

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
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ANOTHER MAN'S WIFE / La Mujer Ajena (1954)

Juan Bustillo Oro

Genre: Drama

TO VIEW : <https://youtu.be/i1Py6Zk9Kfc>

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OVERVIEW

In *La Mujer Ajena*, Juan Bustillo Oro blends realism with Expressionism to explore the inner worlds of individuals caught in a love triangle, whose strengths and weaknesses are probed by means of a deep exploration of their inner thoughts and self-concept. The script was based on the **play by 19th century Spanish author Benito Pérez Galdós**, who was deeply influenced by the trend of literary realism called Naturalism, and contemporary authors such as Gustav Flaubert and Emile Zola. This is Bustillo Oro's second film based on a work by Galdós – the first was *La Loca de la Casa*. Both *La Mujer Ajena* and *La Loca de la Casa* are typified by scenes that show the inner drama of the protagonists, and while the Expressionistic camera work from Bustillo Oro's psychological films such as *Dos Monjes* and *El Hombre sin Rostro*, what they have in common is an intense (perhaps even over-wrought), journey into minds in torment, with the goal of better understanding the human condition and why some choose paths of self-destruction, and others are comfortable and able to position themselves as society's privileged ones. It is a world of rigid gender roles, and successful navigation of those roles results in a kind of female masochism in order to curb one's own needs or desires. In the weakness of the gambling addicted wastrel who is betraying a friendship by having an affair with his friend's wife, there is also a portrayal of the social message that those who do not adhere to conventional notions of masculinity will (and possibly should) self-exterminate. What begins as a familial melodrama becomes, with Bustillo Oro, also a kind of domestic horror film, where the interiority of the locations mirror the secrets in the interior lives of the protagonists, and the monsters of guilt and shame that lurk there. The ultimate horror is that there is no redemption or easy path to restore order in a disordered, broken domestic world. Instead, the lack of a clearly positive resolution suggests a nihilistic viewpoint, which positions Bustillo Oro within existentialist literary and philosophical traditions.

SYNOPSIS

Augusta is a beautiful, but insecure, young woman who married Tomas, a man many years older because she valued security. After years of a barren, loveless marriage, she plunges into a torrid, highly dramatic affair with Federico, a young friend of her husband who is at least 20 years younger than Augusta. Federico is addicted to gambling and often goes on drinking binges when things do not work out for him. His addictions and self-loathing make him weak, and Augusta manipulates him to satisfy her cravings for affection. He can't satisfy her, and she accuses Federico of being in love with someone else, namely the loyal young woman, Leonor, who is like a sister to Federico. In the meantime, Tomas knows that something duplicitous is going on, but he wants Augusta to tell him and confess rather than having to confront her. He tells himself that if she admits her sins, he will forgive her. Through this, Federico feels very guilty about betraying his good friend. He avoids Augusta, which puts her into an emotional tailspin. She confronts Tomas and demands to know why he has always treated her as though she were his inferior; he is smug and supercilious toward her. Federico buckles under her pressure and his own guilt, ending up putting a bullet through his head. Tomas is shocked and heart-broken at the double

loss – his friend and his wife. He longs for her to confess all and return to him. However, she can not read his thoughts and she feels condemned. Further, she condemns her own foolishness, and decides to punish herself. She leaves the home that she and Tomas share in the middle of the night, into a dark and uncertain future.

STORY

LOVERS

Augusto feels jealousy: Augusta is begging Federico to tell her how much he loves her in an apartment in Mexico City. Augusta is married to Tomás, a wealthy man, in what appears to be an arranged marriage. Federico is compulsive gambler and womanizer but also a friend of Tomás. Augusta, the wife of Federico's friend and father-figure, is complaining that Federico is not demonstrating that he truly loves her. Federico appears to be pressured into the affair. The scene shows behavior that departs from societal norms, and promises a journey into a dark, inner world of forbidden behavior. Phone rings and triggers doubts: Tomás wonders that perhaps it is Tomás. Augusta thinks that perhaps it could be another woman, or worse, her husband, Tomás. The suspicion that it could be a love rival wins out, and Augusta accuses Federico of having another lover.

