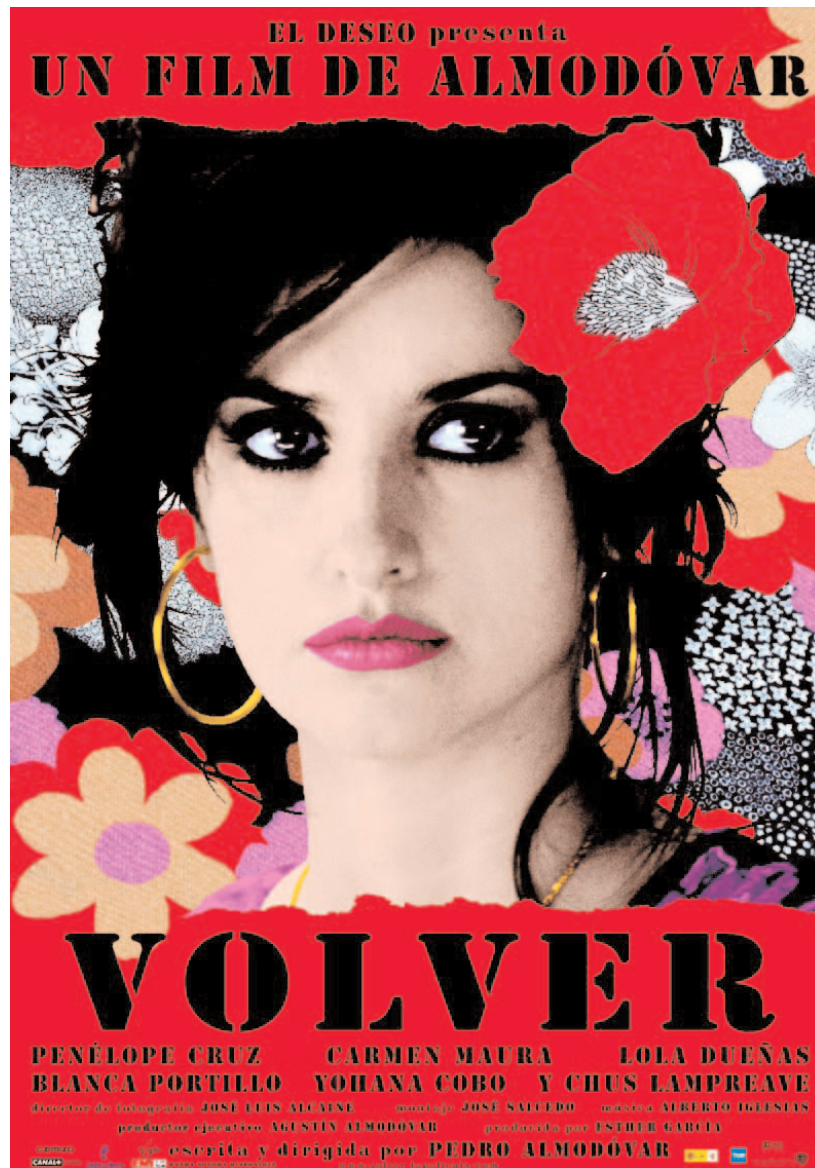


Volver



You may be interested in this film for a number of reasons including:

- Looking at European Cinema
- Almodóvar as auteur
- Star study looking at Penelope Cruz – does her casting in the role signify anything particular? Would her part be the same with someone else in the role?

- An example of independent film
- For students of Spanish, or Spanish speakers

FILM SYNOPSIS

Three generations of women survive fire, insanity and even death in Pedro Almodóvar's new film. The women (inspired by people from his own childhood) are sisters, Raimunda and Sole, Raimunda's teenage daughter and their mother, who dies in a fire but who miraculously appears before them. Almodóvar cleverly blends love story, melodrama, ghost story and thriller.

Now that you've seen the film, think about the ways in which the film positions the following:

- Women/Men – What kind of representations do we see? Does this fit into any other ways of considering the film, such as Almodóvar as auteur or any of the other positions mentioned above?
- Characterisation – When we meet the characters, with whom do you sympathise? Do we understand their motivations?

