



la Vierge des Tueurs

(Our Lady of the Assassins)

A film by Barbet SCHROEDER

Les Films du Losange, Le Studio Canal+, Vertigo Films, Tucan Producciones Cinematograficas Ltda
with the participation of Canal+
presents

A film by
Barbet SCHROEDER

OUR LADY OF THE ASSASSINS

(La Virgen de los Sicarios)

Official Selection Venice 2000

Screenplay by
Fernando VALLEJO

Adapted from his novel « La Virgen de los Sicarios »

starring

German JARAMILLO Anderson BALLESTEROS Juan David RESTREPO

and special appearance by **Manuel BUSQUETS**

Produced by
**Les Films du Losange
Le Studio Canal+
Tucan Producciones Cinematograficas Ltda
With the participation of Canal+**

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Synopsis



After an absence of thirty years, writer Fernando Vallejo returns to Medellín, the city where he was born and raised. Little remains of what he had left behind. His parents are dead and so are his siblings and most of his friends. Half the city has been destroyed to make room for an elevated subway. The cocaine Mafia - the Medellín Cartel - sows terror with gangs of assassins: boys from the city's poor neighborhoods employed as hired killers who are often doomed to die at the hands of rival gangmembers. One of these boys is Alexis, a sixteen-year-old who despite his youth already has a few murders on his conscience. Fernando has just gotten into town when he is introduced to Alexis by a childhood friend in a male brothel. Fernando and Alexis fall in love.

In this city ruled by horror, chaos and hate, where blood-debts are passed on from brother to brother and from one friend to another, as if the fate of the living were in the hands of the dead. In this city where the only oases of peace are the churches... they fall in love. A hopeless love, destined to fail through no fault of their own, but for the circumstances they are caught up in.

A stereo Fernando buys Alexis is the motive for a first squabble, as the latter has the habit of leaving dance music on at a deafening volume at all hours of the day and night. But soon they are at odds over a greater issue as Alexis murders anyone who happens to cross their path or bother Fernando. At the slightest provocation, Alexis, like a new Exterminating Angel, unhesitatingly whips out his gun and fires. Condemned by the emptiness of their lives, they go aimlessly from church to church and murder to murder, a more confident love growing between them, until one day Alexis is killed in a drive-by shooting.

Wrought with grief, Fernando goes to the barrio slums of Santo Domingo Savio to meet Alexis's mother, a poor woman with several children. She tells him that her son was killed by a boy from the neighboring barrio of La Francia. She only knows the murderer's strange nickname: « The Blue Lagoon ».

Walking alone and losing himself in the noisy and violent streets that once witnessed his transient moments of happiness, Fernando bumps into someone he at first mistakes for Alexis, as if the boy were still alive. Or as if the horror of life had induced a grotesque hallucination.

The boy in question is Wilmar. He resembles Alexis on more than one count: he's the same age, wears a similar jacket, is just as devoted to Our Lady Help of Christians, whose scapularies - tied around his neck, right wrist and left ankle - he never doffs. But the most poignant similarity of all is the gun he always carries with him. So the series of murders Alexis had started continues with Wilmar, while Fernando begins a new love affair. It seems that the world of Medellín has gone insane, going around in circles and creating live replicas of the dead.

Interview with Barbet SCHROEDER

By
JEAN DOUCHET

You've been making films in the United States for 15 years. Why did you decide to go to Colombia?

I've always wanted to make a movie in Colombia. I grew up there and I return every year as soon as I have an opportunity. For years, I've been looking for a Colombian writer with whom I could collaborate on a film and I discovered Fernando Vallejo only recently. It was a revelation. I read all of his works. His major work is a sort of autobiography in six volumes. He also wrote two biographies of Colombian poets and very exciting essays on biology. The discovery had the same intensity for me as when I had read the works of Bukowski. I fell in love with it. I believe, even if I didn't have such a special connection with Colombia, I would have wanted to work with Vallejo after discovering him.

What are your memories of Colombia and what would you like to show of this country?

There is in that country a marvelous energy and vitality combined with a special humor full of sarcasm. I am very sensitive to these qualities. In Colombia, they laugh about everything, even the most horrible things... even if it's just happened. It acts as a type of protection against the harsh events that occur around them.

I also have all my memories of childhood. And when I return (*often*), there isn't a day when those images and odors don't resurface in my memory. I have a particularly violent memory: there were uprisings on April 9, 1948. I was seven years old. The town was overrun by rioters and killers. I was told not to look out the window. Obviously, that's just what I did. I saw some people who had stolen a big heavy American refrigerator.

Six of them were carrying it and the seventh one



who was giving the orders wore a red headband around his head and had a machete in his hand.

One of the six men carrying the refrigerator began to complain and the one holding the machete had a violent dispute with him. Suddenly, with a couple of swift blows of the machete, he chopped off his head. The man without a head remained standing for a moment, stuck under the refrigerator. It seemed like an eternity for me.

