

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
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Amores Perros (2000)

Alejandro González Iñárritu

OVERVIEW

This is the first of the *Trilogy of Death*, a collaboration of the Mexican duo, director Alejandro González Iñárritu and screenwriter Guillermo Arriaga. This film, along with others in the trilogy, explores the way a single traumatic event sets off causal chains that are seemingly unrelated, but then clearly tie back to each other. In this case, a car accident is the precipitating event, but the continuity in the film really has more to do with the fate of dogs who are brutalized by being used in dog fights, and those who are rescued by individuals who identify with their bite marks, scars, broken teeth and legs. *Amores Perros* means “Dog Loves” or, more idiomatically, “love that’s gone to the dogs.” And so it has. Each of the three separate intersecting story arcs involves a person or people who has a love interest that has just utterly gone to the dogs.

CHARACTERS

Octavio: in love with his brother’s wife, Susana, and he has a rottweiler, Cofi, that he makes fight in dog fights in order to earn enough money to run away with Susana.

Susana: married to Octavio’s brother, who listens to Octavio’s declarations of love, but does not accede

Ramiro: Octavio’s brother and Susana’s husband; a complete thug without ethics or morals

Daniel: Magazine publisher who leaves his family to live with Valeria, a Spanish supermodel

Valeria: Spanish supermodel working in Mexico City

El Chivo: Hitman hired to kill a businessman, when the car crash interrupts him; rescues dogs; told his ex-wife to tell their daughter he was dead when he had to go to prison.

Maru: Chivo’s daughter who has not seen her father since he left many years ago. She believes he is dead.

THE STORY

Amores Perros has three interweaving non-linear story lines or arcs, all centering on the car crash that happened when Octavio’s car speed through an intersection and collides with Valeria’s car. She is gravely injured and may lose her leg. Crossing the street and also affected is Chivo, a hitman on his way to execute a job on a businessman.

Octavio and Susana Octavio decides to enter his beloved Rottweiler, Cofi, into the world of dog-fighting in order to earn money so he can run away with his brother’s wife, Susana. One gets the impression that Octavio did not realize what a sickeningly brutal and sordid enterprise dogfighting would be. They go to sign up the dog, and it’s in a squalid, dilapidated old hotel in Mexico City. The dog fights take place in “the pit” which is the old hotel swimming pool. The place is filthy, and the people who are there are soulless brutes who are addicted to gambling and the suffering of the innocent. Susana, Ramiro’s wife, is going along with Octavio, but then, she goes along with Ramiro, too. It’s hard to say. Octavio sinks further into the world of dogfighting, unable

to stop, even though each fight has its own tragedy, and other owners lose their beloved dogs. The owners then turn on each other. Jarocho shoots Cofi. Octavio stabs Jarocho. And so it goes. Ramiro, who abuses Susana, knows Octavio is trying to persuade Susana to run away with him. In revenge, he steals Octavio's money. They flee with a badly wounded Cofi. The car crash happens. Cofi ends up with El Chivo. Octavio is in the hospital. His best friend, Jorge, is dead.

Daniel and Valeria Daniel is a successful magazine publisher. Valeria is a Spanish supermodel. Their segment opens with Valeria touring the apartment where they will live together. The window opens to a massive billboard with her image on it. All is good until the moment of the car crash, where she is gravely injured. She goes home to recover. Things go downhill quickly as she reinjures herself in trying to rescue her beloved Yorkie, Richie, who has gotten trapped under the floorboards in the raised hardwood flooring of the apartment. Things go from bad to worse as her leg becomes gangrenous and must be amputated, and she completely loses her supermodel career.

El Chivo and Maru El Chivo is a private school professor who, after getting involved in a guerrilla movement, is sent to prison. He instructs his ex-wife to tell their daughter, Maru, that he is dead. Nonetheless, he longs to have a relationship with his daughter, and he sends money and keeps up with her, albeit in a clandestine manner. El Chivo is on his way to perform a hit on a businessman who has failed to obey the corrupt police commander, when the car crash happens. El Chivo, who has long hair, a beard, and who lives in an industrial space, absolutely loves dogs. He has at least ten or twelve. So, when the car crash happens right in front of him, and he sees Cofi, the terribly wounded Rottweiler, who is suffering from dog fight injuries, plus a gunshot wound, he wants to do all he can to help the dog. He takes Cofi home, cleans his wounds, gives him nourishing food, and nurtures him back to health. He decides to leave the hitman business for numerous reasons. His last hit was hired by a man who wanted to have his half-brother killed. Leaving all this behind, the client and the "mark" chained to a wall, a pistol between them, El Chivo leaves. He goes to his daughter's house, breaks in, and leaves a large bundle of money. Then, El Chivo sells his client's SUV, receives the money and then simply walks away, Cofi's name having been changed to "El Negro". ("The Black").

