HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
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Devil Between the Legs */ El diablo entre las piernas* (2019)

Arturo Ripstein (1943–)

OVERVIEW

Director: Arturo Ripstein (born in Mexico City in 1943) is one of the key figures of Mexican cinema. His films usually unfold in cramped interiors, with long takes and scenes that stretch time instead of rushing it. Within those rooms, he stages relationships saturated with tension, resentment, and a very dry sense of humor. Early on he learned from Luis Buñuel, but over the decades Ripstein has developed a style of his own. For more than thirty years he has worked alongside the screenwriter Paz Alicia Garciadiego; together they return, again and again, to stories of difficult love, power struggles, and people who cannot leave each other even when they should. Some of his best well-known films are *El castillo de la pureza* (1973) [*The Castle of Purity*], *El lugar sin límites* (1978) [*Hell Without Limits*], *El imperio de la fortuna* (1986) [*The Realm of Fortune*], and *Profundo carmesí* (1996) [*Deep Crimson*]. These films show how his style has changed over time, becoming slower, more focused on small spaces, and more interested in difficult relationships. *Devil Between the Legs* belongs to his late period: the camera moves slowly, the shots are patient, and the dialogue cuts straight to the bone.

Film: *Devil Between the Legs* (2019) is a black-and-white
portrait of Beatriz and her aging, pathologically jealous husband. Their days repeat almost identically: accusations, fights, reconciliations that are never really reconciliations. The action rarely leaves the house, bedroom, kitchen, hallway, bathroom, so that the domestic space feels more like a cell. The long takes and crowded rooms build a constant sense of suffocation. At the same time, the film insists on the persistence of desire in old age. There is nothing romantic or "cute" about that desire; it appears as something stubborn, painful, and complicated.

Background: The script is by Paz Alicia Garciadiego and the cinematography by Alejandro Cantú, who lights the house with sharp contrasts of brightness and deep shadow. The main cast is Sylvia Pasquel as Beatriz, Alejandro Suárez as the Old Man, Greta Cervantes as Dinorah, and Daniel Giménez Cacho in a small but significant role. After premiering in 2019, the film circulated in festivals and streaming platforms. Many critics read it as one of Ripstein's most personal works, a movie obsessed with control, routine, and the forms of emotional violence that hide inside ordinary domestic life.

MAIN CHARACTERS

Beatriz – wife of the Old Man.
The Old Man – Beatriz's jealous husband.
Dinorah – the maid in the household.
Tere – the Old Man's lover.
Cacho – a man the Old Man imagines as Beatriz's lover.

SYNOPSIS

Almost the entire story takes place inside a single house in Mexico City. The time is roughly contemporaneous with the film's release, set around 2019. Beatriz and her husband have lived together for decades, but what remains between them is anger, suspicion, and habit. Every day the Old Man trails behind her, asking where she went, with whom, why she is late. He repeats the same accusations until they become part of the background noise of the house. Beatriz usually answers very little. She finishes her chores, listens, and endures. The house itself feels like a prison. Rooms are small, hallways are narrow, and the camera's long takes give the impression that time moves slowly inside those walls. Dinorah, the maid, watches everything without stepping in. When Beatriz leaves for her tango classes, something in her

posture changes: she walks faster, smiles occasionally, and seems more alive. Tango becomes her small, fragile space of privacy. But as soon as she comes back home, the weight of suspicion returns.

The tension peaks on the night Beatriz stays out. The Old Man convinces himself that this time she really has cheated. When she finally returns, their fight escalates into physical violence. Dinorah, who has been watching from the side for most of the film, intervenes and attacks Beatriz. The film ends quietly: Beatriz lies on the floor, the Old Man cries beside her, and Dinorah stands by. There is no resolution, no moral lesson. Desire, rage, and routine have trapped all three.