It was a scene that marked me, but it was not as horrible as it seems because there was no sound. Behind my window, the scene was silent, and therefore somewhat unreal.

How was the adaptation handled?

After reading all his work, I was very impatient to meet Vallejo, who lived in Mexico. I called him and announced that I would be arriving in a week and that I wanted to develop a project with him. During that entire week, he thought, « *surely he wants to do **Our Lady of the Assassins*** ». I had read the book which I loved, but I didn't think it could be adapted to the cinema. First of all, it was a long imprecatory monologue. It would have

needed voice over which I have always felt was a cop out in literary adaptations. Second of all, there were a significant number of deaths: 18. It was very powerful and worked very well in literature because these murders were parables or metaphors to a certain degree. But in cinema, we are dealing with the reality of things and it would have been unbearable. When I met Vallejo, he said he had already thought about the adaptation of « **Our Lady of the Assassins** » and had found several solutions. « *I think I can easily write dialogues between men and boys without ever using voice over* », he said to me. I told him we had to considerably reduce the number of deaths.

We began to talk about two other projects, but we soon realized that this one was truly original and we had the chance to work on a project that was unlike any other film.

Then we began to negotiate with regard to the number of murders to decide which deaths we would keep and under what conditions...

The result for me was thoroughly surprising: another version of the same story cropped up, certainly closer than the book, to what happened in real life. Somewhat like Marguerite Duras when she would retell the same story, but from a different angle.





Once the financing was set, you went to Colombia: How did you choose your sets and actors?

The filming happened very quickly, in less than two months in Medellin. However, the preparation took six months.

I had the time to carefully choose my locations. It was essential that this film also be a portrait of a city... Medellin had to become a character in the movie.

The other thing that was long and difficult was choosing the young actors who had to be young handsome street guys. They had to be photogenic. Aided by the Medellin filmmaker Victor Gaviria we found some young talented actors that looked OK. But a magical face on the screen is a rare thing to find. It was finally the true character of Alfonso (*he had introduced the real Alexis to the real Vallejo*) who told us about Anderson. He was selling incense and had already been in prison. He lived in a neighborhood very high on the mountain. One of the typical characteristics of Medellin is that the higher you are on the mountain, the poorer the neighborhood is. These are the newest neighborhoods where people are coming to settle and build. They are « invading » and are living higher

and higher. Anderson's place was practically inaccessible and partially controlled by guerillas. He lived with his thirteen year-old brother. We had to convince him to come with us, go for medical check-ups, etc. I virtually began to live with him day and night. I did the same thing with Juan David (*Wilmar*) who came from a similar neighborhood.

For the main role, I began searching in Mexico because I was already there with Vallejo.

I met some very interesting actors, but a little later when I began to hear Colombian actors read the text, I immediately realized that not only the street actors but also the part of Fernando had to come from this country. Everything took on a different resonance when the text was read by a native Colombian.

I also had the chance to meet a very exceptional actor who was not very well-known in Colombia because he always refused to work for television. He is very intransigent and was not willing to make any compromises. He had done practically no cinema, but learned quickly in only a few days. We did several readings and rehearsals. Because

all of our sets were there and we had the time, we took the cinematographer with my mini digital camera and went to the locations to rehearse on tape the entire film.

I even did a small editing job. It was incredible to have such a luxury... the entire film on cassette before we even started production. These numerous readings and rehearsals were very important for the actors. They were able to get used to their roles and I could detect our weaknesses and strengths, find solutions and especially shoot the film faster. I was even able to drop several beautiful, but useless scenes before I actually made the film.

Did having a professional actor help the two young actors? Was this actor put off by not having professional partners?

No, he was fascinated by the two young actors as we all were. They had an incredible vitality and were so natural and good-natured it was contagious. In fact, he did something very useful with them. Every morning for several weeks he did theatrical exercises with physical contact. When we

were filming, it was wonderful to see their natural ease and intimacy with each other.

Let's talk about the environment of filming in Medellin, which has a reputation the world over as a dangerous city.

There were countless logistical problems due to questions of security. However one thing that helped me a lot was that the entire crew was Colombian, after the French had left. We were a Colombian film. As a foreigner, I was the only one in real danger, especially with regard to kidnapping. My bodyguards were members of the police. They told me that on the list of risks, I was classed 7 on a scale of 10.

The van which contained high definition material worth over 300,000 dollars was guarded 24-hours a day by men on motorcycles with bullet-proof vests and machine guns. When we filmed in neighborhoods that were a little more dangerous we had five additional police officers armed to the hilt. In the center of town, their weapons weren't as visible.

Was the sound direct?

