

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
Susan Smith Nash, Ph.D.

ANOTHER DAWN / Distinto Amanecer (1943)

Julio Bracho (Mexico)

Genre: Romance / Drama

Language: Spanish

Link to film: https://youtu.be/F9_hAcaxmQ

OVERVIEW

Auteur Julio Bracho was born in Durango, Mexico, in 1909. His initial passion was theatre and he was deeply influenced by the psychological theater of Italian playwright and short story writer, Luigi Pirandello. Over the course of his career, he directed more than 50 films and was nominated for Ariel, Cannes Film Festival and Venice Film Festival awards, but never won. His style has elements of both film noir and German Expressionism, which create an emotional intensity that is unique in film. An urban thriller, *Another Dawn* is considered one of his best films. Bracho flourished in the 1940s and 50s, but his controversial politically-charged work, *En la sombra del caudillo*, was banned in Mexico and had a negative impact on his career. Nevertheless, Bracho continued to work until his death in 1978.

Film Directed by Julio Bracho, "Distinto Amanecer" (A Different Dawn), was immediately hailed as one of the most significant films of Mexican cinema. Influenced by German and Mexican Expressionism, the film explores the secrets and hidden desires and lost dreams of people who live in the newly urbanizing Mexico City. With photography by the gifted and highly celebrated Gabriel Figueroa, the images themselves tell a story through light, shadow, labyrinthine streets, and shabby interior rooms which are alternately invaded by political henchmen or reanimated dreams and aspirations, all equally dangerous. Considered one of the most important Mexican films, *Un Distinto Amanecer* (Another Dawn) combines elements of Mexican expressionism and film noir to explore the human heart in a backdrop of broken dreams, grinding poverty, vulnerable youth, and the potential to escape to a world of fantasy, love and adventure. The film takes place in Mexico City in the 1940s, as it is in the grip of rapid urbanization, leaving it with a combination lights, mass transportation, faceless masses, and crime, inhabiting the same spaces as the romantic crumbling buildings of Mexico's colonial times and the art nouveau of the 19th century Porfiriato age. Dangerous pursuits, murder, and the clash between her old and current life take Julieta into a psychological dark night of the soul in the chiaroscuro world of Mexico City, with its electric and diesel modernity juxtaposed with the crumbling romantic hulks of a baroque past.

CHARACTERS:

Julieta – Wife of Ignacio and former classmate of Octavio

Octavio – Activist and former classmate of Julieta

Ignacio – Former public servant now unemployed; husband of Julieta

Juanito – Julieta's younger brother

Ruiz -- Henchman pursuing Octavio to obtain documents

SYNOPSIS

Octavio, a union official seeking to expose the murderers of his boss, is on the run and being pursued by shadowy government henchmen who want to silence him and destroy the documents he carries. He ducks into a dark movie theatre to hide, but is almost revealed when the woman next to him strikes a match to light her cigarette. He is shocked to find that he recognizes Julieta, a woman he once proposed to when they were students together in college. Julieta agrees to help him hide from his pursuers, and as she does so, the spark they once had is rekindled, at least for Octavio. Julieta, who has been

disappointed in life and love after marrying Ignacio, an unemployed government bureaucrat and underemployed writer, is dedicated to taking care of her younger brother, Juanito, and doing what is necessary to keep them from going hungry. Octavio is surprised at the shabby apartment and evident poverty, and he wants Julieta to leave with him. In the meantime, henchmen are closing in on Octavio, rooting him out of Julieta's apartment, following him to the club where Julieta works, and even pursuing Juanito. The film follows Octavio as he tries to elude his pursuers, and Julieta as she seeks to protect Julio and Ignacio, while wrestling with the temptation to leave her hard life behind and start one with love and dreams with Octavio. In the end, she chooses abiding love and duty over dreams and fantasy.



IN PURSUIT OF DOCUMENTS

In the opening scenes of the film, we can see that the newly urbanizing city of Mexico City is both the setting and a character. People and human activity are reduced to moving dots in a dark, shadowy city that robs people of their dreams and pushes them into anonymity.



