



[Bruce Jackson & Diane Christian video introduction to this week's film](#)

[Click here to find the film online.](#) (UB students received instructions how to view the film through UB's library services.)

Videos:

["Pedro Almodóvar and Antonio Banderas on Pain and Glory"](#) (New York Film Festival, 45:00 min.)

["How Antonio Banderas Became Pedro Almodóvar in 'Pain & Glory'"](#) (*Variety*, 4:40)

["PAIN AND GLORY Cast & Crew Q&A"](#) (TIFF 2019, 24:13)

["Pedro Almodóvar on his new film 'Pain and Glory,' Penelope Cruz and his sexuality"](#) (27:23)

DIRECTOR Pedro Almodóvar

WRITER Pedro Almodóvar

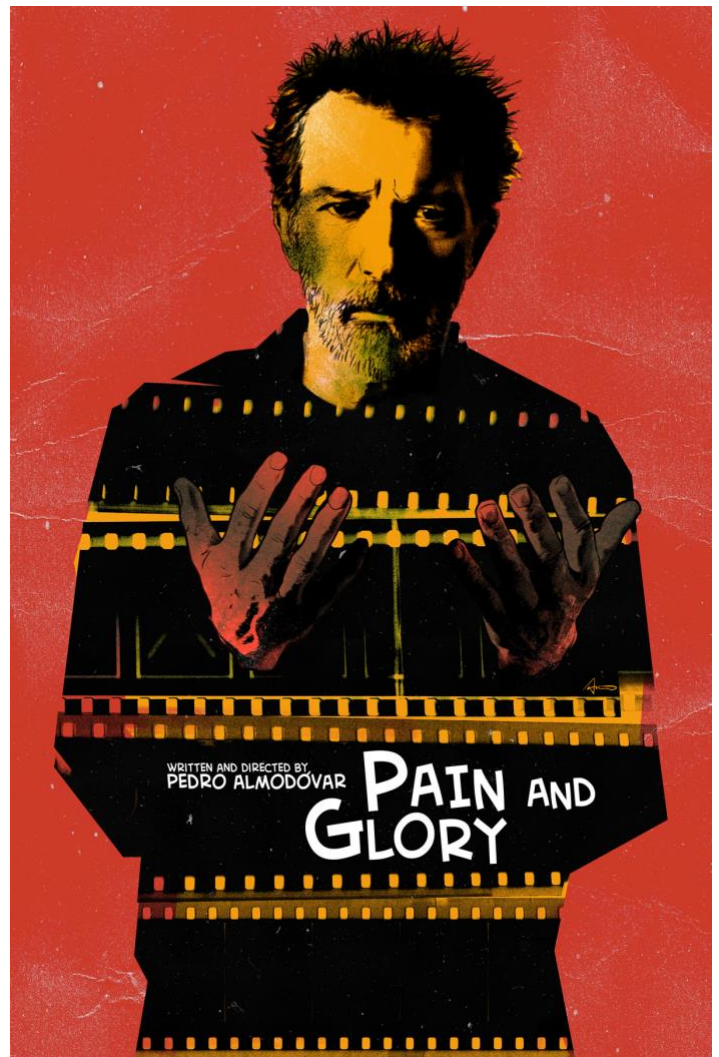
PRODUCERS Agustín Almodóvar, Ricardo Marco Budé, and Ignacio Salazar-Simpson

CINEMATOGRAPHER José Luis Alcaine

EDITOR Teresa Font

MUSIC Alberto Iglesias

The film won Best Actor (Antonio Banderas) and Best Composer and was nominated for the Palme d'Or and the Queer Palm at the 2019 Cannes Film Festival. It was also nominated for two Oscars at the 2020 Academy Awards (Best Performance by an Actor for Banderas and Best International Feature Film).



CAST

Antonio Banderas...Salvador Mallo
Penélope Cruz...Jacinta Mallo
Raúl Arévalo...Venancio Mallo
Leonardo Sbaraglia...Federico Delgado
Asier Etxeandia...Alberto Crespo
Cecilia Roth...Zulema
Pedro Casablanc...Doctor Galindo
Nora Navas...Mercedes
Susi Sánchez...Beata
Julieta Serrano...Jacinta Mallo (old age)
Julián López...the Presenter
Paqui Horcajo...Mercedes
Rosalía...Rosita
Marisol Muriel...Mari
César Vicente...Eduardo
Asier Flores...Salvador Mallo (child)
Agustín Almodóvar...the priest
Luis Calero...brother José Maria

Sara Sierra...Conchita



PEDRO ALMODÓVAR (b. September 24, 1949 in Calzada de Calatrava, Ciudad Real, Castilla-La Mancha, Spain) grew up mostly in the company of women. His father was a mule driver who led a team of twenty animals across the Sierra Morena to deliver wine to Jaén, in Andalucía. As a young boy, Almodóvar was raised by women and saw them as a communal force. They were Spain's secret power. "It was because of women that Spain survived the postwar period," he says. Also, at this time, he and his younger brother Agustín became regular moviegoers.

By then, Almodóvar had realized that he wanted not just to see movies but to make them. At the age of seventeen, he told his parents that he was moving to Madrid to pursue a career in film. His father, he recalls, "threatened to turn me in to the National Guard." Almodóvar intended to enroll in film school, but the city had only one, and Spain's dictator Franco, viewing it as a center of Communism, had all but closed it. Instead, Almodóvar bought a Super 8 camera and began to shoot short films on his own. "I had no budget, no money," he says. "The important thing was to make movies." He wrote out complete scripts, even though his camera couldn't record sound, and changed the characters depending on which of his friends showed up for a shoot. He avoided filming where he might bump into the authorities, so he made several Biblical epics in the countryside, giving them, he says, "a bucolic and abstract air, the opposite of Cecil B. De Mille's." Since he had no money to buy lights, many of the scenes in his Super 8 movies were filmed on rooftops, in parks, and by windows. "Fortunately, Spain is a place with a lot of natural light."

