

Volver / No Return (2006) Almodovar

P Michell, 2021

Synopsis

Headed by actress [Penélope Cruz](#), the film features an [ensemble cast](#) that also includes [Carmen Maura](#), [Lola Dueñas - Sole](#), [Blanca Portillo - Augustina](#), [Yohana Cobo - Paula](#), and [Chus Lampreave](#) – Tia Paula. Revolving around an eccentric family of women from a wind-swept region south of [Madrid](#), Cruz plays Raimunda, a working-class woman forced to go to great lengths to protect her 14-year-old daughter Paula. To top off the family crisis, her mother Irene (Maura) returns from the dead to tie up loose ends.

Very successful Almodovar film – ‘without the carnal bits’. Estimated cost Euro 7.5 million. Total gross US\$85 million.

Almodovar began as niche Spanish director, then successful arthouse/film festival film circuit. By *Volver* he’d become more well known, and especially after.

Creative Personnel

Most of the behind the camera people are regulars with Almodova.

Pedro Almodovar – Screenplay / Director (43 credits)

The most internationally acclaimed Spanish filmmaker since [Luis Buñuel](#) was born in a small town (Calzada de Calatrava) in the impoverished Spanish region of La Mancha.

Often uses symbolism and metaphorical techniques to portray circular storylines.

Films often portrays strong female characters and transsexuals.

Welles’ [The Lady from Shanghai](#) (1947), is one of his favourite films. Others include [Le Doulos](#) (1962) and [The Red Circle](#) (1970) directed by [Jean-Pierre Melville](#).

“All my movies have an autobiographical dimension, but that is indirectly, through the personages. In fact, I am behind everything that happens and that is said, but I am never talking about myself in first person singular. Something in me--probably a dislike of cheap exhibitionism--stops me from approaching a project too autobiographically.”

“Cinema can fill in the empty spaces of your life and your loneliness.”

Alberto Iglesias – Music (63 credits)

Known for Almodovar films as well as *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier Spy* (2011) and *The Constant Gardener* (2005).

Jose Luis Alcaine – Cinematography (163 credits)

[Beside every great director, there’s an even great cinematographer! Paul.]

Mostly film work but since 2008 mixing TV. Seven films with Almodova.

His enormous cinematographic work has been rewarded with five [Goya Awards](#) for the best photography of a total of eighteen nominations.

Was the first cinematographer to use [fluorescent](#) tube as key lighting in the 1970s. He has worked on films such as [Belle Époque](#) ([Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film](#), 1993), [Two Much](#) (1995), [Blast from the Past](#) (1999) and [The Skin I Live In](#) (2011).

He won the [European Film Award for Best Cinematographer](#) for [Volver](#).

In February 2019, he received the [Medalla de Oro al Mérito en las Bellas Artes](#).^[1]

How digital technology has changed his work:

"Most of all, the digital revolution has changed the way that directors work. There's a famous memo in which [David O. Selznick](#) warned [King Vidor](#) not to do more than five takes of each shot while filming [Duel in the Sun](#) (1946). Today, thanks to the low cost of digital technology, one can shoot countless takes, and with several cameras! Many movies are shot with three, four, or even eight cameras. That destroys any notion of the director's point of view. There are still directors who shoot with only one camera, such as Asghar [Asghar Farhadi](#), Pedro [Pedro Almodóvar](#), or Brian De Palma [Brian De Palma](#), with whom I'll shoot [Sweet Vengeance](#). But there are directors who have no idea what they're going to edit while they're shooting. They use three or four cameras and the end result looks like a television broadcast." [2018]

Trivia: Charles Chaplin was notorious for his number of takes – hundreds! Paul.

Useless Trivia: Sidney James, the British actor, was known as 'one take Sid', as his best work was the first.

