



**Becoming 'Arturo Ripstein'? On Collaboration and the 'Author Function'
in the Transnational Film Adaptation of *El lugar sin límites***

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*Arturo Ripstein, el director tiene quien le escriba/
...the director has someone to write him¹*

Despite being one of the most distinctive film *auteurs* in Latin America since the late 1960s, Mexican director Arturo Ripstein has almost exclusively chosen to adapt existing, usually well-known, and often highly original literary works by writers from that continent and beyond.² Before he teamed up with his current scriptwriter Paz Alicia Garciadiego in 1986 for an adaptation of Juan Rulfo's *El imperio de la fortuna/The Realm of Fortune*, Ripstein also frequently co-authored his scripts with a number of highly distinguished Latin American novelists and short story writers. In 1978, he released his film adaptation of Chilean writer José Donoso's 1966 short novel *El lugar sin límites* ('The Place without Limits', aka 'Hell Has No Limits'). Set in a decrepit bordello cum nightclub, this queer family melodrama, which culminates in the homophobic murder of its drag-artist protagonist, had an extraordinary international impact.³ The film eclipsed the success of Donoso's novella, at the same time as reawakening an interest in his text that had earlier circulated internationally as part of the Latin American literary 'Boom.'⁴ While Ripstein took the only screenwriting credit for *El lugar sin límites*, he worked on the script with Donoso (whose novel is, of course, credited as the film's 'source'), with the Argentine novelist, playwright and screenwriter Manuel Puig, as well as with a number of other, uncredited Mexican writers including José Emilio Pacheco, Cristina Pacheco and Carlos Castañón. Puig and Ripstein famously fell out over Puig's contribution and

his name does not appear in the credits. While each of Ripstein's films prompts interesting questions about collaborative authorship, few of them do so as compellingly as *El lugar sin límites*.

Non-mainstream and oppositional filmmakers and critics in Latin America—for example, Grupo Cine Liberación with their late 1960s formulation of 'Second Cinema' in 'Hacia un tercer cine'/'Towards a Third Cinema' (Solanas and Getino)—have often attacked, as 'ideologically limited', '*extranjerizante*' or 'Eurocentric,' and 'literary' or 'individualistic,' the kind of film *auteurism* in which Ripstein has engaged over four decades. Despite these and other similar attacks, it seems clear that this model of film production (along with Ripstein's 'brand' of it) has been particularly resilient in the face of the political, economic and cultural vicissitudes of the 1970s, 1980s, 1990s and 2000s in a number of countries in the continent. Few sustained studies of *auteurism* as an internationally successful mode of production in Latin America exist, however. In this article, then, rather than focusing solely on the similarities and differences between the homonymous film and literary texts (the principal critical activity in which studies of the adaptation process engage [Grant 2002]), I propose to use the transnational story of the adaptation of *El lugar sin límites*—as told from the point of view of its diverse 'authors' (Donoso, Puig and Ripstein)—to explore some questions concerning collaborative authorship across film and literary culture in Latin America after the end of the period of the literary 'Boom'. I focus on the differences in the accounts that I reproduce here not in order to discover, or distil, a 'true story', but instead to show, and to work with, the diversity of authorial discourse about the adaptation of Donoso's novel.

While this particular case of transnational *auteurist* adaptation is a compelling anecdote in its own right, my examination of it will move beyond the biographical. As my title suggests, the discussion here is underwritten throughout by an interest in Michel Foucault's concept of the 'author function.' For Foucault, supposedly *individual* authorship is the result of a complex, institutionalized, discursive operation that constructs the singular 'reasonable being' or agent, that we call 'an author' (Foucault 215). According to the French theorist,

The author does not precede the works; he is a certain functional principle by which, in our culture, one limits, excludes, and chooses; in short, by which one impedes the free circulation, the free manipulation, the free composition, decomposition, and recomposition of fiction. [...]The author is therefore the ideological figure by which one marks the manner in which we fear the proliferation of meaning (Foucault 221-221).

In what follows it will be clear that I regard actual film writers and directors—Ripstein, Donoso, Puig, say—as historical agents, or subjects, who have direct, intentional and reflexive, if obviously not completely all determining, relationships to the cultural products they help to produce, as well as to their reception. But, following Foucault and Judith Butler, I understand these subjects' forms of cultural agency as 'reiterative or re-articulatory practice[s], immanent to power and not as a relation of external opposition

to power' (Butler 15) no matter how 'free' their work might seem. While these agents do *author* or *direct* cultural texts—by choosing, doing and saying (sometimes) original things, as individuals—what they cannot individually engender, or 'direct', is the discursive or conceptual framework of *authored* cultural production and reception itself. In this context, for Ripstein to be seen as an auteurist director—like his mentor Luis Buñuel, also known for his distinctive film adaptations co-scripted by others—he can only 're-make' or 're-direct,' or, cite or repeatedly perform, the kind of work (to risk tautology) that is already constructed as being that of an 'auteur,' in other words the (studiously) 'distinctive', 'individually-signed' and 'free' work that audiences are primed to expect from this kind of historically contingent figure.⁵ Clearly, auteurs are not born *sui generis* (the constitutive characteristic of auteurism), but rather they become it.⁶ As we shall see, in the case of the transnational production of *El lugar sin límites*, such a laborious *becoming* necessarily involved and built upon the contribution of named collaborators, themselves *sui generis* authors, at the same time as it paradoxically required, to a certain extent at least, the *dis*-appearance of these collaborators.

Chronicle of an adaptation

*El infierno son los otros / Hell is other people*⁷

All three of the main authorial collaborators in the film adaptation of *El lugar sin límites* – Donoso, Puig, and Ripstein - have given their versions of what occurred during this process (Donoso 1979; Puig 1987; Ripstein; Yakir; Levine; Entraigües; García Riera; Pérez Estremera). Their accounts, and those of film historians, have it that Luis Buñuel first purchased the rights to Donoso's novel in the late 1960s, but was unable to convince the censors in Spain, where he was based at the time, that the film be made (Millares; Monterde). According to Ripstein, his father Alfredo Ripstein, a well-regarded producer of commercial Mexican films and friend to Buñuel, then acquired the rights and gave the project to his son (Entraigües 93). Ripstein Junior liaised with Donoso who was at that time resident in Mexico,⁸ and plans for the adaptation began in earnest in 1975.

