

# Objectification of the Female Body in Almodóvar's films from the 1980s to the 2000s.

## Introduction:

I am a woman, and as such my position in this society is one of disadvantage with respect to the male gender. Throughout our existence we have been "objects" or "possessions" controlled by men and, although we have made great progress thanks to various feminist movements, today we are often subjugated to the roles established by the patriarchy.

This oppression manifests itself in many ways, and there is one in particular that goes unnoticed. Art. And in this case, we will focus on the branch of cinema/film. Every country has a set of "national treasures" that make them proud, and that is why when one of them does something questionable it is hard to accept or judge it, after all, it is a product of our culture. But it has to be done and that is why we will talk about the Spanish director Pedro Almodóvar and three of his films: *Tie me up tie me down!* (1989), *Kika* (1993) and *Talk to Her* (2002) (pic) It is my country and culture and therefore I am able to give a deeper analysis of the factors that have affected the director's works.

These three dramas, arranged in chronological order, portray with increasing gravity the forced subjugation of women to men, without treating it with much respect, but rather presenting it as something normal, comical or excusable. And so, to have a better understanding of this topic and how it is affected it is necessary to explore two relevant aspects that seriously influence the director's films: women and their representation in art (pictures and paintings); and the impact of the Spanish dictatorship under Franco's rule on Spanish cinema and art.

For better or worse, art, in all its forms, has allowed us to express our interpretation of our surroundings, dreams, landscapes and people, and this expression has changed from culture to culture. Nudism is a recurring theme and one that often focuses on female physiology, it became a staple in European art during the European Renaissance period, especially from the 1500s onwards, it was not the first time that considered naked bodies but it was a reinvention of such, from ancient cultures such as the Roman and Greek.

*Ways of seeing* (1972) by John Berger, both in video and book form, is an excellent source of information that digs into the effects and motifs of female nudity in art. Throughout the entire work, Berger surprises us with observations from a more feminist perspective, delving more into the role that the artist gives to women in their work, and reaches conclusions that even I had not taken into account and that has been of great use to me in this study (video). One of these reflections is to know how to differentiate between the naked and the nude; *Naked* (pic) is you for yourself, your most natural form, your privacy, that comes with no opinions of others; in opposition to that we have the *Nude* (pic), which is an object, to be seen, to be judged or to be shared, admired. The nude goes hand in hand with the discerning eye, the observer who wants to see in our reflections the fulfilment of their pleasures and it is only they who are allowed to enjoy such gaze and fantasy.

A clear example of the nude would be *Vanity* by Hans Memling (Circa 1485) (pic), one would think this shows both naked (a woman admiring herself) and nude (a naked body to be admired), what this painting really does is blatantly blame the object of admiration for enjoying her reflection, despite the fact that her naked body is practically the only thing we can appreciate, she is completely facing us, except for her face, which is slightly turned towards the mirror, although in my opinion, the protagonist has a distant gaze, as if she were in another world, not even aware of the reflection.

Another example is the painting *Venus and cupid* by Sir Peter Lely, circa 1668 (pic) Berger states that “this nakedness is not, however, an expression of her own feelings; it is a sign of her submission to the owner’s feelings or demands” (John Berger, 52).

This observation is key to the situation of the women in the three movies, each of their stories are affected by the sexual desires of the men that are attracted to their physic, these men put the females through bad and traumatic situations only to fulfil the pleasure of a fantasy they created upon the image of a woman. This issue and the next that we will address are present in a source we will see throughout the video: Laura Mulvey’s book *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* (1975) (pic). Here the writer’s intention is to discuss the presence of the erotic pleasure focusing on the image of the woman and what it eventually means. Something that I consider will give an insight into the next topic is this quote of hers: “The thrill that comes from leaving the past behind without rejecting it, transcending outworn or oppressive forms, or daring to break with normal pleasurable expectations in order to conceive a new language of desire.” (subtitles) (Introduce this a bit my own way)

With the help of sources such as “La represión franquista y la transformación de España tras la dictadura” (Franco's repression and the transformation of Spain after the dictatorship) (subtitles) a PhD by Professor Brenda Werth (2014) and “Arte, ideología e identidad en los años del franquismo” (“Art, ideology and identity in the Franquist years”) (subtitles) a chapter from the book “book of plastic and monumental arts” by Valeriano Bozal (2006) (subtitles) I am able to provide a small look at what Spain’s recent history has to do with Almodóvar’s style.