Trivia: Jose Luis Alcaine has a theory that the [Frank Borzage](#) movie [A Farewell to Arms](#) (1932) after a story by Ernest Hemingway, was the main and total inspiration for Pablo Picasso in the creation of the "Guernica", one of the most important painting of the 20th century. He believes that several images of a sequence of 5 minutes long showing the exodus of countrymen and soldiers on an infernal rainy night was the inspiration of Pablo Picasso. This sequence can be found in the second half of the movie - from minute 51 to minute 56 -. If you search "Jose Luis Alcaine and the Guernica" in the internet you will find the theory very well explained.

One link:

<https://albavolunteer.org/2011/09/a-hemingway-film-and-picasso's-guernica/>

Link to Three Stories of Light:

<https://www.rosco.com/spectrum/index.php/2020/01/three-stories-of-light-from-cinematographer-jose-luis-alcaine/>

[Penelope Cruz](#) – Raimunda (87 credits)

Known outside her native country as the "Spanish enchantress", Penélope Cruz Sánchez was born in Madrid to Eduardo Cruz, a retailer, and Encarna Sánchez, a hairdresser. As a toddler, she was already a compulsive performer, re-enacting TV commercials for her family's amusement, but she decided to focus her energies on dance. After studying classical ballet for nine years at Spain's National Conservatory, she continued her training under a series of prominent dancers. At 15, however, she heeded her true calling when she bested more than 300 other girls at a talent agency audition. The resulting contract landed her several roles in Spanish TV shows and music videos, which in turn paved the way for a career on the big screen. Cruz made her movie debut in [The Greek Labyrinth](#)(1993) (The Greek Labyrinth), then appeared briefly in the [Timothy Dalton](#) thriller [Framed](#)(1992). Her third film was the Oscar-winning [Belle Epoque](#) (1992), in which she played one of four sisters vying for the love of a handsome army deserter. The film also garnered several Goyas, the Spanish equivalent of the Academy Awards.

[Penélope Cruz](#) became the first Spanish actress ever to be nominated for Best Lead Actress at the Oscars.

[Carmen Maura](#) – Irene (159 credits)

Descendant of the conservative Spanish politician Antonio Maura, Carmen lead an art gallery and appeared in various roles in night- clubs. With [Tigres de papel](#) (1977) she had her first successful appearance on the movie screen and thereafter she worked at the theatre, the movies and in TV productions. Although she played dramatic roles, too, her most important genre has always been the comedy, e.g. [Coarse Salt](#) (1984), [Sé infiel y no mires con quién](#) (1985) or [Dear Nanny](#) (1986).

Almodova: *“If you divide the stages of my career and labelled them with the names of the people I've worked with, there's definitely a stage in my filmmaking that would be called The Carmen Maura Years, and those films were all in the 80s - although I did work with her again on [Volver](#) (2006). At the time, I felt she was absolutely the best vehicle I could find to tell my stories. She was the actress who had the best intuition, to connect with what I wanted from her. She could be very funny and very dramatic at the same time, so it was the perfect combination for me. Our relationship was absolutely perfect. We had this total communion, this osmosis, that went on, and due, probably, to that very intense and very fruitful engagement, it generated a number of personal problems that led to us having to stop working together. We were a filmmaking couple, but we faced all the issues - all the personal issues - that a normal couple faces. In that same period, through the 1980s up to 1990, the actor who best understood me and was able to play my parts was [Antonio Banderas](#) as well.”*

Trivia

In [Pedro Almodóvar](#)'s eleventh film, [The Flower of My Secret](#) (1995), the main character (Leo) is criticized for writing a novel about a woman whose husband attempts to rape her daughter and, after the daughter kills him, hides his body in her neighbor's restaurant freezer. Eleven years later, this plot line appears in the narrative of [Volver](#).

According to [Pedro Almodóvar](#), there's only one fake element in Raimunda's ([Penélope Cruz](#)) body: the bottom. He said that this kind of characters are usually big-bottomed people, and that Cruz is just too stylized.