Yes. Whenever possible, I like to have all the takes in my films done with direct sound. For

this film, we were able to do this 99 % of the time. I was very happy with the sound engineer because Medellin is a very very noisy city. We primarily used hidden mike ties and he worked wonders with that.

Sound is also an important element with respect to the narration of this film.

How did you broach the subject of homosexuality with your actors?

For me, it was important to make a love story and to treat the homosexuality as totally natural. I tried to communicate that to my actors. I believe that everybody has homosexual tendencies within themselves. It wasn't that hard for them to look within and find it, but at times they were afraid and my job was to convince the young actors that it wasn't dangerous to delve into those feelings. I showed them the film « **Strawberries and Chocolate** » and some Fassbinder and Almodovar films. As for the main actor, he has a brother who is homosexual and he thought of him often.

The story focuses on a young man who is with a mature man.

This is the heart of the film. The story recounts this apprenticeship. The adult tries to teach some principles to the young boy even if he does it in a joking manner, making fun of everything. The young boy participates by laughing because he is seduced by this rebellious character. He is a model father that many would dream of having... a father who is also a friend. But there is an apprenticeship in another sense as well. Fernando learns to discover the new reality of the city of his childhood through this young man. This writer discovers another language and grammar. Even the language has changed in his absence.

Now for the theme of the film: murder which happens as if it is the most natural thing in the world.

This is a Colombian tradition that has been around for at least 100 years, for the

most part uninterrupted. This violent culture is reflected in the film.

It took on nightmarish proportions with cocaine drug dealing in Medellin and thousands of armed gangs. The impunity of crime is 97%. I think this percentage is much greater than the Far-West during its worst period of crime.

This is the reality of the city. Even within Colombia, Medellin is an exception. There are three times more murders per number of inhabitants than in Bogota.

Our main character, through his love story, finds himself mixed up and confronted with violence. At first he is distraught and horrified; but this young boy is the love of his life. If staying with the boys means being confronted by a choice: to witness murders or abandon the child, he chooses to remain with him and become some kind of an accomplice...

I wanted the viewer to feel the « *sense of progressive anesthesia* » with respect to this violence which is what happens to Fernando. If we want to survive in Medellin,

one must become more and more anesthetized. He is horrified by what has happened to his city. But for him, what's at stake is humanity itself, not just Medellin. He has stopped believing not only in God but also in Man. He sees Medellin as the example of what will happen in the rest of the world. Or what might happen if some safeguards and protective varnish were to disappear.

Are you afraid the film might "shock audiences because it doesn't shock"?

Yes. This is a film in which shocking things are shown as normal occurrences and are treated naturally and simply, as the reality of the situation demands.

There seems to be a documentary approach when filming the subject of this story.

Like all my films, this one has a documentary quality. I wanted to anchor this film as much as possible in the city of Medellin. I wanted the city to be another character in the film. Though he has been living in exile for 30 years, all of Vallejo's work has been inspired by Medellin...





especially « **Our Lady of the Assassins** » which is partially autobiographical. Documentary and documentation are aspects that were also present in « **Barfly** ». What's most important to me is to respect the writing. It is about a writer and the dialogues that seem very natural are actually very literary. This aspect excites me : anchoring a text in reality, and in so doing find a style that corresponds to the writer. In his books Vallejo is full of humor which is at once flamboyant and precise, very literary, with passages that are very verbal. He always writes in the first person... I also needed to convey the hallucinatory aspect of the work, combining handheld camera and dolly for example and always filming from the first person point of view of Fernando and Alexis. How each sees the other.

Why did you choose to shoot in high definition ?

As soon as I discovered the high definition image, I was completely fascinated. I really wanted to use it. It turned out that this project was ideal for that.

Once the shooting began, we had to film the exterior scenes very quickly, in 4 weeks, before word got out. We were quickly spotted, and the last week of shooting the exterior scenes were the most dangerous. We began to receive death threats. There were so many locations, to the point that on some days, we had to film in three different spots with weather that was constantly

changing from cloudy to torrential rain to bright and sunny. We finished with 3 weeks of interior shots. Shooting on 35 mm would have taken twice as long, we would not have been able to complete the shooting.

The HD allowed us to work with multiple cameras. We had up to three cameras for some scenes. The response to the big question for cinema « *where to put the camera?* » becomes very exciting when you're dealing with three cameras. It becomes a strategy to make the least compromises possible and not to resemble television. At one point during the filming, two cameras were moved in to capture two over the shoulder shots after the main camera went by in a complicated tracking shot. When the good take came through, it was good for the three cameras, the filming of the scene was over. It was very satisfying for the actors.

With our main obsession of speeding up the filming and doing it more discreetly, more realistically, the special effects like bullet impacts, for example, could be added in post-production without any problem at all because we were already working in digital mode.

