

THE MEXICAN FILM BULLETIN

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CHANGES FOR 2016

Beginning with Volume 22, *The Mexican Film Bulletin* will be published quarterly, in March, June, September and December. Our original frequency was monthly, then we went to 8 issues a year, 6, and now 4. Hopefully our loyal readers (and new ones, too) will continue to read *MFB*, albeit somewhat less frequently than before.

OBITUARIES GERMÁN ROBLES

Germán Robles died on 21 November 2015; he had been suffering from chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and later contracted peritonitis. Germán Horacio Robles



was born in Gijón, Spain, in March 1929, but moved to Mexico at age 17, where Spanish actor Enrique Rambal *padre* started him on a career as an actor. Spotted in a play by producer-actor Abel Salazar, Robles was awarded the title role in *El vampiro* (1957) and

earned a place in Mexican cinema history. Although forever linked with his initial film role, Robles essayed a wide variety of characters on screen in many different genres. His last live-action film may have been *El secreto* (2010).

Robles worked steadily in films, television, and on the stage throughout his life. He also did voice acting for dubbing of foreign films, TV shows and animated cartoons, and operated an acting school in Mexico City.

Germán Robles was married three times: to actress Judy Ponte, to Elisa Aragonés (mother of his children Germán and Maribel, the latter currently married to actor Rogelio Guerra), and Ana María Vázquez (mother of his son Pablo).

◆◆◆ JOSÉ ÁNGEL ESPINOSA "FERRUSQUILLA"

Actor and composer José Ángel Espinosa "Ferrusquilla," died in Mazatlán on 6 November 2015 after

suffering a stroke; he was 96 years old. José Ángel Espinosa Aragón was born in the state of Sinaloa in 1919 and moved to Mexico City in 1937 to attend medical school, but soon began to work in radio--where he picked up the nickname "Ferrusquilla"--and study music. Espinosa went on to compose numerous songs, including classics such as "Échame a mí la culpa," and "El tiempo que te quede libre." He continued to write music almost until his death.

Ferrusquilla began working in films around 1946, both as actor and comedic narrator, eventually earning over 80 credits. Because he was bilingual, Espinosa can be seen in a number of foreign films or co-productions shot in Mexico, such as *Sierra Baron*, *Rage*, and *Big Jake*. His last film appearance may have been *Miel para Oshun* (Spain-Cuba, 2001).

José Ángel Espinosa had two daughters, actress Angélica Aragón and Vindya Espinosa Stransky (who died in an automobile accident in 2008).



La vida de Agustín Lara [The Life of Agustín Lara] (Promexi, 1958) *Exec Prod*: Pascual Aragonés C.; *Prod*: Antonio Badú [and Agustín Lara, uncredited?]; *Dir-Adapt*: Alejandro Galindo; *Story*: Ricardo Garibay; *Photo*: José Ortiz Ramos; *Music Dir*: Manuel Esperón; *Prod Chief*: Antonio Guerrero T.; *Asst Dir*: Américo Fernández; *Film Ed*: Fernando Martínez A.; *Art Dir*: Edward Fitzgerald; *Decor*: Rafael Suárez; *Camera Op*: Sergio Véjar; *Lighting*: Miguel Arana; *Sound Supv*: James L. Fields; *Music/Re-rec*: Galdino Samperio; *Sound Ed*: Reynald P. Portillo; *Dialog Rec*: Nicolás de la Rosa; *Makeup*: Concepción Zamora; *Union*: STPC

Cast: Germán Robles (*Agustín Lara*), Lorena Velázquez (*María Islas*), Tito Junco (*Manuel Rangel "El Garbanzo"*), Ofelia Montesco (*"La Mariposa"*), Antonio Prieto (*Dr. Alfonso Ortiz Tirado*), Sara Montes (*Violeta*), Fanny Schiller (*Estrella*), Pilar Pellicer (*young admirer*), Jorge Russek (*Col. Rodolfo*), Miguel Ángel Ferriz (*Emilio Azcárraga*), Pin Crespo (*?El Garbanzo's girlfriend*), Emma Grissé, León Barroso (*film producer*), Rafael Estrada (*film director*), Amparo Arozamena (*servant*), Miguel Suárez (*Toledito*), Raúl Guerrero (*cemetery caretaker*), Laura Martínez, Agustín Fernández (*movie*



actor), Pedro Vargas, Fernando Fernández (*himself*), Julio Aldama (*boat pilot*), Mikaela [Micaela Rodríguez Cuesta] (*zarzuela singer*), María Duval (*María Luisa Olguín*), José Luis Caballero, Antonio (?) Brillas* (*Martín, orchestrator*); *Voices*: Amparo Montes, Linda Arce, Chucho Martínez Gil, Agustín Lara; *Musical groups*: Los Tres Conchitas, Los Costeños, Hermanos Samperio, Trio Los Duendes, Trio Ascencio, Mariachi México, Los Tres Caballeros

*it's either Antonio or Emilio Brillas, I don't know which

Notes: composer-performer Agustín Lara was still very much alive when this not-too-accurate film biography was shot in 1958 (Lara died in 1970), and in fact did his own singing on the soundtrack. Emilio García Riera quotes Ricardo Garibay (who wrote the screen story) as stating he met with Lara for about six months to get background on the life of the "Flaco de Oro" from the man's own lips, only to be repeatedly told "don't use that story" and the like. Lara is portrayed in *La vida de Agustín Lara* as a brilliant songwriter (who remarkably couldn't read music and had to have his songs transcribed by others) who was an incurable romantic. Some of the basic facts of his life are correct, others are somewhat altered, and many things are completely changed or omitted entirely.

[This film is very difficult to see today. This review is



based on a videotape I have of a 1990s Telemundo broadcast, which removed the credits and compressed the 114-minute original (according to García Riera) into a 2-hour

time slot with lots of commercials. It's impossible to know what was cut, although stills exist of a scene between Robles as Lara and Pedro Vargas (playing himself) which does not appear in the version I have (Vargas is heard on the soundtrack, however).]

In the 1920s, Agustín Lara arrives in Mexico City looking for work as a pianist. He's hired by Estrella, who runs a brothel: he plays the piano so the prostitutes and their clients can dance. Lara falls in love with La Mariposa, a beautiful whore, but she is the favourite of Colonel Rodolfo, who eventually sets her up in a luxurious apartment as his mistress. Lara, broken-hearted, writes various songs in her honour. Another brothel habitué is "El Garbanzo," who encourages Lara in his musical career, eventually becoming his manager. Jealous prostitute Violeta slashes Lara's face with a broken bottle, leaving him with a noticeable scar. However, this brings the composer into contact with Dr. Alfonso Ortiz Tirado, a surgeon who is also a talented singer. Ortiz Tirado takes Lara's songs to Emilio Azcárraga, head of radio station XEW, who says he'll make Agustín "rich and famous."

[This stretches the truth considerably: although Ortiz

Tirado was a real person, the performer who usually gets credit for giving Lara his "big break" as a composer is singer Juan



Arvizu. But having Ortiz Tirado sew up Lara's face and "accidentally" stumble across a song written by his patient is much more dramatic, I suppose.]

Azcárraga is true to his word: Lara's romantic songs are a hit. He meets La Mariposa once again, and she leaves Rodolfo for him. However, the irate cuckold breaks into their apartment and forces Lara to play and sing at gunpoint, while Rodolfo roughly dances with his ex-mistress. Lara attacks the man and La Mariposa steps in front of Rodolfo's pistol, taking a bullet intended for Lara and suffering a fatal wound. Lara's fame increases but he continues to grieve over La Mariposa, visiting her grave with flowers.

Lara meets movie star María Islas and is immediately smitten. El Garbanzo warns him that two famous people can't be happy together-- in a relationship, one person has to be the leader, the other the follower--but Lara refuses to listen and the two men quarrel and their friendship ends. Lara marries María and they seem to be happy, but his intense concentration on his music causes him to ignore his equally self-centered wife and they are divorced. As the film concludes, Lara conducts an orchestral version of his popular songs on a television broadcast, then visits La Mariposa's grave once again.

[One wonders what Lara's current wife—Yolanda Santacruz Gasca--thought of this portrayal of her husband as a man obsessed with a dead lover.]

"María Islas" is a thinly-disguised version of María Félix, who was married to Lara for a relatively short period of time (1945-47, which would make it unlikely that a television broadcast would have occurred immediately

after their divorce became final). Lorena Velázquez seems to have made an effort not to visually imitate Félix, since her hair is dyed blonde here, but she does a good job of playing the diva.

La vida de Agustín Lara was not the first non-vampire role for Germán Robles after *El vampiro*, *El ataúd del vampiro*, and *El castillo de los monstruos*--he appeared in the linked films *Pueblo en armas* and *Viva la soldadera!* in 1958 before shooting *La vida de Agustín Lara*, but these two films were released after the biopic and Robles had



only a supporting role in these pictures in any case. So this was his first starring role since *El vampiro*, a major change of

pace for the actor: from sinister, supernatural foreign menace to a major Mexican contemporary celebrity composer-musician. Robles is fine as Lara, beginning as a rather naïve newcomer to the capital who is bemused by the brothel *milieu*, then becoming, in quick succession, love-struck and bitter (first, at La Mariposa's abandonment, then at the assault which disfigures his face).

As noted earlier, Lara's character and life aren't portrayed in much detail--he alludes to various events we never see--and he mostly alternates between morosely cranking out his song hits and swooning over women (well, La Mariposa and María, although in one scene he admits he's had "many affairs" but only really loved one woman prior to meeting María). His romantic nature is more than reciprocated: the film is loaded with unintentionally hilarious scenes in which--as Lara plays & sings--women become entranced by his music and almost literally throw themselves at him.

[It's possible scenes were cut from the version I have which show a jolly Agustín Lara living it up, thus presenting a more balanced image of the composer, but this seems unlikely.]

The production values of *La vida de Agustín Lara* are adequate. On the positive side, there are a few interesting exterior shots of the Churubusco studios; on the negative side, horrible back-projection makes Lara and María's idyll in Acapulco laughable (they're shown lounging on a "beach" which is clearly two beach chairs placed in front of a projected image of Acapulco; the following sequence, with Julio Aldama singing "María Bonita" as he drives a speedboat carrying the two lovers, is almost as bad). Alejandro Galindo's direction is workmanlike but without much style, with the exception of scene in which Violeta slashes Lara's face--then we get some dynamic editing and even radical dutch tilts of the camera.

La vida de Agustín Lara, as one might expect, is loaded with musical numbers. These are interestingly eclectic in

style. Some are naturalistic: Lara playing the piano and singing, performances on the stage, and so on. Others are "movie musical" in form, i.e., Lara or someone else (such as Dr. Ortiz Tirado) suddenly begins to sing in the middle of a dialogue sequence (and an unseen orchestra provides accompaniment). In probably the most imaginative musical sequence of the movie, Lara visits the derelict Teatro Politeama in which he will soon begin a successful run-- as he stands in the back and stares at the stage, the ghostly figure of a woman (La Mariposa? The whole scene is in long shot and the print I have isn't good enough to tell) appears, and Pedro Vargas can be heard singing "Mujer." Then there are back-projected images of Lara and Mariposa's previously-shown trip through Xochimilco on a *trajinera*.

