the festival]. Irene sings with them (in English) and is a big success. However, Zoyla also shows up and Emeterio overhears



them discussing their scheme. Emeterio and "Irene" go with the rest of the band to the apartment they share and she sleeps with at

least one other band member. They ask her to join the group.

The next day, Magdalena and Emeterio return to Zoyla's house and move out. Armando shows up and Zoyla says Magdalena "discovered her true vocation--she became a nun and entered a convent." After thinking it over, Armando tells Zoyla that she's the one he's always loved and asks her to marry him.

Time passes. Armando and his mother live with Zoyla, who doesn't get along with either of them (she tells a lottery vendor "don't ever get married," and



when the woman says she's already married, Zoyla says "try to become a widow as quickly as possible"). Armando is working as a clerk in a shop.

Magdalena, now known as "Irene Durán," is a famous singer and movie star. When an interview with her comes on the television, Zoyla turns off the electricity so she won't see it; she insists it isn't her daughter, that "Magdalena is a nun!" Emeterio and the band watch

the interview with the sound off as they play a song. As the film concludes, Magdalena is shown acting in a scene with actor Roberto Jordán (with a giant afro).

La verdadera vocación de Magdalena is tonally rather confusing. For much of the film it's a comedy--sometimes screwball, sometimes black--but with various dramatic moments occasionally showing up, plus commentary about religion, and youth culture. There's also a bit too much music--it is connected to the plot and, given that Angélica María was a popular singer and La Revolución de Emiliano Zapata was a popular band, there was some commercial justification, but seen today these scenes tend to slow down the film's pace (the actuality footage of Avándaro is interesting, however). [One interesting aspect is that--despite their nationalistic name--La Revolución de Emiliano Zapata performed most of their songs in English; their biggest hit, in fact, was titled "Nasty Sex."] Hermosillo's direction is assured and the script has some very good parts, making the film quite enjoyable overall.

The conclusion is a bit downbeat. Although Zoyla is a comic-relief "villain" of sorts for much of the picture, her descent into delusion and her new, hellish life with Armando and his mother don't seem entirely justified and instead of being delighted at her comeuppance, the viewer may actually feel sorry for her.

The performances are good. Although Carmen Montejo chews the scenery voraciously, some of this may be attributed to the outrageous nature of her role as the mother-in-law from hell. Angélica María is fine, and Javier Martín del Campo--whose dialogue seems to have been post-dubbed--is satisfactory, especially since he wasn't a professional actor. Farnesio de Bernal, who'd work for Hermosillo many times, is a perfect fit for his role, and Hermosillo's real-life mother María Guadalupe Delgado (who would appear in number of her son's movies) is amusing as Armando's mother and Zoyla's feisty opponent in the final sequence.

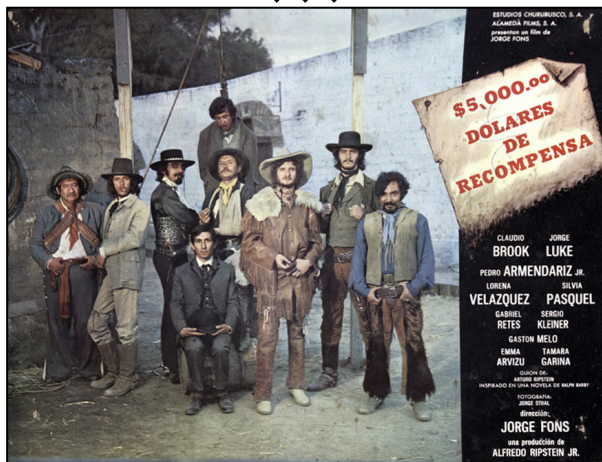


La verdadera vocación de Magdalena is filled with many interesting (if occasionally inscrutable) touches. Zoyla's house is filled with religious artwork and with animals: dogs and birds in cages, kittens roaming wild. She keeps the furniture in her "parlor" covered with sheets, hastily removing them when Armando comes to call. During the day, she operates a machine that

weaves fabric--it's unclear if this is a hobby or paid work. Zoyla also provides after-school daycare for three young boys, hectoring them to do their homework. Her relationship with Magdalena is complicated, over-protective and manipulative; once Magdalena is temporarily free of her mother's dominion, she insists on seizing her chance at freedom, moving out immediately. Magdalena says her mother broke up her relationship with Armando because she didn't think he'd ever amount to anything (a *don nadie*), but when he returns (falsely) claiming to be a successful businessman, suddenly he's a desirable mate (to be fair, Magdalena thinks the same thing). On the other hand, when Zoyla says Emeterio will divorce Magdalena to marry someone else, Magdalena starts to cry, demanding to know who "the other woman" is.

