

Analytical and thematic approach to the female characters in the novel *Between the curtains* by Carmen Martín Gaité.

Zohra Karima MOKDAD* ¹
Kamel AMAMRA ²

¹University of Oran 2 (Algeria), E-mail :mokdadkrima111@gmail.com

²University of chlef E-mail : kamal@univ-chlef.dz

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Abstract:

This article provides an exhaustive analysis of the female characters in Carmen Martín Gaité's novel *Between the curtains*, using an analytical and thematic approach. In this novel, the characters are presented as complex figures that reflect the realities of post-war Spanish society. The main purpose is to understand how these female figures contribute to the representation of the social and cultural reality of the time, as well as to explore themes related to the search for identity, sexual repression and life dissatisfaction experienced during the specific historical context of Spain in the 1950s.

Keywords: The novel, femininity, character, society, repression

INTRODUCTION

Literature has always served as a mirror reflecting the social and cultural realities of its time, offering a window onto the complexities and tensions inherent in society. In the context of Franco's Spain,

* Zohra Karima MOKDAD.

marked by ideological rigidity and patriarchal norms, the figure of women occupied a particularly restricted and defined place.

Carmen Martín Gaité's *Between the curtains*, winner of the Nadal Prize in 1957, was one of the most outstanding voices in 20th century Spanish literature. The author used her narrative as a means to forge a delicate but intense critique of the social conventions that limited women in the 1950s.

This article sets out to carry out an analytical and thematic study of the female character in *Between the curtains*, with the aim of examining and unravelling the female perspective presented in the novel, in order to understand the role and position of women during the Franco dictatorship in Spain. It also seeks to interpret the author's implicit protest against the patriarchal norms of the society of her time. Through this analysis, the aim is to provide the reader with a new vision, highlighting the precision and beauty of Martín Gaité's writings, as well as their historical and literary relevance in the context of Franco's Spain.

In order to address the proposed objective, we pose the following questions as a central problem: What is Carmen Martín Gaité's biographical background and context, and how did it influence the writing of *Entre visillos*? What are the central themes explored in the novel and how are they intertwined with the social and cultural reality of Spain in the 1950s? What roles do the different characters play within the plot of the work and how do they contribute to the representation of the female experience?

In order to resolve this question, it would be necessary to determine how Spanish society perceived women in the 1950s, and how this perception is reflected in the representation of the female characters in the novel.

In order to carry out this study, we will focus on analysing the narrative elements, the main themes and the representation of the

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female characters in the work. This will include contextualising the novel within the Francoist period in Spain. Furthermore, the use of a wide range of bibliographical sources, both literary and historical, together with the review of numerous official documents of the period, will allow us to validate a large amount of data and reach various conclusions that have emerged during the research process.

1. Historical and Literary Context of the Novel

1.1. Historical Context

On the other hand, the post-war period was a historical milestone that had a significant influence on Carmen Martín Gaité's life and, consequently, on her first literary works. Indeed, this convulsive and difficult period deeply affected Spanish society and was the backdrop against which many writers, including Martín Gaité, expressed their experiences and thoughts through literature (Štibrániová, 2011).

On this basis, the post-war period was a historical milestone that had a significant influence on Carmen Martín Gaité's life and, consequently, on her early literary works. Her novel *Between the curtains* is set in Franco's Spain, specifically in the 1950s, characterised by Spain's entry into the **United Nations**¹ in 1955, although the country remained isolated internationally. This decade is marked by poverty and social division, direct consequences of the Civil War. Franco's regime promoted National Catholicism, an ideology that fused the fascist principles of the Falange with the values of the Catholic Church, imposing traditional roles on women, relegating them to being wives and mothers, subordinate to men. This environment significantly influences the lives and experiences of the female characters in the novel (Cajade Frías, 2010 : 491) Indeed, *Between the curtains* is set in Spain in the 1950s, a period defined by isolation and economic adversity following the Civil War. Franco's regime, a promoter of national Catholicism, imposed traditional roles on

women, confining them to the domestic sphere. This framework had a significant influence on the experiences and the way women are represented in the work. Martín Gaité herself stated in an interview in 1979:

Entre visillos I wrote it as a kind of rejection of the provincial world I was fleeing from. I was in my twenties and had just arrived in Madrid. There is a criticism, albeit without cruelty, of that small and too closed world of my childhood and youth" (Fernández, 1979: 57-58)

Despite these criticisms, Martín Gaité clearly states that there is no cruelty in her work, which indicates that, although she presents an unfavourable assessment of this "small and closed world", she does so with a certain understanding or without intending to denigrate those who are part of it. In short, *Between the curtains* is not only a literary work, but also a personal reflection and a way of approaching and dealing with her own experience and evolution.

