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“Veinte años no es nada,” sings Raimunda, portrayed by Penélope Cruz. In this scene, Raimunda - borrowing the voice of Spanish flamenco singer Estrella Morente - performs the song that gives the title to Pedro Almodóvar’s 2006 film, *Volver*. She sings it for her daughter, Paula, who has never heard her sing before, and - unbeknownst to Raimunda - for her mother, Irene. The song means something different to Raimunda, a woman in her early 30s, Irene, a woman in her early 60s who showed the song to Raimunda, the teenage Paula who is hearing her mother sing for the very first time, and the Spanish audience that may very well recognize this song as a reworked version of Carlos Gardel’s original tango rendition of the track. This is one of the many instances in Spanish cinema during which music simultaneously evokes the memory of characters and audience members to craft a shared world. The crafted world in each film exists beyond the bounds of its runtime. Before the movie begins, after the movie ends, and between cuts, the world is continuous. Music emphasizes this continuity by stitching together different moments in time by tapping into the Spanish national collective memory, as well as the individual memories of characters within a unit, oftentimes a family. Movies that showcase this are *Cría cuervos*, *Volver*, *La vida secreta de las palabras*, and *El laberinto del fauno*.

This essay will analyze instances in which this happens, with careful consideration of the distinction between instances of these occurrences in the films’ runtimes (when the audience experiences something) and their canonical timelines (when the characters experience

something). Memory and music are things humans recall nonlinearly: a 30-year old might remember something from their childhood and something from their breakfast within the same hour. The films listed often touch on this.

The haunting, recurring lullaby in *El laberinto del fauno* serves as a tether that binds the two principal worlds in the movie, the magic of the subterranean kingdom, and the surface, post-civil war Spanish country-side, under the same plane of existence. Throughout the film, Ofelia seems to be the only entity that can travel between or even knows about the two realms, creating the illusion of a wall between the two that only she can penetrate. The lullaby, then, creates a bridge, rather than a wall, based on when it's heard, and where it comes from. The lullaby is first heard in the opening scene of the movie, which isn't only the earliest moment in the movie's runtime, but also the earliest moment in the film's canonical timeline. Followed by this, the narrator begins "hace mucho, mucho tiempo..." and tells the audience about the tragedy of the lost Princesa Moana in the underground kingdom. One watching might presume this is being sung by the princess, as we recognize the voice of a little girl, but it's not explicitly shown, instead serving as a non-diegetic sound cue that helps establish the tone of the film as a dark fairytale seen with childlike wonder.

The melody of the lullaby makes its way into some violin moments in the non-diegetic score, enveloping the world with sonic consistency that immerses the audience in the film. While these inserts might not be particularly obvious, the lullaby comes back in a big way at the end of the film, when Ofelia is shot. The audience sees and hears Mercedes caressing the baby and humming the lullaby. A bridge is formed in this scene because a human sings the song of an ancient, subterranean kingdom, showing that somehow, though it isn't clearly explained, they are

related. In this moment, the song shows how memory of the past isn't something disconnected from a person or a culture; that memory or song of the past is part of a society's composition.

The intentional shift from a non-diegetic rendition at the beginning of the film to a diegetic one at the end punctuates the transcendental nature that songs or memories have. To a spectator, a diegetic piece of music in a movie might seem more "tangible" because it directly interacts with the onscreen characters, but a non-diegetic piece of music doesn't stop being something a spectator processes and digests all the same. This distinction is similar to the divide between an event and memory. Memories can often seem dreamlike or mythical because they are not actively being experienced like an event, but they're still real and actively shape a person's character.

The shift from diegetic to non-diegetic music is also incorporated in Carlos Saura's *Cría cuervos* with the recurring use of "Porque te vas" by Spanish pop singer Jeanette - at times, it's a song that the sisters Ana, Irene, and Maite listen to on a record player, and at times, it's a song playing in the background, outside of the narrative. While Guillermo Del Toro moves the labyrinth lullaby from non-diegetic to diegetic to explain the compositional value the past historical memory has on a society's identity, Carlos Saura introduces "Porque te vas" as a diegetic sound, played on Ana's 45 record player before moving the song to a non-diegetic soundtrack piece. This move is made to showcase the idea that one can appropriate the ideas or memories of a song or performer to sculpt one's world. Listening to the song about adult heartbreak in Ana's youth formed ideas of womanhood and emotions in her mind. The absence of a strong maternal or even parental force in the life of Ana and her sisters made this sculpting process more effective, which is why the song eventually transcended the speakers in Ana's room and became part of the world she inhabited.

More illustrative of this is the fact that the girls tried physically dressing up as grown women while the song was playing in the background, putting on makeup and trying on bras. Their memory doesn't include any sort of adult experience, and Jeanette's song fills in some gaps in their mind and character. It completes an image of womanhood without their mother to guide them.