Octavio is reading the newspaper that announces that Armando Ruelas, a union leader, instigating a nation-wide strike, was murdered at the post office. Octavio was Armando's right-hand man and is now attempting to bring documents with explosive contents to the press and the government. Octavio is in a bus, and he realizes that he is being followed by political henchmen.



Looking for a place to escape from the people following him, Octavio ducks into a movie theatre, where he buys a ticket and sits down, hoping to be lost in the crowd and thus shake his pursuers.



COINCIDENTAL ENCOUNTER WITH AN OLD FLAME

To his horror, the woman next to him strikes a match to light a cigarette. Octavio realizes that the matchlight could illuminate him sufficiently to be recognized by the henchmen who are following him. So, he blows out the match. His action annoys the woman and she asks him, "What gives you the right ...?" She is indignant. Octavio points to a "no smoking" sign, to which she counters with a gesture to a cigarette advertising poster.



The henchmen recognize Octavio, so he gets up to leave. He follows the woman into the ladies' room. She sees him in the mirror and asks him, rather shocked, what he is thinking. It is at that moment that they recognize each other – she is Julieta and they had been classmates together at the university, where both were activists. This scene is beautifully composed and shot by Gabriel Figueroa, and it gives the viewer a sense of having an exclusive view of a private scene. Octavio is framed in the mirror, which both highlights his presence and isolates him.



Octavio and Julieta leave the theatre together as Julieta offers to help hide Octavio. As they rush toward the door, Octavio enquires about her husband, Ignacio. Julieta is rather reticent. Octavio had loved Julieta, but she chose to marry Ignacio instead of her.



Octavio listens to Julieta as she describes what happened to her life after she chose to marry Ignacio. Although he started out well as a public servant, he lost his position with the change of administration, and so has been trying to eke out a living writing articles for the newspaper. Julieta's little brother, Juanito, is alone in the world, except for her, so he lives with both of them in very reduced circumstances. Hunger is always at the door.



HIDING OUT AT JULIETA'S HOME

Julieta introduces Octavio to little Juanito. Juanito is a studious, well-mannered boy who loves his sister.



Ignacio talks to Octavio and tells him about how difficult life has been. At that point, it is clear that Octavio still has feelings for Julieta, and that Ignacio is jealous and suspicious.



This is an example of the brilliant photography by Gabriel Figueroa. Julieta descends staircases in her apartment building, and as she does so, the lighting with chiaroscuro shadows and light intensify the emotional impact, and this becomes a visual metaphor for descending into a dark place.



Ruiz, with his dark glasses, is one of the henchmen who pursues Octavio, and later Julieta and Ignacio, in order to get his hands on the documents that will implicate politicians and expose corruption. The documents are so incendiary that it already led to the death of one union leader. Now, they're after Octavio.



Ruiz enters Julieta's apartment under the guise of being a compliance inspector for lights and utilities. He needs to go through and make sure that the lights and systems are within code. Julieta is suspicious, but is not sure what to do.



Ruiz meets Ignacio and explains he just needs to look around a bit. He is immediately suspicious of Ignacio's office, which has a large number of documents, which triggers Ruiz to think of the letter in the post office that contains incendiary information that will destroy politicians in power.



RETRIEVING THE DOCUMENTS

A haunting “noir” scene that shows a solitary Ignacio walking down a dark street in a rough, poverty-etched Mexico City street. The urban night seems to swallow him in darkness, just as has happened to him in life.



Ignacio approaches the post office where people are milling about, tending to their business. It is as alienating a place as other locations in the city, as it is clear that people are not interacting with each other, and the sole sources of illumination are far from their bodies and faces. It is a shadowy place and the photography lends a sense of secrets and loneliness.



Ignacio turns the key in the lock of the post office box. As he opens the door of the box, he sees a letter, which he realizes is the one that contains the document that will change Octavio's life.



In the bus, Ignacio realizes that he is being followed and that it would be better to have someone else deliver the contents. He sees a friend in the bus, and then asks him if he will deliver the letter to a specific address. The friend agrees.



