◆ Chapter 7

"Revenge Is a Dish Best Served Cold": The "mare defensora" in Teresa Solana's "Feina feta no fa destorb" and Empar Fernández's "El dia que vaig perdre el món de vista"

Diana Aramburu

The 2008 crisis was a truly global phenomenon, both in terms of its geographic scope and its extension into a variety of areas of life. Spain, one of the so-called European PIIGS (Portugal, Ireland, Italy, Greece, and Spain), suffered serious economic contractions, budgetary austerity, and mass youth unemployment following 2008. Positioned on the periphery of the European Union, both geographically and in terms of its marginal position within the broader European political and economic picture, Spain's financial downfall was rapid and severe. Consequently, and perhaps paradoxically, it also experienced vigorous responses to the crisis in terms of social movements, such as 15-M, and new cultural productions in the form of films, music, art, and literature.

For feminist activists in Spain, the 15M, or *indignados*, movement was "an opportunity for the reactivation of feminist struggle" because, according to María José Gámez Fuentes, they were able "to create [new] alliances against structural violence" that emphasized intersectionality (362). Gámez Fuentes demonstrates that the 15M feminists "focused on the links between capitalism and patriarchy. In the face of quotidian precariousness, the materiality of the feminist 'the personal is political' was clearer than ever," as they connected "the political struggle to the materiality of their bodies" (362). Indeed, the political struggle was directly connected to women's bodies as one of the consequences of the 2008 financial crisis was a rise in gender-based violence (Sanz-Barbero et al.). As Erika M. Redding et al.'s study signals, "in Spain, regional male unemployment, particularly after the 2008 economic crisis, increased a woman's risk for experiencing IPV [intimate partner violence]" (87). As fundamental issues plaguing contemporary Spanish society,

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feminicide and gender-based violence formed part of the feminist concerns championed by the 15M movement. After more than a decade after the start of the economic crisis, the feminist struggle against gender-based violence endures through marches and demonstrations. Women continue to take to the streets to protest the crisis of gender violence and respond to the legal system's handling of cases like that of Juana Rivas in 2017 and that of the victim of La Manada, or the Wolfpack, in 2018.[1]

These protests, which decry gender-based violence and feminicide, are not limited, however, to public demonstrations. Turning to literature, one of the most popular literary responses to the crisis of gender violence since 2008 has been in the form of female crime fiction. Speaking about the current boom in crime literature, particularly in women's crime fiction, Elena Losada Soler suggests that crime literature "directly reflects social realities, changes and contradictions that can remain hidden in other literary genres; this is why it is so interesting for gender studies. . . . the crime novel was the first to react to the economic crisis and its consequences, it also shows the diversity of cultural identities and has also reflected on questions pertaining to gender" (9). Contemporary women crime fiction authors in Spain, like Empar Fernández, Susana Hernández, Graziella Moreno, Dolores Redondo, and Teresa Solana, among others, are not only responding to the 2008 financial crisis but are also advocating for a feminist response to gender-based and sexual violence by exploring how sexist politics are written on the female body in the form of crimes against women—feminicide, physical violence, sexual abuse, rape, and sexual torture. According to feminist scholar Nerea Barjola, crimes against women are done in the name of a sexist political system (19). To use Rita Segato's terminology, these crimes are forms of "expressive violence" because they demonstrate patriarchal sovereignty or male domination over women's bodies as a territory (21). Furthering Segato's point, Barjola argues that feminicide narratives are political narratives that encourage readers to focus on what is done to the victim's body but to forget the social mechanisms, the social body, that is also at work (26). What this means is that, while the forms of assault on the female body are made visible, the strategies that are in place to permit or regulate these assaults are made invisible, thus accentuating the female victim's invisibility. As scholars like Shelley Godsland, Nina Molinaro, Inmaculada Pertusa Seva, and Nancy Vosburg claim, women's crime literature in Spain gives visibility to precisely those social and legal mechanisms that continue to conceal and perpetuate forms of gender-based violence.

Beyond uncovering these forms of systemic violence against women, women writers of crime fiction in Spain have also succeeded in complicating established modes of representation of criminal and victimized women by reinterpreting the genre's classical approaches to female characters (Aramburu).

