

## *Celia Says:*

### *A Conversation with Filmmaker Celia Rico Clavellino*



*Due to its capacity to express greater truths, the feature film Journey to a Mother's Room (2019) became, with four nominations (Best Supporting Actress, Best Actress, Best Debut in Direction, and Best Editing), one of the stand-out films of the last Goya awards. Behind this film motherhood, is the Sevillian filmmaker Celia Rico Clavellino, considered one of the new talents on the national film scene (Hopewell, "Celia Rico"). In this first work with artisanal roots, Rico Clavellino presents herself as a creator with an intimate point of view that reflects on mothers and daughters. By*

*contrast to other representations of motherhood in Spanish cinema, that examine traumas, conflicts, and score settling between parents and children, Journey to a Mother's Room explores something that is not often seen on screen: the confusion and loss that a recently-widowed mother feels on the cusp of an empty nest. This is certainly a tender and sensitive portrayal of motherhood that demonstrates the strength of mother-daughter bonds and their extraordinary weight in the process of identity construction. As if it were a domestic still life, the film reflects the trivialities and minutia of daily life and presents the spectator with a dilemma: how can we live and love so much?*

*With this interview, conducted in person and via Skype on July 22, 2019 and edited with the objective of maximizing the effectiveness of its communication, we invite the readers of Gynocine to reflect on the preceding question through the original gaze of this filmmaker. The title of the conversation, "Celia Says" ["Celia, lo que dice"], and its sections structuring the interview ("Celia and Celluloid", "Celia and Her Camera", "Celia and Her Readings", etc.) are inspired by the work of another perceptive story teller, Elena Fortún, whose character Celia shares, in addition to first name, a curious and enterprising spirit. Big revelations can be hidden behind small stories and for those who live it, Journey to a Mother's Room will certainly become an extraordinary adventure.*

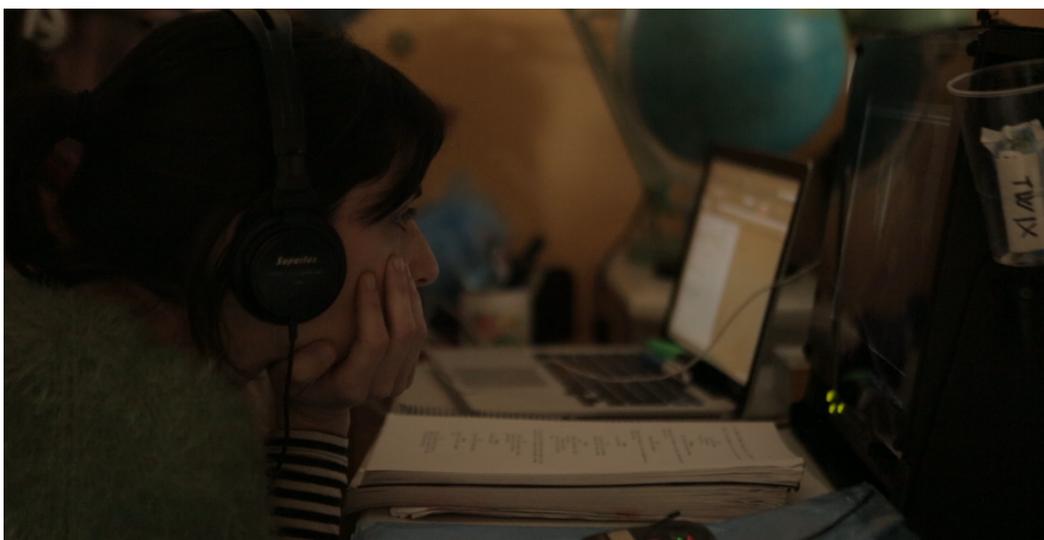
### *Celia Rico Clavellino (Seville 1982- )*

*Celia Rico Clavellino was born in Seville in 1982, where she studied Audiovisual Communication (University of Seville). At just twenty years old she moved to Barcelona to study Literary Theory and Comparative Literature (University of Barcelona), which she complemented with a postgraduate degree in audiovisual project development and doctoral studies (DEA) in Cinematic Theory, Analysis, and Documentation (University of Pompeu Fabra).*

*In addition to broad education, Rico Clavellino has done freelance work for more than ten years for a variety of production companies like Arcadia Motion Pictures or Oberon Cinematography, in multiple roles related to coordination, project development and casting. Her work as a screenwriter and director began in 2012 with her acclaimed short Luisa is Not Home, selected for the Venice Film Festival, Seville's European Film Festival and the Málaga Film Festival, and awarded with the Gaudí Prize for Best Short and the Premio del Col·legi de Directors de Catalunya (Prize of the Directors' School of Catalonia). Her anticipated debut in features, Journey to a Mother's Room (2018), arrived six years later following script development supported by the prestigious Berlinale Talents Script Station Lab. Since its premier, the film has been received warmly by the public and critics, and has earned a number of national (2019 San Jordi Prize for Best Debut, four XXXIII Goya nominations, and the 2019 Feroz Prize for Best Actress) and international (2019 Platino Prize nomination for Best Debut) accolades.*

*Currently, Rico Clavellino combines teaching at the ESCAC and ECIB (Barcelona) with the preparation of her next creative project, an animated children's series Mironins, that she will soon co-direct. In addition, she participates in the film pedagogy project "Cinema en Curs", that collaborates with a variety of primary and secondary schools.*

### ***Celia and Celluloid***



**Arcadia Motion Pictures (Making of *Journey to a Mother's Room*, 2018)**

**MARÍA GARCÍA PUENTE and ERIN K. HOGAN:** In a number of new outlets you have highlighted your affinity for the cinema of Yasujirō Ozu. What do you admire in Ozu's cinema and which Spanish film references inform your work? Are there any women filmmakers who you particularly admire?