The period of Franco's dictatorship is something that not only affected the attitude of the Spanish nation but is also reflected in Almodóvar's films, which shout and demand a revolution in art that had been silenced for many years. This era is a very recent part of my country's history and it is very easy to find people with traumatic experiences of such times, your parents, your grandparents and stories of their families, and just as easily you can find sympathisers of the past regime. (Pictures of these events)

As a result of the 1936 coup d'état orchestrated by General Francisco Franco and the Nationalists, Spain entered into a military-fascist dictatorship. Repressive policies characterized by isolationism and conservatism. After Franco's death in 1975, Spain's political system and culture underwent rapid transformations.

A relevant aspect in our case was the great cultural repression that affected the media and general culture, which was based on extreme control in order to isolate the country from ideologies that the dictatorship considered dangerous for the institution. In order to eliminate any content considered politically or morally offensive, the Junta Superior de Censura (Higher Censorship Board) was created in 1937, which worked in conjunction with the Comisión Nacional de Cinematografía (National Film Commission). As expected, the Catholic Church was part of the censorship committee, which ultimately ensured that the content was in line with the catechism. (subtitles)

To quickly explain this here's an example of how these rules were applied. (Picture of the actress)

In an effort to redress the negative effects that Spain's exclusion from more modern countries had on its economy, the dictatorship decided in 1959 to introduce more open economic policies with the Plan de Estabilización (Stabilisation Plan). This meant a "re-opening" of Spain and with it came tourism, which not only boosted the country's economy but also brought with it the trends of the time, a change to modernity, fashion and the social culture of the time. Altogether, as Davyddr Greenwood mentions in "Turismo como un agente de cambio: un caso español vasco" Tourism as an agent of change: a Spanish-Basque case study (1972) referring to the tourists "they brought not only their money but also the seeds for change-they brought the air of democracy" (Pictures of tourists AND QUOTES) (subtitles)

After Franco's death, the country decided to return to democracy and enjoy a new beginning without the martyrs of the past. This led to two occurrences in the provincial capitals that we will see reflected in Spanish cinema. One of them was the creation of cultural associations, neighbourhood organisations and youth groups, which years before had been illegal due to the institution's fear that such gatherings could lead to an anti-fascist uprising. This led to the so-called "Movida", groups of young people who took advantage of the new change and freedom of expression and who influenced Spanish art, from music to sculpture and, of course, cinema. (pic)

With all this information we can start to focus more specifically on each film, which, to prepare you, deals with scenarios of themes beyond the sexualisation of a woman's body, rape as a fairly recurrent theme and the forced submission of all the female characters, among other sexist aspects. The three stories are completely different and yet everything mentioned above is applied in each of them, as a modus operandi of the director.

Over the course of this video, we will see how in this new stage of Spanish cinema artistic freedom is adopted, a change from Franco's censorship while at the same time, the European tradition of objectifying the female body endures.

## Chapter One: *Tie me up tie me down!* (1989)

We shall start with (name and year), this film about a "forced love" based on the obsession of the protagonist Ricky (Antonio Banderas), a young man who is released from a mental hospital, with Marina (Victoria Abril), a drug-dependent porn actress, whom he decides to kidnap into his house in order to achieve his goal, for her to fall in love with him, which eventually happens after repeated manipulation and abuse.

This film exhibits extreme sexism and fetishism of women, their bodies, and their weaknesses, whether that's deliberate or not. What was perceived as innovative in 1989, is in fact a representation of our bodies being commodified under the guise of "art".

J.M. Caparrós Lera's book The Spanish cinema of democracy: from Franco's death to the Socialist "change". *El cine español de la democracia: de la muerte de Franco al "cambio" Socialista 1975-1989* (1992) is very informative regarding the decade in which the movie was released. Although every part of the Spanish transition is of great importance, we will focus on the 1980s. As we already know, cinema by then had left censorship far behind and many more art forms such as fine art, music, theatre, literature, etc.

Artists had started to separate themselves from previously imposed rules, this allowed younger people to experiment with art on a much freer scale. That was the effect of fresh democracy. The film industry is able to show its more artistic and less commercial or censored side and a daring newborn cinema had been launched by several directors such as Carlos Saura who directed *Cría Cuervos* (1976) and *Ana y Los Lobos* (1973); and Eloy de la Iglesia with *La Estanquera de Vallecas* (1987) and *Otra Vuelta de Tuerca* (1985) (subtitles) (pic); these directors challenged and exposed the former and very recent fascism with the freedom that they couldn't so obviously use before. Nevertheless, this freedom does not mean in any way a decrease in female body objectification, it, in fact, helps it to increase as these creators had the "carte blanche" to use it as loudly as they pleased, it wasn't any longer a sin or illegal, it was to be openly enjoyed.

