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Pedro Almodóvar **PARALLEL MOTHERS** (2021, 123 min)

URL for this week's film introduction: <https://vimeo.com/775369804>

+URL for 7:00 Tuesday discussion zoom: <https://vimeo.com/748377120>



DIRECTOR Pedro Almodóvar

WRITING Pedro Almodóvar

PRODUCERS Agustín Almodóvar, Esther García (executive producer), Diego Pajuelo (associate producer), César Pardiñas (line producer), and Bárbara Peiró (associate producer).

CINEMATOGRAPHY José Luis Alcaine

MUSIC Alberto Iglesias

The film was nominated for two Oscars at the 2022 Academy Awards: Best Performance by an Actress in a Leading Role (Penélope Cruz) and Best Achievement in Music Written for Motion Pictures - Original Score (Alberto Iglesias). It was nominated for nine Goyas: Best Film, Best Director, Best Lead Actress (Penélope Cruz), Best Supporting Actress (Aitana Sánchez-Gijón), Best Supporting Actress (Milena Smit), Best Cinematography, Best Production Design, and Best Sound.

CAST

Penélope Cruz...Janis

Milena Smit...Ana

Israel Elejalde...Arturo

Aitana Sánchez-Gijón...Teresa

Rosy de Palma...Elena

Julieta Serrano...Brígida

Auria Contreras...(as Luna Auria Contreras)

Carmen Flores...Dolores Alice Davies

Ainhoa Santamaría...Niñera

Adelfa Calvo...Sobrina de Brígida

Julio Manrique...Jesús



María Jesús Hoyos...(as M^a Jesús Hoyos)

Chema Adeva...Actor

Daniela Santiago...Modelo (as Dana Santiago)

Ana Peleteiro...Modelo

Pedro Casablanc...Padre de Ana (voice)

PEDRO ALMODÓVAR (b. Pedro Almodóvar Caballero, September 24, 1949) grew up mostly in the company of women. His father was a mule driver who led a team of twenty animals across the Sierra Morena to deliver wine to Jaén, in Andalucía. As a young boy, Almodóvar was raised by women and saw them as a communal force. They were Spain's secret power. "It was because of women that Spain survived the postwar period," he says. Also at this time, he and his younger brother Agustín, became regular moviegoers. By then,

Almodóvar had realized that he wanted not just to see movies but to make them, too. At the age of seventeen, he told his parents that he was moving to Madrid to pursue a career in film. His father, he recalls, “threatened to turn me in to the National Guard.” Almodóvar intended to enroll in film school, but the city had only one, and Franco, viewing it as a center of Communism, had all but closed it. Instead, Almodóvar bought a Super 8 camera and began to shoot short films on his own. “I had no budget, no money,” he says. “The important thing was to make movies.” He wrote out complete scripts, even though his camera couldn’t record sound, and changed the characters depending on which of his friends showed up for a shoot. He avoided filming where he might bump into the authorities, and so he made several Biblical epics in the countryside, giving them, he says, “a bucolic and abstract air, the opposite of Cecil B. De Mille’s.” Since he had no money to buy lights, many of the scenes in his Super 8 movies were filmed on rooftops, in parks, and by windows. “Fortunately, Spain is a place with a lot of natural light.” The director’s first Super 8 movies are too damaged to be shown today and exist only in his retelling. He projected them for friends in bars, discos, and art galleries. He improvised dialogue, sometimes commenting on the acting, while Agustín, who had followed him to Madrid, provided a soundtrack with recorded music. Almodóvar worked hard on his screenplays, giving them plenty of twists (he’s often referred to himself as a ‘frustrated novelist’). His first film, *Pepi, Luci, Bom*, was shown at the San Sebastián Film Festival in 1980. Some critics savaged the low production values, but others argued that this attested to the film’s urgency and cultural authenticity. Who cared if the director hadn’t miked the actors properly? *El Periódico* perceptively praised Almodóvar as “a stubbornly passionate defender of substandard movies.” The film became a staple of late-night Madrid—like a Spanish *Pink Flamingos*—and highly profitable. His films blurred the lines between gay and straight, coerced and consensual, comedy and melodrama, the funny and the repulsive, and high and low art. They were delivered with a puzzling cheerfulness that made them far more



transgressive than if their tone had been serious. Spain had just emerged from decades of dictatorship and repression, and Almodóvar’s films suggested that the country had leaped from Opus Dei to the Mudd Club in a single bound. Critics could not decide whether Almodóvar was the most trivial filmmaker in history or the inventor of an important new strain of postmodernism. Spanish producers began courting Almodóvar, but he fought them over creative control. In 1985, the brothers founded their own film company El Deseo, in part to protect Almodóvar from such creative battles. Agustín ran the business side. By profession, he was a chemistry teacher, but his relationship with Pedro was the crucial thing in his life. Agustín has said that his sole purpose at El Deseo is to help “Pedro make the movie he wants.” He has also played bit parts in most of his brother’s films. Creating his own production company allowed Pedro an unusual luxury: he could often shoot a movie from first page to last, rather than in the least expensive order. Almodóvar felt that a chronological approach yielded more persuasive performances. “I owe Agustín the independence and liberty that I enjoy as a director,” he says. “It’s completely without precedent. Not even Scorsese himself has been able to do that.” *Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown*, Almodóvar’s