**CELIA RICO CLAVELLINO:** Something that really inspires me from Ozu's films is that in all of them (independent of the fact that they are family narratives, which really interest me)

there are few elements and they are always very well tied together.<sup>1</sup> If I remember correctly, the director Pedro Costa commented in an interview that Ozu demonstrated that it's possible to make a movie with a table and two characters. I totally share this idea that it is possible to begin with something that simple, that's why every time I review Ozu's films I feel like sitting down and writing.

If you ask me about Spanish cinema, it's impossible not to mention Víctor Erice. His cinema fascinates me, his films have the most beautiful and intriguing images that can be found in the cinema of our country. His films are endless: every time you re-watch them you are able to find new depths and details that you hadn't noticed before.

With regards to your second question, unfortunately, when I was studying, the work of women filmmakers was hardly mentioned in the classroom so it was very difficult to have any models to refer to, let alone Spanish women directors. With the passing of time, I have discovered the films of Chantal Akerman, Agnès Varda, Claire Denis and Lucrecia Martel, all of whom have become great models. Nationally, I think it was very inspiring for many of us (*nosotras*) to see a director as young as Mar Coll premiere her first film *Three Days with the Family* (2009). This paved the way in Catalonia and Spain for other young women directors to tell personal and family stories. Today there are many women filmmakers of the same age (and many are friends) who are very important for me because we dialogue with each other and this is enriching: Carla Simón, Meritxell Colell, Pilar Palomero...

**MGP and EKH: The article “The Ágata Generation” [*Generación Ágata*], published in *Fotogramas* in June 2017, identifies a new batch of women directors that has appeared in recent years in Spain featuring Elena Martín, Carla Simón, Nely Reguera and Alba Cros, among others. Do you identify with this generation?**

**CRC:** I met some of these debuting directors before I made *Journey to a Mother's Room* (2018) and I've crossed paths with others either in the process or afterwards in film festivals. Even though I do not have a relationship with all of them, I can say that I fundamentally identify with them as far as the filmmaking process is concerned, a subject we've spoken about quite a bit. I think that many of the filmmakers in this batch have searched for their own way of working, often times for practical reasons (the lack of financing) but also due to the desire to search for other more personal ways of approaching the practice of filmmaking. In this respect we resemble each other and I think that it is important to point this out, since it's not just a question of subjects, but also of ways of making films. Furthermore, many of these filmmakers have something in common: the majority of them have debuted with films about lived experiences, so in all of them there are traces of the truth.

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<sup>1</sup> Yasujirō Ozu (Tokyo, 1903-1963) was a famous Japanese director, author of world cinema classics such as *There Was a Father* (1942), *Tokyo Story* (1953) and *Late Autumn* (1960). For his use of a static camera and predilection for small stories, according to Ira Jaffe, Ozu can be considered alongside Robert Bresson, Michelangelo Antonioni and Carl Theodor Dreyer, among others, as one of the precursors of *slow cinema* (2).

**MGP and EKH: In fact, your films display your interest in exploring family dynamics and women’s self-realization, which reminds us of directors like Mar Coll and Nely Reguera. In your opinion, how does your cinema compare with theirs?**

**CRC:** I think that they are actually very different approaches that have some aspects in common. In both Nely’s and Mar’s work women characters are at the center and show their strengths and weaknesses. In this sense I think that both directors explore the essence of womanhood (without needing to vindicate femininity or anything like that) in the complexity of their characters. In my films, I feel like I write from a similar place, that I ask myself the same questions, but in my case, I’ve departed from the relationship between two women and each reflects the other, so I focus on that dynamic.

**MGP and EKH: Javier Ocaña’s review of *Journey for El País* identifies paradox as your cinematic signature.<sup>2</sup> In your words, what is the essence of the Rico Clavellino imprint?**

**CRC:** It is always very difficult to speak about what one does and it’s not that my portfolio is extensive enough to be able to make conclusions. All in all, when I reflect on my previous work I realize that there is something to do with paradox and contradiction that really interests me. For me this impulse is inherent in human beings and it is very present in the subjects that I’ve discussed (because, if you think of it, love is profoundly contradictory). In my films I try to make visible human contradictions in everyday life, in how we often advance then change our minds and retreat only to try to take another step forward that is more connected to our desire. That duality between what we want and what we do and the gap between the two really interests me and is how I conceive of the characters in my stories. So, the conflict in *Journey* revolves around contradictory feelings that Leonor (Anna Castillo) and Estrella (Lola Dueñas) struggle with. While the former feels divided between her strong desire for independence and the feeling of responsibility that keeps her in the family home with her mother, the latter vacillates between holding her daughter by her side and letting her go. In my opinion, a relationship is forged in these contradictions; or to put it another way, contradiction no longer exists if you stop negotiating and relating to another person. Both of my films to date explore this dynamic to a greater or lesser extent.