For this reason, women crime writers are not only focusing on the representation of women as victims of gender-based violence but are also introducing and activating them as agents that use violence as a weapon, whether it is for revenge or in a quest for power. Losada Soler proposes that "[p]erhaps this is the most innovative—and the most disturbing—element to emerge in consideration of evil women in these texts. Might bad women be acting of their own volition, without being a victim of the patriarchy? Can the one who gives life also be the one to take it?" (10). Looking to answer these questions, contemporary scholars, such as María Xosé Agra, have turned their focus to studying women's agency in their use of violence—what she and other critics have called "salir de la inocencia" (exiting innocence). According to Agra, "la novela criminal—ha sido y es otra de las vías para aproximarse a la violencia, . . . un recurso o una estrategia que, aun a sabiendas de que se trata de ficción, de la obra de la imaginación, nos permite encarar y así servir de ayuda para comprender, para *pensar lo impensable*: la violencia humana, y lo que, de entrada, parece aún más *impensable*, esto es, la violencia de las mujeres" (20, emphasis in original) (the crime novel—has been and is another way to approximate violence, . . . a resource or a strategy that, knowing full well that it is fiction, a work of the imagination, allows us to come face to face with and helps to understand, to *think* the *unthinkable*: human violence, and what, at the outset, seems even more *unthinkable*, that is, women's violence). Agra, therefore, calls for questioning traditional conceptions such as violence as a masculine problem and women as nurturing pacifists (21). She problematizes the idea that female violence constitutes an exception, a prevailing idea since the studies of the Italian criminologist Cesare Lombroso in the late-nineteenth century (25). As Hillary Neroni explains, "Feminine violence disturbs us because it is extralegal while masculine violence is an integral part of the legal system. . . . Masculine violence fits into a system of exchange . . . because male subjectivity is structured in reference to a limit" (104). When violent women are viewed as anomalous, this subtracts agency from their actions, allowing the prevailing image of women—as nurturing, maternal, domesticated, and overall peaceful and innocent—to remain intact (Gentry and Sjoberg 23). Breaking with this state of innocence signifies "no asumir generalizaciones sobre la violencia de las mujeres, abordarla atendiendo a la diversidad de las experiencias con los crímenes, examinando las circunstancias y contextos específicos del *passage à l'acte*, atendiendo a las individualidades de las mujeres violentas, a su capacidad de acción, no simplemente a su 'acto'" (Agra 31) (not assuming generalizations about women's violence, approaching the subject by addressing the diversity of experiences with crime, by examining the circumstances and specific contexts of *passage à l'acte,* taking into account the individualities of violent women, and their capacity for action, not simply their 'act').

This chapter focuses on a character that has only recently been given some critical attention by crime fiction scholars, such as Losada Soler—the criminal mother, as seen in Teresa Solana's "Feina feta no fa destorb" (2010) (A Stitch in Time) and Empar Fernández's "El dia que vaig perdre el món de vista" (2013) (The Day that I Lost Sight of the World). In these two stories, two ordinary mothers are driven to acts of violence as part of their response to abuse, whether it is the abuse suffered by a daughter, in the case of the former, or by the threat of mistreatment of a daughter, in the latter. I investigate how both crime fiction stories use a first-person narrative and maternal perspective to showcase the effects and trauma of gender-based violence. Yet, each responds to this form of violence by employing two very different maternal narratives. While Solana employs a defense and revenge narrative, in which a mother and her friend meticulously plan and kill a vicious son-in-law, Fernández's Marga brutally punishes her ex-husband when he threatens their daughter Clara. Marga's maternal fury blinds her, however, to such an extent that in the end she kills an innocent stripper that she mistakes for a *mosso d'esquadra*, a member of the autonomous Catalan police force. As Marga recounts her story from the Can Brians prison, Fernández's ending stands in stark contrast to Solana's "Feina feta no fa destorb" because the successfully murderous older women literally feast on the daughter's victimizer.

As I demonstrate, both stories also problematize the space of the home by introducing the crisis of gender violence into the domestic sphere, which is a common topic in domestic noir. A crime fiction subgenre that has gained considerable popularity since the 2008 global crisis, "[c]ontemporary domestic noir can be categorised as a literary and cinematic phenomenon foregrounding the home and/or workplace which, by exposing those seemingly 'safe' spaces, highlights and reflects women's experience" (Peters 12). Fiona Peters bases her definition of contemporary domestic noir on the one provided by writer Julia Crouch on her blog. Crouch emphasizes that the subgenre primarily concentrates on the female experience and "takes as its base a broadly feminist view that the domestic sphere is a challenging and sometimes dangerous prospect for its inhabitants" ("Genre Bender"). In domestic noir, the spaces of the home or the workplace are usually destabilized because, as Emma V. Miller underscores, "the treatment of the female characters, their experiences and the way they are responded to, echoes social truth" (90). I propose that, even though they adapt the domestic noir to structure their stories, both Solana's "Feina feta no fa destorb" and Fernández's "El dia que vaig perdre el món de vista" complicate the subgenre's focus on violence against women by challenging a dysfunctional legal system via the figure of the criminal mother.

