

Almodóvar and film studios

Almodóvar y los estudios filmicos

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Abstract:

The academic reception of Pedro Almodóvar's work has varied significantly over the years. This monograph demonstrates the renewed scholarly interest, both within Spain and internationally, in Almodóvar's oeuvre. New voices, themes, methodologies, and influences are emerging within the academic sphere, marking a clear revitalization of scientific interest in Almodóvar studies.

Resumen:

Ha variado mucho la recepción académica de la obra de Pedro Almodóvar a lo largo de los años; este monográfico muestra el renovado interés académico, tanto en el ámbito del estado español como en el extranjero, en la obra almodovariana: nuevas voces, temas, metodologías e influencias se abren en el ámbito académico en una renovación clara por el interés científico en los estudios almodovarianos.

Keywords:

Pedro Almodóvar, film studies, Spanish Cinema, El Deseo.

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The Evolving Academic Reception of Pedro Almodóvar's Work

In 2003 (November 26-29), the University of Castilla-La Mancha (Cuenca campus) hosted the first international conference dedicated to the figure and work of Pedro Almodóvar. This event followed Almodóvar's conferral as Doctor Honoris Causa by the same university on June 29, 2000. He later received the same academic distinction from Harvard University (2009) and Oxford University (2016).

During the era of that seminal Cuenca conference, the speakers were primarily international scholars, mostly Hispanists who had dedicated a significant portion of their careers to studying, researching, and teaching Spanish cinema. A notable number of French, American, and British academics, among others, participated, including Jean-Claude Seguin (Université Lumière-Lyon 2), Marsha Kinder (University of Southern California), Victor Fuentes (University of California, Santa Barbara), Paul J. Smith (University of Cambridge), Brad Epps (Harvard University), Marvin D'Lugo (Clark University), Kathleen M. Vernon (State University of New York, Stony Brook), and Peter Evans (Queen Mary, University of London). Paul J. Smith's case is particularly noteworthy; he had already published his important and groundbreaking monograph on Almodóvar, *Desire Unlimited*, in 1994, followed by *Las leyes del deseo. La homosexualidad en la literatura y el cine español 1960-1990* in 1998, a book with a significant impact on the "classic" Spanish academic landscape. For the first time, LGBTQ+ Studies (as we would call them today) forcefully entered Academia, and from a distinguished Hispanist professor at one of the world's most prestigious universities, Cambridge.

However, Spanish academia was slow to embrace these "new" perspectives. Consequently, the only "senior" Spanish academic who attended the Almodóvar Conference was Román Gubern, despite invitations extended to virtually all Spanish full professors at the time. Spanish academia continued to disregard the Almodóvar phenomenon and failed to take his cinema seriously, even though he had already won an Oscar and many other

international awards. Only a small handful of young Spanish academics attended the conference and presented papers; half of them, moreover, came not from Spanish universities but from foreign institutions, primarily in the United Kingdom and the United States. This made Gubern's contribution even more significant, lending a certain "authority" to the Cuenca conference. It is only fair to acknowledge Gubern's courage and broad-mindedness; having also taught in the United States, he understood the academic value of Almodóvar's cinema better than most in Spain.

Twenty years later, the 2nd International Pedro Almodóvar Conference was held at the Complutense University of Madrid in 2023 (October 23-25), along with the monograph "El cine de Pedro Almodóvar. Nuevas perspectivas desde los estudios LGBTIQ+" from the Complutense academic journal *Estudios LGBTIQ+, Comunicación y Cultura* (Zurian, 2024). The articles included in this (and the upcoming issue 32) also demonstrate this shift. This indicates that academic interest in Almodóvar's work has grown across all spheres, and it is no longer exceptional to find numerous texts analyzing his work in international and national conferences, academic journals, and books.

Undoubtedly, this change has several motivations, but the emergence of younger professors with more international experience and greater exposure to different approaches and interests is one of the key drivers. These lines also serve to honor those early academics who paved a difficult path and whose teaching and example have enabled so many to follow in their footsteps.

This *Fotocinema* Journal monograph was led by the "GECA: Género, Estética y Cultura Audiovisual" Research Group (www.ucm.es/geca) at the Complutense University of Madrid, a pioneer in Spain for incorporating research from Cultural and Gender Studies, including LGBTQ+ Studies, into the audiovisual field. From its inception, Almodóvar's work has been a constant object of study for the group. We also wish to express our gratitude to the long list of reviewers who worked to ensure that the selected texts meet the academic quality demanded by a journal like *Fotocinema*. Many texts had

to be excluded from the selection, often not due to a lack of quality but because they were slightly outside the focus or simply because it was impossible to accommodate the sheer volume of submissions we received. A heartfelt thank you for such enthusiastic reception of this monograph proposal!

As we have consistently stated, the importance of Almodóvar's work (over 45 years of cinematic production) has only grown over the years. Almodóvar's presence on the international cinematic scene is overwhelming, marked by a vast list of international awards, presidencies at top-tier film festivals worldwide, accolades, exhibitions, and showcases globally. Even in countries where his work is not officially shown, his films circulate.

