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## The Golden Ring: A Narrative Film Production

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THE GOLDEN RING:  
A NARRATIVE FILM PRODUCTION

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
University of New Orleans  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts  
In  
The Department of Drama and Communications

by

Marcela Alejandra Vales

B.A., National Film Institute of Argentina, 1999

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## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis documents the production of THE GOLDEN RING, a short narrative film shot on digital video. All the phases of the production, from the writing process through the post-production, are addressed in the thesis.

THE GOLDEN RING is a film I wrote and directed. It tells the story of Luke Stevenson, a man who has it all on a material level, but that otherwise has a void in his life. One day something out of the ordinary happens to him. He finds a ring that belonged to a woman he used to be in love with. Now he might have a chance to recover that love and change his life forever. But, will he have the courage of facing the challenge that change represents?



## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The idea for the storyline of The Golden Ring came to my mind many years ago. I remember I was sitting on a chair in the kitchen of the house where I was born and raised, in Buenos Aires, when my brother came in and said he had found a ring at the local train station. I still remember vividly the impact that it had on me. It triggered in me the idea of how an apparently simple choice such as picking up a ring can alter the sequence of events. I immediately thought of the concept of causality, of how one event follows another one, and with every cause its subsequent effect. The idea that a simple object or choice of action can change somebody's life forever always fascinated me. How an apparently insignificant object like an aluminum ring has that amazing power.

As the great filmmaker Krzysztof Kieslowski used to say, my idea as a filmmaker is not to give the answers, because I don't have them, but to pose the questions and share the uncertainties with the world. No matter how we were raised or where we are originally from, Kieslowski would say, we have in common that we all are capable of very basic emotions such as feelings of love and hatred. These feelings are universal. And I came to realize that The Golden Ring had eventually become a universal script in the sense that it dealt with feelings and uncertainties that are common to all human beings. I knew that, no matter how much time went by, because of our condition as humans, we would always deal with these kind of feelings. It was the realization, the fact of knowing that people would always be able to identify with it, that made me decide to make of The Golden Ring my thesis project, because I don't want to be merely an entertainer, I

also want to be a communicator. Through this film I wanted to be able to communicate and share my views of the world with people, as I previously said, not by providing them with the answers because I am sensible enough to know that, as a human, all I can do is share the uncertainties. Rather, I hoped to help people reflect, which I think is crucial in our times, where little or no time is given to matters related to our spiritual needs. We are at the mercy of an extremely materialistic society that makes us crave things we don't really need, things that don't fulfill those needs. The modern world leads the average individual to believe that the degree of his success is measured according to how much he possesses, that if he doesn't have all that society approves of he is going to be left out. But he is not told that what really makes someone successful is not what he possesses to impress the outer world, but what he recognizes when he confronts his own, naked spiritual self. He cannot live a life that is ultimately a fake life, in a world that is ultimately an abstract world, where there are many abstract concepts, but few concrete human beings. So as a communicator I wanted to express that it is each individual's responsibility to make things happen. There are things that might happen at random, but that it is ultimately the inherent force within every human being that he can rely on to make any change in his life possible. We have to live with ourselves, and we are not really successful if we don't **feel** we are. This concept might seem basic at a first glance, but unfortunately I believe many people live sadly and have a void in their lives nowadays.

Even though entertaining and communicating are important, my main goal is to become a better artist, to be able to create something beautiful and share it with

the rest of the world. Of course this is easier said than done. It isn't something that will be learned overnight. It takes years and years of practice. It is, in fact, something one will never stop learning, since we redefine ourselves constantly and, as we do, we redefine the art we create. For The Golden Ring, then, I wanted to focus mainly on the aesthetic and technical choices of making a film, which I shall expand on in the chapters that follow.

## CHAPTER 2: THE WRITING PROCESS

The Golden Ring tells the story of Luke Stevenson, a man in his thirties who leaves his luxurious house early in the morning to go to work as it is his custom. Bad memories of breakfast with his wife invade him as he walks to the streetcar station. Once there, a ring on the floor calls his attention. He picks it up, puts it in his jacket pocket, and leaves the station.

Luke meets Samantha, a former love interest, and the owner of the ring. After realizing that she still has feelings for him, Luke kisses Samantha passionately. At that moment Samantha's husband arrives and points at Luke with a gun, threatening to kill him.

Luke is still at the train station, holding the ring. We realize he actually has not moved, which means he was daydreaming. He chooses routine over the challenge that change represents.

I think the greatest challenge I had to face was to make what was in my mind clear to my audience. This had never happened to me before, even though I have written numerous scripts. I realized that the main reason why this was so difficult was because there was a daydream sequence in it, and a daydream has a logic entirely of its own. In general, all that happens in a film relates to the plot in one way or the other, but a daydream doesn't need to since it's not "real." It just happens in somebody's mind. It also was problematic for me to write the daydream sequence and to make it understandable to the potential reader in the earlier drafts, because I didn't know what action was going to take place in it. In general

every script requires that the characters perpetrate certain actions. Things have to happen, we have to see them happen. But a daydream is something that merely occurs, again, in somebody's mind. Even though there were no particular actions that I wanted the main character to carry out in this sequence, I was clear about one thing: I wanted him to go through two extreme experiences, a really good one and a really bad one; but both, even if they were opposites, would make him feel alive. I believe that there are times in one's life when one is struggling to survive, and one desperately needs to feel alive, even if it is through something that shocks somehow.