Referring back to the movie I will now introduce Pietsie Feenstra's chapter, *The liberation of women from his book New Mythological Figures in Spanish Cinema: Dissident Bodies under Franco* (2011) (subtitles) (pic) where we are made aware that Almodóvar is usually considered by the public as a women director, by this he means a director who gives more focus to the female character supposedly being more faithful to the reality of women today, in other words, it is like qualifying him as a "feminist" director, someone who supports the female collective. This belief is due to the role he gives to his female characters, often portraying their professional goals, sexuality, and emotions, essentially giving them a personality and an interesting developed character that is supposed to be observed and analysed beyond their body. Having watched this movie and others from this artist, one can disagree with the title (woman-director) given to him, as these so-called "liberated" characters are often treated roughly and without any real interest or respect for the female experience.

The poster chosen for the movie's release proves my previous point; Marina's character is shown in a very obvious submissive, petite, defenceless, and strangely sexualized pose, whilst Ricky is depicted in a much "macho" possessive pose, and I consider his expression confident and arrogant compared to his co-star, a lion versus lamb situation. To reinforce this I found another source, an article written by Betül Özcan Dost called "Lamb women vs lion women" (2018). In this article, the author explores the idea of the existence, in her opinion, of two types of women, "a "lamb woman" who has a puppet-like character, is repressed by the society and cannot act as an individual" (Betül Özcan, 2018, p. 332); and "a "lion woman" since she takes the strings into her own hands and lives her life according to her own rules and ideas" (Betül Özcan, 2018, p. 332).

Not only in this poster but throughout the film we see Marina's character depicted with this lamb-like submission, in the text to which we have referred the author makes it clear that women are not born obedient and docile but that they are imposed with this passivity, in which case they cannot be blamed for this mental imprisonment.

Another issue that Özcan highlights is that "the typical lamb woman [...] internalizes the traditional role models and subconsciously accepts them without questioning their rightness" (Betül Özcan, 2018, p. 335). My understanding is that, both in society and in this film, women often do not have the freedom to make that choice, consciously or not, this can be seen in the movie, Marina has been forced, (poner video o foti), to be that lamb, her soul is that of a lioness, a normal woman who opposes her kidnapping and sexual assault, but who is turned into the lamb by the violent imposition of the male character. It was Almodóvar's choice to have an ending to the movie that proves this "passive woman" behaviour, as Marina, having been left with no choice falls in love with this very unstable abusive character, Ricky and accepts her "fate". SCENE

Almodóvar's cinematic style is key to the reading of some of the scenes in this movie, with "Pleasure and the New Spanish Mentality: A Conversation with Pedro Almodóvar" (1987) an article by Marsha Kinder we get some context about it. The former dictatorship is a topic discussed in the interview, Almodóvar declares that this factor not only impacts his work but Spanish society as a whole, leaving behind the fear of the church, prejudice and "earthly power", the police. On the other hand, he claims that Spain has recuperated the inclination toward sensuality, something he states is "typically Mediterranean" Such sensuality that he speaks of does revisit Spain but his way of portraying it or expressing it through his art is dangerous, the constant presence of abuse could be perceived by the viewer as something normal or even romantic, which is the case in this film. SCENE. I consider my culture as one that respects people's sensuality and is not ashamed of human pleasures, something that Almodóvar and I agree with, but the way he brings sex into the realm of violence is, at the end, a return to dictatorship, enforced love.

Having said this I would now like to introduce Urios-Aparisi's section "The Body of Love in Almodóvar's Cinema: Metaphor and Metonymy of the Body and Body Parts" (2010) from the journal named Metaphor and symbols which will link the past topic to the presence of direct sexual use of body parts. To begin with it Urios-Aparisi states that "the female body is the locus of male desire and has been re-created by the traditional forms of art to conform to the male gaze, and it has led to a re-appropriation of the female body as part of the new social and political situation of women" (Urios-Aparisi, 2010, p. 183).

