

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE  
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## MAN WITHOUT A FACE / El Hombre Sin Rostro (1950)

Juan Bustillo Oro

Genre : Drama

To view : <https://ok.ru/video/460690098778>

### OVERVIEW

Juan Bustillo Oro brings together elements of film noir, German Expressionism, surrealism, and DaDa to create a landmark film about the disintegration of a decent man into a monomaniacal killer of women. The film, which contains long sequences of visually evocative dream states, was nominated for and won Ariel awards as well as at the Venice Film Festival in 1950. Predating *The Three Faces of Eve* (1957) and *Psycho* (1960), *El Hombre sin Rostro / The Man without a Face* brings the audience into the hallucinatory world of the person suffering from a profound psychological rupture, while also maintaining the view from outside, as the psychiatrist conducts a profound psychoanalysis. Framed in Freudian psychology, and using Carl Jung's ideas of symbols, archetypes, and the narratives that construct reality, the film provides a captivating view of hidden inner worlds and their often lethal consequences, as Juan Carlos Lozano is driven to viciously kill women whose actions trigger a murderous rage. This film is groundbreaking in its juxtapositions of dream sequences with the unfolding action as the police try to find the killer, the chief medical forensics officer suffers increasingly disturbing dreams, and his friend, a psychologist, attempts to help him through psychoanalysis. Far from helping, the psychoanalysis acts to unveil the existence of a schizoid, divided self. At times the interplay of dream sequences and the detective's investigations seems a bit disjointed, but it serves to emphasize that one's unconscious is a powerful force that has an impact on people's actions.

### PRIMARY CHARACTERS

Juan Carlos Lozano	Medical forensics investigator for the police
Ana María	Wife of Juan Carlos
Dr. Eugenio Britel	Psychiatrist and long-time friend of Juan Carlos
Juan Carlos's mother	Intense connection with her son; does not want to let him go
Detective from Guadalajara	Called in for consultation
Singer in nightclub	Juan Carlos responds female sensuality with violence

### SYNOPSIS

Juan Carlos Lozano is a highly respected medical forensics investigator with the police department of Mexico City. He begins to be tormented by strange, highly disturbing dreams just as he is called on to investigate a string of vicious murders of women. His friend, Dr. Eugenio Britel, a psychiatrist, offers to help Juan Carlos by undergoing psychoanalysis. Instead of calming him, the psychoanalysis seems to trigger even more dream-visions. In the meantime, the killings continue. Juan Carlos makes no progress in his investigation and begins to be troubled by blackouts. His marriage to his beloved Ana María starts to crumble, and he has odd bursts of rage when he sees any hint of female sexuality. Dr. Britel starts to suspect the truth; Juan Carlos suffers from disassociative fugue states and commits murder with no recall of his actions. The psychoanalytic process brings to light Juan Carlos's intense relationship with his jealous and possessive mother. He internalized his mother's murderous rage toward rivals, and began to act on commands from the voices in his head. In the end, he is healed as the deranged side is extinguished and the loving husband, Juan Carlos, emerges again, just as he dies.

## STORY

*A man, fog, and leafless trees.* The film opens with a surreal dream sequence featuring a man in a long coat standing in swirling fog and surrounded by leafless trees. As the dream continues, the viewer sees a funeral and a beckoning woman in black. The dream sequence continues as a woman in black continues to beckon, and a group of pallbearers carry a black cloth-draped casket.

*Shots are fired.* In the third part of the dream sequence, a woman mocks him as he makes his way through fog and swirling mist. He looks at the killer. The killer has no face.

*Dr. Britel's strange confession.* Dr. Britel, an esteemed psychiatrist, is writing in his journal to describe the strange and tragic story of his dear friend of many years, Juan Carlos Lozano, who works as in Medical Forensics in the police department. Dr. Britel is recounting how Juan Carlos was troubled by a number of strange dreams he was starting to have, and he wanted to ask Dr. Britel what to make of them.

