

studies in contemporary women's writing

Mazal Oaknín



Feminism,
Writing and the
Media in Spain

Ana María Matute,
Rosa Montero and
Lucía Etxebarria

PETER LANG

This book explores the different treatment of writing by women and writing by men in twenty-first-century Spain. Focusing on contemporary Spanish authors Ana María Matute (1926–2014), Rosa Montero (1952–), and Lucía Etxebarria (1966–), the author examines how Spanish women writers are marketed in Spain and, in particular, how current marketing strategies reinforce traditional structures of femininity.

Through an analysis of their work and lives in the context of the Franco Regime, the Transition to democracy and contemporary Spain, this book provides an innovative study of the construction of the public personae of these key female writers. As social media and the internet transform authors' relationship with their readers, the rapidly shifting publishing industry offers an important context for the difficult balance between high levels of reception and visibility and the persistence of traditional gender stereotypes.

Mazal Oaknín completed her MA and PhD in Hispanic Studies at University College London, where she has been teaching Hispanic language and literature since 2009. She previously taught Spanish in Malaga, New York, Paris and Birmingham. She co-edited the volume *Literatura política y política literaria en España: Del Desastre del 98 a Felipe VI* with Guillermo Laín Corona (Peter Lang, 2015) and her work has appeared in journals such as *Espéculo*, *Fahrenheit 452*, *Alba Magazine* and *Argus*. Her research focuses on four main areas: contemporary Spanish literature, gender and identity, fiction in the digital age and representations of minorities.



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Feminism, Writing and
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Studies in Contemporary Women's Writing

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Translated Works

- Amado amo* [Beloved I Love] (Rosa Montero, 1988)
- Amor, curiosidad, prozac y dudas* [Love, Curiosity, Prozac and Doubts] (Lucía Etxebarria, 1996)
- Beatriz y los cuerpos celestes* [Beatrice and the Heavenly Bodies] (Lucía Etxebarria, 1998)
- Cinco años de país* [Five Years of El País] (Rosa Montero, 1982)
- Con la noche auestas* [The Night on their Backs] (Manuel Ferrand, 1968)
- Con nuestra propia voz: a favor de la literatura femenina* [With our Own Voice. In Favour of Women's Literature] (Lucía Etxebarria, 2000)
- Contra el viento* [Against the Wind] (Ángeles Caso, 2009)
- Cosmofobia* [Cosmophobia] (Lucía Etxebarria, 2007)
- Crónica del desamor* [Chronicle of Enmity] (Rosa Montero, 1979)
- De ninguna parte* [From Nowhere] (Ana María Matute, 1993)
- De todo lo visible y lo invisible* [Of Everything Visible and Invisible] (Lucía Etxebarria, 2001)
- El amor de mi vida* [The Love of My Life] (Rosa Montero, 2011)
- El amor es un juego solitario* [Love is a Solitary Game] (Esther Tusquets, 1979)
- El árbol de oro* [The Tree of Gold] (Ana María Matute, 1995)
- El club de las malas madres* [The Bad Mothers' Club] (Lucía Etxebarria and Goyo Bustos, 2009)
- El contenido del silencio* [The Content of Silence] (Lucía Etxebarria, 2011)
- El corazón del tártaro* [The Heart of the Tartar] (Rosa Montero, 2001),
- El maestro de esgrima* [The Fencing Master] (Arturo Pérez-Reverte, 1988)
- El manuscrito carmesí* [The Crimson Manuscript] (Antonio Gala, 1990)
- El mismo mar de todos los veranos* [The Same Sea as Every Summer] (Esther Tusquets, 1978)
- El rapto del Santo Grial* [The Abduction of the Holy Grail] (Paloma Díaz-Mas, 1984)
- El río* [The River] (Ana María Matute, 1973)
- El saltamontes verde* [The Green Grasshopper] (Ana María Matute, 1986)
- El sueño de Venecia* [The Dream of Venice] (Paloma Díaz-Mas, 1992),
- El sujeto cultural: sociocrítica y psicoanálisis* [The Cultural Subject: Sociocriticism and Psychoanalysis] (Edmundo Cros, 2002)
- El verdadero final de la Bella Durmiente* [The Real End of the Sleeping Beauty] (Ana María Matute, 1995)

- En brazos de la mujer fétiche* [In the Arms of Lady Fetish] (Lucía Etxebarria and Sonia Núñez Puente, 2007)
- En esta tierra* [In this Land] (Ana María Matute, 1955)
- Entre visillos* [Behind the Curtains] (Carmen Martín Gaité, 1957)
- Fiesta al Noroeste* [Northwest Party] (Ana María Matute, 1952)
- Historia del rey transparente* [Story of the Transparent King] (Rosa Montero, 2005)
- Historias del Kronen* [Stories of the Kronen] (José Ángel Mañas, 1994)
- Inés y la alegría* [Inés and Joy] (Almudena Grandes, 2010)
- Instrucciones para salvar el mundo* [Instructions to Save the World] (Rosa Montero, 2008)
- Irlanda* [Ireland] (Laura Espido Freire, 1998)
- La Eva futura/La letra futura* [The Future Eve/Writing's Future] (Lucía Etxebarria, 2000)
- La flor del Norte* [The Flower of the North] (Laura Espido Freire, 2011)
- La función Delta* [The Delta Function] (Rosa Montero, 1981)
- La hija del caníbal* [The Cannibal's Daughter] (Rosa Montero, 1997)
- La inmigración en la literatura española contemporánea* [Immigration in Spanish Contemporary Literature] (Andrés-Suárez et al., 2002)
- La literatura española en el exilio: un estudio comparativo* [Spanish Literature in Exile: A Comparative Study] (Ugarte, 1999)
- La loca de la casa* [The Madwoman of the House] (Rosa Montero, 2003)
- La mano invisible* [The Invisible Hand] (Isaac Rosa, 2011)
- La oscura historia de la prima Montse* [The Dark Story of Cousin Montse] (Juan Marsé, 1970)
- La oveja negra* [The Black Sheep] (Ana María Matute, 1994)
- La ridícula idea de no volver a verte* [The Ridiculous Idea of Not Seeing You Again] (Rosa Montero, 2013)
- La vida después* [The Life After] (Marta Rivera de la Cruz, 2011)
- La vida devorada* (novela, mujer y sociedad en la España de los noventa) [Devoured Life (Novel, Women and Society in 1990s Spain)] (Katarzyna Moszczyńska, 2009)
- La Virgen de Antioquia y otros relatos* [The Virgin of Antioquia and Other Tales] (Ana María Matute, 1990)
- La voz dormida* [The Sleeping Voice] (Dulce Chacón, 2002)
- Lágrimas sobre la lluvia* [Tears in the Rain] (Rosa Montero, 2011)
- Las edades de Lulú* [The Ages of Lulu] (Almudena Grandes, 1989)
- Les Enfants du Nouveau Monde* [Children of the New World] (Assia Djebar, 1962)
- Literatura y mujeres* [Literature and Women] (Laura Freixas, 2000)
- Lo que los hombres no saben: el sexo contado por las mujeres* [What Men Do Not Know: Sex According to Women] (Lucía Etxebarria, 2008)

- Lo verdadero es un momento de lo falso* [Truth is Naught but a Moment of Falsehood] (Lucía Etxebarria, 2010)
- Los Abel* [The Abels] (Ana María Matute, 1947)
- Los hijos muertos* (Ana María Matute, 1959)
- Luciérnagas* [Fireflies] (Ana María Matute, 1949)
- Luz de mujer* [A Woman's Light] (Manuel Prados y López, 1950)
- Media boda y un marido* [A Half Wedding and a Husband] (María Romero Jusén, 1945)
- Melocotones helados* [Frozen Peaches] (Laura Espido Freire, 1999)
- Modelos de mujer* [Models of Women] (Almudena Grandes, 1996)
- Nada* [Nothing] (Carmen Laforet, 1945)
- Nosotras que no somos como las demás* [We Are not Like the Others] (Lucía Etxebarria, 1999)
- Nosotros los Rivero* [We, The Riveros] (Dolores Medio, 1951)
- Olvidado Rey Gudú* [Forgotten King Gudú] (Ana María Matute, 1996)
- Pequeño Teatro* [Small Theatre] (1954)
- Primera memoria* [First memory] (Ana María Matute, 1960)
- Razas opuestas* [Opposing Races] (Enrique Martínez Fariñas, 1959)
- Saúl ante Samuel* [Saul Before Samuel] (Juan Benet, 1980)
- Siempre en capilla* [Always in the Chapel] (Luisa Forellat, 1953)
- Socotra. La isla de los genios* [Socotra: The Land of Djinn] (Jordi Esteva, 2011)
- Soldados de Salamina* [Soldiers of Salamis] (Javier Cercas, 2003)
- Solitario de amor* [Solitaire of Love] (Cristina Peri Rossi, 1988)
- Sólo un pie descalzo* [Only a Bare Foot] (Ana María Matute, 1983)
- Te deix, amor, la mar con a penyora* [I Leave You, Love, the Sea as A Token] (Carme Riera, 1975)
- Te trataré como a una reina* [I'll Treat You Like a Queen] (Rosa Montero, 1984)
- Tiempo de silencio* [Time of Silence] (Luis Martín Santos, 1962)
- Un milagro en equilibrio* [A Miracle in Equilibrium] (Lucía Etxebarria, 2004)
- Una historia de amor como otra cualquiera* [A Love Story Like All the Rest] (Lucía Etxebarria, 2003)
- Viento del norte* [Wind of the North] (Elena Quiroga, 1950)
- Ya no sufro por amor* [I Don't Suffer for Love] (Lucía Etxebarria, 2005)

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INTRODUCTION

Gender, Memory, Culture, and History in the Spanish Literary Market

In 1984–5 sociologists Ross and Holmberg conducted an oral history of interpersonal memory with sixty married couples in Canada, which led them to the starkly gendered conclusion that women's memories are more vivid and detailed than those of their male partners, that both sexes are happy to acknowledge this fact, and that 'women tend to be the interpersonal historians in our culture' (1990: 141). I mention their conclusions briefly here for the way they highlight an overarching concern in this book insofar as issues of gender, memory, identity, reception, culture, and history are concerned. With regard to women's memories, Neubamer and Heyer-Ryan propose, rather more cautiously, that:

Even if we assume that remembering is not biologically determined, we can assume that memory is influenced by the particular social, cultural and historical conditions in which individuals find themselves. And since men and women generally assume different social and cultural roles, their way of remembering should also differ. (2000: 6)

Historically, it seems that rather than being biologically linked, women's memory of the past, vivid or otherwise, has more to do to their responsibility for nurturing the family, bringing up children, and organizing family social life (Kidder, Fagan, and Cohn 1981). Jansen further argues that women's memory has no biological link to the female sex, but it is determined by their traditionally marginalized position in society and by the way that the socially conditioned maternal role has been passed down from one generation to the next. This traditionally marginalized position, she argues, has also made women highly receptive listeners who are particularly well placed to pass on, 'stories of oppression and repression unknown to men' (Jansen 2000: 37). For Jansen, the memories of women and similar

groups, regarded as socially inferior, function like the ‘undercurrents of a river within the dominant collective memory’ (2000: 37).

It is not my intention here to attempt to prove or disprove the connections these writers make between gender and memory, fascinating though they are. What interests me is the ongoing need to examine women’s writing for traces of a ‘matrilineal’ literary and publishing history that might challenge the dominant ‘patrilinear’ canon (Gilbert and Gubar 1979: 51). Instead, I will compare and contrast three writers, each of whom represents a different generation, and who might well be considered the most high-profile women publishing in Spain today. The writers I have selected for close analysis are Ana María Matute (1926–2014), Rosa Montero (1952–), and Lucía Etxebarria (1966–), all of whom are high profile, publish enormously popular novels, and enjoy ongoing literary success in Spain. In terms of their memories, of course, Matute and Montero have far more extensive memories of the way the publishing industry in Spain has changed over the last half century than does Etxebarria. However, I am particularly interested in the role played by historical context in their understanding of where they are located within Spanish cultural history, and in their response to questions of sex- and gender-difference and writing.

Ana María Matute is widely considered a key figure in the field of Spanish postwar narrative. Her prestige and the recognition she has achieved are illustrated by the numerous literary prizes she has received (including the Premio Planeta, the Premio Nadal, and the Medalla de Oro al Mérito de las Bellas Artes). Her first novel, *Primera memoria* [First Memory] (1960), is regarded as one of the leading *novelas de formación de la posguerra* [female *Bildungsroman* in postwar Spain] (Riddel 1992: 281–7). Its commercial success, and its ongoing relevance to post-dictatorship Spain, can be traced to the fact that it ran through four editions between 1979 and 1984 alone. Despite the prevailing censorship at the time of their original publication, Matute’s postwar novels raise important political, social, and ethical questions about Spanish postwar society and the role of women within it. Continued publication of her work, not only during the regime, but in the post-Transition period, indicates the market that still exists in Spain for contemporary fiction that recounts the past from a

female perspective. Matute is now an extremely well-known public figure and a crucial member of the contemporary Spanish cultural world. Her work was certainly appreciated during the Franco regime, but since the Transition to democracy, and particularly since the mid-1990s, she has come to occupy an important role in the Spanish cultural establishment, becoming, in 1998, only the third woman ever to be elected to the Spanish Royal Academy (RAE).¹

Rosa Montero's work, testimonial in its approach, addresses topics little explored in Spanish literature prior to the Transition to democracy, including abortion, divorce, sex discrimination in the workplace, and single motherhood.² Her first novel, *Crónica del desamor* [Chronicle of Enmity] (1979), was a pioneering account of the experience of a group of largely middle-class female friends working and bringing up their children in the immediate Transition years. Montero wrote a new prologue for most recent edition (2009), in which she thanks her readers for their ongoing enthusiasm. The protagonists of *Crónica del desamor* reject the Francoist ideal of femininity, but at the same time they find themselves concerned, if not slightly sceptical, about their own uncertain future. Montero has published regularly since *Crónica del desamor*, and her work continues to be well received by readers and critics alike. She was the first woman journalist to receive the *Manuel del Arco* prize in 1978, going on to receive other awards for her journalism (the Premio Nacional de Periodismo, 1980) and for her fiction (I Premio Primavera de Narrativa, 1997). Like Matute, she enjoys a high public profile, in part due to her frequent contributions to *El País* since 1976.

- 1 Carmen Conde was the first woman, elected in 1978, and there have been eleven female members in total. In 2018 there were eight: Carmen Iglesias, Margarita Salas, Soledad Puértolas, Inés Fernández-Ordóñez, Carme Riera, Aurora Egido, Clara Janés, and Paz Battaner.
- 2 Divorce in Spain became legal in 1981. Abortion was decriminalized in 1985, but only in cases of rape, or when the health of the child or mother was at risk. In the summer of 2012, Justice Minister Alberto Ruiz Gallardón proposed changes to existing laws, including implementing a requirement for parental permission in cases where 16- and 17-year-olds want to end pregnancies, and making it harder for women to abort fetuses with physical deformities.

Matute and Montero are both recognizable public figures with official websites devoted to their work and their lives.³ However, the third novelist this book examines is the one whose personal and professional life has been most clearly mediated by the new virtual era. Lucía Etxebarria is a member of the so-called ‘Generation X’, a group of writers famous for their unconventional and postmodern narrative styles, and for their complex appearance within and, some might argue, their conscious manipulation of their own position within the Spanish cultural establishment. Jo Labanyi affirms that Etxebarria

has cultivated a *risque* image attuned to youth culture (sex, drugs, and rock’n’roll) while exploring different models of femininity – including bisexuality and lesbianism in *Beatrice and the Heavenly Bodies* (*Beatriz y los cuerpos celestes*, 1998). She has been criticized for playing the market and admired for brazenly exposing its workings. (Labanyi 2010: 120)

The writers of this generation use blogs and websites that allow them to establish a more accessible relationship with their readers, and, on hers, Etxebarria acknowledges – more openly than either of her older contemporaries, Matute or Montero – that she has an overt political and feminist agenda. She states that one of the aims of her work is to raise awareness of the fact that, despite the legal equality of sexes in twenty-first-century Spain, full equality has not been achieved in practice: ‘I think that social and committed literature is gendered because today, unfortunately, living as a man is not the same as living as a woman.’⁴ The success of her novels suggests Etxebarria has excelled in providing a feminist portrait of the so-called Generation X. In addition to the high sales figures and the prestigious prizes she has been awarded (including the Premio Planeta 2004, and the Premio Primavera de Novela 2001), she is famous for the controversy that has surrounded her public persona since the beginning of her literary career. Indeed, as is often now the case with young writers, the visual

3 See <<http://www.clubcultura.com/clubliteratura/clubescritores/matute/bio.htm>>; <<http://www.clubcultura.com/clubliteratura/clubescritores/montero/>>, and <<http://www.facebook.com/pages/Luc%C3%ADa-Etxebarria/149885159988>>.

4 <<http://www.lucia-etxebarria.com/>>, now closed.

publicity that surrounds her (including book covers and the photographs illustrating interviews with her and articles about her) aims to capitalize on and reproduce this high-profile public persona. Etxebarria's first novel, *Amor, curiosidad, prozac y dudas* [Love, Curiosity, Prozac, and Doubts] (1996) sold over 100,000 copies in under a year. The story of Ana, Rosa, and Cristina Gaena, three sisters who despite sharing a strict, conservative upbringing end up pursuing totally different paths in life, was a literary success that turned Etxebarria into an overnight star and prompted a film adaptation by Miguel Santemas.

This book examines the way these three important women writers respond to the question of women's writing and the changing status of their own work within the Spanish literary establishment, as well as the tightly gender-bound marketing of their literary production – whether they wish their work to be marketed in this way or not. I examine their work and lives in the context of the socio-political background of the Franco regime, the Transition to democracy and contemporary Spain, these being the three stages Colmeiro has described as the 'particular cultural moments in contemporary Spain that have shaped the construction of memory and collective identity: the post-Civil War dictatorship, the democratic Transition, and the post-Transition process of European integration and globalization' (2011: 24). My interest lies in examining the relationship of these writers to these three 'cultural moments' and, more precisely, the way each has addressed contemporary issues concerning the status of Spanish women in their work, in relation to the Spanish literary canon, and, perhaps more controversially, the way each responds to the label 'Spanish woman writer'.

'Women's writing' has been a controversial subject of academic debate for many decades, and it could be argued that my decision to focus solely on women is retrogressive. Indeed, two of the women I examine here (Matute and Montero) are understandably reluctant to countenance the label 'women's writing', being wary of studies, like this one, focusing on women's writing to the exclusion of men's. Nonetheless I have chosen to direct my attention selectively in order to extend the debate on 'women's writing', originally publicized widely by critics like Toril Moi (1997), and more recently, and with particular regard to Spain, by Laura Freixas (2000) and Christine Henseler (2003a and 2003b). Influenced by photographs,

newspaper articles, critical reviews, websites, and the different degrees and ways in which these authors participate in the promotion of their works, my research examines the changing public perception and representation of these writers over the forty or fifty years in which each of these highly successful women writers has published their major work.⁵

Chapter 1 begins by addressing the question of ‘women’s writing’ directly. This chapter focuses on the question whether writing by women should be considered separately from that of men, opening with a summary of the response to this question outside Spain since the 1970s, with close reference to Moi’s study of the history of feminist literary theory. I then move, in the second half of the chapter, to consider the response of women in Spain to ‘women’s writing’. Chapter 2 subsequently contextualizes this question, with closer examination of the way Spanish women writers are marketed in Spain. My aim here is to illustrate just how tightly gender-bound the marketing of women writers remains, whether the women concerned wish their work to be marketed in this way or not. This chapter focuses on the representation of Spanish women writers within the wider press and uses their representation within the literary magazine *Qué Leer* as a case study.

I have taken, as my point of departure, Laura Freixa’s pioneering study *Literatura y mujeres* [Literature and Women] (2000), commended by Joan Torres-Pou for the way it ‘analyses the creation and diffusion of female literature in Spain, evaluates the extent of the woman’s role in the Spanish literary world and exposes the misogyny hiding behind the news of a supposedly female protagonism’ (Torres-Pou 2001: 235). Freixas has identified a number of trends in the literary industry that are associated with Spanish women writers in the twentieth century as well as providing an impressive array of much-needed data contradicting the oft-trumpeted claim that women writers have nothing to be concerned about.⁶ Noting

5 Unless otherwise stated, all translations into English of author quotations and critical reviews are mine.

6 According to the FNAC ranking, only forty of the eighty-six best-selling books in 2018 were written by women. See <<https://www.fnac.es/n710/Libros-mas-vendidos?PageIndex=3&sl>>.

that the greater the popularity achieved by a female writer, the more disparaging the critical reaction, Freixas aims to:

[r]evis[e] the history of female literary creation by emphasising the reasons for keeping women away from literature and the current revisionist trend that seeks to recuperate and reevaluate those texts that, due to different reasons, had been traditionally excluded from the canon. (2001: 235)

Freixas' work has been particularly important also for bringing feminist critics and theorists, such as Gilbert and Gubar, Kristeva, Showalter, and Cixous, to the attention of Spanish readers, who have tended to remain marginalized from theoretical and, in particular, from feminist approaches to literary criticism. For that very reason, my own study will focus less on feminist debate outside Spain, in order to give precedence to the views of writers publishing within Spain.

Moving to Chapter 3, and the second of the pioneering academic studies of Spanish writers mentioned above (Henseler 2003a and 2003b), this chapter focuses on the construction of the literary *personae* of Matute, Montero, and Extebarria. My concern here is not with their literary output, but with the development of their public persona; that is, with the reception of their work, their status and interaction with the wider public via interviews, television appearances, and, increasingly, via their presence on the internet. Henseler's ground-breaking study (2003a) argues that Spanish Generation X writers have the potential to subvert the literary system by embracing the increasing commercialism of the literary market to promote their own works.⁷ Like Freixas, Henseler remarks that, although the changing demands of literary marketing affect male and female writers alike, it is women who, while they may resist traditional sexually discriminatory tactics, now enjoy high levels of reception and visibility. This represents the, as yet, little-analysed aspect of contemporary publishing world that I have

7 Henseler's study includes a collection of short writings by a number of women authors with the purpose of establishing the degree to which authors actually 'change their positions and their production in light of the (visual) forces of the publishing industry' (2003a: 127); however, she does not directly address, in her work, the question of the label 'women's writing' *per se*.

selected as my point of departure for a closer analysis of the relationship between the gender of these writers and the rapidly changing publishing industry in which they work. Henseler analyses five texts by contemporary women writers: Esther Tusquets' *El amor es un juego solitario* [Love is a Solitary Game] (1979), Lourdes Ortiz's *Urraca* (1982), Cristina Peri Rossi's *Solitario de amor* [Solitaire of Love] (1988), Almudena Grandes' *Las edades de Lulú* [The Ages of Lulu] (1989), and Paloma Díaz-Mas' *El sueño de Venecia* [The Dream of Venice] (1992), while a sixth section focuses on Lucía Etxebarria. Henseler considers these texts a bridge between marketing and visual culture. Her contention is that all the novels mentioned above use the female body as an instrument of subversion and, at the same time, as a vehicle for sales, establishing a link between this commodification of women and the role of the mass media in the creation of contemporary female texts. She praises Etxebarria's use of her own (often sexualized) image to promote her novels as an embodiment and recuperation of the commercial appropriation of the female body that here works in Etxebarria's favour to undermine the cultural signifiers that more normally relegate the female body to the status of fetishized commodity.

Not wishing to disregard this very positive interpretation, my own study goes back further in time to allow for a comparison between the public marketing and reception of these three writers over different generations in Spain. It is my view that, although it may be very helpful for Henseler to focus on some of the more positive outlets for female authors, they often remain caught in a double bind, according to which their appearances (and I am thinking of the particular case of Etxebarria here) may in fact undermine, or at least complicate her self-proclaimed feminist stance, especially insofar as this concerns her denunciation of the media tendency to objectify the female body and the persistence of this trend well into the twenty-first century. My reading of the public reception of Matute, Montero, and Etxebarria in Chapters 2 and 3 also owes a debt to Joe Moran's study of the growing importance of the 'star-author' (2000). According to Moran, celebrity, rather than being a stable phenomenon, is subject to continuous negotiation between marketability and cultural authority. Moran's theories of literary celebrity indicate that whereas Matute and Montero, major women novelists of earlier generations, were able to maintain a certain

distance between their personal and their public lives, for contemporary authors such as Etxebarria this line has become increasingly blurred, as they are expected to be both 'available' and highly visible. I posit that, far from offering a vehicle for subversion, as Henseler optimistically predicts, the negotiation of public appearances and the photo shoot has become another potential pitfall for women negotiating an increasingly commercialized and gender-biased 'virtual', or web-based, literary marketplace. In view of the persistence of traditional gender stereotypes dating back to the Franco regime vis-à-vis reception and marketing of these writers, not to mention the resurgence of a rather disturbing gender-bias that has accompanied the visual and textual marketing of women via the internet, I am also inspired by Hall's 'encoding-decoding' model of communication. This theory argues that meaning is encoded by the sender and decoded by the receiver, and that these meanings can be altered and decoded to represent something else. Given that senders encode their messages according to their ideals and views, and that receivers also decode these messages according to their ideals and views, miscommunication may occur (Hall 1993: 91). Each of these authors' construction of her public persona reflects a negotiated position in which the audience member, or receiver, is able to decode the sender's message within the context of the dominant cultural and societal views (Hall 1993: 102).

Chapter 4 analyses the response of Matute, Montero, and Etxebarria to the question of the existence (or not) of 'women's writing', presenting their voices on the question of the existence of a 'women's literature' over time. The first section of this chapter considers Matute as pre-dating the 'women's writing' label, positioning her as the product of a particular cultural, historical, and political background, in which the question of 'women's writing' was only beginning to surface. The second section focuses on Montero as a transitional figure in (Transition) Spain. Her case is more ambiguous, as she seems able, or at least consistently aspires, to establish a separation between her political ideas and her writing. Finally, the third part engages with Etxebarria as one of the main advocates of 'women's writing' in Spain today. Etxebarria's role as a woman writer entails a very conscious and marked position on issues such as feminism, the role of media in the construction of her persona, and shifts in the literary industry. Her

case is illustrative of the oppositional view, wherein the audience member is able to decode the message in the way it was intended to be decoded while imagining an unintended meaning within the message due to their own societal beliefs (Hall 1993: 103).

To conclude, bearing in mind the different attitudes of these women writers to feminism (a topic to which I shall return), and the difference between writing as a feminist act and writing that represents a female point of view (albeit one that may contribute to raising awareness about the conditions in which women live), in this book several questions recur. To what extent have these well-known writers cultivated a public persona and what role has this played in their wider reception within Spain? What is their view of 'women's writing'? And, finally how do these writers address changing social role models and social expectations of women?

As Matute's rather exceptional invitation to the Royal Academy aptly demonstrates, these writers continue to publish from within a cultural establishment that remains dominated by men. Each has become well known and has established a reputation for their work not only within Spain, but also internationally, as a result of the inclusion of their work on the reading lists of Hispanic Studies departments in universities outside Spain, and they have been the subjects of numerous academic books, articles, and research papers. However, the fact that women writers have, until recent decades, tended to be excluded from academic studies in Spain raises the immediate question of how we approach the notion 'women's writing'.

CHAPTER I

The Question of ‘Women’s Writing’: A ‘Double-Edged’ Double Bind?

The ‘special’ and double-edged position of ‘women’s literature’ – [that] it is at once highly marketed and rendered invisible – makes critics uncomfortable and makes authors wonder whether the category itself may lead women writers into a trap.

— HENSELER (2003a:16)

Henseler’s comment draws attention to the problem with the label ‘women’s writing’. Its existence (or not) is controversial, and the debate as to whether women write differently from men, or whether a label for writing by women ought to exist, has a long history. This chapter introduces the debate in two sections: first a brief overview of recurring themes in a debate that has been conducted largely outside Spain and that has been summarized so effectively by the feminist critic Toril Moi, while the second examines the views of Spanish women writers with regards to the four currents of opinion identified by Elaine Showalter.

The Response to the Debate outside Spain

Any introduction to the debate surrounding the much-debated existence of ‘women’s writing’ and offering an overview of feminist literary theory must begin by mentioning Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* (1949), whose publication continues to inspire and challenge feminist thinkers. De Beauvoir draws on different disciplines, such as history, religion, literature, philosophy, and anthropology, to demonstrate how one is not born a woman, but rather becomes a woman by learning and

following the role moulded by patriarchy over centuries of male domination. Since the publication of de Beauvoir's work, feminist theory has continually evolved, adapted to, and challenged new cultural and academic environments.

In the 1960s, American feminism gained momentum with the civil rights movement. In Britain the feminist movement was equally politically orientated. As a result, Anglo-American feminism is deeply concerned with history, and situates both feminist concerns and literary texts within an ideological, cultural, and political context. Among the earliest, most influential Anglo-American feminist works are Betty Friedan's *The Feminist Mystique* (1963), Mary Ellman's *Thinking About Women* (1968), Kate Millet's *Sexual Politics* (1970), and Germaine Greer's *The Female Eunuch* (1970). Ellman analyses the representation of femininity in British and American literature, exposing sexual stereotypes and comparing criticism by men and women authors. By focusing on selected works by male authors, Millet examines the role played by the patriarchy in sexual relations. Greer draws on disciplines such as history, literature, biology, and popular culture to highlight sexual liberation as the way to fight women's oppression and social conditioning.

Social conditioning is also key in Gilbert and Gubar's now canonical study, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and Nineteenth Century Literary Imagination* (1979). The authors assert that literature by women has been traditionally marked by its authors' sense of inadequacy, inferiority, and self-doubt – qualities that they link, historically, to the inferior education of women (1979: 59–60). According to these critics, whose focus of interest is a series of nineteenth-century women authors, 'phenomena of *inferiorization* mark the woman writer's struggle for artistic self-definition and differentiate her efforts at self-creation from those of her male counterpart' (1979: 50). In the same vein, Elaine Showalter notes that, in a literary text, what is presented as the human experience and perspective is commonly a masculine one (1971: 856). This produces the vicious circle in which 'an androcentric canon generates androcentric interpretive strategies, which in turn favour the canonization of androcentric texts and the marginalization of gynocentric ones' (cited in Schweickart 1980: 54). Indeed, Showalter is well known

for her pioneering efforts to recuperate literary texts written by women that had been marginalized by the literary canon, establishing a parallel literary tradition that should be fully integrated into our literary heritage. This form of feminist criticism, which she named *gynocritics*, is explained in 'Towards a Feminist Poetics' (Showalter 1979). Hence, in its desire to revise a patriarchal literary tradition and introduce a more nuanced understanding of gender theory, feminist literary criticism has therefore claimed the right to a series of spaces traditionally regarded as extra-literary and based on their close relationship to the traditionally domestic or private sphere. If we accept the critique that women writers have historically been subject to a number of gender-prescribed choices, and that their works therefore belong to a distinctive literary tradition, subsequent questions arise. Does this mean that they will write differently from men? If so, where is this difference located, and will women necessarily employ a specifically female language to portray their experience?

While the Anglo-American theorists discussed the role played by gender in the context of a patriarchal society, French feminists focused on discourse as a vehicle for coding and keeping the dominant patriarchal order. Moving away from the psychoanalytic premises of Freud and Lacan and the deconstructive methods of Derrida, French feminism argues that all Western languages are eminently male-engendered and male-dominated, focusing on the constructed nature of subjectivity and representation. Among the main foundational works of French feminism are Lucy Irigaray's *Speculum of the Other Woman* (1974), which looks at psychoanalysis from a feminine perspective and challenges psychoanalytical representations of women, Hélène Cixous's *The Laugh of the Medusa* (1975) claims that women should revel in everything that makes them different from men; in it she introduced the seminal term *écriture féminine*, which narrates women's experiences and desires and encourages experimentation in language. For Annette Kolodny, an individual consideration of each author is the only way to observe whether particular stylistic patterns recur in female fiction. Her research leads her to conclude that reflexive perception and inversion are the most persistent traits (cited in Moi 1997: 70–1). Reflexive perception occurs when a character encounters unexpected or incomprehensible situations. Inversion,

on the other hand, happens when the stereotypical images of women in literature are subverted with the purpose of humour, revelation of their hidden reality, or connotation of their opposites (1997: 70–1). Conversely, Myra Jehlen maintains that the difference between men's and women's writing cannot be determined through the study of women's texts alone, but requires comparisons with writing by men (cited in Moi 1997: 70–1). Julia Kristeva, on the other hand, regards language as the product of a heterogeneous, ever-changing process, reminding us that no study of sex difference in literature can ever be conclusive. She chooses, rather, and as Moi explains, to champion the study of explicit linguistic strategies in precise situations in male- and female-authored texts (1997: 152–5). With regard to writing by women, Kristeva finds it impossible to affirm whether the peculiarities of women's literature are due to a 'truly feminine specificity, socio-cultural marginality or more simply to a certain structure which the present market favours and selects among the totality of feminine potentiality' (Moi 1997: 163).

Kristeva does, however, concede that various recurrent stylistic and thematic patterns can be distinguished in 'women's writing', though it is impossible to ascribe these characteristics to something we might define as 'femaleness' or 'femininity'. It would seem safer to ascribe them to a socio-cultural marginality, or more simply, to the selection carried out by the literary market from among the totality of feminine potential. According to Kristeva, the same stylistic and thematic patterns can be found in all language, and have been marginalized by what Lacan refers to as the 'Law of the Father'. For the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, the structure of language and its rules are inherently paternal. Submission to the rules and laws of language itself, namely the Law of the Father, is required in order to become a speaking subject and to enter the Symbolic. Thus, through the acceptance of a number of restrictions that control both the subject's desire and the rules of communication, the child enters a community of others and is able to interact with them. It is perhaps for this reason that Kolodny's notion of 'inversion' in 'women's writing', that is, the subversion of stereotypes, appears as one of the two most frequent traits in writing by women. Kristeva calls language that refuses to conform to the Law of the Father 'carnavalesque', co-opting a term used by the Russian critic

Mikhail Bakhtin to refer to a literary mode that subverts and liberates the assumptions of the dominant style or atmosphere through humour and chaos. For Kristeva, 'carnavalesque discourse breaks through the laws of a language censored by grammar and semantics and, at the same time, is a social and political protest' (1980: 65).

For contextualizing purposes I have merely outlined a simple differentiation between the Anglo-American and French feminists, but it ought to be pointed out that, since the 1980s, debates surrounding the superiority of each mode have abated as the dividing lines between them have become blurred. Indeed, feminist writers have used and continue to use different theoretical approaches in order to examine the ways in which gender operates within literary texts. According to feminist literary historian Janet Todd's *Feminist Literary History* (1988), the literary representation of the domestic and private is as valuable as the literary representation of the public and civic. Nonetheless, Toril Moi (1997) warns against interpreting the mere fact of narrating women's experience as a feminist act, a statement strongly supported by Rosalind Coward. For Coward,

[f]eminism can never be the product of the identity of women's experiences and interests – there is no such unity. Feminism must always be the alignment of women in a political movement with particular political aims and objectives. It is a grouping unified by its *political interests*, not its common experiences. (1986: 238)

One of the first questions that tend to arise when considering this debate is whether women's writing is feminist writing. In her now classic essay, 'Feminist, female, feminine' (1997), Moi explains that a clear grasp of the differences between these three terms (feminist, female, feminine) is crucial to understanding the political and theoretical implications of contemporary feminist criticism. For Moi, the word 'feminist' implies a political position in line with the objectives of the new women's movement as it emerged in the 1960s, so that 'feminist criticism', whilst embracing a multitude of different political views, is understood not merely as a concern for gender in literature, but as 'a critical and theoretical practice committed to the struggle against patriarchy and sexism' (1997: 104). The term 'female', she points out, refers simply to biology, and the third of her terms, 'feminine', is defined as a set of characteristics that are culturally specific. It is a

long-established practice among feminists to use this last term to refer to sexual and behavioural patterns that are imposed on women, as opposed to the term 'female', which is reserved for biological characteristics.

Michèle Barrett (1982) takes a slightly different approach from Moi, suggesting that feminism as a political project should not be divorced from women's experience, while Rita Felski offers a useful path between the two positions. Felski's term 'feminist confession' refers to women's writing that 'exemplifies the intersection between the autobiographical imperative to communicate the truth of unique individuality, and the feminist concern with the representative and intersubjective elements of women's experience' (1989: 165). She asserts that the popularity of women's fiction on account of its description and portrayal of women's experience is one of the strengths of feminism. Since the late 1970s this concept of women's experience has vastly expanded to include female voices other than white, middle-class, heterosexual voices, and in fact feminist criticism has also considered intersectionality, looking at how factors including race, sexuality, religion, physical ability, politics, and class are also involved. Anna Carastathis defines intersectionality as 'the predominant way of conceptualizing the relation between systems of oppression which construct our multiple identities and our social locations in hierarchies of power and privilege' (2014). With regards to the feminist movement, a key moment was the Combahee River Collective's *A Black Feminist Statement* manifesto, which in 1979 claimed that their unique black feminist movement was necessary, given the racism they had experienced in the context of mainstream feminism, while simultaneously suffering sexism in the context of antiracist struggles. That same year, Audre Lorde's paper 'The Master's Tools will never Dismantle the Master's House' denounced mainstream feminism for its futile and counterproductive stance in ignoring the fact that racism, homophobia, and poverty are intersecting forms of oppression, and demanded that the voices of women of all races, classes, and sexuality should be heard. Since then, leading feminists have published works opening groundbreaking debates and pleading for a more critical treatment of representations of heretosexuality as the norm; see, for example, Adrienne Rich's 'Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence' (1980). A defence

emerged of women's right to enjoy their sexualities in ways promoted by the sex industry and seen by many as encouraging violence against women; Gayle Rubin's 'Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality' (1984) demanded that Western women recognize their own privilege and how they have silenced Third World feminists by speaking for them (see also Chandra Talpade Mohanty's *Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses*, 1984). Others championed the concept of hybridity as a means of reflecting various cultural differences and of fighting racist and sexist paradigms (Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera*, 1987). Likewise, Donna Haraway's *A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s* (1991) uses cyborgs as a metaphor for highlighting the problematic use of traditional Western traditions and taxonomies, and calls for a revision of gender constructs as categories for identity. Many would argue as well that Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990) changed the trajectory for future feminist scholarship when its author questioned the category 'woman' as essential and interpreted gender as a performative act, thus paving the way for queer theory and the study of dissident sexualities.