What's more, everything that is filmed is in focus. High definition gives a depth of field that would have delighted Orson Welles and his cinematographer Gregg Toland. All this we obtained naturally, like a video documentary. Contrary to some who try to make high definition look like cinema and believe for example that the change of focus is an important element in the language of film, I wanted to explore the new technical characteristics by simply accepting them. The more clearly defined the image, the happier I was. For example, in a close up of Alexis, we can see the city very clearly behind him. For me, this

was terrific. It didn't distract me at all and reinforces the idea of the film.

Another aspects that excites me is the treatment of the image: changing colors, creating a sunset or adding things. There are nearly 200 subtle modifications to the film, for the most part undetectable. It has provided me a great freedom in filmmaking. High definition helped me to translate onto film the idea so dear to Vallejo of « *reality becoming mad* » because this excess of reality, this excess of depth of field, ends up by becoming unreal as if reality had « *become mad* » from hyper-reality.

But I also paid the price for being among the first to use High Definition for a fictional feature film. The high definition 24-image camera designed for George Lucas didn't exist yet. I filmed with the exact same camera, but it was 30 images which created a multiform nightmare in post-production and a slight stroboscopic effect in the rapid panoramic shots.

Will the final version of the film be seen in 35 mm?

Yes, naturally. For the time-being it will be shown in 35 mm while we wait for digital projections to become more common and of better quality... perhaps in 5 years time.

Did you focus on color when you were making this film?

Yellow is the main color in the film. We ended up painting certain things yellow. There are very few exterior shots taken in the film in which I didn't organize for a yellow taxi to drive past. This is Alexis' color, the vitality of this city. Sunny, angelic but also diabolical. I always remember the intense esthetic emotion that the yellow car provoked in me in Douglas Sirk's « **Written on the Wind** ».

The two other colors are red and blue.

Two rules:

- 1) We could never use the three colors at the same time: it's the color of the Colombian flag!
- 2) The color orange which was too close to yellow and red was not permitted. We had to unscrew or cover over an incalculable number of plastic garbage bags fixed to posts everywhere around town in gray... what kind of documentary approach is that!

How did you treat the music in the film?

The parts of the film anchored in the reality of Medellin, we hear only ambiance music... music that we hear in the street: salsa, bolero, tango popular Colombian music that I like a lot. There is a surreal part in the film in which the fantasy or hallucinatory quality is punctuated by the use of music written for the film. I chose a composer with a Latin sensibility who had worked on Raoul Ruiz films. His name is Georges Arriagada. He wrote symphonic music that brought a lot of emotion to the movie. Working with him was very exciting.

This film tells the story of someone who comes to the city to die, who discovers love, life and an intense suffering which is much worse than the death he was searching for in the beginning. It is this symphonic music that makes us feel that pain. Through Fernando, it is also the suffering of a whole country that we discover.

How do you see the film now that it is completed?

We couldn't return the next day to improve certain shots. It has some imperfections, but I like them because they are part of the unusual situation we had to work with. I like the movie because it does not look like any other.



Excerpts from:

« End of the century in Medellín »

(Emails from the shooting)

By Barbet SCHROEDER

Father's Day

Today I met the mayor of Medellín.

He's very worried about a new armed gang made up of FARC dissidents operating in the Pilarica neighborhood and headed by a female doctor who is apparently out of control and very bloodthirsty. Four policemen were seriously wounded last night by her gang.

While we were in his office he found out that one of the policeman had died. Then a little later another phone call: he learns that a commando of seventeen members of the Las Terrazas gang (*from the Manrique neighborhood*) have burst into the San José Hospital to free a terrorist and a very dangerous assassin who had been injured and brought there from the high-security prison.

Last Sunday, on Father's Day, there were thirty-four deaths. That same day the opening of the Poetry Festival drew a larger crowd than any soccer match ever had in the city's history.

The casting's going very well, in just a few weeks we have already found two possible boys.

These fifteen-year-old criminals' vitality and angelic good-looks, the very studied elegance of their clothes and their way of considering their short lives like that of a butterfly are irresistible. The ones that survive talk like retirees - they're 21 years old.

Anderson

That's it, I finally met Anderson. I'd seen a video of him and sent everyone looking for him through the city for the last fifteen days. He is absolutely extraordinary. Ambiguous, angel and devil, very charismatic - a sixteen-year-old, streetwise, Montgomery Clift type. His acting needs some work but he's bright and the camera loves him. He lives with his thirteen year-old brother in a Commune very high up in the hills controlled by the militia (*tied to the guerilla*). We try to put him up in town but he doesn't want to move because his mother, who's in prison, calls him at a phone up there. He sells incense on the street and has just finished a three-month jail sentence for burglary. Last night with three friends of his he assaulted a passerby, they split the equivalent of fifty dollars. A little later the police stopped them after they'd already spent the money and made them give their victim their shoes. He had to go home barefoot: a two-hour climb to get to the end of the La Sierra barrio, created after a recent « *invasion* ».

