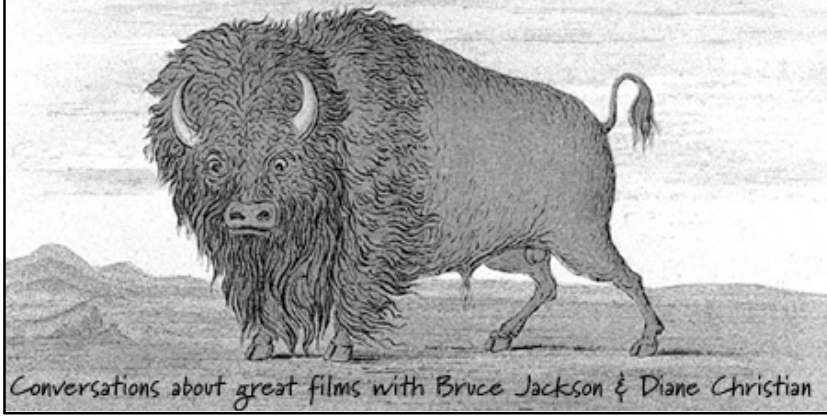


# The Buffalo Film Seminars



**HABLE CON ELLA/TALK TO HER** 2002 112min.

Javier Cámara....Benigno Martín  
Darío Grandinetti....Marco Zuluaga  
Leonor Watling....Alicia  
Rosario Flores....Lydia González  
Geraldine Chaplin....Katerina Bilova  
Mariola Fuentes....Rosa  
Roberto Álvarez....Doctor  
Adolfo Fernández....Niño de Valencia  
Fele Martínez....Alfredo  
Paz Vega....Amparo  
Elena Anaya....Ángela  
Lola Dueñas....Matilde  
Ana Fernández....Lydia's Sister  
Chus Lampreave....Concierge  
Loles León....TV Presenter  
Helio Pedregal....Alicia's Father  
Joserra Cadiñanos....Hospital Director  
Pina Bausch....Herself  
Malou Airaudó....Herself  
Caetano Veloso....Himself

Directed by Pedro Almodóvar

Written by Pedro Almodóvar

Produced by Agustín Almodóvar

Original Music by Alberto Iglesias

Non-Original Music by Antonio Carlos Jobim (song "Por Toda Minha Vida"), Henry Purcell (aria "O Let Me Weep, For Ever Weep" from opera "The Fairy Queen"), Caetano Veloso (song "Cucurricucú Paloma")

Cinematography by Javier Aguirresarobe

Film Editing by José Salcedo

Production Companies El Deseo S.A., Antena 3 Televisión, Good Machine, Vía Digital

**PEDRO ALMODÓVAR** (25 September 1951, Calzada de Calatrava, Ciudad Real, Castilla-La Mancha, Spain) Biography from Leonard Maltin's *Movie Encyclopedia*: "One of the most original writer-directors to emerge during the 1980s, Almodovar has been called 'Godard with a human face—a happy face.' While working for Madrid's National Telephone Company in the 1970s, he became a member of the city's pop subculture, making raunchy 8mm films, acting in avant-garde theater groups, and performing in drag in a punk-rock band. His first features—*Pepi, Luci, Bom* and *Other Girls On The Heap* (1980), and *Labyrinth of Passions* (1981) were extensions of his underground tastes and became cult hits, but *Dark Habits* (1984), about an order of delinquent nuns, gained serious international attention. Almodovar's popularity increased with *What Have I Done to Deserve This?* (1985), *Matador* (1986), and *Law of Desire* (1987), which established his style of melodrama, comedy, and kitsch that frequently flouted conventions of taste. *Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown* (1988), a more subdued and conventional but still distinctive comedy, became a worldwide hit and was nominated for a Best Foreign Film Oscar. The controversial *Iain Tie Me Up! Tie Me Down!* (1990), *High Heels* (1991), and *Kika* (1993) show Almodovar's creative energy running full speed." His more recent films are *Todo sobre mi madre* (*All About My Mother*, 1999), *Carne trémula* (*Live Flesh*, 1997), *La Flor de mi secreto* (*The Flower of My Secret*, 1995).



**CAETANO VELOSO** (7 August 1942, Santa Amaro de Purificação, Bahia, Brazil) says Online NewsHour, “has been called the Bob Dylan of Brazil -- a popular musician who has made staggering artistic and intellectual contributions to his country. The New York Times recently dubbed him ‘Brazil’s unofficial poet laureate.’” The Iceberg.Com says: Veloso has been compared at times to Bob Dylan, John Lennon and Bob Marley - another way of saying he is a cultural icon who has managed to be both a traditionalist and a rebel, often at the same time. In the course of more than 30 years, Veloso has continuously created some of Brazil’s most original and engaging pop, putting his unmistakable stamp on whatever he chooses to do.”

