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PRESENTS

THE FLOWER OF MY SECRET

A FILM BY PEDRO ALMODOVAR

Rated R / 100 minutes

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A SONY PICTURES CLASSICS RELEASE

THE FLOWER OF MY SECRET
A FILM BY PEDRO ALMODOVAR

CAST

Leo	MARISA PAREDES
Angel	JUAN ECHANOVE
Paco	IMANOL ARIAS
Betty	CARMEN ELIAS
Rosa	ROSSY DE PALMA
Mother	CHUS LAMPREAVE
Antonio	JOAQUIN CORTES
Blanca	MANUELA VARGAS
Manuela	KITI MANVER
Doctor A	JORDI MOLLA
Doctor B	NANCHO NOVO
Alicia	GLORIA MUNOZ
Tomas	JUAN JOSE OTEGUI
Junkie	JOSE PALAU
Bartender	ABRAHAM GARCIA
Dancer	MARISOL MURIEL
Neighbor A	ALICIA AGUT
Neighbor B	MARIA TERESA IBANEZ

CREDITS

Written and directed by	PEDRO ALMODOVAR
Executive Producer	AGUSTIN ALMODOVAR
Director of Production	ESTHER GARCIA
Director of Photography	AFFONSO BEATO
Editor	JOSE SALCEDO
Music	ALBERTO IGLESIAS
Sound	BERNARDO MENZ

A Sony Pictures Classics Release

Running Time: 100 minutes

MPAA Rating: R

In Spanish with English Subtitles

THE FLOWER OF MY SECRET

(Synopsis)

Two doctors attempt to make a grieving mother understand that her son, who has suffered a motorcycle accident, has died, even though he seems to be breathing. But her son is dead. It is not easy to explain a cerebral death, and the doctors' clumsiness only manages to give the mother false hopes. At the end of this disconcerting scene, we discover that the situation is not real, but is in fact a dramatization of a typical case, which the doctors face every day. It is part of a seminary organized by the National Plan for the Donation of Organs. Its purpose is to teach doctors the most humane and clear way to communicate the tragic news of a sudden death to the victim's relatives, followed by the request for the donation of the victim's organs. These seminars are directed by Betty, (Carmen Elias), a respected psychologist.

During the lunch break, Betty receives the unexpected visit of her friend Leo Macias. Betty is surprised and a little upset by her friend's interruption. When Leo explains that she has come because she couldn't remove her boots and needs Betty's help, Betty's surprise turns to stupor. Leo's voice begins to break, as she is close to tears. "I'm not crazy, Betty, just alone."

Betty overcomes her initial hesitation and understands this last remark. Before Leo breaks down, she helps her take off her boots and change them for looser ones. Leo tells her that Paco, her husband, gave her those boots. The first night she wore them, Paco also had to help her take them off.

Paco's absence is the reason why Leo begins to crumble simply because a pair of boots is too tight. Her husband is in Brussels. During the last few months before he left, the couple had argued constantly. Paco is a soldier, a professional strategist, who is participating in the Spanish contingent of the NATO Peacekeeping forces in Bosnia, a mission he requested voluntarily.

The first scene in the film, the fiction interpreted by the doctors and the mother who refuses to understand that her son is dead, is a metaphor for the moment Leo is going through. Paco's love is dead, but she defends it blindly and hangs onto hope, however absurd. Nobody explains the evidence to her in an appropriate manner, not her husband, nor her friend Betty, a psychologist who is also Paco's secret lover.

The postponement of the solution to the problems of her marriage provokes in Leo a fragility and uncertainty that affects and floods all of the aspects of her life, especially her work. Leo feels so weak that she is unable to lie. Even though it is a secret, privy only to her husband, her intimate friend Betty and her editors, Leo Macias is a writer of romance novels who hides under the

pseudonym Amanda Gris, one of the queens of this romance genre. By contract she must deliver three novels a year, but Leo has not been able to fulfill her obligations in months. Rather than "pink" novels, everything she writes comes out black. To fill this void, the Fascination Publishing Company, which publishes the novels of Amanda Gris, edits her first anthology, and threatens the writer with revealing her true identity.