*Back at home.* The dream sequence is over, and Dr. Britel's journal-writing has come to an end. The camera does a quick cut and Juan Carlos is at home. He lives in a shadowy mansion. It is night and the lights are one, but there are shadows. He is speaking to his wife, Ana María, about how he is troubled that something is happening in their relationship. He is clearly troubled, and she does not understand it. She is a lovely young woman. Juan Carlos paces up and down and states repeatedly that he cannot go on.

*A midnight stroll in the park.* Someone is walking in the park. A young woman seated next to a monument is wearing a fur coat. She smiles to the approaching man, and it becomes clear that she is a prostitute. Her expression turns to horror as the man rushes toward her with a knife in his hand. She is brutally murdered.

*Headlines.* The *Excelsior*, the daily newspaper, emblazons the news of the killing across top of the paper. KILLER IN THE PARK! Juan Carlos is in the police department in his office and is reading the headlines.

*Dr. Britel has a special session with Juan Carlos.* Juan Carlos calls Dr. Britel to ask if they can meet soon. Something strange has happened, he said. He is not sure what to think. He's worried and he seems to have blackouts for which he has no recall of what happened.

*In a nightclub.* Dr. Britel and Juan Carlos Lozano go to a local nightclub for a drink. They are watching the singer, a sultry woman who sings, "Mentiras" (Lies). As she sings, patrons dance. A couple catches Juan Carlos's eye – they are dancing cheek-to-cheek, and then the man kisses her. Juan Carlos is outraged. He jumps up and goes to the woman and begins to berate her and slap her. Eugenio pulls Juan Carlos away before there is a fight. It shocks him and he asks Juan Carlos what on earth is happening.

*Ana María's Perplexity:* Juan Carlos returns home. Ana María asks him what is wrong, and Juan Carlos can't really say except that perhaps he needs a bit of a break. However, he is shaken. In contrast with what happened earlier, he now tells Ana María that he loves her deeply, and has since the beginning.

*More strange thoughts:* Juan Carlos discusses more weird thoughts with Eugenio. He describes another dream. In this one, the camera cuts to Juan Carlos's dream sequence, which starts with the flowing mist / fog, and then dark stick figures that look a bit like the sculptures of Modigliani pop up. Juan Carlos explains that they seem sexless and unappealing to him. He says they are low-price prostitutes. He hates them. And then, the dream changes, and he is falling down a spiral staircase. When he gets to the next level, he sees more fog, and in the fog, a

shadowy figure. It is the silhouette of a chained beast. The beast struggles against its chains. It breaks free and shakes its fists above its head, waiving the chains.

*And what about your mother?* Juan Carlos tells Eugenio that the dream made him think about his relationship with his mother. "I was a total failure," he said. "My mother loved me, but was disappointed in me, especially when I introduced her to Ana María, the only woman I've ever loved." Juan Carlos went on to explain that his mother considered Ana María to be a thief who would steal away her son. At that, Juan Carlos reflects that his mother was a good person, but that "we were too close."

*Juan Carlos responsible for his mother's death?* Juan Carlos said that what happened next still fills him with guilt. As his mother proceeded to insult Ana María, Juan Carlos stormed in to defend her. He shouted at his mother to leave them alone, and if she could not accept their marriage, then "Don't call me your son!" Upon that, his mother collapsed. His mother went into a rapid decline, and on her deathbed, Juan Carlos promised that he would never marry as long as she was alive. Then, his mother went on to say things that verge on incestuous as she explained to Juan Carlos that she loved her son with all her heart, and that she wanted to give him her heart. At that, she died.

*Dr. Britel's opinion:* Eugenio tells Juan Carlos that it's clear that his mother created a terrible inner conflict, and that he was trying to manage it by pushing Ana María away. Later, Ana María supports the notion as she shouts at Juan Carlos and accuses him of being a coward and not being able to deal with the absorbing, engulfing domination of his mother.

*More inner conflict:* In the meantime, the investigations into the death of the prostitute in the park continue. A detective from Guadalajara starts to point out very strange aspects of the case. Juan Carlos leaves the office and returns to his home, just to witness a woman kissing a man near the door. Juan Carlos asks Ana María what is happening, and Ana María explains that it was Rosa, who was kissing her fiancé because they would be separated until the next weekend. Juan Carlos will not hear it and calls in Rosa. "You're fired! We have a decent home!" he shouts. He insists she pack her bags and leave in the middle of the night. She does so, but not with a very happy ending. As she is walking in the dark, a man rushes up to her. He is holding a small knife in his hand, and he slashes her until she is dead.

