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### Spanish Cinema and Pedro Almodóvar

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Advisor's Department: Modern Languages & Cultures Advisor's School: Dyson College of Liberal Arts and Sciences This paper examines how Spanish film evolved since the years of Franco's dictatorship to the present. By examining the influence of Franco's censorship on the film industry, this paper will analyze how his censorship affected the changes that took place in cinema after his death by analyzing the films of Pedro Almodóvar.

The first part of this paper focuses on the censorship measures that were put into place by Franco's regime. The paper also examines what genres were popular during Franco's era and how the regime attempted to manipulate the film industry in order to promote its fascist ideology. The paper goes on to discuss several directors who challenged Franco's censorship and the Franco myth, the messages and themes that were promoted by that state in fascist films. How the directors subverted his censorship is also discussed. The paper also analyzes the state of the Spanish film industry both economically and qualitatively by the time of Franco's death in 1975 and how this crisis was brought about as a result of Franco's policies towards the film industry.

The second part of the paper focuses on the transition period (1975-1982) that took place in the Spanish government after Franco's death and how its policies affected the film industry. The paper discusses the new genres that emerged as a result of the end of censorship. The paper also analyzes the cultural movement (la movida madrileña) that took place in Spain as a result of new found freedoms of expression and how this cultural movement translated into film, which was pioneered by the Spanish film director Pedro Almodóvar.

The last part of the paper analyzes the films made by Pedro Almodóvar from the time of la movida madrileña (late 1970s to the 1980s) to the present. This part of the paper focuses on how the cultural movement influenced the style, genres, and themes of

Almodóvar's films and how the style, genres, and themes of his films changed

throughout his career. The paper discusses and compares how his films have evolved

into well-developed, thought out, and conventional films with universal themes during

the 1990s versus the punk rock, exaggerated, unconventional films of the 1980s.

Francisco Franco's Dictatorship: (1939-1975)

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At the end of the Spanish Civil War in 1939, the Spanish dictator Francisco

Franco came to power and ruled Spain with a repressive dictatorship for 36 years. The
repression of freedoms and liberties affected all aspects of life and society, one of which
was Spanish cinema. During Franco's dictatorship strict censorship laws were enforced
which greatly impacted the Spanish film industry economically, culturally, and
qualitatively.

The state used film in order to promote Franco's regime and the state's fascist ideology. The Franco regime's first measure to censor film occurred during the Civil War in 1937. In July 1937, the censorship office Junta Superior de Censura was established in Sevilla and Salamanca (Higginbotham 8). The office required the prior submission of film scripts and the censorship of foreign films in Spain. Because of the requirement for the submission of film scripts, Spanish films became less competitive with foreign films because they were censored before they even started production. As a result, Spanish audiences preferred foreign films because they were less censored. In 1941, the projection of original versions of foreign films was illegal and they had to be dubbed in Spanish studios (8). Regional languages, such as Catalán, were also prohibited in films. In December 1942 No-Do was established. This organization was the state monopoly of news and documentary film.

Censorship affected cinema in three significant aspects: sex, politics, and religion. Sex was not permitted in films and criticism of the Church and the government was not allowed. Violence was also not tolerated in film (Seguin 32).

In order to compete with the preference and popularity of foreign films, a designation of "Películas de interés nacional" was created in 1944 (Higginbotham 8).

This meant that the films whose artistic and technical quality reflected Spanish society, culture, and values received recognition and distribution privileges. The films had to demonstrate racial values or teachings that represented Spanish moral and political principles. As a result of this designation, fascist films were rewarded for representing fascist values of the state (Higginbotham 9).

Some progressive measures were taken by the regime in order to advance the Spanish film industry so that it could compete with foreign film. The Instituto de Investigaciones y Experiencias Cinematográficas (IIEC) was created in 1947 (Higginbotham 9). It was the first national film school of advanced study in Spain. By the end of 1947, dubbing of foreign films was no longer required either. Despite these advancements, Spanish censorship of the film industry prevented new developments in film from entering Spain, or it at least made it very difficult for the Spanish to learn about new developments, such as Italian neorealism (9).

During the first two postwar decades, the major genres of Spanish film were *cine cruzada*, Civil War films, *cine de sacerdotes*, religious films, historical extravaganzas, and folklore musicals (Higginbotham 18). These genres portrayed Spain as it had existed in the past. They promoted the traditional views of the church and Franco's fascist regime. The goal of these genres was to reassure Spaniards that the country's values and institutions had not changed despite the Civil War (18).

War films encouraged the values of Franco and justified the Civil War, as well as encouraged sympathy for Franco's victory. Religious films portrayed priests as admirable people that would give up their lives to defend the moral values of Franco's

regime. Nuns were often represented in films. Films with religious themes were one of the most common genres of postwar cinema (Higginbotham 18-21).

Folklore films were very popular among the lower classes and the undereducated. Most of these films starred flamenco singers and were operettas based on *zarzuelas*, or musical comedies. In the film *La Dolores* (1940) the audience is reinforced with the idea that Spain was protected from change and that unemployment, housing, and food shortages did not exist in Spain's past (Higginbotham 22-23).

In 1951 José María García Escudero was appointed as the head of the Dirección General de Cinematografía y Teatro (Higginbotham 9). He was politically moderate and defended the film *Surcos* (1951), which dealt with the problem of urban migration of the rural poor. The film included scenes of city slums filled with prostitutes and swindlers, filthy rooms, and a woman smoking a cigarette on an unmade bed (Higginbotham 24). He was replaced six months later because the state did not tolerate the portrayal of national problems in film or scenes of such nature (Higginbotham 10).