Lara was not just a composer and musician, he was also a public figure and his biography (accurate or not--even his place and date of birth are disputed) was well-known. [There was even a long-running comic book series entitled "La vida de Agustín Lara" which began in the mid-1960s.] As a celebrity, his romances were reported in the gossip columns, and he acted in a number of films--including the pseudo-biopic *Las mujeres en mi vida* (1949)--so the omissions and outright fictionalisation of large parts of *La vida de Agustín Lara* were and are rather obvious. However, this is not surprising--biopics aren't documentaries, and when the subject of the film is not only still alive but actually involved in the project, the unvarnished truth is not likely to be revealed. However, the film is moderately entertaining, regardless.



Rapiña [Plunder] (CONACINE-STPC, 1973) Dir-Scr:

Carlos Enrique Taboada;
Photo: José Ortiz Ramos;
Music: Raúl Lavista; STPC
Co-ord: Alfredo Salazar; Prod
Chief: Antonio Guajardo; Sub-Dir: Winfield Sánchez; Film Ed: Carlos Savage; Art Dir: Roberto Silva; Set Decor: Rafael Suárez; Makeup: Elda Loza; Recordist: Javier Mateos; Sound Ed: Abraham Cruz; Union: STPC



Cast: Ignacio López Tarso (*Porfirio*), Germán Robles (*Evodio*), Norma Lazareno (*Rita*), Rosenda Monteros

(*Fina*), Enrique Pontón (*doctor*), José Luis Caro (*major*), Héctor Cruz, José Chávez Trowe (*José, charcoal burner*), Raúl Dantés (*Tiburcio*), Jorge Mateos, David Estuardo (*school teacher*), Amado Zumaya (*investigator*), Ángel Casarín, Manuel Dondé (*Tata Andrés*), Jesús Gómez (*Teófilo*)

Notes: in some ways it's a shame Carlos Enrique Taboada is mostly remembered today for his fantasy/thriller films (*Hasta el viento tiene miedo*, *El libro de piedra*, *Más negro que la noche*, *Veneno para las hadas*, *Vagabundo en la lluvia*), because his other directorial efforts are thus sometimes overlooked, rather unjustly. *Rapiña*, *La guerra santa*, and *El negocio del odio* are all excellent pictures, and Taboada's three contemporary dramas--*El arte de engañar*, *El deseo en otoño*, and *La fuerza inútil*--are also worth a look.

Rapiña is quite well-written, acted (López Tarso and Rosenda Monteros both received Ariel nominations, but Germán Robles' work is really fine as well) and produced--shot mostly on location, with some studio interiors--and deserves to be considered one of Taboada's best pictures.

Rapiña could be considered an alternate version of *La perla*, directed by Emilio Fernández (from a story by John Steinbeck): both films deal with poor *indios* who suddenly



come into the possession of items of great monetary value. These items promise a better life for the protagonist, his wife, and child, but in the end prove to be a curse rather than a blessing.

Both *Rapiña* and *La perla* conclude with the protagonists

fleeing from pursuers across a hostile landscape. *Rapiña* contains a far more ambiguous portrait of the main characters—in *La perla*, Quino and his wife Juana are basically sympathetic throughout—but is careful to show how Porfirio's personality changes as the film unfolds: he's not greedy or violent or dissatisfied from the first, it's a combination of factors which alter him for the worse.

Humble *indios* Porfirio and his *compadre* Evodio work as woodcutters in a mountainous region of Mexico. Each day, they laboriously trek into the forest, fell a large tree, and split it into firewood that they later sell for a relative pittance. Porfirio's wife Rita is pregnant, and his elderly *tata* (usually = father or grandfather) is in poor health. In order to pay the doctor's bill, Porfirio reluctantly accepts Evodio's gift of the latter's (only) pig, which he sells in the village. Porfirio overhears the doctor telling the newly-arrived schoolteacher that the residents of the area are "savages" and "like animals," who live without ambition and die without ever seeing the wider world—the doctor admits he, too, is too cowardly to leave the village and try to re-make his life.

Shaken by this revelation, Porfirio asks his dying father, "What does one have to do to be content [*conforme*]?" and

is told "Work. Be honest. And have children." The older man dies.

One day when Evodio is laid up with an injury, Porfirio goes into the mountains alone. He watches in shock as an airliner crashes in the remote area, and climbs to the site, which is littered with wreckage and corpses. The poor woodcutter spots many items of value and tells Evodio about this when he comes home that night. The two men decide to plunder the wreck rather than notify the authorities, rationalising that the victims no longer need their money or possessions. Porfirio sees this as a way of making enough money to leave the village and start a better life elsewhere with his wife and yet-to-be-born child.

However, after a day of stripping the aircraft and dead bodies of cameras, jewelry, cash, etc., Porfirio and Evodio are surprised by the arrival of two *carboneros* (charcoal makers). The men agree to split the booty but, after camping overnight, Porfirio kills one of the men with a machete; Evodio starts to shoot the other *carbonero* but can't bring himself to do it, so Porfirio hacks that man to death as well. They then hide the booty in a cave. Porfirio is anxious to sell as much as he can and leave the area; Evodio is uncertain, but his wife Fina urges him to go along with the plan. Unfortunately, when the two men visit the large town of San Blas, they are unable to sell most of the cameras, jewelry, radios, etc., because the merchants are suspicious of the origin of the items.

Meanwhile, the authorities have finally located the airplane crash site. While removing the bodies, they discover the two dead *carboneros* and find a few plundered trinkets on the corpses, which provokes an investigation.

Porfirio tells Rita, Evodio and Fina they must leave immediately, taking as much of the booty as they can carry. The four must go over the mountain and cross a desert to



avoid detection. The trek is long and arduous. At one point, Fina neglects to tie up the burros and the animals wander off; enraged, Porfirio hits her. Evodio leaps in to protect his wife and the two *compadres* battle. When Evodio seizes his machete, Porfirio shoots his former best friend to death (with a pistol he'd found in the wreck). Later, when Fina runs off, Porfirio tracks her down and kills her as well.

Rita refuses to go any further. When Porfirio threatens her with the pistol, she dares him to shoot: "You don't want me to be with you, you just need me to carry some of the loot. And if you shoot me, I can't do that, either." As the film concludes, Porfirio, heavily laden with items stolen from the crash, staggers alone across the desert.

Ignacio López Tarso, one of Mexican cinema's finest actors, was no stranger to *indio* and *campesino* roles (*Macario* and *Rosa blanca* are two good examples), although he played a wide variety of characters of all



ethnic and social backgrounds over the years. He's excellent as Porfirio, whose world-view is irrevocably skewed by his realisation that he's a virtual

prisoner of his economic-social-racial status, and by the discovery of the airplane crash which will theoretically allow him to escape this "cage." There's a well-known saying in Mexico that "an *indio* ceases to be an *indio* when he wears shoes" (in other words, his identity as an indigenous person is not defined by his race, but by his socio-economic class), and *Rapiña* includes a sequence in which Porfirio spends some of his ill-gotten cash to purchase a pair of leather shoes (as opposed to *huaraches*). The shoes naturally hurt his feet, but he's determined to wear them as a sign he's not a "savage."

Porfirio's decision to plunder the crash site and murder the *carboneros* is portrayed as a direct result of overhearing the town doctor characterise everyone in the area as cowards, savages, even animals. Prior to this, Porfirio is apparently a hard-working, decent man—he doesn't even want to accept Evodio's gift of the pig, which will allow him to pay part of his father's medical bills—but everything changes in a moment. The airliner crash provides the opportunity to act on his newfound discontent, and prompts his rapid descent into homicidal greed and a frantic desire to escape from his current life. Although, even at the end—after he's murdered his *compadre* and *comadre* and is threatening his pregnant wife with a pistol—Porfirio still tries to justify his actions as resulting from a desire to give his unborn son a better life. Rita debunks this, saying it's his own frustration and wounded self-esteem which have driven him to rob and kill.

As Evodio, Germán Robles demonstrates how talented an actor he was: it's difficult to imagine this is the same performer who starred in *El vampiro* or *La vida de Agustín Lara*, for instance. Robles not only convincingly plays an *indio*, he also creates a character who's distinctly different than his *compadre* Porfirio: Evodio is soft-spoken, a follower rather than a leader, isn't infected with Porfirio's mania to flee their village, and is unable to kill one of the *carboneros* when the man begs for his life. He's generous—as the incident with the pig illustrates—and leaps to defend his wife when Porfirio strikes her, a gallant gesture which results in his death.

While Norma Lazareno and Rosenda Monteros are also good as Rita and Fina, respectively, they're subsidiary characters with only a few standout scenes. However,

Taboada's script once again takes pains to distinguish them from each other, giving them separate personalities. Neither wife is caught up in Porfirio's greed and desire to move to the city, although both enjoy a few luxuries purchased with the stolen money or found amidst the wreckage: in a telling if rather obvious scene, Rita admires a little stuffed animal and decides to take it for her unborn child, but is horrified when she discovers it's stained with the blood of its previous owner.



[In another scene, reminiscent of *La perla*'s depiction of the naïve nature of its indigenous protagonists, Rita picks up a pair of binoculars and looks through the wrong end, then reverses them and falls back in surprise at the effect. In a similar sequence, Porfirio and Evodio spot a electric razor in a shop window and are unable to fathom its purpose; even when informed by a clerk, they are still unable to conceive how it accomplishes its task.]

The supporting performers in *Rapiña* are satisfactory. The largest role is given to Enrique Pontón as the doctor, who's effective but has a distractingly fake-looking beard; José Luis Caro is also good as the leader of the military search/recover team who later masterminds the hunt for Porfirio and the other looters (this section is organised almost as a police procedural, although as the film concludes, Porfirio has yet to be apprehended—the implication is that he will either die in the desert or be caught, however).

Overall, *Rapiña* is an excellent drama: well-written and acted and slickly produced.



Los vampiros de Coyoacán [The

Vampires of

Coyoacán] (Prods.

Filmicas Agrasánchez,

1973) Prod: Rogelio

Agrasánchez; Dir-Scr

Adapt: Arturo Martínez;

Story: Mario Cid; Photo:

Javier Cruz; Music:

Ernest Cortázar [Jr.];

Prod Mgr: Ignacio

Bonilla; Co-Dir:

Fernando Durán; Film

Ed: Ángel Camacho; Art

Dir: Roberto Muñoz;

Camera Op: Alberto



Arellanos; Makeup: Graciela Muñoz; Re-rec: Heinrich Henkel; Sound Op: Víctor Rojo; Script [Clerk]: Damián Acosta; Union: STIC; Eastmancolor

Cast: Germán Robles (*Dr. Wells*), Mil Máscaras (*Mil Máscaras*), Superzan (*Superzan*), Sasha Montenegro (*Nora Thomas*), Carlos López Moctezuma (*Dr. Thomas*), Mario Cid (*Baron Bradok*), [N. León] Franqustein (*El Espectro*), Pura Vargas (*housekeeper*), Mister Tempest (*El Ciclón?*), Tony Salazar (*Tony Salazar, wrestler*), El Greco (*El Greco, wrestler*), David Castañeda, Alfredo Gutiérrez (*detective*), Manuel Corcuera, Elías Churar, Judith Velasco (*fiancee of El Ciclón?*), Jorge Victoria, Silvia Manuela, Alfonso Quiroz, Gabriel Mondragón, Alfonso Padilla, Filiberto Estrella (*little vampire*), Ángel Mondragón, Gerónimo Díaz, Armando Acosta (*baggage clerk*), Edelmira Oliva, Luis Guevara (*drunk at wrestling match*), Humberto Elizondo (*ticket clerk*), Antonio Padilla "Picoro" (*ring announcer*), Jorge Moreno & Jesús Montes de Oca (*police agents*), ?Lauro Salazar (*wrestling spectator*)

Notes: despite some impressive aspects (one amazing set, decent monster makeup, a good cast, little-person-vampires, two masked wrestling heroes), *Los vampiros de*



Coyoacán is not an outstanding film. The first 15 minutes can be skipped (a long, tag-team match between Mil Máscaras, Superzan, El Greco and Tony Salazar, shown in its

entirety), the *denouement* is weak, and the script is both shallow and (frequently) incomprehensible. Top-billed Germán Robles is fine but his role is under-developed and not very distinctive. Mario Cid, who wrote the original story for the picture, is not especially memorable as Baron Bradok (and even his dialogue when he assumes his bat-face form is dubbed by someone else).