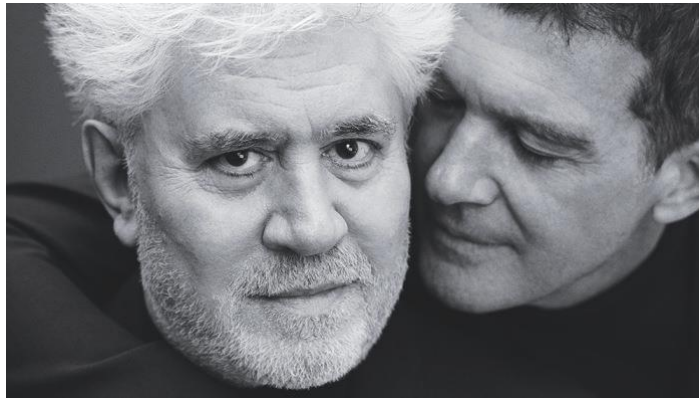
The director's first Super 8 movies are too damaged to be shown today. They exist only in his retelling. He projected them for friends in bars, discos, and art galleries. He improvised dialogue, sometimes commenting on the acting, while Agustín, who had followed him to Madrid, provided a soundtrack with recorded music. Almodóvar worked hard on his screenplays, giving them plenty of twists (he's often referred to himself as a 'frustrated novelist').

His first feature film, *Pepi, Luci, Bom*, was shown at the San Sebastián Film Festival in 1980. Some critics savaged the low production values, but others argued that this attested to the film's urgency and cultural authenticity. Who cared if the director hadn't miked the actors properly? *El Periódico* perceptively praised Almodóvar as "a stubbornly passionate defender of substandard movies." The film became a staple of late-night Madrid—a "Rocky Horror Picture Show" for the Spanish—and highly profitable. The film featured transvestites, transgender people, bondage, rape, and lots of drug use and sex. His stories blurred the lines between gay and straight, coerced and consensual, comedy and melodrama, the funny and the repulsive, high and low art. It was all delivered with a puzzling cheerfulness that made the movies far more transgressive than if their tone had been serious. Spain had just emerged from decades of dictatorship and repression, and Almodóvar's films suggested that the country had leaped from Opus Dei to the Mudd Club in a single bound. Critics could not decide whether Almodóvar was the most trivial filmmaker in history or the inventor of an important new strain of postmodernism. Spanish producers began courting Almodóvar, but he fought them over creative control.

In 1985, the brothers founded their own film company *El Deseo*, in part to protect Almodóvar from such creative battles. Agustín ran the business side. By profession, he was a chemistry teacher, but his relationship with Pedro was the crucial thing in his life. Agustín has said that his sole purpose at *El Deseo* is to help "Pedro make the movie he wants." He has also played bit parts in most of his brother's films. Creating his own production company allowed Pedro an unusual luxury: he could often shoot a movie from first page to last, rather than in the least expensive order. Almodóvar felt that a chronological approach yielded more persuasive performances. "I owe Agustín the independence and liberty that I enjoy as a

director,” he says. “It’s completely without precedent. Not even Scorsese himself has been able to do that.”

Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown Almodóvar’s eighth feature and his second under El Deseo, was released in 1988. The movie began with a script based on Jean Cocteau’s play *The Human Voice*, in which a woman is heard on the phone speaking to an unseen lover who is breaking up with her. Almodóvar provoked major outcries over his next feature *Tie Me Up!*



Tie Me Down! (1990), with its plot of an actress being held captive by and falling for a mentally unhinged man, and the MPAA also giving the film an X rating for its sex scenes. The director followed up with *High Heels* (1991) and *Kika* (1993), which was controversial as well over its treatment of women. *Live Flesh* was released in 1998 and featured Penélope Cruz in her first film with the director (seeing *Tie Me Up! Tie Me Down!* as a teenager made her want to go into film), while Almodóvar’s next work, *All About My Mother* (1999), featured Cruz again along with actress Cecilia Roth portraying a woman who has lost her son and seeks out his father, who is a transvestite. The acclaimed, riveting work saw Almodóvar win an Academy Award for best foreign language film, with an emotional Antonio Banderas and Cruz presenting him with the award. Almodóvar received another Oscar, this time for screenwriting, with 2002’s *Talk to Her*.

His next work, the noir-ish *Bad Education* (2004), starring Gael García Bernal and Fele Martínez, told the story of two boys who attended a Catholic boarding school together is said to be the director’s most autobiographical. In more recent years, Almodóvar has broadened his subject matter and his tone. A new one comes out every couple of years with no two alike. His aesthetic has become harder and harder to pin down. His youthful, transgressive films have given way to a more reflective tone. This can be seen in *Volver* (2006), which earned Cruz her first Oscar nomination as well as *Broken Embraces* (2009).

Often described—especially in his early years—by American critics as a ‘gay director,’

Almodóvar has often bristled at this designation. In an interview with *The New Yorker*, he recalls, with frustration, a journalist asking him, “What’s your boyfriend’s name?” “That’s the first thing they ask you in the United States!” he says. “That and your box-office numbers.” He eventually got used to Americans describing him as “openly gay” and came to realize why many Americans found it necessary to counter homophobia by coming out. “In Spain, in that era, you didn’t need to say

anything,” he noted. “People just knew it. I’d never had to make any confession.”

In 1989, the film executive Michael Barker arranged a meeting between Almodóvar and his idol Billy Wilder. They had lunch, and at the end of it Wilder told him that he had one piece of advice: “Don’t come to Hollywood, no matter what.” At that moment, Almodóvar says, he saw in Wilder’s eyes “memories of compromises, failures, and misunderstandings.” Though he has flirted with the idea of making a film in Hollywood, even going as far as to initially ask Meryl Streep to play Juliet in *Julieta* (2016). Yet, he always returns home in the end. The director has held steadfast to Wilder’s advice and one might argue his films are better for it.

His latest, and tonight’s feature, *Pain and Glory* (*Dolor y gloria*) was released in Spain on 22 March 2019 to positive reviews and made its international debut at the 2019 Cannes Film Festival, where the film was selected to compete for the Palme d’Or, while Banderas won the award for Best Actor and Alberto Iglesias won for Best Soundtrack. It was chosen by *Time* magazine as the best film of the year.

Almodóvar has written and directed 39 films, some of which are *A Manual for Cleaning Women* (2021), *I’m So Excited!* (2013), *The Skin I Live In* (2011), *Broken* (2009), *Embraces* (2009), *The Cannibalistic Councillor* (2009, Short), *Volver* (2006), *Bad Education* (2004), *Talk to Her* (2002), *All About My Mother* (1999), *Live Flesh* (1997), *The Flower of My Secret* (1995), *Kika* (1993), *High Heels* (1991), *Tie Me Up! Tie Me Down!* (1990), *Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown* (1988), *Law of Desire* (1987), *Matador* (1986), *Tráiler para ‘amantes de lo*

prohibido’ (1986, TV Short), *What Have I Done to Deserve This?* (1984), *Dark Habits* (1983), *Labyrinth of Passion* (1982), *Pepi, Luci, Bom and Other Girls Like Mom* (1980), *Folle... folle... fólleme Tim!* (1978), *Salomé* (1978, Short), *Sexo va, sexo viene* (1977, Short), *Muerte en la carretera* (1976, Short), *Sea caritativo* (1976, Short), *Tráiler de 'Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?'* (1976, Short), *Blancor* (1975, Short), *El sueño, o la Estrella* (1975, Short), *Homenaje* (1975, Short), *La caída de Sódoma* (1975, Short), *Dos putas* (1974), *o historia de amor que termina en boda* (1974, Short), and *Film político* (1974, Short).