An event that exposed Spain to outside film industries was an Italian Film Week in Madrid, held by the Institute of Italian Cultures in 1951, which was a major influence in the Spanish film industry (Higginbotham 26). Students at the National Film School were able to screen films that had been prohibited. After this event took place, neorealist ideas began to take root in Spanish film.

Neorealism was a new style that directors used to counteract stereotypes common in film (Higginbotham 26). For the Spanish director Luis García Berlanga, the Italian Film Week was "decisive" for his career. For director Juan Antonio Bardem the week was a turning point in his career where he saw new kinds and styles of films that he

wanted to make. They both collaborated on *Bienvenido*, *Mr. Marshall (Welcome, Mr. Marshall)* (1952), which presented a new perspective of Spain to the public. Instead of praising past military events, the film takes place in a present day small village where the peasants and town council are ordinary people. The characters' behavior is influenced by fear, greed, self-interest, and community and national pride (26). In Bardem's *Muerte de un ciclista (Death of a Cyclist)* (1956), he presents a critical view of Spain's bourgeoisie and included scenes of the destitute living conditions of the poor (26).

Carlos Saura was another director that was influenced by neorealism. In *Los golfos (The Drifters)* (1959), most of the cast did not consist of professional actors. He also suggests that the problems presented in his film are not resolved and do not go away. In keeping with the neorealist tradition, Saura assigned different parts of the script to different writers and used this collaboration as an outline for the action. Most of the scenes were improvised and he shot them on a low budget in lower-class neighborhoods in Madrid (Higginbotham 26-27).

Luis García Berlanga used comedy to challenge Franco's censorship. He criticizes Spanish politics and society with his use of comedy. Berlanga uses chaotic farces, which has a rapid pace of two characters talking at the same time. He refers to this as *barroquismo valenciano* (Valencian baroque) (Higginbotham 43). His satire presents social commentary about women and the abuse of power. Berlanga pushed the button further than any other director of his time in challenging the *franquista* myth of duty, honor, and patriotism that was portrayed in films promoted by the state (Higginbotham 52).

Juan Antonio Bardem is another director of the Franco era who attempted to demystify the Franco myth and criticize his regime. He collaborated with Berlanga on many films. Their first film was *Esa pareja feliz (That Happy Couple)* (1951). He also collaborated with Berlanga on *Bienvenido Mr. Marshall*. Bardem expressed the reality of Spain in his film. Bardem tried to change a film industry that was "politically ineffective, socially false, intellectually infirm, aesthetically crusty and industrially rickety" (Schwartz 16). Most of his films have political criticism. His first film not in collaboration with Berlanga was *Muerte de un ciclista (Death of a Cyclist)* (1955). In this film he wanted to create a "national cinema with love, sincerity and honor" (Schwartz 16).

Buñel was the leader in directing other Spanish directors beyond neorealism, which he viewed as pointless under censorship. Spanish directors wanted to follow the Italian neorealist example of showing postwar life, but direct statements and open critical attitudes were not possible under Franco. Spanish films that were made using the neorealist style were censored, such as Nieves Conde's *Surcos* and Marco Ferreri's *El pisito*. Buñel was a surrealist and felt that neorealism was incomplete. "Reasonable, but poetry, mistery...are completely nonexistent" (Higginbotham 75).

Most of Buñel's films were censored in Spain so they were unknown there for many years (Higginbotham 75). Buñel did what other directors would have liked to have done. He showed Spain's national identity and reality. His influence is the strongest in the work of director Carlos Saura (76).

Carlos Saura started his career using the neorealist style of filming postwar testimony of the misery and manipulations of life under Franco (Higginbotham 77). His

early films were censored, *Los golfos* (The Drifters) (1959) and *La caza* (The Hunt) (1966). Since he could not portray Spanish life in a direct manner, he followed Buñel's example of "surreal documentary" in order to show reality indirectly to challenge the Franco myth. He used metaphorical film images and syntax which censors thought the public would not understand (77).

In *Los golfos*, Saura uses realism to portray Spanish society. In his next film, *Llanto por un bandido* (Lament for a Bandit) (1963), he follows the example of the film industry to portray reality by using historical events and analogy. This film marks the point in Saura's career where he was able to "master the censor's own game" (Higginbotahm 79). In his next film, *La caza*, Saura creates his own political metaphors. The film is a war allegory and the central theme is a hunt (79). The film is filled with an atmosphere of warfare which is portrayed by the hunting and fighting which leads to killing and slaughter. This film and these events represent the cruelty and terror of people's lives during the Franco regime (81).

During the 1960s economic problems forced cultural change in Spain, which meant change in the film industry. Spain tried to join the European Common Market in 1962, so they added new bodies to the government (Higginbotham 12). One of them was García Escudero, who was renamed the director of the Dirección General de Cinematografía y Teatro (12). His censorship is not considered conservative or liberal; it is considered *aperturista* because of its openness towards Western attitudes and customs.

García Escudero created the first major change in censorship in 1963. He updated the censorship codes, called the Regalmiento de la Rama de Censura de Clasificación y Censura, although he met a lot of attack and opposition from both sides (Higginbotham

61). He suggested that the criteria for censorship should be written out. A list of prohibited topics was published, the "Normas Cinematográficas," and this list included divorce, abortion, euthanasia, birth control, and ideas justifying adultery, prostitution, and illicit sexual behavior (Higginbotham 12). A film could not be banned just because it offended military, religious, or political groups. Six years later, García Escudero was replaced by Sánchez Bella, who ended the apertura in film (13).