Despite their different approaches to the emplotment of the criminal mother, I argue that Solana and Fernández employ a version of what Caron Gentry and Laura Sjoberg refer to as the "mother narrative" in their texts. However, Solana and Fernández transform the mother narrative to problematize how violence is rooted in the maternal function. Gentry and Sjoberg's study of women's political violence claims that we continue to categorize female violence using three narrative frameworks—that of the mother, the monster, or the whore. According to the authors, "[t]he mother narratives describe women's violence as a need to belong, a need to nurture, and a way of taking care of and being loyal to men; motherhood gone awry" (12). The maternal protagonists in Solana's and Fernández's criminal narratives, however, defend their daughters against the real threat of future abuse or perhaps even feminicide. In these domestic noir stories, violence stems from a maternal need to protect, not from a maternal function "gone awry." According to her analysis of the criminal women that appear in her anthologies, including Fernández's Marga, Anna Maria Villalonga classifies those who protect either themselves or their family members as "dones defensores" (women defenders) because they are not violent by nature but are compelled to employ violence to defend either themselves or their family (31–32). I claim that these two short stories employ a mother narrative framework and a maternal perspective to demonstrate that female violence is the result of a maternal function that has come into crisis, made vulnerable by gender-based violence and by patriarchal institutions that do not effectively protect victims. As I demonstrate, "Feina feta no fa destorb" and "El dia que vaig perdre el món de vista" bring visibility to criminalized mothers, women transformed into "mares defensores" (maternal defenders), who employ violence to protect their daughters because they find that the cycle of violence cannot be stopped otherwise. Although the maternal revenge narrative has a long tradition in international and mass-produced literature and film, Solana and Fernández's crime stories revise the traditional representation of gender-based violence in Spanish fiction by emphasizing the fundamental transformation of the maternal figure into a violent character who is activated and driven by trauma. In turn, this traumatic experience is shared by the reader who must also become a witness.

In her analysis of "Feina feta no fa destorb," Shelley Godsland characterizes it as "contestatory crime fiction," writing that Solana presents "female action as a possible response to the problem of heterosexual domestic brutality" (114). While Godsland's article does an excellent job of explaining Solana's use of Boccaccio's *Decameron*, specifically of Day IV to emphasize the female criminal response to gender-based violence, I argue that it is critical to underscore the maternal narrative that is at work in the short story. Told from the criminal's point of view, the story is also narrated from a maternal perspective and voice. Furthermore, the element of trauma, from witnessing her daughter Marta's suffering, also merits further attention because it is the driving force that compels the nameless maternal protagonist and her friend Carmeta, a second mother to Marta, to commit murder. More than just about protecting a daughter from a man that brutalizes her as a "mare defensora," "Feina feta no fa destorb" also appropriates the figure of the vengeful mother, giving an element of revenge to this crime. Gentry and Sjoberg describe the vengeful mother as "driven by rage because of her maternal losses, maternal inadequacies or maternal incredulity. Her decision is not calculated retaliation but emotion-driven revenge" (75). I argue that Solana's maternal protagonist, with Carmeta's help, employs calculated retaliation, a vengeance born from the trauma of witnessing the effects of gender-based violence that are still visible on her daughter's body. Becoming a witness to her daughter's victimization, therefore, redefines her role as a mother.

Converting the reader into her confidant, the mother-turned-killer begins her first-person narrative by describing the *mossos d'esquadra*'s visit to her apartment that morning as they search for Marta's missing husband, Marçal. In preparation of their visit, the nameless protagonist has put together a performance for them, making sure that her hair looks tangled, that her clothes look worn and stained, and that she appears to be in the early stages of Alzheimer's disease. Though she diverts the conversation away from the disappearance of her son-in-law by pretending to have memory lapses, we learn from her humorous exchange with the police that Marçal and Marta are in the process of getting a divorce and that she had reported him for physical abuse. The interrogation-turned-social-visit ends abruptly when the *mossos* realize that this frail woman will not help them advance their investigation because she could not be responsible for Marçal's disappearance. The opening scene, however, functions to establish our complicity as readers with this widowed mother in her seventies and her friend Carmeta, who is undergoing cancer treatment while taking care of her husband, Ramón, who has recently suffered a debilitating stroke.

After the narrator details her current situation, likely in a bid to provoke the reader's sympathy, we enter the next phase of the story. The protagonist recounts through a series of flashbacks how she witnessed the abuse that her daughter Marta suffered at the hands of her husband and what she and Carmeta did to protect her from further victimization. Seeing Marta's abuse from the perspective of her mother, we share in the pain that this mother experiences as she recalls how her daughter "estava una mica estranya. Ensopida. Com si estigués trista. Però ja se sap que tothom passa males èpoques" (21) (seemed to be behaving a bit strangely. Sluggishly. As if she were suffering. But we all have our bad moments) (30).[2] The mother–narrator then depicts the moment when she visits her daughter, accompanied by Carmeta, and finally realizes the extent of her daughter's suffering:

> Aquell matí, quan la Marta va obrir la porta parapetada rere unes enormes ulleres de sol, a nosaltres de seguida ens van saltar les alarmes. Alguna cosa no rutllava. La nena es va excusar dient que tenia conjuntivitis i que per això anava per casa amb ulleres fosques, però la Carmeta, que és malpensada de mena, no s'ho va empassar i les hi va treure d'una revolada. En veure-li l'ull de vellut mal dissimulat sota el maquillatge, a totes dues el cor ens va fer un bot. (21–22)
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> (That morning, when Marta opened the door barricaded behind a pair of giant sunglasses, our alarm bells immediately started ringing. Something was amiss. She pretended she had conjunctivitis and that was why she was wearing dark glasses inside, but Carmeta, who's a suspicious sort, didn't swallow that and snatched them from her face. Our hearts missed several beats when we saw that black eye, ill-concealed under layers of make-up.) (30)

This description of the unsettling memory of seeing Marta's black eye functions as a sort of traumatic testimony, to use Susan J. Brison's terminology. Brison explains that "[i]n the case of trauma testimonies, the action could be described as transforming traumatic memory into narrative memory or as recovering or remaking the self" (71–72). In this fictional instance, the person recounting the traumatic memory is not the survivor but her mother, who witnesses the aftereffects of her abuse. The narrative makes us aware of the effects of gender-based violence through the maternal viewpoint, and, thus, the victim's body cannot be understood unless it is analyzed as both a victim and a daughter. According to Brison, "Trauma testimonies do purport to describe events that actually occurred. And what they *do*, or accomplish, if successful, is *undo* the effects of the very violence they describe" (72, emphasis in original). Trauma testimonies have the dual and complementary function of "bearing witness" and "narrating or working through" the memory itself (72). Unlike what Brison describes as the ultimate purpose of a successful trauma testimony, which undoes the effects of the violence described, here the effect is supposed to be the opposite. The violence endured is supposed to remain present, and it is for this reason that the narrative pauses to give us a description of the daughter's victimized body.

Marta denies it at first, but she finally confesses that Marçal "bevia més del compte i que de tant en tant la colpejava. Ara una bufetada, ara un cop de puny, ara una empenta . . . L'estrès de la feina, es justificava ell després, que li passava la mona. També li deia que, si mai explicava res a algú, la mataria" (22) (drank too much and occasionally beat her. A punch, a slap, a shove . . . He'd blame it on stress at work when he calmed down. He'd also say he would kill her if she ever told anyone) (31). The narrator has been kept in the dark about her daughter's situation until now, and the intensity of the scene continues as the mother–narrator brings Marta's bruised body into full view: "Vaig veure que la nena tenia un blau al braç esquerre i li vaig dir que es despullés. La pobra no va tenir esma per negar-s'hi i, de mal grat, va accedir a treure's la roba. A la Carmeta i a mi també se'ns van saltar les llàgrimes. La Marta, la nostra nina, tenia blaus per tot el cos" (22) (I saw a bruise on my little girl's left arm and told her to strip off. The poor thing couldn't bring herself to say no and agreed. Then Carmeta and I burst into tears. Our darling Marta was black and blue all over) (31). After confirming Marta's abuse through the evidence of her marked body, the protagonist relates how they hired a lawyer who started the paperwork for Marta's case, only to realize how ineffectual Spain's legal system would be in punishing Marçal and protecting Marta from further attacks. Upon learning that Marçal had threatened Marta after appearing at her apartment, our narrator confirms that "[c]ap llei benintencionada no podria protegir la Marta. Si s'ho proposava, el Malparit tard o d'hora se sortiria amb la seva. Com ell deia, només era qüestió de temps. D'esperar que algú de nosaltres abaixés la guàrdia o que el jutge considerés que hi havia altres casos més greus i decidís que la nena ja no necessitava protecció. . . . Intimidar una persona no és difícil. Matar-la tampoc" (23) ([n]o well-intentioned law could protect Marta. If he put his mind to it, the Bastard would sooner or later do the evil deed. As he said, it was only a matter of time. A matter of waiting until one of us lowered our guard or the judge decided there were more serious cases to see to and our little girl no longer needed protection. . . . It's not hard to intimidate someone. Or kill them) (32). The legal system, specifically the 2004 Ley Integral Contra la Violencia de Género (Comprehensive Protection Measures Against Gender-Based Violence), comes under scrutiny here as the mother–narrator denounces the temporary nature of protective measures, such as restraining orders, because there are no mechanisms in place to ensure that abusers will not become repeat offenders.