**SCENE** (focus on legs, they're smooth, clean, submissive and provocative?)

As the film is esoteric in nature, the legs are clearly the focus (**pic**). This part of the human body has many erotic qualities which are affected by a number of factors, including the proximity of these parts to the female genitalia. The legs are technically a part of the path to pleasure, so the more they are displayed, the more attention the spectator is going to pay to them, "particularly in the film noir tradition, women are portrayed as distant controlling sexual beings, and their legs stand as the point of departure for sexual intercourse as well as an obstacle" (Urios-Aparisi, 2010, p. 187).

**SCENE** legs

There is a great deal of overlap with what the author says and what we see in the film, it is remarkable. Almodóvar's attempt to seduce us is quite obvious afterwards. In these sequences, we observe the passivity and especially the submissiveness of Marina's legs, since as an added element they are tied and hooked to the bed, which could also refer to sadomasochism. Aparisi agrees with this "the legs are shown normally in the foreground without any other bodily reference and with passive position, lying down, sitting, or standing with one leg over the other" (Urios-Aparisi, 2010, p. 186). **SCENE** Then the night garment she wears shows all the flesh and leaves this proximity to the genitalia very close to the limit, the colour of the garment, pure white, offers a certain touch of innocence that directly increases this perspective of the lamb. We can see this again with Mulvey, where in the section "Pleasure in looking/fascination with the human form" and "Woman as image, men as a bearer of the look" the use of the female body as an object of visual pleasure is explained. In this case, we occupy the role of spectator, but Ricky, her abductor, is the active observer of the scene and carries out a literal interpretation of the aforementioned, he sets her up as an object to observe her in a sexual manner, without touching her he is capable of harassing her. Now we will see the outcomes of this story **SCENE** (sex scene and happy ending). There is a bit of drama that is irrelevant to us, but this is how it ends, as a "complicated love story.

I consider the whole movie an act of forced "love", for all the above reasons: kidnapping, manipulation, sexual assault, forced nudity and forced submission, all of these being the most obvious elements. But we can conclude that the problem is not only in these acts but also in the erotic staging of the female body.

## Chapter Two: *Kika* (1993)

Now we will be moving on to the next movie: *Kika* (1993) directed by Pedro Almodóvar, a feature film whose photography, set and, most importantly, the costumes, which were partly created by Jean-Paul Gaultier, are visually impressive. It goes without saying that all of these things are overshadowed by the dark and twisted narrative told by the director.

The film's main character is Kika (Verónica Forqué), an optimistic and energetic make-up artist, who lives and has a relationship with Ramón (Àlex Casanovas), a very introverted photographer who is obsessed with the death of his mother. They love each other but don't understand one another, which leads her to have a lover, Nicholas (Peter Coyote), an American who is Ramón's stepfather. Kika has a friend with very few prejudices, Amparo (Anabel Alonso); a bitter enemy, Andrea "caracortada" or "Scarface" (Victoria Abril), director and presenter of a reality show; and finally, a "moustached" maid, Juana (Rossy de Palma), secretly in love with her and sister of Pablo (Santiago Lajusticia), a porn actor who, after escaping from prison, hides in Kika's house and eventually rapes her. The film ends with Nicholas, Ramón and Andrea killing each other and Kika free and happy.

To my surprise, before watching the film, I discovered it was classified/marked as a "comedy". Considering the synopsis I believe the shock is understandable. In contrast to *Tie me up tie me down!* (1993), the poster does provide a comical message. We have four different characters, each one with a different posture and costume that implies ridiculous humour. The slight detail of Andres's breast (better picture on the other side), might be the only hint of the underlying obscure story that is behind it. As a result, the film contains a lot of the interests I am looking for in my thesis, these being the constant presence of non-consensual sexual content, the camera's "obsession" with the nude female body, in this chapter specifically breasts, and the lack of realistic feminine characters.

While doing some research I came across not really a source but an informative piece of writing, a small website, that froze me in my tracks. "Frenchfilms.org" from where I found this statement: "Kika is a film that shocks and entertains in roughly equal measure, and even in scenes that are hilariously funny – notably the seemingly interminable sex rape sequence – leave an unpleasant after taste". This is a scene we will discuss later but reading this website's perspective of such, hilariously funny? As a woman, more as a human being, I cannot conceive the possibility of a "white man" creating a scene that depicts rape as a joke, as a thing that can even be funny and calling it art. No one in my opinion has the right to that, as non-consensual sex leads to trauma and not to comedy.

