

**Representation of (Non)Idealized Motherhood in Theater and Film.  
A Comparative Study of Pedro Almodóvar and Federico García Lorca  
Representación de la maternidad (no) idealizada en el teatro y el cine.  
Estudio comparado de Pedro Almodóvar y Federico García Lorca**

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**Abstract:**

Many studies address the relationship between the works of Almodóvar and Lorca, however, there is no research comparing how they represent the figure of the mother, despite the fact that literature has pointed out the importance of this type of character in their works. Given this gap in the literature, the research questions of this article are as follows: (1) Do the mother characters have attributes in common or are they different in both authors? (2) Do the attributes represented in these types of characters correspond to idealized motherhood, or do they break with this stereotype? (3) Do they represent other stereotypes of motherhood commonly used in fiction? This study explores, through documentary analysis, what type of motherhood is found in three films by Almodóvar (produced in the 20th century) and three plays by Lorca, using as a basis the attributes that literature assigns to idealized motherhood and its opposites. The results suggest that although Lorca moves further away from idealized motherhood than Almodóvar, both authors tend to represent conflicted and selfish mothers; complex characters who stray from the patriarchal ideal of the mother: faithful wives with children.

**Resumen:**

Muchos estudios abordan las relaciones entre las obras de Almodóvar y Lorca, sin embargo, no existen investigaciones que comparen cómo representan la figura de la madre, a pesar de que la literatura ha señalado el peso que este tipo de personaje ocupa en sus obras. Ante este vacío en la literatura, las preguntas de investigación de este artículo son las siguientes: (1) ¿tienen los personajes de la madre atributos en común o son distintos en ambos autores?; (2) ¿los atributos representados en este tipo de personajes, se corresponden con la maternidad idealizada, o rompen con este estereotipo?; (3) ¿representan otros estereotipos de la maternidad empleados habitualmente en ficción? Este estudio explora, por medio de un análisis documental, qué tipo de maternidad es la que se encuentra en tres películas de Almodóvar (producidas en el siglo XX) y tres obras teatrales de Lorca, utilizando como base los atributos que la literatura asigna a la maternidad idealizada y sus opuestos. Los resultados apuntan a que si bien Lorca se aleja más de la maternidad idealizada que Almodóvar, los dos autores tienden a representar madres conflictivas y egoístas; personajes complejos que se alejan del ideal patriarcal de la madre: fieles esposas con hijos.

**Palabras clave:** Almodóvar; García Lorca; maternidad idealizada; teatro; cine.

**Keywords:** Almodóvar; García Lorca; Idealized Motherhood; Theatre; Film.

## 1. Introduction

The institution of motherhood has had a decisive influence throughout history. However, as in most cases where women play a central role, little and very superficial attention has been paid to it until recently (Villarme and Massó, 2015, p.1).

Motherhood has important implications for women, both individually and socially and politically. From the traditional patriarchal perspective, once a woman becomes a mother, she is no longer considered an independent human being (Nari, 2004). This process, which strips women of any aspirations, power, consideration or activity other than motherhood, is known as "idealised motherhood" (Visa and Crespo, 2015). In contrast to this model, gender studies advocate for empowered motherhood, which defends the authority, autonomy, authenticity and activism of women-mothers, allowing them to develop their identity as women beyond motherhood (O'Reilly, 2024, p. 139).

Achieving social acceptance of empowered motherhood is therefore one of the challenges facing today's democratic societies. In this sense, cultural representations of motherhood play a decisive role.

In the field of fiction, cinema and theatre, compared to other modes of representation, have had a particularly significant influence on the processes of enculturation and the construction of social models (Blaine, 2025; Latif, 2025), and in the case of 20th-century Spain, two of the most recognised and influential creators are the filmmaker Pedro Almodóvar and the writer Federico García Lorca.

Numerous studies have been conducted comparing different aspects of their works. One of the most analysed common points is the representation of women, as female characters feature prominently in many of their works. However, despite the fact that many studies analyse the representation of mothers in both authors separately, to date there is no study that *compares* and contrasts how they represent the figure of the mother.

This study seeks to explore what type of motherhood is represented in some of Lorca's plays and Almodóvar's films, using the attributes of idealised motherhood (Visa and Crespo, 2015) as a basis for analysis. The research questions that guide this article are as follows: (1) Do the mothers in Lorca and Almodóvar's works have attributes in common, or are they different?; (2) Do the attributes analysed in these types of characters correspond to the stereotype of idealised motherhood or do they break with it?; and (3) Do they represent other stereotypes of motherhood commonly used in fiction?

