

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE  
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## **STOLEN PARADISE / Paraíso Robado (1951)**

Julio Bracho (Mexico)

Drama – Spanish

Location: <https://youtu.be/5zhsYGJ27t4>

### OVERVIEW

*Auteur:* Julio Bracho explored the extremes of psychological states of being in his films. In *The Absent*, the ghostly presence of his cruel former wife inhabits the house they lived in together, and in *Twilight*, an esteemed doctor finds he has a monstrous and uncontrollable inner self that takes over when triggered by a mocking, tormenting, tempting former lover, now married to a good friend. In *Stolen Paradise*, the woman who has a deep psychological impact on the protagonist, Marcela, is herself suffering from an extreme psychological state. She has lost her memory due to emotional trauma, and thus lives in a condition of having a “lost” self, or at least a consciousness that is partially plunged into the darkness of forgetting, of oblivion. While the script can be effective at describing this condition, Bracho worked closely with cinematography / photography Alex Phillips to create visual and auditory metaphors for the condition. To depict a condition of being that is characterized by amnesia, Bracho uses reflective surfaces in which the images are blurred, fragmented, or even deceiving. For describing the slow process of regaining one’s self, and becoming whole once again, Bracho uses the concept of the voice recording to bring a loved one back in one’s conscious awareness. The subject of the recording is important – in *Stolen Paradise*, it is a fragment of a poem about a secret, unnamed, unacknowledged love that, when introduced to isolated, suffering one, a unity is possible; bounteous psychological fruitfulness even within the spartan spaces of the mind suffering from amnesia.

*The Film:* The film is a unique blend of interior and exterior spaces, each with both reflective surfaces and deep spaces of darkness, which create a visual metaphor for what is occurring in the minds of both Dr. de la Vega and also in Marcela, and her condition of amnesia. For Dr. de la Vega, his inner ethical dilemma and also his sense of his own identity are framed around his face as he looks at Marcela or thinks of her. In the pensiveness of his face, we see an identity on hold, or at least in thrall to her. Marcela’s torment of amnesia is illustrated in interior shots where the chiaroscuro photography captures the notion of a mind with dark lakes of oblivion. The reflective surfaces – the mirrors, the puddles, the windows – either show her only partially, or are completely blurred, which also forms a powerful visual metaphor for identity that is emergent, or submerging – and it suggests to the viewer that such may be possible in one’s on mind / experience.

*Background:* As a psychological drama, *Stolen Paradise* explores some of the same territory as Bracho’s other films. For example, there is an ethical dilemma that involves whether or not he should provide medical treatment to a person he has an emotional relationship with. The concept of “stolen paradise” refers to his nurse assistant Lucia’s scathing commentary that by carrying on an intimate relationship with a former student suffering from amnesia who does not remember him as her teacher, but who has confused him for her fiancé, he is, in essence, stealing someone else’s paradise. However, in contrast with Bracho’s other psychological dramas, there are no monsters here. Instead, there is a great deal of tenderness, and much to Dr. de la Vega’s relief, Marcela loves him even more after she regains her memory, and acknowledges that she felt love for him even though she could not express it when he was her professor.

## CINEMATIC NARRATION

In his films, director Julio Bracho challenges the ambiguity that is characteristic of Mexican cinema – that is, that the principal characters do not have a fixed identity within themselves, but are instead composites of reminiscence – sometimes of nostalgia, other times of desire, but always shaped and formed by a tremendous sense of longing. In *Stolen Paradise*, Julio Bracho deepens his quest to propel the viewer in the same destabilized space as the protagonists and thus have them experience the loss of identity within a vortex of emotional shock and longing, and the self-questioning when one perceives that a long-forbidden or out-of-reach love could suddenly be in reach, although to solidify the conquest would mean going into an ethical No Man's Land. When esteemed medical doctor and professor Carlos de la Vega learns that the young student he secretly yearns for has lost her memory in the shock of seeing her uncle murdered, and, then when she mistakes him for her fiancé, Dr. de la Vega is thrust into emotional and ethical turmoil. On the one hand, he wishes to protect her, but on the other hand, he is deeply in love with her, despite the vast age difference and the opprobrium of his colleagues. The story is reinforced by dramatic cinematography of Alex Phillips which utilizes influences from German Expressionism and film noir to visually represent identity formed and shaped by reminiscence and shadowy constructions of longing. *Stolen Paradise* augments his series of psychological dramas and launches the career of Irasema Dilián, who would be nominated for an Ariel award for best actor.

