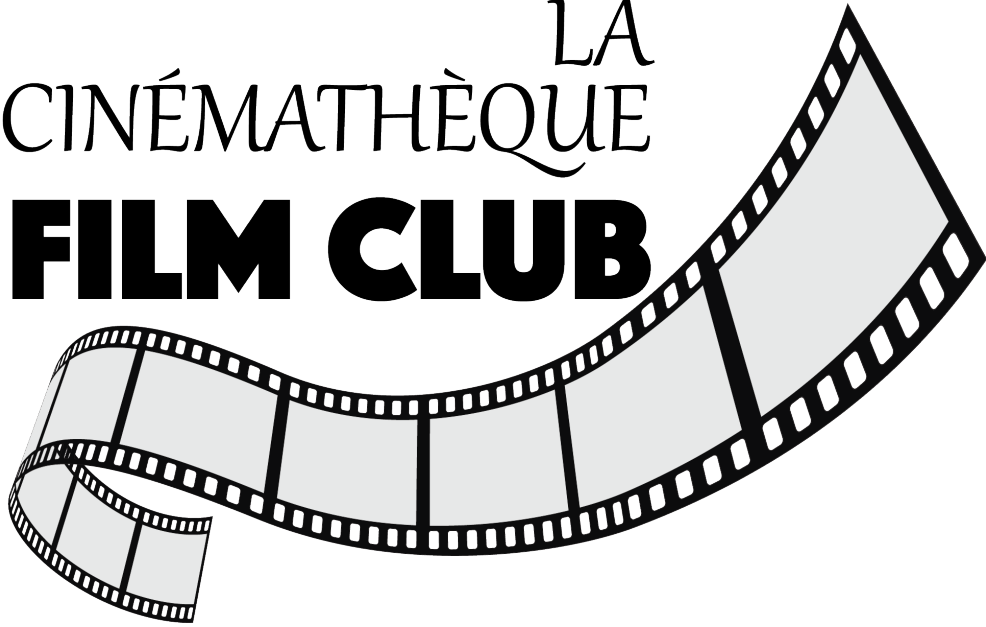


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Latin American Film Series  
Fall 2019

Alejandro Iñarrítu  
b.1963  
Mexico

Amores Perros  
2000

# Amores Perros

Roger Ebert • April 13, 2001

Article sourced from RogerEbert.com: <https://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/amores-perros-2001>

3.5/4 Stars

"Amores Perros" arrives from Mexico trailing clouds of glory--it was one of this year's Oscar nominees--and generating excitement on the Internet, where the fanboys don't usually flip for foreign films. It tells three interlinked stories that span the social classes in Mexico City, from rich TV people to the working class to the homeless, and it circles through those stories with a nod to Quentin Tarantino, whose "Pulp Fiction" had a magnetic influence on young filmmakers.

Many are influenced but few are chosen: Alejandro Gonzalez Inarritu, making his feature debut, borrows what he can use, but is an original, dynamic director.

The title, loosely translated in English, is "Love's a Bitch," and all three of his stories involve dogs who become as important as the human characters. The film opens with a disclaimer promising that no animals were harmed in the making of the film. That notice usually appears at the ends of films, but putting it first in "Amores Perros" is wise, since the first sequence involves dog fights and all three will be painful for soft-hearted animal lovers to sit through.

"Octavio and Susana," the first segment, begins with cars hurtling through city streets in a chase and gunfight. The images are so quick and confused, at first we don't realize the bleeding body in the back seat belongs to a dog. This is Cofi, the beloved fighting animal of Octavio (Gael Garcia Bernal), a poor young man who is helplessly in love with Susana (Vanessa Bauche), the teenage bride of his ominous brother Ramiro (Marco Perez). Flashbacks show how Cofi was shot after killing a champion dog; now the chase ends in a spectacular crash in an intersection--a crash that will involve all three of the movie's stories.

In the second segment, "Daniel and Valeria," we meet a television producer (Alvaro Guerrero) who has abandoned his family to live with a beautiful young model and actress (Goya Toledo). He's rented a big new apartment for her; Valeria's image smiles in from a billboard visible through a window. But then their happiness is marred when Valeria's little dog chases a ball into a hole in the floor, disappears under the floorboards and won't return. Is it lost, trapped or frightened? "There are thousands of rats down there," Valeria wails to Daniel.