JOSÉ LUIS ALCÁINE (b. 26 December 1938 (age 81), Tangier, Spanish protectorate in Morocco) is a Spanish born cinematographer (161 credits) who was a pioneer in using fluorescent tube as key lighting in the 1970s. He has frequently worked with Pedro Almodóvar and in the last decade with Brian De Palma. He got his start in 1965 and the following year doing several shorts before shooting the obscure science fiction feature *Javier y los invasores del espacio* (1967). He began a continuing working relationship with Almodóvar with the director’s breakout film: *Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown* (1988) and then the controversial *Tie Me Up! Tie Me Down!* (1989). He won the European Film Award for Best Cinematographer for Almodóvar’s *Volver* (2006). He also worked with Almodóvar on *Bad Education* (2004), *The Skin I Live In* (2011), *I’m So Excited* (2013), and *Pain and Glory* (2019). He began working with De Palma with 2012’s *Passion*. For De Palma he also did *Domino* (2019), and he is in pre-production on De Palma’s *Sweet Vengeance*. Recently, he also did cinematography for the Penélope Cruz-starring *The Queen of Spain* (2016) and *Everybody Knows* (2018), and the Antonio Banderas-starring *Finding Altamira* (2016). These are some other films he has shot: *Vera, un cuento cruel* (1973), *Corazón solitario* (1973), *El Niño es nuestro* (1973), *Yo la vi primero* (1974), *¿Quién puede matar a un niño?* (1976), *El Puente* (1977), *La Muchacha de las bragas de oro* (1980), *Asesinato en el Comité Central* (1982), *La Triple muerte del tercer personaje* (1982), *La Corte de Faraón* (1985), *Los Paraísos perdidos* (1985), *La Reina del mate* (1985), *Rustlers’ Rhapsody* (1985), *Hay que deshacer la casa* (1986), *El Viaje a ninguna parte* (1986), *Mambrú se fue a la guerra* (1986), *El Caballero del Dragón* (1986), *Belle Époque* (1992), and *Jamón, jamón* (1993).

ALBERTO IGLESIAS (b. 1955 in Donostia-San Sebastián, Guipúzcoa, País Vasco, Spain) is a Spanish composer who gained international recognition as a score composer for Spanish films, mostly from Pedro Almodóvar and Julio Medem. Iglesias garnered his first Oscar nomination for his score in Fernando Meirelles’s film adaptation of *The Constant Gardener* (2005). Iglesias also composed the score for *The Kite Runner* (2007), based on Khaled Hosseini’s 2003 novel of the same name. He earned his second Oscar nomination for that score. He also received an Oscar nomination for his score for *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy* (2011). For Almodóvar, he has composed for films such as *The Flower of My Secret* (1995), *Live Flesh* (1997), *All About My Mother* (1999), *Talk to Her* (2002), *Bad Education* (2004), *Volver* (2006), *Broken Embraces* (2009) and *The Skin I Live In* (2011), *I’m So Excited* (2012), *Julieta* (2016), and tonight’s film. For Medem, he has composed scores for films, such as: *Cows* (Vacas) (1992), *The Red Squirrel* (La ardilla roja) (1993), *Lovers of the Arctic Circle* (1998), *Sex and Lucia* (2001), and *Ma Ma* (2015). He has also composed scores for actor John Malkovich’s directorial outing *The Dancer Upstairs* (2002), Steven Soderbergh’s *Che* (2008), and *Exodus: Gods and Kings* (2014), for Ridley Scott.

Some of his other film scores are for films, such as: *I’m So Excited!* (2013), *The Monk* (2011), *Outrage* (1993), *Autumn Rain* (1989), *Bilbao Blues* (1986), *Lucas de bohemia* (1985), *La muerte de Mikel* (1984), and *La conquista de Albania* (1984).



ANTONIO BANDERAS (b. 10 August 1960 (age 59), Málaga, Andalusia, Spain) began his film acting (110 credits) career with a series of films by director Pedro Almodóvar in the 1980s. While performing in the theatre, Banderas caught the attention of Almodóvar, who cast the young actor in his 1982 film *Labyrinth of Passion*. After Banderas appeared in Almodóvar’s 1986 *Matador*, the director cast him as a

gay man in *Law of Desire* (1987) and in his internationally acclaimed 1988 film, *Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown*. Two years later in Almodóvar's controversial *Tie Me Up! Tie Me Down!*, Banderas played a mental patient who kidnaps a porn star (Victoria Abril) and keeps her tied up until she returns his love. This role helped spur him on to Hollywood stardom in the 1990s. In 1991, pop star Madonna introduced Banderas to Hollywood as an object of her desire in her pseudo-documentary film *Madonna: Truth or Dare*. The following year, speaking minimal English, Banderas began acting in U.S. films; learning his lines phonetically, Banderas turned in a critically praised performance in *The Mambo Kings* (1992). Banderas then further established himself with American audiences opposite Tom Hanks in *Philadelphia* (1993), and the following year he the high-profile Anne Rice adaptation *Interview with the Vampire* (1994), sharing the screen with Tom Cruise and Brad Pitt. He appeared in several major Hollywood releases in 1995, including a starring role in the Robert Rodriguez-directed *Desperado* and as Sylvester Stallone's antagonist in *Assassins*. In 1996, he starred alongside Madonna in *Evita*. In 1998, He had success as Zorro in *The Mask of Zorro*, and in 1999 he starred in *The 13th Warrior*, about a Muslim caught up in a war between the Northman and human eating beasts. He would team up with Rodriguez in 2001 for the children's action series *Spy Kids*. In 2002, he starred in Brian De Palma's *Femme Fatale* and in Julie Taymor's *Frida* with Salma Hayek. At this point in his career, he brought life to the Zorro-inspired Puss in Boots in the *Shrek* series, and he would, in 2005, reprise his Zorro part in *The Legend of Zorro*. In 2011, he would once again work with Almodóvar. In *The Skin I Live In*, he breaks out of the "Latin Lover" mold from his Hollywood work and stars as a calculating revenge-seeking plastic surgeon following the rape of his daughter. That same year, he again lent his voice to his *Shrek* character Puss in Boots, as the protagonist, opposite frequent collaborator Salma Hayek, in the *Shrek* prequel, *Puss in Boots*. In 2012, he was in several films, including the Zoe Kazan-written *Ruby Sparks*. In 2015, he was in Terrence Malick's *Knight of Cups*. In 2018 he, again, reunited with Almodóvar, opposite Penélope Cruz, in *Pain and Glory* (*Dolor y gloria*), a part for which he would gain recognition as Best Actor at the 2019 Cannes Film Festival and with a nomination for the Best Actor Oscar. In March

2020, Banderas was cast in an undisclosed role in the upcoming *Uncharted* film.