Tomorrow I'm taking him to see a doctor and we'll look for an apartment for him near his little brother's school.

Todo Bien

Two serious problems the day before yesterday. We lost the most important, irreplaceable location - the apartment the film takes place in - and two bikers caught up to our driver and threw a crumpled paper ball into the car, a note that read: « LOS PP'S QUEREMOS AL MONO TODO BIEN » (*the PP's want the foreigner, everything's all right*).

In Colombia receiving a note like this is often a death sentence. Now the paranoid atmosphere is guaranteed. On the bright side, we think it's from a gang who are into extortion and not kidnapping. The dark side: it's only the beginning, something else could follow like someone firing shots at the car or the house. Today a meeting with one of the country's top « *security analysts* » who suspects... the chauffeur. We are waiting for the results of the graphology (*writing samples*) tests. Anyway, without telling the security specialist (*you really can't trust anyone*), we have also established discreet contact with the police chief. Starting tomorrow he is lending us two cops dressed as civilians armed to the teeth who will follow me in their car as soon as I leave my new home which will be a true fortress. Officially I will keep living at the same address. I will never travel twice in a row in the same car, my drivers will also be security guards. On location or tomorrow for the outdoor rehearsals there will always be a armored car ready to take me away! There are many other very funny details I can't disclose before we finish shooting, and others I'll never be able to or, at best, ten years from now.

The actors' reading went fabulously well. The script is perfect and so are the actors. I am a happy man for the moment, now we just have to make the movie come to life.

A new strategy

I found out last night from a police source that the guerilla has just put out a call for hostages in the criminal underground - they'll pay a thousand dollars cash for any foreigner. A new strategy to replace that of the « *Pescas milagrosas* » (*miraculous catches*) which draws too many protests from the population. A strategy similar to the one Pablo Escobar adopted eight years ago when he offered the same price for each murdered policeman. My bodyguards are very nervous. They can't take it easy anymore.

Still, there was a « *miraculous catch* » the night before last on the road that joins the town of Envigado to the road to the airport. For once, the police tried to intervene: two dead among their ranks but only four people taken hostage.

The guerilla is among us, in the city, and they're given a monthly salary (*unemployment exceeds 20%*). They steal vehicles, put on uniforms at the last minute, raise blockades, capture the hostages that interest them after having stripped the others of any valuables. They find out who is of interest to them on the spot using computers linked to the internet and take them to some nearby place where other stolen vans are waiting to carry them off to mountainous areas in the jungle. In the best of cases, hostages are freed six to eight months later after several payments have been made. One thing is certain: taking into account the fact that, on every front, things are getting inexorably worse, this film could not have been made here a year from now. Unless there were a miracle, and peace took hold overnight. Nobody believes that will happen. Anyone who can is thinking of settling abroad.

The tragedies of young actors. Avenging a death

Anderson hadn't told us about his recent problems with the law: he's wanted for kidnapping and armed assault! We try to soften up the judge. In one of the cases they'd taken a cab driver hostage but the taxi had an alarm system that paralyzed the vehicle after fifteen minutes. He and his friends found themselves in the open countryside in the middle of the night with a mob of taxi drivers (*all communicating through their radios*) who were about to lynch them; they were saved by the police, who then filed charges against them.

Juan David, who plays Wilmar, is also in trouble. He lives in the Bello Commune and he's on a list - made by a group interested in « *social cleansing* » - of people to be executed. He should move today to an apartment we found him right next to ours. The day before yesterday, a rainy night, none of the members of his gang were on guard, watching out for the neighboring enemy gang who took advantage of the situation and sneaked into his best friend's house and killed him. Since his mother stood up to them they killed her too.

Last night Juan David was faced with the following dilemma: avenge his best friend's mother's murder or refuse to take part in the retaliatory expedition and thus put his own life in danger. I tried to explain to him that the mother's death wasn't the worst thing that could've happened and that in fact she had averted years of terrible misery. He seemed convinced when he left.

When he got back for the make-up test this morning I found out his best friend's mother's murderer had been killed last night.

At the make-up test Anderson and Juan David met and checked each other out for the first time. They had both taken their shirts off so we could try out some scar-effects but they already each had at least five real ones. They also each have a large tattoo: a kind of iguana on Anderson's back and a gargoyle on Juan David's arm.

Recipe for filming downtown

- First of all, organize a fake set with cameras, projectors and a hysterical director. Comedy mixed with violence is a true crowd-pleaser. One of those mimes/beggars is the perfect stand-in for an actor. This afternoon, to distract an enormous crowd of onlookers, the violent comedy had social content; the delirious female crack-smoker who was in charge of finding five homeless people, crack-heads or beggars every day as extras had a starring role, playing opposite the mime.

- Then very discreetly film the real thing fifty meters away.

