



all about **almodóvar**

A **PASSION** FOR CINEMA BRAD EPPS AND DESPINA KAKOUDAKI, EDITORS

10 All about the Brothers

Retroseriality in Almodóvar's Cinema

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Looking for Blood Brothers

In 1987, when I interviewed Pedro Almodóvar shortly after the release of *Law of Desire*, he told me that the most important thing about the movie was that it was a story of two brothers ("Pleasure and the New Spanish Mentality" 33–44). Although I did not find the comment illuminating at the time, I do now as I look back at *Law of Desire* through *Bad Education* (2004) and the comments that Almodóvar has made about fraternity in its wake: "Fraternity is the result of two great feelings, love and friendship, bound together by something as unfathomable as consanguinity" ("Self-Interview"). In narrative terms, it is *consanguinity* that is the rub, for it means that the characters derive from the same source, which not only heightens the love and rivalry they feel for each other but also facilitates fluid identifications between them and their proliferating doubles across borders of bodies and texts.

In a "Self-Interview" posted on his official Web site, Almodóvar acknowledges that *Bad Education* and *Law of Desire* are "blood brothers," two texts based on the same source. Although he admits that *Bad Education* derives from the scene in *Law of Desire* in which a transsexual played by Carmen Maura confronts the priest who molested her when she was a boy, he claims that both films were based on an earlier story and set of events:

Long before [*Law of Desire*] I wrote a story about this transvestite going back to the school he attended in order to blackmail the priests who harassed him as a kid. During the making of *Law of Desire*, I remembered that story and found the inspiration for the sequence where Carmen enters the school chapel and comes across the priest who loved her when she was a boy. At that time I was already thinking about working further this story. In this sense, Carmen is the premonitory shadow of Zahara [the transvestite played by Gael García Bernal's character Juan/Ángel in *Bad Education*]. ("Self-Interview")

According to his own explanation, Almodóvar replicates the structure of *Bad Education*, which he describes as consisting of "three stories, three concentric

triangles that end up in one single story" (ibid.), a compulsive repetition reminiscent, as several critics have noted, of the spiral structure of Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (1958). But in Almodóvar's personal myth, this strategic repetition threatens to draw his entire filmography into a spiraling *mise en abîme*, generating new versions while keeping the point of origin out of reach.

As René Girard reminds us about the original crime of the father against the son (which generated the Oedipal narrative and its homoerotic variations that play such a key role in film noir), the original act must remain hidden if a myth is to retain its structuring power (190). Yet, according to Claude Lévi-Strauss, repetition can be used to reveal a myth's underlying structure:

A myth exhibits a "slated" structure, which comes to the surface . . . through repetition. However, the slates are not absolutely identical. And since the purpose of myth is to provide a logical model capable of overcoming a contradiction (an impossible achievement if, as it happens, the contradiction is real), a theoretically infinite number of slates will be generated, each one slightly different from the others. Thus, myth grows spiral-wise until the intellectual impulse which has produced it is exhausted. (229)

Although we do not have access to the first version of Almodóvar's story or its point of origin, we do have an earlier film by him featuring two brothers, *What Have I Done to Deserve This?* (1984), which he presents as a neorealist portrait of his own family. Although it may not be a "blood brother" in the strict sense, I hope to show that this film is at least a close cousin and that all three are "consanguineous" variations of the same genetic material. In performing what I will be calling a "retroserial reading" of these three films as a trilogy about brothers, I will use repetitions to reveal the films' structuring contradictions about fraternity and to explore the following questions:

1. What are the contradictions about fraternity that *Bad Education*, like its predecessors, tries to overcome? In other words, how does it address the contradictory desire for fusion and the fear of interchangeability? Can fraternal love, a love ostensibly between equals or doubles, dispel a murderous sibling rivalry over the love of the father? Can it prevent a domestic civil war?
2. Why does a compulsive retelling of the fratricidal story of Cain and Abel replace, as appears to be the case, Oedipus as the primary myth of homoerotic desire for Almodóvar? Does the father's favoring of one brother over the other (or some other variant of the prodigal son) strengthen or weaken the favorite, especially if the father's desire is inflamed by absence and his favor expressed through seduction? Is it possible to tell a story about a violated child without his remaining a stunted victim or becoming a violent abuser himself?

Despite his teasing disavowals about the alleged autobiographical dimensions of *Bad Education*, I am not interested in speculating on Almodóvar's relations with his own priests or siblings—not even with his brother Agustín, who appears as an extra in many of his films.¹ Rather, I want to explore how *Bad Education* enables us to *reread* two of his earlier films featuring a pair of brothers, which also involve murder and molestation and which marked important steps in Almodóvar's emergence as a world class auteur: *Law of Desire*, the first film produced by his fraternal production company, El Deseo, that he and his brother Agustín control; and *What Have I Done to Deserve This?*, his first film to win recognition from international critics. Conversely, I want to see how these two earlier films affect our reading of *Bad Education*.

I recently traced a similar dynamic of retroseriality through what I have called Almodóvar's "brain-dead trilogy": *The Flower of My Secret* (1995), *All about My Mother* (1999), and *Talk to Her* (2002), each of which contains an episode in which a young person is rendered brain dead. I claimed that this recurrence leads us to follow Almodóvar's development of the trope from a symbolic image in *The Flower of My Secret*, to a major pivot in the plot of *All about My Mother*, to the central narrative situation of *Talk to Her*.² In some ways, this paper is that earlier essay's spectatorial sibling—a sequel that shows how Almodóvar again leads us to choose two earlier works from his canon to illuminate what a later film is doing and to redefine them as a trilogy through this act of retroserial rereading.

Defining Retroseriality: Four Models

I am using the term "retroseriality" to describe both an aspect of Almodóvar's films and a method of reading them. I am not suggesting that his work is regressive or nostalgic; nor am I referring to his recurring thematic of a "return," which can be found in many of his films, as well as in the title of the recent *Volver* (2006). Rather, I am arguing that his films increasingly perform an evocation of earlier works (both his own and intertexts of others) that leads us to read them as an ongoing saga and to regroup them into networked clusters. Thus, like T. S. Eliot's classic essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent" and Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of dialogism, his films remind us that new works influence old works just as old works influence new ones, for new variations lead us to reread older works in new ways.³

Although this "retroserial" rereading can be applied to many artworks, it takes on new meaning in the postmodernist era of television, where

intertextuality becomes deliberate and pervasive. Retroseriality acquires special irony in the case of Almodóvar, because in the 1980s he disavowed the past and pretended that the Francoist era had never existed. But retroseriality also acquires special resonance inasmuch as his hyperplotted, multi-threaded narratives create a supple form of sexually mobile melodrama with an extraordinary tonal range, what he himself, in his "Self-Interview," has called "a labyrinth of passions." This unique combination enables Almodóvar to create his own alternative universe, a personal mythology in which memories of earlier movies are frequently more important than historical events. Nowhere is this more evident than in *Bad Education*, which he calls "a sort of anthology of all the themes that have interested me up until now, with a sort of more pessimistic and serene look" ("Bad Education" 5). To experience fully the reverberating pleasures of his texts, we need to remember the earlier movies in detail and recognize their variations. "All I want is to see people going to the theatre and watch the film so they can't get it out of their heads afterwards" ("Self-Interview").