PENÉLOPE CRUZ (b. 28 April 1974 (age 45), Alcobendas, Community of Madrid, Spain) is an Oscar-winning actress who has appeared in 82 films and television series. She won an Oscar for Best Performance by an Actress in a Supporting Role for her performance in Woody Allen's *Vicky Cristina Barcelona* (2008). She was also nominated for Oscars for performances in Pedro Almodóvar's *Volver* (2006) and the 2009 film *Nine*. For *Volver*, she, along with the ensemble female cast, won Best Actress at the 2006 Cannes Film Festival. As a teenager, Cruz became interested in acting after seeing Almodóvar's *Tie Me Up! Tie Me Down!* (1990). Her first starring role for a feature film was for Bigas Luna's *Jamón, Jamón* (1992). Her subsequent roles in the 1990s and the early 2000s included *Belle Époque* (1992), *Open Your Eyes* (1997), *The Hi-Lo Country* (1999), *The Girl of Your Dreams* (2000), and *Woman on Top* (2000). Cruz achieved recognition for her lead roles in the 2001 films *Vanilla Sky*, *All the Pretty Horses*, *Captain Corelli's Mandolin*, and *Blow*. She has since appeared in a wide variety of films, including the comedy *Waking Up in Reno* (2002), the thriller *Gothika* (2003), the Christmas film *Noel* (2004), the action-adventure films *Sahara* (2005) and *Pirates of the Caribbean: On Stranger Tides* (2011), the romantic comedy *To Rome with Love* (2012), the crime drama *The Counselor* (2013), and the mystery film *Murder on the Orient Express* (2017). In 2018, she played Donatella Versace for the television series *American Crime Story*. Besides her starring role in tonight's film, she has recently been in films such as *Nobody Knows*, with Javier Bardem. She will be

appearing with her costar in tonight’s film, Antonio Banderas, in *Official Competition* (2021) and *Love Child*.

Maria Delgado: “Pain and Glory review: Pedro Almodóvar makes an art form of reminiscence” (*Sight and Sound*)

[Pedro Almodóvar](#)’s films are haunted by creatives – directors, actors, writers – negotiating personal and professional crises that have a profound impact on their artistic work. His latest feature is no exception. [Antonio](#)

[Banderas](#)’s sixtysomething filmmaker Salvador Mallo bears a strong resemblance – spiky hair, mannerisms, attire and gait – to the Manchegan director. And while it is possible to read *Pain and Glory* as Almodóvar’s [8½](#),

the treatment of remembering as a powerful mode of better understanding the present also positions the film within wider debates about historical memory in contemporary Spain.

Salvador’s journey back into his 1960s boyhood is facilitated by water – the first scene sees him immersed in a swimming pool – and by drugs, both prescribed and illegal. As in [I’m So Excited!](#) (2013), which similarly featured an elixir with the power to transport the characters to altered states of being, Salvador is taken to a place that allows him to make sense of the condition he finds himself in. Revisiting the Paterna cave dwelling of his childhood – a return to the womb in Freudian terms – he recalls encountering sexual desire for the first time and sharing the pleasures of literacy with Eduardo, the young mason helping the family to decorate the cave.

With his observant gaze and sharp intelligence, the boy Salvador is one of a long list of child protagonists in Spanish cinema offering a window on to the problematic years of Franco’s dictatorship. Like the precocious Ana Torrent in Carlos Saura’s [Cría cuervos](#) (1975), nine-year-old actor Asier Flores disarms with his incisive comments. Unhappy at being sent off to the seminary – the only chance of a decent education for the

children of the rural or urban poor – he runs out of the cave in anger. The church’s corrupt control over education and public life is evidenced in rules that can be bent at the clergy’s whim, in the reprimand Salvador is given by a priest for having ‘pagan’ recreational tastes (The Beatles, cinema), and in the power exerted by the village holy woman – a gloriously pious cameo from [Susi Sánchez](#).

The film has a fiercely political dimension. Salvador proffers the illiterate Eduardo access to an education that has been denied him by society’s wider

inequalities – illiteracy in Spain in 1960 was close to 15 per cent. The vestiges of sociological Francoism also contaminate the present. When Salvador travels to the working-class district of Vallecas in southern Madrid to score heroin, graffiti

on the wall spells out “Sister, I believe you”, fixing the film very much in the recent past. It is a reference to the ‘wolf pack’ case, which involved five men from Seville accused of gang-raping an 18-year-old woman during the bull-running festivities in Pamplona in 2016; the subsequent trial has polarised Spanish society, played a role in consolidating the far-right Vox’s vote and galvanised the feminist movement. Almodóvar’s decision to feature the mural – which he recreated for the shoot – aligns him with progressive voices in a country split across opposing political lines.

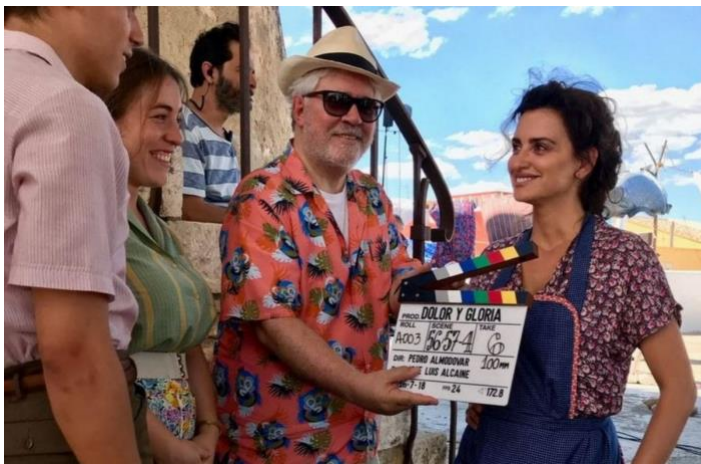
Pain and Glory is a film of multiple pleasures: the glorious summer light that illuminates [Penélope Cruz](#)’s Jacinta, the mother whose luminosity inspires Salvador; flamenco fusion singer Rosalía providing a rendition of Lola Flores’s *A tu vera* while Jacinta and her neighbours wash clothes in the river; the tenderness of Salvador’s reunion with former lover Federico 30 years on; the rapture on the child Salvador’s face as he is engrossed in Françoise Sagan’s *Bonjour tristesse* – a novel about a gifted teenager that clearly resonates with the young boy; and [Julieta Serrano](#)’s older Jacinta asking to be prepared for burial in a particular fashion – a moment



that recalls Chus Lampreave's demands to her daughters in [The Flower of My Secret](#) (1995).

