

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
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FOREVER YOURS / SIEMPRE TUYA (1952)

Emilio Fernández

Genre: Romantic Drama

Link to the film: <https://youtu.be/EANtlIOC7RM>

OVERVIEW

With cinematography by Gabriel Figueroa, the harsh realities of life for poor tenant farmers and ranch workers left destitute and without many options by drought are explored with extreme realism. The saga of Ramon Garcia and his wife, Soledad, illustrates not only the economic plight, but also the unfulfilled promises of the Mexican Revolution which were supposed to provide economic access for the poor, and to liberate the country from the stranglehold the ruling elites still had, despite independence from Spain in the 19th century, revolution in the 20th, and ongoing conflict such as the War of the Cristeros. Like most of Emilio Fernandez's films, *Forever Yours* exposes the classism and elitism against the poor, often uneducated rural working class. In doing so, it embraces Mexican culture, traditions, and heritage while attacking a corrupting influence from the United States. Further reinforced is a notion of the "proper" role of women of modesty, obedience to an often harsh male head of household (paterfamilias). A few critics have noted that this film is actually two in one. The first part is deeply naturalistic and provides a grippingly realistic view of the harsh conditions in Mexico during widespread drought and extreme social inequality. The second half is a "winning the lottery" dream come true as a rustic, untrained, uneducated rural Mexican rises to fame and fortune as a singer on a popular radio show due to his talent and for being in the right place at the right time. After hitting rock bottom and being literally destitute on the streets, Ramon wins a talent competition and rockets to wealth and public adulation. Sadly, he naively falls into the clutches of a designing blonde American, resulting in his being shot multiple times by her jealous lover. In spite of this, there is a happy albeit rather unbelievable ending, as Soledad and Ramon return to the same still-parched ranch where they lived before in Zacatecas.

PRIMARY CHARACTERS

Ramón García:	Tenant farmer from Zacatecas who goes to Mexico City for work
Soledad García:	Ramón's devoted wife
Mirta:	Successful Texan star, seductress

SYNOPSIS

Ramon Garcia and his wife, Soledad, are forced to leave their small home on a farm in Zacatecas after the owner decides to sell it after years of drought resulting in crop failures and the death of his herds of cattle. Despite Ramon's command that she stay behind and live with relatives, Soledad disobeys and follows him, begging to accompany him to find a new life in Mexico City. Filled with optimism, Soledad and Ramon arrive in Mexico City, only to be abused and insulted by the city dwellers, who mock their rural origins and lack of education or resources. They are forced to live in filth, cold, and vermin as they struggle to find work. At one point, they even find themselves in jail after the building they are helping construct on someone else's private property is razed to the ground. Soledad finds work as a live-in maid and Ramon as a horse handler on a race horse farm. After losing his job there after insulting the American owner, Ramon decides to try his luck at a live-audience radio singing competition. Ramon gives a stunning performance of Mexico Lindo and is offered a spot on a weekly radio show singing classic Mexican songs. His career skyrockets and he and Soledad move into a luxurious apartment. Soledad has misgivings, which turn out to have been well-founded as Ramon embarks in an affair with his costar, Mirta, a stunning and predatory American blonde, Mirta insists to Soledad that Ramon now belongs to

her, and that she and Ramon will marry. In claiming Ramon, Mirta completely disregards the territorial claims of her jealous boyfriend, the owner of the radio station. He shoots Ramon multiple times. Abandoned by all except the faithful Soledad, Ramon barely survives. After a lengthy convalescence, Ramon and Soledad return to Zacatecas, to the very same ranch and small home they left. It is worth noting that nothing has changed. The drought does not to have lifted.

PLOT

Drought in Zacatecas: After three years of drought, the “hacendado” (owner) of the ranch tells Ramon Garcia and his wife, Soledad, that he is giving up and selling the ranch. He urges Ramon and Soledad to leave before all of them turn into what they see around them – cattle bones.



