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**“Honey, I rose up from the dead, I
do it all the time”: A study of the
Greimas’ opponent role in Taylor
Swift’s and Madonna’s songs**

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ABSTRACT

In the present dissertation, I explore opponent's role in Taylor Swift's and Madonna's lyrics. Greimas' actancial model and his notion of Opponent have been used as a theoretical point of departure. I have compiled a corpus that contains eighteen songs (nine songs per singer) and carried out a close reading and coding process to find the opponents. The external opponent was previously elaborated, and the internal opponent (denominated as "the shadow") appeared during the process. The Qualitative analysis shows that both singers share a conflict between their identity and the forces that attempt to establish control over them. Respecting their inner conflicts, Madonna's strict religious parenting played an important role in her lyrics and served as a gravitational center for other forms of opposition. In the case of Swift, the lyrics reveal an impostor syndrome, also including other issues such as fear of abandonment and betrayal.

Keywords: Greimas' actancial model, Taylor Swift, Madonna, Process of coding, Opponent, Shadow

RESUMEN

En la presente disertación exploro el papel del oponente en las letras de Taylor Swift y Madonna, para ello, como punto de partida se usa el modelo actancial de Greimas y su noción del Oponente. He recopilado un corpus que contiene dieciocho canciones (nueve por cantante) y realizado un proceso de lectura atenta y codificación para encontrar a los oponentes. El oponente externo fue previamente elaborado, y el oponente interno (llamado "la sombra") apareció durante el proceso. El análisis cualitativo muestra un conflicto compartido entre sus identidades y las fuerzas que intentan establecer un control sobre ellas. En cuanto a los conflictos internos, la estricta crianza religiosa de Madonna desempeña un papel importante sus letras y sirve como centro gravitatorio para las demás formas de oposición. En el caso de Swift, sus letras revelan un síndrome del impostor, seguido de otros problemas como miedo al abandono y traición.

Palabras clave: Modelo actancial de Greimas, Taylor Swift, Madonna, Proceso de codificación, Oponente, Sombra

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1. INTRODUCTION

Since 1966 and over the years, the Greimas' actantial model has played an important role in the literature's theory, helping to analyse and identify the different roles that the characters or objects play in a lot of narrative stories. Furthermore, this model has been very necessary to analyse the story of a novel, it helps to comprehend the plot as a whole and to classify the different actants that are present in a narrative as well as the role of the hero and the role of the opponent, that are the most important and make the main events happen. However, the applicability of the system is not restricted to novels or stories, it can be also applied to narrative songs (Eg., songs with biographical material). Greimas' model can help us to identify roles in the life's narrative of songwriters and the emotions they transmit to the audience. Taylor Allison Swift and Madonna Luise Ciccone (Madonna), have an idiosyncratic way of expressing sophisticated feelings through their songs and their successful way of storytelling that narrates the story to the listeners, some of them connecting with the audience. Despite this remarkable feature shared by both singers, these aspects of their lyrics are not explored enough in the music field. The aim of this paper is performing a comparative study of the forces of opposition in Swift and Madonna's narratives using the Greimas' model, thus providing a new perspective of their lyrical universe that was never studied enough by researchers. To achieve this, I carried out a process of coding where several opponents are associated to codes and subcodes (society, ex-lover, religion...) to compare and show what patterns they have in common as well as the ones that are specific of each singer. All this will show the way the role of the opponent is described and how both singers attempt to fight and claim the different obstacles presented throughout their lives, playing the role of the hero in their own narratives.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Academic research on Taylor Alison Swift and Madonna Louise Ciccone (Madonna) has variously focused on their music, lyrics and their public personae.

One of the most recurrent themes in Swift music are the feminist topics. As a result, some studies have been made on this issue to understand the deeper sociological meaning of Taylor Swift's lyrics (Li, 2024; Arnadottir, 2024; Wafi Asrih, 2024; & Delshad Rezaee, 2023). All of them start from the textual analysis of Swift's songs and explore themes related to gender equality. For instance, Wafi Asrih (2024) emphasizes the relevance of Swift's attacks on the gender roles that society has established and her claims for female independence. It appears that the singer's main motif is the fight against gender boundaries present in society. Other striking examples are Arnadottir (2024) and Delshad Rezaee (2023) studies which are focused on the album *Folklore* (2020). Their analyses, point to explore the inscription of a female addressee in Swift's lyrics, and the gravitation around typically feminist concerns. Delshad Rezaee (2023) further identifies common strategies of women's folklore such as appropriation of male culture, juxtapositions and trivializations. By contrast, Arnadottir (2024) differs on the exploration of the presence of Gothic elements in the album such as the recurrent themes of death and afterlife, the feelings of isolation and escape, and the prevailing sense of nostalgia as a form of comfort.

