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# Review of Mejor no hablar (de ciertas cosas), dir. Javier Andrade

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*Mejor no hablar (de ciertas cosas)*. Dir. Javier Andrade. Ecuador. 2012. Dur. 100 min.

*Mejor no hablar (de ciertas cosas)* (2012), directed by Javier Andrade, is the story of Paco (Francisco Savinovich) and his brother Luis (V́ctor Arauz) and their downward spiral. The two young men have no direction and spend much of their time using illegal drugs. One night, Luis decides to steal a porcelain horse that is worth a lot of money from their father Carlos

(Héctor Napolitano) to buy more drugs. Paco accompanies him, but their father arrives home early and catches them. The fight that ensues ends in their father's death. The camera in this scene remains behind while the characters enter the other room; the viewer only hears the fighting, yelling, and then crying when the father dies. After this, the mother and sister move to Miami with the inheritance and Paco and Luis stay in Ecuador. Luis has a band and struggles to play music and maintain his drug habit. Paco continues his relationship with his former girlfriend, Lucía (Leovanna Orlandini), who is married to someone else with whom she has a son, Pedrito. Lucía leaves her husband Rodrigo (Alejandro Fajardo) to move in with Paco. In the meantime, Rodrigo produces Luis' music and starts a relationship with him. Luis ascends in his music career as Paco spirals in his guilt and apparent self-loathing. The brothers coincide at their father's gravesite on his birthday, both bearing gifts—Paco takes a bottle of whiskey as it is the only vice they share (as he explains at the beginning of the film) and Luis takes the stolen porcelain horse that precipitated the film's events (stolen back from the man to whom he sold it for drug money). Lagarto (Andrés Crespo), the dealer who had the horse, sets out to find Luis and kill him. In a scene full of foreboding, Rodrigo, Luis, Paco, Lucía, and her son get ready to eat dinner and Paco takes the boy to the bathroom. As with the previous scene in which the camera remains behind as the events unfold in a different room, here the camera stays in the bathroom with Paco and the boy as we hear yelling in the living room and shots fired. When Paco emerges, all the others are lying on the floor, dead. Paco and Lucía's father reconcile. The film jumps forward and an image of an older, more clean-cut Paco appears. We learn that he is a politician, thanks to Lucía's father's connections. This is the career his father told him he would have, as revealed in the cemetery scene. However, the images of the older Paco show a very empty life. The film comes full circle in the end, with an image of a young boy walking down a dirt road; it is the same boy from the opening scene, a young Paco losing his virginity to a prostitute. The voice "in off" says: "muchos en el partido incluso me consideran 'presidenciable'."

The end of the film represents redemption for the protagonist as he takes responsibility for Pedrito after his mother's death. But there is an element of corruption with Lucía's father and the way Paco enters politics. Most of the images toward the end of the film present Paco and his family with expensive clothes and insinuate that the money from Lucía's father somehow paves the way for Paco's candidacy. In fact, money and privilege are also themes in *Mejor no hablar*. Lucía comes from a wealthy family and when her father cuts her off financially she treats the employees of the stores she visits with disdain. Her condescension is symptomatic of her privilege. Paco's mother, Elena (Maribel Solines), is also used to having money and there seems to be a message with her choice to stick with Paco when he becomes a politician. The director states: "I thought, if I could make a film about corruption, it would be an interesting place to start with personal corruption"

(<http://www.thewrap.com/porcelain-horse-writer-director-javier-andra-de/>). This is reminiscent of Ecuadorian director Alex Schlenker's *Distante cercanía* (2013) in its exploration of small town political corruption (in itself suggestive of Mexican director Luis Estrada's *La ley de Herodes* [1999]).

One common technique in this film is when the camera remains behind so that the viewer only hears the events rather than seeing them. This occurs in the fight scene between the brothers and their father; in the scene in which Lagarto and his companion kill Rodrigo, Luis, and Lucía; and when the military men kill Lagarto and the others in the house. In each scene, the viewer hears yelling and in the second two, gun shots. However, we are left to imagine what the scene looks like. This technique adds to a sense of confusion and chaos, which parallels the opening theme of a life out of control. Furthermore, the colors of the film are dusty, beige and grey; they mirror the subdued mood throughout. The lighting and colors also reflect coastal Ecuador as

opposed to Quito; Andrade comments: “I love the light in the coast of Ecuador, it is generally harsh for most of the day, but after 4 pm it becomes magical” (<http://mejornohablardeciertasco-sas.com/thefilm/#.VLhaJBYval4>).

*Mejor no hablar* was Ecuador’s pick for the 2014 Oscars for Best Foreign Language Film. It also won the following: Best Film, Cataluña; Best Director, Cataluña; Best Film, Americas Film Festival, Austin, Texas; and Best Opera Prima, Dominican Republic. This film’s even tone, thematic coherence, and use of color, lighting, and unique camera techniques make it one of the most accomplished films to come out of Ecuador in recent years.

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