There are at least four basic models for retroseriality, which Almodóvar combines in uniquely productive ways: (1) auteurist cinema; (2) serial television; (3) the transformational trilogy; and (4) open-ended database narrative. The first model comes from auteurist cinema, where filmmakers become obsessed with certain issues that they compulsively rework in film after film. Because of the total control that Almodóvar exercises over his own movies, this model is usually applied to him—particularly in the wake of earlier auteurs like Buñuel, Bergman, Fellini, Wenders, and Hitchcock. His own comments about *Bad Education* in his "Self-Interview" encourage us to apply this model, for he claims that this film grew out of a compulsion to revisit the fraternal family romance:

I definitely had to make *Bad Education*. I had to get rid of it before it turned into an obsession. The story had been in my hands for over ten years already, and I knew I could still wait another ten years. Due to the multiple combinations possible, putting the writing of *Bad Education* to an end was only realizable once the film was shot, edited and mixed.

Despite the association of this kind of auteurist obsession with the European art film, Almodóvar made his debut with "low" popular forms—the serial memoirs of porn star Patty Diphusa and early sex farces like *Pepi, Luci, Bom* (1980) and *Labyrinth of Passion* (1982), works that established his reputation as "the Spanish Andy Warhol." As an artist who unraveled the bound-

ary between high art and pop culture, Warhol provided Almodóvar with a brilliant model for how marginality could be transformed into mainstream success. Yet Almodóvar treated this Warholian entitlement with mixed emotions—at first leveraging it as he was rising to global stardom, but then discarding it once he had arrived. No matter how successful he became and how sophisticated his cinematic mastery grew, Almodóvar never lost touch with these lower popular forms, which provide the second model for retro-seriality: serial television.

Serial television is the most familiar model, one that applies not only to production and reception, but also to transnational marketing. In serial television, an episodic narrative is launched by a pilot, but usually takes several episodes to captivate its viewers. If the series proves successful, it generates a more complex structure in syndication or foreign sales, which provides a nonlinear entry into the overarching story and a haunting afterlife that survives cancellation, even after the narrative possibilities of the basic premise have supposedly been exhausted. By entering a TV series in medias res or picking up back episodes in syndication while simultaneously watching the new season unfold (possibilities enhanced by VCRs, TiVo, and DVD releases of past seasons), viewers experience a slated, multitiered structure that enriches the narrative reverberations of any individual episode.

Although Almodóvar tends to treat television disparagingly as cinema's evil twin, he has steadily used it as a source not only for humor but also as a model of narrative rupture. As with a television series, we viewers can enter his serial myth with any specific film and then can wait for the next film (or episode) to be released. Or, we can go back to earlier works on film, video, or DVD in any order we choose. Even his earliest references to television evoke issues of nonlinear structure. For example, in his serial memoirs of Patty Diphusa published "sometimes without continuity," Almodóvar claims: "If she were in America, she'd have her own TV show" (*Patty Diphusa* 7). In his debut feature, *Pepi, Luci, Bom*, the entangled plots are interrupted by a series of hilarious television commercials for miraculous Ponte panties that turn farts into perfume, urine stains into new spring colors, and—when used as a dildo—commodity fetishism into pleasures of the flesh. If this mundane medium could make such miraculous transformations convincing, then it was ideally suited to promote those cultural changes celebrated by the *Movida*, the irreverent cultural movement of the giddy early post-Franco era.⁴ With its growing regionality and expansion of global sales, television increasingly proves effective in violating spatial borders, enabling

series with distinctive urban and suburban locales (like *Sex and the City* and *Desperate Housewives*, whose Almodovarian traces are blatant) to reimagine a transnational community of loyal fans.

The third model, the transformational trilogy, is rarer and more challenging: the expansion of a story across a number of sequels that demand an ideological shift in understanding the underlying contradictions, which were only implicit in the original episode. Like the TV pilot, the first episode is designed to capture and prepare an audience for the more threatening segments that follow, and the connections between them may be strengthened by the use of flashbacks, particularly to scenes of victimized youths. The best-known examples are Sergei Eisenstein's *Ivan the Terrible* (1943–48) and Francis Ford Coppola's *Godfather* saga (1972, 1974, 1990). Although the Communist Party interpreted Eisenstein's sympathetic portrayal of Ivan in Part I as a defense of Stalin and his cult status as hero, the more critical Part II, despite its flashbacks to Ivan's perilous childhood, was read as an attack, thereby preventing Part III from being finished. In the case of the *Godfather* saga, Part I was originally read as an exciting work in the gangster genre that defended the Corleone family and its use of violence in its rise to power, but Part II emphasized the family's mirror relationship with the corrupt establishment it had initially challenged. Although Almodóvar does not claim either of these trilogies as an intertext, he does praise *The Godfather* for having "left us with wonderful sequences with brothers and sisters loving, beating, protecting and killing one another" ("Self-Interview"), thereby linking this transformational trilogy structure to his own personal obsession with siblings.

In contrast with these two trilogies and the more typical series of sequels whose episodes are blatantly linked by titles—from Robert Zemeckis's *Back to the Future* (1985, 1989, 1990) to Krzysztof Kieslowski's *Three Colors: Blue* (1993), *White* (1993), and *Red* (1994)—Almodóvar's films are more fluid in their relations with each other. They can always be reconfigured into a new cluster whenever a new film comes along. Yet, they share with *Ivan* and *The Godfather* trilogies the kind of ideological shift that is rarely found in the more popular ongoing series of sequels. For example, when we compare *Bad Education* to earlier films like *What Have I Done to Deserve This?* and *Law of Desire*, we find a darker reading of sexual mobility and authorial power; they no longer perform a radical sex change on Spain's national stereotype (as I argued in the past), but seem to avenge his own victimization as a child. As Almodóvar acknowledges: "The good thing about cinema, among many

other things, is its capacity to convert into spectacle and entertainment the worst of our nature" ("Self-Interview"). In *Bad Education*, the worst seems to be a priest molesting a child, the notorious patriarchal crime, which, despite its recent prominence in the press, still remains largely hidden in the bushes. This crime is rivaled by the fratricidal betrayal of a brother, an act dramatized on-screen. No matter which crime is deemed worse, they are both inflicted on the same victim, the "favored" prodigal brother, Ignacio, who dared to leave home.

The fourth and most recent model of retroseriality is the open-ended database narrative that has emerged within digital culture—a form of narrative experimentation that has been the focus of my own research and multimedia production for the past decade. By database narrative, I mean those structures that reveal the underlying database of possibilities out of which any particular tale or story element—character, event, object, setting—is chosen, by either author or spectator. By suggesting that all of these elements can easily be reshuffled, and by demanding an active mode of reading that searches for new connections, this structure weakens the ideological hold of any master narrative and thereby encourages transformation and mobility. Although this structure has been fostered and fetishized by digital culture, it also can be found in earlier nondigital narrative forms (including experimental theater, fictional cinema, and television) and is therefore compatible with the other three models of retroseriality. Database narrative is especially well suited to a personal *mythos* like Almodóvar's that celebrates sexual and social mobility and that constantly gives his open-ended "labyrinth of de pasiones" new life. As he put it in *Patty Diphusa*: "My life, like my stories, has only foundations, but lacks a beginning and an end" (66).⁵

The Way In: An Overview of Bad Education

In order to show the connections among this trilogy of films on fraternity, I need to provide a brief plot summary of *Bad Education*, which, given its intricately slated structure, is not so easy to compress; for the film is both "three concentric triangles" and "one single story" divided into seven episodes.

Part I introduces the narrative frame, set in 1980, that begins with a visit. A young actor named Ángel (Gael García Bernal) visits the office of filmmaker Enrique Goded (Fele Martínez), claiming to be his old schoolmate Ignacio and showing him a fictional story he has written about their relationship. Although Enrique does not believe that the visitor is really Ignacio, he is eager to read the story, for he desperately needs new material.