Risher (2023) and Sloan (2021) explored Swift's identity and the innovation of her music over the years. As we can see, the singer's evolution has been an important topic of discussion within the music industry. Risher (2023)'s rhetorical analysis confirms that the singer is an artist who constantly evolves into new versions, while Sloan (2021)'s study of her songwriting techniques concludes that Swift as a modern song writer, responds to commercial pressures without losing her coherent musical identity, serving also as activism against authorship issues. Both reinforce the fact that Swift's main purpose of innovation is the avoidance of becoming outdated as it happens to other female singers.

Another aspect that has been discussed about Swift is her "diaristic" songwriting style as was famously termed by Arnadottir (2024). For this purpose, Sloan (2021), McGrath (2023) and Diko (2024) carried out lyrical analysis of her musical works. McGrath (2023) studies the nostalgic atmosphere that arose as a response to the Covid 19's lockdown in the album *Folklore*. The study reflects the presence of Swift as a storyteller who offers

this album to people as an escape from the difficult circumstances experienced during those months.

As another example, Diko (2024) focuses on the song “Look What You Made Me Do” and carries out a pragmatic and semantic exploration of Swift’s deployment of metaphor techniques to express subtle nuances of meaning and villainizing the lyrical persona. We can conclude that the singer’s songwriting style and the connection with her fans play an important role in her musical success.

Speaking of fans, the deep relationship that she establishes with her listeners draws the researcher’s attention. Morris (2024) and Chittenden (2013) focus on the “Swiftie” fandom and the audience’s reception of the artist’s lyrics. According to Morris (2024) and the Reddit and YouTube discourses created by fans, Swift’s confessional style provokes a response in the listeners, especially in the female audience, building a community where everyone can share and link their own experiences with her songs. Chittenden (2013) does the same thing but focusing on teenage girls using Swift’s songs as a safe space. Both authors claim that Taylor creates a sense of “nostalgic escapism” through her lyrics. It is confirmed that this creative nostalgia inspired by her songs allows fans return to something that “feels like home” and encourage them to compare their own experiences to her songs. Besides, Morris (2024), shows that Swift’s re-recordings also allow listeners to re-experience her albums and think about the past creating an even more nostalgic feeling.

Madonna has also been studied from a feminist perspective. Giménez, Baró (2014) and Street (1993) have performed different textual analysis to find the presence of feminism in Madonna’s works and the representation of this issue in her music. Giménez & Baró (2014) concur that Madonna has evolved over the years, and her image has gone from being victim to avenger and the hero of her own story. As we can see, both singers are interested in the feminist field and have the tendency of evolving into new roles throughout the years.

According to the visual analysis made of Madonna’s image by Curry (1990), the female singer embodies the concept of female icon in her music videos and album covers. This shows that one of Madonna’s goals is to be considered as a feminist model by her listeners. Another researcher, McClary (1994), performs a textual analysis combined with an analysis of Madonna’s self-representation in the media. This study also asserts that she

additionally attempts to challenge gender boundaries and the patriarchy itself, with the help of her songs and the way she portrays herself as a “sexually free” woman. As said before, the singer seems to be very interested in the field, and she intentionally adds this type of feminist discourse to her lyrics.

It has been shown that Madonna criticises society in a lot of her songs, but not only from the feminist perspective. Prayoga (2012) analyses the songs “Material Girl” and “Dress You Up” using Hall’s theory of encoding/decoding to find the portrayal of materialistic society that Madonna does in both songs. By contrast, Häger (1996)’s study adds the existence criticism of Christianity and racism in her song “Like a Prayer” through a sociological analysis.

As we can appreciate, both singers have been studied from the social and musical perspective, but there are other fields where they play a highly important role, for instance, economics. To finish this review, I think that is important to point out Canavan & McCamley (2020)’s research. Using the literature-in-marketing approach, these researchers show the impact these celebrities have in marketing theory and practise.

3. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The Greimas' Actantial model was developed during the 20th century by Algirdas Julien Greimas and published in 1966. It consists of a framework used to analyse the actants that belong to a specific narrative, film or in this case a song. Of particular relevance for us in the present study is the role of the opponent, that apart from being the obstacle of the subject, it is also what initiates the central conflict of the narrative.

According to Greimas' model, the opponent and all the actantial entities are considered as actants. Regarding these abstract forces developed by the author, I divided the opponent into two distinctions. The opponent can be whether external, which refers to another living being such as another character or a monster, or internal which is referring to the hero's own internal thoughts, doubts or weaknesses for instance. Likewise, the internal opponent can be interpreted as a symbolic role that the hero must overcome to achieve his goal and succeed.