*Juan Carlos back at home:* Juan Carlos returns home with no recall of what has happened. The next day he speaks with Eugenio, and said he thinks he slept but woke up nervous and exhausted.

*The knife in the suitcase.* The detective from Guadalajara has been assigned to this murder of a young woman as well. He goes through her suitcase and finds a bloody knife which seems to be the same kind of knife used to kill the prostitute. He calls in Juan Carlos to take a look, and Juan Carlos looks at it with shock and horror. The detective notes Juan Carlos's odd behavior. "You're too nervous about this. What is going on?" he asks Juan Carlos.

*Disintegration.* Juan Carlos returns home in an agitated state, which terrifies Ana María. She calls Dr. Britel who comes over right away. In the meantime, Juan Carlos is in some sort of fugue state where he is seeing blood on his hands that will not wash off and is going into hallucinatory states where he sees fog and a woman beckoning him.

*Lock yourself up.* Dr. Britel gives Juan Carlos a sedative. "Lock yourself in your room," he warns Ana María. She does so, and goes to bed. In the meantime, Juan Carlos crawls out his window and walks on the ledge to get to Ana María's room, where he climbs into the window. Ana María wakes up and tries to reassure Juan Carlos that she loves him. Juan Carlos seems to be in a trance of some sort. He pulls out a knife and advances toward Ana María to stab her. Just as he is about to stab her, Dr. Britel breaks through the door and shoots Juan Carlos.

**Juan Carlos's Deathbed:** As Juan Carlos is dying, he comes to himself and recognizes Ana María. The homicidal side of him is gone, and just the sad, sensitive romantic remains. He tells Ana María that he has always loved her and would love her forever and that he truly loved her (rather than his mother).

**A Letter.** The final scene takes place as Dr. Britel picks up the phone to call the police to report that someone has been killed. He then drops the phone. He picks up his pen and continues his letter of confession that he killed Juan Carlos. He literally did, by shooting him to keep Juan Carlos by killing Ana María, but there is also the implication that Juan Carlos was killed as the final consequence of actions that happened because Dr. Britel awakened the murderous Doppelgänger – the side of Juan Carlos that was dominated by his rageful mother.

## THEMES

**Divided Selves / Schizophrenia:** Beginning with the very first scene, we see the issues of the fragmentation of the self, and the notion that one side of one's personality does not know the other. Juan Carlos Lozano's psyche begins to disintegrate under the pressure of guilt and anger toward his mother. This is a theme that has been explored in authors as disparate as E.T.A. Hoffmann, Edgar Allan Poe, Fyodor Dostoevsky, and in the sensation novels of Mary Elizabeth Braddon and Wilkie Collins. Later, in the twentieth century, Freud's ideas about the unconscious and the psychologists Jung and Neumann explored symbols and archetypal narratives. All are explored within a context of expressionism in *El Hombre sin rostro*.

**Maternal love:** Maternal love is depicted as something grotesque and toxic in *El Hombre sin rostro* and it is quite revealing that Ana María and Juan Carlos are childless. Maternal love, usually depicted as something approaching reverence (invoking the Holy Mother of the Catholic Church), is now depicted as invasive, engulfing, and a source of horror as notions of incest are triggered.

**Guilt:** Juan Carlos suffers from guilt for having triggered his mother's heart attack when he heatedly defended Ana María from his mother's aspersions. Now, guilt and remorse have started to consume him. He feels guilty whenever he is attracted to a woman, or sees any indication of female sexuality because it represents a conflict with his mother, and a betrayal of her love (which is, in fact, domination).

**Female Sexuality:** At the heart of the dynamic that drives the film is the issue of female sexuality. Juan Carlos is clearly uncomfortable with all forms and expressions of female sexuality, ranging from a woman kissing her fiancé to one soliciting sex for pay in a public park. He's enacting his mother's rage toward usurpers of her authority and pretenders to her affection. It is telling that he stabs them with a small knife that leads to blood over his hands, and a Lady MacBeth-type of unremovable stain as he sees blood dripping from his hands even after he washes, rinses and washes them again.

