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DIRECTORS IN FOCUS

Movie Love: Almodóvar and His Inspirations

While his films are noted for their strong critique of contemporary Spanish culture and ideology, Pedro Almodóvar wears his cinematic influences on his sleeve. A true cinéophile, he is constantly reworking characters and conventions from the Golden Age of Hollywood. His latest film, *Bad Education*, is no exception, drawing from the work of masters of suspense such as Alfred Hitchcock and Billy Wilder to create something wholly original. This program explores a sampling of those influences in a collection of double features that pairs some of Almodóvar's greatest works with their respective cinematic forebears.

Special thanks to Brad Epps, Professor of Romance Languages and Literatures at Harvard University, and Fran Zurián.

◆ September 21 (Tuesday) 7 pm

Matador

Directed by Pedro Almodóvar

Spain 1985, 35mm, color, 106 min.

With Assumpta Serna, Antonio Banderas, Nacho Martínez

Spanish with English subtitles

MATADOR IS A FILM ABOUT OBSESSIONS. A black comedy, the story focuses on the darker sides of human nature by following closely the morbid excesses of its three main characters. Almodóvar connects the lives of an injured matador, an aggressive lawyer, and a young religious zealot while playfully examining issues of repression and religion, death and obsession. Almodóvar's psychosexual morality play strikes deep at the social soul of post-Franco Spain.

◆ September 21 (Tuesday) 9 pm

Duel in the Sun

Directed by King Vidor

US 1946, 35mm, color, 138 min.

With Jennifer Jones, Gregory Peck, Joseph Cotten

KING VIDOR'S PICTURE has everything in spades: shootouts, land grabs, dramatic vistas, Hollywood stars galore, a rare appearance by the great Lillian Gish, plus the most sexually charged romance ever seen in a western film. It's as hot as the baked desert where it all ends in *l'amour fou*, smoking guns and blood. Herein is the fatal romance that shimmers like the coupling in *Wuthering Heights*: the wild half-breed (the startlingly beautiful Jones) is courted by the nice guy (Cotten) but attracted to the devil cowboy in black (the startlingly beautiful Peck). The bad guy proves irresistible and Freud reigns on the frontier, leading to that crazy, crazy finale which Martin Scorsese has obsessed about since childhood.

◆ September 22 (Wednesday) 7 pm

High Heels (Tacones lejanos)

Directed by Pedro Almodóvar

Spain 1991, 35mm, color, 112 min.

With Victoria Abril, Marisa Paredes, Miguel Bosé

Spanish with English subtitles

AN AGING SINGER (Paredes) returns home after many years to reconnect with her estranged daughter (Abril). Her daughter has found success in her career as a television newscaster and in love with the owner of the TV station, who also happens to be one of her mother's ex-boyfriends. When he turns up dead, the relationship between the two women faces its greatest test. Drawing explicitly from Hollywood's great women's movies of the 1940s,

Almodóvar lovingly brings to life his heroines who embody both presentational performance and sacrificial integrity.

◆ September 22 (Wednesday) 9 pm

Mildred Pierce

Directed by Michael Curtiz

Spain 1945, 35mm, color, 111 min.

With Joan Crawford, Ann Blyth, Eve Arden

AFTER THE SUCCESS of his most notable film, *Casablanca*, Curtiz directed this film exploring the dark side of the American family. Structured in flashback, *Mildred Pierce* recounts the sacrifices of a mother, Mildred (Crawford), for her libertine daughter (Blyth), as she is questioned by the police about the murder of her second husband. Based on the racy novel by James Cain, the film skirts its notorious sexual themes with innuendo. Crawford won her only Oscar as the melodramatic matriarch.

◆ October 3 (Sunday) 7 pm

Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown

(Mujeres al borde de un ataque de nervios)

Directed by Pedro Almodóvar

Spain 1988, 35mm, color, 89 min.

With Carmen Maura, Antonio Banderas, Julieta Serrano

Spanish with English subtitles

MIX ONE PART Doris Day-Technicolor frivolity with a dash of Nicholas Ray's Technicolor melodrama, shake with an ample portion of screwball comedy, and update the film's location to Madrid circa 1988. The result is this farcical hit comedy by Pedro Almodóvar. Soap star Pepa (Almodóvar favorite Maura) is losing her mind because her lover Iván is leaving her. Iván's wife goes on a gun-toting rampage when she finds out. Meanwhile, Pepa's friend Candela needs a place to hide because she has unwittingly fallen for a Shiite terrorist. At Pepa's, she meets Iván's son Carlos (Banderas), whose fiancée has been drugged by Pepa's Valium-laced gazpacho. Confusing? Absolutely, but how can you resist a film where kindly grandmothers make the nightly news and the mother of a notorious killer endorses detergent?