Another important figure to be mentioned is Vladimir Propp who in his model about the Russian folktale, previously published in 1928, conceives the role of the villain. Propp establishes that the villain must do a wrongdoing to the hero which initiates the central conflict of the tale. Moreover, this character is willing to do whatever it takes to prevent the hero's success, the villain directly confronts the hero using various ways of manipulation such as the creation of illusions, disguise or deceit. In addition, Propp also establishes that the villain must receive a punishment at the end of the story.

Later on, the psychologist and essayist Carl Jung, developed the concept of the shadow. In Jung's conception this shadow consists of the unconscious aspects of our personality that are rejected, which I found related to Greimas' symbolic role of the opponent. This symbolic shadow embodies the resistance of the subject, accepting the negative aspects of himself, and acting as obstacles to his personal growth that he must overcome. In the end, when that shadow is defeated, the subject evolves by going through a process of psychological development. Having said that, Jung is not the only figure in developing this idea. Joseph Campbell influenced by the Jungian ideas, develops what I denominated as the concept of the "shadow" opponent in the narrative. This new idea of the opponent is linked to the hero's inner conflicts that he must overwhelm to reach a balance. Besides, Campbell gives a name to the psychological evolution that was previously described by

Jung: The Atonement stage consist of the confrontation between the opponent and the hero, when the hero defeats this negative force, he finally can reconcile with his own trauma and gains wisdom that allows him to have a better self-understanding. In this case, the opponent can be a father figure or a controlling authority related to the hero's inner conflicts.

4. METHODOLOGY

I have collected a corpus that contains eighteen songs by Taylor Swift and Madonna (nine songs each). Through a process of close reading, I have identified textual elements that could fit in the role of the opponent of the Greimas's actantial model. The classification of these songs was made through a process of coding (Saldaña, J. 2016).

Since the beginning, the process was guided because the main objective of finding the opponent was previously established. To obtain these opponents from the fragments, I have divided the process into the following steps:

4.1. Pre-coding

I collected the corpus and performed a close reading procedure of the data to make a contextual exploration. This exploration was aimed to identify problematic issues, interpretations and possible cultural influences.

4.2. Coding process

It begins with the preliminary color coding of keywords and essential lines, each color is associated to a specific code. At the same time, there is a preliminary jotting where heuristic annotations are added. These annotations are not definitive, but they will serve as additional information to list the final codes in the next step.

4.3. Compiling a Codebook

This codebook or code list contains all the codes and subcodes that were obtained in the previous step. Then, the codes are accompanied by an extract and a brief description that serves as an example.

This process was made manually with the use of Google Drive and Google Docs, and the songs' lyrics were picked up from the webpage Genius.

4.4. Comparison and contrast

When the results were gathered, I compared the data obtained from both singers to find the principal similarities and differences on the representation of the opponent in both cases. This comparison helps to find the common patterns and conflicts the singers may have, as well as the inner conflicts of each singer.

5. RESULTS

5.1. The Opponent's role in Taylor Swift's narrative.

The results obtained from Swift's discography are wide: a total number of five codes could play the role of the opponent in the narrative that Swift has built in her songs, divided in their respective subcodes. These results are compiled in Table 1.

Table 1

Codes and subcodes of Taylor Swift

Code	Subcode	Title of the song	Album	Year
Society	Patriarchy	"The Man"	<i>Lover</i>	2019
	Female	"Mad Woman"	<i>Folklore</i>	2020
	Range			
	Media	"Blank Space"	<i>1989</i>	2014
	Politics	"Mis Americana and the Heart Break Prince"	<i>Lover</i>	2019
Music industry	Music	"Who's Afraid of Little Old me?"	<i>The Tortured Poets Department</i>	2024
	industry itself			
	Someone	"Look What You Make Me Do"	<i>Reputation</i>	2017
Ex-lover		"All Too Well (10 minutes Version)"	<i>Red (Taylor's Version)</i>	2021
Religion		"False God"	<i>Lover</i>	2019
The Shadow		"Anti-Hero"	<i>Midnights</i>	2022

5.1.1. Society.

The first code that was found was the most recurrent. It includes all the songs where the critique of society is present. This has an important presence in Swift's songs, and the singer usually depicts the society as the opponent of her own story. Here Swift expresses how this opponent makes her musical career more difficult and makes her dream of become successful even more impossible. This code is an external opponent and can be divided in three sub themes: Patriarchy, the Media and Politics.

