

The Castle of National Purity: Closed Markets and Closed Homes

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Arturo Ripstein's *El castillo de la pureza* (1972), one of his earlier films, portrays a man who locks up his family and shuts them inside their home without any contact with the outside world. The film uses the nuclear family to demonstrate how inward economic strategies amount to political repression. Academic criticism about the film has focused on the gender and sexual roles of the family without placing it into a larger social context. The way that the film portrays the family is definitely morbid and problematic, but in my view it is a critique of the state's role in Mexican society. As I argue in this paper, *El castillo de la pureza* is a sharp criticism of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) and its political and economic control of Mexico at the end of the 1960s and early 1970s, when the film was made. The film takes direct aim at the "Mexican Miracle," or what has been hailed as the successful economic policy called Import Substitution Industrialization, an economic plan that sought to revitalize Mexican industries by limiting imports. *El castillo de la pureza* then serves as a national allegory about the PRI's economic and political control of Mexican society as embodied in the family.

Because of the storyline of *El castillo de la pureza*, the family unit is at the core of any analysis. As Charles Ramírez Berg notes, "One way of looking at *El castillo de la*

pureza (*The Castle of Purity*, 1972; directed by Arturo Ripstein) is to see it as one father's desperate attempt to stem the tide of *la crisis* and maintain his dominance regardless of the changing ideological times" (161). Berg is strictly analyzing the father's role, but he lays the groundwork for a different type of reading. In this essay, I explain that the crisis that Berg mentions is the fall of the Mexican Miracle and the state's excessive political control in reaction to the downturn. My reading also diverges from Andrea Noble's point of view; she sees the "capitalist modernity and utopian idealism as embodied in competing masculinities as commensurate" and argues that "until this paradigm of masculine embodiment has been subject to scrutiny, together with its feminine equivalent of openness, the cyclical narratives of enclosure are doomed to repetition" (115). For me, *El castillo de la pureza* critiques the enclosure of Mexican society that occurred as a result of the economic strategy of the Mexican Miracle. One might read the film as a call for a neoliberal opening, but a closer reading of the family structure based on the incestual relationship between Porvenir and Utopia points to the nation-state's political role in society.

The roots of the Mexican Miracle are prior to 1946. The economic policy began in 1940 and continued until the 1970s, when the policy's perverse effects began to surface. President Lázaro Cárdenas (1934-1940) was the first to take steps to create an inward economic model by nationalizing train transportation through Ferrocarriles Nacionales de México (1938) and expropriating petroleum from the foreign investors to create Petróleos Mexicanos (Pemex, 1938). Later, Import Substitution Industrialization (ISI) was used to replace imports with domestic products. The government used tariff barriers to make imports more expensive or completely absent in the Mexican economy. The strictest ISI policies were implemented in 1947 during President Miguel Alemán's sexenio. As Enrique Cárdenas notes, the nationalization of the freight and petroleum industries, among other basic structural investments, helped the protectionist measures propel the economy (24). The Mexican Miracle was supposedly the result of a successful policy that worked inward to develop the Mexican economy with its own resources. The process was gradual and started with basic resources such as foodstuffs; it ideally should have moved into more complex products. The miracle, however, did not come without a cost. Cárdenas argues that the internal products survived in the national market because they were indirectly favored by the strict tariff barriers that were implemented in 1947. While that allowed various Mexican products to circulate within the local market, they were unable to compete on an international level because the local market was inefficient (69-71). The initial phases of

ISI were productive, but the latter ones required more capital, which was available through external debt. As Cárdenas also notes, the agricultural sector played an important role during the initial phases of ISI, but it went into decline in 1959. Those employed in the agricultural sector were affected, so this caused an internal migration from the rural to the urban areas.

By 1970, the economy had gone into decline, and the Mexican Miracle was clearly over. National products could not compete on an international scale, so the balance of trade sharply shifted toward imports. Cárdenas explains that the Mexican economy had the smallest economic growth in 1971 since 1959, more than a decade earlier. The Mexican government's economic interests were motivated by social unrest. As Cárdenas notes:

la reducción del producto revivió viejos temores de estancamiento económico y de descontento social, los cuales estaban a flor de piel por los sucesos sangrientos de 1968 y del 10 de junio de 1971, en que el gobierno reprimió movimientos estudiantiles. Es claro que el gobierno no podía darse el lujo de mantener una economía aletargada, mucho menos en situación de recesión, por lo que no tenía más opción que crecer, y cuanto más pronto mejor. (94)

The recession in 1971 would only initiate a list of fluctuations in the Mexican economy that would include two devaluations of the peso, the first in 1976 and the second (and hardest) in 1982.