**MGP and EKH: On the formal level, the minimalism of your work indicates a strong tendency towards contemplative cinema, that connects with what the influential French critic Michel Cimen calls “slowness in cinema”.<sup>3</sup> How do you think that this style has influenced your gaze as a filmmaker?**

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<sup>2</sup> In his review, Javier Ocaña explains in chromatic terms the contradiction that characterizes Rico’s film: “luminous in its interior, its formal exterior is grayish brown” (“Épica”).

<sup>3</sup> Matthew Flannagan comments in relation to this concept that it’s a cinema characterized by the use of “(often extremely) long takes, de-centered and understated modes of storytelling and a pronounced emphasis on quietude and the everyday” (“Towards”).

**CRC:** I have always been fascinated by cinema with little dialogue, in which filmmakers try to show and make visible that which can't be expressed in words, inner workings, and to a certain extent this aesthetic choice also influences my work. I make films that pause and that involve observation, but in my case this interest comes more from a personal inclination, a certain vision of the world, than from cinema in particular. For me this approach is a sort of resistance. Philosopher Josep María Esquirol has a book, *La resistencia íntima: Ensayo de una filosofía de la proximidad* (2015), in which he vindicates the need for us to stop and pay attention to the care, to what happens inside the home and what we share.<sup>4</sup> I think that it is crucial that we pause to contemplate these gestures because we rarely appreciate them as we should since, without these actions, without those pauses, it is impossible to live.

In spite of this, I think it would be more precise to say that my films are in between two cinemas. My film evidences a clear observational focus, but without renouncing narrative; in other words, I always try to combine both veins: to trace a character's trajectory, their life's path, but from a contemplative gaze that is not a slave to that narration. I have the impression that in certain observational cinema emotion does not detach itself from the biographical comings and goings of a character but rather from an aesthetic expression, from a conceptualization of itself. *Journey* is a film that investigates the mother-daughter relationship from my own personal experiences, so in my case, lived experience is always prioritized over conceptualization. For this reason, even though I reflect a lot during the writing and planning process, I ultimately realize that what I was doing was opening a channel in myself that would allow my emotions to guide me. The resulting film is contemplative and presents a small, everyday story with a very strong emotional charge.

**MGP and EKH:** On one occasion you commented that your feature film was born from a physical sensation, that of being seated at a brazier table. Could you elaborate on this idea a bit more? What sensations did you wish to transmit to the spectators of your film and how were you planning on transmitting them?

**CRC:** This physical sensation is associated with a childhood memory: the coziness that we felt seated at the brazier table, which is so warm that you could spend hours lying there while life continues outside. I think that this feeling has a lot to do with motherhood and what it means to be a daughter, since this table could be considered an extension of the mother's womb, that is in fact the first house that we inhabit and leave in our lives. This childhood memory is a very powerful image of what motherhood means for me.

I wanted this sensation to appear in the film through temperature, which was a challenge since cinema can undoubtedly evoke many feelings but it's very difficult for it to transmit warmth or coolness. Moreover, returning to the idea of contradiction that I was telling you about, I tried to defy the expectations of the spectators with regards to temperature. I wanted to show how, often times, warm spaces, if they are too warm, can burn us and that cold and distant atmospheres can become places where, to our surprise, we can find ourselves and connect with

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<sup>4</sup> Esquirol's essay won the National Essay Prize in 2016 from the Ministry of Education, Culture, and Sport.

the people who are closest to us since distance helps us return home.<sup>5</sup> I really liked playing with distances and proximities based on thermic contrasts and, for which, we recreated a home atmosphere of confinement that would make the spectator want to leave the space. We achieved this through close attention to lighting, using a monochromatic palette and, definitively, working on a minute level with the tedium of daily life.

Some spectators have told me that during viewing there were moments when they felt claustrophobic, but that they also wanted to continue getting to know the protagonists, and I'm pleased that this came across. Someone also told me that they realized that in the entire film there was only one shot revealing the sky. I honestly hadn't realized this and I think that observation was really interesting. Even though the visual concept was such, I always imagined a horizon for the evolution of the character; a horizon that might arrive beyond the ending, once the front door of the house can be opened without so much effort.

### *Celia and her Camera*



Arcadia Motion Pictures (Making of *Journey to a Mother's Room*, 2018)

**MGP and EKH:** As we understand it, you filmed your last project entirely in your hometown, Constantina (Seville), and for its preparation you were able to rely on the valuable contributions of neighbors and family members. What is autobiographical about your film?

**CRC:** What's most autobiographical about *Journey* is the presence of the world of sewing. My mother is a seamstress and the film reflects on this profession from a variety of angles. To begin with, I reflect on sewing from the lens of motherhood. For me, sewing, dressing, and being dressed are indistinguishable from motherhood since they were a way that my mother protected me: covering me in her clothes. Even though I experience this as something very personal and

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<sup>5</sup> This contradiction deepens due to the fact that, as Rico points out, everyone imagines that the South is happy and warm, which has very little to do with the wintry and monotonous atmosphere of Leonor's and Estrella's town.

autobiographical, in reality it has a universal dimension. In fact, there is a popular saying in Spanish with which we can all identify that clearly expresses this idea: “you grow up when you leave your mother’s skirt” [“uno se hace mayor cuando sale de las faldas de una madre”]. In my particular case (and in that of Leonor in the film), this saying is not simply metaphorical but also acquires a literal meaning, a realness. Just like I did, the protagonist has to leave her mother’s skirt and the skirt of the brazier table in order to achieve her independence.