I wrote six drafts before I arrived at the final version and, as the script developed, I learned that, no matter what is in one's head, one has to make it understandable to one's audience. They don't assume anything and they will probably see the film just once, with no possibility of rewinding. This is even a greater challenge, again, in a film where most of what happens is in the main character's head. The second thing I learned through the writing process is that what one has in mind, one's initial ideas about the *physique du role* of the actors, can be something very different from the reality, especially when working on a schedule. Sometimes it is important to learn to compromise and work with what is available. At the same time this can open up new possibilities you never thought were there. Based on my resources, I changed the sixth, and last, draft, radically. I shall expand on this notion in the section on Casting Call.

## CHAPTER 3: PRE-PRODUCTION

### A. Visual Proposal:

It was my aim for this project to have the camera somehow represent Luke's emotions, to make a conscious use of the different types of shots and camera angles. As far as the types of shots go I used long shots to mark the emotional distance between Luke and his wife, and close ups to show his closeness with Samantha.

As for the angles, I intended to use Dutch angles, low and high angles, and a handheld camera as a reflection of the roller coaster of his emotions and chaotic life.

I was also very interested in marking the difference between the coldness of Luke's wife and Samantha's warmth. In order to achieve this I decided to oppose the kitchen of both of their houses by using blue gels in the wife's house, and orange gels in Samantha's.

I also wanted Samantha's house to be much more modest than Luke's, but with few personal touches, so as to stress that there are certain things that money cannot buy. I also felt this would emphasize the wife's coldness much more.

One thing I was very interested in exploring from the very beginning was the use of the diagonals in the composition of a frame, and how this could, in some cases, reflect Luke's state of mind. I was also very interested in the aesthetic possibilities it presented, in using it as an artistic tool throughout the film.

### Wardrobe:

I wanted the relationship between Luke and Samantha to be identified as an entity throughout the film, and I wanted the same with the husband and the wife. Even though light colors are more often associated with purity and darker ones with corruption, I used light colors for the husband and wife and dark colors for Luke and Samantha because I didn't want to fall into pre-established conventions.

### Equipment:

I originally thought of shooting the film in 16 mm. because of the unique texture that film confers, but eventually decided upon digital video, since the department recently purchased very good digital cameras (the Panasonic DVX 100) that emulate the look of film. And because I felt video offered few restrictions, more creative freedom, and would be more cost effective.

### Lights:

It is very important to think of what lights one will really need before checking them out. To determine this one has to consider whether all the lights will actually be used. It is important to know whether one will have access to a generator, and the restrictions of the locations one will be shooting at, if any. These are main considerations that will save one time and trouble if considered beforehand.

For this project we initially checked out two 2 K fresnels, two 1 K fresnels, an Arri Kit and a Tweenie Kit. In CHAPTER 3: PRODUCTION, I shall explain what we finally ended up using.

### **B. Sound Proposal:**

At the beginning of the film Luke, the protagonist, is invaded by flashbacks of breakfast with his wife that morning. He is walking down the street in order to catch the streetcar to go to work and these memories keep coming back to him. I had the idea that these flashbacks could actually be like flashes, very brief, not leaving him alone, bombarding him constantly. Since the traffic in the street was already going to be very loud, if the flashbacks were shot M.O.S. these would make them even more invasive and present a parallel with the more symbolic kind of silence in his relationship with his wife.

### **C. Crew Call:**

My main goal in recruiting crew members was to have a small crew, but a committed one. I wasn't so much interested in experience (except for key positions such as director of photography) as I was in enthusiasm. People can be trained, but having a person on set who doesn't have the right attitude can lead to chaos (as well as add to the cost of the production).

Therefore, the choices I made when recruiting my crew members were ultimately based on this concept.



#### **D. Scouting locations:**

The most difficult location to scout--and I want to mention this because of the new possibilities it presented--was the train station. It was present in all the drafts of the script except for the last one. In Buenos Aires, the city I am from, it's very common to take the train and combine it with the subway to go to work. But New Orleans is a different city, and even if I found the right location, which didn't happen, it was going to be very complicated to shoot in a train station with all the necessary extras.

The closest I got to securing a train station location was through a friend of mine who knew the manager of the Amtrak station downtown. But it was a terminal and it didn't have a ticket booth and a bench on the side that was featured in the script. It definitely didn't have the look I wanted, and I didn't like the way the train looked either. So I realized that a streetcar was actually a better choice, presenting a very picturesque and unique look, so characteristic of this particular area.

Moreover, I wouldn't need permission or extras, and time was running short. As often happens when shooting a film, there are some things that one might have to give up. The feeling of letting go is not a pleasant one, but new possibilities sometimes open up that might be even better than what one originally planned. One has to be aware that one can become very attached to a project and, therefore, very subjective. This tends to blind us and doesn't let us always see new opportunities that present themselves. I am really thankful for many things like this that happened in situations of emergency during both the pre-production and production phases of this project, when there really wasn't time for other

considerations or choices, and prompt decisions needed to be made. Creativity often emerges in such instances in ways that one would have never foreseen.

#### **E. Casting Call:**

For the casting call I prepared three different monologues for the three characters that the actors were going to audition for. Only the character of Samantha had one long monologue in the script, so I decided that for the characters of Luke and the wife I would write a monologue based on what those characters might say if they were speaking truthfully to a therapist. This strategy proved to be effective and the actors related to it.

