

The Main Feature



Issue Number 15 – 24th April 2008

Away From Her

Canada/2006/110 mins

Directed By – Sarah Polley

Writing Credits

Sarah Polley (written by)

Alice Munro (short story "The Bear Came Over the Mountain")

Cast

Gordon Pinsent	Grant Anderson
Stacey LaBerge	Young Fiona
Julie Christie	Fiona Anderson
Olympia Dukakis	Marian
Deanna Dez mari	Veronica
Clare Coulter	Phoebe Hart
Thomas Hauff	William Hart
Alberta Watson	Dr Fischer
Lili Francks	Theresa
Andrew Moodie	Liam
Wendy Crewson	Madeleine Montpelier
Judy Sinclair	Mrs Albright



There are moments in Sarah Polley's dazzling, wrenching feature debut, *Away From Her*, in which cinematographer Luc Montpelier lights Julie Christie just so. That icon from the Swinging '60s is 65 now, but in those moments, framed in soft light, the young woman is still present, you see her peeking out of the lined face. Then, too, there is her walk in the drama's early scenes, a sinuous swinging step, sexy and graceful as a cat. She's playing Fiona, who, after the tumultuous early years of her marriage, has at last found an idyllic happiness with Grant (Gordon Pinsent), a retired college professor and her husband of five decades. But when the couple can no longer ignore her frequent and increasingly severe memory loss, they are forced to confront the fact that the enjoyment of their golden years is over. Fiona has Alzheimer's disease, and there is no stopping its onslaught.



Polley adapted her screenplay from the Alice Munro short story "The Bear That Came Over the Mountain," and the story she tells is a love story, albeit one in which one partner helplessly watches the other slip away. It is, nevertheless, a tale of true devotion. Grant would like Fiona to stay home with him for as long as possible. Caring for her will be a challenge, but one he feels is his duty. She disagrees, deciding that the time has come to enter Meadowlake, a board-and-care facility.

Reviews

They have one hard-and-fast rule: Gordon cannot visit during her first month of confinement, a way of helping her settle into her new surroundings. It might be a kindness to her, but it is a cruelty to him, as it only takes that long for him to become a stranger to her.

Grant remains steadfast, doggedly visiting every day, bringing her books, reading to her, and determinedly trying to jog her vanishing memories. At times, he only watches her, his distress growing as she becomes attached to another patient, Aubrey (Michael Murphy). But he will put up with her attentions to Aubrey if it keeps her somewhat sentient; he has seen patients in the latter stages of the disease and is not anxious for Fiona to join them. And day by day, her deterioration is evident, manifesting itself not just in memory loss, but also in her very walk, her grace giving way to a painful shuffle. Her very essence is disappearing before his eyes.



In a way, this is a story about grief. Grant is losing his wife years before he will have to officially bury her, and he feels that loss keenly. Yet, because she is still living, he remains caught between his memories and the faint hope that she may still have moments of lucidity in her. He is guilt-ridden, too—the infidelities of his teaching years haunt him. Christie is fantastic; this is simply a great performance as we, like Grant, witness Fiona's disintegration. But as great as she is, the film belongs to Pinsent, an actor who is little known in the United States but a giant in his native Canada. In limning Grant's love and devotion for this woman who is slipping away, he gives a mesmerizing, resonant performance, one that will break your heart.

For 27-year-old actress-turned-filmmaker Polley, *Away from Her* marks quite an achievement. Nothing in her vivid screenplay or adroit direction gives one to believe that this is a freshman effort. The film suggests the work of a veteran artist at the top of her game. Polley is starting from a very lofty place. We can only marvel at what she might do next.

PAM GRADY Reel.com

Broadcast Film Critics Association Awards

Actress: Julie Christie

Canadian Genie

Actor: Gordon Pinsent

Actress: Julie Christie

Actress-Supporting: Kristen Thomson

Adapted Screenplay

Director: Sarah Polley

Film

Golden Globe Award

Actress-Drama: Julie Christie

National Board of Review Award

Actress: Julie Christie

New York Film Critics Award

Actress: Julie Christie

Screen Actors Guild Award

Actress: Julie Christie

Please can we appeal for no 0.5 voting!

Reactions to

The Painted Veil - 10th April 2008

Score 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 6.5 7 8 8.5 9 9.5 10
 Votes ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ 1 1 6 23 1 5 1 3

Total Votes - 41 Average Score - 8.09 Position in Season - 2nd

Film	Score	Position
The Lives of Others	8.23	1 st
The Painted Veil	8.09	2 nd
Little Miss Sunshine	7.886	3 rd
Notes on a Scandal	7.73	Joint 3 rd
Last King of Scotland	7.73	4 th
Jour de Fete	7.26	5 th
Belleville Rendevous	6.97	6 th
Pans Labyrinth	6.88	7 th
The Prestige	6.86	8 th
Offside	6.56	9 th
L'Enfant	6.37	10 th
Consequences of Love	6.24	11 th
Belle et la Bette	5.97	12 th
Black Cat, White Cat	5.74	13 th
The Day I became a Woman	5.72	14 th

Your views

Wonderful

Very good

Predictable, charming film which I enjoyed twice!

Worthy but uninspired - stunning scenery

Agonising, depressing but in the end redeeming - brilliant acting and photography

Beautiful scenery

Excellent photography

Sad, slow but good

Stunning scenery, good story

A beautifully produced film - thoroughly enjoyed

Best film so far - especially if you know the country

I enjoyed tonight's film, but bring back Jacques Tati!

So typically Somerset Maugham

Very enjoyable but predictable

A bit too long but enjoyable

I would watch this film again tomorrow - story line was well done and the shots of China a trip down memory lane.

Next Time

8th May 2008 - *Volver*

Pedro Almodovar's prize winning film in which sisters return to their home village, after years away, to discover secrets and support one another through difficult times. When their old aunt dies the situation changes and the past returns (volver) in a twist of mystery and suspense.

 Spain/2006/121mins



Repropoint

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