eighth feature and his second under El Deseo, was released in 1988. The movie began with a script based on Jean Cocteau’s play *The Human Voice*, in which a woman is heard on the phone speaking to an unseen lover who is breaking up with her. Almodóvar provoked major outcries over his next feature *Tie Me Up! Tie Me Down!* (1990), with its plot of an actress being held captive by

and falling for a mentally unhinged man, and the MPAA also gave the film an X rating for its sex scenes. The director followed up with *High Heels* (1991) and *Kika* (1993), which was controversial as well over its treatment of women. *Live Flesh* was released in 1998 and featured Penelope Cruz in her first film with the director, while Almodóvar’s next work, *All About My Mother* (1999), featured Cruz again along with actress Cecilia Roth portraying a woman who has lost her son and seeks out his father, who is trans. The acclaimed, riveting work saw

Almodóvar win an Academy Award for best foreign language film, with an emotional Banderas and Cruz presenting him with the award. Almodóvar received another Oscar, this time for screenwriting, with 2002's *Talk to Her*. The filmmaker's next work, the noir-ish *Bad Education* (2004), starring Gael García Bernal and Fele Martínez, told the story of two boys who attended a Catholic boarding school together and is said to be the director's most autobiographical. In more recent years, Almodóvar has broadened his subject matter and his tone. A new one comes out every couple of years with no two alike. His aesthetic has become harder and harder to pin down. Over the years so of his youthful transgressive films have given way to a more reflective tone. This can be seen in *Volver* (2006) which earned Cruz her first Oscar nomination as well as *Broken Embraces* (2009). Often described—especially in his early years—by American critics as a 'gay director,' Almodóvar has often bristled at this title. In an interview with the *New Yorker*, he recalls, with frustration, a journalist asking him, "What's your boyfriend's name?" "That's the first thing they ask you in the United States!" he says. "That and your box-office numbers." He eventually got used to Americans describing him as "openly gay," and came to realize why many Americans found it necessary to counter homophobia by coming out. "In Spain, in that era, you didn't need to say anything," he noted. "People just knew it. I'd never had to make any confession." In 1989, the film executive Michael Barker arranged a meeting between Almodóvar and his idol Billy Wilder. They had lunch, and at the end of it Wilder told him that he had one piece of advice: "Don't come to Hollywood, no matter what." At that moment, Almodóvar says, he saw in Wilder's eyes "memories of compromises, failures, and misunderstandings." However, he has flirted with the idea of making a film in Hollywood, even going as far as to initially ask Meryl Streep to play Juliet in tonight's film. Yet, he always returns home in the end. The director has held steadfast to Wilder's advice and one might argue his films are better for it. He has directed 41 films, some of which include *Pain and Glory* (2019), *Julieta* (2016), *I'm So Excited!* (2013), *The Skin I Live In* (2011), *Broken Embraces* (2009), *The Cannibalistic Councillor* (2009, Short), *Volver* (2006), *Bad Education* (2004), *Talk to Her* (2002), *All About My Mother* (1999), *Live Flesh* (1997), *The Flower of My Secret* (1995), *Kika* (1993), *High Heels* (1991), *Tie Me Up! Tie Me Down!* (1990), *Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown* (1988), *Law of Desire* (1987),

Matador (1986), *Tráiler para 'amantes de lo prohibido'* (1986, TV Short), *What Have I Done to Deserve This?* (1984), *Dark Habits* (1983), *Labyrinth of Passion* (1982), *Pepi, Luci, Bom and Other Girls Like Mom* (1980), *Folle... folle... fólleme Tim!* (1978), *Salomé* (1978, Short), *Sexo va, sexo viene* (1977, Short), *Muerte en la carretera* (1976, Short), *Sea caritativo* (1976, Short), *Tráiler de 'Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?'* (1976, Short), *Blancor* (1975, Short), *El sueño, o la Estrella* (1975, Short), *Homenaje* (1975, Short), *La caída de Sódoma* (1975, Short), *Dos putas* (1974), *o historia de amor que termina en boda* (1974, Short), and *Film político* (1974, Short). He also produced 13 films and had small acting parts in 11: *Bad Education* (2004), *Law of Desire* (1987), *Matador* (1986), *What Have I Done to Deserve This?* (1984), *Dark Habits* (1983), *Labyrinth of Passion* (1982), *Pepi, Luci, Bom and Other Girls Like Mom* (1980), *Rapture* (1980), *Times of the Constitution* (1979), and *¿Qué hace una chica como tú en un sitio como éste?* (1978).