Firstly, one of the detected subcodes is Patriarchy, which is very notable in Swift's songs. She has written a lot of songs where the influence of feminism and the critique of patriarchy are very easy to find. For instance, they are very noticeable in her song named "The Man":

"I'm so sick of running as fast as I can
[Wondering if I'd get there quicker if I was a man](#)
And I'm so sick of them coming at me again
['Cause if I was a man](#)
[Then I'd be the man](#)
I'd be the man
I'd be the man"

"[They'd say I hustled](#)
Put in the work
[They wouldn't shake their heads and question how much of this I deserve](#)
What I was wearing
If I was rude
[Could all be separated from my good ideas and power moves?](#)"
(Swift, 2019, 0m26s)

In the song Swift complains about the gender inequality present in our society and how this affects to her career.

There is another subcode closely related to Patriarchy, which I called Female rage. This subcode includes all the songs where the singer complains about the invalidation of women's emotions such as anger. The song "Mad Woman" deals with this issue:

"[And there's nothin' like a mad woman](#)
[What a shame she went mad](#)
No one likes a mad woman
[You made her like that](#)
[And you'll poke that bear 'til her claws come out](#)
And you find something to wrap your noose around
And there's nothin' like a mad woman"

"[Now I breathe flames each time I talk](#)
My cannons all firin' at your yacht
[They say, "Move on", but you know, I won't](#)
[And women like hunting witches, too](#)
[Doing your dirtiest work for you](#)
It's obvious that wanting me dead
Has really brought you two together"
(Swift, 2020, 1m02s)

In this song, she is directly addressing the issue of the hysteria. This was considered a disease in the past and it was usually assigned to women who expressed any intense feeling like anger, and they were depicted as mad.

The next subcode collected was the Media. The results reflect that the singer wrote songs that served as a response to the negative comments she received by the media. As an example, this happens in the song “Black Space”:

“New money, suit and tie
I can read you like a magazine
[Ain't it funny? Rumors fly](#)
[And I know you heard about me](#)
So hey, let's be friends
I'm dying to see how this one ends
Grab your passport and my hand
[I can make the bad guys good for a weekend](#)”

“So it's gonna be forever
Or it's gonna go down in flames
You can tell me when it's over, mm
If the high was worth the pain
[Got a long list of ex-lovers](#)
[They'll tell you I'm insane](#)
'Cause you know I love the players
And you love the game”
(Swift, 2014, 0m25s)

The song is a response to the critics the singer received for dating a lot of men. She embraces the role of a mad woman who enjoys torturing her lovers.

Finally, the last subcode found is Politics. This subcode is the less frequent and includes the songs that Swift has written about America's political situation. The following example belongs to her song “Miss Americana and the Heart Break Prince”:

“You know I adore you, I'm crazier for you
Than I was at 16, lost in a film scene
Waving homecoming queens, marching band playing
I'm lost in the lights
[American glory faded before me](#)
[Now I'm feeling hopeless, ripped up my prom dress](#)
Running through rose thorns, [I saw the scoreboard](#)
[And ran for my life \(ah\)](#)”
(Swift, 2019b, 0m12s)

“[My team is losing, battered and bruising](#)
[I see the high fives between the bad guys](#)
Leave with my head hung, you are the only one
Who seems to care
American stories burning before me
I'm feeling helpless, the damsels are depressed
[Boys will be boys then, where are the wise men?](#)
[Darling, I'm scared \(ah\)](#)”
(Swift, 2019b, 1m19s)

This song was released after Trump's victory in the American presidential election in 2016. It seems to be describing a teenage love, but the hidden meaning reveals the singer's frustration and disillusionment with the American political situation at that time.

5.1.2. *Music Industry.*

The next code to be collected is the Music industry, it is an external opponent, divided into two subcodes: The music industry as a whole and someone who belongs to the music industry. The songs that belong to this code are the singer's critics against the musical industry where she works.

The first subcode that was found is the Music industry as a whole. As said before, these songs were written as a critique against this specific industry. In the lyrics, the singer tells her own experiences working there. This is showed, for instance, in a song of her newest album, which is called "Who's Afraid of Little Old Me?":

"The scandal was contained
The bullet had just grazed
At all costs, keep your good name
You don't get to tell me you feel bad"

"Is it a wonder I broke? Let's hear one more joke
Then we could all just laugh until I cry"

"So I leap from the gallows and I levitate down your street
Crash the party like a record scratch as I scream
"Who's afraid of little old me?"
I was tame, I was gentle till the circus life made me mean
"Don't you worry, folks, we took out all her teeth"
Who's afraid of little old me?
Well, you should be"
(Swift, 2024, 1m13s)

In this song she addresses how working there, and all the rumours that surround her since she was a teenager, affected to her mentally. The pronoun "you" could be referring to a lot of elements such as the media, but she is also addressing the music industry.

