



Big Screen Classics

Amores perros

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Director: Alejandro González Iñárritu
Production Company: Zeta Film, AltaVista Films
Executive Producers: Martha Sosa Elizondo, Francisco González Compeán
Producer: Alejandro González Iñárritu
Associate Producers: Raúl Olvera Ferrer, Guillermo Arriaga, Pelayo Gutiérrez, Mónica Lozano Serrano
Production Manager: Tita Lombardo
Head of Production (STPC): Oscar Reboreda
Production Supervisor: Erick Tamayo
Production Co-ordinator: Gloria 'Pekas' Lozano
Location Manager: Patricia Cano, Mayte Gallegos
Post-production (Supervisor): Tlacatéotl Mata
Post-production (Co-ordinator): Pablo Baksht Segovia
Production Consultant: Anna Roth Kanarska
Production Assistants: Paco Medina, Mario A. Cornejo Ruiz, Fabio García Montes de Oca, Juan Carlos Landero
1st Assistant Director: Carlos Hidalgo
2nd Assistant Director: Efrén del Moral
2nd 2nd Assistant Director: Julián 'Chico' Valdés
Assistant Director (2nd Unit): Adrián Grumber
Assistant to the Director: Lucero Gutiérrez
Script Supervisor: Luciana Kaplan
Casting Director: Manuel Teil
Screenplay: Guillermo Arriaga
Director of Photography: Rodrigo Prieto
Lighting: Benito Aguilar
1st Assistant Camera: Arturo Castañeda
2nd Assistant Camera: Fernando Díaz Torres
Gaffer: Jesús González
Key Grip: Pedro González
Special Effects Co-ordinator: Alejandro Vázquez
Graphic Design: Luis Blackaller
Editors: Alejandro González Iñárritu, Luis Carballar, Fernando Pérez Unda
Consultant Editors: Guillermo del Toro, Carlos Bolado
Production Designer: Brigitte Broch
Art Director: Melo Hinojosa
Art Department Co-ordinator: Alisarine Ducolomb
Set Decorator: Julieta Alvarez
Storyboard and Making-of: Fernando Llanos
Costume Designer: Gabriela Diaque
Wardrobe Head (STPC): Ismael Jardón Texas
Stylist: Gabriel Solana
Make-up: David Gameros, Marco Rosado
Hair: Isabel Amezcua, Eduardo Gómez
Front Credits Design: Oliver Castro
End Credits Design: Pablo Rovalo, Ignacio Borja
Music: Gustavo Santaolalla
Additional Music: Daniel Hidalgo
Music Supervisor: Lynn Fainchtein
Music Engineer: Anibal Kerpel
Sound Design: Martín Hernández
Sound Supervisors: Martín Hernández, Roland N. Thai
Sound: Antonio Diego
Final Mix Engineers: Geoffrey G. Rubay, Rudi Pi
Sound Editors: Joaquín Díaz, Efraín García Mora, Alejandro Quevedo, Rodolfo Romero, Adrián Reynoso
Sound Effects Recordists: Martín Hernández, Carlos Honc, Samuel Mendoza, Kaeri Tedla
Stunt Co-ordinator: Gerardo Moreno
Stunt Co-ordinator (Vehicles): Edgar Lezama 'chivata'
Stunts: Javier Lambert, Mauricio Martínez, Rafael Valdez, Igor Aranda, Tomas Guzmán, Gabriela Moreno, Jorge Corzo, Ubaldo Bucio, Raúl Martínez
Dolby Sound Consultant: Andy Potvin

SPOILER WARNING The following notes give away some of the plot.

Near the end of the 154-minute running time of Alejandro González Iñárritu's exhilarating debut *Amores perros*, an old man, sitting by the side of the road, takes time out to look up at the sky. The character, El Chivo/The Goat (Emilio Echevarría), is an ex-revolutionary down on his luck who's been contracted to assassinate a businessman, and he's waiting beside a telegraph pole outside his target's office in Mexico City, staking things out. But for the moment, El Chivo looks up and squints, the sun darting behind the pole, then out again, its fresh light flickering on the old man's weathered face.

It's a masterful and exquisite moment – one that lets you catch your breath and reflect on the street-level urgency of the previous two hours. An ambitious multi-plotted portrait of overlapping lives in contemporary Mexico City, *Amores perros* rarely relaxes its grip. Its opening view of the city is as an accelerated blur, glimpsed from the window of a speeding car that's about to crash; its subsequent images are of a place always on the move, teeming with incident, where the collision of coincidence and the irruption of violence are ever present.

This opening car-crash set-piece is the film's pivotal plot point. *Amores perros* is divided into three sections, each devoted to otherwise unconnected characters whose lives are affected by the crash. Unemployed teenager Octavio (Gael García) heads up the first, alongside his brother Ramiro (Marco Pérez) and Ramiro's wife Susana (Vanessa Bauche). In part this episode plays out like a clammy domestic melodrama – in the cramped, overheated confines of their small family flat, Octavio falls in love with Susana and vows to take her away from her abusive husband. But in order to pay for this, he takes to entering his beloved Rottweiler Cofi in the illegal dogfights regularly organised by an underworld connection.

These sequences have already earned the film a degree of notoriety in the UK. A title card at the beginning might reassure us that no animals were harmed during the film's making, but the dogfights are still vivid, fierce affairs (though arguably it's the aftermath that's most telling – glimpses of the dead dogs, their coats glossy with blood, being dragged off like hulks of meat by their indifferent owners, or of those barely alive being splashed into action to fight again by handfuls of soapy, blood-red water).

