

NEGOTIATING CENSORSHIP IN
THE POSTWAR SPANISH NOVEL
DIVORCE AND CIVIL MARRIAGE IN
ELENA QUIROGA'S *ALGO PASA EN LA CALLE* (1954)

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ABSTRACT: In recent years, the postwar Spanish novel has received relatively little critical attention, with much scholarship focusing instead on more contemporary works that deal with the Civil War and its legacy. My argument in this article is premised on the notion that works produced in 1950s and 1960s Spain merit renewed scholarly attention and a fresh critical approach. I focus my discussion on the works of novelist Elena Quiroga, whose works have been the focus of little scholarly attention and are generally not well-known by the reading public. My discussion considers the reasons for this neglect of Quiroga and her works, examining her narrative style and her treatment of highly contentious issues in her works, despite the strict censorship regime in place in postwar Spain. My analysis centres on *Algo pasa en la calle*, Quiroga's most experimental novel of the 1950s in terms of technique, and also the most daring in terms of social criticism. I examine the author's representation of the contentious issue of divorce and civil marriage, and her subversion of the gendered identities prescribed in Franco's Spain.

KEYWORDS: Spanish postwar narrative written by women. Elena Quiroga.

LA CENSURA EN LA NOVELA ESPAÑOLA DE POSGUERRA.
Divorcio y matrimonio civil en *Algo pasa en la calle* (1954), de Elena Quiroga

RESUMEN: La novela española de posguerra ha recibido poca atención crítica en los últimos años, en contraste con la mucha atención dedicada a obras contemporáneas que tratan el tema de la guerra civil y sus consecuencias. Este estudio parte de la premisa de que las obras literarias producidas en la España de los 50 y 60 merecen otra visión crítica y un enfoque nuevo. El artículo se centra en las obras de la novelista Elena Quiroga, cuyas novelas han sido escasamente atendidas por la crítica y son poco conocidas por los lectores en general. Se estudian las causas por las que no se ha tenido en cuenta a Quiroga y sus obras, analizando su estilo narrativo y cómo trata en sus novelas temas altamente polémicos a pesar de la rígida censura que existía en la España de posguerra. El análisis se centra en *Algo pasa en la calle*, su novela de los años 50 más experimental por su innovación formal y también la más atrevida por su clara crítica social. Se examina cómo presenta en *Algo pasa en la calle* el debatido tema del divorcio y el matrimonio civil y la forma en que la novela subvierte las identidades de género prescritas en la España de Franco.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Narrativa femenina, de la posguerra española, Elena Quiroga.

In recent years, the postwar Spanish novel has received relatively little critical attention, with much scholarship focusing instead on more contemporary works that deal with the Civil War and its legacy, works that are part of the contemporary ‘memory boom.’ This lack of interest in novels published in the first decades of the dictatorship may be attributed, at least in part, to the perception that many were lacking in literary merit, except for a small number of canonised works. This is particularly true of texts of the 1950s, many of which

were associated with the dominant trend of social realism, a term that came to be used as a negative descriptor; as Barry Jordan has noted, “novela social was frequently used in a pejorative sense to marginalize or disqualify as artistically invalid novels whose ‘social’ content was too explicit or direct” (Jordan, 1990: 18). Such preconceptions have continued to inform much critical work in this area, with most novels of this period pigeonholed as realist texts in literary histories, a tendency noted by Janet Pérez who points to the way in which such generalisations “aid grasping the dominant tone of each period but necessarily muffle other notes” (Pérez, 2004: 631).¹ Pérez’s comment alludes to the fact that not all novels produced in early postwar Spain fall within such narrow categorisations, as is the case with the novels of Elena Quiroga (1921-1995), whose literary production is the focus of my discussion in this study. My argument in this article is therefore premised on the notion that works by writers belonging to what Ana María Matute termed the “wounded generation” of postwar Spain (Matute, 1965),² those who lived through the Civil War and wrote their works in the repressive postwar environment, merit renewed scholarly attention and a fresh critical approach.

Elena Quiroga published a total of ten novels and three novelettes over the course of her literary career; she was awarded the prestigious Nadal Prize in 1950 for *Viento del norte*, a work which received much critical acclaim within Spain, and the Critics’ Prize in 1960 for *Tristura*, and she became, in 1983, the second woman to be elected to the Real Academia Española (RAE). Despite such accolades, Quiroga’s works have been the focus of little scholarly attention and they are generally not well-known by the reading

¹ Such generalisations constitute part of a tendency by literary historians to “compress a wide variety of texts produced in the 1950s to mid-1970s into a putative evolutionary scheme, from an early tentative realism (1950s) to a more openly critical realism (late 1950s to mid-1960s) with a strand of initially revisionist and finally anti-realist writing (early 1960s onwards) giving way to yet another new realism in the 1980s” (Perriam *et al.*, 2000: 135).