SCENES



The Awakening The film opens in darkness while Marlene Dietrich sings faintly in the background. The first image is the Old Man's bedroom. The camera moves in from the hallway, close to the floor. Morning light divides the bed. The Old Man sits up slowly, turns his back to the camera, and begins to dress with effort. A mannequin stands in the corner with a towel over its chest. He says "Peeping Tom" as he adjusts it. Inside the closet there is another mannequin with an open torso. He takes his robe and cane and leaves the room. The camera remains with the empty bed and the flicker of the silent television screen



Beatriz in Bed In Beatriz's bedroom the scene is colder. She lies under the blankets when the Old Man enters. He lifts the blanket and raises her nightgown without speaking. The camera stays still. He sits in a rocking chair, opens the nightstand, and takes out her bra. He rubs it against himself and says, "Not even for this you are good for… hypocrite." The camera cuts to Beatriz's face; she is awake and looks to the side without answering. He sniffs the bra, spits on it, drops it on the floor, and takes more underwear from the drawer. His footsteps fade as he leaves. Beatriz stays in the same position, silent.



At the Kitchen Table — Beatriz and Dinorah Beatriz sits at the kitchen table applying makeup. Dinorah stands near the sink. Light from the window divides them in the frame. Without looking at her, Beatriz says, "Well, you finally show up… it's almost ten." She tells Dinorah that the Old Man is in a bad mood and that she should avoid him. She also warns her not to arrive so late again. Dinorah answers softly, "Yes," and continues her work.



First Tango Class — Beatriz Arrives Late Beatriz enters the tango studio a little late. Long silver strips hang from the ceiling and move as she walks through them. The instructor sees her and says, "Did you see the time?" Beatriz explains that "the girl didn't show up," so she was delayed. The instructor replies, "Today it's for this, tomorrow it's for something else. Your partner already left." She adds that Mr. Ismael brought his wife "to look you over." After stepping away briefly, the instructor returns and dances a few steps with Beatriz before the class continues.



Beatriz Returns Home After Dancing In the kitchen, Beatriz and Dinorah appear in an eye-level medium shot. Strong daylight comes through the large window behind Dinorah, turning her into a silhouette, while Beatriz is lit from the side. Beatriz stands near the doorway on the left; Dinorah stirs a pot on the stove on the right. The camera

remains still at first. When Beatriz exits the frame, the camera pans slowly to follow her toward the dining area while Dinorah keeps working in the background.



Laundry Area — Beatriz and the Old Man In a small laundry area, the Old Man asks, “Did you go out?” Beatriz tells him she went to the gym and got a massage because of her bursitis. He repeats her words in a mocking tone. He changes the subject to her underwear and says, “No wonder you spend so much on panties and bras.” He points at a lipstick mark on a cup and says, “Look, red.” She continues folding clothes and placing items around the room. He stays close to her, talking without pause as she moves from task to task.



At the Hair Salon — The Old Man Visits His Lover The Old Man enters the hair salon suddenly, and the Lover turns toward him quickly. She says, “Another scare like this and you’ll be paying the ambulance.” He replies, “I came.” She tells him she cannot leave work, but he repeats, “Just a little while,” until she agrees. The mirror in front of them shows both of their reflections as they talk. The countertop is crowded with combs, bottles, and other tools. Warm light fills the small room, and they remain seated next to each other while they continue their conversation.



The Daughter Resemblance Beatriz comments on the freshly cleaned room and says it looks “like in old movies.” She turns to Dinorah and says she resembles her daughter. When Dinorah tries to continue the conversation, Beatriz stops her and says, “You met her. And that’s not you.” She explains that when arguments start in the house, Dinorah stands nearby and listens. The two remain in the room together as Beatriz speaks in short directions and comments.



Sorting the Laundry Dinorah enters the bedroom with folded clothes. She opens the closet, places the garments inside, then crosses to the bed where a laundry tub is waiting. She picks it up, carries it back to the closet, and sets it down. Beatriz sits on the bed, smoking, and watching her. Dinorah says, “Here are the clothes I washed. And the rest… you’ll tell me when.” Beatriz does not respond. Dinorah leaves. After the door closes, Beatriz goes to the closet, removes the clothes Dinorah just placed there, and sits on the floor. She examines her underwear piece by piece, smelling each one. She makes two piles: one she folds neatly, and one she drops on the floor to be washed again.