Betty recommends her to meet for an interview with her friend Angel, in charge of the cultural supplement of El Pais, a leading newspaper. Angel is charming, although often drunk, a film buff and a fan of Amanda Gris. He does not suspect that the woman who sits before him is his favorite author. Angel proposes that she write something about the Amanda Gris anthology. Leo refuses, claiming she hates that type of literature and that particular author. She leaves the interview very depressed. But then she writes a demolishing critique of her own work using another pseudonym.

Paco calls her from Brussels to announce his visit. He has obtained a day's leave. At the prospect of seeing her husband again, all of her problems immediately disappear.

But she is mistaken. From that moment on, Leo's real test is about to begin....

INTERVIEW WITH PEDRO ALMODOVAR

Tell me about the film's opening scene....

The first scene is always useful for me to establish the themes which I'm going to deal with later on. The first sentence that is said in the film is, "Your son, Juan is dead." In this scene, doctors attempt to explain a death to a relative, so that the grieving person can understand it. (The film also speaks of a death. It's the death of a feeling, but I think that it's equivalent in pain and in tragedy to the death of someone near.)

Now at the same time this is all fiction, a dramatization of the real thing. Which is the equivalent to say that all the characters in the film are living in a certain kind of imposture. They seem to be something that they really aren't or they are something else that they don't seem to be. Many of them act under a pseudonym.

The reality of the sequence is a seminar which is being taught by Leo's friend Betty, who is a psychologist, in order to teach doctors how to obtain relatives' authorization for the donations of organs. (Although this may seem surreal, these seminars actually take place in Spain.) And the psychologist that teaches this seminar, who is trying to teach the most humane and clear way for a doctor to explain the death of a relative, this specialist in bad news is unable to tell her best friend the bad news.

Why?

I think this is very human. There is a huge difference between life and work. I think of myself, for example. I'm able to make very tough decisions in my work that I can't make so quickly in my life. Theory is something and practice is something different. The husband of the protagonist is a strategist, and he knows professionally how to behave in a war but he can't handle his own domestic war. He goes to the Bosnian war escaping from his domestic war.

What is the source of Leo's pain? Why does she suffer so intensely?

Something very simple and very basic. The man that she loves does not love her. She has been living for a year or two in absolute uncertainty. That uncertainty, I think, is probably the worst feeling any person can live with. It is a cancer that seems to be eating away inside you, mining inside you. It corrodes everything--your security and your sense of life.

I think there is an obligation that lovers have towards the other person. When you are absolutely sure that you are no longer in love with the other person, you have to tell them. And you have to do so in a very clear way. Without being afraid of their reaction. Once you are sure that that feeling is completely finished, then you can act. You can face it. The problem is there. When Leo finally realizes that her marriage is over, she is so fragile, so weak that she doesn't have the strength for anything so she needs help. Fortunately, the help comes from her mother.

Why does Leo try to kill herself?

Leo is a woman who is lost, completely lost. One of the devastating effects of the end of her relationship. For the last few years the uncertainty has made her able to only think of him. The moment that he is out, there is nothing left of her life. In her world, there was only him. So when he's gone, nothing else exists..

After living two years of uncertainty, she is just too fragile. Look at the way she is portrayed in the first scene. It's enough for a pair of boots to be too tight, - for her whole world to come crashing down.

After Leo's suicide attempt, Leo is on her way to unconsciousness when she hears the voice of her mother on the machine. Why does that voice revive her?

Leo is not only falling into unconsciousness, she's really being enveloped by the darkness of death. That moment when the mother's voice resonates from the answering machine, it is as if she has thrown a jar of cold water at Leo to bring her back from the hands of death and to silence death. That voice reminds Leo that she has a mother twenty kilometers away from her for whom Leo's death would probably signify her death. And it also is the voice that represents life. She says to her, "I've just fought with your sister; I'm very depressed." Things which seem very trivial, but which do represent what life is. At that moment, Leo thinks, "I can't do this to my mother. I have to take her back to the village." So in a way she comes back from that darkness to be able to take her mother back to the village. That scene is also shot in a way so that the voice goes through the corridor, all the way to Leo's bedroom, as if it was a smell that was travelling to knock on that door and wake her up.

The mother literally saves Leo's life but at the same time is a destructive element in her sister Rosa's life.

I created the mother as a portrait of my mother. But I wanted this to be a very realistic portrait, in the same way that the film is a realistic film. (Although I would actually say neo-realist, meaning the genre that was created by the Italian filmmakers.) I didn't want this to be an idealized portrait of my mother, because I think my mother's faults are much more interesting than her virtues and her qualities.