² Writers of this generation are also known as the “generación del 50” and the “niños de la guerra”.

public, in comparison with those published by both her male and female contemporaries. Among these are the three other women writers who were honoured with the Nadal Prize in the 1950s — Dolores Medio, Carmen Martín Gaité and Ana María Matute —, following the bestowing of the inaugural award on Carmen Laforet in 1944. Quiroga is, without doubt, the least-studied of this group of writers, to the extent that upon her appointment to the RAE in 1983, one of the press articles on the topic was entitled “Elena Quiroga, la olvidada” (Llopis, 1983: 89).

My discussion in this article will consider the various reasons for this neglect of Quiroga and her works, examining the trajectory of her literary career and the way in which her writing departs from the social realist narrative that dominated literary production at the time. I will focus in particular on Quiroga’s novels of the 1950s and 1960s, works which are complex and experimental in style, and which deal with such sensitive subjects as female sexuality, divorce, wartime violence, and the moral degeneracy of postwar Spanish society.³ My discussion will consider the narrative strategies adopted by Quiroga to allow her to present such issues, despite the strict censorship regime in place in postwar Spain. While I will make reference to a number of Quiroga’s novels in my discussion, due to constraints of space I will centre my analysis here particularly on *Algo pasa en la calle* (1954), the author’s most experimental novel of the 1950s in terms of technique, and also the most daring in terms of social criticism.

Quiroga’s works, like many postwar Spanish novels, have received little critical attention in recent years. Early scholarly work on Quiroga’s novels is included in studies produced by José Domingo in the early 1970s and in articles by Martha Marks published in the early 1980s, among others; more recently, work by Rosa Isabel Galdona Pérez (2001) and Blanca Torres Bitter (2001) has further contributed to scholarship on Quiroga, focusing particularly on her best-known

³ While the topic of the Civil War and its aftermath is alluded to in social realist novels of the period, Quiroga’s works differ from most such works in terms of narrative technique, and in her frank treatment of female sexuality, among other topics.

works, *Tristura* (1960) and *Escribo tu nombre* (1965). There has been, however, scarce attention paid to *Algo pasa en la calle*: this is limited to a 1954 review of the novel published by Joaquín de Entrambasaguas soon after its publication and work by Phyllis Zatlin, the critic who has considered Quiroga’s work most extensively and has published specifically on this novel. My discussion of *Algo pasa en la calle* in this article draws on and is indebted to existing studies on Quiroga’s writings, particularly work by Zatlin published in the 1980s and early 1990s, but seeks to offer a different approach, by focusing particularly on Quiroga’s negotiation of the strict censorship process in place in postwar Spain and on her representation of the contentious issue of divorce and civil marriage. Furthermore, I examine Quiroga’s subversion of the gendered identities prescribed in Franco’s Spain and the way in which her novel challenges notions of the existence of a single version of the past.

Although born in Santander, Quiroga considered herself Galician, as she spent much of her childhood and adolescence in rural Galicia, an area that provides the setting for a number of her literary works. Quiroga’s mother died when she was very young, so she was raised by her father, later attending Catholic boarding school and studying in Rome. Quiroga began to write for publication in the late 1940s, publishing her somewhat melodramatic debut novel, *La soledad sonora*, in 1949. She married historian Dalmiro de la Válgoma in 1950; the couple moved to Madrid, where the author lived until her death in 1995.

It was in the 1950s and 1960s that Quiroga developed her literary career and wrote her most significant works, beginning with the publication of the Nadal-winning *Viento del norte* in 1950. This is a traditional novel, related by a third-person omniscient narrator and set in rural Galicia, and likened by some critics to the naturalist works of nineteenth-century writer Emilia Pardo Bazán (1851-1921) —a reading of Quiroga’s work that has been dismissed by Phyllis Zatlin as representative of “a male-centred focus that tended to put all women writers, and certainly all Galician women writers, in the

same category, and a Madrid-centred focus that failed to appreciate the realities of twentieth-century Galicia” (Zatlin, 1991: 44).⁴ This categorisation of Quiroga’s works as out-dated, however, tended to prevail, despite the fact that her later novels bore little resemblance in style to her first literary efforts.