Bathroom – Beatriz Cleans Herself After finishing her inspection, Beatriz shuts the double doors of the bedroom. The next shot shows her in the bathroom, seated on the toilet with her robe open at the knees and her underwear around her ankles. She places her hand between her legs, lifts her fingers to her nose, and smells them. She repeats this motion several times. She stands, washes her hands at the sink, takes a small bottle that looks like rubbing alcohol, sits again, and pours the liquid between her legs. Then she returns to the laundry area and washes the underwear by hand. She scrubs each piece, smells it again, and continues. In an outdoor shot, she hangs the wet garments one by one on the clothesline. Dinorah watches from a distance in the doorway.



Jealous of the Man Who Feels No Jealousy In the Lover’s bedroom, she holds up a bra and says, “It smells like her. Is that why you want me to put it on?” The Old Man tells her to rub it under her arms and “down there.” She asks how a woman can be happy in bed if he wants her to smell like someone else. She says her own husband never gets jealous. The Old Man replies that he is jealous of “the husband who doesn’t get

jealous.” The two stand close to each other as they continue talking, with the bed and the room’s furniture around them.



The accusation at the bedroom door Beatriz sits at her small vanity table, writing in her notebook under a warm lamp. The hallway appears in the previous shot, empty and narrow. The Old Man enters the frame walking slowly with his cane. He reaches Beatriz’s bedroom door, takes the doorknob, and shakes it. It is locked. He knocks once, then harder, and shouts, “Shameless! Shameless!” He says she left “the evidence” in the open and mentions her panties. He talks through the door about “bugs” and “worthless men.” He leans closer and warns her not to look at him “for any excuse,” saying he could crush her skull. He continues speaking, repeating the same phrases, including “the milk of other men.” Beatriz does not appear in the scene. The camera stays in the hallway with the Old Man as he speaks against the closed door.



Photographs on the Bed — Beatriz and Dinorah Beatriz sits at the edge of the bed wearing her robe. On the bedspread are cut photographs, spread out in small pieces. Dinorah stands beside her, looking down at them. Beatriz asks, “And this?” Dinorah replies that she thought Beatriz might be interested in some of them. Beatriz tells her to take some change from the kitchen, go to the stationery shop, and buy glue and three sheets of card stock. She says, “This stays between us,” and repeats the instructions. Dinorah asks if Beatriz’s daughter helped her when she was young. Beatriz answers that “one doesn’t tell these things,” and adds that she is telling Dinorah only now. When Dinorah asks if Beatriz is alone, “left in God’s hands,” Beatriz repeats the phrase in a firm tone. She ends the exchange by telling Dinorah to “go feel sorry for your mother.”



Beatriz and Her Tango Partner Beatriz and her tango partner sit at a round table outside the dance hall. He sits on one side, she on the other. Behind them, stacks of chairs and the lights of the studio show that class has ended. Beatriz asks if he is in a hurry. He says he has a doctor’s appointment and is waiting for his wife. Beatriz tells him she wants to show him something “very quick” and says he is “a man” and understands “men’s things.” He replies that talking about such things is “not proper” because they are dance partners and she is “a married woman.” Beatriz asks why his wife allows him to dance with other women. He explains that his wife has bad knees. Beatriz then says she writes down everything her husband tells her and begins to open her notebook. He does not move closer, and the conversation ends with distance between them.



The Tango Partner Breakup Inside the dance studio, silver foil strips hang from the ceiling and separate parts of the room. Through the strips, Beatriz approaches her former partner. He stands next to a woman in a sequined dress. Beatriz tells him that if he had stayed a little longer the other day, she would have apologized and “everything would be fine.” He answers that everything would not be fine. Beatriz looks at the new partner and says, “She doesn’t even dance.” He replies, “She’s my new partner,” and adds that they “do not tolerate scandals.” He tells Beatriz that if she has a complaint, she should speak to the instructor. He says he is not used to dealing with women “of your kind” and tells her she may look like a decent woman but is “a shameless one.” He then tells her to leave because they are practicing. Beatriz turns to the instructor, who says Beatriz was rude and that the man is “very decent.” She adds that he said Beatriz came on to him. When Beatriz asks, “And me? What about me?” the instructor answers, “And you? Bye bye.” The silver streamers move as Beatriz steps back and leaves the space where the dancers continue practicing.