Federico feels guilt. Federico is having an affair with one of his good friend's wife. "He looks at me and I feel very small" to which Augusta adds, "as do I" -- this feeling is repeated several times, which leads to a major theme of the work, which is more or less a rebellion against patriarchy, and the superior male who holds himself up as a paragon of moderation, virtue, and values, and who abhors deception above all. His self-control makes him unapproachable and a bit less than human; the frail humans -- the gamblers and the romantic, affection-starved women are considered perhaps a bit more sympathetic

Gambling debts Federico and Augusta are together, and as usual, she begs him to reassure her that he loves her. "I have wonderful news about something that's just ours," she says. She wants to know about his gambling losses, his problems so she can "save him." Federico reacts with anger. Federico breaks up -- I can't do it -- your husband is so superior to me. Augusta reacts with rage. Augusta offers to save Federico from his gambling debts. Federico is horrified and ashamed, and explains that money from Augusta would be coming from Tomás, who has been a father to him, and it would merely intensify the guilt he feels. Augusta is also hinting in very obvious terms that she is pregnant with Federico's child. Federico fails to live up to society's idea of masculinity – wracked with guilt, but cannot seem to stop, nevertheless, in his weakness, he is somewhat sympathetic, because he does not want to be what he is, and is slipping into madness (guilt, paranoid delusions, hallucinations).



FREDERICO'S FRIEND LEONOR

Leonor, the friend that Federico loves like a sister, loans him money to cover some of his more pressing gambling debts. Federico and Leonor share a moment of mutual support and acceptance.



Federico has collapsed. Felipa, his maid, is not allowing anyone in to visit him as he is very ill, and even hallucinating. Nonetheless, Leonor makes her way in and she speaks to Federico. He shows her the book of prayers his mother had, and he then repays her the loan she made. He mentions that he will be going away to a special place.



JEALOUS OUTSIDER

Monroy knows. Monroy goes to the library to accompany Augusta to return a book. He warns Augusta he knows that there is another man, and that secrets will ultimately come to the surface. He is clearly disgusted with her. Monroy tells Augusta in no uncertain terms that he knows that she is having an affair, and that he is willing and able to reveal her secret. He also hints that he is jealous because if there is to be another man, he should be the one. Monroy is a notorious womanizer, but he does it his way, as opposed to Federico, who is dominated by Augusta's desire.



Monroy sees them leaving the love nest. Monroy sees them again and he certainly does not believe the odd explanation that Augusta's dressmaker has moved her operations there, and that she must go there every night. He will spread the news.



HUSBAND IS SUSPICIOUS

Why are you so nervous, Augusta? And why has Federico started avoiding me? Tomás and Augusta speak after Monroy leaves. He comments on how strange she has been lately, and how Federico has started to avoid him. He remarks to Augusta that she probably knows the reason. She startles and acts very nervous and guilty. Somewhere in the conversation she brings up the fact that she resents Tomás - "you're so superior to me..." Augusta plays hostess to her cousin, Manolo, and another of her husband's friends. They play cards in the Orozco home, but Tomás does not join them until later. Tomás works while his wife makes them welcome. As Augusta offers cognac to the group of friends, Federico paces nervously on the other side of the room rather than joining with them to play cards. His behavior attracts attention. After the friends have gone home, Tomás asks Augusta about her strange behavior, as well as the rather odd behavior of Federico, who has been like a son to him. Augusta is startled, acts nervous and tense, and spontaneously invents pretexts for her anxiety. The staging of this scene, with Tomás's back to the camera and Augusta's distance, sets up tension and illustrates their emotional distance from each other.



You're giving me the impression that you have a deep secret. Tomás enters the room just as Augusta finishes writing the letter to Federico. He gives her some papers that have come, and a letter proposing an orphanage that Augusta has always wanted to run. At this moment, though, her dreams of running an orphanage pale in comparison with being in love with a wastrel, incorrigible gambler whose womanizing and gambling destroy his finances, his friendships, and his future.

Tomás is suspicious again. Why is Federico so nervous? Augusta and Tomás have almost a word-for-word repetition of the previous encounter, and Thomas describes the situation in such clear and specific terms that it seems obvious that he knows. He tells Augusta that he thinks that she knows why Federico is falling apart and also avoiding him.



Tomás and Augusta talk. In a scene with a great deal of internal dialogue, Tomás tells himself that if she will only tell the whole truth, he will forgive her. Augusta explains how he clearly knows, and that she does not trust him. The communications become irremediably broken when Tomás comments that Augusta is weak but brave, but that he is stronger, to which Augusta bristles. She dislikes that he is so cool, collected, and calm, and that he makes it clear on many levels that he considers himself superior. Needless to say this is her own interpretation.