**Dreams:** A significant part of the film consists of dream sequences. They are either dreams that are recounted to Dr. Britel, the psychiatrist friend of Juan Carlos, or they are waking dreams triggered by hypnosis. All are filled with symbolism and they suggest that the truth is beneath the surface, and reality is often not what one empirically gathers by means of the senses but what one perceives through intuition. The dreams contain potent symbols such as spiral staircases, silhouetted monsters, bare trees, funerals, and women in black dresses. Most disturbing is the man without a face.

## CHARACTER ANALYSIS

**Juan Carlos Lozano:** Juan Carlos Lozano is a rather meek and reserved medical forensics doctor for the police force. He is a respected professional and holds an important position. For all his tidy professionalism, however, Juan Carlos has another side, and one which starts to

dominate as he goes further and further into an investigation of his disturbing dreams, and his buried feelings. The psychological “therapy” sessions are actually accelerating the disintegration of his psyche to the point that he becomes homicidal in his fugue states.

*Divided Self:* The fragmentation of Juan Carlos intensifies during the movie. He begins as a rather tense and constrained professional, but then becomes a man terrified of his own lapses of consciousness and memory. His personality splits and when he has fugue states, a ravening monster emerges that attacks women who could potentially excite his libido (and thus separate him from his mother’s unwholesome love). At the end, he is reintegrated as the “killer mother” in him dies as he dies.

*Guilty Conscience:* Juan Carlos is ostensibly driven by guilt, not only for having betrayed his mother, but also for not living up to the expectations of his wife and even his friend, Dr. Eugenio Britel. The guilt, however, does not seem to be the kind of guilt that one would feel for committing an offense, but a guilt for not wanting to have his mother love him as much as she wants to. The guilt is a resistance to engulfment, and a source of energy that allows him to maintain differentiation from his mother. At the end of the film, the guilt that Juan Carlos felt is reflected in the guilt felt by Eugenio Britel, who suggests that his own probes and his decision to utilize Freudian psychoanalysis is what unleashed the monster in Juan Carlos.

*Romantic:* As strange as it might seem, Juan Carlos is a romantic. He idealizes women, and his love for Ana María is based on the romantic idea that love involves unity and transcendence. The Romantic sensibility would suggest that love is pure and a positive force of nature, and is marked by extremes of feeling and intense desire. His mother’s love for him was a grotesque and aberrant manifestation of “love” – but the kind of love that engulfs, dominates, and humiliates.

*Loyal:* The ending is not as much a surprise as a relief as his tormented, divided, schizoid self comes back together as whole once the evil side is extinguished. Bustillo Oro’s films often contain rather vexed relationships with women. In *El Hombre sin Rostro*, women are viewed with fear, scorn, horror, and danger. A mother’s love is depicted as engulfing. A woman kissing her fiancé is viewed as indecent. And, finally, the love of a wife is viewed as separating him from his mother and responsible for the mother’s death. The inner conflicts unleash a monster, and the film itself is essentially about the monster that burst free from deep within the psyche, how it formed, and what can be done with it. To whom should he be loyal? To his mother? Or, to his wife?

## QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW

1. Dr. Eugenio Britel calls the police to inform them that “there is someone here who turned into a killer.” His words can be taken in a few different ways. Please explain at least two possible interpretations, and how and why the practice of psychology itself could be considered capable of turning people into killers.
2. There are a number of surrealistic scenes that could be dreams or visions under hypnosis. Please describe them and identify potential symbolic elements. What are some of the possible interpretations? For example, after seeing thin statues he considers to be prostitutes, he descends what appears to be a spiral staircase, where he meets a chained beast that roars and breaks free from its bonds. What could that mean?
3. Juan Carlos Lozano is a “by the book” forensics examiner for the police, and as such is law-abiding and law-enforcing. However, when he goes into an altered state, he is anything but that. Describe how Juan Carlos the killer of women who demonstrate feminine sexuality is the same or different from Juan Carlos, the law enforcer. (For example, one could argue that the violent law-breaking Doppelganger is also an enforcer of morality.)