Alberto Iglesias (b. Alberto Iglesias Fernández-Berridi, 1955 in Donostia-San Sebastián, Guipúzcoa, País Vasco, Spain) is Spain's most acclaimed living composer. Iglesias received early musical training in piano, guitar, composition and counterpoint, as well as electronic music studies. His entry into film composition began in 1980 and he has enjoyed a long, fruitful partnership with Almodóvar, producing such films as *Broken Embraces* (2009), *Volver* (2006), *Bad Education* (2004), *Take My Eyes* (2003), *Talk to Her* (2002), and *About My Mother* (1999). Further collaborations with film directors include Julio Médem's films *Vacas* (1992), *La Ardilla Roja/ The Red Squirrel* (1993) and *Tierra/ Earth* (1998), *Los*

amantes del Círculo Polar/ Lovers of the Arctic Circle (1998), *Sex and Lucia* (2001) and *Iciar Bollain / Take my Eyes* (2003), as well Bigas Luna's film *La camarera del Titanic/ The Chambermaid on the Titanic* (1997). Additionally, Iglesias has written for leading Hollywood directors such as Oliver Stone's *Comandante* (2003), John Malkovich's *The Dancer Upstairs* (2002), Fernando Meirelles' *The Constant Gardener* (2005) and Marc Foster's *The Kite Runner* (2007). Recent scores include the two films of Steven Soderbergh's biopic about Ernesto Guevara's life, *Che: Part One* (2008) and *Che: Part Two* (2008). The composer was awarded the European Film Award for Best Original Soundtrack in 2006 for *Volver* and the World Soundtrack Award for Soundtrack Composer of the Year and Best Original Soundtrack of the Year (Flanders International Film Festival, Ghent) as well as his nominations for both an Academy Award and BAFTA for *The Constant Gardener*. He won the 2008 Satellite Award for Best Original Soundtrack for *The Kite Runner*, and received a second Academy Award nomination. He has also been awarded nine Goyas and numerous other European accolades. Some of his other film scores are *I'm So Excited!* (2013), *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy* (2011), *The Monk* (2011), *The Skin I Live In* (2011), *Even the Rain* (2010), *Live Flesh* (1997),



The Flower of My Secret (1995), *Outrage* (1993), *Autumn Rain* (1989), *Bilbao Blues* (1986), *Lucas de bohemia* (1985), *La muerte de Mikel* (1984), and *La conquista de Albania* (1984).

PENÉLOPE CRUZ (b. Penélope Cruz Sánchez on April 28th, 1974) is a Spanish actress. As an adolescent, she studied classical ballet for nine years at Spain's National Conservatory, instilling in her a discipline that would later be evident in her acting. After seeing Pedro Almodóvar's *Tie Me Up! Tie Me*

Down! (1990), she became interested in acting and subsequently sought out an agent, eventually winning an audition at a talent agency at the age of 15, beating out more than 300 other girls. Soon after, she made her acting debut, appearing in the music video for Spanish pop group Mecano's song "La Fuerza del Destino." After a series of small, single-episode roles in Spanish and French television programs, she landed her first film with Bigas Luna's art-house romantic comedy, *Jamón, jamón* (1992), which was followed by ten Spanish and Italian films between 1993 and 1996. In 1997, she appeared in her first Almodóvar film, *Live Flesh*, portraying a prostitute who gives birth on a bus. The same year, she starred in thriller *Open Your Eyes* (1997), a massive hit in Spain, and her 1998 performance in the comedy *La Niña De Tus Ojos* would earn her a Goya award for Best Actress. Her domestic success would soon become international superstardom; she made her American film debut in *The Hi-Lo Country*, a 1998 western. In 1999, she collaborated with Almodóvar again, starring in *All About My Mother*, which was a bigger success internationally than in Spain. Several major American blockbusters would follow, including 2001's *Vanilla Sky*, Cameron Crowe's remake of *Open Your Eyes*, in which she was cast opposite Tom Cruise. The same year, she appeared in Ted Demme's *Blow*, playing a drug kingpin's wife. She continued to appear in Spanish, American, French, and Italian films, including five others with Almodóvar: *Volver* (2006), *Broken Embraces* (2009), *I'm So Excited!* (2013), *Pain and Glory* (2019), and tonight's film. Some of her other films include *The 355* (2022), *En los márgenes* (2022), *L'immensità* (2022), *Pain and Glory* (2019), *American Crime Story* (TV Show, 2018) *Murder on the Orient Express* (2017), *The Queen of Spain* (2016), *The Counselor* (2013), *Twice Born* (2012), *To Rome with Love* (2012), *Nine* (2009), *G-Force* (2009), *A Matador's Mistress* (2008), *Vicky Cristina Barcelona* (2008), *Elegy* (2008), *Bandidas* (2006), *Chromophobia* (2005), *Head in the Clouds* (2004), *Gothika* (2003), *Masked and Anonymous* (2003), *Waking Up In Reno* (2002), *Captain Corelli's Mandolin* (2001), *All The Pretty Horses* (2000), *Talk of Angels* (1998), *Don Juan* (1998), *Brujas* (1996), *Entre Rojas* (1995), and *The Rebel* (1993). She has received various accolades, including a Best Performance by an Actress in a Supporting Role Academy Award for *Vicky Cristina Barcelona* (2008).