When I saw Lisa Picone I knew immediately there was something about her I liked; she had charisma. I wanted to use her talent, but she was not the Samantha I had in mind at all; and I didn't want to use her merely for the role of the wife. On the day of the casting call, I decided to modify the script radically. The character would be based on a real person, and not just a mere illusion. This new possibility had been triggered in my mind, and all of a sudden years of trying to instinctively put this script together made sense as never before. Again, when faced with a real situation, obstacles will present themselves. The wisdom lies in turning these obstacles into challenges, and these challenges into stepping stones. They often represent opportunities that would never have occurred to one, because they emerged from an exterior source, and not merely from the power of one's creative mind. Creativity is very important, but filmmakers are also technicians. They are hands-on individuals, who work with tools; they depart from an imaginary idea, but

then that idea has to be applied to a real world, so they have to be able to accept the contingencies of life and work with them. In this instance Lisa made me realize that what the character of Luke was missing in his life was a real person, real love, and not just a one-night stand. And that if the ring he found was real and Samantha had really been his former lover, then that would make his own existence much more pathetic and tragic.

Through the casting call I met Crystal Philippi, a UNO opera singer whom I also liked from the moment I saw her. She was very expressive, and she had the *physique du role* I was looking for.

As for Luke's part, since the UNO Drama Department doesn't really have actors in their early to mid thirties whose appearance met my requirements, I had to look elsewhere. I didn't want Luke to be too attractive. I wanted him to be more like the guy next door with whom everyone could identify. At the same time, since he was the lead actor, he definitely needed to have a certain magnetism. So my assistant director told me of an actor he knew whom he thought would be good for the part, and I agreed to meet with him. His name was Gary Desroche, and he had experience, which was fundamental. Gary was enthusiastic about the script, which was a very positive factor. He also seemed to be an easy going person, so I could anticipate that it was going to be a good experience to work with him. And I was right.

As far as the role of the husband goes, I had my friend Paul Miller in mind. Paul is not an actor, so I looked for other possible choices. But Paul kept being the best one. I could perfectly picture him in the film. He had to be the one. So I decided to

talk to him. At first he was reluctant because he had never acted before, but I finally convinced him. Since he is a painter, he can appreciate art in other forms as well. So I was positive that, with a little bit of training, he was going to do a good job. And he did.

#### **F. Rehearsals:**

Thank God the chemistry between the two protagonists was good. There was immediate empathy. If this doesn't occur, it is good to rehearse as often as possible, so that the actors get to know each other and feel comfortable in each other's presence. The more comfortable they feel around each other before the production phase, the better the results of the production.

It was more important to me that the actors had a grasp of the meaning of what they were saying than that they learned the words by heart. Sometimes actors don't feel comfortable saying certain words. In such cases I like to allow them certain freedom to change them, because the fact that they feel comfortable is fundamental to me. If it doesn't feel comfortable to them it doesn't sound natural, and if it doesn't sound natural it ruins one's film. And the actors are the only human part of a film. No matter how well composed or technically good one's film is, if the actors are artificial, if the audience is incapable of believing in what they say, then the film is not going to be good because it is not going to be believable. In general I don't allow major changes; just replace one word for another, a word that feels more suitable to them. But, then again, my main concern is the essence of what I am trying to communicate.

## **G. Getting organized:**

I think it is fundamental, in order to have a good production, to organize the pre-production really well. Therefore, I wrote a shooting script<sup>1</sup> and a shot list,<sup>2</sup> and I provided every crew member with a copy of it, so that at all times during the production phase we would be on the same page, knowing what was going to be shot and in what order. Since the crew was small and some of us were even going to be covering more than one crew position at a time, I decided that call sheets would not be necessary.

I also drew a story board<sup>3</sup> as a visual aid as I was writing the shooting script. It helped visualize the script.

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<sup>1</sup> A version of a script from which a film is actually shot and which includes scene numbers, camera angles and certain directors' notes.

<sup>2</sup> A list of all the shots in the shooting script, specifying when and in which order they will be shot.

<sup>3</sup> An illustration presented in sequence, with the intention of previsualizing a film.

## CHAPTER 4: PRODUCTION

The production phase of The Golden Ring lasted five consecutive days. The fifth day, though, was actually a half day, and was mainly used to shoot some final shots, and re-shoot certain shots that I was not pleased with. I had already determined beforehand that I was going to have one extra day, because one never knows how things are going to turn out, especially when one is shooting in the street and doesn't have control of the traffic and the passers-by. The production had been organized in the best way possible, taking into account the actors' availability in the first place, and what was best for schedule purposes in the second place.

Due to the lack of a generator and the limitations of the places we would be shooting at, we decided we would not be using the two 2K and the two 1K fresnels. We would only use the Arri and Tweenie lightning kits.

## EXTERIOR SAMANTHA'S HOUSE (Day 1) – Tuesday, May 16th:

The first scenes of the film we were going to shoot were the exterior scenes with the husband. The call time for the crew was 9:00 A.M., and the call time for the cast was 10:00 A.M..

Since the actors wouldn't be arriving for another hour, we immediately started working on the living room to have it ready for when we had to shoot in the afternoon. We moved furniture, hung some pictures on the wall, and decorated the living room in a way that reflected Samantha's spirit. Being that I had found some of those pictures by chance that same morning, I was really happy with the results. In a short period of time we had achieved a great accomplishment.

Paul Miller, who plays the role of the husband and is a very good friend of mine, came to the location a few minutes before 10:00. I will never forget my shock when I saw him dressed with a beige jacket, a beige shirt, and black pants, since this altered my initial idea as far as the wardrobe went. I thought I had made it clear to him when we had talked over the phone that I wanted him to wear something of a light color. It didn't seem like I had, though. The problem was even bigger because Paul had to leave after lunch time, and he was going to be away all week. So there wasn't going to be a chance of shooting this later on. So what I did was take him to a Goodwill store that was near the location where we were shooting, and bought a pair of beige pants for him. Thank God it all worked out well, and by 1:00 P.M. he was already leaving.