Wrestler El Espectro kills El Ciclón in a match; El Espectro is arrested, since this is his third opponent who has died in the ring, but he's released--it's a "sports accident!" A vampire bat flies into the dressing room where El Ciclón's corpse is resting, and drains it of blood. [This makes no particular sense: El Espectro kills El Ciclón by rather blatantly strangling him (apparently while in a trance, if the soundtrack music is any indication). Why he does this is unclear--couldn't the vampire (presumably Baron Bradok) get victims any other way? And since when does a vampire drink blood from a corpse?]

Mil Máscaras and Superzan, who suspect foul play, visit Dr. Thomas, who has a visitor: Dr. Wells, a specialist in the supernatural. [Since Wells had been at the wrestling match, and emerged from El Ciclón's dressing room just after we've seen the vampire there, there is a slight hint early in the movie that Wells might be a vampire himself. However, this misdirection, if intentional, is dispelled rather quickly, when blatantly obvious vampire Baron

Bradok--he's got the cape and everything--visits the Thomas house.]

Dr. Thomas says one of his daughter Nora's college friends fell ill and died recently, and now Nora seems to have contracted the same, mysterious illness. [This is one of the first clear allusions to Bram Stoker's "Dracula." Later, Nora practically quotes the novel as she describes her nightmares of "burning eyes" and "mist" in the darkness.] Baron Bradok, a recent acquaintance of the family and admirer of Nora, arrives, and everyone troops upstairs to visit Nora. After some awkward conversation, Bradok departs; Wells pronounces Nora to be suffering from "acute anemia," and in passing notes several small wounds on her neck. Later, he says she's the victim of a "human vampire."



Meanwhile, Bradok returns to his mansion in an antique car, accompanied by various little-person henchmen, El Espectro, and several coffins. The coffins contain Bradok's vampire cousins, who say "It's been 2,000 years since we saw each other." [2,000 years?] The two cousins go out trolling for prey: both are solicited by street-walkers and subsequently kill the prostitutes.

Nora opens her bedroom window to admit Bradok, who carries her off. [As he walks, he changes into a bat-faced monster in a nice series of progressive makeups.]



However, Wells sees them leaving and he, Mil Máscaras and Superzan confront the vampire and--as it develops--his numerous little-person henchmen and El Espectro. After a desultory battle, Bradok and his minions change into bats and fly away.

Back at the Thomas house, Bradok appears--he says the housekeeper told him Nora was in a bad way. [The housekeeper appears throughout the film, doing nothing but stare menacingly. It's never clear if she's in Bradok's employ or not.] Because Bradok was in his bat-face form when confronted earlier, Dr. Thomas doesn't realise his neighbour is the vampire. Later, Dr. Wells tells everyone (again) that a vampire is responsible, and hints that Bradok is the culprit. This irritates Nora, who defends the foreign nobleman.

That night, leaving Superzan to guard Nora, Mil and Wells enter Bradok's mansion, but wind up locked in a room that rapidly fills with purple smoke. Sure enough, the little person-vampires and El Espectro pop up and another brawl ensues, but suddenly the vampires all collapse! [For no apparent reason.] Mil and Wells leave the room.

Meanwhile, Nora sneaks out of her house and warns Bradok: she and the vampire baron kiss. Dr. Thomas and



Superzan, discovering her absence, head for Bradok's house; Superzan is sent to fetch the police. Wells and Mil observe a ceremony in which Nora is magically converted into a vampire. [The two heroes are shot on an actual exterior, while the ceremonial area is clearly on a studio soundstage, but the latter is apparently supposed to be outside as well. This set is darn impressive, with a huge statue of a devil's head and torso, and some large Stonehenge-ish slabs of rock.] The vampires all troop off to wreak havoc, or something.

The police scoff at Superzan's tale of vampires but agree to accompany him to the mansion. Too late for Dr. Thomas, who is bitten on the neck and drained of blood by his own daughter (in her defense, she screams when she realises what she's done). One of Bradok's vampire-



cousins kills a police detective. Mil Máscaras and Dr. Wells find where Bradok keeps his coffins, and burn them up real good. Nora leaps into the raging inferno and dies. When Bradok and his vampire gang return, they are stunned to see the ashes of their coffins. Mil, Superzan, Wells, and the remaining police attack the vampires, resulting in another inconclusive brawl. The rays of the rising sun come in through a window, causing Bradok and the other vampires to evaporate. [Shades of *El vampiro y el sexo*.] The end.

There is virtually no real character or plot development in *Los vampiros de Coyoacán*. The opening credits are

followed by two extended wrestling matches which occupy the first 23 minutes of the 87-minute film, leaving just over an hour for the story proper. Everything takes place over two nights (it's unclear, exactly), and the various characters get a line or two of back story: Nora went to university "in Canada," then came back; Wells is an expert in the "supernatural"; Bradok emigrated to Mexico from Transylvania a few months ago, for unspecified reasons (he tells Dr. Thomas Mexico is a good place for his "research"); El Espectro has killed 3 men in the ring; Mil Máscaras and Superzan are well-known wrestlers who also have a reputation as "defenders of justice." All of these facts are related verbally, in the laziest kind of narrative explication.

The three battles between the heroes and the vampires are boring, despite the multiple combatants. As one would expect in an Agrasánchez film of this era, little people are employed as henchmen of the villain, and get tossed around by Mil Máscaras and Superzan, only to pop right back up and reenter the fray. Neither the wrestlers nor the vampires seem capable of harming their opponents, which renders these fights pointless.

There are some amusing and interesting aspects. As noted above, Bradok's bat-face makeup is quite good (Emilio García Riera denigrates it as "a mask that probably cost *cinco pesos*" but it's actually rather effective). Nora's horrified reaction to her father's death is one of the few sincere moments of emotion in the whole picture. It's funny when Bradok's cousin-vampires go on the prowl, only to immediately be hailed by two prostitutes (Coyoacán must have been a swinging place in 1973). While Arturo Martínez's direction is far too zoom-happy, there are a handful of nicely-framed shots, and the Satanic altar set is extremely impressive for a film of this budgetary level.

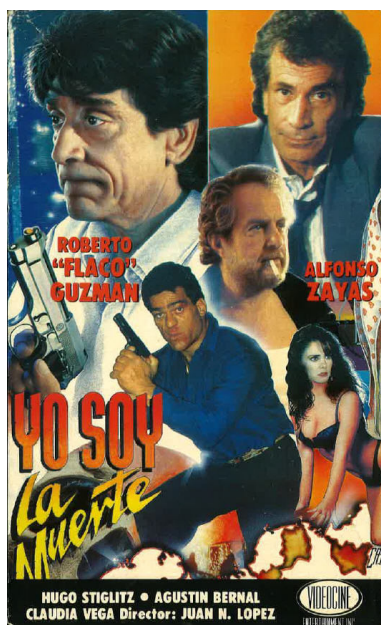
Trivia notes: *Los vampiros de Coyoacán* was shot in September 1973, immediately after *El Tigre de Santa Julia*, made by the same producer, director and crew. Carlos López Moctezuma, Germán Robles, and Mario Cid (along with some supporting players) appeared in both movies. Mario Cid had small roles in several of the "Nostradamus" series with Germán Robles, as well as parts in both of the "Conde Frankenhause" films, so he was no stranger to cinematic vampirism.

Not horrible, but superficial and forgettable.



CROSS- DRESSING KILLERS

Yo soy la muerte [I Am Death] (Milenia Films, ©1993) *Prod:* Abraham Cherem; *Dir:* Juan N. López; *Scr:* Verónica A. Franco; *Photo:* Tim Ross; *Music:* Richard Cuervo; *Prod Mgr:* Jesús Bretón M.; *Asst Dir:* Begoña López; *Film Ed:* Cuauhtemoc Ponce; *Décor:* Alberto Villaseñor; *Makeup:* Ricardo Mora; *Re-rec:* Marco A. Morante; *Sound Ed:* Miguel Larraguivél



Cast: Roberto “Flaco” Guzmán (*Lt. Horacio Fajardo*), Hugo Stieglitz [*sic*] (*Lt. Miguel Suárez*), Alfonso Zayas (*Lt. Ramón Gutiérrez*), Agustín Bernal (*Lt. Bernardo Soto*), Gerardo Vigil (*transvestite*), Tomás Goros (*Daniel Montilla; his father*), Claudia Vega (*Lola González*), Francesa Guillén (*La Nena*), Max Vega (*doctor*), Victo [*sic?*] Avelar (*client*), Silvia Valdés (*prostitute*), Miguel Ángel Lapiz

& Mauricio Rubí (*cops*)

Notes: well, somebody (i.e., scripter Verónica Franco) saw the 1988 remake of *D.O.A.* (1) Protagonist given poisoned liquor (containing “radium chloride”), told he has only a short time to live? Check. (2) Protagonist “connects” himself to a woman (super-glue in *D.O.A.*, handcuffs in this one) as they try to solve the crime? Check. (3) Dying protagonist makes a video-taped “confession” of his story? Check.

Unfortunately, the rest of the script of *Yo soy la muerte* wasn’t cribbed from *D.O.A.*, and is thereby riddled with plot holes, inconsistencies, gaffes, and illogicalities. Director Juan N. López (who kindly provided me with a copy of this film) agreed to respect the script when he took the job, and was thus handicapped from the start. He tries to spice up the proceedings with some visual stylistic touches: the result is a watchable trainwreck of a movie, not really good but certainly not boring.

The reality and economics of film marketing (in this case, *videohome* marketing) are obvious here. Of the billed “names” in the cast, only Flaco Guzmán (and, to a lesser extent, Agustín Bernal) has significant screen time.

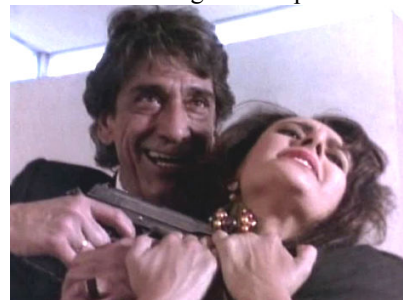


Hugo Stieglitz (wearing a pea coat, white t-shirt, and baggy jeans) appears in 2 scenes for a total of less than 5 minutes, but the real rip-off

is the “presence” of Alfonso Zayas, who shows up for about one minute (long enough to legally justify getting his name and photo on the video box). Actual protagonists Tomás Goros (primarily a television actor) and Claudia Vega are billed after all these people (and after Gerardo Vigil, who’s on screen for about 2 minutes, tops).