In order gain more recognition at international film festivals, a new official committee was selected in 1960 to choose films that represented Spain at film festivals (Higginbotham 11). José Luis Sáenz de Heredia, a Falangist, was the head of the committee, but directors and other film professionals like Juan Antonio Bardem were on the committee as well. Carlos Saura's *Los golfos* won international recognition at the Cannes Film Festival as a result of this move (11).

Buñel's *Viridiana* won the Palme d' Ore at Cannes in 1961 and this success attracted more international ridicule on Spanish censorship (Higginbotham 12). The conservative Catholic *L'Osservatore Romano* loved the film, but Italian Catholics were offended by the scene that parodied the Last Supper because it was a shot of drunk beggars and jokes about Catholic dogma. They were also offended by the final scene, which ended with Viridiana, Jorge, and the maid playing cards at the table. They interpreted this scene to be a ménage a trois between the characters. The Spanish government was embarrassed by this and prohibited the showing of the film as well as the mention of the film in the press. The film was not seen in Spain for another sixteen years (12).

During the 1970s the quality of Spanish film declined. The government owed producers three hundred million pesetas in back payment for subsidies (Higginbotham 67). The subsidies came from fees for dubbing foreign films on TV and in cinema and for subtitling permits.

In February 1975, nine months before Franco died three changes took place in the censorship code. The language of the code was changed into a more permissive statement, divorce was no longer a prohibited topic, and nudity was allowed as long as it was required for the entire function and unity of the film (Higginbotham 14).

#### Transition Period: 1975-1982

After Franco's death free elections were held on June 15, 1977 (Higginbotham 126). Censorship laws were abolished in November 1977. Even though censorship was abolished it did not disappear. Topics such as the military justice and the monarchy were still "untouchable" (126). Films that were never publicly released could be seen for the first time (121). The prior submission of scripts was no longer required for Spanish films but it was still required for foreign films shot in Spain. The prohibition of specific themes and eroticism was abolished in 1976 (15).

Films that covered the Civil War were released the year Franco died. One film that was prohibited during Franco's regime because it presents the war in a nostalgic manner was Basilio Martin Patino's *Canciones para despues de una Guerra* (Postwar Songs) (1971). *Canciones* was one of the first models of films that discuss the Civil War. Other films that discussed the war used film interviews as the foundation for their films, such as *La vieja memoria* (*The Long Memory*), directed by Jaime Camino and *El desencanto* (*Disillusion*) Jaime Chavarri, both shot in 1976 (Higginbotham 125).

Documentaries were new to postwar Spanish directors because they were prohibited from making controversial topics during Franco's regime. Since censorship was abolished directors were able to make their own documentaries with interviews or footage from outside of Spain or they could make a fictional story of historical events. This was a way to show the collective memory of Spain's past. Most directors continued to follow Saura's example of the film metaphor to get their message across even though it was no longer necessary during the transition period (Higginbotham 125).

Saura's methaphorical film style that he and others used during the postwar period was a type of insurance for directors who were still unsure or distrustful of the transitional government. Ambiguity was the language used in political films during the transition period (Higginbotham 128).

The transition period ended with the election of socialist prime minister Felipe González in July 1982 (Higginbotham 132). This period was filled with directors gathering memoirs from interviews and foreign war footage that opened up public discussion and debate about the past.

Pilar Miró was named director of the Departemento de Cinematografía y Teatro in 1984 (Higginbotham 127). In order to revitalize the film industry and put it back on its feet the Ley Miró was passed: Real Decreto para la Protección de la Cinematografía española (BOE, 12-I-1984) (Caparrós Lera 57). The law was passed in order to protect art and other forms of culture in Spain. The government gave money to new directors for the production of new films in order to create a cinema of better quality. The law also required a quota for the number of Spanish films produced in order to protect the film

industry. The production of films fell in the 1980s but the quality of films improved (Seguin 76).

#### La movida madrileña

After Franco's death a cultural revolution took place from the late 1970s into the 1980s among the youth. The new democracy meant a break with repressive social norms and regulations (Allinson 13). A new pop culture emerged with roots in 1960s New York underground and 1970s punk (Jordan and Morgan-Tamosunas 81). This movement mainly took place in Spain's capital, Madrid. It has been called la movida madrileña. This new pop culture took its shape in music, fashion, art, design, photography, and film. The youth rebelled against the repressive dictatorship of Franco through exploring alternative identities, sexualities, drugs, and experimentation and pursuit of pleasure (81). Pedro Almodóvar is one of the directors that not only emerged from this movement but captures this movement in his early film career.

After Franco's death, traditional ideas of order, nation, patriarchy, family, machismo, and gender roles were being questioned in many films (Jordan and Morgan-Tamosunas 84). Almodóvar is the one director of this time period who is known for challenging these values, especially sex and gender roles. Lesbian and gay identities were a focus point of his films. He challenges traditional morals, values, and sex and gender roles with the pursuit of pleasure and experimentation with sexual identities. Conventional social structures and patterns of behavior are challenged and they are mocked and replaced with alternative lifestyles and relationships (115).

Almodóvar uses characters that represent Madrid during the 1980s and the mentality and behavior that existed then (Kinder 42). He states that the moral of his films

is "to get to a stage of greater freedom" (54). He describes his films as denying the memory of Franco by creating a world where the disenfranchised are in control of their destiny (Russo 64). In his early films there is no representation of Franco, the past, or the Civil War, only the rejection of this past and the representation of present society (Rouyer and Vié 71).