In the way she treats Leo's sister Rosa, she is aggressive, unfair and plain obnoxious. Now at the same time, she can't really live without Rosa. There are sometimes mother/daughter relationships that are condemned to scream at each other and be at each other's throats. They can't seem to conceive of life in any other way. By the same token, they can't live separately. Something that is pathetic and comic at the same time. And that is the way life is.

How does going back to the old village begin the healing process for Leo?

When she takes her mother home to the village, without realizing it, Leo has returned to the beginning of her own life, to the place where she was born. She in fact returns to the same bed in which she was born. And from there she starts again. She hears the same conversations she heard when she was little, from the same neighbors who are now older, who are doing the same thing they were doing forty years ago: embroidery by hand. She passes through the same doors that she did when she was little, she sees the same streets. This allows her recover her own signs of identity. It is very important in moments of crisis, to look for the few emotional references that you may have. I think those help to orientate you.

Another positive aspect in her life is her new friendship with Angel. It doesn't seem like they are destined to become romantic...

I think there is a very interesting moment in the relationship between a man and woman. If the couple hasn't made love, and there is reciprocity, there is a moment where they become friends as opposed to lovers. I think that moment actually scares a man. But I think that is in fact something very positive. Because this friendship actually helps her to deal with her problems for a second time in a different way. Because it is a new friendship, it is more stimulating than usual. She doesn't need to jump into the arms of the first man that crosses her path.

I think one of the things that made her suffer so much is that Betty is her only friend. That's a sign of her isolation.

Yes. She really has to begin almost from scratch. She's got to start with new habits. There really is a moment where you need company more than sex.

When you get that company from your friends, you can be more selective when you do look for sex. Leo's friendship with Angel is going to help her to be a mature woman and to be the owner of her solitude. And that is very important. And to acquire little by little new habits without urgency.

The flamenco performance marks another step in her recovery...

I think that is the beginning of her realization that life can be very contradictory. It can be difficult, and at the same time very fair. There is a natural recycling of the things in life. In the blackest period of her life, she was helping to create something beautiful because someone--the son of the maid--was stealing from her to finance a work of art. And that is a very positive point of view, that something can be both destructive and creative. And it's part of the mystery of living.

The title of the flamenco dance, by the way, is "Loneliness." That loneliness comes out of that clash between the male figure and the female prototype. It ends with her on the ground, whereas he's dancing triumphantly.

Angel loves the romantic fiction that Leo can no longer bring herself to write.

At that moment in her life, Leo is needing authenticity, she's needing truth, and those novels represent exactly the opposite. The pink novels, romance novels seem to write about suffering and pain, but she who knows what it is to suffer, knows that those novels don't reflect that at all. Even though she is earning her living from them, she's against them.

Angel can look at those novels in a different way. He can look at them as a kitsch phenomenon, and like them very much. Probably for the same reason she looked at those novels and suffered. To her those novels put together with the pain she is feeling creates the rejection. He on the other hand, brings to his reading a lot of humor and the result is the opposite. Everything can have many different readings, depending on how you look at them. I am not trying to make any sort of judgement as to what is good literature or bad literature. I am trying to deal with the needs of each one at given moments in their lives. So this type of literature that for her is not acceptable, this is something that he likes. The difference is that for him it's a caprice, whereas for her, it's an obligation.

Leo's writing has changed in the movie you say it went from pink to black. Are you trying to consciously make a change in your cinema with this film to be more serious?

No. I have only changed genre and I think that change of genre is what really obligates a change in style. I think in fact there are films that are darker than this that I have made. I think both "Kika" and "Matador" deal with darker sides of me than this film. This film, although it may not be the most colorful I think is one of the most luminous films I've made, because they are two different concepts.

You shot the film completely in real locations, and often outside. Did you do this to show that the film was made in contemporary Spain?

Starting with the idea of a realistic film, I wanted to place the film in a very clear context and space. For example, you do see junkies in the streets of Madrid, just like in the film. The bar which she goes to is a bar that is very, very real. The screaming contest on TV. The protesting students. The reality is as absurd and as clear as we see it in the film.

Can you talk about your visual style in the film. For example, your use of mirrors...