It was the publication of *Algo pasa en la calle* in 1954 that marked the beginning of Quiroga’s more sophisticated and experimental literary production.⁵ Adopting a stream of consciousness technique and presenting the perspectives of multiple characters through interior monologues, this novel also introduces the highly sensitive topic of divorce together with other elements of social critique, as I will discuss further below.⁶

The best-known and most highly-acclaimed of Quiroga’s works are her two novels featuring protagonist Tadea Vásquez, *Tristura* (1960) and *Escribo tu nombre* (1965). *Tristura* recounts Tadea’s childhood experiences from the perspective of the young protagonist, revealing the constraints placed on girls growing up in Spain in the 1920s and 1930s, in a society dominated by patriarchal and religious discourse and a strongly gendered moral code. The elements of social criticism that are nascent in *Tristura* are developed and intensified in *Escribo tu nombre*, with the now-adolescent Tadea presented as more rebellious, as she struggles against the repressive rules of the convent school that can be read as a microcosm of prewar Spain. The freedom for which Tadea yearns is denied by Church doctrine and strictly conservative

⁴ Zatlin refers here to the fact that the critics, generally based in Madrid, who were dismissive of Quiroga’s novel lacked an understanding of rural life in Galicia at the time; they thus labelled *Viento del norte* as an outdated portrayal of an earlier era (hence the parallel drawn with Pardo Bazán). They were, however, unaware that the rural life depicted by Quiroga in this novel was a reality in many isolated areas well into the twentieth century.

⁵ Similar narrative techniques are also present in two of Quiroga’s other novels of the 1950s, *La enferma* (1955) and *La careta* (1955).

⁶ The question of divorce is also an important topic in the pre-Civil War works of Carmen de Burgos (1867-1932), who deals with this issue in both her theoretical writings and her fictional works. See Louis (1999) for discussion.

social mores, with the novel revealing the hypocrisy of both, while also daringly portraying adolescent female sexuality as part of the teenage Tadea’s first-person narrative. *Tristura* has been lauded by Pérez as Quiroga’s “most significant contribution” (2002: 502), and these two novels have been described by Luebering as her “crowning achievement” (2011: 82). Critics have highlighted the particular accuracy and intensity of Quiroga’s portrayal of the oppressive social environment that restricted the lives of girls and young women in early twentieth-century Spain, praising her complex and nuanced representation of the “problems of growing up female” (Pérez, 2002: 502).⁷

Quiroga’s use of such varied and innovative narrative techniques in her literary works, together with her bold engagement with proscribed sexual and social issues, means that her works make an important and unique contribution to the postwar literary tradition; in fact, as Kristen Barney has affirmed, “one could easily label her the most progressive Spanish writer of the 1950s” (Barney, 1993: 105), referring to both the style and content of her novels. Given this, the neglect of Quiroga’s works is particularly lamentable, and may be attributed to a range of different factors, some of which overlap with the reasons that her novels were able to circumvent the censorship process.

One important factor was Quiroga’s use of sophisticated and experimental narrative techniques, which meant that her works did not fit within the dominant social realist trend of the time, thus automatically falling outside the canon. Moreover, the use of these devices, such as stream of consciousness and temporal fluidity, resulted in her works being inaccessible to many readers, and thus rejected as too difficult.⁸ Significantly, this was a factor that actually worked in Quiroga’s favour in terms of the censorship process, as publications that would reach a larger audience were subject to a more rigorous assessment: thus material for television and cinema,

⁷ For extensive analysis of Quiroga’s *Tristura*, see Torres Bitter (2001).

⁸ Quiroga’s works have been described as “Faulknerian” due to her use of these devices (Zatlin, 1977).

classified as “public” and designed to reach a mass audience, had to pass through many levels of approval in what was often a lengthy process, while novels, considered to be for private consumption and intended for a minority, elitist audience, were usually read by only one or two censors (Neuschäfer, 1994: 49). Quiroga’s novels were likely to have been considered of little interest to most of the population; moreover, the complexity of her works may well have made them inaccessible to the censors themselves, whose backgrounds and levels of education varied widely, and who generally lacked training and guidance. Censors were, for the most part, in full-time employment elsewhere, with their work as censors a secondary job that was poorly remunerated (Neuschäfer, 1994: 51-52). Scholars have indicated the resultingly arbitrary nature of the censorship process in postwar Spain, in which, Daniel Linder has affirmed, censors often acted “unfairly, arbitrarily, and in bad faith” (Linder, 2004: 161). Texts that were submitted to more than one censor often received contradictory reports (Curry, 2006: 54-56), and there were cases of manuscripts receiving differing judgements depending on the time of year at which they were submitted (Mangini, 1987: 46). Quiroga’s experiences appear to confirm the unsystematic nature of the process: Zatlin has indicated, for example, that the censor assigned to the highly contentious *Algo pasa en la calle* did not even read the novel, assuming that it would be similar in content and style to Quiroga’s earlier and more conservative work, *Viento del norte* (Zatlin, 1991: 45).