Closing national borders to imports had an effect on the circulation of cultural goods. One example is the repression of rock music culture in Mexico, which is the subject of Eric Zolov's book, *Refried Elvis*. Zolov argues that rock music was not allowed to flourish at its inception in Mexico precisely because of the inward-looking trade strategies and the political closing of national borders. He concludes that the contradictory result is that little memorabilia is left of Mexican bands and the rock memory that persists is that of international bands. Zolov's historical study permits an analysis of other types of cultural effects that resulted from Import Substitution Industrialization. Indeed, the economic strategy amounted to a political and social repression that we can see represented in *El castillo de la pureza*.

Ripstein in the Context of Mexican Cinema

Ripstein was born into a film family as the son of a well-known producer of the same name, but his international success allowed him freedom to make films that did not necessarily fit into the national mold. Perhaps he is best compared with Luis Buñuel, his mentor, but his career also diverges from the famed Spanish director.

Buñuel started in Spain and then developed his career while in exile in Mexico. He made a variety of films in Mexico that ranged from the drama *Los olvidados* (1950) to the comedy *El ángel exterminador* (1962). As Ripstein describes in an interview with Sergio de la Mora, “with Buñuel I share a love for the grotesque, the absurd, and the paradoxical. Buñuel is, we could say, the only foreign filmmaker who has really captured the true essence of Mexico” (7). It is no surprise that Ripstein would later develop a relationship with Televisión Española that would help him to make his films. He has managed his long career by navigating between the Mexican national film industry and an international one that allows him access to funding and a film audience. During his early years, though, he made his films solely with national funding.

Because of state support for film production in Mexico, the political and economic shifts that occurred with each administration are reflected in film production. Just as Pemex and Ferrocarriles Nacionales de México were created, the film industry was also being developed with national funds distributed through the Banco Cinematográfico, which was later renamed Banco Nacional Cinematográfico in 1947. In the early 1940s, Mexico and the United States had a pact to help Mexico with its industrialization, which included the film industry: “Hollywood interests granted technological help and raw materials to the national industry and, on occasions, made direct production investments” (de la Vega 86). The Mexican film industry hit its apex during the 1940s with films that were being exported to other Latin American countries, but the industry changed dramatically by the end of the 1940s. As Eduardo de la Vega Alfaro notes:

In 1952, the last year of the Miguel Alemán *sexenio*, the submission to the interests of the monopoly was a fact: several of the more powerful producers (Gregorio Wallerstein, Raúl de Anda) combined with [William] Jenkins to provide him with films designed exclusively for the domestic market, since the foreign markets by this time were irredeemably lost. (91).

By the late 1960s, when Ripstein started his film career, the Mexican film industry had already weakened in comparison to the 1940s because of the sharp decline in the number of films and also the quality of the majority of them. While low-quality productions dominated the industry, an auteur cinema was also growing.

Auteur cinema during the early 1970s was heavily dependent on state funding. As Tomás Pérez Turrent describes the film industry at the moment, “State control grew and when the absence of producers caused an alarming drop in production, the state took matters into its hands assuming control of production, first through the Churubusco studios (1972-3) and later through its own production companies

(Conacine, 1974; Conacine Uno and Conacite Dos, 1975)” (100). Although the film criticizes the role of the state, Ripstein filmed *El castillo de la pureza* at the Estudios Churubusco. While he did not solely depend on the state to produce his films, it is undeniable that he relied on its support. In the early 1970s, as Pérez Turrent describes, Mexican cinema “had become a state institution” (100). Productions during this period, argues Pérez Turrent, were not political: “with the exception of Leduc, no one assumed a political position, in the best sense of the term, and no one questioned the function of cinema and the film-maker in a specific social context” (101). Instead, as he continues, the majority of the directors of this period “re-establish the myth of the Artist-God.” One of my doubts with this conclusion has to do with what Pérez Turrent considered to be political. What is political and how are politics expressed? A director who makes auteur films can be political, but how? Pérez Turrent’s analysis does not give us enough information to know how he came to this conclusion.