By the mid 1970s, Ripstein was already well established as a filmmaker. His five earlier feature length fiction films, made from 1965 onwards, had all been in receipt of state finance and most of them were made at the prestigious state-sponsored studio complex Estudios Churubusco, a sign of the esteem

in which he was held as well indicative of his excellent contacts in the movie industry as assistant to Buñuel and as son of a notable producer.⁹ In fact, this very 'promising' trajectory had been fractured by Ripstein's dissatisfaction with the heavily 'commercial' and 'impersonal' nature of the films of the very early part of his career. After a brief experimental foray into very low budget, independent filmmaking (a move which coincided with the tumultuous political events in Mexico from 1968 onwards), he returned to the commercial fold in the early 1970s with a greater desire to use his films as a form of personal (and principled) expression. These truly *auteurist* concerns connected him with a generation of filmmakers (Cazals, Leduc, Fons, Hermosillo, Isaac, and others) whose films would comprise the so-called 'Nuevo Cine Mexicano'. While these directors were initially encouraged by the then head of the Banco Nacional Cinematográfico Rodolfo Echeverría, a technocrat interested in fomenting a cinema 'de interés nacional y extraordinario', they were less well supported by Echeverría's successor Margarita López Portillo. In the face of economic and political crisis, and declining national and international cinema audiences for Mexican films, Ripstein's increasingly oppositional stance in the industry resulted in a lesser degree of state support for his project to adapt Donoso's *El lugar sin límites* with its homosexual themes and 'sordid' setting. While he chose to shoot some of the film on location in Querétaro, for the rest he was relegated from Estudios Churubusco to the less well-equipped Estudios América and received finance not from the premier state film production company of the period (Conacine) but from the less prestigious Conacite Dos (Monterde 46-47).¹⁰

In the early to mid-1970s, Argentine novelist, cinephile and screenwriter¹¹ Manuel Puig had made a temporary home in Mexico City, away from the political strife of his native country. He had also found a place in its cosmopolitan literary and cultural circles, like the expatriate Chilean Donoso whom he knew there and whose work he admired. He soon fell out with the Mexican 'cultural "mafias" (Puig cit. by Levine 271), however, and moved on, again temporarily, to New York, Río de Janeiro and Paris. While still in Mexico, he finished his novel *El beso de la mujer araña/The Kiss of the Spider Woman*, eventually published in Spain by Seix Barral in 1976, but he also worked on film scripts and plays inspired by the musical film melodramas of Mexican cinema's 'Golden Age' of the 1940s and 1950s, especially ones in the *cabaretera* (nightclub, cabaret) mould (Levine 268). None of these were produced, unfortunately. One of the producers commissioning work from him at the time was Barbachano Ponce, and it was he who introduced the Argentine writer to Ripstein in 1975. Ripstein expressed his appreciation of Puig's first novel *La traición de Rita Hayworth* and in due course, as Suzanne Jill Levine reports, Puig gave him a copy of *El beso de la mujer araña*, which cemented his admiration for the Argentine author's work (Levine 286). In September 1976, Ripstein commissioned Puig to write a screenplay for his adaptation of *El lugar sin límites*. While filled with doubts about adapting existing books, Puig was intrigued by Donoso's novel (Levine 286), and submitted a first version of the script to Ripstein two months later. On the basis of her

many interviews and long acquaintance with Puig, Levine gives his version of subsequent events in her brilliant biography of the Argentine writer.¹² It is worth quoting this at length:

For Manuel this was almost a rehearsal, though he didn't realize it then, for his contributions to the film version of *Kiss of the Spider Woman* – the challenge of bringing a believable, sympathetic queen to a wider audience. [...] Manuel was worried about what Ripstein would do with his script, but, as it turned out, Ripstein was in tune with Donoso's unmasking of macho stereotypes – he portrays Pancho as an angry, insecure stud, and benevolent Don Alejo is even more elderly in the film – and gave the grotesque whores and La Manuela the human depth with which Donoso had imbued them. Manuel feared mainly that Ripstein would turn the gay character into a caricature, while Ripstein felt that Manuel was trying to make La Manuela too exaggerated and Pancho too macho, and believed that his directorial interpretation of Donoso's feelings about machismo and sexual underdogs was more nuanced. As Manuel saw it, Ripstein's psychological realism and expressionist touches – mirrors, dark interiors – tried to reflect an inner life but were oppressive; his camera direction tended towards 'artsy' static tedium.

After the script was taken out of his hands and worked over by the Mexican writer José Emilio Pacheco, Manuel asked that his name be not included in the credits. Pacheco and Ripstein had agreed on making it clear to the spectator that Pancho kills La Manuela, whereas Manuel wanted to preserve the original's ambiguous ending – which left Manuela's fate to the reader's imagination, and also left open the possibility that Pancho's brutality would go unpunished.

Though the film was 'overdone, like an El Greco painting,' Manuel ultimately regretted withdrawing his name from the credits: 'I liked it, but I had taken my name off it, because of the threat of censorship. At that time, 1978, the Argentine drama was at its worst [the military had launched its *golpe/coup* in March 1976], so I became hysterical. I was also censored in Spain and Hungary, so I was becoming paranoid. The film was a success' [Yakir 208]. With the Mexican elections coming up, Manuel was concerned about possible censorship, especially, he implied, if a known homosexual signed a script in which the main character was gay. But Ripstein claims that Manuel feared he would deal with the transvestite in a crass manner. It was the same apprehension Manuel experienced later with Hector Babenco's, or, rather, William Hurt's, interpretation of Molina [in *El beso de la mujer araña/The Kiss of the Spider Woman*]. (Levine 286-287).