Police Lt. Fajardo watches as the body of one of his colleagues is fished out of the water, wearing a dress and wig. This is the second murder of a policeman in recent days—both victims were shot, then dressed in drag. Meanwhile, private detective Daniel Montilla searches for prostitute Lola, who stole the wallet of a prominent politician. Daniel stops to chat with Lt. Suárez, a cop who knew Daniel’s late father (another policeman). Suárez is murdered on the street, but Daniel chases off the killer before Suárez’s corpse can be outfitted in women’s clothing like the other victims.

Daniel tracks down Lola and she (as we later learn, acting on instructions) sends him to an isolated location where the killer knocks him unconscious and pours some alcohol down his throat. Finding Lola once more, Daniel handcuffs himself to her and attempts to locate the murderer. He begins to experience stomach pains and



learns he was poisoned with radium chloride, which will kill him within a day. Interrogating some transvestite hookers, Daniel and Lola are directed to La

Nena, but she’s murdered by a veiled, black-clad “woman” before they can interview her. Daniel discovers a small gold pin at the site. He learns this was awarded to 7 policemen who rescued the president’s daughter from a kidnaper in 1978. These are the men who are being killed and dressed like women.

The two remaining policemen are Lt. Soto—who’s been the object of ridicule among his fellow officers since he was caught having gay sex—and Lt. Fajardo. Daniel suspects Soto, but the other man convinces him of his innocence, which



leaves only Fajardo. Soto is shot to death by Fajardo. Daniel and Lola accuse Fajardo of the murders: back in 1978, the group of decorated officers got drunk and were celebrating their awards, when Fajardo showed up in drag. [Why?] Now, over a decade later, Fajardo is eliminating those men. [Why?] Fajardo tries to use Lola as a human shield but is killed by Daniel. As the film concludes, Lola and the dying Daniel make love on his living room sofa. [What--?]

Although I was fairly sure Flaco Guzmán was the killer in the first minute of the movie—because he was clean-shaven, thus facilitating his cross-dressing—his identity is kept a secret until around the 40-minute mark, when the black-clad killer appears and Guzmán’s features can clearly be seen through the veil. Daniel and Lola aren’t quite so

perceptive as I am, however, and don't figure it out until near the end of the film.

The revelation that Lt. Fajardo is the serial killer prompts many questions, only a few of which can be answered sensibly. He poisons Daniel rather than murdering him early in the movie (which he could easily have done) because Daniel is the exact double of his late father, who was one of the men who mocked Fajardo in 1978: Fajardo wants to make Daniel suffer and frame him for the killings. This is barely acceptable as a plot device, but later in the



picture there are several sequences in which Fajardo opens fire on Daniel and Lola, failing to kill them only because he's a terrible shot. I guess he changed his mind?

There are plenty of other plot holes one could cite, if one was so inclined; this isn't really a productive use of time, but we'll bring up a few. As mentioned above, while large chunks of the narrative are lifted from *D.O.A.*, the film's basic premise (a serial killer murdering his enemies) is not. [Nor does the film feature its predecessor's flashback structure, which renders Daniel's final video "confession" here moot.]

One might reasonably ask: (a) why did Fajardo appear in full drag at the private celebration in 1978? "He was drunk" is not an excuse, because he clearly had to go somewhere and put on a wig, makeup, and women's clothing before returning to the room where the other cops are sitting around, drinking. It would have made more sense if he'd drunkenly made a



pass at one of his colleagues (not that all cross-dressers are gay), but then we wouldn't have the transvestite killer and the "dressing victims in drag" motifs for the rest of the picture. (b) Why did Fajardo wait more than a decade to start murdering the other policemen (aside from Daniel's father, who was killed in a similar fashion years before)? (c) Why does he suddenly go on a killing spree, rather than spreading the murders over a period of time?

Making Lt. Soto the subject of anti-gay slurs sets him up--vaguely--as an alternative suspect (it also provides the opportunity for a pool-hall scene in which some idiot calls Soto a *joto* (fag) and gets severely beaten; I mean, would you openly mock the muscular, mean-faced Agustín Bernal? Not me!) but Soto only appears in a couple of sequences and is never really in the running (it'd be really hard to imagine him in drag). Playing by the rules of the mystery genre, the killer has to be a known character, so Fajardo is the main suspect from the start.

Although obviously shot on a low budget, *Yo soy la muerte* doesn't look especially cheap. Director López and cinematographer Tim Ross try to spice up the proceedings a bit: the billiard sequence includes an overhead tracking shot, there are some nicely-lit and framed shots, and even extreme Dutch tilts (maybe a few too many of those, some for no particular reason). In technical terms,



certain parts of the film are rather nice, others are satisfactory, and a handful are...not so good. Astute viewers will easily spot two sequences in which it's extremely obvious the principals weren't even in the same room together during their "conversations"--Fajardo and Daniel "interact" in the morgue and hospital scenes only through the magic of cinema editing (without naming names, the director admitted there were several instances where an actor was late and the scene had to go on, regardless).

The main performances aren't bad, although Tomás Goros is not a very charismatic leading man. Claudia Vega is quite good--attractive in her whore-outfits, but also a decent actress (at least to the extent required by the script). Flaco Guzmán is adequate, going from supportive to smarmy and condescending to outright loony as the film progresses. Guzmán balanced comedy and drama in his career but in the last decade of his life (he died in 2002) he mostly made action-oriented *videohomes*, along with the rare theatrical release (*El Tigre de Santa Julia*, 2001) and even several (non-sex) appearances in sleazy sex films (the soft-core *Drácula mascaferro* and the hard-core *Exxcitación latina*, both 2002). As noted early in this review, he was shorn of his usual moustache in *Yo soy la muerte* and as a result looks rather different than usual, somewhat older and weaker.

Yo soy la muerte is one of the least of Juan N. López's directorial efforts (making a low-budget movie based on a clunky screenplay must have been like directing with one hand tied behind your back) but it's still entertaining enough in a perverse way.



El psicópata asesino [The Psychopathic Killer]

(Procinema, ©1993) *Prod*: Raúl Galindo; *Dir*: Ruben Galindo Jr.; *Adapt*: José Movellan; *Story*: Rubén Galindo Jr.; *Photo*: José Luis Vera; *Music*: Federico Chávez; *Assoc Prod*: Rogelio Ramos; *Prod Mgr*: Víctor M. Vera; *Asst Dir*: Raúl Galindo; *Film Ed*: Marcos González R.; *Costumes*: Karla Acosta; *Sound Engin*: Hugo Noriega

Cast: Gerardo Albarrán (*Sgt. Mario*), Agustín Bernal (*Dr. Molina**), Roxana Chávez (*Erika*), Luis Gatica (*Cmdte. López*), Claudio Báez (*Dr. Ortiz*), José Manuel Fernández (*David*), Sara Castro (*Alejandra*), Genaro

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Aguirre (*policeman*), Carlos Chacón Jr. (*reporter 1*), Elsa Cárdenas (*first victim's neighbour*), Martín Gómez (*killer*), Laura Linares (*victim*), Irene Juárez & Miguel Ángel Rangel (*couple on street*), Jorge Marín (*reporter 2*), Rodolfo Odi (*lab technician Víctor*), Darwin Solano (*Lt. [sic] Zamora****)

* called "Dr. de Molina" in dialogue, credited as just "Dr. Molina"

*** presumably this is the character who is repeatedly

referred to as "Captain" in the film

Notes: *El psicópata asesino* has the germ of a decent premise—a psychiatrist hypnotises his patients into becoming murderers—but the script not only fails to develop this in any meaningful way, it is also filled with countless loopholes, omissions, gaffes, and illogical turns of the plot. As a result, the film—which



isn't badly produced or directed—is superficial and rather disappointing overall.

The casting also deserves part of the blame. Gerardo Albarrán is (and was) a stunt-man and stunt-director

(under his real name, Gerardo Moreno) who was elevated to leading-man roles in action-oriented *videohomes* around this time (he slightly resembles Steven Seagal, but I don't know if that was the reason).

Albarrán is a decent actor but he can't really breathe life into his character (a cop who's frustrated at every turn by an incompetent supervisor). Similarly, burly Agustín Bernal proved himself capable of playing fearsome villains



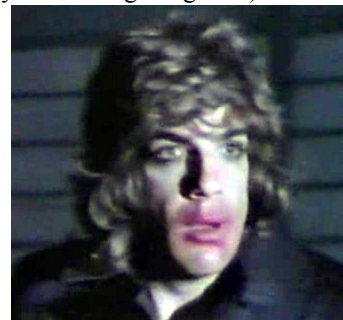
(and, later, fearsome heroes) but simply putting a pair of Fearless Fly-style eyeglasses on him does not make him look like a "psychiatrist." *El psicópata asesino* concludes with a long and brutal fight to the death between Albarrán and Bernal—a good ending to an



action movie, but hardly the sort of climax expected in a thriller.

A serial killer has been murdering young blonde women in Mexico City. Police investigator Mario is assigned the case by his unscrupulous, hostile boss Cmdte. López (López got the promotion instead of Mario by falsely claiming responsibility for solving a big case). The body count increases.

Mario is attacked by a mysterious assailant but escapes unhurt; he finds a small lapel pin indicating membership in the alumni of the psychology program at the university. Mario's obsession with the case adversely affects his relationship with his girlfriend Alejandra. López refuses to assign more officers to an area that Mario has deduced—based on a pattern of previous murders—could be the site of the next murder. The crime does occur, but Mario arrests the killer: a man dressed in a trench coat, wearing a blonde woman's wig and with lipstick smeared on his face. However, the man says he's innocent and remembers nothing of the crime, even under strenuous interrogation.



Mario is approached outside his apartment by Erika, a young woman who says she's being followed and has received threatening letters. Despite Mario's assurances that the serial killer is under arrest, she says they have the wrong man, and storms off angrily. Forensics prove that the suspect in jail could not have committed the earlier murders: there are two or more killers involved. Mario visits Erika to apologise (she initially imagines he's the killer, which prompts some amusing "fantasy" shots of Gerardo Albarrán wearing a long, blonde wig) and agrees to allow her to stay at his apartment for the time being. [Oddly enough, this provokes an argument between Mario and Alejandra.] The next day, Mario chauffeurs Erika to a doctor's appointment—she doesn't tell him it's with psychiatrist Dr. Molina, who questions her closely about her relationship with the detective, and plants a post-hypnotic suggestion in her mind. That night, Erika and



Mario go to bed together, but she later wakes up, paints her face crudely with makeup, and tries to stab him with a kitchen knife. When snapped out of her trance, she remembers nothing. With the assistance of Dr. Ortiz, they discover Erika was brainwashed by Dr. Molina, as were all of the

other killers.

As Erika and Mario leave Ortiz's office, Molina—in broad daylight, not even attempting to hide or disguise himself—opens fire with a pistol (from a considerable distance, so he misses every time). Mario pursues the mad psychiatrist, who gives him the slip and then captures Erika in a nearby parking garage. This concludes with an

extremely long fight scene between Mario and Molina: at the end, Molina is hanging by his fingertips and Mario deliberately causes him (not just lets him) to fall to his death.