Migration: The first option for the ranchers leaving the ranch was to go to “el otro lado” or “the other side,” to become “braceros” or temporary workers in the United States. However, there are no more slots left for the braceros, and it is told that anyone who tries to sneak across the border will be shot. So, they decide to go to Mexico City to try their luck at getting work. Ramon orders Soledad to stay behind and live with her relatives. Soledad begs him to take her with him, but he refuses. Finally, the second time that she ran after the group, caught up with them, and begged to accompany them, Ramon grudgingly accepts her company.



Mexico City: No Work and Out of Money Mexico City is a tremendous disappointment. They cannot find employment immediately, and the few places to stay are filthy and dangerous. Famished and literally fainting from lack of nourishment, Ramon and Soledad order food at a restaurant where someone mentioned they could get a full meal, with dessert, for just a few centavos. It was not true, but they did not realize it until they had ordered and run up a large bill which they could not pay. The owner, a loud, abusive woman, called the police. They finally negotiated to work for several weeks to pay off the bill and to eat a meager meal a day. The experience was difficult for Ramon, who felt emasculated for not being able to provide for his wife, and humiliating for Soledad, who cherished her virtue, loyalty, and reputation above all.



The Poor Unite to Build, but It Is Torn Down: After living in conditions of almost unspeakable filth and danger, where rats and other vermin scurried about, and Ramon and Soledad slept under a makeshift blanket that was actually the shroud of a man killed in the knife fight (and it still had bloodstains), Ramon meets a group of activists who are angry about high rents and private land in the city that could be used for affordable housing. They assemble together to build a building using their own labor that can be used as a collective space where everyone can live with decent hygiene. The owners of the property learn that squatters are building on their land and they get an order to have it bulldozed to the ground. They are arrested, but then, sympathizers who are part of a left-leaning Communist movement arrange to have them released.



Ramón and Soledad Find Work: Now without any place to sleep at night and no income, Ramon and Soledad take whatever work they can find. Soledad finds work as a live-in maid and Ramon finds his experience as a rancher comes in handy as he gets a job handling horses at a race horse stable and training center. Their lives have some stability, even though they must live apart from each other. Things were looking up until one Saturday night, invited by the boss to go out to drink with his coworkers, Ramon is fired after he, in a drunken state (no different from his companions), criticizes the American owner of the race horses for being racist towards blacks.



Ramón Wins a Contest and Becomes Famous: After losing his job, and being back on the hard streets of Mexico City again, it seems that Ramon has no hope whatsoever of survival. However, he happens to learn of a talent show on the radio that features unknown singers who perform for a raucous audience in the hopes of winning money and also a possibility of appearing on a radio show. Ramon, who has a rich baritone and professional delivery, sings “Mexico Lindo” with a full mariachi orchestra which absolutely delights the audience and the owner of the radio station, who signs him up for a weekly program for a princely 100 pesos a week. There, he sings popular “rancheras” which prove to be extremely popular.



Radio Program Success and Proud, Supportive Wife: Ramon Garcia is a huge success with his performances of Mexican classic songs, which delight a Mexico City audience of people like Ramon and Soledad, refugees and internally displaced hard-working but discriminated against people who fled the countryside because of civil war (Guerra de los Cristeros), criminality (gangs), drought, and general lack of economic access. Soledad, who was able to quit her job and to live with Ramon again, is a proud, supportive wife. As Ramon’s fortunes continue to rise, Soledad begins to worry that Ramon is becoming too materialistic, and their luxurious apartment makes her uneasy.



Falling under the Spell of a Designing Woman: Not all goes well in paradise, however, and the roses still have thorns. One of the costars of the radio program is a stunning blonde from Texas who speaks Spanish as well as English. She becomes obsessed with Ramon to the point that she wants to possess him, and rip him away from Soledad. Ramon is weak and starts spending time with Mirta, leading Mirta to announce to Soledad, "He's mine!" Instead of rejecting him, Soledad explains that she does not blame Ramon for falling under Mirta's spell, but she will not leave him because she knows that some day he will return to his senses. Finally, after much badgering from Mirta, Ramon hesitantly approaches Soledad to say to her that he needed to ask her "for my freedom."