#### Pedro Almodóvar

Almodóvar wanted to challenge the sexual and cinematic taboos, scandalize and offend the mainly heterosexual audience, and promote the pursuit of pleasure and freedom of expression in his first three full length feature films *Pepi, Luci, Bom y otras chicas del montón* (Pepi, Luci, Bom, and Other Girls on the Heap) (1980), *Laberinto de pasiones* (Labyrinth of Passions) (1982) and *Entre tinieblas* (Dark Habits) (1983) (Jordan and Morgan-Tamosunas 83).

After he made ¿Qué he hecho yo para merecer esto? (What Have I Done to Deserve This?) (1984) his film style changed and many of his movies fell under the genre of melodrama and stylized thriller, such as Matador (1986), La ley de deseo (Law of Desire) (1987), and Mujeres al borde de un ataque de nervios (Women of the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown) (1988) (Jordan and Morgan-Tamosunas 83). The film that marks his change in the style, genre, and themes of his films is La flor de mi secreto (The Flower of My Secret) (1995), which no longer focuses on hedonism and the pursuit of pleasure. It is a more serious film which focuses on the life of a middle-aged woman who is dealing with a failed marriage and mid-life crisis (Jordan and Morgan-Tamosunas 83-84 and 117).

Pedro Almodóvar's first full length feature film is *Pepi, Luci, Bom y otras chicas del montón* (1980). In the film, Almodóvar wants to portray Madrid's society as it was during the late 1970s and early 1980s. He portrays alternative lifestyles, sexual experimentation, and the punk rock scene that was taking place among the youth. He creates a comedic effect through the conflict of scenes of domesticity (the knitting scene) and perverse sexual practices (the urination scene) (Jordan and Morgan-Tamosunas 82). This film represents a break with the social, cultural, and moral values of Franco's Spain.

The film is about a middle-aged housewife who leaves her husband and engages in a lesbian relationship with a 16 year-old girl. Pepi is raped by a policeman, who happens to be her neighbor and the husband of the middle-aged housewife. Pepi wants to get revenge by encouraging Luci, the housewife, to leave her husband. She engages in a lesbian relationship with Bom, a 16 year-old girl who is a singer in a punk rock band. They have a sadomasochist relationship, which starts when they meet in a knitting class. In one of the scenes Bom urinates on Luci, which gives her sexual satisfaction. Almodóvar incorporated this scene in order to scandalize the audience and create a break with the social norms of society and of film (Torres 13). In the end Luci goes back to her husband instead of staying with Bom because he beats her, which she enjoys, so she wants to go back to him in hopes of getting this kind of sexual pleasure from him. In the film Almodóvar wants to portray women as controllers of their destiny and show that it is a film about strong and vulnerable human beings who experience passion, suffering, love, and the enjoyment of a good time (Vidal 36).

The representation of female relationships in this film is a trait that he carries throughout his film career. Pedro Almodóvar has come to be known as a 'women's

director' (Jordan and Morgan-Tamosunas 115). He has a positive representation of female relationships and support networks in his films and he represents female protagonists in a positive manner versus a critical portrayal of men (115).

In *Pepi, Luci, Bom y otras chicas del monton* Almodóvar was interested in representing female behavior, which is characteristic in almost all of his films (Francia and Pérez Perucha 5). He states in an interview that he wanted to make a movie about "autonomous women, owners of their bodies and minds, who do without men, who make use of them" (6). He did not want to make a feminist film, but a film that is "outside of morality" (6). One of the main themes is friendship, and he wanted to portray the theme of female friendship between Pepi, Luci, and Bom (Vidal 32).

Almodóvar has stated that the reason his films focus on the relationships of women is because he is more fascinated by their relationships than those of men. "The show that goes on between girlfriends when they are in the bathroom together, talking about female things, is a situation I love" (Vidal 33). He likes to watch women talk and gossip with each other. He says that he is not only interested in their gossip, but in all aspects of their lives (34).

Laberinto de pasiones (1982) is another film that represents la movida and Madrid during the 1980s. The film represents a "glorification of Madrid" (Vidal 39). Almodóvar's message in the film is that "Madrid is the best of the best" (39).

The film is a spoof comedy with many characters and much action (Vidal 40). It's a pop film and it's a parody of films about teenage love. In addition to being a spoof comedy, the film focuses on the difficulties of love relationships, such as with the relationship between the two nymphomaniacs (40).

A group of young madrileños are trying to escape their repressive fathers to pursue their own pleasures (Kinder 42). Riza Niro is the bisexual son of the "emperor of Tehran." He is more interested in sex and cosmetics than in his family or politics. He leaves his father and stepmother and becomes a punk rock singer in Madrid. He eventually tries to escape with Sexilia, a nymphomaniac who is part of a feminist punk rock band called "Las Ex." She is also the daughter of a sex-loathing gynecologist and she is driven to sexual promiscuity as a result of her father's scientific detachment (43). Riza and Sexilia are pursued by jealous punks and Islamic fundamentalists as they try to escape together. One of the Islamic fundamentalists, played by Antonio Banderas, is in love with Riza.

Queti, another female character, is a laundress who is raped by her father. He mistakes his daughter for her mother who left years ago. She gives her father drugs to attempt to make him impotent, but they fail to work. She also gets plastic surgery to be Sexilia's replacement on stage.

The relationship between Queti and her father has elements of sadomasochism but this is not the intention of Almodóvar. In an interview he states that he finds the visualization of those practices sickening (Vidal 50). He explains that the reason Queti is tied to the bed is because her father loses control. He states that he ties her up for practical reasons because she does not want to stay tied to the bed and does not hold still (50). He states that the sadomasochism in his characters is based on practical reasons (52).