In sum, as Gill Plain and Susan Sellers affirm in their introduction to *A History of Feminist Literary Criticism* (2007: 1), 'The impact of feminism on literary criticism over the past thirty-five years has been profound and wide-ranging'. Besides continuing to affect a host of related disciplines such as philosophy, history, media studies, cultural studies, theology, law, and economics, current debates include how – and whether – women's bodies should be digitally altered, sexual assault and how it should be discussed, regretting motherhood, and the morality or immorality of surrogacy, among many other controversial topics. Moreover, the revolutionary mission undertaken by feminist scholars (to which this series contributes) has since the 1970s been re-shaping the literary canon and thus 'radically influencing the parallel processes of publishing, reviewing and literary reception' (Plain and Sellers 2007: 1). This process is still very much ongoing, and indeed plenty of works by women writers have been successfully rediscovered and given the critical and public attention they deserved.

The Response to the Debate inside Spain: ‘On a knife’s edge’

We women writers are reluctant to be held in publishing ghettos, thus exhibiting a slightly schizophrenic position that flatly rejects the label of ‘women’s literature’ and at the same time, [taking advantage of] promotional and anthologies packages of that very same ‘women’s literature’; [...] ‘we keep a stiff upper lip’ as much as we can, *on a knife’s edge*, with respect to universities, public forums and the media. – (Marta Sanz, cited in Henseler 2003b: 61, emphasis added)

Henseler’s comment about the ‘double-edged’ position in which women writers find themselves outlines one of the central paradoxes of women’s writing: that to acknowledge its existence (as writing by women) is to risk its ghettoization. It is to position oneself, as Sanz so evocatively says above, ‘en el filo de la navaja’. This illustrates the point that to discuss women’s literature as separate from men’s literature is controversial, and as this is something I have set out to do in this book, this is an issue I address from the outset.

Just like everywhere else, in Spain the question of the existence (or not) of ‘women’s literature’ has occupied not only women authors, but male authors, critics, readers, reviewers, and academics alike. The situation for the female writer is clearly a complex one. As discussed in Chapter 2, the publishing industry is keen, if only for marketing purposes, to promote the notion of ‘women’s literature’ in a way that is very different from the marketing of the male writer. The manner in which women authors respond to this – or not – may well determine their commercial success and their literary prestige, so the *literatura femenina* label is clearly a double-edged sword.

While most female writers will be asked to address the question of ‘women’s writing’ sooner or later, allusions to the question of ‘men’s writing’ in the case of the male author, his readers, or his characters remain virtually unknown. As Almudena Grandes explains in her prologue to *Modelos de mujer* [Models of Women], ‘Women writers are constantly forced to comment on the gender of the characters in their books, whilst male writers are enviably privileged and exempt from this’ (1996: 16). To test Grandes’ theory, I have examined interviews with Spanish writers in the Spanish

literary magazine, *Qué Leer* [What to Read], from February 2009 to July 2012, and found that in *none* of the sixty-two interviews with Spanish male writers was a single reference made to male identity, be that with reference to their fictional characters, the writer, or the reader. However, in the twenty-three interviews conducted with Spanish women writers over the same period, it was commonplace to find questions such as 'Could we say that you are reclaiming "normal women"?' (Calandri 2009), 'Where do you find the time for your nine children, your university job and your writing?' (Piña 2010b), not to mention biased declarations based on the writer's sex and gender such as: 'Many of the women in these tales are you at some point in your life' (Piña 2010c). Ten, that is, almost half of the twenty-three women interviewed were directly questioned about the relationship between their female condition and their own profession as a writer.¹

The question of gender difference in writing is raised repeatedly in interviews with Spanish women writers,² and the emergence of the so-called boom of women writers during the period of the Transition (the literary generation to which Montero belongs), intensified the debate. Henseler observes that the very different approaches to the writing of the generation of women authors born in the 1960s and 1970s³ 'suggest that a male-female distinction is inappropriate and outdated' (2003a: 14). Henseler makes an important point. The response of many of these women to the question of 'women's writing' certainly suggests that some feel the question is outdated and inappropriate. However, while female authors, like Matute, who belong to earlier generations tend to reject, and may always have rejected, the notion of women's literature, the trend among more contemporary women writers, like Extebarria, is to celebrate the notion of gender difference.

1 These were Clara Usón, Elvira Navarro, Ángeles Caso, Lucía Etxebarria, Julia Navarro, Carmen Gurruchaga, Soledad Puértolas, Reyes Calderón, Almudena Grandes, and Maruja Torres.

2 See, for example: García (2002); López-Cabrales (2000: 151-66); Velázquez Jordán (2002); Salvador (n.d.); Prado (n.d.).

3 This is the generation that includes Lola Beccaria, Lucía Etxebarria, Clara Obligado, Espido Freire, and Paula Izquierdo, as well as more recent work by widely respected women authors from earlier generations.

The ‘women’s writing’ label is indeed a suggestive one, and in her landmark essay *Towards a Feminist Poetics* (1979), Elaine Showalter distinguishes between women’s role as readers – consuming male-produced literature – and women’s role as writers, which she terms gynocritics. Within gynocritics, Showalter identifies four currents of opinion dealing with the question of whether women’s writing differs from men’s writing and, if this is the case, where that difference may be located. Although Showalter’s study admittedly focuses on English-speaking female authors, a brief overview of these currents will allow us to identify the main ways in which contemporary Spanish writers respond to the label.

The first, deprecatory current argues that writing by women is inferior to writing by men. Far from being outdated, our field study of critical reviews and interviews in Chapters 2 and 4 will prove that this bias is still very firmly in place, and that the advent of the globalized, internet era has perhaps surprisingly fostered this kind of gender bias. In 2010, Almudena Grandes summed up the problem succinctly: ‘I do not like the term “female literature”, although I would not have any problem using it if the term “masculine literature” also existed’ (for more on this, see Freixas 2008). As the term ‘women’s literature’ is not used alongside an equivalent term ‘men’s literature’ to distinguish between literary works written by either sex, the term may all too easily become, consciously or unconsciously, a means to distinguish ‘women’s literature’ from ‘literature’, in general (Freixas 2008). Espido Freire is also cautious about the risks involved in the use of the term *literatura femenina* by the critical establishment:

One of the most common ways of discrimination is that imposed by the dictatorship of the so-called *female literature* [...] whenever it is mentioned that a man or woman author writes *female literature*, they are being automatically despised. (Alapont 2010)

Likewise, in 2001, Freixas offered a sardonic interpretation of the subtext to the many and various answers that female writers provide to the frequently asked question where they stand on the question of ‘women’s writing’:

I know that what you’re really asking me, you idiot, is if I write literature for women instead of good literature; and what I’m answering, listen up, is that there is indeed

good and bad literature, but that has nothing to do with it being for men or women, get this in your heads, you twits, for twits is what you are. (Freixas 2001)

And Elena Santiago even suggests that most contemporary critics and editors remain under the influence of a male-oriented tradition:

The reason for their [the critics'] behaviour, with rare exceptions, lies in that centuries-old mentality of theirs, which they hold very dear [...]. Most editors are men [...]. For long years, for a long life they remained inflexible and more willing to help male writers [...]. There are editors and critics who are still eager to always be favourable to men. (2003: 42)

Grandes, Freixas, Santiago, and Freire make valid points, and it is also noteworthy that these denunciations of this male-oriented tradition are made by different writers who, respectively, span the time frame of this study (Elena Santiago was born in 1941, Laura Freixas in 1958, Almudena Grandes in 1960, and Espido Freire in 1974), indicating that the debate is still ongoing. However, it is also undeniable that the label has allowed for the promotion of the work of numerous, valuable women writers and of themes that had been traditionally little explored. The paradox, nonetheless, remains. An example of this is provided by Dulce Chacón in her interview with Alapont (2000). Chacón famously won the *Libro del Año* prize for *La voz dormida* [The Sleeping Voice] in 2003, a novel based on interviews she conducted with women imprisoned during the post-Civil War period. Her work has rescued a very important part of women's silenced history and paid particular attention to the status of women in Spain in the context of the Civil War and dictatorship, and yet she is quite clear in her interview with Alapont that the label 'women's writing' denigrates female authors:

There is not a female literature; although there is a literature written by women and a literature written by men, written by homosexuals, written by brunettes, by blondes, by red heads [...]. However, it is only literature written by women that is labelled, 'female'. I think that is simply a matter of degrading women writers. Literature does not need any adjectives, for it is universal.

Chacón seems unaware of the fact that the branding of literature does, in fact, extend to other widely studied categories, such as Black literature, Gay

literature, Jewish literature, and so on, so her aversion to the term may be symptomatic of the fact that issues involving ethnic and other minorities – and their literatures – have dawned only fairly recently on Spanish consciousness, for instance in the works of Herrero Granado (1997: 197–212), Segarra (1998), and Mérida (2007). What the ‘women’s writing’ label has in common with the above-mentioned categories is that the author’s identity is central to the labelling process. It is easy to agree with Chacón, that, along with ‘women’s writing’, these literatures should not be studied as separate literatures to be contrasted with a white, male form of ‘men’s literature’. It is also easy to sympathize with her instinctive sense that adding the adjective ‘women’ denotes inferiority. This assumption that the label denotes inferiority is unfortunately borne out by the negative references to the sex of the author in the critics’ interviews with women writers and the reviews of ‘women’s writing’ highlighted in the first section of this chapter. Such attitudes to women who write are linked to deeply rooted gender prejudices that will take a long time to overcome, and that precede the debates, both academic and public, on ‘women’s writing’. However, the removal of the label alone is unlikely to remove such tenacious prejudice and if there has been such an enormous growth in gender-marked publicity, it is perhaps even more vital to continue to analyse the role of gender in the production and reception of contemporary literature.

The second trend identified by Showalter, championed in Spain by Spanish women writers such as Chacón, Grandes, Matute, and Montero, argues that it is impossible to distinguish writing by women from writing by men and that any intrinsic differences in style and/or subject matter will be individual, and cannot be ascribed to gender difference. Indeed, we find that the tendency is for more veteran writers to privilege the need to dismantle the myth of a literature marked by gender. For example, Carmen Posadas (born in 1953) maintained, in 2010, that although there may be a male and a female viewpoint, ‘at the end of the day there’s only good literature and bad literature’ (*Diario de Navarra*, n.d., n.pag.). Similar statements have been made by other prominent women authors of her generation and older ones, such as Josefina Aldecoa (*El Mundo*, 2004a), Paloma Pedrero Díaz-Caneja (2011: 76), and Ana María Matute (*Ayuso Pérez* 2007). Unlike Montero and Etxebarria, who have dedicated non-fictional works to the

discussion of the existence of 'women's writing', Matute is the only writer that I examine at length here who has not dealt in depth with the question of 'women's writing'. When asked about her opinion on the existence of a difference between a male and a female perspective in literature, Matute's reply is somewhat ambivalent:

Maybe women have a different outlook, but I don't have a very clear opinion on the matter, because literature is one, I don't care if it's written by a man or a woman. There are good books and bad books, period. (Cited in Potok-Nycz 2003: 156)

In Spain, this individualist approach appears to suit – albeit unconsciously – its supporters' desire to reject the separation of male and female activities inculcated in women (and men), during the dictatorship by the *Sección Femenina de la Falange Española* [Women's Section of the Spanish Falange]. The main problem with this approach is that it gives rise to inherent contradictions. Indeed, affirmations made about 'good' and 'bad' literature, such as the one Matute makes above in order to avoid having to comment on sexual difference in writing style, are rarely accompanied by an enumeration of the historical, cultural, or literary factors that combine to produce literary texts. It is now more widely recognized that the process by which a literary canon is created is a selective one, and one which is clearly marked by the cultural criteria, political attitudes, and interests of its creators. Whereas formerly these interests responded primarily to aesthetic, religious, and political criteria, these criteria now increasingly come second to the demands of sales and marketing. Rebecca O'Rourke's discussion of the widespread popularity, in the late 1970s and 1980s, of English-language novels giving central focus to women's experiences notes that '[t]he willingness of mainstream publishers to print and reprint the work of women must be in part their response to the creation, through the women's movement, of a feminist audience whose choice of reading is women centred' (1979: 3). Paula Izquierdo acknowledges a similar tendency to distinguish between male literature and female literature in the Spanish arena:

It could be addressing the market requirements, that is, the need to label, classify, pigeon-hole any 'products' or 'goods'. However, I am afraid that there are other less obvious yet well-documented aspects showing an undercurrent of thought, a cultural

heritage entrenched in the subconscious of some critics and ‘cultural agents’ who tend to dismiss, degrade and systematically undervalue a work for the simple reason it has been signed by a woman. (Cited in Henseler 2003: 122)

The process by which writing by women is integrated, or not, within the literary canon is crucial to the reception of women writers, with women writers themselves frequently denouncing the absence or misrepresentation of their work in mixed anthologies, prizes, or congresses (see Nichols 1987: 80; Montero 2003: 173). If we take just two recent examples, none of the works examined in *La inmigración en la literatura española contemporánea* [Immigration in Spanish Contemporary Literature] (Andrés-Suárez et al.: 2002), is written by a female author, yet Lucía Etxebarria’s *Cosmofobia* [Cosmophobia], Rosa Montero’s *Instrucciones para salvar el mundo* [Instructions to Save the World], and Ángeles Caso’s *Contra el viento* [Against the Wind] – which won the LVIII Premio Planeta in 2009 – are just three examples of well-received novels written by women that deal with the topic of immigration in Spain. Similarly, no female authors are examined in *La literatura española en el exilio: un estudio comparativo* [Spanish Literature in Exile: A Comparative Study] (Ugarte 1999), although nothing in the title suggests that the book’s comparative focus will be limited to male authors.

This tendency to exclude female authors from anthologies and critical studies has, since the mid-1980s, increasingly been countered with women-only collections and events that bring women writers into the public domain. Nonetheless, this could be perceived as a patronizing form of ghettoization that reinforces the segregation that such events and publications attempt to redress, as summed up by Henseler in the epigraph to this chapter.

Prior to the twentieth century, the lack of female artists and intellectuals could have been attributed to lack of opportunity, finance, and/or education. Today, however, Spain’s female university students outnumber male undergraduates, and several generations of women writers have been born during the democratic period. Until recently, women writers were an almost exotic addition to a male-dominated world; nowadays, however, competition in the literary market is fierce and women writers are seen

as new and, for some, commercially overrated competitors. The situation is very different, however, if we look at the question of literary prestige, where 'women's writing' remains underrated. In this sense, Esther Tusquets denounces the segregation of women's writings that the critical establishment practises through what she refers to as 'the women's panel' that is usually presented as distinct from more serious, 'universal' literature (cited in Nichols 1987: 80). This segregation appears to have been made even worse by the increasing commercialization of bookselling, a conundrum that, as I argue in Chapter 2, makes it especially difficult for women writers to balance their public image and their work. This explains why many women who wish to be regarded as serious writers would rather avoid, or completely reject, the label.

The third approach signalled by Showalter is the one which avows a difference between male and female writing, and attributes this difference to individual experience; she notes that, as men and women live different lives, it is only natural that their writing should also be different. In Spain, Etxebarria is perhaps the most vociferous supporter of this trend, which regards the role of women writers as being responsible for raising themes and issues related to women's vital experiences, such as the mother–daughter bond, the experience of childbirth, menstruation, female sexuality, and so on. In this vein, Freixas asserts that she believes that there is

[a] female or women's literature with its own characteristics [...] Its most specific [contribution] focuses on expanding the range of female characters and presenting them as valuable characters both *per se* and in their relationships with other women, and not only with men. (Bengoa 2000)

Whereas the second approach does not regard these themes as the mark of 'women's writing', the third approach argues that, not only are these issues specifically associated with 'women's writing', but that their inclusion in a universal history of literature represents a re-appropriation of domesticity and reclaiming of female experience that automatically makes such writing 'feminist' rather than 'feminine', feminine being a cultural term that shifts across generations, cultures, and religious belief systems. Feminist, on the other hand, has specific political connotations with reference to women's rights.

Thus, Chapter 4 explores that while Matute and Montero establish a separation between politics and literature, Etxebarria regards feminism as something that extends naturally into her fiction. If it can be assumed that we bring our own individual and also a sex- and gender-inflected context to any act of interpretation, what is it that defines ‘women’s writing’, and is it necessarily feminist? According to Lola Luna, a feminist reader should be concerned with ‘the political sense of the term’ and it is not enough to practise ‘a differential reading based on her experience as a woman’ (cited in Navas Ocaña 2009: 69). For Luna, a feminist reading would imply ‘the resistance to the canonical and institutional – patriarchal – pattern of reading interpretation’ (2009: 59). Conversely, the poet Juana Castro warns of the danger implicit in reducing the study of women’s literature to feminist politics and in perpetuating an unnecessary and counterproductive division between women critics and women writers:

There is an issue that worries me: it seems that feminists do their own thing and so do women writers [...] and furthermore, the former despise the latter [...]. Feminists do not care about cultural and artistic developments; they only care about the legal system, about work. It seems that these two worlds are impossible to merge. (Cited in Ugalde 1991: 59)

Of course, not all feminist critics focus exclusively on work and the legal system. Although the source of difference as based in sex and/or gender has never been unanimously established, what is widely recognized by critics such as Hélène Cixous (1997: 101)–who proposes difference, multiplicity, and heterogeneity as the means to combat the binary patriarchal system – and Annette Kolodny (cited in Moi 1997: 70–1), as well as by Spanish authors such as Etxebarria (2000a and b) and Freixas (2000), is that women’s writing brings new topics, new sensitivities, and new character models to literature. Etxebarria overtly champions women’s literature, stating, in her essay ‘Con nuestra propia voz: a favor de la literatura femenina’ [With our Own Voice. In Favour of Women’s Literature]:

Women’s literature generally amalgamates the same viewpoint expressed by different voices emanating from our own women’s nature. We have our own style and space of creation, because creation is inherent to the experiences lived by male or female writers. (2000b: 107–8)

Three points raised in this comment ('different voices', 'own women's nature', 'our own style') summarize the main arguments used to justify the separation of 'women's writing' from 'writing'. Etxebarria argues that, just as men and women live and experience life differently, their way of writing will differ, and it is these different styles and voices that are necessary to provide a more complete picture and that should be celebrated for their different literary representation of the world we live in. More problematic, perhaps, is the term 'own nature', which would not only apply to the way in which readers relate to novels, but also to the way every writer's work is determined and influenced by his or her sex. The question as to whether this gender influence is biological or socially constructed is a central part of the debate.

Finally, a fourth approach to 'women's writing', noted by Showalter and generally associated with so-called 'French' feminist literary theory, argues that the difference between male and women writing lies not only in its themes, but also in its structural and formal aspects. Its supporters assert that therefore, not only women, but also men can write *écriture féminine*. Although my research did not find any Spanish writers openly defending, or at least specifically referring to, the concept of *écriture féminine*, I found that it was occasionally hinted at – interestingly, by both supporters and non-supporters of the 'women's writing' label, as will be explored in Chapter 4.

Conflicting Trends

Where the potentially gendered position of male critics, reviewers, and members of academia is seldom questioned, there remains a trend even among well-known, educated, and experienced professionals such as Montero and Grandes, to distrust literary studies carried out by women – feminist or otherwise. Such distrust becomes more pronounced when such studies focus on a range of topics – the figure of the mother or the relationship between mother and daughter, for example – that tend to be regarded

as of interest only to women. Ironically, and this is also a consequence of the assumption that any male quality is universal, the perspective of a male reviewer or academic is still widely assumed to be neutral, and not gender-inflected. Of course, many literary analyses by heterosexual male academics will highlight the figure of the father, or a rival relationship between brothers, but such a focus is rarely interpreted to be of interest only to men, or as taking a position that is prejudiced or gender-biased. Indeed, one of the reasons for focusing only on women in this book is provided by an anecdotal recollection from Etxebarria. In 'Con nuestra propia voz: a favor de la literatura de mujeres', Etxebarria explains that the absence of female literary role-models she encountered as a teenager almost dissuaded her from pursuing her desire to become a writer. She also recalls tearing up a first draft after it had been defined as 'too feminine' by a successful male writer (2000b: 105–22). When studying the public reception of Matute, Montero, and Etxebarria, my own work will, therefore, consider that status of 'women's writing' to be a basic and necessary aspect of their construction of female characters and of their own public personae. Chapter 2 will consider that question with regard to the marketing and publishing of women writers in Spain.

The Reception and Marketing of Women Writers in Spain

All of us, it's obvious, read from our prejudices and nobody could make an interpretation based on nothing; however, the great potential of good literature consists largely in its ability to redefine those prejudices, shaping them so that we can read differently, by assimilating readings and, ultimately, building our understanding and sensitivity.

— SANZ (2003: 164)

There is a kind of novel, usually written by women, who speaks of bubbling emotions and lives in spaces where feelings are the only axis in which the story is based, [...] it does not pose big questions in their stories, nor does it reflect ideological positions, stand in deep thought, or build a narrative corpus with enough weight to hold and feed that complex world where emotions live.

— MONTEYS (1997)

This chapter examines, first, the critical responses to women's writing within the Spanish press and the wider academic community, and, secondly, marketing strategies, using the Spanish literary magazine *Qué Leer* as a case study. The first of the two quotations in the epigraph above illustrates a fact too often overlooked, which is that we are prone to an unconscious gender bias as readers, and that we each bring to our interpretation a different story and set of prejudices that produce (in the Barthesian sense) a different literary text. The second outlines one of the most persistent of those prejudices.

The Reception of Spanish Women Writers within the Literary Press and the Academy

In her seminal work *Literatura y Mujeres* [Literature and Women] (2000), the prominent Spanish novelist and scholar Laura Freixas provides some interesting statistics with regard to the reception of women in the Spanish literary market: 70 per cent of the Spanish equivalent to the UK's Arts and Humanities BA degrees are awarded to women, and yet only 20 per cent of all books published are written by women; 10 per cent of literary prizes in Spain are awarded to women, and only 6 per cent of the Cervantes prizes have gone to women.¹ Freixas also notes that, in 1999, only 129 female writers had published novels with the main Spanish publishing houses (Alfaguara, Anagrama, Destino, Planeta, Plaza y Janés, Seix Barral, and Tusquets), the overall proportion of women to men being 24 per cent (2000: 35–6). She also notes that, conversely, the majority of readers are women (2000: 39). This point is confirmed by the sociologist Enrique Gil Calvo, who concluded on the basis of reading polls carried out by the Spanish Ministry of Social Affairs in 1978, 1985, and 1990, that in Spain the number of women readers is greater, both in absolute and in relative terms, than the number of male readers (1993: 120).

Despite the fact that women publish fewer books and receive fewer literary awards than men – which is both a product and an illustration of an unconscious bias – both the literary market and mainstream literary criticism continue to assume that, as women-authored literature tends to give precedence to female protagonists, it focuses on women's issues and appeals only to a female readership. This could be explained by the fact that if – as suggested by Sanz in the first epigraph above and as proposed by reader-response theory – the meaning of a literary text is produced as a result of a dynamic relationship between writer and reader, no text has

1 These figures were given by Freixas in 2011 during her contribution to an excellent *Nostramo* episode ('Esther Tusquets. Autoras. Joan Brossa') in which Esther Tusquets, Laura Freixas, and María Ángeles Cabré discussed the state of writing by women in Spain; see Tusquets 2011.

a single meaning that can be discovered on one close reading, or by investigating the author's intentions; its meaning is the product of successive readerly engagements. As Jonathan Culler explains:

An interpretation of the work can be a story of that encounter, with its ups and downs: various conventions and expectations are brought into play, connections are posited, and expectations defeated or confirmed. To interpret a work is to tell a story of reading. (1997: 59–60)

According to reader-response theory, every reader will tell a different story about a given text, and if a range of factors can influence what theorists have called the reader's 'horizon of expectations' (see Jauss (1982) and Iser (1974)), it would be naïve to assume that sex and gender do not affect these 'horizons'. Culler suggests that reader-oriented criticism can be applied to

[r]everse the usual situation in which the perspective of a male critic is assumed to be sexually neutral, while a feminist reading is seen as a case of special pleading and an attempt to force the text into a predetermined mold. (1982: 55)

Annette Kolodny also suggests that reading is a learned activity, along with other interpretive strategies in any society. As such, it is 'sex-coded and gender-inflected' (cited in Culler 1982: 51). If it is the consensus of a given society that 'male' is the equivalent to 'universal', we will be programmed to assume that when the protagonist of a particular story is male, the feelings, events, and conflicts experienced by this character are universal, and that it is possible for both male and female readers to identify with and to relate to these. On the other hand, it would seem that whenever a story has a female protagonist, the adventures, thoughts, and experiences of this character are assumed to be pertinent only to females.

Freixas' study exposes similar prejudices, for instance that the increasing number of women writers is diminishing the quality of literature (2000: 48) or that women sell more books than men (2000: 33–4). These are also commonplace in Spanish literary criticism, and may translate, consciously or unconsciously, into negative allusions to women authors' sex and gender in reviews. Another factor which is key in this bias is that, as Freixas explains, while in most Anglophone countries, research on women's writing has an important presence in public opinion, in Spain it is rarely heard outside

the confines of universities. As a result, in Spain renowned literary critics may make statements in prestigious and widely read newspapers such as *El País* that would be considered sexist elsewhere, but that in this context are presented as if they were a serious contribution to ongoing academic debate. In 1998, Vicente Verdú warned of the danger of 'all that badly written literature whose alibi is that it has been written by or for women [...], [a]s if being a woman was a good enough excuse for writing badly' (1998: 86–7). It is as if the critic fears the popularity of such literature might spread from female to male authors who 'have already signed up to write that kind of literature after realizing that they already have an assured readership' (Roma 1998: 86–7). Likewise, in 2000 Javier Vicoso noted that there is indeed an essentially feminine literature, which has different features and is distinguishable from the common characteristics of a 'possible' sexless literature (Vicoso 2000, n.pag.), and this view that there is a feminine and a neutral, or 'asexual', literature is symptomatic of the unconscious assumption that literature written by women is gendered, while literature written by men is not.

Freixas offers these quotations as examples of the circulation within literary criticism of a number of persistently male chauvinist ideas; however, turning to the reception of women writers within the Spanish press and academic community more widely, she paradoxically identifies the chief trends associated with Spanish women writers at the turn of the twenty-first century as: greater media visibility and greater female readership, a concurrent desire on the part of publishing houses and other institutions to attract women consumers, the coexistence of integrating and segregating policies in the publishing world, the small body of sometimes inaccessible academic research on women's writing, and a lack of female members in the most prestigious literary institutions (2000: 29, 80–2, 23, 38–9).

Indeed, views such as that of Verdú quoted above may be exacerbated by the points Freixas highlights: women's writing in Spain tends to be segregated for the purposes of marketing, and there is a lack of academic criticism written by women. The segregating approach to women writers, which is the absence of or inclusion of very few women in anthologies, publications, or conferences about literature in general, produces a movement that paradoxically risks compounding this segregation by countering

it with women-only collections and events. It is interesting that, while the existence of a distinctive gender difference in literature is still in doubt, attempts such as these to make women writers visible by grouping them into a given category tend to suggest an understanding of women's writing as a phenomenon with common characteristics.

Of interest, and perhaps what could be seen as threatening to the traditionally male-dominated literary market, is the major change that has occurred since academic criticism focusing on Spanish women writers began to develop as a discipline, albeit outside Spain, from the mid-1980s onwards (for example, Brown 1991 and Ciplijauskaitė 1988); as a consequence of their greater visibility and wider readership, publishing houses and literary institutions are now more keen to attract women (Freixas 2000: 39). This could be linked to the fact that, according to writer Clara Obligado, one of the female authors cited in Henseler (2003b: 131–3), the destiny of a book is largely sealed before it arrives in bookshops. Hence, although each author may have a certain say in the way their book will be presented, allowing for a small margin of error, publishing houses generally know whether the book will sell or not. This could depend on the investment in promotional material, on the popularity of the author, and/or on the commercial iconography employed, an iconography that is sharply marked by gender, as noted above. Parallel to this trend in the field of publishing houses, references to women authors' sex and gender are relatively common in the field of literary criticism, and often made in a negative light.

Literary magazines' co-opting of the portrayal of authors as a means of promoting certain ideals is not new, as illustrated by Joe Moran in his article 'The Author as a Brand Name: American Literary Figures and the *Time* Cover Story' (Moran 1995). Moran focused on the decade of the 1960s and on the American magazine's introduction of authors as cover-story subjects. Through interviews, commentary, and photographs, the magazine offered a portrayal of its authors as 'apparently ordinary, representative figures' and sought to appropriate them 'as the expression of a collective national mood' (Moran 1995: 354). Moran offers different examples such as the portrayals of Ernest Hemingway, William Faulkner, and John Cheever, which responded to the *Time*'s critics and journalists' understanding of and intention to present these authors as 'non-literary

“men’s men” (Moran 1995: 353). Thus, the magazine was careful to focus on their hobbies, lifestyles, personalities, personal opinions, and worries, but it also made an effort to downplay non-normative qualities such as the homosexuality of Tennessee Williams and James Baldwin, with the aim of highlighting ‘their exemplary status as members of the [...] Protestant, newly exurban bourgeoisie of upstate New York and New England – an archetypal *Time* readership (and a prosperous audience for advertisers) that the magazine presented as typically American, which ultimately helped the purpose of celebrating the traditional lifestyle of American readers’ (Moran 1995: 354).

Perhaps with the purpose of maintaining the ideal of a male-dominated literary marketplace, in the current Spanish arena there seem to be plenty of cases where journalists, reviewers, and literary critics have more or less unconsciously implied that whereas the creation of inspiring, encouraging male characters is rarely introduced as evidence to question the literary value of a text, the writing of stimulating, unusual female characters is all too often assumed to detract from the potential literary value of a novel by a woman writer on the grounds that the fiction has been co-opted to fulfil some kind of political agenda concerning the ‘emancipation’ of women.

The following example shows the different ways in which unnecessary reference to a woman’s gender contributes to the portrayal of a biased and less than accurate picture of the situation of women writers:

Espido Freire, a 25-year-old Basque writer, wins the Planeta prize with a women’s tale. As predicted, the 48th Planeta Awards has been taken over by women writers. (*El País* 1999, n.pag.)

This eye-catching headline refers to the 1999 Planeta prize that was awarded to Freire’s novel *Irlanda* [Ireland]. The definition of the novel as *una historia de mujeres* [a women’s tale] suggests that Freire is a female writer and the novel’s main characters are female, and therefore the book is for women readers. The protagonists of *Irlanda* are indeed two female cousins, and the plot centres around their mixed feelings about one another and their rivalrous relationship. However, the story also includes a number of prominent male characters, and there is no reason why the depiction of this complex relationship between two women should not be as universally applicable

as a fictionalized account of a relationship between two male protagonists. On the contrary, it is difficult to imagine any headline announcing that a male author had won a literary prize with a 'men's tale' about the complex relationship between two men, and that his book was intended primarily for male readers.

Interesting also is the use of *tomada* [taken]: 'as predicted, the 48th Planeta Awards have been *taken over* by women writers', which in Spanish is generally used in the context of a war or an avalanche. The word *tomada* implies an illegitimate or metaphorically violent attack on the traditional order and supremacy – in numerical terms – by women writers. Each year a Planeta first prize is awarded to one primary winner and a second prize to a runner-up. It is interesting and exceptional that both prizes in that year were awarded to a woman writer: Espido Freire and Nativel Preciado. This should be interpreted, metaphorically, as a *female* takeover, or an insurrection.

In the case of certain interviews, it is the question itself that entails an implicit disdain for any features in the text that might give it away as female-authored. The following question was part of the interview with Belén Gopegui in *El Mundo*'s 'Encuentros digitales' series from 2001:

When I read any of your books, I am unable to tell whether it has been written by a woman or a man, which does not happen with the rest of women writers. In fact, I get the feeling that I am reading a book written by a man. Is intelligence a male quality? (*El Mundo* 2001, n.pag.)

It seems that the initial remark on the supposed gender neutrality of Gopegui's writing is meant as a compliment, which is only logical if, as the question goes on to suggest, intelligence is understood as a male quality whereas femaleness is most associated with emotion, intuition, and sensitivity. Gopegui's answer is, not surprisingly, ambivalent:

I sometimes read men's books and I get the impression that they have been written by women, that is, they reproduce feminine clichés that sell well. Being intelligent is a rare quality, at least nowadays. It is a universal quality, but it dies with lack of use. (*Ibid.*)

It is also interesting to examine the critical response in 2001 of a well-known Spanish critic, Sanz Villanueva, to the theme of fame in Etxebarria's *De*

todo lo visible y lo invisible [Of Everything Visible and Invisible], for its identification of the author with her female characters:

The famous director is set against the minority writer, but although this conflict emphasizes their relationship, their love story only has a relative importance. It is rather a pretext on the part of the author to show how she makes a distinction between two different types of creator: the winner with the audience against the writer applauded by a competent reviewer. The many paragraphs dedicated to this are catchy and pitiful, for they ooze a sad personal grudge.

Rather than with the novel, these interpolations have to do with Etxebarria herself, with her frustration at not achieving this recognition, which despite her claims of contempt for it, makes her suffer [...]. What the author does is to fix things before they break, because it does not take a genius to understand that she is arrogantly forecasting *De todo lo visible y lo invisible*'s future. But one does notice a somewhat childish tantrum: suck it up (all of you – Great Literature authors, it is understood), because I am famous, I appear on TV and you are only celebrated in cultural magazines. (Sanz Villanueva 2001)

This critique of *De todo lo visible y lo invisible* is a pertinent illustration of the tendency to conflate the life of the female author with her fiction. These comments about Etxebarria may or may not be accurate, but they would not generally be regarded as literary criticism. Since no quotation from Etxebarria is included in the article, it may be assumed that the allegation that she uses her protagonists to express her 'sad personal grudge' is speculation, or even perhaps a form of projection on the part of Villanueva. Indeed, the facts that Villanueva has the arrogance to assume that he has access to Etxebarria's thoughts and that the terms he uses in expressing these thoughts are deliberately belittling are out of order.

Elsewhere, Ayala-Dip's review of Etxebarria's *Un milagro en equilibrio* [A Miracle in Equilibrium] in 2004 accuses its author of using the unclear, from-mother-to-daughter emotional format of the novel with the sole purpose of venting her social and political opinions:

Because for her [Etxebarria], what matters above all is to express and show her disagreement with the world. But the reader may wonder, what is going on here? Is this a mock novel/diary/letter? What if it is all of that at the same time, what does it have to do with all that venting? [...] The novel never takes flight; it never exceeds the level of emotional bickering. (Ayala-Dip 2004)

Similarly, in an interview by Piña in 2010, with Carmen Gurruchaga, cited below, not only is it assumed that the creation of a strong and independent female character indicates an ulterior motive on the part of the author, but what is also taken for granted is that the protagonist is an alter ego of the author herself. However, Gurruchaga's subsequent reply denies this ('Lola is not me; she is many women'): 'It is unavoidable to think that the author wanted to create the character of Lola, a veteran journalist, confident, independent and tirelessly hard-working, by taking herself as a model' (cited in Piña 2010a).

These reviews are all representative of the critical tendency to assume that 'women's writing' is more concerned with personal politics than with literature. Although they are not representative of all literary criticism in Spain, they do however highlight an ongoing and often uncontested tendency to consider that what has been written by women is inferior and has relevance primarily for women readers. As noted by Freixas, the lack of research on women's writing in Spain results in the assertion that 'women writers do not tend to articulate theoretical contributions and the world of literature keeps disseminating unfounded judgements' (Potok-Nycz 2003: 7).