### INTERIOR SAMANTHA'S HOUSE (Day 1) – Tuesday, May 16th:

The remainder of the day was focused on the scenes with Lisa Picone and Gary Desroche (Samantha and Luke) that take place in the living room.

The day had a few bumps, with some misunderstandings between crew members. I believe the biggest problem was that some of them behaved unprofessionally, to my surprise and dislike. There was even one crew member who kept asking questions regarding pre-production or what the script was about. Eventually I had to decide to let him go, but I'll go back to this later on.

The first thing I took care of was making sure of having a master shot. I think it's fundamental for coverage. After I did that I took care of shooting the initial shots when Luke arrives at Samantha's house, and all that happens when they first meet.

### EXTERIOR LUKE'S HOUSE (Day 2) – Wednesday, May 17th:

Call time for the crew was 8:30 A.M.. Call time for the lead actor was 9:00.

The morning ran smoothly. We started shooting outside, because we were going to be shooting the first shot of the film, and it takes place early in the morning. It was going to be a long tracking shot following the character of Luke as he left his mansion to go to work. We didn't have a dolly but were going to use a wheelchair instead. I wanted the shot to be a slight high angle, and I wanted to create an effect with the bars to show how Luke was trapped in his own cell. Fortunately we got very good shots.



### INTERIOR LUKE'S HOUSE (Day 2) – Wednesday May 17<sup>th</sup>:

Crystal Philippi, who played the role of Luke's wife, was scheduled to arrive at 10:30 A.M.. She arrived on time and, thank God, with the right clothes.

Crystal was easier to work with than I had anticipated, and I definitely liked the way she looked on camera. She had the perfect look for the wife, and her expressiveness was also very real. Not too little, not too much. She gave me exactly what I was looking for.

I enjoyed filming this scene because of the aesthetics that it conveyed. It was exactly what I had in mind. The long shot marking the distance between Luke and his wife, and the Dutch angle showing how out of balance their relationship was. Also, the whiteness of the kitchen in contrast with the blue gels created the cold atmosphere I was looking for.

### INTERIOR SAMANTHA'S HOUSE (Day 2) – Wednesday May 17<sup>th</sup>:

The afternoon was devoted to the shots that took place in the living room, from the point we had left the previous day on, following the shot list tightly. As I mentioned before, there was one crew member that wasn't even aware of what the script was about and kept asking pre-production questions. I didn't want to let him go without asking the other crew members what they thought about it. I wanted to work as a team. So we got together and we all decided that it was better if he didn't come back again.

## EXTERIOR AND INTERIOR SAMANTHA'S HOUSE (Day 3)– Thursday, May

18<sup>th</sup>.

Call time for cast and crew was at 8:00 A.M.. We had to meet early because Lisa was also rehearsing a play at the time, so she had to leave at 5:00 P.M. every day (and this was the last day we would have her).

First thing in the morning we had a short meeting with the crew that I will always be grateful for. It clarified a lot of issues and gave us positive energy to work with.

Thursday was going to be a real challenge in the sense that there were plenty of shots to be taken care of, apart from the fact that I had to direct the kiss between Luke and Samantha. In all the years I have directed films, this was going to be the first time I ever directed a kiss. I wanted to leave it for the last day and for the very end of the day because I knew that, if the actors were even a little concerned about doing this scene, it would read as sexual tension between Luke and Samantha. And that was my aim. Besides, if any issues arose at this point, the production would have been almost over.

Thursday ran very smoothly. It was a great day of ten hours of non-stop work. We just stopped ten minutes for lunch, and shot one more hour with Gary after Lisa had left. It really felt as a team.

One more good thing that happened this day was the communication with the actors. Lisa especially is a great actress to work with. She helped me explain to Gary certain basic things about blocking that were very necessary for him to know. There were certain shots, as one that was shot using a handheld camera, that

required going through the blocking with the actors. This particular scene was very emotional. I wanted Luke to pull away from Samantha and her to try to get near to him, as if they were dancing around each other, so blocking the scene was fundamental. Lisa also had a better grasp of what I wanted in the scene, so she helped me clarify it to Gary in her own words, apart from adding to the collaborative spirit.

When we finally shot the kiss scene, what actually helped was that Lisa was in a hurry, so the actors were trying their best. I remember I was looking at the monitor and the kiss didn't seem at all real. I didn't know how to mention it to them without being too specific. (It's kind of a delicate matter when one hasn't done it before. One never knows how actors are going to react, especially when they are not paid.) So I told them the best way I could, and Lisa asked Gary to follow her. I was relieved, because I thought that he was tense and that she was going to help him relax and do it the right way. To my surprise, I found out later that the problem was that Lisa told him, at the last moment, that they were going to pretend that they were kissing without actually doing it. So that was the reason it looked fake. It was fake. In the rehearsal she had said she was ok with the kiss, so I never mentioned it to her. What Lisa had done when she had told Gary to follow her was apply a technique that, by keeping the lips together, makes it seem that a kiss is real.

### EXTERIOR LUKE'S HOUSE (Day 4) – Friday, May 19<sup>h</sup>:

We met with the actor at around 10:00 A.M..

Since I had modified the script not long before production started, we didn't have time to get a fashionable car as specified in this final version. We tried our best, but we couldn't find one. So we decided that we were going to shoot the scenes with the car on Friday, if we happened to get one. That would, at least, give us more time. If not, we would go directly to the streetcar station. Unfortunately, we couldn't get the car. I believe it would have helped to define Luke's character and how wealthy he is, apart from adding dynamic to the film. We did, though, go back to the exterior of Luke's house, because, since we didn't have a car, we would need to see him exit the house to go somewhere. So I had him leave the house and walk towards the camera, exiting the frame from the left. So then, when I went downtown to shoot, I had him enter the frame from the right in a long shot, appearing from behind a statue in a square. That way I made sure that I wouldn't have problems in the editing room.

