



HELLO, HEMINGWAY is the LVCA's January, 2014 donation to the Ligonier Valley Library.

Cuba 1990 84 minutes color live action feature drama in Spanish with English subtitles ICAIC (Instituto Cubano de Arte e Industria Cinematograficos )

Producer: Ricardo Guila

15 of a possible 20 points

\*\*\*\* of a possible \*\*\*\*\*

Key: \* indicates outstanding technical achievement or performance

(j) indicates juvenile performer

#### Points

- 2 Direction: Fernando Perez Valdes\*
- 1 Editing: Jorge Abello
- 1 Cinematography: Julio Valdes
- 1 Lighting
- 2 Screenplay: Maydo Royero
- 1 Music: Edesio Alejandro
- 1 Art Direction: Onelio Larralde
- 2 Sound
- 2 Acting
- 2 Creativity

15 total points

Cast: Laura de la Uz\* (Larita), Raul Paz (Victor, Larita's boyfriend),  
Herminia Sanchez (Josefa), Caridad Hernandez (Rosenda),  
Enrique Molina\* (Larita's uncle Manolo), Marta del Rio (Dr. Martinez, teacher),  
Micheline Calvert (Miss Amalia), Jose Antonio Rodriguez (Tomas),  
Ana Gloria Buduen (Leonila), Yanara Moreno (Marisabel), Wendy Guerra (Estela),  
Carlos Manuel Barco (Rafael), Nestor Rivero (Pedro), Maria Elena Espinosa  
(Hildelisa, activist classmate of Larita's), Diosdado Tarajano\* (Cafeteria Owner),  
Roberto Delgado (Institute Director), Pedro Regueiferos (Bedel),  
Manuel Angel Daranas (Dr. Sanchez), Armando Leon (Butler), Judith Sisto  
(Cintia), Magda Resik (Diony), Luis Enrique Pacheco (Henry), William Vega  
(Roberto), Susana Maria Perez (Patricia), Cirenaica Moreira, Zulma Nunez,  
Alejandro Arazoza (Scholarship Candidates), Jorge Luis Marimon (Jeweller),  
Carmen Rivera (Nun), Felix Rodriguez (Old Fisherman),  
Modesto Alanis von der Meden (Ernest Hemingway)

Director Fernando Perez Valdes joins the unlikely duo of Ernest Hemingway and Cuban schoolgirl Larita into parallel tales of hope and despair, using THE OLD MAN AND THE SEA as backdrop to the vicissitudes of life in 1950s San Francisco de Paula, a backwater suburb of Havana. Fulgencio Batista is in power, aggrandizing himself and a small aristocracy while generally ignoring laborers, except at election time. American cultural and economic influences are widespread. Likewise, poverty and despair.

Larita, child of an unmarried mother and utterly absent father, is being raised in the household of Uncle Manolo and his wife. Mother works extended hours trying to provide more than subsistence income, nursing an ambition to propel her daughter into the middle class through education. A failed attempt to get Larita permanent acceptance into an orphanage, which would have provided food, clothing and religious education, is replaced by maternal instruction in reading and eventual enrollment in a local public school. Unfortunately, as Larita discovers, lack of connection between San Francisco de Paula's high school and Havana's university is not readily bridged. Nor designed to be. Even her relatively

dark complexion works against the quest for entry to higher education. A sympathetic grandmother and resolute mother are no more helpful than superior grades. Like the fisherman in Hemingway's novella, Larita finds herself pursuing a goal beyond her means to achieve. His failure will result in death. Hers leads to bitter political and social knowledge. She is still alive, but resistance to authority and discrimination is beaten down into submission. Working in a neighborhood coffee bar will do nothing to help her achieve success as a writer or philosopher. She may still dream of a better future. But those dreams are no closer to realization than they were before she applied for a scholarship. And it is by no means clear that impending political revolution will change anything for a self-doubting adolescent clearly lacking chutzpah in social situations outside her immediate family.

A further rift between the girl and potential supporters occurs when Larita refuses to become immersed in radical politics of boyfriend Victor and her high school literature teacher. Their commitment to physical and verbal assault on the status quo is perceived not only as a kind of betrayal, relegating Larita's scholarship acquisition to decidedly minor status, but also as a further impediment to successful integration into Cuban university society.