The film doesn't go out of its way to contrast the petty bourgeois with the hippie-esque lifestyle of the musicians, but the differences are visible. Zoyla and Armando are striving to achieve middle-class status (or at least appear to be middle-class), Magdalena has a white-collar job (secretary to "Mr. Robert Williams"), and the party at which Magdalena meets Emeterio is held at her friend Gloria's house (Gloria's mother keeps warning the young people "don't dance on the carpet"). Various members (but not all, including Emeterio) of the La Revolución de Emiliano Zapata live in the same house, which is a friendly and communal space (with music posters on the walls) but hardly a "hippie commune." The band members seem serious about their music and careers. Magdalena, or "Irene Durán" as she becomes, pursues a third way: her musical and acting talent make her a celebrity, a level above her mother and her husband.

Knowing the version I've seen of *La verdadera vocación de Magdalena* is cut/censored is annoying, but the film itself is still extremely entertaining.



5,000.00 dólares de recompensa* [Five Thousand Dollars Reward] (Estudios Churubusco-Alameda Films, 1972) *Prod:* Alfredo Ripstein Jr.; *Dir:* Jorge Fons; *Scr:* Arturo Ripstein; *Orig. Novel:* Ralph Barby; *Photo:* Jorge Sthal [Jr.];

Music: Claudio Tallini, Gian Franco Plenizio, Giuseppe de Luca, J.E. Bacalov; *Music Selection:* Rafael Castanedo; *Prod Chief:* Enrique L. Morfin; *Asst Dir:* América Fernández; *Film Ed:* Eufemio Rivera y R.; *Art Dir:* Salvador Lozano; *Set Decor:* Enrique Estevez; *Makeup:* Carmen Palomino; *Sound Ed:* Sigfrido García; *Dialog Rec:* Manuel Topete; *Re-rec:* Ramón Moreno; *Studio:* Churubusco; *Union:* STPC

* "5,000.00" on the film itself, but some sources & publicity materials give the title as *Cinco mil dólares de recompensa*. Some sources (including the Mexican lobby cards) also add a \$ to the title but again, this is not on the screen.

Cast: Claudio Brook (*Ferdinand Baker*), Jorge Luke (*R. M. Hunter*), Pedro Armendáriz Jr. (*William Law*), Lorena Velázquez (*Virginia*), Silvia Pasquel (*Claire Baker*), Gabriel Retes (*Ricky*), Sergio Kleiner (*Tom Kotin*), Gastón Melo (*Mortimer Dixon*), Emma Arvizu (*Violeta*), Tamara Garina (*Yaveli*), Armando Acosta (*Billy, bartender*), Gilberto Pérez Gallardo (*Bill Taylor*), Ludwig [sic = Ludwik] Margules (*Halloway, whiskey hauler*), Mario García González (*Tiburcio López*), Ramón Menéndez (*Morgan*), Ricardo Fuentes (*barber*), Eduardo Cassab (*Chacón? Luke?*), Federico González (*blacksmith*), Vicente Lara (*Cacama*) (*prisoner*), Luciano Hernández de la Vega (*sheriff*), Carlos Guiza, Fernando Yapur (*telegraph operator*)

Notes: despite the presence of two of Mexican cinema's finest directors of the past 50 years in the credits (Arturo Ripstein, Jorge Fons--one might also even add Gabriel Retes to the relatively short list of excellent post "Golden Age" filmmakers), *5,000.00 dólares de recompensa* is mostly just a routine faux-spaghetti Western; entertaining enough but no classic.

On the positive side the production values are quite good, the cast is solid, the characters are eccentric and distinctive, and Fons came up with one notable gimmick: virtually every death in the film (and there are plenty) is flashy, giving the actors plenty of "business" to do as they die on screen. Drunk scenes or death scenes are loved by actors and the performers in *5,000.00 dólares de recompensa* were rewarded by Fons in this film with a chance to ham it up.