### EXTERIOR STREETCAR STATION (Day 4) – Friday, May 19<sup>TH</sup>:

The problem we had this day was that we abused our good luck –something one should never do. So it didn't go as well as the previous day at all. We were so over-confident that at 11:30, even before starting, we had already broken for lunch. Gary very generously invited us to a diner nearby, where we spent more time than

we should have. I know that, as the director of the film, I should have stopped that from happening.

The most difficult thing to manage was the traffic. I made the mistake of thinking it was going to be a smooth day because there were no lights needed, but not being able to control the traffic, the streetcars, or the passers-by made things very difficult. I had shot on the street before, but I was inside of a bus, so it was a totally different experience.

It was also difficult because I didn't have a monitor, and if I looked at the LCD the battery was going to be discharged faster. So I had to trust the camera operator. I knew that she knew what she was doing and I did trust her, but I had ideas in my head about exactly how I wanted certain things to be done. So this created a feeling of uneasiness in me. Of course I hid this feeling as much as I could. Another major difficulty was that I had to compromise the script. As difficult as things were, I couldn't keep the shooting script or the shot list as they were. I had to work with what I had and make the best of it. When we were about to shoot the last shot, the battery went dead.

#### EXTERIOR STREETCAR STATION (Day 5) – Saturday, May 20th:

Cast and crew call on Saturday was at 10:00 A.M.. We would only meet until noon to shoot the last shots and re-shoot others that I was not happy with. We worked in a quiet and harmonious atmosphere. Now, thinking about it, I am glad the battery went out of charge on Friday. Otherwise, Saturday wouldn't have

happened and we would never have re-shot takes that were not so good. I wouldn't have had the idea of shooting a couple of close ups and other things I came up with.

The only little problem was how to control the people who were waiting for the streetcar so as to avoid continuity issues. Once we even asked two people if they could step out of frame for a minute and into frame again, since they were not in the frame before. And so they did. The shot was coming out perfect. Except that, right before getting in the streetcar, one of them had the great idea to look right at the camera as he smiled. At the same time, someone from inside the streetcar waved at us –I wonder who he thought we were; I also wonder why people have a fixation with cameras.

All in all, even when it was tough--actually the toughest production I have ever participated in--I think it was a great learning experience. It taught me that I cannot give certain crew positions to inexperienced people, that every person should carry out only one crew position at a time--some of us were even fulfilling three positions, which is too much to handle--, and that plenty of time should be devoted to recruiting crew members. I paid the price for not having enough experienced people on my team--even though, of course, there were exceptions to the rule. They were, though, a committed team, which I am grateful for.

I must say that there was a very nice note by the end of production that lifted our spirit. While most of the streetcar drivers didn't want to wait for Gary to stand up and get in the streetcar, there was one particular driver, Baron Wilson, who

offered to stop for us. He even waited until we moved the camera--it was a different type of shot--and were ready to shoot. And he didn't even look at it!

## CHAPTER 5: POST-PRODUCTION

### A. The Editing Process:

In my formative years in Buenos Aires I had worked on this stage in collaboration with an editor. I knew I wanted to do the same with this project, but not merely because I was used to it. On the one hand, I like working as a team. I think wonderful ideas can emerge from that. On the other hand--and, most importantly--I had become too attached to this particular project. I knew that if I edited myself I was going to be so focused on detail that I was never going to finish editing. Besides, I didn't want to miss the forest for the trees. So I wanted someone who could be detached from the material, someone who hadn't even read the script, someone who could have a clinical eye and approach the material with no sentiments, in an experimental mode. I didn't know of any good editors, so I asked Robert Racine and he suggested that I talked to Joshua Johnston. I was glad that he did, because since the first day Josh and I seemed to be on the same page. When we saw the raw material we both agreed on what takes we liked and what takes we wouldn't use. And he really committed to the project.

The system used to edit the project was the Avid Media Composer, Adrenaline HD – I must say that I am extremely grateful for the fact that the faculty made this suite available to us, which is the best editing suite UNO has at present.

As a filmmaker, I write the shooting script with care, making conscious choices. I try to think of each shot both as a separate entity, and as part of the film as a



whole. So, somehow, the internal visual rhythm within the frame, and even certain transitions between the shots, were pre-determined before the material even went to Josh's hands. For example, one thing I did was shoot the same action in different types of shots. In the editing room this would give me options to combine these shots creating continuity of movement and action. I like the aesthetic they convey. Of course I just did this with the shots that I thought were suitable for it. Another example is the parallel crosscutting that alternates between Luke and Samantha kissing and the husband getting to Samantha's house.

I always base myself on invisible editing because I find it very important to make the audience focus on my characters, and not on the cut. My wish is to establish a connection. This film in particular was very intimate, so I wanted to achieve this more than ever before.

The shooting script had been followed rigorously but, as I mentioned earlier, we had encountered certain difficulties when shooting at the streetcar station, which forced me to improvise. I knew that we needed to do something about it. Every time I watched the material something just wasn't right. Finally an idea came to mind. I thought of turning the wife's flashbacks into obsessions. Of using the same action over and over again. This would make the audience be more engaged, and mistakes less obvious.

I had also established in the pre-production that I wanted to mark an opposition between the very loud traffic and the silence in those scenes. That was accomplished, of course, in post-production.

