



The Main Feature

Season 43 – Issue 13 – Screening 28 March 2024

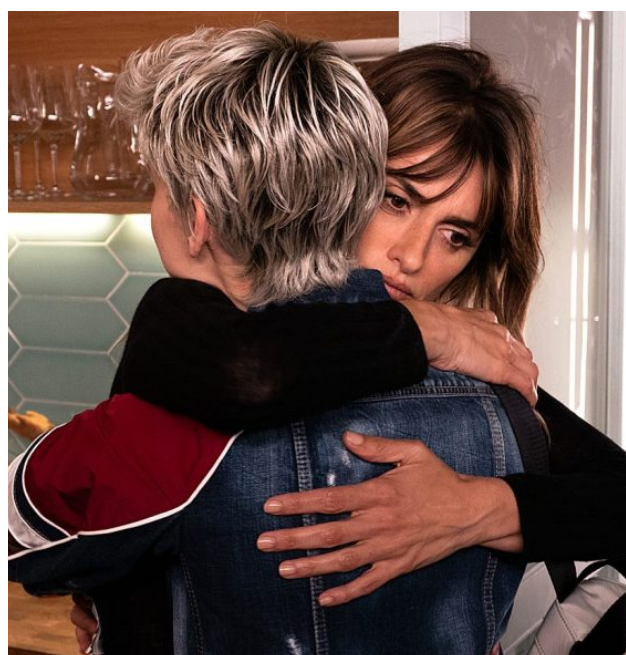
Parallel Mothers (Madres paralelas)

Spain, 2021,
123 mins, Certificate 15

Director and writer	Pedro Almodóvar
Cinematography	José Luis Alcaine
Editing	Teresa Font
Music	Alberto Iglesias

Cast

Penélope Cruz	Janis
Milena Smit	Ana
Israel Elejalde	Arturo
Aitana Sánchez-Gijón.	Teresa (Ana's Mother)
Rosy de Palma	Elena
Julieta Serrano	Brígida



This evening's film is the story of two middle-class Spanish women from different generations, who first meet in a maternity ward and subsequently share memories, offspring and desire over a number of years.

The film opens in Madrid in 2016, with middle-aged, glamorous and single photographer Janis (Cruz) on an assignment taking pictures of forensic anthropologist Arturo (Elejalde). After the shoot, she solicits his support to excavate a field near her home village, where it's suspected her great-grandfather and other local men were murdered and buried during the Spanish Civil War. He agrees to help. They have a brief affair; Janis falls pregnant and decides to have the baby despite her (married) lover's misgivings. In hospital, she bonds with a scared, serious-looking and troubled teenager (Ana) and meets her rather brittle actress mother (Teresa). Ana's backstory is revealed gradually (and be warned - the circumstances of her pregnancy and her postnatal experience are upsetting).

The new borns have to spend time in neonatal care, but eventually the mothers leave the hospital, promising to keep in touch. Both Janis' relationship with Arturo and Ana's brief reconciliation with her own mother come to grief, and the two women end up sharing Janis'



apartment (and a bed). The twisty plot hinges on a secret that Janis eventually reveals and which causes considerable heartache. The film ends with some relationships on a more even keel and with final clarity over the fate of the menfolk in Janis's home village.

This is the fifth Almodóvar film the Club has shown, and - like the others - *Parallel Mothers* features strong-minded and capable women; weak or absent men; vividly furnished and gorgeously rich interiors; and non-restrictive attitudes to sex. There are no nuclear families on screen! This is Almodóvar's eighth collaboration with Penélope Cruz (and his ninth with Rossy de Palma who plays Janis's agent and confidante).

Cruz drew considerable praise for her portrayal, winning the Best Actress award at the Venice International Film Festival. The film was nominated for two Oscars (Best Actress; Best Musical Score) but won neither. A global box office of \$23.1m was respectable but fell shy of Almodóvar's prior film *Pain and Glory* (\$37.5m), shown by the Club in 2022.

Nonetheless, critics fell over themselves to praise the film. Entertainment Weekly celebrated a 'tale of memory and identity, connection and desire filtered through the lens of melancholic whimsy.' The Guardian welcomed 'an emotional bundle of joy' noting that 'it springs tragedy on audiences expecting comedy.' The Times commended a 'powerhouse cast' and Cruz in particular, noting that 'she's incessantly watchable in every scene, and lightly carries a film that might have encumbered another performer with its seriousness.' The Telegraph celebrated 'a sumptuous, provocative, playfully transgressive melodrama.' Empire Magazine added 'Almodóvar juggles comedy and drama to terrifically entertaining ends, aided by a tip-top Penélope Cruz' and Total Film described it as 'a richly satisfying, stirring emotional banquet.'



All well and good. My own initial grouchy reaction was irritation whenever Cruz's character complains about how tired motherhood has made her. She has a maid and the services of an (admittedly dozy) au pair at least for a while – but is always beautifully coiffured and stunningly made up, with no washing basket in sight. Not my memory of the joys of bringing up young children – but hey, it is only a movie after all! More seriously, the historical subplot sometimes jars and the plotting is frankly sometimes improbable, but the film draws you in and is a visual delight.