As the film concludes, Mario and Erika are asleep together when she awakes, goes into the kitchen, takes a knife out of the drawer....Mario, suspicious, confronts her, only to be offered a piece of cake! Wah wah wah...

The script of *El psicópata asesino* has numerous gaping holes. For instance, the motivation of Molina's plot is never explained: does he hate blonde women? Why do the hypnotised killers wear wigs and smear makeup on their faces? Why would he send his own patient Erika, threatening letters? López lies about the confession of the killer under arrest, thus claiming credit for "solving" the crimes, but what happens when another blonde woman is murdered? Molina's ridiculous, long-distance attempt to shoot Erika and Mario (and, let me repeat, in broad daylight) is even more desperate than his previous try at

killing Mario (who Molina apparently felt was the only detective in Mexico City, thus by murdering him he'd never be caught): in both instances, of course, Molina breaks his "rule"



of using others to do his murderous work for him (and proves that his zombified killers were in every case more competent than he is at this). Molina also conveniently drops the "psychiatry school" pin during his first murder attempt, which doesn't single him out personally, but puts Mario in touch with Dr. Ortiz, who will prove very useful later.

Also, wasn't it awfully coincidental that Erika--a patient of the criminal mastermind--would seek out Mario, personally, for protection? And Alejandra seems awfully thin-skinned, breaking up with Mario without giving him a chance to explain that Erika's life is in danger and that's why she's in his apartment (to be fair, Mario and Alejandra's relationship seems moderately dysfunctional prior to this, in dramatic scenes which are surprisingly more detailed than usual for this level of cinema).

Although the technical quality of *El psicópata asesino* is not easy to ascertain due to the poor quality of the VHS transfer, the photography is both unpleasantly murky and yet decently fluid and atmospheric at times--some shots that might have been very nice are almost impossible to see clearly. Rubén Galindo Jr.--director of *Cementerio del terror* and *Ladrones de tumbas*, among others--is a competent director whose style, while derivative, is still slick and professional. But he's hampered by the budget in this one (his theatrical films are much better than his later *videohomes*, without exception). The performances are adequate, although as noted above neither Albarrán nor Bernal is well-served by the script and both seem out of

place. Luis Gática is his unusual nasty self, Roxana Chávez is marginally acceptable.



MARCELINO AUPART



El Padre Juan [Father Juan] (Cine Film, S.A., 1985) *Exec Prod*: Ramón Aupart; *Dir-Scr*: Marcelino Aupart; *Orig. Idea*: José Martín Besga; *Photo*: Luciano Amaguer; *Music*: Ryszard Siwy; *Assoc Prod*: Xavier Mexía; *Prod Mgr*: María Luisa Coronel; *Film Ed*: Saul Aupart; *Editorial Adv*: Ramón Aupart; *Camera Op*: Silvano Zúñiga; *Optical FX*: Antonio Muñoz R.; *Sound Op/Dubbing*: José Manuel Iturralde; *Makeup*: Yanira Vega; *Script* [Clerk]: Martha Gasque; *Sound Ed*: Enrique Hernández Ruelas; *Lighting*: Juan Araiza; *Re-rec*: Sergio Muñoz; *Sound Dir*: Ing. Ramón Moreno; *Union*: STPC
Cast: José Martí (*Padre Juan García*), Víctor Junco (*Padre Rodolfo*), Gilberto Román (*Padre Raúl*), Jorge Victoria (*Padre Jorge*), María Luisa Coronel (*doña María*), Marciano Martín (*Padre Ramón*), Honorato Magaloni (*doctor*), Luis Caso (*?Padre Rigoberto*), Martha Gasque (*bargirl*), Rosita Bouchot (*sun-tan oil model*), Carmen Gosteli (*Miss Urania, dancer*), Tropical Fantasía (*band*), Lupita Peruyero (*woman in club*), Jorge Renau, Juan Antonio Llanes, Rafael Torres Heredia, Billy Silva, Alfonso Trimayer, Francisco Rapuano, Lupita Oroná, Silvia Martha, Fanny Rosas, Julián Núñez García, Yamira Vega, Baudelia Pelayo, Norma Alicia Salinas, Gustavo González, Xavier Mexía, Rosalina Hernández, Xavier Xafer, Karla Adame, Javier Aguilar, Alfredo Alejandro, Gerardo Olmedo, Jorge Granados, Lourdes Azcárraga, Federico Sánchez Scott

Notes: brothers Juan Ramón (usually credited just as Ramón, 1913-2015), Marcelino (born in 1943), and Saul Aupart Cisneros were all involved in the Mexican film industry and related fields as film editors, writers, directors, producers, and film school instructors. According to Perla Ciuk's "Diccionario de Directores del Cine Mexicano," "some relatives" of Marcelino Aupart worked in a Mexican film lab, and he gained employment there before enrolling in film school CUEC in 1973. An accident during the shooting of a film resulted in the loss of one of Aupart's legs but proved only a temporary

setback to his career. He made a number of shorts (one of which was nominated for an Ariel in 1977) and also worked as an editor on features, receiving an Ariel nomination in 1976 for *De todos modos, Juan te llamas* (ironically, he lost out to his brother Ramón, who won Best Editor for *Actas de Marusia*). Marcelino Aupart taught classes as his alma mater CUEC as well.

In 1985 one of his unproduced screenplays received an honorable mention in a SOGEM (Mexican writers' society) competition, and he also directed his first feature film, an entry in the III Concurso de Cine Experimental en México (Third Experimental Mexican Cinema Contest), sponsored by IMCINE & STPC. *El Padre Juan* was produced by the Aupart family company, Cine Film, S.A., and both Ramón and Saul Aupart participated in the production. Marcelino directed the film and wrote the script, based on an "original idea" by actor José Martí (under his real name, José Martín Besga).



Aupart's first film introduced a number of people who would appear in his two subsequent efforts (as well as the quasi-Aupartian *Buscando al asesino*), including performers José Martí, Rosita Bouchot, Marciano Martín, Jorge Victoria, Gilberto Román, Francisco Rapuano, Lupita Peruyero (all in 2 or more of the 4 films), and behind-the-camera talent Xavier Mexía, Ryszard Siwy, and Enrique Hernández R..

Father Juan is a middle-aged Catholic priest assigned to a large Catholic parish in a Mexican city. He entered the seminary at age 12 and is now 42. The other priests in the parish include Father Rodolfo (the Father Superior), Father Ramón, Father Jorge, Father Rigoberto, and Father Raúl. Father Juan has been struggling with a problem: he's become obsessed with sex, which he blames in part on the liberalisation of attitudes in the world as a whole—women dressing provocatively, sex used in advertisements, and so on. His preoccupation with sex is affecting his priestly duties. For example, distracted by the cleavage of a parishioner, he drops the Host during Mass. Later, giving a devotional tour of the Stations of the Cross, Juan sees a woman's exposed thigh and terminates the session, berating the whole group as unworthy sinners. Receiving the confession of a young boy who (in an extremely forced and unlikely bit) is holding a container of sun-tan lotion with a bikini-clad woman on the label, Juan smacks the child and knocks him down! Juan also visits a local nightclub where he watches an exotic dancer and chats up a buxom bargirl, but backs out of having sex with the

latter. Later, he cuts himself while shaving after he glimpses another priest in the shower.

Juan fantasizes about the tanning lotion model (whose image appears on a giant billboard directly across from the church), and occasionally dresses up in black panties, a garter belt and stockings to caress himself. [There is also an allusion to auto-erotic asphyxiation, which foreshadows Juan's death by hanging at film's end.]

Father Rodolfo is sympathetic to Juan's problem but has no solution for it, other than to urge the priest to concentrate on his priestly duties and "find a hobby." The two priests even visit the Monsignor (their ecclesiastical superior) but, once again, Juan is expected to resolve his issues on his own. Juan's closest friend, Father Jorge, says he keeps his mind fixed on spiritual issues by indulging in vigorous physical exercise that consumes all of his free

time and leaves him exhausted at the end of the day.

Finally, Father Juan can endure his inner demons no more and attempts to castrate himself with a hot poker. He recovers physically, but as a result of his "suicide" attempt (which it



actually wasn't), he is defrocked. Father Rodolfo allows Juan to return to his room in the church complex until he sorts out his life, but Juan knows nothing except the priesthood. Dressing in his women's underwear outfit, Juan performs an erotic mockery of the Mass and then hangs himself in front of the altar.

El Padre Juan is an odd film which does not seem to have a specific axe to grind: Catholic priest Juan is neither a villain nor a

victim nor an especially sympathetic protagonist; the "Church" (as an institution) is not portrayed overtly hostile to him, and is not blamed for his problems, but certainly doesn't go out of its way to help. There are some vague theological discussions about the relationship between the



Catholic Church and modern society, but one cannot watch *El Padre Juan* and draw any broad conclusions such as "priests should be allowed to marry" or "celibacy is necessary and anyone who can't



conquer their urges shouldn't be a priest."

The various priest characters are, to the film's credit, portrayed as flawed individuals rather than saintly stereotypes. Father Superior Rodolfo seems fair and reasonable, while admitting a fondness for good food and drink (= gluttony). Father Jorge sublimates his urges with constant exercise (and eventually leaves the priesthood to get married). Father Raúl is a modern, academically-oriented priest whose intellectual interests mark him as destined for high-Church work (ambition = he's promoted out of the parish by film's end). Another priest is devoted to music, and one is susceptible to flattery about his personal appearance (and nearly indulges in a gay kiss with the parish photographer, before they're interrupted by Father Juan). Father Ramón is a traditional, conservative priest who disapproves of any unorthodoxy. And so on.



Father Juan's obsession with sex isn't explained (it's not clear when it presented itself, either), although the statement that he entered the seminary at age 12 (right around the age of puberty) would suggest his socio-sexual development was suppressed beginning at that time. As noted above, Father Juan isn't particularly likeable—he's whiny, grumpy, self-pitying, judgemental—and thus the audience may find it difficult to empathise with his dilemma. Why doesn't he just have sex? (Because he thinks it's a sin?) Why doesn't he quit the priesthood? (Because he can't envision any other life?) When the now-defrocked Juan returns to the church, he meets ex-priest Jorge, who left religious orders voluntarily and professes to have a happy, married life, but this option doesn't seem to appeal to the rootless, tormented Juan.

Ironically, Father Juan's odd behaviour—dropping the Host, berating devout parishioners, slapping a child—only earns him a mild rebuke from the Church (he's removed from most public contact duties), whereas his attempt to relieve his psychological issues via self-mutilation is the reason he's stripped of his priesthood (in other words, his offenses against others are perceived less important than his offense against himself—because “suicide” is a greater sin than anger, I suppose).

José Martí and Rosita Bouchot are the two performers most associated with Marcelino Aupart, appearing in all three of the director's films as well as *Buscando al asesino*. Martí in particular seems to have been associated with Aupart since the 1970s (his screen acting career dates to the late '60s). He not only acts in these pictures, he also contributes to their scripts, which is a good way to get juicy roles for yourself. Martí is satisfactory in *El Padre Juan*, although one wonders how much better the film

would have been with either a more dynamic actor or a better script (or both), since Martí plays the role in an almost resigned manner (which may be how he conceived it), rather than as a character who is struggling and tormented, but still fighting against his baser instincts.