**JAVIER AGUIRRESAROBÉ** (1948, Éibar, Guipúzcoa, País Vasco, Spain) , has shot 48 films, beginning with *Escena* (1943). Some of the others are *Soldados de Salamina* (Soldiers of Salamina, 2003), *Eric Clapton and Friends* (2002), *Deseo* (Desire 2002), *The Others* (2001), *Obra maestra* (Masterpiece, 2000), *Salsa* (2000), *La Fuente amarilla* (The Yellow Fountain, 1999), *El Milagro de P. Tinto* (The Miracle of P. Tinto, 1998), and *Secretos del corazón* (Secrets of the Heart, 1997).

### Almodóvar:

The film is about words.

To speak naturally in the film means to love that person. It’s one of the codes in this movie. Whoever speaks, loves.

I want to stress that human actions are often contradictory because of people’s own nature. The problem is that a man of law looks at them from a very dry and specific perspective while Marco looks at them from his heart and his feelings of friendship. So he sees the acts and the contradictions very differently.

Marco for me represents the audience point of view.

The last line is “Nothing is simple.”

from *Desire Unlimited The Cinema of Pedro Almodóvar. Second Edition. Paul Julian Smith. Verso. London, NY, 2000.*

From an interview w/ Almodóvar, 1995:

Paul Julian Smith: You’ve told the Spanish press that this [*The Flower of My Secret*, 1995] is your most La Mancha [Almodóvar was born in the village of La Mancha] and most traditional film. But it strikes me that with its references to NATO and Bosnia, to the newspaper *El País* and Prime Minister Felipe González, this is your most European and most contemporary film.

Pedro Almodóvar: When I say the film’s La Mancha I mean it’s my most realistic film yet. Of course I’m not interested in naturalism: even if I made a documentary it would turn out to be a fictional work on that subject. Between what inspires me and what I actually make, there is always the element of distance, of representation. Even when you decide where to place the camera, you’re manipulating reality. So this is my most realist film, but with the proviso that my realism is very personal and that there is always a touch of artifice there. It’s also my most contemporary film, with references to political demonstrations and to the tension that people now feel on the street. It’s based on the place where I was born: La Mancha; and the place where I now live: Madrid at this particular historical moment.

PJS: You’ve said that it’s your most personal film.

PA: Normally I’m very embarrassed to speak about my roots and my mother, and of myself in the first person. This time the film turned out like that in spite of myself. However, all of my films are absolutely personal; it’s just that normally the things that affect me personally are hidden behind the characters. For example, people often say to me: ‘Your films are full of mothers, it’s as if you didn’t have a father.’ But it’s not true. In *High Heels*, for example, my father is the model for elements of the mother played by Marisa Paredes: my father had cancer and returned to die in the room in which he had been born, just like the mother in the film. I haven’t spoken about this before.

PJS: This is the first time in your films that the village from which the characters originate actually appears. In *What Have I Done to Deserve This?*, the grandmother and grandson are shown leaving for the village; and in *Tie Me Up!* Antonio Banderas returns to his village, but it’s in ruins. But in *The Flower of My Secret* there is an idealized view of the village. To which it’s in fact impossible to return.

PA: In reality I don’t go back to my village. I don’t know what to do with myself there. But the mere fact of placing the camera in front of the earth, the red earth of La Mancha, is moving for me: there’s something atavistic and primitive in that earth of my childhood. In the end I didn’t shoot in my own village, which has changed, but in Almagro, some twenty kilometres away. Almagro now looks more like my village than my village does. This is the question of representation again.

PA: All my films are literary in the sense that there is a lot of dialogue. But Rohmer’s cinema is literary and colloquial at the same time. For me a literary cinema is one in which language is centre stage and is the motive force for the action. This film talks about literature as a means of self-understanding: Leo’s writing becomes darker, just as her life does.

PJS: When you start to write a film you begin with the dialogue.

PA: That’s right: dialogue is action for me. I’ve often said and it seems like a joke but it’s not: in Europe we make films about people because it’s cheaper to put two people in a living

room talking than to make a film full of special effects. For me two girls and some good dialogue are as effective as all the FX in *Terminator*.