- Coach a dozen extras to approach people who might have a tendency to look at the camera during the takes. Have the extras ask them for the time or tell them to move along. The hapless souls who refuse to move are immediately assaulted by our special task-force: a group of frightening, stinking beggars who stick to them like glue and hound them for money until they leave.

This system works wonders. Unfortunately we still have to deal with the hot sun or the rain that alternately burn or soak the image, which means we sometimes have to finish up scenes in a hurry.

Rivers of blood in the Communes

Today was a memorable day spent in the Diamante Commune (*poor neighborhood on the hills*).

The electricians' truck couldn't make it to the location we arranged high up in the neighborhood to get a view from above of the gigantic staircase. Lots of illegal cables - wired to steal electricity though it's practically free in these neighborhoods - are hung so low across streets that a normal-sized truck can't pass through.

The crew's rendezvous site is loaded with memories for the Commune. An enormous mural of the WB logo (*for Warner Brothers, very popular for its cartoons*) remains riddled with the holes from bullets which killed eight youngsters a year ago. The following day the revenge took place: twenty young gansters killed in the neighborhood above. A week ago the battle resumed and has once again become an all-out war: two murders the day before yesterday.

All the \$300,000 high-definition recording and transfer equipment is stored in the van which is always followed by two guards on motorcycles wearing blue uniforms and bullet-proof vests and carrying submachine guns. Today they were utterly terrified. With reason, said my jean-clad bodyguards, for these men were irresistible to groups who would kill in order to get a hold of weapons. Upon their arrival the men in blue could relax a bit as there were eight policemen dressed in olive drab and armed to the teeth, besides the five we are used to having with us. During the shoot, an old lady who was passing by told me that we were quite justified in having protection as there had been a lot of real blood spilled in the neighborhood, and that it was a welcome change to see fake blood which she wouldn't have to worry about.

The most impressive part of the scene was when we made it rain blood over the neighborhood. The special effects crew evidently made too much and we all got stained, our skin and clothes, with red ink that will not come off for three days. A normal movie rain shower that, at mid-take, starts coming down twice as hard and turns red. The sky, the earth, everything turns red and rivers of blood begin to flow everywhere. The quebrada (*stream*) turns red, all the kids start screaming for people to come out and see.

If I had known, I would've taken a wide shot instead of the close-ups of feet walking down steps and the rivers of blood that turn into Blood Lagoon. It's my friend Luis Ospina's team who has the best shots for the « *making of* ». He was up in a balcony.

Everyone was moved by the image and symbolism of this conceptual « *happening* ». Especially the lady who lives in the house whose front part was transformed into blood headquarters. We mixed the water and the pigment in her yard. She'd lost two of her eight sons, one of them at the age of eighteen, the other at twenty-two, in the gun battles that continue to take place every night and that you can hear as distant echoes in the downtown area of the city down below. She said it must be a very sad moment in the film. I told her she had guessed right.

Fernando VALLEJO

Born in Medellín, Colombia in 1942, Fernando Vallejo studied philosophy and arts in Bogotá, before completing his film studies in Rome. The author of several screenplays, Vallejo has directed a trio of films in Mexico, where he currently lives. Vallejo already has eight books to his name, as well as a recent essay on biology and Darwinism. His other books are:

LOGOI - Grammar of literary language (*grammatical and stylistic analysis and study of essential literary heritage*),

1983. **BARBA JACOB, The Messenger** (*a biography of the Colombian poet*),

1984 **THE MAN WHO DIED TWICE**, also about Barba Jacob.

THE SECRET FIRE (1986) forms part of an autobiographical saga (*RIVER OF TIME*). The other volumes in the series are: **THE BLUE DAYS** (1987), **THE PATHS OF ROME** (1988), **YEARS OF INDULGENCE** (1989), **AMONG GHOSTS** (1991).

Vallejo's most recent book, **OUR LADY OF THE ASSASSINS** (1994), the first one to come out in Europe, was published in France by Belfond in 1997. This disturbing and polemic book revealed its author as one of the most important new Latin American writers to have broken with the celebrated tradition of "magical realism". This year it will be published in several other countries.

In Colombia and Mexico, Vallejo's books are more famous than the man himself, so much that he is sometimes called the "literary ghost of Colombia." Interviews and photographs of him are few, and he makes few public or media appearances...