But while these sequences are gruelling, they're not gratuitous. As in Robert Bresson's *Au hasard Balthazar*, here animal suffering is an index of human cruelty. (The parallel is made explicit towards the end when two brothers determined to kill one another are chained to either side of a room and strain at their binds like dogs held in check before a fight.) Dogs get a rough deal in *Amores perros*: whereas the first section sees them tear at one another's throats in order to enrich their owners, the second features a pampered pet pooch Richie belonging to Spanish model Valeria (Goya Toledo) which disappears under the polished floorboards of its owner's new flat where it nearly starves to death while being gnawed at by rats. Like Octavio, Valeria is involved in the crash that opens the movie – and González Iñárritu charts her slow recovery in the flat her lover Daniel (Álvaro Guerrero) has bought her. If the first section unfurled at a fiery, breakneck pace, this one is more of a slow-

Thanks: Guillermo del Toro
 Special Thanks: Federico Gonzalez Compeán,
 Alfonso Cuarón
 Dog Trainers: Larry Casanova Ernesto,
 Ernesto Aparicio
 Cast:
 Emilio Echevarría (*El Chivo, The Goat*)
 Gael García Bernal (*Octavio*)
 Goya Toledo (*Valeria*)
 Álvaro Guerrero (*Daniel*)
 Vanessa Bauche (*Susana*)
 Jorge Salinas (*Luis*)
 Marco Pérez (*Ramiro*)
 Rodrigo Murray (*Gustavo*)
 Humberto Busto (*Jorge*)
 Gerardo Campbell (*Mauricio*)
 Rosa María Bianque (*Aunt Luisa*)
 Dunia Saldívar (*Susana's mother*)
 Adriana Barraza (*Octavio's mother*)
 José Sefami (*Leonardo*)
 Lourdes Echevarría (*Maru*)
 Laura Almela (*Julietta*)
 Ricardo Dalmaqui (*Andrés Salgado*)
 Gustavo Sánchez Parra (*Jarocho*)
 Dagoberto Gama (*Alvaro*)
 Gustavo Muñoz (*El Chispas*)
 Carlo Bernal (*Javier*)
 Rodrigo Obstab (*El Jaibo*)
 Edgar González (*baby Rodrigo*)
 Hilda González (*cashier*)
 Patricio Castillo (*doctor*)
 Roberto Medina (*male TV announcer*)
 Angeles Marín (*female TV announcer*)
 Ana María González (*nurse*)
 Carlos Samperio (*man at scrap yard*)
 T. Kazuyo Togawa (*fat lady*)
 Gema Aparicio (*domestic*)
 Adriana Varone (*Luis' lover*)
 Bruno Salgado (*Champignon*)
 Adriana Islas (*Lina*)
 Regina Abad (*Jimena*)
 Leoncio Torres (*El Pelón*)
 Luisa Geliz (*Daniel's secretary*)
 Jean Paul Bierry (*man at meeting*)
 Alma Rocío González (*woman at meeting*)
 Mauricio Martínez (*police agent*)
 Juan Manuel Ramos (*policeman*)
 Ernesto Bog (*man 1*)
 José Luis Barraza (*man 2*)
 Jorge Arellano (*young caretaker 1*)
 Jonathan Herrera (*young caretaker 2*)
 Heriberto Castillo (*stranger*)
 Mexico 2000©
 154 mins
 Digital

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burner – although no less intense. A mocking echo of happier times, Richie can be heard yelping occasionally, scurrying underneath their feet as Daniel and Valeria attempt to figure out what went wrong between them. The segment is a piercing account of a relationship falling apart – and a painstaking exploration of the hold domestic spaces have over us – shot through with a line of dark absurdist humour that brings to mind Buñuel's treatise on bourgeois entrapment *The Exterminating Angel*, a late entry in the Spanish director's Mexican period.

A sprawling saga of lives in a violent urban environment, with flashes of self-conscious narrative (the film shuttles back and forth in time) and overlapping plotlines, *Amores perros* will inevitably invite comparisons with Quentin Tarantino's first two movies. In fact, González Iñárritu seems to be goading us to make them: in the opening scene, which takes place inside Octavio's car as it hurtles through the city, Octavio's friend attempts to stem the blood from a wound Cofi has just sustained much as Harvey Keitel extemporised first-aid on Tim Roth in the back of their getaway car in *Reservoir Dogs*; later there's a playful parody of the torture scene from that film. But if the comparison works, it's only superficially: *Amores perros*' moments of violence are forceful but fleeting (when El Chivo shoots dead a businessman in a restaurant, all we see is a trickle of blood bubbling and thickening on a hotplate), and despite the occasional reversal of the film's chronology, it's largely stylistically unaffected.

The final section follows El Chivo, who's been glimpsed throughout the first two episodes as an impassive witness to events. Living in a one-room squat and spending his days wandering the streets followed by the troupe of dogs he cares for, he seems to have retreated from the world some time ago. A former revolutionary, his idealism has long since flagged – when a corrupt police commander asks him why he doesn't wear his glasses any more, his resigned reply is: 'If God wants me to see blurry I'll see blurry.' Concentrating on El Chivo's attempt to set up one last hit – and his efforts to find out more about the daughter who believes him dead – the film's final reel also catches up with Octavio, Ramiro and Susana. There's a courageously bleak edge to the turn of events ('To make God laugh, tell him your plans,' Susana says of Octavio's hopes), and it's tempting to read a political critique underlying the harrowing portrait of a place that seems to drive its inhabitants to the edge of despair. González Iñárritu himself has stated that the film illustrates the legacy of 71 years of single-party rule (which ended in December 2000): a society where the chasm between rich and poor is ever-growing and crime seems the only means of subsistence for millions of people. Yet the film snatches hope where it can – and it's perhaps González Iñárritu's greatest achievement that, after all its grim stretches, *Amores perros* comes to a close with a note of muted optimism.

Edward Lawrenson, *Sight and Sound*, May 2001