## CHARACTERS

<i>Doctor Carlos de la Vega</i>	Doctor of psychiatry and professor at the university
<i>Marcela</i>	Student who loses her memory after a shock
<i>Lucía</i>	Nurse and assistant to Dr. de la Vega
<i>Don Gustavo</i>	Marcela's uncle
<i>Julio Solorzano</i>	Marcela's scheming boyfriend
<i>Abuela de Marcela</i>	Marcela's grandmother

## SUMMARY

Dr. Carlos de la Vega, a renowned doctor who specializes in psychiatric disorders and who teaches at a medical university in Mexico City, struggles with his conscience and with desire as he falls deeply in love with Marcela, his young former student, who is now his patient. She has suffered a deep psychological trauma which has left her with amnesia, and worse, she has confused Dr. de la Vega with her fiancé and cannot leave his side without feelings of anxiety. The truth starts to take shape as it becomes clear that Marcela is in mortal danger; someone wants her dead, and yet she has no idea why. She almost falls into a trap devised by her duplicitous, scheming former fiancé before hearing the recording of a poem by Mexican poet Xavier Villaurutia, made by Dr. de la Vega when they were together. The poem clears her amnesia and she recalls that her fiancé murdered her uncle, and that they want to kill her in order to keep the money that they stole. She also becomes aware that her regard for Dr. de la Vega is not a case of mistaken identity, but that she indeed loves him for himself, and he is the love of her life. Since Marcela is now of sound mind, Dr. de la Vega may have a completely clear conscience and accept and repay her love.

## The Story



The story of "Stolen Paradise" begins in Rinconcito, Mexico.



The film opens in a remote town between Mexico City and the coastal town of Veracruz, as a train makes a daily stop. It is a typical small Mexican town, with quiet, tree-lined streets and a center plaza. It is the hometown of the protagonist, Marcela.



Every time she hears the train approaching, she runs to meet it at the station. It slows, stops, and she runs to each window, wiping it clear with her hand to see who might be inside. The image shows a vague, shadowy presence on the other side of the glass, impossible to see who it is, but also obscured by her own reflection. This is a powerful visual metaphor of identity that is indeterminate, partially consisting of what might be projected from her own mind, and partly consisting of the reflection of her own face.



Marcela's face expresses her inner condition. She is suffering from partial amnesia, and a deep anxiety that causes her to involuntarily repeat behaviors every time she is triggered – the train's horns sounding the approach to the station impel her into a Pavlovian conditioned response, but it is one that has no positive outcome or denouement – only repeated quest for answers, where answers cannot possibly be revealed in the reflections of the train windows.



Just as he is leaving for the clinic, Dr. Carlos de la Vega hears a radio newscast that is describing a very strange incident in the train station of the town of Rinconada. A young woman goes to the station every day and runs up to the windows where she searches for someone she never finds. Dr. de la Vega speaks to his nurse, Lucia, and cancels his appointments for the day. He does not realize it, but she is deeply in love with him, but will not and cannot reveal her feelings.



Seated on the train that will take him to the town Marcela is living with her grandmother, Dr. de la Vega assumes a pensive look. Behind him, in the window, the landscape reflects his inner state, as he passes through impenetrable mountain passes, with drifts of snow and chill air. He does not yet know that the subject of the newscast is Marcela, but he has a presentiment that it could be.



Through a series of flashbacks, we learn that Marcela was a student in Dr. de la Vega's criminal psychology class at the university. She is the blonde, seated toward the front of the class, attentively listening to his lecture.



After class, Dr. de la Vega mentions that he will drop by her home to pay a visit to her and her uncle. She is holding her lecture notes and looking into his eyes in an expression of deep regard. In this point of view shot, we see his shoulder, arm, and back, with the overall impact of being privy to a private encounter.