MILENA SMIT (b. October 5th, 1996) is a Spanish actress. She began working as a model at 15 years old, soon moving from her home of Elche to Madrid. She studied acting at the Cristina Rota acting school, and after appearing in three shorts and a music video, she made her feature-length debut in the 2020 thriller *Cross The Line*, which earned her a Goya nomination for Best New Actor. Pedro Almodóvar, who found her performance in that film “overwhelming,” cast her in tonight’s film. This year, she starred in the Netflix original series *The Girl in the Mirror* and appeared in *Libélulas*. She is slated to star in *Tin and Tina*, an upcoming horror film, and *The Snow Girl*, a TV miniseries).



ISRAEL ELEJALDE

(b. December 10th, 1973) is an actor and theater director from Madrid, Spain. He began acting in high school, and in college he split his time between political science and acting, training at William Layton’s lab, the Teatro de La Abadía, and Real Escuela Superior de Arte Dramático. Though he has primarily worked as a stage actor, his performance in the 2014 film *Magical Girl* was a breakthrough, earning him a Goya nomination for Best New Actor. He has a total of 47 screen credits, including tonight’s film, *Eden* (2021), *The Perfect Family* (2021), *Ana Tramel*. *El juego* (TV Series, 2021), *ByAnaMilán* (TV Series, 2020-2021), *Veneno* (TV Miniseries, 2020), *45 rpm* (TV Series, 2019), *Traición* (TV Series, 2017-2018), *La princesa Paca* (2017), *Smoke and Mirrors* (2016), *Love Above All Things* (2016), *Bajo sospecha* (TV Series, 2016), *Charles*, *Emperor King* (TV Series, 2015), *Amar en tiempos revueltos* (TV Series, 2010-2011), *Cuéntame* (TV Series, 2006-2010), *People in Places* (2013), and *Seis o siete veranos* (2007).

AITANA SÁNCHEZ-GIJÓN (b. November 5th, 1968) is a Spanish-Italian film actress. Born in Rome, she moved to Madrid when she was one year old. She made her television debut at the age of 16 with the high school series *Segunda enseñanza* (1986). Her breakout role was 1989’s *Bajarse al moro*, which made her a star in Spanish cinema. Internationally, she is perhaps best known for 1995’s *A Walk in the Clouds*, in which she starred alongside Keanu Reeves. She was

the president of the Academy of Cinematographic Arts and Sciences of Spain between 1998 and 2000. She has 71 listed credits, and some of her other films include *Under Her Control* (2022), *Estoy vivo* (TV Series, 2019), *Velvet Colección* (2017-2019), *Alex’s Strip* (2019), *Thi Mai, rumbo a Vietnam* (2017), *Velvet* (TV Series, 2013-2016), *The Misfits Club* (2014), *Maktub* (2011), *The Drifters* (2011), *The Frost* (2009), *The Machinist* (2004), and *Mouth to Mouth* (1995),

ROSSY DE PALMA (b.

September 16, 1964 in Palma de Mallorca, Spain) has been a close friend and muse to Almodóvar since he discovered her in 1986 at a café in Madrid. De Palma—often referred to as ‘Dama Picasso’ or ‘a Picasso come to life’ on account of her striking, asymmetric features – first appeared with a small

cameo in Almodóvar’s 1987 thriller *Law of Desire*. (*The New York Times* once called her “unforgettably strange- looking.”) The director was so impressed by the actress’s onscreen charisma that he cast her again the following year in *Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown*. In the three decades since, de Palma has appeared in five more of Almodóvar’s films, taking on a variety of roles from feisty drug dealer to lesbian maid to “crab-faced” sister while tonight’s feature sees her assume the small but vital role of a sinister, soothsayer-like housekeeper with a stony, penetrating glare. “*Julietta* marked a change of pace for the frequently frenzied filmmaker”, says de Palma. “At the beginning this film was supposed to be called *Silencio*, and it works very well this title because when it finishes, you have nothing to say,” she says in her lilting Spanish tone. “You think about it, but you don’t have any words; you have to digest it.” She goes on to add, “I don’t know if Pedro would agree, but my feeling is that he’s entering another era: another Almodóvar...All the emotion has to be there, but not outside, inside. His approach is much more minimalist, much more clean—of course in the train there are the colours, but he didn’t let the barocco [baroque] come in.” She appeared in several of his films: *Law of Desire* (1987), *Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown* (1988), *Tie Me Up! Tie Me Down!* (1989), *Broken Embraces* (2009), and two that earned her Goya nominations for performances, *Kika* (1993) and *The Flower of My Secret* (1995). She has a total of 104

screen credits. Besides her acting career, she has been a muse and modeling for the late fashion designer Jean-Paul Gaultier as well as appearing in George Michael's video for "Too Funky" and has her own MAC cosmetics makeup line (every tube complete with a profile of Picasso, naturally).