Pérez Turrents’ observations about this period are contradictory and are noticeable in his brief analysis of *El castillo de la pureza*: “The film contributed to his development of the theme of a closed and suffocating world where man, like God, attempts to create a world in his image and, as Christian Zimmer pointed out, developed a magisterial political metaphor about fascism (daily and familiar)” (101). Ripstein “developed a magisterial political metaphor about fascism,” but yet it is only applied to daily and familiar life. Ripstein himself explains the political content of his films in the following manner:

When I was a young man being politically engaged was a major issue. My films are not derivative of a political situation or a political action. I’ve never tried to make a political issue more important than the narrative. I’ve always tried to make films about things that scare me or leave me in awe. Some of my contemporaries were engaged in political action. I’ve always thought that engaged writers prefer politics to writing and I’ve always preferred filmmaking to politics. We can say that every statement is political in its broadest sense, so in that way my films are politically oriented. (de la Mora 7-8)

Following the director’s view on his films as being “politically oriented,” I acknowledge how Ripstein’s use of metaphor and allegory allowed him to make a political statement about the PRI’s role in Mexico’s economic decline and the effects of the political constraints it placed on Mexican society.

While *El castillo de la pureza* is not an overt political statement, the allegorical family presents a sharp criticism of the government’s economic and political role in society. My argument follows Sergio de la Mora, who analyzes the ways that Ripstein subverts melodrama:

Like other members of his generation (such as Jaime Humberto Hermosillo, Felipe Cazals, and Jorge Fons), Ripstein breaks with the ideological conventions of Mexican cinematic melodramas. He exposes, lingers, festers in the dark and disturbing underside of sacred icons, institutions, and sensibilities that are part of Mexican national identity; family, paternal and maternal representatives of authority and power. Long takes and extended tracking shots, a sparse use of close-ups, claustrophobic, tawdry, dark, enclosed interiors, often kitschy *mise-en-scène*, characterize his frequently predatory, relentlessly voyeuristic, and impassively detached gaze. Ripstein revisits the familiar territory of Mexican melodrama and runs a bulldozer right through it. (108)

In sum, *El castillo de la pureza*, Ripstein uses melodrama and the family to portray the perverse nature of national culture and its economic policies.

Ripstein made *El castillo de la pureza* early in his career when he relied heavily on national funding. The Mexican Miracle was in decline, but state funding was still the principal source for Mexican film directors of the time. The film signals the decline of the Mexican economy that would later become more strikingly evident because of the devaluations of the Mexican peso in 1976 and in 1982. The fall of the Mexican Miracle led to a major economic restructuring that opened the country to a more neoliberal economy. As Ignacio Sánchez Prado notes in *Screening Neoliberalism*, the economic restructuring that began at the end of the 1980s affected the Mexican film industry that had once been dependent on state funding. Although I agree with Sánchez Prado's assessments of the funding and production of Mexican films, I take issue with his contention that Mexican identity is in decline.¹ One might be tempted to read *El castillo de la pureza* within the context of the waning of Mexican identity and the Mexican state, but the film is more of a reflection of a desire for the PRI to lose its control rather than a representation of what happened during the 1980s. The PRI was in power for seventy-one years without interruption until 2000. What the film signals, then, is a decline of an economic model rather than a political one.

I understand *El castillo de la pureza* to be a representation of the PRI's authoritarian role within Mexican society and its use of inward economic policies. The family structure serves as the primary nucleus of the national allegory. The family in the film has lived eighteen years locked in its home. While the patriarchal figure partially represents Gustavo Díaz Ordaz, the representation of the national economy is much more closely aligned with 1972, the date of release of the film (during Luis Echeverría's sexenio). It is clear that the film takes aim at the PRI. The party was created in 1929

¹ For more on the relationship between national identity and state funding, see [“Entre el Cha Cha Chá y el Estado: El cine nacional mexicano y sus arquetipos.”](#)

under the name Partido Revolucionario Nacional and renamed Partido de la Revolución Mexicana in 1938. The title that is now used, Partido Revolucionario Institucional, was implemented in 1946 during Miguel Alemán's sexenio (1946-1952). By my calculations, the beginning of the family's isolation and Mexico's as well is linked to Alemán, specifically 1946 and 1947.

The Family's Castle

Gabriel and Beatriz raise their children within the strict confines of their home, and Gabriel is the only one to venture into the outside world, where no one knows that the rest of the family exists. The mother and children have been locked up in the home for eighteen years, which means that the children have never ventured outside the house in their lives. The family keeps a strict regimen that includes work, education and exercise. Gabriel attempts to control every aspect of family life, and he dictates how they must think by educating them with his odd ideas. We are reminded of the state's role in education shaping the minds of children. Gabriel makes his children mechanically repeat what he says, but his teachings do not seem to have any specific source. He seems to be inventing his teachings on the spot. The family dynamic and the insulated construction of the house exemplify the political control of the PRI.

