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Film Discussion Group  
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## *Wild Tales* (dir. Damián Szifron, 2014)

### On Camera

Salgado, on the plane      Darío Grandinetti: Doted on his comatose lover in *Talk to Her* (02)  
Isabel, on the plane:      María Marull: Cast in Szifron's TV series *Brothers and Detectives* (06)  
Moza, girl in the diner:      Julieta Zylberberg: Amazing coming-of-age film *The Holy Girl* (04)  
The cook, in the diner:      Rita Cortese: Popular actress in Argentinean film and television  
Cuenca, man in diner:      César Bordón: Argentinean star; also worked with Merchant Ivory  
Rich guy at the bridge:      Leonardo Sbaraglia: Major film and TV star since turn of the century  
His foe at the bridge:      Walter Donado: Rare case of a relative unknown in a major role  
Simón, aka "Bombita":      Ricardo Darín: Argentina's biggest star; *The Secret in Their Eyes* (09)  
Victoria, his wife:      Nancy Dupláa: Leading actress in TV comedies and telenovelas  
Mauricio, in tough spot:      Oscar Martínez: Biggest Argentinean star of a previous generation  
Helena, his wife:      María Onetto: Star of mystery/melodrama *The Headless Woman* (08)  
Santiago, his son:      Alan Daicz: Recently featured in CIFF film *The German Doctor* (13)  
Mauricio's handyman:      Germán De Silva: Won the Argentinean Oscar for this performance  
Mauricio's lawyer:      Osmar Núñez: Top actor, nominated four times for Argentinean Oscar  
Romina, the bride:      Érica Rivas: Three-time winner of Argentina's Oscar, incl for this film  
Ariel, the groom:      Diego Gentile: TV star making his first film appearance in five years

### Off Camera

Screenplay      Damián Szifron: *The Bottom of the Sea* (03) and *On Probation* (05)  
Editing      Szifron and Pablo Barbieri Carrera; edited *The Aerial* (07), showed at CIFF  
Musical Score:      Gustavo Santaolalla: Oscar winner for *Brokeback Mountain* (05), *Babel* (06)

### Previous features from director Damián Szifron

*The Bottom of the Sea* (2003) – Comic thriller about architecture student jealous of his girlfriend  
*On Probation* (2005) – Comic thriller about a disgraced psychologist and a depressed policeman

### If you enjoyed *Wild Tales*...

*Pulp Fiction* (1994) – Clearly a major influence, and worth another look for comparison's sake  
*Magnolia* (1999) – More intertwined than compartmentalized, but similarly heightened behavior  
*Amores perros* (2000) – More brutal use of multi-strand narrative as pop film and social critique  
*Songs from the Second Floor* (2000) – A Swedish vignette-based comedy, by Roy Andersson

Facts about *Wild Tales* you may appreciate...



*Wild Tales* was the rare film by a little-known director to debut in competition at Cannes. It screened alongside *Foxcatcher*, *The Homesman*, *Mr. Turner*, and *Two Days, One Night*. You can imagine how refreshing its tone and energy must have been.

*Wild Tales* swept the Argentinean Academy Awards, winning for Best Picture, Director, Actress (the bride), Actor (the rich deal-maker), Supporting Actor (the groundskeeper), Original Screenplay, Cinematography, Film Editing, Original Score, and Sound—on top of eleven additional nominations!

The bridge in the third segment has become something of a tourist attraction within Argentina, as evidenced by this photo I found on Google. It's halfway between Salta, a major Argentinean city, and Cafayate, a smaller, well-known wine-country town.

*Wild Tales* grossed more in Argentina than any homegrown movie ever has. In fact, it sold more tickets than *any* other film ever released in Argentina, except for *Titanic* and, go figure, *Ice Age 4: Continental Drift*. Its success is more than a happy accident. By teaming early with a wealthy US distributor (Warner Bros.) and a local television network (Telefe), *Wild Tales* was ubiquitously promoted and met an appetite for more locally-produced blockbusters.

*Wild Tales* placed on *Time's* Top 10 Films of 2014, was nominated for the Foreign Film Oscar, and won the Best Foreign Language Film prize from the National Board of Review.

*Variety* listed Szifron as one of its ten Directors to Watch for 2014, alongside Ava DuVernay (*Selma*), Dan Gilroy (*Nightcrawler*), and Ronit and Shlomi Elkabetz (*Gett*).

Pedro Almodóvar, his brother Agustín Almodóvar, and their regular collaborator Esther García all take producing credits on *Wild Tales*, continuing their tradition of supporting upcoming and/or important filmmakers in Spanish-language cinema. See also Guillermo del Toro's *The Devil's Backbone* (2001), Lucrecia Martel's *The Holy Girl* (2004) and *The Headless Woman* (2008), Isabel Coixet's *The Secret Life of Words* (2005), Julia Solomonoff's *The Last Summer of La Boyita* (2009), and Pablo Trapero's upcoming *The Clan* (2015).

Szifron's TV work kept him busy and popular during a long decade when his feature ideas were not getting produced. While many people have understood *Wild Tales* as an expression of national frustrations, Szifron has also hinted that the black-comic edge of the material came from his own creative frustrations after early successes in film. Meanwhile, his TV series were so successful they have been remade in Mexico, Spain, Italy, Turkey, Chile, and Russia.

Szifron has now attracted multiple offers to write and/or direct for Hollywood studios, many of which he says he is entertaining. However, he remains committed to a diverse slate of projects he would like to make in Argentina, including a romantic comedy, a three-stranded sci-fi mystery called *The Foreigner*, and a US-style but Argentine-set Western, *Little Bee*.