I shall come back to the question of the film adaptation's transfiguration or transposition of its novelistic source shortly, but in his own published version of these and other events concerning his relationship with the cinema,¹³ Puig describes things in a much more 'balanced', seemingly more 'self-censored' fashion:¹⁴

From Mexico, Arturo Ripstein asked me to adapt José Donoso's novella *El lugar sin límites*. At first I said no, but Ripstein insisted, so I read the book again. It was more of a long short story than a novel, so in this case the problem was to add material to round out the script. This I enjoyed far more [than his earlier experience of 'compressing' his own novel *Boquitas pintadas* for Torre Nilsson's 1974 homonymous film], and my good working relationship with Ripstein led to another project, which I myself suggested: the adaptation of a story by the Argentine writer Silvina Ocampo, 'El impostor' [filmed as *El otro*, 1984, with Puig taking the screenwriting credit this time]. What did *El lugar sin límites* and 'El impostor' have in common? [...] Both stories were allegories, poetic in tone, without any claims to realism, even though basically they dealt with well-defined human problems. (Puig, 1987: 287-288)

Despite the rosy view, given here, of his experience of working with Ripstein, Puig does go on to hint later in the article, however, that contemporary auteurist films—like, though he does not say so, those which make up the Mexican director's work—cannot reach the heights of films made under the classical, studio eras either in Hollywood or in Mexico (Puig 1987, 289).

Ripstein may well have 'redeemed' himself in public with Puig, if not completely in private, by his decision to direct the stage version of *El beso de la mujer araña*, based on Puig's own script, that ran in Mexico City between 1979 and 1981 (Levine 286).¹⁵ In any case, they fell out again in the mid-1980s over Puig's script for *El otro*. Even as Puig and Ripstein's recollections fail to coincide in their emphasis, what is clear from the Mexican director's own accounts of the adaptation of *El lugar sin límites* is that his bitterness about it chimes with the heightened emotions expressed by Puig to his biographer. In an interview published in 1996, six years after the death of the Argentine writer in Mexico City, Ripstein recalled that, upon *El otro's* release in 1984,¹⁶

Puig después lanzó una diatriba furibunda en contra de la película por los cambios que le hice, misma diatriba que había hecho, pero al revés, cuando terminamos de hacer *El lugar sin límites*, película que no quiso firmar cuando la hicimos originalmente, pero que cuando vio los cambios hechos por mí y que la película tenía éxito, entonces el tipo sí se paró el cuello y dijo que él había hecho todo, cosa que era falsa. En ésta fue exactamente lo contrario. Fue muy desagradable trabajar con Puig. (Ripstein: 99)

Afterwards, Puig launched into a furious diatribe against the film because of the changes I made, the same diatribe, albeit in reverse, that he launched when we finished *El lugar sin límites*, a film for which he didn't want a credit when we made it originally, but when he saw the changes I made, and that the film was successful, he went into show-off mode and said that he had done everything, which was untrue. With the later film, he did exactly the reverse. It was very unpleasant working with Puig. [My translation of Ripstein: 99]

As for Donoso's view of the adaptation of his work, Levine writes that he 'felt pleased and honoured when he learned that Manuel had authored the screenplay of his novel, which dealt frankly with the taboo subject of homosexuality' (Levine 286). He certainly gave Ripstein his permission to change the novel's ending (Monterde 48), and to increase the quotient of *esperpentismo* (the Hispanic aesthetic tradition of distortion and the grotesque) deriving, as Lluís Miñaro Alberó writes in his assessment of the film, from 'el sentido tragicómico de la existencia mexicano'/'the tragic-comic sense of Mexican life' (Miñaro Alberó 39). And while on the whole Donoso liked the finished film, in an interview published in 1979, he noted that

La verdad es que la novela trata de cómo somos nosotros, los chilenos, un poco más grises, más sombríos, con menos colores, más matizados, más sutiles que los mexicanos (...) La

transposición a México sacrificó nuestro lenguaje cotidiano hasta convertirlo en otro idioma (...) Es un libro sombrío. Otoñal, frío, lleno de corrientes de aire, de olor a orujo, con presencias de habitaciones vacías, cargadas de pobreza. La versión cinematográfica mexicana hizo que todo se llenara de cromatismo. Las prostitutas, por ejemplo, aparecen vestidas de todos los colores, cosa que en Chile no pasaría (...) Se ha interpretado bien la letra de mi novela, pero no se captó su poesía. (Donoso 1979, 30)

The truth is that the novel deals with how we Chileans are, a little greyer, darker, with fewer colours, more shaded, more subtle than Mexicans (...) The transposition to Mexico entailed the sacrifice of our day to day idioms and almost turned them into a different language completely (...) It is a dark, autumnal, cold book, filled with draughts, the smell of *orujo* [a rough, local liquor], haunted by empty rooms, weighed down by poverty. The Mexican film version filled everything with colour. The prostitutes, for example, are colourfully dressed, which just wouldn't happen in Chile (...) they interpreted the letter of my novel well, but the film just didn't capture its poetry. [My translation of Donoso, 1979, 30]

Were the Pachecos and Castañón brought in by Ripstein *before* the emergence of 'problems with Puig' or with his script, simply to aid in Ripstein's 'Mexicanization' of the Argentine author's original translation of Donoso's Chilean setting and idiolect? Or were they brought in *afterwards*, to 'correct' the script in other ways (Puig certainly believed this to be the case as Levine reports), perhaps to tighten up Ripstein's own efforts at 'making it his own work'? It is difficult for me to make a clear case for either of these possibilities.¹⁷ But it seems certain, nonetheless, that given Puig's withdrawal of his name from the credits, the director's own work on the script must have been sufficient to warrant that only Ripstein's name, and not those of the other Mexican writers, should appear with a screenwriting credit. Later marketed versions of the film, for example the sleeves of the most recent commercial releases on VHS and DVD, have awarded José Emilio Pacheco co-screenwriting credit with Ripstein.¹⁸