The house in *El castillo de la pureza* is a two-story home with a basement. It is the castle mentioned in the title. While it does not have a moat, it does have a dungeon, which serves as the basement where the father banishes his children as punishment. The house is a traditional Mexican construction with a patio in the interior. This type of house was made so that the beautiful façade was not actually on the outside of the building, but rather faced the encapsulated patio. While it may seem that the family is insulated from the rest of the world, it is impossible to keep the natural elements out of the house. As the film starts, the rain pours in through the patio. The family keeps pouring buckets of rain into the drain. Gabriel's need for control is also seen in other aspects of the home. As an extra measure of control, several strings of cans are strategically placed so as to signal when someone is coming in or out of the house and when someone is approaching Gabriel's private office, which contains a locked desk. He demands to have his privacy yet he has a system of surveillance to monitor the rest of the family. Each of the rooms has a small square cutout or tiny window that he uses to peer into each person's room. He places a block to hide the hole in the wall but removes it each time that he wants to peep and interrupt his family's privacy. When an inspector comes by the house, he warns Gabriel that the house is not in good shape

and that he should take care of the pillars because the house could come down at any moment. This warning serves as a foreshadowing of what will soon happen.

Gabriel's hypocrisy is made apparent as the film follows him in and out of the house. The family has a strict vegetarian diet, but he eats meat tacos when he goes out for his sales. Beatriz makes all of the children's clothes yet Gabriel orders his suits from a catalogue. He is quite jealous of his wife's past although she lives locked up with her children. Gabriel constantly asks her about men and insinuates that she is a whore, but he is the one who makes his advances on a young woman, the daughter of the store owner played by María Rojo. He is very straight forward in telling her that he wants to sleep with her. When she refuses and threatens to tell her mother, Gabriel accuses her of being too forward with him before she can ever complain. The film at this point cuts back to the house. Beatriz is entertaining the children playing games with them until their father steps through the door. He also coerces Beatriz to tell him more about her sexual past, threatening her with a knife at her throat, and yet Gabriel also claims that he has been trying to protect Beatriz so that she does not hurt herself.

Although Beatriz suffers the consequences of her husband's control, she serves as a mediator and peacemaker, stabilizing the home environment so that they are able to stay within the confines of the house. Beatriz plays with her children when her husband is out of the house. The little that the children know about the outside world they owe to Beatriz. Their mother has fond memories of the outside but lives in the house to please her husband. While Gabriel teaches the children his ideology and what he wants them to think, Beatriz tells her children about growing up in the real world. She describes animals that her children have never seen, for example.

El castillo de la pureza can only be read metaphorically if we consider that the children have abstract names: Voluntad (free will), Utopía (Utopia), and Porvenir (future). Voluntad, the youngest of the two daughters, exercises her free will in the house, but she pays for what Gabriel considers misbehavior. We see this early in the film when she decides to hit one of the rat cages. It flies open, and the rat escapes (until Porvenir kills it with a broom). Gabriel punishes Voluntad precisely because of her free will by locking her up in the basement. Later in the film, she follows her father outside as he takes out the trash. Utopía and Porvenir follow her. Gabriel punishes all three of his children by locking them up in the basement.

Utopía and Porvenir are adolescents who have never been taught about human nature, especially sexuality. Utopía tends to be a quiet girl with few opinions. She does not question her father or even have a free will, like her sister does, yet she tends to

provoke her father's anger. As she matures, she becomes more sexually desirable although she does little to provoke any type of attention. Gabriel reacts and punishes her simply for becoming a woman. The attempts to create an insular Mexico fail because the measures stunt any possible growth within the family. On one level, we can understand the complexity of gender and sexuality. The patriarch attempted to block all the temptations from the outside world, but he cannot keep his daughter from becoming a woman. When the inspector comes by the house, he gives Utopía some attention. Although it is nothing that should concern him, Gabriel punishes Utopía without ever taking into consideration that she helped him pass the inspection. After this brief contact that would be insignificant to someone else, Gabriel punishes Utopía by cutting her long hair as if trying to tarnish her physical beauty, but the attempt is futile. Even with short hair she is still a beautiful young woman. Read on another level, the insular home becomes the breeding ground for utopian thinking. Utopianism may not be a threat at its inception, but it becomes one in its maturity. Gabriel's desire for a closed society breeds the desire for utopia, a world of free expression and sexual liberation.