The use of mirrors is really to try to amplify the spaces to make them larger. In an objective and very basic sense, the mirrors amplify or enlarge the space. Now at the same time they enlarge the space, they also manipulate it. In a way that is not artificial, but in fact very profound, almost as if they were X-rays. For example, in the scene where Paco arrives in the entry hall, the mirror in the hall serves to enlarge the small entry hall but by the same token since it is a mirror composed of many small mirrors, the effect it has is that of creating a fragmented image of a couple kissing. We never see lips. To show that they are in fact a fragmented couple.

The film recalls some old Hollywood movies ...

It does correspond well with the kind of films that were made in the 50s. What we call a "women's picture."--"Mildred Pierce," for example. That type of movie with Bette Davis or Susan Hayward. A big portrait of a lady. But the fifties were a naive period, and to do a story fifty years later, you need more complexity.

* * *

Notes on "THE FLOWER OF MY SECRET" by Pedro Almodovar

"The Flower of My Secret" is a film of "good feelings," which does not imply at all any concessions to sentimentality. That is, it is a drama. Although I adore melodrama, this time I chose the aridity and the synthesis. Bile instead of honey. Tears that do not serve to let off steam, but to asphyxiate. True Pain.

This "Flower...." casts an intense and painful spell, and yet, there are no evil characters. They are all good, like in a film by Capra. But in spite of this absence of evil, their mere clumsiness, indecision or cowardice (or quite simply the fact that human beings are imperfect) ends up causing pain to those around them.

Another expression that I am terrified to use (besides "good feelings") is "the story is full of humanity" or "the characters overflow with humanity." But that is the case, even if these expressions have lost their meaning through their abuse or misuse.

I remember perfectly the first pages that I wrote of all the scripts that I have shot, those that were the motor and seed of a future film. My first impulse was to make a short from these first pages, but I always ended up turning them into feature length films, not only because it was more profitable but because these first pages provoked in me enormous curiosity about the characters and the situations they were living. And if I wanted to know how they had arrived in these situations and what would happen to them afterwards, I had to find out and write it myself. And while I inquired into the past and future of these characters I ended up discovering the story I wanted to tell, which, in the beginning, I didn't even know by intuition.

Because of this haphazard system of creation, the first scenes that I write almost always end up in the middle of the film they generate.

The first thing I wrote in "Kika" was all of the episode of the rape, from the moment Paul Bazzo arrives until he leaps out the window. In "High Heels" it was Victoria Abril's confession on the newscast, when she admits to being the author of the murder she has just announced. In "Tie Me Up, Tie Me Down!", Antonio Banderas' declaration, after he has tied and immobilized Victoria Abril: "I'm twenty-three years old and I have fifty thousand pesetas. I am alone in the world, I'd like to be a good husband to you and a good father to your children."

The first thing I wrote for "The Flower of My Secret," that I urgently wanted to see projected on the screen, was the husband's visit. In the eight versions I wrote of the script, "the visit" is a block that has barely changed, it came out all at once. It includes everything from when the husband rings the bell until he disappears down the stairway's landing.

THE GOODBYE LOOK

The stairs that lead him away from Leo sound like bells tolling for the dead. And that is precisely what they announce, the death of their love.

Leaning on the corner of the landing, Marisa-Leo listens paralyzed to Paco's steps. One by one, step by step, two floors of an old Madrid building, leading to the street. And she holds it in piercing close up that lasts as long as the scene would last in real time. It's the torrential goodbye look.

I did not want to remove a single frame, a single step, a single tear.

From that moment on Leo and Paco walk in opposite directions. the same steps that lead Paco to a new life lead Leo towards death. Leo has to kill the love she feels for Paco, and the only way she can do it is to kill herself, the inseparable container of that love.

THE VOICE OF LIFE

When Leo lies down and closes her eyes to the world, after taking a lethal dose of tranquilizers, at the very moment in which her conscience begins to turn dark, the phone rings. It's her mother. She has had a fight with her sister (with whom she lives in a Madrid neighborhood) and she calls Leo to complain and say goodbye. She wants to go to her village, flee from Madrid..."I would have liked so much to say goodbye to you..." The mother's voice sounds depressed as it is recorded on the answering machine. Leo can barely move, she opens her eyes, the phone is too far away, a long hallway separates her from the living room where the answering machine is. the mother's sad voice travels down the hallway like a breath of air, it arrives at the bedroom's door and shakes the weakened conscience of the daughter until it makes her react.