1.2. Literary context

It is important to point out that the Generation of the 50's or the children of the war are the names given in the history of Spanish literature to the literary generation of writers born around the 1920's and who published around the 1950's, after the Civil War, and who are considered "children" of the Civil War. Especially in poetry they unite social vindication with a new lyric and concern for language, as well as incorporating metaphysical and philosophical reflections (Khelladi, 2013 :77).

During the 20th century, many Spanish intellectuals, authors and poets faced persecution and repression during the Spanish Civil War and Franco's dictatorship. Some were forced into exile, seeking refuge in other countries to escape oppression and continue their creative and intellectual work in freer environments. Those who remained in Spain

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experienced censorship, imprisonment or worse, in an effort by the regime to control thought and expression. This period profoundly marked Spain's cultural landscape, highlighting the tension between authority and creative freedom.

Between the curtains marked the beginning of a singular literary career for Carmen Martín Gaité, who clearly distinguished herself from the works of her contemporaries of the 1950s generation and distanced herself from the dominant currents of social realism and the social novel of her time. Although the author admits the presence of elements of objective realism in her work, she considers *Between the curtains* to be her exclusive contribution to this literary style (Frías Jiménez, Quintana Cocolina, 2021: 89).

In this respect, this novel was the beginning of a unique literary career for Carmen Martín Gaité, who moved away from the social realism of the 1950s generation and offered her own contribution to objective realism. In this period, Spanish women novelists found a way to express and criticise the injustices and inequalities of society. Through their works, these authors sought not only to entertain, but also to raise awareness and denounce. The novels became a mirror of social misery, reflecting themes such as oppression, gender inequality, poverty and the struggle for civil rights.

1.2.1. Spanish narrative in the 1950s: social realism.

Social realism in post-war literature emerged as a challenging narrative technique in the 1950s. This movement developed and evolved over the next ten years, profoundly shaping the literary landscape. However, after the publication of *Time of Silence* in 1962, social realism gave rise to new theoretical currents and narrative

experiments, marking a major shift in the novel of the time.(K. Herzberger 2004 :1835)

In this period, a group of writers emerged who were grouped under the name of the Generation of the Mid-Century, also known as the Generation of the 1950s. Among them are literary figures such as Juan Goytisolo, Luis Goytisolo, Jesús Fernández Santos, Rafael Sánchez Ferlosio and Carmen Martín Gaité, among others. These novelists, characterised by their commitment to the social reality of their time, became prominent voices that reflected and criticised post-war Spain through their works, leaving an indelible mark on the Spanish literary scene. In any case, the main themes of the Spanish Social Realist novel will be: - The harshness of life in the countryside (*Dos días de septiembre*, by Caballero Bonald). - The world of urban work (*Central Eléctrica*, by Juan García Hortelano). - The city (*La colmena*, by Cela). - The working classes (*El Jarama*, by Sánchez Ferlosio). - The bourgeoisie (*Entre visillos*, Carmen Martín Gaité). - The Civil War and its consequences (Menezes Souza, Carvalho da Silva, 2018 : 67)

1.2. 2. Entre Visillos: Post-war Spanish women's literature

In Spain, in the historical context of the post-civil war and Franco's dictatorship, women were subjected to significant socio-political and cultural constraints. Martín Gaité's novel raises issues of repression, conformity and the search for identity in an oppressive environment. Through the adventures of her female characters, the author from Salamanca offers a unique insight into the condition of women during this oppressive period.

Thus, Martín Gaité approaches the relationship between women and literature from several angles of her literary theory: she explores the particularities of women as readers, the singularities they present as writers, and examines the representation of women in fiction. This representation is not only limited to reflecting the society of the time, but also serves as a driver of new patterns of female behaviour (Fuentes del Río, 2017 : 152). In other words, the Salamanca-born

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author not only studies how women are represented in literature, but also observes how this influences the perception and behaviour of women in real life.