Another factor in this knee-jerk reaction against women and women writers may be the label 'feminist'. Freixas is quite clear about what are for her the negative aspects of feminist criticism:

There is no doubt that in Anglophone countries *Women's Studies* have the regrettable consequence of isolating women's literature by bringing it closer to historical, sociological, or political fields and distancing it from literature *per se*. (2000: 80)

Freixas highlights the fact that, in Spain, academic research on women's literature seldom reaches the general public (Freixas 2000: 39). With reference to a Spanish reading public, research emerging from Women's Studies is based on the Anglophone tradition and tends to be published in English. It would therefore be logical to expect that the majority of academics specializing in Spanish women authors are Anglo-American, or Spaniards working at Anglophone institutions (Freixas 2000: 81). Women writers' participation in Spanish literary institutions parallels this lack of academic studies on their works. With the exception of some notable authors such

as Ana María Matute, women writers are rarely represented in the most traditional and prestigious institutions. Academic research on women writers does, however, resist the notion of 'women's literature' as a purely commercial category, and helps to bring the debate closer to students and specialist readers. Freixas's point about the lack of female members in the most prestigious Spanish literary institutions is also relevant to this situation: in 2018 there were eight female members out of the total forty-six members of the RAE (Real Academia Española), two female members in the permanent commission of the ASALE (Asociación de Academias de la Lengua Española),² and there are currently only eighteen female directors out of a total of the fifty-nine Cervantes centres that exist outside Spain.

Having studied and worked at various American and British universities, I have a different view. Academic research on women writers does resist the notion of 'women's literature' as a purely commercial category and helps to bring the debate closer to students and specialist readers. I would argue that, taking into account findings based on reader-response theory that shows the meaning of any text is based on the relationship between the reader and the author, there is a need for more women critics and reviewers to focus primarily on writing by women to ensure their presence within both academic and public debate.

Taught modules on 'Spanish Women's Writing', classified as a separate subject from 'Spanish Literature', are still common in Anglophone universities, but the focus is not necessarily separatist or feminist. While there is a danger of ghettoization, the aim of this measure – a measure that I believe should be temporary – seems to be to familiarize students with the debate surrounding the existence of 'women's literature' in Spain and to introduce them to works of women authors that until relatively recently had received little attention from the academic world. In the United States, to cite two modules that deal with writing by Spanish women as simply

2 The ASALE [Association of the Academies of Spanish Language]. The permanent commission currently comprises President Darío Villanueva, General Secretary Francisco Javier Pérez, Treasurer Aurora Egido, and rotating members Jorge Ernesto Lemus Sandoval, José Rodríguez Rodríguez, and Pablo Adrián Cavallero. For more information see <<http://www.asale.org>>.

literature, Drury University and Indiana College offer one such undergraduate course each. Three credits, SPAN313: 'These Are Not Sweet Girls: Hispanic Women's Literature', taught at Drury, investigates issues of power, space, and archetypes in the literature written by Hispanic women and it covers the period up to and including the twenty-first century. Similarly, S470: 'Women and Hispanic Literature' is a three-credit undergraduate module taught at the Indiana University School of Liberal Arts at Indiana University–Purdue University Indianapolis. Focusing on a selection of poetry, autobiography, short stories, essays, and novels, and covering different genres and time periods from the Middle Ages to modern times, the module examines the representation of women in a series of literary works from Spain and Latin America. Literary topics explored in this course include image (portrayal and self-representation), characterization, and voice, as well as gender-oriented narrative techniques and linguistic and stylistic codes.

Similarly, in the UK, the focus of modules on women writers is progressively shifting from a feminist perspective to a wider range of theories and angles. For instance, the University of Durham provides final-year students with the option of a module titled 'Representing Women: Sex and Power in Colonial Latin America'. The module studies the portrayal of women's subjectivity and aspirations in literature and other kinds of cultural production by both male and female writers and artists, and deals with questions of self-representation and institutional intellectual collaboration on the part of women intellectuals before the nineteenth century, but the fact that it incorporates artists of both sexes denotes a wish for integration rather than ghettoization. A similar example can be found in the University of Bristol's Department of Spanish, Portuguese, and Latin American Studies. The aim of the module 'Women's Writing in Post-War Spain' is to provide students with an introduction to several of Spain's most important postwar women writers. The focus of this unit is a literary one, and a close reading of each text set is carried out with the aim of examining the key themes that each writer explores in her fiction.

Within the Spanish arena that is our focus here, it is the case that on the syllabi of the literature modules taught at most Spanish universities, where Spanish literature by men is regarded as universal and as the

norm, women authors are generally absent or have only very small representation in general literature modules and are only present in specific female literature modules. For example, the degree in *Filología Hispánica* [Hispanic philology] available at the Universidad de Granada offers a general module titled ‘La novela española a partir de Cervantes’ [The Spanish Novel from Cervantes Onwards]. In spite of this all-inclusive title, the module includes just two women (Emilia Pardo Bazán and Rosa Chacel) out of a total of over thirty authors. However, that same university teaches a specific course called ‘La mujer en la literatura española’ [The Woman in Spanish Literature], which contributes to the reinforcement of the idea that literature written by women is different.³ The same situation is repeated in the Universidad Complutense de Madrid, where students at the Departamento de Filología Española II study the module ‘La mujer en la literatura española’.⁴ By contrast, there is no such module as ‘El hombre en la literatura española’ [The Man in Spanish literature], or ‘Introducción a la literatura masculina’ [Introduction to Men’s Literature].

Marketing ‘Women Writers’ in Spain

As women authors become commercial icons, their once marginalized status increases their promotional visibility. (Henseler 2003a: 16)

This comment from Henseler succinctly outlines the paradox that this chapter examines, which is that although to a greater or lesser extent all writers are obliged to conform to the expectations, the demands, and the publishing iconography of the literary market, this iconography is marked for gender in a way that is particularly complex for women. This section examines the role of marketing in the dissemination and reception of women’s writing

3 See <<http://litespa.ugr.es/pages/docencia>> (accessed 29 June 2010).

4 See <<http://www.ucm.es/info/literat/Web/Departamento.php?tipo=Asignaturas&orden=2>> (accessed 29 June 2010).

by using as a case study an in-depth analysis of the representation of female authors in the publication *Qué Leer*.

Tsuchiya notes that in Spain, perhaps because their life experiences parallel the increasingly promotional demands of the book market, '[i]t is no surprise [...] that the 1980s and 90s, which gave rise to a new generation of readers raised in a consumer society, coincided with a boom of young writers, as the concepts of "lo nuevo" (novelty) and "lo joven" (youth) became commodified as objects of consumption' (2002a: 239). Because the problem of gender identity has been a central preoccupation for many female authors of the post-Franco period, an ability to respond to socio-cultural changes has been shown by the generation born in the 1960s and 1970s – both men and women (Tsuchiya 2002b: 77). Marta Rivera de la Cruz chose to contribute personally to the promotion of her novel *La vida después* [The Life After]. With this in mind, a book trailer was uploaded to YouTube showing a considerable number of anonymous participants answering the question: 'Can men and women be friends?'⁵ The same question, which is central to the novel's plot, was posted on the author's Twitter account for the general public to answer and discuss. For these writers, the need to comply with the ever-pressing demands to promote one's novels in different media, to embark on seemingly endless tours, and to work on one's media projection is unavoidable. The notion that it might be possible to be a successful writer without conforming to the demands of the market is not even questioned.

Many factors are at stake in questioning the existence of 'women's literature', but what makes the label immediately controversial is that it is used for only one of the two sexes. It could be argued that the label provides better publicity and more opportunity for the dissemination of informative press about women writers, or, on the contrary, that it also perpetuates a particular kind of discrimination against female authors that is based solely on the biological prerogative of their sex. There are good reasons to adopt one or both of these views, and Henseler is not wrong in her subliminal reference to a double-edged sword. The label makes women writers more

5 See <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6ori1-POtY8>>.

visible and more accessible to the wider public. This encourages interest from publishing houses and literary institutions, and as a result the construction of women writers as an attractive commodity for the purposes of marketing. On the other hand, it also encourages negative politics of segregation: women writers find themselves appearing in women-only collections. Even now, in the twenty-first century, women writers are often excluded from universally themed anthologies and collections.

Moran (2000: 350) affirms that ‘the wave of mergers and buyouts within the publishing industry since the 1960s and the subsequent formation of multimedia conglomerates have certainly precipitated more vigorous and sophisticated attempts to sell books, often by promoting the personalities of their authors’, and in this sense the critic Ricardo Senabre (2000) has noted that the boom in women writers is not only about difference, but also about marketability. Likewise, the writer Rebeca Rus (2012) points out that it is not necessary to be a feminist to write *literatura femenina* [women’s literature] but nevertheless she agrees with Senabre that the labelling of ‘women’s writing’ is very closely linked to marketability: ‘This is certainly a controversial issue, and my perspective as an advertising and marketing professional is that the label [...] is nothing but a marketing tool. Publishers find it easier to sell a type of novel once it has been labelled.’⁶ This view gestures towards a central paradox in any attempt to write about women writers and one of the reasons why the label remains an uncomfortable one for women. It becomes particularly ill-fitting when scrutinized in the context of the increasingly important role of marketing strategies for the creation of literary canons. Although it may be impossible to decide whether there is in fact any difference in the way men and women write, there is certainly a quantifiable difference in the way they are marketed that is under consideration here.

Freixas’s research focuses on the 1990s and includes sources taken from numerous literary conferences, anthologies, reviews, newspaper articles, and polls published in Spain during this period (Freixas 2005). The trends she identifies are intimately linked to the incorporation of women writers

6 Author’s email interview with Rus, 14 August 2012.

into the literary market from the early 1980s onwards and are ultimately tied in with the question of the existence of 'women's literature'. It may well be impossible to define substantively the difference between writing by men and writing by women, as critics like Kristeva have suggested, which is further confirmed by the reluctance of many women writers to concede its existence. However, what is clear is that whether or not it exists, writing by women is certainly marketed as if it did. Publishers, interviewers, critics, journalists, and even cultural-event planners frequently place primary importance on the gender of the female writer.

Freixas opens her discussion by noting that as a result of marketing strategies contemporary women writers are highly visible and accessible. Their various media appearances may even create the illusion that they dominate and are supported by the literary market (2000: 38). Freixas confirms the high commodity value of women writers to publishing houses and other institutions interested in recruiting and marketing to women. The 'demand' that Freixas highlights has led to, and is in turn fed by, the predominance of a particular kind of marketing: glossy photographs of women writers accompany literary articles in prestigious magazines such as *Qué Leer* and *Época*. The text and discussion that accompany this kind of marketing, particularly on popular television programmes, often includes highly personal questions.⁷ However, the greater media visibility granted to women is double-edged, for it also creates the false impression that women have conquered the literary market, and this may be a factor in some of the hostile responses to women's writing mentioned above.

Montero (2012) in her interview in *El camino de las palabras* [The Path of Words] argues that the promotional demands of the literary industry affect women writers and male writers alike and in a similar way.⁸ Sensing

7 In her role as editor of *Lo que los hombres no saben. El sexo contado por las mujeres* (2008), Lucía Etxebarria was interviewed by Marta Robles as part of the book launch. The interview, broadcast on *Telemadrid* on 17 March 2008, soon left the literary arena to move onto much more intimate questions. Complete interview on <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mgX1aORFios>> [accessed 5 July 2010].

8 Author's conversation with Montero as part of her talk in Instituto Cervantes London on 26 January 2012.

that Montero's statement might cloud the very different nature of the promotional demands placed on male and female writers, I have been prompted to test this theory against a case study of 147 interviews with male and female writers in issues of the popular publishing journal, *Qué Leer*, from 2010 to 2012. *Qué Leer* is aimed at a general reading public, rather than at the academic community, and for this reason it is a good indication of the marketing strategies that both male and female authors face. It is one of seventy magazines published by MC Ediciones, one of Europe's most important publishing houses, and it boasts the highest number of readers of all book magazines distributed in Spain, as measured by EGM (Estudio General de Medios) and OJD (Oficina de Justificación de la Difusión), two trustworthy indicators of the success enjoyed by publications. On its website, *Qué Leer* attributes this success to its rigorous yet accessible and stimulating style:

Its good acceptance among the public arises from a fundamental idea: if reading is one of the most exciting, imaginative and dreamy life experiences ... why is information about books cumbersome, serious or boring? QUÉ LEER seeks to report the news of the month, the events of the publishing world and the universe of writers with strict rigour and topicality, but also with a casual style and the ultimate goal of spreading the fascination with reading. (<<http://www.que-leer.com/revista-que-leer>>)

Presumably in the interests of stimulating said 'fascinación por la lectura' [fascination with reading], each interview in the issues studied was accompanied by a glossy photo of the author, regardless of sex. Renowned photographer Susan Sontag (who is also a prestigious author, teacher, film-maker, and activist), states that '[i]n teaching us a new visual code, photographs alter and enlarge our notion of what is worth looking at and what we have the right to observe' (Sontag 1979: 3). In this sense, *Qué Leer* readers enjoy the opportunity to observe their favourite authors in casual, non-professional settings. Interestingly, following the trend initiated by, among others, *Time* magazine, *Qué Leer*'s captioned photographs focus on a single, emblematic quality of the author portrayed. Hence, the subject is identified with a main characteristic that according to Moran owes much to 'the culture of advertising, and specifically

its techniques of product differentiation' (2000: 358). As Susan Sontag maintains, if photographs tend to be treated as more genuine and truthful than information in prose (1979: 6), readers would have the illusion that these photographs could depict the real personality behind the writer's public persona.

However, what is striking is the difference in the *mise en scène* of the portraits of the female writers that we will observe, who were framed in a far less neutral poses and with quite different demeanours from those of the male writers. For example, while *Qué Leer* tends to frame female writers at home, the tendency with male writers such as Alberto Olmos and Boris Izaguirre (see Figures 2.1 and 2.2) is to portray them in close-up, framing them in a more professional and impersonal way.

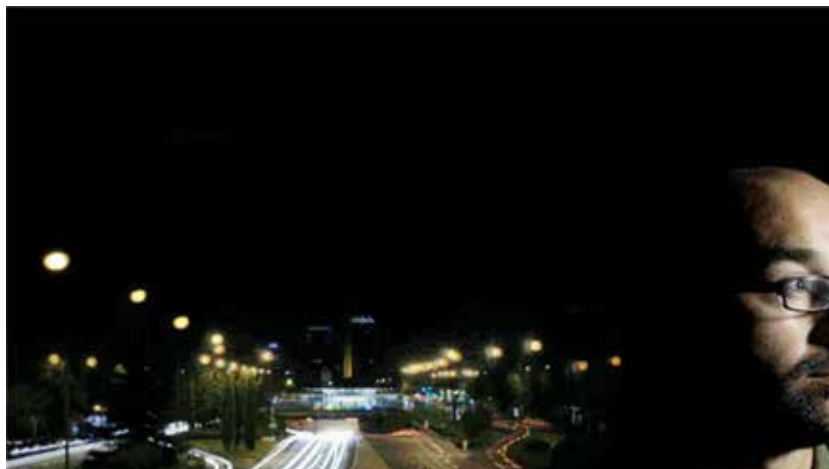


Figure 2.1 Photograph taken for Álex Gil's interview (2011) with Alberto Olmo in *Qué Leer* 167. Photograph: Asís G. Ayerbe. Reproduced with permission from the photographer.



Figure 2.2 Antonio Baños's interview with Boris Izaguirre (2011) is accompanied by this photograph in *Qué Leer* 168. Photograph: Diana Hernández. Reproduced with permission from *Qué Leer*.

The interview with Boris Izaguirre in *Qué Leer* was accompanied by a photograph taken in London, where the writer owns a house. What is particularly interesting about this portrait of Izaguirre as a serious career writer about town is how little it corresponds to his career trajectory and professional background. Born in Caracas in 1965, Izaguirre is a Venezuelan-Spanish screenwriter, journalist, and writer. He moved to Spain as the popular scriptwriter of a series of Venezuelan telenovelas [soap operas], such as *Rubí* [Ruby] and *La dama de Rosa* [The Lady in Pink], where he continued writing scripts and started participating in TV shows. Izaguirre is considered one of Spain's most important media personalities, particularly as a result of his role as co-host in the highly popular late-night TV show *Crónicas Marcianas*. From 1999 to 2005, his polemical appearances and provocative behaviour in this programme, in which he became notorious for stripping off his clothing, turned him into a media phenomenon.⁹ By 2018 Izaguirre had published eight novels and received a *Planeta Finalista* award for *Villa Diamante* [Diamond Villa] (2007). Notwithstanding the popularity of his novels, in Spain Izaguirre is more famous for his persona as a provocative showman than as a writer, and for a Spanish audience the portrait of the serious writer provided in *Qué Leer*, seems slightly incongruously removed from the image of Boris Izaguirre that has secured his reputation and fuelled his successful media career. This serious framing of the showman becomes particularly ironic when considered in direct contrast to the frivolous framing of far more serious female writers like Montero and Grandes.

As can be seen in Figures 2.3, 2.4 and 2.5, women writers are framed in a personal instead of a professional setting, presenting them as friendly, accessible, and, perhaps most tellingly, at home: Rosa Montero barefoot, strokes a cat; Almudena Grandes plays (again) with a cat in a cosy domestic setting; while Maruja Torres (catless) strikes a rather camp, self-mocking pose for the camera.

9 'Boris se desnuda para Chenoa', *YouTube*, <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iOQJvOfT7JE>>.



Figure 2.3 Picture accompanying Antonio Baños' interview with Maruja Torres (2011) in *Qué Leer* 164. Photograph: Mario Krmpotic. Reproduced with permission from the photographer.

Journalist and novelist Maruja Torres has had a high profile in Spain for decades. She is respected for her diverse but stable career and her frequently controversial opinions. Her wit and satirical sense of humour are the trademarks of her writing. If the portrait itself gestures obliquely towards this aspect of her writing, the text that accompanies it contains not a trace:

Maruja Torres takes the photographer and me to the Borne neighbourhood so that we can portray her and make her pose with joy. It is rare to find a happy writer [...] Promotions allow her 'to feel taken care of and noticed,' she confesses.



Figure 2.4 Image of Rosa Montero included in Begoña Piña's interview with her in *Qué Leer* 164. Photograph: Asís G. Ayerbe. Reproduced with permission from the photographer.

The familiar, cosy portrait of Rosa Montero with her cat accompanies an interview in which the author often diverges from the main topic, her novel *Lágrimas sobre la lluvia* [Tears in the Rain], to discuss her personal life, her friends, and, most strikingly, the painful death of her husband, Pablo Lizcano, from cancer, an experience that renders the domestic cosiness of the photograph somewhat incongruous.



Figure 2.5 Photograph to accompany Inés García-Albi's interview with Almudena Grandes in *Qué Leer* 157. Photograph: Asís G. Ayerbe. Reproduced with permission from the photographer.

As stated in the accompanying interview, the photograph of Almudena Grandes was taken in the comfort of the writer's house, 'where this Madrid-born author shares her life with the poet Luis García Montero'. The interview soon focuses far more on this intimate setting than on discussion of Grandes' novel, *Inés y la alegría* [Inés and Joy]. As well as making several explicit references to her husband and family life, the interviewer remarks on Grandes' skills as a hostess and cook:

The García Montero Grandes family is at home, expecting the arrival of several friends coming to watch the first game of the World Cup. They like entertaining. The house is ample, the TV is big and Almudena loves rolling up her sleeves and standing over the stove to feed the whole troop of family and friends.

This reads like a parody of *Hello!* magazine, so it is not surprising that references to the writer's physical appearance follow: 'dressed in white-striped grey jeans, a black top and homespun Crocs'. And yet the photograph we see shows Grandes wearing a much more feminine and formal blue dress; perhaps to complete an article composed of clichés, it was felt that more formal attire was needed to establish an equally clichéd parallel between the author and her latest protagonist:

The deep voice accompanies the feeling that the novelist is a woman of character, a real take-charge kind of woman [...]. While I follow her down the corridor, it occurs to me that Inés, the heroine of her novel, is also one of this kind of women; lively women, who are not afraid to get their hands dirty, who are Jacks of all trades, who have definite opinions and ideals, who are fighters, who protect their families, who are like a mother hen, who are passionate about things. (García-Albi 2010)

From this brief sample, it is clear that photographs of women writers are predominantly less serious, less professional, and more personal than those of their male peers. Their image is also more commonly and conveniently utilized, perhaps designed and prepared, as an advertising tool for literary events and the promotion of novels. While advertising is of course the primary purpose of almost all interviews and reviews, images of men tend to advertise their own work, whereas images of women are used additionally as part of the iconography of an event. A striking example of this tendency is provided by the photo (Figure 2.6) which accompanied an article in *El*

Cultural (2011, n.pag.) titled ‘La Semana Gótica y Espido Freire descubren la parte oscura de los cuentos de hadas’ [Gothic Week and Espido Freire discover the dark side of fairy tales].



Figure 2.6 Espido Freire advertising La Semana Gótica [Gothic Week] in *El Cultural* (2011). Photograph: Alan Cueto for La Semana Gótica Madrid, October 2011. Reproduced with permission from *El Cultural*.

La Semana Gótica is an annual, multidisciplinary celebration that incorporates fashion, literary, cinematic events with the common denominator of a Gothic theme. In 2011 the event took place from 21 October to 30 October in Madrid's Museo Romántico. The picture shows writer Espido Freire sporting a rather Gothic look; indeed her exceptionally long dark hair, pale creamy skin, and melancholic expression make her the perfect advertising image for such an event.

With the purpose of establishing whether men are linked to their works in a similar fashion, the photographs that accompanied the 159 interviews with men in *Qué Leer* were also examined, covering the period from the magazine's inception (4 February 2009) to its 27 July 2012 edition. *Qué Leer* features both national and international authors and artists, but since my focus here is on Spain, this selection exclusively covers Spanish writers. I found that a total of sixty-two Spanish male writers and twenty-three Spanish women writers had been interviewed over this period. In spite of the higher number of male authors, only two of the interviews of male authors were accompanied by a photograph in which the writer was presented as part of the plot he had created. These authors were the late Francisco Ibáñez and Manel Loureiro. In the case of Ibáñez, a picture of 'Mortadelo y Filemón', the comic characters he created, had been superimposed on the portrait of Ibáñez that accompanied Iturbe's interview with the author (*Qué Leer* 165 2011: 60–3). In the photograph that accompanies the interview with Loureiro, the author of the *Apocalipsis Z(ombi)* trilogy is portrayed wearing zombie make-up in a cemetery (*Qué Leer* 167 2011: 74–5). Not one of the male authors was portrayed in a cosy way, nor even in a mildly unprofessional manner. For example, although Jordi Esteva was photographed in the forest leading to his home and accompanied by his dog, his demeanour and expression were much more serious, and the natural setting is justified by the fact that the interview centres on his exotic novel *Socotra. La isla de los genios* [Socotra: The Land of Djinnns] (2011), which has been compared to a travel book (see Figure 2.7).



Figure 2.7 Photograph accompanying Xavier Armendariz' interview with Jordi Esteva in *Qué Leer* 169. Photograph: Xavier Armendariz. Reproduced with permission from *Qué Leer*.

Equally neutral is Isaac Rosa's pose for the photo accompanying an interview to promote his novel *La mano invisible* [The Invisible Hand] (2011). Taken in a busy street, the photo portrays the writer posing in a natural yet confident manner (see Figure 2.8).



Figure 2.8 Photograph of Isaac Rosa to illustrate Antonio Lozano's interview with him in *Qué Leer* 168. Photograph: Asís G. Ayerbe. Reproduced with permission from the photographer.

Conversely, the number of women writers who had either been dressed up as an event advertising their own characters or photographed in an overtly friendly, non-professional way was nine. In addition to Etxebarria, Grandes, Torres, and Montero, whose images are reproduced in this chapter, they are

Alicia Giménez Barlett, Mercedes Salisachs, Esther García Llovet, Milagros Frías, and Cristina Fallarás. The difference in numbers is considerable when one takes into account that this means that in Spain's most widely read book magazine, only around three per cent of men but almost forty per cent of women writers have their own appearance commodified as a commercial icon for the promotion of their writing. In other words, contemporary marketing techniques mimics, and compounds, the tendency noted earlier within traditional literary criticism to conflate the work and the sex of the writer in a way that risks limiting its scope and its appeal to that of women's issues.

In *Mythologies*, originally published in French in 1957, Barthes' questioning of the meanings of cultural artefacts and practices that surround us in our everyday lives seems applicable to the use of women writers' portraits as iconographic elements. Barthes claims that the supposed naturalness, innocence, and neutrality of cultural objects, gestures and practices should be challenged, for underneath their particular utilitarian function lies the imposition of a certain ideological message. For every object, a series of secondary meanings or connotations can be uncovered. In his essay 'Iconographie de l'abbé Pierre' Barthes analyses the attire of the priest, with an emphasis on his haircut:

The Abbé Pierre's haircut, obviously devised so as to reach a neutral equilibrium between short hair (an indispensable convention if one does not want to be noticed) and unkempt hair (a state suitable to express contempt for other conventions), thus becomes the capillary archetype of saintliness: the saint is first and foremost a being without formal context; the idea of fashion is antipathetic to the idea of sainthood. But at this point things get more complicated – unknown to the Abbé, one hopes – because here as everywhere else, neutrality ends up by functioning as the sign of neutrality, and if you really wished to go unnoticed, you would be back where you started. The 'zero' haircut, then, is quite simply the label of Franciscanism; first conceived negatively so as not to contradict the appearance of sainthood, it quickly becomes a superlative mode of signification, it *dresses up* the Abbé as Saint Francis. (Barthes 1991: 47)

Rather than simply claiming that this is the product of the priest's conscious manipulation of his public image, what Barthes argues, more importantly, is that no detail is exempt from meaning or from possible interpretation, and a similar approach could be taken to the media commodification of the image, the contemporary iconography, of the female and male writer.

Henseler notes that, as a result of their promotional visibility, women authors have become commercial icons despite their numerical inferiority in the literary market (Henseler 2003a: 16–17) and although Henseler’s study dates back to 2003, the use of women authors as commercial icons is perpetuated in the pictures and promotional campaigns accompanying women authors’ latest novels in *Qué Leer*.



Figure 2.9 Philipp Engel’s interview with Lucía Etxebarria (*Qué Leer* [151]), following the publication of *Lo verdadero es un momento de lo falso*. Photograph: Marta Calvo. Reproduced with permission from the photographer.



Figure 2.10 Photograph accompanying Sabina Friedjulsßen’s article on Espido Freire’s ‘La princesa que vino del frío’ (*Qué Leer* 162). Photograph: Paco Arzúa. Reproduced with permission from *Qué Leer*.

Figure 2.9 illustrates Philipp Engel’s interview with Lucía Etxebarria following the publication of *Lo verdadero es un momento de lo falso* [Truth is Naught but a Moment of Falsehood]; interview and picture were published in *Qué Leer* in February 2010. Figure 2.10 is Paco Arzúa’s photograph to illustrate Sabina Friedjulsßen’s article on Espido Freire, ‘La princesa que vino del frío’ [The Princess Who Came From The Cold], published in *Qué Leer* in May 2011.

These photos demonstrate that a common ploy for marketing the woman author as commercial icon is to blur the boundary between her

persona and her characters. In this way, through a particular pose, attire, and mise-en-scène, Figures 2.9 and 2.10 place the female author in the middle of her own plot and give readers the illusion of an identification between the writer and the fiction. The first photo corresponds to an interview that Etxebarria gave as part of the promotion of *Lo verdadero es un momento de lo falso*. The protagonists of this novel are the three members of an alternative rock band, and the photo appropriately presents Lucía Etxebarria in a rock-star attire, ready to play drums against the black background of a rock stage. Very different, although equally (in)appropriate, is the second photo, which shows Espido Freire dressed up as a Nordic princess. This picture accompanies an article on the publication of her novel *La flor del Norte* [The Flower of the North], which is the story of the Norwegian princess Kristina.

Following Barthes' claim that the alleged neutrality of cultural artefacts and practices should be questioned, this analysis of the pictures above challenges the supposed innocence of contemporary iconography of the female and male writer to conclude that although both sexes are commodified for marketing, the women are consistently more likely to be represented either as domesticated and at home or as an event that is conflated, crudely, with the subject matter of their work.

Paradox and Prejudice

This chapter opened by proposing that, as a result of our own set of prejudices and unconscious gender bias, all readers may interpret a text in a different way. By examining a selection of critical responses to works by women authors within the wider academic community and, above all, in the Spanish press, I have been able to establish some of the most common and persistent of these prejudices. Amongst these predominate: a tendency to underrate writing by women and assume that its content is more personal than literary or political; an assumption that writing by women gives priority to female protagonists, whose identity becomes conflated with that

of the writer; that writing by women addresses women's issues that are primarily of interest to women readers, rather than to the general public. At the same time, there appears to exist a paradoxical fear that women sell more books than men, and that the rise of women's writing is somehow threatening to literature in general. These prejudices tend to recur in the form of negative allusions to women authors' sex and gender in reviews and interviews. While this is not always the case, the interviews and reviews analysed here certainly do highlight an ongoing and rarely contested tendency to patronize the work of women writers in a negative way.

Such prejudices are not confined to written reviews and interviews. They are also perpetuated in the promotional illustrations in *Qué Leer*, and accordingly the second part of this chapter has concluded that the role of marketing in the dissemination and reception of women's writing and the visual iconography employed is marked for gender in a way that is potentially more complex for women authors than for their male peers, because it is inherently more personal. The next chapter examines the response of Matute, Montero, and Etxebarria to the complex question of how best to negotiate their own public appearances in an increasingly commercialized and virtual literary market and to explore the way in which they respond to the role played by gender in their own public (re)construction.

The Literary Market and the Construction of the Public Personae of Women Writers

The previous chapter examined the gender bias in the marketing of writers that characterizes women as more domestic and more closely aligned with their literary characters than are their male counterparts. This chapter will analyse the manner in which these writers negotiate their public appearances in an increasingly commercialized and virtual, or web-based, literary market as well as the role played by gender in their public (re)construction, focusing on the process of construction of the public personae of writers Matute, Montero, and Etxebarria in the context of the changing socio-political background of the Franco regime, the Transition, and contemporary Spain. 'Public personae' in this context are the projected images of these writers that are at once individual and particular to each and at the same time are the product of their interaction with, and representation within, the media. These three novelists have enjoyed popular success that is reflected in consistently strong sales and, in the case of Matute and Montero, success sustained over several decades. This chapter will focus on the reception of their work, their literary status, and their interaction with the wider public through interviews, TV appearances, and, increasingly, on the internet.

In view of the persistence of traditional gender stereotypes dating back to the Franco regime vis-à-vis reception and marketing of these writers, not to mention the resurgence of a rather disturbing gender bias that has accompanied the visual and textual marketing of women via the internet, I am inspired by Hall's 'encoding-decoding' theoretical model of communication (Hall 1993). This theory argues that meaning is encoded by the sender and decoded by the receiver, and that these meanings can be altered and decoded to represent something else. Given that senders encode their

messages according to their ideals and views, and that receivers also decode these messages according to their ideals and views, miscommunication may occur (Hall 1993: 515). Although Hall's model was originally intended for television and it establishes four stages of communication (production, circulation, distribution or consumption, and reproduction), his theory will be applied here for the purpose of determining the ways in which the construction of Matute, Montero, and Etxebarria's public personae as messages are part of a complex structure of dominance due to the fact that they find themselves imprinted by institutional power-relations.

The construction of these authors' public personae reflects a negotiated position in which the audience member, or *receiver*, is able to decode the sender's message within the context of the dominant cultural and societal views (Hall 1993: 515). The first section of this chapter considers Matute as pre-dating the 'women's writing' label and the mediatization of authors, positioning her as the product of a particular cultural, historical, and political background, in which the question of 'women's writing' was only beginning to arise. The second section focuses on Montero as a transitional figure in (Transition) Spain. Her case is more ambiguous as she seems able, or at least consistently aspires, to establish a separation between her political ideas and her writing.

These authors' construction of their public personae reflects two types of positions in which the audience member, or receiver, is able to decode the sender's message within the context of the dominant cultural and societal views: the hegemonic-dominant position and the negotiated position (*ibid.*: 515–16). Finally, the third part engages with Etxebarria as one of the main advocates of 'women's writing' in Spain today. Etxebarria's role as a woman writer entails a very conscious and marked position on issues such as feminism, the role of the media in the construction of her persona, and changes in the literary industry. Her case is illustrative of the oppositional view wherein the audience member is able to decode the message in the way it was intended to be decoded while imagining an unintended meaning within the message due to their own societal beliefs (*ibid.*: 517).

Matute, the oldest of the three writers examined, published her first novel, *Los Abel* [The Abels] in 1948, during the first decade of the Franco dictatorship. The literary culture of the Franco period, including works by

nationalist supporters such as Dionisio Ridruejo and Camilo José Cela, confronted a variety of discouraging impediments to freedom of expression that had been appended to Spanish law. Although Matute began publishing much earlier, this analysis will take the 1960s as its starting point. From the early 1960s onwards, under the regulation of Francoist liberal Manuel Fraga and with the passing of 1966 Ley de Prensa e Imprenta [Press and Printing Law], there was a relaxation of direct censorship that replaced the emphasis on authorial responsibility. This is the period Henseler singles out as the point of departure for the transformation of the traditional publishing industry into the aggressive cultural market that is familiar today (2003a: 9–10). Despite the fact that the 1960s policy of *desarrollismo* [developmentalism] included the promotion of the publishing and tourism industries as part of plans for economic expansion (Herrero-Olazoila 2005), it soon became apparent that the needs of the literary market were not being met. Initially, the greater freedom of expression of the post-Franco era coincided with an unstable publishing market. While the removal of censorship allowed writers such as Montero to articulate their concerns and frustrations more freely, the publishing industry found itself in severe crisis in the 1970s.

Montero's *Crónica del desamor* [Chronicle of Enmity] was published by Debate, a small liberal publishing house founded in Madrid in 1977. Although Debate initially specialized in essays, Montero would publish her first two novels with them and became their star author. Freixas relates *Crónica del desamor*'s phenomenal success to the ephemeral attention paid to so-called *libros de mujeres* [women's books], noting that while the authors belonging to this category achieved high sales, most were either unknown or known only as journalists at the time. She also believes that this category had an impact on the mobility of the author's persona (Freixas 2000: 50–1). In spite of the lack of previous publicity, works such as Esther Tusquet's *El mismo mar de todos los veranos* [The Same Sea as Every Summer] (1978), Carme Riera's *Te deix, amor, la mar con a penyora* [I Leave You, Love, the Sea as A Token] (1975), and *Crónica del desamor* sold a minimum of 50,000 copies. Although Freixas briefly mentions the role of these works' political significance in relation to the success they enjoyed, she considers these *libros de mujeres* to be ephemeral products (2000: 51). Some years

later, economically favourable conditions, together with the prosperity and establishment of publishing houses and other cultural developments such as the emergence of book prizes, boosted the books' recognition.¹

The crisis would come to an end in the 1980s with the merging of a series of small family-run publishing houses and their absorption by huge multimedia conglomerates that created new channels of commercialization for literary products. The significance of this was been highlighted by Christine Henseler, who noted that: 'The globalization of the book market in Spain has contributed to making the country's publishing industry the third largest in Europe, after Great Britain and Germany, and the fifth largest in the world' (Henseler 2003a: 1). The mass production of books and their fierce promotion as a commercial product has resulted in the current proliferation of literary prizes and increasing competition among authors, who are now expected to meet the promotional needs of the industry. As previous chapters have indicated, competition is particularly fraught for women authors who have to contend with the special emphasis placed by the media on their bodies.

Matute's work now enjoys critical and public acclaim but this was not always the case. This chapter will consider how she was initially side-lined to the minor genre of children's literature, the period of her own literary silence, and her controversial membership in the Real Academia Española (RAE). Matute's career largely predates the mediatization of the author and there is, therefore, less to note about the construction of her public persona prior to the pivotal events in 1996 which formed its basis: the award of the Medalla de Oro al Mérito de Bellas Artes and her entry into the RAE.

Rosa Montero's profile, on the other hand, is symptomatic of the way the relatively unsophisticated packaging of authors in the late 1970s and early 1980s developed into the present more media- and market-savvy environment that writers must navigate in order to meet the demands of the literary market. The analysis of the construction of Montero as a public figure in this chapter will focus on two defining moments in her literary career. First was the publication of *Crónica del desamor* in 1979,

1 For an in-depth consideration of the economic development of the Spanish book market at the end of the twentieth century, see Henseler (2005).

pre-dating the increased commercialization of the female writer that has become so relevant to the next generation and establishing Montero as a committed, progressive journalist. Second was the response to the publication of *La hija del caníbal* [The Cannibal's Daughter] (1997) and the ways in which it affected how Montero's public image adapted to that process of commercialization.

Lucía Etxebarria published her first novel *Amor, curiosidad, prozac y dudas* [Love, Curiosity, Prozac and Doubts] in 1996. That defining year for the construction of Matute as a public figure came four years after three internationally famous events that have come to symbolise the decisive political and socio-political changes that accompanied the establishment of democracy; the Olympic Games in Barcelona, the EXPO 92 World Fair in Seville, and the designation of Madrid as the official European capital of culture. Unlike the case of high-profile women novelists of previous generations, who maintained a certain distance between their personal and their public lives, this chapter will explore the extent to which contemporary writers like Etxebarria have been expected to be both highly available and highly visible.