Alongside the mother and Carmeta, the reader is also converted into a witness of the effects of Marçal's abuse during this sequence. According to E. Ann Kaplan, "'witnessing' happens when a text aims to move the viewer emotionally but without sensationalizing or overwhelming her with feeling that makes understanding impossible. 'Witnessing' involves not just empathy and motivation to help, but understanding the structure of injustice" (22–23). To use Kaplan's words, crime literature can make readers experience "a traumatic situation and make it come alive for us," but it also exposes the paradox with respect to trauma, given the fact that "trauma is unrepresentable and yet must be represented" (56). What is significant about this episode is that it invokes an act of witnessing, meaning that it looks to provoke "an ethical response that will perhaps transform the way someone views the world, or thinks about justice. . . . witnessing leads to a broader understanding of the meaning of what has been done to victims, of the politics of trauma being possible" (123). Here, the traumatic episode is used to give visibility, a face and a voice, to a form of gender-based violence that is often silenced and that would, without a witness or multiple witnesses, remain invisible. While other genres or formats can also mobilize the visibility of violence, crime fiction's intimate relationship with crime and the victimized body makes the use of trauma testimony in the genre still more effective because it invokes these episodes of witnessing to inform or direct our reading of violence against women.

Once they ascertain that Marçal plans to enact his threat to kill Marta, Carmeta and the mother–narrator decide it is their duty to protect her. When the legal system is unable to effectively safeguard her daughter, a mother's function has to change accordingly: "I una mare, em sembla a mi, està per a aquestes coses: per donar un cop de mà als fills quan tenen problemes. Tant si ho volen com si no" (24) (And I reckon that's what a mother's for: to be around to give a helping hand to her children when they've got problems. Whether they like it or not) (33). A new form of maternalism is activated here, which compels the mother–narrator to utilize violence against her daughter's attacker—a victimizer who is unlikely to stop. Contrasted with the traditional narrative that is used to explain the vengeful mother's violence, here the murderous act is not irrational or "driven by rage," as Gentry and Sjoberg have signaled (75). Instead, the maternal function invokes a premeditated retribution on behalf of both women, who are transformed into "mares defensores." The maternal need to protect is also combined with an aspect of revenge that manifests itself as a personal form of justice. The way that they kill and dismember Marçal suggests that this is not only about protecting Marta but also about avenging the physical and mental suffering that he has caused her.

Using the ruse that she will pay for a hotel for Marta and Marçal to reunite, the mother invites Marçal over. As soon as Marçal steps into the kitchen, Carmeta stabs him in the back. Marta's mother then delivers the deadly blow, thrusting her knife into his carotid artery. The narrative emphasizes, "aquell tall, fet amb tota la ràbia de mare que duia a dins, era una sentència de mort" (26) (that thrust, driven by a mother's fury, was his death sentence) (35). Driven by a calculated maternal fury, the mother's appropriation of the phallic weapon is used to penetrate and immobilize the abuser in what is traditionally considered a domestic or maternal space. Marçal dies alone in the kitchen because the narrator accentuates that they wanted "el Malparit morís sol, com un gos" (26) (the Bastard to die alone, like a dog) (36). Meanwhile they drown out his screams with the Beatles. Taking a series of tranquilizers to aid them, the women then proceed to dismember Marçal, encouraging one another throughout the gory process and, later, during the burial of Marçal's body parts.[3] Our narrator expresses no regret and sleeps soundly that night, knowing that Marta's abuser is both spread out across her roof terrace and wrapped in tinfoil in her freezer.

Left with some of Marçal's frozen remains, our maternal protagonist follows Carmeta's advice. Carmeta suggests she forget buying more flowerpots and, instead, purchase the ingredients for a pork-roast feast. The narrator underscores that "[a]l principi m'hi he oposat, més que res per les noies. Però, mirat fredament, he de reconèixer que no és una mala solució" (31) ([i]ntially, I objected, mostly on behalf of the other girls. But, seen in the cold light of day, I have to agree it's not a bad solution) (41). In her analysis of the story, Godsland signals this element of female solidarity by concluding that "females will prevail, quite literally bodily, over the disappeared, but unlamented, Marçal, and thus over the narrative itself" (122).[4] Indeed, the ultimate revenge will occur with the consumption of Marçal. There is a ritualistic undertone to this scene, as women will come together to feast on the remains of the abuser on the mother's terrace, where the rest of his body parts have been buried. Together these women celebrate both the end of this particular instance of gender-based violence and the opportunity for Marta to create a new narrative for herself, one in which she is no longer Marçal's victim. Moreover, the return to the kitchen, the domestic site where Marçal has been killed, for this final solution reaffirms the success of the personal and maternal form of justice in the narrative.

Although humorously subversive, Solana's story is also a powerful commentary on gender-based violence and trauma and how they affect not only the abused but also the family members of the victimized, specifically mothers. In Solana's story, the emphasis is not solely on the victim's experience of gender-based violence and trauma but on the mother's conversion into a witness of her child as a victim. In turn, this provokes the reader's empathetic reaction toward a maternal avenger mobilized by the law's impotence. Although Solana has previously clarified that, while she does not advocate violence, she does want to demonstrate what can happen to a man who beats his wife and how two old lady killers could provoke empathy in the reader despite committing a truly gory crime (Encàrrec Especial, "Teresa Solana"). I would maintain, however, that the reader's empathy stems from witnessing trauma through a maternal perspective. This act of maternal witnessing allows the reader to comprehend her (and Carmeta's) criminalization, to read their transformation into "mares defensores" to protect Marta, superseding their abiding by the law.