Gender may also have played a role here, although the censors’ reactions to works by women was somewhat contradictory: on the one hand, critics have suggested that texts by women writers tended to be taken less seriously by the censors, who assumed that their works would be insignificant and harmless, and thus treated them more leniently. Conversely, others have suggested that works by women were scrutinised more carefully, particularly in relation to the ‘moral’ aspects of their work, as they considered supposedly questionable material to be ‘unwomanly’ and the regime was hostile

towards “cualquier tipo de intento de liberación por parte de la mujer” (López, 1995: 11). The approval of Quiroga’s later works, *Tristura* and *Escribo tu nombre*, would also have been facilitated by their use of a child’s perspective, which made the works appear unoffensive, and by their autobiographical basis, allowing them to be dismissed as an insignificant example of women’s life-writing.

Finally, yet significantly, writers were often able to circumvent the censorship process through personal connections; as Mangini has noted, “Quien conociese a un alto funcionario o a un clero-censor podía negociar sus problemas censoriales”, due to the fact that “[l]os mismos que hacían reglas las deshacían si les convenía” (Mangini, 1987: 46). Quiroga herself suggested in an interview that this was indeed true in her case, indicating that she had a personal contact who approved her works for publication without going through the usual channels: “[T]uve muchísima suerte, porque la censura la pasé, y no la pasé, porque tenía un amigo en censura lo bastante noble para decirme ‘ven mañana; tráeme el libro’. Y me daba la tarjeta de censura y ponía los sellos, y se acabó” (Hermida, 1995). It is unclear which of Quiroga’s works were approved for publication in this way, but at least one was censored after publication: *La careta*, which portrays the long-term psychological effects of the atrocities of the Civil War and goes so far as to suggest that these were not confined to one side, was prohibited from being displayed in bookshops (Zatlin, 1991: 45).

I will now turn my discussion specifically to *Algo pasa en la calle*, examining the narrative strategies adopted by Quiroga in this particular novel to allow her to deal with topics generally prohibited by official censorship and to present an implicit criticism of aspects of the Franco regime. The events in the narrative present of the novel — Madrid on a day in the spring of 1954— are sparked by the accidental death of university professor Ventura, who dies after falling from the balcony of the home that he shared with his common-law wife Presencia. Ventura’s body lies in the house awaiting burial, as his relatives, colleagues and neighbours come to pay their respects. This includes Ventura’s legal wife Esperanza, from whom he has been

estranged for many years; their adult daughter Ágata, who has not seen her father since she was six years old; Ágata's husband Froilán, who never met his father-in-law; and Asís, the teenage son of Ventura and Presencia, who returns from boarding school to farewell his father. The narrative is comprised of the interior monologues of each of these characters who, together with the grieving Presencia, the priest and a few minor characters, offer the reader different perspectives on the dead Ventura and his life. Thus while the novel is set in the postwar 1950s, the characters' memories and flashbacks take the reader back, in a jumbled and fragmentary manner, to events of the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s. The purported protagonist of the novel, the deceased Ventura, is voiceless, characterised for the reader only by the partial and often contradictory accounts of those who knew him.

The narrative style adopted by Quiroga in this work is, then, innovative, characterised by the techniques of multiple perspectives, stream of consciousness, flashbacks and simultaneous time. One of the many instances of this in the work occurs when Esperanza contemplates her deceased ex-husband's body in the narrative present, while in an internal monologue remembering conversations they had many years before:

Habían sido en vida manos febriles, delgadas, muy marcados los nudos de los dedos, con uñas que se encorvaban levemente. . . . Las sintió sobre sí, espirituales y ardientes, si cabían las dos cosas. Y en Ventura las dos cosas cabían.

- *Quisiera que nuestro matrimonio fuese un compañerismo perfecto.*

No supo qué responder, no le parecieron las palabras adecuadas. Sabía que era hermosa y deseable, y la palabra 'compañerismo' la hirió.

Era preciso, ahora, todo su oscuro conocimiento de mujer para reconocer aquellas manos expresivas y sobrias en estas pobres destrozadas manos. (27)

The narrative voice also shifts between interior monologues in the first person and others in an indirect third person, as well as a brief monologue in the second person. An omniscient third-person narrative

voice appears only occasionally; for the most part, there is no coherent, guiding voice for the reader; rather, this novel calls upon the reader to make sense of the different narrative strands for him or herself, in order to be able to understand the complete picture of relationships and events and to fill in the gaps in the different versions provided by the characters. These versions are, moreover, often contradictory, as characters have only partial information about others, or may be unwilling to acknowledge the truth about their own situation or actions. *Algo pasa en la calle* was, as a result, a very challenging text for readers of the 1950s, accustomed to social realism.