At home, Marcela has changed out of her school togs and is dressed for dinner with a pretty dress and pearl necklace. She is showing Dr. de la Vega a new voice recording machine that her uncle gave her as a present. She wants to try it out, and is showing Dr. Vega that it's just a matter of pushing the "record" button.



But, what to record? Marcela asks Dr. de la Vega to record something. He does not know what to record, but then selects a book of poetry by Xavier Villaurutia, a popular Mexican poet whose poems of love were very well known. He records a brief poem that deals with a secret love that cannot reveal itself. He himself has decided to reveal his love to Marcela, but is interrupted by the arrival of her uncle.

Somber Madrigal

Fortunate is our love, which nothing and no one names  
Forgotten prisoner, without light, without witness  
Secret love which turns the shadow into honey  
The barren cell into a bountiful fig

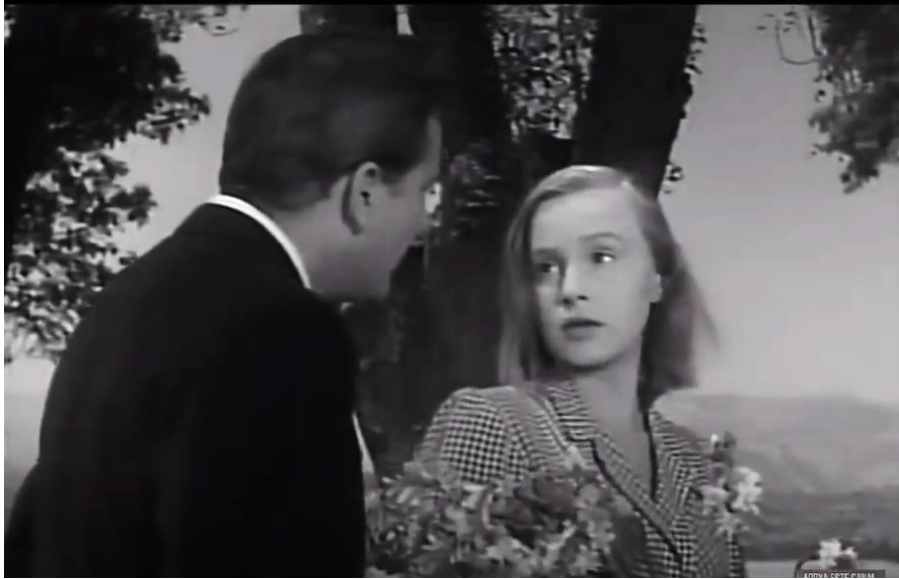


Back in the present, Dr. de la Vega looks out his window from his train compartment. He is stunned to see Marcela wiping the glass and attempting to see inside. Her face is blank and uncomprehending.



Dr. de la Vega is warmly received by Marcela's grandmother, who describes the suffering of young Marcela, who suffered a tremendous shock upon the death of her uncle, Gustavo, and the presumed death of her fiancé, Julio. Since their murder on the train, she has been fixated on trains and unable to do anything but repeat her actions.





Dr. de la Vega is troubled to find that Marcela does not recognize him, and even worse, she is afraid of him. They are in the local cemetery and she is bringing flowers to place on her uncle's grave. There is a gravestone with her fiance's name on it, but it is not totally clear that he is dead.



An investigator from the government approaches Dr. de la Vega to inform him that there are issues surrounding the death of Gustavo and it appears that a file containing valuable securities has gone missing. There is suspicion that he was murdered for the securities.



Holding flowers, Marcela looks into a pool of water where she sees herself in the reflection as a bride dressed for the wedding. Transfixed, she stares at the reflection for some minutes.



Looking up, Marcela sees Dr. de la Vega and she races to him, embracing him. She is convinced he is her fiancé who has come back to marry her. It does not matter that he looks nothing at all like the callow Julio (who was her conniving fiancé, and who murdered her uncle).



Lucia is concerned that Dr. de la Vega is taking things too far to try to help Marcela. She is also concerned that Marcela's condition of amnesia and mistaken identity is something that Dr. de la Vega is taking advantage of.



