



VENICE INTERNATIONAL  
FILM FESTIVAL

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# BLEAK STREET

*a film by  
Arturo Ripstein*

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## **BLEAK STREET**

(La Calle de la Amargura)

B&W, Mexico/Spain, 2015, 99 min.

In Spanish with English subtitles

### **OFFICIAL SELECTION:**

2015 Venice Film Festival – World Premiere

2015 Toronto Film Festival

2015 Morelia Film Festival

2015 Gijón Film Festival

### **SYNOPSIS**

In the early morning hours, two elderly prostitutes go back to their hovels. They are not tired from working; they are tired of not working. One has problems at home with her teenage daughter and cross dressing husband. The other lives with her invalid mother and loneliness. But that night, they have a date to celebrate the victory in the ring of two wrestlers, twin midgets wearing masks. At the hourly hotel, in order to rob the tiny men of their earnings, they drug them with eye drops. But the dose proves fatal. They murder them unintentionally. Scared and confused, they decide to hide from the police and run away together to live, as they always have, on Bleak Street.

“Veteran auteur and master of the Mexican bizarre, Arturo Ripstein –an influence on a generation of his country’s directors– plunges into a Mexico City demimonde of crime, prostitution, and luchador wrestling. The film’s luscious black-and-white cinematography recounts a true crime story of twin mini-luchadores (who never remove their masks), the mother who adores them, and two prostitutes whose best days are long behind them. Ripstein imbues his Bunuelian tableaux with both empathy and dark humor. “

–Film Forum

## CREW

Directed by	Arturo Ripstein
Written by	Paz Alicia Garcíadiego
Cinematography by	Alejandro Cantú
Producers:	Walter Navas and Arturo Ripstein
Executive Producers:	Xanat Briceño and Luis Alberto Estrada
Edited by	Arturo Ripstein and Carlos Puente
Costume Design by	Laura García de la Mora
Sound by	Antonio Diego
Production Design by	Marisa Pecanins
Locations	Mexico City

## CAST

Patricia Reyes Spíndola	Adela
Nora Velázquez	Dora
Sylvia Pasquel	Doña Epi
Arcelia Ramírez	Zema
Erando González	Ornelas
Paola Arroyo	Azucena
Alejandro Suárez	Max
Alberto Estrella	Juanes
Juan Francisco Longoria	Little Death
Guillermo López	Little AK
Emoé de la Parra	Márgara
Greta Cervantes	Jeza
Eligio Meléndez	Hilario
Lety Gómez	Older Woman

## DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

The country is convulsing, yesterday's news lies on two day old news. In this immense and contaminated Valley of Anáhuac, everyone is minding their own business. Nothing matters, no one gives a damn. The indignation, in the best of cases, is a simple gesture of naivety.

Images of my city, my cherished and hated city, dusty, filthy, brawling, and violent, circled my mind since I began weaving this story of prostitutes and little people...because my city is cruel. This is a valley that feeds off of blood, guarded by Coatlicue, the devourer of men and souls.

And in this turbulent plateau, moor of disgrace, it seems that it's fed by chance, by mistakes...the "excuse you, I fucked you over but didn't mean to," the "I blew it," the "I was fucked"...destiny.

Destiny, who is both an inexorable God and caustic demiurge, places dirty tricks for us.

The story of the accidental homicide of the little people wrestlers was, at least to me, more than a case of corruption and injustices, more than a case of decaying society or one that spoke of rotten luck. It spoke, loud and clear, of destiny.

When I learned about it, I understood why subconsciously this story fascinated me. The inexorable and terrible destiny has been one of my themes in many of my films, not to say all...this unchangeable force which intertwines people, biographies, and love.

The Realm of Fortune, Deep Crimson, The Ruination of Men, Life Sentence are some of the titles in my filmography, that in a more pronounced way, speak to the futility of destiny.

The victims and the comic prostitutes, who were about to end their shifts, who live moment to moment, without knowing what they want and merely following the course of destiny, turn into murderers by mistake, by casualty, by, what people say in this country, "without meaning to..." All of this: my weaknesses.

The prostitutes are a product of the old and cruel center of Mexico City, my city. The city of my anger, of my disillusionments, and of my interests.

This story would bring me to film in their streets filled with shadows and puddles, like in other occasions.

When I realized that the story fell into my favorite locations, I knew why I was interested in such a strange tale. I was obsessed.

More than that, I knew that it was my film, that I wanted to film it, that I should film it...another thing up to destiny...