JULIETA SERRANO (b. January 2nd 1933) is a prolific actress from Barcelona, Spain. Working in theater, film, and television, she began her career in the 1960s and is perhaps best known internationally for her work with Pedro Almodóvar. In September 2018 she was awarded the National Theater Prize by the Premio Nacional de Teatro, recognizing her life's work of theatrical accomplishments. She has 135 screen credits, and some films and shows she has been in include tonight's film, *Las cartas perdidas* (2021), *Caronte* (TV Series, 2020), *Pain and Glory* (2019), *The Warning*, (2018), *A Stroke of Luck* (2016), *Algo que celebrar* (2015), *La última isla* (2012), *Mil cretins* (2011), *Opération Casablanca* (2010), *Temps de silenci* (TV Series, 2001), *Marta and Surroundings* (1999), *Caresses* (1998), *Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown* (1988) and *Dark Habits* (1983).



Anthony Lane: “Cradles and Graves in Pedro Almodóvar’s ‘Parallel Mothers’” (*New Yorker*)

Is there a better time traveller than [Pedro Almodóvar](#)? Who offers a smoother ride? His new film, “Parallel Mothers,” starts with a photographer, Janis (Penélope Cruz), snapping pictures of a fellow named Arturo (Israel Elejalde). Afterward, over a bottle of wine, they talk. Jump ahead a little, and we hear him calling to arrange another meeting. Jump again, and we see the white curtains of her apartment, in Madrid, billowing like sails in the breeze: a rapturous image, which tells us, with mysterious clarity, that love is being made inside the room. One last jump takes us to Janis, in a hospital, preparing to have Arturo’s child. The movie is eight minutes old, and already months have passed, two lives have been turned upside down, and a third

life is about to begin. The whole thing, lovely leaps and all, has been achieved without a hint of haste. We could be leafing idly through a book.

The title of the film becomes clear when Ana (Milena Smit), also heavily pregnant, enters the scene. She and Janis share a room at the hospital; as the movie unfolds, they will share a great deal more. Janis is nearing forty and was named for Janis Joplin. (Later, on the soundtrack, we hear “Summertime” sung by Joplin, for whom the living was never easy.) Ana is less than half Janis’s age. This being one of Almodóvar’s gynocentric sagas, our heroines bring forth daughters: Janis gives birth to Cecilia, and Ana to Anita. The babies, though safely delivered, are placed under observation before being returned to their mothers. It is at this point that the director’s regular fans, drilled in melodrama, will brace themselves for a twist.

As if guessing what happens next isn’t tricky enough, we also have to work out, as the plot expands, where its center of gravity lies. In the hospital, Ana is visited by her mother, the suave Teresa (Aitana Sánchez-Gijón), an actress by profession. Having been, as she admits, “the worst mother in the world,” she now proves to be equally unreliable as a grandmother; presented with a plum role, in a play by Lorca, she grabs it and goes on tour, just when her daughter needs her. As we watch Teresa in rehearsal, staring at the camera (“She really overacts,” Ana says), we wonder if the movie might be swaying toward her and away from the younger generations. Plot and subplot keep switching around. Given that Janis’s bright-red iPhone matches her fruit bowl *and* her baby carrier, is it any surprise that Almodóvar, a master colorist, should arrange for his herrings to be redder than anyone else’s?

For those of us who deify Penélope Cruz, the new film is a case of déjà vu. In Almodóvar’s “Live Flesh” (1997), she played a young Madrileña who gave birth on a bus. (A friend had to cut the umbilical cord with her teeth.) But there was a clinging helplessness to that character, whereas Janis, in “Parallel Mothers,” is—or, for a while, appears to be—in mature command of her fate. Deeming Arturo to be surplus to requirements, she raises Cecilia on her own. Circumstances, though, conspire against her, and she winds up employing Ana as a nanny. “I’ll teach you how to run a house and cook,” Janis says, kicking things off with a lesson in peeling potatoes. Here is Cruz at her least showy and yet her most adventurous, allowing a storm of confusion to sweep across her face

as she sits at a café table, and guiding us through the stages of one woman's self-possession: having it, losing it almost completely, and then reclaiming it.

What's fascinating is that the rediscovery is achieved not so much by strength of will as by reaching back into the past. Not only Janis's own past, either, but that of her forebears and their native land. In an early conversation with Arturo, who is a forensic anthropologist, she asks about the possibility of excavating the grave of her great-grandfather, who was killed during the rule of General Franco. She knows more or less where the grave lies, and her elderly relatives may be useful in the quest; but Arturo (having all but vanished from the movie, only to slip back in again) is the one person who can collate the evidence and examine what she hopes, or fears, will be the location of the discarded dead. Why call it a resting place, when nobody was ever laid to rest?



In a book of interviews, published in 2006, Almodóvar said: “

Twenty years ago, my revenge against Franco was to not even recognize his existence, his memory; to make my films as if he had never existed. Today I think it fitting that we don't forget that period, and remember that it wasn't so long ago.”