He explains that in *Pepi, Luci, Bom y otras chicas del monton* the relationship between Luci and Bom is based on comic-type violence and not on sadomasochism. His

people are based on a contract that allows the couple to function (Vidal 52). With Luci the contract is based on violence, although she is not being victimized. She enjoys the pain and the violence inflicted on her, she recognizes the pain and controls it, and therefore prevents her from becoming a victim (52).

Almodóvar said that the reason behind the name of the film is because there is a lot of passion and characters in the film and they develop and relate to each other through a labyrinth (Vidal 56). The reason for so many characters was to create a feeling of madness, speed, and weirdness (55).

Pepi, Luci, Bom y otras chicas del monton and Laberinto de pasiones were pop films and were both comedies. Entre tinieblas has a change in tone. In Entre tinieblas (1983) the display of human emotion plays a much more important role, such as with the use of boleros (Vidal 59). Emotions are expressed openly, they play an important role in the storyline, and the characters are motivated by their feelings. The narrative is more relaxed than the first two and it is much more thought out (Llauradó 21). It is a melodrama with a bit of humor, but it is less wacky than the first two (23).

Almodóvar states that this film fits into the melodrama genre. The source of inspiration for the characters is love. It is a force that drives them to do unexpected things without caring about if they are sublime or wrong (Vidal 65). Passion is what drives them, morality plays no role in their actions.

There is also less action than in the first two films and everything takes place in a small, confined space (Vidal 59-60). The storyline is slower paced and the narration is much more detailed (60). Almodóvar wanted to create a kind of melodrama but at the

same time portray a feminine universe that is defined and limited by the parameters of the convent (Rouyer and Vié 73). At the same time he wanted to create a film where the women are free and autonomous beings where the reason for their lives in the convent is of secondary importance to their passion and desire. He also wanted to create an irrational love story where the heroin always does unusual and unexpected things (73).

In this film, although the story focuses on the lives of nuns living in a convent, the story also focuses on the absence of religion. God does not inspire their religious feelings. The nuns are no longer concerned with their gospel mission. They are devoted to their own lives. They have become closer to their own natures and farther away from God (Vidal 61).

Mother Superior is the only one who has not forgotten her mission. Everything that she does is a result of her love for the girl who comes to the convent, Yolanda. Almodóvar states that this is how religion is portrayed in the film. He states that it is not an attack on religious institutions or the Catholic Church; it is just a film about the community of women and their emotional ties and their relationships with each other (Vidal 62).

The movie displays the autonomy of a group of women who confront an established order (Vidal 72). Each character is involved with delinquent behavior. Mother Superior is involved through love and sex and Sister Rata de Callejón plays the role of a friend and confidante (Vidal 73). She writes novels about the stories others tell her and creates romance novels about them. Sister Perdida is the housewife. She takes care of the pet tiger, the birds, hens, and rabbits. She also tries to keep the place clean even though it is falling apart. Although her role is like that of a housewife, she

represents an independent housewife because she chooses to take on that role, it is not forced upon her (Vidal 74).

Sister Víbora is only interested in fashion and she is concerned about the Catholic Church's view on fashion (Vidal 77). She wants to change the vestments on the statues of the saints. The priest plays the role of a secondary character. He is not a dominating character so that the story maintains its focus on the story of the women. He is in love with Sister Víbora and he starts to sew with her and show an interest in fashion in order to be with her. The scene in the sacristy where they are talking about *My Fair Lady* and Cecil Beaton and his designs is a dialogue about love, not about fashion (Vidal 78).

In many of his films, including this one, the characters speak to each other in a very uninhibited manner. Mother Superior talks to Mother General while she snorts a line of cocaine (Vidal 80-81).

The character Yolanda escapes to the convent because she is running away from the police as the result of the accidental death of her boyfriend from a drug overdose. She is also a drug addict, drinks heavily, and deals with cold turkey withdrawal symptoms from heroin (Vidal 66). Mother Superior is a drug addict who falls in love with Yolanda although Yolanda does not love her back (66).

Mother Superior gives everything that she has to Yolanda and is willing to do whatever Yolanda wants of her. Yolanda wants to break with her past and break herself away from Mother Superior. Yolanda tries to live a healthy lifestyle, get rid of her drug habits, and get rid of Mother Superior. The main reason why she makes these changes is that she wants to reject Mother Superior's love (Vidal 70).

Drugs in the film form an integral part of it, but they show that they form a part of everyday life (Vidal 70). Mother Superior's withdrawal does not have anything to do with physical symptoms. She feels the abandonment by the other girls and she does not eat, drink, or do anything as a result of the abandonment (Vidal 71). She is tortured because Yolanda is gone. She mixes Yolanda's absence with God's absence. She cannot talk to Yolanda about her problems, so she tries to talk to God but she cannot. This is where she experiences her true separation from God because the Church has always been her refuge, but she can no longer go to it for help and refuge (71).

In ¿Qué he hecho yo para merecer esto? (1984) Almodóvar diverts from the use of the punk rock scene going on in Madrid, experimentation with drugs, and the experimentation with sexual identities. Instead the film focuses on the struggle of a suburban housewife. He describes the film as more of a neo-realist film than a melodrama but he also adds humor to it (Kinder 48).