Ana María Matute: From Children's Literature to Member of the RAE

If one were asked to put a female face on the contemporary cultural establishment in Spain, Ana María Matute would be among the first to come to mind. Her work is acclaimed by readers and critics alike and she is the recipient of prestigious literary prizes awarded over several decades and by diverse institutions, including the Premio Planeta (1954), Premio de la Crítica (1958), Premio Nadal (1959), Premio Nacional de Literatura (1959), Premio Nacional de Literatura Infantil y Juvenil (1984), Premio Nacional de las Letras Españolas (2007), Premio Miguel de Cervantes (2010), Premio Miguel de Cervantes 2010, and Premio de la Crítica de la Feria del Libro de Bilbao (2011). Unlike her younger contemporaries, writers like Etxebarria

who are well-known to the average Spanish citizen from mainstream TV appearances and extensive book promotions, Matute is still today more closely associated with high-brow TV-news coverage of eminent literary conferences and prominent literary prizes.

This privileged position in the cultural establishment places Matute and the construction of her public persona in what Hall calls the dominant-hegemonic position, in which the viewer or audience member is located within the dominant point of view. In other words, the sender (Matute) and the receiver (the audience) operate under the same set of rules, assumptions, and cultural biases. In general, miscommunication is uncommon and misunderstanding is rare, which is why this position allows an optimal understanding of the ideas that are being transmitted, though certain frictions might occur where issues of power and class structure are involved. This typically occurs when conflicts, contradictions, and even misunderstandings arise between elites who are in a position to dictate the set of rules and non-elites who are forced to accept the elite's rules as dominant (Hall 1993, 515–16).

Indeed, it must be noted that Matute forms part of a literary context more readily associated with male writers such as Camilo José Cela and Francisco Umbral than with women writers. This may result from the fact, noted by Ana María Moix in 2012, that literary prize juries are usually men (Moix cited in Agudo 2012).² It is also possible that her own career has made her more aware of the specific difficulties faced by many women writers publishing in a male-dominated industry. According to Moix, Matute was one of the few intellectuals who regularly referenced female writers in public discussions of literature. 'She does remember women writers. And men writers. She does not give lessons on feminism, but she is a feminist when giving lessons, and that is obvious' (*ibid.*).

Although she is widely acclaimed today, Matute's public reception has been stigmatized over the years by her association with the 'children's writer' label and by the suggestion that her invitation to the Academy was undeserved. Her hegemonic position has shifted from a place of contradiction

2 See <<http://blogs.elpais.com/mujeres/2012/07/hacer-el-caf%C3%A9-no-es-cocinar.html>> [accessed 30 October 2012].

and misunderstanding to a position of an almost 'transparent communication'. This section will consider a series of articles published in *ABC* in 1961 and 1968, and in *El País* between 1982 and 1996 as a case study to enable a closer exploration of this initial defining period of miscommunication in the construction of Matute's public persona. The former time-frame is representative of the *desarrollismo* period, the second phase of Francoism, characterized by important economic developments and by a relative relaxation of customs thanks to the arrival of mass tourism. 1966 was a key year in *desarrollismo* as the Ley de Prensa e Imprenta was passed, creating an intermediate legal framework between the previous restrictive law and the freedom enjoyed by democratic countries. Although not a panacea, this law did allow greater freedom of exchange of ideas, used by some media to exhibit attitudes more openly critical of the regime. I have selected the years 1982 to 1996 as the second time-frame for this case study, as 1982 witnessed the first appearance of debates surrounding the existence of a 'women's literature' in the Spanish press and coinciding with the Partido Socialista Obrero Español's victory in the general elections and subsequent legislation legalizing abortion, increased personal freedom, and the restructured education in Spain (see Juliá 2000). Finally, 1996 was the year when *Olvidado Rey Gudú* [Forgotten King Gudú] was published, the sophisticated and elaborate presentation of this novel marking Matute's change of her approach to the marketing of books. Once the message of Matute's public persona had been signified in a hegemonic manner, it could be decoded in terms of the reference code in which it had been encoded and therefore it is an ideal case of 'perfectly transparent communication' (Hall 1993: 514).

Initiating the Spanish debate on 'women's writing'

This study of Matute's public persona will take as a point of departure two articles published in 1961 and 1968, respectively. Given that the Ley de Prensa e Imprenta was passed in 1966, these articles will provide a sense of the state of the press before and after. On 15 July 1961, an article was published in *ABC*'s Sunday supplement *Blanco y Negro* [Black and White]

with the purpose of marking the approaching ten-year anniversary of the Premio Planeta (1961: 98). Two aspects of this article seem particularly striking: its lack of text and its unexplained, unswerving focus on women authors. Indeed, the article is just two pages long, focused on four female literary prize winners. The first page is entitled 'Estas mujeres han ganado el Premio Nadal' [These women have won the Nadal Prize], and the second page entitled 'Estas mujeres han ganado el Premio Planeta' [These women have won the Planeta Prize]. Apart from the title, the content of each page is limited to four photographs of female winners of the relevant prize, with their names underneath each photo. The first page contains one photograph of each of the following authors: Carmen Laforet, Elena Quiroga, Dolores Medio, and Luisa Forrellad, and the second a photo of Carmen Martín Gaité, one of Carmen Kurtz and two of Ana María Matute. The reason why Matute is entitled to two photos is not revealed, but the fact that by 1961 she had already been awarded the Premio Nadal and the Premio Planeta could serve as a possible explanation. In any case, the format and layout of the article, as well the lack of any actual text suggests an advertisement rather than a newspaper article, perhaps indicating the sensationalism and lack of seriousness surrounding women writers at the time. Moreover, the article lacks any unity or uniformity with the rest of the articles in the magazine, with the possible exception of the collection of summer stories located a few pages before. While all of these short stories are apparently authored by women, none of them is among the women portrayed in the article described above. To make matters worse, the magazine's weekly recipe section, a few pages later, presents 'ensalada funcional', a summer salad created by Dolores Medio, one of the Planeta winners featured in the previous article. This cocktail of summer stories, literary prizes, and summer cuisine, all involving women writers, gives the contemporary reader the impression that women writers were not seen as individuals, but rather as a group, and that they were not taken very seriously by the press. After all, it is difficult to imagine a man being portrayed as a Planeta winner on one page and giving advice on how to fix a car on the next page.

Seven years later, an article published in *ABC Sevilla*, after Manuel Ferrand's *Con la noche auestas* [The Night on their Backs] was awarded the 1968 Premio Planeta, gave a number of previous Planeta winners,

Matute among them, the opportunity to express their views on the prize (1968: 20–1, 24–5). That this article, titled ‘Los escritores ante el premio’ [The Writers before the Prize], did not limit itself to reproducing photos of the winners was refreshing in itself. However, a deeper look at it reveals that not much had improved for Matute’s public reception since the 1961 article. In the first place, Matute’s photo did not appear on the article’s first page (1968: 20), which featured photos of eight Planeta winners (six men and two women: Tomás Salvador, Andrés Bosch, Ángel Vázquez, Concha Alós, Luis Romero, Rodrigo Rubio, Marta Portal, and Ángel M. de Lera). In keeping with the confusion characterizing the 1961 article, not all the authors featured in the article’s text appeared on the first page and not all of the authors featured on the first page were included in the text. Apart from Ana María Matute, the writers included in the text were Concha Alós, Andrés Bosch, Fernando Bermúdez, Torcuato Luca de Tena, Tomás Salvador, Emilio Romero, Santiago Loren, Rodrigo Rubio, Carmen Kurtz, and Luis Romero. As with the first page, women were underrepresented, not only in numbers but also in terms of importance.

The text consisted of a quotation by each of the writers in the latter group, reflecting on their experience as Planeta winners. While quotations by the male writers were generally long (for example, Tomás Salvador’s was twenty-three lines long, and Luis Romero’s forty-two), quotations from women writers were given much less space. More upsetting still, of the three women writers quoted in the article, it was Matute who was given the least space (a mere seven lines), while the quotations from Kurtz and Alós were eleven and thirteen lines long, respectively. Apart from the brevity of the quotation by Matute, what seems especially disappointing is the aspect of her experience that she chose to highlight: ‘I regret that when I won the Planeta Prize it was not as “lucrative” as it is today. Anyway, in those days 100,000 was a considerable amount. I was very happy (and still am) to have won it’ (1968: 25). Matute is right in that the Planeta Prize was not always as lucrative as it had become in 1968, when her remark was published – or of course today. The initial 40,000 pesetas offered to winners in 1952 went up to 100,000 pesetas one year later, 200,000 in 1959, 250,000 in 1966 and 1,100,000 in 1967. With the advent of the euro, the value of the award by 2018 had risen to €601,000 for the first winner and €150,250

for the second winner. So while Matute was awarded 100,000 pesetas in 1954, the winners at the time the *ABC Sevilla* article was published were being given more than ten times this amount. Notwithstanding, while her complaint might be a fair one, the fact that her quotation focuses on the monetary aspect of the prize shows her in a bad light as a superficial and materialistic writer for whom the monetary value of the Premio Planeta takes precedence over prestige, recognition, or literary quality. Although she quickly adds that after all she is still happy to have won it, the fact that this is said immediately after stating that 100,000 pesetas was a worthy quantity in 1954 serves to reinforce the negative impression, which is in turn confirmed when comparing the deeper and more reflective comments of other authors in this article:

Literary awards have created the environment that the novel has in our time; suddenly, they have consecrated the writer again. They have considerably assisted the publishing business and hence have given a popular and spectacular tone to our culture. (Emilio Romero)

A literary award helps and strengthens [writers]. Only the passage of time and the daily work of the writer can create a balance between the great help achieved and the obligations required. (Santiago Loren)

Since the article does not follow a question-and-answer interview format, it is hard to know whether it was a specific question by the journalist that prompted Matute to make her statement, and whether she was aware that her response would end up being her only quotation. The diversity of the quotations in the article and the different aspects of the prize discussed in them appear to indicate that each quotation was extracted and highlighted from within wider conversations vis-à-vis the prize. If this was the case, it is difficult to understand why the journalist – whose name is not revealed in the article – would choose first to allow such limited space to Matute's observation and then to highlight an extract so open to misinterpretation. Clearly, back then Matute was both less adored by the media and less media-savvy than today.

Our second time-frame will take 1982 as a departure point. Three years prior to this date, Gilbert and Gubar had published *The Madwoman*

in the Attic. In 1979 they could not have foreseen that this study of what was at that time regarded as marginal literature written by women would become a landmark in literary criticism. Although it focuses exclusively on the Victorian era, examining Jane Austen, Mary Shelley, Charlotte and Emily Brontë, George Eliot, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Christina Rossetti, and Emily Dickinson, this text continues to provide the groundwork for all subsequent scholarly writing on women authors, regardless of language and historical context (see, for example, references to this book in Pacheco Acuña (2006); Amago (2006); Medina and Zecchi (2002)). The text clearly champions the existence of women's literature. However, in the Spanish arena the first articles in *El País* [The Country] to raise the question of the existence of 'women's writing' three years after the publication of *The Madwoman in the Attic* are not particularly promising. The first was Marta Pessarrodona's 'El largo camino de la mujer escritora' [The long journey of the woman writer] in *El País. Libros* [Books], in which Pessarrodona draws on Simone de Beauvoir's ideas, concluding that it is not enough for women to talk amongst themselves but that 'women also feel the need to read each other' (Pessarrodona 1982: 1). In language that seems overly gender-prescriptive to contemporary readers, Pessarrodona explains that Woolf's novels, although written by a woman, are 'suitable for a mixed readership' (1982: 8) and allow us to see 'the world through a woman's eyes' (ibid.). As this article was written to commemorate the centenary of Virginia Woolf's birth and its focus is on English women writers, it is perhaps not surprising that this first article to address the question of gender and authorship for the wider Spanish reading public does not refer to any Spanish women writers. The next article to raise the question of female authorship was published in *El País* a few months later. It focuses not on literature but on a legal dispute over plagiarism. 'Resuelta una querrela de Esther Tusquets y Ana María Matute contra Rosa Regás' [A lawsuit by Esther Tusquets and Ana María Matute against Rosa Regás has been settled] (Canals 1982: 30). Rosa Regás (1933–) is a Spanish writer and novelist who is also well known for her political commitment. Following Franco's death, Regás launched *Biblioteca de Divulgación Política* [Library for Political Distribution], the first political collection from the legendary publishing house Seix Barral, most of whose authors were still in hiding

at the time. The origin of this dispute dates back to 1969, when Matute sold the rights to reprint and sell her novel *Paulina* (1969) in Spanish to Tusquet's Editorial Lumen. This novel would later be included in the *Moby Dick* children's collection. Although started by Lumen, this collection was subsequently continued by La Gaya Ciencia [Gaia Science] publishing house, whose representative was Regás, by virtue of an agreement that had expired in 1978. Nonetheless, despite the fact that in 1981 Regás was accused of reprinting *Paulina* without Matute's consent, the verdict returned was not guilty.

It is disappointing to find that one of the first articles to deal exclusively with Spanish women writers in the country's pre-eminent newspaper highlights a legal dispute with one of the leading names in contemporary Spanish literature (Regás was the recipient of the 1994 Premio Nadal and of the Premio Planeta in 2001). Still more disappointing is Regás's statement that the legal challenge appears to respond to a 'female visceral impulse' rather than a 'solid feminist ideology'. Why a lawsuit about plagiarism would need to engage with a 'solid' feminist ideology is not clarified, nor is the difference between a visceral female impulse and a visceral male impulse. In many ways, this approach from a leading writer and self-declared feminist (Durango Simón 2007) is symptomatic of the state of the debate at the time. Although Matute's name is mentioned in the article, and although by this stage she was already the recipient of numerous and prestigious literary awards, Matute herself managed to stay out of the polemic. At this period, Matute had been silent for years, apart from some children's stories – *Sólo un pie descalzo* [Only a Bare Foot] (1983); *El saltamontes verde* [The Green Grasshopper] (1986); *La Virgen de Antioquía y otros relatos* [The Virgin of Antioquía and Other Tales] (1990); *De ninguna parte* [From Nowhere] (1993); *La oveja negra* [The Black Sheep] (1994); *El verdadero final de la Bella Durmiente* [The Real End of the Sleeping Beauty] (1995); *El árbol de oro* [The Tree of Gold] (1995) – and after *El río* [The River] in 1973, she did not publish another novel until 1993, when *Luciernagas* [Fireflies], originally censored in 1949, was finally released. Understandably, there is a shortage of news regarding the author during this period but it is interesting to note the generally negative criticism accompanying the few references to her name in *El País*. Asún's article, 'Treinta años en la

historia de la literatura española' [Thirty years in the history of Spanish literature] (1982), which provides a brief history of the Planeta Prize, cites Matute's first novels as examples of 'works of little or no significance in the evolution of the most commonly appointed [candidates]' (1982: 25). This is slightly odd if one takes into account that Matute's first novels, *Los Abel* (1947), *Fiesta al Noroeste* [Northwest Party] (1952), and *Pequeño Teatro* [Small Theatre] (1954) were awarded, respectively, the Nadal, Café Gijón, and Planeta prizes, and is perhaps indicative of the differing public perceptions of the author in the press and within more high-brow academic circles at this time. What both spheres had in common, however, is that they continued for many years to omit Matute's name from discussions of the existence of 'women's writing'. Thus, one of the main articles to highlight the debate's relevance during the 1980s, 'Diez grandes mujeres para una gran literatura' [Ten great women for a great literature], published in *El País Libros* in 1984, limited itself to a brief review of ten novels by women. Although only one book written by a Spanish woman was mentioned (*El rapto del Santo Grial* [The Abduction of the Holy Grail], by Paloma Díaz-Mas, 1984), it constitutes a pioneering attempt by the Spanish press to bring the question of 'women's writing' to a wider audience, albeit as a topic of very limited interest to men.

It is not until 1990 that Matute's name appeared directly in a debate on 'women's writing' in an article celebrating the IV Feria Internacional del Libro Feminista in Barcelona. Around 300 stands and 150 women writers from all over the world assembled from 19 to 23 June 1990 in an unprecedented event in Spain. Although Matute had originally been invited to take part in a panel entitled 'Tres generaciones de escritoras en España' [Three generations of women writers in Spain], her name was eventually removed from the programme due to the fact that she had published in Spanish, but not in Catalan. Matute's contemporary and chair of the panel in question, Ana María Moix, blamed this unfair decision on the different treatment given to women writers:

While, in principle, holding a feminist fair may be questionable for reasons of self-marginalization, attitudes such as this demonstrate the necessity of doing so, since I doubt that anyone would have dared to exclude authors such as Juan Marsé and Manuel Vazquez Montalbán, who are Catalan but write in Castilian. (*El País* 1990: 38)

Although this event and Moix's reaction to it have now been largely forgotten, it illustrates important aspects of the double bind facing women writers. Matute as a writer who has tended to avoid the 'women's writing' label, but agreed on this occasion, to align herself with a feminist and women-only event (only women were permitted entry to the Feria's farewell party in Laberint d' Horta) only to be ostracized on linguistic grounds. Moix's comment regarding the unlikelihood of a similar rejection of well-known male writers from an alternatively gendered event illustrates that, even after three decades of literary success and recognition, Matute faced the same dilemmas and discrimination as many of her female peers.

Matute's comeback: Debate and general recognition

Although Ana María Matute's family was part of the religious and conservative Catalan bourgeoisie, she has always identified herself as a liberal. Matute was 10 years old when the Civil War broke out, and this conflict would have a great impact on her life and writing. She reached maturity as a writer under the oppressive postwar regime. In 1952, Matute married writer Ramón Eugenio de Goicoechea, who was awarded custody of their child upon their separation in 1963. In accordance with Spanish law at the time, Matute had no right to see her son after their separation, resulting in emotional problems and in her long absence from the Spanish literary scene. It cannot be certainly known whether this event influenced her focus on children's fiction during this period, and was also implicated, therefore, in her marginalization from the ranks of more serious Spanish authors. Her two-decade silence was only broken in 1993 when *Luciérnagas* was finally published. Although the novel was written in 1949 and was a finalist in that year's Premio Nadal, the authorized version was only published in 1955 under the title, *En esta tierra*, after undergoing drastic cuts by censors.

After Matute's long absence from the publishing world, Xavier Moret's article in *El País* briefly described her as the 'author of *Primera memoria* (Nadal Prize 1959) and other successful novels'. He also notes that she had not published any adult novels in a long time 'because of depression' (1993: 27). In this article, Matute also contributes to her reputation for

commitment to a humanistic, anti-injustice agenda by commenting that *Luciernagas* 'is not a political novel, but a human one, about young people who fail to understand what is it that they have done in order to deserve this' (ibid.). These first public references, both to her depression and to her continued commitment to fighting injustice, give the earliest indication of renewed interest in her private life. Although Matute had been a well-known literary figure since the appearance of her first novels, it is only from this point onwards in the 1990s that her status as a female writer and her personal life are referred to directly in interviews and articles. This new departure corresponds with a growing need for contemporary authors to learn how to negotiate a public persona constructed not only in the press but also virtually and on television. An article by José-Miguel Ullán, published in *El País* on 17 November 1993, is typical of this new focus, largely confirming the pleasant, accessible persona that is still associated with her today. Ostensibly intended to summarize a lecture she had given on her favourite bedside reading, the article makes little reference to this topic (beyond mention, in passing, of *Alice in Wonderland*, *La buena Juanita* [The Good Juanita], and *Wuthering Heights*), as the author prefers to focus instead on her lively personality: 'Besides chastened, she is passionate and funny' and 'smiley and in shape' (Ullán 1993: 39).

The award of the Medalla de Oro al Mérito de Bellas Artes presented by King Juan Carlos, and her induction into the RAE made 1996 a key year in Matute's public reception. Only three women out of a total of twelve received the Medalla de Oro al Mérito de Bellas Artes that year (Arias 1996: 35); the other two women were Rocío Jurado and Amparo Soler Leal. In her acceptance speech, Matute does not refer to the lack of female representation, but rather highlights the fact that the recipients are all 'carriers, creators, makers of dreams' and that 'we all need dreams'. But if her comments were conciliatory and neutral to the point of banal at this time, the news of her induction into the RAE would prove controversial both within the Spanish cultural establishment and due to the fact that it prompted renewed interest in her private life that continues to shape her public persona.

Matute's seat K was previously held by Carmen Conde, and a full-page article by Carlos González was published in *El País* to mark her acceptance

into the Academy (González 1996: 38). This is an interesting piece of journalism for three reasons: its focus on her own reaction to the news, the inclusion of a series of opinions regarding the award of this privilege to a woman, and Matute's timid pronouncement regarding the lack of female representation in the Academy. The article goes to great lengths to accentuate her humility:

When reporters arrived at her home, Matute, having no phone, was still working on her latest book and was dressed casually. After hearing the decision of her future colleagues, she was excited. 'I cannot believe it', she kept repeating. A little later, and somewhat calmer, she answered all questions hastily while sitting on the sofa in her sunny room. 'I usually give better answers', she claimed. (González 1996: 38)

With regard to the Academy, Matute expresses her support for the entrance of younger members: 'the more the merrier [...] [The Spanish Academy] should open up and freshen up' (*ibid.*). Matute timidly alludes also to the small number of female members: '[women] still have a lot of work to do here. There ought to be even more of them.' In order to appreciate the tentativeness of this comment, it should be noted that Matute was only the third woman elected to the Academy in its 300-year history. This fact automatically placed her at the centre of a debate as to whether the Spanish cultural establishment ought to congratulate itself on the (albeit still scarce) inclusion of women, and should each female vacancy now be awarded to a new female member? Was Matute's seat well deserved or was she simply a woman who happened to be in the right place at the right time (see González 1996: 38; and García-Posada 1996: 38)?

Fernando Lázaro Carreter, who was president of the Academy from 1992 to 1998, described her election as

[a] very important day for the Academy, besides the fact that it regains the presence of women. Matute is an undisputed first figure of our letters, a writer who is already included in the history of literature in her own right and whose presence honours us much. (González 1996: 38)

While noting the need for more women in the Academy, he also makes it clear that, regardless of biological sex, Matute is a writer who deserves to

become a member in her own right ('por derecho propio'). Also symptomatic of the debate at this stage is that, although he also advocates more women writers, the writer Luis Goytisolo also felt it necessary to qualify this by saying that she received the award on her own merit and that her inclusion does not represent a 'dumbing down' of the Academy: 'I do not think that the fact that there were no women has influenced the decision' (González 1996: 38).

Not all comments relating to the appointment of Matute were so benign. García-Posada (1996: 38) stated baldly, and rather disparagingly in *El País* (28 June), that

[a] woman replaces another woman in the Academy: Ana María Matute instead of the former Carmen Conde. The Academy has these somewhat corporate seats, to sit on the bench a bishop, a soldier, a scientist and, since Carmen Conde, a woman (or two: Elena Quiroga, also deceased, was an academic). There is no need to question these decisions: the Academy is entitled to elect anyone, even a cartoonist. (García-Posada 1996: 38)

Elena Quiroga occupied seat A from 1983 until 1995. After her death, her seat was occupied by Professor of Spanish Literature Domingo Ynduráin Muñoz. García-Posada's comments imply that Matute's appointment bears no more relation to her literary achievements than the appointment to the Academy of a bishop, a general, a scientist, or a painter. The association of her (female) gender with (male) vocations so clearly marginal to literary talent is pejorative, and the reference he makes to her literary achievements and her reception on the part of other (women) writers seems equally grudging:

Nowadays many Spanish writers claim Matute as an inescapable model, as an indispensable reference, but the most solid part of her work was written years ago: *Los Abel*, her first novel, was written in 1948, and *La torre vigía* dates back to 1971 [...] Then she almost disappeared, as she was very dedicated to children's literature, but had recently made a comeback. (Ibid.)

He fails to note that none of the numerous prestigious prizes awarded to Matute from 1952 and 1984 were awarded for her achievements as a *woman* writer (including the Premio Café Gijón, the Premio Planeta,

the Premio de la Crítica, the Premio Nacional de Literatura, the Premio Nadal, the Premio Fastenrath, the Premio Lazarillo, and the Premio Nacional de Literatura Infantil y Juvenil), and he shows a marked lack of prescience with regard to her future career; in 2007 Matute would receive the Premio Nacional de las Letras Españolas and in 2010, the award generally considered the most prestigious literary award in Spain, the Premio Cervantes.

Matute as a 'celebrity' author

These two media events in 1996, the award of the Medalla de Oro al Mérito de Bellas Artes and her acceptance into the RAE, drew attention to Matute's status and marked the beginnings of a new shift in the public reception of her. One of the most noteworthy signs of this is provided by an interview with Rosa Montero for *El País*, published on 8 September 1996. The piece is entitled 'Ana María Matute. El regreso del cometa' [The return of the comet], and its relevance to this work is two-fold, both for the unprecedented emphasis placed on Matute's physical appearance and the unparalleled amount of private information disclosed. Even though Matute's dislike of the topic 'women's writing' remains unchanged, these two factors highlight the demands, and the publishing iconography, of the literary market examined by Henseler (2003a).

Montero opens her interview (1996a: 52–6) with an in-depth, almost literary physical description of the author:

She has just turned 70 and has white, beautiful hair. Below the hair, a face butchered by age and hardships. Further down, a badly injured leg since she had an accident (a fall) three years ago: she still limps and needs to use a crutch. [...] I remember her youthful pictures, she was absolutely beautiful. Then life ran her over, knocking her down badly. (1996a: 52)

This detail contributes to the construction of Matute's persona, albeit a far less domesticated and feminine persona than the ones examined in the previous chapter. Especially useful for this purpose is the full-page, black-and-white, close-up portrait of Matute's face on the following page. Montero's

tone is that of a friend confiding in us the personal, off-the-record details of a meeting with a well-known public figure: 'She would then have another relationship, a great love story which lasted 28 years and which ended in 1990 with her partner Julio's death.' For the first time in Matute's career, she discusses her divorce and the loss of custody of her son. The intimate tone and content of this conversation generates the impression of a truly accessible and innovative vision of Matute at this time:

Well, I don't want to go down that road. If I told you all about it we would both be crying our eyes out, and I'd rather not do it [...]. Do you know what a friend— now a renowned writer—told me when he found out about my separation? Well, he said: What have you done, impetuous woman? Me! Calling me impetuous, after everything I had to go through for ten years! (1996a: 54)

Montero's questions barely touch on the literary arena, and Matute's private life is clearly the main subject of the interview. As such, this interview can be taken as an early example of the way the discourse of celebrity is structured on the desire to unveil the private self behind the public persona (Rojek 2001). Here, discussion of her literary career ('Matute started publishing at a very young age, when no other woman would. In the fifties and sixties she was probably the most famous, acknowledged, honoured and translated author in Spain.') is interspersed with constant incursion into her private life. There is detailed reference for the first time to her relationship with her mother ('My mother, who was very strict with me when I was a child [...] was very proud of me as a writer. She would help me out with great patience and sweetness. She would dictate my manuscripts so I could transcribe them on the typewriter'); to her marital problems ('With that first husband I ended up being a bit excluded, because I isolated myself from my friends quite a lot'); and to the fact that a childhood stammer made it difficult for her to make close female friends ('Of course, as a child I had lots of issues and [...] the other girls rejected me as a result of my defect. I stammered. I stammered a lot, and the other girls would put me aside. I didn't have any girl friends when I was young').

Matute's almost blunt account of her personal issues, and a transcription of this interview that seems designed to maximize the spontaneity of

the spoken word, the constant changing of topics, and the address to her interlocutor, have parallels with the now familiar discourse of celebrity and reality TV, albeit Matute's insight into her state of mind appears more reflective than attention-seeking. Her comments about her depression are particularly revealing of the difficulties attendant on being a woman, not to mention a woman writer under the Franco regime:

[Depression] overcame me for no obvious reason, without a cause, as it is the case with any real depression. That's when I was at my best, I was successful, had a wonderful man, a wonderful son, I didn't have any financial problems... Because that's a different matter: the financial side. With my first husband I... I was disinherited and went through a really bad time, as it was also very difficult for women to find a job at the time. But that is a different matter. What I meant is that I was at my best moment when I got this terrible depression. (1996a: 54)

This interview is symbolic of an important shift in Matute's public persona. Although the question of the existence or not of 'women's writing' is not openly discussed, Matute does provide answers to questions about the beginnings of her writing career as a young female writer in Franco's Spain. She explains that her desire to write singled her out and that she felt a lack of female friends for which she only managed to compensate in later life (1996a: 55). For the first time in this interview, Matute openly addresses her gender. She comments on the difficulty for women to communicate in a male literary environment:

At the time of my first marriage, to my son's father, I dragged myself over to Café Gijón. And it was very hard for me, all these tables at Café Gijón with lots of men, only men, all of them opening their mouths and letting the gas out like overinflated balloons. (Ibid.)

And she responds, again with direct reference to gender, to Montero's questions about her recent 'recuperation' for a new generation:

Yes... I think that being a woman has had an influence. Under the same conditions and with the same value, a man is not underestimated, but I was. That is why I am so pleased with the Royal Academy. Because I see it as a recognition for my whole life. (Ibid: 55–6)

This focus on her private life appears to have provided a space for her to speak openly for the first time about the difficulties she encountered in a male-dominated literary market, thus marking a new stage in Matute's public reception. This stage, beginning in 1996, highlights the demands and the publishing iconography of the literary market noted by Henseler (2003a) and discussed in Chapter 1. The new approach to the marketing of writers has brought hitherto unprecedented opportunities for publicity on the one hand, and increasing demands on the part of the literary market on the other. Matute's literary career spans over sixty years and a her public reception can be divided into different stages corresponding to the changes in the publishing industry. The first, pre-1996 stage exemplifies the specific difficulties faced by women writers publishing in a male-dominated industry. Post-1996, after becoming a member of the Academy, she becomes associated with eminent literary conferences and prominent literary prizes to an extent that is still highly unusual for a woman writer.

An interesting example of Matute's contemporary public reception is her promotion of *Olvidado Rey Gudú* [Forgotten King Gudu] (1996), published after decades of silence. In order to highlight the extensive promotion of this novel, Xavier Moret's article in *Babelia* (1996: 10–11) opens with Matute's recollection of how her first novel came to be published:

Ana María Matute, member of the RAE, now remembers how she went to Ediciones Destino when she was 17 with her first novel tucked under her arm: *Pequeño teatro*. 'I was then a very young woman, still wearing socks, who looked like a 14-year-old', she recalls. 'A young man at the publishing house took pity on me and introduced me to Ignacio Agustí, and I handed him my novel, handwritten in a squared notebook with black rubber covers. One week after, I saw him on the street and he approached me with deference. "We liked your novel, Miss Matute", he said, "and we are going to publish it." I started trembling: I thought I was going to die.' (Moret 1996: 11)

This account of a young, shy, and inexperienced girl stands in marked contrast with the two-page article that accompanied the launch of *Olvidado Rey Gudú*. And, as Moret explains, 'We are now living in an era of aggressive agents, of publishers obsessed with merchandizing and

publishing, desperately looking for new voices' (ibid.). However, if the young Matute was naïve about the much simpler post-Civil War publishing world, the older Matute continues to insist on her separation from the far more demanding contemporary literary marketplace, claiming, 'I do not understand this world very well [...] The truth is I can only grasp very few things. I keep on writing and that is good enough' (ibid.). Nonetheless, as shall be examined in more depth below, her fame does not exempt her from meeting the demands of the literary market. Only four days after publication ('her dragon spitting fire through its mouth (honouring the carefully-designed book cover) ... magically brought theatre props into books'), an article was published in *El País* describing the launch of *Olvidado Rey Gudú* in ways that would certainly indicate something of a media circus (Salas 1996: 40). This event involved the performance of theatre company *Comediants* and the participation of fellow writer and journalist Rosa Montero, who interviewed Matute and welcomed the publication with high praise: 'I have very rarely had the certainty of actually being in the presence of a classic' (ibid.). Today, as will become apparent in subsequent sections of this chapter, younger writers like Etxebarria are well known to the average Spanish citizen as a result of their appearances on TV programmes and through extensive book promotions.

Matute on the other hand remains more closely associated with TV coverage of eminent literary conferences and prominent literary prizes. And yet, she has not remained untouched by the effects of the media circus, by a marked interest in her private life, and by her own participation in the intensive promotional circuit that the publishing industry now demands. Although she did not encounter such intrusion into her private life in the earlier stages of her public reception, the way she represents herself in interviews has adapted to the contemporary discourse of celebrity that is dependent on the (paradoxical) construction of an image of individuality and structured by a desire to unveil the private self behind the public persona (Rojek 2001). The next section will explore the difference between this experience and the making of Montero's public persona by studying the ways in which she has dealt, over the years, with the similarly increasing demands of the literary marketplace.

Rosa Montero: From Feminist to ‘Humanist’

The fact is that for ten years now, there has been an increasing pressure that becomes unbearable for the writer, because working is not enough: one has to be a media manager of one’s own work.
— MONTERO (in Güemes 2010)

In an article entitled ‘Political Transition and Cultural Democracy: Coping with the Speed of Change’ Rosa Montero argues that the Spanish Transition involved three different stages: initiation, achieved through political change; consolidation, achieved through legal change; and accomplishment achieved through a generational change that took place with the new socialist leaders’ arrival in power (1995a: 316). *Crónica del desamor* reflects the pressing need to address contemporary political and legal issues confronting women by adopting a narrative voice that is shot through with their concerns. In doing so it mirrors what Montero clearly regarded as the almost revolutionary spirit of the first phase of the Transition. This novel also explores the sense of disappointment, apathy, and uncertainty that, as Montero remarks, accompanied this period of dramatic, decisive political, legal, and social change (1995b: 381–5). From the 1970s to the 1990s, Spain went from being a national-Catholic dictatorship to a democracy, from a protected economy to a globalized market, and from a semi-rural society to becoming a member of the European Union – shifts that resulted in a more secular society that had experienced deep demographic change, as well as a rapid process of industrialization.

The literature of this period ranges from *noir* novels that still enjoyed the success achieved in the immediate Transition years, such as Arturo Pérez-Reverte’s *El maestro de esgrima* [The Fencing Master] (1988); to the proliferation of historical novels, such as Antonio Gala’s *El manuscrito carmesí* [The Crimson Manuscript] (winner of the Premio Planeta 1990); to a continued focus on narrative experimentation in novels such as Juan Benet’s *Saúl ante Samuel* [Saul Before Samuel] (1980). At the same time, the literacy rate increased considerably, as did the number of women in the marketplace. In 1978, the new Spanish Constitution guaranteed legal equality to women, putting into practice social and political advances that most

European countries had developed over the previous fifty years. The distinctive sociological approach to literature of leading French Hispanophile Edmond Cros (1988), an approach he refers to as socio-criticism, aims to prove that the encounter with ideological traces and with antagonistic tensions between social classes is central to any reading of texts. Thus, in his work *El sujeto cultural: sociocrítica y psicoanálisis* [The Cultural Subject: Sociocriticism and Psychoanalysis] (2002), Cros notes that the society and marketplace of the Transition period are characterized by the coexistence of two very different sets of values: the traditional Francoist 'bunker' values and the values of those who embraced the arrival of modernity.

It was in this changing political climate that Rosa Montero published her first novel, *Crónica del desamor* (1979). This novel, initially envisaged as a collection of interviews, was an overnight success, selling 75,000 copies in its first edition. It was re-issued a total of five times in its first year of publication alone (Davies 1994: 96–7). It raised issues that had hitherto received little literary attention in Spain, such as sexual equality, abortion, single motherhood, the lack of understanding between the sexes, female masturbation, pre-marital sex, and infidelity. Montero's depiction of young, marginal, mainly female characters, out of place in Franco's society and adrift in the Transition, clearly resonated with its contemporary readership.

Through over thirty years of the writing career that followed, Montero has retained a high profile both as a journalist and as a writer. To date she has published fifteen adult novels, four children's stories, one collection of short stories, and nine collections of essays and journalism. She has received important national and international prizes for her contributions to journalism, literature, and human rights, including the Premio Nacional de Periodismo (1980), the Premio Derechos Humanos (1989), the Círculo de Críticos de Chile (1999); the Premio Asociación de la Prensa de Madrid a toda una vida profesional (2005); the Premio Grinzane Cavour a la Mejor Novela Extranjera (2005); and her fiction has remained popular. In 1984, *Te trataré como a una reina* [I'll Treat You Like a Queen] sold almost as many copies as the work of fellow Spanish author Camilo José Cela, and *Amado amo* [Beloved I Love] (1988) sold 25,000 copies within the first two weeks of publication and was that year's best-selling novel at the Feria del Libro de Madrid (*El País* 1988; Galindo 2006).

Montero's literary career mirrors the vertiginous shifts that have taken place in the Spanish literary market since the 1970s. The construction of Montero's public persona appears to correspond to Hall's negotiated position. This position takes place when audience members are capable of decoding the sender's message within the context of the ruling cultural and societal views and perceptions (Hall 1993: 516). From the publishing of *Crónica del desamor* by the small, recently founded publishing house, Debate, to her subsequent association with mass-media conglomerates; from her harsh criticism of literary prizes to her participation with the award of the Premio Primavera de Novela; from her explicit and polemic articulation of feminist concerns to her refusal to identify herself with any given political agenda; from the virtual absence of women writers in literary charts to what some see as their over-representation in the media, Montero's career illustrates many of the issues that would affect the women writers of her generation, and her work chronicles these changing literary times.

