

Coming Home

Almodóvar plumbs the feminine mystique – again

VOLVER: Written and directed by Pedro Almodóvar. Music, Alberto Iglesias. Cinematography, José Luis Alcaine. Starring Penélope Cruz, Carmen Maura, Lola Dueñas, Blanca Portillo and Yohana Cobo. Sony Pictures Classics, 2006. R. 121 minutes. ★★★★★

Pedro Almodóvar, in the production notes for *Volver*, says that the most difficult thing about the film “has been writing its synopsis.” He surely exaggerates, but not entirely. *Volver* is complicated in story and tone (a complication assisted by Alberto Iglesias’ playful, sometimes spooky score). It’s a funny drama, a dramatic romp, a story in which seemingly large events turn out to be small and the smallest moments are quietly laden with meaning. It’s also a return, after the director’s more male-centric *Bad Education*, to a loving look at the relationships between women, particularly with men out of the picture.

Volver centers on Raimunda, played by a vibrant Penélope Cruz decked out with a padded rear, upswept hair and a ton of dark eyeliner. Raimunda, a young wife and mother, is perpetually striding about (in heels) as she juggles work and family — extended family, in the form of her sister Sole (Lola Dueñas), fading aunt Paula (Chus Lampreave) and family friend Agustina (Blanca Portillo), a somber woman who



likes to indulge in an occasional joint in memory of her hippie mother. Raimunda’s parents were killed in a fire some years back; her husband is a layabout and her sweet, skinny daughter, also named Paula (Yohana Cobo), appears as normal as they come.

One thing *Volver* has in spades is sympathy. Whether it’s for an ailing woman trying to solve a mystery about her mother or for a daughter who has to learn to forgive her

own mother — and yes, it is a lot to do with mothers — Almodóvar’s film is warmly understanding, creating a world in which the mostly female characters interact with real grace and real awkwardness. In this world

next are believable but almost too tidy. But you can take this as simply an aspect of Pedrostán, which might be better described as “slightly other than real” rather than “fantastical.” Mostly, *Volver* is hyper-domestic, observing dishwashing, hair cutting, floor scrubbing and the preparation of food with an eye that indicates these are beautiful, necessary tasks (and ones done with an almost frightful efficiency by Raimunda).

Almodóvar’s palette of bright colors is on cheery display here in everything from young Paula’s bright red top to the peppers Raimunda chops for lunch. And Cruz herself seems on display, her costumes cut tight, the camera accenting her cleavage and curves. It’s a fantastic role for Cruz, who uses the regal bearing of a screen queen to great effect in such an intimate film. The contrast with Raimunda’s sister, Sole, who tries gamely to be cheery but is clearly quite lonesome, is striking. But to focus solely on Cruz is to overlook the performance of Carmen Maura, who plays a visitor from the past. Maura, who starred in Almodóvar’s *Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown* (1988) and hasn’t worked with the director since, has a warm, open face, and she carries herself with a lovely uncertainty that gradually turns to confidence as her place in the story becomes clear. Cruz is *Volver*’s star; Maura, whose character embodies the title’s English translation, “to return,” carries the film’s heart. **EW**

Volver opens Friday, Jan. 26 at the Bijou.

movie clips

OPENING OR RETURNING:

Blood and Chocolate: Being a werewolf spells trouble in love for Vivian (Agnes Bruckner) in this adaptation of Annette Curtis Klause’s young adult novel. Directed by Katja von Garnier (*Bandits*). PG13. Cinemark.

Catch and Release: Jennifer Garner is a suddenly single woman who finds comfort in her quirky male friends after the death of her fiancé. With Kevin Smith and Timothy Olyphant. PG13. Cinemark.

Chi-hwa-seon: A portrait of a 19th century Korean painter and his search for artistic transcendence. In Korean with English subtitles. 6 pm Jan. 31, Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art; 7 pm Feb. 1, Int’l Resource Center, EMU, UO. Free.

Crossroads Festival: International film festival, Jan. 28-Feb. 18, features movies from Indian, Italy, Tunisia, Japan, Brazil, Palestine and more. *Lagaan: Once Upon a Time in India* screens at 2 pm Jan. 28; *Red Satin* screens at 7:30 pm Jan. 28, Avalon Theater, Corvallis. \$8 per film.