## **B. The Music:**

My brother, who is an excellent musician, has written music for many of my short films. However, he resides in Maryland at present, so it would have been difficult to have him write the score of this project. I was thinking about calling him, and ask him whether he would have time or not, when all of a sudden the telephone rang. It was a UNO alumni saying she had seen a flyer that read that I was filming my thesis project. Her name was Shawn Garmon, and she expressed a keen interest in writing the score for my film. She also sent me her resume, and I was impressed. She didn't have one but two masters, and she had written music for more than thirty short films. So I considered myself very lucky that someone with such an experience had offered her help, and without even asking for remuneration. Of course I still had to see what she could offer. But I had nothing to lose and I would find out soon enough.

I gave Shawn a copy of the script with indications on how many seconds of music I would need –approximately– according to the scenes. I also specified, for every particular scene I wanted to include the music, the tone I was looking for. The following day we ran into each other in the PAC. She was on her way to start writing the score. We met a few hours afterwards and she played what she had composed so far. I was amazed, not only by her talent, and how fast she could write, but by how well she had captured the essence of what I was trying to say.

Almost a week afterwards Shawn and I got together again and she played the whole score for me, to my delight. She based the score mainly on piano. For the titles, she combined jazz elements with classical.

We had agreed that she was going to compose the score in a minor key, in order to better reflect Luke's inner state. There's something that she did that I considered very interesting. When Luke leaves at the end of the film the music shifts, indicating that he chooses not to be with Samantha. There was an indication of that shift when he attempted to leave her while she was in the kitchen.

My composer also developed a theme that leads to the love music at the end of the film, and very effective suspense music for the scenes with the husband.

Something I particularly like in the music for the film is a 3-note motif representing the syllables of the word Sa-man-tha. It is present at the beginning and at the end, when Luke notices the ring, which represents her. I like it aesthetically, and also because at the end of the film we go back to the point we were at the beginning. It serves as closure, as an ending of a cycle.

## CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

The process of creating The Golden Ring was the most challenging experience I had ever undertaken. Therefore, it became a great learning experience I will always be grateful for. I realized that, when I am faced with hardship, my best talents emerge. I also learned that it is indispensable to make sure that each and every member of my crew knows their craft, and not to assign more than one task to each crew member. Of course I did this out of necessity and not because it was my choice. I prefer, though, as I mentioned earlier, to work with a small and committed crew than to have several crew members on set. I think that if I even have one extra person on set who isn't skillful or professional enough it can lead to disaster. To an extent I don't regret that we were so few, because I wanted to create an intimate atmosphere between the actors. I thought it would help the purpose of the script.

The phase I enjoyed the most was the post-production. I liked seeing how, little by little, the film was getting better and better. I enjoyed how new ideas that emerged in the editing suite, or adding the music score, contributed to its fluidity.

I also enjoyed working with the actors. I always do. I respect them and try to give them the attention they deserve, because I know they are the only living components I can count on. That in order to bring my script to life, to create a connection with the audience, they are indispensable to me. Years ago a professor told me: "If you don't have an answer for an actor right away, at least tell them you'll get back to them." I think actors somehow are like children. They need

attention, care. As I mentioned earlier, a film can be technically perfect, but if the actors are not believable the audience is not going to mind that. They need to empathize.

All in all I must say I am proud of myself for having finished this project. I conceived this story many years ago, and I went through many difficulties to finally bring it to life. Looking back, there are things that I would have done differently, but for the most part I can say that I am satisfied with the end product. As a filmmaker one is in constant transformation. One will always learn from every single experience one has, so I appreciate this experience as much as any other.

What I want to achieve in life is to become an entertainer, an artist and a communicator at the same time. I know that I still have a long way to go, and that learning is a never ending process, especially for an artist. Even more so for a filmmaker, for they tell stories that are based on their own personal experiences, and experiences change constantly as they go through life.

In the first place, The Golden Ring was conceived as something that was meant to be merely entertaining. I eventually developed, though, clear ideas of the visual and sound components of the film. I wanted to make use of elements such as diagonals, Dutch, low and high angles in the composition of the shots so as to represent Luke's world. I also wanted to contrast the noise in the street in the scenes at the beginning with the M.O.S. shots with the wife to symbolize the indifference in the relationship.

Eventually, I wanted the film to also communicate something. I wanted to make people reflect about the materialistic and superficial times we are living in. My

intention was not to judge the character of Luke (or any other character for that matter), but to present him as he was, human. I wanted to show, too, that the fact that Luke's character chose routine over the love of his life didn't mean that it had to be like that for everyone. If people are displeased with their lives maybe they can change it. That sometimes we just have one opportunity and we have to seize it. And if only one person can see that in my film it will make me happy.

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APPENDIX A  
FINAL REVISED SCRIPT



EXT. LUKE'S HOUSE - DAY

LUKE walks towards the big iron gate of the mansion. Though the house is rather old, it's very neat and stylish. The swimming pool is clean and the grass is cut; everything shows the place is taken care of.

Luke gets out of the house and starts his brand new red Porsche. He is in his 30's; his intense and magnetic dark eyes, in contrast with his pale complexion, make him enigmatic and, therefore, quite attractive. He is wearing a gray suit, a white shirt and a burgundy tie; his short dark brown hair carefully combed to the back.

EXT. STREET DOWNTOWN - DAY

Luke parks the car and hurries as he crosses the square.

INT. LUKE'S KITCHEN - DAY ( FLASHBACK )

Luke sits at the table reading the newspaper. He wears the same clothes and is combed the same way as when he left the house. His WIFE, a tasteless and old fashioned brunette, sits on the opposite side having a cup of coffee.

EXT. STREETCAR STATION - DAY ( REALITY )

A streetcar arrives.