The physical interaction not just between Ana and clothing while music is playing, but also between Ana and her actual music is especially worth noting. The act of taking a record and putting it on the player ties into the archaeological concept of "thing theory" which states that objects aren't static but are able to engage in direct two way communication between object and user. This allows us to extrapolate not only that the song means something to Ana, but also that Ana is actively searching for meaning in the song. Her putting it on the record player is a conscious activity that isn't only to entertain herself and her sisters; it's her way of starting a conversation with the music.

The act of engaging in direct conversation with music is shown throughout Spanish cinema as a whole but especially highlighted in *Cría cuervos*. It's featured when Ana asks her mom to play the piano for her. This occurs after we're introduced to Jeanette in the runtime but before Ana interacts with Jeanette in the canonical timeline. After initially resisting, Ana's mom eventually caves and plays Catalan composer Frederic Mompou's "Canción y Danzas N. 6." The act of the mother physically producing sound for her daughter is a moment that paints Ana's previously established connection to music as a search for nurture.

The physicality with which Carlos Saura approaches the portrayal of music in the film informs the camera work and editing because these filmmaking devices make it look like characters are actively walking through memories. A key example of this is when Ana, Irene,

and Maite travel to the countryside with their aunt, they take off running, and the camera pans to reveal the children's mother and father walking through the space at an earlier point in canonical time. This meshing together of different timelines is Saura's way of showing *El laberinto del fauno*'s treatment of memory of the past as something that actively engages with and molds the present.

The visual representation of characters traversing through memories is something Pedro Almodóvar invokes in *Volver*. Throughout the movie - sometimes separated, sometimes together - several of the characters in the family unit - Raimunda, Sole, Paula, and Irene - make drives back and forth from Madrid, where they live, through La Mancha to Alcanfor de las Infantas, where they grew up. This journey blurs the line between fantasy and reality, especially as the car drives by the field of windmills. To a Spanish audience member or someone familiar with Spanish culture, the windmills of La Mancha automatically recall Miguel Cervantes's *Don Quixote*, in which the titular character confused the windmills with giants. The mythic quality of the journey is further punctuated by the shot of a windmill superimposed over Sole's face during her nighttime drive back to Madrid. This superimposition technique might remind audiences of the works of Buñuel decades prior, who harnessed the technique to create the illusion of a world beyond reality in his surrealist movies.

The drives through La Mancha in *Volver*, both in their existence in the plot as well as the way in which they are incorporated into the plot, brace the audience for the existence of magic in the world of the movie. To an international viewer, however, the presence of magic will not be as viscerally felt as a Spanish viewer, because Almodóvar draws on locations and artistic instances that a Spanish viewer would recognize as part of their world. Therefore, while an international

viewer may recognize the magic as existing within the confines of the movie, a Spanish viewer would connect with the magic as something existing in the world around them.

Within the movie, different characters would also have a different conversation or connection to the magic, as each generation's interaction with each place and memory is different. The interaction that every different generation can have with one piece of memory is best highlighted in the titular scene of the movie: Raimunda's performance. Almodóvar's passion for highlighting interdisciplinary art in his movies, from fashion to culinary art to music comes to the forefront here, as the performance serves a similar purpose in the movie as a the title track of an album might serve. In an album, the title track shares a name with the album, and across all eras, genres, and cultures, from Metallica's *Master of Puppets*, to Bad Bunny's *Un Verano Sin Ti*, the title track can appear at any moment in the album and presents a lens through which to view the record as a whole, either sonically or lyrically setting a tone that encapsulates the entire album experience.

In other words, this scene conveys everything the movie is trying to say. The sequence begins when flamenco musicians start setting up in the patio of the restaurant during the film crew's wrap party. From a distance, Raimunda recognizes the song they're warming up and sings a line to the amazement of Soledad, who hasn't heard her sing in ages, and Paula, who hasn't heard her sing. The acting here and throughout the sequence showcases the power "Volver" has on the characters to draw emotion. Raimunda takes a drink and goes to sing with the band, after which Sole tells Paula that her grandmother, Irene, showed the song to Raimunda for child auditions. When Raimunda sings, she bridges the span of time between three generations; the song becomes a moment shared by grandmother, daughters, and granddaughter that turns the

film's world from three separate eras to one united time that Irene, Raimunda, and Paula all share.

Simultaneously, the song and its lyrics mean something different to each character. To Paula, the lyrics of "Volver" aren't particularly interesting: she hasn't seen "veinte años" in her life, and she doesn't know a "frente marchita." The song becomes a moment in which her mother opened herself up to her daughter, sharing emotions and memories that Paula doesn't understand the meaning of, but the act of opening up brings them closer.