Transnational transposition

...cada texto de Arturo Ripstein es un lugar sin límites/
...each text by Arturo Ripstein is *The Place without Limits*¹⁹

It seems obvious, if only in retrospect, why Ripstein was drawn to Donoso's novel. As Donoso partially indicates (and like nearly all of Ripstein's other films to date), *El lugar sin límites* deals with poverty, sordidness, 'unconventional' human sexuality, families 'queered' by patriarchal capitalism, and other compelling Latin American political issues, such as the modern survival of neofeudal *latifundismo* and *caciquismo*.²⁰ As Ripstein has noted of his interest in adapting the literary works of fellow Latin Americans, 'Más que el realismo mágico en cine, me interesa lo real atroz/More than magical realism in

cinema, I'm interested in "atrocious realism" (Entraigües 96). But, given that José Emilio Pacheco eventually did become involved in the screenwriting process, why did Ripstein ask Manuel Puig to adapt *El lugar sin límites* in the first instance, and not his old and trusted friend with whom he had co-scripted four earlier feature length films?²¹ Perhaps Ripstein believed that Puig's authorship was required to contribute something 'different' to his film work; or perhaps he felt that Donoso's novel needed Puig's special talents to bring it to the cinema.

I shall deal only briefly with the most obvious contribution Puig was felt to have made to the adaptation, that of his authentic—and relatively openly lived and expressed—'effeminate' homosexual experience.²² While homosexuality, bisexuality and ambiguous sexuality had made several appearances in Ripstein's films prior to *El lugar sin límites* (as well as in many of his films since), La Manuela is his first and only 'loca' or 'queen' protagonist. As I have already shown, Puig's work had clearly impressed both Ripstein and Donoso - two reportedly heterosexual, and certainly married, men²³ - with its (often autobiographical) depiction of homosexuality in general, and of 'locura' in particular. Perhaps the (not always reliable) principle that 'it takes one to know one' was being followed in this case: Manuel must re-write La Manuela for the cinema. Yet any assumption that the Argentine writer might have been limited by his own 'foundational' (or national) experiences of homosexual identity in the enterprise of 'translating' the character for its new Mexican context may be countered, I would argue, by the understanding that, as a practising gay man living in Mexico City between 1972 and 1975, Puig already had a first-hand knowledge of Mexican homosexual life and its mores (see Levine 245, and *passim*). That Puig was aware of his role in this regard in the adaptation seems evident from Levine's account of the tortuous period following the submission of his script for *El lugar sin límites*. Clearly Puig's concerns about his safety as a known gay man as the film headed towards its release date in 1978 seem very well founded, even if there were other factors that had led him to withdraw his name from the film's credits.

What seems equally clear is that Puig's contribution to the adaptation does not turn specifically on his nationality or, indeed, on his politics,²⁴ which were, perhaps, always less easy to characterise than Donoso and Ripstein's shared, anti-feudal, anti-neocolonial, pro-pan Latin Americanist outlook, filtered through their own national lens. In a practical sense, of course, each of *El lugar sin límites'* three primary 'authors'—Donoso, Puig and Ripstein—had come together due to the vagaries of politically-forced exile, in Mexico City's cultural melting-pot in the early to mid 1970s. In that environment, compared with the other members of the international literary elite (Fuentes, Paz, Rulfo, García Márquez, Pacheco, and others), Puig's literary cachet derived from his reputation as one of a new generation of post-'Boom' writers, with their foregrounding of humour and elements of pop(ular) culture, their fusions of multiple narrative genres and their capacity to be influenced by a variety of artistic and cultural forms. While Donoso himself started out as a 'Boom' writer in a fairly classic or generic sense, from the 1970s onwards

he increasingly saw his work as being infused by these new values: he described himself in an interview in 1981 as 'literario, plástico y músico, por ese orden'/'literary, sculptural, musical, in that order' (Donoso 1981, 7). What is especially interesting about Donoso's 1966 novel, in this respect, is that, for all its qualities as a 'Boom' rewriting of Latin American Regionalism, it also personifies what may be interpreted as strikingly post-'Boom' elements in its central *loca* character, La Manuela, with her love of gossip, her cruel humour and nostalgic attachment to the popular *boleros* and *cuplés*, as well as the films and fashions of hybrid Latin and Hollywood transnational celebrity culture of the 1950s. Puig's earlier novels, well known by Ripstein when he came to commission the script, were bursting with similar characters, similar dialogue and free indirect discourse, and similar cultural references. As Lluís Miñaro Alberó writes in his review of *El lugar sin límites*, 'los personajes en el film parecen más criaturas del escritor argentino que del chileno'/'the characters seem more the creatures of the Argentine writer than of the Chilean writer' (Miñaro Alberó 39).

It has been argued that the script was only 'Mexicanized' when Puig's version was taken over by Ripstein and his other collaborators. This may very well be the case in terms of the film's dialogue. As De la Mora writes, his comments based on knowledge of García Riera's conversations with Ripstein, the dialogue 'undergoes a triple transformation: from *chilenismos* to *argentanismos* to *mexicanismos*' (De la Mora 102). Yet what has not been recognized sufficiently, I would argue, is that Puig was in a very good position himself to contribute in other key ways to the Mexicanized expansion of many of Donoso's original cultural references in his novel.²⁵ During his stay in Mexico, not only had he become an expert in the very musical Mexican cinema of the 1940s and 1950s (Levine 268), with its abundant, diegetically-performed *boleros* and *mambos*; but he had also immersed himself in Mexican *ranchera* culture, not only *norteña* music, but also the *charro* tradition of films. In 1974-1975, he even wrote a musical play for the famous *ranchera* singer Lucha Villa (Levine 270). Villa was also beloved by Ripstein, who cast her as La Japonesa Grande in his film.