The inset story, "The Visit," contains Parts II and III. It is divided into two time periods, which were shot in different styles and were presumably written by different authors. Set in 1980 (like the frame), Part II is pure fiction and played primarily for laughs. It was written by Ángel, who plays the starring role of Zahara, Ignacio's female persona inspired by real-life Spanish movie diva Sara Montiel. After a dazzling onstage performance, Zahara goes home with a handsome drunken biker, who turns out to be a fictional version of Enrique (played by beefy Alberto Ferreiro rather than wiry Fele Martínez). Before Zahara can rob him, she discovers Enrique's identity and the fact that he is now married and has a son. After giving the sleeping Enrique a flamboyant farewell fuck (the only sex scene García Bernal seems to relish), she leads her friend Paca/Paquito (another transvestite played by Javier Cámara) to an alternative source of funding: they go to her religious school where Zahara/Ignacio tries to blackmail Father Manolo (Daniel Giménez Cacho), the impassioned priest who molested him as a child. These acts of revenge lead into a flashback to the 1960s when Ignacio and Enrique were innocent boys at Catholic school.

Part III is devoted to a series of poignant childhood memories from the inset story, which has a range of tones not found in the rest of the movie. Allegedly written by the real Ignacio, it includes scenes of the young Ignacio (Nacho Pérez) sweetly singing a Spanish version of "Moon River" for the smitten Father Manolo and his fellow lecherous priests at the annual picnic, where the "hidden" molestation presumably takes place; of Ignacio and his little friend Enrique (Raúl García Forneiro) tenderly groping each other in a movie theater as they watch Sara Montiel on-screen; of Ignacio and Enrique later being caught together in the toilet by the outraged Father Manolo; of Ignacio losing his faith when he succumbs to the priest's advances; and of the jealous priest separating the young lovers by forcing Enrique to leave the school.

Part IV returns to the more cynical contemporary frame, which focuses on a melodramatic power struggle between Ángel and Enrique. Their interaction turns erotic in a poolside sequence where the sexual dynamics are played out primarily through gestures and movements rather than words, evoking the mysterious scene in *Talk to Her* in which the graceful gliding of an anonymous male body through a swimming pool is set to music as if he were performing an erotic dance. Significantly, this is the sequence in *Bad Education* where Almodóvar's brother Agustín makes a brief appearance, playing the pool man who is linked to the erotic site. Although Enrique dis-

trusts Ángel as an actor, he still wants to conquer him sexually but refuses to cast him as Zahara. Enrique traces Ángel to his family home in Galicia, where his mother reveals that Ignacio died four years earlier (in 1976, shortly after the death of Franco) and that Ángel is in fact Ignacio's younger brother Juan. She gives Enrique the letter that Ignacio left for him, and tells him about a publisher named Berenguer, who turns out to be the former Father Manolo. Like the fictional Enrique in Part III, Berenguer is now married and has a son.

Part V presents the finale of Enrique's film adaptation of "The Visit," which is being shot on the set with Juan/Ángel in the role of Zahara. Instead of accepting Juan's happy ending of revenge (depicted in Part II) Enrique writes a new ending that lets him vent his own hostility toward the actor. Meanwhile, Mr. Berenguer (the former Father Manolo, now played by older, heftier Lluís Homar) has been there on the set, watching the action from the shadows; he promises to tell Enrique what really happened to Ignacio.

Part VI presents Berenguer's film noir version of the ending, which is set in 1976 and is much darker in tone than the two earlier versions. Berenguer admits that he refused to publish Ignacio's story and then was threatened with blackmail. When he went to Valencia to negotiate with Ignacio, who was by then a transsexual junkie, he fell passionately in love with his younger brother Juan, who looked innocent and boyish. While Ignacio is in rehab, Berenguer manages to spend a week alone with Juan, seducing him with the blackmail money promised to his brother. After attending a film noir movie (where the characters "are just like them"), Berenguer and Juan plot to kill Ignacio, who dies of tainted smack while typing the final letter to Enrique.

Part VII depicts the final segment of the frame: the final bitter encounter between Enrique and Juan, which is followed by a postscript from ten years later (the 1990s) that summarizes the fates of the three surviving homoerotic male characters. Despite all these explanations, at the end of the film, we are still left wondering: why did Juan kill his brother? One way of answering this question is to turn back to the two earlier films in Almodóvar's fraternal trilogy.

The Esperpento Family Romance in What Have I Done to Deserve This?

When Wim Wenders decided to win the heart of the Americans and the general audience, he made a story about the family; a melodrama with an absent mother and a redeeming brother, plus a straight-haired boy. The family never fails. I found that out when I shot *¿Qué he hecho yo para merecer esto?*. People began looking at

me with different eyes, sort of like "he's modern, but sensible." The family is always first-rate dramatic material. (Almodóvar, "Law of Desire")

The Wenders film to which Almodóvar refers is *Paris, Texas*, which was made in 1984, the same year that his own *What Have I Done to Deserve This?* was released and close to the time when the narrative frame of *Bad Education* is set. In contrast to Wenders's melancholy melodrama about a runaway mother, Almodóvar's film is an absurdist comedy about a downtrodden housewife and cleaning woman named Gloria (Carmen Maura), who is addicted to a Spanish version of NoDoz. When her husband Antonio smacks her in one of their spats, she kills him with a ham bone. Her two sons pair off with the surviving matriarchs: the older brother Toni, a drug dealer, goes back to the family village with his paternal Granny (Chus Lampreave) so that he can "work the land." The younger, sexually precocious Miguel (who, with a spin of a Zoetrope, defines himself as a future filmmaker like Almodóvar) returns home to mother Gloria, even though she had loaned him to their pedophilic dentist to pay off their bills.

Although I am treating this film as the first episode in Almodóvar's fraternal trilogy, its genre—comic melodrama—keeps the focus on the women rather than the brothers: not only on Gloria and Granny, but also on Cristal (Verónica Forqué), the friendly whore next door who dreams of going to Vegas. Yet, there are blatant connections between the young brothers (the drug dealer and molested child) and the grown-up siblings in *Bad Education*. By reading this earlier film with hindsight, we can find the potential rivalry between these two brothers, even though it is displaced onto the rival matriarchs.

Before leaving for their home village, Toni tries to get Cristal to seduce Miguel, hoping to "cure" his brother's homosexuality—a sentiment that prefigures Juan/Ángel's lame excuse for killing Ignacio at the end of *Bad Education*: "You don't know how hard it is to have a brother like that in a small village." Like Juan/Ángel, Toni's gay sexuality is more ambiguous and closeted than his brother's; not surprisingly, he also turns down Cristal's sexual favors. The person the brothers compete for is their father, who, like Granny, clearly prefers the older son Toni, who has inherited his name as well as his talents for forgery. When the younger son Miguel returns home, he poignantly asks, "Did Dad miss me?" His mother candidly responds, "He was so busy he didn't realize you were gone, but I missed you." This exchange helps explain why Miguel is attracted to older men, such as his friend Raúl's father, and why he willingly goes home with the dentist.

By sending Miguel to live with the dentist and taking Toni back to the village, the competing matriarchs succeed in keeping the brothers apart and holding their rivalry in check. According to Almodóvar, as soon as two brothers encounter someone they both desire, jealousy erupts into violence: in *Bad Education*, "the presence of F. Manolo blasts the existence of the two brothers [and] 'fraternity' turns into 'murderous rivalry'" (Almodóvar, "Bad Education" 5). Like the two artistic brothers molested by the same priest in *Bad Education*, the two abused children in *What Have I Done to Deserve This?*—Miguel and his neighbor Vanesa—have special powers that keep them from being seen merely as pathetic victims. But here those powers are pushed to comic extremes. Miguel has a superadult sophistication on matters of sexuality, art, and familial love. Like Almodóvar, Miguel is "modern but sensible": he cheerfully goes with the dentist so long as he can get free art lessons. The other victimized child is the little redhead Vanessa, who relies on her telekinetic powers to retaliate against her abusive mother, a situation that parodies such Hollywood horror films as Brian De Palma's *Carrie* (1976).