That progression of personal feeling is, you might say, a mirror of a larger transformation in Spanish attitudes. In the wake of Franco's death, in 1975, came the *pacto del olvido*, or pact of oblivion—a determination, enshrined in the Amnesty Law of 1977, to brush away the vestiges of former crimes and hence to move onward with a guiltless transition to democracy. As any shrink could tell you: Good luck with that. It's hard enough for a family to stash one skeleton in the cupboard, so what chance is there for an entire nation, with the cupboard bursting and the skeletons tens of thousands strong?

Pushback against the pact acquired legal force in 2007, with what was commonly known as the Law of Historical Memory. Among other things, it issued a formal condemnation of the Franco regime and—

mindful of those who had been executed and interred in that ruinous period, often in mass graves—provided for the tracing and identifying of corpses. (The remains of Lorca, for example, have yet to be found.) Only thus could they be decently reburied. In “Parallel Mothers,” we learn that Arturo is employed by the Association for the Recovery of Historical Memory—a real organization, whose job is to gather testimony about the missing and to assist in exhumation. Arturo complains that the government has stopped subsidizing such projects, but the movie, I'm glad to report, has been overtaken by events; under the administration of Pedro Sánchez, elected in 2018, funding has resumed.

Almodóvar was an executive producer on “The Silence of Others” (2018), a documentary about the missing victims of the Franco era, and, presumably,

one of the roots of “Parallel Mothers.” In fiction, however, the larger and more distant the

monstrosity, the tougher it is to dramatize, and Almodóvar's solution, here, is to home in on the particular—on one man, and one dreadful death. Janis, returning to the town where she was born, learns that her great-grandfather was taken from his house and made to dig his own grave. The following night, he was shot and dumped in it, having spent a final day with his loved ones. Now, in the present, a patch of ground is dug up to reveal a bundle of bones. We get a closeup of a glass eye, dusted with dirt, which still fits the socket of a skull.

But what of other fits? How do far-off horrors lock into the troubles of two single mothers in modern-day Spain? One answer would be that “Parallel Mothers” is a parable of repression, in the individual as in the state. Janis wants to know the truth about her child, and, having acquired that truth, she hastens to tamp it down and to hide it away. Though quick to love, and incapable of cruelty, she is nonetheless drawing on deep wells of cultural denial, forging her own private *pacto del olvido*, until conscience impels her to bring the facts to light.

One sign of a strong film is that it won't hold steady in your sights. Your mind is made up and then changed, and changed again. Initially, for instance, the construction of "Parallel Mothers" struck me as too pat for its own good, and some of the joins seemed rougher than you'd expect from Almodóvar. "It's time you knew what country you're living in," Janis says to Ana, launching into an impromptu history lesson in the kitchen. The scene grated on me, and only on a second viewing did I catch the irony: the older woman is in no position, morally, to lecture her junior. Ana, even as a parent, has a child's innocence, and she may not be the smartest of souls. Yet her awareness of right and wrong is instinctively keen, and, in Milena Smit's fine performance, you *see* what it means to be wronged. Her eyes brim with tears, and her features flush with pain.

"Parallel Mothers" is graced by slow fades into darkness—at one point, the camera dives into a cup of black coffee—and the score, by Alberto Iglesias, could be that of a sad whodunnit. The prevailing mood is both beautifully forgiving and ruthlessly forgetful, concluding in quiet magnificence: we see people from Janis's town, most of them female, processing with a steady purpose down a country road, on their way to inspect an open grave. Think of them as a squadron of Antigones. No disrespect to Arturo, but Almodóvar leaves us with an overwhelming sense that the pursuit of justice, by right, is women's work. That is why the movie ends with Cecilia, now a little girl, at a graveside. Welcomed to life as the story begins, she brings it to fruition by gazing down at the dead.



Charles Ealy: "Parallel Mothers ranks among Almodóvar's best"

"Parallel Mothers" ranks near the top of Spanish director Pedro Almodóvar's filmography. It's complicated, mature, revelatory and profound.

It all starts, as many Almodóvar films do, with the celebrated Spanish actress Penelope Cruz, this time

playing a photographer named Janis. She is photographing Arturo (Israel Elejalde) for a magazine spread. He's a forensic anthropologist, and she starts asking him about how to open an unmarked, mass grave that contains the body of her great-grandfather, who was murdered by the fascists during the Spanish Civil War.

Arturo works for the Association for the Recovery of Historical Memory — which, in fact, is a real organization devoted to making the crimes of Spain's past more transparent.

Besides their mutual interest in uncovering the past, Janis and Arturo are sexually attracted to each other, and before long, Janis is in the hospital with another single woman, Ana (Milena Smit), waiting to give birth. Both will be single mothers. Janis is excited by the prospect. Ana is not. They give birth on the same day.

Both go home with their newborns. And a few months later, Janis orders coffee at a cafe and realizes that her waiter is Ana.