◆ October 3 (Sunday) 9 pm

Johnny Guitar

Directed by Nicholas Ray

US 1954, 35mm, color, 110 min.

With Joan Crawford, Sterling Hayden, Mercedes McCambridge

IN THIS MOST UNCONVENTIONAL of westerns, Joan Crawford stars as

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Pedro Almodóvar [Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown](#) 1988

Vienna, a saloon keeper under attack from Emma Small, a ruthless landowner played with malicious glee by Mercedes McCambridge. Determined to bring down Vienna and her cohorts, Emma tries to pin the town's crimes on her rival's posse. Vienna makes a defiant stand against these forces with the aid of her recently-returned former lover, the mysterious Johnny Guitar. Seething with sexual tension and marked by day-glo costuming, Ray's world twists the moralistic divide between good and evil in a film which was dismissed in its time by critics but has since been revived (thanks in large part to writers such as Jean-Luc Godard and François Truffaut) as a masterful allegory of the ethically-challenged McCarthy-era.

◆ **October 5 (Tuesday) 7 pm**
[All About My Mother](#)
(Todo sobre mi madre)

Directed by Pedro Almodóvar
 Spain 1999, 35mm, color, 101 min.
 With Cecilia Roth, Marisa Paredes,
 Penelope Cruz

Spanish with English subtitles
 A MASTER OF THE GENRE, Almodóvar creates a modernist melodrama with dashes of his trademark surrealism that draws not only on empathy for the wounded but on an admiration for the resilience of women. *All About My Mother* is a story of love and friendship that is born of significant loss. After losing her son in an unfortunate accident after attending a production of *A Streetcar Named Desire*, a single mother seeks solace from her grief. Along the way she rediscovers pieces of her past as she reunites with the boy's transvestite father, meets an old friend, and forges new friendships with a nun who runs a shelter for battered prostitutes and with the stage actress her son so admired. Embracing issues of gender, role playing, and melodrama itself, Almodóvar creates a uniquely affecting work.

◆ **October 5 (Tuesday) 9 pm**
[All About Eve](#)

Directed by Joseph L. Mankiewicz
 US 1950, 35mm, b/w, 138 min.
 With Bette Davis, Anne Baxter,
 George Sanders

An aspiring actress (Baxter) maneuvers her way into the life of a Broadway star (Davis) and her close-knit circle of friends. As she plots her rise to the top,

the ingenue is aided by the acid-pen of a shrewdly cynical theater critic (Sanders) who sees through her benevolent façade. The ultimate backstage story features one of the all-time great acting ensembles (including a young Marilyn Monroe) reveling in larger-than-life performances and trading the nastiest of barbs...a bumpy ride, indeed.

◆ **October 6 (Wednesday) 7 pm**
[Talk to Her \(Hable con ella\)](#)

Directed by Pedro Almodóvar
 Spain 2002, 35mm, b/w and color, 112 min.
 With Javier Camara, Dario Grandinetti,
 Rosario Flores

Spanish with English subtitles
 A NURSE CARING for a comatose young dancer develops a strange yet intimate friendship with a writer who awaits the recovery of his lover, a bullfighter who has been gored. A series of jumps in time reveal many surprising twists in the development of the relationships between each of the comatose women and their respective male companions. Framed by a moving Pina Bausch spectacle, this relatively restrained melodrama received international acclaim (including a surprise Oscar win for Best Original Screenplay). Despite his acclaim as a "women's director," Almodóvar proves equally adept at constructing complex male characters.

◆ **October 6 (Wednesday) 9 pm**
[The Incredible Shrinking Man](#)

Directed by Jack Arnold
 US 1957, 35mm, b/w, 81 min.
 With Grant Williams, Randy Stuart,
 April Kent

AFTER SCOTT CAREY IS CONTAMINATED by a mysterious cloud, he undergoes a bizarre metamorphosis in which he gradually shrinks to the size of an insect. During the process, Carey witnesses not only the loss of his physical prowess but also his position as head of his household, leading to a debilitating impotence. Arnold brilliantly reworks the B-movie plot line to investigate the increasingly prevalent domestic anxiety then seeping through a culture that was struggling to reinforce traditional gender roles amidst great social change. The film provides an intelligent critique of the constraints of life in postwar American suburbia.