



El Deseo presents

Julietta

an Almodóvar film



1. Synopsis

Julieta lives in Madrid with her daughter Antía. They both suffer in silence over the loss of Xoan, Antía's father and Julieta's husband. But at times grief doesn't bring people closer, it drives them apart.

When Antía turns eighteen she abandons her mother, without a word of explanation. Julieta looks for her in every possible way, but all she discovers is how little she knows of her daughter.

JULIETA talks about the mother's struggle to survive uncertainty. It also talks about fate, about guilt complexes and about that unfathomable mystery that leads us to abandon the people we love, erasing them from our lives as if they had never meant anything, as if they had never existed.

2. Matriarchy

The film begins with a close-up of red fabric, we soon discover that a heart is beating within it, Julieta's heart. The second image is of a sculpture with the texture and color of terracotta. It represents a naked seated man (robust, compact legs and torso). Julieta places the figure on a cardboard box and folds it carefully in bubble wrap. The figure seems like a child being dressed by its mother. It is 2016.

The sculpture is seen later, or rather, earlier, in 1985, in the studio of the sculptress who created it. The sculptor is called Ava, probably in honor of Ava Gardner. Ava is very beautiful and as free as the actress who played Venus in *One Touch of Venus*. Venus is the goddess of love, beauty and fertility. The three qualities are very present in Ava's studio.

The young Julieta of 1985 takes the sculpture of the seated man in her hands. Again, the figure seems like a child in the women's hands as they talk about its weight and the texture of its skin.

In the next sequence Ava is molding a new figure with clay, while Julieta looks on. The mud gradually takes the form of male buttocks and legs. "The gods created men and other beings with the help of clay and fire", says Julieta. Ava listens closely while continuing to mold. Julieta teaches classical literature and she carries on telling her about the creation as if it were a story and ends up confessing that she is pregnant...

The three sequences show the power of women: woman as the creator of man. The man represented by the sculpture is tiny compared to their hands (the same proportion of the blond prisoner in King Kong's hands). They pass him from one to the other (in the case of Ava and Julieta that transfer is literal). The woman not only gives life but she is stronger in order to fight, administer, suffer and enjoy all that life brings with it. Only fate is stronger than her.

3. Strangers on a Train / Human Desire

I'm fascinated by trains, toy ones and those that appear in films. I'd always dreamed of filming on a real train. Of all the means of transport that make up film iconography (apart from stage coaches and horses, which have their own genre, the western) the train is my favorite. The train moves through all the genres but the train scenes I remember best belong to Hitchcock (*The Lady Vanishes*, *Strangers on a Train*, *North by North West*) and Fritz Lang (*Human Desire*).

When I entered one of the compartments of an old train from the 80s to rehearse with the actors, I realized how hard it was going to be to work in a space where there was barely room for the camera and the operator. Naively, I never thought that the real space on the 1985 trains was so limited. A hell full of mites. But we all knew that those sequences were crucial for the story, because Julieta's destiny is traveling on that train.

I built the script of JULIETA around the sequences on the night train. In a place that is so metaphorical and significant, Julieta comes into contact with the two poles of human existence: death and life. And physical love as a response to death. The two times that we see Julieta feverishly making love with Xoan someone has just died. It is the response of both to the idea of death.

4. The goodbye look

In 2003, Antía, Julieta and Xoan's daughter, turns eighteen, she's an adult and she goes off for three months to a retreat in the Aragonese Pyrenees. Julieta is distraught at being separated from her daughter. Until then they had never been separated.

Julieta sees her go through the door and disappear down the stairs. She hides her unease as best she can. The scene stirs up memories of two other goodbyes from which she has never recovered and which she never mentioned to Antía.

One of the goodbyes happened on the train. On the night train in 1985, the same night Julieta conceived Antía. A damp-eyed man sat across from Juliet and tried to start a conversation. The man was ugly and had a clingy amiability to which Julieta reacted coldly. Julieta was uncomfortable and didn't want to talk. She got up and left him alone in the compartment.

Taking advantage of one of the stops, the man ended up throwing himself under the wheels of the train. Undoubtedly he had already planned to kill himself before getting on the train, but Julieta reproaches herself for treating him so coldly, and she can't forget the man's look when she was leaving the compartment.