At the Lover's House The Old Man sits on a worn sofa in a small living room. The Lover sits beside him in a cardigan. The wall behind them is covered with framed portraits, and shelves filled with dolls and small objects. She picks up a bra and says, "It smells like her." She asks if that is why he wants her to put it on. He tells her to rub it under her arms and "down there." She responds by asking how a woman can be happy in bed if she must smell like someone else. She then mentions her own husband and says he never gets jealous. The Old Man says he is jealous "of the husband who doesn't get jealous." They continue talking, and she says she has been his lover, his "second front," and his "other woman." She says that something feels different now and she plans to end the relationship "today." He repeats "Today?" She answers "Why not?" and stands.



At the Hair Salon Dinorah arrives at the hair salon and knocks on the door. Tere opens it and says they are closed. Dinorah asks for a quick haircut, saying she has "about fifteen minutes." Tere lets her in. Dinorah sits in the chair and says she wants her hair loose "like hers," referring to Beatriz. Tere replies that the style does not suit her because "the lady has a lot of hair" and Dinorah's is thin. Dinorah tells her she saw her crying. Tere asks what she could know. Dinorah says, "I know everything. I saw you. I saw you with him. I saw where you went." Tere tells her to get up and leave and asks who sent her, if she is the daughter. Dinorah says no one sent her and that she did it "for him." Tere calls her a "nosy brat" and says she came too late. They stand facing each other, reflected in the mirrors around the room.



The Confession About the Other Woman Beatriz stands in her robe, holding a small glass. Dinorah enters the room in her maid uniform. Beatriz asks, "Are you going to tell him?" and Dinorah shakes her head. Beatriz hands her the glass and says, "Let's toast to what's coming." Dinorah takes a sip. Then Dinorah says, "I saw her. I went to see her." Beatriz asks, "Who?" Dinorah answers, "The other woman of the sir." Beatriz repeats the question. Dinorah says she saw the woman the Old Man is seeing and spoke with her. Beatriz denies it, saying he is not seeing anyone. Dinorah continues and says the woman thought she—Dinorah—was Beatriz's daughter and that she knows Beatriz has a daughter. Beatriz listens, and the scene ends with the two standing in the same room, the glass still in Dinorah's hand.



Infidelity The hotel room is dim, lit by a small lamp beside the bed. The man who works there stands near the door with his hand on the handle. Beatriz sits on the bed without moving. He tells her that women arrive "without luggage, at dawn, all the same," and says that if anything happens to her "in a hotel bed, in the room with your lucky number," it will cause trouble for him because "the hotel is in my care." He calls her an old gossiping woman and tells her to leave. Beatriz stays where she is and says, "Come over here. Close the door." He tells her again that she needs to leave, but she repeats, "Close the door." He closes it after a short pause. Beatriz tells him, "Sit down. Come closer to the chair." He hesitates but sits. She says, "I came to sleep with you. I came to pick you." He looks at her and says she seems like "a lady… from your house… a mother maybe, a grandmother." Beatriz responds by calling herself an "old lady" and continues speaking in a steady tone. The man asks, "Me?" and "But why me?" Beatriz leans in slightly and answers, "And why not?"



Last Scene — The Reading The Old Man sits on the couch in a striped robe, holding a small notebook and reading from it aloud. Beatriz sits next to him in a dark dress, turned slightly toward him, looking ahead. As he reads, Dinorah stands behind them with a plate in her hands. She steps forward and serves them. The Old Man continues reading from the notebook. Beatriz remains seated with her hands on her lap. The three stay in this arrangement until the film ends.

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Beatriz (Sylvia Pasquel)



Beatriz is an aging woman trapped in a marriage built on jealousy and habit. Her daily movements, washing, dressing, combing her hair, mark the rhythm of a life reduced to repetition. Beneath her silence lies endurance; beneath her obedience, the faint pulse of rebellion. Ripstein presents her as a survivor whose body still remembers passion even as her voice has been taken from her.