The 1980s – such a formative time both in Almodóvar's life and in the wider body politic of Spain – haunt the film. The spectres of this decade – the paintings, theatrical productions, memories and absent loves – remain a palpable part of Salvador's life in the present.

Pain and Glory is anchored in a terrific performance by Banderas: minimal gestures and economical conversations give little away. As such, the mysteries of the past unfold delicately over the course of the film. References to Hamlet – there are posters for the play in the home and dressing room of Salvador's actor colleague Alberto ([Asier Etxeandia](#)) – point to an existentialist crisis that affects both men. Alberto the convivial addict is trapped in the 1980s, his aesthetic out of place in Salvador's ordered, museum-like home. But like Salvador he finds solace and purpose in art. For it is the pleasures of engaging with culture that Pain and Glory celebrates, whether watching a film outdoors – “The cinema of my childhood smells of pee and jasmine and a summer's breeze,” Salvador recalls – or reading a novel in the intimacy of one's home. Art gives form to that which cannot be contained or controlled and provides a way of making sense of the most difficult of pasts.



Manu Yáñez Murillo: “Pain and Glory” (Film Comment)

An aging, afflicted, and lone filmmaker named Salvador (Antonio Banderas), his eyes closed and [front] marked by the scar from a spine operation, dives into the deep end of a swimming pool, submerging himself into an enchanted childhood memory of his mother (Penélope Cruz). She's hand-washing laundry in the river with a natural detergent

that attracts the attention of what she calls “soap fishes.” This evocative, nostalgic voyage back in time welcomes the viewer to *Pain and Glory*, Pedro Almodóvar's heartrending, meditative, and deeply confessional culmination of his prolonged immersion in the waters of autofiction.

The clues of this fictionalized self-portrait are hidden in plain sight: Banderas, in the role of a lifetime, wears Almodóvar's messy hairstyle, flashy sweaters, and flowery shirts, and Salvador's memories are in perfect sync with episodes from Almodóvar's career. As a pretext for putting its physically, spiritually, and artistically stagnant protagonist into motion, the story knits one of its threads around a restoration of *Sabor (Flavour)*, a movie Salvador directed 32 years earlier, to be presented at Madrid's Spanish Cinematheque. Those happen to be the same number of years that have passed since the release of *Law of Desire*, whose restoration Almodóvar presented in 2017 at, yes, the Spanish Cinematheque. On that occasion he was accompanied by his greatest muse, Carmen Maura, while in *Pain and Glory* Salvador (the name is reminiscent of “Almodóvar”) intends to attend the premiere with *Sabor*'s star, a former and estranged alter ego played by Asier Etxeandia, in a veiled reference to actor Eusebio Poncela. It goes without saying that the third star of *Law of Desire* was Antonio Banderas, playing Poncela's impulsive and psychotic young lover in his third collaboration with Almodóvar.

Given the amount of self-referential signposts throughout *Pain and Glory*, it's tempting to read Almodóvar's 21st feature as a kaleidoscopic rendering of his own creative and personal universe. The passionate, liberated, and libidinous life in 1980s Madrid is invoked through Salvador's reunion with old collaborators and lovers, but also via a multilayered recalling of *Law of Desire*: Carmen Maura's memorable enactment of Jean Cocteau's monodrama *The Human Voice* here becomes a frustrated attempt to stage Cocteau's *Le bel indifférent*, eventually replaced by an autobiographical monologue written by Salvador and called *The Addiction*; and, in one of *Pain and Glory*'s most vibrant and suspenseful moments, a mature man asks his long-time lover, delicately, “Do you want me to spend the night with you?”—the same question posed nonchalantly to *Law of Desire*'s protagonist by one of his fleeting lovers.

Another past periodically visited by *Pain and Glory* is Salvador's childhood, which represents the protagonist's last connection to inner peace and innocence. This youth was an earthly children's paradise ravaged both by religious dogmas and hypocrisy, as denounced by Almodóvar in *Bad Education* ("they made of me an absolute ignorant," asserts Salvador about his first religious teachers) and by the material and emotional penuries of postwar Spain; Almodóvar synthesizes all this in an extraordinary double incarnation of her mother by Penélope Cruz (who reenacts her character in *Volver* but with an extra hint of distant resilience) and a heartbreakingly tenebrous Julieta Serrano.

Another connection to Almodóvar's past films is the similarity between *Pain and Glory* and *Pain & Life*, the title of an unfinished novel (which contained the premise of *Volver*) that was discarded by Marisa

Paredes's character in *The Flower of My Secret*, another of the filmmaker's dissections of a creator's tormented psyche.

Despite the reported amount of self-references and apparent dualities—between avatars and real people, and between different incarnations of the same character—*Pain and Glory* is probably Almodóvar's most cohesive movie, a remarkable accomplishment since the narrative doesn't rely on stylistic mannerisms, a baroque take on melodrama, or self-reflexive meta-artifices: the ingredients that shaped the tones and narratives of *Pain and Glory*'s most direct predecessors, *Law and Desire* and *Bad Education*. In the new film, the unifying force comes first from the ubiquity of Salvador, Almodóvar's doppelgänger and Banderas's stroke of genius, an actor-director communion that can only make us dream what might have been between François Truffaut and Jean-Pierre Léaud later in life. Banderas's leap from the impulsive, histrionic early

characters in *Law of Desire* or *Tie Me Up! Tie Me Down!* to the sibylline, interiorized protagonist of *The Skin I Live In* may have been colossal, but nothing could have predicted the nuanced, expressive quietness the actor achieves in *Pain and Glory*. While watching Banderas's Salvador accept his first-ever puff of heroin out of pure "curiosity," I couldn't stop thinking about Chaplin accepting his first-ever glass of rum before his execution at the end of *Monsieur Verdoux*. Let's just call it a matter of humanity.