The next subcode it is pretty similar to the previous one, but this time referring to a specific someone who also belongs to the music industry. As we can see Swift have lots of songs where she tries to portray her enemies. This is very noticeable in her album *Reputation*, the following example belongs to this album, and it is called "Look What You Make Me Do":

“I don't like your perfect crime
How you laugh when you lie
You said the gun was mine
Isn't cool, no, I don't like you (oh)”

“But I got smarter, I got harder in the nick of time
Honey, I rose up from the dead, I do it all the time
I got a list of names, and yours is in red, underlined
I check it once, then I check it twice, oh
Ooh, look what you made me do
Look what you made me do”
(Swift, 2017, 0m30s)

The song reflects Swift's seek of revenge after being tortured by this person or group of people. The album *Reputation* was released in 2017, after the singer's disappearance from the public eye. The previous year, Swift had some problems with other singers, which provoked her disappearance. Having said that, the pronoun “you” refers to these specific people.

5.1.3. *The ex-lover.*

The third code to be found was the ex-lover figure in Swift's songs, which is an external opponent. It refers to the songs where Swift express her disappointment to a specific partner who emotionally hurt her at some point in her life. For instance, a good song that exemplifies this is “All Too Well (10 minutes version) (Taylor's Version) [From the Vault]”:

“Well, maybe we got lost in translation, maybe I asked for too much
But maybe this thing was a masterpiece 'til you tore it all up
Runnin' scared, I was there
I remember it all too well
And you call me up again just to break me like a promise
So casually cruel in the name of bein' honest
I'm a crumpled-up piece of paper lyin' here
'Cause I remember it all, all, all”

“They say all's well that ends well, but I'm in a new hell
Every time you double-cross my mind
You said if we had been closer in age, maybe it would've been fine
And that made me want to die
The idea you had of me, who was she?
A never-needy, ever-lovely jewel whose shine reflects on you
Not weepin' in a party bathroom
Some actress askin' me what happened, you
That's what happened, you”
(Swift, 2021, 4m04s)

This song tells Swift's bad experience in a toxic relationship that had at a young age.

5.1.4. Religion.

Another external opponent is the Religion. Swift has composed some songs where the religion is used to represent something like love or as in this case sexual attraction. The following song is called “False God”:

“But we might just get away with it
Religion's in your lips
Even if it's a false god
We'd still worship”

“We might just get away with it
The altar is my hips
Even if it's a false god
We'd still worship this love”
(Swift, 2019a, 0m53s)

This song uses religious imagery to compare Swift’s relationship and the sexual attraction she feels for her boyfriend.

5.1.5. The Shadow.

This would be an instance of an internal opponent. The songs that belong to this code talk about her own psychological issues and insecurities, that is why I called the last collected theme as “the shadow”. Her single “Anti-Hero” is one of the best examples since this song covers some of these issues:

“I should not be left to my own devices
They come with prices and vices
I end up in crisis (tale as old as time)
I wake up screaming from dreaming
One day I'll watch as you're leaving
'Cause you got tired of my scheming
(For the last time)

It's me, hi, I'm the problem, it's me (I'm the problem, it's me)
At tea time, everybody agrees
I'll stare directly at the sun but never in the mirror
It must be exhausting always rooting for the anti-hero”
(Swift, 2022, 0m24s)

Depicting herself as the anti- hero of her own story, in this song the singer expresses her deepest thoughts about herself, including insecurities and self-hatred.

5.2. The Opponent's role in Madonna's narrative.

The results obtained from Madonna's music are pretty similar to Swift's but there are still some differences. There is a total of four codes that could represent the role of the opponent in her songs, some of them also divided in subcodes. These results are compiled in Table 2.

Table 2

Codes and subcodes of Madonna

Code	Subcode	Title of the song	Album	Year
Society	Patriarchy	“What It Feels for a Girl”	<i>Music</i>	2000
	Materialism	“Material Girl”	<i>Like a Virgin</i>	1984
	Media	“Human Nature”	<i>Bedtime Stories</i>	1994
	American culture	“Hollywood”	<i>American Life</i>	2003
	Politics	“God Control”	<i>Madame X</i>	2019
Someone	Father	“O father”	<i>Like a Prayer</i>	1989
	Ex-lover	“HeartBreakCity”	<i>Rebel Heart</i>	2015
Religion		“Like a Prayer”	<i>Like a Prayer</i>	1989
The Shadow		“I’m So Stupid”	<i>American Life</i>	2003

5.2.1. Society.

The most recurrent code is the Society, an external opponent and one of the similarities shared with Swift. This opponent represents all the obstacles presented in society that Madonna has criticized in her songs. The code was divided into other five sub codes: Patriarchy, Materialism, the Media, American culture and Politics.