Departed, The: Martin Scorsese’s new film is a remake of the 2002 Hong Kong thriller *Inferral Affairs*. Leonardo DiCaprio plays a cop undercover in the mob; Matt Damon is the gangster mole in the police force. With Jack Nicholson and Mark Wahlberg. R. OSCAR NOMS: MARK WAHLBERG, SUPPORTING ACTOR; BEST DIRECTOR; BEST PICTURE; FILM EDITING; ADAPTED SCREENPLAY. Cinema World. Cinemark. ★★★★★ (10/12/06)

Epic Movie: Kal Penn, Jennifer Coolidge and Fred Willard are among the cast in this send up of everything from *Willy Wonka* to *Harry Potter* to *Narnia* — actually, they’re saving the land of Gnarnia. Could be funny, could be terrible. PG. Cinema World.

James Brown: Film of Brown’s 1968 performance in Boston, less than 24 hours after the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. With a 1971 performance featuring Bootsy Collins. Bijou LateNite.

Last King of Scotland, The: At long last, Eugeneans can see Forest Whitaker’s highly-praised performance as Idi Amin in Kevin MacDonal’s new(ish) film. With James McAvoy as the (fictional) young doctor who becomes Amin’s personal physical until his eyes are opened to the dictator’s

brutal actions. R. OSCAR NOMS: FOREST WHITAKER, BEST ACTOR. Cinema World.

Life and Debt: Stephanie Black’s 2001 documentary examines the effect of the World Bank, International Monetary Fund and aid organizations on the economy of Jamaica. 6 pm Jan. 31, Room 240-A, McKenzie Hall, UO. Free.

New Land, The: The story of Swedish immigrants to Minnesota Territory in the mid-1800s. Dubbed in English by the original actors. 7 pm Jan. 26, 221 McKenzie Hall, UO. Free.

Notes on a Scandal: Richard Eyre’s new film teams up two of today’s finest actresses, Judi Dench and Cate Blanchett, in a story of secrets and obsession that begins when Sheba (Blanchett), a teacher, has an affair with one of her students. OSCAR NOMS: JUDI DENCH, BEST ACTRESS; CATE BLANCHETT, SUPPORTING ACTRESS; ORIGINAL SCORE; ADAPTED SCREENPLAY. R. Cinemark.

On the Nameless Height: 2003 Russian miniseries takes place in 1944 and focuses on the relationship between a military officer and female sniper. Part 1 of 2; in Russian with English subtitles. 7 pm Jan. 30, 111 Pacific, UO. Free.

Smokin’ Aces: There’s a price on Jeremy Piven’s head, and a whole lot of people are out to collect it. ‘Course, he’s under FBI custody. Joe Carnahan’s film has a whiz-bang trailer and a passel of unexpected stars, including Alicia Keys and Jason Bateman. R. Cinema World. Cinemark.

State of Mind: Documentary focuses on two young girls in North Korea as they prepare for the Mass Games, a huge “socialist realism spectacle” dedicated to Kim Jong Il. In English and Korean with English subtitles. 7 pm Jan. 25, Int’l Resource Center, EMU, UO. Free.

United 93: Director Paul Greengrass’s (*The Bourne Supremacy*) acclaimed film looks at how things might have happened when United Flight 93 went down over Pennsylvania. R. OSCAR NOMS: BEST DIRECTOR; FILM EDITING. 7 pm Jan. 26, Unity of the Valley. Free. **Online archives.**

Van Wilder Deux: The Rise of Taj: We worry about Kal Penn. *Harold and Kumar Go to White Castle* was great fun, but since then he’s had a barely-speaking part in *Superman Returns* and now this. Maybe *The Namesake*

will work wonders for his career. Movies 12. R.

Video Slam: Monthly event invites video artists to submit short videos of up to 10 minutes for a competition that follows the format of the poetry slam. 4 pm Jan. 28, DIVA. \$2-\$5.

Volver: Penélope Cruz is radiant as troubled mother, daughter and sister Raimunda in the new film from celebrated director Pedro Almodóvar. Warm and welcoming, but not as engrossing as some of the director’s earlier work. R. OSCAR NOMS: PENÉLOPE CRUZ, BEST ACTRESS. Bijou. Cinemark. **See review this issue.**

Films open the Friday following EW publication date unless otherwise noted. See archived reviews at www.eugeneweekly.com

CONTINUING:

Alpha Dog: Justin Timberlake is among the ensemble cast in Nick Cassavetes’ new film, which follows L.A. teens who impulsively kidnap a younger boy who begins to enjoy himself with his captors. R. Cinemark.

