



Wild Tales

Director: Damián Szifron

Country: Argentina/Spain

Date: 2014

A review by Peter Bradshaw of *The Guardian*:

Here is a fantastically scabrous collection of movie tales from the dark heart of Argentina. There's a refreshingly high standard of cynicism and horror throughout, though probably nothing can match the flourish that finishes off its first adventure. It winds up in a suburban garden where an elderly couple are placidly reading the papers. I have watched this film twice, and each time that scene's ending made everyone in the audience, including me, bring their fists up to their mouths with a tiny traumatised yelp.



In my initial notice at last year's Cannes film festival, I reached for the Argentinian slang word bronca, meaning "pissed off". These are truly tales from a bronca nation, and the screen pulses with heat and ill-temper. As one character says: "I see violence all over the place." Wild Tales is a great rage at the complacency and mediocrity of Argentina's ruling classes. I also originally invoked the term "curate's egg" (in its traditional, fallacious sense) although a portmanteau collection of short movies is no more likely to be a mixed bag than a conventional single narrative – and the success/fail ratio for this film is an awful lot higher than for most others. It is far superior to a curate's egg: it's a bishop's egg, a cardinal's egg, although it must be said that there is a winding down of energy levels by the final extended story. Having initially established a tone of such exquisite nastiness, the movie's later hints at happiness take the edge off by a tenth of a micrometre. It is still a lethally sharp movie.

Some airline passengers realise what they have in common. A waitress recognises a customer from her past. A road-rage incident escalates. An engineer feels aggrieved at a parking fine. A wealthy man covers up his son's crime. A bride and groom fall out at their wedding. These gripping nightmares have something of Roald Dahl, or Quentin Tarantino, or Pedro Almodóvar, who co-produced the film. They are about one thing: revenge. Writer-director Damián Szifrón allows a queasy irony to sink in. The title cards in the opening credits show a series of wild animals: a hawk, a bear, a tiger. The implication is that we are going to see some really wild, bestial stuff. And so we do. But animals aren't interested in revenge. This type of egomaniacal savagery is for humans only.

My favourite is the airplane scene. The accelerating anxiety among shocked passengers is genuinely both funny and scary, an almost impossible trick to bring off. But the chilling aggression between the two drivers is very good too – like a sequel to Spielberg's *Duel*. Perhaps Wild Tales 2 will have a story about three English guys driving through Argentina making a television programme about cars, although it should incidentally be said that Szifrón is not interested in the behaviour of non-Argentines.



Ricardo Darín is the film's big star name: an explosives engineer pushed to breaking point – or detonation point – by a parking fine enforcement system that is cynically engineered to generate municipal income. (London audiences will enjoy this bit.) At the story's climax, and despite my earlier caveat, Darín's face genuinely does look like that of a fierce, wild animal.

I was fractionally less enamoured of the story about a rich man who has to find a way to keep his pampered son out of prison, after the boy has done something terrible. The storyline is actually the same as Nuri Bilge

Ceylan's 2008 film *Three Monkeys*, although it was only on my second viewing that I appreciated Szifrón's sly casting joke: the boy's rich mother is played by María Onetto, who was the lead in Lucrecia Martel's cover-up drama *The Headless Woman*.

Like a Shakespearean comedy, *Wild Tales* ends in marriage: a ferocious wedding in which sexual transgression is made a great deal worse by class rancour. It is a longer tale than the others, and in my simplistic and mean-spirited way, I would have preferred to see it end in complete orgiastic dismay, rather than on the more complex note than the film (ingeniously) finds. But this is a great collection, with tiny details to savour: the swatch of hair-extension thrown angrily to the floor, the twitching hands of a dying man. A delicious chocolate box of nastiness.

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