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At Venice Film Festival, Immensity, Headlined by Penelope Cruz, is a Haunting Look at Domestic Abuse

By: Gautaman Bhaskaran

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Venice



Competing for the Golden Lion at the ongoing 79th Venice Film Festival, Immensity is set in the 1970s Rome and talks about the ways anger can wreck the very foundations of a home.

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Penelope Cruz stars in Immensity, by Italian director Emanuele Crialese, which was screened at Venice Film Festival.

L' Immensity is the first feature of Italian director Emanuele Crialese in as many as 11 years, and only the fifth in the past 25 years. But he has not lost his touch, and I still remember his immigrant saga, *Golden Door*, set on Ellis Island — which was a fascinating piece of cinema. Much like his earlier work, *L'Immensity*, or which translates as *Immensity*, is gripping with its intimate canvas and a very ordinary story of domestic abuse headlined by the compelling Spanish actress, Penelope Cruz (often considered the Spanish giant Pedro Almodovar's muse).

Competing for the Golden Lion at the ongoing 79th edition of the Venice Film Festival on the Lido, an island off mainland Venice, *Immensity* is set in the 1970s Rome, and while examining how the cruelty of a man could psychologically demolish the confidence and mental wellbeing of a woman, talks about the ways anger can wreck the very foundations of a home.

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Two people are immensely affected. Cruz's Clara is considered an outsider because of her Spanish origins that her husband, Felice (Vincenzo Amato), never ceases to taunt her with. And in the 1970s, Catholics could never dream of divorce, although she does suggest they separate.

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It is in this scenario that Crisalese sets the story of a 12-year-old girl grappling with her sexual identity in a world where transgenders do not have it easy. Andrea, as she likes to call herself (played by captivating, wild-eyed newcomer Luana Giuliani) is close to her mother, who protects her against her husband's wrath. At one point she bursts out that "we are a joke among our family and friends".

Among the three siblings, it is Andrea who clearly sees how wounded her mother is, and in utter frustration, she bursts out, "You only wear makeup if you are going out or crying." She cries more often than she goes out. Apart from her mother, Andrea has another friend Sara (Penelope Nieto Conti), who lives across the reeds and is part of a socially unacceptable group. She accepts Andrea for whatever she is, and a delicate relationship builds up till Sara and her folks are uprooted.

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Crisalese never dramatises either the gender issue or the cruelty Clara suffers, and the violence is mostly suggestive and subtly narrated, although they evoke anger and sorrow in us.

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The film leads with its star attraction: It was Almodovar who helped Cruz establish herself as, let us a say, a worthy stand-in for Sophia Loren. Crisalese takes this a step ahead by planting Cruz in Loren's hometown of Rome.

At a media conference following the screening of Immensity, Cruz speaking about Clara, who winds up in a psychiatric institution, said, "I don't think my character is crazy at all. She is trapped in her family. Trapped in her

home, in her body. In the situation in which she finds herself living. She doesn't have a plan B. There is no escape. She's not crazy at all. She's oppressed in many different ways. And she simply can't take it anymore. There are many women around the world trapped in their homes, who pretend in front of their children. They try to pretend that things aren't that bad. They do this to survive."



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Cruz also pointed out, "I have played so many mothers. I've made seven movies with Pedro, and in five of them I play a mother. That's not a coincidence. I have a very strong maternal sense. And I am fascinated by what happens in every family."

Immensity is running for the Golden Lion.

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About the Author

GAUTAMAN BHASKARAN *Gautaman Bhaskaran is a movie critic, commentator and an author, who penned the first ever biography of Adoor Gopalakrishnan, and has been covering ma...* [Read More](#)

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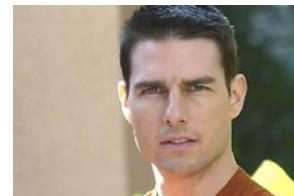
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