The rest of cast performs adequately. Víctor Junco, Gilberto Román, and Jorge Victoria, the other “name” actors, are fine. Rosita Bouchot has no dialogue, as she is Father Juan's fantasy figure only. The supporting parts and bit players are alright, although much of their dialogue was apparently post-dubbed.

The production values of *El Padre Juan* are satisfactory, with most of the action taking place in actual locations (including a large church). Aupart uses a technique he would repeat in *Ardor de juventud*, shooting fantasy or dream characters against a black background.

El Padre Juan is not, despite the theatrical advertising campaign which emphasized Juan's cross-dressing and a nude Rosita Bouchot, a sleazy exploitation film. What it is, however, is difficult to say: it's a bit of a psychological drama, a social-problem picture, a vague socio-political statement about organised religion and faith and such... None of these themes are handled especially well and the film itself is rather unfocused, but it's never dull.



Ardor de juventud [Ardour of Youth] * (Cine Films, S.A., ©1988) *Exec Prod*: Ramón Aupart; *Assoc Prod*: Jaime Arcos; *Dir-Scr*: Marcelino Aupart; *Story*: Xavier Mexía, Marcelino Aupart, José Martín B.; *Photo*: Germán Salcedo; *Music*: Ryszard Siwy; *Songs*: Martín Urrieta, Ignacio Zalvidea, Adrián Chávez; *Prod Mgr*: Xavier Mexía; *Asst Dir*: Juan Núñez; *Film Ed*: Ramón Aupart, Saul Aupart; *Makeup*: Margarita Capo; *Sound*: Juan Chávez; *Sound Ed*: José Li-Ho, Enrique Hernández R.; *Camera Op*: Héctor Medina; *Lighting*: Juan Araiza; *Sound Co-ord*: Ing. René Cerón; *Union*: STPC

*original title: *Antonio ante el espejo roto* [Antonio in Front of the Broken Mirror]; aka *Juventud rebelde*

Cast: Rosita Bouchot (*Antonio's mother*), José Martí (*Uncle Esteban*), Franco Rapuano (*Antonio*), Lucero del Alba (*Luz María Ortega García*), Thelma Dorantes (*Luz María's mother*), Abel Casillas (*Major García*), Ana María Jacobo, Ernesto Schwartz (*Eduardo del Rey*), Juan

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Antonio Llanes, Mario de Jesús Villers, Yessika Fregossi, Laura Zoraya, José Luis Luna, José Villier, Ricardo Cervantes, José Luis de Alba, Valentín Santana, Carlos Aguilar, Lupita Oroná, Ernesto de Alba, Jorge Miguel, Enrique Hernández R., Jorge Nájera, Sofía Cerecero, Salvador Ibáñez, Lucy Escandón, Jorge Corso, Claudia Rivas, Gustavo Díaz, Raúl Salazar, Juan Manuel Hernández, Miguel Ángel Hidalgo, Federico Sánchez S., Salvador Vargas, Miguel Ángel Platas, Norma Angélica Valdés, Adriana Sánchez, Raúl Aupart

Notes: Marcelino Aupart, Cine Film, S.A., José Martí and Rosita Bouchot returned from *El Padre Juan* for *Ardor de juventud*. The original title of this project—and one



which persists in some references—was apparently *Antonio ante el espejo rotpido*, a title replaced for the theatrical release (the main title is in an entirely different

font from the other credits and is crudely spliced in to existing prints—the sound of breaking glass can be heard in the background, presumably to accompany the original title logo).

Although advertised as some sort of “wild youth” movie, *Ardor de juventud* is really a sort of shaggy dog mix of Hitchcockian thriller with angsty teen-age drama and, incidentally, a depressing sub-plot about a self-destructive alcoholic.

As the film begins, teenager Antonio is getting dressed for an unspecified big occasion. [His thoughts are heard in voice-over, a technique horribly over-used for various



characters throughout the film.] Flashback...some time before, his father departed for a business trip to Houston, leaving 19-year-old Antonio and his mother alone.

Antonio drives his

father’s shiny new car to school, hoping to impress his female classmates. [There are too many driving scenes in this film, and too many “lyrical interludes” with music playing over boring footage.] After some pointless time-wasting in class and outside the school, Antonio offers attractive Luz María a ride home. They stop off in Chapultepec Park for fries and Cokes, then pull into a semi-secluded area. Luz María spots a bottle of brandy in the glovebox and she and Antonio chug it down expertly. They start to make out, but suddenly Luz María faints. No, wait, she’s dead. Antonio, whining to himself about his bad luck, stuffs her in the trunk. Before he can drive

away, however, he’s accosted by two park policemen who demand a bribe to overlook his “crime.” They accept a wristwatch and a few pesos, which Antonio—like an idiot—starts to say “seems too little for—“ and then discovers they’re accusing him of urinating on a nearby tree (it was a dog). Antonio hurriedly drives off.

Unable to think of a single place to dump a body, he goes home. Leaving the car on the street, he discovers his mother’s brother, shiftless Uncle Esteban, has arrived for a visit. Claiming illness, Antonio takes a nap and when he awakes, the car is gone. His mother says Esteban drove it to his job interview.



Esteban is offered a job by Sr. del Rey (who has a sexy photo of Antonio’s mother in his desk drawer), but he keeps pushing, demanding, and insulting del Rey until the offer is withdrawn. He departs—he considers putting his jacket in the car’s trunk but decides against it, a bit of Hitchcockian suspense—and drives to a bar where he starts drinking with his friend Eduardo, celebrating his “narrow escape” from employment. The next morning, Antonio notices the car is back in the garage, with a drunken Esteban inside (at first Antonio thinks his uncle is dead). Esteban stumbles off but Antonio can’t find the keys to unlock the trunk and is eventually forced by his mother to walk to school.

Meanwhile, Esteban staggers through the streets and gets drunker, finally passing out on the sidewalk, where he’s accidentally doused with a bucket of bloody water by a butcher. In school, Luz María’s widowed mother and



her uncle (a police detective) make an appeal to the students for clues regarding the girl’s disappearance. Antonio’s friends split up into small groups to search for her, with Antonio reluctantly going along.

Back home, Antonio learns uncle Esteban is in the hospital with pneumonia. Antonio half-heartedly tries to force the lock of the car’s trunk, then finds the keys on the floor but now the lock is jammed. Suddenly, there’s a knock at the door—it’s Luz María, her mother, and her uncle! Luz María demands to know why Antonio abandoned her in a hotel, unconscious. Antonio realises Esteban must have discovered the girl (who suffers from

catalepsy) and taken her to a hotel (possibly with some of his *cantina* friends, it is suggested), but she doesn't remember anyone but him.

As the flashback ends, Antonio dresses for his wedding to Luz María, and muses that perhaps his broken mirror is avenging itself on him with the legendary run of bad luck.

Ardor de juventud has a slightly interesting premise--a teen is stuck with a dead body--but does less than nothing with this idea. Antonio puts Luz María in the trunk of his



car and goes home, then takes a nap! He awakes to find the car gone. He sleeps all night, and when the car turns up the next morning but he can't find the keys, he...goes to school (leaving the vehicle and, presumably, Luz

María's decomposing corpse behind). Back home, he makes a few stabs at forcing the trunk with a screwdriver, then gives up. (Why he wanted to look in the trunk is unclear, as far as he knows, the body is still in there) Finding the keys, he discovers the lock is now jammed, and this is when Luz María turns up, alive. (It's possible he would have driven the car away to some remote location and tried to open the trunk to remove the corpse, but this logical step is certainly not a given, considering his lackadaisical attitude about it over the previous two days.)

Director Aupart makes two vague stabs at Hitchcockian suspense--the scene with the park police and the moment when Esteban starts to open the trunk--but otherwise doesn't even try to develop any tension, or show Antonio as anything more than mildly (and sporadically) concerned about the body. To maintain the twist ending, no details of Esteban's adventures with the unconscious Luz María could be shown, of course, but had Aupart included a shot in which Esteban was seen opening the trunk and reacting, this could have been followed by his drunken wanderings and the audience could have assumed he was trying to forget whatever he'd seen. But to simply have Antonio (in voiceover) make a passing comment about his uncle's presumed actions is not a satisfactory resolution.

The screenplay is unfocused and much of the Esteban footage is extraneous. There's no real sense of urgency or fear: "yes, there's a dead girl in my automobile trunk, I'll get around to it sooner or later." The twist ending is presented in a manner which feels illogical and is annoying. The flashback structure is reminiscent of *film noir*--as is the film's premise, for that matter--but the rest of the picture fails to capitalise on this in any way.

The performances vary, from satisfactory to stiff, but the awkward dialogue makes them seem worse than they actually are. Franco Rapuano isn't horrible, but his character is largely unsympathetic to the viewer, even though he's an innocent protagonist faced with a horrible

accident. Rosita Bouchot, whose character simply vanishes (she isn't seen in the final wedding-reception sequence, although almost everyone else from the movie is), is adequate as Antonio's mother. José Martí has some very good bits--the job interview sequence is quite amusing--but hams it up in his later "drunken" scenes.

The production values are decent. Aupart includes a few more of the "character shot against a black background" shots that he used in *El Padre Juan*, this time featuring Luz María as a sort of "ghost," asking Antonio "Why did you leave me!" A fair amount of dialogue seems to have been post-dubbed, and (as noted above), the music score includes 3 songs which are shoe-horned into the picture's "lyrical interludes" as background music.

Final note: Antonio, Luz María and the others attend the real-life Escuela Preparatoria de Coyoacán (now known as Escuela Nacional Preparatoria No. 6). Although *prepas* are roughly equivalent to "high school" in the USA, the number of years required to obtain a degree (*bachillerato*) vary--however, students usually graduate by age 18, and yet Antonio is specifically identified as being 19 years old. This is unimportant but annoyed me slightly nonetheless.



