



***Cerrar los ojos (Close Your Eyes)* is a 2023 Spanish film directed by Victor Erice. It is partly based on the 1993 novel *El embrujo de Shanghai* (English title: *Shanghai Nights*) by Juan Marsé Carbo. Below is Kino Ken's review of that Film Movement dvd release.**

13 of a possible 20 points = *1/2 = above-average film**

**Key: *indicates outstanding technical achievement or performance
(j) designates a juvenile performer**

**Spain 2023 color 169 minutes subtitled live action feature mystery drama
La Mirada del Adios / Tandem Films / Nautilus Films / Pecado Films /
Pampa Films Producers: Christina Zumárraga, Pablo Bossi, Victor Erice,
José Alba, Odile Antonio-Baez, Agustin Bossi, Pol Bossi, Maximiliano Lasansky,
Conrad Clark, Alma Gimena Blanco, Melina Guetmonovich, and Masha Clark**

Points:

- 2 Direction: Victor Erice***
- 0 Editing: Ascen Marchena**
- 1 Cinematography: Valentin Álvarez 2nd Unit Photography: Dani Lisón
Still Photography: Manolo Pavón**
- 1 Lighting: Ignacio Romanillos Colorist: Raquel De La Haza
Special Visual Effects: Juliana Lasunción (Supervisor), Alicia Abril Carrera,
Guillermo Rafecas, Eva Artiles Quintana, others**
- 1 Screenplay: Victor Erice & Michel Gaztambide, based on a story by
Victor Erice and ideas from the novel *El embrujo de Shanghai***

by Juan Marsé Carbo

1 Music: Federico Jusid

Music Recording: Carlos Lillo and Manuel Pájaro

**Orchestrations: Gustavo Gini, Federico Jusid, Guillermo Pita, and
Carme Rodriguez**

2 Production Design: Curru Garabal

Graphic Design: Ferran Navarro-Beltrán

Set Dressing: Natalia Llopis*

Costume Design: Helena Sanchis

**Makeup: Beatushka Wojtowicz (head), Elena Chico, Ana Belén Marin,
Maria Minguez, and Mónica Solanas**

2 Sound: Iván Marín, Juan Ferro, and Candela Palencia

Sound Design: Juan Ferro*

Sound Effects: Jonathan Gerber and Brendan Golden

Casting: Pablo Ini and Pilar Moya

2 Acting

1 Creativity

17 total points

**Cast: Manolo Solo (Miguel Garay), Jose Coronado* (Gardel / Julio Arenas),
Ana Torrent (Ana Arenas), Petra Martinez* (Sor Consuelo), Maria León (Belén),
Mario Pardo* (Max Roca, film editor), Helena Miquel (Marta Soriano),
Antonio Dechent* (Tico Mayoral), Josep Maria Pou (Mr. Levy), Soledad Villamil*
(Lola San Román), Juan Margallo (Doctor Benavides), Dani Téllez (Toni),
Alejandro Caballero Ramis (Patón), Rocio Molina (Teresa), Ana Maria
(Sor Lucia), José Manuel Mansilla (Don Rafael, theater owner), Kao Chenmin
(Lin Yu, Levy's servant), Venecia Franco (j)* (Qiao Shu / Judith), Fulgencio Javier
(Cristian), Natalia Llorens (Dorina), Maria Veloso (Chica Pelo Rojo), Pepe Frias
(Announcer – Set Information), Laura Bermúdez (Announcer 2 – Soccer Field),
Amparo Duscio (Young Woman Journalist – Soccer Field), Fernando Ustarroz
(Inspector Raúl Baños), Carmela Lloret (Announcer 3 – Information Desk)**

**What happens when your film-within-a-film is more engrossing and
emotionally powerful than its main narrative frame? That's the problem**

inherent in Victor Erice's *Cerrar los ojos* (*Close Your Eyes*), a 2023 release representing the first feature film directed by that Spanish master since 1992. Like his other two feature films *El espíritu de la Colmena* (*The Spirit of the Beehive*) and the incomplete *El Sur* (*The South*), *Close Your Eyes* involves a mystery. In *The Spirit of the Beehive* a young girl chooses to seek love and protection from an imaginary monster rather than a physical father figure. Why? Audiences are left wondering. The daughter in *El Sur* tries to discover why her father seems both physically and emotionally estranged from wife and daughter in northern Spain. What's so fascinating about Andalucía to the south?

The puzzle in this newest film is a renowned actor's sudden, seemingly unmotivated disappearance during the course of a movie production. Erice asks each viewer to form a personal hypothesis about its cause.