PJS: Godard said that all you need for a film is a girl and a gun. But you'd rather have two girls?

PA: My relationship with cinema started as a child in the village when I'd go with a tin canfull of glowing pieces of cheap charcoal: it was right in the middle of the post-War period and to keep warm in the cold you took a tin can with you. I seem to remember that in *The Spirit of the Beehive*, the characters went to just this kind of improvised cinema. My conception of cinema is still that it's something that gives me warmth, that comforts me, like that tin can.

PJS: If this is an image of the past of Spanish cinema, what of its future? You've now made three successful features in co-production with the French company Ciby 2000. Is this a model for European film-making?

PA: My relation with Ciby is absolutely free. It's not just that they don't bother me when I'm shooting; they don't even see the film until it's subtitled in French. It's the ideal model because it means that co-production doesn't become hybrid and deracinated. With us the money doesn't affect the idiosyncrasy of the project and the decisions are artistic, not financial. The film is still Spanish, although the funding is French. Moreover, my films are cheap and Ciby knows they sell all over the world. So it's good business for them. That's why I have so much freedom. Is I got involved with a film like *Little Buddha* that cost forty millions dollars I'd have more problems.

PJS: But your films are expensive by Spanish standards.

PA: A normal Spanish film costs less than mine, that's true. I spend a lot of money on set design. I won't settle for things you can buy in shops. I have things brought in from all over. This stylization is expensive. I also rehearse the actors a lot, which is costly. These things are essential for my films.

PJS: What about postproduction? You've made all eleven features with editor José Salcedo.

PA: I'm very fast with editing. I cut every day after shooting and I continue refining the rough-cut as I go. It makes things cheaper, because after we finish shooting we have a cut of the whole film and ten days later we always have the final version. I can't shoot and wait until the end to edit. The film is alive and if you cut as you shoot you know what rhythm it's taking on and how the characters are really turning out. You can also sort out problems as you see them coming up in the editing process.

PJS: Critics in the UK and US have often asked you to take up a clearer political position in your films.

PA: My political position is perfectly clear. I've never been a member of a political party because I need to keep my

PA: Maybe they're carrying a gun in their handbag, and you can't see it. Or maybe they use their tongues as guns.

PJS: Can we talk about your first experience of film? You've compared it to the opening of Erice's *The Spirit of the Beehive*, when the traveling cinema comes to the village.

independence. But I'm very much on the left. In films it's not necessary for characters to talk about politics. The politics is implicit in the film.

PJS: To finish: this may strike you as crazy, but there seems to be a connection between two characters called Angel: the one who comes to the aid of Leo in *The Flower of My Secret* and the Angel (played by Antonio Banderas) who plays a similar role in *Matador*. They are both creatures without sex.

PA: This is something that hadn't occurred to me. But it's true that this Angel undergoes a process of feminization throughout the film. By the ends he and Leo have become two female writers toasting each other by the fireside, like Candice Bergen and Jacqueline Bisset in *Rich and Famous*. So the man ends up as the woman's best girlfriend. It's a very positive process..(orig. in *Sight and Sound* February 1996)

Foreigners cannot expect Almodóvar to subscribe to forms of resistance which evolved in response to the triumph of the British and North American Right in the eighties; and if they are serious about respecting cultural difference they must pay more attention to a nation whose understanding of such issues as gender, nationality, and homosexuality may well be more sophisticated than their own. In his celebration of fluidity and performance, in his hostility to fixed positions of all kinds, Almodóvar anticipates that critique of identity and essence that was later to become familiar in academic feminist, minority, and queer theory.

The discontinuities of Almodóvar's technique are not to be dismissed as the result of chance or incompetence; rather they form part of a critique of representation (of the relationship between film as presence and film as language) which is also manifest in a love of the reflexive ironies reminiscent of Sirk (a frequent point of reference), or even Godard.

The offices of El Deseo, S.A. are situated in an undistinguished residential street outside central Madrid... Their anonymity, even invisibility (there is no identifying sign on the street or in the building itself) seem somewhat uncharacteristic when contrasted with the all-pervasiveness of the Almodóvar 'trademark' and the flagrant visibility of the director and his films. Few visitors could fail to be impressed by the loyalty and industry of Almodóvar's 'family' of co-workers (most particularly his producer-brother Augustín) and by their determination to protect him from unsympathetic critics (known as 'detractors') who have dogged him since the beginning. It would be difficult to underestimate the role of such a collaborative enterprise in the success of films identified, perhaps improperly, by the single name 'Almodóvar'. One specific advantage of El Deseo is Almodóvar's ability to shoot each film in sequence, thus following the natural development of character and narrative,

an expensive option which would be denied him by other production companies.