Arthur and the Invisibles: In this animated feature, 10-year-old Arthur goes in search of a magical land after finding a note left by his grandfather. Directed by Luc Besson (*The Fifth Element*). PG. Cinemark.

Babel: The last film of a thematic trilogy for director Alejandro González Iñárritu follows four emotional, affecting storylines on three continents, exploring their connections and breakdowns. Starring Brad Pitt, Cate Blanchett, Gael García Bernal and astonishing newcomer Rinko Kikuchi. R. OSCAR NOMS: RINKO KIKUCHI & ADRIANA BARRAZA, SUPPORTING ACTRESS; BEST DIRECTOR; BEST PICTURE; ORIGINAL SCREENPLAY; FILM EDITING; ORIGINAL SCORE. Cinema World. ★★★★★ (11/9/06)

Borat: Sacha Baron Cohen (of “Da Ali G Show”) plays the title character, a Kazakhstani reporter creating a documentary while road-tripping across the U.S. The subtitle, “Cultural Learnings of American for Make Benefit Glorious Nation of Kazakhstan,” ought to tell you something. R. OSCAR NOMS: ADAPTED SCREENPLAY. Movies 12. ★★★★★ (11/9/06)

Children of Men: Clive Owen and Julianne Moore star in this highly

praised adaptation of P.D. James’ novel, which envisions a troubled near future where no more children are being conceived. Directed by Alfonso Cuarón (*Y tu mamá también*). R. OSCAR NOMS: CINEMATOGRAPHY; ADAPTED SCREENPLAY; FILM EDITING. Cinema World. Cinemark. ★★★★★ (1/11)

Déja Vu: This Jerry Bruckheimer-produced, Tony Scott-directed thriller has something to do with traveling four days back in the future to stop a boat exploding. Or maybe it’s just *looking* four days back. Clever preview, either way. Stars Denzel Washington and Val Kilmer. PG-13. Movies 12.

Dreamgirls: The much-buzzed-about musical from director Bill Condon (*Kinsey*) stars Beyoncé, Jamie Foxx, Eddie Murphy and the said-to-be transcendent Jennifer Hudson in the story of a girl group’s rise, loosely based on the story of the Supremes. PG13. OSCAR NOMS: EDDIE MURPHY, SUPPORTING ACTOR; JENNIFER HUDSON, SUPPORTING ACTRESS; ART DIRECTION; COSTUME DESIGN; ORIGINAL SONGS; SOUND MIXING. Cinema World. Cinemark. ★★★★★ (1/18)

Eragon: Adaptation of young novelist Christopher Paolini’s first thick tome stars John Malkovich as an apparently campy evil king. Newcomer Edward Speelers plays the title character, who bonds with a dragon named Saphira and, um, saves the world? Or at least the kingdom. Just a guess. PG13. Cinemark.

Flags of Our Fathers: Clint Eastwood’s new film explores the story behind the iconic image of the flag-raising on Iwo Jima during WWII. “A film of awesome power and blistering provocation,” says *Rolling Stone*. R. OSCAR NOMS: SOUND MIXING; SOUND EDITING. Movies 12.

Flushed Away: Aardman Features (*Wallace and Gromit*) teams up with Dreamworks for the story of a pampered pet mouse (Hugh Jackman) who finds himself, after a trip down the drain, in London’s bustling rodent underground. With Kate Winslet, Ian McKellen and Jean Reno. PG. Movies 12.

Fountain, The: Fearless director Darron Aronofsky (*Pi, Requiem for a Dream*) spent years making this ambitious film, which follows characters in different times periods, all played by Hugh Jackman and Rachel Weisz, all

on difficult quests. PG13. Movies 12. ★★★★★ (11/30/06)

Freedom Writers: Hilary Swank stars as a real-life teacher who made a difference in an inner-city high school through an ambitious writing project. PG13. Cinemark.