In every instance above the director is more deeply concerned about characterization and intersection of tangible with intangible realities than in playing detective. Here, a retired filmmaker tries recovering a lost friendship with his former star actor. This can only be accomplished by penetrating the latter's amnesia, forcibly bringing him back into the present. Perhaps Miguel hopes Julio Arenas can resume the role he had been playing when life "overwhelmed him." Whether Julio wishes to or not might well be a secondary condition for Señor Garay.

To accomplish this, Miguel enlists the aid of Julio's daughter, someone who long ago resigned herself to a total paternal exit, and his former film editor, Max Roca. Max believes it better to leave the past unexplored. He grudgingly provides Miguel with surviving footage of *The Farewell Gaze*. Ana, only child of Miguel's thespian pal, half-heartedly visits an unearthed surviving parent. She feels neither great compassion nor filial affection for that confused relic from a childhood where he only intermittently put in an appearance.

Only Miguel, caregiver Belén, and television program hostess Marta Soriano are fully invested in removing "Gardel" from his present carefree existence at a rest home for the elderly. Belén simply wants happy and complete closure of the whole affair, having been first to make connection between vanished film actor featured on *Unsolved Cases* and a handyman working at the charity institution employing her as social worker. Marta similarly desires a fairytale conclusion for the story she developed and aired. Miguel, who abandoned motion picture directing after the disastrous dereliction of his leading man, now

has, thanks to Belén, concrete photographic evidence of Julio's continuing existence. Therefore he vigorously pursues various means of unblocking his memory. Should he succeed in his efforts, a resumption of their cinematic careers could follow. It would even potentially be possible to reshoot and complete *The Farewell Gaze*. Albeit with a different cast. That project seems more alluring than endless fishing trips, gardening tasks, translation of dull film studies into Spanish, and occasional writing of short stories solely as income-generating exercises.

Miguel pays a call on the singer he and Julio both courted in their younger days, Lola San Roman. She, like Ana, put the past behind her and is unreceptive to pleas requesting involvement with researching the cold case of Julio Arenas's mid-production vanishing. Advising Miguel to do likewise, she also fades out of his life.

Editor Ascen Marchena uses such slow fadeouts repeatedly, accenting the manner in which people enter and leave memory over time, a theme highlighted in this feature. Unfortunately, that device becomes tiresome through overuse and reinforces sluggish pacing already testing the patience of audiences after protracted conversational interludes conveying plot material with little personality information inherent.

The screenplay contains no striking material. It's further plagued by periodic insertions of totally irrelevant obscenities. Was the idea to distinguish between 2012 slang and patois of 1947, when *The Farewell Gaze* action is supposed to be set? If so, it fails artistically, seeming merely a set of vulgarities that communicate nothing enlightening about characters conversing.

Federico Jusid's music is low-key, lacking memorable melodies. The song repeated as leitmotif for the friendship of Julio, Lola, and Miguel is trifling, nothing anyone would remember over passing years and treasure. Even more baffling is inclusion of "My Rifle, My Pony and Me" from *Rio Bravo*. While it may serve as backhanded tribute to a director Erice admires, the song has no functional purpose in its contemporary Spanish setting.

Natalia Llopis's set dressing admirably exhibits a wealth of relevant clutter, especially in scenes within Miguel's trailer and in the warehouse of director memorabilia from his earlier career. Both these cornucopias of cherished relics indicate a relentless grip of the past on Miguel.

Sound recording catches even the softest whispers.

Cinematography and lighting though acceptable make no impressive contribution to the film's overall impact.

What does is consummate acting of Jose Coronado, playing with equal command amnesiac "Gardel" and actor Julio Arenas, Mario Pardo's cynical depiction of atheist film editor Max Roca, Petra Martinez's wrinkly and tender Sor Consuelo, Soledad Villamil's melancholy, faded beauty Lola San Roman, and the extraordinary transition of Venecia Franco from passively stoic to wrenchingly tearful in this film's finale where she embodies the "lost" daughter of Mr. Levy belatedly reunited with her sire.

Film Movement's dvd release of *Close Your Eyes* includes a two-minute theatrical trailer for it and five bonus featurettes, each of which has a runtime of one or two minutes. None supply significant insight into either production or participants.

Unrated, *Close Your Eyes* is suited to adults only due to thematic content and aforementioned verbal obscenities. It's worthwhile viewing only for passages containing *The Farewell Gaze* material. If the rest of his narrative had only matched those scenes in emotive drama, Erice might have given us a cinematic classic. Alas, such was not to be.