Directed by: Pedro Almovador
Certificate: 15
Running time: 117 mins
Release date: 18 March 2011

Synopsis:
A brilliant plastic surgeon, haunted by past tragedies, creates a type of synthetic skin that withstands any kind of damage. His guinea pig: a mysterious and volatile woman who holds the key to his obsession. (http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1189073/)

These Study Notes are suitable for students of Media and Film Studies & related subjects at GCSE, AS/A2 or equivalent.
Spanish cinema flourished after the demise of the country’s long-reigning dictator Francisco Franco in 1975. Before this turn of events, censorship and oppression were rife under the Franco regime and film schools were closed, stifling creativity. Filmmakers often had to hide their political expression and anger deep within the meaning of their films. But in the late 1970s, Pedro Almodóvar was part of the rapidly emerging Spanish film and culture renaissance (la Movida) which celebrated and explored diversity, counter-culture attitudes and new-found freedoms.

- Investigate the impact Franco had upon film production, exhibition and export in Spain. How could you characterise Spanish cinema during his forty-year reign?
- How would you categorise the themes and style of Almodóvar’s work at this early stage? According to your research, what was he best known for?

You can find out more about Almodóvar and la Movida in Sight and Sound (July 2011, volume 21, issue 7)

**Almodóvar as Auteur**

Almodóvar’s films are linked by themes that are both personal and universal. Do you see any of the following hallmarks in *The Skin I Live In*? If not, which of the director’s previous films do feature such themes?

- family
- gender (strong women and weak men)
- sexuality
- matriarchs
- nationality and identity
- gay and transgender issues
- recurring actors/actresses such as Antonio Banderas and Penélope Cruz

You can find materials on two other Almodóvar films on Film Education’s website:

**Broken Embraces**
http://www.filmeducation.org/brokenembraces

**Volver**
www.filmeducation.org/pdf/film/Volver.pdf
New Territory
Directing a thriller is unusual territory for Almodóvar who is widely recognised for his family dramas. Take a look at the following report from The Independent...

Almodóvar, 61…said he was ready for a new genre after melodramas such as ‘Broken Embraces’ starring his frequent muse Penélope Cruz. “I’m currently in a thriller time of my life,” he said. “But in a thriller you can touch on all kinds of other genres. I don’t think you have to stick rigidly to the rules of a genre. But thrillers are indeed my favourite kind of film right now and I’ll probably make more.”

http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/films/Almodóvar-revenge-thriller-a-hit-at-cannes-2286773.html

- In what ways does The Skin I Live In conform to or subvert thriller conventions?
- Almodóvar has never made a film for Hollywood, but does his new thriller recall any Hollywood movies?
- What other genre elements are present?
- In this era of ‘Torture Porn’ and Extreme Cinema, how does The Skin I Live In compare in terms of intensity and aesthetics?
- Look at the trailer and promotional materials for the film. Does it target mainstream or art-house audiences or both? What USP is emphasised in the trailer?

Frankenstein
The story of The Skin I Live In instantly recalls Frankenstein, but critics have spotted thematic similarities to other films as well.

- What visual motifs, props and characters are there in the film that allude to Frankenstein? Are these motifs subverted in any way?
- Why might critics have commented that The Skin I Live In is thematically similar to both Eyes Without a Face (Georges Franju, 1960) and Darkman (Sam Raimi, 1990)?
- Does the film comment on society’s fixation on appearance and beauty? If so, what do you feel is its message?

Activity
Pick your favourite director or auteur and then either:
- Create a trailer for a new Frankenstein film ‘directed’ by them in their style. Will you draw attention to the director’s involvement? Who will you cast?

or

- Create a trailer for a new film by this director in a genre that they have never attempted

Written by Gareth C Evans