In one of the few two-shots that show both faces in full light, the true feelings of Lucia are revealed, as well as the rather obdurate attitude of Dr. de la Vega who, even though ethically conflicted, cannot seem to pull away from the young woman he loves, nor can he force her to see the truth.



Marcela is terrified of being left alone and begs Dr. de la Vega to stay with her always. He is deeply in love with her and wants to protect her. The intensity is heightened by Dr. de la Vega's awareness that the relationship is an illusion.



Unable to be without him, Marcela walks through the cold night to visit Dr. de la Vega. He snaps at her and tells her to leave. He has not confessed his love to her in words, and is tormented by conscience. She runs out into the cold rain.



Pursuing her and bringing her back where he can dry her cold, wet feet and legs, and also warm her by a fire, Dr. de la Vega's hands on Marcela's cold, wet legs and feet visually reinforce the notion of loving care as well as the energy of youth, with her slim ankles and arched feet.



The jealous and condemnatory Lucia tells one of the government investigators where Dr. de la Vega is caring for Marcela.



Gripped by a cold chill, Marcela feels a shadow pass over her as she prepares to marry Dr. de la Vega. In the back, the priest speaks to Dr. de la Vega and exhorts him to wait to marry, even though Marcela deeply wants to marry. The fact that she is not of sound mind is something that should nullify the marriage. They should wait until she regains her memory.



Still fragile, Marcela begs Dr. de la Vega not to leave her. He insists that she go to the clinic for help. He would like for her to regain her memory, and then he will gamble to see if she still loves him once she is restored to her right mind.



Back at the office, Dr. de la Vega's mentor accuses him of grave ethical misconduct and tells him he no longer had privileges at the hospital.



Marcela still needs help, though, and Dr. de la Vega makes sure that she is able to obtain the care she so desperately needs. She does not want to go, and weeps as she sees Dr. de la Vega leave. This close-up features her tears, and the lighting gives her face a luminous quality.



Finally released from the hospital, Marcela returns to her home, which she does not recognize. She does find that she knows Italian (her mother was Italian), and she explores the living room of the home she shared with her uncle Gustavo, whose murder shocked her and caused her to lose her memory.



This camera angle shows Marcela within the context of her home, exploring items that she is starting to recognize.





Julio, who has reappeared, is planning to marry her so that he can have access to her uncle's property as well as the securities he has stolen. He watches her anxiously.



The tape recorder is the same place as when her uncle first gave it to her and where it was when Dr. de la Vega read verses from a poem from Xavier Villaurutia.

Somber Madrigal

Fortunate is our love, which nothing and no one names  
Forgotten prisoner, without light, without witness  
Secret love which turns the shadow into honey  
The barren cell into a burgeoning fig tree



Marcela regains her memory upon hearing Dr. de la Vega's voice reading the poem, and she suddenly remembers that it was Julio who murdered her uncle.



Julio pulls a gun, intending to dispatch Marcela into the same netherworld as her uncle rather than have her reveal his sordid secret.



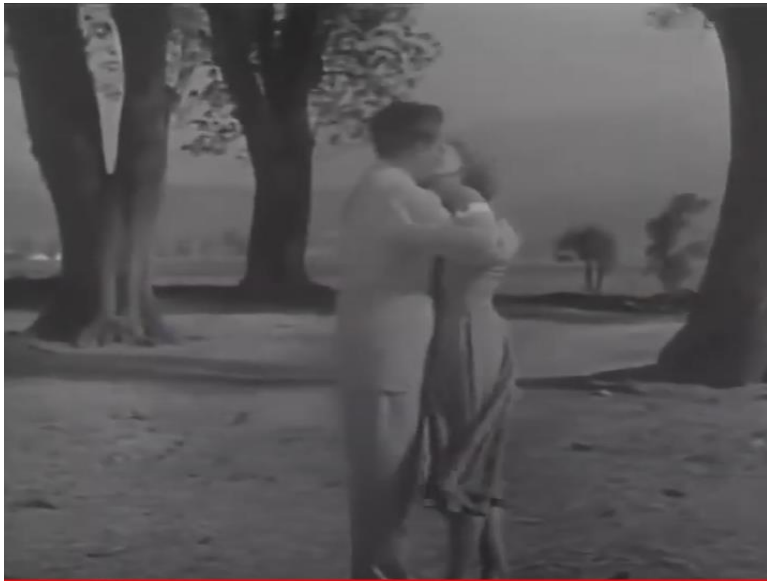
Marcela is saved by the government investigator who followed Julio, intent on preventing any mischief and also intervening in order to arrest him. He succeeds, and the fiancé who had feigned death is now truly defunct.



