Cinematograph of the Week no. 6
Gustavo F. Aguilar (as “Sánchez Filmador”)
*El Universal Ilustrado* (Mexico City), February 19, 1925

This text is an example of a recurring feature in *El Universal Ilustrado* that took the cinema—or more precisely, a variety program or newsreel—as an organizing metaphor for comic vignettes that satirized current events in verse, accompanied by cartoonist Andrés Audiffred’s illustrations. (Rhyme and meter are not preserved in the translation, though rough equivalents have been found where possible.)

Translation

The movie theater is full today,
there's been a big premiere:
They're going to show “The White Moth”¹
And, people say,
Barbara la Marr’s so lovely,
Things are really stirred up [*está la mar de bárbara realmente*].²
There’s another, featuring Valentino
in a sword and broad-brimmed hat.
One girl says: “He’s adorable!”
Another answers, “He’s divine!”
They sigh, throw languid looks
and wring their hands excitedly. . .
Oh, Rudolph! Oh, Ramón!³
Who else could inspire such emotion
in lovely girls like this
at the movies in the dark!
The reason’s clear: a continuous-showing kiss! [*beso de permanencia voluntaria*]
And after this scene [*vista*
begins the Revue [*Revista*];
it’s a rich week for events
let’s see some of them:

To the Islas Marías⁴
they’ve been sending many thieves
for the many robberies perpetrated
LAURA ISABEL SERNA and RIELLE NAVITSKI | EPHEMERATA
in more or less distant locations.
And for this reason the robbers
fleeing from the raids
ganged up in the cities
and aristocratic haunts;
the safest neighborhood’s now La Bolsa.5
There’s an excess of police
on guard night and day.
But, on the contrary, no one ventures
Near the entrance of the Bosque [de Chapultepec] and Tacubaya6
Anyone who goes there
Is liable to be instantly robbed
Anyplace around there
Of a watch of eight hundred twenty pesos
even if you try to hide it in your shoe.

xxx

A portrait of a downcast man
whom everything in life took by surprise,
his marriage was an error,
He had a friend and he turned out a traitor.
His wife was unfaithful,
he never knew until she left,
he killed his rival in a trance.
The jury found him not guilty,
yet he was condemned
by judicial error
and the file will rest
in the High Tribunal.
How’s that for a bad mood?

xxx

A bullpen appears … well, in reality
it’s an enormous tenement patio,
and some men are looking very frightened
at others they’re shouting
they’re airing lots of dirty laundry
some are judges and others magistrates
of civil and criminal courts
that despite their different surnames
are recognized as namesakes
because they’re all called “venal.”

xxx

What’s happening on the street
now appearing onscreen?
The people seem to form a cordon
so they won’t miss a detail,
is it perhaps a funeral?
The cars, inching forward
move in a line through the street
with exasperating slowness . . .
The vehicle in front
is it some dairy’s milk truck . . .?
It’s the car regulating the traffic
marking in a manner quite graphic
the maximum velocity
that should be used in the city:
it’s a kind of sack race
a game of new invention where losers win.
He who passes gets an infraction
and so the idiots fall for it,
since a slow-moving chauffeur might as well go on horseback;
but if someone shouts, “here comes the other one!,”
the same thoughtless driver controlling the traffic
will speed away at sixty miles all of a sudden.

xxx

Ba-ta-clan!, Ba-ta-clan!, Ba-ta-clan!?
Bam, bam, bam, bam!
Everybody lets out a guffaw;
though, of the joke, they’ve understood nothing at all,
those who speak French laughed
the rest chuckle after.
“And the costumes?” (The eternal question.)
“Well, it’s a modern Paradise,
nothing from the waist up
nothing from the waist down
showing us with impudence
with that French chic that captivates us
half a meter of expensive tulle
and splendid, showy outfits,
pure flesh without mystification,
nor cotton, nor stockings.

Do they have insurance against pneumonia?
Because if by chance the cold weather returns
bam, bam, bam, bam,
it will be closed for a funeral, the Ba-ta-clan!

Translated by Rielle Navitski

Notes

1. A 1924 First National production directed by Maurice Tourneur.

2. Here, the writer makes an untranslatable pun on Barbara La Marr's name and the words "mar" (sea) and "bárbara" which, in addition to "barbarous," can mean "rough," "wild" or colloquially, "fabulous."

3. A reference to matinée idol Ramón Novarro.

4. A prison colony located on an archipelago off the Pacific coast of Mexico.

5. A neighborhood northeast of Mexico City's center, near Tepito, which had a reputation for harboring thieves.

6. The Bosques de Chapultepec are a series of large parks located in the western zone of Mexico City; Tacubaya is a nearby neighborhood and transit hub.

7. A traveling troupe from the Ba-ta-clan vaudeville theater in Paris that caused a sensation in Mexico City during their South American tour.