As I did before I was looking for a source that could give a closer look at what Spain was like during the decade of the 1990s and so Ana M<sup>a</sup> Manrubia's thesis **The representation of women in Almodóvar's films** (*La representación femenina en el cine de Almodóvar*) (2013) illustrates it very well. "España en la década de los 90: entorno cinematográfico" ("Spain in the 90s: cinematographic landscape"), is a chapter that dives into the 90s situation for women and for the Spanish film industry.

At the beginning of the decade, Spain implemented the "National Plan for the Promotion and Development of the Audiovisual Industry" (1990). This achieved to leave behind the delay in this industry, meaning the evolution of censored and conservative content in most movies. However, in the midst of the siege of American productions, not even the "cultural exception" pushed by Europe was able to save national projects. Thus, every Spanish artist involved in the art of filmmaking sought to create cinema that would shock and leave both their own country and the rest of the world speechless. The genre was not necessarily drama, but comedy, using **daring topics** that undoubtedly got the intended response such as religious mockery, pedophilia, LGBTI+ characters, etc. Some examples can be ***Open your eyes* by Alejandro Amenábar (1997), *The Day Of The Beast* by Álex de la Iglesia (1999) and *Las edades de Lulú* by Bigas Luna (1990)**

These directors were launched into the European and American spotlight, but the main example of this approach is Almodóvar who speaks of life as a theatrical performance in his films, influenced by the prominent **Spanish playwright Calderón de la Barca**. Yet that is not what makes the director so renowned, but rather his provocative use of bodies, his fixation on the female nude, already mentioned in the previous chapter, and, in the instance of *Kika* (1993), the satire embedded in a story where rape and violence against women are presented in an ill-considered manner, without really reflecting on the impact that his content has on the reality of the victims.

I would now like to delve into the moral issue with regard to the naked bodies of the female protagonists. What I find quite blatantly obvious in *Kika* is the clear intention to draw the attention of the audience in an exaggerated manner, which is a topic that refers us back to **Laura Mulvey**, specifically to a chapter I briefly mentioned, "Woman as image, men as a bearer of the look". Here we are brought to an argument where women characters are perceived as sexual objects, the examples used do not imply the presence of a nude, is the beauty, the glamour or the eroticism they portray. Some of the directors that Mulvey uses as examples are **Hitchcock** and **Sternberg**, who by then were constrained by Hollywood's censorship. Their works allow the male gaze to feel pleasure through an image without any remorse or guilt.

Before we dive into the stronger scenes, the following I believe is a direct modern representation of my last statement. **SCENE**

As we have observed the male, **Ramón**, is sexually turned on not by the lovemaking act but through an image or a lens of such and of her objectified beauty. Now there is another element that Mulvey speaks about and that we can also use for the same sequence.

The famous Freud is brought up for one of his theories, "scopophilia": pleasure is given by using a person, in this case, a woman, as an object of sexual stimulation through sight, so, Ramón's camera. The prior contemplation is, in a way, opposite to Hitchcock and Sternberg's explanation of pleasure: based on narcissism, the second insight offers the idea that the source of pleasure is the sight of your own image, rather than someone else's. To explain this better I'm going to play back the second half of the scene. SCENE. In this case, Kika is the one taking a photo of Ramón during this sex act, but she, as stated by her, is not aroused in any way by the action of looking through the lens, she only complies to satisfy him. With this, I concluded that both theories, although opposing, share the same purpose: Ramón somehow combines Freud, Hitchcock and Sternberg's views as he is the only one gaining sexual pleasure both by looking and by being looked at.

To clarify this further: with the first pictures taken, he can proudly observe not only Kika's objectified body but also inflates his ego, thinking that he is the one who gives her pleasure, something that is not happening. Then, he hands her the camera so he can later admire his own sexual reflection caught in the sexual act, she is basically irrelevant in the scene. Thus, Kika is only the means to an end.

We're going to redirect our focus to the meaning of the body parts and to do so I wish to bring back Urios-Aparisi's article, concretely to a section called "THE TORSO". This time I will focus on the breasts, they are undoubtedly a character in all of Almodóvar's films, especially in *Kika*. The text informs us of the difference between a female torso and a male torso: the former is associated with "sexuality and maternity" (maternal or erotic breasts)", and the latter with "bravery and power" (broad shoulders, muscular arms)". This author establishes a separation between "good breasts" and "bad breasts". (scarface breast dresses)