Regret, and Shooting: Wracked with guilt and regret, Ramon confesses to Mirta that he regrets having gotten involved with her. In the meantime, the owner of the radio station, who is also Mirta's insanely jealous lover, can stand no more and he shoots Ramon. Mirta uses the shooting to return to the radio station owner, leaving Ramon bleeding on the floor. In the hospital, no one visits but the loyal Soledad, who waits through a 7-hour surgery, and then helps nurse him through his long, slow recovery.



Back to Zacatecas: With his wounds healed enough to walk, Ramon and Soledad rekindle their love and their commitment to always being together. Instead of seeking a contract with a show on a different radio program, Ramon and Soledad decide to return to their roots, no matter how drought-scourged they may be, and to live in the same small one-room ranchhouse they left, but where they were happy together.



THEMES

Social inequality: As in many of Emilio Fernandez's films, Mexican society is exposed to be one where social inequality exists in all locations, despite the promises of independence, revolution, and rebellion against the Catholic Church and wealthy landowners. For the working class, education and access to ownership of property is but a distant dream, and they are have almost no real self-determination. In the case of Soledad and Ramon, when the rains came regularly, they could count on subsistence-level existence as workers on a ranch. However, once the crops failed and the owner decided to stop farming, they had nothing. One survival tactic during the 1940s was to apply for a work permit in the United States and to go there to be a "bracero," or laborer or migrant farm worker, thus earning enough money to send home, keeping family members alive. However, the spaces were limited. Another option was to go to the nation's capital, Mexico City, and hope to find work. However, the conditions there were abysmal, making starvation in Zacatecas seem preferable. As Ramon puts it, "you don't know what you had until you've lost it." In addition to a lack of capital, Ramon and Soledad face prejudice to the point of scorn for being rural "rubes" or "hicks" (pueblerinos). The only time having a rural background was helpful was in caring for horses, and then, later, in the knowledge of traditional Mexican songs. Even when Ramon earns money, his social status does not notably improve, and he is still considered a naïve and uneducated outsider, to be exploited and preyed upon.

Devotion: Soledad exhibits all the qualities that are considered desirable in a good Mexican woman. Above all, she is devoted to her husband, even overlooking the fact that he wanted her to stay behind as he left her to seek work that he could not hold down a job in Mexico City, and that entered into an affair with another woman once he was successful. In each case, Soledad found excuses for him, and in the last situation, she blamed the other woman, rather than Ramon's own choices for his atrocious behavior. After he is shot by Mirta's jealous boyfriend, Ramon recovers, thanks to the fact that Soledad stays solidly by his side.

Machismo: The success and survival of a family is thought to be the sole responsibility of the male, even though women are the strength and stable elements behind the scenes. The idea of a strong, male "paterfamilias" head of household is an example of macho culture, as is the concept of defending one's honor, and demonstrating one's virility through risk-taking. Machismo shows up in many places in *Forever Yours*, first in the insistence in going alone to work, then in brashly getting into a fight with the boss while

drunk and obsessed with the issue of racism, and finally in making a great show of wealth and status by having a luxurious apartment and a blonde “trophy girlfriend.” Ramon’s machismo clashed with the radio station owner’s machismo; the latter’s topping Ramon’s as he shoots him with a pistol for daring to encroach on his territory (his girlfriend).

Ambition: Ramon is ambitious in a land where opportunities are limited if not non-existent for the working class. Those who achieve wealth often do so by means of criminal enterprises, or, in the case of Ramon, through luck and musical talent. In this aspect, the film is not very credible, since Ramon’s voice is clearly a classically trained baritone, and he obviously has a great deal of experience and practice working with orchestras, which means he would need to have had years of musical training. Anyone who has been to rural fiestas during saint days and has heard the bands that play in the street knows that they are raucous and out of tune, and not the highly skilled and trained mariachis that were in the radio station. For Ramon to have experience with them was not really possible, and he himself said it was “a dream” to be able to sing rancheras with a mariachi orchestra. The fact he succeeded was a way for the audience to vicariously satisfy their own dreams and ambitions.