Marcela returns to Rinconcito, where she stands in the same copse of trees at the side of a cultivated field where she first saw Dr. de la Vega. She is alone, and very pensive upon hearing the sound of the train.



Unlike before, Marcela does not run to the train station to look inside to find the person who never comes (her uncle Gustavo, or his killer). However, she does look toward the field. As she does so, she sees Dr. de la Vega walking toward her. She runs to him and they embrace.



After a long embrace, Dr. de la Vega looks deeply into Marcela's eyes. Marcela looks at him and asks, "Do you still doubt that I love you?" Dr. de la Vega smiles and asks, "Since when?" he asks. She responds, "Since forever."

## THEMES

### JUSTICE

**Crime.** Julio Solorzano, the duplicitous and scheming boyfriend of Marcela, is well aware of her vulnerability, given that her parents are dead, and that she lives in her uncle Gustavo's home. Gustavo is wealthy and influential and is carrying securities with him as he travels on the train from Mexico City to Veracruz. On that train – the very line that stops in Rinconcito, In a scene in the grandmother's house, Marcela's grandmother explains to Dr. de la Vega that Marcela went to the train station to meet her fiancé in order to get married. When the train stopped, the tragedy happened almost in front of her eyes – her uncle was brutally murdered. At that moment, she lost her senses and was never the same Marcela, explained the grandmother. Dr. de la Vega inquires if it might be some sort of "idee fixe" or delusion that is causing her to return every time a train pulls into the station and then to return to her grandmother's house, downtrodden with deep disappointment. The cruelty of it is that the fiancé is letting her believe that he was killed or at least kidnapped, when in reality, he was the murderer.

### PSYCHOLOGY

**Identity.** The minute that Marcela loses her memory, she loses her identity. Her identity becomes one defined by compulsion and repetition: she runs to the train station each time she hears the train whistle / horn indicating that the daily run from Mexico City to Veracruz, which makes a stop in Rinconcito. As the train slows and makes its stop, she runs to the windows and rubs her hand across each one to see if can find the person she is seeking. She does not, and her heart is broken. She turns and retraces her steps back to her grandmother's home, never quite understanding who she is looking for, or what she has lost. Although she is moving and active, she might as well be in a state of catatonia. The shock of the death of her uncle has caused her mind to protect itself, which means that she is not able to remember how her fiancé murdered her uncle and how he sequestered the valuable portfolio of securities for himself. When it is clear that she will inherit the bulk of what remains of her uncle's estate, he plots his return, along with marriage, so that he will actually have access to everything. She is defenseless because she has lost the vast proportion of her identity, and will be unable to perceive anything beyond her intensified need to connect to someone who will protect her. So, when Dr. de la Vega appeared, and she mistook him for her fiancé, the fact that he was motivated to protect her and shield her from harm, resonated on a profound level. She connected to him, even though she never knew who she was, and neither did she remember that she loved him when he was her professor. This identity peristalsis would be pretty unbearable except for the fact that they can chip away at the limitations through actions that legitimately demonstrate tenderness and authentic concern. For example, when Marcela appears at Dr. de la Vega's bungalow in the cold, pouring rain, he ejects her. He does not want to, but his ethical conflicts preclude his taking advantage of her. She does not understand his point, but she accedes and leaves. He instantly regrets his decision and pursues her – pulling her back to him, back to a warm, dry, place, and back to a place where he can address her needs, shore up her fragility, and offer his love and experience in life to help her heal and perhaps regain her memory. On a larger level, her identity has been abrogated by shock; and yet there is the hope of restoration by means of selfless love and a proffering of a safe place.