One mildly irritating trivia note: the outlaw band in the film consists of Tom Kotin and his seven henchmen--Law, López, Ricky, Dixon, Taylor, Morgan, and one more man, named either Luke or Chacón. But the last two names are used in the film as if they refer to two different people, and this is compounded by Emilio García Riera's *Historia documental del cine mexicano*, where he refers to a shoot-out in which "Chacón, Luke y Virginia" are killed. Except that it is Morgan, Virginia, and a third man (Eduardo Cassab?) who die in this scene. Similarly, Dixon says "Ricky, Morgan, Luke, Chacón, and me [Dixon]" were the five men who killed Holloway, but it's actually Ricky, Morgan, Law, Dixon

and the aforementioned character played by Cassab who are on-screen in the scene. This is annoying.

Another trivia note: the music for the film was "selected" by Rafael Castanedo, and at least some of it was apparently taken from actual spaghetti Westerns. The composers and themes (but not the original film sources) are credited on-screen.



Bounty hunter Hunter is summoned to the town of Goldfield City by Mayor Baker. Baker will pay him to kill outlaw leader Kotin, but says leave the rest of the gang alone; Hunter agrees, but insists upon being named sheriff before he will act. The first outlaw to die is Taylor, who tries to ambush Hunter as Taylor and Ricky attempt to hijack a shipment of whiskey belonging to Holloway and his son. Afterwards, Tiburcio begs for the chance to kill Hunter, attacking him in a barber shop, but the bounty hunter shoots him to death instead. Hunter goes to Kotin's house and kills the outlaw; he collects his money from Baker but refuses to return the sheriff's badge and leave town.

The remnants of Kotin's gang ambush the Holloways, murder them and steal their wagonload of whiskey. With Baker in tow, they confront Hunter while he's eating lunch in the local saloon, humiliate him by smashing his face in a cake baked by saloon owner Virginia, take away the badge (and give it to gang member Law), and give him an hour to leave



town. Hunter learns the Holloway's wagon is parked outside a whiskey warehouse in town: he forces Dixon to reveal the truth about

the Holloways' deaths, then sets the warehouse on fire and shoots Dixon. He rides to the scene of ambush in the desert and finds the Holloways' bodies (he had given the elder Holloway some money to take to his brother but can't find it on the man's corpse). While there, Hunter's shot, brutally beaten, and stripped to his underwear by Baker and the remaining outlaws, then left to die in the hot sun.

Hunter is rescued by two spinster sisters, Violeta and Yaveli. However, Violeta is killed by a stray

bullet when she goes to town to obtain some medical supplies. Baker's niece Claire takes the woman's body back to her house and learns Hunter is there. Hunter later tells her that her uncle has gone into business with the outlaws but she refuses to believe him. When Claire finally realises the truth, she decides to leave: Baker agrees to take her to a nearby town to catch a stagecoach.

Recovered, Hunter goes to town. He shoots Morgan and Luke/Chacón; Virginia, who is in league with the gang, is hit by a stray bullet and dies. Hunter kills Ricky, who (before he dies) says Baker and Claire are headed for Richfield. On the way to Richfield, Law stops Baker's carriage: he wants Claire, and shoots Baker when the man objects. Claire shoots Law in the back with her uncle's derringer [a perfect example of Chekhov's Gun: Hunter spots Baker's hidden derringer the first time they meet] but is in turn shot by the outlaw when she tries to flee. Hunter arrives and kills Law. He picks up Claire and Law's bodies and leaves. The wounded Baker begs to be taken along, but Hunter says "there's no reward for you."

The film concludes with Hunter sitting outside the sheriff's office in a deserted Goldfield City, the U.S. flag flying behind him.