Porvenir is the only male other than his father. He is the future of the household and also of the patriarchy. The hope for the future is not bright. On the surface, the games that he plays with his mother and siblings seem to be of little consequence, but they can be read on another level. Porvenir is blindfolded as he struggles to catch his mother or one of his sisters. The person who is caught is supposed to pose as Porvenir wants. He first catches Utopía, and he asks her to be "alegría" (happiness), so she raises her hands up in the air and smiles. Porvenir catches his mother next and asks her to pose as death. When she protests, he insists that she take the form of death. Without the ability to see, Porvenir seeks both happiness and death. His search for happiness under the circumstances in which he lives can only lead to death. Gabriel scolds Porvenir for not paying attention to his teachings and for being distracted. He sends his son to the dungeon because of his son's disinterest. If he is to be his successor, he will not be able to venture into a world that he does not know, but Gabriel is more interested in his personal gain. He makes it impossible for Porvenir to mature and learn to lead.

What is most troublesome is the sexual tension between Utopía and Porvenir. As a young male, his adolescent sister is the only option for him to explore his sexuality. The film first shows him flipping her skirt up when they are playing in the courtyard. While it is a minor detail, it does seem inappropriate for a brother to do that to his

sister. Later, we see that he is interested in seeing her nude. He tries to walk into the bathroom when his sisters are about to take a shower. Indeed, he sits outside the bathroom door anytime that Utopía is in the bathroom. When she asks for a towel, he is ready to come in to give it to her. The film builds the tension until the brother and sister lay on the backseat of an old Volkswagen. Porvenir slides his hand down his sister's body and grabs her crotch. Their moans awaken Gabriel who finds them and separates them. While the incestual consequences are obvious, the metaphorical implications of this possible relationship can be read in a variety of ways. The economic impact of a closed home/nation is negative if we consider that the insulation leads to incest. Inbreeding leads to stagnation.

From Díaz Ordaz to Echeverría Álvarez

El castillo de la pureza is a counter-discourse to the national allegory that was propagated by the PRI. The president was the head of the household. Zolov argues that in Mexico there was an “*institutionalization* of the president as patriarch,” and he goes on to explain the metaphorical family of the PRI:

The idealized family of the postrevolutionary order was one in which the father was stern in his benevolence, the mother saintly in her maternity, and the children loyal in their obedience. Faith in the father's ultimate commitment to the progress of the family—even when that father had been corrupted by temptation and error—excused his mistakes and pardoned his sins. Undergirding this sense of pardon was the vision of the mother figure as saint and sufferer, whose moral stability of the family—and by extension the nation (as did the Virgin of Guadalupe, Mexico's semiofficial patron saint). (5)

While the metaphor of the family was created by the PRI, as Zolov explains, people also questioned it: “Must the voice of the father-president always be so authoritative?” (8). *El castillo de la pureza* interrogates the role of the father by demonstrating its repressive consequences. Gabriel's violent nature is reminiscent of President Gustavo Díaz Ordaz and his reaction to the student movement in 1968, but his economic choices are more aligned with Echeverría during his term as president. As viewers, we are not given any clues as to how much time has passed from the beginning of the film to its end. Rather than equate the father figure solely with Díaz Ordaz, I believe that he represents the PRI, encompassing both Díaz Ordaz and Echeverría.

El castillo de la pureza does not represent the student movement within the film, but it does demonstrate the repressive nature of the government during that period. As Mexico was getting ready to host the Olympics, Díaz Ordaz repressed the student protest on October 2, 1968 so that the Olympic visitors would not see the protests,

basically creating the impression of a peaceful nation. Carlos Monsiváis furnishes a sarcastic explanation of Gustavo Díaz Ordaz's role as president:

Al Presidente se le encomienda llevar el navío a puerto seguro y él es piloto y padre y capitán y dueño de los símiles. Sabe con detalle del sentido de sus acciones, ha meditado en su entrega confiada en las manos rugosas del porvenir. No está enojado ni podría estarlo: México actúa dentro de él y dirige sus pasiones, las ordena, las depura, las vuelve inflexibilidad de conducta. Con violencia y alharaca y héroes extraídos del forro de sus conciencias descastadas, los subversivos se proponen hacernos olvidar la verdad: somos una gran familia, el país que atravesó—entre sangre, sudor y lágrimas—por una gran revolución. Y a Díaz Ordaz le toca hacer que el país siga teniendo amor y respeto a las instituciones. A como dé lugar. (58-59)