The second look that tortures her is that of Xoan, the fisherman she met on the same train on the same night. Julieta and Xoan have formed a family and live in Redes, a Galician fishing village. Thirteen years have passed since they met. Julieta and Xoan have a domestic row about Xoan's past, something that Julieta has discovered and that has disappointed her greatly. She decides to go out for a walk, Xoan begs her to stay so that they can talk, but she takes refuge in silence and leaves the house.

Xoan looks at her as she goes out the door, disconcerted and almost pleading. Julieta returns home in the afternoon, ready to resume the interrupted conversation, but Xoan isn't there, and she will never have the chance to finish that conversation. Shortly after she left, Xoan went fishing, and in the afternoon a sudden, very violent storm broke out, and the fisherman was drowned.

Standing at the door of their apartment, seeing how Antía disappears towards the stairs, Julieta remembers the looks of the two men who met their death shortly after she left them on their own.

5. Fatality/ chance

The two tragic goodbyes, the result of chance and bad luck, have marked Julieta's conscience. The feeling of guilt, which also infects

her daughter, slipped into the script without my fully realizing. It appeared when I thought the script was finished, at that moment when the pieces readjust themselves independently and become richer, almost without the writer's intervention. (It comes from the story itself.)

Guilt travels in Julieta's train like a kind of fatal destiny. This element darkens the drama and gives it a *noir* appearance, something Alberto Iglesias has reinforced in the soundtrack.

JULIETA has its literary origin in Alice Munro. Ever since I read *Runaway*, I thought about adapting three of her stories for the cinema (*Chance*, *Soon* and *Silence*). The three stories have a common protagonist, Juliet, but they're not consecutive. They are three independent stories and I've tried to unify them, inventing what was necessary.

6. Script

The book of short stories *Runaway* already appeared in the props of *The Skin I Live In*. On the tray that the jailer Marisa Paredes (Marilia) passed to the captive Elena Anaya (Vicente/Vera), as well as breakfast there was a copy of Alice Munro's book.

I had already begun the adaptation. I'd substituted Vancouver with New York, because I feel closer to the United States than to Canada. Both countries have a similar family structure. The children leave home early, when they go to university, and many of them become distanced from their families; independence is also emotional and geographical. In Spain family relations are never broken, the umbilical cord joining us to our parents and grandparents survives the passing of time, with exceptions, of course. Here, too, there are children who leave home, and fathers or mothers who abandon their families and never return.

I worked on a first draft in Spanish, I tried to make the three stories mine and I moved with all the freedom that writing a script demands, even if it is an adaptation. But in the end I was defeated by uncertainty,

I wasn't sure of the script or of my ability to direct in English. I was scared to change language, culture and geography. So I kept the first draft, without any specific plan for it, although I already had the rights to Munro's stories.

I started sniffing around the draft again two years ago. I liked it more than I expected and I tried it again, with the story taking place in Spain. As the Spanish version advanced I moved farther away from Alice Munro, I had to fly with my own wings. Her stories are still the origin of JULIETA, but if it's difficult to translate the Canadian writer's style to a discipline as opposed to literature as cinema is, making it into a Spanish story is an impossible task. Admirers of Alice Munro should see in my JULIETA a tribute to the Canadian writer.

7. The color white/containment

After not hearing anything about her daughter for years, Julieta destroys all the physical reminders of her and moves house. She decides to bury the memory of her, she doesn't want any object or place to remind her of Antía. Like every big city, Madrid is made up of many different cities. Julieta looks for an area where her daughter had never set foot, an ugly, charmless area, far from the center where she had lived with her. She rents an impersonal apartment with walls that are painted white, without any objects or pictures adorning it. The silent, austere white reflects emptiness.

The white living space also shows my desires for containment. I've contained myself very much in the visual composition, in the austerity of the supporting characters. No one sings songs. Nor do I introduce scenes from other films to explain the characters. There isn't the slightest trace of humor, or any mixing of genres, or so I believe. From the outset I had in mind that JULIETA is a drama, not a melodrama, a genre to which I'm partial. A tough drama with a hint of mystery: someone who's looking for someone without knowing why she left. Someone with whom you've lived for a lifetime disappears from your life without a word. You can't understand it. It happens, it's in our nature, but it's incomprehensible and unacceptable. Not to mention

the pain it causes.

8. The houses/the decor

When Julieta takes a drastic decision, she moves house. Through the furniture and the walls we see her state of mind at each moment.