**Amnesia / Psychiatric Disorder:** In response to the severe emotional shock sustained by seeing a murder transpire in front of her eyes, Marcela loses a large portion of her memory. It is interesting that she does not seem to have forgotten her grandmother or the orientation of the house she lives in, but she has lost all memory of Mexico City, her university classes, and her professor. She has even forgotten the appearance of her fiancé, because it was possible for her to confuse Dr. de la Vega for her fiancé. What we realize later is that she has always held a deep and abiding love for Dr. de la Vega, and her heart knows who her true love is, even when her mind and her eyes deceive her. As a medical doctor specializing in psychiatry and psychology, he believes that the best pathway to recovery is to provide a supportive, calm, and loving environment where she will not suffer additional shocks. Eventually, that does prove to be the approach that works, although it must be said that she did sustain another shock when her scheming and dishonest fiancé attempted to kill her, and then was shot dead by the government investigator in front of her eyes.

## FLAWS

**Jealousy.** Lucia loves Dr. de la Vega. She is a loyal, competent nurse, but her underlying motives have nothing to do with her professional acumen, but instead are motivated by her passionate regard for the man she can never have. She is more or less satisfied with her role as long as he is unattached. She can delude herself and think that there is hope. However, when he shows interest in one of his students, and then, even worse, characterizes their relationship as that of brother and sister, she is crushed. She shows no signs that she thinks that she can successfully compete with the youthful coed adored by Dr. de la Vega. However, she can try to eliminate her rival. At the end of the day, Lucia is not what she purported herself to be. She is not the loyal companion, helpmeet, nurse. Instead, she actively sabotages Dr. de la Vega's attempts to provide medical and psychological support for Marcela, as well as any hope of love. There is a moment in which Marcela perceives Luisa's toxic jealousy. Instead of responding directly to Luisa's insults, Lucia simply confirms her feelings and also her willingness to commit without reservation.

## RELATIONSHIP

**Love.** Dr. Carlos de la Vega is an esteemed doctor and also a professor of criminal psychology. He is a deeply emotional person, but no one has the slightest idea of his subterranean selves, given that he masks it all with his professional demeanor in the classroom and his consultancy. He is an impeccably groomed, impeccably demeanored professional who, despite surface appearance, is driven by his own existential insecurity – his very beingness is at best conditional, and since he bases his value on how people perceive his superficial presentation of himself, there is no affirmation of a deeper, more emotional core being. So, when he feels a connection with his young, angelic student, Marcela, there is no way at all that he can let her know without destroying all that he has worked for. And yet, his feelings are genuine, and he would truly like to make her his wife. He has access to her outside the classroom because her uncle, Gustavo, is a good friend of Dr. de la Vega. So, he is able to legitimately say that he will drop by her home after class / work. What happens, however, is utterly unexpected and fateful. When he arrives, Marcela is playing around with a voice recorder her uncle has just given her and which fascinates her because she treasures the notion of being able to capture the sound of loved-ones' voices. However, she has never used it, and Dr. de la Vega's arrival presents the perfect opportunity to try it out. She asks him to say something ... he does not want to be remembered as something ersatz, so he offers to read a snippet of a poem from a collection by Xavier Villaurutia, a highly esteemed Mexican poet. It turns out to be a beautiful poem that encapsulates the dynamic of what he feels for her:

Somber Madrigal

Fortunate is our love, which nothing and no one names  
Forgotten prisoner, without light, without witness  
Secret love which turns the shadow into honey  
A barren cell into a bountiful fig tree.

At this point the love seems one-sided although she has already given many indications that she also holds a secret passion. She, however, is held hostage by the coercive force of Julio, who claims her troth based on his supposed close relation to her uncle Gustavo. Dr. Carlos de la Vega is likewise held hostage by his role as professor and staff doctor in the university and the hospital. At least 30 years separate them, which is not mentioned often, but it is an omnipresent issue.

## PAST

**Memory.** Marcela lost her memory in conjunction with the terrific emotional shock she sustained when her uncle Gustavo was murdered. She had no recollection of any of her time in class, with Dr. de la Vega. She sought refuge from her condition and was driven by unknown psychological forces to repeat actions such as going to the train station at Rinconcito. It was as though they would bring her back to mental wholeness. Unfortunately, that strategy was ineffectual. Certain visual or auditory triggers did work to restore aspects of her memory. For example, when she looked into a pool of water and saw herself as a bride, she remembered that she had a fiancé and that they were engaged to be married. She did not actually know who that was, though, and so she assumed it was Dr. de la Vega. In another example, her

memory was restored when the tape with the recording of Dr. de la Vega's voice reading the poem by Xavier Villaurutia, which appears in one of the sections above.