To answer these research questions, we draw on three sets of literature: the stereotype of idealised motherhood and other stereotypes of mothers commonly used in fiction; comparative research on Lorca and Almodóvar; and, finally, studies on the figure of the mother in both authors.

## **2. Theoretical framework**

### **2.1. The "Idealised motherhood" and other stereotypes applied in the realm of fiction**

Motherhood "has not been considered a relevant philosophical issue, in itself and in its bio-socio-cultural complexity, until relatively recently" (Villarme and Massó, 2015, p. 1). Traditionally defined as the default activity of the female gender, motherhood lacked relevant status within the framework of patriarchal values. This does not mean that it was alien to patriarchy; on the contrary, from a patriarchal perspective, it has been modelled as an ideal to which every mother should aspire. Visa and Crespo (2015) describe it as unproblematic motherhood, where the mother is responsible for maintaining the home and raising the children.

Virginia Woolf, in her speech *Professions for Women* (1931), described the figure of the idyllic mother in the following terms:

Perhaps you don't know what I mean by Angel of the House (...) She was intensely understanding. She was intensely charming. She was completely unselfish. She excelled in the difficult arts of family life. She sacrificed herself daily. If there was chicken for dinner, she would take the drumstick; if there was a draught, she would sit in it; in short, she was so constituted that she never had an opinion or a wish of her own, but always preferred to adhere to the opinion and wish of others. (Wolf, 1931, p. 3)

This idealised view of motherhood stems from the transposition of the concepts of woman and mother, where women cease to be considered independent human beings and become solely mothers (Nari, 2004). This process has been designated by some authors as "idealised motherhood" (Visa and Crespo, 2015); others have conceptualised it as "intensive motherhood" (Green, 2010); and there are authors who refer to it simply as "motherhood" (Quiroz, 2020; Badinter, 1981). In this research, we have chosen to use the expressions "idealised motherhood" or "idyllic motherhood" (Visa and Crespo, 2015), as we consider that they more accurately convey the implications for women.

Although idealised motherhood is a stereotype of the ideal mother created by patriarchy, it is not the only one. In fictional cultural representations, there are other stereotypes of motherhood that function as counter-models to idealised motherhood. Guarinos (2008) distinguishes six stereotypes of mothers in cinema: *mater amabilis*, *mater dolorosa*, castrating mother, monster mother, stepmother, and childless mother. The stereotype of idealised motherhood corresponds to that of *mater amabilis*: "She is the happy, middle-aged housewife, loving and attentive to her children and husband. A good person with little to contribute in any sense." (Guarinos, 2008, p. 116). This variety of stereotypes makes it possible to avoid a polarised analysis between

idealised and non-idealised motherhood, broadening the framework from which to classify the figure of the mother in the works analysed; for it may be that, even if they do not reflect the attributes of idealised motherhood, they fall into other stereotypes.

In contrast to idealised motherhood, gender studies advocate for empowered motherhood, where women, in addition to being mothers, can be many other things, and where motherhood is not limited to strict moral approaches that define what it means to be a 'good' mother (O'Reilly, 2024).

## **2.2 Comparative studies of Lorca and Almodóvar**

The influence of Lorca's plays on Almodóvar's films has been extensively studied from an intertextuality perspective (Amaya, 2022; De la Torre, 2017, 2018; Smith, 1995). The most obvious example is found in *All About My Mother* (1999), specifically the scene that dramatises a monologue from Lluís Pacual's play *Haciendo Lorca* (1996), in which the playwright interweaves passages from *Yerma* and *Blood Wedding* (Cabrera, 2020).

However, intertextuality goes beyond the dramatic construction of characters, conflicts and plots; as De la Torre (2017) points out, there are intertexts associated with a *queer* sensibility that both artists share.

### **2.2.1 Criticism of patriarchy and the prominence of women**

In contrast to the widespread prominence of male characters in fiction, Lorca and Almodóvar will give dramatic weight to female characters, endowing them with complexity (Hernández, 2004), and whose conflicts are associated with a critique of patriarchy.