The film's primary Hollywood intertext is, however, Elia Kazan's *Splendor in the Grass* (1961), which belongs to Almodóvar's eclectic list of fraternal classics, for, as he explains in his "Self-Interview," like *Paris, Texas*, it features a supportive relationship between two suffering siblings:

I love the sense of fraternity, and I have always enjoyed movies with siblings: Warren Beatty being beaten up in the parking lot for watching his sister's loss of honour . . . in *Splendor in the Grass* . . . Thrilling Harry Dean Stanton in *Paris, Texas* and his silent visit to brother Dean Stockwell.

These intertextual connections and allusions help counteract the potentially dehumanizing effects of Almodóvar's grotesque humor, which masks the movie's emotional core.

In *What Have I Done to Deserve This?*, the puppetlike characters and absurd situations evoke the tradition of *esperpento*, a distinctively Spanish version of the grotesque that can be traced back to Goya and to the puppet theater of modernist Ramón María del Valle-Inclán (1866–1936), who described it as a reflection in a concave mirror. Yet, Almodóvar sets his story in a realistic low-rent apartment complex on the outskirts of Madrid. As his "most social picture," it revealed his own "most unmodern roots, the small town" (*Patty Diphusa* 91). Such statements connect *What Have I Done to Deserve This?* to the Spanish adaptations of Italian neorealism that helped launch Spain's "modern cinema" of the 1950s. As Almodóvar puts it in *Patty Diphusa*:

The theme is a classic one: a rural family moving to the metropolis and their fight for survival—*Rocco and His Brothers* [Luchino Visconti, 1960] and *Surcos* [José Antonio Nieves Conde, 1951]. I tried to adopt a sort of revamped neorealism with a central character that's always interested me: the housewife . . . and victim of consumer society. (126)

This "revamping" led Almodóvar to reject the "Falangist neorealism" of *Surcos* (literally, "Furrows"), which turned Valle-Inclán's puppet theater into a right-wing moralizing, misogynist form that "saves" the younger brother from urban corruption and sends the family back home to their conservative village.

For a more politically compatible model, Almodóvar turned instead to the black humor of "absurdist neorealism," which was associated with the leftist opposition and which made a more corrosive use of *esperpento*. In the words of John Hopewell:

In the 50s and 60s Spain experienced a kind of neorealism which was far less sentimental than the Italian brand and far more ferocious and amusing. I'm talking about the films of Fernán Gómez (*La vida por delante*, *El mundo sigue*) and *El cochecito* and *El pisito* [by Rafael Azcona and Marco Ferreri]. It is a pity that the line has not been continued. (238–39)⁶

By continuing that line in *What Have I Done to Deserve This?*, Almodóvar demonstrated that, despite its grotesquerie, the unique Spanish tradition of *esperpento* could provide access to emotional truth.

Ricardo Gullón's description of the emotional ruptures in the puppet melodramas of Valle-Inclán also apply to these early films:

Now and then buffoonery comes to a halt, and in the sudden stillness of the moment, brought about by the intrusion of something unexpected and tragic . . . there is a change of atmosphere. And the reader, like the characters in the story, suddenly discovers he is in the presence of true drama. The puppets take on a human aspect. (133)

This is precisely what happens at the end of *What Have I Done to Deserve This?*, when Gloria says good-bye to her elder son Toni and is reunited with her younger son Miguel. Despite the comic grotesquerie of its puppetlike characters, the movie still ends with a moving emotional climax. When Gloria goes home to her empty apartment, she walks out onto the balcony and looks down at the many similar tenement buildings, as if recognizing the neorealist setting. We know she is thinking of jumping. When describing "the desolation of these housing projects," Almodóvar observes:

In Madrid life was not all fun and games. Cities have suburbs and pollution, noise and poverty. . . . When I went to work at a telephone company warehouse near the suburb of Fuencarral, every day I drove along the M-30 highway [which effectively circles Madrid]. The enormous buildings shaped like beehives that sprout up along the highway have always made an impression on me. That impression and a certain feeling found their outlet years later in *What Have I Done to Deserve This?* (Patty Diphusa 91–92)

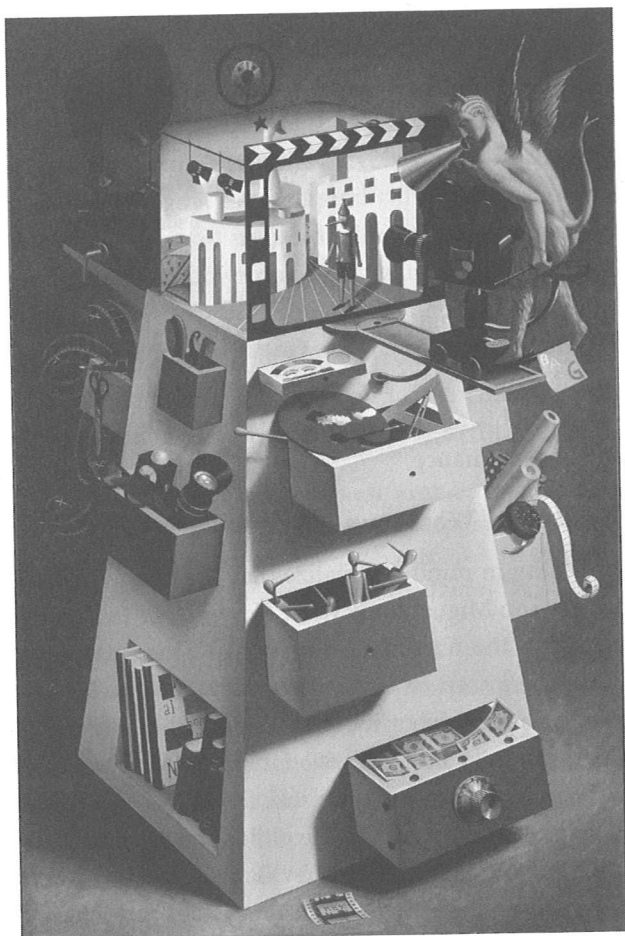
Gloria's suicidal feelings are interrupted, however, by another sudden switch in tone when she spots her son Miguel trudging "home from the hill"—the title of a 1960 Hollywood fraternal classic by Vincente Minnelli. The music swells—the same music that we will hear again later in *Law of Desire*—for the melodramatic reunion, as Miguel rushes into his mother's arms and says, with a precocious heroism: "I know about Dad. . . . I'm here to stay. This house needs a man." In case we wonder where the *esperpento* went, Miguel sensibly adds, "At first it was fun with the dentist, but I'm too young to get tied down."

The emotional intensity of this scene depends heavily on Carmen Maura's superb performance, but also on Almodóvar's masterful manipulation of *esperpento*, which becomes central to his unique tonal range. This fusion of neorealism and grotesque melodrama might lead us to recall the earlier sequence in which Granny helped Toni with his homework assignment by labeling a series of writers either Romantic or Realistic. Consistently (and comically) making the wrong choices, she labels Goethe and Byron realists; and Balzac, a romantic. The exercise calls attention to Almodóvar's own ability to manipulate the tone of this familial melodrama that slides so fluidly between neorealism and hyperromance.

Reading Bad Education through What Have I Done to Deserve This?