Secondly, another autobiographical element that has to do with sewing is the act of creation and how true vocations can save us from moments of fragility, including depression as in Estrella’s case. My mother is retired but I realize that to this day she hasn’t stopped sewing, especially when she is bored, tired, or down (as we all feel from time to time). In those moments she energizes herself when she makes clothes with the sewing machine. I think it’s beautiful how artistry (artisanal, creative work), diverse activities from writing a novel or shaping fabric, can invigorate us. This is something that is very autobiographical that I am discovering especially these days since I’ve returned to writing.

And, of course, the film is about the experience of living far from home and discovering that your relationship with your parents has become one founded on the telephone (that in my case began as a landline and is now a WhatsApp conversation thread). The phone has become, to put it one way, the new umbilical cord that connects us to our loved ones. This is what’s happened for me but it belongs to the reality of almost all of us, I think that this relationship to new technologies is what’s most universal in the film.

**MGP and EKH: One of the characteristics of your filmography is your inclination for stories with main characters who are mothers or older women, as can be seen in the cast of *Luisa is Not Home* (2012), *Filmed Diaries* (2014), and *Journey*. What attracts you to these characters who are so rarely portrayed in commercial cinema?**

**CRC:** Honestly, it’s not something that I’ve done on purpose, it’s simply arisen this way. I come from a family of many women and I feel the necessity to portray what surrounds me. My interest in these female characters is due precisely to their absence from cinema. In fact, in a few screenings older women (over 50) have approached me to thank me for creating characters with whom they identify. When this happens, I get the feeling that it’s not so much an indication of the merit of my work but rather of the paucity of films in which this group is visible. This is when I realize how important it is for us to make room for these characters on the screen. The workshop that I conducted for *Filmed Diaries*, in which I worked with a group of older women (widows some of them), allowed me to discover the enormous solitude that women of a certain age suffer and how difficult it can be for them to reconnect with their desires after a lifetime of pushing them aside in order to care for others. They all have so much to tell and so many hidden desires to recover! I like to think that a part of these voices and faces has made it into the film.

**MGP and EKH: We would like for you to tell us more about motherhood, since it is a prominent theme in your cinema. What does motherhood mean for you? Do you consider yourself “mother” of your films?**

**CRC:** Even though I am not a mother, motherhood, at my age, occupies a central part of my life. Firstly, all of my girlfriends are starting families and, although I’m not considering it right now, the question of motherhood inevitably arises. I think that we as women are affected by this topic,

which is extremely complex and impossible to avoid, especially for those of us who aren't mothers and don't have models.

Given this and given my personal situation, I conceive of motherhood as something closely tied to being a daughter; in other words, I can only think of motherhood from my gaze as a daughter. We frequently talk about mothers but we talk about daughters less often, maybe because many daughters end up replacing their mothers in their maturity, but I wonder: what happens with those daughters who never become mothers? I am convinced that in the near future we are going to reflect more and more as a society on what it means to be a daughter.

Another aspect that is portrayed in the film and that I'd like to call our attention to is the enormous weight that the role of motherhood has on the lives of women. This weight is like a legacy that during centuries has fallen exclusively on the shoulders of women (and is finally starting to be shared with men).

I feel like my "children" are my films and maybe they always will be. Coincidentally, my sister is now pregnant with her second child and I'm realizing that my family's attention is centered on, on the one hand, her children, and, on the other, on my work. Our situations are obviously very different but they have some things in common. In the same way that my parents hope that my sister's children are strong and healthy, they have a sense of pride and hope that my films will be successful. With regards to this, there is a beautiful book, *Maternidad y creación* (2007), that I find inspiring. It's a collection of texts by many women authors who reflect on how to write when one is a mother. Because, even though it doesn't seem like it, both experiences (of creating and procreating) are intimately related: one gives life to a work of art just like one conceives and gives birth to children. In my case, I like to consider my films as creations that I bring to life.

**MGP and EKH: Carlos Vermut in *Quién te cantará* (2018), one of last year's most critically acclaimed films, offers a perspective on motherhood that is diametrically opposite yours in *Journey*. Do you think that this topic has historically been treated differently by men and women in Spanish cinema?**

**CRC:** I wouldn't want to sound too assertive, but I have observed that many films, both contemporary and classic, often explore motherhood from the standpoint of conflict with the mother and all relating to it: psychological traumas, feelings of guilt, score settling, etc. I don't know if we can attribute this or not to the presence of a supposed male gaze behind the camera; honestly, I don't know. Nevertheless, I am convinced that, by contrast to the male director's gaze, the relationship between women and their mothers starts to change as one matures, when daughters become mothers or are at the age to become mothers. In this new stage of our lives we begin to perceive our mothers in a different way, we are more benevolent with them and can even understand them better since we recognize their attitudes and behaviors in ourselves that we rejected before and are now unconsciously repeating. It's in this instance that we realize that there is really not that much separating us but rather, without a doubt, we are much more similar than we imagined. For this reason, as women mature we do not experience the relationship with our mothers as score settling but rather as identification or even mimesis. This discovery is very powerful and terrifying at the same time, and I am sure that psychoanalysis has a lot to say about this.