According to Hall, decoding within the negotiated version 'accords the privileged position to the dominant definitions of events while reserving the right to make a more negotiated application to "local conditions", to its own more corporate positions' (1999: 516). To facilitate the study of Montero's public persona and to illustrate how the message of her public persona, although generally largely understood, is deciphered by the audience in a different sense from the dominant hegemonic position due to the particular cultural context, I highlight two moments in her career that mark two sharply differentiated stages in the Spanish literary market: the publication of *Crónica del desamor* in 1979, and the phase commencing with her winning the Premio Primavera de Novela in 1997. The initial stage will allow us to consider the public perception of Montero as a committed, progressive journalist as well as the social and cultural role of publishing houses during the Transition. The second stage will allow us to analyse the increasing commercialism of the Spanish literary market and the growing pressure exerted on authors to meet its demands. This stage will also examine increased media preoccupation with Montero's private life.

Crónica del desamor: From journalist to best-selling author

Born in 1951, Rosa Montero has worked for the prestigious Spanish newspaper *El País* since 1976. Indeed, her notable journalistic career began at the age of eighteen when she started writing for a considerable range of media outlets including *Pueblo* newspaper. Although *Pueblo* was the property of Sindicato Vertical (the only legal trade union under the Franco regime) and was, consequently, associated with a conservative ideology, its opinion columns were regarded as a forum for dissident journalists, as they provided authors with the chance to insinuate criticism of the regime. *Diario Pueblo* provided a substantial training platform for many of the journalists who would take part in the process of renovating the Spanish press during the Transition. The list of *Pueblo*'s contributors included important contemporary names in journalism and literature such as Arturo Pérez-Reverte and Jesús Hermida. *Pueblo* was dissolved with the arrival of the Spanish Transition, while Rosa Montero's journalistic success kept increasing with her appointment as the first female editor-in-chief of the *El País* Sunday magazine (1980–1).

It was as a result of her excellent reputation as journalist and interviewer that in 1978 Montero received an offer to write a collection of interviews on a series of feminist topics. This would become the basis for her first novel *Crónica del desamor*, which Montero describes as an almost factual description of her world at the time (Amell 1994: xv–xvi). On her website the only mention of the release of Montero's first novel is: 'in 1979, she presented her first novel *Crónica del desamor* in a Madrid library'.³ This brief description stands in contrast to the information provided on the same website on Montero's later books. For instance, the publication of *La hija del canibal* is described as follows:

On the 22 April 1997, she won the Spring Novel Prize for her novel *The Cannibal's Daughter*, which she presented under the motto 'I never think about having to die' and under the alias of Company Segundo. *The Cannibal's Daughter* was the best-selling

3 See <http://www.clubcultura.com/clubliteratura/clubescritores/montero/autora_bio.htm> [access 2 June 2010].

book in Spain in 1997. It was launched in Latin America in the spring of 1998 in countries such as Argentina, Colombia, Chile, Mexico, etc. In 1999 the novel won the Círculo de Críticos de Chile Prize.

This fact that may be linked to the greater simplicity of book marketing in 1979: 'I remember very clearly the launch day, the hot afternoon, my red dress, the Antonio Machado bookstore in Madrid, the small group of friends. It was a modest book and a very humble function' (Montero 2009c). As this comment illustrates, the late 1970s was marked by the relative innocence of authors, in the sense that their personae were not considered a commodity to be fetishized for promoting book sales. Interestingly, the following remark by Montero regarding her promotion of *Cinco años de país* [Five Years of *El País*] (1982) at that year's Feria del Libro illustrates her relative innocence in relation to the selling of her product at this first stage of her literary career:

When I've been signing books at the Feria del Libro I thought I had to make it clear [that *Cinco años de país* was a book with a compilation of interviews], and that's what I did. Some people said 'Aha!' and let it go. It makes me a little anxious that there could be a misunderstanding. (*El País* 1982)

The situation had changed radically by the time of the publication of *La hija del caníbal*. Because Montero was awarded the Premio Primavera, Espasa Calpe won the right to publish her work, and this prompted an avalanche of ever more intensive, expensive and elaborate advertising campaigns. Anna Caballé suggests that Montero has become a feminist liberal cliché:

Rosa Montero has become the representative cliché of the liberal, progressive, and feminist woman that was born in Spain after the Transition. That is the price to pay for the popularity she enjoys for having worked as a journalist since *El País* was founded in 1976. (Caballé 2004: 515)

Nonetheless the development of her public image has particular resonance for women authors and for the increasing role of the mass media in the construction of the identity of all successful writers.

Montero's public image at the time of *Crónica del desamor* was influenced by her reputation as one of the leading journalists involved in the

renewal of the Spanish press during the Transition to democracy. Her political orientation and her strong ties with the liberal newspaper *El País* seemed inseparable from her public image as a writer. During the dictatorship, all (overt) cultural activity was intended to reinforce the dominant ideology (Abellán 1980; Jansen 1988; Herrero-Olaizola 2005), although banned books by Latin American and exiled Spanish authors did circulate covertly. This situation has been referred to by the prestigious editor Jorge Herralde, founder of the publishing house Editorial Anagrama [Editorial Anagram], as ‘political edition’ (2006: 177), and it highlights the important resistance role played by certain editors and booksellers at the time. For example, Editorial Ruedo Ibérico in Paris created a political and intellectual space for both exiled and internal literary authors (see Goytisolo 2007; González Santiago 2007; Herralde 2006). The choices made by publishers, including language options, promoted regional autonomy and democratic, Marxist, and feminist ideas. Thus, the term ‘political edition’ highlights the fact that the activities and attitudes of writers and booksellers were an important part of the resistance.

Unlike Matute who was silenced, as we have seen, by a difficult first marriage followed by divorce and temporary loss of custody of her son, Montero’s role as a journalist allowed her far more control over the construction of her public persona. Hardly ephemeral, the impact of her work owes much to her political and feminist commitment. She used her contributions to *El País* to denounce patriarchal and sexist attitudes in the Spanish ruling class and in society in general. For example, in ‘El sexo de los ministros’ [The Sex of the Ministers] she exposes and denounces the continued use by new, democratic, and supposedly liberal ministers of a moral and marital hypocrisy reminiscent of Francoism: ‘What worries me is that our new ministers are still bent on offering an old, smooth and outdated family image, that they dare to cover up the marital cracks with the old glue of lies’ (Montero 1983: 72). Furthermore, as Davies notes, she continued the fight in her fiction:

Through her first novel [...] Montero brought pressure to bear on politicians for the implementation of the reforms arising from the new Spanish constitution, passed through Parliament the previous year. This novel can be considered part of the general offensive by progressive women keen for change. (1994: 96)

Montero's high-profile public image, far from being a by-product of an ephemeral literary fashion, coincided with a need for liberal intellectuals to follow through on the transformation of cultural life after the end of the dictatorship. After years of cultural isolation and censorship, writers and artists took an active role in this reconstruction. In response to this appetite for new cultural, social, and even sexual horizons Tusquets Editores cannily introduced the erotic collection written by women, *La Sonrisa Vertical* [The Vertical Smile] (1977), and the *Premio Sonrisa Vertical* [The Vertical Smile Award] (1978) (Bermúdez 2002: 227). This climate explains the overnight success of Montero's illuminating fictional portrait of the complex situation of women during the Transition. She herself is modest about the literary quality of her first novel, stating that at that time the demand for the articulation of women's concerns superseded the demands for literary quality: '[I think that *Crónica del desamor*] might not have been good on literal terms, but it surely was a contextual book and it did portray a historical period' (Gutiérrez Llamas 2010). *Crónica del desamor* made Montero a figurehead for women readers and the 2009 edition contains a prologue by Montero in which she comments on the ongoing enthusiasm readers have shown for this novel and their response to her commitment to a feminist cause, to the exorcism of the 'ghosts' of the Franco regime, and her first intention of doing a more or less feminist book about the life of women, 'something I wasn't forced to do by anybody, but was somehow a heavy weight on my shoulders, like a sort of ghostly imperative' (Montero 2009c).

From La hija del canibal onwards

The merging of publishing houses and the absorption of small, family-run businesses by larger companies in the 1980s resulted in the Spanish literary market being dominated by four main publishing groups in the nineties: Bertelsmann, Planeta, Anaya, and Santillana. The struggle of these conglomerates for dominance caused the market to be saturated with new titles and well-known authors, while books by less well-known individuals came to have an increasingly short life span. As a result of this saturation, by the end of the twentieth century the Spanish publishing scene had

experienced a literary boom triggered by a globalizing, capitalist consumer economy in which authors' exposure to the mass media was a determining factor in their literary success. As Henseler puts it, 'these coordinates and characteristics shift the position, demands, and expectations of writers who must take the forces of the literary market into account when publishing their works' (2003a: 2). Similarly, André Schiffrin argues that in the current era of mass media consumerism, publishers worldwide have abandoned their traditional plans to guarantee cultural production after having submitted to the demands of the global market (cited in Herrero-Olaizola 2005: 113–18). Given that consumerism in the literary market reaches its peak in the twenty-first century with polemic authors such as the extremely media-orientated Lucía Etxebarria, the current dynamics of the market's greater demands placed upon writers will be detailed in the section of this chapter dedicated to Etxebarria. With regard to Montero's public reception at the stage when *La hija del canibal* was published, what is particularly relevant to her case is that among the changes in the publishing industry that would take place in the 1990s, the diminishing appeal of writers' political orientation appears to parallel the shift in the construction of Montero's public persona.

Freixas argues that the current trend of classifying literature according to the writer's sex, age, and nationality is linked to the waning of political ideology. She asserts that the issue of politically committed literature is no longer the subject of debate (Moreno n.d.). Nonetheless, ideology understood as the immediate relationship of the individual with their social and political context, remains an issue. Regardless of the degree of commitment of an author to a set of political ideas, novels are the product of an industry that is framed by a particular cultural context and created according to a set of assumptions that have to do with the values of that culture. Montero relates to the world as a white, intellectual, liberal woman born under a dictatorship and now living in a democracy, and this situation continues to inform her fictional works and the construction of her public image.

Freixas argues that the relative lack of important political controversies in contemporary Spanish society means that artists are no longer defined by their political ideas (2000: 37–8). This view is matched by Montero's own insistence on the freedom of expression she has enjoyed in *El País*,

which could be read as an attempt to distance herself from the newspaper's editorial line: 'It is a platform where I can write repeatedly against their editorial line without receiving the slightest pressure' (1996b: 17). This statement, made in 1996, contrasts with the more or less enforced ideological identification she admitted to having with *El País* in 1982:

I would like to thank [*El País*] [...] for their support and the professional platform it has meant for my career. I do not imply thereby that *El País* is a journalistic paradise, because there is no press without pressure, without difficult balances at the edge of freedom of expression. (1982: 8)

My interpretation of the diverging statements above is that government intervention in the cultural landscape marked the rise of the PSOE political party in Spain that was widely questioned by 1996 (Vila-Sanjuán 2003: 120). *El País*'s overt support for the PSOE has remained fairly consistent since the party's victory in the 1982 elections, to the point that the conservative PP has repeatedly accused the newspaper, together with the other media belonging to Grupo PRISA, of supporting the interests of the PSOE. However, more recently, with her own status assured and with more public scepticism with regard to party politics, it became convenient for Montero to separate her public persona as both journalist and author from this newspaper's editorial line, particularly in the years following the PSOE's victory in the 1993 general election.

As a result of the economic crisis, corruption scandals, and state terrorism (GAL) against ETA, the popularity of Felipe González – who had been the PSOE General Secretary since 1974 – was greatly eroded and in the general election of 1996, the PSOE lost to the conservative PP. Montero's articles in *El País* became more and more critical of the government during this period, to the extent that in the newspaper's 'Letters to the Editor' section she was accused of repeatedly discrediting González:

Rosa Montero delivers excellent interviews and her summer stories are of great quality. But it is something else to analyse the political or social reality [...]; she insists on revealing to us her disapproval, her reiterated condemnation of the President. (Casado Conde 1995: 13)

In the same letter, the author goes so far as to accuse Montero of flattering the PP.

Montero is still well known for her ethical commitment, as is indicated by her being awarded the Premio Derechos Humanos in 1989. The reasons why Montero was awarded this prize were: her growing commitment against social, racial, and political discrimination, her fight for women's rights, and her articles published in *El País* on the trial connected with the disappearance of Santiago Corella. Her commitment however was no longer defined by a clear political ideology, as can be inferred from Anna Caballé's more recent comment:

[Montero] has always stood out for her literary quality as well as her ethical commitment, not only to women and children, but to the disadvantaged, who are usually, almost always, marked by gender, social class or race differences. (2004: 45)

This is not to say that Montero's opinions on social issues and political conflicts have always been perceived as fair and balanced by intellectuals and readers alike. In fact, throughout her journalistic career, the judgements made in her columns have been frequently challenged. Especially poignant was Barbara Probst Solomon's column in response to Montero's article 'Hambre' [Hunger] (1987: 44). In it, Montero's denunciation of the hunger in Palestinian camps included a series of antisemitic remarks. These led Solomon, an internationally renowned author, essayist and journalist, and the recipient of numerous professional awards (including the Association of European Journalists in Spain's twenty-fifth Francisco Cerecedo Prize, the most prestigious journalism prize in the country, and the United Nations Women Together Award) to assert that 'Rosa Montero's article as political journalism, is phantasmagorical; as humanism, it is hypocritical, and as a step on the progress to peace in the Middle East, ineffective' (Solomon 1987).

It is also symptomatic that twenty-two years later Montero's article 'Energúmenos' [Lunatics] (2009b) was likewise harshly criticized and accused of islamophobia by Webislam, 'the Islamic portal of reference in Spanish, not just for quantity but also quality of information offered in terms of the number of visitors to the page. Written shortly after the news that a pregnant Muslim woman had allegedly been beaten as a result of her refusal to wear a headscarf, the article was found deeply offensive by Webislam, which went as far as to accuse Montero of promoting 'ethnic cleansing and lynching' (Fuente 2009). Perhaps the increasing difficulty of

finding a label that categorizes Montero's political ideas is that she is mainly regarded as a liberal intellectual, although her opinions have also been labelled conservative, even offensive, which indicates the problems involved in the 'globalization' of the literary author and is a logical consequence of the waning regard for party politics (see Freixas 2000; Bustamante 1995; Izquierdo 2001; Naharro Calderón 1999).

According to Freixas, the main factors now used by the media to brand authors are age and sex, and contemporary authors are expected to take the requirements of the literary market into consideration when publishing and presenting their works (2000: 37–8). Juan Cruz cites author and journalist Juan Manuel de Prada, who admits to having constructed his career according to the rules of literary competitions published in *El País* in order to '[make] stories in accordance with the submission guidelines of the competition I would choose. I ended up writing hundreds of stories, more than two hundred in those five years. I was a story-making machine' (cited in Cruz 1999: 143). Literary prizes bring visibility and greater media attention. An important number of the literary works that are published nowadays are written not so much according to individual creative imagination and literary sensitivity, but to the criteria of the market. Furthermore, as their books are increasingly reviewed in literary magazines, newspapers, and even on popular television shows, authors are expected to attend gatherings organized by their publishers, and cardboard images of authors are commonly found in book stores and supermarkets. As a result of the 'cardboard' cut-out author, Freixas notes that women may even appear to be over-represented as commercial icons (2000: 37–8), facing them with the double bind that while they enjoy unprecedented promotional visibility, their visibility is too often associated with a lack of literary quality.

In her article 'Globalization, Publishing, and the Marketing of "Hispanic" Identities', Jill Robbins notes that

[t]he perceived feminization and globalization of the publishing industry, like the atomization of the economy, the book business, and society at large, represents to many intellectuals – even those who consider themselves Leftist – a loss of the prestige and solidarity associated with those literary spaces traditionally reserved for men – the bookstore, the publishing house, the university, the Real Academia, the anthology. (2003: 96)

Fortunately, this does not appear to be the case with Montero, as the award of the Premio Primavera de Novela (1997), among others, confirms. In *La vida devorada (novela, mujer y sociedad en la España de los noventa)* [Devoured Life (Novel, Women and Society in 1990s Spain)], Katarzyna Moszczyńska asserts that this award responds to the publishing houses' demand for media-friendly authors to represent the season's blockbuster (2009: 200), and that, as Montero was older and better-known, less publicity was needed for the promotion of her novel than that which was used in the promotion of the younger Espido Freire's *Melocotones helados* [Frozen Peaches], winner of the Planeta prize in 1999. This phenomenon has also affected other writers previously known for their journalistic careers, such as Fernando Sánchez Dragó and Fernando Schwartz. At the same time, Montero has also had to contend with the increasing demands of the publishing market. Although by 2003 she was extremely well known and successful, the promotion of *La loca de la casa* [The Madwoman of the House] that same year involved a joint event with Argentine cartoonist Maitena in Buenos Aires (Reinoso 2003). Two years later, the launch of *Historia del rey transparente* [Story of the Transparent King] at the Teatro Español de Madrid would be even more spectacular. The book presentation benefited from contributions by the Spanish actress Pastora Vega, who read different segments of the novel, and the countertenor José Hernández Pastor, who sang medieval songs with the purpose of transporting the audience to the plot setting.⁴ In conclusion, as the author asserted on her website,

Commercial pressure is so high [...] I have been publishing for a long time and see how much it has changed. When I started, it was nothing like this. There were no interviews, no advertising, but now it's all about that. Pressure is brutal, and you need to dedicate a tremendous amount of energy, and a long time, trying to neutralise it, and you never neutralise it all. There always remains a bit of nonsense. And this in spite of me being very old and having been publishing for a long time. And I am so happy that I didn't have to go through this in my twenties, when I started, because I think it can destroy you. (Montero cited in Anon. 2005, n.pag.)

4 See <http://www.clubcultura.com/clubliteratura/clubescritores/montero/obra_rey_presentacion.htm>.

Starting from from *Crónica del desamor*'s low-key promotion ('In the old days we did not use to go on tours, we did not appear on TV or anything like that') (Montero in Gutiérrez Llamas 2010), Montero has now become a well-known face at the Feria de Libro and literary festivals, and through newspaper interviews and international promotional tours Montero's initial opinion on literary prizes ('I personally understand that so-called commercial prizes should be used to bring new writers to light and to help the lesser-known authors sell more. I think I would not feel comfortable taking part in this whole thing') is stated on the *Carta al director* that she wrote as a response to the misleading news item claiming that she was one of the 1991 Premio Planeta finalists, denying having even stood for the award (see Montero 1991: 13). It was the commercial pressure exerted that led her, despite having been previously critical of literary prizes, to participate at the Spring Novel prize with *La hija del canibal*:

For many years I insisted on saying that participating in commercial literary prizes is not right when you are well-known: those prizes should be for new writers. But it is generally not the case, that is, they're not usually won by new writers. So when I took part in the Spring Novel prize, I sort of betrayed a principle that was, anyway, not essential in my life. Commercial pressure is increasingly higher, so when I wrote *La hija del canibal*, the most mature thing I had done up until that moment, I wanted to support the novel: I was scared that it might go unnoticed within the existing commercial noise. So I said to myself: I will take part in this prize. I was urged by Carmen Balcells, who is my fairy godmother, and I did what everybody else does: I took part in a commercial prize. And it came in really handy [...] because it was as a result of *La hija del canibal* that I became known in many countries where I had never been present before, and this makes me very happy. (Montero cited in Anon 2005, n.pag.)

Reading such a statement by a writer who has traditionally been critical of literary prizes, the words of Tsuchiya come to mind: 'Given the consumerism that drove the Spanish publishing industry of the 1980s and 1990s, it is impossible to deny these writers' participation in capitalism and the mass market, regardless of their professed ideology' (2002a: 239). Editors, critics, and authors have been forced to contend, more or less willingly, with the extra-curricular demands of the market to the point that as Vicente Verdú puts it, 'Being a good professional is not enough to become famous, you have to be a personage. Marketing involves the media promotion of one's

self' (1995: 32). While this is true of the different generations that coexist in the current Spanish literary scene, including the far less mediated image of Matute, it is the authors belonging to the so-called Generation X, as will be explored in the section dedicated to Etxebarria below, who have been most implicated in this alleged process of 'selling out' to an industry more interested in high sales than in literary quality.

While Montero admits to the increasing pressures of consumerism, her most recent book launches are characterized by a far lighter approach to the promotional campaign. This is illustrated by three comments below. The first is an extract from an interview with the Mexican journal *La Jornada* as part of the promotional campaign for *El corazón del tártaro* [The Heart of the Tartar] (2001), which, as well Spain, involved most of Latin America. In the interview, Montero talks about promotion becoming an increasingly unavoidable part of the literary career:

The fact is that for ten years now, there has been an increasing pressure that becomes unbearable for the writer, because working is not enough; one needs to be a media manager of one's own work. The noise of the media is already so loud that even your most benevolent readers would not notice a new book release if you don't take part in the actual noise. And this takes up precious time. (Cited in Güemes 2010)

The second and third comments made refer to Montero's decision to wind down the extent of her promotional campaigns following the publication of *La loca de la casa* (2003) and to limit them to a maximum of five countries:

[Promotional campaigns] I despise them, really hate them [...] they build up, each promotion is worse. So I decided to lower the bar a lot with my antepenultimate book. With my last book, I decided not to go on a Latin-American tour, something I used to do, like a rock star. And I've said: enough is enough. No more. That is why I'm lowering the bar a lot. If I did a promotion of 100 for my last book, it has now dropped to 10. And that is how it's going to be. (Cited in Gutiérrez Llamas 2010)

The images that Montero uses to describe the process of self-publicity – a serious, well-known writer repeating herself in interviews, feeling like a rock star on tour, and feeling foolish in interviews – illustrate the paradox that the more recognizable, and therefore fixed, her public persona has grown, the more fragmented and dissociated her sense of herself has become.

Interestingly, in *El camino de las palabras* [The Path of Words],⁵ Montero explained that the main reason authors are impelled to write is that they are especially aware of their inner multiplicity. This remark fits well with the sensation that some famous writers, like Montero herself, might have to become more clown-like ('una loca carioca') at the same time as they become more famous and more highly regarded. Montero regards writers as more than usually dissociated people, who are especially obsessed with the passing of time and the fleetingness of life. For Montero, writing is an attempt to stop life's vertiginous rhythm and to fight the sense of dissociation. It is therefore something of a Catch 22 that control over the promotion of her own novels has only been achieved as a result of consolidating the high-profile persona needed to reassert that level of control over her own writing.

Rather than indicating what Tsuchiya sees as a more or less voluntary 'selling out', and as part of the conversation held in *El camino de las palabras*, Montero acknowledges that the marketing of literary works to a wider audience has been a very positive move, while expressing concern over the lack of minor works in mainstream bookshops. As a general practice she notes that only novels with an initial circulation of 3,000 copies will be accepted in the majority of bookshops in Spain, and if these 3,000 copies do not sell within the first month, the book will usually be withdrawn. While the double bind facing contemporary women authors will be examined in more detail in the next section dedicated to Etxebarria, two factors should be mentioned at this point in relation to the construction of Montero's current public persona: the increasing importance ascribed to her image, which becomes particularly apparent in the interviews, and the growing interest in her private life and personal opinions.

5 *El camino de las palabras* was the title of the thought-provoking conversation that Dr María-José Blanco and I had with Rosa Montero at an event held at King's College, University of London. The event, which took place on 26 January 2012 and was held in collaboration with King's College and with the support of Dirección General del Libro, Archivos y Bibliotecas (Ministerio de Cultura, Gobierno de España), dealt with the process of creativity, all its personal associations and the ways in which it is related to the time and space in which it occurs.

In a society that functions increasingly on the circulation of visual virtual imagery, women stand out both as a minority and for their visual objectification. As Freixas explained:

The media exploit the fact that women sell more, and figures are taken out of proportion to turn them into news. Reality is distorted and the media give more exposure to some female writers, allowing them to find breeding ground to be boisterous and over-the-top. (*El Correo Español* 2000)⁶

All the interviews cited in this section ranging from 2005 to 2010 include glossy, close-up images of the author. Although this is also true of most male authors, references to their physical appearance as part of the interview are the exception, while in the case of Montero, there is frequent reference to her eyes, clothes, handbag and hair (Bernal 2005, Gutiérrez Llamas 2010). Finally, in addition to this commodification of the writer's visual image comes a concomitant demand for accessibility. That authors find it increasingly hard to maintain a distance between their private and personal lives is reflected in interviews with Montero and, in addition to their inquiries about the author's views on current national and international political events, newspapers have taken especial note of the death of Montero's partner. From the tentative remarks in *La Hora* [The Hour] newspaper, in which an interview with the author commences by explaining that 'unfortunately, the death of her partner impeded her from attending this meeting' (*La Hora. Suplemento Cultural* 2009), to the sensationalist title 'La gran entrevista: Rosa Montero. La escritora habla sobre cómo se recupera de la muerte de su esposo' [The big interview: Rosa Montero. The writer speaks about how she recovered from the death of her husband], which was given to an interview in *El nuevo día* [The New Day] newspaper in which, paradoxically, there is not even one reference her partner's death (*El nuevo día* n.d.: n.pag.). Montero's public image is now more than ever dictated by her personal life. The gratuitous title of the interview with *El nuevo día* clearly illustrates the morbid aspects of publicity. Rosa Montero has spoken openly about her husband's illness and death (Sánchez-Mellado 2011), and she dedicated a

6 See <<http://www.laurafreixas.com/freixascriticas4.htm>>.

poem to him immediately after his death in the weekly column she writes for *El País* (Montero 2009d), so it is possible that Montero avoided mentioning her husband's death at the interview, and the sensationalist title was exploited simply as a way of enticing readers. Montero's more recent book, *La ridícula idea de no volver a verte* [The Ridiculous Idea of Not Seeing You Again] (2013), is a memoir about her grief.

The shifts in the construction of Montero's public persona that have taken place throughout her literary career clearly reveal the growing 'mediatization' of the figure of the literary author. Her initial image as a committed, progressive journalist corresponds with the end of censorship, while a second stage in her public construction commences with the publication of *La hija del caníbal* in 1997. Taking into account the increasing commercialism in the Spanish literary market, her strongly political and feminist persona would shift in the decades to follow towards an association with more global issues concerning human rights that is accompanied somewhat incongruously by an almost prurient interest in her 'domestic' life. This uneasy balance exemplifies the development of the publishing industry from the 1990s onwards, during which time the rise of neo-liberalism questioned the compatibility between state subsidies and artistic independence and the rise of mass media conglomerates, the mass commercialization of the literary market, and the proliferation of prizes would increase competition among authors, who are now forced to find new and often uncomfortable ways to remaining within the literary spotlight while still attempting to exert some control over the construction of their public image.

Lucía Etxebarria: Constructing Virtual Subjectivities for an Increasingly Global Market

This section examines the increasing importance of the 'virtual' literary persona. Starting with a brief summary of the social and political changes that accompanied the emergence of the postmodern Generation X with which Etxebarria's early work is associated, it then provides a brief introduction

to the contrast between her representation of female characters and that of her largely male peers in order to examine the increasing need for contemporary authors to negotiate their public persona (both virtually, on television and in the press). I will focus on Etxebarria's self-construction with reference to Generation X, and especially on the difficulty of negotiating the relationship between a sense of individual, female subjectivity and an increasingly global literary market. The construction of Etxebarria's public persona is representative of what Hall calls 'oppositional view': although audience members are well capable of deciphering the message exactly as it was intended to be deciphered, a different, unintended meaning is often grasped due to their own societal beliefs (Hall 1993: 517).

In *Postmodern Spain: A Cultural Analysis of 1980s–1990s Spanish Culture*, Antonio Sánchez notes that the political processes and socio-political changes that followed the establishment of democracy were recognized, symbolically, by three internationally famous events celebrated in Spain a decade later in 1992, mentioned earlier in this chapter: the Olympic Games, the EXPO 92 World Fair, and having its capital named official European capital of culture (Sánchez 2007: 21). These events four years prior to the publication of Etxebarria's first novel *Amor, curiosidad, prozac y dudas* (1996) marks the point of Spain's entry into what Francisca López describes as the 'prevailing culture in the developed capitalist world' (2008: n.pag.). By this stage, the focus on a centralized, archaic notion of the 'patria' [fatherland] of the Franco regime had given way to an increasingly decentralized State and to a growing sense of regionalism. Along with this political transformation came a major shift towards a broader acceptance of cultural, ethnic, and sexual difference that is probably the most important change Spain has experienced over the last three decades, and it is this change that is central to the themes of Lucía Etxebarria's work. These novels explore the major social changes since the Franco years to do with increasing immigration and the role of women, and the views of Etxebarria's fictional characters reflect the tension between the fact that, despite the progress made with regard to the legal equality of sexes, and despite government commitment to the extension of women's rights, full equality has not yet been achieved in practice (see also Fraguas 2004).

The literature of the new global millennium has encompassed the changes in Spanish society, adopted new styles, and seen different generations of writers competing for attention. Rosa Regás (1933–) won the Premio Nadal with *Azul* in 1994, but José Ángel Mañas (1971–), almost forty years her junior, was also among that year's finalists with his first novel *Historias del Kronen*. In the same year, the veteran Camilo José Cela (1916–2002) won the Premio Planeta, but in second position was Ángeles Caso, born in 1959. Three members of this new, younger generation are considered by Henseler to have the potential to redefine the literary canon and to subvert the literary system by appropriating and embracing the growing commercialism within the literary market in order to promote their own work: José Ángel Mañas (1971–), Ray Loriga (1967–),⁷ and Lucía Etxebarria (1966–) (Henseler 2004: 692–702).

Generation X: 'Multimedia' subjectivities and the writer as star author

These writers share an interest in disrupted, postmodern narratives, including references to American and popular culture, dialogues permeated by colloquial and vulgar language, treatment of explicit topics, and all have had to contend with the effects of complex and high-profile public appearances within the cultural establishment that mark the rise of literary-author-as-star phenomenon. All three represent a sector of the Spanish youth hitherto ignored by Spain's older, more established authors. The so-called Generation X comprises writers born from the 1970s to the late 1980s, and it is defined by the music this generation listened to, with bands like Nirvana, Sonic Youth, Pearl Jam, and Alice in Chains playing grunge, punk, and indie rock. The transnationalism of these mainly English-speaking bands attests to the sweeping social and cultural changes noted above, and their literary representation of an often violent and self-destructive counterculture offered a questionable form of salvation to young readers who, frustrated by the job difficulties and generation gap they encountered, often turned to

7 Although a Spanish writer, Ray Loriga is based in New York and has published some of his novels originally in English.

sex, drugs, and apathy. The work of the three writers singled out for comment by Henseler provides an explicit portrayal of Generation X, summed up by Manuel Vázquez Montalbán as ‘a literary movement, following the dream of “la movida” [the movement], that intentionally or unintentionally bears witness to the discontent at the end of the millennium’ (cited in Martín 2001: 52). Tsuchiya points out that, given the increasing promotional demands of the book market:

It is no surprise [...] that the 1980s and 90s, which gave rise to a new generation of readers raised in a consumer society, coincided with a boom of young writers, as the concepts of ‘lo nuevo’ (novelty) and ‘lo joven’ (youth) became commodified as objects of consumption. (2002a: 239)

As gender identity is a central aspect of this commodification, not to mention a central preoccupation for female authors of the post-Franco period (Tsuchiya 2002b: 77), the work of the Basque author Lucía Etxebarria is particularly important to this study.

Tsuchiya’s essay, ‘The “new” Female Subject and the Commodification of Gender in the Works of Lucía Etxebarria’ (2002), explores the way that Etxebarria, like so many contemporary Spanish women writers, has exploited the market through the treatment of a series of ‘temas de moda’ [themes in fashion]. In her opinion Etxebarria achieves this ‘through a self-conscious commodification of peripheral identities (and sexualities) [...] for the general reading public, this contributing to the creation of a “new” readership from which the publishing industry can profit in turn’ (Tsuchiya 2002b: 86). Tsuchiya certainly has a point, although similar remarks could also be made about male authors such as Javier Cercas, who applied this approach highly successfully to the Civil War theme in *Soldados de Salamina* [Soldiers of Salamis], or José Ángel Mañas, who addresses a range of Generation X issues in *Historias del Kronen* [Stories of the Kronen]. All address ‘temas de moda’, but perhaps the residual assumption that male protagonists have universal importance, has given rise to the suggestion that Etxebarria’s treatment of similar topics from the point of view of female protagonists seems more exploitative. Tsuchiya concludes that Etxebarria:

has quite consciously turned herself and her work into marketable commodities for the mass media, to the extent that it has become difficult to separate her works from her public image, an image she deliberately exploits as part of her marketing strategy. (2002b: 79)

Etxebarria's website acknowledges the need to create alternative contemporary models of femininity: 'I believe that social and engaged literature has a gender, because, as of today, life is unfortunately not the same when you are a man or a woman'.⁸ And, as made clear above, her novels tend to focus on social factors that have affected the development of women since the Transition. Thus, whereas the first novels of her male peers, like Mañas and Loriga, award their female characters a limited and secondary role, Etxebarria's first novel, *Amor, curiosidad, prozac y dudas* (1996), brings women centre-stage, focusing on three female characters, the Gaena sisters, who could be considered to represent three different female prototypes: the passive, submissive housewife; the ruthless capitalist worker; and the hedonistic and promiscuous nightclub waitress.

In her essay 'Con nuestra propia voz: a favor de la literatura de mujeres' [With Our Own Voice. In Favour of Women's Literature], Etxebarria highlights the need for women writers to produce female protagonists:

We are not only looking for the typical experiences of our sex in the mirror of fiction [...]. But the experiences of an author and the experiences forbidden to them undoubtedly determine their selection of topics in books and the topics they will write about too. And this doesn't mean that a male writer cannot, of course, create excellent female characters, and vice versa, but we cannot forget that writing from experience is very different from writing from documentation or fantasy. (Etxebarria 2000b: 2)

Where the female characters are marginalized and objectified in Loriga's *Héroes* (1993) and in Mañas' *Historias del Kronen* (1994), in *Amor, curiosidad, prozac y dudas* (1996) they are the protagonists. Described on the author's website as 'an accelerated and controversial novel about the difficult search for female identity outside gender conventions and outdated stereotypes', the central character is the youngest and the most prominent

8 See <<http://www.lucia-etxebarria.com>>.

narrator, Cristina, whose lifestyle is typically Generation X, including, as it does: sexual promiscuity, drug abuse, the rejection of traditional and societal values, pessimistic disaffection, a focus on the present, and a lack of hope for the future. Here, the more common Generation X gender roles are reversed and the portrait of the female Generation X-er presents Cristina as an active (if unwise) decision maker, rather than the marginalized companion or muse to a male rebel. As Montero's *Crónica del desamor* addressed liberal female concerns for the late 1970s, *Amor, curiosidad, prozac y dudas* addresses female turn-of-millennium Generation X concerns from a female perspective: frequent one-night stands, multinational companies, police stations, drug addiction, and ostentatious consumption.

Etxebarria's public appearances have similarly confronted the media tendency to objectify women rather than to treat them as autonomous individuals. Like her male peers, Etxebarria has faced the effects of the complex and high-profile public appearances that characterize the media-tization of the literary author-as-star. Like her male peers, she had to learn to commodify her own image to promote her work. However, as a woman this aspect of her 'performance' as a writer is inevitably inflected by the difference in the media portrayal of the male and female body, as examined in the introduction, and the tendency to sexualize the female body more overtly than the male. Etxebarria's media persona will be examined in more detail later on, but it is worth noting here that her appearances range from posing semi-nude on the cover of *Dunia* magazine to participating in extremely popular television shows such as *Pasapalabra*, *Moros y Cristianos*, and *Caiga quien Caiga*. These programmes attract high viewing figures and are responsible for the fact that even those Spaniards who do not read Etxebarria's books can identify her from photographs. Her contemporaries, Mañas and Loriga, have also appeared in the media for reasons other than their writing, but it is interesting to see that in the case of her male peers the interest in the 'body' that dominates media images of women seems to focus on an association between their public persona and punk or rock music. *El País* used the inaugural concert of Mañas' rock band Lox as a vehicle for extensive promotion of his novel *Historias del Kronen* (*El País* 1994), and much public notoriety

was attached to Loriga's marriage to and subsequent divorce from rock singer Christina Rosenvinge (*20 minutos*, 2010: n.pag.). Henseler has argued that Mañas, Loriga, and Etxebarria have the potential to subvert the literary system by embracing the increasing commercialism of the literary market to promote their works, and yet Etxebarria's public appearances, read in the context of Joe Moran's study of the growing importance of the 'star author' (2000), suggest that far from offering a vehicle for subversion, their increasing commodification means that the clearly media-friendly author Etxebarria cannot always control the negotiation and re-negotiation of her celebrity persona. Among earlier generations of Spanish writers, Camilo José Cela stands out as one of the few authors who exploited his own self-construction as a star author, but the process that identified him as a narcissistic self-promoter has now become an integral part of the career of all contemporary writers.

Celebrity authors and the literary marketplace

The literature of the new global millennium has responded to radical social change and the rise of the internet and concurrent rise of the celebrity persona. And yet, although the world-wide web has had an enormous impact upon the dissemination of images of celebrity, the association of celebrity with a commodified visual image and the relationship of that visual image to the marketplace is not new (Rojek 2001: 14). What characterizes literary celebrity in the contemporary era is the unprecedented opportunity for public attention that authors enjoy, which, as noted earlier, is linked to economic shifts in the literary marketplace.