When read with retroseriality in mind, we realize that the loving mother Gloria and her sensitive gay son Miguel from *What Have I Done to Deserve This?* are later conflated into the nurturing transsexual Tina, played by Carmen Maura, in *Law of Desire*, an erotic thriller with many scenes that achieve the same kind of emotional intensity, but without using *esperpento* for contrast. This is not the case in *Bad Education*, despite the fact that it also contains a loving mother and sensitive gay son, for its only scenes of comparable emotional intensity occur within the childhood flashbacks to the 1960s, when the primary molestation occurs. Yet, *Bad Education* features an alternative form of puppetry, which is tailored to the generic conventions and coldhearted manipulations of film noir.

The puppet image occurs in the very first sequence of *Bad Education*, which takes place in Enrique's production office. On the wall there is a painting by Sigfrido Martín Begué that reflexively captures the dehumanized puppet-show dynamics in this multitiered story. The painting depicts a tall tower-shaped toy box full of open drawers, on top of which sits a square theatrical stage framed by a clapboard, with a director (like Enrique) precariously perched on a platform. The director is pictured as a yellow, long-tailed, horned devil with red-and-blue wings, who stands behind the camera shouting directions through a megaphone to a Pinocchio-like puppet with a long nose (like the lying Juan/Ángel), whom he looks at through the clapboard. Like an archive or database, the open drawers reveal what mate-



The picture on the wall of Enrique Goded's production office, a painting by Sigfrido Martín Begué.

rial goods go into the production: wooden mannequins ready to serve as extras or doubles; fabrics, hairbrush, and cosmetics for costuming, makeup, and drag; lenses, light meters, and other visual equipment for the stunning mise-en-scène; film stock and scissors for editing; and, at the base or bottom line, stacks of money and a pile of books or intertexts, including Almodóvar's breakthrough mainstream success, *Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown*.

The puppet image recurs later in the film, in the crucial noir sequence where Juan/Ángel and Berenguer plot Ignacio's murder. They are standing in a Valencia museum that is lined with a number of grotesque icons whose smiling faces all wear frozen expressions and whose mouths remain open as if waiting to speak whatever lines they are given to read. Like the wooden mannequins in the Begué painting, this database of extras seem ready to be cast as doubles in a noir plot. In his "Self-Interview," Almodóvar compares the scene to the supermarket sequence in *Double Indemnity*, identifying Juan, who here sports dark sunglasses, with Barbara Stanwyck's femme fatale and insisting that it is the moment when Juan's manipulation of Berenguer becomes blatant: "Juan tells his lover that, after doing it, they shall not meet



Gael García Bernal as Juan and Lluís Homar as Sr. Manuel Berenguer facing the puppets.
Photograph by Diego López Calvín. Copyright Diego López Calvín/El Deseo.

for a while. With the naiveté particular of manipulated lovers, Mr. Berenguer thought the killing would bind them together forever, but it is too late now to avoid the separation." All of the characters in these self-reflexive movies about brothers are easily manipulated puppets, especially the interchangeable siblings and lovers who are repeatedly split and doubled, as if such doubling allowed the victimized child to regain control of his destiny.

Like the Begué painting, these puppets underscore the reflexive dimensions of these three movies, which explore the tyranny and power dynamics of authorship. In *What Have I Done to Deserve This?*, the most resonant reflexive dimension resides in the publishing crimes of the murdered father Antonio, a cabdriver who forged Hitler's love letters to Ingrid Müller, a suicidal German singer who managed to lose the originals; now he resists another plot to forge Hitler's memoirs. This noirish subplot links corrupt publishing practices both to fascism (and the kind of censorship that was operative under Franco and Hitler) and to the venal commercialism and piracy that were rampant in Spain during the 1980s. Although Antonio is killed off in the film, he prefigures the paternal publisher Mr. Berenguer from *Bad Education*, who rejects Ignacio's story for telling the truth and who kills him to avoid scandal and save money. Once the priest becomes a publisher, he performs a more secular version of the same censorship and exploitation that he exercised as principal of Ignacio's religious school: for, the tyrannical publisher quite literally fucks the author, whose story undergoes a chain of appropriations and accommodations.

Brotherhood in Law of Desire

Despite the great leap in genre, story, and tone, Almodóvar recognized that the move from *What Have I Done to Deserve This?* to *Law of Desire* was essentially a return to his obsession with fraternity. Only now, the rival brothers and their relations moved into the central spotlight and the reflexive emphasis on showbiz became more pronounced. As Almodóvar himself put it:

I focused *What Have I Done to Deserve This?* on the Mother figure. I'm focusing on the Brothers now. I didn't know what type of fraternity to opt for when I started writing the screenplay: . . . Given my temper, I turned for reference to Warren Beatty and Barbara Loden in *Splendor in the Grass*. . . I've always been sensitive to stories of siblings; even in those with a good main love story, my interest was always on the siblings. . . . Pablo and Tina are the type of siblings working [in] show business. Like Vivien Leigh and Kim Hunter, they are attracted to the same man. And like Harry Dean Stanton and Dean Stockwell, they support one another when necessary. ("*Law of Desire*")

The generic move from comic melodrama (*What Have I Done to Deserve This?*) to erotic thriller (*Law of Desire*) entails a shift of dramatic focus onto the male characters and the erotic encounters between them. As Almodóvar puts it, "This is a movie about guys; from now on nobody can accuse me of only directing women" (*Patty Diphusa* 82–83). Yet, whereas women virtually vanish from *Bad Education*, *Law of Desire* recasts Carmen Maura as the transsexual brother, a move that strengthens the bond between it and the earlier *What Have I Done to Deserve This?*. While retaining Gloria's maternal nurturing and humor from *What Have I Done to Deserve This?*, Maura's Tina acquires a more flamboyant sexuality and, as a child molested both by her father and a priest, a doubly victimized past. The combination turns her into a diva rivaling Sara Montiel and "the premonitory shadow of Zahara."

Like *What Have I Done to Deserve This?*, *Law of Desire* contains two abused children, a boy and a girl. Although we never see Tina as the sexually abused little boy (except for a brief glimpse of his family snapshot), we do see her adoptive daughter Ada repeatedly abandoned by her lesbian birth mother, played by real-life transsexual Bibi Anderson. The doubling relationship between Tina and Ada is featured in their collaborative performance in Jean Cocteau's play *The Human Voice*, in which the Jacques Brel song "Ne me quitte pas" is addressed both to Tina's incestuous father, who abandoned her after her sex-change operation, and to Ada's mother, who is backstage. As if following in Tina's footsteps, Ada falls in love with an older man—Tina's older brother Pablo (Eusebio Poncela), who directs the play and who serves as surrogate father. In fact, all of the sex scenes in *Law of Desire* are transgenerational: between an older man and the young lover he controls, seduces, and abandons. On the one hand, the film celebrates a libertarian sexual mobility by suggesting that issues of age, gender, and biological sex do not matter, insofar as anyone, regardless of past sexual history, is capable of being sexually attracted to anyone else—especially while watching an Almodóvar movie. On the other hand, some limits do seem to hold, for a sexual love between brothers, or even between males of the same age, is avoided. As Almodóvar puts it in his press book for the film, "I also discarded the incestuous thing for being too obvious. Fraternity doesn't need sex to be manifest, and sex simplifies the stories that deal with it. [*Law of Desire*] had to be something else" ("Law of Desire").

In the light of Girard, we cannot help wondering whether this deliberate omission of fraternal incest indicates its structuring power. Be that as it may, what we see dramatized is, instead, the more traditional model of father-son

seduction. Nowhere is the paradox of Oedipal sexual mobility more striking than in the opening self-reflexive sequence—an erotic excerpt from an inset film by Pablo, in which an older man directs a sexy young hustler as if he were a puppet, dictating precisely how to masturbate in front of a mirror and camera—though, as it turns out, two middle-aged men have been dubbing the voices and sex sounds to go with the action. The scene has a powerful impact on Antonio (Antonio Banderas), a young right-wing man in the audience whose heterosexuality is instantly destabilized and whose homoerotic imagination is inflamed. As the inset film ends, Antonio runs to the men's room to replicate the sex moves and spends the rest of his life, and the movie, gaining control over the dictatorial director, even though it makes him become equally manipulative and eventually drives him to murder and suicide. The power struggle between the young puppetlike performer and the older manipulative director becomes more corrosive in *Bad Education*—whether played out in church or in cinema.

