



FILM: **PARALLEL MOTHERS**

FDG RATING: 4.0

Film Discussion Group (FDG) Scale is 1-5 (5 is best)

Pedro Almodovar: *director/writer*
Penelope Cruz: *actress, Janis*
Milena Smit: *actress, Ana*

DATE: APRIL 17, 2022

DISCUSSION SUMMARY: **PARALLEL MOTHERS**

The web briefly describes Almodóvar's 2021 film, *Parallel Mothers*, as a story about two single women who share a hospital room where they are both going to give birth. Janis (an Oscar nominated performance by Penelope Cruz) is in her 30s and although her pregnancy is an accident from a brief relationship, she doesn't regret it, while Ana, an adolescent, is scared about becoming a mother from her accidental pregnancy. The two women form a strong bond with one another as they both confront motherhood.

Important themes are explored as we watch their relationship evolve. The core story line has many layers giving the film depth and historical relevance. Almodovar brilliantly blends his message about war: "you cannot bury history" as we watch the lives of the two women intersect not only with each other, but also with past generations. In the opening scene, we see Janis, a professional photographer, meeting with a forensic archeologist, Arturo, who has agreed to excavate and use DNA to identify bodies that have been buried in a mass grave so that their living relatives can give them a proper burial. She is hoping to find the body of her great grandfather who, during the Franco era, was taken from his house, made to dig his own grave, and then shot and dumped in it. He was a photographer and left behind pictures of his neighbors who died with him. This parallel story line grounds the film with historical and political importance. One discussion participant pointed out that the lives of the two women intersect rather than run parallel and their lives, as well as the lives of others in their community become deeply connected.

Almodovar is known to blur the edges of sexuality and gender in his films and here he blurs the edges of motherhood and mothering. Janis gives birth to Cecilia and being financially independent, wants to raise her on her own. We get a hint of something amiss when we sense Janis does not think the baby looks like her or the father, Arturo. Ana gives birth to Anita and is worried about being able to care for her especially since she cannot depend on help from her mother, an actress who flits in and out of Ana's life.

Janis unexpectedly reconnects with Ana, who serves her coffee at an outdoor café, and learns that Anita died from crib death. Janis feels motherly toward Ana, employs her as a nanny, and expresses a desire to teach her how to cook, but also chides her for not knowing the history of the country she lives in. Like a bee in her bonnet, Janis decides to have Cecilia's DNA tested and discovers she is not the birth mother. After no longer being able to hide the truth, she admits to Ana that Cecilia is Ana's baby.

Although one discussion participant thought the film did not hold together, others disagreed noting that the important themes are seamlessly interwoven.

-Loss: Ana lost baby Anita in crib death which is also Janis's loss of her birth baby. Janis gives up baby Cecilia to Ana. And there is also the tragic loss of loved ones in the Spanish Civil War.

-Truth: Janis hides the truth about her baby at first, but as another discussion participant noted, Janis is a truth seeker. She wants to uncover the truth about her grandfather and the others who

were buried in the mass grave. It's an interesting parallel that she uses DNA to identify the birth mother of Cecilia and Arturo uses DNA to identify the dead bodies.

-Identity: Another discussion participant observed the slipperiness of identity. In addition to the confused identity of the babies, it was an infant's rattle held by one of the bodies in the grave that enabled his identity.

-Motherhood, Mothering: We meet all aspects of mothers as this theme is explored from birth mom to the mothering of someone else's child to Janis feeling motherly toward Ana. Neither Ana nor Janis had nurturing mothers. Janis was raised by her grandmother since her hippie mother died young (we loved hearing songs by her namesake Janis Joplin). Ana's self-absorbed actress mother has neglected her daughter her whole life. Several of us pointed out that this film maker understands the essence of women and has made other films that probe dimensions of motherhood.

We agreed the film is engaging without being at all preachy and the acting is outstanding. One discussion participant commented on the honesty of shared moments and the acceptance of inter-connections. Janis actually felt as if she had two daughters: Ana and Cecilia. A favorite scene is at the end when we see the entire extended family standing together.

And we can't overlook the gorgeous scenery and eye-popping colors, especially Almodovar's signature red as seen in Janis's bright-red iPhone and baby carrier,

For almost all of us, the multitude of layers added dimension and historical relevance to the central storyline which is entertaining on its own. We applaud *Parallel Mothers* with a warmly maternal 4.0 on our scale of 1 to 5. (5 is the best.)

Footnote:

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.



See you at the movies!

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