Of course this doesn't mean that men don't understand their mothers or that there are more conflicts between mothers and daughters. Frictions undoubtedly remain but these are

confrontations that are derived from love. At a certain point, the substance of the conflicts that governed our relationship with our mothers (those of adolescence, personal frustrations stemming from not becoming what they hoped we would, or their frustrations that we've not followed in their footsteps...) lessens little by little until it fades away. Finally the only true conflict remains, that of love: how can we live loving people so much who are not near to us, who do not listen to us or to whom things happen that we wish wouldn't happen.

**MGP and EKH: The performance of motherhood is closely related to one's cultural context. In *Journey*, for example, Estrella embodies a very Spanish way of understanding and playing this role. The film has been screened in a number of international festivals. Was Federico Marín Bellón right when he asserted in *ABC* that the story is "translatable to anytime or place"? Could you tell us how your portrayal of motherhood has been received in other countries?**

**CRC:** With all modesty, I think that Marín Bellón was right. I never expected the film to travel to so many places, but it has and in the different screenings that I've attended from the United States, to Korea, to cities across Latin American and Europe I have been able to confirm that mothers are mothers and children are children wherever you go. In all cases I have perceived how spectators have recognized Estrella's maternal gestures towards Leonor, although they could of course vary depending on the cultural context: instead of sitting at a brazier table, in other cultures interactions would take place in different spaces, and, in place of ham, they would send other foods to their children. Discovering the universality of the film, despite its particularities, is one of the most beautiful parts of the experience of filmmaking.

It is very possible that in other countries mothers are not as protective as in Spain, where they feel that they have the right to share their opinion on whatever decision that their children make.<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, I think that, regardless of the degree of control that mothers wield over their children, audiences from other cultures can connect to the film due to the universal emotions that it communicates. We all have or have had a mother and we can identify with that feeling of unconditional love, just like we can understand the profound grief of losing a father, even when different cultures will experience grief differently.

**MGP and EKH: Women in your films take care of each other. For example, it's thanks to the initiative of a neighbor (María Alfonsa Rosso) that the main character of *Luisa is Not Home* (Asunción Balaguer) decides to abandon her prison-like family home. Similarly, Leonor in *Journey* only dares to follow in her friend's footsteps to London when she can rely on her mother's blessing and support. Why is it important to you to bring stories of women's solidarity to the big screen?**

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<sup>6</sup> It is possible that lack of familiarity with the Spanish cultural context is behind differences in the film's reception in the United States. While John Hopewell (*Variety*) praises the director for her sensitive portrayal of the mother-daughter relationship ("San Sebastian"), Jonathan Holland (*Hollywood Reporter*) does not empathize with the mother's character, whom he even classifies as a tyrant.

**CRC:** My interest in the topic of solidarity probably has something to do with my experience in *Filmed Diaries* that I told you about before, where I discovered these powerful stories of loneliness, and my having come from a small town. When I moved to Barcelona, where I've lived for a number of years, I realized how different it is from small town life. In my town all the neighbors know each other and you can rely on them for anything: they'll give you a couple of eggs or pick up a package for you. It's an environment characterized by solidarity in which people are really generous and strongly connected to each other.

Personally, I think that we can make each other's lives easier if we reach out mutually, this is why my films position their main characters in difficult situations for which they'll need help from the women around them to surmount. Actually, I write these stories of women's solidarity simply from the desire to make life a little easier for women.

**MGP and EKH: Would you say that your films respond to a certain social motivation? In other words, to what extent do you consider yourself a politically-engaged filmmaker?**

**CRC:** My intention wasn't to make social cinema nor politically-engaged cinema, but inevitably you do not stop being yourself when you write or do anything else. In my case, I'm really rooted in my own identity, which translates into an interior monologue from which I cannot isolate myself and can even cause me trouble. In *Journey*, to look no further, I've realized that my political positioning on certain social matters that are important to me is subconscious. There are actually only small, veiled indications of a political posturing. For example, there is a moment in which the protagonists converse about how the cost of English classes would impact the family budget. This dialogue is in the script because I think that very few films talk openly about money management in the home and I think it's something important. Another similar scene is when the mother has to pretend that she is her husband over the phone in order to acquire a cell phone. This is a comic moment with a bitter aftertaste since it makes us realize suddenly that all the household bills like bank accounts are in the name of men so simply being a woman can be inconvenient for some tasks. The film is sprinkled with anecdotes like these that, without calling attention to political allegations, invite us to adopt a critical perspective on reality.