Salvador's body, voice (his own or an accomplice reciting his words), or perspective are somehow present in almost every shot, including in subjective flashbacks of his homosexual awakening,

which evoke the incandescent visions of Bud from Terence Davies's *The Long Day Closes*. And though the singularity of Almodóvar's writing always creates strong spiritual and rhetorical affinities

between characters, *Pain and Glory* functions almost literally as a single-character film, not so much stream of consciousness or interior monologue, but a sort of cinematic account book of emotions, memories, sources of inspiration, loved ones, and life lessons. In this sense, the movie I thought about most while watching *Pain and Glory*, even more than *8½*—an obvious reference underlined by the poster of Fellini's film hanging in the office of Salvador's personal assistant—was Nanni Moretti's masterful *Mia madre*. Both movies wander around the afflictions, uncertainties, and scarce moments of solace of a filmmaker in crisis, and both emotionally culminate in the depiction of a filmmaker caring for an ailing mother.

Throughout the film, Almodóvar explicitly invokes some of the authors who have shaped his literary sensibility, from Chekhov to Cocteau to Éric Vuillard, though the most pertinent reference is undoubtedly Fernando Pessoa's *The Book of Disquiet*,



the Portuguese poet's inexhaustible celebration of autofiction, subjectivity, individualism, alienation, and integrity. Salvador reads the passage in which Pessoa claims, "I find life distasteful, like a useless medicine," while Almodóvar could have quoted the Spanish critic and translator Manuel Moya, who described *The Book of Disquiet* as a "*Umana commedia* where heaven, hell and purgatory are interwoven in conflict, neutralizing each other to illuminate a space where the misery and grandeur of the human experience coexist." Salvador recovers from the vault of his childhood memories some trading cards featuring Tyrone Power and Robert Taylor, while his autobiographical monologue invokes *Niagara* and *Splendor in the Grass* (this cinematic time capsule is brought up to date by the inclusion of a clip from Lucrecia Martel's *The Holy Girl* of the young heroines drifting in a swimming pool—a film for which Almodóvar was executive producer). The recurrence of water imagery accounts for the particular fluidity of *Pain and Glory*, a movie riddled with transitions between different narrative time frames but cleared of the flashy dissolves and wipes that have become part of Almodóvar's DNA.

Almodóvar deploys diverse strategies in *Pain and Glory* to introduce flashbacks, sometimes through match cuts between analogous objects (a piano at a bar and the one played by a kid's choir instructor; the jewelry boxes where Salvador's mother keeps her Catholic rosaries, now and then), or periodical medium-shots and close-ups of Salvador closing his eyes, losing consciousness under the influence of drugs and submerging into childhood recollections. These simple but spellbinding moments bring to mind key scenes from such essential film noirs as Otto Preminger's *Laura* (in which Dana Andrews falls asleep next to a portrait of the title character played by Gene Tierney) and Fritz Lang's *The Woman on the Window*, where Edward G. Robinson falls asleep in a

dream to wake up in reality. "Sometimes I'm inclined to lose track of time," are the last words spoken by Robinson's character before the film's reins are handed to his subconscious, a phrase Salvador would definitely approve of. Far from the evident tributes to film noir Almodóvar devised in *High Heels*, *Bad Education*, *Broken Embraces*, and *The Skin I Live In*, *Pain and Glory* recaptures the dreamy atmosphere of the genre while maintaining a safe distance from its most morbid tendencies.

In line with the duality of its title, *Pain and Glory* balances its innate warmth with painful historical and medical realities: the misery of postwar Spain, the perils of drug addiction, and, most significantly, the protagonist's inventory of maladies, including insomnia, arthrosis, ulcer, asthma, migraine,

and tinnitus. All of these diseases are graphically described in an animation sequence by the Argentinian designer Juan Gatti, and evoked in vivid detail every time Salvador puts a cushion on the floor before kneeling to pick something up ("The days when several aches converge I believe

in God and pray to him; the days I only suffer of one pain I'm an atheist," says Salvador). The feeling of personal wreckage spreads throughout Salvador's negotiation with his past: the memory of the breakup with an old lover (Leonardo Sbaraglia) is tinted with grief; a thin stream of mutual resentment hinders his reteaming with the protagonist of *Sabor*, with whom Salvador had creative differences; and his relationship with his mother is haunted by disillusionment and remorse. However, *Pain and Glory* doesn't register as a settling of scores with—or an exorcism of—the past, but as a conciliatory exercise of remembrance, an array of dramatic reencounters the director faces with a restrained and ultimately moving stoicism—Akira Kurosawa's *Ikiru* formally tempered by Yasujiro Ozu's minimalism. Almodóvar observes with bright lucidity the course of a life and allows the notion of mortality to emerge from an imperturbable



resignation—“avoid sentimentalism” Salvador tells his old collaborator regarding the stage adaptation of his autobiographical monologue. In fact, the highest praise one could dedicate to *Pain and Glory* would be to compare its profound, sapient serenity with the restrained but emotional charge of such monumental last films as John Huston’s *The Dead* or Carl Dreyer’s *Gertrud*.

In order to find the clearest perspective on Salvador’s past and present, Almodóvar submits his filmmaking to a subtractive process, leaving little room for pop art, references to current political affairs (present only in a graffiti with a feminist slogan), or lengthy musical interludes (though there’s a mandatory bow to Chavela Vargas). *Pain and Glory* is guided by an austerity and quietude that only pulls back in the most exuberant childhood flashbacks. Cinematographer José Luis Alcaine builds scenes around middle-distance shots, not indulging in tracking or crane shots. And Almodóvar’s idiosyncratic color palette is replaced by a muted, more naturalist study of shadowy interiors—mainly Salvador’s flat, a studio replica of Almodóvar’s apartment with actual objects from the director’s home—and the possibilities of the color white, which covers the walls of the cave where the infant Salvador lives with his mother, and dominates a theater stage due to the imposing presence of a mostly blank film screen.

Almodóvar’s drive toward subtraction—an exercise of style refinement and purification—causes a shift in the narrative paradigms, psychological mechanisms, and archetypal figures that constitute Almodóvar’s cosmology. In his world of wounded and vindictive characters, the Spanish auteur has long adopted the labyrinth as his favorite narrative geometry—the perfect device to capture the confusion of men and women in search for their own identities. He has used metafiction and unlikely coincidences to channel melodrama and amplify his characters’ traumas. However, *Pain and Glory* renounces

ambiguity in order to embrace clarity. Here gender and sexuality are no longer a matter of conflict but of self-acceptance—the secretive and tormented trans characters of *Law of Desire* and *Bad Education* are here substituted for such characters as a former lover who feels free enough to talk about his bisexuality with his son. The metafiction of *Pain and Glory* is

delivered with poignant subtlety, while the film’s narrative reliance on chance and unexpected encounters are less an opportunity for dramatic fireworks than for benign, tranquil dialogues with healing potential. In perhaps the film’s most revealing image, Salvador’s mother’s hands untangle a pair of Catholic rosaries, a



perfect representation of the unraveling skein of memories, tête-à-têtes, and reflections that make up the transparent, fragmented, almost plotless narrative of *Pain and Glory*.