It turns out that Ana has lost her child to an illness, and she's left her home and is working on her own. Janis needs help with her child and her career and invites Ana to be her live-in nanny/helper.

As is so often the case in Almodóvar's movies, sexuality exists on a spectrum, and it's not at all unusual to see both Janis and Ana develop a sexual relationship. But Almodóvar is getting at something much deeper than sexuality. He is exploring how people deny personal truths as well as historical ones.

In this case, Janis is the one who's hiding something from Ana, and the story revolves around Janis's coming to terms with her guilty secret — and in uncovering the shames of the Spanish Civil War.

As Janis, Cruz is brilliant, as always. She seethes over a moral dilemma, one that could upend her life. And it's wonderful to watch the various stages of denial and recognition cross her face in Almodóvar's famous close-ups.

It's also wonderful to see Almodóvar tackle the history of fascism in Spain head-on. He has made a career of thumbing his nose at conservative European society by making outrageous, over-the-top sexy melodramas. But "Parallel Mothers" differs in remarkable ways. It has a serious sensibility. It makes us reflect on uneasy truths.

Fans of Almodóvar will be happy to hear that Rossy de Palma shows up as Janis's colleague and friend. De Palma has been almost as central to Almodóvar's acting club as Cruz. De Palma has had

roles in several Almodovar classics, including “Law of Desire” and “Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown.”



Jazz Tangcay: “Pedro Almodovar on Creating ‘Rapid and Tense’ Storytelling Through Editing in *Parallel Mothers*” (Variety)

Women have always been in the center of [Pedro Almodovar](#)’s films, driving his narrative. For the past few years, a woman has also been in the editing chair. For years, José Salcedo Palomeque was his go-to editor, until Palomeque died in 2017. Since then, [Teresa Font](#) has been working by the filmmaker’s side, on set and cutting dailies — she cut his latest film, “[Parallel Mothers](#),” where emotion was imperative to the storytelling.

Almodovar says, the two didn’t preestablish what rhythm the editing would take. “The film itself calls for how it wants to breathe. The important thing is that we agree on how we evaluate the shot,” he says. Additionally, when it came to coverage, Almodovar, who often could attempt 30 takes, confesses he used fewer takes than ever for this. “It was not necessary to repeat takes because one or two captured what I wanted.”

“*Parallel Mothers*” stars Almodovar’s muse, Penelope Cruz, and follows two single women who meet in a hospital room where they are both going to give birth. One is middle-aged and doesn’t regret it, while the other is adolescent and scared. The two women form a strong bond with one another as they both confront motherhood.

When it came to the film’s rhythm, Almodovar says, “The pacing of the film is a very abstract and personal thing, it is driven by whatever a director’s ideas are about narration and by the genre of the film. The idea is to hold on to a shot until it becomes expressive, at the moment when it ceases to be, is when one must cut. Font concurs that to help with that

emotion, she put herself in the actor’s position — in this case Cruz’s shoes. She said, “I have to feel how she feels to know where to cut, and have that sense of what the emotion tells you.”

In scenes where Cruz’s Janis is alone in the apartment with her newborn child, Font would linger on Cruz’s expressions, which were the key to driving the narrative forward. “She had this look in her eyes without uttering a single word, and you could feel what was going on in her mind,” explains Font.

A deep political theme on the Spanish Civil War runs through the course of the film. When Janis approaches Arturo, played by Israel Elejalde, to help excavate a mass grave, Cruz’s Janis is forced to face a home truth after running a home paternity test. Her performance and shock reaction were vital. Almodovar says, “The power of the sequence almost absolutely depends on her performance. We witness how, after her initial shock, while stammering and knocked down, she attempts to call her lawyer. Since she doesn’t find him, she calls Arturo, the baby’s father, but she pulls back at the last minute.” He continues, “She calls Ana because she intuits that she somehow holds the key to the situation, and she also cannot reach her. She has to traverse through all of that before she finally decides that she’s going to act as if she didn’t know. When she turns the computer off, she is mentally wiping away the news of the results of the maternity test.”

It was here that Font’s editing needed to accompany the different moments of tension that the character was experiencing. Says Almodovar, “In this case, it’s the character’s changing moods what determines the editing rhythm – it’s rapid and tense.”

His favorite edited moment? “During the last part of the film, when Penélope shares her secret with Ana. The entire situation until Ana leaves is made up of a block of about 15 sequences where the emotional tempo that the editing marks is extraordinarily efficient and heartbreaking,” says Almodovar.