We discover that Valeria was involved in the crash that begins the movie; we see it this time from a different angle, and indeed it comes as a shock every time it occurs. Her leg is severely injured, and one complication leads to another--while the dog still snuffles under the floor, sometimes whining piteously, sometimes ominously silent. This sequence surely owes something to the great Spanish director Luis Bunuel, who made some of his best films in Mexico, and whose "Tristana" starred Catherine Deneuve as a beauty who loses her leg. The segment is sort of dark slapstick--morbid and ironic, as the romance is tested by the beauty's mutilation and by the frustration (known to every pet owner) of a dog that will not come when it is called.

From time to time during the first two segments, we've seen a street person, bearded and weathered, accompanied by his own pack of dogs. The third segment, "El Chivo and Maru," stars the famous Mexican actor Emilio Echevarria, who, we learn, is a revolutionary-turned-squatter and supports himself by killing for hire. El Chivo is approached by a man who wants to get rid of his partner and is inspired to add his own brutal

twist to this murder scheme. The three stories have many links, the most interesting perhaps that El Chivo has rescued the wounded dog Cofi and now cares for it.

"Amores Perros" at 154 minutes is heavy on story--too heavy, some will say--and rich with character and atmosphere. It is the work of a born filmmaker, and you can sense Gonzalez Inarritu's passion as he plunges into melodrama, coincidence, sensation and violence. His characters are not the bland, amoral totems of so much modern Hollywood violence, but people with feelings and motives. They want love, money and revenge. They not only love their dogs but desperately depend on them. And it is clear that the lower classes are better at survival than the wealthy, whose confidence comes from their possessions, not their mettle.

The movie reminded me not only of Bunuel but of two other filmmakers identified with Mexico: Arturo Ripstein and Alejandro Jodorowsky. Their works are also comfortable with the scruffy underbelly of society, and involve the dangers when jealousy is not given room to breathe. Consider Jodorowsky's great "Santa Sangre" (1990), in which a cult of women cut off their own arms to honor a martyr. "Amores Perros" will be too much for some filmgoers, just as "Pulp Fiction" was and "Santa Sangre" certainly was, but it contains the spark of inspiration.

# Amores Perros

Maria San Filippo • April 2001

Article sourced from Senses of Cinema: <http://sensesofcinema.com/2001/current-releases/amores/>

From its gripping opening sequence, a frenetic car chase through an apocalyptic Mexico City, to its final image of man and dog setting off into a vast and empty landscape, *Amores Perros* strikes like a bullet in the gut – wincing pain giving way to prolonged, dreadful suffering and, a great deal of blood later, finally reaching a surprisingly serene end. First-time feature director Alejandro González Iñárritu delivers a sobering, epochal meditation on the dog-eat-dog modern world, vis-à-vis a trendy intersecting narrative set amidst the luxury and squalor that uncomfortably rub shoulders in the world's most crowded city. It's *Magnolia* south of the border, with a grimly realistic car crash taking the place of biblical plague as denouement.

Octavio (Gael Garcia Bernal) is an audacious, soulful young man who carries a torch for his battered sister-in-law Susana (Vanessa Bauche). In a desperate attempt to rescue her and flee oppressive barrio life, Octavio offers up his rottweiler to the barbarous world of back alley dogfights. Across town but a world away, wealthy middle-aged executive Daniel (Alvaro Guerrero) deserts his family for supermodel Valeria (Goya Toledo), only to have her looks and career shattered in a sudden accident (the aforementioned car crash). Furthering their torment, Valeria's precious pooch becomes trapped beneath the floorboards of their apartment. Rounding out the triptych is El Chivo (Emilio Echevarria), an older street person and former communist guerrilla who left his own family long ago. Recently released from prison, he attends to a pack of stray dogs and works reluctantly as a hired killer for the same cop who put him away.

The frantic pace, skewed time structure and plenteous blood-letting will invite misleading comparisons to Tarantino, the grave distinction being that Iñárritu does not go in for stylized violence. His depiction of the urban jungle is not about hip gunplay and even hipper wordplay, and he lingers on shots of charred bullet entry holes in a decidedly un-sexy manner. Rather, *Amores Perros* concerns itself with the everyday navigation of life's traps, those which lay in wait with jaws poised to irrevocably alter our false sense of security in one fateful instant. If misfortune clamps down with steel teeth, escape may require chewing off a foot.