Good Shepherd, The: Robert DeNiro heads back behind the camera to direct a story about the birth of the CIA, starring Matt Damon as one of the agency’s founders and Angelina Jolie as his frustrated wife. R. OSCAR NOMS: ART DIRECTION. Movies 12. ★★★★★ (12/28/06)

Hitcher, The: Sean Bean (*The Lord of the Rings*) stars as the titular creep, who torments a young couple on the road. R. Cinema World. Cinemark.

Jonestown: The Life and Death of Peoples Temple: Stanley Nelson’s carefully constructed documentary is an engrossing look at the bizarre world of Jim Jones, whose Jonestown settlement in Guyana was the site of a terrible mass murder/suicide. Not rated. Bijou. ★★★★★ (1/18)

Letters From Iwo Jima: Clint Eastwood’s second 2006 WWII film recently won a Golden Globe for Best Foreign Language Film; *The New York Times* called this film, which looks at WWII from the Japanese side, “one of the best war movies ever.” R. OSCAR NOMS: BEST DIRECTOR; BEST PICTURE; SOUND EDITING; ORIGINAL SCREENPLAY. Cinema World. Cinemark. **See review this issue.**

Lunacy: Described by director Jan Svankmajer as “a philosophical horror film,” this movie, in which a young man is helped to get over his nightmares by a very odd Marquis, is based on two stories by Edgar Allan Poe and inspired by the Marquis de Sade. Not rated. Bijou LateNite.

Night at the Museum: When down-on-his-luck Larry (Ben Stiller) gets a job as the night guard at a museum, he sure doesn’t expect the exhibits to come alive at night. There’s something very *Jumanji* about this. PG. Cinemark.

Open Season: Sony breaks into the animation game with the story of a clueless grizzly bear (Martin Lawrence) whose friend Elliot (Ashton Kutcher) lures him into the wild life. PG. Movies 12.

Painted Veil, The: Edward Norton and Naomi Watts star in the third film adap-

tation of W. Somerset Maugham’s novel about an English socialite and the doctor she marries, who takes her to a Chinese village afflicted with cholera. “Let it sweep you away,” said *Rolling Stone*. PG13. Bijou. ★★★★★ (1/18)

Prestige, The: Two magicians (Christian Bale, Hugh Jackman) see their slight friendship turn to rivalry in Christopher Nolan’s (*Batman Begins*) enthralling film. Competition grows as the men do, each trying to outdo the other’s performance. With Scarlett Johansson, Michael Caine and David Bowie. PG13. OSCAR NOMS: ART DIRECTION; CINEMATOGRAPHY. Movies 12. ★★★★★ (10/26/06)

Pursuit of Happiness, The: Will Smith stars as a down-on-his-luck father who strives to make it as a stockbroker while facing eviction and raising his son (Smith’s real-life son Jaden). PG13. OSCAR NOMS: WILL SMITH, BEST ACTOR. Cinemark.

Queen, The: Stephen Frears’ movie about the shifting desires and threats of Britain’s public and the differences in Tony Blair’s (Michael Sheen) and Queen Elizabeth II’s (Helen Mirren) responses to the death of Princess Diana is a grand, usually subtle fiction that gets at a lot of truth. PG13. OSCAR NOMS: HELEN MIRREN, BEST ACTRESS; COSTUME DESIGN; BEST DIRECTOR; ORIGINAL SCORE; BEST PICTURE; ORIGINAL SCREENPLAY. Bijou. Cinemark. ★★★★★ (11/30/06)

Running With Scissors: Adaptation of Augusten Burroughs’ memoir stars Joseph Cross as young Augusten, whose bipolar mother (Annette Bening) sends him to live with her slightly addled psychiatrist (Brian Cox) and his oddball family. PG13. Movies 12. ★★★★★ (11/2/06)

Santa Clause 3, The: Santa (Tim Allen) faces off against Jack Frost (Martin Short), who’s trying to take over Christmas. G. Movies 12.

Stomp the Yard: A troubled street dancer from L.A. finds himself a hot commodity among the step dancing teams of two fraternities at a university in Atlanta. PG13. Cinemark.

Stranger Than Fiction: Harold Crick (Will Ferrell) begins to hear a voice (Emma Thompson) narrating his life — and he doesn’t like where the story’s going. PG-13. Movies 12. ★★★★★ (11/16/06)