Monsiváis describes the appearance of a calm president as a pilot and head of the family and the nation. From the paternalist perspective, the president is not violent; he is merely trying to maintain order in any way possible. The paternalist and oppressive figure is associated with Díaz Ordaz but also applies to Echeverría, who was directly involved in the paramilitary action taken against the students in 1968. Although Echeverría denied any involvement in the decision making, the government also took action against a group of students on June 10, 1971.

Gabriel is the paternal figure akin to the PRI, and he becomes more repressive as he begins to feel that he is losing control. Rather than teach Porvenir and Utopía why their behavior is wrong, Gabriel reacts by extending a strong arm and becoming violent and aggressive. Gabriel demands that Porvenir and Utopía stay apart. Gabriel pulls them out of the car where they were intimate. It is clear that the siblings do not understand that they are doing something wrong. They do not hide from their father because they leave the car door open, and Gabriel can see them from the second floor. When Gabriel realizes what is happening, he grabs them and pulls them out of the car, he beats Porvenir first and locks him up, and he continues with Utopía. Beatriz tries to stop him and believes that her husband's response is excessive and inappropriate. They have a private conversation about this in their bedroom. Gabriel feels that what occurred demonstrates that he is a failure, but Beatriz recognizes that they have never taught their children about human sexuality. The film thus alludes to the inefficiencies in the education system and even the outright attempts of the PRI to maintain the ignorance of the population. Despite this, neither Gabriel nor Beatriz ever explains the concept of incest to Porvenir and Utopía or why they should not explore their sexuality together. Gabriel tries to tighten his control in response, but he becomes more overtly oppressive, even for a family that has lived under such strange conditions. To avoid

contact, Gabriel insists that Utopía sit at the doorway to the dining room even though she is barely protected by the rain in the courtyard. Voluntad complains that she does not like the food because it has too much garlic, so Gabriel responds angrily. He screams that Porvenir must remain separate from his sisters, that he will lock them up before they go to bed, and that women are the cause of all evil. His reaction is both exaggerated and out of context because Voluntad's complaint about the food has nothing to do with the previous situation.

While the metaphor of an insular nation works within this framework, I want to compare the government's use of public space to contain the student protest with Gabriel's repression of his family by way of the physical space of the house. The government surrounded the Plaza de las Tres Culturas in Mexico City by blocking the exits and squaring the space so as to stop the protesters from escaping the area. The protesters did not have many choices to withdraw and escape from the violent repression. Likewise, while Gabriel's use of the house is apparent from the beginning of the film, it becomes more marked after he catches Porvenir and Utopía in the car. Gabriel confines his wife and children to their rooms. After Porvenir and Utopía's encounter, the film focuses on each space that is boxed in as Gabriel moves from room to room. The space of the home was used in *Rojo amanecer* (Jorge Fons, 1989) to represent Tlatelolco in 1968, so it serves as a point of comparison to *El castillo de la pureza*. Released sixteen years after Ripstein's film, *Rojo amanecer* used the space of the family and the home to portray the various reactions to the massacre. Most of the film takes place within an apartment located in the Plaza de las Tres Culturas, except for brief scenes in the same building. As viewers, we hear the protest on the outside, but we never see what happens at the demonstration. While *Rojo amanecer* does not have a father-figure comparable to Gabriel, the physical space of the house is as oppressive as that presented in *El castillo de la pureza*. In *Rojo amanecer*, the family stays inside the house hoping to avoid the repression happening just outside their home, but they are unable to avoid it. Unfortunately, the only member to leave the home is the youngest son because the rest are killed inside. Both films capture the ways that the government tried to round up the protesters by enclosing the physical space so as to avoid anyone leaving.