EXT. STREET DOWNTOWN - DAY

Luke rushes in order to cross the street, but the lights turn red and he misses it.

INT. LUKE'S KITCHEN - DAY ( FLASHBACK )

Luke goes on reading the paper. His wife accidentally spills the coffee. She looks furious, though she remains in silence. She gets up, looks for a cloth, and cleans it. He remains the same; indifferent.

EXT. STREET DOWNTOWN - DAY ( REALITY )

Luke sees the streetcar leave as he waits for the lights to turn green. He crosses the street.

EXT. STREETCAR STATION - DAY

Luke sits on the only bench in the isolated stop. All of a sudden something calls his attention. He gets up and sees a cheap, but yet nice, ring, shining on the floor. He stares for a moment and picks it up. After a last glance, he puts it in his jacket pocket. He crosses the street.

EXT. FRONT OF SAMANTHA'S HOUSE - DAY

The house is very small, painted with vivid colors. There's many different flowers at the entrance. Luke walks towards the main door and knocks on it. SAMANTHA opens it. She is in her thirties and is quite attractive. Her wavy red hair and her open features contribute to the warmth she emanates. The expression on her face shows contentment and surprise at the same time.

SAMANTHA

Luke...what...?

LUKE

Am I doing here? I came to return this.

Luke takes the ring out of his jacket pocket and shows it to Samantha.

Samantha's face illuminates. She smiles, never taking her eyes off the ring.

SAMANTHA

I cannot believe you found it.

She stares at the ring, totally in awe.

SAMANTHA

But what am I doing keeping you out here? Come in.

INT. SAMANTHA'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

The living room is very neat and warm, and it shows little personal touches.

The decoration is classical: two armchairs facing each other, a sofa on a side and a coffee table.

Samantha sees a sweater lying on the sofa and she picks it up. It shows she is a little nervous.

SAMANTHA

I wasn't expecting company. Sorry,  
it's a little messy.

Luke and Samantha stand looking at each other for a moment, their physical distance being opposite from the intensity in their gaze.

A slight whistling from a kettle is heard.

Samantha, still looking at Luke, walks towards the kitchen.

SAMANTHA

I'll be back in a minute.  
Take a seat.

Luke sits down on the armchair that's nearer to the main entrance as he looks at his surroundings. The walls are painted in a very light yellow tonality, and there are very impressive paintings hanging on the walls. Everything in the room seems to be in perfect harmony.

INT. SAMANTHA'S KITCHEN - DAY

The kitchen is very warm. Samantha turns off the gas stove and pours water from the kettle inside a cup with a tea bag already in it.

INT. SAMANTHA'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

Luke, after hesitating for a moment, stands up and walks towards the main door. Samantha enters the living room walking slowly with a tray that has two steamy cups of tea on it.

SAMANTHA

Why are you leaving, Luke?

Luke turns and stares at Samantha, speechless. Samantha walks towards the coffee table and puts the tray on it.

SAMANTHA

Come on, sit down. Drink the  
tea. It'll make you feel better.

LUKE

Feel better? I'm feeling fine.

SAMANTHA

Are you sure? I know you too  
well, dear.

Luke walks towards the armchair. They both sit down.  
Luke lifts the cup carefully and takes a little sip.

LUKE

My favorite tea. You still have  
some left, after all these years?

SAMANTHA

Actually I started drinking it  
after you left, I guess as a secret  
way of keeping you with me.

LUKE

So you could forgive me?

SAMANTHA

There's nothing love cannot forgive,  
or understand.  
You needed your little  
safety net. Most people do.

Luke stands up, evidently touched by Samantha's words.

LUKE

If I didn't marry her I was going  
to lose it all.

Samantha approaches Luke and tries to make him calm down.

SAMANTHA

I know, dear. And I don't blame  
you.

Luke gets carried away and walks away from Samantha.

LUKE

But how do I know you are not  
just saying that?

Samantha approaches Luke and takes him by the hands.

SAMANTHA

It's me, Luke.

They stare at each other for a moment.

Samantha takes the ring from her index finger and holds it with her fingers.

SAMANTHA

Do you know the story behind this ring? Why it's so important to me?

Luke stares at Samantha, at a wonder.

SAMANTHA

On the one hand, it reminds me of how ethereal and ephemeral everything is, that the only value something has is the emotional value we confer to it.

LUKE

That's very true. And on the other hand...

SAMANTHA

On the other hand, when I was a little girl my father gave me this ring, and he told me this story about this young boy who was given a magic ring as a one time opportunity to change his life. So he gave it to me and he told me: "Sam, this is your magic ring. Have it always with you, and if ever in your life you have a challenge you need to face, let it remind you that you have the power to overcome it. Let it give you the strength you need to succeed."

Luke is totally absorbed by Samantha's words.

SAMANTHA

This ring represents the opportunity we all have to change our lives.

LUKE

And with it, the challenge that  
change represents.

Samantha takes Luke's hand and puts the ring on his small  
finger, since he has a wedding band on his ring finger. Luke is  
speechless.

SAMANTHA

This might be your one chance,  
Luke. What are you going to do  
with it?

Luke pushes Samantha against the wall and kisses her intensely  
and quite wildly.

EXT. FRONT OF SAMANTHA'S HOUSE - DAY

A MAN IN HIS 50's parks his old Buick in front of the house. He  
is rather fat and it shows he's beginning to lose some of his  
gray hair. He wears a suit and a raincoat.

INT. SAMANTHA'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

SAMANTHA

Did you hear something?

Luke goes on with the kissing, now kissing her neck.

LUKE

I didn't hear anything.

EXT. FRONT OF SAMANTHA'S HOUSE - DAY

The man in his 50's slams the car's door and walks towards the  
main entrance.