For many years I have had the temptation to make a movie about my mother. The idea came up during a conversation had with one of my sisters: "Mother has asked me to take her to see a psychiatrist. She doesn't want to go crazy like her aunts," my sister said. "Mother is not crazy," I told her, what she wants is to talk. "Yes, but I can't be chattering away with her all day," my sister protested with reason.

I had never thought of it, but that conversation with my sister revealed to me the solitude of my widowed mother and her indirect search for an interlocutor. And I thought I could do something about it. I have discovered my mother almost casually, listening to her while she talks to other people.

For example, when I was preparing "Women..." I discovered that she had worn black since she was three years old until she turned thirty. We were in the "Corte Ingles" (a Madrid department store) looking for the dress she would wear in the film, (she played the part of a news anchor woman) when I heard her say to the saleswoman who was taking care of us and who insisted on dark colors: "Give me something colorful, I don't want dark dresses, I've spent my life wearing black dresses. Since I was three, when my father died, until I was pregnant with this one (pointing to me) I went straight from one mourning period to another."

I didn't make any comment then, but the discovery shook me. I had never imagined that my mother wore black during my gestation. I deduced that I was a reaction against the cruel tradition which she had been a victim of. That in spite of the blackness of her dress my mother was gestating inside her revenge against black: me, someone whose whole life would be determined by color, and who would express himself through its excess. When I heard her talk to the saleswoman, I understood the reason for my natural tendency for bright colors.

After speaking to my sister I thought I should accompany my mother for a few days, simply listen to her. The summer was the perfect time because she spends it in the village. I would go to the village and would take a camera with me to record all of her words because I don't trust my memory.

But I didn't do it and I think I never will. Something more complex than laziness prevents me from it. But the idea is still there. It comes and goes. Lately, two films reminded me of it: "The Quince Tree Sun" (Victor Erice) and "Through the Olive Trees" (Abbas Kiarostami) made me feel again the need to get together with my mother and make a movie with her words. I suppose it was the exciting sharpness, the basic emotion that both of those films breathe, which inspired and motivated me. If I were to make a film about "my mother's words", Erice's and Kiarostami's style would be the ideal one. But I didn't do it. I didn't even try it, instead I shot "The Flower of My Secret."

I didn't go to the village in the summer, but I made Leo go with her mother to Almagro, a village that is thirty kilometers away from my own and which represent the quintessence of everything in La Mancha. I selected for their arrival a street which is very similar to the one my mother lives. And I wrote for Chus Lampreave dialogues that I had heard my mother say a thousand times.

And I photographed the fields of red earth, infinite, struck directly to the sky. Fields of La Mancha without horizon. And the ash colored olive trees. And Chus recites as they are arriving in Almagro, "My village," a poem my mother still recites.

And Leo recovers her desire to survive under the patio's grapevine, roots in the wind that indicate where she has come from, the first door she had to cross before walking out on the blinding white street.

LIKE A COW WITHOUT A COWBELL

Without knowing it, the initial "husband's visit" has been the pretext for making my most Manchegan film, since consciously I would never have made it. The pain suffered by the abandoned Leo has transported me, without previous permission, to my origins. And the effect has been as unexpected as it has been balsamic. I sense too that the film about "my mother's words" is contained within "The Flower of My Secret." And I'm not referring to the unstoppable and drastic verbosity of the Chus Lampreave character.

There is a sense that synthesizes in a special way the film didn't make: through the embroidered curtains (I should point out that Almagro is the "Cradle of Female Crafts", the only place in La Mancha--which is equivalent to saying the only place in the world--where the woman still sit out in the sun to do embroidery with "bolillos." By hand. Sheets. Curtains. Table cloths. Handkerchiefs. They spend a lifetime doing it.) Jacinta, Leo's mother walks up to the bed where Leo is lying, pale and listless. The mother senses Leo's drama and she laments: "How sad, my child, that so young you are already like a cow without a cowbell!"

There is no comic aspect to this comparison at all. In response to Leo's look of incomprehension, the mother explains, "...lost, without course or bearing, with no one to control you...like me...I too am like a cow without a cowbell, but at my age that is normal. When a woman is left by her husband, because he has died or has left with another woman, which is the same in any case, we must go back to the place where we were born. Visit the saint's chapel, sit outside with the neighbors, pray with them, even if we are not believers, because otherwise we will be lost like a cow without a cowbell..."