What both memory triggers have in common is the idea that love can and does exist, and that one's existential solitude and fragmentary state can be healed by means of connection, but such a connection is not one of words, but of trust, belief, and a shared reminiscence, which is to say a shared memory of longing for the ideal and to be made whole.

**Appearance vs. Reality.** After the psychological trauma of witnessing the murder, Marcela suffers from amnesia, and no longer has any recall of her time at the university. When Dr. de la Vega arrives in Rinconcito to help untangle the puzzle of what is happening, he follows Marcela home. She perceives that he is following her and is fearful. Surprised, he asks her if she recognizes him. When she does not respond, he tells her he was her professor. It is clear she has no recall. Strangely, in one moment after visiting the church where she was to be married and carrying flowers that Dr. de la Vega gave her, she runs when hearing the train approach. In her hurry, she trips and almost falls into a puddle of water, in which her face and torso are clearly reflected. She sees a distortion of the image, and imagines herself seeing herself preparing for her wedding, holding flowers and wearing a pretty dress. Marcela sees herself as a bride. She looks up and sees Dr. de la Vega approach her. She mistakes him for her fiancé, runs and embraces him with deep joy, vowing to be inseparable. Dr. de la Vega realizes that the reality is that her mind is inventing an extended projection, and she sees him as her fiancé and not her former professor.

## CHARACTER ANALYSIS

### **DR. CARLOS DE LA VEGA:**

Dr. de la Vega is a medical doctor as well as a professor at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Mexico, a prestigious institution in Mexico.

*Idealistic.* Although he appears to be a rather aloof person who is motivated by pragmatism and professionalism, Dr. de la Vega is in reality, a passionate idealist, who wants more than anything to alleviate suffering in those who have been overlooked, neglected, or psychologically abused. He sees all of that in the orphan Marcela, who is living with her uncle Gustavo, but who has been ensnared by the evil designed of the greedy to the point of murder Julio. Without knowing the details, Dr. de la Vega senses the presence of injustice, and he is willing to put himself in jeopardy in order to

*Ethical.* Although Dr. de la Vega's mentor and his nurse, Lucia, accuse him of being unethical for going along with Marcela's attachment to him and are convinced that he is taking advantage of the fact that she is suffering from emotional shock and amnesia, the truth is that Marcela's love for Dr. de la Vega is genuine, even if she does not have any memory of time before the murder of her uncle Gustavo. Dr. de la Vega is tormented by guilt and is conflicted. In the scene in the church when Marcela is eager to be married, Dr. de la Vega adheres to the priest's guidance and postpones the marriage ceremony. Later, even after stripped of his privileges at the hospital, he makes sure that she receives treatment to help her regain her memory.

*Persistent.* From the moment he heard about the mysterious woman in Rinconcito and the daily Mexico City-Veracruz train, Dr. de la Vega was driven to solve the mystery. Not only did the behavior interest him because of his profession as a psychiatrist, he was also struck by the premonition that it might have been Marcela. Once confirmed, he leaves no stone unturned to try to find out what happened to make her lose her memory. He is convinced her mind is blocking a key bit of evidence that is too dangerous for her to have conscious knowledge of. Scenes throughout the film start putting the puzzle pieces together – the government investigators who follow Marcela, the mysterious reappearance of Julio, her misinterpretation of reflections (seeing herself in a wedding dress in the reflection of a puddle), and the strange aversion that Marcela has to certain places (the church, for example). He persists and is finally rewarded when Marcela spontaneously regains her memory when Julio presses the "play" button on the tape recorder.