In Carmen Martín Gaité's novel *Between the curtains* (1958), written during the period of Francoism, discursive mechanisms are observed that highlight the power of the male figure in manipulating time within a social hierarchy, thus perpetuating the subordination of women (Bruce Milton Jackson, 2019 : 40). Indeed, this novel portrays the lives of young men belonging to the Salamanca bourgeoisie, especially focusing on women. Through the experiences of the characters, the work offers a vivid testimony of their lifestyle, daily routine, usual occupations, thoughts, desires and concerns within a specific social and cultural context (Cajade Frías, 2010 : 494).

Evidently, with the passage of time, the author herself highlights the testimonial and anthropological value of the novel as a reflection of the life of the provincial bourgeois class in Spain in the 1950s.

2. Carmen MARTÍN GAITE : Life and Works

(Salamanca, 1925 - Madrid, 2000) Spanish writer. Recognised as one of the most outstanding figures of Spanish literature after the Civil War, her work is characterised by the examination of the dynamics between the individual and society (Agulló, 2023 :01).

Carmen Gaité studied Philosophy and Literature at the University of Salamanca, where she contributed to the magazine "Trabajos y Días" and wrote her first poems. She also explored the theatre and acted in several plays. He collaborated in different magazines, such as "Trabajos y Días" in Salamanca and "Revista Nuestra" in Madrid. In 1946, he obtained a scholarship to the University of Coimbra, which marked the beginning of his international projection. Subsequently, he moved to Madrid, where he obtained his doctorate in 1950 with the

thesis "Los usos amorosos del siglo XVII español" (Bekkouche, 2018 : 03)

In the spring of 1954, she was awarded the Café Gijón Prize for her short novel "El balneario". She established herself as an outstanding novelist when she was awarded the Nadal Prize in January 1957 for *Between the curtains*, her first full-length novel, in which she created a unique female character known as the "rare girl". Subsequently, with "Ritmo lento", she was a finalist for the Biblioteca Breve de Narrativa prize in 1962.(Raul, 2013)

On the other hand, this author from Salamanca, outstanding in the literary field, received numerous awards. In 1987, she was awarded the Anagrama Essay Prize and the Golden Book of the Spanish booksellers for her essay "Usos amorosos de la posguerra española", which boosted the popularity of her works in Spain. The following year, in 1988, she shared the Prince of Asturias Award with the poet José Ángel Valente and was honoured with the Acebo de Honor Award for her contribution to literature (Abdulla Muhammed, 2021 : 65)

Also, the author you refer to is a prominent member of the Generation of the 50s in Spain. Her stories focus mainly on female characters. She won the Nadal Prize with her first book, *Between the curtains* (1958), where, through a neo-realist technique, she portrays the monotonous life of several girls in a small town. Later, he moved away from this testimonial approach with "Ritmo lento" (1963), emphasising introspection and communication between people. His novel "Retahílas" (1974) is considered one of his most significant works, delving deeper into these themes and including a reflection on the act of narration (Aquintanaa, 2014).

In this way, Carmen Martín Gaité uses the first person to reflect on literature and the people around her, thus making it easier for us to approach her personal life. In a similar context, Carmen Alemany Bay stands out:

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This writer, always attractive because of her incessant activity, does not make it so difficult for us to find her personality because, apart from the many sketches that have been published in books on post-war literature, her novels and essays present, line by line, the true being and feelings of Carmen Martín Gaité" (Alemany Bay, 1990: 17).

Since then, his narrative has focused on the psychological introspection of his protagonists, who revisit their experiences and confront the spectres of their past. This approach is evident in "Fragmentos de interior" (1976), which portrays a middle-class family in Madrid in the 1960s; "El cuarto de atrás" (1978), in which a writer dialogues with an enigmatic visitor; "Nubosidad variable" (1992), which explores the lives and careers of two women writers; "Lo raro es vivir" (1995), an introspection into a woman's past; and "Irse de casa" (1998), another profound reflection on the memories of a female figure.