The main theme and focal point of this film is mothers and the role of mothers, which is why Almodóvar's mother plays the role of the grandmother's friend (Vidal 99). The film includes social commentary on the role of housewives (100). Almodóvar shows the struggle and torment of everyday life for a housewife. The female protagonist, Gloria, works as a maid to support her family. Her husband is a taxi driver, he is obsessed with a suicidal German singer, and he is involved with a plot to forge Hitler's memoirs. She has two teenage sons, one of which is a heroin dealer and the younger twelve-year old son is a homosexual who is "adopted" by his dentist. The mother-in-law longs for her pet lizard and home village. She also has very needy neighbors. One of which is a hooker who wants to go to Las Vegas and a mother who abuses her daughter.

Almodóvar wanted to tell a story of a family with a certain social status and problems of survival (Vidal 101). He presents the housewife with strengths and weaknesses. She is the heroin of the film and her deficiencies are the result of the surroundings of her life. "She is her own victim" (102). He wanted to portray a woman with a lot of pent-up aggression, surrounded by men, and with a ton of frustration. She is the character who is stuck in the position of cleaning up after everyone else (Vidal 118).

Gloria has frustrating sexual relations. She never gets any pleasure; neither from her husband nor from anyone else. She can never achieve an orgasm (Vidal 125). She becomes a machine. She never knows what's going on around her and she does not notice anything or think about herself or anyone else (125). She is liberated when she says goodbye to the grandmother and to her son when they leave to go live in the village and after she kills her husband because she no longer has to deal with or look after anyone anymore (125). The worst part of her life is that she has never been able to lead her own life, but once her family is gone she is free and can live the life that she wants (125). The only downfall is that she does not want to live anymore. She thinks that her life is pointless and as she is contemplating jumping from the balcony her youngest son comes back home and she decides that she wants to live because he brings meaning to her life (125).

Matador (1986) was a very different film from the previous four that Almodóvar had made. The film centers on death and the enjoyment of killing. The message of the movie is about the coming together of two beings from the same species, an eclipse (Vidal 138). The two main characters that form this eclipse, María, a lawyer, and Diego, a bullfighting instructor, enjoy killing and death is part of their pleasure (139). The film

is about physical pleasure and the art of achieving it. The film is a story about death in which everyone kills with desire (143).

The film is a psychological thriller with extravagant costumes, lush visuals, and erotic fantasy (Kinder 44). Diego Montes used to be a bullfighter, but since he was gored by a bull and can no longer fight, he has resulted to teaching the art of the kill. In order to fulfill his pleasure of the kill he kills.

From the beginning of the movie the audience is made aware of the fact that Diego gets pleasure from seeing women suffer violently as it opens with a scene of him masturbating to a porno video of women being killed (Vidal 142). The scene transitions into a scene of him explaining the art of the kill to his students. As he explains the art of the kill Maria carries out this activity.

The film reflects the art and sequence of bullfighting. The two characters convey the moment of the kill and the preamble, the passes, and the risks in their behavior (Vidal 140). The two characters roles are interchangeable. At one point María is the bullfighter and then Diego takes on the role of the bullfighter. María usually takes the initiative in committing crimes and is the driving force of their behavior (140). María begins to fall in love with Diego and they finally pursue their destiny with each other as the final scene ends with the two of them making love to each other. As the eclipse occurs María kills Diego and then kills herself. They both die with smiles on their faces as the two beings, or eclipses, come together just as the eclipse occurs (Kinder 44).

Guilt is another important theme in *Matador*. Angel, one of the pupils, is driven by guilt. Angel goes into the police station and confesses to a rape he committed against Eva, Diego's girlfriend. He needs to feel punishment (Vidal 148). He is innocent but

wants to be accused. This feeling of guilt has been instilled in him by his mother. His mother is a monster. She's a fanatic of Opus Dei (150). Because of the guilt that Angel's mother has drilled in him, he begins to feel like he needs to commit a crime so that people believe that he is guilty of something and punish him for it (Vidal 159). He also has the ability to envision death and the murders committed by Diego and María. Angel brings the police to the sight where the corpses are in order to accuse himself of the murders and show that he's guilty (160).

With this psychic ability Angel envisions the murders of Diego and María. Angel gets a bad feeling about the eclipse that is going to occur and can sense where Diego and María are going. He guides Eva and the police inspector to where they are in order to try and stop the murders, but once they arrive it is too late and they discover Diego and María dead with smiles on their faces.

La ley de deseo (1987) takes place in Madrid, but almost all of it takes place at night, which is very different from his previous films. Almodóvar wanted Madrid to be the recipient of the stories and passions of all of the characters, which connects with the heat and sweat of the city during the summer (Vidal 175). This film is about a triangle of desire and passion. "La ley de deseo is a hyper-realist drama with black humor and passions that turn red with the sweltering heat of the Madrid summer. It signifies a return to the eternal themes of romanticism and love" (175). This is also his first film in which there is a central focus on the homosexual relationship of the characters (Jordan and Morgan-Tamosunas 126).

The film is a melodrama but it does not abide by the conventions of the genre.

There is music, emotions, but no Manichaeism, which is one of the conditions for a

melodrama (Vidal 196). It is the most polished, though out, and most restrained film that he had made at this point in his career. Carmen Maura's character Tina represents the excess in the film, as she plays a transsexual, and everything else is toned down (207).

The film is about two brothers, Pablo and Tina. Pablo is a homosexual screenwriter/director who is in love with a bisexual man named Juan. Antonio, another male character, has his first homosexual experience with Pablo and turns into his possessive lover. He is jealous of Juan, who Pablo is in love with. Antonio ends up killing Juan because of his possessive jealousy for Pablo.