In Lorca's case, the conflicts of his female characters are marked by the oppression of a world normalised by patriarchy (Fernando, 2019). Almodóvar, also critical of patriarchy (Camino, 2022), employs two

strategies to transfer masculine traits to feminine characters: on the one hand, by creating female characters with masculine attributes (Akyön, 2014); on the other, by making solidarity among women a principle of overcoming adversity: "all evil is eliminated by solidarity among women themselves" (Akyön, 2014, p. 22). This model of solidarity endows women with a virtue that had been considered exclusively masculine in genres such as westerns, or in subgenres such as gangster films (Lin, 2011).

The recurring appearance of female protagonists in Almodóvar's films has earned him the label of "director of women", a concept that was used in Hollywood in the middle of the last century to refer to those directors who portrayed female characters far removed from the more traditional patriarchal image (Maddison, 2000). Lorca, for his part, has been the subject of numerous studies focusing on the role played by female characters in his dramatic work (Degoy, 1996; Vázquez de Castro, 2001) and the way in which he reflects the problems of Spanish women of his time (Nieva, 2008).

### **2.3 The figure of the mother in the work of Almodóvar and Lorca**

Mothers are a recurring theme in Almodóvar's films, which has allowed him to address a wide range of representations: housewives, artists, married women, widows and single mothers; rural and urban mothers; mothers belonging to the LGBTI+ community or prostitutes. Despite their differences, they all share a common trait: "they are not helpless, passive objects waiting to be rescued" (Akyön, 2014, p. 14). They are active, complex, ambiguous and sometimes contradictory characters: they love their children, but they do not exercise idealised motherhood.

The works of Lorca that most develop the figure of the mother form his rural trilogy: *Blood Wedding*, *Yerma* and *The House of Bernarda Alba*. In these

plays, women occupy almost the entire text: in *Yerma* and *Blood Wedding*, the absence of male characters is notable; in *The House of Bernarda Alba*, it is extreme (Gabriele, 1993), as no male character has any lines.

The perception of femininity at the time Lorca was writing was based on three pillars: love, marriage and motherhood (Nieva, 2008, p. 156). All three are problematised through his female characters, who are under pressure to uphold their honour and lack alternatives when they fail to fulfil their main role in society as women: to be mothers. This is the theme of *Yerma*: a woman who is unable to become a mother and suffers from fear of not meeting the expectations of the community (Cabello, 2008).

However, the defence of this code of honour is not embodied in male characters, but in mothers, who thus become transmitters and defenders of social values in the private sphere (Moncó, 2010; Cabello, 2008). In *Blood Wedding*, the Mother explains, first to the Groom and later to the Bride, the values associated with gender: "Your grandfather left a son on every corner. I like that. Men, men: wheat, wheat" (1969, p. 1174). She is more emphatic with the Bride: "A man, some children and a two-foot-wide wall for everything else" (1969, p. 1200).

Lorca's mothers are neither benevolent nor loving towards their children. Although they love them (García, 2017), their concern for complying with social values dominates their feelings.

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1. Hypotheses and case studies**

A review of the literature allows us to propose the following hypotheses: (H1) the characters analysed deviate from the stereotype of idealised motherhood; (H2): the treatment of the figure of the mother is similar in both authors.



To test the two hypotheses, a documentary analysis of three plays by Lorca and three films by Almodóvar was carried out. The following criteria were used to select the sample: 1) the works had to have been created in the 20th century; 2) motherhood had to play a decisive role in the structure of the work; 3) the characters analysed had to play a prominent role in the work. In addition, two plays and two films were selected in which the characters were protagonists, and, in order to determine whether the secondary characters follow the same parameters as the main ones, one play and one film were selected in which the characters analysed are secondary.

Table 1. Case studies

	Work and year	Character	Type of character
Lorca	<i>María Pineda</i> (1927)	María Pineda	Protagonist
	<i>Bodas de sangre</i> (1933)	Mother of boyfriend	Supporting role
	<i>La casa de Bernarda Alba</i> (1936)	Bernarda Alba	Protagonist
Almodóvar	<i>¿Qué he hecho yo para merecer esto?</i> (1984)	Gloria	Protagonist
	<i>Tacones Lejanos</i> (1991)	Becky	Protagonist
	<i>Todo sobre mi madre</i> (1999)	The Mother	Supporting role

Source: Own work

### 3.2. Dimensions and coding of idealised motherhood

In order to carry out the most nuanced analysis possible, a code book has been created with the attributes that characterise idealised motherhood from different sources in literature (Visa, 2015; Badinter, 1991; Douglas and Michaels, 2005; Salk, 1978; Green, 2010; Luz, 1877; Aliaj, 2013; Quiroz, 2020 and Nari, 2004). Each researcher coded a film and a play. Subsequently, a joint analysis was carried out, on the basis of which the definitions of the attributes and their opposites were established (Table 2). A scale from -2 to +2 was created, with -2 being the value furthest from idealised motherhood in that attribute, 0 being neutral and +2 being closest



to the stereotype<sup>1</sup>. Each researcher recoded a play and a film, and finally all the codings were reviewed together.