To Raimunda, the lyrics about returning home can be seen as resonating in two different ways that cause conflicting emotions: returning home to her mother and returning home to her daughter. We see her smile and cry over the course of her performance, suggesting a bittersweetness caused by both of these ideas. On the one hand, in this moment, her mother lives only in her memory. Again, seeing as memory shapes one's current experiences and live, this would be particularly painful as Raimunda's memory of her mother is tainted with rage and confusion. The song also reminds Raimunda of a common ground between her and her mother, making it all the more painful that Irene is gone - the good memories will never have a chance to develop into a good relationship. On the other hand, the song fills her with optimism looking towards the future, towards her daughter. In the light of the huge shift in her life, the death of her husband, Raimunda sees her relationship with Paula as something that can't and won't be as bleak as her relationship with her mother.

The sequence ends with a close shot on Irene crying by herself in the car after having heard Raimunda sing the song that she showed her years ago. The lyrics seem to speak to her directly: she's seemingly returned from the dead, and the decision of whether or not to come back to her daughter's life is in her hands. She thinks her daughter hates her, and she thinks she's

travelled too far for too long to return. “Volver” washes guilt over her, as it causes the realization that her disappearance wasn’t her biggest offense, it was having the ability to reappear and not doing so. The casting of Carmen Maura and Penélope Cruz in this moment and this movie serve as a meta-commentary that opens a dialogue between real life people and the characters on the screen. Irene’s return to her daughters is analogous to Carmen Maura’s return to working with Pedro Almodóvar, despite the time and ill memories prior to the return.

So, can music create a point of agreement and understanding across different times? Almodóvar tells us it can with *Volver*. Saura tells us it can with *Cría cuervos*, particularly in the scene where Ana plays music for her grandma as they look at photos together, creating an unspoken moment of communication between the two. Isabel Coixet tackles a different question in *La vida secreta de las palabras*: can music create a point of agreement and understanding across different cultures? Coixet certainly recognizes the potential for transnational understanding between people and societies, she wouldn’t have made an English-language movie featuring American and Yugoslavian lead characters as a Spanish filmmaker.

In the film, Coixet shows music as a way to catalog the sentiments of a nationality across time. Recording and listening are quite prevalent in the film, with Hanna’s character being deaf, her therapy sessions being recorded on tapes, and the soundtrack filled with songs from across the world. Music makes it easier to learn a foreign language, as it can present new words and pronunciations in ways that stick in people’s heads, and Coixet takes this a step further by portraying music as a device that makes it easier to connect with people of origins foreign to one. The use of music in the film is similar to how Ana uses “Porque te vas” in *Cría cuervos* because like Ana was borrowing the music of an older woman to form her persona, the members of the oil rig in *Vida secreta* borrow cross-cultural music to form the idea of a family on the sea outside

of national borders. This way, songs aren't just communications between one another, but words that anyone can borrow to express their own identity. The lead characters' impairments in the movie, the lack of sight and the lack of hearing, are a way in which Coixet reflects the importance of art as a medium for understanding - sight as a way to interpret movies and hearing as a way to interpret music.

Shifting between diegetic and non-diegetic music, as Guillermo Del Toro and Carlos Saura both did, Isabel Coixet allows the songs in her movie to transcend the plane of reality and achieve a looming, omnipotent sort of quality. The montage with Clem Snide's "Forever, Now and Then" playing non-diegetically while cutting between glimpses of plot threads that weren't completed on screen such as the two lovers and the scientist emphasize this idea. Music oversees all in this moment, and brings together different narratives under one world which the audience knows will continue long after the movie ends.

The mythical, artificial, magical quality that music and memory engage with appears consistently across *Cría cuervos*, *Volver*, *La vida secreta de las palabras*, and *El laberinto del fauno*. Spanish filmmakers seem to be deeply concerned and interested in the blurring of the lines between fantasy and reality, especially when looking back at the past. Can we trust Ana's memories to be real? Are there really ghosts in Alcanfor de las Infantas? Was there a sea monster under Joseph's paddleboard? Is El Reino Subterráneo a real place?

Did what happened really happen? For the Spanish nation, this seems to be a question that plagued many people's thoughts, even years following the Spanish Civil War and Franco's fascist regime. Either through outside forces, such as Franco's censorship, or internal struggles, like Hanna's reluctance to remember the trauma of the Yugoslavian genocide or Raimunda's violation at the hands of her father, memories are buried so deep that they take on a mythic,

ghostly, or artificial quality. Cinema from Spain deals with this, and presents music as an access key with which someone living can access worlds that may have died lifetimes ago - “Veinte años no es nada.”