In Donoso's novel, the actual lyrics of four existing pieces of popular music are reproduced or alluded to: three *boleros*, 'Vereda tropical' (Donoso 1999, 112), 'Bésame mucho' (Donoso 1999, 146) and 'Flores negras' (Donoso 1999, 150, 153), and one Spanish *pasodoble* or *cuplé*, 'El relicario', La Manuela's 'party piece' (Donoso 1999, 168). In the film adaptation, completely different *boleros* are used, as well as music from the Cuban *son* and *mambo* traditions, and the Mexican *ranchera* tradition, mostly in versions recorded by locally well-known, Mexican or Mexico-based musicians (Pepe Arévalo y sus Mulatos, las Hermanas Gómez y Hernández, Sonora Santanera, among others). These songs and pieces of music are not primarily employed for the purposes of underscoring the film's action. Like the set song and dance numbers in the films of the 1940s and 1950s' *cabaretera* sub-genre, the music in *El lugar sin límites* is often in the foreground. More importantly, it is all shown to have a diegetic source (the radio, the

Wurlitzer or the record player, as well as live performance). The film's music also has a clear formal and narrative function, akin to *cabaretera* film music. As Carlos Monsiváis writes, the *cabaretera's boleros* help to establish the space of the brothel or *cabaret* as 'a moral hell and sensorial heaven, where the "forbidden" was normalised' (Monsiváis, 1995, 118). Both in the central section of the film's tripartite structure,²⁶ where the action flashes back to the Mexico of the 1950s (not only the 'Golden-Age' of its cinema but also the 'golden age' of the brothel and the town portrayed in *El lugar sin límites*), as well as in the rest of the film, the selection (and then *mise-en-scène*) of the film's music knowingly and lovingly recalls the earlier film tradition, at the same time as it points to the anachronism and inappropriateness of its mythologies for its 1970s' characters: the characters rarely perform vocally themselves, but listen and occasionally mime to the recycled music. *El lugar sin límites* was the first of Ripstein's fiction films *not* to have a specially composed musical score, and while several of his earlier films use diegetic music, they do so very sparingly. After 1978, most of Ripstein's film work continued to employ heterogenous and non-scored diegetic music (from borrowed *boleros* to opera extracts) in the way set out by those who collaborated in the adaptation of Donoso's text.

Only 'El relicario' survives the transposition of novel into film. Even so, its climactic function in Donoso's text is replaced in the movie by the addition of another piece of music borrowed from the Spanish *cuplé* tradition. As Levine writes, this is the one aspect of the finished film that has been acknowledged by Ripstein to be entirely Puig's contribution. In interviews with Puig's biographer, Ripstein admitted that

the best moment of the film was written by Manuel: the fatal dance that poor Manuela, decked out in a red feathery flamenco dress outlining his bony male buttocks, performs for Pancho. La Manuela dances to a wordless Spanish song [sic]²⁷ ([performed] by Los Churumbeles de España) titled 'La Leyenda del Beso', [...] based on the myth of the sleeping princess awakened by a prince's kiss. Manuel added the words and inverted the myth: this time the sleeper is a young man [Pancho] awakened to his sexuality by a woman's kiss [La Manuela]. La Manuela's dance for Pancho, aggressively seductive, precipitates disaster: when brother-in-law Octavio sees Pancho swept away to the point of kissing La Manuela, Pancho is obliged to defend his masculinity by beating La Manuela to death (Levine 287-288).

Only one song which has been associated consistently with Ripstein throughout his career, 'Perfume de Gardenias',²⁸ appears in the film. Indeed, it seems literally invoked as a 'Ripsteinian' signature tune, since it is heard twice, once during the film in a recording by Sonora Santanera, and then again at the end as the closing credits are accompanied by an instrumental arrangement of the same song. This being the case, and given that Ripstein had never employed music before as he employs it here, it seems valid to speculate that Puig played a more significant role in the film's musical selection than has previously been acknowledged. The Argentine author was, after all, the person initially

responsible for ‘expanding’ Donoso’s narrative setting, and the film’s most visible and audible act of expansion inheres in its increase in musical numbers (from four songs to twelve), and in their foregrounding.

I would also argue, however, that the film’s style of musical *bricolage* points at least as much to Puig’s authorial signature as it does to Ripstein’s, if not more so.²⁹ As Lucille Kerr writes in a remarkable chapter on Puig’s *Pubis angelical* (set in mid 1970s Mexico City), this novel, like Puig’s work more generally, ‘seems to eradicate traditional authorial indicators with the forms of discourse and narration through which its story [...] is told. But it also figures authorial interests and aims’ (Kerr 93). For Kerr,

when one thinks of Puig’s writing one thinks of the themes and forms of detective fiction or serial fiction, popular songs, soap operas and Hollywood movies, as well as of the languages of fashion magazines, psychoanalysis and melodrama, among others – all juxtaposed and combined to shape Puig’s literary signature. The figure to which one would give the name Puig thus surfaces through certain topics, talk and techniques that have been regarded as characteristic of his writing – as constitutive of his style. (Kerr 103-104)

Kerr goes on to argue that, in some senses, Puig ‘dis-appears’ as an author:

He presents himself [in this and other novels] as a virtual compiler who combines and correlates discourses that originate with no individual subject, and as a commentator who presents anew controversial topics and talk, apparently without taking his own identifiable or stable position about them. [...] Puig disappears as an author [from the discourse of his novels] also because he works through a mode of writing that is grounded in the virtual stealing of the styles of others [...]. Oddly, though his work derives from the cultural models that belong not to any individual author but rather to contemporary culture itself, those models have nonetheless come to mark Puig’s position as a writer of original texts. (Kerr 105-106)