Table 2. Definition and scope of attributes and their opposites

Attributes	Definition and scope
Generous	Puts their needs, interests, and principles before those of others. Refers only to their attitude in their private life, with their family and closest circle (Visa and Crespo, 2015). Its opposite value is selfishness.
Loving	Represents a mother's unconditional love for her children, even if it is not reciprocated. It may involve acknowledging affection for children beyond the private sphere (Badinter, 1991; Quiroz, 2020). Its opposite value is affectivity.
Compassionate	Indicates the ability to put oneself in another's shoes and actively engage in helping one's husband or children overcome the situation. It requires patience and listening, and a calm and kind attitude (Salk, 1978; Douglas and Michales, 2005). Its opposite value is indifference.
Caring	Provides the care that the family needs, especially children when they are young and adolescents. It may involve giving up personal or professional aspirations in favour of family well-being (Green, 2010; Douglas and Michaels, 2005). Its opposite value is neglect.
Self-sacrifice	Represents voluntary sacrifice for the family, through the renunciation or denial of one's own desires, feelings, aspirations or interests. It is more extreme than generosity, as it involves varying degrees of self-sacrifice (Luz, 1877; Green, 2010; Douglas and Michaels, 2005). Its opposite value is indifference.
Non-Confrontat	It is related to characters who are submissive to the male will. The non confrontational personality avoids confrontation and conflict, which can sometimes involve verbal and/or physical violence. (Aliaj, 2013; Quiroz, 2020; Nari, 2004). Its opposite value is the confrontational person.
Exemplary	This represents the patriarchal ideal of what every woman should aspire to: to be married, have children and be faithful in order to maintain the family's reputation; this is their greatest social recognition (Lorite, 2012). Its opposite value is dissent.

Source: Own elaboration.

### 3.3. Analytical strategy

The qualitative analyses and codifications of the dimensions were carried out following the approaches of documentary analysis. Data triangulation (Aguilar and Barroso, 2015) has made it possible to combine qualitative data,

<sup>1</sup> This coding was done with negative and positive values, taking into account that, given the very small sample size, it was neither possible nor relevant to apply statistics beyond the arithmetic mean and frequency distribution.

which provides analytical depth to the case studies (Galeano, 2020), with quantitative data, which has facilitated an overview of the works analysed by each author, as well as a comparison between the works of both authors.

Table 3. *Codification of dimensions*

Dimensions	-2	-1	0	1	2
Selfishness - Generosity	Totally selfish	More selfish than generous	Neither selfish nor generous	More generous than selfish	Totally generous
Coldness - Affectivity	Totally cold	More cold than affectionate	Neither cold nor affectionate	More affectionate than cold	Totally affectionate
Insensitivity - Empathy	Totally insensitive	More insensitive than empathetic	Neither insensitive nor empathetic	More empathetic than insensitive	Totally empathetic
Insensitivity - Empathy	Totally inattentive	More inattentive than caring	Neither inattentive nor caring	More caring than inattentive	Totally caring
Inattention - Care	Totally inattentive	More inattentive than caring	Neither inattentive nor caring	More caring than inattentive	Totally caring
Indifference - Self-sacrifice	Totally indifferent	More indifferent than self-sacrificing	Neither indifferent nor self-sacrificing	More self-sacrificing than indifferent	Totally self-sacrificing
Conflictive – Non-Conflictive	Totally conflictive	More conflictive than non- conflictive	Neither conflictive nor non- conflictive	More non- conflictive than conflictive	Totally conflictive
Dissent - Exemplary	Totally dissident	More dissident than exemplary	Neither dissident nor exemplary	More exemplary than dissident	Totally exemplary

Source: Own elaboration.