As in *What Have I Done to Deserve This?*, the emotional peak of *Law of Desire* occurs in a climactic embrace, but this time between the two men—Pablo and his young lover Antonio. Once again, the embrace involves redemption and forgiveness: just as Miguel had to forgive his mother for sending him away and, as if he had intuited the truth, for killing his father, Pablo must forgive Antonio for murdering his boyfriend, and Antonio's rival, Juan (Miguel Molina). But here, Antonio is redeemed by the sheer intensity of his passion, for which he gladly sacrifices his life. It is this intensity, musically amplified by the Mexican bolero "Lo dudo" (I Doubt It), that replaces religion and that is so urgently sought by all of the other characters. It arouses envy in all of us spectators who witness (or imagine) their final embrace—including Tina and Ada who wait below with upturned, tear-streaked faces.

Unlike the other two films in the trilogy, *Law of Desire* has no publisher; but it does have a powerful, manipulative auteur, Pablo Quintero, the sensitive writer/director who stands in for Almodóvar and who prefigures both Enrique and the demonic figure in Begué's painting from *Bad Education*. As is apparent from the self-reflexive soft-core sequence that opens the film, Pablo's authorship is a matter of control rather than criminality. He ghostwrites love letters from Juan to himself, which Antonio intercepts and misinterprets with murderous consequences; exploits his sibling's pain to empower his own writing; invents the fictional Laura P., who later becomes a prime suspect in Juan's murder; and displaces his own guilt onto the typewriter as an infernal machine. Yet this man who might otherwise appear to be an autho-

rial tyrant is rehumanized by the intensity of Antonio's love, which shifts the balance of power—even though his brother, or rather sister, Tina is still left out in the cold. As Almodóvar remarks in his "Self-Interview": "They are heads and tails of the same coin; Tina had to pay a price too high for being herself, and Pablo suffered the unbearable load of his own conscience and talent."

In the light of *What Have I Done to Deserve This?*, *Law of Desire* seems radical and exhilarating—particularly the aforementioned sexual mobility, which is liberating, dangerous, and edgy. The emotional range is more comprehensive; the humor more supple; the colors more vibrant; the costuming more expressive, and the music more engaging. There are moments of zaniness, but they do not detract from the grand sweep of emotions, which are kept at full force by the vibrant performances of Maura and Banderas, the two courageous changelings who are willing to take risks and be controlled by their feelings. They are the ones who bring Pablo's stories and Pedro's movie to life.

But when we look back at *Law of Desire* through *Bad Education*, the film seems darker and the sexual mobility more dangerous. As Almodóvar writes in *Patty Diphusa*: "[i]n a tone very different from the tabloids, *Law of Desire* . . . deals with brotherhood. It tells the story of brothers, who, in addition to a dark family past, share a lover, a crime and a secret" (82). In many respects, Pablo is a manipulative puppeteer who tethers Tina and Ada to a telephone in his production of Cocteau's *The Human Voice*. Antonio is more pathetic, and his relationship with Pablo more repressive. Despite the ostensible centrality of the relationship between Pablo and Antonio, Tina emerges as the central character, one who combines many of the strands from the later film, *Bad Education*, and who overcomes her serial victimization through bravado, warmth, and humor, qualities she passes on to little Ada. Not only is "Carmen's physical mimicry . . . incredible," but "Maura proves herself to be in possession of so many registers that her performance becomes an actual festival. This woman enlarges in front of the camera. She was so generous, intuitive, sincere, that for her sake alone I'm happy to have made the film" (*Patty Diphusa* 83). Although Almodóvar claims that Tina prefigures Zahara in *Bad Education*, there she is split into two transvestites played by male buddies; indeed, the legacy of Maura's performance is stronger in Zahara's friend Paca, played with brilliant comic resilience by Javier Cámara, than in the coldhearted changeling embodied by García Bernal.

***Reading Bad Education and Gael García Bernal
through Law of Desire***

What does the preceding reading of *Law of Desire* tell us about *Bad Education*? It might make us question Almodóvar's own "tyranny of authorship" and his apparent penchant for "conquering" heterosexual hunks like Banderas and Bernal, by casting them as homosexuals who perform graphic sexual acts on-screen. Almodóvar seems to have turned against Banderas, whose fame he helped orchestrate but who abandoned both the Spanish auteur and his nation. Although Banderas also plays key roles in *Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown* and *Tie Me Up! Tie Me Down!* (1990), *Law of Desire* was the last Almodóvar movie in which he played an explicitly homosexual role. Once Banderas "crossed over" to Hollywood, he soon was playing straight Latin lovers and macho action heroes, whereas Almodóvar, like Enrique, kept making films of passion, at home in Spain.

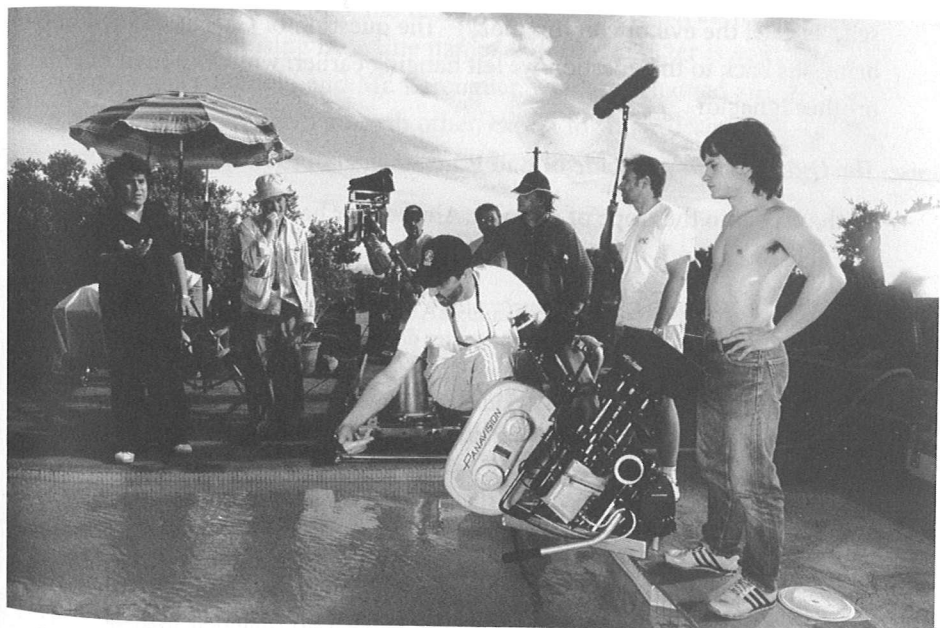
While Banderas's character Antonio is redeemed by his passion, the actor Juan/Ángel, played by Gael García Bernal, in *Bad Education* remains a cold, calculating killer who is sodomized and humiliated in every version of the story. Although I am not suggesting that sodomy is inherently humiliating and recognize that this sex act can be pleasurable for both partners, in the sex scenes with García Bernal (except for the first comic encounter with the "hunky" Enrique already mentioned), the Mexican actor always has a pained expression on his face, whether or not he is in drag. Like Enrique's attempts to possess and humiliate Juan/Ángel, Almodóvar seems to enjoy transforming the young Mexican heartthrob into an opportunist who claims: "I'm capable of doing anything. I'm an actor!" Then he turns this mobility into a turnoff by having Enrique say: "There's nothing less erotic than an actor seeking a role." In this noir thriller, García Bernal's character turns sexual mobility, previously a progressive political force in Almodóvar movies, into a venal form of opportunism, stripping away its political edge and glamour.