Work	Type	Date
A day of freedom	Story	1953
Slow Rhythm	Novel	1963
Eight Centuries of Galician Poetry Galicia	Essay	1972
Nostromo	Essay 1	1973
A rachas	Poetry	1976
The Count of Guadalhorce, his time and his work	Essay	1977
Water under the bridge	Essay	1993
Destination	Story	1994
The Little Sister Theatre 1999	Theatre	1999

Tablero n 1: the important works of Carmen Martin Gaité.(Bekkouche, 2018 : 05)²

Retrieved from : <https://theses-algerie.com/3732014911828652/memoire-de-master/universite-abdelhamid-ibn-badis---mostaganem/an%C3%A1lisis-comparativo-entre-el-cuarto-de-atr%C3%A1s-d>

3. Synopsis

Carmen Martín Gaité's novel *Between the curtains* explores the life of bourgeois youth in a provincial town, probably Salamanca, during the 1940s and 1950s. This story is a faithful reflection of post-war society, marked by the restrictive morality of National Catholicism, where prohibition and sin predominated. The narrative draws a clear distinction in freedoms and opportunities based on gender: men enjoy more autonomy, pursuing university studies, engaging in family business or art, while women rarely advance beyond high school, staying at home and leading monotonous lives centred on church, walks and movies, with the primary goal of marriage.

The plot focuses on these women, trapped in a life of boredom and despair, many of whom passively accept the values with which they were raised. However, some of them show restlessness, wishing to pursue university education or become artists, and one of them aspires to move to Madrid to marry her boyfriend, against her father's wishes. Martín Gaité masterfully addresses the theme of female oppression and frustration of the time. The characters include Pablo Klein, a German teacher who criticises social conventions.

The teacher taught his students that a woman's life is not just about getting married and having children, but that they can rebel and assert themselves without being afraid of the criticism of this macho society, they have to be free and independent.

The story ends when Professor Pablo Klein leaves the city and Julia decides to break all these taboos without worrying about what people will say and finally agrees to run away with her boyfriend to Madrid. Through her critical and liberal perspective, Martín Gaité sheds light on the rigidity and hypocrisy of post-war Spain, unravelling the social dynamics that constrain and shape the lives of her characters.

4. The female characters in *Between the curtains*

In Carmen Martín Gaité's *Between the curtains*, the female character emerges as a central element, offering a penetrating and critical look at the condition of women in post-war Spain, i.e. the author from Salamanca describes the life of young women in Spain in the 1950s, focusing on women subjected to Francoist and Catholic ideals. They experience a monotonous existence, confined to the home and with limited access to public spaces. The narrative highlights the oppression and cultural limitations of the time (Gómez Villán, González De Garay Domínguez, Marcos Ramos, 2019: 78). These women, represented in characters such as Natalia, Julia and Mercedes, face a constant dilemma between conformity and a yearning for autonomy, reflecting the tension between traditional expectations and their personal desires.

In unravelling their stories, Martín Gaité not only critiques the restrictions imposed on the women of her time, but also celebrates their resilience and the subtlety of their struggle for self-assertion and identity in a world that assigns them a secondary role.

There are five female characters in the play:

- **Natalia Ruiz**

The protagonist of the novel is Natalia, known as Tali, a sixteen-year-old girl who has lost her mother and is about to begin her final year of high school, where she will be a student of Pablo, one of her teachers. She lives with her father, her older sisters Julia and Mercedes, and her aunt Concha, who keeps a strict watch over them (Cajade Frías, 2010: 495).

In the novel, the character of Natalia, who embodies the archetype of the "strange girl", as defined by Carmen Martín Gaité (Sánchez García, 2019: 23). Thus, this sixteen-year-old girl represents the archetype of the "rare girl". She begins her last year at high school, a

decision that does not entirely convince her family, and she observes how some of her classmates choose not to finish it. Unlike other teenagers, Natalia has unique interests: social conventions such as marriage, fashion and dances not only do not appeal to her, but also bore her deeply (Kováčová, 2020: 24).

We will try to give some examples:

Statement 1:

"Time to dance and to get bored of dancing. Precisely..." (Martín Gaité, 23: 1984)

Statement 2 :

Her family does not like her behaviour, as her sister Mercedes indicates:

"Tu vienes al mirador con nosotras, por Dios, que manía de estar siempre en otro lado, como la familia escocida" (Ibid, 21).(Ibid, 21)

- Elvira Domínguez

This female character, like Natalia, is another example of the "rare girl" archetype. She is distinguished from the other women by her passion for art; she particularly enjoys painting, reading books and giving walks in solitary confinement. When her father, the headmaster of the Institute, died, she went through a period of mourning that led her to isolate herself at home (Kováčová, 2020: 25).

Elvira is a character who defies social conventions by displaying interests and behaviour atypical for women of her time. Her commitment to art and her reclusion after the loss of her father can also be interpreted as a form of resilience in the face of social expectations of women in post-war Spanish society.