Agnès Varda, whom I profoundly admire, said that she was always on the side of women and the working class. I consider that this political stance, which I share, and can appear on the screen in a subtle way: through the stories you choose to tell, who leads them and what their homes are like. It bothers me when the locations and contexts do not correspond in films. What's more, I think that the choice of a humble home as a location implies a political decision, since filming in small, tight spaces generates a lot of technical difficulties. In *Journey* I preferred to forego more shots and angles in order to show things as they are, instead of embellishing them (*disfrazarlas*). Furthermore, I am aware that reality has many faces and facets so I was concerned with avoiding the cliché of the young person from a small town with few prospects and employment opportunities (often the parents' line of work, traditional work that they inherit). I tried to adopt a more complex and nuanced perspective to this topic so that it did not appear that children simply reject the work of their parents because they want something more. Instead, I tried to vindicate these traditional professions by valuing their creativity. Despite being a simple town seamstress, Estrella is much more creative than her daughter, who moves to the big city of London but doesn't have a vocation in life. I wanted to give this a new spin since I feel that often cities look down upon small town life. There is a tendency to think that everything is better in the big city and it's not necessarily the case.

## *Celia and her Journey*



Arcadia Motion Pictures (*Journey to a Mother's Room*, 2018)

**MGP and EKH: How was your transition from the short to the feature film? What were the challenges you encountered and the lessons you learned?**

**CRC:** After the short, I started to write stories with one or two characters in interiors with the idea that I might film a short or a series of shorts. Of all these ideas, I kept one that ended up becoming the film. Therefore the creative process was very natural since it departed from the same elements that I'd worked with in *Luisa is Not Home* (the house, the division of roles by gender...) even though, of course, I was met with the challenge of maintaining the spectator's attention for 120 pages, the equivalent of one and a half hours of footage, with such a small and bare plot. I think that opting for simplicity benefitted me enormously when I presented the script to producers since they could clearly see continuity between my film and my previous works, and this gave the project credibility and gave me the capacity to move it along. As we expected, financing had its deadlines and downtimes. In my case, I think that it was key that I didn't stress too much while I waited and that I was patient and confident that we were going to make the film one way or another.

With respect to filming, the biggest challenge was without a doubt directing actors. I had little previous experience with it and it's very difficult to practice until you're in the midst of it. Furthermore, with such a small story like this one, of this mother and daughter, I was very aware that the success of the film would depend to a great degree on the quality of the actresses' performances and their chemistry. This is why I worked so hard with them in order to find the appropriate tone for each scene.

**MGP and EKH: The casting for *Journey*, and in particular the selection of Lola Dueñas for the role of Estrella or Pedro Casablanc to play Miguel, could seem surprising and even risky. How did you select them? Do you think that your casting experience in Pablo Berger's *Snow White* (2012) was useful for casting in your film?**

**CRC:** As casting assistant for *Snow White*, many girls had to audition before we found the protagonist. It was a good experience in which I learned to distinguish, with all the difficulties involved in such a difficult task, the innate talent a person can have to transmit emotions. With regards to *Journey*, nevertheless, the casting process was very different from that of *Snow White*. For starters, our pool of candidates was smaller since we were looking for actresses with a certain amount of experience in the industry. To this we'd have to add the fact that I didn't do it alone. I had the help of Rosa Estévez, a fantastic casting director who aided me a lot. The reasons for the final selection of Lola Dueñas and Anna Castillo as Estrella and Leonor were their freshness and naturalness. It's incredible how both of them can utter the most outlandish sentence possible without it sounding strange. Moreover, both have a strong and sweet presence, which I thought could considerably open up the range of nuance in their performances.

**MGP and EKH:** **One of the commonalities of your works is your passion for portraying the tedium of daily life, focusing on domestic work and household objects. What would you highlight about your exploration of this topic?**

**CRC:** It's a topic that since it does not lend itself to grand epics or narrative turns, appears infrequently in film even though it represents the greater part of our daily life. If we stop and think how much time we spend loading the laundry, preparing meals, or cleaning the house we would be surprised how relevant a role these daily activities play in our lives. In my stories I simply give this world the attention that I think it deserves.

On the other hand, one of the aspects that most attracts me to daily life is its sonorous potential. When I think about how to film the day-to-day, myriad sounds inevitably come to mind: the grazing of scissors on the fabric they're cutting, the rhythmic noise of the sewing machine, the sound of juicers or the pressure cooker, or the key opening the door in the case of *Luisa is Not Home*. I find these familiar and evocative sound images to be a very stimulating place from which to narrate.

**MGP and EKH:** **In both *Luisa is Not Home* and *Journey* your treatment of the mise en scene, in which you privilege sobriety and naturalness, is meticulous. If landscape is one of the favorite scenarios of slow cinema, your films more closely resemble domestic still lifes. What if the relevance of objects in your films?**

**CRC:** Interestingly, my doctoral dissertation focused on the images of still lifes and ruins.<sup>7</sup> More specifically, I proposed exploring how everyday objects become the witnesses of our lives since they are what remains in our absence. I connected this with the idea of the passing of time and its remnant, ruins.

I have always been interested in this topic, maybe because I'm inclined to write from a nostalgic perspective, focused on life that passes, that objects help me articulate. Those elements are also useful for constructing the kind of stories that I like, small stories in which characters are

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<sup>7</sup> For more information, see *El cine entre la inmediatez y la memoria: los motivos de la naturaleza muerta y la ruina a partir de Still Life (2006) de Jia Zhang Ke (2009)* by Celia Rico Clavellino.

immersed or adrift in emotions that don't let them move forward. Through repetition, spectators can detect variations in how the characters behave within the domestic landscape and take note of their personal evolution. For example, in the feature, the coffee maker alludes indirectly to the absence of the father (who would open it if he were alive) and it allows me to put the mother and daughter in analogous scenarios in which they behave differently. In other words, objects change their meaning depending on their use or disuse and this helps me build a world and characters; that's why I pay so much attention to this aspect of the *mise en scene* in my films.