## **4. Analysis**

### **4.1. Analysis of Federico García Lorca's characters**

#### **4.1.1. Bernarda Alba (1936)**

Bernarda is a widow with five daughters and a dictatorial personality who shows no affection or empathy. Generosity is not one of her attributes either, as reflected in the scene where she prefers to eat (by) herself rather than let the rest of the family eat (García Lorca, 1982, p. 119). Bernarda is, therefore, a selfish character, with negative consequences for her daughters' lives. One of the most obvious moments occurs when, in order to maintain her honour, she sabotages her daughter Martirio's marriage proposal to Enrique, her only suitor. Bernarda not only does not regret her words and actions, but also feels proud, indicating a clear lack of empathy.

Bernarda's personality is also defined by the speeches and actions of other characters. La Poncia is the one who contributes the most assessments of Bernarda: she considers her cold, insensitive and cruel, far removed from values such as affection, empathy and self-sacrifice for her family.

Any behaviour on the part of her daughters that suggests weakness is a source of shame and censure for Bernarda. Faced with Magdalena's grief as she mourns the loss of her father, Bernarda says to her: "Magdalena, don't cry; if you want to cry, go under the bed. Do you hear me?" (p. 124). Not only is she not affectionate with them, she is also aware of it: "Even if my mother is crazy, I am in my right mind and I know perfectly well what I am doing" (p. 144). Bernarda's relationship with her daughters consists of dictating rules of obedience and restricting their freedom (García Lorca, 1982, pp. 143-144): "a daughter who disobeys ceases to be a daughter and becomes an enemy" (p. 178).

The only dimension of idealised motherhood that Bernarda fulfils is that of being an exemplary figure. The most important value is honour, and she does not hesitate to put it before the care and well-being of her daughters, even if this causes them sadness and suffering (García Lorca, 1982, p. 183). Faced with the unexpected death of her youngest daughter, Bernarda does not hesitate for a moment: she gives orders, demands silence and assures her daughters that they can cry in private, but what is truly important at that moment is to know that Adela has died a virgin (García Lorca, 1982, p. 199).

The importance of keeping up appearances and maintaining composure in public is almost non-existent in private. Bernarda's conflict with the other characters is constant throughout the play, leading to bitter and harsh situations, even resorting to violence against some of her daughters, such as Angustias and Martirio (García Lorca, 1982, pp. 167-168).

#### **4.1.1 Mother-in-law**

The character does not have a name, but is known by her dramatic role in the story. In this case, she is the mother of the male protagonist of *Blood Wedding* (1931).

The groom's mother is a woman with a strong personality. Her relationship with her son seems good, and her caring nature is evident in the early dialogues (García Lorca, 1969, p. 1172), but it soon becomes clear that her attitude is motivated by her own needs rather than her son's well-being. She is, therefore, a selfish character, who would even have preferred her son to be a woman so that he would stay at home, keep her company and relieve her of the worries generated by a son outside the control of the private sphere (García Lorca, 1969, p. 1174). When her son tells her that he is going to get married, she reluctantly

accepts it, emphasising that she will be left alone, which not only indicates a lack of self-sacrifice but also of empathy (García Lorca, 1969, p. 1175).

The character's lack of generosity and self-sacrifice is expressed through her resentment towards the Félix family, with whom she had a conflict that led to the death of her husband and her other son (García Lorca, 1969, p. 1182). Her resentment generates attitudes that distance her from idyllic motherhood, as she puts it before her son's happiness. The neighbour is critical of her attitude in this regard: "Don't stand in the way of your son's happiness. Don't say anything to him. You are old. So am I. It is up to you and me to remain silent" (p. 1183).

On the wedding day, the mother's resentment towards the Félix family (García Lorca, 1969, pp. 1127, 1128 and 1190) is expressed through comments that cause discomfort and tension among the guests. The Mother explodes when the Bride runs away with Leonardo and sends her son to pursue them in order to save her honour, even if it means his death (García Lorca, 1969, p. 1244).

Although the character's obsession leads her to put her son's life at risk, several of her lines indicate her affectionate nature, especially towards her deceased husband and son (García Lorca, 1969, p. 1128), even refusing to move house, as this would mean abandoning their bodies (García Lorca, 1969, p. 1175).

Self-sacrifice, as a typical attribute of idealised motherhood, is expressed through the passion with which the character shows her sacrifice and suffering for her family (García Lorca, 1969, p. 1128). Her devotion to her family, although not exercised through care, involves giving up a more comfortable and fulfilling life for the sake of faithfully remembering her deceased relatives.

The importance of honour and society's opinion (García Lorca, 1969, p. 1268) makes her an exemplary woman, faithful to her late husband and devoted to her children. Now in her old age, her only possible fulfilment as a woman lies in the hope of caring for her future grandchildren.