Good breasts, these are the ones that are associated with maternity or a gentle female feature, whose destiny is not them becoming sexualised. This is what I understood from his description and I find it a bit far from reality, because breasts, even in their maternal function according to patriarchal guidelines, are constantly related to a sexual message, even in many countries and in the cinema itself the act of breastfeeding is brutally judged because people are not able to admire a breast as a pure and natural human feature. Another more specific example that I see a lot in our society and that is slightly overlooked is the constant interpretation of breasts as equivalent to the penis. This is my own observation, if we stop and think female nipples are censored, male nipples aren't; female breasts are used as something sexy the male chest isn't; and in English, they don't even share the same word (breast and chest) and so we understand that women do not possess a body part that is not associated with sexual pleasure. Exhibit a SCENE in this scene breasts lose a certain "morbidness" thanks to the presence of a white, pure and delicate bra that covers everything, these are good breasts. But seconds later these same good breasts are corrupted by Ramón SCENE. The passive observer, whose presence turns the sequence into something that becomes sexual.

**Bad breasts**, the kind that Almodóvar uses, are those whose presence represents cruelty or human suffering. In contrast to exhibit a, we have exhibit b to prove this (**SCENE**). In this scene, the camera positions us in a close-up with respect to the breasts of Ramón's mother, who, as we've seen, has just been fatally shot in the chest. There is another nuance in the sequence, the presence of sexual tension, which is caused by two factors: the **location** of the gunshot, close to her nipple (**pic**); and the position in which Ramón decides to mourn her death, clutching her breasts and clinging to them (**pic**).

Following this and as a final note, I am going to show you a scene that I found hard to watch (**SCENE and short silence after, fading intro**). I suppose that Almodóvar thought it was a better idea to represent the rape scene in a humorous way, as a mockery.

We are now going back to Ana M<sup>a</sup> Manrubia's text, where she has included an exclusive section of this film in the chapter "**the representation of women in Almodóvar's filmography**". As she rightly states: "**If as a general rule, in almost all films, the comedy removes the harshness of the criticism of the gender stereotype, although without making it disappear... in *Kika* this is not achieved, the reflection on the naivety of women fails with the attempt to show rape in a humorous way**". Furthermore, she informs us of **Almodóvar's** intentions, "**that scene had the mission of showing the strength of the female characters in difficult situations**", page 256. During the prolonged scene, we are not able to see a liberated or strong Kika, but a woman who at that moment is going through a tough situation and is aware that she cannot escape it.

I can't see here or anywhere in the movie how Almodóvar is presenting to us Female empowerment, I've only seen women going through bad situations.

### Chapter Three: *Talk to her* (2002) directed by Pedro Almodóvar.

As I mentioned in the introduction, the order of the chosen films is chronological and the content of each increase in harshness. *Talk to Her* is in a sense a combination of *Tie me up tie me down!* and *Kika*, the focus here is again on sexual abuse, and rape is also present at an exorbitant level, showing the lengths to which Almodóvar is capable of going in order to create an alternative cinema.

During the course of the film, we follow the journey of Benigno (Javier Cámara), a loquacious and well-mannered nurse, as well as Marco (Darío Grandinetti), a reserved journalist who struggles with loneliness on a daily basis. The story brings these two men together through the tragedy of two women, Lydia (Rosario Flores), a bullfighter, and Alicia (Leonor Watling), a ballet student, both in comas. The fact that Benigno is obsessed with Alicia, whom he had been seriously harassing before her accident, reveals the true nature of his intentions, which go far beyond simply caring for her. Benigno rapes Alicia and she gets pregnant during the coma, after that he's brought to jail and dies ignoring the fact that Alicia is alive.

From the many videos and online review sites that talk about this movie I came across "*Talk to Her* | psychological analysis" by Psicología, Música y Cine in Youtube (2022), where we are told this (it is a movie that talks about the consequences of death and sickness and it's focused on men, so they can't say now that my movies are targeted towards women, there's more mystery in masculine tears than in feminine tears, it seems that men inspire tragedy in me minute 1:24 to 1:41) This one quote proves that he may not care much for women, as a so-called women-director. Furthermore, if we look at every situation that his female characters undergo in my previous chapters, we can come to the realization that his emphasis on men's feelings towards these women or their motives for committing acts of dubious sanity are given more prominence than the real feelings of the women affected by these actions.