Statement 1:

Elvira got up to pull the blinds and remembered that she would be at least a year and a half without going to the cinema. [...] This was called the relief of mourning" (Martín Gaité, 1984: 114).

Unlike Natalia, Elvira, being older, has already understood the situation in which she finds herself and finally decides to agree to

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marry Emilio. He is a young man who has loved her since childhood, a considerate and attentive boy who loves her sincerely and is genuinely concerned for her welfare. Although Elvira's love for him is not as deep as Emilio's, she chooses to marry him as soon as possible, thus taking on the role of the woman who is destined to marry.

- Julia Ruiz

In the novel, twenty-seven-year-old Julia embodies the figure of an indecisive woman, facing family discontent due to her choice of a boyfriend who does not belong to a 'prominent family'. It is pertinent to recall that in the 1950s it was common for young women to select their partners based on their social position in the community, as status was considered more relevant than genuine love.(Kováčová, 2020 :27)

Julia's monologue clearly reflects the dilemma she is facing. She is deeply distressed, caught between the pressure of her family and the expectations of her fiancé. She longs to defend her love and escape from the province where she lives, seeking freedom from this oppression that makes her feel suffocated.

- Gertru and Angel

In the novel *Between Curtains*, Getru is a character who represents the typical young woman who is ready to get married. She is Natalia's friend and they both attend the same high school. However, Getru decides to drop out of school, a detail that Natalia mentions in her diary.

Statement 1:

"She says that this year she finally won't enrol, because Ángel doesn't like the atmosphere at the Institute". (Martín Gaité, 1984: 11)

Thus, Getru abandons her studies and, eventually, her friendship with Natalia to adopt the role of the ideal girl, preparing herself to assume the responsibilities of being a housewife.

Getru's choice of wife is not so much based on love, but on her youth, sexual inexperience and virginity, which in that context is considered a sacred value. Female virginity is also seen as a guarantee of male control over women, and Getru conforms to these expectations.

Angel is attracted to several girls and is not faithful to Getru. As *Between the Curtains* reflects the society of the time, it is seen how men, once married, were allowed to have extramarital affairs, as society offered them a certain leniency in this respect. On the other hand, women were expected to be completely loyal to one man. This explains the men's interest in finding a young and faithful wife, as evidenced in the dialogue between Angel and Manolo Torre. (Kováčová, 2020 :29).

Gertu personifies the figure of a young virgin and susceptible to manipulation, qualities that Angel values in a woman. In the novel, the interaction between these two characters is fundamental, as Angel's development is intrinsically linked to Gertu's, influencing each other. This dynamism between the two allows the reader to obtain a comprehensive view of their personalities and roles within the story.

- Mercedes Ruiz

Mercedes, a member of the Ruiz family and sister of Natalia and Julia, is another female character in the narrative. At the age of thirty, she is not yet engaged to be married.

Statement 1:

-And that's the bad thing, she's not getting married, she's not going to get married. With the character she has, do you think she's going to find someone to put up with her? (Martín Gaité, 1984: 226)

Natalia and Julia describe their sister Mercedes as difficult-tempered and unbearable, suggesting that for these reasons she will probably remain single, or "para vestir santos", an expression that was used to

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refer to women who did not marry. As already mentioned, in that historical period, unmarried women were frowned upon, an aspect that Carmen Martín Gaité details in her work "Usos amorosos de la posguerra española". (Kováčová, 2020: 30)

From a young age, women were taught that being single was frowned upon and that society would view them with pity and contempt. It was believed that some women were already destined not to marry. Often, single women were judged as having a difficult character, being stubborn or not being comfortable with men (Martín Gaité, 2015: 33)

- Rosa

A secondary character in the novel *Between Curtains* is Rosa, the entertainer at the Casino.

Statement 1:

According to Pablo Klein she is "a pale girl with oxygenated hair combed tightly and large earrings of costume jewellery in the shape of a hoop, with a vulgar face". (Martín Gaité, 1984 : 76)

Rosa embodies a model of woman who defies the social norms of the 1950s. She is presented as an atypical figure, being single and working as an entertainer, an occupation that stigmatises her and contributes to her perception as vulgar. Her behaviour also plays a role in this image, resulting in her lack of acceptance by society.