Looking over user reviews on IMDb showed the usual divergence of opinions (though the overall weighted average score at 7.1/10 is perfectly respectable). I'll quote one thoughtful gourmet reviewer (from the US): 'The title took me to the movie theatre all excited and ready to shed my tears for all the mothers and all the children parallel or not. However, it was a lot less than what I expected. The movie touches so many topics and actually loses focus and confuses you. It's impossible to relate to any of the things happening because you cannot dive in to any of that. I have to admit that the signs were telling me it was going to be a disaster. They didn't have nachos with cheese at the canteen and that should be my warning sign to leave.'

Fear not – we have cakes!

Eugene Smith

Pedro Almodóvar and Penélope Cruz

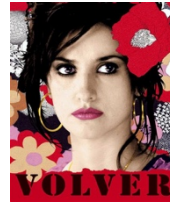
Pedro Almodóvar is a prolific Spanish film director, with 15 shorts and 22 feature films to his name; Penélope Cruz is a similarly productive Spanish actor with over 60 appearances since 1992. And they work together – *Parallel Mothers* is their eighth collaboration. Here are some we have seen before:



All About My Mother (*Todo sobre mi madre*, 1999, 96 min, cert 15) Rosa, a young, pregnant HIV-positive nun who works in a shelter for battered sex workers is played by Cruz. The Guardian commented ‘This funny, sad and emotionally generous movie is about love, parenthood, friendship and loyalty, about life, art and acting roles, about re-creating oneself according to one’s dreams, and about what, if anything, is truly natural’. The film won an Oscar and two

Baftas. The club showed it in season 21 where it scored 6.97.

Volver (2006, 121 min, cert 15) *Volver* can be translated as ‘coming home’ or ‘coming back’. In an ensemble cast, Cruz portrays Raimunda, a hard-working woman with a



teenage daughter and a feckless, layabout husband. The New York Times said ‘To relate the details of the narrative—death, cancer, betrayal, parental

abandonment, more death—would create an impression of dreariness and woe. But nothing could be further from the spirit of *Volver* which is buoyant without being flip, and consoling without ever becoming maudlin’. When shown at the club in season 28, the film scored 7.06.

Pain and Glory (*Dolor y gloria*, 2019, 114 min, cert 15) Cruz plays, in flashback, the mother of film director Salvador Mallo who is in decline, both physically and mentally, which has made him reflective. The Observer said: ‘Painful for sure, but glorious too, *Pain and Glory* is Spanish wunderkind Pedro Almodóvar’s best and most moving film in years - a brave and wrenching self-portrait of an aging artist under the siege of age and the fear of death.’ Shown by the club in season 41, it scored 6.5

Other news: for those who have not caught up with the 2024 Oscars, held on 10 March, *Oppenheimer* was the big winner with seven awards; *Barbie* lost out with just the best original song award; Emma Stone won best actress for *Poor Things*; and *Anatomy of a Fall* won best original screenplay. Sadly, running for three hours, *Oppenheimer* is too long to show at the club. <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2024/mar/11/oscars-2024-your-catchup-with-all-the-action-from-hollywoods-biggest-night>. And do you recall that the makers of *The Lost King* were being threatened with legal action by one of the university administrators portrayed in the film? The BBC has reported that preliminary issues are being considered by the court <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-leicestershire-67003060>.

Michael Hipkins



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Comments and reactions to: **Empire of Light**

No of reaction slips received = 28

Average score = 7.46

Score	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
	~	~	~	~	1	1	~	13	10	1	2

Superb insight into schizophrenia – I am a nurse

Olivia Coleman, spectacular as always

Very good performances, and lovely cinema

Well-acted and a better conclusion than I was expecting towards the middle of the film

Second half speeded up. Excellent film, sad ending. Did show 80s Britain

Authentic 1980s atmosphere and a commanding performance by Olivia Coleman

All the ingredients for a memorable film were there. Despite a winning performance from Olivia Coleman, it never took off. The "magic of cinema" subplot was wasted and too many scenes fell flat.

A 'B' film, laboured acting

Evocative of an era. Thoroughly enjoyed it

Really great film

Position	Film	Average score
1	Where the Crawdads Sing	7.83
2	Living	7.62
3=	Mrs Harris Goes to Paris	7.58
3=	Downton Abbey – A New Era	7.58
5	Empire of Light	7.46
6	The Lost King	7.38
7	Dog Day Afternoon	7.15
8	The Banshees of Inisherin	7.06
9	Rams	6.40
10	Three Colours: Blue	6.18
11	Vagabond	5.88
12	Decision to Leave	4.59

Forthcoming attraction: 11 April 2024 – **Top Gun Maverick**



Burnished 1980s blockbuster nostalgia as Tom Cruise and producer Jerry Bruckheimer prove they can still make 'em like they used to. Strap in for the thrillingly real aerial dog fights. Metro

... A summer blockbuster of the old school, with rust-bucket F-14s duking it out with young pups in F-18s, all shot on celluloid rather than sketched in by computers, at the behest of a star who refuses to quit. The Times

If this sounds like hokum, it is. But the storytelling too reminds you of the best version of old Hollywood, broad strokes rendered with watchmaker care. Financial Times

Club website: www.wncc.org.uk. Prefer to leave your comments on the film and your score online rather than on paper? Email to reactions@wncc.org.uk by Wednesday 3 April 2024
Discs of previous shows are available to hire for a modest fee.