Chantaje al desnudo "Doble jaque a la dama"

[Naked Blackmail: Double Checked Lady] (Cine

Film, S.A.-

Cin. RA,

©1989) Exec

Prod; Ramón

Aupart; Assoc

Prod; Jaime

Arcos; Dir-

Scr: Marcelino

Aupart; Story:

Xavier Mexía,

Marcelino

Aupart, José

Martín B.;

Photo:

Germán

Salcedo;

Music

Arr/Cond:

Ryszard Siwy;

Prod Mgr:

Xavier Mexía;

Asst Dir:

Dowglas [sic]

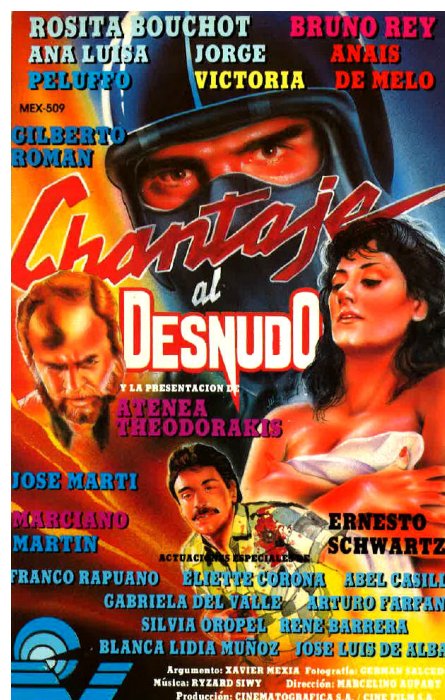
Sandoval; Film Ed: Ramón Aupart, Saúl Aucis [Saul

Aupart Cisneros], Enrique Hernández R.; Makeup: Lupe

Peruyero; Lighting: Rafael Sánchez; Sound Co-ord: René

Cerón; Direct Sound: Héctor Ochoa; Union: STPC

Cast: Rosita Bouchot (*Berta de Arguedo*), Bruno Rey (*jeweler*), Ana Luisa Pelufo [sic] (*Berta's mother*), Jorge Victoria (*Gómez, private detective*), Anaís de Melo (*Dr. Barrena's client*), Gilberto Román (*Omar Izaga*), Ernesto Schwartz (*Dr. Ornof Barrena*), José Martí (*Ramón Arguedo*), Atenea Theodorakis (*Mahú*), Franco Rapuano



(Guillermo García), Eliete Corona, Abel Casillas (Narciso, *bodyguard*), Gabriela del Valle (Sra. Godínez), Arturo Farfán (*second bodyguard*), Silvia Oropel, Marciano Martín (Lic. Godínez), René Barrera (*blackmailer*), Lupita Peruyero (*card player*), José Luis de Alba, Margot Gabilondo, Guillermo Inclán (*chauffeur sent by Godínez*), Susana Contreras, Ernesto de Alba, Blanca Lidia Muñoz (*Soledad, maid*), María Dolores Oliva, Raúl Aupart, Humberto Olivares, Xavier Trimayer, Luis Chagar, Fabiola, Rafael Sánchez, Yendi Nayeli Gómez, Eduardo Aupart, Víctor Rocha, Nora Olvera, Mariana Hidalgo, Hilda Denedet, Lourdes Zapata, Elizabeth Ortiz, Odet Suri, Erasema Camu, Xavier Mexía

Notes: after appearing in both of Marcelino Aupart's previous movies (*El Padre Juan* and *Ardor de juventud*),



Rosita Bouchot was promoted to the glamorous starring role in *Chantaje al desnudo*, with several nude or semi-nude scenes and many costume changes (she also sings on the

soundtrack!). Although it's possible the script was written specifically with Bouchot in mind, the role seems more appropriate for a younger actress (Bouchot had just turned 40 when the film was shot, but is very well-preserved), and in fact Bouchot's character says at one point that she's "26 years old," but this is not a serious problem.

In addition to members of the usual stock company (Bouchot, Martí, Marciano Martín, Abel Casillas, Lupita Peruyero, Jorge Victoria, Franco Rapuano, Ernesto Schwartz, Gilberto Román had all been in previous Aupart movies), Cine Film collaborated with Cin. RA and brought in several "name" performers (Ana Luisa Peluffo, Bruno Rey) for marketing purposes, although neither actor contributes significantly to the plot (and frequent dubber Rey is bereft of his magnificent voice, with his dialogue ironically post-dubbed by someone else).

Berta is the second wife of powerful politician Ramón Arguedo, who is considerably older than she is. Pressured



into the marriage by her mother for financial reasons, Berta is also having an affair with Omar, a Mexico City businessman. A blackmail gang intercepts one of Berta's love letters to Omar, and demands money to keep

silent. Berta knows her husband, more than 20 years

before, murdered his first wife Malú when he discovered she had a lover (shown in flashback); short of cash, she takes her jewelry to the capital to pay off the blackmailers.

Omar meets Berta and they try to work out a plan, but the blackmailer has a walkie talkie delivered to Berta's hotel room and informs her she is under surveillance. Omar makes arrangements for copies of Berta's jewelry to be made, and visits a private detective, but eventually loses his nerve and flees the country. The private detective tries to cut himself in on the deal and is murdered by the blackmailer's motorcycle-riding henchmen.

Berta begins to develop a romantic fixation on the blackmailer, although she's only heard his voice. She buys a small reproduction

of Michaelangelo's "David" and fantasizes that it is the criminal mastermind, who comes to life (in a dream sequence) and makes love to her. Ramón arrives in the city and,



convinced Berta is having a nervous breakdown, makes an appointment with psychiatrist Dr. Barrena. Barrena calls himself a "sexologist" and tells Berta she'll have to remain in Mexico City for a two-week "treatment." She confesses the whole plot to him (meanwhile, turning over her jewels to the blackmailer by dropping them off the balcony of her hotel room).

Barrena tells Ramón the whole story and Ramón confronts Berta ("What about professional secrets!" she cries). She pleads for her life and Ramón tells her not to be silly: he has always regretted killing Malú and in fact knew Berta was having an affair with Omar. It was OK with him: it kept Berta busy! "Too bad he wasn't man

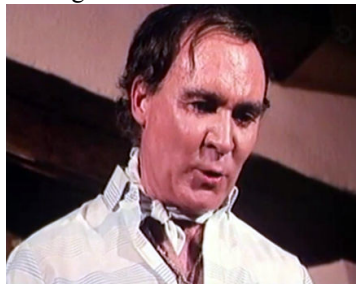


enough to stick around," Ramón says, since now Berta will have to find another discreet lover. As the film ends, Berta fantasizes that her new lover will be the blackmailer, unaware he is

actually old, bald, and has a horribly scarred face (his granddaughters are his accomplices).

Chantaje al desnudo is reasonably entertaining; Aupart likes to include a lot of rather unusual (even grotesque) characters in cameo bits, sometimes with no bearing on the plot (one suspects he wanted to give his actor friends a bit of work), but these red herrings are generally interesting and don't seriously harm the overall pace. The acting is quite variable: some performers turn in fairly naturalistic performances, while others hilariously over-act or deliver their clumsy dialogue in a stilted manner.

The production values are adequate--virtually everything was shot on location--but *Chantaje al desnudo* looks a bit slicker than Aupart's previous two films, for whatever reason. The plot is relatively straightforward, although this doesn't eliminate various wacky and illogical



bits. In the aforementioned dream sequence, Berta makes love to a nude man (whose face is never seen clearly) but--at the very end of the scene--another man appears, clad in black feathers and wearing a bird

headdress?! Also, Berta's obsession with the murder of her husband's first wife (whose portrait still hangs in their bedroom) is curious--she keeps a copy of a decades-old newspaper carrying the story, and fantasizes about the events of that fatal night. Ramón, for his part, blurts out his guilt literally three seconds after falling asleep one night, so I suppose her fears are justified, especially since she's doing the same thing (having an affair) that resulted in her predecessor's death! There's also a hilarious scene in which Berta shows a camera shop clerk--a perfect stranger--a nude photograph of herself and Omar (well, he's wearing tiny blue bikini underwear) and asks if the young woman can identify what sort of camera took the picture!

I have to give Aupart credit for a clever bit that I

initially dismissed as a piece of clumsy filmmaking: when incompetent, blackmailing detective Gómez is assaulted by two motorcycle-riding assassins, he pulls his pistol, fires once (and misses),

then throws the gun away! He only had one bullet? However, I recalled that in an earlier scene, Omar went to Gómez for advice and the detective was fumbling around with his gun (Omar in fact had to help him with it), which thus foreshadows the technical problems he would have later. So, one point for the screenwriters. The twist ending is also effective--Ramón isn't going to murder his second wife for her infidelity (which he knew about all along), and the blackmailer is



shown to be about as far removed from Berta's fantasy lover as possible.

Despite some illogical and awkward bits, *Chantaje al desnudo* actually does a pretty decent job of painting a portrait of Berta: married to an older man for money, she seeks love and sex elsewhere (she even describes herself as over-sexed, and constantly flirts with and evaluates the men she meets as potential lovers). Her gradual infatuation with the blackmailer is depicted in an interesting and believable manner: she fears her husband (and dislikes him because he ignores her) and her lover Omar has deserted her (fleeing to the airport and taking "the first flight to anywhere!"), while in contrast the blackmailer's courteous but forceful manner impresses her.

At times unintentionally amusing, but overall still entertaining.

[An earlier version of this review appeared in *The Mexican Film Bulletin* Vol. 14 No.8]



Buscando al asesino* [Searching for the Killer]

(Cuadros y Sprockets-Cin. RA, ©1991) *Assoc Prod*: Jaime Arcos, José Martí, Sergio Pérez Grovas; *Dir*: Sergio Pérez Grovas; *Adapt*: Xavier Mejía, José Martí, Sergio Pérez Grovas; *Story*: Xavier Mejía, Marcelino Aupart, José Martí; *Photo*: Xavier García, Moy Frutos; *Music*: Jesús Contreras Ramírez; *Prod Mgr*: María Zapiain; *Asst Dir*: Pablo Herrero; *Film Ed*: Jesús Paredes; *Cam Asst*: Héctor Ortega; *Union*: STPC

*aka *Un asesino anda suelto* [A Killer is Loose] and *El impotente* [The Impotent One]

Cast: Bruno Rey (*Lic. Andrés Landín*), La Princesa Lea (*Vanessa Loring de Soto*), Rosita Bouchot (*Delia Ruiz de Soto*), Nelson Velázquez (*Manuel*), Sergio Arau (*Dario*), José Martí (*Leopoldo Soto*), Alicia Camps (*Consuelo de Soto*), Octavio Acosta (*Felipe***), Athenea Theodorakis (*Athenea, Landín's sec'y*), Alicia del Lago (*Sra. Landín*), Helena Novi, Luis Guine, Pablo Herrero, Marciano Martí[n] (*Peter*), Roy de la Serna (*emcee*), Abel Casillas (*detective*), Lupita Perrullero (*irate woman*), José Luis de Alba, Yendi Nayeli (*Delia's daughter*), Mister Chivo (*band*)

**on the end credits, Octavio Acosta is billed twice, as "Felipe" and "partner" (the same character)

Notes: Marcelino Aupart directed three independent feature films (all of which received theatrical release, no mean feat) in about three years, but then (for reasons unknown) made no more. *Buscando al asesino* is credited to Sergio Pérez Grovas, whose directorial credits are slim (he's had more success as television producer), and yet many names from Aupart's trio of movies appear in the credits: José Martí (as actor, associate producer, and writer), Jaime Arcos (associate producer), Xavier Mejía (or Mexía, writer), Aupart himself (writer), and performers Rosita Bouchot, Athenea Theodorakis, Marciano Martín, Abel Casillas, and Lupita Peruyero.

The story behind the production of this film is unknown. Did Aupart begin it and was then replaced by Pérez Grovas? Did he simply collaborate on the script and then wash his hands of the project? The presence of two

credited cinematographers suggests either two units or that filming was done at two separate times (Fernando Uribe is also cited in at least one source), and in fact some scenes look distinctly different than others. "The "Diccionario del Cine Mexicano 1970-2000" indicates the film was shot in January 1991 (which may or may not be accurate--the entry for the film also lists Charly Valentino, Ernesto Schwartz, Pilar Pellicer and Anaís de Melo in the cast, and none of these people appear in the film itself). Pérez Grovas is also credited with the direction of *El muerto*, allegedly shot in February 1991 with some of the same cast (Rey, Martí, Princesa Lea, Roy de la Serna, Sergio Arau, Elena Novi, Pablo Herrero), but this second film has so far proven impossible to locate.