This aspect can be clearly seen in a conversation at the party, when Pablo decides to go and look for the entertainer and the organiser replies: "Who are you going to bring here? The entertainer? Hey, no, not those jokes. We don't want that kind of people". (Martín Gaité, 1984 : 105) From this conversation it is clear that Rosa is not accepted by the patriarchal society and that her figure clashes with the ideal prototype of the woman.

In short, the characters in this novel, especially the female ones, are affected by two main conditions: the monotony and the intense sexual repression of the time. Set in a provincial town where rarely anything out of the ordinary happens, the emotional state of the characters is characterised mainly by the tedium and routine of days that seem identical to each other. This situation gives them a deep sense of frustration, hopelessness and disillusionment with life, as they perceive few opportunities to escape their environment and find meaning or happiness outside of it.

5. Recurring themes

Life dissatisfaction as a result of an oppressive and monotonous existence imposed on women by society was a recurring theme in 19th century narrative, as we see in works such as "La Regenta" and "Madame Bovary". However, what is distinctive about *Entre visillos* is the way in which the gaze is projected through the window: in this novel, the protagonists abandon their romantic fantasies to observe the street as a space where they can claim their own agency and protagonism, which marks a significant change in the way the story is narrated (Sánchez García: 2019:23). Indeed, the protagonists of *Entre visillos* are deeply dissatisfied with their lives and seek to escape the restrictions and limitations that surround them. Now, the author uses this theme to explore the complexities of the female condition in a specific historical context, highlighting how women struggle to achieve meaning and fulfilment amidst the social and cultural restrictions of the time. The search for identity in the feminine characters of *Between the curtains* Within this framework, the experiences of the young women in "Entre visillos" are framed within a complex network of social and cultural expectations. From these, they must seek their *raison d'être* in order to establish an identity of their own. Their self-knowledge, in this context, is conditioned as much by universally accepted commitments as by particular identifications (Taylor, 1989: 113).

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Thus, the search for identity of the female characters in *Behind the Curtains* is a complex process influenced by social and cultural expectations. The protagonists have to find their own *raison d'être* within this context, which determines how they know themselves. Their identity is shaped both by the norms accepted by society and by the personal identifications they develop.

Sexual repression

In the context of the novel, the sexual repression experienced by the characters accurately reflects the social norms of the time in which they live. Julia is aware of this repression and tries to contain both her own desires and those of her boyfriend Miguel, hoping to channel them into a future marriage where they can freely express their feelings and passions. Elvira, on the other hand, faces this repression in a different way, manifesting herself through doubts and contradictions that lead her to act irrationally and to seek solutions to her problems in complicated situations. Mercedes, for her part, already feels repressed in her desires and calls herself an old maid, regretting not having experienced the kind of romance expressed in the letters Miguel writes to his sister Julia. Themes of love and relationships with men. This is because the main characteristic of the female protagonists is their search for freedom and a break from oppression and isolation, achieved through reflection on the past and escape into memories. We try to illustrate this through the following scheme:

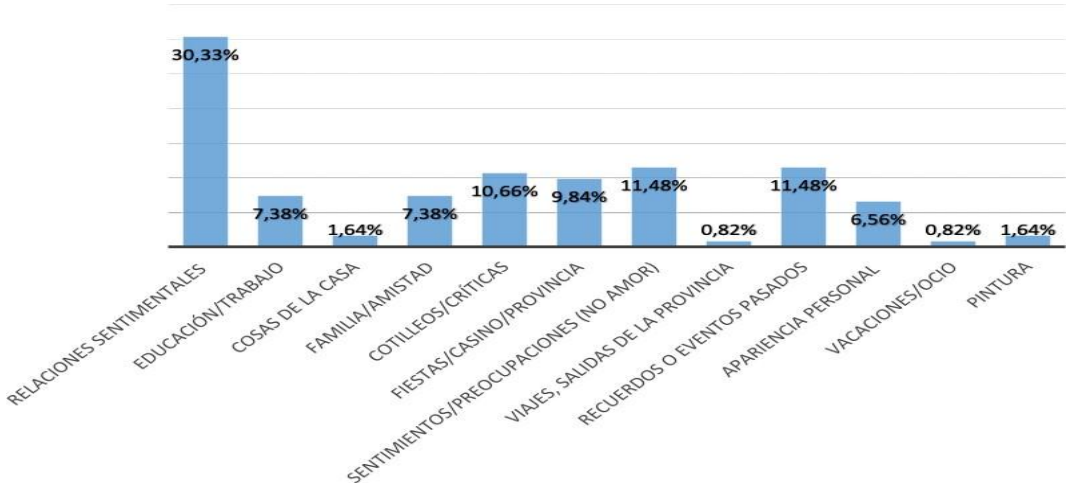


Illustration 1. Topics of conversation of female characters (Gómez Villán, González De Garay Domínguez, Marcos Ramos, 2019:84)³

The value of marriage

In post-war Spanish society, marriage was seen as an inescapable goal for women, as it represented economic and social security, as well as the fulfilment of gender expectations imposed by patriarchal society.

