

Alienation and loneliness in *Querido Diego, te abraza Quiela* by Elena Poniatowska.

Alienación y soledad en *Querido Diego, te abraza Quiela* de Elena Poniatowska.


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Abstract:

This article examines Elena Poniatowska's *Dear Diego, Yours Quiela* (1978) through the lenses of alienation and solitude, understood as consequences of emotional abandonment and identity subordination. The central approach focuses on the unilateral epistolary voice of Angelina Beloff, whose letters reveal a gradual emotional, creative, and existential disintegration caused by Diego Rivera's silence. The main objective is to analyze how the epistolary structure constructs a loss of self and reshapes both space and artistic vocation under the weight of absence. The scope of the study emphasizes the subjective, symbolic, and gender dimensions of the novel, highlighting its implicit critique of unequal power relations that historically marginalized women artists. Methodologically, the article employs a close textual and hermeneutic reading of the letters, examining narrative voice, emotional language, and symbols of mourning. The analysis demonstrates that solitude in the novel transcends emotional loneliness, functioning as a profound form of identity and creative alienation.

Keywords: Alienation. Solitude. Epistolary narrative. Female subjectivity.

Resumen:

Este artículo analiza la novela *Querido Diego, te abraza Quiela* (1978) de Elena Poniatowska desde la perspectiva de la alienación y la soledad, entendidas como efectos del abandono afectivo y de la subordinación identitaria. El planteamiento central parte de la experiencia epistolar unilateral de Angelina Beloff, cuya voz revela el progresivo deterioro emocional, creativo y existencial provocado por el silencio de Diego Rivera. El objetivo del estudio es examinar cómo la estructura epistolar articula un proceso de pérdida del yo, así como la transformación del espacio y de la vocación artística bajo el peso de la ausencia. El alcance del trabajo se centra en la dimensión subjetiva, simbólica y de género del texto, destacando la crítica implícita a las relaciones desiguales que

históricamente han invisibilizado a las mujeres artistas. Metodológicamente, el análisis se apoya en una lectura textual y hermenéutica de las cartas, atendiendo a la voz narrativa, el lenguaje emocional y los símbolos del duelo, para demostrar que la soledad en la novela no es solo un estado afectivo, sino una forma profunda de alienación identitaria y creativa.

Palabras clave: Alienación. Soledad. Narrativa epistolary. Subjetividad femenina.

Querido Diego, te abraza Quiela by Elena Poniatowska is an intense exploration of the emotional devastation produced by abandonment. Through a series of unanswered letters sent by Angelina Beloff to the Mexican painter Diego Rivera, the novel reveals how loneliness and alienation gradually take hold of the protagonist's subjectivity. The epistolary structure allows Poniatowska to capture the intimacy of suffering and to expose the manner in which the absence of the other can destabilise identity and transform everyday surroundings into a hostile space. The novel is based on the relationship between the painter Angelina Beloff and Diego Rivera, who were married for twelve years while living in Paris, until Rivera returned to Mexico without Angelina.

From the very first letter written by Quiela (the name given to Angelina Beloff in the novel), Quiela's vulnerability becomes evident. Her bewilderment at Diego's silence is explicitly expressed: "Dear Diego: I do not know why you do not write to me. Every day I wait for your letter and the postman passes by without stopping" (Poniatowska, 1978, p. 11). This repeated gesture of frustrated and anguished waiting initiates a process of emotional isolation. The one-sided communication places Quiela within a painful monologue that, rather than relieving her, deepens her sense of abandonment. In the absence of any reply, her identity begins to erode: "Without you, Diego, I feel myself falling apart, as though I were nobody any longer" (p. 15). Alienation thus manifests itself as a loss of self, a detachment from a subjectivity that depended upon the affective bond. Quiela feels that she cannot exist without Diego; she perceives her identity as tied to his life.

The city of Paris, once shared with Diego as a space of artistic creation, becomes a desolate and hopeless setting. In one of the novel's most significant letters, Quiela confesses

from the depths of her tormented being: “Paris is no longer the same without you. It is a hostile, cold city that looks at me as though I were a shadow” (p. 22). This projective perception demonstrates how loneliness alters the experience of space. The protagonist no longer finds a sense of belonging either within the artistic community or in her own home. The death of their son, Miguel Ángel, who lived for only fourteen months, intensifies this fracture: “Our little one is no longer here, and with him went the only joy I had left” (p. 28). Poniatowska articulates here a multiple mourning that redoubles solitude: the loss of the beloved, the loss of the child — a being created by both of them — and the loss of a sense of existence itself.

Diego’s silence functions as a ghostly interlocutor structuring the entire narrative. Every unanswered letter serves as a reminder of disconnection and as confirmation of alienation, absolute loneliness, and Angelina’s total abandonment. Writing, which might otherwise function as refuge, becomes instead an act of painful self-exposure. In one of the most revealing reflections, Quiela admits: “Writing to you is the only thing that keeps me going, although I know you may never read these words” (p. 34). The epistolary act becomes a precarious lifeline which, paradoxically, reaffirms the very distance it seeks to overcome. Angelina’s unilateral letter-writing constitutes the forced connection that she constructs and perpetuates in order, from her perspective, to remain “connected” to the great love of her life, Diego Rivera, and thereby continue to exist.

The novel also reveals the tension between Quiela’s artistic vocation and Diego’s dominant figure. Her emotional dependence extends into the creative sphere: “I paint, yes, but my hands can no longer find colour now that you no longer guide them” (p. 37). Alienation, therefore, is not merely emotional, but also professional and identitarian. Poniatowska subtly critiques the unequal dynamic that has historically relegated women artists to a subordinate position. Indeed, Angelina Beloff postponed and sacrificed her artistic career so that Diego Rivera might continue painting.

Taken as a whole, *Dear Diego, Quiela Embraces You* portrays the emotional devastation produced by loving with absolute devotion without receiving reciprocity in return. Quiela’s loneliness is not simply the absence of companionship, but rather a profound state of affective

and symbolic dispossession. The novel restores a voice to a historically marginalised figure and exposes the human dimension of abandonment. Poniatowska thus achieves a moving portrait of alienation and loneliness that transcends Quiela's particular case in order to become a universal commentary on the existential fragility of the subject when confronted with unrequited love.

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