### Broad conversation topics...

**To Link or Not to Link:** During one draft of the script, Szifrón considered adding elements or characters that explicitly linked the stories. He later removed these, but it's worth thinking about the stakes of this decision. How would *Wild Tales* mean something different or affect you differently if the stories overlapped? What is meaningful about their separation?

**Political Reverberations:** *Wild Tales* premiered as the political and economic misfortunes of Argentina continued to mount, with debt defaults, soaring inflation, widespread strikes, and increasing recriminations against President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, which have only mounted in the months since the film's release. Does *Wild Tales* strike you as reflecting this national mood? On the one hand, the film seems primarily geared to entertain, and it can be facile to link movies automatically with their political contexts; many critics feel that this is almost a cliché when it comes to films made outside one's country of birth. At the same time, indisputably, many of *Wild Tales*'s vignettes are driven by repressed and/or unleashed anger, corrupt elites, violent revenge plots, and social breakdowns. What do you think?

**Controversies at Home:** In the US, *Wild Tales* has attracted acclaim for its lively energy, black humor, and crowd-pleasing inventiveness. Cannes journalism and Oscar coverage stressed the film's welcome dissimilarity from the kinds of difficult, sober statements that tend to compete at festivals and the solemn dramas that usually please the Academy. But at home in Argentina, despite (or perhaps because of) the film's astonishing box-office success, debates have emerged as to whether *Wild Tales* seems too geared toward Hollywood storytelling or international marketability. Similarly, those who admire the film for suggesting political critiques within an exuberant entertainment find themselves arguing with other viewers who wish the political critique were sharper and the tone less superficial. Where do you fall?

### Specific touches worth discussing...

**Tone:** The first episode builds on the dawning joke of how everyone on the flight is connected, in a sort of reverse-*Murder on the Orient Express*. We never see Pasternak, the pilot, which relieves the film from having to show us a controlled avenger, a madman, or something else. How did you react to this first episode? Did any moments push the story especially into comedy, or make it *harder* to take as comedy? What do you make of Pasternak's absence?

**Freeze Frame:** This vignette ends with the plane heading towards Pasternak's parents and their home, suggesting his private retaliation, but also the film's attack on an older generation.

**Beasts:** The film's credits—accompanied by music, and postponed until after the explosive first episode, just like *Pulp Fiction*'s—are full of animal images, including the fox that appears alongside Szifron's name. We could certainly see the whole movie as revealing the “animal” nature of its characters. What are the virtues but also the cons of that interpretation?

**Poison:** The “villain” in Story #2 is just as bad as we have heard, fully justifying Moza's animosity. At the same time, the cook goes to shocking lengths to harm a character whose wrongdoings were not really “hers” to avenge. It's the second instance of overweening revenge in the film. How must this affect our readings, especially of the film's politics?

**Charred Bodies:** One of the most famous moments in cinema is in Roberto Rossellini's *Voyage to Italy* (1954), when Ingrid Bergman and George Sanders tour Pompeii and encounter two embracing, long-preserved corpses. Bergman recoils in horror, as if they mirror the demise of her marriage or prefigure her own death, or everyone's death. The final shot of this story recalls that shot, but rather than a timeless image of mortality, it's a shot of two brutes who have nobody to blame but themselves. (Once again, note the motif of revenge taken too far.)

**Cars:** Both of Szifron's prior features involve key scenes or storylines with cars or crashes. This is the second of three consecutive vignettes in *Wild Tales* built around automobiles. What resonance or meaning do you ascribe to the cars as a repeating motif in #3, #4, and #5?

**Money:** Simón certainly quails at the 360p cost of his daughter's cake (at a bakery called "Choice"), in advance of the 490p towing expense and 560p ticketing fee. As specifically angry as he is about those charges, his daily life already involves exorbitant prices—and the film is careful to make every expense slightly higher than the last . . . which may or may not parallel how the running time of each individual vignette is longer than the last.

**Crowds:** "Bombita" becomes a popular hero, yet everyone in line behind him is very hostile. The crowd around Simón during his second tantrum even seems to cheer the security guards.

**Sound:** In the exchange with the DMV agent, almost every line of dialogue is distorted through the intercom, no matter where the camera is, making the conversation even less personal.

**Angle:** The shots of Buenos Aires in the "Bombita" segment almost never include a skyline, but instead fill the screen with urban landscape—depicting the city as a flat, impenetrable wall.

**Hammer:** While many of the stories have explored the deep motivations or drawn-out cycles for violent revenge, the next-to-last one compresses that idea into the story's very final moment.

**Class:** While the earliest stories transpired in the air or in rural areas, *Wild Tales* culminates in a luxury hotel in Argentina's capital, where the children of two wealthy families intermarry.

**Lyrics:** The joyous, energetic, strobe-lit dance at the beginning of the wedding is scored to David Guetta and Sia's song "Titanium," whose lyrics may forecast some of the story's later directions: "*Cut me down / But it's you who have further to fall ... I'm bulletproof / Nothing to lose / Fire away, fire away ... You shoot me down / But I won't fall / I am titanium.*"

**Framing:** In ways obvious (the kitchen worker, on the roof and afterward) and less obvious (the servants in the background of the final wedding-cake shots), the film tucks representatives of the working class into shots of Romina and Ariel's conflict and eventual reunion. To some extent, the film seems to celebrate the renewal of their mad passion for each other, especially as their parents are ejected from the room—to include Ariel's cold, clingy, inappropriately devoted mother. On the other hand, you could say that, having used the kitchen worker for consolation and quick gratification, the blood-spattered Romina is recommitting to her handsome, unfaithful, gluttonous husband Ariel for purely carnal reasons. As fun as they are, these spoiled rich kids are back in cahoots. The workers will all have to clean up the mess.