KILLING IN SELF-DEFENSE

The henchmen who have been following Octavio and Ignacio break into the home of Julieta and Ignacio in order to obtain documents.



Instead of strong-arming his way to the documents, Ruiz finds himself overwhelmed by Julieta and Octavio, who tie his hands behind his back and place a cloth over his face so he will not shout for help.



Ruiz manages to untie his binds and to find a gun. He approaches Julieta and demands the documents. Although she has a gun in her hand and is pointing it at him, Ruiz stares her down and tells her she is much too weak to ever actually discharge the gun, but he, on the contrary, will if she does not give him what he wants. Julieta surprises Ruiz by shooting him.



Julieta holds Juanito as they both look at Ruiz, shot to death, now lying on the floor of the apartment. Julieta is dressed for work, and must leave despite Ruiz's body on the floor.



A quick cut to a close-up of the snub-nosed revolver in Julieta's hand, at the moment she fires it at Ruiz in self-defense as he brandished a gun at her and told her he would kill her if she did not cooperate.



In the "odds and ends" shop in the same building, Octavio tells Julieta not to worry – he will take care of disposing of Ruiz. He asks her to go about her normal routine, and adjures her likewise to make sure Juanito goes to bed.



Concerned, Julieta holds her head as she contemplates the steps forward. She prepares to go to work where she dances as a taxi dancer. Octavio is horrified by the fact that she works in a nightclub as a dance hall escort, with potential obligatory sex work, but she explains that she had no other way. Since losing his government / political sinecure, he has been unable to bring in much money, and they have been literally hungry.



LIFE'S EXIGENCIES

Julieta enters the cabaret where she works as a so-called “taxi dancer” which the term used to describe the women who come to the club to dance for hire. While not all taxi dancers were sex workers, the fact that a man would come to a club and then purchase tickets in order to dance with the dancers made the profession a bit unseemly. The clubs and cabarets with taxi dancers tended to be ones that featured provocative Caribbean music, and intimate dances such as samba, danzon, rumba, and tango.



Octavio follows Julieta to the cabaret, and she dances with him.



Julieta leaves the club saying she needs to run an urgent errand. It is a difficult task – she is on her way to visit the home of a woman with whom Ignacio is having an affair.



IGNACIO'S WEAKNESS

With Gabriel Figueroa's stunning photography, the confrontation with Ignacio's lover is painted in tones of dark, light, and shadow – and in the shadowy depths is the presence of the guilty Ignacio, shadows denoting secrets and shame. The woman stands defiant, taunting Julieta for being a failure as a wife and a woman.



As the woman with whom Ignacio is having an affair turns toward the curtain dividing the living from the bedroom in her dingy, small apartment, Ignacio peers out, confronting the scene.



Meanwhile, at the club, the thugs have followed Julieta and are ordering drinks as they wait for her return. They also engage the owner and ask him to provide the whereabouts of Julieta and Octavio.



The henchmen take a break from their pursuit of Julieta and stand in the men's lounge where they discuss the importance of obtaining the documents before they reach the newspaper or heads of state.



Ignacio and Octavio talk about Julieta and Ignacio reveals his deep sense of shame for being a failure as a husband and provider.



TEMPTING JULIETA WITH AN ESCAPE FANTASY

Octavio implores Julieta to leave with him and to put Ignacio in her past. Julieta is conflicted and tells Octavio that she cannot leave Juanito, to which Octavio responds that he lost Julieta once and he does not want to lose her again.



When Julieta starts to return home, dawn is already breaking and cleaning ladies already engaged in their matutinal work. This stunning photo from Gabriel Figueroa shows Juliet's progress as one going down a dark tunnel to an uncertain end.



Julieta's back still toward the camera, she makes her way through the haze of early morning, where pinpoints of light suggest the adumbration of her world; only a few main points are visible and all the rest are in the shadows and potentially unknowable.



MAKING THE DECISION TO LEAVE

The open gas flame of the primitive, antiquated cookstove in her shabby apartment is a focal point in this shot. The flame is so high it appears to be dangerous, and yet it is the only one that is available for cooking or boiling water. The open, unprotected flame is another visual metaphor in this film – this time it represents the omnipresent and unmanageable danger and risk that is close to burning Julieta (and all those near her). In this scene, Julieta has returned home to prepare Juanito's breakfast and to change clothes so she can leave and deliver the documents to Octavio at the train station.