Like Solana's short story, Fernández's "El dia que vaig perdre el món de vista" is also told from the maternal first-person point of view. Once again, the mother's voice and perspective guide our understanding of how the maternal function responds with violence when threatened. In Fernández's story, the mother's transformation into a killer occurs when she seeks to protect her daughter from an abuser, her ex-husband Anselm. We are introduced to our protagonist, whose name we later find out is Marga, in the Can Brians prison on October 15, 2013, as she reflects upon how her bad luck commenced when she married Anselm, a man responsible for her current misfortune: "Si era poc el que vaig passar mentre encara vivíem junts, ara li dec una llarga temporada a la presó durant la qual gairebé no podré veure la meva filla, que resta eventualment sota la seva tutela. La seva tutela!" (125) (If what I went through while we lived together weren't enough, I now must serve a long prison sentence and I will almost never see my daughter, who will eventually be under his custody. His custody!). Blaming Anselm for no longer being able to hug her young daughter Clara, Marga also holds him responsible for the guilt that she now feels over the events that occurred some two weeks before, on Friday, September 7. Herein lies the meaning of the story's title: Anselm made her lose sight of the world that Friday night when he threatened their daughter. The maternal crisis ensues from the idea that Anselm will hurt their daughter and results in a maternal fury that is translated into violence against Anselm, as well as into a blinding rage against an innocent stripper who poses as a *mosso* for her sister's bachelorette party.

Brought back to that Friday night, we witness the encounter between Anselm and Marga, a woman that we suspect has been a victim of past gender-based violence, judging from the fear that she experiences when she sees her ex-husband. Once he allows Marga to get out of the car, a drunk Anselm starts screaming at her and attempts to hit her: "Amb les mans intento protegir-me el cap. És un instint. El cap. L'Anselm ara parla de la Clara, em crida a cau d'orella . . . Diu que creu que no és filla seva, que no pot ser-ho" (127) (I try to protect my head with my hands. It's an instinct. The head. Now Anselm is talking about Clara, he screams in my ear . . . He says that he doesn't believe she is his daughter, that she can't be). As Anselm's violence toward Marga escalates, he calls her a whore and claims that she should not be the one to care for Clara, even though, in his drunken stupor, he repeats that he is not certain that Clara is indeed his daughter. Shortly thereafter, the scene turns increasingly violent, as Anselm pushes her against the car while continuing to berate her: "Tremolo. Sé que no el pot sentir ningú, que cap veí alarmat no baixarà a ajudar-me. Estic sola. M'agafa pel clatell, em fa mal. Estic paralitzada. Tinc tanta por que l'orina se m'escola cames avall. No puc evitar-ho. Però no hi ha espai dins del meu cap per a la humiliació o la vergonya. El sento tan furiós darrere meu que el crec capaç de fer-me mal de debò" (127–28) (I'm shaking. I know that no one can hear him, that no frightened neighbor will come down to help me. I'm alone. He grabs me by the back of my neck and hurts me. I'm paralyzed. I'm so afraid that piss runs down my legs. I can't stop it. But there isn't any space in my head for shame or humiliation. I can feel him furious behind me and I start to believe him capable of really hurting me). Like in Solana's story, we are witnesses to the effects of the abuse. But here, we also observe the violence and experience it through the victim herself. Recounted as a flashback by the victim, the episode depicts a truly terrifying sequence where Anselm becomes abusive, not only physically but verbally. He humiliates and degrades her, questions her fidelity, and, more significantly, problematizes her maternal role by calling her unfit and undeserving of their daughter. Throughout this scene, we witness not only the attacks but a woman emotionally scarred by a repeat abuser. Her fear is undeniable as she loses control over her body and urinates on herself. Alone and vulnerable, she realizes that her neighbors, out of fear, are unlikely to help her, even if they witness the scene. This provides a commentary on the prevalence of these situations in addition to the social fear and apathy toward gender-based violence.