Resilient In the kitchen, she continues washing dishes as the Old Man shouts behind her. The camera stays on her hands and the running water. She does not look up, but the insistence of her work becomes a modest form of resistance.

Sensual At the tango studio, she dances with a younger partner. Light catches on her earrings as she moves, hesitant at first, then more fluid. For a brief moment she smiles, as if her body were remembering another life. The smile fades when the music stops.

Defiant In their final confrontation, after another round of accusations, she takes his hand and forces it against her own body. The gesture is small but fierce. Ripstein lets the silence stretch, giving weight to this moment where shame and power collide.

The Old Man (Alejandro Suárez)



The Old Man embodies jealousy as an illness. Once a pharmacist, he now lives surrounded by the remnants of his authority: medicine bottles, old tools, medical mannequins. His speech is constant, repetitive, corrosive. Jealousy has become his only language, the last sign that he is still alive and capable of feeling something. He spies, mocks, and interrogates because suspicion gives structure to his days. Ripstein portrays him as grotesque and pathetic at once, a man more terrified of impotence and irrelevance than of death itself. His violence is mostly verbal. Insults and graphic metaphors replace physical blows. Yet beneath the aggression there is fear: fear of being forgotten, replaced, or unloved. His obsession with Beatriz's supposed infidelities covers a deeper panic about his own aging body and fading masculinity. Controlling her is his final illusion of potency.

Jealous At the kitchen table, he bangs his cane with each question, "Where were you? Who was there?" turning the interrogation into a kind of drum beat. Beatriz's silence functions as the counter-melody.

Vain In the bathroom mirror, he examines his sagging skin and trembling hands. The harsh light exposes every wrinkle, and the mirror becomes his harshest audience.

Cruel During arguments, his insults land like slaps. Ripstein often keeps the camera on Beatriz's face while we hear his voice offscreen, filling the house. The violence is heard more than seen.

Pathetic Late at night, he sits alone, muttering Beatriz's name as the radio hums faintly. The once domineering man shrinks into a fragile figure, his words dissolving into the empty soundscape of the house.

Dinorah (Greta Cervantes)



Dinorah is servant, witness, and eventually executioner. She moves through the house like a low, constant note, carrying trays, cleaning floors, opening doors. She sees everything. At first she barely speaks, and her silence seems like simple caution. Over time, that silence becomes complicated. Living inside the cycle of violence, she internalizes it. By the end of the film,

she repeats it. Dinorah mirrors a younger Beatriz like another woman confined to the house, expected to serve and keep quiet. Her attachment to the Old Man is not love but learned submission. When she finally attacks Beatriz, she is both obeying the patriarch and claiming a twisted kind of agency, proving that she also belongs to the house's cruel order.

Submissive Carrying a tray of tea, she enters the Old Man's study. He watches her closely, but she never meets his gaze. She places the cup carefully, bows her head, and leaves. The door closes softly behind her.

Observant After a shouting match, she cleans the kitchen. Her movements are slow, precise, her eyes distant. The sound of her cloth wiping the counter blends with the muffled cries upstairs.

Complicit In the final scene, she lifts the Old Man's cane and strikes Beatriz. The act is sudden, mechanical, and horrifying. Her silence continues even as she becomes the hand of violence.

The Lover (Patricia Reyes Spíndola)



The Lover (Tere) functions as both a mirror of Beatriz and a wound in the Old Man's pride. She represents the residue of desire in his aging body and the illusion that he can still impress someone. Their relationship is transactional: she offers company and flattery; he offers stories and attention. Through her, Ripstein exposes the emptiness of male vanity in old age.

Calculated She meets the Old Man in his living room, speaking softly while he brags about his youth. Her smile is polite, practiced. The lighting isolates their faces in partial shadow, suggesting that both know the exchange is hollow.

Comforting She touches his arm lightly, listening as he repeats the same stories of betrayal. The gesture feels rehearsed, but the Old Man relaxes under her attention. The scene unfolds in slow rhythm, filled with pauses and the sound of his labored breathing.