4. What is Juan Carlos's relationship with his mother? How does the conversation on his mother's deathbed become the key revelatory moment in the film? At what point did Juan Carlos "become" his mother?

5. How does the film demonstrate society's complicated attitude toward women? For example, how does it show both condemnation and sympathy for women who are considered "fallen"? How does it show both respect and horror for a mother's love? Please explore examples and provide examples from scenes from the movie.

#### **ILLUSTRATIVE SCENES**



Opening scene a silhouetted man walks through a foggy, barren landscape with leafless trees and water on the ground. It suggests a solitary journey.



The man in the hat (the man without a face, we later learn), is being approached by a man seeking answers. One side of the street is illuminated. The other is dark. Fog covers the path. There are numerous interpretations for this highly symbolic scene.



The man in the dream approaches the man in a hat and black coat. He looks to see who he is, but to his horror, he has no face. In Jungian psychology and in Lacanian psychology, the people one sees in a dream are essentially mirrors back to the dreamer to reveal their identity or what they imagine they are. In the case of facelessness, there is no mirroring or revelation. Instead, the facelessness becomes an identity sink – a nihilistic space of nothingness.



A man attacks a woman in a fur coat who was walking in the park, seemingly to solicit sex work. His approach is swift and brutal, and he kills her with his knife.



Headlines: Another Crime by the Mysterious Killer of Women – The main Mexico City daily newspaper is transfixed by the appearance of a Jack the Ripper kind of killer. The city is suffused with fear. There is pressure to solve the case. This means things will become difficult for Juan Carlos.





Dr. Britel looks at the victim and notices how and where she has been cut by a knife. He also contemplates her profession and where her body was found.



The forensics unit examines the evidence collected at the scene of the murder. This scene emphasizes the science of forensics investigation, and suggests to the audience that it will be difficult for the killer to hide.



Juan Carlos Lozano listens to the song, "Mentiras" and watches a woman and a man kiss on the dance floor. The public display of affection enrages him and he races up to the dance floor to accost the woman in a brutal and degrading fashion.



Dr. Britel uses psychoanalysis to get at the root cause of Juan Carlos's extremely eccentric behavior toward women and his lapses of memory and weird dreams.



Juan Carlos recounts his dream sequence (or, alternatively his hallucinations) that took him from what seemed to be a basement down a flight of spiral staircases in a film technique that was emulated by Alfred Hitchcock. Here the dreamer encounters a ravaging beast who breaks his chains. At this point, the violent Doppelgänger (Id) comes out and constitutes the visualization of rage.



Ana María begs her dismissed maid to wait until the morning to leave. She is worried that it will be unsafe. The maid, who was caught kissing her fiancé, is humiliated.



Ana María entreats Juan Carlos to stay at home and not to worry about things. She tells him that she loves him, and that he should follow his heart, rather than be internally tormented by what he imagined his wife to be doing.



In a classic Bustillo de Oro shot, Dr. Eugenio Britel speaks with Juan Carlos Lozano (left). They are parallel with each other, and the most direct way they can speak to each other.



Ana María speaks with Dr. Eugenio Britel and expresses her concern as she sees his increasingly erratic behavior.



Under hypnosis, Juan Carlos describes his dream. In the swirling fog, he sees a woman dressed in black, beckoning him deeper into a trackless oblivion.



Juan Carlos enters into a fugue state in which he has a single, monomaniacal obsession: kill a woman whose behavior would offend his mother. In this trance state, he cannot control himself, and acts strictly upon the obsessive thought.



After being shot when trying to kill Ana María, the personality of Juan Carlos, the medical forensics investigator returns, and the homicidal maniac is extinguished. Cradled in Ana María's arms, he declares his love for her just as he takes his last breaths.



Psychiatrist and close personal friend of Juan Carlos, Dr. Eugenio Britel agonizes over the possibility that his psychoanalysis, with hypnosis and questions triggering memories of disturbing dreams, may have caused the monster in Juan Carlos to emerge and to murder women.