The scene reaches a turning point, or reversal, when Anselm starts insulting their daughter, Clara. According to Anselm, Clara is "[u]na puta com tu, com ta mare, com la teva germana. Una . . . Un dia d'aquests t'asseguro que l'agafo i . . ." (128) (A whore like you, like your mother, like your sister. One . . . one of these days I'm going to get my hands on you and . . .). The moment that he threatens their daughter, Marga immediately goes on the offensive, not even allowing him to finish. As she recounts, "No diu res més. No li ho permeto. No tocarà la nena. Ignoro d'on trec el coratge, però agafo el casc de la moto que continua davant meu, . . . em giro com si m'hi anés la vida i li foto la primera trompada" (128) (He doesn't say anything else. I don't let him. He won't lay a finger on my baby. I don't know where I got the courage, but I grab the motorcycle helmet that is still in front of me, . . . I turn with all my might and I land the first blow). Although she does not protect herself from the violence that he inflicts upon her, Marga is activated, infuriated, by the mere mention of any sort of violence against her daughter. Her protective impulses transform her into a "mare defensora": "No m'aturo. No puc. Colpejo i colpejo fins que el malparit de l'Anselm queda estès a terra . . . vençut" (128). (I don't stop. I can't. I hit him and I hit him until the bastard Anselm is lying on the floor, defeated). Anselm remains stupefied by this woman, who moments ago was urinating on herself in fear but who now reacts with such violence. Our narrator even surprises herself when she feels no pity for Anselm, who is on the ground, bleeding from his head, and no longer making a sound. While Gentry and Sjoberg describe the vengeful mother as blindly driven by revenge, Marga's assault against her ex-husband is less about vengeance and more in line with Villalonga's characterization of the "dona defensora" (32). She responds with violence because her protective impulses have taken hold, and there is a fundamental transformation in her character. While she is helpless and impotent when Anselm's violence is directed at her, she becomes active and fierce when this same violence might be directed at Clara.

Believing that her daughter is in danger, Marga reacts ferociously as a "mare defensora." Leaving Anselm for dead, she runs into her house with the helmet, forgetting that her sister Bea's bachelorette party is being hosted in her apartment. As she washes off the blood, the doorbell rings, and, thinking it is Anselm, she prepares to defend herself, helmet in hand once again. Pushed to the limit by her ex-husband, she emphasizes that "[j]a en vaig tenir prou de sentir-me com un cuc. No sóc una puta, ni una mala mare, tampoc no vull ser una perdedora la resta de la meva vida" (131) (I'd had enough of feeling like a worm. I'm not a whore, or a bad mom, and I don't want to be a loser the rest of my life). Tired of living in fear, of living like a victim, she is ready, when she opens the door, to create a new narrative for herself and her daughter.

Here, the story takes another interesting turn because Anselm is not the one who appears at her door. A *mosso d'esquadra* is there instead, and his smiling demeanor bothers Marga. Thinking that he is there because he believes that she killed Anselm, she finds it odd that he does not demonstrate any sense of compassion. She panics upon realizing that she is about to lose her daughter and go to prison: "No puc anar a la presó. Senzillament, no puc. Faré el que calgui" (132) (I can't go to prison. It's that simple, I can't. I'll do whatever is necessary). As with Anselm, she responds violently and hits the unsuspecting man with the same helmet. It is only later that she discovers that he was the stripper hired for her sister's bachelorette party. This time, her maternal fury leads to the murder of Oscar Castro, a philosophy student who turned to stripping because of the economic crisis. The story ends with Marga blaming the murder on Anselm, who survived the assault. It was because of him that she lost "el món de vista" (133) (sight of the world). Marga admits that her panic blinded her to the details, like the fake sheriff badge and plastic gun, that revealed that Màxim Volcano, Castro's alter ego, was not a real *mosso*. With this dark reversal scene, however, the story comments on how the law responds to women like Marga, abused women who have decided to respond with aggression toward their victimizers. The law appears arrogant and unsympathetic toward female victims, whose repeated abuse has transformed them into "dones defensores." Yet, the fact that the *mosso* is a stripper further implies that the law has no serious place in Marga's story until it is used to imprison her.

What ties these two stories together are the elements of trauma, traumatic testimony, and witnessing, in addition to the element of the maternal function made vulnerable by gender-based violence. Unlike Solana's ending, where the mothers succeed in eliminating Marçal, an abuser who represents the gender violence crisis, and the women come together to feast on him, the end of Fernández's short story suggests the opposite. Because Marga is in prison for assaulting Anselm, Clara will now be in her father's custody. Both women become "mares defensores" to protect their daughters, and the narratives put forth the idea that violence is the only option open to them because the law is unable to protect them. For Solana's Marta, the law is ineffective, while, for Fernández's Marga, it has no real bearing until Marga finds herself imprisoned at Can Brians, having lost her maternal rights to an abuser. As Fernández explains in a recent conversation, "Son dos categorías diferentes. Hay gente que hace el mal por el mal, pero hay gente que hace el mal porque no le queda otro remedio, porque está atrapada. Y esa es la gente que me interesa" (They are two different categories. There are people that are bad and act accordingly, but there are people that act badly because there is no other option, because they are trapped. And these are the people that interest me).