Juanito washes his face after Julieta informs him that she will be leaving – for a few days, weeks, or months. Julieta has never left her little brother, and he is devastated by the news, and yet his pride does not allow him to let her know how saddened he is by it. He uses the water in the cloth to both cleanse his face and to wipe away his tears.



Now wearing street clothes and ready to leave, Julieta gives Juanito the documents to deliver to Octavio at the train station. She entrusts them to him because she knows that she is being watched and that the henchmen would be able to manhandle them from her. Juanito, dressed for school with his “mochila” (leather backpack) on his back, gets ready to leave.



Just as Juanito leaves for the station with the documents, henchmen and Rosa, the wife of the murdered Sr. Ruiz arrives to ask questions. Rosa insists that Julieta must know something about his disappearance because he told her he was investigating the gas usage at Julieta's home. He always wore dark glasses, she said, because he had to protect his eyesight. Ironically, in a later scene, Rosa eats one of the biscuits that Ruize had bought for her.



Unknowingly holding a biscuit that Sr. Ruiz purchased for her, Rosa lifts it up to take a bite.



JUANITO DELIVERS THE DOCUMENTS

While on the bus, his curiosity getting the best of him, little Juanito takes out the documents and examines the envelope containing them.



Octavio grips the door handles of the train car, waiting for Julieta (or Julieta's designate) to deliver the documents.



The walkway to the train station platform has a clock, which is repeated in many frames, emphasizing time – the departure of the train.



Ignacio rushes to the train station in hopes of meeting Julieta before the train departs. He has already typed a letter to her in which he releases her, but he still does not want to relinquish the original dream that brought them together.



The train platform is chaotic and dangerous; the henchmen who are trying to obtain the incendiary documents are becoming desperate and reckless. They will stop at nothing to intercept the documents and to obstruct Octavio as he attempts to expose how corrupt officials have undermined the unions (and the ordinary people).



Julieta races against the clock to make it to the train platform and board the train before it leaves. The cinematography positions her against a backdrop of a train that is already beginning to prepare to depart.



Ignacio smokes a cigarette while standing on the train platform and observing Julieta. Even though his letter to her gave her freedom to leave him, he is hoping that love will prove more powerful than dreams and fantasy, and that she will regain faith in him.



Julieta finds Octavio, who has already received the documents from Juanito. She shows him the letter that Octavio left her, and in which it expresses his profound love (and regret).



Octavio's response is to crush the paper in his hands and to fling it to the floor. This close-up of the gesture communicates a powerful emotion, and also demonstrates that Octavio has a dark, selfish side.



The train, clearly denoted as Mexican, is leaving the station, and it appears that Julieta is leaving with Octavio. The point of view shot emphasizes action and also a sense of loss and alienation.



In the gorgeous photography of Gabriel Figueroa, two people are silhouetted against a panorama which includes a dramatic skyscape of clouds, black billowing smoke (from coal engines), and a train moving away slowly.



A FINAL DECISION

Ignacio, Juanito, and Julieta stand at the edge of the train platform, after Julieta returns, choosing not to go with Octavio. Juanito observes that Julieta's eyes are tearing up, and he asks why she decided to say, to which she replies that she would have cried much more if she had gone away.



With love and duty prevailing, the little beleaguered family crosses the street together. There are no illusions of escape or instant release from grinding poverty, just a refocused dedication to each other, and to fighting to protect each other.



The final scene ends with a bit of light humor, as Julieta points to the clock and tells Juanito they need to hurry up so that he's not late to school again. It is not much of a joke, but it does lighten the mood and also show a common commitment to Juanito's success and well-being which helps restore family bonds.