Obviously, some of Kerr’s words have resonance here because *El lugar sin límites* is a film from whose credits Puig’s name *officially* disappears. But Kerr’s characterization of Puig in her chapter as ‘a copier, as well as an editor, of the scripts of others (perhaps, one might even say, as a kind of *scriptor*)’ (Kerr 105) is also pertinent because the Argentine author builds on, but greatly departs from, Donoso’s own limited, lyrical borrowings in his novel. Puig ‘adapts’, in a very productive fashion, the pre-existing and relatively anonymous ‘scripts’ provided by songs from popular music and film culture. These recordings and performances do not just ‘accompany’ the film, as they might occasionally in Ripstein’s earlier films: they are used, as musical lyrics are used in Puig’s novels, *to tell the story*. These small ‘myths’ in their locally-rooted but ‘universal’ musical forms provide *El lugar sin límites*, as Monsiváis writes of the *bolero*, with ‘songs that make intimate history a public concern – the autobiography of everyone and no one’ (Monsiváis 1997, 312). This, then, is an ethical choice, and a matter thus of an authorial style as much as it is of narrative ‘content’.

In the name of 'Ripstein'

El lugar sin límites es, de alguna manera, una película que me da patente de seriedad... me doctora en esos términos, me doctora /

*The Place without Limits is, in some ways, a film that licensed me in seriousness, gave me a doctorate in seriousness.*³⁰

In 1978, the adaptation of *El lugar sin límites* won the prize for best screenplay at the San Sebastián Film Festival. Ironically, the prize was collected by Arturo Ripstein, only one of those involved in writing the film script, though accompanied by many of his cast. From the outset, then, the film was received as an *auteurist* product. Even though it was based, originally, on someone else's words and ideas, and, like all commercial films, on the active collaboration of many artists and technicians, institutionally and in its mode of circulation, this was Ripstein's film. Donoso was the author of the novel and Puig was the *sriptor* of the film, but only 'Ripstein' *functioned* as the author of the film.

What I have attempted to do in my investigation so far is akin to what Robert Carringer has described as the activity of the first of two phases in the analysis of collaborative authorship. This first phase 'entails the temporary suspension of single author primacy [...] to appraise constituent claims to a text's authorship. In the second phase, the primary author is reinscribed within what is now established as an institutional context of authorship' (Carringer: 377). I have already established that Ripstein not only gained 'raw material' for his adaptation from José Donoso and Manuel Puig. Through his collaboration with these authors he also gained a kind of story and an approach to style that would come to characterise his cinema from that period onwards. The narratives of his films would continue to engage in flashing back, in direct and indirect ways, to the 'Golden Age' of his country's melodramatic cinema, and perhaps to that of its politicians too, in order to reveal the shortcomings of both sets of institutions in the period since, in the face of neo-colonialism. And the stylistic 'flash backs', would also continue to infuse his cinematic palette with the unfulfilled utopian values of popular musical and cinematic forms. To paraphrase Lucille Kerr's astute assessment of Puig's authorial style (Kerr 105-106), and to apply it to Ripstein: after *El lugar sin límites*, these kinds of borrowings situated 'Ripstein' as an author responsible for an enterprise that would critically frame cultural forms traditionally situated outside 'high' art but resituated by his *auteurist* project. Indeed, the status of the 'low' models whose style is 'stolen' by the film is modified so that they also adhere to principles identified with the 'high'. And the 'high' is in turn somewhat transformed by the contact with what initially seems to be 'low'. The ownership of such models

is effectively transferred to 'Ripstein', under whose name they are received and re-authorized.

Perhaps, this is why, despite a relatively static camera in *El lugar sin límites*, so different from the much more fluid style that came to characterize his later work, many critics and film historians - and also, notably, Ripstein himself - regard this film as 'Ripstein's' first *serious* intervention as a film *auteur*.³¹

While Donoso's story was 'Mexicanized' by Ripstein's film, it did not become uniquely a 'Mexican story' any more than *Cien años de soledad/One Hundred Years of Solitude* was received (outside of Colombia, at least) only as a 'Colombian story'. The process of transnational adaptation allowed Ripstein to develop an *international* style and cachet that fully acknowledged the national and international contexts of financing, regulation, and distribution that defined Mexican cinema at that time.³² He achieved this not only by choosing to adapt a literary work that had already circulated internationally.³³ As Paulo Antonio Paranaguá argues, the other Mexican directors of the 'Nuevo Cine Mexicano' were also looking to adapt such works (Paranaguá 39), their government sponsors content to see the prestige of the original works rub off on their national cinema. But Ripstein took an additional risk in *El lugar sin límites* that paid off handsomely. Always working within the limits of national censorship,³⁴ Ripstein nonetheless employed a writer very well known for his 'post-modern' portrayal of homosexuality -- Puig's novels had already sold in their thousands in many languages around the world. And Ripstein placed a '*loca*' protagonist in the centre of his cinematic frame. Not only was his film as successful on the international festival circuit as most Mexican filmmakers could only have dreamed, his film's central topic ensured that it achieved a long-lasting salience well beyond that circuit as a 'cult' film,³⁵ one which 'spoke' with its convincing portrayal of homosexuality to an emergent national and international 'community' of gay spectators.³⁶

If 'Arturo Ripstein' benefited from the aesthetic and critical successes of his film, I would argue that the film also functioned to promote the work of its other authorial collaborators. While Donoso may not have been completely satisfied with the film's transposition, his novel remained in print throughout his lifetime and is still in print in a number of languages, including Spanish and English, unlike some of his other works that had greater success originally than *El lugar sin límites*. Puig may also have benefited from his association with the film's success in direct and indirect ways. While his name was officially withdrawn at his request from the credits of Ripstein's film, it is safe to say that enough discourse has circulated about his contribution—emanating not least from Puig himself—to ensure that his work will always be associated with *El lugar sin límites*. Meanwhile, the second, internationally distributed film issuing from the Americas with a '*loca*' protagonist was Héctor Babenco's 1995 *Kiss of the Spider Woman*, scripted by Puig, and regarded by the Argentine author as his 'entrance into immortality' (Levine: ix).