El Deseo has produced three of the top five grossing Spanish films of all time; and it has been the most profitable production company in Spain (often by a considerable margin) in the last four years for which figures are available. And this achievement has to be seen in the context of a Spanish cinema in perpetual crisis, with the eighties marking a steep decline in the industry, in all three sectors of production (the falling numbers of domestic features), distribution (the increasing stranglehold of US-controlled multinationals), and exhibition (the collapse in the number of functioning theatres).

One secret of Almodóvar's success has been determination from the very beginning to devote as much time to promotion as to production.

I shall argue that in his love of fantasy and cross-gender identification, Almodóvar coincides with recent psychoanalytically inspired feminist film theorists. Both he and they pose a challenge to an earlier view which read narrative cinema primarily as the sadistic or voyeuristic gaze which the male exercises over a passive female object. If desire is unlimited (if spectator positioning is mobile and labile), then opportunities for visual pleasure proliferate.

To juxtapose Almodóvar with US gender studies is perhaps incongruous; for his films have often been criticized by foreign feminists, or men claiming to speak on their behalf. My own position is that images can never be inherently transgressive or hegemonic, and must always be placed in historical debates around cinema, censorship, and sexuality.

One favorite technique of Almodóvar is cross-cutting... Cross-cutting can lead... to confusion, to discontinuity. But it also promises the spectator access to simultaneous action in discrete locales and significant juxtapositions in montage. [It is] a key to a privileged understanding of a complex and contradictory cinematic phenomenon. By naming his production company El Deseo, S.A. Almodóvar hints with typically sly irony at the intersection of the psychic and the commercial. His practice of cinema will also prove to be a model of libidinal economy, unprecedented in film history.

#### Epigraph

"In North American films friendship is generally between men, but I enjoy the complicity which exists between  
**Susan Yung, Bausch Meets Almodovar in New Film, Dance Insider**

MADRID -- It is no secret that Pina Bausch's choreography and theater have made a profound impression within the dance world. Influences from her company, Tanztheater Wuppertal, in other choreographers' work are pervasive, whether overt or nuanced. Bausch's theater has been the subject of a number of photographic projects, writings, and some film projects. A new film by Pedro Almodovar, "Talk to Her," out now in Europe and scheduled to be released in the U.S. in November by Sony Pictures Classical, substantiates the lasting effect she's had on artists working in other genres. The difference is that Almodovar himself has an enormous following and that Bausch's work is now being seen, most likely, by vastly larger audiences than have seen it previously,

women... Women have been able to give themselves up unashamedly to friendship for cultural reasons, because they have been condemned to live out their private life [*intimidada*] in secret and that private life has only been revealed to female friends. . . . Men deserve to be deceived by women. I love the idea of a girl deceiving her husband with a girlfriend. It's an image which I find attractive and which forms part of the secret autonomy of women. . . . Now I'm aware that the fact that I like the private life of women may still be a reflection of machismo. But I hope not, because I'm interested in women and their world, not just when they go to gossip in the bathroom, but at all times. I believe I'm one of the least machista men in the world, one of the most authentically feminist." [interview given in 1987]

Revisions to the censors' code as late as 1975 (shortly before the death of Franco) included amongst a list of forbidden topics: suicide; the use of violence as a means of solving social or human problems; prostitution, sexual perversions, adultery and illicit sexual relations; abortion and anything tending to undermine the institution of marriage and the family; drug abuse and alcoholism. . . .

It may be more than a coincidence, then, that Almodóvar's first film should consist of a string of vignettes devoted almost exclusively to topics banned from cinema screens only a few years earlier.

As a consummate female impersonator, Almodóvar has clearly placed himself on that side of the cinematic gender division which is coded as feminine. Thus he posed cheekily for Spain's best-selling daily *El País* peeking out from behind a pair of curtains, an oversize polka-dotted bow in his bushy hair. The same paper carried pictures of the director in costume for all the principal roles of the film, male and female.

At a deeper level, the threat of Almodóvar's professions of performance is in their hints of subjective merger and fluidity. Just as his films are full of characters unable to separate from their parents or lovers, so Almodóvar's over-identification with his creations, his compulsion to repeat and act out their dilemmas both on and off the set, puts fixed individual boundaries into crisis and throws the rigid divisions or gender binaries into confusion.

perhaps catalyzing a subtle shift in pop culture.