**MGP and EKH: The voids that your films highlight are as or even more important than the physical objects are. In your short the idea of absence is apparent in the very title: *Luisa is Not Home* while *Journey* is plagued with evocative narrative ellipses (for example, with regards to the father's death or what the characters view on television). Could you explain to us the reasoning behind these omissions?**

**CRC:** These omissions relate to my desire for austerity and for keeping only the minimum and the indispensable. In the process of writing and staging of my films, I assemble, so to speak, a frame built upon a foundation that later I eliminate little by little until I'm left with just a couple of supports, the most fragile ones, that carry the weight of the film.

Ellipses can be explored cinematographically in a number of ways but in my cinema they are fundamentally related to absence. They have to do with a perspective that is almost spatial and choreographic of the characters in relation to the spaces they occupy and leave. In the resolution of the short, when Luisa refuses to open the front door of the house to Esteban (Fernando Guillén), what she's actually doing is reappropriating that space, reclaiming it as her own, since she didn't feel like it belonged to her despite sharing it for many years. Likewise, in *Journey* the absence of Leonor drives her mother to take another look at herself and to center herself in her life.

In a certain sense, I imagine this play of the presence and absence of my characters like a dance and, in fact, in a first draft of the feature's script I wrote a scene in which Estrella danced by herself in her apartment. This idea was finally reduced to a gesture, one simple dance step, when she returns home from the dance performance rehearsal that, although small, is able to communicate her new lease on life. I read something about how dance connects us in an intimate way to our most atavistic desires and I think it's a fascinating idea.

**MGP and EKH: Additionally, we are intrigued by the importance that you give in *Journey* to certain liminal spaces in the house: the hallway and landing. What do you find interesting about those spaces and what do you think they bring to the action of the film?**

**CRC:** When I was writing the script, I always imagined the hallway as a sort of no man's land, a frontier zone between the mother's and daughter's worlds where both perspectives cross. The hallway is an ambivalent liminal space since you can use it to meet people who are close or to pass through it to hide in a bedroom. It fascinates me how each one of us hides our feelings and secrets in these nooks, that are like our hidden corners. By conceptualizing the hallway in this way, I obsessed over locating the film in an apartment with bedrooms and doors that faced each other so that you could see into them from across the hall. In practice, this was not at all easy to find since houses aren't actually designed this way; architects tend to stagger doors for privacy.

Similarly, it was important to me that you could see the front door, the definitive threshold that the characters must cross, from the hallway border zone.

### *Celia and Her Readings*



Arcadia Motion Pictures (*Journey to a Mother's Room*, 2018)

**MGP and EKH:** With Gloria Rico you published an illustrated book in 2017, *Celia se aburre/Celia is Bored* (*Boolino Illustrated Book Prize*). Could you tell us more about this publication?

**CRC:** I began composing verses with the intention of publishing a children's story. The idea came about when it occurred to me that my sister, who studied Fine Art, could illustrate it. I love how she draws and this project was an opportunity for her to explore her artistic side. As it turns out, it's possible to find parallels between the story and the film since the book also draws from my childhood memories: when afternoons seemed endless and boredom became a stimulus for creativity. I wanted to celebrate tedium and nature through simple activities like walking and gathering leaves.

**MGP and EKH:** In your facet as storyteller you draw from a number of sources. In *Journey*, to look no further, we perceive a mythic background. Estrella's character, a widow who retreats into her home to sew, is linked to a female archetype of great weight, Homer's Penelope, who awaits the return of her husband in the *Odyssey* while patiently knitting and unknitting her work. Is this intertext intentional or unintentional?

**CRC:** It wasn't at all intentional and it's unfamiliar to me because, like I mentioned, *Journey* is a very personal project. Actually, the conceptualization of the film did not arise in a conscious way from any cultural reference even if later I recognize that I identify with some artists, like Louise

Bourgeois.<sup>8</sup> In the case of Bourgeois, known as the creator of the gigantic spider at the Guggenheim entitled *Mother* (1997), there is a real link with my biography, since my mother worked at a textile factory. Moreover, like I do in *Journey*, this artist examines in her work the inherent contradictions of home and of the figure of the mother, who knits a comfort zone around us that supports us and protects us, but at the same time it can overpower us and drown us.<sup>9</sup>

**MGP and EKH: Nevertheless, in some significant ways your feature vaguely reminds us of the universal story of *Cinderella*. In our view, one could argue that Leonor has a lot in common with Cinderella. Also, as you've just mentioned, in her caring but dependent relationship with her daughter, Estrella seems to play a double role of fairy godmother and evil stepmother in the story. What role do fairy tales play in your film?**

**CRC:** It's interesting that you mention this but it wasn't a conscious reference as I was conceptualizing the project. However, we have these narratives and archetypes so rooted in our consciousness that it is possible that one would appear unintentionally.