Women’s Roles: To an audience of today, seeing Soledad’s self-abnegating behavior is not only demeaning but inexplicable. She chases after Ramon even after he tells her to go back home, and she does it not just once, but twice. As everyone wears light-colored clothing, she garbs herself in a long black dress, and long, draping headscarf, which is clearly not only uncomfortable but potentially dangerous in the hot desert. She stays loyal to Ramon even though he gets into drunken brawls and can’t keep his employment. Not only that, with this new-found wealth after his stroke of luck and win in the talent show and his success as a radio personality who sings classic Mexican folk songs, Soledad has the resources at her disposal to dress in the same glamorous way that Mirta dresses. However, Soledad continues to wear her hair in braids around her head, and modest dresses, draping herself with a long shawl (rebozo). She looks frumpy from a modern perspective, but perhaps from a contemporary Mexican perspective, her costuming would have communicated integrity, modesty, and commitment to traditional Mexican values.

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Ramón García: A poor tenant farmer in the Mexico state of Zacatecas who loses everything when the owner of the farm / ranch is no longer able to continue farming and ranching due to a long, severe drought.

Persistent: Despite the parched soil and the lack of rain, Ramon is willing to continue farming. However, that is not an option as the owner decides to sell. Ramon then travels to Mexico City where he and Soledad realize that to find enough to eat each day is a full-fledged fight for survival. When Soledad faints from hunger and dehydration, Ramon does whatever he can to find food and work. They work for an abusive woman who pays them in food to clean and do the lowest kind of work in her restaurant. Later, after setbacks, Ramon persists and finally finds work on a horse ranch.

Talented: Ramon is a talented singer, and the many songs that are featured in the film showcase his gorgeously modulated and baritone. He has an extensive repertoire of traditional Mexican songs, which appeal to the Mexican populace, especially those who seek to preserve the cultural legacy. The populism is not only a feature of a kind of nationalistic message, but also an affirmation of traditional values which are quickly being eroded by the influx of American music and film. In addition to supporting the long, proud tradition of Mexican mariachis, traditional Mexican music, and the values, Ramon’s talent is also used to indirectly (and rather self-reflexively) promote Mexican cinema as culturally separate from others, such as Hollywood. Emilio Fernandez, who acted in Hollywood but directed in Mexico, worked in both worlds, but deeply supported Mexican cinema. The showcase for Ramon is also a showcase for Mexico in general.

Naïve: When Ramon goes to Mexico City, he naively assumes that he’ll be able to get work, and that opportunities will abound simply because he’s willing to do hard work. Unfortunately, he’s one of thousands in the same situation and so there is tremendous competition for the low-level jobs he is

qualified for. Desperate, Ramon is an easy mark for left-leaning Communist organizers who decide to build communal living quarters on private property to strip the wealthy of their seemingly unused land. He is not aware that it is against the law and is rounded up and put in jail, one of many pawns whose efforts only made their plight worse. Once he has had luck with singing and has resources, he assumes that his costar, the seductive blonde, Mirta, loves him for himself, and is not scheming to get her hands on his newfound wealth and success.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

1. Review the scenes at the beginning of the film that show the environmental conditions. What does Gabriel Figueroa's photography do to communicate a message of desperation and the ultimate impotence of working class Mexicans against circumstances such as drought, economic decline, or political turmoil?
2. Describe the women's clothing in the film. What does Soledad wear at the beginning, in the middle when she is working as a maid, and then after Ramon's success? What does the woman restaurant owner wear? What does Mirta wear? What does each person's outfit communicate about their status, their attitudes, and beliefs vis a vis Mexican culture?
3. Describe three scenes in which Ramon demonstrates a certain naïve optimism about the future, despite his lack of education, higher-level skills, and resources. What does he say while he is still on the ranch about his prospects? What does he express while he is working on the horse farm? What does he say to Soledad when he shows her their new, modern and very spacious Mexico City apartment?
4. Explain how *Forever Yours* expresses a belief that Mexican culture is, despite hardships and the need to go to the "otro lado" (the United States) or Mexico City, for work and to survive, superior to imports such as American music, fashion, and ways of life.