The first subcode is Patriarchy. Madonna reflects her attitude against the patriarchal society in some of her songs where she directly complains about the unfair situation of women in society. A clear example of this is her song “What It Feels for a Girl”:

“Girls can wear jeans and cut their hair short
 Wear shirts and boots 'cause it's okay to be a boy
[But for a boy to look like a girl is degrading](#)
['Cause you think that being a girl is degrading](#)
 But secretly you'd love to know what it's like wouldn't you?
[What it feels like for a girl”](#)
 (Madonna, 2000, 0m02s)

The first stanza of the song is a spoken intro that belongs to the film *The Cement Garden* (1993) which address this issue perfectly and introduces the theme of the song.

[“Strong inside, but you don't know it](#)
[Good little girls, they never show it](#)
When you open up your mouth to speak
[Could you be a little weak?”](#)

“Do you know what it feels like for a girl?
[Do you know what it feels like in this world](#)
[For a girl?”](#)
(Madonna, 2000, 0m56s)

The main theme of this song is the expectations that the society has on women's behaviour. It also shows the society's double standard and how affects women in their daily life.

The next subcode is Materialism. It includes the songs where the singer uses some techniques such as satire and mockery to represent a very common issue in American society: the materialistic culture and the stereotypical materialistic population. The famous song where this subcode is presented is the famous Madonna's song called “Material Girl”:

“Some boys kiss me, some boys hug me
I think they're okay
[If they don't give me proper credit](#)
[I just walk away”](#)
(Madonna, 1984, 0m29s)

[“Cause we are living in a material world](#)
[And I am a material girl](#)
You know that we are living in a material world
And I am a material girl”
(Madonna, 1984, 0m56s)

In the song Madonna performs the role of a materialistic women, she mocks these people and reflects the typical materialistic culture in the American 80's.

The third subcode collected is the Media. As well as Swift, Madonna has been criticized and labelled by the press too, in her case the media usually published commentaries talking about Madonna's sexually explicit behaviour in her works. This subcode includes the songs where she attempts to show her anger through her music as a response to these people who always tried to control her. It is shown in the song “Human Nature”:

“You wouldn't let me say the words I longed to say
You didn't want to see life through my eyes
(Express yourself, don't repress yourself)
You tried to shove me back inside your narrow room
And silence me with bitterness and lies
(Express yourself, don't repress yourself)”

“Did I say something wrong?
Oops, I didn't know I couldn't talk about sex
(I must've been crazy)
Did I stay too long?
Oops, I didn't know I couldn't speak my mind
(What was I thinking?)”
(Madonna, 1994, 0m45s)

This song is clearly a response to her own critics. Here she expresses her anger to the media who was saying that her image was too provocative to the public.

Another subcode related to society is the Madonna's songs that depict the American culture. She has written some songs where she criticises some aspects of the culture of her country, for example in the song “Hollywood”:

“Everybody comes to Hollywood
They wanna make it in the neighborhood
They like the smell of it in Hollywood
How could it hurt you when it looks so good?”

“I lost my memory in Hollywood
I've had a million visions, bad and good
There's something in the air in Hollywood
I tried to leave it, but I never could”
(Madonna, 2003a, 0m59s)

This song discusses the concept of greed present in the American culture. To do this, Madonna uses satire and idealization of the city of Hollywood portraying it as a perfect place.

Finally, the last subcode is also related to America's issues, but this time it is focused on Politics. Another thing that Madonna and Swift have in common is that both have written songs concerned about America's political situation of their time. The song is called “God control”:

“Everybody knows the damn truth
Our nation lied, we lost respect
When we wake up, what can we do?
Get the kids ready, take them to school
Everybody knows they don't have a chance
To get a decent job, to have a normal life
When they talk reforms, it makes me laugh
They pretend to help, it makes me laugh
I think I understand why people get a gun
I think I understand why we all give up
Every day they have a kind of victory
Loving ourselves, spread everywhere
They say that we need love
But we need more than this”

“We lost God control
We lost God control
We lost God control
We lost God control”
(Madonna, 2019, 0m01s)

The title is a play on word that actually means “gun control”. In this song the singer criticises the failed gun control in America and the politicians who are described as liars that only work for their own well-being.

5.2.2. *Someone.*

Sometimes, the role of the external opponent is played by specific a person instead of a broader concept. In this case the songs that belong to this code talk about a specific person who make her life more difficult or just hurt her feelings. This code is divided into two subcodes: the father and the ex-lover.