THEMES:

SOCIETY The film explores the ways in which the quickly urbanizing Mexico affected the people who lived in it. First, there are the politicians who want to maintain control at any price, and extinguish any threat; hence the resistance to the rise of trade unions. The murder of Octavio's boss was an example of that. Second, is the impact of industrialization and urbanization on people as they are able to move about in mass transportation (buses and trains) in relatively anonymous fashion, not looking at each other. Julio Bracho's direction emphasizes the alienation and even dehumanization of life in the city, where even the people who pursue others with the intent to do them harm are largely faceless and nameless.

RELATIONSHIPS Perhaps the most poignant relationship is that between Julieta and little brother, Juanito. Juanito is 12 or 13 years of age, and lives with Julieta and Ignacio. The bonds are so profound that Ignacio considers Juanito his son, and exhorts Julieta to let him raise Juanito if she decides to run away with Octavio. There is no mention of parents, so it is clear that they have passed away. Julieta is significantly older than Juanito – he is at most 14 and she is at minimum 26 although she appears to be older (hard life). When Julieta tells Juanito that she must leave and be away for a space of time, the emotional intensity reaches a peak. He hides his tears. She has never left before, and has always been there for him. The uncertainty and abandonment pain are palpable. Ignacio's relationship with Julieta is likewise poignant, but for different reasons. Ignacio loves, even adores Julieta, but he feels so much existential shame for losing his prestigious governmental position and plunging the family into penury that he suffers from an insuperable existential shame. His ridiculous affair with a shallow, cruel woman shows the masochistic downside of existential shame. When Julieta responds to his letter and chooses to stay with him and Juanito rather than chasing a fantasy with Octavio, there is a deeply gratifying affirmation of duty and family love over the bewitching power of narcissism.

QUEST There are two competing quests in *A Different Dawn*. First is Octavio's quest for success and glory in overcoming the challenges of getting the truth about the murder to the press and to the people who will support the trade unions. Second, is Julieta's long-suppressed quest for an ideal life of comfort, prestige, social status in the nation's capital, Mexico City. The quests both reside in the passion and imagination of each; the problem is when the desired fantasy conflicts with reality, and a choice must be made to pursue a dream or to help family members in need, particularly those who are vulnerable and the young.

FLAWS The characters' weaknesses create a fascinating dialectic, and Julio Bracho perfectly reinforces them in the noir / expressionist tone of the film, with many visual metaphors. While Octavio

could be viewed as a courageous champion of trade unions, willing to risk his life to get information to the press, he unthinkingly involves all around him in his dangerous, risky game. With his single-minded pursuit of his own objective and his rather blind passion toward the things that make him feel emotion, he rather unwittingly inveigles the disappointed and downtrodden Julieta. Julieta's inability to keep from comparing her current situation from her youthful expectations trap her in a mindset that keeps her stuck in a state of disappointment. Ignacio's flaw is that of self-imposed paralysis. He is so humiliated by his loss of his job, he has lost the spark of drive and determination to charge ahead and be successful in his endeavors. His existential shame is what traps him, and even his deep and profound love of Julieta is tainted with shame as she has to work as a taxi dancer to bring in enough money to feed the family.

CHARACTERS ANALYSIS

Julieta

Self-sacrificing: At first, it does not seem as though Julieta is particularly self-sacrificing. She is depicted as watching a movie alone, and seeming to be interested in entertaining herself. However, as one gets to know her character, it is evident through her commitment to raising her little brother, Juanito, and to doing what she could to support her husband, Ignacio, who has been unable to find steady work since losing his politically appointed position two years before the movie takes place. Since that time, he has attempted to earn a living by writing articles, but the pay has been paltry and the family experienced true hunger. For that reason, Julieta found a job as a taxi dancer at a popular nightclub, Cabaret Tabu.

Dutiful: Julieta places duty above simple self-satisfaction as she takes care of the home, earns money at her job at a night club, cooks, cleans, and cares for Ignacio and Juanito. She endures the disappointments of her life and shows true compassion for Juanito as she prepares breakfast for him and helps him get ready for school so he arrives on time.