Like the character of Bernarda, the Mother of the Groom not only embodies the most traditional rural values of Spain at the time (García Lorca, 1969, pp. 1174 and 1241), but also uses physical violence (García Lorca, 1969, p. 1268), although in this case she does not use it against her son, but against the Bride.

#### **4.1.2 Mariana Pineda**

Mariana Pineda, inspired by the historical figure who fought for the liberal cause against the restoration of absolutism, is a widow with a boy and a girl, for whom motherhood is secondary. Mariana does not take care of her children; it is Angustias—whom Lorca calls the adoptive mother—and Clavela, the maid, who take care of them (García Lorca, 1969, pp. 788 and 816-818). On occasions, the children demand attention from their mother, but Mariana does not fulfil their wishes (García Lorca, 1969, pp. 825-826), which indicates that she is not a self-sacrificing woman. The character only appeals to her motherhood in situations of weakness: when she begs for her life (García Lorca, 1969, p. 856) or when she plays the victim (García Lorca, 1969, p. 788).

Generosity, care and self-sacrifice for her family are displaced by her love for Pedro and her liberal convictions. Furthermore, the character is aware of this (García Lorca, 1969, p. 805), which indicates a conscious decision to prioritise some values over others. However, the few interactions she has with her children are marked by affection and empathy (García Lorca, 1969, pp. 825-826 and 859).



Her dissent from established values causes conflicts (García Lorca, 1969, p. 857) and gossip (García Lorca, 1969, p. 882). In her private life, her romantic relationship with Pedro after becoming a widow and her lack of involvement in raising her children reveal a profoundly disruptive way of being in the world, which is perfectly in line with her struggle for the progressive principles in the public sphere.

We are faced with a woman-mother who puts her sexual freedom and progressive political principles before what, according to the patriarchal values of the time, a woman and mother should be.

## **4.2. Analysis of Pedro Almodóvar's characters**

### **4.2.1. Gloria**

The protagonist of *What Have I Done to Deserve This?* (1984), is the mother of two children and lives with her husband and mother-in-law. Although she is portrayed as an exemplary character in public, the viewer will see that her actions and words indicate the opposite in private: in the first few minutes of the film, she has extramarital sex (without regret) with a man at the gym where she works as a cleaner.

Her relationship with her husband is marked by a lack of communication and a regime of servitude in which Gloria only attends to Antonio's needs. This situation, fraught with conflict and frustration for Gloria, will lead her to murder him (1:07:40). Faced with the crime she has committed, Gloria does not cry or show sadness; on the contrary, she remains cold and devises a plan to avoid discovery, which indicates a bold and determined character. The character arc shows us a woman who goes from being submissive and resigned to rebelling against the oppression she suffers.

Throughout the film, Gloria is presented as a woman devoted to family life, both inside and outside the home. Her generosity and self-sacrifice

for her children can be seen in the food (00:10:00) and clothing (00:49:30) she provides for them. However, her treatment of them is neither affectionate nor empathetic; she even blames them for her discomfort (00:38:32). The coldness with which she addresses her children is particularly significant with Toni (01:20:49). The only time Gloria shows affection for her son is in the scene where Toni, before leaving for the village, gives his mother money and asks her to stop taking pills. At that moment, Gloria realises that she does not know her son, showing sincere sadness (01:29:50).

Her pill consumption explains many of the character's attitudes, actions and decisions. It is her addiction that leads her to make bad decisions or treat her children badly. Furthermore, it is her addiction that causes her to be more confrontational both within and outside the family environment (01:04:42).

Gloria tries to take care of her whole family, including her grandmother, but she is so overwhelmed that she ends up neglecting everyone. Desperation over a lack of money leads her to leave her son Miguel with a paedophile dentist (00:41:15). The character becomes contradictory in the next scene, where we see Gloria buying a hair straightener (00:42:27).

As the film progresses, Gloria becomes more selfish. However, when she is left alone, with no family members at home, she seems to intend to commit suicide by jumping off the balcony, which shows that, although she does not want the role of woman-mother that society has assigned her in family life (00:19:28), she does not understand any other way of existing.

#### 4.2.2. Becky

Becky del Páramo, a well-known singer, is Rebeca's mother in *Tacones Lejanos* (1991). The mother-daughter relationship plays a prominent role, both in the plot and in the psychology of the characters.