In *El castillo de la pureza*, the family business makes rat poison. The rats are central to the narrative: they are the reason for the family business. Except for the caged rats in the work space, the film does not show any other rats. Gabriel often tells his family that rats are undesirable, and he compares them to people. Beatriz objects to this comparison, but it makes sense that he would think so badly of humans if we consider

that he has done everything possible to separate his family from the rest of humanity. As viewers, we never see any type of destruction caused by the rats nor do we see that they are really such a threat. In Spanish, a “rata” is a person of questionable character who is despicable. A “ratero” or “ratera,” another term derived from rat, is someone who robs or steals. Politicians are often thought of as rateros, too. The only real despicable person that we see in the film is Gabriel, so his concern seems out of place and his angry reactions even more so. Judging from Gabriel’s reactions, however, it is possible to see that anything that falls outside of his control is undesirable. The family keeps some caged rats in the workroom, but, supposedly, they are not bad. If the rats are contained, then they pose no threat. Perhaps the same can be said of Gabriel, who needs to be restrained.

While we see that the family is in crisis, Gabriel’s business is also waning. The store owners, Gabriel’s clients, tell him that they do not want as many bags of the rat poison because the product is just not selling as well. An Asian-looking store owner tells him that he is not interested in buying any more of his poison. The man takes out the competing product and shows it to Gabriel. It is an industrialized rat poison, and it sells much more because the people see the commercials on television. Gabriel argues that his product is better precisely because it is less industrial and made by hand; however, his arguments cannot compete with the demand for the other product. When he returns to his house, Gabriel tells his wife about his difficulties selling the poison, and he urges them to cut down on their expenses, which include electricity—a reference to its nationalization in 1960—and the makeup that she wears.

Besides the decline in sales that we see early in the film, the business is called into question when the inspectors investigate the production site. After the first inspection passes, Gabriel is stopped as he is trying to sell his poison. Although the film does not mention it directly, we can infer that the young woman whom Gabriel harassed made the accusations that led to the questioning. The inspectors are waiting for Gabriel as he enters the business, and they escort him to his house when he says that he has left the paperwork at home. As the tension in the film builds, we expect the inspectors to condemn the family business, but the end is chaotic. Utopía becomes less willing to accept her father’s authority and violence because he locks her in her room when he leaves the house. She writes a letter in a desperate attempt to denounce her father’s abuse and throws it out the window. The letter falls on the sidewalk and does not receive any attention, so we know that no one reads it. The detail, however, is significant because Utopía and later Beatriz (after Utopía admits to her what she has done) are

worried that the police are going to come to the house. When Gabriel arrives with the inspectors, chaos ensues because Beatriz believes that the inspectors are the police coming to investigate Utopía's claims.

The house finally erupts before the inspectors even have a chance to act. Gabriel comes out with a knife and threatens to harm his family if they come close to him. The people from the street file into the house as the doors finally fly open. Utopía screams from her bedroom to be freed because her father locked the door. The inspectors run around without knowing how to react. One of them eventually opens the door for Utopía, and she comes down to the first floor. As Gabriel continues to threaten them, the family is left in one of the rooms. He sets fire to his house, but the firefighters intervene. Subsequently, the police finally take him from the house, and everyone leaves. The end of the film shows Beatriz walking into the house with her children as they look perplexed at what they have just seen. Gabriel loses control of the space of the home, which is now open to the rest of the world.

Beyond the Mexican Miracle

El castillo de la pureza symbolically represents the cultural impact that Import Substitution Industrialization had on Mexico. The economic strategy coincided with a larger political project that sought to repress any dissenting voices. Through an allegorical family narrative, the film shows us that part of the failure in the system was its strict patriarchal structure, as embodied by Gabriel. He was responsible for the chaos that ensued inside the house because he had created an unlivable situation for his family. In the early seventies, patriarchal Mexican society was already suffering the consequences of political repression, but the economic consequences would be felt for the next decade. While Import Substitution Industrialization was the key to the Mexican Miracle, it demise also created the perverse economic conditions that led to the economic crises in 1976 and 1982. The stifling nature of the closed government, however, was already felt during the late 1960s and early 1970s, as we can see in *El castillo de la pureza*.

While it may sound like the film favors a more international or global market, we must remember that the industrial product is still rat poison. The results from the different approaches (national vs. global) may be different, but industrialization, the film suggests, is poisonous. Combining both national and international sources of funding, Ripstein went on to make his films with funds from the state and from Televisión Española. He followed Buñuel's lead in many ways. While *El castillo de la*

pureza is not an overtly political film, Ripstein's use of allegory and metaphor reveal a sharp criticism of the stifling political and economic plans in Mexico during the early 1970s. Yet Ripstein did not have a clear answer as to what route was best for the Mexican economy. We know that the space of the allegorical home is finally open, but we do not know how the story of the family continues.