Spanish Civil War (Wikipedia)

The **Spanish Civil War** ([Spanish](#): *Guerra Civil Española*)^[note 2] was a [civil war](#) in [Spain](#) fought from 1936 to 1939 between the [Republicans](#) and the [Nationalists](#). Republicans were loyal to the [left-leaning Popular Front](#) government of the [Second Spanish Republic](#), and consisted of various [socialist](#), [communist](#), [separatist](#), [anarchist](#), and [republican](#) parties, some of which had opposed the government in the pre-war period.^[12] The opposing Nationalists were an alliance

of [Falangists](#), [monarchists](#), [conservatives](#), and [traditionalists](#) led by a [military junta](#) among whom General [Francisco Franco](#) quickly achieved a preponderant role. Due to the international [political climate](#) at the time, the war had many facets and was variously viewed as [class struggle](#), a [religious struggle](#), a struggle between [dictatorship](#) and [republican democracy](#), between [revolution](#) and [counterrevolution](#), and between [fascism](#) and [communism](#).^[13] According to [Claude Bowers](#), U.S. ambassador to Spain during the war, it was the "[dress rehearsal](#)" for [World War II](#).^[14] The Nationalists won the war, which ended in early 1939, and ruled Spain until Franco's death in November 1975.

The war began after the partial failure of the [coup d'état of July 1936](#) against the Republican government by a group of generals of the [Spanish Republican Armed Forces](#), with General [Emilio Mola](#) as the primary planner and leader and having General [José Sanjurjo](#) as a figurehead. The government at the time was a coalition of Republicans, supported in the [Cortes](#) by communist and socialist parties, under the leadership of [centre-left](#) President [Manuel Azaña](#).^{[15][16]} The Nationalist group was supported by a number of conservative groups, including [CEDA](#), monarchists, including both the opposing [Alfonsists](#) and the religious conservative [Carlists](#), and the [Falange Española de las JONS](#), a fascist political party.^[17] After the deaths of Sanjurjo, [Emilio Mola](#) and [Manuel Goded Llopis](#), Franco emerged as the remaining leader of the Nationalist side.

The coup was supported by military units in [Morocco](#), [Pamplona](#), [Burgos](#), [Zaragoza](#), [Valladolid](#), [Cádiz](#), [Córdoba](#), and [Seville](#). However, rebelling units in almost all important cities—such as [Madrid](#), [Barcelona](#), [Valencia](#), [Bilbao](#), and [Málaga](#)—did not gain control, and those cities remained under the control of the government. This left Spain militarily and politically divided. The Nationalists and the Republican government fought for control of the country. The Nationalist forces received munitions, soldiers, and air support from [Fascist Italy](#) and [Nazi Germany](#), while the Republican side received support

from the [Soviet Union](#) and [Mexico](#). Other countries, such as the [United Kingdom](#), [France](#), and the [United States](#), continued to recognise the Republican government but followed an official policy of [non-intervention](#). Despite this policy, tens of thousands of citizens from non-interventionist countries directly participated in the conflict. They fought mostly in the pro-Republican [International Brigades](#), which also included several thousand exiles from pro-Nationalist regimes.

The Nationalists advanced from their strongholds in the south and west, capturing most of Spain's northern coastline in 1937. They also besieged Madrid and the area to its south and west for much of the war. After much of [Catalonia](#) was captured in 1938 and 1939, and Madrid cut off from Barcelona, the Republican military position became hopeless. Following the fall without resistance of Barcelona in January 1939, the Francoist regime was



recognised by France and the United Kingdom in February 1939. On 5 March 1939, in response to an alleged increasing communist dominance of the republican government and the deteriorating military situation, Colonel [Segismundo Casado](#) led a [military coup against the Republican government](#), with the intention of seeking peace with the Nationalists. These peace overtures, however, were rejected by Franco. Following internal conflict between Republican factions in Madrid in the same month, Franco entered the capital and declared victory on 1 April 1939. Hundreds of thousands of Spaniards fled to refugee camps in [southern France](#).^[18] Those associated with the losing Republicans who stayed were persecuted by the victorious Nationalists. Franco established a dictatorship in which all right-wing parties were fused into the structure of the Franco regime.^[17]

The war became notable for the passion and political division it inspired and for the many atrocities that occurred. [Organised purges](#) occurred in territory captured by Franco's forces so they could consolidate their future regime.^[19] [Mass executions](#) on a lesser scale also took place in areas controlled by the Republicans,^[20] with the participation of local authorities varying from location to location.^{[21][22]}

THE FALL 2022 BUFFALO FILM SEMINARS XLV:

August 30 William Wellman *Wings* 1927
Sept 6 Jean Renoir *Rules of the Game* 1939
Sept 13 Michael Curtiz *Casablanca* 1942
Sept 20 Nicholas Ray, *In a Lonely Place* 1950
Sept 27 Luis Buñuel *Viridiana* 1961
Oct 4 Orson Welles *Chimes at Midnight* 1966
Oct 11 Mel Brooks *Young Frankenstein* 1974
Oct 18 Arthur Penn *Night Moves* 1975
Oct 25 Sydney Pollack *Tootsie* 1982
Nov 1 Akira Kurosawa *Ran* 1985
Nov 8 Martin Scorsese *Goodfellas* 1990
Nov 15 Hayao Miyazaki *The Wind Rises* 2013
Nov 22 Ava Duvernay *Selma* 2014
Nov 29 Pedro Almodóvar *Parallel Mothers* 2021
Dec 6 Ang Lee *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* 2000

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