At the film's conclusion, its protagonist is more fully aware of her utter isolation, alienated by choice from relatives and classmates, estranged by prejudice from political conservatives. All that is left to her are unfulfilled dreams and life itself. Possibly a metaphor for modern Cuba under the Castro regime.

Subtitles are not always sufficiently contrasting to backgrounds. This is sometimes quite frustrating in viewing a film with so great a dependence on oral reading of book excerpts.

At times, there seems too oppressively pointed a contrast between Hemingway's affluence, with its consequent freedom, and lifestyle limitations imposed on Larita by her environment. Yet obvious anticapitalist propaganda is somewhat diluted when Grandmother or a sympathetic bookseller echo Hemingway's conclusions about the purpose of life.

Director Perez avoids openly stereotyping any of his characters, even if the script by Maydo Royero occasionally drifts into socialist class warfare ideological currents.

What separates this film from most productions hailing from nations burdened with Communist regimes is the warmly genuine expressiveness of its performers, particularly Laura de la Uz in the lead and Enrique Molina's Manolo.

Laura is completely convincing, both as idolizer of American pop icons and as introspective prober of literary ideas. What she reads, she becomes, both on the written screenplay page and on screen. Whether playfully gamboling in torrential rain or sitting in stony alienated defiance at school, Laura de la Uz's Larita is fully authentic, providing a complexity of personality that far exceeds that of the fisherman her character adopts as philosophical mentor.

Molina makes his performance just as ranging, moving from placid resignation to drunken disjunctive rage .

Minor characters invariably are portrayed with credible realism.

While not propulsive or showy, Jorge Abello's editing manages to always find an appropriate rhythm for each scene, slowing down for recitations and romancings, accelerating the pace when confrontations arise at home and school.

Julio Valdes's cinematography highlights outdoor scenes in an effective travel agency promotional manner, communicating the sensual allure of Caribbean beaches without overshadowing human drama being played out on them. When filming indoors, the cramped confines of Larita's home are splendidly contrasted with spacious interview chambers where scholarship applicants are alternately pampered and grilled. Pastel external lighting is replaced with somber, darker tones for classroom and book shop scenes, suggesting the heroine's greater seriousness when conversing with adult mentors and her debilitating failure to empathize with peers and their concerns.

At times, production design is remarkably detailed and revealing, especially in the interior furnishings of a dusty, overstocked bookseller's shop and Larita's bedroom, with walls almost completely obliterated by posters of Elvis Presley and contemporary teen idols. But there is little ornamentation of quarters where contenders hoping to gain a prized scholarship for study in America are interviewed, perhaps because of a paucity of period upscale decorations in Cuba.

Sound recording is generally excellent, conveying with equal clarity conversations and a gamut of background noises.

HELLO, HEMINGWAY offers an intriguing portrayal of pre-Castro Cuba and its trapping of economically marginal families in an endless cycle of poverty and frustration. Recommended viewing for mature teens ages 16 and up, as well as for discriminating, adventurous adults.

Bonuses of the First Run dvd release include a 1999 documentary running thirty-two minutes. Titled ERNEST HEMINGWAY'S CUBA and directed by Jorge Alonso, it provides a wealth of information about sites in Cuba pertinent to Hemingway.

Another bonus is newsreel footage extracted from the archives of ICAIC. It varies from crackly, defective sound to complete absence of accompanying narration or dialogue, probably necessitated by embarrassingly awful flaws in sound recording. Fortunately, the ICAIC film clips only last for 8 ½ minutes.

A third notable special feature comes from 1962. It's a short subtitled documentary directed by Fausto Canel. This minifilm runs twenty minutes and provides further background information on author Hemingway's life before and during his Cuban residency years.

Special note: The First Run dvd of HELLO HEMINGWAY does contain some partial freezes, occasional artefacts, and grainy intrusive flashes which probably trace to inferior original production elements. However, it does play through without loss of picture and sound.

Kino Ken wishes to acknowledge his gratitude to Clarke Fountain's review of this film in THE ALL MOVIE GUIDE and Beat Borter's essay titled "Moving To Thought: The Inspired Reflective Cinema of Fernando Perez," which appeared in the collection FRAMING LATIN AMERICAN CINEMA: CONTEMPORARY CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES, 1997, University of Minnesota Press, edited by Ann Marie Stock.