Becky is characterised by a lack of self-sacrifice and generosity, as she prioritises her professional career and shirks her responsibility as a mother. This is demonstrated by the 15 years she has lived in Mexico devoted to her professional career, during which she has not seen her daughter (08:08:13).

The *flashbacks* at the beginning of the film show Becky caring for Rebeca (00:03:15), but the comments of other characters reveal Becky's indifference towards her daughter; what really interests her is her artistic career (00:06:12). The conversation between mother and daughter at the airport reinforces this idea: Becky is more concerned about her artistic prospects in Madrid than about seeing her again (00:11:19).

When Becky returns to Spain, she tries to rebuild her relationship with her daughter, but shortly after settling in Madrid, she begins a romantic relationship with her son-in-law, who had been her lover in the past (00:38:01), indicating an absence of qualities associated with idealised motherhood (generosity, affection, empathy, care and self-sacrifice).

After confessing that she has murdered Manuel, Rebeca goes to prison, but Becky does not visit her. Once again, she puts her own emotions above those of her daughter (01:06:55). Finally, Judge Domínguez convinces Becky to see her daughter. During the meeting, when Rebeca confesses to being responsible for her stepfather's death, Becky slaps her, showing no sign of empathy or sensitivity. Only when she is about to die does she recognise the damage she has inflicted on her daughter

and try to redeem herself by taking the blame for Manuel's murder to exonerate her daughter from the crime: "I gave her nothing in life, so it's only fair that my death should be of some use to her" (01:38:23).

As with other characters in Almodóvar's films, Becky is a woman with an extreme personality. Her need to be the centre of attention prevents her from accepting criticism or disagreement, leading her to lie in order to justify herself and safeguard her ego.

Her life has not been exemplary as a mother, as, in addition to shirking her maternal responsibilities and acting in a way that is outside conventional values, she has a character that is far from submissive and leads a dissolute life.

#### **4.2.3 Rosa's mother**

Rosa's mother is a secondary character in *All About My Mother* (1999) who has no name, as her only function in the dramatic structure is to be a mother. The first time she appears, she shows joy at seeing her daughter, although she reproaches her for not visiting her (00:31:50).

Rosa's mother is prejudiced; she does not want to hire Manuela because she thinks she is one of the prostitutes her daughter helps. She gets rid of her, creating tension, albeit discreetly and politely. However, when she is alone with her daughter, she is much harsher (00:32:55), displaying an authoritarian character.

The tone she uses with Rosa shows a lack of empathy and affection, which causes Rosa to feel distrustful of her mother. For this reason, when Rosa needs to rest due to her pregnancy, she decides not to tell her mother anything. However, Manuela manages to get her to visit her; during the meeting, despite her efforts to appear empathetic (01:29:50), she makes it clear that she is disappointed that she has

become pregnant—being a nun—(01:14:00). It is clear that social appearances are what drive the mother to adopt this attitude. In order to avoid being exposed to gossip and judgement, Rosa's care will fall to Manuela, whom she offers money and asks to keep her informed of her daughter's progress (01:15:15). In this sense, Rosa's mother can be considered exemplary, because although she is not submissive, she is concerned with projecting a public image in line with established social values.

Finally, when Rosa dies in childbirth, her mother and Manuela agree that the latter will have custody of the child, which once again indicates the absence of most of the dimensions of idealised motherhood. The only sign of affection towards her grandson is allowing Manuela to care for him at home. However, the fact that the mother contracted HIV when she became pregnant and may have passed it on to her child not only causes rejection of the baby but also fear that people will find out (01:27:32). Once again, concern for what others may think is evident.

The negativity of Rosa's mother's comments, attitudes and actions is reinforced by the exemplary contrast of Manuela, who embodies almost all the values of idealised motherhood, despite not being the child's biological mother.

### 4.3 Comparative analysis

Table 4. Comparison of results between characters and authors

	Lorca			Almodóvar			Media
	Bernarda Alba	Mother Boyfriend	Mariana	Gloria	Becky	Mother Rosa	
Selfishness - Generosity	-2	-2	-2	-1	-2	-2	-1,8
Coldness - Affectivity	-2	-2	+1	-2	+1	-2	-0,8
Insensitivity - Empathy	-2	-2	+1	-2	+1	-1	-0,8
Inattention - Care	-2	+1	-2	+1	-2	-2	-1,0
Indifference - Self-denial	-2	+1	-2	+1	-2	-2	-1,0
Conflictive - Non-conflictive	-2	-2	-2	-2	-2	-1	-1,8
Dissent - Exemplarity	+2	+1	-2	+2	-2	+2	0,5
Average for characters	1,57	-0,7	-0,9	-0,1	-0,9	-1,0	
Average per author	-1,0			-0,7			

Source: Own elaboration.