The first subcode that has a noticeable presence in her songs, is the figure of the father. Madonna has composed some songs where the complicated relationship with her father is implied, but a perfect case to exemplify this subcode is the song “O father”, where the singer sings directly to him:

“It's funny that way
You can get used
To the tears and the pain
What a child will believe
You never loved me”

“You can't hurt me now
I got away from you
I never thought I would
You can't make me cry
You once had the power
I never felt so good about myself”
(Madonna, 1989b, 0m46s)

In this song, Madonna describes the hard relationship she has with her father after her mother's death. There is a clear villainization of the father and the singer also expresses the grudge that she has to her own father.

The last subcode of this category is the figure of the ex-lover in Madonna's songs. It includes the songs where she expresses her anger to a partner who hurt her in the past. The song that serves as an example of this subcode is "HeartBreakCity":

"Now I'm in the middle of heartbreak city
'Cause I'm in the middle of a world not pretty
Your clever game got the best of me
But you ain't gonna get the rest of me
'Cause I'm in heartbreak city"

"You tore me into pieces
You didn't have no damn reason
I let you in my house
You helped yourself to everything
And left me with your mess"
(Madonna, 2015, 1m02s)

In this song Madonna depicts a toxic relationship she had with an ex-partner in the past.

5.2.3. Religion.

The next code is Religion, which is an external opponent. This code includes the songs where the singer uses religious imagery to hide an implied sexual meaning. This is another aspect that Swift and Madonna have in common. The song that is going to be used as an example of this code is Madonna's "Like a Prayer":

"I close my eyes
Oh, God, I think I'm falling
Out of the sky, I close my eyes
Heaven, help me"

"When you call my name
It's like a little prayer
I'm down on my knees
I wanna take you there
In the midnight hour
I can feel your power
Just like a prayer
You know I'll take you there"
(Madonna, 1989a, 0m59s)

The song can have two completely opposite interpretations: one that shows the religious admiration of a passionate young girl and the other one which implies a narration of a sexual act. If we look at the second interpretation there is a representation of the sexual activities as something that is divine and very close to God.

5.2.4. *The Shadow.*

Finally, there are occasions in which the singer can also be represented as her own internal opponent. This refers to the apparition of internal thoughts and self-internal hatred that are expressed in the songs as a way of relief. Although Swift has more songs that address this issue, Madonna has some examples in her career that are worthy to mention as well. As an example for this internal opponent, this song is called “I’m So Stupid”:

“I’m
I’m
So stupid
Cause I use to live
In a fuzzy dream
And I use to believe
In the pretty pictures
That were all around me
But now I know for sure
That I was stupid”
(Madonna, 2003, 0m31s)

“I’m so stupid
Cause I use to live
In a tiny bubble
And I wanted to be
Like all the pretty people
That were all around me
But now I know for sure
That I was stupid
Stupider than stupid”
(Madonna, 2003b, 1m43s)

This song is about self-criticism and regret of past decisions. Madonna shows all this with feelings of disillusionment and embarrassment of her young self. In addition, she also criticizes the American Dream.

6. DISCUSSION

The results compiled in table 1 and table 2 show that the lyrics of the singers Swift and Madonna present a lot of opponents who originate several conflicts that they try to fight back. Taking into consideration the opponents acquired from the singers Swift and Madonna, the broadest one is the society in both cases. Therefore, the main issue in both artists is the pressure received by society due to the heavy expectations they have in their behaviours. In general, they have portrayed the same type of opponents in their songs such as the media or the ex-lover. However, despite the numerous similarities, they have several differences, for instance, the presence of an authoritarian father figure in Swift's songs is practically absent. On the contrary, in Madonna's case this figure has a lot of impact on her songs. Likewise, the portrayal of the dark side of the music industry in Madonna's discography does not appear but in Taylor's music is very noticeable and has a lot of presence.

Although they seem to differentiate in several ways, both artists seem to have a more complex and abstract issue. Their lyrics reveal that, even though they belong to different periods of time, they could probably share a serious conflict in common between the constant pressure of being loyal to their own identity, that they are always trying to reassert, and the external forces. These forces are the ones that attempt to control their attitude, put them labels and silence their revindications against society (For example, the media, politics or patriarchy). In Swift's case, she expresses her complaint in a more emotional way, introducing topics like romanticism, tragedy and revenge that clearly shows how this external pressure has an impact on her own sense of self. However, Madonna's attitude is more provocative and rebellious than Swift's. In her songs she attempts to challenge all these sociological rules, confront her censorship and reveal against some aspects of society such as religion. Despite their generational and stylistic differences, both singers seem to spread a similar feminist discourse in their songs.