Notes

¹ Paranaguá, 1997A, 151. My essay on Ripstein for *Mediático* [<http://reframe.sussex.ac.uk/mediatico>] is an expanded and updated version, for the first time in the English language, of Grant 2002B. I would like to offer thanks, once again, to Laura Podalsky for her commissioning of the earlier, Spanish language work.

² Ripstein is also known for a small number of film 'remakes' of old Mexican and Hollywood films, scripted by his regular collaborator since 1986, Paz Alicia Garciadiego: e.g. *La mujer del Puerto* (1991), *Profundo carmesí* (1996).

³ The English-language publisher's synopsis of the novel reads as follows: 'This grimly vivid novel evokes the sweetness and despair during one fateful day in the collective existence of Estacion El Olivo, a decayed community marked for doom as surely as Donoso's central character, the transvestite dancer/prostitute la Manuela, whose virginal daughter operates the brothel out of which she/he works. La Manuela is menaced both by his would-be protector, the local politician/land baron who wants to raze Estacion El Olivo for his expanding vineyards, and by a coldly vengeful trucker [Pancho], nursing a lifetime of hurts, deprivation, and suppressed sexual ambiguity. The lives of this trio - past and present - are indelibly forged in the novel's stunning climax, which combines a shocking act of violence in the present with a bizarre erotic encounter from decades before': see

<http://www.iblist.com/book30008.htm> (last accessed June 29, 2008). The following synopsis of the film in Spanish is more detailed: *El lugar sin límites*: 'La Manuela, un homosexual que vive en el burdel pueblerino dirigido, de hecho, por su hija La Japonesita, teme el regreso del joven Pancho, con quien tuvo un altercado, y que vuelve en un camion por él comprado con el dinero que le prestó don Alejo, cacique del lugar. La acción retrocede al tiempo en que La Japonesa, madre de La Japonesita, concibió a ésta para ganar una apuesta de don Alejo: al cabo de una fiesta en el burdel, donde La Manuela baila disfrazado de mujer, logró que el homosexual copulara con ella. La acción vuelve al presente. Después de pagar su deuda con don Alejo, Pancho va con su cuñado Octavio al burdel de La Japonesita. Desde el gallinero donde se esconde, La Manuela ve como su hija es maltratada por Pancho. Esto le da el valor de aparecer vestido de andaluza y bailar ante Pancho "La leyenda del beso". En su actuación, La Manuela hace que Pancho baile con él y lo bese. Octavio ve eso y se lo reprocha a su cuñado. Furioso por haber sido sorprendido, Pancho persigue con Octavio por la calle a La Manuela y ambos hombres acaban matando a golpes al homosexual' (Pérez Estremera 128)

⁴ As Suzanne Jill Levine writes, 'Movies made from novels prolong their sources' literary lives' (Levine ix). The film version of Donoso's novel has since attracted academic attention as a cult gay movie as well as a key 'Ripsteinian' text (see De la Mora; Paranaguá 1997B).

⁵ For theoretical discussions of directorial agency and of 'being seen as a director', or auteur, see Grant 2001. On auteurist 'free' adaptation please see Grant 2002.

⁶ See also Grant 2002, for further theorizations of contemporary auteurism.

⁷ Paranaguá (paraphrasing the famous words from *Huis clos* by Sartre) 1997B, 132.

⁸ Donoso had in fact completed the writing of the novel during his extended stay at the Mexico City house of Carlos Fuentes (Millares 18).

⁹ The earlier features are *Tiempo de morir* (1965), *Los recuerdos del porvenir* (1968), *El castillo de la pureza* (1972), *El santo oficio* (1973), *Foxtrot* (1975). Ripstein had also directed numerous other short films, documentaries and projects for television.

¹⁰ The film did go on to win four *Arieles*, the official state-sponsored Mexican film awards, however, as well as several prizes from the San Sebastián and Cartagena de la Indias film festivals (Monterde 47).

¹¹ Puig was trained at Rome's *Centro Sperimentale di Cinema*.

¹² Levine credits the assistance of Ripstein in researching her biography (Levine 430), and some of his views are reflected in this long quotation. She also interviewed Donoso. I very gratefully acknowledge here that my research for this article was inspired and made considerably easier by Levine's biography of Manuel Puig. She has also translated Donoso's novel *El lugar sin límites* into English as *Hell Has No Limits*, 1972, 1995.

¹³ For a preface specially written for a 1985 Spanish collection of scripts for some of the other films he was involved with (Puig 1987); 'La cara del villano' and 'Recuerdo de Tijuana', published by Seix Barral, Barcelona. This preface was translated into English as 'Cinema and the Novel' by Nick Caistor and included in John King's *Modern Latin American Fiction: A Survey*.

¹⁴ My purpose is not to weigh up the differences in the accounts I reproduce here to discover a 'true' story, but to give evidence of a variety of 'authorial' discourse about the adaptation of Donoso's novel.

¹⁵ This starred Gonzalo Vega (Pancho in *El lugar sin límites*) in the role of Valentín.

¹⁶ Interestingly, *El otro* was, at the time of this interview at least, Ripstein's least favourite among his many films: 'Es una película que prefiero no discutir. Era pobre de producción, pobre de concepto, pobre de elementos, pobre de realización, pobre de imaginación, pobre técnicamente... Era una miseria, / 'A film that I prefer not to discuss. A poor production, a poor concept, poor content, poor direction, poor in imagination, poor technically... It was woeful,' (Ripstein 99).

¹⁷ I must acknowledge here that I have not yet been able to access one important source that might provide further clarification on this matter: Emilio García Riera, *Arturo Ripstein habla de su cine con Emilio García Riera*. Guadalajara: Centro de Investigación y Enseñanza Cinematográficas, Universidad de Guadalajara (colección Testimonios del Cine Mexicano núm. 1), 1988. This source is heavily cited in Mexican studies of Ripstein's work, but these studies do not make much if any precise reference to Pacheco's collaboration.