« *I think it is good that books are written by ghosts* », he says, « *I write to disturb people... is that not one of the only literary raisons d'être?* »

Press Excerpts for the Novel

« The most beautiful, the most outrageous literary song of love and damnation for a long time. A book in a class of its own... accusing, merciless, surreal. »

(Claude-Michel Cluny - Le Figaro)

« Vallejo bellows with the rage of great damning literary voices such as Léon Bloy and Genet. We are literally bowled over by this massacre. »

(André Clavel - L'Express)

« We have not heard an author roar like this for a long time. This is a fiction taken from reality by a sort of visionary Bardamu. »

(Fabrice Gignault - Elle)

« People are not called to their defenses with lullabies, but with warning sirens... Vallejo writes with his fists, and his writing hits where it hurts, pants like a boxer, and dodges in and out with the slang of a killer... »

(Jean Soublin - Le Monde)

« With excessiveness and lyricism, Vallejo seems to go beyond the apocalyptic painting of his country, to sound the death toll for an entire world which has lost its traditional references and become 'God's nightmare'. »

(Annie Coppermann - Les Echos)

« If Medellín is the way Vallejo says it is, it would be no surprise if the « powers that be » in the city send the writer a summons to appear in court, if not a professional hitman.

A novel, a confession of love, a pamphlet, a report, a lyrical poem, a guide to make the tourists run for cover. He mixes tones and genres at his leisure... « **OUR LADY OF THE ASSASSINS** » is a scandalous and provocative book full of light and darkness, a kind of personal letter abroad to tell his foreign friends about Medellín, the capital of hate. »

(Cambio 16. Bogota)

« Hell is right there, with far more than seven circles. Death is the cheapest, most frequent, and commonplace occurrence in Medellín... Fernando Vallejo uses literature in a clean way, quick as a bullet, to paint a world of death which clearly demonstrates a possible end to our species. »

(El Financiero. Mexico. 28.10.94)

Crew

Director	Barbet Schroeder
Screenplay	Fernando Vallejo <i>adapted from his novel</i> <i>« La Virgen de los sicarios »</i>
Cinematographer	Rodrigo Lalinde
Sound Engineer	Cesar Salazar
Sets and Costumes	Monica Marulanda
Music	Jorge Arriagada
Editor	Elsa Vasquez
Sound Editor	Jean Goudier
Sound Mixer	Dominique Hennequin
1 st Assistant Director	Jorge Valencia / Hervé Ruet
Casting	Marlin Franco
Cameraman	Oscar Bernal
Steadycam	Sergio Gazzera
HD Engineer	Gabor Bene
Sound Effects	Jean-Pierre Lelong
Sound Effects Assistant	Mario Melchiori
Set Dresser	José Gabriel Sanchez
Make-up	Flor Marina Sandoval
Special Effects	Miguel Angel Guzman
Stuntman	Juan Carlos Garcia

Production

Les Films du Losange	Barbet Schroeder / Margaret Menegoz
Le Studio Canal+	
Vertigo Films	
Tucan Producciones Cinematograficas Ltda	Jaime Osorio Gomez
With the participation of Canal+	
International Sales	Le Studio Canal+ 17 rue Dumont d'Urville 75116 Paris Tel. : (+33-1) 01 44 43 98 00 Fax: (+33-1) 01 47 20 13 58

Actors

Fernando	German Jaramillo
Alexis	Anderson Ballesteros
Wilmar	Juan David Restrepo
Alfonso	Manuel Busquets



Barbet SCHROEDER

Born on August 26, 1941 in Teheran.

1958-1963 : journalist at the 'Cahiers du Cinéma' and *Air de Paris*.

Assistant trainee to Jean-Luc Godard on the film **LES CARABINIERS**

Directed two amateur 16 mm short films in black and white.

1963 : Creates the production company Les Films du Losange and produces the first two moral tales by Eric Rohmer :

LA BOULANGÈRE DE MONCEAU (*he also had the starring role*)

and **LA CARRIÈRE DE SUZANNE**

Nomination at the Oscars and the Golden Globe Awards for **REVERSAL OF FORTUNE**

Barbet Schroeder has often acted in minor roles, most notably : **LES CARABINIERS**, **PARIS VU PAR ...** (*episode GARE DU NORD by Jean Rouch*), **OUT ONE**, **CÉLINE ET JULIE VONT EN BATEAU**, **BANDINI**, **BEVERLY HILLS COP 3**, **LA REINE MARGOT**, **MARS ATTACK**, etc...

Director

- 1969 **MORE** with Mimsy Farmer and Klaus Grunberg
- 1971 **SING-SING, LE COCHON AUX PATATES DOUCES**
MAQUILLAGES, LE REPAS RITUEL
(short documentary films in New Guinea)
- 1972 **THE VALLEY** with Bulle Ogier and Jean-Pierre Kalfon (*Venice 1973*)
- 1974 **GENERAL IDI AMIN DADA** (*documentary*) (*Cannes 1974*)
- 1975 **MAITRESSE** with Bulle Ogier and Gérard Depardieu
- 1977 **KOKO, A TALKING GORILLA** (*documentary*) (*Cannes 1978*)
- 1982-84 **THE CHARLES BUKOWSKI TAPES** (*50 x 4 minutes vidéos*)
- 1984 **TRICHEURS** with Bulle Ogier and Jacques Dutronc
- 1987 **BARFLY** with Mickey Rourke and Faye Dunaway (*Cannes 1987*)
- 1990 **REVERSAL OF FORTUNE** with Glenn Close, Jeremy Irons and Ron Silver
- 1992 **SINGLE WITHE FEMALE** with Bridget Fonda and Jennifer Jason Leigh
- 1994 **KISS OF DEATH** with David Caruso, Nicholas Cage and Samuel Jackson (*Cannes 96*)
- 1995 **BEFORE AND AFTER** with Meryl Streep and Liam Neeson
- 1997 **DESPERATE MESURES** with Andy Garcia and Michael Keaton