Another response would be "*Talk to Her: The Ethics of an Act of Love*" by Cine y Literatura (2020). There are several sections where the reviewer comments on certain aspects of the film, here's a first look at one of them "Benigno has committed a crime, but Benigno is innocent (as his landlady suggests), a kind of angel for whom the rules of society do not apply" which is followed by "Benigno has taken tender care of Alicia (as he did of his mother before), but he is capable of committing an act of barbarism, even if this act involves tenderness". Almodóvar depicts this rape as an act of love, something impossible, rape and love do not exist in the same realm, the act of love goes hand in hand with consent.

Let's address the obvious presence of a correlation between Alicia and a fairy tale that Almodóvar subtly presents to us *Sleeping Beauty of the Forest* by Charles Perrault (1697) and the Grimm Brothers (1812). The title of this book offers us already a clue as our female character is at the El Bosque hospital (the forest).

Our protagonist, Benigno, will be accused of rape by the laws of the legal system, unlike the prince of the fairy tale who got off scot-free, perhaps because he was the son of kings. His crime, also undoubted, that of sexual harassment without consent, forcing the oral bond. He **kissed** her on the mouth while she slept, in a coma too.

Fast forward a little further in the film and this scene appears. (**SCENE**). Benigno had been fantasising about the possibility of losing himself in Alicia's body, so by watching the silent film (movie made up) he feels identified with the shrinking lover, a male character who enters the woman's vagina in order to make her obtain pleasure, Benigno, motivated by this fantasy, wishes to become the diminutive lover by entering her in an attempt to make her obtain the same pleasure that the woman in the film experiences when her lover enters her vagina.

This atrocious act has consequences and so we can emphasize again in *Sleeping Beauty*: **The prince's expression** of satisfaction and the princess's **awakening to jouissance** is a coherent correlation with Alicia's awakening, who isn't woken up by a prince's king but by the "seed" Benigno had planted in her, in other words: **childbirth**, Benigno's perverse offering of himself to her. However, Almodóvar wants us to believe that Benigno is not interested in Alicia's body parts, but that he is interested in her as a whole, therefore she wouldn't be a sexual object for him. Evidently, that's **not** the case, it doesn't matter where his intentions are coming from as it only results in perverse behaviour. Almodóvar shouldn't be portraying this as a love story, the male character might think he is in love but he doesn't know her, and thus she becomes an object, she is the **canvas** of Benigno's imagination and what he imagines (pause) he **does to her**.

It is here that I would like to briefly recall **Berger's** book with his first chapter. I will show a few sentences from it:

**"The relation between what we see and what we know is never settled, knowledge never quite fits the sight"**

**"The way we see things is affected but what we know or what we believe"**

**"We only see what we look at. To look is an act of choice"**

**"Soon after we can see, we are aware that we can also be seen. The eye of the other combines with our own eye to make it fully credible that we are part of the visible world"**

Isn't it interesting how, even without being related to this story, Berger shows us Benigno's delirium and how it affects Alicia's freedom and, above all, her **lack of vision**? She isn't looking and so she cannot conceive a thought of Benigno. The way Benigno chooses to see her does affect what he believes. He also doesn't meet the eye of the other to prove that what he knows isn't real.

I would now like to refer to Susan Brownmiller's book *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape* (1975) and its second chapter "In the Beginning Was the Law" (p. 16-30). Throughout much of the existence of our species, women have been categorised as not equal but inferior and weaker subjects, that is why the concept of rape goes back to our beginnings. By this I mean to make a connection between the movie and this quote offered by Brownmiller:

"Female fear of an open season of rape, and not a natural inclination towards monogamy, motherhood or love, was probably the single causative factor in the original subjugation of woman by man, the most important key to her historic dependence, her domestication by protective mating" (Susan Brownmiller, 1975, p. 16)

Thanks to this, I have been able to highlight the fact that the character of Alice who surely shared this fear did not have the choice to "mate" in order to "protect" herself but was the figure of a man who under his own judgement decided that she needed his special care and affection, which stands against to the purpose of mating in order to prevent rape.

Benigno convinces himself that by "loving" the idea of her, she, therefore, loves him back. Loving means permission, that is what Benigno believes, but, in my eyes, without permission, there is no love, only a sad and traumatic result, in this case, an unwanted pregnancy.

(SCENE) Marco is quite relevant at the end of the story, not for his relationship with Lidia, but for sincerely believing that Benigno is innocent, for "understanding" his acts of "love" and finally feeling empathy and sorrow for his destiny, suicide. This is why in the ending Almodóvar offers us "sad scenes" of Marco mourning Benigno's death, and only offered us barely 10 seconds of Alicia's impotence of not only a dream but a frustrated life, the eternal scar marked by abuse. As I said, with this final movie we see a sort of collage from all of them. We have objectified female characters and sexual assault and abuse, in this case brought up to a whole new disturbing level.