Antonio seduces Tina and holds her hostage in order to have a final hour of love with Pablo. Antonio is so obsessed with Pablo that he is willing to lose his life in order for one hour alone with him, and he ends up killing himself (Russo 68).

Tina, a transsexual actress who was loved and abandoned by her father now hates men. She confesses to Pablo about the relationship she had with her father and how she committed incest and changed her sex so she could be with her father (Kinder 51). She lives with a lesbian model that deserts her and her ten-year-old daughter Ada who Tina takes under her wing.

There is more sex in this movie than in his previous films, but the film is about desire, and sex is used to explain Antonio's behavior and ideas (Vidal 176). Almodóvar explains that the sex scenes are used as songs because the story has to continually keep moving. Pablo needs to feel desired. He is desired but he's desired by someone that he does not love and he desires someone who cannot desire him (179).

Almodóvar's next film, *Mujeres al borde de un ataque de nervios* (1988), was written without any fixed structure. The films focal point is a female monologue in

which there is a woman on the edge of losing her mind (Vidal 219). The idea for this film was inspired by Cocteau's *The Human Voice* (220). He describes the idea of this film as coming from his protest against the telephone because of the time he spent working at Telefonica when he first moved to Madrid and starting making movies in the 1970s (Vidal 221). Carmen Maura's character Pepa says that she is going to start a new life where there is no telephone. She throws the phone out of the window multiple times out of the anger and frustration of missing her husband's call. Almodóvar keeps the situation of an abandoned woman and the absence of a man from the original play, but she does not wait around for her husband to call. She constantly calls home to see if there are messages for her (222).

The three main female characters, Pepa, Lucía, and Candela have all been abandoned in some way (Vidal 223). Lucía was abandoned by her lover twenty years ago and Pepa is dealing with a broken relationship with her lover, who happens to be Lucía's ex-lover. Candela's situation is not related to Pepa or Lucía. She was abandoned by a man she recently met who just wanted to take advantage of her (223). Paulina is the fourth female character who is a feminist lawyer.

Lucía wants her lover to come back once she has finished psychiatric treatment, but he left her for Pepa. She wants to sue him for damages because she spent the last twenty years in a mental hospital. The lawyer contacts Ivan, the lover, and the two engage in a relationship together (Vidal 225). Carlos, Ivan's son, is connected to all of the characters in the film. He is Lucía's son, Pepa's friend, falls in love with Candela, his girlfriend is Marisa, and he knows the lawyer, Paulina (225).

Both Lucía and Pepa are looking for Ivan, but Lucía is out to kill him because she says that is the only way that she can forget him and live in peace. Lucía's madness originates from being fixed on the idea of waiting for Ivan to come back and never letting go of it. She becomes so obsessive about it that she cannot see anything else around her. Time has stopped in her world, which is represented through her sixties-style clothes (Vidal 230).

Pepa has spent the last two days trying to get in contact with Ivan because she has something to tell him. When she finds him in the airport she saves him from being shot by Lucía and decides not to tell him what she had been planning to tell him all along. She realizes that the anguish of waiting becomes obsessive, like what happened to Lucía. Once she realizes this, her anguish, desire, and need all dissolve, which is why she does not say anything to Ivan. In the end she ends up telling the person that she knows the least her secret, "her great problem which has kept her on the edge of a nervous breakdown for forty-eight hours" (Vidal 231).

#### A Change in Almodóvar

After 1995 Almodóvar changed the style of his films. He still maintained the subversive use of melodrama but also used a mix of realism and artifice (Mackenzie 160). There is more emotional control in his films and his vision is much gentler (160). *Carne tremula* (Live Flesh) (1997) ends with the birth of a child and *Todo sobre mi madre* (All About My Mother) (1999) ends with the survival and recovery of a child who has HIV (161).

La flor de mi secreto (1995) is the film that marks this change. He diverts away from the display of the hedonistic pursuit of pleasure and creates a film that focuses on

the pain and growth process of the marital, friendship, and familial problems of a woman (Torres 113). The movie starts off with a scene in which the woman, Leo, cannot take off the boots that she is wearing. It is not because they are too tight but because her husband, who used to take them off for her, is no longer there (114).

Leo is a writer of romantic best-selling novels. Her husband Paco is evasive, cruel, and left her to go work with the peacekeeping forces with NATO. Her friend Sue has been having an affair with him for years. Her mother and sister are too involved with themselves and their own problems to give any time and consideration to Leo. The theme of the film is about romance and obsessive love but it is much more subdued than in previous films (Noh 119). The film deals with uncertainty. It's about the emotional state of uncertainty when you do not know if someone loves you, which is the emotional state of Leo (Noh 120).

Todo sobre mi madre (1999) is about women who spend their lives struggling through difficult situations. The film focuses on Manuela, a single mother who left the transvestite father of her son when she was pregnant. She loses her son Esteban when he is hit by a car on his seventeenth birthday after they go see the play A Streetcar Named Desire. He never had the chance to meet his father.

Manuela spends her life running away from her problems (Montano 137). She runs away from the father of her son, who lives in Barcelona, and moves to Madrid to raise her son. When her son dies she returns to Barcelona to run away from the memory of her son (Altares 148). She decides to find the father, Lola, and tell him that they had a son because of her son's desire to meet his father.