Imagine that this film was remade for Hollywood. Can you think of ways in which the narrative might be different? (A Hollywood remake that you might want to consider is *Vanilla Sky* (Crowe: 2001). The original film was *Abre Los Ojos* (Amenábar: 1997): both star Penelope Cruz). For example, could you imagine Raimunda (Penelope Cruz) becoming romantically involved with the film director character? This possible narrative thread is not developed, so what is the focus of the story? How different is this to Hollywood films? Do you like this focus? What ingredients are necessary for this to work? Think about script, actors and performance.

MORALITY AND MOTIVATION

During the course of the story we learn of and are witness to several serious crimes. How these crimes are dealt with by the characters is key to the way in which the narrative progresses.

- Make a list of the crimes that we observe or learn about during the course of the film. Using these as a starting point, consider how they might otherwise have been dealt with, for example, imprisonment, etc.
- The consequences of these actions are key to informing the genre of the film. Imagine how different the film would have been if Raimunda had been put in prison.

- How do these crimes link the characters? The title of the film 'Volver' means 'to return'; how many ways can you see that this title has a relevance to aspects of the story? Think about character relationships, locations, narrative events, etc. and be specific in your answers, pointing to particular sequences for discussion.
- How are we, the audience, positioned in moral terms, and how is narration used to convey a particular point of view? What was your response to the crimes committed? Were you pleased that the protagonists were not conventionally punished? Do you think Raimunda, her mother and daughter were justified in their actions, and what makes you understand and perhaps like these characters (if you do)?

SUSPENDING DISBELIEF

This is necessary for spectators when watching most films, however in *Volver* this is a very clear part of the approach to the story, as we are introduced to a culture where death is not necessarily seen as final. This is a necessary part of the narrative as it makes possible certain character interactions and scenes, for example, when towards the end as Raimunda's mother goes to Agustina's house to look after her as she dies, this is not met with any fear, and we understand that Agustina believes that she is seeing the kind spirit of Irene, Raimunda's mother. Is it possible to see the town and village in contrast, with the village representing a place where these kinds of beliefs are retained compared to the city/town where this is not the case? Irene remarks that she could live in the village as long as she was not seen because of the beliefs of the villagers and Raimunda has moved to Madrid and does not believe in ghosts, and humours Agustina's request to ask her mother before she realises she is not dead.



In addition to these specific aspects of the film's narrative and this culture and the possibilities that are opened as a result, we are also presented with the power of the east wind as a force, a means of accounting for the actions of the characters at certain points, particularly in relation to the village and the characters of Aunt Paula and Irene. This is not the only film that draws on these traditions; some of you may have seen *Chocolat* (Hallstrom: 2000) and may remember that the wind was responsible for the arrival of Vianne Rocher (Juliet Binoche) in the village, and it is only when she tells her dead mother that she will not follow the wind that she finally settles in the village. These beliefs can also be found in *Como Agua Para Chocolate* (Arau: 1992). All these films, even though *Chocolat* and *Como Agua Para Chocolate* are either hispanic or locate this aspect of the narrative in Mexico, draw on a shared Spanish folklore and influence. This is key to the way in which the story is presented to the audience in genre terms. For example, the return of a character from the dead may commonly signify horror in Hollywood films. However, the cultural meaning-structures that surround death and ghosts in *Volver* inform the way with which this thread in the narrative is dealt. For example, the use of music or narration does not code the presence of Irene as something we should be afraid of, even where we are encouraged to believe that she is a ghost.

POINTS FOR DISCUSSION:

- Think about the elements of *Volver* that you enjoyed most. You might like to consider performance, narrative and so on.
- Would you have watched this film before a screening event like this?
- If not, what put you off?

The treatment of characters and themes raised here are typical of Almodóvar. You may wish to consider this by looking at his other films on the internet.

Sight and Sound – for a review of *Volver* – do you agree with the point of view being put across here?

Senses of Cinema is a useful site for looking at directors and getting an overview of their work.

Author: Alice Crystal

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