Disenchanted When he boasts about controlling Beatriz, she turns her eyes away. Ripstein holds the shot on her expression, a mixture of pity and fatigue. Her silence answers him more sharply than words could.

The Tango Partner (Daniel Giménez Cacho)



The tango partner is a mature, respectable man who enters Beatriz's life as desire and companionship. He insists on rules, distance, reminding Beatriz at every turn that she is "a married woman" and that he has "a very understanding wife." He enjoys dancing and the attention that comes with it. However, as long as his public image remains intact. Through him, the film shows how everyday morality can be used to police women's behavior while protecting male comfort.

Respectable Outside the dance hall, seated at the table with Beatriz, he keeps his hat on, back straight, and tone measured. When she tries to confide in him and asks, "You're a man and you understand men's things," he immediately draws a line: they are dance partners, nothing more; talking about "intimate things" is "not proper." His language is full of rules, what is appropriate, what is out of place.

Guarded When Beatriz asks if his wife minds him talking to other women, he responds with a ready explanation: her bad knees, her trust, their arrangement. He refuses to admit any vulnerability or temptation. Instead, he shifts the question back onto Beatriz's marriage, asking why her husband does not come to the dance, deflecting scrutiny away from himself.

Moralizing In the studio scene, when Beatriz approaches him behind the shimmering foil curtains to apologize, he refuses her attempt at reconciliation. He tells her that he and his new partner "do not tolerate

scandals," and that if she has any complaint she should take it to the person in charge. He speaks as if he were a guardian of order, calling Beatriz "a shameless woman" even as he enjoys the status of a "very decent man."

THEMES

LIFE STAGES

Old age The Old Man and Beatriz move through the house slowly. Their routines become signs of how time has settled in their bodies. The Old Man tries to hold on to authority because it is one of the last things he feels he still has. Beatriz looks for youth in her tango classes, even if they last only a few. Old age becomes a kind of prison where the body remembers desire but no longer knows what to do with it.

Illustrative moment: the shot where Beatriz examines in the bathroom mirror. Her face looks tired. That brief moment reveals vulnerability, beneath the accusations and cruelty, she is terrified. Old age, then, is not just a theme but a condition that shapes every frame.

RELATIONSHIP

Marriage: *Dysfunctional* The marriage is a long-term disaster that never explodes completely and never heals. Beatriz and the Old Man share a whole life together, but what remains between them is not love; it is habit, anger, and mutual dependence. They know exactly how to hurt each other. He uses jealousy and verbal abuse. She uses silence, resistance through routine, and brief escapes to the world outside, like tango. Their relationship is not about solving problems. It is about repeating the same conflict until it feels normal.

The film suggests that a marriage can be completely broken and still feel impossible to leave. Practical and emotional ties hold them in place: the house, money, history, the fear of being alone. Over the years, their roles have become rigid. He is the one who accuses, she is the one who endures, and Dinorah is the one who watches and learns. The house itself reflects this dysfunctional structure. It is full of narrow corridors, closed doors, and dark rooms, as if every space were shaped by years of resentment. The damage also spreads to others. Dinorah absorbs this model of marriage as if it were normal, and in the end she repeats the violence herself.

Illustrative moment: At Beatriz's locked bedroom door, the Old Man shouts, bangs, and accuses her of bringing "the milk of other men" into his house. We never see her, only the hallway and his body leaning against the door. The image captures their marriage in one shot: his aggression on one side, her silence and self-protection on the other, with no real dialogue between them.

Sexuality Beatriz's sexuality is tied to her body. When she dances tango, we see a different side of her. These moments are not about romance; they are about remembering that she still has a body that can feel. Back at home, that same sexuality turns into a problem. The Old Man talks about her underwear, her smell, and her supposed lovers in graphic and humiliating ways. For the Old Man, sexuality is deeply connected to fear. He is afraid of impotence, of being replaced, of no longer being desirable. His visits to the Lover try to prove that he is still "a man," but the energy of those scenes is tired and sad. The Lover listens, complains, and sometimes pushes back. Beatriz turns her desire against herself. She doubts her own body, feels dirty, and tries to erase every possible "trace" of sex from her skin and clothes.