Leo looks at her mother and sees herself reflected in her. For different reasons they are both alone.

THE FEMALE SOLITUDE

That is the subject of the film, of the one I didn't make and of "The Flower": Solitude.

THE MAP

I was born during a bad period for Spain, but a very good one for cinema. I'm referring to the fifties. I was only a few years old when I first stepped inside a village cinema. It was similar to the one that appears in "The Spirit of the Beehive," if my memory does not betray me and a movie theatre does in fact appear in that film by Victor Erice. With the passing of time, I have noticed that the memories I have of films which had an impact on me do not usually coincide with the original films, but rather with what viewing them provoked in me.

To that first village cinema, besides a chair, I also brought a small tin filled with embers, to fight off the cold during the projection. Years later, the heat from that improvised brazier has become the paradigm of what films meant to me during that period.

When I was eleven years old, in Extremadura, there was a cinema on the same street as the school where I studied. At this school the priests tried to form my spirit, deforming it with religious tenacity. Fortunately, a little further up, on the same street, in the theatre stalls, I reconciled with the world, with my world. A world dominated by perverse emotions, to which I was sure I belonged. Very early in my life, when I was eleven or twelve, I was forced to choose, and I did so with the forcefulness of inexperience. If I were doomed to hell for watching "Johnny Guitar," "Picnic," and "Splendor in the Grass," or "Cat on a Hot Tin Roof," I had no alternative but to accept such punishment. I did not know what genres were, but without a doubt, my genetic code was branded in burning red, like a cow, with the stigma of the provincial film buff. I could not help but being more sensitive to the voice of Tennessee Williams, coming from the lips of Liz Taylor, Paul Newman or Marlon Brando, then to the drooling whispers of my Spiritual Director. For me there was no doubt. The calling of the light, projected in my eyes as the reflection of the movie screen, was much stronger than any other calling.

What I didn't know was that decades later some of the images projected on the screens of my childhood would bear my signature and would be marked by those first few films in which Tennessee Williams was my true Spiritual Director.

THE BED AND ITS SURROUNDINGS

In a love story, the Bed is very important (relatively so, because lovers only need to have their bodies at hand to express themselves as such, and can do so on any surface) but in a story where the love is gone the Bed is essential. Its lack of use is very eloquent, and it serves as the best thermometer to measure the temperature of the relationship.

In "The Flower of My Secret" there is only one Great Bed Scene between Leo and her husband, but they never get to lie on it. The bed only serves as a witness.

Paco has just arrived from Brussels, Leo leads him to the bedroom, talking endlessly, eating him in her hands, but he wants to take a shower before anything else, claiming to be sweaty from the voyage...Leo and her husband revolve around the bed, while she unbuttons his shirt, one button after another, reciting the rosary of her immediate desires to the best of the unbuttoned buttons: "...first you shower, since you are so interested ...(first button)...then we fuck (second button)...then, we rest (third button)...then we fuck again (fourth button) and then, whatever God wills! (fourth button, shirt off). All around the bed, as if they are standing next to an altar. An altar that will become an abyss as deep as the Grand Canyon, and equally dangerous.

After the shower (during which Leo waits with the towel in her hands and hungry eyes), a brutal discussion emerges, like a tropical storm...Paco explains that he does not have a full day's permit, as he promised, but only a two-hour leave, after which he has to go back to the airport. Leo roars with frustration. But Paco is a soldier, and he responds "I don't have to explain to you what my obligations are." "You are my husband," Leo retorts. "Do I need to explain to you what your obligations are to me?" The discussion heats up in the bedroom, while Paco puts on his clean underwear. The Bed is witness to the enormous abyss which has opened between the couple.

Mute, intact and enormous, the bed only welcomes Leo's buttocks, when she sits with her back to Paco and, with the monotony of pain which has been simmering for months, confesses her opinion of the Peace Mission which separates them: "You went to resolve a war fleeing from the one you had here, in your own home, and in this war I am the only victim." Leo remains sitting, with her back to him. She doesn't know that he is not even listening to him anymore. Leo goes from being a Williams character, one of those strong-willed women, full of reason even while they make deafening mistakes, to being a Cocteau character: an abandoned woman even when she has before her her object of desires, as that object has fallen asleep ("Le Bel Indifferent") or is simply not there.