In an internal monologue, Tomás explains that if she would only tell the full truth, he could forgive her. He is obsessed with the truth, and thus a moral structure in the world that is absolute, strong, and predictable. He explains that he has made himself strong so that he can even endure making himself temporarily weak. At one point, he asks himself, "Why don't I kill her?" He does not answer that, but the message is clear. He doesn't need to. She will ultimately pay the price for social deviance, and it will be through an internalized "crime and punishment" scheme.

Tomás attempts to convince Augusta to tell him the full truth, and to simply let it all come out. She, however, takes the rather paradoxical position that to tell the truth would be to betray the man she loved (Federico) and their unborn child. It does not seem to matter that her love (which actually manifests as manipulative obsession) is the result of the betrayal of her husband. The child is the fruit of betrayal as well.



FREDERICO'S SUICIDE

Tomás visits Federico. “Whatever he asks you, deny it!” she advises Federico. “Why are you here?” asks Federico. It becomes clear that Federico had hallucinations that Tomás had visited. Tomás comments, “That’s strange. Augusta had similar delusions a few days ago. What a weird coincidence,” he says to Federico. “You must tell me the truth,” says Tomás, much to Federico’s anguish.



Tomás visits Federico who has been like a son to him. He is worried about the accounts of Federico’s illness, as well as his gambling and other addictions. Federico is wracked with guilt and begs Tomás to please stop talking about it.



Augusta visits Federico after Tomás has left. Federico is terrified that Tomás will see her there and he entreats her to leave. She does so, but then hears a gunshot from the other side of the locked doors. This is a good example of double levels of interiority. The scene takes place inside a home, and what is happening is reflective of what is happening within her hidden tormented, love-starved psyche. In a deeper interiority – the room on the other side of the locked doors, Federico’s hidden secrets manifest in the form of a gunshot to the head.

Tomás, Leonor, and Manolo visit the fallen Federico. No one says a word. Tomás leaves, and then Manolo explains that Augusta learned the news and could not speak, having gone into shock.

AUGUSTA'S COUSIN

Augusta confesses everything to her cousin, Manolo. Manolo encourages her to confess and tell the whole truth to Tomás. She is afraid to do so, though, fearing the consequences and her own self-loathing. She mentions that confessing would only reinforce his superiority and her inferiority, and she would only feel trapped again in a lovely, barren, cold marriage.

He's my husband, but he's never let me get to know him. Augusta describes core issue that is keeping her from feeling close to her husband. Manolo asks he Tomás is treating her, and Augusta tells him that he is treating her with tact, calm, and tenderness, as he always treats her. She considers that it is simply a function of manners, and it is cold and barren. But, she's horrified about the truth about her situation and dreads having him find out -- or at least admit he knows.

My advice: Confess everything to your husband. Manolo gives brotherly advice and urges Augusta to come clean and confess the truth. "The truth is the only thing that will suffice," explains Manolo. "If you tell him everything, I'm sure he will forgive you." But Augusta is distraught and filled with fear. She is worried about herself and her unborn child.



WIFE LEAVES THE HUSBAND

Departure into the storm. The night is dark, with winds, lightning, and booming thunder. Augusta is dressed for outdoors, and she prepares herself to leave. She has a single envelope in her hand -- a letter addressed to Tomás. She explains that to confess would be an act of disloyalty to Federico and her unborn child. So, she leaves without telling him where she is going. She comments that she will suffer and will be poor, but that she deserves the punishment.



THEMES

Truth: Tomás values the truth above all, and is determined to find the ultimate truth about Augusta, Federico, and others. He values the truth as a matter of honor, and a way to maintain his own honor. At the same time, there is a sense that he values the truth because it is what keeps the world ordered and logical. His worldview does not admit the dark twists and turns of Romantic sensibility, but instead places people, actions, events, and the motivations behind them. On a deeper level, the quest for truth is a part of the larger Naturalistic aesthetic that the novel (and the film adaptation) explores by having main characters that are deeply flawed (gambling-addicted womanizer and an unfaithful wife) and, no matter how understandable their angst, are deeply unsympathetic as well.