THEMES

Love has gone to the dogs. In each of the story arcs, the central tragedy has to do with love, particularly a kind of thwarted love that engenders misery rather than a sense of unity and fulfillment. Ramiro is abusive toward Susana, but that does not mean that Octavio's love is any better. If it had not been for Daniel's leaving his wife to live with Valeria, she would not have been in the accident. Chivo's love for stray dogs is kind and noble, except that it is a sad substitute for what he truly longs for; a relationship with his daughter.

Multiple chains of events are triggered by a single action: A single car crash has precipitated life-changing events in many different lives. In many instances, the people were already on a trajectory to tragedy, and the car crash only accelerated it. This is most particularly the case with Octavio, whose brother is outraged at the idea of his trying to steal his wife, and Jarocho, who is enraged that his dog was killed by Cofi, and so he gravely wounds the poor rottweiler, Cofi, who, until Octavio needed money, was Octavio's best and most loyal buddy.

Justice is indeterminate in the world of phenomena: There does seem to be a kind of karmic reprisal in the seemingly random occurrences in the world of phenomena. However, such justice is capricious and often not easily recognized. The dogs who were mauled in the cruel dog fights were vindicated when Jarocho was stabbed in a vicious "people fight." But, where is the justice for people like El Chivo, who may have been falsely imprisoned and consequently has no compunction at all about eliminating the corrupt. Perhaps the most ironic act of justice was the way that El Chivo decided to leave the two brothers to work it out for themselves. One brother had hired El Chivo to murder his brother, to get him out of the way. When Chivo found out they

were brothers, he tied each one up, and placed a gun equidistant between them. Either one would kill the other, or they would find a way to overcome their differences.

Meaning must be invented: *Amores Perros* is presented in a non-linear narrative, with many returns to the moment of the car crash, and the intersecting / converging lives, or in this case, story arcs. It is a meta-narrative, which is all about the process of constructing a narrative, and in doing so, pulling together threads that connect the people and events. In the case of *Amores Perros*, dogs are clearly one point of connection. Each main character has a very meaningful relationship with a dog. For example, Valeria aggravates the condition of her leg as she desperately searches for little Richie, who has fallen between the floor boards and the ceiling of the apartment below. Octavio most foully betrays his faithful rottweiler, Cofi, by making him fight in dog fights. Cofi is rescued by the person possibly least “rescatable” (ransomable), El Chivo, a former professor, turned guerrillero, turned ex-con and vagrant hitman. Despite the fact that he is a stone-cold killer, El Chivo is a sweet and tender owner of dogs, who nurtures all of them, including poor Cofi, back to health.

CHARACTER ANALYSIS:

Octavio Octavio is one of the main characters in *Amores Perros* and it was his reckless driving down the streets of Mexico City that caused the catastrophic car accident.

Desperate: Octavio is desperate for a change in his life. He lives at home with his extended family, which includes his brother and his wife, Susana. Octavio has fallen in love with Susana, and it must be said that even though she decides not to leave her abusive husband, Ramiro, she does precious little to discourage Octavio.

Dreamer: Octavio is something of a delusional dreamer. He does not seem to be very realistic about the fact that his love for Susana is not exactly reciprocated, and that she is merely playing with him. As for his idea of riches and instant wealth from using his dog to fight in dog fights, he does not seem to acknowledge the fact that putting your dog in dog fights is not at all the same as being an agent for a boxer. The dog may be killed in his very first fight, or be maimed to the point. He also does not seem to mind the fact that he is forcing his beloved dog, Cofi, to suffer indescribable pain and potential death.

Foolish: Octavio’s ideas are extremely unrealistic, and in fact, they will harm anyone who decides to accede to his wishes. He does not seem to have any inkling of risk or risk assessment. Instead, he foolishly believes that everything will have a positive outcome. Of course, it has just the reverse. In this sense, it is clear that Iñárritu is making a political statement, or at least, a commentary on the nature of the Mexican people in general. Iñárritu points out that Octavio’s actions and his manner of thinking, reflects the mindset and behavior of a large percentage of Mexican people in the working class, or the working poor.