Whether celebrities are charismatic beings destined for fame or the product of media companies or an image exploited by a particular political system (the three main options considered in Rojek 2001), the illusion produced derives from an elaborate discourse of individuality that is, ironically enough, designed at the same time to pander to and feed the desire to uncover the 'real' person behind the public persona (Dyer 1986: 11–17). This explains the enormous consumption of glossy magazines and the high viewing figures of television programmes that concentrate on the

private lives rather than the careers of celebrity figures. Work on celebrities in the sphere of commercial entertainment by Joshua Gamson and by Daniel Boorstin highlights the ubiquity of media images in contemporary culture, suggesting that celebrities are artificial, even at times pernicious, figures constructed through the influence mass media exerts on culture and society (Gamson 1994; Boorstin 1992).

The sense that these constructed images may be or may become pernicious is relevant to this analysis of Etxebarria's negotiation of her public persona. Whereas the major women novelists of previous generations examined in this chapter were able to maintain a certain distance between their personal and their public lives, contemporary authors are increasingly expected to be both available and highly visible. As Joe Moran asserts in relation to the commodification of the author in the United States:

There is no avoiding authors in contemporary American culture. The books and arts sections of newspapers and magazines are filled with author-interviews and profiles and features about them; they crop up on talk shows and other television programmes, as well as infomercials and shopping channels; they draw audiences to readings, lectures, signings, book fairs, literary festivals, public debates and writers' conferences. Aside from these concrete appearances, they also circulate in a more nebulous sphere of gossip and rumour, as the media reproduce speculation about their private lives. (Moran 2000: 1)

Moran's *Star Authors: Literary Celebrity in America* focuses on American writers and contemporary culture in the United States, but the star-author phenomenon is also relevant to other developed Western countries, as a consequence of the trans-nationality of the postmodern era. Without intending to oversimplify the differences between the American and the Spanish literary markets (for instance, the appearance of writers in infomercials and on shopping channels is still virtually unknown in Spain), the situation described by Moran above is generally more applicable to the Spanish literary landscape. The *Día de San Jordi* [Saint Jordi Festival] annually gathers dozens of writers for public book signings, study days, and conferences dedicated to one or more authors are regularly organized by universities and book premieres are regularly held at the international

entertainment retail chain FNAC. Writers such as Rosa Montero, Elvira Lindo, Antonio Muñoz Molina, Manuel Vicent, Almudena Grandes, Javier Cercas, and Javier Marías are regular contributors to *El País*, where they present their opinions on a variety of topical issues, and the voicing of the political opinions of authors is not limited to printed press, as Bernardo Atxaga's appearance in Julio Medem's political documentary *La pelota vasca* [The Basque Ball] demonstrates. More informally, Espido Freire's participation in the *Pasapalabra* television show provided audiences with a seemingly closer, more attainable image of the author. Finally, gossip and rumour have likewise spread to these writers' lives: the proliferation of newspaper articles breaking shocking news and providing salacious gossip of doubtful verity on Etxebarria's private life, her alleged aggression to her tenant or her custody battle with her former partner are but a few examples (*El Mundo* 2009a, n.pag.).

In *The Writer as a Celebrity* John Cawelti distinguishes between the literary fame that is achieved when authors' words remain in people's mind, and contemporary literary celebrity, which is more closely associated with the 'body' of the literary persona (1977: 164). In the case of Etxebarria, while her strong political views and polemic appearances on popular TV programmes have contributed to her fame and notoriety, her literary achievements also include a Premio Planeta and high sales – 350,000 copies sold of *Un milagro en equilibrio* [A Miracle in Equilibrium] (2004). As Joe Moran points out, work in the field of contemporary celebrity culture by Richard Dyer (1986), Joshua Gamson (1994), and David P. Marshall (1997) has challenged the notion of a straightforward separation between promotional packaging and content on the grounds that celebrity, far from being a stable phenomenon, is subject to a constant negotiation between

cultural producers and audiences, the purveyor of both dominant and resistant cultural meanings and a pivotal point of contention in debates about the relationship between cultural authority and exchange value in capitalist societies. (Moran 2000: 4)

The pivotal difference between literary celebrity and the celebrity produced by commercial mass media derives from the complex relationship between the cultural elite and the marketplace. And the formation of a

literary star system and of a shifting, changing hierarchy of star authors is the result of various legitimating bodies competing not only for cultural supremacy, but also for economic profit. Rather than following Cawelti's distinction between literary fame and literary celebrity (1977), I argue that the concept that best applies to Etxebarria is Moran's concept of star author as the embodiment of both commercial success and of traditional cultural hierarchy.

Etxebarria as a star author

Etxebarria conforms to Moran's definition of celebrity authors as 'those who are reviewed and discussed in the media at length, who win literary prizes, whose books are studied in universities and who are employed on talk shows' (Moran 2000: 6). As well as winning prestigious literary prizes such as the Premio Planeta, and participating in talk shows such as *Moros y Cristianos* and *Carta Blanca*, Etxebarria's work is increasingly attracting academic attention both within and outside Spain as the organization of an 'Etxebarria Study Day' at the Centre for the Study of Contemporary Women's Writing (CCWW) in London illustrates. The fact that Etxebarria's generation is increasingly required to engage with the construction of such a widely disseminated public persona is particularly fraught for women. According to Moran, the recent transformation of the publishing and authorship industry was triggered by the purchase of a considerable number of small, family-run publishing houses, by a small number of great multimedia companies owned by huge, multimedia parent companies, which took place first in America during 1980s and 1990s. As a consequence:

There are now few areas of book publishing which do not, directly or indirectly, come under the control of seven main conglomerates: Bertelsmann, Pearson, Viacom, Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation, Time Warner, Hearst and Holtzbrinck. (Moran 2000: 36)

Given that these conglomerates have extensive additional interests in other areas of mass media that are more profitable than the publishing sector,

they have developed more sophisticated book-marketing strategies in order to compete for commercial success. Publishers have noted that publicity tools concentrating on the author, especially television appearances, have proved to be the cheapest and most effective (Norman 1994).

This explains why the negotiation of a public persona was less problematic for Ana María Matute and Rosa Montero than it was for Etxebarria. As noted earlier, Montero published her first novel *Crónica del desamor* (1979) with Debate, a small, progressive publishing house that specialized in essays, and it was not until 1994 that Debate was incorporated within Bertelsmann. In the case of Etxebarria's novels, the pivotal role of the multimedia conglomerates in charge of the publication of her novels has provided numerous marketing opportunities in different media. *Amor, curiosidad, prozac y dudas* was published in 1996 by Plaza y Janés, which has been a part of the multinational, multimedia company Bertelsmann since 1984. *Beatriz y los cuerpos celestes* [Beatriz and the Celestial Bodies] (1998), *Nosotras que no somos como las demás* [We Are not Like the Others] (1999), and *Cosmofobia* (2007) were published by Destino, which belongs to Grupo Planeta. Likewise, the publishing houses in charge of *De todo lo visible y lo invisible* [Of Everything Visible and Invisible] (2001) and *Una historia de amor como otra cualquiera* [A Love Story Like All the Rest] (Espasa Calpe, 2003), and *Un milagro en equilibrio* [A Miracle in Equilibrium] (Planeta, 2004), belong to the same group. Grupo Planeta is one of Spain's most important multimedia conglomerates, with interests in the publishing, audiovisual, and communication sectors, operating in Spain, Portugal, and Latin America. The opportunities for cooperation in book marketing within the same conglomerate have been even greater in the case of Etxebarria's *Lo verdadero es un momento de lo falso* [Truth is Naught but an Instant of Falsehood] (2010), which was published by Suma de Letras, under the umbrella of publishing group Santillana Ediciones Generales, that is controlled, ultimately, by Grupo PRISA. Grupo PRISA is Spain's main multimedia conglomerate, with extensive interests in the areas of entertainment, culture, mass media, and education. It is also responsible for widely read newspapers (such as *El País* and *Diario As*), successful television channels (such as Canal +, Telecinco, and Cuatro), and

leading musical events (via Planet Events). As a result of this corporate 'muscle', *Lo verdadero es un momento de lo falso* has enjoyed substantial promotion. As well as book signings at FNAC in Madrid and Barcelona, numerous interviews, and considerable media appearances, the 'hype' has included the *Coge palomitas* [Grab Popcorn] promotional video clip. This music video, available on YouTube, supposedly features the novel's protagonist and his rock band, and in a particularly explicit illustration of the marketing ploy to link the public persona of the author to the text on sale, Etxebarria appears in the video alongside the popular Spanish actors Lluvia Rojo, Fernando Andina, and Raúl Fernández. In 2018 the site had enjoyed about 45,300 hits.⁹

It is also important, however, to note that, given the current economic climate and the crisis in the publishing industry as a result of the proliferation of illegal downloads, the promotional opportunities offered by these multimedia conglomerates no longer guarantee sales. Upon discovering that more illegal copies of *El contenido del silencio* [The Content of Silence] (2011) had been downloaded than had sold, Etxebarria denounced Spain for being the third location, after China and Russia, associated with the highest number of illegal downloads (*Telegraph*, 2011: n.pag.), and announced that she would not be publishing another book in the near future (González 2011). Yet dealing with the demands of publishing industry is a natural part of Etxebarria's life, and she has on several occasions attempted to take matters into her own hands. As she wrote on her Facebook page,

A few years ago, when a novel came out, you could pay for viral marketing or, in trade jargon, 'buzz'. What it really means is that you'd pay an agency, who would in turn pay five professionals to go on every literary blog under the sun and who'd let the cyber community of readers know that your novel was coming out soon.

Well ... That was then and this is now. That is, good times are over. (Etxebarria in Jiménez 2001)

On the same Facebook page, Etxebarria announced her latest idea to help the promotion of her most recent novel, *El contenido del silencio*: a prize

9 See <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fqRc5V2QbdA>>.

draw for a night out with her (drinks on the author). The winner would be the reader with the highest number of tweets or Facebook posts relating to the publication of her novel.¹⁰

As a star author who is expected to achieve a maximum readership, Etxebarria is a woman in a marketplace that privileges men and that exploits multimedia representation of the author that is not immune to the sexualized and objectified mass media approach to the female body in general. The overtly sexualized image of Etxebarria's body in the *Coge palomitas* video illustrates how as a woman this aspect of her 'performance' as a writer is inevitably inflected by a mass media tendency to sexualize women's bodies more overtly than those of men. The increasing power exerted by publishers makes authors increasingly susceptible to the manipulation of their public persona, and this is even more troubling for women. Female authors negotiating this highly visual public persona are often caught in a double bind. Although Henseler praises Etxebarria's semi-naked photo shoot in *Dunia* magazine as 'an embodiment of commerciality itself' that 'plays with the same set of cultural signifiers that are used against her' (2006: 104), this appearance could also be considered to contradict her self-proclaimed feminist stance and especially her denunciation of Western objectification of the female body. Two book covers serve to highlight that the negotiation of her public performance of femininity involves a focus on the 'body' that is very different from that of her male peers (Figures 3.1 and 3.2).

10 See <<http://www.facebook.com/notes/luc%3%ADa-etxebarria/etxebarria-se-sortea-a-s%3%AD-misma/10150346469339643>>.

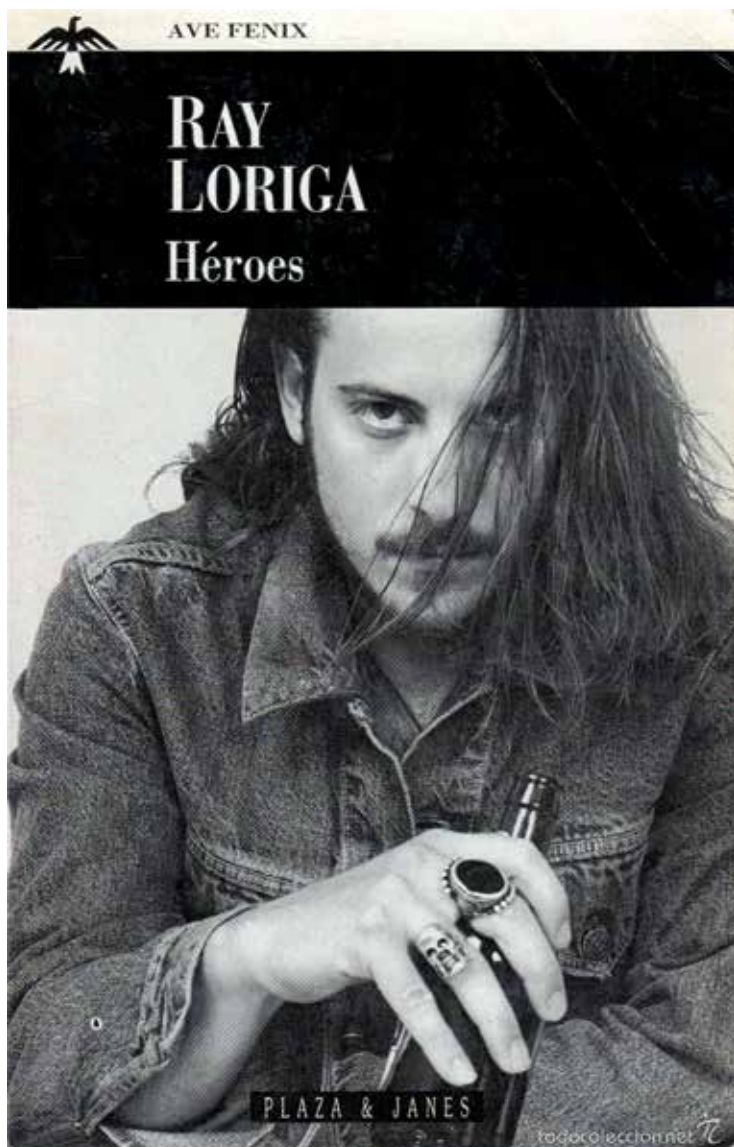


Figure 3.1 Looking like a rock star, Ray Loriga poses on the record-like cover of his novel *Héroes* (1993).
Reproduced with permission.



Figure 3.2 A leather-clad Etxebarria inserts herself on the cover of *Nosotras que no somos como las demás* (1999).

Reproduced with permission.

Joe Moran notes that ‘through star-making society imposes a strong tension which permits the fan to consume stars without however dignifying the processes which produce them’ (2000: 9), and there is a risk that the creation of a star author by an extended network of financial and cultural practices further reduces authorial agency. Indeed, the following case illustrates how according to Hall’s oppositional view ‘it is possible for a viewer perfectly to understand both the literal and the connotative inflection given by a discourse but to decode the message in a globally contrary way. He or she detotalizes the message in the preferred code in order to retotalize the message within some alternative framework of reference’ (Hall 1993: 517).

Etxebarria’s website appeared initially to provide a vehicle for her to control her public persona and to promote individual agency. Readers were able to interact directly with her via a blog that she maintained in the form of an online diary in which abundant personal information as well as news on different topical subjects and text samples were offered to the public. Readers would leave comments and Etxebarria would reply, with a degree of personal involvement that was highly innovative at that time in Spain. Events took a radical turn when, on 21 November 2006, Lucia Etxebarria announced that she would shut down her blog. Psychologist Jorge Castelló’s unfounded accusations of plagiarism in her 2005 book *Ya no sufro por amor* [I Don’t Suffer for Love] (*El Mundo* 2006b) had provoked an avalanche of insulting comments online and the appearance of anonymous threats in her letter-box. Etxebarria concluded that: ‘In the end, it has become a nightmare, because – and this is my fault, which is the worst thing – I have ruined, inadvertently, a rather huge part of my own privacy’ (Etxebarria 2009). As this case illustrates, the loss of agency is particularly notable when the audience is given the impression of an ‘intentional fallacy’; according to Moran, this is how literary critics refer to the attempts exerted by the machinery of celebrity to persuade audiences that authors are entirely in control of their images (2000: 61). The author becomes less in control of the uses and readings that are being made of their image to the extent that more cynical sectors of her public ‘read’ these attacks on Etxebarria and her response to them, as just another vehicle constructed in the interests of self-promotion.

It is important to emphasize that authors use the way their fame has been constructed in a variety of different ways and for different purposes. For instance, Etxebarria has used her own fame and her public persona for feminist and political purposes, as shown in her prologue to *Nosotras que no somos como las demás* (1999), and in her essay 'Con nuestra propia voz: a favor de la literatura de mujeres', previously cited, she reveals the issues and agents at play in the production of literature and exposes the gender-based inequalities within the literary marketplace.

In the literary world, as in European governments [...], as in television series, as in the board of directors of any company, the 'Smurfette Principle' is applied [...]. 'In a male group, of any type, a female figure tends to be included, whose relevance will be minimal and whose role will consist of giving a hint of colour to the group.' (The case of Smurfette among the Smurfs.) If the group is large [...] the number of female figures can be increased, but it will never be more than 10% of the total. I have confirmed it empirically. (Etxebarria 2000b:7)

While the exploitation of multimedia representations of the author carried out by the literary marketplace does tend to link the body of the female author to the sexualized and objectified mass media approach to women in general, it should also be noted that this negotiation between authors and the cultural marketplace has allowed new audiences to be reached, new authors to be published, and new themes and literary traditions to be explored. In order to conclude this section with a positive example of the uses of her star persona, Etxebarria's high profile has allowed her to edit the work of thirteen women writers in *Lo que los hombres no saben: el sexo contado por las mujeres* [What Men Do Not Know: Sex According to Women] (2008). As stated on the back cover, the purpose of this book was to present a series of explicit narrations of female sexuality from a women's perspective, a theme that according to Etxebarria, had been little explored until then: 'This book aims to give a voice to women, from literature, so they can tell us what has hardly been told' (Anon. n.d.).

Ambivalence and anxiety: Negotiating the celebrity self

The advantages and disadvantages provided by the increased visibility of the contemporary author are a symptom of an increasingly 'virtual' and global network of cultural and economic practices. Moran notes the recurrent complaints about loss of agency and control that have become commonplace in interviews and asserts that star-authors' 'unease with their celebrity [...] has less to do with an objection to being noticed per se than to a vulgarized fame which seems to borrow its methods and assumptions from the sphere of commercial entertainment' (Moran 2000: 68). The danger that their authorial identity might be undermined by their public image recurs as a common concern. These anxieties account for the fact that authors continually address ambivalence about their own fame in their works and interviews. Etxebarria's approach to celebrity in *De todo lo visible y lo invisible* (2001) could be regarded as another way of attempting to regain agency, through her fictional exposure of the intricacies of the celebrity machinery, or as a way of channelling the anxiety produced by the increased commodification of the body of the author through the protagonist's fluctuating feelings about her fame and about her public persona that permeate the whole novel. As she herself notes 'I dream of the day when I can stay locked at home and not be obliged by contract to give interviews' (*Deia* 2008: n.pag.), which is in conflict with the continued inclusion of autobiographical data in her interviews, articles, essays, and even in her novels.

This trend towards autobiography and autobiographical fiction, often found in the work of authors negotiating the culture of their own fame, like Etxebarria, Montero, and Marías, is regarded by critics such as Christopher Lasch as the 'culture of narcissism':

The increasing interpenetration of fiction, journalism, and autobiography undeniably indicates that many writers find it more and more difficult to achieve the detachment indispensable to art... Instead of working through their memories, many writers now rely on mere self-disclosure to keep the reader interested, appealing not only to his understanding but to his salacious curiosity about the private lives of famous people. (Lasch 1991: 231)

Prominent critics such as Vicente Verdú and Henseler have remarked cynically upon the demands placed upon star authors to exploit their own image to achieve a maximum readership. For instance, in his article 'La creación sin posteridad' [Creation without Posterity], Vicente Verdú affirmed with reference to Etxebarria and her peers that in today's literary marketplace: 'being famous is not enough to be a good professional, one needs to be a character. Marketing includes the media promotion of oneself' (1995: 32). The critics have not, however, written on the way that Etxebarria's public 'performance' is affected by the media objectification of the female body, particularly for a woman in a marketplace that privileges men. Thus, it is striking to note that in her article 'Pop, Punk, and Rock and Roll Writers: José Ángel Mañas, Ray Loriga, and Lucía Etxebarria Redefine the Literary Canon', Henseler (2004) makes no distinction between the gendered media representation of these authors. As a way of negotiating the effects of high-profile public appearances that mark the rise of the literary-author phenomenon, Etxebarria's own attempts to confront the objectification of women has been harshly criticized by reviewers such as Ignacio Echevarría, who asserted that the award of the Premio Nadal for *Beatriz y los cuerpos celestes* (1998) was only justified by 'the promotion of a female writer who turns to the most spectacular ostentatious displays in order to stand out from the large crowd of her colleagues' (Echevarría 1998: 11).

Conclusion: Towards a Commercial Appreciation of 'Women's Writing'

Focusing on the public personae of Matute, Montero, and Etxebarria, women writers who are representative of three different generations, this chapter has explored how the literary market of the new global millennium has adapted to the shifts in Spanish society. The main challenge has been the rise of the discourse of the author-as-celebrity that has initiated a new focus for critical awareness of the construction of the individual writer that is driven by the will to uncover the private individual behind the

public persona. While Rojek (2001) points out that there is nothing new about the association of celebrity with a commodified visual image, and the relationship of that visual image to the marketplace, the internet has had a major effect on the diffusion of celebrity images. Contemporary literary celebrities enjoy unprecedented opportunities for public attention that are linked to economic shifts in the literary marketplace following the rise of the conglomerates. Publishers have observed that television appearances and publicity events focusing on the author appear to be the cheapest and most effective ones (Norman 1994). The negotiation of a public persona was less of an issue for Ana María Matute and Rosa Montero than it is for the youngest of these writers, Lucía Etxebarria.

This is not to say that writers belonging to older generations such as Matute and Montero have been able to ignore the increasing demands of the literary market. They too have been affected by the struggle of the conglomerates to dominate the publishing field that produced a literary boom in Spain at the end of the twentieth century. This phenomenon was triggered by a globalizing, capitalist consumer economy in which an author's exposure to the mass media was a pivotal factor in their literary success. This applies especially to Etxebarria, but also to Matute and Montero. What has been highlighted in this chapter and will be explored in more depth in Chapter 4 is that the difficulties faced by these women writers publishing in a male-dominated industry have no doubt influenced their views on the 'women's writing' label.

A study of *El País* articles published between 1982 and 1996 allowed us to conclude that Matute's public figure shifted dramatically from the mid-1990s onwards rather than following a stable path. This factor may have made her more aware than she had been previously of the specific difficulties faced by women writers publishing in a male-dominated industry, although she kept her detachment from the notion of a female literature, which will be explored in the next chapter. Matute's detachment is linked to her status as a familiar literary figure from the Franco era. Nonetheless, by the 1990s her body and her personal life took precedence in interviews and articles designed to make her more accessible to the demands of a contemporary reading public. This is also the case with Montero: after enjoying *Crónica del desamor*'s success on the weight of its themes alone, she had to adapt to

the more media- and market-savvy environment of the contemporary literary market. Among the changes in the publishing industry that would take place, the diminishing appeal of writers' political orientation would explain why the highly feminist and political nature of Montero's public persona has shifted in the decades that followed. This is in line with what Freixas has argued is the current trend to classify literature not according to politics, but according to sex, age, and nationality. With reference to the construction of Montero's contemporary public persona two factors have been highlighted: the increasing importance ascribed to her image and a growing interest in her private life and personal opinions. Like Matute, Montero is uncomfortable with the notion of 'women's writing', although she does recognize the double bind women authors face, as will be explored next chapter.

The increasing need for contemporary authors to negotiate the public persona is abundantly clear in the case of Etxebarria. Etxebarria has made of her own image to promote and popularize her novels and her political opinions. Whereas both male and female writers are now confronted with the effects of complex and high-profile public appearances within the cultural establishment that characterizes the surge of the literary author-as-star phenomenon, the fact that Etxebarria is a woman means that this aspect of her performance as a writer is inevitably inflected by the tendency to sexualize women's bodies more overtly than those of men. Although Etxebarria has repeatedly attempted to benefit from the promotion opportunities favoured by the fact that she is a woman, this chapter has highlighted the fact that, while she is clearly a media-friendly author she cannot control the process of negotiating and re-negotiating the construction of her celebrity persona. In the next chapter, I shall consider whether Etxebarria's avid defence of the 'women's writing' label stems from this tendency of the critical establishment to treat female authors differently from their male peers. Although Matute, Montero, and Etxebarria are well known, they still publish in a cultural environment dominated by men, as the small number of women writers accepted into the Real Academia demonstrates. Female celebrities, their public performance must contend with gender bias in the media portrayal of the male and female body. This, together with the fact that women writers have until recently tended to be marginalized by academic studies, brings up the question of how theoretically to approach the label 'women's writing'.

Matute, Montero, and Etxebarria on Women's Writing

Chapter 3 examined the effect on Matute, Montero, and Etxebarria of the increasing commercialization of the literary market, and the gender bias evident in the commodification of the female writer. This chapter analyses their response to the question of the existence (or not) of 'women's writing'. Each is representative of a different literary generation, and as the definition of femininity changes according to the role of women in different historical contexts, it is natural that they respond in different ways to the question of the existence of women's literature.

The question of 'women's writing' was not, for example, an issue of public debate at the beginning of Matute's career, and her ambivalence with regard to its existence may reflect the suppression of debates on the construction of femininity during the Franco dictatorship. For instance, the first translation into Spanish of Simone de Beauvoir's *Le Deuxième Sexe* (1949), often regarded as a major work of feminist philosophy and the starting point of second-wave feminism, happened in 1954 in Argentina. Spain, on the other hand, would have to wait until 1972, when Aguilar publishing house launched a one-volume translation of de Beauvoir's work. This delay resulted in what some critics have interpreted as a lack of 'literary sisterhood' in Matute's fiction (Fuentes in Matute 2011: xviii). Matute's views on the 'women's writing' label will be examined by looking at her participation in numerous events debating and celebrating women's literature, and at her demonstrably high regard for the expression of what she sees as particularly 'female' issues in fiction.

Rosa Montero belongs to the immediate post-dictatorship generation that was directly influenced by feminist theory. Coming to public attention in the late 1970s, she is perhaps the best-known exemplar of the boom in

female writers that appeared in the 1980s. This period marks the beginning of debates as to when gender can be ascribed to literature in Spanish journals and in interviews with Spanish women writers. Her contribution to this debate will be explored by examining interviews with her, as well as the views on the topic she expresses in *La loca de la casa* [The Madwoman in the House] (2003) and, more recently, in *El amor de mi vida* [The Love of My Life] (2011).

Lucía Etxebarria is a self-described feminist, who champions the notion of ‘women’s writing’. Feminism is one of the central themes in her non-fiction, and she admits that one aim of her fiction is to promote political and feminist consciousness. Her views on this topic will be considered through interviews with her, academic analyses of her novels, and *La letra futura* [The Future Letter] (2000a), in which she addresses the question of the ‘women’s writing’ label directly.

Matute’s Views on ‘Women’s Literature’

When Matute’s views on the topic of ‘women’s writing’ have been sought in interviews, her responses are generally brief and forthright:

Cavallé: Does female literature exist?

Matute: No, because literature is not male or female. There is only one literature. (Cavallé 2007)

Unlike Montero and Etxebarria, she has never considered it necessary to write at length about literature, nor about the question of ‘women’s writing’. In fact, she describes the question of ‘literature’ as somewhat distanced from her own concerns:

To me the word ‘literature’ came quite late and it was always also embellished by something I was not doing. Then it turned out I was actually doing ‘literature’. But I wouldn’t know it. I never asked myself this question. What is called literature has no exact definition to me. (Doyle 1985: 238)

Little attention has been paid, therefore, in academic studies of her work, to her thoughts regarding this label. As a celebrated (female) member of the Spanish contemporary art world, and an internationally renowned novelist with a high profile at literary conferences and events, it is interesting that Matute has avoided in-depth questioning on this subject. In interviews with her, the question does arise, but in general her interviewers give it little weight and tend to raise it only as if to comply with some kind of mandatory 'box-ticking' – a question to be posed and swiftly dismissed. Nonetheless, a closer look at her responses suggests that Matute's views on the subject waver; despite the fact that her oft-repeated statement, 'Literature exists, good and bad' (Ayuso Pérez 2007), leaves considerations of gender in the reception of literature to one side, her views on this question continue to affect the way she is perceived in the contemporary Spanish cultural world.

The question of the 'escritoras de agravios' [chroniclers of grievances]

In spite of her rejection of 'women's writing', Ana María Matute has been invited to – and has attended – numerous events debating and/or celebrating literature written by women. In 1994, a symposium on 'women's literature' was held by the Fundación Luis Goytisolo in El Puerto (Cádiz). The debate began with a forthright denunciation by the writer Cristina Peri Rossi: 'When literature is not meaningful any more, because it bears no power, that's when men leave it to us women' (Rodríguez 1994a), and Ana María Matute's response encapsulates her own ambivalent views on the subject quite clearly.

She was quick to distance herself from Peri Rossi, stating categorically: 'One doesn't need to be so radical [...] It is not true that literature is currently underestimated. People read more now than they did in my time', adding, perhaps in an attempt to further distance herself from the issue: 'I only believe in good books or bad books.' However, she did take advantage of this occasion to concede, in a way that clearly reveals her own gender bias, that women possess a wealth of emotion and experiences that may be best narrated by a female writer: 'Like maternity and a certain different sensitivity, though you can't be very strict on that. Even so, tenderness is still a rare feeling in men.'

These statements illustrate the fact that Matute's views on this subject are balanced between the rejection of the 'women's writing' label, and recognition of certain female themes (even feminine themes, if her reference to a 'male' innate lack of tenderness is to be believed). She compliments, for example, her fellow writer Josefina Aldecoa as 'a female writer with an extraordinary sensitivity in capturing the most important moments in a woman's life' (Astorga 2000: 56). The fact that Matute belongs to an older generation of writers, and that her public profile was raised by her invitation to join Spain's most revered (and male-dominated) literary and linguistic institution, the Real Academia, are key factors influencing her position on this subject. Matute has acknowledged that the question of a female literature was not considered at the beginning of her career and that, as a woman writer, she was in a very small minority: 'When I started out, there were only a few female writers, and no distinctions were made between female and male literature' (Ávila 1994: 67). Moreover, this absence of any debate on gender still held for the literary generation that followed. Esther Tusquets, born eleven years after Matute in 1936, a writer who published her first novel, *El mismo mar de todos los veranos* [The Same Sea as Every Summer], in 1978, thirty years after the publication of Matute's *Los Abel*, corroborates Matute's statement. In the *II Simposio Internacional 'Mujer y creación literaria'* [Second International Symposium 'Women and Literary Creation'], Tusquets explains that at the beginning of her writing career, for women of her and Matute's generations, the question of gender difference in literature was not an issue for public debate and their ambivalence is understandable (Ávila 1994: 67). The issue only begins to arise in studies of Matute's work, and in interviews with her, from the 1990s onwards, so her situation is clearly radically different from that of younger women writers, like Etxebarria, who have been familiar with the question of sex and gender from the beginning of their literary career.

Rather than distinguishing between male literature and female literature, Matute prefers to acknowledge the differences between men and women who write. For Matute, writers are born, not made: 'You are a writer, full stop; you are born a writer' (cited in Martín Gil 2001: 38). She also distinguishes, reasonably enough, between the literature of personal and social protest and 'good' writing:

A woman who writes often does it in order to claim her rights and even her little failures in life, and that is alright. But a born writer does not just do that. The frustrations and issues she writes about are not hers, but every man's or woman's. (Cited in Martín Gil 2001: 38)

For Matute,

[literature] is creation, it is recreation, it is a process. It is a form of protest that doesn't need to be political or social; it can even be against you [...]. There are men, women and children whose stories we need to tell, and this is even more awful. We will always be protesting on behalf of those who are abused and neglected. (Ibid.)

Her literary project is a social one, and one that acknowledges the different social positions of men, women, and children, so it is interesting that, in an interview with Josefina Aldecoa for the *ABC*, both are dismissive of what they describe as the 'injustices writer': 'There are now female writers who speak about their experience, about the bad times they went through, but being a writer is something else' (Astorga 2000: 56).

Social injustice

Highlighting its consciousness-raising properties, Ana María Matute has defined literature as 'a sort of red light that shines in the consciousness of readers and leads them to lay out questions, complaints and reflections' (Doyle 1985: 238). She sees literature as an art form that allows both writers and readers to elaborate 'their own protest, their own doubt or assertion' (Doyle 1985: 238), and agrees with critics who consider writing a form of (specifically female) protest against Spanish society:

They said I was destroying social values, destroying the family, destroying religion... In a way, it was actually true. I wanted to change everything. It was a scream for freedom from a young woman against a world that seemed fake, hypocritical, exploitative and deceitful. (Gazarian 1997: 91)

The censorship in place at the beginning of Matute's literary career made it particularly difficult for writers to denounce social situations that might

compromise their supposed allegiance to the regime. However, in his prologue to the 2011 edition of Matute's *Los Abel*, Víctor Fuentes remarks that the first indications of a postwar literary rebelliousness intimately linked to the condemnation of social injustice can be found in two novels by women: Carmen Laforet's *Nada* [Nothing] and Matute's *Los Abel* (Fuentes in Matute 2011: xii). In the same prologue, he also commends Jenny Fraai's (2003) choice of these two novels as examples of 'rebeldía camuflada' [rebelliousness in disguise] (2001: xi–xii).

Although these two women writers were still the exception, the twentieth century witnessed the arrival of a number of women who began, from the award of the Premio Nadal to Laforet's *Nada* in 1944, to open a new chapter in the history of Spanish literature. Important female names, such as Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda or Emilia Pardo Bazán, come to mind in the context of nineteenth-century Spanish literature, but it was not until the 1940s that the success of a number of women writers in literary competitions adds significant numbers to this very small selection of female names. Subsequent Nadal Prizes were awarded to Elena Quiroga's *Viento del norte* [Wind of the North] (1950), Dolores Medio's *Nosotros los Riveros* [We, The Riveros] (1951), Luisa Forellat's *Siempre en capilla* [Always in the Chapel] (1953), Carmen Martín Gaité's *Entre visillos* [Behind the Curtains] (1957), and Ana María Matute's *Primera memoria* [First Memory] (1959) during the postwar period (Alchazidu 2001: 32–3). Prior to receiving this award, Matute had also twice been a semi-finalist in the Nadal Prize with *Los Abel* (1948) and *Luciérnagas* [Fireflies] (1949). Although *Luciérnagas* was written in 1949 and became a finalist in that year's Premio Nadal, the authorized version, titled *En esta tierra* [In this Land], was published only in 1955 after undergoing drastic cuts by censors. Indeed, the original version was only eventually published in 1993.

In *Panorama de escritoras españolas* [Overview of Spanish Women Writers], Cristina Ruiz Guerrero discusses these women authors as 'the first generation of female Spanish authors in the post-war era' (Ruiz Guerrero 1997: 165). She notes that all come from wealthy families and were able to study for university degrees, and that their literary treatment of the role of women in society involves the representation of social barriers and the need to effect social change (Ruiz Guerrero 1997: 165–6). Of course, a similar

preoccupation with social barriers and the need for social change can be found in the work of preeminent male writers of this era, such as Luis Martín Santos' *Tiempo de silencio* [Time of Silence] (1962), while certain works, for example, Juan Marsé's *La oscura historia de la prima Montse* [The Dark Story of Cousin Montse] (1970), also explore the changing role of women in postwar Spain. Nonetheless, renowned critics such as Alchazidu (2001), Ruiz Guerrero (1997), and Alicia Redondo Goicoechea (2009) make particular mention of the presence of rebellious female characters in novels by this first generation of postwar women writers:

It is fair to say that the heroines of these female authors were teenagers who had to go through a series of adversities, who are linked to a specific social environment that generates an endless number of conflicts that, in turn, are the cause of their estrangement. It is the need to stand against patterns they deem unacceptable that leads them to a negative stance that, in the end, turns into open rebelliousness. (Alchazidu 2001: 34)

The literary link between rebellious children and adolescents in Matute's work and that of her female contemporaries is not limited to Spain. Prominent critic Saliha Zerrouki (2006) has also established links between the Algerian writer Assia Djebar's *Les Enfants du Nouveau Monde* [Children of the New World] (1962) and Matute's *Los hijos muertos* (1959). Examining how these novels depict human suffering in war, Zerrouki remarks that, while these writers belong to different continents and cultures, there are clear similarities in their denunciation of the destructiveness of war. Matute's literary style has also been analysed by other academic studies that support the notion of a literary similarity in works by women that might justify the use of the 'women's writing' label (see, for example, Lee-Bonanno (1987)). Freixas (2008) links Matute with prominent women authors from different cultures and historical periods such as Virginia Woolf and Clarisse Lispector, arguing that as well as providing 'models of women writers', their writing demonstrates clear differences between female literature and male literature (Freixas in *El Mundo* 2009b). Redondo Goicoechea posits, likewise, that similarities exist in the writing of women as diverse as Santa Teresa de Jesús and Carmen Martín Gaité, and that the fact that these can be characterized as a style that, like Matute's, is linked to sex and gender:

It's about giving importance to silence and to the unexpected, to the unseen. This entails the need to break with the logical syntax and order, and writing with great silences, blanks and ellipses. This type of writing [...] does not spring up only from thought but also from passion and desire, and its fruits are related above all to sexuality and sensuality; with singing and dancing and their rhythmic repetition systems, which are more circular and horizontal rather than vertical and linear; with adjectives and emotions. (Redondo Goicoechea 2001: 203–4)

With this list of characteristics traditionally associated with women rather than men (emotion, sensuality, and intuition), Redondo Goicoechea concurs with mainstream feminist criticism that these features, also present in Matute's work, corroborate notions of gender and sex difference in literature and language. Similarly, Fraai argues that common themes in Matute's work – silence, the use of nature to symbolize freedom, the representation of women as a minor, and recurrent use of symbols of confinement – are paradigmatic of so-called 'women's writing' (Fraai 2003: 164–5). Notwithstanding, Matute, as discussed later, reiterates her sense of literary estrangement from her female peers.