I rehearsed the scene with the actors to the level of torture. After this process my only problem was what to put over the Bed. It may seem like a small thing, but it was not only an aesthetic problem.

The image placed over the Bed's headboard dominates the room, watches over our dreams, stands guard at the door of our intimacy, symbolizes something which we believe in, something that gives us confidence, gives us shelter and protects us. It is a sacred place. As my characters were not fervent believers, deciding what should go over the headboard was a delicate decision. At least I got the idea of placing a large map of Spain, framed with gilded care. One of those maps, with sky blue seas, in front of which we posed for our school pictures.

I never had a chance to pose for that picture, I wasn't given it, and I feel as if a prized toy had been taken away from me, which I had a right to have like any other child. I think the day on which mine was to be taken I couldn't go to school because I was to emigrate with my family to Extremadura, in search of prosperity.

The school of the priests, the bad religious education, geography and movies: they're all mixed in my life like the rice, shrimp, calamari and peppers in a paella.

My bad relationship with geography carried on to my school in Extremadura. With the salesians I only learned to be fearful and to sing precious masses in Latin. I was the soloist of well reputed children's chorus. In order to rehearse I was exempt from geography classes. At the end of the school year, I got a passing grade for nothing. I grew up with the conviction that the universe was a fantasy. Fifteen years later I started to travel frantically, but blindly, always unconscious of the distance of the place that I visited, surprised and marvelled that they existed.

I mention all of this to explain to what point geography and maps have always signified for me something marvelous, mysterious and out of reach. For that reason I placed a map above Leo and Paco's bed.

One only feels protected by those things one does not know (isn't that religion, after all?), those things which our ignorance renders fascinating. That which we lack, or we didn't have in its time. I have taken from God and his saints the place that corresponds to them, and we have replaced them with a political map (and that knowledge) to which I never had access to as a child, and which was called to preside over the mother-scene of "The Flower of my Secret".

PEDRO ALMODOVAR

Director, screenwriter, composer and actor, **PEDRO ALMODOVAR** is the most celebrated Spanish director since Luis Bunuel and Carlos Saura. He was born in Calzada de Calatrava, La Mancha, Spain in 1951. His family emigrated to Extremadura when he was eight years old and there he studied the elementary and superior bacalaureate, with the Salesian and the Franciscana. His bad religious education only taught him to lose faith in God. Around that time, in Caceres, he started to go to the movies, compulsively.

At sixteen he moved to Madrid, alone, without his family and without any money, but with a very concrete project: to study and make films. It was impossible to enter the Official film School, as Franco had recently closed it. As he couldn't learn the language (the form) he decided to learn the content, and dedicated himself to living. It was the end of the sixties, and in spite of the dictatorship, Madrid was for a provincial adolescent the capital of culture and liberty.

He worked in multiple and sporadic jobs, but he couldn't afford to buy his first Super-8 camera until he took a "serious" job with the National Telephone Company. He worked there for twelve years as an administrative assistant. These years were in fact his real education. In the mornings, he was in touch with a social class that would not have gotten to know so well under other circumstances: the middle class Spanish family at the beginning of the age of consumerism. Their dramas and their miseries. Quite a gold mine, for a future story teller. In the afternoons and evenings, he wrote, loved, joined the independent theatre group "Los Gollardos," and made Super-8 movies. He wrote for several underground magazines. He wrote short stories, some of which were published. He was a member of the parodic punk-rock group "Almodovar and McNamara," etc. He was lucky that the opening of his first feature film coincides with the birth of democracy in Spain.

After a year and a half of difficult shooting in 16mm, he opened, in 1980, his first feature, "Pepi, Luci, Bom..." Since then, film has become his second nature. He writes and directs. And lives, enough at least to be able to invent stories which are alive. His films are shown all over the world.

Almodovar's subsequent films include "Labyrinth of Passion," "Dark Habits," "What Have I Done to Deserve This?," "Matador," "Law of Desire," "Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown" (which was nominated for an Academy Award as Best Foreign Language Film, became 1989's highest grossing foreign film in North America and currently the most successful Spanish film ever), "Tie Me Up! Tie Me Down!," "High Heels" and "Kika." Almodovar is the recipient of numerous awards, including the Glauber Rocha Award for Best Director, Rio Film Festival, and L.A. Film Critics Association "New Generation" Award.

