

**DORCHESTER FILM SOCIETY**  
**2022/23 SEASON**



**PARALLEL MOTHERS**  
(Language: Spanish)

Director: Pedro Almodóvar, 2021. Running time: 123 minutes.  
Presented by Dorchester Film Society, 26 September, 2022.

“...Showcasing a sure-footed performance from Penélope Cruz, *Parallel Mothers* shapes up as a boisterous swapped-at-birth melodrama, full of mix-ups and moral quandaries, occasionally tilting towards farce. But first appearances are deceptive and the film belies its high-concept conceit. All newborns, we’re told, carry the ghosts of the past in their genes – and so it is with Almodóvar’s latest, which is knotted and subversive; an autopsy of dark Spanish history dressed up as a bright baby shower. It’s a turbulent movie. The ingredients don’t always gel. But it is so generous of spirit that it would be churlish to complain. Most directors give so little. Almodóvar, by contrast, offers an overabundance of riches.

Cruz stars as Janis, a 40-year-old photographer who is determined she will raise her daughter as a single mum, just as her mother and grandmother did before her. In the maternity ward she meets teenager Ana (Milena Smit), who is similarly intent on going it alone. The women become close; they are both in the same boat. Months later, a biological test will establish just how linked these two are.

Almodóvar tackles the plot’s twists and turns with his customary energy and abandon, rustling up a robust, warm-bodied celebration of female solidarity and the makeshift families that serve as life rafts to those who feel adrift. The mothers love each other and are raising their children as best as they can. The trouble is that Janis knows the truth and Ana does not, and it is this deceit and its repercussions that steer the film towards its stranger, darker second act.

Janis’s married lover, it transpires, is a forensic archaeologist and part of a foundation responsible for exhuming the remains of those killed during the Spanish civil war. She wants his help to reclaim her great-grandfather’s body, supposedly buried in a mass grave outside his old village. Towards the end, the aged locals – mostly women – gather in the meadow for their first sight of old bones. It’s a fresh birth of sorts and in its way just as precious.

Let nobody fault Almodóvar’s ambition here. If this finally lacks the polished sweep and completeness of *Pain and Glory*, his previous feature, it compensates

with an air of fraught intimacy and throws out a wealth of ideas, leaving some tantalising loose ends to be picked up and examined. Confined for much of its run to a small quarter of Madrid, *Parallel Mothers* nonetheless looks, Janus-like, to the past and the future and then dares to join the dots between them. It's a film that's bent by hardship and pierced by tragedy but it finally bows out with a message of hope. Almodóvar's implication is plain. It is only by confronting the crimes of the past (whether recent or historic) that Spain's faltering modern-day citizens can set things straight and move on."

Peter Bradshaw, *the Guardian*, 2<sup>nd</sup> July, 2020.

"...There is a sense that *Parallel Mothers* is overstuffed. It's doing too much at once, in terms of subtext, plot twists and political implication. It has a sprawling quality, and a certain messiness to it, right up to its moving – but a tad over-egged – conclusion.

Still, it's easy to forgive the movie for its indulgences when its subject is so deeply felt, and so heart-wrenchingly portrayed by Cruz.

*Parallel Mothers* works in service of a reassuring concept: that our struggles, as mothers of children and children of mothers, have been shared by our forebears, and we should listen to the lessons they have for us."

Christina Newland, *i* September 1<sup>st</sup>, 2021.