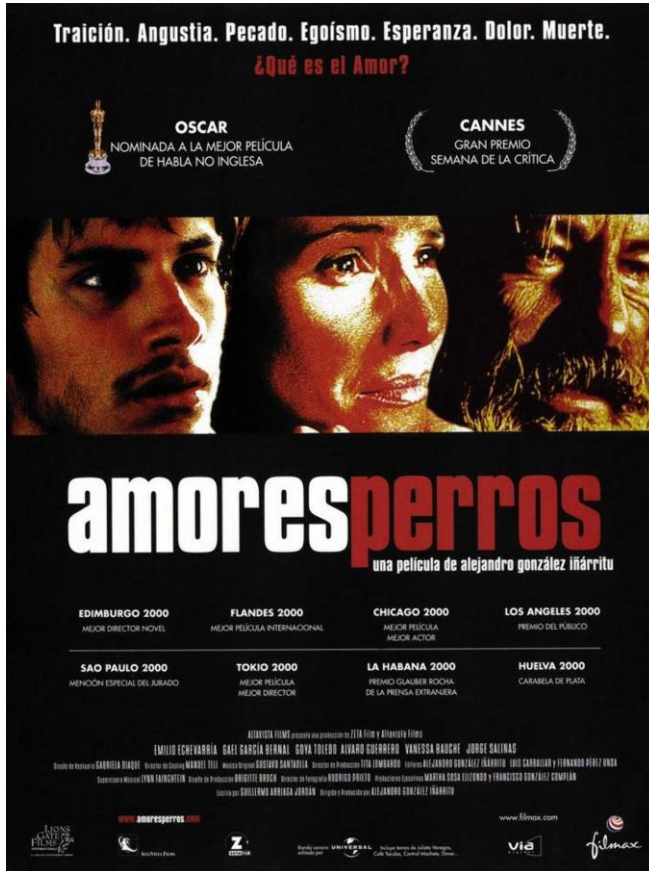
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. In each of the story arcs, there is a love story (albeit not necessarily a positive one). Please identify and describe where and how love appears in the story of Octavio and Susana, Daniel and Valeria, and El Chivo and Maru.

2. The structure of *Amores Perros* is non-linear. By not following a chronological narrative, and by introducing fragmentary snippets of the lives of the people in the story arcs, one gains a different perspective of the reasons for the various events. One also is able to contemplate the events from different perspectives, thanks to juxtapositions and quick cuts. What are some of the observations that you are able to make about the people, their lives, and the world in general? Please go into detail about what the structure allows you to see and to explore as possible interpretations.

3. The settings of *Amores Perros* contrast with each other, and they tell something about life in general as well as about the values and mindsets of individuals, all of whom live in Mexico City. Where does Octavio live? Where will the dog fight take place? Describe the colors, the lighting, and the overall collections of items in the “habitat” of each of the characters. What does this tell us about life in general in each of these setting?

ILLUSTRATIVE SCENES





Octavio prepares Cofi for his first dogfight.



Octavio holds Cofi after his first fight which has taken place in a filthy, abandoned hotel somewhere in Mexico City. One can see that dogfighting is a vicious blood sport, as there is blood on the floors.



The giant billboard featuring Valeria, visible from the new apartment that she and Daniel share. After she has the accident that injures her leg, then must have it amputated after the complication in which gangrene sets in, the billboard disappears. Valeria's career is over.



Valera speaks to Daniel about their future life together after he leases an apartment for them to live in.



Point of view shot showing the mess that Valeria has made as she tears up the wooden floorboard to liberate little Ritchie, her dog.



Valeria is so desperate to rescue her small dog, Ritchie, that she reinjures her leg. Here she has a light and is trying to determine where he might be. She has already torn of a few floorboards. Her wheelchair is in the background.



Valeria returns from the hospital after having her leg amputated. She is a shadow of her former self.



El Chivo, living in squalor, but precisely how he chooses to live, with his rescued dogs.



El Chivo nurses the gravely injured Cofi back to health. Cofi was injured during and after a dog fight, and was in Octavio's vehicle that crashed as Octavio and Jorge sped down the streets of Mexico City to avoid Jarocho, a dog-fighter.



The rescued dogs that live inside an abandoned warehouse that Chiveo is living.