The first house she rents in Madrid is in a very lively central area. The wallpaper in the apartment has very striking, almost jarring, motifs. “It’s a bit oppressive” Julieta says weakly, accompanied by Antía-child and her little friend Bea, from whom she never separates. Bea says: “No, it’s cool”. And Antía always agrees with Bea. The two girls are keen to rent the apartment because Bea lives in the same neighborhood. Julieta doesn’t have the energy to argue with the girls, she feels too fragile to fight against wallpaper, she’s very weak physically and mentally.

The second house, as I said, is far away from the first, and is just the opposite. White walls, no objects adorning it, furniture with clean, neutral lines. Everything has an impersonal air. This house is the negation of the house in which mother and daughter lived.

Years later, Julieta decides to leave Madrid, with Lorenzo, and never come back. But a chance meeting in the street with Bea, whom she hasn’t seen in years, drives her to change plans. Bea tells her that by chance she met Antía at Lake Como and that she told her that Julieta was still living in Madrid. “And look! A week later I meet you in the street “. She doesn’t tell her much more, but it’s enough for Julieta to change her plans drastically. She breaks up with Lorenzo without giving him any explanation (one of so many silences in a story plagued with them), she goes back to the building with the apartment with the striking wallpaper which she’d rented with Antía and Bea, and welcomes the ghost of her daughter.

9. Repetition

The concierge who showed her the apartment back then is surprised

to see her again after twelve years. Julieta wants to rent that apartment again, but it's been sold. The one on the floor above is empty. But it isn't suitable to move into; the walls, painted a dirty green, still have the marks of the previous tenant's pictures and furniture, there are no curtains or furniture.

The same concierge who showed her the apartment with Antía and Bea now shows her that apartment in an identical scene, under the same arch in the hallway, except for the color of the walls and the dirt. The apartment has the same internal architecture as the previous one, the same light coming through the windows, etc. To the superintendent's amazement, Julieta rents it. She has decided to wait again for her daughter in the same place where they'd lived together ("so that when you return you'll find nothing strange, it will all be as before and we'll never part again..." says the song). She has decided to wait for her and look for her again.

In 2016 Julieta walks through the same places where she walked with her daughter Antía in 1998, when they were newly arrived in Madrid. She prowls around the alleyways in the same neighborhood, she goes to the basketball court where she went with the girls and remains there for hours. In the face of Antía's invisibility, Julieta makes herself visible in the streets and places her daughter frequented before she disappeared.

I'm a film director and I believe in repetition and rehearsal. The human being finds himself unwittingly involved in situations which he has lived before, as if life were giving us the chance to rehearse the toughest moments before they really arrive.

This idea is present in *All About My Mother*. The nurse Manuela works for the NTO (National Transplant Organization) helping doctors in the difficult task of informing relatives of the victim's death and then asking them to donate some of his organs. One fateful night it is Manuela who must undergo that protocol, but as the victim's mother. She knows the scene, she has been going through it for years, but on the doctors' side.

Julieta moves into the apartment with green walls. Time passes and the apartment is still as bare as when she saw it for the first time. The only piece of furniture is a table where she writes to Antía all that she didn't tell her when they lived together. On the mantelpiece, her only company, is the seated man sculpted by Ava.

10. Objects, paintings...

The sculptor Miquel Navarro is the author of *The Seated Man* and of all the pieces that appear in Ava's studio. I have lived with the seated man for twenty years and since then I've wanted him to appear in one of my films. There are landscapes, songs and objects which, from the time I discover them (or rediscover them, or buy them, if they are objects), I have the feeling that sooner or later they'll appear in one of my films. I keep them and wait patiently for years until the right film comes along. It happened with the landscape of the black beach in Lanzarote in *Broken Embraces*, with the diver in *Tie Me Up! Tie Me Down!*, even with the brown towel with which Antía and Bea dry the depressed Julieta. The poster for the Lucien Freud exhibition only waited four years until it found its place on the wall of the new Julieta, who is living through a tranquil period with Lorenzo Gentile. I'm very satisfied with the way in which Freud's look interacts with Julieta when she searches in the garbage for the blue envelope which she had previously thrown in the wastepaper basket. (The wastepaper basket is my wastepaper basket and I knew that sooner or later it too would end up appearing too.)