While historical events or the social context that frames the novel are not explicitly outlined in *Algo pasa en la calle*, as is to be expected given the constraints of censorship, there is nevertheless strong sociopolitical commentary in this work. The most significant element of social critique in the novel, and the most provocative given the social and political context of 1950s Spain, is Quiroga's treatment of the issue of marital separation and divorce; as Pérez notes, it was unthinkable in Francoist Spain to "attempt to publish writings favoring divorce, abortion, birth control" (Pérez, 1989: 74). The legalisation of divorce and the recognition of civil marriages were among the wide-ranging social, cultural and legal reforms introduced by the governments of the Second Republic between 1931 and 1936, many of which were aimed at improving women's civil and employment rights. In addition to the major advances of the legalisation of divorce in 1932 and of abortion in 1936, women came to be acknowledged as citizens with political rights: from 1931, women could be nominated as political candidates and, following the establishment of the new Constitution, they were also granted the right to vote (Scanlon, 1986: 265, 308, 274).⁹ These

⁹ The issue of women's suffrage was highly controversial, even among the different Republican factions. Notably, the politicians Clara Campoamor and Victoria Kent clashed over this issue: Campoamor argued strongly for women's right to vote, while Kent argued against it, on the basis that it would be damaging for the Republic as most women would vote for the right.

reforms, radical for their time, were highly controversial, and did not necessarily have wide support from Spanish women; as Helen Graham has noted, “it is probably the case that a majority of Spanish women in the 1930s were hostile to the new divorce legislation —not because their confessors of parish priests told them to be (though they did), but primarily because it was viewed as eroding their economic security and the only social environment they had experience of” (Graham, 1995: 102). In any case, the reforms were short-lived, with the Franco regime reinstating much of the former Civil Code in 1939, thereby revoking the legality of divorce and civil marriage. As a result, couples who had been married in civil ceremonies during the years of the Republic found that they were no longer considered to be legally married, their children were declared illegitimate, and couples who had been granted a divorce were officially deemed to be still married (Torres, 2002: 14).

This is precisely the situation that is presented in *Algo pasa en la calle*. The retroactive repealing of the Republican divorce and civil marriage laws means that Ventura, upon his death, remains legally married to Esperanza, and his relationship with Presencia is neither officially recognised nor sanctioned, leaving Asís illegitimate. However, rather than denouncing the relationship between Presencia and Ventura, who have, according to Francoist doctrine, been living in sin, Quiroga’s novel highlights instead the devastating impact that the outlawing of divorce had on families, and the anguish caused by loveless marriages.

Ventura and Esperanza were clearly in an incompatible marriage: Ventura was not part of his wealthy wife’s social circle and had no interest in her materialistic life, dominated by frivolous social events; Esperanza did not understand her husband’s scholarly world, and his love of solitude to be able to read and write. Both were unhappy, yet while Esperanza saw no need for them to separate — “Con seguir como estamos, en paz” (Quiroga, 1954: 34) — Ventura refused to continue to live in an unhappy relationship, and decided that they should separate. He pays a high price for his decision to leave his wife, losing contact with his daughter, as Esperanza chooses

to tell Ágata that her father is dead. She hopes, moreover, that Ventura will be killed in the Civil War, thus dying a hero and leaving her the widow of a martyr: “Cuando la guerra ella había esperado . . . recibir la noticia. Muchas mujeres recibían la noticia; era un hecho que podía suceder” (Quiroga, 1954: 104). Quiroga thus also inserts here an oblique reference to the decimation of the male population that resulted from the conflict, a reality that had negative consequences for many families, and that tended to be downplayed in official rhetoric.

The contrasting characterisation of Ventura’s two wives, Esperanza and Presencia, is significant and in itself subversive. Esperanza, the beautiful, wealthy, conservative, Church-going legal wife is a highly unlikeable character: she is portrayed as selfish, vain, and hypocritical, described from the very start of the novel as “impaciente y rencorosa” (Quiroga, 1954: 12). Esperanza repeatedly emphasizes that she is Ventura’s legitimate wife — “Soy su mujer legítima”, “era su mujer legítima, la única” (Quiroga, 1954: 25, 31) —, a position that, she believes, means that she commands respect and is admired by others: “Me admiran. . . . ‘Hay que ver qué buena: vino y rezó por él’” (Quiroga, 1954: 101). She raises her daughter Ágata to believe, first, that her father is dead, and later, that he has abandoned them to live with another woman; Ágata thus grows up in an atmosphere of bitterness, believing that her father never loved her and coming to despise his memory. The superficiality of Esperanza’s life is emphasised in the text and, significantly, is acknowledged by Esperanza herself as she reflects on her relationship with Ventura: “Tenía la vida colmada: Ágata, la casa, los amigos, su posición en sociedad... Todo un artificio montado que le ocupaba días enteros, meses, años” (Quiroga, 1954: 108). This, Esperanza muses, is precisely what Ventura used to say, as he dismissed the shallowness of her life and social environment, telling his wife that “tu medio es como un monstruoso pulpo, y no sabes desenredarte” (Quiroga, 1954: 109). The implicit criticism here of the life of the supposedly “good wife” and, by extension, of the social class of which she is a part, is daring for the time; moreover, the fact that Quiroga makes Esperanza, as the representative of the social and religious values upheld by the regime,

such an unpleasant character effectively discredits the ideology that she embodies.