As noted above, Fons apparently instructed the actors to "go nuts" in their death scenes. Taylor: shot in the head, spins around, falls on the ground, twitches for a long time. Tiburcio: tries to cut Hunter's throat with a straight razor, is shot multiple times, falls on top of Hunter (tied in a barber's chair), an owl (!) flies around the shop. Kotin: searches for Hunter throughout his house, then stops in front of a full-length mirror to wipe his face; Hunter is behind the mirror and shoots through it, Kotin falls backward into a bathtub full of water. Holloway's son is shot long-distance; Holloway hugs his son's body, then runs at the outlaws, holding his jacket open (he's unarmed) and is shot to death. Dixon and Hunter are inside the flaming warehouse,

Dixon runs through the flames and is shot, falls to his knees and dies. Ricky corners Hunter in Baker's house; Hunter



loses his pistol but picks up a convenient knife and tosses it at Ricky, who falls down a staircase as he dies. Both Law and Virginia are basically just shot, but they each get an amusing, bug-eyed look on their face as they die. There is a running motif in the film: after each person is killed, their corpse is next seen in a "stand-up" coffin display, presumably in the undertaker's window.

Most of the outlaws have some outré distinguishing traits. Taylor is constantly giggling (one of his

companions refers to him as a *mariquita*, presumably a version of the anti-gay slur *maricón*); Tiburcio wears a hat that resembles a Brazilian *cangaço* but otherwise



looks like a stereotypical Mexican *bandido*; Law dresses all in black with a brocaded vest, has an "Napoleon III Imperial"-style

beard, uses a cigarette holder, and seems to be wearing eye shadow; Morgan is dressed in a military uniform and has one injured arm; Dixon is "intellectual" and exaggeratedly precise in his actions; Ricky sometimes wears a *pince-nez*.

None of these characters--nor others, like Kotin--has much of a back-story or a character arc in the film. Instead, *5,000.00 dólares de recompensa* focuses chiefly on Hunter, with somewhat lesser attention paid to Baker and Claire. Hunter is a bounty hunter who defends and legitimises his profession to others; his demand to become Goldfield City's sheriff may be connected to his desire for respectability. The final shot of Hunter sitting in a rocking chair is reminiscent of Henry Fonda as Wyatt Earp balancing in a chair outside the saloon in John Ford's *My Darling Clementine* (bargirl Virginia and mayor's daughter Claire also mirror the characters of Chihuahua and Clementine from Ford's film). In what may be an allusion to spaghetti Western tropes inspired by Clint



Eastwood in the "Man With No Name" trilogy, Hunter wears a blanket (not a *serape* but close enough) over his shoulders throughout the film; asked by Claire what the blanket means, he replies that he just likes it and would like to be buried wearing it.

One sequence towards the end of the film is evocative but is never explained. Hunter vehemently tells Claire that being a bounty hunter is a noble profession: he's not just killing people, he's eliminating a "plague" that infests the Earth. It's interesting to note that Hunter really only stalks and kills Kotin--otherwise he generally acts in self-defence (or, the case of Law, in a belated and ultimately failed attempt to save Claire)--and in fact offers to take Kotin in alive,

but the outlaw refuses to cooperate. When he's questioning Dixon, Hunter threatens to kill the man unless he provides details about the murder of the Hallows; Dixon asks "Will you let me go if I tell the truth?" and Hunter replies "perhaps"--but Dixon breaks the deal by trying to shoot Hunter when his back is turned, and is killed as a result. These reinforce the idea that Hunter is law-abiding (he takes money from Baker for killing Kotin, but the outlaw also had a government bounty on him) and desires to lead a normal life.

The scene in which Law, Baker and the others take away Hunter's badge and smash his face into a cake is painful to watch. Hunter is hunched over his meal

when Virginia happily approaches with a cake she baked for him. She asks if Hunter's wife ever baked him a cake and he says "I don't have a wife." He tastes the cake and smiles, then says "My sister baked me cakes." However, the cake subsequently becomes an instrument of humiliation, as the outlaws smash it into his face, then depart. Hunter sits there for a long time, his face completely covered with the white icing, and weeps.



Another aspect which is never resolved is Hunter's brother: he's never seen and lives in another town, but Hunter thinks enough of him to send him the earnings from his bounty hunting, and tells Halloway to inform his brother that "I'm doing fine."

5,000.00 dólares de recompensa is generally entertaining and well made, with a number of clever



and amusing touches that lift it above the average.

Trivia note: "Ralph Barby" is the pseudonym for Catalán author Rafael Barberán

Domínguez, who has written hundreds of novels since 1966 (some in collaboration with his wife). Many of these are science fiction or fantasy, but clearly he wrote at least some Westerns, since *5,000.00 dólares de recompensa* is based on his work.



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