In many popular stories like *Cinderella* there is a Manichean perspective on motherhood, and I think that *Journey* deviates from this portrayal by offering a more nuanced and complex figure of the mother. This totalizing and extreme view of women in art has always bothered me. No woman is entirely good or bad, angel or devil, nor are mothers; we are all human and, as such, we have our defects and virtues.

Even though *Cinderella* is a classic, ever since I was little, the fairy tale that had the most impact on me was *Rapunzel*, maybe due to the evocative image of the princess in the tower. But if I had to choose one children's story that left a mark on me, it would have to be *Pippi Longstocking* by Astrid Lindgren. I have fond memories of this peculiar orphan's adventures who, accompanied by a monkey and a horse, took the reins of her destiny with extraordinary freedom and strength for her time. I think that it was important for me and my generation to discover Pippi in our childhood since, in a certain sense, it was our first contact with feminist thought.

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<sup>8</sup> At another point in the interview, Rico explains that, in preparation for the role of Estrella, she and Lola Dueñas spoke a lot about the rootedness of the sculptures of George Segal (1934-) as an existential expression.

<sup>9</sup> Even though Louise Bourgeois began working later on what would become her artistic signature, the motif of the spider as an homage to her mother, one can appreciate the deep contradiction of meaning between her visual art and her installations with this motif. While her drawings consistently depict arachnid families in warm and harmonious atmospheres, the shadowy aesthetics and enormous dimensions of her famous spider sculptures transmit a sense of fear and claustrophobia that relate to the ambivalent character of the mother-spider archetype: a mother is at the same time protective and damaging, loving and threatening (125-126).

## *Celia and the Revolution*



Arcadia Motion Pictures (*Journey to a Mother's Room*, 2018)

**MGP and EKH:** What is your opinion of the work that CIMA has done in recent years to promote gender equality in the audiovisual industry? What do you think about CIMA's efforts to establish a quota system to promote gender parity in the film industry?

**CRC:** Maybe if it hadn't been for CIMA's work, I would not have been able, nor would other women filmmakers, to direct my film. About the debate as to whether projects created or directed by women should be favored in a system of quotas or not, I would totally agree with the passing of a similar law, at least to the point of interrupting the discrimination that women suffer in this male-dominated field.<sup>10</sup> In the current system, which grants extra points to projects led by women, I think that there is a fundamental error, that has been the use of the term "positive discrimination."<sup>11</sup> Language shapes our understanding one way or another, and the label "discrimination" has alarmed certain sectors of the industry who are afraid to be adversely affected by the point system. Personally, I think that it would be better to substitute the term with "affirmative action" ["acción positiva"], which is free of negative connotations and is closer to reality, which is none other than to compensate for gender bias in film work. If it is true that in certain areas of production, which many women have recently joined, the figures are optimistic, there is still a lot of work to be done in decision-making positions. For example, I think it's fundamental that the presence of women increases in the fields of film distribution and exhibition

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<sup>10</sup> The fact that for Lola Dueñas, a prolific actress with a twenty year career, *Journey* was the first time she was directed by a woman is symptomatic of the disadvantage that women encounter in Spanish cinema.

<sup>11</sup> According to the Official State Bulletin of April 2019, in public competition for film funding, films written, directed and produced by women can receive up to seven extra points for their final funding eligibility score.

because, in addition to all of the other filters through which a film must pass (funding, mass media companies, producers) so that it can reach spectators, it has to rely on a distributor and exhibitor willing to project it in cinemas. Luckily, with respect to festivals, some of them have signed the gender parity agreement in order to guarantee greater visibility of projects by women. This is a hopeful initiative but more actions are needed to generate real change. For example, as I understand it, in Iceland there is a movie theater created by two women that only shows films that pass the Bechdel test and there are also a number of theaters in Sweden that are following suit.<sup>12</sup>

### *Celia and the Future*



Arcadia Motion Pictures (*Journey to a Mother's Room*, 2018)

**MGP and EKH:** Could you tell us anything about your future projects? Do you see a long career directing feature films ahead of you?

**CRC:** I am starting to write a new project, about which I prefer not to say too much, not because it's a secret but rather because I'm still in an initial stage of the creative process. It's very likely that the story I have in mind will change considerably in the future, but for now I can say that it has some things in common with *Journey* but also something new. When one sits down to write, one inevitably returns to the paths of earlier works in the hope of being directed to new latitudes.

Otherwise, for some time now, I've been developing a children's animated for which we are looking for funding. The project is called *Mironins* (in homage to Miró's work) and its purpose is to introduce an audience of children to the art world and museums, not as places where one can only look but as play spaces in which one interacts with art.

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<sup>12</sup> First appearing in Alison Bechdel's *Dykes to Watch Out For* in 1985, the "Bechdel test" was added in June 2018 to the *Oxford English Dictionary* (Suh) and defined as: "an informal method of evaluating whether or not a film or other fictional work portrays women in a way that marginalizes them or which exhibits sexism or gender stereotyping."

**MGP and EKH: What is the question no one has asked you that you would like to answer?**

**CRC:** It would probably have less to do with cinema and more with creativity in general; for example, if I'd like to create from other places and disciplines (literature, music, sewing, dance, etc.). Of course, my answer would be yes. I have always been really curious and I have had an interest in creative processes, even before I landed on cinema.

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