These power dynamics take on a more complex transnational dimension with Bernal, for Almodóvar also has the Mexican actor pose as a Spaniard and adopt a "lisp" Castilian accent. Almodóvar acknowledges the connection between these two forms of masquerade: "To the difficulty of having to change sex, without looking grotesque, you have to add the phonetic issue; I wanted him to speak Castilian." Whereas I have written before on how Almodóvar frequently uses Mexican and Brazilian music and casts Latin

American actors in his films to strengthen their connection to a broader Spanish-language culture, here something else seems to be occurring.⁷ The director's treatment of Bernal could be read intertextually alongside a group of venturesome films from Latin America—Alejandro González Iñárritu's *Amores perros* (2000), Alfonso Cuarón's *Y tu mamá también* (2001), and Walter Salles's *The Motorcycle Diaries* (2004)—that established the young actor's global stardom in Spanish-language works that rival Almodóvar's unique success in the transnational market. All three films feature homosexual characters in plots that are explicitly political beyond the registers of sexuality and gender, where Almodóvar has reigned supreme.

García Bernal's resentment has been widely reported in the press. According to Lynn Hirschberg in the *New York Times*:

Bernal . . . clashed with Almodóvar during the filming of *Bad Education*: in particular, he had difficulty with some of the explicit homosexual love scenes. Neither Bernal nor Almodóvar would talk about it, but Bernal did tell me, several weeks after Cannes: "Everyone has their inner transvestite, but my inner transvestite is Mexican-Caribbean, and that's a very different way of putting on a show than Pedro's. Making this film was very hard." (4)



The Director and the Actor: Pedro Almodóvar and Gael García Bernal on the set of Bad Education. Photograph by Diego López Calvín. Copyright Diego López Calvín/El Deseo.

Despite, or possibly because of García Bernal's own growing stardom, Almodóvar seems to take pleasure in making the power dynamics of their collaboration very clear, even while mocking his own tyranny. Here's how he describes their interaction in his "Self-Interview":

Q: Poor Gael!

A: Not at all. Gael is going to work a lot and make lots of money.

Q: How and why did you choose him after dressing up every Spanish brat?

A: After two or three casting sessions, just like everybody else.

Even when praising Bernal for his hard work, Almodóvar claims that he gave him the most challenging role that he had ever had, as if his earlier parts were easy.

Yet Almodóvar has also stated in his "Self-Interview" that he chose the actor for his looks rather than his acting abilities: "As a transvestite Gael definitely reminds me of Julia Roberts—the same huge smiling ship-shaped mouth floating on her face"—a remark that teeters on the border of ridicule. Although Almodóvar claims that he never judges his characters, "however atrocious their behavior might be," he never denies that he judges his actors. In this case, he seems to fuse the actor Gael García Bernal with the opportunistic actor and femme fatale that he plays in the movie, finally asking himself, "Is Gael the evil one in this story?" The question of Gael as the evil one brings us back to the question we left hanging earlier: why does Juan kill his brother Ignacio?

The Question of Fratricide in Bad Education

With respect to the trope of puppets, Almodóvar has the following to say in his "Self-Interview":

Whatever Happened to Baby Jane? . . . [is] a wonderful puppet show with two sisters, both former child stars, who live together despite their hatred. One of them (Bette Davis) ends up killing the other (Joan Crawford). There's a bit of this in [*Bad Education*], although not so explicit. As kids, Juan (Ángel Andrade) envies his elder brother Ignacio for doing everything better than him. Jealousy among brothers is very common when they are young, but Juan's grows [over] time. Both want to become artists, and Ignacio is able to do everything so naturally: sing, dance, write, read, transform and act. Everything Juan would like to do, Ignacio did better. And Juan hated him in silence until Ignacio gave him reason to hate him openly when he began taking drugs and dressing up as a woman, in their hometown. Family life was like hell due to Ignacio's behavior. The mother, with a heart condition, lived an eternal unbearable situation. The father could not take the shame and began to drink, . . . until he was found dead on a frozen puddle one winter day.

As Almodóvar moves from the Hollywood intertext to the plot of his own film, he reveals the fratricidal rivalry that lies at the heart of this neorealist portrait of his family. The father's death and Juan's desire to imitate Ignacio (despite the risk of humiliation) emerge as primary motives. According to Girard, what is central to the Oedipal myth is mimetism—the son's desire to imitate his father (or, in this case, the older brother)—rather than his erotic attraction to the mother. Girard claims: "By making one man's desire into a replica of another man's desire, it invariably leads to rivalry; and rivalry in turn transforms desire into violence" (169). Mimetic doubling is thus the source of the murderous impulse, and doubling relies on splitting, the way Ignacio felt "split into two" (male and female, victim and killer) after he was molested by Father Manolo. In Almodóvar's first feature, *Pepi, Luci, Bom*, the act of rape and the resulting desire for revenge trigger a similar splitting (but of the rapist rather than the victim) into a pair of identical twins. Thus, paradoxically, Almodóvar presents fratricide as expressing a desire to be whole again—regardless of the consequences.

Almodóvar's splitting of characters in *Bad Education* is more extreme than in any of his previous films. One actor (Gael García Bernal) has four avatars: Juan, Ángel, Zahara, and Ignacio. Another character, Enrique, is split into three avatars: the child, the filmmaker, and the biker, each played by a different actor, all using the same name. A third character is split into two avatars, Father Manolo and Mr. Berenguer, who are renamed and recast so as to bear little similarity to each other, except for their desire for boys and young men. These variations become a dizzying database of doubling worthy of Buñuel.

Evil Twins and Movie Queens

At the end of *Bad Education*, Juan/Ángel is sentenced to a life in television as punishment for his fratricide, apparently a fate worse than death. In the earlier two films, it is the Almodóvar figure who is held captive in that realm: the film director Pablo Quintero appears in a TV interview, which clinches his seduction of Antonio and teaches his captive how to seduce him in return; and Almodóvar himself appears in a parodic TV sequence in *What Have I Done to Deserve This?* But these parodic television excerpts are always offset by cinematic intertexts from melodrama that feature sympathetic siblings.

The inset film at the heart of *Bad Education*, the Francoist tearjerker *Esa mujer* (That Woman) (1968), may be the most revealing, for this is the film that the young Enrique and Ignacio see at their local movie theater, the kind

that was historically displaced by television. This Mario Camus melodrama has several parallels to the plot of *Bad Education* and provides Ignacio a strong basis for identification. Sara Montiel plays Soledad Romero, a woman accused of murder who finally tells her sad story in flashback. Formerly a nun who was raped when her convent was attacked, like Ignacio, this sister lost her faith and fled the religious life. Becoming a sexy singer like Zahara, she had many lovers but then met Carlos, her one true love. Unfortunately, he turned out to be the husband of her daughter. When Carlos died, she was falsely accused of his murder, a familial turn in the plot that evokes Almodóvar's *High Heels* (1991).