First movie of [Pedro Almodóvar](#) and [Carmen Maura](#) together in 18 years. Their friendship broke after shooting [Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown](#) (1988).

The movie that Irene watches on TV is [Beautiful](#) (1951), starring [Anna Magnani](#) as a fame-hungry, working class mother who drags her unwilling daughter to the Cinecitta film studios in Rome for a movie audition. There is a parallel in the film, as Raimunda mentions that Agustina's fame-hungry sister once dragged her to Madrid for a singing audition.

Reviews

A O Scott – New York Times Critics Pick

To relate the details of the narrative—death, cancer, betrayal, parental abandonment, more death—would create an impression of dreariness and woe. But nothing could be further from the spirit of *Volver* which is buoyant without being flip, and consoling without ever becoming maudlin. Mr. Almodóvar acknowledges misfortune—and takes it seriously—from a perspective that is essentially comic. Very few filmmakers have managed to smile so convincingly in the face of misery and fatality: Jean Renoir and Billy Wilder come immediately to mind, and Mr. Almodóvar, if he is not yet their equal, surely belongs in their company. *Volver* is often dazzling in its artifice—[José Luis Alcaine's](#) ripe cinematography, Alberto Iglesias's suave, heart-tugging score—but it is never false. It draws you in, invites you to linger and makes you eager to return.

The story of 3 generations of women and their struggle to survive wind, fire and death

[inesv](#) 8 February 2007

This is simple story about 3 generations of women: the grandmother Irene (Carmen Maura), her daughters Raimunda (Penélope Cruz) and Sole (Lola Dueñas) and her granddaughter Paula (Yohana Cobo). It takes place mainly in Madrid, in a neighbourhood where various ethnic groups and people from the different provinces of Spain live, people who went to Madrid looking for a better tomorrow. Raimunda, Sole and Paula have to go back to their home town to praise the dead and meet one of their aunts, Tia Paula (Chus Lampreave). Soon the old aunt dies and unleashes a series of mysterious events, their dead mother re-appears to settle some unresolved issues with her daughters and with her neighbour, Augustina (Blanca Portillo), revealing a past until then unknown. This is movie about the Spanish culture, homesickness, the culture of the death and the struggle of 4 women with strong character and strong personality traits to survive wind, fire and death. It is extremely well produced and has great photography as well as an unmatched soundtrack. It is a very nice movie, filled with laughter and emotions and with a beautiful simplicity. If you are waiting for a Hollywood romance, a Hollywood comedy or a twisting complex plot, this might not be what you are looking for.

From Culture Vulture

<https://culturevulture.net/film/volver/>

With *Volver* Spanish director Pedro Almodóvar seduces his audiences more subtly than in his previous work. The hard, bright visual surfaces of his signature hyperreal style still predominate. But *Volver* wends its way playfully through Dalí-esque surrealism, nineteenth-century melodrama, pictorial realism, and classic Hollywood *noir*, into a complex study of moods and relationships. Critics have esteemed *Volver* a more mature, if lesser film, and therein lies its seductive charm – it is an impossible hybrid, (in the words of at least one observer) an epic comedy.

Almodóvar is increasingly concerned with style, and *Volver* delights, eschewing camp and brittle irony for deeper, heart-felt explorations of mood and the precise experience of complex emotions and relationships. *Volver* is about family ties, women's relationships with each other, and Almodóvar's genuine love and appreciation of women. *Volver* is, at its heart,

also an affectionate, but complex meditation on the director's own mother and the womenfolk of his rural La Mancha childhood and poor working-class Madrid youth.

Deftly and with deceptive simplicity, *Volver* begins as a retelling of *Mildred Pierce*. Poor, hard-working Raimunda (Pénelope Cruz) is married to an unemployed laborer named Paco (Antonio de la Torre), who may or may not be the father of their daughter Paula (Yohana Cobo). When Raimunda comes home from work to find her daughter has stabbed Paco to death, mother quickly invents an alibi to protect her daughter, and assumes the guilt herself.