*Compassionate.* Dr. de la Vega's behavior is motivated by compassion. He is captivated by her glowing youth and beauty when she is his student, but when it is clear that she is suffering from deep

anxiety and an obsessive-compulsive disorder as well as amnesia, he feels compassion. He expresses his concern for Marcela's well-being when he speaks to her grandmother, and also when he describes her situation to his nurse assistant, Lucia. While Marcela's grandmother is moved and approves, Lucia feels jealousy and does what she can to undermine their relationship.

### **MARCELA:**

Marcela lives in the home of her uncle Gustavo, her mother and father having passed away. Marcela is often bathed in a shining, glowing light which gives her a unique radiance. The camera angles and lighting further emphasize her youth and innocence, and later, her inner torment, by means of extreme chiaroscuro when she is in closed spaces, such as in her home, in Dr. de la Vega's office, and in the house where they are living.

*Sensitive.* Above all, Marcela is extremely sensitive. This aspect of her personality makes her easily manipulated by her fiancé, Julio, who pressures her into marrying in order to achieve his nefarious intentions of stealing her uncle's securities, and also to have control of her wealth. Marcela has a nervous collapse when her uncle is murdered, and when she is led to believe that her fiancé, Julio, was murdered as well.

*Idealistic.* When she is with Dr. de la Vega, she believes that they can live together forever without any practical interference from the outside world. While she is tormented by the lacunae in her memory and conscious awareness of her past, she thinks she and Dr. de la Vega will be happy together. The intensity of his passion and of hers flow from a sense that they are not complete unless they are with each other, and the joy they feel in each other's embrace is one of an almost neo-platonic and transcendent sense of unification.

*Fearful.* Marcela fears whatever it is that is driving her to run, as though she were in a trance or sleep-walking, to the train when she hears the horn and the whistle. She also fears the sense of solitude that arises from the fact that she has lost her sense of identity along with her memory, and that she is recreating her own identity from the depths of desire and longing, but also from fear – fear of abandonment and also fear of being incomplete. Her feelings are echoed and expressed in visual metaphors – the reflections in puddles, windows, and glass where she is only partially visible, and or blurred beyond recognition.

*Romantic concept of self.* The concept of Romanticism often is linked with the notion of a problematized self, either a divided self where there is a monster within that threatens to engulf the decent, civilized self, or a loss or fragmentation of self, and the horror of wandering around with only that partial self, and the dark lake of nothingness that coexists with one's conscious awareness. In the case of Marcela, when her uncle Gustavo was murdered, she experienced a shock that cause a part of her Self to be extinguished and go "dark" In the abyss of amnesia. The horror of this partial existence is truly unspeakable and can only be expressed visually, as she runs up and down the train, wiping windows, trying to see inside and also a reflection to find knowledge that will illuminate the dark spaces in her mind. It is exhausting and solitary work, but with Dr. de la Vega, with his knowledge of the torments of the mind, she is comforted and assured. His support may not restore her immediately, but at least it forestalls further losses of memory and/or psychological fragmentation.

### **QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION**

1. The university that is attached to the hospital and the clinic is the Universidad Autónoma de México (UNAM), the most prestigious school in Mexico. It is an honor to be a professor there, and the entrance standards are rigorous. What is Marcela's relationship to Dr. Carlos de la Vega when she is in school? Please describe her interactions with him before her uncle is killed. How do they contrast with those of Julio?
2. Describe the recording equipment in Marcela's home. Describe how and why it is considered to be new technology and how Marcela is moved that she can preserve a person's voice and replay them to have a proxy for their presence in the room. What is the poem that Dr. de la Vega reads? How does the recording capture his essence in ways and lodge itself into her memory in ways that a photo would not.



3. Describe the behavior of Julio. How does he behave toward Dr. de la Vega? How does he behave toward Marcela. Describe his ways of controlling and manipulating her. Why do you think he did so?
4. Please select three scenes that have reflective surfaces. What do they show, and how do they function as visual metaphors for the individuals sense of identity and self? Which ones are the most disturbing? Why?
5. Please explain how the exterior scenes – the copse of trees alongside a cultivated field in Rinconcito, the view of the train coming in to Rinconcito, the rainy, cold night when Marcela fled from the house after being rejected, and the exterior of Marcela's uncle's house (where she lives) express a sense of becoming and re-integration of a fractured or partially extinguished (through amnesia) self.