Vulnerable: Julieta's disappointments in life make her vulnerable. When she runs into Octavio, it is a shock, and the fact that his feelings for her are ignited after so many years is gratifying to her. Memories of their times together when they were both students and involved in demonstrations and social justice movements makes her remember her youth with fondness, as well as the dreams she once had for her own life. The fact that her life now is one of hardship and little hope for the future makes her vulnerable to being swept off her feet by someone who is passionately imploring her to leave her philandering, underemployed husband and run off with him.

Disappointed: More than anything, Julieta is disappointed in her life. As a college student, she had visions of changing the world and fighting for causes that could make a difference. Her marriage to Ignacio seems to have started out well, but he plunged into a depression after the elections and changes in the government (resulting in his losing his job). There is not much said about her own family, but clearly they are not in the picture since she is raising her younger brother, Juanito, with Ignacio. Ignacio considers Juanito his son, and is compassionate and kind to him.

Octavio

Ambitious: Octavio is presented as a dashing, passionate champion of the people, and the union. His boss is murdered on the eve of presenting incriminating documents to the authorities, and now Octavio is risking his life to get his hands on those same documents, to safeguard them and deliver them to the same parties that will expose corruption. His goal is to defend the trade union. It appears that he will have the opportunity to ascend to the position of head of the union and take the place of his boss. Octavio is so ambitious that he seems to be relatively unconcerned about the danger he puts innocent people in; namely Julieta, little Juanito, and Ignacio.

Adventurous: Octavio has a sense of adventure. He is eager to tackle the challenges of life and to advance his career. In the meantime, he's eager to sweep Julieta off her feet and have her accompany him, even if she leave only with a light suitcase and nothing more. He considers her to be a companion in

the grand adventure of his life, which is one of risk-taking and what he considers to be heroic political “David vs. Goliath” fights.

Passionate / Romantic: When he tells Julieta that he lost her once and he does not want to lose her again, he does so with a passionate, romantic fervor. He is living completely in the moment and is riding high on emotion. There is no sense of rational, realistic planning for the future, nor is there

Impulsive: Within hours of meeting Julieta, Octavio tells Julieta he wants her to go away with him. He lost her once and he does not want to lose her again. While this statement sounds romantic, upon further consideration, it is actually quite selfish. He does not consider the reality of the situation, but impulsively blurts out a desire, not thinking through the long-term effects.

Ignacio:

Depressed: At one point in time, Ignacio was a successful government appointee with a prestigious job. However, the government changed and he lost his job. Since that time, he was not able to find a position, so started trying to generate funds by writing. While he clearly had talent, he lost his self-esteem with the loss of the job and consequently appears very depressed.

Disloyal / unfaithful: Julieta is disappointed in the way things turned out. He is disappointed in himself as well. His negativity shows in other ways as well as he starts an affair with another woman. It is not clear how he can possibly maintain an affair, since he does not bring in enough money to keep food on the table.

Unenergetic: Everything about Ignacio communicates depression, low energy, and a sense of futility. He is a broken man. However, when faced with losing Julieta, he felt a spark of passion and typed a letter to her in which he expressed his deepest feelings and also his sense of shame and self-loathing for not having been the kind of husband he wanted to be.

Quiet / Introspective: At the end of the day, the Ignacio’s quiet, introspective nature prevailed and he was able to think through the situations with Octavio. He did not threaten or become violent and try to defend his honor. Instead, he typed a thoughtful and heartfelt letter which ultimately broke the frozen barrier of emotional discouragement and allowed Ignacio, Julieta, and Juanito to be a family and work together to overcome life’s challenges.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

1. Please select five scenes that illustrate the character of the city itself and describe the impact of the newly urban city on the people in the film.
2. Please find two interior scenes and describe how they reflect the inner dimensions of the characters’ lives and what they keep secret without revealing.
3. Define duty and also romantic love. Please describe how both duty and romantic love manifest themselves in the film.
4. Describe the pursuit scenes. How does the man in the dark sunglasses create a sense of menace? Go into detail about at least one scene that gives the impression that the danger is everywhere and inescapable.
5. Select three scenes in the film and explain how the use of chiaroscuro and camera angles creates a mood and gives insight into the existential condition of Julieta, Ignacio, Octavio, and Juanito.