Producer

- 1964 **MEDITERRANEE** by Jean-Daniel Pollet
- 1965 **PARIS VU PAR...** by Claude Chabrol, Jean Douchet, Jean-Luc Godard, Jean-Daniel Pollet, Eric Rohmer, Jean Rouch
- 1966 **LA COLLECTIONNEUSE** by Eric Rohmer
- 1967 **TU IMAGINES ROBINSON** by Jean-Daniel Pollet
- 1968 **MA NUIT CHEZ MAUD** by Eric Rohmer
- 1970 **LE GENOU DE CLAIRE** by Eric Rohmer
- 1972 **L'AMOUR L'APRES-MIDI** by Eric Rohmer
OUT ONE by Jacques Rivette (*coproduction*)
- 1973 **LA MAMAN ET LA PUTAIN** by Jean Eustache (*coproduction*)
- 1974 **CELINE ET JULIE VONT EN BATEAU** by Jacques Rivette
- 1975 **FLOCONS D'OR** by Werner Schroeter
LA MARQUISE D'O by Eric Rohmer
- 1976 **ROULETTE CHINOISE** by R.W. Fassbinder (*coproduction*)
L'AMI AMERICAIN by Wim Wenders (*coproduction*)
- 1977 **LE PASSE MONTAGNE** by Jean-François Stévenin
- 1978 **PERCEVAL LE GALLOIS** by Eric Rohmer
- 1979 **LE NAVIRE NIGHT** by Marguerite Duras
- 1981 **LE PONT DU NORD** by Jacques Rivette
- 1984 **MAUVAISE CONDUITE** by Nestor Almendros

German JARAMILLO



German JARMILLO was born in Manizales in Colombia in 1952.

In 1973 he participated in the creation of Bogota's Free Theatre which started with an artist's movement that began at universities which at the time were searching to create a national dramaturgy that focused on the political and social contradictions in the country. The most famous work from this early stage in his career is without a doubt Esteban Navajas' « **The Agony of the Deceased** » (1977) directed by Jorge Plata in which German Jaramillo played the main role of Don Agustino Landazabal for 20 years with over three thousand performances. This work was shown throughout the entire country and won the prize Maison des Ameriques in 1977. It was produced for television on two separate occasions.

Also during this period, he played the role of Ivan Vesovchikov in Bertolt Brecht's « **Mother Courage** » (1974) and Jacobo Herrera in Jairo Anibal Nino's « **The Renters**

of Hate » (1976) directed by Ricardo Camacho. He continued to train as an actor playing the role of Kent in Shakespeare's « **King Lear** » 1979, and the Grand Prevost in Valle Inclan's « **Farce and Licence of the Queen of Castille** » in 1982. Soon the Free Theatre was travelling to China, Spain, Holland, England and France for « **The Agony of the Deceased** » and Jairo Anibal Nino's « **The Baladins** ».

In 1984, German Jaramillo played the role of Marvin Macy in Carson McCuller's « **Ballad of the Sad Café** » adapted by Edward Albee (1984) and directed by Ricardo Camacho. In 1985, in a joint project with French Association of Artistic Action and the Free Theatre, he played the role of Monsieur Jourdain in Molière's « **Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme** » directed by Hervé Van der Meulen. This play received a prize for best play of the season in Colombia and German Jaramillo won the best actor's award.

He also played the role of Father in Pirandello's « **Six Characters in Search of an Author** » (1989) directed by German Moure. The role of the poet José Asuncion Silva in « **On Sad Sand** » directed by Eduardo Camacho (1991) was also filmed for television.

In 1993, he played Don Juan Tenorio in Tirso de Molina's « **Le Moqueur de Séville** ».

Between 1995 and 1997 he played Sir Toby Belch in Shakespeare's « **Twelfth Night** » and Jacobo in Piedad Bonet's « **Out Deathly air** » both directed by Ricardo Camacho.

In 1999 before he was invited by Barbet Schroeder to play the role of Fernando in « **Our Lady of the Assassins** », he produced for the Free Theatre Eschylus' trilogy « **Orestes** » and also played the role of Agamemnon, a slave and the god Apollo. This play was considered the best play of the year in Colombia (1999).