INT. SAMANTHA'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

Samantha and Luke kiss passionately. She is about to bite his  
neck.

EXT. FRONT OF SAMANTHA'S HOUSE - DAY

The man in his 50's reaches the entrance and takes a key from his raincoat pocket.

INT. SAMANTHA'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

There's the sound of a key. They all of a sudden stop the kissing and look, astonished, towards the door.

SAMANTHA

I guess it's him.

Luke looks at Samantha and then at the door, at a wonder.

LUKE

Him?

SAMANTHA

My hus...

The man in his 50's opens the door and watches them with a clear expression of retaliation on his face.

MAN IN HIS 50'S

I told you to get rid of him,  
or otherwise this would be it.

With no hesitation he draws a gun from his belt and points it towards Luke, who is paralyzed as he stares at the gun.

EXT. STREETCAR STATION - DAY

A gunshot is heard while a streetcar approaches the station. Luke is standing, staring at the ring. The streetcar gets to the station. Luke looks at it. When it's about to stop, he walks towards the front door. The streetcar stops. Luke goes back to staring at the ring. The streetcar door opens right in front of him. He looks at the open door, looks back at the ring, throws it in a trash can next to him, and steps into the streetcar. The door shuts.

FADE TO BLACK.

APPENDIX B  
FINAL BUDGET



The Golden Ring

Cost Summary

ITEM	CASH	IN KIND	TOTAL
Salaries/Payments	\$0.00	\$500.00	\$500.00
Food and Travel	\$60.00	\$100.00	\$160.00
Production Department	\$10.00	\$290.00	\$300.00
Art Department	\$0.00	\$210.00	\$210.00
Camera/Lighting	\$0.00	\$2,310.00	\$2,310.00
Audio	\$0.00	\$1,040.00	\$1,040.00
Film and Lab	\$35.00	\$340.00	\$375.00
Post Production	\$0.00	\$2,230.00	\$2,230.00
Other	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
Contingencies (@10%)	\$100.00	\$600.00	\$700.00
Total	\$205.00	\$7,620.00	\$7,825.00

### Budget Breakdown

ITEM	CASH	IN KIND	TOTAL
Salaries/Payments (Specify)	\$0.00	\$500.00	\$500.00
Cast/Crew 14 hours @ \$7 hour			
Food	\$40.00	\$40.00	\$80.00
Transportation	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
Other (specify) gas	\$20.00	\$60.00	\$80.00
<u>Food and Travel Total</u>	\$60.00	\$100.00	\$160.00
Telephone	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
Shipping	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
Atmosphere	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
Picture Vehicles	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
Location/stage Fees	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
Insurance	\$0.00	\$250.00	\$250.00
Stills and Publicity	\$10.00	\$40.00	\$50.00
Other (specify)	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
<u>Production Department Total</u>	\$10.00	\$290.00	\$300.00
Properties	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
Sets	\$0.00	\$100.00	\$100.00
Wardrobe	\$0.00	\$50.00	\$50.00
Makeup-Hair	\$0.00	\$60.00	\$60.00
Other (specify)	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
<u>Art Department Total</u>	\$0.00	\$210.00	\$210.00
Camera	\$0.00	\$2,000.00	\$2,000.00
Camera Accessories	\$0.00	\$200.00	\$200.00
Electric	\$0.00	\$40.00	\$40.00
Grip	\$0.00	\$70.00	\$70.00
Other (specify)	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
<u>Camera/Lighting Total</u>	\$0.00	\$2,310.00	\$2,310.00

Budget Breakdown (Cont'D)

ITEM	CASH	IN KIND	TOTAL
Recorder and Mics	\$0.00	\$1,000.00	\$1,000.00
Audio Tape Stock	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
Other (Specify) boom/cable	\$0.00	\$40.00	\$40.00
<u>Audio Total</u>	\$0.00	\$1,040.00	\$1,040.00
Video Tape	\$35.00	\$0.00	\$35.00
Processing	\$0.00	\$200.00	\$200.00
Transfer	\$0.00	\$100.00	\$100.00
VHS Dubs	\$0.00	\$40.00	\$40.00
Other (Specify)	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
<u>Film and Lab Total</u>	\$35.00	\$340.00	\$375.00
Editing Suite	\$0.00	\$2,000.00	\$2,000.00
Titles/Graphics	\$0.00	\$100.00	\$100.00
Sound Effects and ADR	\$0.00	\$80.00	\$80.00
Music Recording	\$0.00	\$50.00	\$50.00
Music Rights	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
Other (Specify)	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
<u>Post Production Total</u>	\$0.00	\$2,230.00	\$2,230.00
<u>Other (Specify)</u>	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
<u>Sub-Total</u>	\$105.00	\$7,020.00	\$7,125.00
<u>Contingencies (@10%)</u>	\$100.00	\$600.00	\$700.00
<u>Grand Total</u>	\$205.00	\$7,620.00	\$7,825.00

APPENDIX C  
DVD DUB OF FILM

## VITA

Marcela Alejandra Vales was born in Buenos Aires, Argentina, on December 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1975. In 1995 she received a full scholarship in the National Institute of Film in Buenos Aires. In 1999 she graduated from that school, receiving the degree of Film Director. After graduating, Ms. Vales started evaluating the possibility of pursuing a graduate degree in the United States. She was granted admission and a scholarship at the University of New Orleans in the Fall of 2002.

Among other short films, Ms. Vales wrote and directed "Point of Departure," "The Golden Ring," "The Gesture of Death," and "The Man with the Gun" (these last two were adaptations). She also directed "Interno 6", which she filmed in 35 mm..