Like my own, Iñárritu's metaphors are heavy-handed at times and not wholly original, though through utter conviction he manages on the whole to make them resonate. As in the case of man's best friend, who figures predominantly (and harrowingly – a disclaimer vows that no dogs were hurt during the production, but it looks awfully real enough) in the film's examination of humans' beastly capabilities. "Masters take after their dogs," a character remarks, an axiom that does not refer only to physical resemblance. Humans are just another domesticated breed, and like dogs are capable of kindness and loyalty as long as our needs are met. Take away those creature comforts, and we'll do whatever is necessary to survive. The film makes little exception for family; rather, the characters' most malevolent acts are inflicted upon their own. Moreover, we can exhibit compassion and cruelty at once, as in a scene where Octavio lovingly bathes his dog before sending him into the ring. The film's dire realization being – man is capable of even greater viciousness than dogs; we'll even kill for money. This, the film imparts, is the true moment of trial. Is someone who is taught cruelty – forced to accept cruelty in order to survive – to be blamed for exacting that cruelty?

The performances are unpretentious and uniformly excellent, though Bernal and Echevarria are given the most to do and are the clear standouts. Cinematographer Rodrigo Prieto keeps his camera close to the actors,

seemingly to hone in on the range of raw emotion conveyed in their expressions – years of regret and defeat deeply etched in El Chivo’s visage, Susana’s perpetually terrified vulnerability, and Octavio’s physical transformation from baby-faced to gaunt as he realizes what he (and others) is capable of. Life afflicts physical scars – bruises, gunshot wounds, amputations. Similarly, the city shows its disfigurement – walls are loose and crumbling, rotten floorboards disintegrate underfoot. Even the film’s bold palette of colors appears faded, sun-bleached in the same deteriorated hues that so beautifully suffused last year’s *Three Kings* (David O. Russell, 1999).

Nominated for an Academy Award for Best Foreign Film and (somewhat over enthusiastically) hailed by the *New York Times*’ Elvis Mitchell as “one of the first art films to come out of Mexico since Buñuel worked there,” *Amores Perros* seems to be the delegate-elect for a new Mexican cinema. And yet, an epic scope, ensemble cast and melodramatic sensibility alone do not make a masterpiece. Ultimately, though it demonstrates far more than a glimmer of potential talent, *Amores Perros* falls short of what it endeavors to be. Iñárritu makes the classic first-timer mistake of striving for too much, attempting both depth and style and coming off slightly hackneyed and derivative. Several ill-advised intervals find Iñárritu galloping to catch up to his own structural complexities by inserting expository montage sequences that, clumsy and soundtrack-heavy, too closely resemble music videos. Attempts to interweave characters among the three segments seems forced, as the links tying them together are indirect and metaphorical – thus, there’s no satisfying *a-ha* of recognition à la *Pulp Fiction* as disparate parts are finally revealed as a cohesive, cleverly staged whole.

The segment with the scarred supermodel is the weakest of the three, in that we’re never allowed as close to these characters, thus restraining their dimensions and our own sympathies. Yet the metaphor of the trapped dog, whose tortured cries they can hear all around but who maddeningly continues to elude them, is gravely apt. The people of *Amores Perros* are searching, attempting Herculean efforts to achieve what seems just around the corner. They are thwarted by a world that swiftly and unexpectedly asserts its force, like a bully pulling a gun, and instantly the rules are meaningless and nothing’s fair. It’s a cynical message but one not totally without hope. As El Chivo’s ascent from angel of death to gallant savior shows, reconciliation and redemption still seem possible.

### Filmography as Director

- **Nike: Air Moves You** (2018) video short
- **Carne y Arena** (2017) short
- **The Revenant** (2015)
- **Birdman (or The Unexpected Virtue of Ignorance)** (2014)
- **Naran Ja** (2012) short
- **Behind Biutiful: Director’s Flip Notes** (2011) documentary short
- **Write the Future** (2010) tv short
- **Biutiful** (2010)
- “Anna” segment of **To Each His Own Cinema** (2007)
- **Babel** (2006)
- **21 Grams** (2003)
- “Mexico” segment of **September 11** (2002)
- **Powder Keg** (2001) short
- **Amores Perros** (2000)
- **El timbre** (1996) short
- **Detrás del dinero** (1995) tv short

## *Alejandro Iñárritu: "There Is No Way You Can Stop"*

January 27, 2016

Article sourced from The Talks: <https://the-talks.com/interview/alejandro-inarritu/>

### **SHORT PROFILE**

Name: **Alejandro González Iñárritu**

DOB: **15 August 1963**

Place of birth: **Mexico City, Mexico**

Occupation: **Director**

### **Mr. Iñárritu, does a filmmaker have to live his films?**

I think every film in a way is an extension of yourself. No matter what. Every film that I have done is an extension of myself. Sometimes I feel that the films start blending with reality. Suddenly there's a weird blurred line that disappears and what's going on thematically in the film starts surrounding your life in a very real way. That has happened to me many times.