The seascapes are by the Galician painter Seoane. I wanted the house in Galicia to have pieces by artists and craft workers from there. It was a great piece of luck to discover Seoane. The marvelous Sargadelos ceramics are also very present. The heart in the tattoo is signed by Dis Berlin, as is one of the seascapes which Antía recovers for her room when they come to Madrid.

11. Music and song.

The first reaction by Alberto Iglesias, my musician for twenty years,

when he saw the edited film was that it didn't need music. He liked it bare, just as it had been born in the editing room.

(I have to express my thanks, once again, for “the delicacy” with which Pepe Salcedo, my regular editor, eased himself into this brain teaser of a film and breathed along with the characters without the cuts being noticed. The narrative flows as in a linear story, and nothing could be further from the truth. The film begins with Julieta's breathing under a red dress and “breathing” has been the key word for the editing and the creation of the music.)

Going back to Alberto Iglesias, I told him that it did need music. Although, in the throes of the period of containment I was going through, it was tempting to strip JULIETA of musical accompaniment. For me, music has always been an essential tool in the story; together with the script, it structures the narrative, they are its skeleton.

I suggested to Alberto that he composed little transitions to accentuate the changes of era or the character's repetitions. Something delicate and light like Clint Eastwood's compositions in some of his best films (*Million Dollar Baby* or *Letters From Iwo Jima*). Alberto set to work, but the result didn't convince either of us. He tackled it from various places and we discovered something that I already sensed. The film's narrative structure was inaccessible to any sound other than that of direct sound. JULIETA is seemingly transparent and fluid, but when Alberto tried to include some music in that mechanism, the film rejected it, like a human being. And it was very frustrating.

I listened to lots of soundtracks and completely randomly, as I often do, I chose the work Toru Takemitsu for *Woman of the Dunes*, by Hiroshi Teshigahara. We tried it, the tempo wasn't that of JULIETA but there was something that suited it. Alberto thought the same. Takemitsu led him to Mahler and Alban Berg. That was the path, the spark. From there everything flowed.

I think Alberto Iglesias has written one of his best soundtracks. I wanted to get away from music that is synchronized with cutaways. Alberto has synchronized it with the voices and looks of the characters.

Even if it is a wide, ensemble shot, at times it seems that the music is coming from the eyes of Julieta's character. It's a kind of music with very long arcs that breathes like a living thing and melds organically with the dialogue. At times I have the feeling that Alberto has composed an opera, where the arias are the multiple narrations by Emma Suárez and the action takes place in the actors' eyes. It's very hard to write music for scenes with so much dialogue. Normally there is a fight between the music and the words. Alberto Iglesias has resolved the problem in an ingenious way.

There is only one song, over the final credits. I had my doubts about that too, because of the containment, but the words that Chavela Vargas sings in *Si no te vas* (*If You Don't Leave*) are the continuation of Julieta's last words: "If you leave, my world is going to end, a world where only you exist. Don't leave, I don't want you to leave, because if you leave that's the very moment I'll die".

12. Actresses

JULIETA marks my return to the female universe. Almost all the actresses in its long cast were new to me. I had only worked previously with Rossy de Palma and Susi Sánchez. One of the risks I faced from the beginning was that of using two different actresses for Julieta. Adriana Ugarte from twenty five to forty, and Emma Suárez from forty onward. I'm not in favor of the same actress playing all the ages of the same character. I don't trust the effects of make-up for aging, and it's almost impossible for a young woman of twenty five to have the presence of someone of fifty. It isn't a matter of wrinkles, it's something more profound, the passing of time, on the outside and on the inside. I accept the convention in the theater, but I reject it in the cinema. But it is risky to use two different women, especially in a film in which one of the characters, Ava, isn't divided but is played by the same actress, Inma Cuesta.

Now I'm happy about having taken that decision. And I think that Adriana Ugarte and Emma Suárez now form part of my particular Olympus where they rub shoulders with Penélope Cruz, Carmen

Maura, Victoria Abril, Marisa Paredes and Cecilia Roth, my muses.

13. What else?

Almost all my films gain the second time they're seen. JULIETA will certainly be enjoyed more when you've already seen it and know the story. I'd like to persuade my brother to offer a free second viewing to people who have already seen the film. You don't know everything about people or enjoy their company when you meet them for the first time. The same thing happens with JULIETA.



**Emma
Suárez**

**Adriana
Ugarte**

julieta

an **Almodóvar** film

Daniel Grao Inma Cuesta Darío Grandinetti Michelle Jenner & Rossy de Palma

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