This film represents a different type of family. He describes family as the people around you who help you deal with the problems and trivialities of everyday life (Vidal 188). The film does not present the traditional idea of a family where there is a mother and father who live with their biological children. The father is a transvestite who has two sons, one of which is with a nun. It is not the traditional or conventional idea of family. It was very important to Almodóvar that the audience sees this family because he states that families take on very many different shapes and forms and are no longer made up of the traditional family from the village (Altares 150). "To establish a family can mean for two women or two men to adopt a child. Or for a mother to have a child for her daughter" (Altares 151). Manuela forms a new family with Rosa, a nun that she takes care of while she is in Barcelona. Rosa is pregnant with Lola's child and Manuela takes care of the child after his mother dies, who is HIV positive. This film does not present the conventional ideal of a family, but a family is created through the women and their help and support for one another.

The most important theme in this film is the struggle, unity, and relationships of women. The women in the film struggle through many different obstacles in life, such as Manuela with the loss of her son, Rosa with her pregnancy and the possibility of transmitting HIV to her son, and Agrado, Manuela's friend, who deals with the life on the street as a transsexual prostitute. Manuela takes care of Rosa while she is pregnant and also cares for Agrado. The women demonstrate the intimate relationships that exist between women and the unity and strength that women have in caring for and looking after one another.

La mala educación (Bad Education) (2004) was the first film of its kind for Almodóvar. This is the first film in which he does not focus on the feminine universe and where female characters do not play a dominant role in the film. The film is about the homosexual relationship between two boys who grew up going to Catholic school together. The film was influenced by Almodóvar's childhood experiences going to Catholic school. The film is a reflection of his early life in many ways.

He says that when he was in school about 80 percent of the boys were sexually abused by priests (Mackenzie 159). He said that they would run down the dark corridors to get away from the priests. The priests would force him to kiss them as a greeting even though he would refuse. He says that his refuge was music and that he sang in the choir. He was described as having a lovely voice (159).

In the film two young boys, Ignacio and Enrique, meet at the Catholic school they both attend. The two boys fall in love but Ignacio is abused by the priest. He is also in the choir and has a very sweet and lovely voice, a reflection of Almodóvar. The priests that abuses Ignacio discovers their relationship and sends Enrique home in order to separate the two.

Later on, when the boys are young adults, they reunite when Juan (Ignacio's brother dressed up as Ignacio) presents Enrique with a script that he wrote about their lives when they were younger. Another reflection of Almodóvar in the film. Ignacio is killed by Juan and Manolo, the priest from his past, who develop a relationship with each other. Enrique was aware the whole time that Juan was pretending to be Ignacio, but he did not know that Juan killed Ignacio until Manolo told him.

#### Conclusion

Pedro Almodóvar's films have undergone significant changes from the beginning of his film career to the present. His first films, *Pepi Luci, Bom y otras chicas del monton, Laberitno de pasiones*, and *Entre tinieblas*, deal with the punk rock scene in Madrid at the time the films were made, the pursuit of pleasure, experimentation with drugs, experimentation with sexual identities, lesbian relationships, the feminine universe, and everything unconventional that broke with the social norms of Franco's Spain. His first two films mainly just dealt with portraying the punk rock scene and the cultural movement that was going on in Madrid in the late 1970s and the 1980s. With *Entre tinieblas* he creates a more well-developed and thought out plot that tells a story, but at the same time still incorporates the elements of sexual and drug experimentation in. He masters his break with social norms by having the story take place inside of a convent with a bunch of nuns who live together. Almodóvar also delves into the female universe with these films and really establishes himself as a women's director concerned with themes about female lives and relationships.

¿Qué he hecho yo para merecer esto? continues to delve into the feminine universe by showing the struggle of women, especially mother's and housewives. With this film he begins to show social commentary about society, especially about the role of women, which was never allowed during Franco's era. Even though this film does not center on the punk rock scene and the cultural movement going on in Madrid, it continues to demonstrate Almodóvar's break with social norms and rebellion against the repression of Franco because critical or realistic depictions of society were not allowed under his fascist regime.

His later films, *Matador* and *La ley de deseo* continue to display Almodóvar's interest in the pursuit of pleasure and desire. They still incorporate elements that break with the social norms of Franco's Spain, such as killing for pleasure, transsexuals, incestuous relationships with one's father, and so on, but these films have a more well thought out and developed plot and storyline than his first films. These films tell stories about the love, desire, and revenge that exists between people.

With *Mujeres al borde un ataque de nervios* Almodóvar continues to portray the female world with the anguish and abandonment of women. This film does not delve into the pursuit of pleasure, desire, or sexual experimentation like his other films, which marks the beginning stages of his change in film.

The mid-nineties are when Almodóvar really begins to change the focus, style, and themes of his film. They no longer incorporate the elements of sexual desire or pursuit of pleasure. His films focus on the emotions and relationships between people. They have more universal themes that a wider audience can relate to. He still does contain some elements that may seem a bit unconventional, such as the character of a transvestite father in *Todo sobre mi madre*, but the use of these elements and storylines are for the purpose of the message of his films. They are no longer used to rebel against the repression of Franco and to break with social norms.

He continues to portray the feminine universe with *La flor de mi secreto* and *Todo sobre mi madre* by portraying the struggle and relationship problems that women have. *La mala educación* marks a shift in Almodóvar films because he does not delve into the female universe; he concentrates on the male universe in order to tell a story about the abuse and love that exists between men. *La mala educación* was not made as a challenge

and rebellion against the social norms of society. The film tells a love story that exists between men.

Almodóvar's current films are no longer pushing the limit to break with the social norms of Franco's Spain. It is true they still may contain characters, elements, or subplots that may seem unconventional, but the use of them is not as a rebellion against society. They are integrated into the story as a whole and are part of the larger picture of the film in order to tell a story about love, struggle, abuse, relationship problems, and everything else that people experience in their personal lives.

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