The melodramatic foreshadowing preceding this moment moves between farce and horror. The night before, Paco pauses in the doorway to watch his daughter disrobe. From an angle directly over the kitchen sink, Raimunda is shown carefully cleaning a very large knife, her pair of melon breasts tantalizingly mooning the camera. Paco later masturbates when his wife rejects his sexual advances (and this on the same day Paco has been fired from yet another job). Not only will Raimonda, like her filmic predecessor *Mildred Pierce*, protect her daughter by taking blame for the murder, but will soon find herself transforming a failing restaurant into a smashing success.

At times *Volver* seems to channel Rainer Werner Fassbinder, with whom Almodóvar shares a love of Hollywood melodrama. Where some of Fassbinder's most memorable work was inspired by Douglas Sirk, Almodóvar pointedly steers his audience to *Mildred Pierce*. Remembered films mix with childhood memories here, and, as if to make this point, in a later scene Visconti's *Bellissima* runs on a television set.

Another plot line begins when Raimunda's mother, Irene (Carmen Maura), or rather her ghost, returns upon the death of her own sister Paula (Chus Lampreave) to their impoverished pueblo in La Mancha. The apparition of Irene appears first to Paula's caretaker Agustina (Blanca Portillo), the daughter of a deceased village neighbor. Other villagers soon claim to have seen Irene's ghost. Of course no one is surprised to hear this. Of Raimonda's home village it is well-known that the men die young and the women live long. The town also has the highest rate of insanity anywhere in Spain — people are frequently driven mad by a powerful sirocco-like wind that blows only there. How the dead, memories of them, and the dead's own memories intertwine is all important, and is wickedly lampooned in the memorable opening scene, of an army of women villagers cleaning and polishing headstones in the local necropolis-like cemetery, as if pantomiming a Roman orgy.

Of course, when Irene's ghost stows away in the trunk of the car of her other daughter Soledad (Lola Dueñas), Sole can only capitulate to the ghost's pleas and let her move in with her and niece Paula (who is by now living with her tía Sole). The womenfolk soon find it scandalous, but not in the least improbable. The screwball plot is played for mirthful laughs, as Irene becomes explained away as "*una rusa sin papeles*" — an undocumented Russian alien who speaks no Spanish — now working as Sole's assistant in her illegal hairdressing home business.

A third plot strand involves the mysterious kinship between the sisters and their childhood friend, Agustina, who is suddenly diagnosed with terminal cancer. Agustina sets off on a quest to learn the secrets of the dead, and may face a showdown on a nationally broadcast trash TV talk show. As the mysterious disappearance of Agustina's mother, which coincided with a fire in which mother Irene and her husband perished a few years before, becomes more mysterious, a thick conspiracy of silence becomes deafeningly audible to the audience. The tension wavers delicately between farce and horror.

As *Volver*'s multiple and brightly-colored surfaces take on depth and weight, nothing is what it seems. Each woman will find herself hopelessly entangled and impugned in each other's past transgressions. And, in fact, the title of this film begins to make much more sense — *volver* is a common, but complex basic Spanish word, meaning to turn over, to turn upside down, to return, to put back, to store, to repay, to restore, to start doing over again.

Volver was intended as a vehicle for Pénélope Cruz, and she emerges here as the heir apparent to Sophia Loren. Alberto Iglesias provides a lush, orchestral score, and Cruz's character sings (or lip-synchs) the show-stopping title song "Volver," after a long day (in another plot strand) feeding a film crew in "her" restaurant (perhaps channeling Lotta Lenya as Doris Day). Variations of bright reds saturate the screen, over and over, drawing attention to the also lush cinematography of José Luis Alcaine. Lastly, the ensemble acting is superb — Lola Dueñas, Blanca Portillo, Chus Lampreave and Yohana Cobo each turn in complex and well-tempered, if less flashy performances.

END