Deceitfulness: Augusta is deceitful. It is a deceitfulness driven by her condition of emotional starvation – she married her husband for his wealth and his position, and cares nothing for him. He is the quintessential gentleman and “great man” in that he is quiet, sober, driven to work, honest, conscientious, and respectful. There is nothing passionate or irrational in his behavior. Further, he irritates Augusta because she cannot penetrate his shell of self-control, and she does not believe he loves her. And, he does come across as smug and superior (a word used many times in the film). In many ways, the film reinforces the cliché that women are emotional, shallow creatures who need constant flows of attention. But, thankfully, not all women in the film are deceitful. Leonor is honest, kind, compassionate, and straightforward. Federico’s criada (maid) is protective, nurturing, and sheltering. Once Augusta enters into a web of deceit, she continues to entangle herself. For example, when Monroy says he saw her she claims she was visiting her seamstress rather than Federico’s love nest. She has to invent lies to cover her actions and her behavior. As she swears she is telling the truth, it is hard to imagine it will end well, given that she has become pregnant with Federico’s child.

Obsession: The film explores obsession on many different levels. First, there is the obsession that Augusta has for Federico, clearly because he satisfies her hunger – to the starvation point! – for romantic, fawning love. What she calls love is not a healthy, adult love, but is, instead, obsession. Federico is obsessed with the idea of easy money. He is addicted to gambling, which is a kind of obsession in and of itself. He says he loves Augusta, but is conflicted about it, because he considers that Tomás has treated him better than even his father did. Tomás has his own obsessions as well. He is consumed by a rage for order – a need to have the world be one of truth and truthfulness, and he will forgive transgressions if only one commits to transparency and order. Finally, Monroy, who seems to rather fixate on Augusta, is both jealous of Federico and protective of his close friend, Tomás, and so he is obsessed with catching Augusta in her deceit and transgressions.

Women’s Roles: The film explores the double standard with men and women’s roles. For example, Monroy likes to be known as a ladies’ man, and is offended by Augusta’s behavior, not so much for having betrayed her husband and his friend, but for having spurned his attentions in favor of the younger, weaker Federico Viera. A man such as Monroy, who may or may not be married, is admired for being able to charm and seduce the women, whereas Augusta is roundly condemned for seeking affection outside her marriage. Within the context of the film, women are expected to be content with the affection that the husband is willing to give, while the husband is entitled to the wife’s physical intimacy as a part of her required duties of marriage. The wife has no ability to complain when the husband withholds attention, and keeps himself walled off emotionally. In the case of *La Mujer Ajena*, Augusta behaves as though she is utterly starved for affection, and she will use whatever leverage she can to secure Federico’s love. It’s important to note that Augusta’s “love” looks like obsession and lust and Federico’s love looks like a quiet acquiescence to bullying.

Naturalism: Augusta is a beautiful, privileged woman whose life seems perfect from the outside. However, thanks to the literary Naturalism of the original source play, Benito Pérez Galdós’s *Realidad* (1893), the film focuses on the interiority of the characters, and we can see that Augusta

is riddled with self-loathing, who has internalized the notion that she is somehow inferior to her much older husband, who prides himself in emotional discipline and adherence to the highest standards of honesty and ethical behavior. He is not a passionate man, but a measured and decent person who is deeply loved and appreciated by his friends and acquaintances. Despite the fact that she seems to be living in the best of all possible worlds, she characterizes her relationship with her husband as “arid and barren” where he smugly considers himself to be superior (and she, by default would be considered inferior). She is hungry – starving, even – for expressions of male affection, and she finds it in the person of the ruined wastrel and compulsive gambler and drinker, Federico Viera. Coincidentally, Federico is a friend, who has been very kind to Federico, to the point of even considering Tomás more of a father than his actual father. When the affection-starved Augusta enters an illicit relationship with Federico, he feels increasing levels of guilt and shame. Augusta, however, is increasingly possessive and jealous. The story begins as the two behave in ways that make people suspicious, and Federico’s gambling losses, bad conscience, and heavy drinking are taking a toll on his physical and mental health. Modifying Pérez Galdós’s story only slightly, Bustillo Oro captures the Naturalism of Galdós and combines it with his own brand of Mexican Expressionism. Literature Naturalism, which in Pérez Galdós’s hands becomes a compassionate exploration of human frailty.