In contrast, it is Presencia, the non-Church-going “other woman” with whom Ventura has lived for some fifteen years in a “sinful” relationship that is not accepted by society or by the Church, who embodies the supposedly Christian virtues of love, care, respect and humility. Unlike the unsatisfying and hostile relationship that Ventura experienced with Esperanza, his marriage to Presencia is shown to be based on mutual love and respect. Presencia, an unassuming, studious young woman, lost her mother when she was a young girl, growing up in the care of her aunt and uncle, who banished her from their home when they learned of her relationship with Ventura and her pregnancy. The figure of the motherless female protagonist is a common in Quiroga’s work, with the author’s own experience giving her a particularly empathy with their plight. This is, moreover, representative of a broader trend in postwar novels by women writers, which often feature young women whose lives are deeply affected by maternal absence.¹⁰

In contrast to Esperanza, Presencia shared Ventura’s intellectual curiosity and understood his need for solitude to work; a non-believer herself, she nevertheless respected his strong religious beliefs, lamenting the fact that her husband “pasaba delante de las iglesias como un desterrado” (Quiroga, 1954: 218) as a result of his banishment from the Catholic church due to their relationship. Following the accident, Presencia selflessly leaves the dying Ventura with the priest so that he might receive the last rites. Tellingly, it is Esperanza who believes that the dying man should have been denied this comfort, criticising the priest’s actions: “¿Cómo pudo

¹⁰ Mothers of all ages are significantly absent in many twentieth-century narratives by Spanish women writers, particularly in novels of the early postwar years which, Biruté Ciplijauskaitė affirms, “se destacan por la ausencia de la figura de la madre” (1988: 77). Examples include Carmen Laforet’s *Nada* (1944), Rosa Chacel’s *Las memorias de Leticia Valle* (1945), Ana María Matute’s *Primera memoria* (1960) and Mercè Rodoreda’s *La Plaça del Diamant* (1962).

absolverlo? Esta mujer no era su esposa” (Quiroga, 1954: 48). In effect, the fact that the priest is willing to bless the deceased Ventura, thus contravening the Church doctrine to which he ascribes and is supposed to uphold, is a further subversive element in the novel, as is the priest’s empathy with the grieving Presencia and his criticism of the Church-going Esperanza. While the priest praises Presencia’s nobleness — “Renunció a él totalmente. Supo la grandeza de Aquel que se acercaba por lo suyo, y no se lo estorbó” (Quiroga, 1954: 50) —, he refers to Esperanza as “Aquella dura mujer queriendo regatearle su victoria a Dios” (Quiroga, 1954: 49).¹¹

Quiroga paints, moreover, a sympathetic portrait of Presencia as a victim of the regime’s abolition of the divorce law: as Ventura’s common-law wife, she has no rights, and will now be left with nothing. Presencia has long been marginalised socially due to her marital situation, recalling “el desvío de la gente de su calle” and her awareness of “la hostilidad de los demás” (Quiroga, 1954: 91, 93). The novel clearly denounces the unfairness of this treatment, as well as the hypocrisy of the moral code, as the same people who ignore Presencia nevertheless talk to Ventura, and acknowledge her when she is with her husband. There is a clear gendered double-standard at work here, according to which the woman bears the blame, “Como si ella fuese una terrible mujer que le hubiese cautivado” (Quiroga, 1954: 91). This treatment of Presencia reflects the gender discourse espoused by the Franco regime, based on the Eve-Mary dichotomy of Catholic doctrine which posits the Virgin Mary as the “female paragon, and the ideal of the feminine personified” (Warner, 2013: xxxvi), in contrast to woman as sexual temptation, the personification of sin and responsible for the ills of humanity. Problematically, however, Presencia does not conform to stereotypical representations of the “other woman” as a sinful *femme fatale*: she is not portrayed as beautiful nor elegant, and is initially described as “Insignificante.

¹¹ Historians have explored the emergence of dissidence and opposition to Francoism among members of the Catholic clergy, particularly in the 1950s and 1960s, described as “el fenómeno de los ‘curas obreros’” (Sánchez Recio, 2003: 225).

Desvaída” by Froilán (Quiroga, 1954: 64). The fact that Presencia is not instantly recognisable as a “fallen” woman exacerbates the hostility towards her, as she astutely muses: “Quizá lo que menos le perdonaron fue su aspecto de muchacha decente” (Quiroga, 1954: 91). Presencia’s “decency” means that her transgression of the code of morality is particularly unforgiveable.