Nonetheless, *Buscando al asesino* bears enough of Marcelino Aupart's stamp to justify its inclusion in this retrospective of his feature films, although it's certainly cross-pollinated with Pérez Grovas and Cinematográfica RA (notably the presence of Cin. RA stalwart Nelson Velázquez in the cast, and the absence of Aupart's regular technical crew).

The film begins with a long (over 13 minutes) pre-credits sequence consisting of 3 (or maybe 4) flashbacks. "25 November 1969"--Leopoldo Soto and his wife Delia are having dinner with family friend Felipe. Felipe urges Leopoldo to give up his desire to be an artist and accept Felipe's offer of a real job so he can care for Delia as she deserves. Leopoldo reluctantly agrees. "27 January 1972"--Leopoldo argues with Consuelo in a nightclub (= two tables, with cutaways to the band "Mr. Chivo" performing somewhere else), and another man intervenes. "7 October 1980"--Leopoldo hands over a package, gets a briefcase in return, then rushes to meet Vanessa in a park. He gives her the briefcase and promises to meet her in Los

Angeles. [The next scene does not appear to be set in "1980," but it doesn't have a different time-stamp.] Vanessa performs her nightclub act (the "club" is about ten feet



wide) in which she bathes in a giant champagne glass. Leopoldo watches. Later, Vanessa's manager Peter threatens Leopoldo and warns him not to use Vanessa in his "dirty business."

As the credits begin, a man (whose face is hidden) makes a phone call and orders his henchman to "give (Leopoldo) a good scare" that night. [This begins the contemporary part of the film, although the title "22 January 1988" doesn't appear onscreen until after Leopoldo's death.] Leopoldo comes home and spots a note reading "You Are Going to Die Today" in his liquor cabinet. Taking a pistol and a bottle of pills (earlier, we

saw him taking pills after suffering chest pains and shortness of breath), he waits in the dark. An assassin (whose face is never seen) enters the house, lights a cigarette, puts on rubber gloves, and goes upstairs to confront Leopoldo.

Leopoldo's gun is empty, and he suffers a heart attack when the intruder points a pistol at him. The killer leaves, collecting his cigarette butt and the note, but leaving behind a single wooden match on the stairs (shown in closeup to make sure we don't miss it).

The next morning, Lic. Andrés Landín investigates Leopoldo's death, assisted by his secretary Darío and detective Manuel. All signs point to a heart attack, but



Landín spots the discarded match and saves it; he also discovers the names of three women, all named "Soto." Delia Soto lives in Guadalajara, Consuelo in Mexicali, and Vanessa in the United

States. Consuelo, reached by telephone, isn't too broken up about her husband's death (in fact, she's in bed with another man right then!); she agrees to come to Mexico City to identify the body. Delia tells Landín that Leopoldo disappeared 10 years before, right before the birth of their youngest child; she will also come to the capital. Finally, Landín calls Vanessa Loring de Soto, a "famous" actress in Hollywood. She and her manager Peter leave immediately for Mexico. Meanwhile, Delia informs Felipe of Leopoldo's death, and Felipe later calls detective Manuel to ask him to facilitate the identification of the corpse.



Delia arrives first, and has two flashbacks to her earlier life with Leopoldo. [The post-credits flashbacks are all shot in soft-focus, unlike the pre-credits scenes.] In the first, he buys her a new house but she complains about his desire to be a great painter "like Van Gogh and Monet." In the second flashback, she tries to seduce him before he leaves on a business trip, but he's in a hurry. As Leopoldo departs, Felipe asks him to deliver a briefcase to a friend of

his, and says this can be the start of a more lucrative business for them.

Consuelo shows up and coldly identifies the body. In flashback, she agrees to marry Leopoldo because he lent her father some money. Vanessa then appears, and her flashback picks up from the earlier one at the beginning of the film--Leopoldo comes back to her dressing room after her act and proposes marriage to her. [Interestingly enough, there are some Aupartian inserts of men (shot against black backgrounds, of course) lustfully watching her perform.] Vanessa tries to seduce Landín but he says "I'm not for sale, *señora*," and she stomps out. Landín then informs Consuelo and Delia that Leopoldo's life insurance was payable to Vanessa.

Vanessa is joined by Landín's assistant Darío, who has



been fawning over her since her arrival. They depart in her truck, driven by Peter (Darío and Vanessa make out in the back seat). Landín and Manuel pursue. Peter jumps out of the truck with

a gun, but Darío shoots him to death to protect Landín. Vanessa mortally wounds Darío then commits suicide. Darío confesses he was the one who accidentally scared Leopoldo to death, at Felipe's orders. Landín tells Manuel to arrest Felipe (although if Manuel is also in Felipe's employ, I'm not sure how much good this will do).

Although *Buscando al asesino* is fairly straightforward, narratively, that doesn't mean it's entirely logical. It's never openly stated Leopoldo is transporting drugs (although it's obvious), but this apparently begins at the time of Delia's second flashback (prior to then, he's working for Felipe in "publicity"). However, Delia's first post-credits flashback shows Leopoldo giving Delia a house, something it's unlikely he could have afforded since--as is made clear by the dialogue--he's still hoping to become a great artist. It's also unclear why Felipe ordered Darío and Manuel to throw a scare into Leopoldo--was he skimming drug money? Although Felipe seems to have been romantically interested in Delia as early as "1969," since Leopoldo had "abandoned" Delia 10 years before his death, he wasn't exactly in Felipe's way in that regard.

While we're on the subject of flashbacks, the pre-credits Consuelo ("1972") flashback is incomprehensible and pointless. At least in her post-credits flashback Consuelo's reason for marrying Leopoldo is explained, but the nasty scene in the nightclub means nothing.

Several minor logistical points are annoying. Landín picks up the discarded match and has it checked for fingerprints. On a wooden match?! Miraculously, forensics notifies him they did find fingerprints on it!

Presumably teeny tiny fingerprints... However, nothing ever comes of this. Also, Vanessa is in Los Angeles, Delia in Guadalajara, and Consuelo in Mexicali when they are notified of Leopoldo's death. Mexicali is over 1300 miles from the capital, Guadalajara almost 300 miles, and Los Angeles is more than 1500 miles away. And yet all three of the "widows" arrive in Mexico City within a few hours of Landín's phone calls. I suppose it's literally possible if they immediately took a flight, but it seems highly unlikely (I can believe Delia made it, but not Consuelo or Vanessa).

"Vanessa Loring" is first introduced in the "1980" pre-credits flashback as an exotic dancer, but by 1988 she has apparently progressed to the status of Hollywood movie and television star (at least, some people in the film remark about how famous she is, while others don't recognise her name at all). Darío makes a reference to her being in *Intrépidos punks*, an interesting meta-reference.

There is also a fascinating bit of technical trickery (sort of): when Landín telephones Delia to tell her of Leopoldo's death, she answers the phone in her kitchen.

Rather than spring for the expense of an optical split-screen (or just cut back and forth between the two



characters), Pérez Grovas puts Landín in the right foreground and Delia in the left background--they're clearly in the same room--and shoots it as if it were a split-screen!

The ending of the film also makes no sense. Why does Darío abandon his post and join Vanessa? Why does Vanessa welcome Darío into her vehicle and immediately start making out with him? If Manuel and Darío are working for Felipe, why does Peter leap out of the truck with a pistol in his hand? What are he and Vanessa fleeing from? Do they think their involvement in Leopoldo's drug trafficking has been exposed? Why does Darío protect Landín and shoot Peter? Why does Vanessa commit suicide?



The script tries to provide some character development--Landín's secretary keeps reminding him to take his pills, Darío repeatedly makes smart-alec remarks and Landín rebukes him--but these mostly fall flat.

There are also two completely extraneous sequences--a

man and his daughter report a rape, two bickering women are brought into the *delegación*--which (as in a number of Aupart's previous films)--seem to be there simply to take up time and give the actors some exposure. The performances in *Buscando al asesino* are all over the map. It's nice to see Bruno Rey in a leading role, and he's fine as the meticulous investigator. Rosita Bouchot and Nelson Velázquez are also professionally efficient, but Sergio Arau tries too hard as the wise-cracking young assistant and Princesa Lea is somewhat worse than usual. Marciano Martín--billed here as "Marciano Martí"--may actually be related to José Martí (he was in some pictures without Martí, such as *Dos hermanos murieron*, but doesn't seem to have had a very prominent acting career); he's adequate at times, not so good

at others. Octavio Acosta is decent as the oily Felipe.

José Martí's footage is spread throughout the film. Some care was spent making him appear younger in the flashbacks (his hair is darker and he has



long sideburns); after his death, everyone remarks about how "wasted" and "worn out" he looks now. The character of Leopoldo is never really developed: he's forced to give up his desire to become an artist in order to support his first wife, then abandons her and compels Consuelo to marry him even though she doesn't love him, and then somehow hooks up with Vanessa (whom he apparently loves enough to make her the beneficiary of his life insurance, although they don't even live in the same country and he mostly uses her as a drug courier). "His three wives are to blame," Delia says. "We humiliated him and made him what he was." Still, Martí is a solid trouper and his performance is decent.

The production values of *Buscando al asesino* are satisfactory. The film looks a bit slicker than even *Chantaje al desnudo*, although most of the footage was shot on location (the pre-credits scenes look like they were shot on the tiniest of soundstages, though). With the exception of Princesa Lea's "champagne bubble bath" (which was apparently part of her real stage act, since it can be seen in other films as well), there is no nudity in the movie (though Rosita Bouchot appears in lingerie several times).

Moderately entertaining albeit mostly as a curiosity piece.



MEXICAN CINEMA IN 2015

According to IMCINE, 2015 was a good and bad year for the Mexican film industry. In terms of film production, 140 films were made (including live-action feature films,

animated films, and documentaries), breaking what is claimed to be a historic record set in 1958 (135 films).

79 Mexican features were released theatrically in 2015, with just over 17 million total spectators. This represented a decline from 2014, and means that only 5.7 percent of the Mexican box-office was due to the *cine nacional* (compared to 9.5 percent last year).

The most popular Mexican movie of the year at the box-office was *Un gallo con muchos huevos*, the third animated "Huevos" movie, which was seen by more than 4 million Mexicans. The U.S.-Mexican coproduction *Little Boy* (aka *El gran pequeño*)—directed by Mexican Alejandro Monteverde but with a largely U.S. cast—was the



second most popular Mexican film (3.4 million tickets sold). The romantic comedy *A la mala*, starring Eugenio Derbez's daughter Aislinn Derbez, finished third with 2.8 million spectators. This was followed by another animated sequel, *Don Gato: el inicio de la pandilla* (a "Top Cat" feature, 1.4 million tickets), the Gloria Trevi biopic *Gloria* (750,000), found-footage horror movie *Archivo 253* (703,000), and the animated *Guardianes de Oz* (known as *Wicked Flying Monkeys* in English), with an attendance of just over 500,000.

In comparison, the box-office champion in Mexico in 2015 was *Minions* (16.1 million spectators), although the 2015 totals for the new *Star Wars* movie have not been completed. Other popular films were *Avengers: The Age of Ultron*, the latest *Fast & Furious* series entry, *Jurassic World*, *Hotel Transylvania 2*, the last *Hunger Games* movie, and *San Andreas*.



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