CHARACTERS

Tomás Orozco	Husband of Augusta
Augusta Cisneros de Orozco	Tomás’s wife
Federico Viera	Tomás’s friend; Augusta’s lover
Leonor	Federico’s friend; loves like a sister
Manolo	Augusta’s cousin
Monroy	Tomás’s friend; suspicious of Augusta
Felipa	Federico’s maid

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Augusta: Augusta Orozco is the significantly younger wife of Tomás Orozco, a wealthy man who spends time in projects in conjunction with his father’s holdings, and in relation to philanthropical activities funded by his inheritance. She lives with her husband in an expansive home where she helps him entertain his friends, and longs for love and affection. Her cousin, Manolo, visits regularly and would do anything to defend her honor. He is also an acquaintance of Federico, an attractive but dissipated young man, considered by Manolo to be hopeless – a hardened gambling addict, an overall wastrel (albeit charming while still maintaining a patina of youth), and heavy drinker.

Romantic (starved for love and affection): Augusta is cut from the same cloth as Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary* in the sense that she hungers for love, and becomes entangled with men who will hasten her self-destruction and their own. When Augusta writes the letter to Tomás in which she explains that she is leaving in order to punish herself and live in poverty, there is not much of a sense that she will be living and thriving on her own pluck and initiative. Instead, it reads more of a suicide note, with the chilling implication that her poor decisions will involve her unborn child as well.

Inner life / landscape: The film allows the viewer to get to know Augusta through scenes that reveal her inner life. Filmed in small rooms and intimate spaces, the film’s sets act as a metonymy for the emotional dynamics, which include fear of exposure, tantrums when not showered with (illicit) love, romantic longing for an idealized nuclear family, and anger when her husband’s friends express their vehement disapproval of her infidelity toward her husband.

Self-Destructive: In her pursuit of the love she does not derive from her marriage, Augusta becomes totally blind to the way that she taking steps that will destroy her marriage, her lover (Federico), and potentially herself and her unborn child. Her vision of marriage is diametrically

opposed to that of Tomás, who believes that after the initial passion wears off, what remains is a strong commitment that grows over time and becomes the joy and refuge of the couple in their advancing years. Such a view of marriage is not appealing to Augusta, perhaps not so much because of the lack of passion, but because she believes that Tomás takes every opportunity possible to refer to his superiority as a human being. She interprets his words as deprecatory and designed to make her feel inferior, and they resonate with her already latent self-loathing. The self-loathing opens the gateway (as it always does) to self-destructive behavior.

QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW

1. When the movie opens, Augusta and Federico are in an apartment where they have apparently met for a tryst of sorts. The phone rings several times, which triggers a sense of alarm in each. Describe the way that each speculates who might be calling, and how it reveals the what they fear most about having their secret exposed. What are Federico's concerns? What are Augusta's? For Federico, he does not want his betrayal of his friend to be exposed. Augusta is fearful of consequences, but then most concerned about other women. How are their fears ironic?
2. Tomás quietly questions Augusta in a way that causes her to become very nervous. What exactly are the observations he makes? What are the questions he poses? How does Augusta respond? How do his questions tend to presuppose her guilt, and also reinforce her belief that he believes himself to be superior?
3. There are numerous examples of self-destructiveness in this film. Discuss at least two examples of self-destructiveness, and then explain how the self-destructiveness has a root cause, which is often a negative concept of oneself. For example, Augusta repeats several times that she believes that Tomás considers himself superior to her in all things, thus making her permanently inferior. What are her other negative self-concepts? What are Federico's negative self-concepts or beliefs that are self-limiting?
4. How does the film use interior scenes to reflect the internal emotional and cognitive states of the protagonists? For example, how is the lighting when Federico and Augusta are together? What do the deep shadows and contrasts suggest? When Tomás and Augusta are speaking in the living room and they are seated in front of the fire, describe the shadows, the illumination, and the positions of their faces. What are some of the non-verbal messages?
5. It is possible to characterize *La Mujer Ajena* as a familial melodrama, and similar to the other Bustillo Oro film based on Benito Pérez Galdós's film, *La Loca de la Casa*. One similarity could be the presence of female masochism as a social virtue. Please explain the presence of female masochism. However, one might also take it a bit further and consider *La Mujer Ajena* a domestic horror film in the sense that there are secrets, shame, and other "beasts" of the subconscious that surface only to destroy the individuals they inhabit. Describe some of the elements of horror, and also how a juxtaposition of the rational and the irrational serve to reveal what was once hidden.