In this limpid, translucent version of Almodóvar’s world, characters don’t impersonate others; they know who they are and what roles they play in Salvador’s orbital system. And Almodóvar is not blind to his own social role. In the last few years, a new generation of Spanish historians, critics, and filmmakers have raised the need for a reconsideration of the legacy of the period known as “la Transición,” encompassing the years from the end of Franco’s dictatorship in the mid-1970s to the establishment of a democracy and the (now questioned) promise of a new time of freedom and sociocultural progress of the 1980s. One of the most significant moments of this recent debate was signaled by the publication of *Cómo acabar con la contracultura* (*How to End Up with the Counterculture*) by film and culture critic Jordi Costa, a book that makes an appearance in *Pain and Glory* when it is handed over to Salvador by his assistant. His reaction after reading the book’s titular rhetorical question out loud: “What do I know?” In the essay, while praising the evolution and persistence of the transgressive spirit of Almodóvar’s work, Costa argues that the countercultural revolution of that time—during which Almodóvar played a central role

as a precursor of the movement known as La Movida Madrileña and an underground filmmaker—became “a lever used by the powers at be to liberate a deposit of libidinal energy which was subsequently exploited . . . by a system that doesn’t seem to have suffered a single scratch in the process.”

Alongside this critique of the inability of Almodóvar’s generation to shake the foundations of Franco’s Spain, the cultural debate has pointed to Iván Zulueta’s 1979 film *Rapture* (*Arrebato*)—about a filmmaker

(Poncela) who becomes friends with a childish man obsessed with cinema and heroin—as the film that best captured the spirit of its time while envisioning the genuine potential of an heterodox, countercultural cinema. Zulueta—who would design several posters for Almodóvar’s films—had to abandon filmmaking because of his addictions right after shooting *Rapture*, his second and last feature, which reinforced the cult standing of the movie and the director’s maverick status. This is all particularly relevant given the striking similarities between *Pain and Glory* and *Rapture*, two movies that deal with the attraction and damnation of heroin, and the memory of childhood as an absorbing refuge. However, the differences are also remarkable: in *Rapture*, cinema is presented as an all-consuming task inextricably linked to psychedelia, while *Pain and Glory* fashions cinema, and the arts, as a source of fulfillment and as a facilitator of human connection—the premiere of *Sabor*’s restoration brings together old collaborators, and the theatrical play reunites two old lovers. All in all, *Pain and Glory* is a fearless act of self-exposure in personal, artistic, and historical terms—a double-edged brushstroke of melancholy and lust for life, and a sublime addition to the Almodóvar pantheon.

Anthony Lane: “Pain and Glory’ Tells Autumnal Truths” (*New Yorker*)

Creative careers have their seasons, and, in the case of [Pedro Almodóvar](#), we are in the depths of autumn. More than three decades have passed since the juice and joy of his springtime, felt in movies like

“What Have I Done to Deserve This?” (1984). High summer, spanning “The Flower of My Secret” (1995) and “Volver” (2006), bestowed a new complexity on his instinctive warmth, with plots that folded in on themselves. Fall has proved a mixed blessing for Almodóvar: there was a nasty edge to “The Skin I Live In” (2011) and a dated air to the farce of “I’m So Excited!” (2013). Yet now, summoning his strength and gathering his obsessions together like old friends, he brings forth “Pain and Glory,” one of his richest and most sombre films. I can’t wait



for the snowfall of his winter’s tales.

Our hero is a movie director, Salvador Mallo (Antonio Banderas), whose existence has stalled. He lives alone, in Madrid, besieged by ailments, some of which he lists for us, in voice-over, as if reciting a roll call of his enemies: asthma, sciatica, tinnitus. “My specialty is headaches,” he adds, with a pang of pride. The filmmaker in [Fellini](#)’s “8½” (1963) was professionally thwarted, too, but his problem was mental blockage and carnal fatigue, whereas poor Salvador has fused vertebrae (surely a better excuse). As he climbs in and out of taxis, we watch him wince. Occasionally, the screen will burst and bloom into animated diagrams, showing the map of his disorders—or, as he grandly calls it, “the mythology of the organism.”

The mythmaking starts with the opening shot, in which Salvador, gray-bearded and marooned in meditation, is seated underwater, on the floor of a swimming pool. Give the man a trident and he could be Poseidon reborn. As he rises and breaks the surface, memory breathes upon him—specifically, the first of many flashbacks to his childhood. We meet little Salvador (Asier Flores) playing beside a stream while his mother, Jacinta (Penélope Cruz), and her friends do the laundry, singing as they toil and spreading the damp sheets on spears of grass, under a benevolent sun.

Here is a vision of bliss, rooted, like much of the film, in autobiography; Almodóvar himself grew up in a secluded rural village where clothes were washed in the river. We might also recall “The Flower

of *My Secret*,” in which women sit outdoors, make lace, and join in song, or maybe “*Amarcord*” (1974)—Fellini again, at his most nostalgic—which begins, likewise, with laundry hung out to dry. Take note, above all, of the elegant, fuss-free simplicity with which Almodóvar dips from the present into the past, and back again. “*Pain and Glory*” is by far his most watery work, drenched in the glide and purl of time; when Salvador, as a kid, catches sight of a grown man soaping and rinsing his naked form, after the labors of the day, he faints into a fever. And how does the M.P.A.A. reward so compelling a scene? With an R rating, citing “graphic nudity.” I despair.

So back and forth we sway, between the years. The restoration of one of Salvador’s early films impels him to track down its leading man, Alberto (Asier Etxeandia). Having quarrelled long ago, they reunite—a fraught occasion, though eased by Alberto’s chasing of the dragon. Salvador follows suit, seeking pain relief, and develops an addiction of his own. This is the one facet of the film from which viewers may shrink; the heroin habit comes across as soothing, controllable, and even civilized, without a hint of the ruin that it can wreak. (For a blunter outcome, see Joanna Hogg’s “*The Souvenir*,” released in May.) In another reconciliation, a former boyfriend of Salvador’s, now resident in Buenos Aires, travels to Madrid and, half by chance, discovers him anew. They talk, drink, embrace, and part once more.