## DIRECTOR'S FILMOGRAPHY

2015	La calle de la amargura (Bleak Street)
2011	Las razones del corazón (The Reasons of the Heart)
2006	El carnaval de Sodoma (Crazy Carnival)
2002	La virgen de la lujuria (The Virgin of Lust)
2000	La perdición de los hombres (The Ruination of Men)
2000	Así es la vida (Such is life)
1999	El Coronel no tiene quien le escriba (No One Writes to the Colonel)
1998	El Evangelio de las Maravillas (The Gospel of the Marvels)-1998
1996	Profundo carmesí (Deep Crimson)
1994	La reina de la noche (Queen of the Night)
1993	Principio y fin (The Beginning and the End)
1991	La mujer del puerto (Woman of the Port)
1989	Mentiras piadosas (Love Lies)
1986	El imperio de la fortuna (The Realm of Fortune)
1968	El otro (The Other)
1981	Rastro de muerte
1981	La seducción (Seduction)
1980	La tía Alejandra-1980
1979	La ilegal
1979	Cadena perpetua (Life Sentence)
1978	El lugar sin límites (Hell Without Limits)
1977	La viuda negra (The Black Widow)
1976	Foxtrot (The Far Side of Paradise)
1974	El Santo Oficio (The Holy Inquisition)
1973	El castillo de la pureza (Castle of Purity)
1969	La hora de los niños (The Children's Hours)
1969	Los recuerdos del porvenir (Memories of the Future)
1967	Juego peligroso (Dangerous Game)
1966	Tiempo de morir (Time To Die)

## **Revelations of a Fallen World – The Cinema of Arturo Ripstein**

By Haden Guest, Director, Harvard Film Archive

Over the course of his prodigious and still active career Arturo Ripstein (b. 1943) has remained the most vital, persistent and original filmmaker working within the Mexican cinema. A maverick contrarian, Ripstein has paradoxically flourished within the same commercial industry whose complacent traditions he has so steadily defied. Fearless and subversive, Ripstein's films artfully transform popular genres – the Western, the "family film" and, above all, melodrama – into devastating attacks against the inveterate prejudice and myopia deeply-rooted in Mexican culture and history. Yet, while major films such as *The Castle of Purity*, *The Place Without Limits* and *Deep Crimson* deliver swift hammer blows against obdurate patriarchy, intolerance, provincialism and, above all, machismo, their lasting power and artistry lies far beyond the daring themes. For within the stark, mesmerizing imagery that haunts Ripstein's films is crystallized a strange fusion of beauty and brutality, compassion and violence, central to a profound melancholia and sense of slow, inexorable decline which underlies his entire oeuvre. Far from nihilistic, the unyielding pessimism often credited to Ripstein's cinema is instead a brand of bracing humanism fascinated by the secret nightmares and dark fantasies of the indelible anti-heroes whose weakness, hubris and folly Ripstein steadfastly refuses to sentimentalize. In 1975 *The Realm of Fortune* launched Ripstein's long and remarkable collaboration with the talented screenwriter Paz Alicia Garcíadiego whose subtle ear for the music of vernacular language and consummate skills at literary adaptation brought a new dimension into Ripstein's cinema, a novelistic complexity of voice and character that resulted in such celebrated works as *The Beginning and the End* as well as lesser known classics like *The Ruination of Men*.

The son of one of Mexico's most prominent film producers, Ripstein was quite literally born and bred into the cinema, observing film productions and apprenticing from a very young age. Especially important to Ripstein's formation was his long friendship with Luis Buñuel who became an intellectual and spiritual mentor to the aspiring filmmaker – although Ripstein never, despite the stubborn myth, worked as Buñuel's assistant on any film. From his very first youthful films, Ripstein boldly embraced a certain Buñuelian iconoclasm and irreverent black humor that which would remain important signatures of his films. Tied not only to Buñuel but also to the Golden Age of Mexican cinema whose crepuscular days he witnessed firsthand and whose stars – such as Claudio Brook and Katy Jurado – he often cast, Ripstein stands as a crucial link between Mexico's studio-era and the new generation of auteur directors such as Carlos Reygadas, Guillermo del Toro and Nicolás Pereda who each, in their own ways, acknowledge Ripstein's profound legacy.

## CRITICAL ACCLAIM

“A lunatic swirl into the hopes, kinks, and day-to-day hustle of a handful of Mexico City characters so colorful, the pic’s black-and-white cinematography merely amplifies their eccentricities. Between its pint-sized pugilists, cross-dressing philanderers and desperate old whores, this carnivalesque group portrait might easily be mistaken for some lost Fellini project, were it not for the twist that this phantasmagoric true-crimer wasn’t dreamed up by its director...but pulled from the pages of the local newspaper.”

–Peter Debruge, Variety

“(Ripstein’s) best film in years... More than any living director, Ripstein has taken up the mantle of his friend and early mentor Luis Buñuel, whose tenure in the Mexican film industry during its peak years represents his most prolific period. Like those characters in Buñuel’s Mexico City-set landmark *Los Olvidados* (1950), the denizens of *Bleak Street* are damned by immovable class barriers and a cruelty that circulates not only from the top down but from within their own ranks—like Buñuel gives voice to the poor without sentimentalizing them. *Bleak Street*’s insistent humor, oneiric slippage, and stylistic mischief all recall Buñuel. They also represent the aggregate of much of what’s best in Ripstein’s oeuvre.”

– José Teodoro, Cinema Scope