Significantly, the injustice of Presencia’s suffering and victimisation is acknowledged in the novel by the male character of Froilán, a representative of the legal family, who nevertheless becomes sympathetic to Presencia’s plight. Having never met Ventura and thus relying solely on the one-dimensional perspective of Esperanza and Ágata regarding his father-in-law, Froilán’s visit to the deceased man’s home gives him a new understanding of the situation. He comes to realise the extent of the falsehoods that have shaped his wife’s life, seeing for himself Presencia’s love for Ventura and her grief at his death, “aquel dolor sin fondo que era ella misma” (Quiroga, 1954: 65), as well as receiving proof of Ventura’s unceasing love and longing for his lost daughter. Froilán is deeply moved by the newspaper clippings of Ágata in her wedding dress and the announcement of the birth of her twin daughters that his father-in-law carried with him until his death: “El abuelo, que nunca se lo oyó llamar, guardando aquel pequeñísimo recorte porque llevaba impreso el nombre de dos niñas desconocidas que eran sus nietas” (Quiroga, 1954: 65). Through this process, Froilán not only gains an insight into the life of the deceased Ventura, but also comes to a new understanding about his wife, realising the extent to which the legacy of her childhood continues to impact on her into adulthood: “Ágata está endurecida por el rencor, y me mira de una manera extraña cuando beso a las niñas. Me mira con ojos de huérfana. Acababa de comprenderlo y le despedazaba el corazón” (Quiroga, 1954: 115). Froilán believes that his wife deserves to be told the truth about her father’s love for her, both for her own sake and to reconstitute Ventura’s memory, affirming that, as a father, “Yo agradecería que alguien devolviese mi memoria intacta a mis hijas en un caso como éste” (Quiroga, 1954: 118-19).

The novel thus highlights the impact that paternal absence has had on Ágata, who, having been told that her father was dead, learned when she was thirteen that he was alive and living in the same city as she and her mother. This revelation was doubly traumatic, as she had to confront both the fact that her father had supposedly abandoned her and the knowledge that her mother had lied to her for many years. The adolescent Ágata initially dreamed of her parents reuniting, a feeling that was later replaced by a deep sense of loathing and loss. The adult Ágata is presented as a spoiled and self-centred woman who has long been sheltered from the truth and the real world by her mother, who still treats her as a child. Ágata searches for a replacement paternal figure in a husband — “Me casaré con un hombre mayor que yo. Mucho mayor que yo. Que tenga canas” (Quiroga, 1954: 174) —, and as a mother, she feels a lack of maternal bond with her own children: “Nacieron las gemelas y Ágata se cuidaba de ellas de una manera rápida y escrupulosa, pero sin alma” (Quiroga, 1954: 117). Through the figure of Ágata, Quiroga paints a complex and accurate portrait of the psychological effects of divorce and the impact of parental absence on children.

Absence and loss similarly cloud Ventura’s life, with his separation from his daughter causing him an intense anguish that stays with him until his death. While he never spoke to Presencia of his daughter, Ágata was nevertheless a silent presence in their relationship: “Desde que estaba Asís para nacer, el hombre no volvió a nombrar a Esperanza o a la niña, y sin embargo permanecieron entre ellos. La niña sobre todo” (Quiroga, 1954: 69). The novel’s positive portrayal of the character of Ventura, a nonconformist who left his family and has fathered an illegitimate son, is a further element of the daring nature of Quiroga’s work. He is cast as a liberal, non-traditional professor, encouraging his students to think for themselves, to debate and discuss issues. Ventura also puts others first, deciding, for example, not to go to court for access to Ágata in order to save her from suffering, despite the pain this causes him: “Yo sabía que, a la fuerza, la podía ver, no había medio de impedirlo legalmente; pero así no podía hacerse, así caíamos en lo que yo había pretendido evitar

al separarnos: no sería yo el aniquilado, ni ella, pero sí nuestra hija” (Quiroga, 1954: 89-90).

Ventura’s other child, Asís, is also deeply affected by the implications of his father’s separation from his first wife, as the new family is not recognised by society or the Church. Asís has only just learned from a classmate the truth about this parents’ relationship, and is thus struggling to come to terms with both this knowledge — “soy el hijo espúreo” (Quiroga, 1954: 129) — and the news of his father’s death. Asís is devastated that his parents lied to him, now understanding why they sent him away to school where nobody knew him, and likening his situation to that of a schoolmate who was “un hijo de... Bueno, la palabra no se debe decir... Su madre no era buena” (Quiroga, 1954: 129), a boy who is consequently victimised by the other children. This child carries the burden of his mother’s shame — “Se hacía perdonar, ¿el qué? ¿Qué culpa era la suya?” (Quiroga, 1954: 129) —, and while Asís to some extent blames both of his parents for his own situation — “sin derecho me hicisteis” (Quiroga, 1954: 126) —, it is clear that, again, it is the mother, Presencia, who is cast as the main culprit: “Ha sufrido también, pero si ella no hubiese... Nada más que se hubiese negado” (Quiroga, 1954: 126). The maternal figure is thus presented as the primary cause of her son’s misfortunes, again evoking the notion of woman as pernicious, responsible, as was Eve, for man’s downfall.