Not every Almodovarian, I imagine, will welcome this muted mood. Where are the shocks of yesteryear? But flashes of heresy remain, if you know where to look; when Salvador fetches his drug from its hiding place, for instance, he has to kneel on a cushion, like a worshipper taking Communion at the altar rail. There is something thrilling, not dulled, in the very honesty of the film, and in the vigor with which feelings, expressed at any age, can strike us like a slap in the face. “You haven’t been a good son,” Jacinta tells Salvador, when she visits him. Now old, and preparing for death, she is played with great spirit by Julieta Serrano, who was—get this—the heroin-injecting Mother Superior in Almodóvar’s “*Dark Habits*,” back in 1983. One pleasure of his movies, as of Ingmar Bergman’s, is the ease with which actors come and go, from drama to drama, like a trusted theatre troupe. Thus it is that Antonio Banderas, once a lustful and febrile hunk in “*Matador*” (1986) and “*Tie Me Up! Tie Me Down!*” (1989), can now assume

the role of Salvador, as shaggy and as wary as a beaten cur.

If you go to the Prado, in Madrid, you will find a late self-portrait of Goya, in an open-necked shirt, surveying the sad landscape of his own features and recounting what he sees, without fear or favor. The picture dates from 1815, when Goya was sixty-nine—as Almodóvar was when “*Pain and Glory*” was released in Spain. What is involved here, in other words, is a tradition of truth-telling, with a long and honorable reach. The new film, like the old painting, is a stubborn, unvain, yet beautiful description of a man whose illusions are failing along with his mortal health, but who is somehow revived and saved by the act of describing. The glory flows from the pain.



Bilge Ebiri: “*Pain and Glory* Is the Most Emotionally Naked Movie Pedro Almodóvar Has Ever Made” (*New York Magazine*).

Pain and Glory is at once the gentlest and most emotionally naked movie Pedro Almodóvar has ever made. It’s being billed as an autobiographical work, though that’s more a matter of approach than of actual content. As the aging filmmaker and onetime provocateur Salvador Mallo, Antonio Banderas has been outfitted with Almodóvar’s colorful shirts and high-tops, and he sports a salt-and-pepper beard and a shock of happy hair not unlike the director’s. The character even lives in Almodóvar’s apartment—the production reportedly replicated the filmmaker’s own abode—with its impeccable, vibrant décor, its rainbow curtains and primary-color cabinets and oddball works of art. But then again, most Almodóvar characters have lived in apartments like that; his body of work is rife with surrogates for himself, be they lovesick artists, scorned lovers, or other emotional castaways.

So Salvador isn’t quite Almodóvar, but a fictional alter ego, a vessel through which the director

can confess his doubts and regrets and tie up loose ends. Salvador, at times, seems to be a man built entirely out of memories. When we first see him, he's submerged in a pool, flashing back to his mom (played by Penélope Cruz) washing clothes and singing alongside some other women by a creek. Then, via a captivating animated sequence, Salvador tells us about his many ailments — his migraines, his depression, his twisted vertebrae — and the various methods and medications he uses to control them. This is the pain, presumably. In the same breath, he discusses how his filmmaking career has taken him all over the world and taught him about all the places and countries and towns that he could once only dream about. These are the glories. The question in his mind is how to keep both extremes in line as he grows older, because right now all he's got, it seems, is pain.

Pain and Glory weaves in and out of the past, through varied forms of expression — paintings, plays, monologues, movies, snatches of literature — in what is sometimes a mazelike narrative. But fundamentally, the picture has two tracks: In the present, Salvador makes amends with an actor (Asier Etxeandia) with whom he once feuded (some have suggested that this references the long period when Almodóvar and Banderas didn't work together, but I suspect it owes more to the director's breakup with the great Carmen Maura, the star of titles like *Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown* and *The Law of Desire*), and then promptly gets hooked on heroin, a drug he'd always scoffed at. (Almodóvar once said that, as a cocaine person, he hated when his actors did heroin.) Mixing that with his painkillers and generous helpings of alcohol, Salvador drifts further and further into his memories, particularly the period when his impoverished family moved to a small rural town and had to live in a glorified cave. There, mom hires a local illiterate bricklayer (César Vicente) to help fix up their catacomb-like home, in exchange for young Salvador teaching the man to read and write. Of course, young Salvador, in the throes of adolescent sexual awakening, becomes fascinated with the hunky bricklayer for other reasons.



The grown-up Salvador is a man paralyzed both creatively and emotionally — and, given all his aches and pains, he may be in danger of becoming paralyzed physically as well. And yet creation swirls around him. An early film, now regarded as a classic, is given a restoration and screening. (Salvador and his actor are supposed to attend; instead, they get high at home and call in for the Q&A, which ends in comic disaster.) A stray composition about a long-lost lover becomes a monologue that then prompts a remarkable and tender reunion. At one point, Salvador refuses to loan out two pieces of art he owns for a museum

show; later, a supposedly anonymous painting drifts back unexpectedly into his life, prompting another cascade of memories, a reminder from the universe that art is meant to be sent out into the world, not kept hidden away.

Throughout, Banderas shifts his understated performance to play the many roles that Salvador finds himself in: He can be a repentant friend one minute, domineering director the next. In a series of scenes with his ailing mother, we see him go from parent to child then back to parent again. It's a performance of phenomenal range, but it also feels so unified, so controlled. "Better not to be an actor who's always crying, but one who's always on the verge of tears," Salvador advises his actor pal at one point, and it's the kind of advice one might imagine Almodóvar giving. Melodrama has always been in the director's bones, but he's resisted the indulgence that comes with it. We rarely find wild, uncontrolled bursts of emotion in an Almodóvar film (there are a few pointed exceptions); instead, what we get is the spectacle of people struggling to hold things back, while the feelings are displaced onto the décor and the *mise-en-scène* and the music. *Why cry yourself*, Almodóvar seems to ask, *when this beautiful red pillow can do it for you?*

In his later years, as his work has gone from comic farces and ironic thrillers to more subdued dramas and mysteries, Almodóvar has become the cinematic poet of certain kind of eloquent hesitancy. Each work dances on the edge of abject tragedy and emotional devastation, without ever falling in. *Pain*

and Glory takes things one step further. For all its confessional qualities, for all the vulnerability of Banderas's performance, the film holds it all together, never quite resolving anything — until it gets to its

closing image, a simple glance between mother and child that fades out as soon as it registers. And then the tears come, like Noah's flood.

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