## 5. Discussion of results

Despite the differences between the characters' personalities and their diverse historical and dramatic contexts, all of them stray significantly from "idealised motherhood" (Visa and Crespo, 2015), thus confirming the first hypothesis (H1).

The two dimensions that have an almost equal value in all characters, and whose average represents the most extreme value (-1.8), are selfishness-generosity and conflictive-non-conflictive. In the first case, all score -2 (very selfish), except for Gloria, who scores -1 (more selfish than generous). The fact that the characters put their own interests before those of the family is related to the ideas put forward by Hernández (2004), for whom the authors' intention is to create complex characters, with nuances and contradictions; characters far removed from the stereotype of idealised motherhood. In the conflictive-non-conflictive dimension, all the characters also score -2, except for Rosa's mother (-1). Although conflict as an attribute plays a different role in each character, none of the mothers analysed is submissive, including Gloria, as the character's initial submission will disappear as the plot progresses.

The only dimension that obtains a positive average value is dissent-exemplarity (+0.5). Were it not for this attribute, the characters' averages would have been much further removed from the values associated with idealised motherhood. One explanation is that all the other attributes unfold in the characters' private sphere, while exemplarity takes place in the public sphere. Of the six characters analysed, the only ones who do not fit the mould of exemplarity are Mariana Pineda (-2) and Becky (-2), and in both cases the characters prioritise their romantic desires (Mariana and Becky), their political ideals (Mariana) or their artistic careers (Becky) over their children and



the image that society may have of them. In this sense, it can be said that the typical transposition of idealised motherhood, in which being a mother curtails other dimensions of womanhood.

The rest of the characters adopt different positive values. Bernarda Alba takes scores the value 2 and the groom's mother 1, while Almodóvar's two characters take score the value 2. These results are significant, as they indicate that, although they possess attributes that break with the patriarchal values assigned to motherhood, not only are they unable to project them into the public sphere for fear of censorship or rejection, but patriarchy has also assigned them the task of safeguarding and enforcing them. This fact may make more sense in the case of Lorca's characters, given the historical period in which he writes and the fact that honour is one of the elements that underpins much of the conflict in his works. But, in Almodóvar's case, this is not so expected, as it is assumed that in the democratic context in which his works and characters are set, there is a greater degree of freedom. This indicates that, despite appearances, the social pressure on the figure of the mother in the public sphere is far from being overcome.

As for possible differences between the main and secondary characters, neither the documentary analysis nor the values provided by the coding indicate that there are significant differences from the main characters.

Overall, the analyses show similar values in the treatment of motherhood by both authors (H2). The character of Gloria is the closest to a neutral value (-1), indicating that both authors move away from idealised motherhood through passionate, authoritarian, contradictory or deceitful mothers.

Finally, if we apply the stereotypes of mother characters identified by Guarinos (2008), we can see that of the six stereotypes he identifies

(*mater amabilis*, *mater dolorosa*, castrating mother, monster mother, stepmother and childless mother), there are three characters that come close to two of them. On the one hand, Bernarda corresponds to the castrating mother: "The dominant mother who restricts her children's freedom of action and thought" (p. 117). However, it is important to note that Bernarda embodies the defence of the macho values of patriarchy as if it were a kind of fatality from which it is impossible to escape and in which, if a woman wants to survive, she has no choice but to obey it. Therefore, the stereotype of the castrating mother symbolises in reality a castrating machismo whose worst effects are borne by young women (in this case, Bernarda's daughters). Women full of desires and longings, unaware of the repercussions of breaking the established code.

The other applicable stereotype is that of *the mater dolorosa*: "the suffering mother who watches her children being mistreated by life and who may even mistreat her. It is one of the few clichés of middle age or approaching old age" (116). The character who most closely fits this stereotype is the Mother of the Groom, where suffering for the family is repeatedly evoked by the character.

Therefore, the convergence of values contrary to idealised motherhood and the limited applicability of other stereotypes to the characters allows us to affirm that the authors provide an image of motherhood that is problematised and laden with social criticism, vindicating a different image of motherhood and women. This would confirm the theories that argue that both Lorca and Almodóvar criticise the patriarchal model through their female characters, in this case, mothers.

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