An 'unusual' writer

Matute has repeatedly defined herself as 'a peculiar girl' (in Arenas 2008), and she uses this image to qualify both her experience of childhood and her writing:

You need to keep in mind that I was weird for the literary scene at the time; I have to admit that I was, just like I had always been as a young girl, a weird girl, and I have been the weirdo in everything I've done, also among my siblings, I was the weirdo, I was the weirdo! (Ayuso Pérez 2007)

In conversation with Marie-Lise Gazarian, she reminisces on her childhood and adolescence, and discusses her sense of isolation when in the company of other girls and women. Matute attributes this sense of alienation to her rejection of the sense that 'in that bourgeois environment, so stupid, women could only be destined to be good wives and good mothers' (Gazarian 1997: 79). While she depicts her relationship with her father as unusually

positive ('I had a wonderful relationship with my father', *ibid.*: 60), her lack of interest in the traditional female role as the submissive mother and housewife may well have been affected by her own experience of the mother–daughter bond: 'I only recall [my mum] ever kissing me twice in my life' (*ibid.*: 61). Fuentes draws a parallel between this early estrangement from women and Matute's self-declared estrangement from female literary influence, although he does find it paradoxical that

[i]n an author who has done so much to increase the value of women's writing by placing them on the very first line, the feeling of sisterhood vis-à-vis women is not present in her writing, neither is the strong tie of matriarchal lines, so distinctive of so much female literature. (Fuentes in Matute 2011: xviii)

It is interesting that, in 2011, Fuentes still feels able to express such concern for Matute's lack of affiliation with her female peers, but it does help to illustrate one of the many factors that play a part in the resistance of writers like Matute to the question of gender difference in writing. Fuentes' comment, presumably unconsciously, exemplifies the gender prejudice that continues to affect academic writing about women. His (extra-literary) concern for her sense (or not) of 'sisterhood' is not an issue that, as far as I can ascertain, is ever raised in interviews with her male peers. Unlike the critics discussed above, and also influenced, perhaps, by her membership of the Academy, Fuentes finds no traces of a female influence on her work, situating her writing within the major postwar literary genre of the literature of social protest. While this is clearly a very positive response to her work, it does raise unexplored questions about the effects of the Franco regime on 'women's writing'.

Mainstream feminist literary criticism argues that 'women's writing' may be characterized by the anxiety-inducing choices to which women writers have historically been subject. Carmen María Matías López and Philippe Campillo note that

[i]n a way, it may be admitted that female writing is a result of a certain position of women in society. If the place that women hold in society can be defined by its changing character (from events that affect their social situation to representations and value judgements on this regard) this uncertainty and these changes confirmed in different ages and civilizations would be based on the predicament of the notion of femininity. (Matías López and Campillo 2009)

If, as they suggest, any attempt to consider ‘women’s writing’ is inevitably complicated by the difficulty of defining femininity across different historical periods and cultures, then the particular status of women during the Franco dictatorship should be taken into account. Matute’s description of herself as isolated and unusual (‘rara’) is particularly indicative of this historical period, and she herself relates this sense of isolation to her rejection (within her writing) of the social role offered to women of her class in this particular historical context. Within Spain her writing, from her early novels onwards, was, as Víctor Fuentes points out a ‘precursor of women’s liberation that took place in the 1960s and 1970s in Spanish society’ (Fuentes in Matute 2011: xvi). Within Spain, Matute was the exception. However the rejection in her work of the Francoist ideal of the passive mother and housewife has clear links with the work of women writing outside Spain, the best-known example of which would be Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* (1949), published in France decades earlier. Although there are obvious reasons why writers like Fuentes, and Matute herself, regard her work as existing in isolation from her female peers, their reasons for so doing are intimately linked to her historical context and to the literary and personal isolation that Spanish writers, and particularly Spanish women writers, endured during the early years of the Franco regime.

As Georgette Ndour points out, postwar censorship presented a major obstacle for Spanish writers: ‘It was extremely damaging as it would block one of the essential requirements of artistic creation: freedom in the conception and production of work’ (2010: 80). And, as Carmen Martín Gaité explains, this censorship also extended to university syllabi, resulting in students being deprived access to any national and foreign works that could be seen as a threat to the Francoist interests.

Spanish literature syllabi for university students, which were lengthily focused on cloak and sword dramas – despised by Aldecoa – only rarely and cautiously took a brief look at the eighteenth century, because the stink of the Encyclopédie could leak through the crack [...] But, of course, they would never include the nineteenth century [...] Any article, story or play that would throw citizens from clouds of glitter to the ground of reality, or that would encourage them to question what was seen or heard, would be branded as negative. (Martín Gaité 1994: 46–8)

The covert communication of social protest via the use of symbolism and metaphor was achieved by talented writers of this generation, such as Camilo José Cela, Carmen Laforet, and Matute herself. However, their isolation and distance from so many of the major liberal and left-wing writers of the late nineteenth and twentieth century necessarily had an impact on their work:

Instead, a consumer sub-literature developed. And this was extremely damaging for Spanish society as a whole, but even more damaging for writers. Young writers born in pre-war times or in the first post-war years would be prevented from learning the most important part of the European oeuvre, intellectual motivation would be beyond their reach, and they would be condemned in advance to start from a state of literature that was already obsolete in many countries. (Rico 1980: 58)

In this climate, Matute's sense of emotional and literary isolation is understandable, as is the fact that she felt a closer sense of alliance with the predominantly male writers of her generation, than with women writers *per se*. After all, the postwar literary and intellectual gatherings were mostly frequented by men. For instance, in his memoirs, when recalling his *tertulias* [literary gatherings] with Ortega y Gasset in the 1950s, Julián Marías, a preeminent Spanish philosopher associated with the Generation of 36 movement, does not mention a single woman attending them (Marías 2008: 357–9). Likewise, Martín Gaité's memories of her literary gatherings in the 'Free University of Gambrinus, a five o'clock gathering at a renowned restaurant in 7 Zorrilla street, where we would get together to talk about more or less philosophical books' (Martín Gaité 1994: 33) highlight how male participants significantly outnumbered the female ones. Thus, Eva Forest and Martín Gaité herself were often the only *contertulias* [female companions] at these events, which were attended by such writers as Francisco Pérez Navarro, Víctor Sánchez de Zavala, Miguel Sánchez Mazas, Luis Martín-Santos, and Juan Benet. It is notable that the two women both had partners, to whom they would be married by 1955 – Martín Gaité to Rafael Sánchez Ferlosio in 1954, and Forest to Alfonso Sastre in 1955 – who were also key names in that literary circle, and this probably facilitated their acceptance as part of the group at a time when *contertulias* were scarce.

All these writers were directly affected by the experience of the Civil War in their childhoods, and, as Aldecoa points out, this experience heightened a sense of *hermandad* [sisterhood] that made no particular concession to gender:

When we were still very young we witnessed the tragedy of a war between brothers. As a result, in one way or another, our work does neither liberate us from that drama, nor from the unforgettable experience of growing up in a landscape of chipped paint walls – old values were cracking, high-sounding concepts were getting old, like threadbare tapestry around us, vestiges of an old splendour doomed to disappear. Inside the ruins of the old lessons, between bombed walls, we, who later became writers, find it difficult to let go of this memory. This, I suspect, led us – in different forms, different personalities, and different sensitivities – to the same attitude towards life and towards literature. (Aldecoa 1970: 9)

Matute states that her novels are not autobiographical ('I have very rarely written any biographical material, at least consciously, about my life'; Gazarian 1997: 36), though she does admit that her personal obsessions and concerns can be found in her fiction: 'But one cannot put aside one's obsessions, so one will write about them; since it makes one worry, it will be personal, because one is present in one's books' (ibid.). The Spanish Civil War is clearly one of these concerns, and she describes the way that 'Civil War marked my childhood and adolescence. I turned eleven not long after it started. Those were eye-opening years. I lived them in Barcelona. I still dream about the air raids' (Cavallé 2007).

However, as Ndour notes, Matute does not herself associate her writing with any literary trend, not even with those peers with whom she shares the experience of this historical event (2010: 93). Her date of birth and the publication dates of her novels classify her as one of the 'generación del medio siglo' [mid-century generation], alongside writers like Miguel Delibes and Camilo José Cela, but prominent Spanish literary critics, such as Santos Sanz Villanueva and Gonzalo Sobejano, agree that her style differs from the objective realism characteristic of this group:

Matute, who is undoubtedly a member of the mid-century generation, frequently talks about social causes and adopts a critical stand, but her tendency to fiction, the importance of very imaginative subjectivism in her work, keep her away from the usual ways of social aesthetics. (Sanz Villanueva 1980: 326)

Matute does not attribute this to gender (Ayuso Pérez 2007), and Redondo Goicoechea argues that although Matute might not have written like her male peers, her writing is also unlike that of her female peers:

Her works are not limited to familiar topics and low murmuring sounds, but they are high-flying and provide a global and tragic vision of human life, wrapped in the knowledge of a great author who is able to gather history and poetry in one novel. (Redondo Goicoechea 2009: 141)

Indeed, although Matute's style may be difficult to classify, there are other female writers of her generation whose novels do not limit their concerns to the sphere of the family. Carmen Laforet's *Nada* (1944) is a novel of gothic estrangement that mirrors the sense of existential alienation of its young protagonist Andrea, while Carmen Martín Gaité's novel *El balneario* [The Bath House], which won the *Premio Café Gijón* in 1954, is clearly not confined to domestic *murmillos* [whispers], providing, rather, a mysterious, almost frighteningly oppressive atmosphere that serves as a metaphor for the sense of entrapment that prompts the protagonist's questioning of her future and her place in this world. Rather than dealing with 'whispers', this appears to be a universal theme which provides readers with a global and timeless vision of life. Neither of these texts could be described as domestic *murmillos* and both denounce the misery and the sense of entrapment suffered by many in Spain in the post-Civil War period, regardless of gender.

A minor genre

As shown at the beginning of this section, Matute claims to regard questions of 'literature' as an aspect of writing with which she is not, herself, concerned.

Although she was the third woman to be elected a member of the RAE, and had been the recipient of both the Miguel de Cervantes (2010) and Premio Nacional de las Letras Españolas (2007) prizes, prominent Spanish critics such as Eugenio de Nora continued to question her right to be considered alongside truly important writers (Ndour 2010: 203). Without specifying names, Matute has recognized that among those who

acclaim her work today are those critics who were initially opposed to her literary style, and, in particular, to the use of fantasy in her novels (Doyle 1985: 240–1). Matute attributes this to her approach being ahead of her time:

I must say that I was not particularly spoiled by critics, not at least until much later [...] Of course, I used to write in a way that was not common back then. I believe I was ahead of my time for a long time, and I was still ahead of my time afterwards.

Those who used to say ‘like the great Ana María Matute used to say’... You are a liar! I kept your reviews! I used to keep them all, liar! But I don’t say anything anymore. Anyway... what did I care! All I was interested in was my book, not what they would say.... (Ayuso Pérez 2007)

Interestingly, one of the subjects which divided the critics in relation to Matute’s work focused on her children’s tales. Matute has published twenty-seven collections of children’s stories, which have achieved reputable literary awards such as the Nadal, Planeta, Fastenrath, Lazarillo, and Cervantes prizes. Furthermore, as Etxebarria reminds us in ‘Con nuestra propia voz: a favor de la literatura de mujeres’ [With Our Own Voice. In Favour of Women’s Literature], it was Matute’s tales that brought her to the attention of both students and a wider Spanish readership:

I was forced to read the works of Camilo José Cela and Rafael Sánchez Ferlosio when I was in primary school. Rosa Chacel was not even mentioned in my textbooks. Ana María Matute was there, but only mentioned as an author of stories ‘for children’. I only found out she had written novels when I was twenty. (Etxebarria 2000b: 110)

Etxebarria includes this information as part as her denunciation of the fact that, until recently, most Spanish female writers did not appear on school and university syllabuses. Even when, exceptionally, as in the case of Matute, her writings were included, they were sidelined to a minor literary genre, as Matute has noted herself with some disapproval on a number of occasions: ‘In my time, right at the beginning, not now, some important writers would say to me: “Why do you do this, if it’s a minor genre?”’ (quoted in Ayuso Pérez 2007). Redondo Goicoechea points out that these

tales were unanimously commended by critics, but she does question the reason for this: 'A very different attitude was adopted by critics with regards to her children's books, which they praised from the beginning, perhaps because, being a minor genre, they wouldn't require stylistic perfection in line with the canons or... was it because a minor genre was the right place for a woman?' (2009: 143).

'Women's writing'?

Matute does not believe a distinction should be made between male and female writing; only between good or bad literature. She does not publicly explore (insofar as I have been able to discover) the complex issue of who is to rule on the 'good' and the 'bad', what criteria might be used, or what role is played in our interpretation of these qualities by historical and/or political circumstance. She thus avoids examining in depth the reasons behind the fact that certain authors and national literatures gain preference during a particular historical period, while some long-acclaimed writers are forgotten as others, such as herself, take their place. Matute is nonetheless aware, based on some of the comments cited above vis-à-vis the reception of her own work, that the canonization of literature cannot simply be reduced to the existence of 'good' and 'bad' texts: it is a selective procedure, symptomatic of, and subject to, particular historical, cultural, and ideological, not to mention financial, criteria. Matute began her literary career in the post-Civil War period, when questions such as these took second place to the questions of aesthetics and the politics of the Franco regime. Carmen Martín Gaité explains:

When the Spanish Civil War was over [...] what seemed to keep the Spanish government most concerned was to artificially uphold a moral of victory, to spread the enthusiasm [...] And this nuisance continued until well into the 1950s [...] This cover-up of reality contributed to the publishing of exotic novels, located in distant settings and places, that seemed to be wrapped by a blur, where events bore no relation whatsoever to what we saw around us [...] It goes without saying that works from authors of the Generation of '98 were rarely republished. (1994: 46–8)

Matute's reception has changed over time from that of a writer of marginal genres to a member of the Academy, and she now works in a field that is recognized as intrinsically linked to the demands of the market.

Her rejection of the term 'women's writing' and her response to writing by women reflect own historical context. This predates debate on the extent to which the terms 'feminine' and 'masculine' can be interpreted as social constructs. If we assume that the term *literatura femenina* [women's writing] refers both to 'female' (written by a women) and 'feminine' (giving precedence to domesticity and nurturing) literature, we find that under the dictatorship and coinciding with the publication of many of Matute's novels, *literatura femenina* connoted a prescriptive form of literature that might be written by male or female authors, but was aimed exclusively at reflecting the role of women promoted by the ideology of the regime. Thus, the genre 'women's writing' would include moral treatises such as *El libro de las margaritas* (a manual written for girls seven to ten who belonged to the *Sección Femenina*), popular magazines, such as *Medina* and *Teresa* (associated with the *Sección Femenina*), and numerous examples of the *novela rosa* [romantic novels] such as María Romero Jusén's *Media boda y un marido* [A Half Wedding and a Husband] (1945), Enrique Martínez Fariñas' *Razas opuestas* [Opposing Races] (1959), or Manuel Prados y López's *Luz de mujer* [A Woman's Light] (1950), from which the following, illustrative extract is taken:

I knew that María Victoria would trust Fernando. I admired the mettle of that heroic, cautious, extremely loyal woman enlightened by her hope. I suspected Fernando did not notice any of this, and he didn't even remember his deep commitment. And, ultimately, I would marvel at how such violent, unstable and equivocal situations would last for so long. Neither did María Victoria claim her right, because she undoubtedly expected love to be repaired, as something that would come sooner or later, nor did he give any importance to his past, as if everything previous to his military life had died in Africa...

When Fernando noticed his wife's humility, he gloated in his infidelities, which he previously found so pleasant, and he tore down the veil of shame that unfaithful men normally use to cover their misdemeanors. Far from taking it as a reprimand, his wife's softness would encourage him to smile and to forgive himself for his own flings, relieving him from the violence of pretense and white lies. (Prados y López 1950: 9)

As this text by a male author illustrates, literature associated with 'women's writing' is not exclusively produced by women writers, and it is not difficult to understand Matute's reluctance to consider the question, nor to understand her point that we should prioritize questions of aesthetics (of 'good' and 'bad' literature) over gender. Women writers of her generation have been understandably reluctant to have their works catalogued in the sub-genre of 'women's writing', as well as being highly conscious of the negative connotations of the association with the *novela rosa* and the conservative moral agenda of the regime (reproduced in the publications of the *Sección Femenina*).

Contemporary debates on 'women's writing' encompass far wider parameters: from discussions of the sex of the writer, to the acceptance or rejection of a particular hegemonic social order, and identification with, or isolation from gender role models. 'Women's writing' remains a complex term. Some would argue for only including literature with a feminist agenda in this category, while others would include any text that focuses on (biological and/or situational) female experience. Some would argue that the term should only be used for fiction written by women, while theorists such as Kristeva would interpret this as overly reductive. Matute's work clearly subverts traditional female roles (she was, as discussed previously, accused of attacking the institution of the family in her early fiction). Her work could, therefore, be easily accommodated under any of these interpretations of 'women's writing'. However, it is also understandable that she would resist identification with a label that is at once so porous and, for her generation in particular, so fraught with the conservative ideology of the regime.

The answer Matute provides to a question about her experience as a member of the Academy illustrates her position quite clearly: 'Very good. I have not found anything strange. Anyway, I am sure there will be more admissions of women' (Cavallé 2007). This response is straightforwardly positive, but it contains a certain element of disavowal. Although Matute does not regard her situation as odd, she is (as a member of a tiny minority) in an odd situation. She was correct in her prediction, as eight more women have joined the Academy since her arrival in 1998. This is the kind of 'no-nonsense' approach that has served her well in a situation that is

both *nada extraño* and absolutely *rara* (to go back to the word she uses to describe herself, as a child and as a woman writer). Her attitude is typical of a successful woman educated during this era of strict (and strictly gendered) social, political, religious and cultural control, but what is interesting, as explored in the next section on Montero, is how this deeply rooted disdain for the ‘feminine’ prevails.

Montero on ‘Women’s Writing’

In her article ‘Tropical como en el trópico: Rosa Montero y el “Boom” femenino hispánico de los ochenta’ [Tropical as in the Tropics: Rosa Montero and the ‘Boom’ in Female Hispanic Writers in the 1980s], Susana Reisz notes that features shared by the Spanish-speaking women writers who became well known in the 1980s and make up the ‘Boom’ include: previous work in journalism, unusual success with their first novel, and popular recognition, both of their work and their public personality (1995: 192). Among them are Spanish and Latin American authors such as Montero, Isabel Allende, Laura Esquivel, and Ángeles Mastretta.

She also notes that their writing attracted the rather lukewarm praise illustrated in the following review of Montero’s *Amado amo* [Beloved Master] (1988): ‘There are no displays or epiphanies in *Amado amo* that could ambush us in a so-called literary wonder. Just as the old *cliché* says: it can easily be read, causing the occasional gentle smile’ (*Antena Semanal* 1988: 26). Despite this, these women did achieve popular success with their first novels and, over the years, critical reception warmed to the more challenging and innovative aspects of their work. An example of this tendency was a review of Montero’s *Lágrimas en la lluvia* [Tears in Rain] (2011), which was intended for a similar readership to that targeted by the negative comment cited in the text above:

The plot is correctly driven, although it might be too simple, but what really captures you is the way Husky faces her solitude, the reality of knowing that her childhood

memories, that her mother and father are an artificial memory inserted in her head, and how the certainty of death prevents her from enjoying life with the happy unawareness of human beings. This is an apparently light novel but it has very solid and intense moments. Bruna Husky becomes a character with an overwhelming physical strength but a vast internal fragility full of contradiction [...]. Husky becomes one of those beings who is part of the gallery of extraordinary beings whom one is lucky to have met, be they real, fictional or technohuman. One initially wonders if it's a realist or science fiction novel, but in the end you realize that it actually belongs to the more important narrative genre of emotionally moving novels. (Iturbe 2011b)

This shift is not entirely unexpected. As shown in the previous section on Matute, critics are often cautious in their assessment of 'new' art forms, and the publication of Spanish-language literature on this scale by women could indeed have been considered a 'new' art form.

Although their critical reception has improved, these writers are still frequently asked for their views on 'women's writing'. Here Rosa Montero's views on the topic will be examined. The main sources for this account include comments published in interviews Montero has given over the years, her own summary of this issue in *La loca de la casa* (2003), and the publication of *El amor de mi vida* [The Love of My Life] (2011), a collection of critical essays on literature that were originally published in *El País* between 1998 and 2010.

To date, few academic studies have addressed Montero's opinion of the 'women's writing' label, and none appears to have focused on the contradictory aspects of this opinion that support Henseler's view of the label as 'double-edged' (2003a). Elena Gascón Vera's pioneering essay, 'Rosa Montero ante la escritura femenina' [Rosa Montero on women's writing] (1987), aims to establish whether *Crónica del desamor* (1979), *La función Delta* [The Delta Function] (1981), and *Te trataré como a una reina* [I'll Treat You Like a Queen] (1983) could be said to conform to a Cixousian notion of 'écriture féminine'. Kristin A. Kiely's thesis 'Female subjective strategies in post-Franco Spain as presented by Rosa Montero and Lucía Etxebarria' (2008), puts the question of literary merit to one side, to focus on a list of topics she considers a women writer should address, an approach that, perhaps unfortunately, recurs in numerous interviews in which Montero has been questioned on the existence of 'women's writing' (see, for example, *El Tiempo.com* 2011; and Gómez

2003). My own theoretically informed approach will differ from these in the sense that instead of analysing Montero's texts and its protagonists for traces of a feminist ideology, I shall focus Montero's often contradictory comments on the notion of 'women's writing'.

The following pages examine what might be considered a discrepancy between Montero's description of herself as a feminist and her rejection of the notion of gender difference in writing. This discrepancy is highlighted by the separation she establishes between the need to promote feminist ideas and her objection to feminist literature. Her most frequently expressed ideas, and those on which her views are most subject to change, can be divided into four distinct areas: questions of gender difference; critical treatment of work by women authors; the difference between feminist and female writers; and the need for women writers to contribute to the fictional depiction of a world that is populated by men and women.

Over the years, Montero has been unequivocal in her rejection of the 'women's writing' label. In a piece originally published in *El País Semanal* (2 May 1999),¹ she stated:

I have absolute certainty that there is no such thing as female literature. That is, women do not write in a different way to men, or at least our difference is not objectifiable. Every writer writes from what they are: their dreams, their language, their social class, their readings, their life experiences, and, of course, their sexual gender too. That is, men write from the fact of being men, and women write from the fact of being women. But sexual gender is only one of the many ingredients in a writer's perspective, like, for instance, the fact of having been born in a big city or in the countryside. (2011: 217)

Clearly, Montero regards gender as just one of many components that contribute to the way a writer sees and describes the world; a component that is no more significant than age, social status, religion, cultural context, or sexual orientation. A number of her contemporaries share this opinion: Carmen Posadas, for instance, points out that 'In my view, everything that surrounds us determines how we write' (*Diario de Navarra* 2008). Montero is quite firm in her affirmation above that 'our difference is not

1 See also Escribano (2000) and Rabí do Carmo (2003).

objectifiable'. However, this interesting and, no doubt, factually correct point of view, is one that she regularly contradicts in her own writing on literature in general, and on 'women's literature' in particular.

'Women's writing': Writing for women, or writing by women?

In the following extract from *El amor de mi vida*, in a piece that originally appeared in *El País Semanal* in May 2000, Montero discusses *Las mil y una noches* [A Thousand and One Nights], arguing for the possibility of female authorship:

In Vernet's view, the non-sexist parts of *One Thousand and One Nights* come from stories that originated in Indochina, where there was a strong matriarchal culture. I believe many of the tales in *One Thousand and One Nights* were written by women. The new feminist theory of literature holds the view that probably a great part of the anonymous texts in the history of literature are the works of women whose authorship was not recognized on the grounds of them being women. This sounds quite reasonable and possible, even more so in the case of *One Thousand and One Nights*, which is a collection of tales that were initially *oral storytelling, modest narrations, private, imbued with an aroma of domesticity and a liking for fantasy* that is so often disdainfully associated with women. (2011: 261, my emphasis)

Despite her belief that the difference between writing by women and men is not 'objectivable', Montero speculates here on what could be considered gender-specific grounds (that these tales are from an oral tradition, that they are modest intimate narratives and that they are impregnated with the 'aroma' of domesticity and of taste for the fantastic). This association of female authorship with such a gender-specific set of attributes sits uncomfortably with her rejection of 'women's writing'. These attributes (oral, modest, intimate, domestic, and fantastic) are, after all, the attributes highlighted both by those who are critical of 'women's writing' and by its advocates. This group includes both critics aligned with what is often reductively referred to as the 'Anglo-American' tradition of feminist criticism and fellow Spanish writers Laura Freixas (Marqués 2012), the novelist, Etxebarria, and critics such as Adelaida Martínez (1999) and Luiza Lobo (2000).

In *La loca de la casa* (2003), Montero notes that she has been questioned about the existence, or not, of ‘women’s literature’ in interviews and at literary discussions and events. As elsewhere (and as noted above), Montero’s view is that, when it comes to literature written by women, gender is just one of many different influences acting upon the writer:

The sex is only one of the many ingredients in a male or female writer’s view. A writer is who he or she is and books are what they are depending on their language, their culture, their age, their readings, their social class, the illnesses they’ve suffered or not suffered, and also on their sex too, on the fact of being a man or a woman, etc. As you can see, it’s impossible to label a type of literature only because it’s been made by a woman or a man. (2003: 173)

Her interview in *El camino de las palabras* [The Path of Words] (reprinted in *La loca de la casa*) also makes it clear that she continues to find the topic, and the continued segregation of women writers irritating:

Women are still discussed in symposia as a different chapter, a short paragraph annexed to the main conference (‘And, with regards to women’s literature...’); we are barely featured in anthologies, in brainy academic articles, in end-of-year or end-of-decade or end-of-century summaries that are released on the media every once in a while. We are not sufficiently represented in academia, in encyclopaedias, and we are not normally asked to carry out serious presentations in international conferences. Critics are often tremendously paternalistic and show a worrying tendency to mix up the life of a female writer with her work (something that never happens to their male counterparts), to identify an indulgent, actionless literature in every novel written by a woman (even if it’s the most exciting thriller) and, of course [...] to think that all that a woman writes about is exclusively related to women and is, therefore, second-class human and literary material. (2003: 173)

Here, Montero confirms a view expressed by other women writers about the way their work is received by a critical establishment traditionally dominated by men. As discussed in Chapter 1, like Montero, women writers of different generations such as Elena Santiago (born in 1941) and Paula Izquierdo (born in 1961) highlight the fact that most male critics and editors are still influenced by this tradition – and the two former even suggest that the habit of distinguishing between male and female literature may, by now, simply be the result of cynical marketing strategies (Henseler 2003a: 42, 122).

Montero's belief that female writers do not receive the same treatment as male writers (and she would extend this view to the response of critics, event planners, academics and journalists) is, therefore, a belief shared with women both a generation older and a generation younger than her. Montero also accepts evidence, albeit anecdotal, that there is a marked difference between the attitude of men and women towards their own writing:

I have a few male writer friends who think about posterity. They are intelligent, charming, and not even excessively narcissistic guys, but they do suffer from the small vanity of believing that their work will live on, and many of them even try to get ready for this, organizing their manuscripts and filing their notes. It is a childish ambition that, oddly enough, I have only encountered in men [...]. It might be that we women are genetically more protected from the painful distress of death because of our ability to give birth and to perpetuate ourselves. ([2008] 2011: 175)

This comment, originally published in *Babelia* on 27 September 2008, is a slight twist on the assumption, more commonly expressed by male writers, that the publication of a book is in some way equivalent to giving birth (in other words, that the literary work, forms the metaphorical function of 'reproducing' oneself for posterity). However, it is striking to see a woman who has repeatedly rejected the notion of gender difference in writing so comfortable with the notion of biological difference in attitudes towards writing. I highlight this here to indicate that Montero's rejection of the 'women's writing' label does not, paradoxically, prevent her from sharing many of the same views of those who champion the label, nor of those who dismiss women's writing, precisely because it is different from that of men.

One reason for Montero's aversion to the label is that she clearly senses that a paternalistic critical tradition associates 'women's writing' with literature that has female protagonists, that deals with 'women's issues' and that is aimed at a female readership:

Official criticism, official culture, academics, universities, national awards, and the whole circuit of literary mandarins are still granting preeminence to men. And then there's the unconscious sexism of the whole society; prejudices make everybody (female readers included) think that, when a woman writes a novel with a female

protagonist, she is writing about women. I don't have a particular interest in writing about women; I write about humankind, but fifty-one per cent of that is made up of women. (Cited in Santoro 2011)

And she qualifies this as follows:

When a woman writes a novel with a female protagonist, everybody thinks she is talking about women; meanwhile, when a man writes a novel with a male protagonist, everybody thinks he is writing about humankind. (2003: 170)

This statement, made at an international 'women's literature' symposium at the University of Lima in 1999, is perhaps the most important of all the declarations Montero has made on the topic. She has consistently asserted that the preponderance of women characters in her works, far from being a direct consequence of her interest in targeting women *readers*, is simply a natural consequence of both her identity as a woman *writer* and of the fact that the majority of the world's citizens are women:

I do not have any interest whatsoever in writing about women. I want to write about humankind, but it just so happens that fifty-one per cent of humankind is female; and since I belong to this group, most of my absolute protagonists are women, just like male novelists normally use male main characters. (2003: 170)

In *Women in the Workplace: Four Spanish Novels by Women 1979–1998*, Catherine Bourland Ross remarks upon the rapid increase in Spanish women in the workplace in the past century (2005: 1). In 1930, only nine per cent of the Spanish female population worked (a low percentage due to the worldwide depression); in 1982, thirty per cent of Spanish women worked, and this grew to over thirty-six per cent by 1992 (Garrido (ed.), et al. 1997: 504–56). Extending this phenomenon to the literary field, Montero explains that the emergence of a considerable number of women writers after the fall of the Franco regime is a natural consequence of the normalization and subsequent enrichment of Spanish narrative (Rabí do Carmo 2003). Nowadays, literary series and anthologies dedicated to women writers, such as *Narradoras españolas de la transición política* [Spanish Women Narrative Writers During the Transition] (Nieva de la Paz 2004b), and *Novelas breves de escritoras españolas* [Short Novels

by Spanish Women Writers] (Ena Bordonada 1996), are more common. Similarly, there has been an increase in the number of literary prizes dedicated to women writers such as the Premio literario Mujeres del mundo rural y pesquero [Women in Rural Development and Fisheries World Literary Award], organized by the Ministerio del Medio Ambiente y Medio Rural y Marino [Ministry of Environment, Rural and Marine Affairs], or the Concurso Literario de Narrativa para Mujeres [Women's Literary Contest], organized by the Generalitat Valenciana. However, Montero resists the notion of separating Spanish women writers, and affirms that she does not feel closer to any given female than to any given male writer:

I probably have much more in common with a Spanish male author who is my age and who was born in a big city rather than with a black eighty-year-old South African female writer who lived under apartheid. Because the things that distinguish us outnumber the things that unite us. (2003: 171)

'Ese feo vicio': Female writer/female protagonist?

Montero may resist being associated with a label ('women's writing') that, for her, has negative connotations, but she is also conscious that 'women's writing' may be received differently: not only because the female protagonist does not seem to enjoy the same connotations of universal humanist appeal as the male protagonist, but because she has observed that there is a tendency to over-identify the female author with her female characters. In a comment originally published in *Babelia* on 10 October 2010, she states:

What I mean is that, when Cercas or Marías, for instance, write novels that are apparently very close to their own lives (they both visit the biographical border quite often), everybody talks about them with profound literary respect; meanwhile, some are already saying about Lindo's *Lo que me queda por vivir* that it is a book of memories, as if that would diminish its quality. I suppose it is a gender prejudice: in male novelists, the personal side tends to be seen as fiction; meanwhile, in female novelists, even the most evident fiction tends to be considered as personal. (2011: 251)

In the case of Stella Rimington's *At Risk*, Montero admitted in *Babelia* on 28 March 2009 that she could not avoid speculating on links between the protagonist and the writer:

They say writers can be divided into those whose life is more interesting than their works and those whose texts are more interesting than their lives. The main character of this novel is the thirty-something-year-old agent Liz Carlyle, on whom readers can't help practising the bad habit of looking for traces of the author when reading. (2011: 53)

Rimington was, of course, Director General of Britain's MI5 from 1992 until 1996, and Montero is not alone in indulging in speculation about how closely Rimington's own experiences reflect those of her protagonists. What is interesting about Rimington here is that she was the head of a notoriously secretive organization. Most readers, regardless of sex, would sympathize with Montero's interest in the connection between writer and protagonist in Rimington's case, but it raises interesting questions about what it is that provokes this interest and why. Could it be that, at least in part, the tendency (that Montero is not alone in noticing) to over-identify the female writer with the female protagonists might stem from a similar sense of exclusion from the mystery (mysterious, that is, for a paternalistic literary critical tradition) that has traditionally surrounded women's lives?

Of the forty-five literary works Montero discusses in *El amor de mi vida*, she only practises what she refers to as 'this ugly vice' with reference to women authors who, like Stella Rimington and Fred Vargas, happen to have led very unusual lives (Fred Vargas is the pseudonym used by Frédérique Audoin-Rouzeau, a historian, archaeologist and crime fiction writer), and it might be interesting, although beyond the scope of the present study to examine more closely the extent to which we all (whether as writers of fiction or criticism) resort to stereotyping in precisely those situations in which we are least familiar with our subject. It is certainly true that Montero's response to Fred Vargas, first published in *Babelia* on 31 May 2008, comes very close to mimicking exactly the kind of response she deplores in the male critic: 'She, Fred [Vargas] must be like this, like her books; this weird, this obsessed, sometimes pedantic, largely inconsistent and childish in her approach, crazy and definitely extravagant' (2011: 80).

'Feminist' Literature/Feminist Academia

It was above noted that, over the years, the public perception of Montero as a feminist (in response to her own explicit and controversial articulation of feminist concerns in her work) has been replaced by the perception of her as a committed, progressive journalist. Montero herself is adamant that she is not necessarily in favour of feminist literature *per se*, and she shares this view with many of her peers, such as Carme Riera (born 1948), who made the comment, 'I consider myself a feminist woman, but not a feminist writer, because while I do not write feminist pamphlets, I am committed to women's fight' (Hernando 2012). Unlike Matute, Montero is a self-declared feminist:

I consider myself a feminist, although I prefer the word anti-sexist, which seems less ambiguous to me. And I believe that being feminist or anti-sexist at the beginning of the twenty-first century is self-evident, that all men and women should be, just as we should be antiracist. (In *El Mundo* 2006)

On the other hand, despite the ongoing popularity of *Crónica del desamor*, she claims not to approve of using fiction for feminist and/or political purposes:

However, the fact that you consider yourself a feminist does not mean that your novels are. I despise utilitarian and militant fiction, feminist, environmentalist, pacifist or any other '-ist' novel that you can think about; because writing to spread a message betrays the fundamental purpose of fiction, the essential meaning: the search for meaning. Thus, one writes to learn, to know; and one cannot exactly start this journey of knowledge carrying the answers with one's self. (Montero 2003: 172)

In a piece for *El País Semanal* (4 April 1999) Montero clearly, and rightly, differentiates between bad writing that is ideologically motivated and good writing that illustrates the repression and entrapment of nineteenth-century women:

A formidable trio of ladies stands out in the history of literature; three curious, intense and tragic women who illustrate, perhaps better than any other fictional character of the time, what the nineteenth century was. I am talking about Madame Bovary (Flaubert, 1857), Anna Karénina (Tolstói, 1875-7), and Ana Ozores, 'la Regenta'

(Leopoldo Alas, 'Clarín', 1884–5); all of them beautiful and rich, all of them married and adulterous; all of them prisoners of a destiny as narrow as a grave [...] It is hardly surprising that three authors coming from such different worlds happened to have such similar arguments. *The issue was there*, monumental, beating under the surface of things. ([1999] 2011: 91, my emphasis)

She outlines what she meant more precisely in the following comment (in *Babelia*, 30 May 2009) about *The Easter Parade* and *Revolutionary Road*, by Richard Yates:

They are feminist books in the best and deepest sense of the word, because *they are not voluntarist texts and they do not depict perfect and remarkable women*; on the contrary, they portray with startling eloquence the unnecessarily cruel destiny of human beings trapped in the cobweb of prejudice. ([2009] 2011: 152–3, my emphasis)

What emerges most clearly from this is the problem with the word 'feminist'. Montero uses it both pejoratively to refer to 'bad', politicized literature and as a positive quality of 'good' literature that happens to reveal problems faced by (nineteenth-century) women. Of course, one does not have to be a feminist or a woman to write literature that illuminates the subordinate position of women. In a piece published in *El País Semanal* on 4 April 1999, she observes, 'Their sensitivity to notice this tragedy does not necessarily imply a feminist concern in the authors: all they needed was enough talent, and they [Flaubert, Tolstoy, and 'Clarín'] are great writers' ([1999] 2011: 93).