Based on this idea, the theme of marriage acquires a fundamental role in the novel not only because it implies the reproduction of the established canons, but also because it provides women with the opportunity to fulfil their duties in accordance with the dominant ideologies of the time (Tabatabai Yazdi, 2001: 114).

Throughout the novel, conversations about boyfriends and marriage are recurrent, especially among young women. For girls of marriageable age, finding a 'good match' is paramount. In this sense, the play underlines that the concept of a good match is rooted in post-war society (Cajade Frías, 2010 : 496). Marriage undoubtedly occupies a central place in the novel, not only because it preserves established social norms, but also because it represents for women a way of fulfilling the roles and expectations imposed by the dominant ideologies of the time. In post-war Spanish society, marriage was considered a duty and an obligation for women, who had to devote themselves to the care of the home and the education of their children.

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Marriage was therefore not only a social institution, but also an instrument for women to adhere and conform to the dominant patriarchal ideals and values of the time. This analysis highlights the way in which the novel addresses and critiques the social conventions associated with marriage and the role of women in post-war Spanish society.

- The fear

The novel illustrates that the greatest fear of post-war women was that of remaining single, as her friends suggest about the situation of Natalia's sister Mercedes. On the verge of turning thirty and still without a boyfriend, according to her friends, due to her supposedly bad character, the concern about her marital status becomes apparent: "And the worst thing is that she is not getting married, how can she get married? (Cajade Frías, 2010: 497).

The fear of celibacy was reinforced by the social stigma associated with celibacy, which could lead to exclusion and judgement from the community. This fear is evident in the case of Mercedes, whose lack of a partner in her thirties is a cause for concern and questioning by her friends, who suggest that her supposed bad character is the cause of her celibacy. This analysis highlights how the novel illustrates the deep-seated fears of post-war women as a consequence of the social and cultural expectations associated with marriage and marital status.

Conclusion

First and foremost, Francoism was a traumatic time for the Spanish people, so the effects of the regime, the ideology of Catholicism and the prolonged repression during these years were most evident. As a result, the persistence of repression engendered widespread fear among Spanish women, who were particularly affected by the restrictions imposed by Franco's regime. Confined to the domestic sphere and deprived of the opportunity to work or participate actively in society, many women lived in constant fear of challenging established norms. This atmosphere of terror and

oppression had a profound effect on the collective psyche, influencing the attitudes and behaviour of Spanish women for decades. Carmen Martín-Gaité was a revolutionary figure in her time, capable of capturing and conveying the concerns faced by women at that time. *Between the curtains* provides us with a detailed analysis of the various female roles in the 1950s, all framed in a narrative that draws on everyday life and post-war testimonies, a period marked by strict social control over the behaviour and role of women in a patriarchal society. The novel shows the subtle resistance and latent aspirations of these women as they struggle to find their voice and autonomy in an oppressive patriarchal context. The story reflects the struggle of women to break free from the expectations imposed by society and find their own identity and freedom, even in an environment that seems to be constantly watched "behind the curtain". Mercedes, on the other hand, embodies the "spinster", whose goal is to get married, but whose personality prevents her from finding a partner and is therefore marginalised by society. At the time, unmarried women were considered to be rejected. Despite her efforts and qualities, Mercedes does not find a partner. Rosa and Marisol symbolise another unfavourable stereotype: that of women considered vulgar and rejected by society.

In the end, author Martín Gaité presents a complete perspective of the society of the time, marked by hostility and deeply sexist values. She denounces the injustices faced by women of the time, revealing the challenges and suffering they had to endure. However, the main message Carmen Martín Gaité conveys in her novel *Between the curtains* is the importance of individual freedom and the search for identity in an oppressive and restrictive social context. Indeed, this work highlights the need to maintain autonomy and authenticity in the pursuit of happiness and personal fulfilment, even when faced with socially tyrannical environments.

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