### **With which films specifically?**

This time, with *The Revenant*, the physicality of the theme really became part of our daily life. The water was extremely cold; one day we were in 40 degrees below zero. The physical reality of the characters appeared in our life and blended with our own physical experience.

### **Why were you so committed to shooting it under such conditions?**

I was really happy to get out into the wild and to get back to the tradition and the origins of cinema where things happen and we're shooting in real places. Where we haven't invented a way to do an artificial world around us by building sets or digitally inventing them. Suddenly the reality and the complexity of the real natural elements and the real light... It's clear for me that no matter how good a computer or set designer is, it will never match that.

### **Why not?**

Not only because of its complexity and beauty, but because the state of mind that it gives those doing the film. It has repercussions in the whole system, you know? I really love the experience in that sense. The odyssey of making the film became the film itself. We became the trappers, you know? It was great and it was a vast emotional experience and physical experience.

### **That reminds me of Herzog's *Aguirre, the Wrath of God*, where he believed the harsh conditions shooting in the Peruvian rainforest would seep through into the film.**

Yeah. Herzog's *Aguirre* or *Fitzcarraldo* were an influence to me. Or Akira Kurosawa did a film called *Dersu Uzala*, or even *Apocalypse Now*. Those films where it's man against nature and there are those landscapes that, in a way, dictate the emotional state of the character. I really love those films.

Werner Herzog on the difficulties of shooting with Klaus Kinski.

**But shooting like that can take its toll as well. During the production of *Aguirre*, Herzog and Klaus Kinski almost ended up killing each other as a result of the stress.**

Yes, once you are there, you realize it will be ten times more difficult! The film is a result of a naïve decision that I made. I made that decision because I was absolutely blind. You really give up any chance of being comfortable and fight every day. That's the mode. It was like rock climbing: once you are climbing a wall without a rope and you are in the middle, any mistake and you know that you fall and you will die. That's how the sensation of this film was every day.

**That sounds horrible.**

It's a little bit scary how crazy I am! It could have been terrible. Everything could have gone wrong very easily... There were so many challenges every day. You become a creature of your own work. Sometimes you are God and sometimes you are a creature. And here you are just a creature surviving your own creation. And the stakes financially, the things that can go wrong in such an ambitious project, the standards were set so high, that we were trapped. I was trapped in my own rules. I couldn't go back; I hit a wall. And if I didn't finish, or didn't finish the way I wanted to, then it would be a complete disaster. It's like a marathon—there is no way you can stop; you have to finish. You feel that you are fainting, but you have to finish!

**Your career must be hard on your marriage.**

I hope I'm not divorced very soon! (*Laughs*) It was tough. It was tough. Filmmaking demands a lot, it takes a lot of shit from you. And you are away from all the people that need you, and that's one of the toughest parts.

**And you were already working on *The Revenant* when you won the Oscar for *Birdman* last year.**

**Wouldn't you say it's time for a break?**

I've run two marathons so I need to stop. To be honest, I haven't had even the time to understand what happened with *Birdman*! It's a very weird situation and I think I will have to rest for a couple of months and then to understand what happened in my life in the last two and a half years. Normally I take two or three years between every film so the only thing that I can really think about is to rest for the next three years. I really need it.

**Does it take a mogul like Arnon Milchan—who financed *Birdman* and *The Revenant* and has previously backed films like *Once Upon a Time in America* and *Brazil*—to make these kinds of ambitious films possible?**

Absolutely. You need a guy with that passion, with certain taste, who is an art lover, and crazy—in a good way—all at the same time in order to make a film like this happen.

**Does everybody else worry too much about money?**

That's why these films are not happening anymore, because most of the people involved now are financiers that their only reason to be there is profit. And when everything is driven by profit, then films become a commodity or a comfortable product that doesn't bother anybody and gets the most audience possible without... So that's a

dangerous state that we are in now. It's only profit. I'm not naïve to think that it was different before. It's always been like that, but now it is much more than ever.

**In hindsight, would you choose to do a film like *The Revenant* the same way again?**

I don't regret having done it at all. I think everything that I went through was worth it. I am very proud. But I would not do it again. (*Laughs*) It was extremely difficult. Extremely, extremely demanding. It became an act of survival, honestly. As a filmmaker, I was in moments that were very difficult and challenging...

**How do you find hope in those moments?**

Sometimes when you lose faith and you understand that something will never be possible the way that you dreamed, but you keep trying, suddenly one thing flips and everything re-accommodates. And suddenly what was not working totally flows. When you are in a very, very tough moment of a day and a lot of frustration because nothing is happening right—but you don't give up—and suddenly that happens! That's almost a transcendental thing.