

Candidate 3**Volver: a film centred around resilient women**

'Volver' is a film by esteemed Spanish director Pedro Almodóvar. Famed for his work consisting of predominantly female characters. Other films mainly concerning women by Almodóvar are 'Mujeres al borde de un ataque de nervios' and 'Todo sobre mi madre'. The film I have studied is set in post-Franco Spain, in the La Mancha region; the place of Almodóvar's birth. The film deals with the life of the lead character 'Raimunda', a young Spanish mother living in relative poverty in the outskirts of Madrid. Raimunda is a character of much depth but throughout the film she is repeatedly portrayed as strong.¹ There are several different aspects to this film but I feel that all aspects directly relate to the main theme of powerful women in the film. In other words, each theme, key scene and other cinematic techniques serve to develop the theme of powerful women. Almodóvar uses several cinematic techniques such as use of contrast, use of colour and camera angles and as well as key scenes to develop the main theme.

Throughout the entire film a contrast between men and women exists. The two genders have polar opposite portrayals. On one hand the two men which, in my opinion, hold importance in the film, Paco and Raimunda's father, are portrayed as bad people. This is due to the fact that both characters attempt to or succeed in raping their daughters. Also, Paco is seen lying on a sofa drinking beer and watching TV. This scene adds not only to his characterisation as lazy, but it also develops the persona of the men of the film as inferior to the women as Raimunda is seen cleaning the apartment as he does nothing. There are two other men present in the film, Raimunda's neighbour who owns the restaurant and the man from the film crew that eats in the restaurant. The man who owns the restaurant is used only so Raimunda is in possession of the restaurant to demonstrate her diligence. The other male who is part of the film crew is utilized solely to display Raimunda's passion. Personally, I believe both are not of any importance to the film overall. Therefore, Almodóvar uses the negative portrayal of Paco and Raimunda's father to create an overall negative perception of the men in the film. On the other hand, the women of the film: firstly, Raimunda. From start to finish Raimunda is characterized as resilient, Almodóvar places Raimunda in countless difficult situations at once during the film. For example, her husband dies, her aunt dies, her mother presumed to be dead returns, she must provide for her daughter as a single parent. These situations characterise her as a resilient woman but also develops the overall synthesis of women in the film. Secondly Paula, Raimunda's daughter is characterized as a strong woman as she suffers through the attempted sexual assault of her own father. Additionally, this amplifies the general consensus that the women of the film are strong individuals as she is a young woman subject to a rape. Also, there are several other women like Raimunda's mother Irene that are portrayed as resilient through the film. Almodóvar utilizes these conflicting portrayals of the men and the women of the film to create a contrast. Due to this film mainly concerning the lives of the women living in a society controlled by men, the contrast serves to make use of the negative representations of the men to further depict the women of the film as powerful.

Almodóvar puts to use several cinematic techniques to develop themes and ideas in his wide range of films. In Volver, Almodóvar uses different colours and the ideas associated with them to develop the theme of powerful women. The most notable colour in the film is red. This colour is largely associated with Raimunda. She is seen wearing red clothes

throughout the film. For example, in the Paco death scene. Paula is also seen wearing red in that scene. Furthermore, the colour red is used in the opening credits while countless women, solely women, are seen cleaning graves. The scene in which Raimunda sings the song from the opening scene, she is wearing red. In the scene at the end of the film where Raimunda's mother Irene cares for Augustina in her last days she is wearing red¹. The colour red is often associated with power and passion.² Almodóvar has continuously paired the colour red with the female characters of the film as it adds to the consensus of the women as dominant and the theme of powerful women.

Almodóvar makes use of another cinematic technique in *Volver*, the use of camera angles. In the scene in which Raimunda returns home to find Paco dead, both Raimunda and Paula are shown using a low camera angle. A low camera angle is generally used to make a subject appear strong and powerful. Almodóvar makes the use of a low camera angle in this scene to depict the two women as paramount. In contrast, a top angle is also used in this scene to display Raimunda's husband's lifeless body spread across the kitchen floor. This angle is used in cinematography to make the subject appear powerless. This contrast in camera angles with regards to the two subjects highlights not only great sense of vulnerability with regards to Paco, but rather creates an immense strength to Raimunda and Paula as they have completely overpowered Paco. As seen as his dead body lies below them. Almodóvar uses this complete domination of women over men to develop the theme of powerful women.

There are several key scenes in *Volver*, and each serves a purpose. In my opinion, one of the key scenes is the opening scene. The film opens with a shot in a cemetery of the village showing women ritualistically cleaning the gravestones. No men are anywhere to be seen. Almodóvar has chosen this scene to open the film as it instantly provides the audience with an idea as to the role of women within the society at this time. Although the rein of Franco was over, their role of being solely a housewife and mother was still deeply cemented into society.³

Almodóvar creates this impression of the women of the film as inferior to men for a reason. He does it to amplify the characterisations of the women of the film as powerful. This portrayal in the opening scene, in turn, makes characters like Raimunda appear as more powerful living her day-to-day life in a society in which she is seen as inferior to men.

Another key scene in the film is the scene in which we see Raimunda return home to find Paco dead. This scene consists of Paula a young girl, killing her father as he attempts to rape her. This is a very powerful scene. Almodóvar makes use of Paula killing her father as it characterises her as an incredibly strong woman. Raimunda and Paula both clean up the gruesome murder scene and hide the body. This scene links back to earlier in the movie where Raimunda is seen cleaning a kitchen knife, the earlier scene foreshadows this scene where Raimunda cleans the same knife this time covered in the blood of her husband. Almodóvar makes use of foreshadowing to convey Raimunda as powerful. It does this as the sight of a woman cleaning the blood of a man who attempted to rape her daughter off a knife is empowering. Personally, I think that this scene also has another purpose; Almodóvar

¹ A Sharper Focus

² Film and Furniture

³ The Spanish Blog

uses Paula killing Paco to demonstrate to the viewer, the change in the role of the women as the women of this film aspire to more than their role within society. Additionally, after the death of Paco, Raimunda finds herself running a restaurant by herself. This example also highlights the change in roles of women as she is working diligently to provide for her daughter. This is the complete opposite of what is expected of a woman in that time. This demonstrates the sheer strength of women in the film.

In conclusion the women of *Volver* are portrayed as powerful characters. Almodóvar uses countless techniques such as use of colour, camera angles and the characterisations of several characters in order to make the women of the film appear strong and resilient whilst simultaneously living in a patriarchal society.

Word Count: 1,410

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Portfolio title	Volver: a film centred around resilient women	
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Word count (excluding quotations and bibliography)	1,410	

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