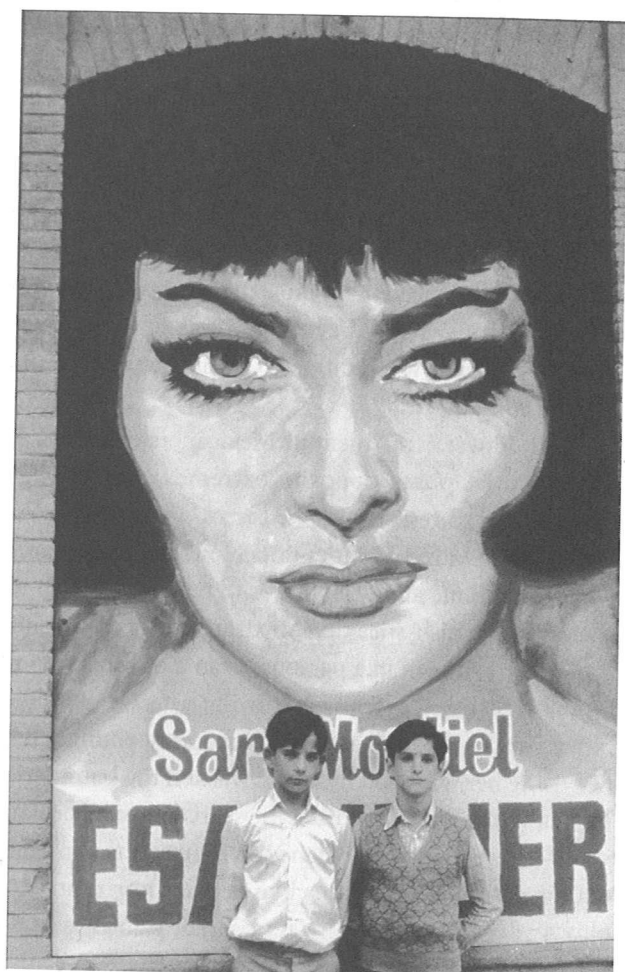
Even more important than the parallels in plot are the circumstances in which the film is experienced, for Soledad's flashback is embedded within Ignacio's own flashback to his childhood. This tale of love and violation accompanies Ignacio's first sexual encounter with his young friend Enrique. It is this "primal scene," this fusion of forbidden sex and cinema, that forever makes film viewing the ultimate erotic experience in Almodóvar's world. We have seen its erotic power dramatized in earlier Almodóvar movies, but here the boys not only desire Montiel across barriers of gender and sexuality, they also want to *be* her. One becomes a transsexual and the other a filmmaker—like the two brothers in *Law of Desire*.

Montiel also provides a fantasy of transnational mobility, for the Spanish-born actress succeeded in the Mexican film industry and in Hollywood, where she married American director Anthony Mann and played in Robert Aldrich's *Veracruz* (1954) and Samuel Fuller's *Yuma* (1957), before returning to a successful movie career in Spain in the late 1950s. Thus, even when playing a victim, she still carried an aura of triumph for Spanish spectators. Like the young Ignacio and Enrique, Spanish moviegoers could embrace this empowering identification with Montiel as part of a libertarian cinematic spectatorship, one associated with sexual transgression and other forms of rebellion, especially during the repressive Francoist period of the 1950s and 1960s when censorship codes were still strictly enforced. As I have argued elsewhere,⁸ one of Almodóvar's major achievements was to carry this libertarian cinematic spectatorship into the global sphere, where it became linked to subversive pleasures and to a sexual mobility that performed a sex change on Spain's national stereotype.

But whereas in *Law of Desire* these pleasures were still associated with the father-son axis of Oedipal desire, in *Bad Education* they become more directly identified with fraternity, a term whose underlying tensions will

always have special resonance in the national context of Spain. Given its history of civil war and recurring conflicts between the "two Spains," fraternity connotes rivalry and violent opposition as much as it does solidarity and identification. The very closeness and consanguinity of brothers raises both an incestuous desire for fusion and a fear of interchangeability—with an accompanying guilt for wanting to be unique, favored, or superior. This paradoxical combination can unleash violence in either sibling—no matter whether he longs for unity, differentiation, or both. Perhaps that is the contradiction that lies at the heart of the "trilogy" and that helps explain why Juan murdered Ignacio: to deny his brother's superiority or difference by becoming him.

Nacho Pérez as the young Ignacio and Raúl García Forneiro as the young Enrique near a poster of "That Woman," Sara Montiel. Photograph by Diego López Calvín. Copyright Diego López Calvín/El Deseo.



In the recent discourse on nationalism, "fraternity" has proved to be a problematic term, especially in Benedict Anderson's influential definition of the nation, which has been widely applied to national cinemas; for Anderson's use of the term "fraternity" exposes his overall lack of attention to issues of gender, sexuality, and cultural specificity:

It [nationality] is imagined as a *community*, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship. Ultimately it is this *fraternity* that makes it possible, over the past two centuries, for so many millions of people, not so much to kill, as willingly to die for such limited imaginings. (7, emphasis added)

Despite Almodóvar's earlier disavowal of the Spanish civil war and the recurring conflicts between the "two Spains," he still dramatizes the masochistic and murderous dimensions of a culturally specific fraternity: not across the grand sweep of Spanish national history, but within the cloistered halls of lecherous priests and nuns and within the hothouse atmosphere of fraternal family melodrama and dark noir romance. His movies successfully expand the term "fraternity," by "queering" it for gay and straight spectators of all genders (including transsexuals and other sisters), and by using a pervasive transnational intertextuality to extend these lines of bonding, identification, and murderous rivalry beyond borders of every kind; for, even within his domestic settings we find traces of transnational conflicts of power, particularly in *Bad Education*.

Almodóvar's treatment of Mexican actor García Bernal and of Spanish diva Montiel poses opposite extremes, which might help explain why Enrique was so resistant to the idea of Juan playing Zahara, even though he had studied with a Montiel impersonator. With García Bernal, Almodóvar uses his supreme authorial power to reassert Spanish identity by "colonizing" a younger Spanish-speaking Mexican and by casting him as the false younger brother or evil twin in a personal drama of fratricidal revenge. With Montiel, he embraces an elder Spanish straying sister—not unlike the sister in *Splendor in the Grass*—with the ardor of an adoring younger brother or transnational fan, using her wayward moves to weaken the boundaries between nation and region, victim and victimizer, the sacred and the profane.

While Almodóvar's reliance on transnational intertextuality runs throughout his entire body of films like "a deep, horizontal comradeship" (to redeploy Anderson's phrase), his retroseriality enables us both to perceive and to preserve the distinctive identity and evolving meanings of each film more

clearly—even as they form new networked relations with each other. There is no danger of their becoming interchangeable—not even those “blood brothers” in the fraternal trilogy that was defined by *Bad Education*.

NOTES

1. In his “Self-Interview,” Almodóvar says that “[t]he film is autobiographic in the deeper sense—I’m telling [the story of] the characters, but not [of] my life.” And also: “*Bad Education* is a very intimate film. It’s not exactly autobiographic—i.e., it’s not the story of my life in school or my education in the early years of the *Movida*, even though these are the two backgrounds in which the argument is set (1964 and 1980, with a stop in 1977). My memories have definitely paid a heavy burden in writing the story—after all, I’ve lived those times and scenarios.”

2. See my “Reinventing the Motherland.”

3. See T. S. Eliot’s *Selected Essays* and Mikhail Bakhtin’s *The Dialogic Imagination*.

4. For a fuller account of Almodóvar’s use of television as well as the industrial history of the medium in Spain, see Paul Julian Smith’s essay in this volume.

5. I am not claiming that the association with database narrative is unique to Almodóvar. Indeed, I have made a similar argument regarding Luis Buñuel; see my “Hot Spots, Avatars and Narrative Fields Forever.”

6. For an analysis of *Surcos* and a fuller discussion of the use of *esperpento* in these films, see my *Blood Cinema* (40–53, 113–26); for a discussion of its pertinence to Almodóvar, see D’Lugo (287–300).

7. See my “Pleasure and the New Spanish Mentality” and “Reinventing the Motherland.”

8. See my “High Heels,” *Blood Cinema*, and “Refiguring Socialist Spain.”

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