Almodóvar's works have achieved international renown without abandoning their roots or his unique production and directorial methods. This commitment has led him to reject international offers to direct films (both commissioned and more personal projects), remaining faithful to his way of working and understanding his role as a director. In this regard, the synergy between his work and his authorship, and his desire to control all aspects of his audiovisual projects, are particularly noteworthy. Furthermore, he has ventured into producing and directing films in English, but without succumbing to Hollywood's production processes. "El Deseo" is increasingly engaging in international productions, always careful to support emerging young talent in both Spain and Latin America.

As mentioned, academic interest in Almodóvar's work has also grown worldwide. This is evident in the increasing number of doctoral theses, scientific publications, and conferences that focus on Pedro Almodóvar's cinema, both in Spain and internationally. The themes typically addressed in academic approaches to Almodóvar's work are broad, ranging from historiographical to aesthetic questions, from studies on his narrative or scriptwriting to film analysis, from issues of social representation to gender, and encompassing cultural or political problems, among others. All of this is explored using the diverse methodologies prevalent in film and audiovisual studies: textual analysis, semiotics, narratology, sociology, critical content

analysis, gender studies, feminist studies, queer studies, and the entire range of research methodologies in audiovisual communication.

This monograph opens with a text by Jorge Zarauza-Castro and María José Bogas-Ríos on the production company El Deseo. They analyze its evolution, production strategies, and impact since its founding by Pedro and Agustín Almodóvar in 1985. Their findings highlight El Deseo S.A.'s consolidation as a benchmark production company in contemporary cinema, emphasizing its adaptability to industry changes and its increasing involvement in international co-productions.

Andoni Iturbe Tolosa and Itxaso del Castillo Aira provide a bibliometric analysis of articles published between 1987 and 2024 on Pedro Almodóvar's cinema in Scopus. They underscore that Almodóvar is the most present Spanish filmmaker in this database, the thirteenth in film history, and the fifth most examined living filmmaker. For his part, José Gabriel Lorenzo López offers a study of cinematic reflexivity applied to Almodóvar's films featuring film directors, drawing on recent studies by Yacavone, whose discourse incorporates tools proposed by Genette, Kristeva, and Waugh, among other linguists.

José María Galindo Pérez and José Ángel Lázaro López investigate the influence of classic Hollywood on Almodóvar's cinema, focusing on Billy Wilder, Douglas Sirk, and Alfred Hitchcock. The text analyzes the stylistic features of these three directors in relation to the fundamental characteristics of three Almodóvar films (*Broken Embraces*, *The Skin I Live In*, and *I'm So Excited!*), producing a rich reading that confirms how Almodóvar's cinema is indeed born from the influence of classic Hollywood cinema.

The research by Aramis Guerrero Muñoz and Luis Deltell Escolar addresses the representation of patient autonomy in Pedro Almodóvar's filmography, specifically in what could be defined as his "health trilogy": *All About My Mother* (1999), *Talk to Her* (2002), and *The Skin I Live In* (2011). In each of these works, key scenes have been identified that illustrate the evolution of medical authority and its impact on the autonomy of the characters/patients.

This research concludes that Almodóvar uses artistic references as a metaphor for patient autonomy in relation to gender and power dynamics. Meanwhile, Valeriano Durán Manso presents a work on the female characters in Pedro Almodóvar's melodramas, based on the hypothesis that the characters in his melodramas keep objects from their past to keep memories alive. Professor Durán selected a sample of seven melodramas released over three decades: *Dark Habits* (1983), *Law of Desire* (1987), *High Heels* (1991), *The Flower of My Secret* (1995), *All About My Mother* (1999), *Volver* (2006), and *Julieta* (2016).

Josep Lambies and Violeta Kovacsics demonstrate how the double act of Victoria Abril and Bibí Andersen in *High Heels* (1991) is built upon two films in which the two actresses had previously appeared together: *Change of Sex* (Vicente Aranda, 1977) and *The Most Beautiful Night* (Manuel Gutiérrez Aragón, 1984). These prior collaborations permeate Almodóvar's film, enhancing the intertextual nature of his cinema. Meanwhile, Mateo Sancho Cardiel and Néstor Muñoz Torrecilla offer research on the *ars moriendi* in *Matador* (1986) and *The Room Next Door* (2024) from a transgressive perspective, moving away from traditional conceptions of death as a tragic or redemptive event and instead proposing an ambiguous and poetic vision.

Álvaro Navarro Gaviño provides a study on the function of costume and makeup in the construction of the main characters in *Kika* (1993), emphasizing how these elements highlight the subjectivity and internal conflict of each character. Meanwhile, Ana Paula Kwitko and Ludovico Longhi analyze costume as an emotional narrative in *Volver*, highlighting its role in representing the emotional and cultural nuances of the main characters, and Raimunda's attire, whose clothing expresses multiple emotional facets related to her strength, vulnerability, and resilience.

We hope that this selection of ten texts will further enrich the academic perspective on Almodóvar's cinema, be useful for all those who approach its study today, and open new horizons for audiovisual research in Spanish cinema.

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