Illustrative moment: After checking each piece of underwear, Beatriz goes to the bathroom and pours alcohol between her legs. This moment also touches on the meaning of the title, suggesting that fear, desire, and shame all concentrate "between the legs," where the couple's conflict becomes most visible. Her expression shows fear and shame. This painful act makes clear that, for her, sexuality has become more about anxiety and guilt than about pleasure.

PSYCHOLOGY

Jealousy The central theme of *Devil Between the Legs* is jealousy, not as a passing feeling but as a way of living. The Old Man doesn't just suspect Beatriz; he feeds on that suspicion. Jealousy is his main instrument of control. It structures their days into a predictable pattern of interrogations, accusations, and imagined scenarios. His questions and routines reaffirm his place as the one who judges. Ripstein frames jealousy less as passion than as cruelty dressed up as intimacy, a force that keeps the couple bound together in misery.

Illustrative moment: When Beatriz comes back from tango, the Old Man is waiting for her in the kitchen. He interrogates her, demands explanations, and repeats the same phrases he has used for years. She moves around him, prepares food, puts things away. Her silence does not calm him; it amplifies his rage. The scene shows how jealousy shapes the rhythm of the house.

Dependency Beatriz and the Old Man are tied to each other by a long routine of anger, repetition, and shared history. He humiliates her; she dreams of freedom. Yet neither one leaves. Their dependence is not tender, but structural. They know how to live in conflict better than they know how to be alone. The film suggests that the habits of coexisting, who cooks, who complains, who answers the door, can outweigh the desire to escape.

Illustrative moment: After a day of errands, Beatriz walks through the house with her bag while the Old Man follows closely behind, complaining and asking questions. She puts things away, feeds the dog, waters a plant. He circles her like a satellite. Both characters move through a routine they know by heart: he depends on accusing, she depends on enduring.

Desire Ripstein shows desire in old age without softening it. Beatriz finds flashes of vitality at the tango studio, where music and touch briefly allow her to imagine another life. The Old Man also desires, but his desire surfaces mostly as jealousy, hostility, and anxious fantasies. In this world, desire is not a gentle emotion; it is persistent and often painful, and it refuses to disappear simply because bodies grow older.

Illustrative moment: In the tango class, Beatriz follows the steps with care. Her body relaxes little by little, and she manages a small smile as she turns. The bright lights and mirrors of the studio contrast sharply with the shadowy house. For a few minutes, her desire is not a problem to be punished but a source of movement.

Humiliation Humiliation becomes the couple's daily vocabulary. The Old Man attacks Beatriz with words; she continues frying eggs, washing dishes, folding clothes. His cruelty is not occasional; it is routine. Her silence functions both as protection and as a sign of how normalized the abuse has become. The film underlines how, over time, humiliation can feel "ordinary" inside a long relationship.

Illustrative moment: In the kitchen, Beatriz washes dishes while the Old Man unleashes a long monologue of insults behind her. The camera stays on her hands and on the water hitting the plates. She does not look back, and she does not answer. This lack of reaction infuriates him further, making clear how humiliation and silence reinforce one another.

Space Because almost everything happens in the house, the domestic interior becomes a metaphor for confinement. Tight hallways, cluttered rooms, and closed doors mirror the characters' emotional constraints. The spaces are familiar but oppressive. The house is not just a setting; it is the physical embodiment of a relationship governed by repetition and control.

Illustrative moment: Beatriz walks down the corridor with a pile of laundry, while the Old Man trails after her, talking nonstop. The walls feel too close. The repeated back-and-forth between rooms, framed in long, unbroken shots, turns the hallway into a visible form of their emotional dead end.

Discussion Questions

1. How does Beatriz's silence function within her relationship with the Old Man?
2. What role do the tango scenes play in understanding Beatriz's emotional life?

3. Why does Dinorah shift from being a quiet observer to a participant in violence?