About the Cast...

MARISA PAREDES (Leo) is probably best known for her co-starring role with Victor Abril as the self-obsessed cabaret singer Becky del Paramo in Almodovar's "High Heels." Her unconventional talents have taken her from international film roles to leading appearances in plays by Samuel Beckett, Turgenev, Chekhov and Arthur Miller and a string of Spanish and international prizes for acting. Paredes was studying at the Dramatic Arts Conservatory in Madrid when Jose Osuna called her to make her debut in "Not Tonight" Since then, her whole life has been dedicated to the development of her vocation. She has frequently participated in the unconventional projects and has often taken a risk with new directors.

Aside from the Onda Madrid Prize which she received for "Tras el Cristal" (1988), the Valladolid Silver medal for her theatrical career, and Fotogramas de Plata in 1970 as Best New Actress, her work in "High Heels" led her to receive the following awards: Fotogramas de Plata (Best Actress), Best Actress at the Gramados Film Festival (Brazil), the Sant Jordi Award, and the Spanish Actors Union Award. Her films include "Las Salvajes en Puente San Gil," "Goya, Historia de Una Soledad," "Larga Noche de Julio," "El Perro," "Sus Anos Dorados," "Entre Tinieblas," "Las Bicicletas Son Para el Verano," "Cara de Acelga," "Tras el Cristal," "Continental," "Tacones Lejanos," "Hors Season," "La Reina Anonima," "Tierno Verano de Lujurias y Azoteas," "Tombe du Ciel," "La Nave de los Locos," "Diario de un Violador" and "Talk of Angels."

ROSSY DE PALMA (Rosa) has been seen in all of Almodovar's films since "Law of Desire," including "Woman on the Verge of A Nervous Breakdown", "Tie Me Up, Tie Me Down!" and "Kika." Also a fashion model for Jean-Paul Gaultier and Commes Des Garcons, she most recently had a starring role in Robert Altman's fashion satire "Pret-a-Porter".

IMANOL ARIAS (Paco) began his career in the Sixties and has since worked with many of the leading Spanish film directors. He has worked with Almodovar before, appearing in "Labyrinth of Passion" and has had leading roles in films by Gutierrez Aragon, Vicente Aranda and Imanol Uribe. He is best known in Spain for his role in the highly popular television series "Anillos de Oro", which made him a household name and one of the most celebrated actors in his home country.

In the past year, **JUAN ECHANOVE** (Angel) received critical acclaim and a string of prizes for his performance in "Madregilda," the controversial feature by Francisco Regueiro about the life and career of General Franco. Echanove has appeared in over twenty films in the past fifteen years.

CHUS LAMPREAVE (Leo's mother) recently won a Goya Award for Best Supporting Actress for her role as Dona Asun in the Academy Award-winning "Belle Epoque." One of the most popular actresses in Spanish classical and modern comedy since the 1950s, Lampreave has performed in nearly all of Pedro Almodovar's films, including "Labyrinth of Passion" (1982), "Dark Habits" (1983), "What Have I Done to Deserve This?" (1984), "Matador" (1985) and "Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown" (1988). Lampreave worked previously with "Belle Epoque" director Fernando Trueba on "Se Infieles" (1985) and "Year of the Awakening" (1986).

About the filmmakers...

Born in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, **AFFONSO BEATO** (Director of Photography) has worked on over thirty feature films as well as numerous documentaries and TV mini-series. His credits include Glauber Rocha's "Antonio Das Mortes," Jean Daniel Pollet's "L'Homme Des Etoiles," Jim McBride's "The Big Easy," "Great Balls of Fire" and "The Wrong Man," and Susan Moraes' "Mil E Uma."

Editor **PEPE SALCEDO** has worked on all of Pedro Almodovar's films, as well as many films by such directors as Manuel Gutierrez Aragon, Jose Luis Borau, Jaime Chavarri, Eloy de la Iglesia and Pedro Olea.

ALBERTO IGLESIAS (Composer) marks his first collaboration with director Pedro Almodovar with "The Flower of My Secret." His previous films include Carlos Saura's "Dispara," Pedro Costa's "Una Casa en las Afueras" and Julio Medem's "Tierra."

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