Although only brief segments of "Cafe Muller" (1978), and "Masurca Fogo" (1998) are shown to open and close the film, Bausch's presence can be felt throughout, like a vibration. She appears at the beginning of the film with Malou Airaudó, an original member of Tanztheater Wuppertal. If Airaudó -- a fiercely dramatic, corporal presence -- represents the body of the dancer, then Bausch surely represents the spirit, with her Manneristically long-boned feet, willowy arms, and non-confrontational gaze. Veering through a maze of cafe tables in the excerpt from "Cafe Muller," the two women crash belly-first into a felt-covered wall, Airaudó assailing it, Bausch melting into it. Both collapse to the floor, in Pieta-like contractions.

The film's two main characters, Benigno (Javier Camara) and Marco (Dario Grandinetti), are seated in the audience next to one another at a performance of "Cafe Muller" the first encounter in a series which entwines their fates in unimaginable ways. It is the writer Marco's emotional reaction, first here to Bausch's work, which recurs throughout the film, representative of his inability to share a charged emotional experience with a loved one. This seam in Marco's otherwise stoic and impassive bearing is a familiar yet continually shocking emotional vulnerability. Benigno's dark secret is masked by a surreal, short silent film which foreshadows his character's actions.

The plot revolves around two women in comas, one a promising young dancer in the local ballet academy (Alicia, played by Leonor Watling), the other a successful bullfighter whose personal life was nearly as volatile as her work in the ring (Lydia, played by Rosario Flores). It is Benigno's life work as a nurse and personal groomer to care for Alicia, massaging the atrophy out of her muscles and tending to the most rudimentary hygiene; Marco sits vigil in girlfriend Lydia's room, yards away from her both spatially and emotionally.

Benigno describes the performance of "Cafe Muller" and his encounter with Marco to Alicia even though she can't react; he has gotten Bausch to autograph her photo (incidentally, the

same photo which appeared in Almodovar's earlier film, "All About My Mother), which he has framed and hung on her hospital wall like an image of a patron saint.

The singer Caetano Veloso makes a cameo appearance singing the sweet "Cucurrucucu Paloma," evoking Bausch's voracious taste for music from all parts of the world (she included Veloso's music in last year's "Agua," which opens in Paris June 18). By the remarkable closing scene, which takes us full circle to a hypnotic line of couples dancing in a performance of "Masurca Fogo," it's evident how organic a match Bausch's style is with Almodovar's in "Talk to Her," with the music from the performance mixing seamlessly with the soundtrack by Alberto Iglesias. Almodovar and Bausch both portray women as simultaneously in control and yet completely vulnerable and at the mercy of outside forces.

It is a rare film that so successfully integrates dance into the story. The Bausch scenes are presented de facto -- performances as we experience them, the same way a scene in a famous restaurant might be filmed, or a sightseeing tour of the Eiffel Tower. Treating these performances as fixed cultural landmarks, Almodovar showed his respect by leaving the dance alone rather than molding it to fit the narrative, as so often happens with dance segments in film. And he mostly left the dancing to dancers and the acting to actors.

We're still working on booking films for the Spring 2004 series. Here's what's we've been able to confirm thus far:

Jan 13 Stroheim, *Greed* 1925

Jan 20 Milestone, *All Quiet on the Western Front* 1930

Jan 27 Lang *You Only Live Once* 1939

Feb 10 Curtiz, *Casablanca*, 1941

Feb 17 Wellman, *Ox Bow Incident* 1943

Feb 24 Powell and Pressburger, *Life & Times of Colonel Blimp* 1943

March 9 Kelly, *Singin' in the Rain* 1952

March 23 Zinneman, *From Here to Eternity* 1953

April 13 Truffaut *Jules and Jim* 1961

We'll know about the films for Feb 3, March 2, March 30, April 6 and April 20 in a week or so. Go to <http://www.buffalofilmseminars.com> for our complete schedule. as well as links to all the goldenrod handouts.

**That's all folks! See you at January 13, 2004 for our screening of Eric von Stroheim's *Greed*.**

...email Diane Christian: [engdc@acsu.buffalo.edu](mailto:engdc@acsu.buffalo.edu)

...email Bruce Jackson [bjackson@buffalo.edu](mailto:bjackson@buffalo.edu)

...for the series schedule, links and updates: [www.buffalofilmseminars.com](http://www.buffalofilmseminars.com)

...for the weekly email informational notes, send an email to either of us.

...for cast and crew info on almost any film: <http://us.imdb.com/search.html>