There is some ambivalence with respect to the violence utilized in the stories. Yet, both stories are successful at placing "the viewer as a 'witness' to trauma," doing so "in an elusive, disturbing, perhaps haunting way that nevertheless provokes in the viewer a need to take responsibility" (Kaplan 124). According to Kaplan, a work successfully represents trauma when it gives attention to the "traumatic situation" beyond individual suffering (125). It involves opening or keeping open the wounds that trauma causes. As Kaplan suggests, "[a]rt that leaves the wound open pulls the spectator into its sphere in ways other kinds of art may not" (135). By keeping the wounds of abuse and trauma open and visible, both stories position and engage readers as witnesses to gender-based violence. This conversion of the reader into a witness is fundamental because "[t]he process of witnessing is both necessary to subjectivity and part of the process of working through the trauma of oppression necessary to personal and political transformation" (Oliver 85). And while they are fictional renditions of abuse and trauma, both stories have an underlying message, following Helena González Fernández in her study of criminal women, that "[s]us crímenes demuestran que una comunidad solo es pensable desde una política de mujeres, desde las mujeres, con las mujeres. No buscan el reconocimiento propio, sino el cambio de la ley" (34) (their crimes demonstrate that a community is only conceivable from a politics of women, from women, with women. They are not looking for self-recognition, but rather to change the law). Accentuating the law's impotence separates these "mare defensora" stories from other mass-consumed maternal revenge or domestic noir narratives, where there is no politicization of gender-based violence.

Moreover, I would suggest that the stories "politicize motherhood," to use Marianne Hirsch's term. Hirsch argues that "[u]nless feminism can begin to demystify and politicize motherhood, and by extension female power more generally, fears and projections will continue. Feminism might begin by listening to the stories that mothers have to tell, and by creating the space in which mothers might articulate those stories" (167). Solana and Fernández open a discursive space in which motherhood, vulnerability, and violence come together to be discussed, because, following González Fernández, "los mecanismos que deberían asegurar la promesa de seguridad" (the mechanisms that should secure the promise of safety), especially in the domestic space, are non-functional (23). The mothers' inability to protect their children drives them to violence, a desire to undo the suffering already caused or preempt the potential threat of abuse. Because their maternal function has been made vulnerable by the threat made by male and institutional victimizers, this vulnerability leads to their transformation into criminalized mothers, more specifically into "mares defensores." This crisis in motherhood leads to a politicization of the maternal function, whereby the role of the mother is redefined in these narratives, and as readers, we become witnesses to a new politics of the maternal, which emerges from the crisis of gender-based violence.

Notes

1. I want to thank Nick Phillips and my research assistant Morgan Smith for reading and commenting on a first draft of this chapter. A special thanks also goes to Empar Fernández for meeting with me during the summer of 2017 and to Anna Maria Villalonga for sharing her article, "El relat negre femení en català per què maten les dones? De la dona defensora a la dona botxí," prior to its publication. Unless noted otherwise, all translations are my own.
2. One of the largest mobilizations against gender violence in many regions in Spain takes place every year on November 25, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women. In the summer of 2017, feminist organizations from Granada to Barcelona and across social media came together to protest the situation suffered by Juana Rivas and her two children. For over a year, the Spanish media covered the case of Rivas, a woman who escaped an abusive partner and took her two children from San Pietro, Italy, to Granada without their father's consent, seeking refuge in the Centro de la Mujer del Ayuntamiento de Maracena [The Woman's Center of the Municipality of Maracena] in June 2016. Rivas, who had already de-

nounced Franscesco Arcuri for gender-based violence in Granada in 2009, brought charges against him once again. Rivas and her supporters argued that the law was better suited to protect an abuser's paternal rights because the judge ordered that the children be returned to their father in support of his complaint of child abduction (Fallarás). The case of La Manada, the gang rape of an eighteen-year-old woman during the 2016 San Fermín Festival in Pamplona by five men who also partially videotaped the assault, led to massive protests across Spain after a ruling in April 2018 found the men guilty of sexual abuse but not of sexual assault (rape) because the judges found that there was no evidence of violence or intimidation. The verdict led to a discussion of how sexual violence is defined in a legal context, signaling the shortcomings of the Spanish legal system. In June 2019, the Supreme Court in Madrid issued a ruling that the five men had committed the crime of rape, thus overturning the previous Pamplona ruling.

3. All translations are by Peter Bush, who translated the entire collection of Solana's short stories in *Crazy Tales of Blood and Guts*. Page numbers are given for both the Catalan version and the translated version.
4. As Godsland and White affirm, feminist crime fiction tends to stress "the importance of female collectivity for the protection of women from violence, the gathering of information, or the successful accomplishment of a planned crime. It is significant in this context, too, that in each case, the female protagonists are spurred on by a sense of solidarity or sisterhood with other women who have been victimized or are vulnerable individuals" (224).
5. Godsland has discussed at length the use of first-person narration from the killer's perspective. She notes that "[a]lthough female felons seem to abound in the pages of women's crime writing from Catalonia and Spain more generally, apportioning the first-person narrative voice to a female assassin in her mid-seventies is an innovative technique, and one that confirms that Solana is here fashioning a fiction told from what John Lutz calls the 'criminal viewpoint'" (115).

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