¹⁸ *Place Without Limits*, 1998 VHS version distributed by World Artists Home Video, and 2006 DVD version distributed by Strand Home Video. Ironically, the official Mexican Cinema Institute website (<http://www.imcine.gob.mx/lugar.html>), which up until at least June 2001, when I last accessed it, carried its own version of the film's technical details (which it no longer reproduces), formally co-credited, not the work of the two Mexican friends, but Ripstein and Puig's 'transnational' collaboration.

¹⁹ Generelo Lanaspá 99.

²⁰ Sergio de la Mora has compellingly made this last point in his excellent essay on Ripstein's film (De la Mora 91).

²¹ The films were *El castillo de la pureza* (1972), *El santo oficio* (1973), *Foxtrot* (1975) and the documentary *El palacio negro* (1976). Paulo Antonio Paranaguá names Pacheco as one of Ripstein's two 'interlocutores privilegiados' throughout his career from the Mexican literary establishment, the other being novelist Vicente Leñero (Paranaguá 181).

²² As a number of academic writers, including Levine and Sergio de la Mora, and many of the film's reviewers have hinted. Roberto Cobo's convincing performance in the role of La Manuela has also often been remarked upon.

²³ After Donoso's death in 1996, however, it has been reported that his personal papers at the University of Iowa reveal his homosexuality. See Marcos-Ricardo Barnatán, 'La doble vida de José Donoso', *El Mundo*, September 15, 2003. On Donoso's attitude towards his 'homosexual tendencies', see also the account of Jorge Edwards, 'Correr el tupido velo, de Pilar Donoso', *Letras Libres*, February 2010. Online at: <http://www.letraslibres.com/revista/libros/correr-el-tupido-velo-de-pilar-donoso> (Last accessed August 1, 2012).

²⁴ I obviously exempt from this Puig's *sexual* politics.

²⁵ De la Mora appears to assume that Ripstein was responsible for musical selection: 'the use of music helps to locate the film in a Mexican cultural context. Ripstein uses classic modern Mexican music for the soundtrack' (De la Mora: 102). In fact, the film's music is no more or less 'Mexican' than that mentioned in the novel. Most of the music in both texts is Cuban produced or infused, with some Spanish music. Only the film's two *Ranchera* songs (out of twelve pieces of music in the film as a whole) are 'purely' Mexican - traditional Mexican song-forms both written and performed by recognizably Mexican musicians.

²⁶ A structure which is much more clearly delineated in the film than it is in the novel, where the characters' memories exceed the bounds of the chapters dealing with La Manuela's arrival at the brothel and La Japonesa's conception.

²⁷ It is not a 'wordless song' but vocally unaccompanied music from the 'Intermedio' in the second and final act of a Spanish *zarzuela* or *operetta* called *La leyenda del beso*, composed by R. Soutullo and J. Vert, and first performed in Madrid in 1924. The plot of the opera does not have a great deal in common with the story of *El lugar sin límites*, but there are interesting connections that can be drawn. I have explored these at length in two as yet unpublished research papers on Ripstein's film (Grant 1999, 2000A). In any case, Puig's adaptation of the music from this *operetta* indicates some knowledge of its narrative source.

²⁸ Paranaguá writes that 'Perfume de gardenias' is 'una de las campeonas del *hit-parade* de Ripstein', as it appears in a number of his films (Paranaguá 130).

²⁹ Ripstein is well-known for his own musical interest, however, selecting the music with his scriptwriters for nearly all his subsequent films, though latterly his regular screenwriter and romantic partner Paz Alicia Garciadiego has taken the principal responsibility for this. He has directed a number of operas both inside and outside of Mexico.

³⁰ Arturo Ripstein cited by Pérez Estremera, 170.

³¹ This opinion is expressed, for example, in José Enrique Monterde's comprehensive 1996 study of Ripstein's early career up to *El lugar sin límites* (Monterde 46-49). See also Generelo Lanaspá: 100-101. Arturo Ripstein concurs with this assessment in correspondence published in 1995 from which the opening epigraph to this section is drawn (Pérez Estremera 170). Interestingly, in the same correspondence, Ripstein reaffirms his dissatisfaction with the film's open forty minutes (he had originally noted this in his interviews with García Riera in 1988). He argues that this section suffers from dialogue that tries to convey too much of the characters' back-story' without letting the film's sounds and images 'tell' this in more cinematic ways (Monterde 56, 170). Perhaps here Ripstein stuck too close to Puig's dialogue-laden script for his later taste?

³² Here I am paraphrasing the words of Marvin D'Lugo in his remarkable study of authorship and national cinema (D'Lugo 339). He makes this argument about the work of Spanish director Carlos Saura. I am greatly indebted to his understanding of the 'author function' in national cinema. I have explored the contemporary international distribution and marketing contexts of film auteurism at greater length in an article published in 2000 (Grant, 2000B) and I have gone on to work further on the concept and practices of auteurist adaptation (Grant, 2002).

³³ Ripstein has continued to adapt the works of authors of the Latin American 'Boom' and post-'Boom', as well as by other post-colonial writers (for example, Naguib Mahfuz's novel *Principio y fin*, released in 1993).

³⁴ The possibility of a full-frontal shot of La Manuela emerging from the river, which might have been suggested by Donoso's novel (Donoso 1999, 168) is refused by the film; and the film dialogue does not refer to his penis size as it does in the novel. The film does include a daring (clothed) crotch shot (see De la Mora 92-97) of Pancho, as La Japonesita gropes him (a scene not suggested by the novel), although this occurs in a heterosexual context, and is very fleeting.

³⁵ Paranaguá hints at this (Paranaguá 125).

³⁶ While Ripstein has far from 'abandoned' homosexuality, or lesbianism, as motifs or themes in his films (see for example, *La reina de la noche*, 1994), it has not been so central in his work since *El lugar sin límites* as to give him a reputation as a 'gay film' maker.

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