In conclusion, we have demonstrated the objectification of women in the cinema of the Spanish classics, in this case, Almodóvar, driven by liberation after the strong censorship that ended up being used in a sexist way, maintaining the patterns of European art.

The common points of the three films have been the abuse and involuntary submission, as well as the sexualisation of the female figure.

With *Tie me up! Tie me down!* we have seen the figure of the female lamb, as well as the fetishisation of the legs.

With *Kika* we have seen the ridiculing of serious issues such as rape and the sexualisation of breasts.

And with *Talk To Her* the greatest of submissions, the coma, thus making reference to *Sleeping Beauty*. This is how the director justifies telling the story as an act of love.

All this finally makes it clear that Almodóvar cannot be a reference for feminist cinema due to his sexist and degrading use of female characters in several of his films.

I recommend reading this thesis and films as such.

## References

- Ana y los lobos*. Dir. Carlos Saura. 1973.
- Anduaga, Aníbal Ricci. ««Hable con ella»: La ética de un acto de amor.» *Cine y Literatura* (27-05-2020).
- Átame*. Dir. Pedro Almodóvar. 1989.
- Benítez, Angelina. «La Mujer Pasiva Vs. La Mujer Activa: La Contradicción De Ideas Feministas En Las Obras De Pedro Almodóvar.» 2018.
- Berger, John. *Ways of seeing*. Penguin books, 1972.
- Bozal, Valeriano. «Arte, ideología e identidad en los años del franquismo.» Bozal, Valeriano. *Cuaderno de artes plásticas y monumentales*. Donostia-San Sebastián: Ondare, 2006.
- Brothers, Grimm. *Little Briar Rose*. 1812.
- Brownmiller, Susan. *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape*. Simon & Schuster, 1975.
- Cría cuervos*. Dir. Carlos Saura. 1976.
- Dost, Betül Özcan. «Lamb women vs lion women.» *Social Science Studies* (2018).
- Feenstra, Pietsie. «The liberation of women.» Feenstra, Pietsie. *New Mythological Figures in Spanish Cinema*. Amsterdam University Press, 2011. 65-127.
- Greenwood, Davydd. «Turismo como un agente de cambio: un caso español vasco.» *European Studies* (1972): 80-91.
- Hable con ella*. Dir. Pedro Almodóvar. 2002.
- Jamón Jamón*. Dir. Bigas Luna. 1992.
- Kika*. Dir. Pedro Almodóvar. 1993.
- Kinder, Marsha. «Pleasure and the New Spanish Mentality: A Conversation with Pedro Almodóvar.» *Film Quarterly* 41.1 (1987): 33-44.
- La estanquera de vallecas*. Dir. Eloy de la Iglesia. 1987.
- Las edades de Lulú*. Dir. Bigas Luna. 1990.
- Lera, J.M. Caparrós. *El cine español de la democracia: de la muerte de Franco al cambio socialista (1975-1989)*. Barcelona: Palabra plástica, 1992.
- Lucía y el sexo*. Dir. Julio Medem. 2001.
- Mulvey, Laura. «Visual pleasure and narrative cinema.» Cohen, Leo Braudy and Marshall. *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*. New York, 1975. 833-834.
- Open your eyes*. Dir. Alejandro Amenábar. 1997.
- Otra vuelta de tuerca*. Dir. Eloy de la Iglesia. 1985.
- Pereira, Ana María Manrubia. *La representación femenina en el cine de Pedro Almodóvar*. Madrid, 2013.

Perrault, Charles. *Sleeping beauty of the forest*. 1697.

Psicología, Música y Cine. *HABLE CON ELLA | Análisis Psicológico | Pedro Almodóvar EA*. 2022.  
<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d3VtPbd3xQg>>.

*The day of the beast*. Dir. Álex de la Iglesia. 1995.

Travers, James. «FrenchFilms.org.» 2009. <<http://www.frenchfilms.org/review/kika-1993.html>>.

Urios-Aparisi, Eduardo. «The Body of Love in Almodóvar's Cinema: Metaphor and Metonymy of the Body and Body Parts.» *Metaphor and Symbol* (2010): 181-203.

Werth, Brenda. «La represión franquista y la transformación de España tras la dictadura.» 2014.