Besides, related to the previous one, there is an additional conflict that the singers may share. That would be the tension created between being loyal to their own identity and the constant personal evolution present in their musical careers. Both artists have built their career on a process of reinvention. However, their lyrics claim that this evolution is a way of reasserting their own selves. Even though Swift and Madonna differ in the way the conflict is portrayed in their music, they are dealing with the same issue: trying to be

loyal to their own identity while those external forces mentioned in the results, demand their change in order to maintain them “relevant” to the musical industry. To sum up, the conflict they share would be the necessity of adding novelty to their careers but at the same time maintain their original essence as musicians.

Apart from the distinctions previously mentioned, another difference has been found. If the main conflicts presented in these songs are gathered, the results indicate that Madonna’s main conflicts initially began in her own familiar environment, more specifically the lack of freedom experienced during her girlhood due to an overcontrolling parental figure. On the contrary, in Swift’s case the main conflicts portrayed in her songs came from an external environment, that is, the society, a former friend or an ex-lover for instance. These conflicts are the ones that attempt to restrict Swift’s freedom and, at the same time, arise other inner conflicts with herself that are reflected in her lyrics as well.

According to the Jungian ideas and Campbell’s “*shadow opponent*”, a kind of psychoanalysis was made to the lyrical subject of both singers (Campbell, 1988; Jung 1953). The songs commented in the results have been gathered in order to find the psychological issue that could be behind their inner conflicts. As a result, Madonna’s overcontrolled environment could have evolved in a constant seek of freedom and relief. These songs have revealed her need to try to express her freedom, even though she was criticized by the media or not, which could also reveal her rebellious attitude against them. This necessity to rebel against authority could also serve as a response to the overcontrolled girlhood she experienced in the past due to her father’s strict parenting. Furthermore, the religious trauma or rejection is also connected to her relationship with her father. It is reflected in her lyrics that she lived in a strictly religious environment, which also explains the numerous songs where she challenges the Catholic rules, usually using sexual connotations as she did in “Like a Prayer”.

In Swift’s case, the concerns portrayed in her songs could show a strong impostor syndrome. This issue is deeply explored in her song “Anti-hero” but it is not the only song that expresses low self-esteem and constant self-doubt among other insecurities. Moreover, her lyrics reflect her struggle with public perception, seeking external validation and how the bad criticism affects her own perception and self-respect. Additionally, the impostor syndrome is usually associated with the fear of being good enough despite the external evidence of success, which could be connected to her work being constantly degraded by a specific male public. This issue is portrayed in “The man”

where the singer claims the criticism and degradation she receives because of her gender. Furthermore, the impostor syndrome could also be followed by a fear of betrayal, this trauma also has high impact in Swift's songs where she expresses her disappointment towards someone who failed her. The constant betrayal from people could also evolve into a fear of abandonment, Swift usually portrays this kind of concerns in songs dedicated to people who are close to her like friends or lovers.

7. CONCLUSION

This study has achieved its purpose to find the several opponents depicted in the music composed by the singers Taylor Swift and Madonna, applying the Greimas' actant theory. In addition, this process has proven the presence of the opponent in both singers' narratives which could serve as support for future research not only of the opponent's role but also for the rest of actants described by Greimas' that could be portrayed in their songs, such as the helper or the receiver. The comparison between both singers reveals that the opponents they usually portray in their songs are very similar to each other. These external forces reveal a complex conflict they might share. That would be the tension created by the necessity of being always loyal to their identity while other external influences try to control them at all costs. Besides, there is an additional conflict related to the previous one. Both singers need to maintain their original essence as musicians, but at the same time they have the necessity to stay relevant and innovate in their music. Respecting their inner conflicts, Madonna's familiar issues portrayed in her songs could have resulted in her rebellious attitude against any type of authority and religion. On the contrary, in Swift's case, their inner conflicts are external. These issues evolve in a severe impostor syndrome which originates a feeling of low self-esteem and a constant self-doubt, adding a betrayal and abandonment trauma showed in her lyrics. Putting all together, this study has come to several opponents which are part of the singers' narratives and that represent not only the external conflicts they faced, but also their inner traumas. Furthermore, it is clear that the use of this actant model helps to understand the singer's lyrical self that is portrayed in the lyrics and to explore the implied meanings of the songs in order to discover the conflicts that are hidden.

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9. APPENDIX

- *Google Drive* folder:

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1TbQ81a3Ayx0nDk2X6Z0T4tly0ZFYTo5x?usp=drive_link