One important possibility to consider is that Porvenir and Utopia have the freedom to begin a relationship given that their father's control of the house is now broken. Ripstein's use of sordid family narratives allows for this type of exploration. Nearly twenty years after he made *El castillo de la pureza*, Ripstein released *La mujer del puerto* (1971), another family narrative about incest. The film is often touted as a remake of Arcady Boytler's *La mujer del puerto* (1934), but Ripstein's film is far from being a remake. His film takes the title of the Mexican classic and twists the narrative. Boytler's film starts in a small town where Rosario still lives with her father. She is interested in a young man, who is a womanizer and who has a confrontation with her father. The father dies, and Rosario feels shame for her sexual desire. She leaves the town to live in a port and becomes a sex worker who wears black in mourning and in shame for her sins. She has sex with a man and discovers that he is her brother and cannot live with the accidental sin of incest. Although the film does not show her suicide, we can assume that she takes her life by diving into the water and drowning. Ripstein then recreates the sex worker in a character named Perla, and she lives in a port and also sleeps with her brother Marro, played by Damián Alcázar. The sex worker in Ripstein's film acts on her sexual desire unlike Boytler's Rosario, who feels the shame of incestual relationship with her brother.

The 1991 film is divided into three sections by the points of view of Marro, Tomasa (their mother), and Perla. Rosario's name in the Boytler classic reminds us of the Rosary (Catholicism), but Perla is the gem of the sea. She is a representation of Mexico at the crossroads of globalization. While she could pick any man, she decides that she would rather be with Marro, even though he is her brother. Thus, an allegorical reading suggests that, despite the opening of the economy, the family structure (Mexico) looks inward and points to the incestual survival of national identity. The first section of the film seems eerily like the Mexican classic because Perla throws herself into the water. Later, we find out that she tries to commit suicide because she feels that she cannot live without Marro. She does not try to commit suicide like Rosario, who dives into the water out of shame for challenging the normative expectation that denies the possibility of incest.

While Perla acts on her sexual desire without any shame, she has her own set of problems because she grapples with the familial consequences of incest. The father in Ripstein's *La mujer del puerto* is more perverse than the one in *El castillo de la pureza* because he sexually abused Perla when she was a baby. Marro kills his father in retaliation, so he must leave town to avoid being caught for his crime. Thus, Ripstein completely reinvents the father figure from the classic version, removing any positive traits that might be ascribed to the patriarch. Marro saves Perla from the abuse, but he later becomes her lover, perpetuating the cycle of incest but not of abuse. Perla knowingly decides that she wants to continue her sexual relationship with her brother despite her mother's initial concerns. Conversely, we also get two different points of view about Perla's relationship with her mother. In one scene, we see the mother forcefully aborting Perla's baby because the child is a product of incest. In a replay of the abortion, we see that Perla asks her mother for the abortion. Whatever the truth really is, Perla is not initially free from societal constraints regarding her relationship with her brother, but the whole family sheds these constraints by the end of the film. In the last scene, we see Marro and Perla together with their daughter, who visibly shows the facial features of Down's Syndrome. She is pregnant with another child, and her mother is present. The pregnant Perla takes Marro behind the curtain and performs oral sex. In sum, Perla embodies both the mother and the sex worker in complex ways that are unusual for Mexican film.

Although the ending is left open in the *El castillo de la pureza*, we can contemplate the possibility of a relationship between Porvenir and Utopía, given Ripstein's representations of sordid family relationships. The film captures the stifling nature of these policies that lead to the Mexican Miracle, as reflected in the family home and the patriarchy embodied by Gabriel. By the end of the film, the space of the house (and thus the nation) is finally undone, and we are left with an open ending. The Mexican Miracle would lead to the economic restructuring of the inward policies of Import Substitution Industrialization and toward economic pacts, such as the North American Free Trade Agreement, yet that would ultimately lead to a dead end. The fall of the symbolic father—the PRI, which stayed in power for seventy-one consecutive years—only represents a desire for political change that did not happen. In the end, *El castillo de la pureza* leaves two options for the future. The first implies an economic change toward international and commercial markets, and the second is an allegorical love affair between Utopia and Porvenir. Together, the siblings come to represent a leftist political vision for the future. It may seem contradictory that the film posits two

supposedly opposite visions, but it perhaps reflects Ripstein's managing of both national and international sources of funding and ideologies for making films. While his career is characterized by working with both Mexican and Spanish film industries, he was not lured by Hollywood markets as many of the younger directors have been.

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