In addition to Quiroga’s treatment of the controversial issue of divorce, there are other elements of more veiled social critique and references to further contentious topics in *Algo pasa en la calle*. As mentioned earlier, there are references to Ventura’s participation in the Civil War, where he fought on the frontlines, despite being a pacifist: “Habría empuñado las armas con dolor” (Quiroga, 1954: 104). Following the war, he was temporarily removed from his university position as part of the process of *depuraciones* carried out by the Nationalists during and after the war. Through this process, teachers and other civil servants who were suspected of opposing the regime were dismissed from their positions for offences ranging from

participation in left-wing political movements to alleged immoral private conduct; in the education sector, some 33% of university teachers and 25% of primary school teachers who had held teaching positions during the Republic lost their jobs as part of this process (Tusell, 2007: 25). However, in many cases the allegations made against teachers, Francisco Morente Valero argues, “no se referían a hechos concretos, sino que se limitaban al plano de las ideas, las simpatías y los sentimientos”, leading him to describe the *depuraciones* as a process in which “el verdadero sentido de la justicia estaba viciado desde el origen” (Morente Valero, 1997: 268, 271). In *Algo pasa en la calle*, both Esperanza and Prudencia note the injustice of Ventura’s removal from his position, which is described as “una vergüenza” by one of Ventura’s colleagues, who affirms that it was the result of “Una malquerencia, una ambición mezquina... Otro quería su puesto y le denunció” (Quiroga, 1954: 105). Ventura is reinstated once his army Commander confirms his service, but the episode highlights the arbitrary and unfair nature of the process. It also impacts on Ventura’s reputation, with his students assuming that his removal is a result of unpatriotic actions during the war and that he must, therefore, have been “con los rojos” (Quiroga, 1954: 181). The political retaliation inherent in the process of *depuraciones* was a topic that was not publicly discussed in postwar Spain.

A further polemical topic that is alluded to in the novel is that of sexual relationships, with indications that there are sexual problems in the marriages of both Esperanza and Ventura, and Ágata and Froilán. Ventura was attracted to Esperanza by her physical attractiveness, but Esperanza herself acknowledges her disinterest in men and in sexual relationships: “Despreció a los hombres desde la pubertad” (Quiroga, 1954: 201). Similarly, Froilán refers to his wife’s “miedo cervical a las relaciones físicas” (Quiroga, 1954: 173). Furthermore, the novel alludes to the sexual activities of secondary characters, such as a friend of Presencia’s who is having an affair with a married man, and Esperanza’s friend Reyes, who seeks to seduce Ventura, amid veiled insinuations that her own husband may be homosexual (Quiroga, 1954: 216, 107-108).

These indirect references to sexuality further contribute to the boldness of Quiroga's work for a novel that appeared in the 1950s. It is, however, the novel's representation of the central issue of marital separation that makes *Algo pasa en la calle* such an extraordinary work for its time. Given that at the time of the novel's publication "not even the memory of divorce reform remained, or, if it did, censorship removed it" (Zatlin, 1984: 131), the very inclusion of this topic was in itself bold. However, in Quiroga's novel, while the actual word "divorce" appears only at the end of the text, the clear implication is that separation and re-marriage is not necessarily sinful, but, rather, can be a preferable option to life in an incompatible marriage. The positive portrayal of the loving and respectful relationship between Ventura and Presencia stands in stark contrast to the antipathy and desolation of the officially sanctioned marriage between Ventura and Esperanza, yet the effects of the prohibition of divorce are revealed to be devastating. In particular, the injustice of the resulting social marginalisation of women and children, embodied in the novel by Presencia and Asís, is highlighted in *Algo pasa en la calle*, reinforced by Quiroga's highly sympathetic portrait of the motherless Presencia as a compassionate common-law wife and a devoted mother, a depiction that makes the reader question assumptions about women in her situation. Again, Presencia stands in contrast to the hypocritical and self-centred Esperanza, and her cosseted daughter Ágata, women who supposedly fulfill expectations of women under the Franco regime, but are here cast in a very negative light. Quiroga's innovative narrative techniques also offer the reader multi-dimensional representations of people and of past events, undermining, through the use of shifting narrative perspectives, notions that there exists a single one-dimensional version of the "truth". *Algo pasa en la calle* is, then, a highly experimental novel, as well a work that presents bold social criticism, alluding to the subjects of divorce, civil marriage, illegitimate children, female sexuality, and postwar political retaliation: all highly sensitive topics in the strictly censored and socially conservative society of postwar Spain.

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