Montero's criticism of the use of literature for functional, political ends is not limited to fiction, but extends to the political intention of feminist literary criticism. While she welcomes the growing participation of female literary critics, she cautions against the kind of separatism that risks reinforcing traditional prejudice against women writers:

There are more female scholars, critics and university professors every day, and this is changing the situation; but some of these professionals insist on writing reviews, anthologies and literary studies which are outrageously feminist, that is, they are ideologised to the point of dogmatism, and they are counterproductive like sexist prejudice. Although they come from the opposite corner they also think that women only write about women. (2003: 174)

Looking again at Montero's response to Flaubert, Tolstoy, and 'Clarín' (particularly the words *el tema estaba ahí, no son textos voluntaristas ni dibujan heroínas perfectas y admirables* [the topic was just there; these are not voluntarist texts, nor do they portray perfect, remarkable heroines]), her attitude toward the question of 'women writers' becomes clear. First, although these male writers come from different countries, *el tema estaba ahí*, for Montero, the fact of female repression is a universal theme that can, and should, be approached by writers, regardless of sex and/or ideological point of view. However, Montero's remark that because Flaubert, Tolstoy, and 'Clarín' were not women or feminists their approach did not tackle the tragedy of female oppression as a feminist cause raises (unanswerable) questions as to whether she would have interpreted their work as feminist had they happened to have been born female.

Bringing a female perspective to bear on 'what surrounds us'

I want to return now to Carmen Posadas' comment, cited earlier, for the way it echoed Montero's own view that gender is simply another aspect of 'everything that surrounds us, which conditions us when writing'.² In an interview published in *El camino de las palabras*, Montero asserts that there is one thing that passionate readers and writers have in common; they both experience a kind of fissure between their own lives and reality. She suggests that the tragedy for the writer of fiction is that their eagerness for limitless adventures and experiences is frustrated by the fact that they must, after all, live a finite, limited life. For Montero, passionate readers and novelists may be more aware of their inner contradictions, and more conscious of the limitations of time and geography that fiction works to overcome. In other words, for Montero, what links both the reader and writer of fiction is the view that literature is a powerful vehicle through which our experience of life can be broadened. She explains:

2 See page 140.

The great human tragedy is to have been born possessed by a will to live and to be condemned to an ephemeral existence [...] We need to expand our living into other existences in order to compensate for the finiteness. And there is no virtual life more powerful and more hypnotizing than the one offered by literature. (2011: 14)

This quotation sums up Montero's view that fiction is a tool for our appreciation of what 'surrounds us'. Whereas for writers like Etxebarria, as shall be explored in due course, the concept of gender identification is central to their understanding and appreciation of literature, for Montero, the driving force behind our enjoyment of fiction, rather than the need for recognition, is the almost voyeuristic pleasure of looking at the world and reinterpreting it in new ways. In a comment originally published in *Babelia* (29 March 2008), she claims: 'When you are reading a novel you sneak into the characters, that is, you enter into other people's lives, which is one of the greatest journeys one can set out on' (2011: 75). Interestingly, this is the approach that links Montero, despite her resistance, most closely to advocates of the 'women's writing' label.

In order to elaborate, it should first be reiterated that, in *La loca de la casa*, Montero notes that, although literary history has been predominantly written by men and the overwhelming majority of its protagonists are male, this literature is not routinely described as 'masculinist' – in fact, it is never described as masculinist, except by feminists who wish to draw attention to this fact. She also notes that, over the years, this tradition has constructed a number of female literary models that may be the product of unconscious fantasy: 'woman as danger (the female vampire who sucks the energy and life out of a man), the earth-witch-mother woman, the little-girl-beautiful-dumb woman such as Marilyn' (2003: 176).

Unusually, while these literary stereotypes tend to be challenged by younger women writers such as Lucía Etxebarria (to be discussed in the next section), Montero suggests that rather than regarding them as damaging portrayals of femininity, they simply respond to the insight they give into male fantasy, or a particularly masculine representation of the female 'other', and, as such, should not be dismissed, as they help to enrich our (universal) understanding of the way human beings function.

For Montero, the inclusion in literature of the world that surrounds us, an aspect she describes as a motivating force for both readers and writers

of fiction, can only be considered complete when it encompasses fiction by both men and women, and, perhaps even more interestingly, at such time when the models of male characterization that women contribute to the field have been assimilated by the male reader:

As we female novelists continue to finish off that description of a world which previously existed only inside of us, we will turn it into everyone's heritage; and men [...] will try to adapt to our male prototypes, just like women try to resemble the female prototypes that men have invented. (2003: 178)

On this point, Montero concurs with writers like Marta Sanz, who consider that 'women's writing' helps to redefine our prejudices about what it is to be 'human':

We all read, and this is a fact, from our own prejudices and nobody can make any interpretations from nothingness; nevertheless, the great potential of good literature is based, to a great extent, on its ability to redefine these prejudices, to shape them into different forms and keep reading from them, assimilating readings and ultimately building our understanding and sensitivity. (Sanz in Henseler 2003b: 164)

It is worth noting that, of the forty-five novels Montero discusses in *El amor de mi vida*, many are praised for their style, but only three are praised for particular innovation of theme and character. These three are novels written by women: Mary Renault's *Funeral Games* (1981), Colette's *Chéri* (1920), and Rimington's *At Risk* (published in Spanish as *La invisible* [The Invisible Woman], 2004).

Mary Renault (1904–83) was a British writer best known for her historical novels set in ancient Greece. She was also a controversial figure: educated at Oxford and trained as a nurse, she moved from Britain to South Africa with her partner, Julie Mullard. She was against apartheid but rejected association with the developing gay pride movement and always resisted being labelled a 'gay' writer. *Funeral Games* deals with the death of Alexander the Great and the gradual disintegration of his empire. Two of the novel's elements are commended by Montero; the creation of female character Eurydice, the charismatic, ambitious and courageous granddaughter of two kings of Macedon who sought to become queen in her own right; and the inclusion of menstruation in this war-set, male-dominated plot:

When Eurydice is next speaking on the platform, she notices a moisture, a cramp, a spasm: her period is coming early. She cannot stand as queen (or, if anything, as king) stained with that ignominious blood that sends her back to her womanhood. Eurydice is an Illyrian princess; she was engaged to the dumb brother of Alexander the Great. She was educated like a man, she is the queen and wants to exercise her power, something Macedonians had never seen. (Montero 2011: 217)

Colette's *Chéri* narrates the end of a six-year affair between Léa, a retired courtesan, and her *chéri*, a pampered and much younger man. The novel has been noted generally for its reversal of gender stereotypes,³ as it is Chéri who wears silk pyjamas and Léa's pearls, and who is the object of the gaze and of desire. Montero applauds this reversal:

With precise prose and a ruthless eye, Colette was able to disembowel human feelings as if she were dissecting a tadpole; furthermore, she was the first woman to talk about love in such a way. Consequently, she was the first woman who managed to celebrate man as an object. (2011: 171)

Finally, in *Babelia* on 28 March 2009, Montero extols the way that Stella Rimington brings her knowledge of spy operations to the thriller genre, in *At Risk*. With regard to Rimington, her powerful heroine is not so unusual, but Montero's praise reflects the way that female heroines of this kind came late to Spanish publishing and tend to fall in and out of favour more quickly than similar novels with male leads. The novel's protagonist is Liz Carlyle, an MI5 intelligence officer in her thirties who receives information that a terrorist threat is looming. As well as dealing with the impending crisis, Liz also has to put up with her MI6 partner's patronizing and sexist attitude. Montero was particularly impressed by the fact that, with Liz, Rimington broke with the literary genre's traditional female roles:

Liz is fascinating and offers a powerful alternative to the male agents provided by spy fiction, and let alone to the stereotyped women these novels usually feature. Liz

- 3 The theme of a passionate relationship between an older woman and younger man (in the novel Léa is twenty-four years older than 'Chéri') is more topical today, and still controversial, and a film version of this novel was released as recently as 2009, directed by Stephen Frears and starring Michelle Pfeiffer.

is analytical, earnest, intelligent, and, at the same time, she complains that the rain is ruining her beautiful shoes. (2011: 53)

All these elements – the character that transcends the traditional literary model of the beautiful, passive princess in Ancient Greece, the explicit treatment of the natural phenomenon of menstruation, the still (over almost a century later) relatively new literary treatment of the male object of desire in the female gaze, and the introduction to the spy genre of a non-stereotypical female spy – are described by Montero as evidence that women writers are beginning to contribute new models to a collective literary imaginary that is usually defined as universal, but that has been, in practice, overwhelmingly male:

As women massively join the world of creative writing, we all contribute with new symbols to the collective imagery. Symbols springing from female intimacy, that, once released from the shadows by women, may be used by everybody [...] What I mean is that, if men menstruated, universal literature would be filled with blood metaphors. This recreation work is what the female writers of this century are carrying out: like Renault and her wretched Eurydice. (2011: 218)

Montero's point about blood imagery is particularly pertinent to any discussion of the role of the (biological) body and gender in writing and its reception, as is her point that the introduction of new themes to the collective literary imaginary, and growing number of female authors publishing fiction, should be greeted with enthusiasm by male and female readers alike.

Clearly, when we look back at the date of Colette's still-famous *Chéri* (1920), the introduction of new themes is not a recent phenomenon; however what distinguishes the late twentieth and early twenty-first-century writers is the sheer number of women authors entering the contemporary literary marketplace.⁴ In her appreciation of their contribution to litera-

4 To cite just two examples of other pioneering women writers, the specialist in literature by women, Biruté Ciplijauskaitė, cites the twentieth-century writer Oriana Fallaci's introduction of a series of motherhood-related topics that had been seldom treated in literature in *Lettera a un bambino mai nato* [Letter to a Child Never Born] (1975). These include 'the possible loss of professional skills; views on abortion; the will for independence as opposed to the social duty of giving a father to the child'. Similarly, to focus on a Spanish example, in *Flavio* (1861), the nineteenth-century

ture as a whole, Montero finds herself, perhaps unwillingly, sustaining one of the key tenets held by writers who, unlike Montero, do not reject the label 'women writer', because it allows for the specific consideration of literature written by women, for the way it introduces 'new' (in the sense that these are age-old, but generally female) characters and 'new' themes (that are also 'age-old' but not hitherto encountered in the literary arena).

Against 'women's writing'?

From the discussion above, it would seem that Montero's resistance to the label 'women's writing' is predicated on the mistaken prejudice that writing that comes under this label is either inherently political and separatist, or perceived to be only of interest to women. In Chapter 1, I noted that current trends in the literary market tend to divide the work of women writers not only between the commercially successful and critically lauded, but also between those that deal with 'universal' themes and those that pertain only to 'women'. Thus, while women writers enjoy higher visibility and marketability, their work is still often separated off into the category of 'women's writing', and considered distinct from literature that is 'universal' in its themes. Montero denounces the way that women writers are treated by the literary establishment. She deplores, especially, the fact that these works tend to be regarded as literature for a female readership concerned only with 'women's issues'. She challenges the notion of literature as a means to a political end, and separates her own feminist identification from any feminist intention in her fiction. This separation accounts for her at times irritated reaction to ongoing questioning in interviews about her thoughts on women writers. Montero's irritation reminds us that literature written by women assumes ascribed and gendered meanings as soon as it reaches the literary marketplace. My own reading of the apparent contradictions in her approach to 'women's writing' is that it is the result both of the prejudice

writer Rosalía de Castro 'posits the idea of a woman's right to an intellectual life by having Mara judged prideful for writing poetry, an activity unbecoming to decent women of the day' (Pérez and Ihrig (eds) 2002: 113).

that surrounds her (as a woman writer) and of her conviction that literature by women is essential to the completion of the literary description of a world that, until recently, has generally been 'written' by men.

Like other writers, including Almudena Grandes, Espido Freire, and Dulce Chacón, as seen in Chapter 2, Montero rejects the notion that gender difference can be ascribed to writing, and she actively supports the need to ascribe *universal* importance to the experience of literary protagonists regardless of their gender. Although she may reject the notion of 'women's writing', her opinions regarding the problems faced by women in the literary market closely coincide with those of Freixas (2000), who is an avid defender of 'women's writing'. In the opinion of both Montero and Freixas, the two most challenging problems women writers face are a persistent tendency to segregate writing by women from that of men and an equally persistent tendency to include negative allusions to the sex and gender in what purports to be literary criticism of their work.

Montero concurs with those writers who regard women as trapped in a 'double bind' (see Freixas 2000; Etxebarria 2000b; Sanz in Henseler 2003b) and who perceive the real problem as how to change the preferences and perceptions of 'lo que nos rodea' [what is around us]; in other words, how to change the gender prejudices of both female and male readers and writers. Although she may, with good reason reject the label 'women's writing', it is Montero's contention that as long as male readers continue to identify male issues as universal and women's as something 'other', women writers will have difficulty attaining parity of prestige:

And it's high time for male readers to identify with female protagonists, in the same way that we have for centuries identified with male protagonists, which used to be our only literary models. Indeed, that permeability, that flexibility of gaze, will turn us all into wiser, freer beings. (2003: 170)

This statement clarifies that, for Montero, the difference between 'literature' and 'women's writing' (and the source of her ambivalence) is not related to the sex or gender of the author. Instead, it is linked to factors such as the adoption of: a hegemonic or marginal position; a traditional or innovative point of view; domestic or public themes; an identification with, or subversion of, cultural roles and models. She appears to assume the

position noted by Jonathan Culler that, regardless of sex, the way in which the reader, reviewer, or critic approaches a text will determine whether the contents assimilated appear more masculine or feminine (1982: 43–60). As Patrizia Violi also indicates, ‘sexual difference constitutes a pivotal dimension of our experience and our lives, and there is not a single activity which is not – in some way or another – marked, signaled or affected by that difference’ (1991: 11). Both of these writers underline that fact that although gender may be understood as a textual preference, it is, in fact, constitutive of the relationship that all readers engage in with the male or female hegemonic cultural model (Arriaga Flórez et al. 2003: 4). In other words, while Montero has repeatedly asserted that, when it comes to literature, gender is only one of a series of influences acting upon the writer, she simultaneously acknowledges, in her own literary criticism, that it is an important one, deserving of more considered appreciation, if we are to assess with any accuracy the contribution a ‘female’ perspective has made to the arena of (so-called ‘universal’) literature, by re-addressing female literary stereotypes and by introducing hitherto marginalized experiences of life.

Etxebarria on ‘Women’s Writing’

Because this is precisely what Lucía Etxebarria is (like Grandes, Montero, Espido and many others): the clever and a little trampy girl in Catholic school, who writes novels and is on the telly, who is read in ecstasy by her schoolmates and former teachers; coming from a good family, well-educated, who, no matter how much doggy-style fornication she practices in her novels, how fascinated she is about ample bottoms, or how many swearwords she says without crossing herself afterwards, she will always be a prudish schoolgirl who just returned from a spiritual retreat. (Menéndez 2005: 182)

The link made, in this facetious review of *De todo lo visible y lo invisible*, between Montero and Etxebarria, helps to explain Montero’s resistance to the idea that writing by women should be considered collectively and/or separately from writing by men. Etxebarria, on the other hand is more likely to take this kind of indiscriminate prejudice as a reason to celebrate

women's writing. In her opinion, it is only by championing gender difference that this kind of chauvinism will gradually die out.

Etxebarria openly describes herself as a feminist. She has used the term in numerous interviews (for example Pita 2001; and *El Mundo* 2004b), and one of her expressed aims is to 'establish bridges between the academic world and popular culture; to create political and feminist consciousness and to promote activism through humour' (*El Mundo* 2004b). Feminism is a central topic in her non-fiction publications: *La Eva futura/La letra futura* [The Future Eve/Writing's Future] (2000), *En brazos de la mujer fétiche* [In the Arms of Lady Fetish] (2007), *Ya no sufro por amor* [I Don't Suffer For Love] (2005), and *El club de las malas madres* [The Bad Mothers' Club] (2009). Although the Spanish Constitution has stated its commitment to the expansion of women's rights and its support for full equality between the sexes, Etxebarria feels the passive roles – which she sees as socially rather than biologically determined – traditionally ascribed to women still block attempts to achieve full equality. In the prologue to her novel *Nosotras que no somos como las demás* (1999), she states:

We have not come to proclaim the battle of the sexes, but to open a debate about the need to rethink the validity of some obsolete roles about what our society considers to be masculine and feminine. Far from being a product of a natural trend, these roles are social constructions destined to strengthen the artificial separation between men and women, a distance created to maintain an unbalanced and unfair power structure that ultimately hurts both sexes. (1999: 10)

Etxebarria regards this tendency to mistake socially constructed roles for biologically determined ones as the key to the reception of writing by women. For Etxebarria, feminist discourse in the social arena must extend to the vindication of 'women's writing' in the literary arena. Therefore, her urge to redefine women's role in society is linked to her urge to redress the negative treatment of their writing by a male-dominated cultural establishment and literary industry, and she regards championing 'women's writing' as the only way to achieve this. Etxebarria maintains that women's lives are influenced by a series of socially condoned roles that mean that their experience of life will differ from that of their male contemporaries. Since men and women live and experience differently, their ways of writing will

also be different. Therefore, their writing is a prime site for redefining the social roles and ideological structures that keep these in place. As we shall see, the concept of identification, both biologically and socially imposed, is pivotal to Etxebarria's understanding of literature. According to Etxebarria, the need for recognition is the driving force behind the reader's enjoyment of fiction, and she believes that all readers 'approach books, films, poems or songs hoping to see our specific experiences reflected in them, and to find models from which to affirm our identity' (Etxebarria 2000b: 107).

Such an assumption brings certain challenges to mind, especially when one considers whether 'women's literature' may be different from 'men's literature'. Does Etxebarria mean that literature needs to provide realistic models for women? Should fiction by women always be ideological? What kind of role models has she herself provided? Would she reject a female point of view that reaffirms the status quo, championing only writing by women that appears to challenge that status quo? This section will seek answers to these questions by examining interviews with the author, academic essays on her work, and *La letra futura*, where she deals specifically with questions of literature, art, creation, and with the question of the existence of 'women's literature'. The section will be divided into three parts, each corresponding to one of the topics raised above. The first will introduce Etxebarria's approach to literature and consider the role of identification both for writer and reader. The second will focus on 'Con nuestra propia voz: a favor de la literatura de mujeres', the essay in which Etxebarria explains her reasons for championing the 'women's writing' label and the new themes and characters which appeared in her own fiction. The third will examine ideology, memory, and political commitment in Etxebarria's views on women's literature with an emphasis on the mother, tracing a distinction between feminist fiction and female fiction. Since Etxebarria is the only one of the writers I examine in this book who openly champions the concept of 'women's writing', and because she argues that one of its achievements is the exploration of a number of themes not explored in sufficient depth by canonical literature, as well as the creation of female characters who are protagonists, this section will also examine Etxebarria's protagonists in order to determine whether Etxebarria succeeds in making her own contribution to the reversal she attributes to 'women's writing'.

Fiction as mirror and vehicle for identification

Etxebarria's persona as a celebrity author, as we saw in Chapter 3, is a rather explosive cocktail constructed from her own controversial declarations, accusations of plagiarism, literary prizes, salacious gossip about her private life, striking outfits, and even nude pictures (Henseler 2006). It ought to be noted, however, that notwithstanding these inflammatory ingredients, the writer's feminist commitment has not wavered. In his article 'Compromiso feminista en la obra de Lucía Etxebarria' [Feminist Commitment in the Work of Lucía Etxebarria], Juan Senís Fernández argues that, behind the polemics surrounding Etxebarria's public persona, there lies a well-organized and solid platform, 'composed of editorial support, writing in various media, and awards' (Senís Fernández 2001), from which to deliver her own message. Senís Fernández's article analyses the way that Etxebarria's feminist ideas are inserted in her fiction, and essays.⁵ He divides Etxebarria's feminist ideas into two main areas. The first concerns itself with questions of identity, roles, and sexual differences, while the second tackles the question of social, economic, and professional inequality.

As we have seen with Montero, feminist writers do not always approve of 'women's literature'. Etxebarria, however, approaches this in *La letra futura* in an overtly accessible way. In this text, she provides a personal account of how writing has had a positive effect on her own complex mental and psychological history, and suggests that, as in her own case,⁶ many authors write in order to 'try to explain what is happening, to try to bring order to the mess inside ourselves, since it seems that if we can capture the scattered feelings on paper, then it will be easier to organize them'

5 Given that Senís' study dates from 2001, it only considers the essays *La Eva futura/La letra futura*, and the prologue to *Nosotras que no somos como las demás*.

6 When asked the same question, twentieth-century English novelist, playwright and journalist Graham Greene gave an answer that seems very in tune with Etxebarria's concept of writing as therapy: 'Writing is a form of therapy; sometimes I wonder how all those, who do not write, compose, or paint can manage to escape the madness, the melancholia, the panic fear, which is inherent in a human condition'.

(Etxebarria 2000: 21–2). According to this understanding of writing as therapy, the process is not complete without an interlocutor: the writer ‘writes for someone who does not exist except in their imagination, but the fact is that they are writing for someone’ (Etxebarria 2000: 21–2). Her strong desire to communicate with the reader outweighs the often exasperating imperative to put up with the demands of the publishing world. The following extract from *La letra futura* serves as an ironic reply to accusations that she, along with other writers, has sold out to the literary market (Henseler 2001):

When a person agrees to publish their writing it is because they intend to communicate, and therefore want to sell. [...] For this reason, any author, like it or not must acquiesce to the promotional demands and sign books even when they do not feel like it, respond politely to interview questions (which most of the time are both misleading and repeated ad infinitum by numerous and varied reporters), patiently pose for photo sessions and attend television programmes in which they, inevitably will make a fool of themselves. (Etxebarria 2000: 146–7)

This comment refers us back to the necessary platform mentioned earlier, and in her interview with the multilingual European current affairs magazine *Café Babel*, she confesses that her dream ‘is to end up being famous enough not to have to promote herself’ (*Café Babel* 2008).

But what exactly is Etxebarria’s aim? ‘Every day I am more convinced that when I write I am seeking identification, not acolytes’ (Etxebarria 2000: 152–3). Etxebarria sees identification as a two-way process of recognition that allows readers to find their own experience reflected in fiction, and that allows the author’s relevance to be identified by the reading public: it works, therefore as a form of reciprocal support. For Etxebarria, therefore, the reader is more important than the literary critic:

The response from readers interests me much more than literary criticism, because knowing that I am read showed me, after years of feeling *weird*, different, difficult and isolated, that there were more people like me. [...] And also, the support has been reciprocal, because, as I can gather from the letters that come to me, reading my books has provided many readers with the same feeling of *recognition*. (2000: 30–1, my emphasis)

A good example of this *reconocimiento* [identification] is the high volume of letters that the writer received following the publication of her novel *Beatriz y los cuerpos celestes* [Beatriz and the Celestial Bodies] (Etxebarria 2000: 38). The 'dozens, hundreds of letters' were mostly written by 'not necessarily homosexual' women readers, who admitted having undergone a similar experience to the non-consummated love between the two main characters, Beatriz and Mónica. She appreciates that what prompted these readers to identify with those experiences was precisely the fact that they had not previously found anything similar reflected in mainstream Spanish-language fiction:

I must thank the many women writers whom I know only through their books for allowing me [...] to feel dissatisfied with a role that had been assigned and [...] tell me that the world had more people like me, and had always had. (2000: 113)

Etxebarria asserts that 'creation is inherent to that which the male or female writer lives' (2000: 108), and this seems to tie in with the fact that she is widely considered a member of the so called 'Generation X'. As previously observed, this group is 'characterized by its age, its mostly young and educated reading audience, its textual appropriation of the mass media and popular culture, and its raw expression of contemporary life' (Henseler 2004: 692). The fact that 'Generation X' writers have grown up in a similar historical, political, and social context makes it natural for them, according to Etxebarria, to present a series of common themes in their works:

The vast majority of us include drugs and night scenes [...] Almost all of us place our novels in the urban environment [...] we include explicit sex in our works because we are the first generation that has grown up under the hangover of the great sexual revolution of the 1960s. (Etxebarria 2000: 87–8)

It is not surprising that this mostly young and educated readership feels attracted to the themes and scenarios described above, but what is perhaps striking is that, judging by the letters received by Etxebarria, what her readers find appealing in her novels differs according to whether they are male or female:

Women were grateful; men were in love, or just horny. Each of them had been attracted to a different aspect of the same work. Women were moved by my narration of childhood, men were aroused by my torrid passages. To my surprise, I have been defined by several magazines as an erotic writer. (Etxebarria 2000: 114)

Even if we overlook the label of ‘erotic writer’ that Etxebarria calls unfounded (*Qué Leer* 2010), and that appears to stem from some of her male readers, this difference in the response of her readers would appear to illustrate Etxebarria’s point that: ‘Men and women live experiences which are in part identical and in part different, and our vision of the world, unfortunately, is conditioned to be different depending on our gender’ (2000: 107). This, as Etxebarria sees it, would not only apply to reader-response, but to the way that an author’s writing is conditioned by sex and gender. Although she notes that gendered roles are socially constructed, she also acknowledges that the sex of the author creates different expectations in readers and, therefore, ‘women’s writing’ will depend to a large extent on its appeal to women readers. As the literary canon has traditionally been written by male authors, Etxebarria feels that for centuries, women readers lacked the opportunity to find their experiences portrayed in fiction: ‘Until very recently, the experience of woman, of woman as a pariah in a patriarchal system, was kept invisible in the art world’ (2000: 110). For her, this means that, as men and women experience life – and the great themes of literature, such as death, war, love, and pain – in a different way, it is not only fair but necessary to champion ‘women’s writing’:

Women in general, and women writers in particular have learned to see the world from the imaginary in which we have grown, an imaginary that no longer serves us. Women’s literature generally amalgamates the same point of view expressed from different voices emanating from the perspective of our own women’s nature. (Etxebarria 2000: 108)

As we have seen, Etxebarria believes that the reception of literature depends to a large extent on reader identification. In this sense, the ‘*propia naturaleza de mujeres*’ would refer to the fact that the socially constructed gender roles mean women are more likely than men to write about experiences and issues that relate to women’s experiences of a certain society. Hence, her championing of ‘women’s writing’ is linked to this appreciation that

literature as a two-way process of identification between the reader and the writer and that the male reader has, historically, been more likely to identify canonical works as those written by men. For this reason, Etxebarria considers it necessary for women to 'live and write as women. Now it is our turn to find a voice of our own, a way of being in the world' (2000: 110), because until 'women did not start to talk for themselves, nobody knew what women really felt' (ibid.).

The question then arises as to what Etxebarria means when she asserts that 'Women's literary tradition needs to correspond to a literary and political subversiveness' (ibid.), and the way her own fiction has attempted to achieve this subversion. We shall examine Etxebarria's explanation, in *La letra futura*, of the way 'women's writing' has reversed the three basic female prototypes in 'male literature', as well as the new motifs and themes it has provided, and then, focusing on Etxebarria's own fictional characters, we shall explore what and how her own fiction has contributed to this reversal.

Literary subversion in Etxebarria

In 'Con nuestra propia voz: a favor de la literatura de mujeres', Etxebarria notes that the fate of canonical female fictional characters like Emma Bovary, Anna Karenina, and Ana Ozores reinforces the notion that the woman who does not subjugate her sexuality to patriarchal imperatives will suffer a tragic fate. According to Etxebarria – and many female critics – the female characters in canonical works tend to be characterized by two main features: they are first and foremost literary objects, not subjects, and secondly, they are radically divided as muses, loving mothers, and beloved partners or bitches, adulteresses, and madwomen. Outside Spain, this approach is familiar from the work of writers like Gilbert and Gubar (1979), Showalter (1979), Millet (1970), and many others, but the fact that her views are still considered so provocative in Spain, reminds us that the resistance of writers of Montero's generation to 'women only' debates, as Montero herself links back to the negative effect of the *Sección Femenina*, has delayed this debate in Spain and specifically, in Spanish higher education. Etxebarria believes that one of the main achievements

of 'women's writing' has been that of giving voice to female characters by turning them into literary subjects, and not objects. In this sense, her views correspond with what has been called Second Wave feminism. 'Women's writing' turns female literary characters into literary subjects, creating new female prototypes that blur the traditional 'good' versus 'evil' divide, and developing literary themes that had not hitherto been explored in any depth, or with any subtlety.

As examples of these themes, Etxebarria cites the mother–daughter relationship, female friendship and rivalry, and the relationship between sisters. These are issues that can be raised by male authors, such as Haruki Murakami, who provides a particularly impressive representation of the love-rivalry relationship between two sisters in his 2008 novel *After Dark*, and Etxebarria in no way suggests that these issues cannot be written by men: 'This does not mean that a male writer cannot, of course, create great female characters and vice versa, but we cannot forget that writing from a place of experience is very different to writing from a place of documentation or fantasy' (2000: 109). However, she rightly notes that none of these themes (so universal to women) are considered universal to the literary canon (2000: 112).⁷

One could infer that, for Etxebarria, what matters is that the experience of the writer matches the experience of the literary character. This is controversial, not to say limiting, for women writers, and it is a debate that has often become heated when the need for positive role models and writing by women come into play. The American author Tova Mirvis, a formerly observant Orthodox Jewish woman, responds to Wendy Shalit's accusations that she has portrayed 'deeply observant Jews in an unflattering or ridiculous light' (Shalit 2005), because she has renounced Orthodox Judaism, saying:

Since when must a fiction writer actually have lived the life he or she writes about? Since when must one be a murderer to write *Crime and Punishment*, a pedophile to write *Lolita*, a hermaphrodite to write *Middlesex*, a boy on a boat with a tiger to write *Life of Pi*? Yes, it seems, Shalit has outed the whole tawdry lot of us. She's revealed to the public the terrible truth: Fiction writers make up things. (Mirvis 2005)

7 For more information on literary themes, see Jennifer McClinton-Temple (2010).

I include this comment here to remind us that it is dangerous to assume, when the sex of the author is female, that the most vivid fictional accounts are those narrated from experience. In *La letra futura*, Etxebarria describes her writing process as a kind of trance that allows her to embody her fictional characters, allowing her to 'become' numerous different female, and on occasion male, characters, who could therefore be interpreted as projections of herself:

Even if my intention was, in principle, to assume the role of a simple narrator [...] I could not help but get into his [Eduardo's] skin. [...] It was not just the fact that I was describing making love to a woman as a woman, but that I did come to feel like a man. [...] I put myself in the place of the other. It was a surprising and unexpected discovery, and I prefer not to analyse this projection or author/character transposition from a psychological perspective, because I would like to keep the magical component of the experience. (2000: 25–6)

Jaime and Eduardo are secondary characters in *Nosotras que no somos como las demás*. Jaime is a married man who falls in love with Raquel and decides to put an end to their affair for fear of the inconvenience it will cause him to divorce his apparently beloved and well-off wife, Gemma. Eduardo, on the other hand, is a young and naive lifeguard, who works in Gemma's swimming pool, and with whom she has an affair. Etxebarria believes, as does Adrienne Rich, that women writers have the richness of 'a whole psychic geography to be explored' (Rich in Sellery 1986: 188) and that this, as for male writers, includes writing and imagining male characters.

In his 2001 study covering *Amor, curiosidad, prozac y dudas*, and *Beatriz y los cuerpos celestes*, Juan Senís Fernández remarks that, at that time, there was a preponderance of female characters in Etxebarria's novels. There is no doubt that this variety of relationships between the different women characters has allowed Etxebarria to explore some of the themes and women characters which, according to her, constitute the main contributions made by 'women's literature', but this is not the only resource she has. Her more recent novels, *Cosmofobia*, *Lo verdadero es un momento de lo falso* [Truth is Naught but a Moment of Falsehood], and *El contenido del silencio* [The Contents of Silence] introduce a number of important male characters, depict relationships between men and women, and between men and

men. Her work deals with the themes of female friendship, the relationship between sisters, the difficulty of balancing work and family life, the relationship between mother and daughter, and the difficulty of escaping traditional roles, and, something that seems especially welcomed by female readers, is that the women are not idealized and these themes are not treated overly simplistically.

Turning to some specific examples from Etxebarria's fiction, the three sisters in *Amor, curiosidad, prozac y dudas* finally realize that, despite the different directions they have taken in life, their respective and unsuccessful pursuit of happiness makes them more similar than they had originally thought. Thus, Cristina's initial disdain for her sisters and their life choices gradually turns into a sense of sisterhood and solidarity. Beatriz, the protagonist of *Beatriz y los cuerpos celestes*, only finds solidarity, temporarily, with her friend Mónica. Their friendship soon leads to much more intense feelings, at least on the part of Beatriz, who finds it impossible to move on after the extremely close and burning, although non-consummated, relationship she had with Mónica. Likewise, *Nosotras que no somos como las demás* features four women characters who, each in her own way, refuse to conform to traditional stereotypes. Raquel, for example, is a character constructed with great psychological depth, whose stunning physical appearance and successful job as a model is combined with a sharp and practical intelligence. Throughout the novel, Raquel's suffering and dismay after realizing that the man she is in love with will never leave his convenient marriage for her shows the futility and injustice of labelling women on the basis of their sexual activity.

Ruth Swanson, the protagonist of *De todo lo visible y lo invisible* is an extremely paradoxical character. Although her films are popular and widely acclaimed by the public, she is constantly harassed by the critics. She appears, in public, to be a witty, even arrogant woman, but she is also depicted as tremendously insecure. While she sees herself as an independent and sexually liberated woman, she looks forward to her partner, Juan, leaving his girlfriend and committing to her. She is distanced from her family, though her deceased mother's phantom keeps haunting her. The variety of themes raised in *Una historia de amor como otra cualquiera* [A Love Story Like All the Rest] includes, among others, mental illness, refugee camps, family blackmail, incest, and the incapacity to confront one's sexual

preferences. Against this background, this collection of short stories portrays many female characters torn between their traditional upbringing and the desire to rebel against social constraints. One of the stories relates the desperation and agony of a traditional mother who must choose between breaking up her marriage and supporting her now devastated daughter, or ignoring the suspicions she harbours against her supposedly abusive husband; another story narrates the predicament of a Saharan woman, who feels the need to leave the man she loves behind in order to repay the debt of gratitude to her homeland.

Etxebarria's subsequent novel *Un milagro en equilibrio* [A Miracle In Equilibrium] is written as a letter/diary-type book, in which complicated, insecure Eva resolves to tell her newborn baby Amanda about her life, her difficulties as a first-time mother, and about the pain of losing her own mother, whom she feels she never got to know properly. *Cosmofobia*, set in the bohemian cultural melting-pot of Lavapiés presents a wide range of characters, both male and female, each of them with their own background. The intricate web of relationships in the novel makes it possible for Etxebarria to introduce us to a series of non-conforming women characters such as Susana, a young Spanish woman who in twenty-first-century-Spain is still discriminated against for being black, or Sonia La Chunga, the epitome of the under-qualified, underpaid young woman of Spain's postmodern society. Additional, atypical female characters are likewise depicted in *Lo verdadero es un momento de lo falso*. Olga, who holds an extremely successful post in the music industry after choosing her career over her family life, ends up having an affair with the much younger Romano. Beautiful Valeria, on the other hand, sees how her intellectual aspirations fade after succumbing to the societal pressure to rely on her stunning physical appearance. Finally, in *El contenido del silencio*, Etxebarria's most recent novel, Heidi, an extremely bewitching middle-aged woman and the leader of a cult, lures beautiful but troubled Cordelia. Upon learning of the cult's collective suicide in which Cordelia is believed to have perished, her brother Gabriel sets out to find the truth, accompanied by Cordelia's adventurous flatmate and best friend Helena. Through their search for Cordelia, Gabriel will embark on a soul-searching journey as part of which he will have to escape the charming but toxic embrace of his manipulative fiancée Patricia.

As Senís Fernández asserts, all throughout Etxebarria's fictional work:

It appears that there are women in crisis for several reasons: an excessive inhibitory load of role models that do not give women the freedom they want, that seem to make them choose between professional development and a family, that condemn them be pariahs (such as Beatriz) if they fail to adopt the existing gender role (whether homosexual or heterosexual). These women are victims of their upbringing, but even when they take advantage of the roles they themselves have established, they are unable to attain happiness. (2001)

Thus, by exploring a number of themes that had not been explored in sufficient depth by canonical literature, and by creating a number of women characters that are not literary subjects, but objects, and that represent a multiplicity of paradoxes instead of a good or bad totality, Etxebarria succeeds in making her own contribution to the reversal achieved by 'women's writing'.

But are these themes and characters really new? Etxebarria's aim is to create a new 'type of woman: neither beautiful nor rich nor elegant, but neither an amazon nor a prostitute not a harpy' (Etxebarria 2000: 112). Interviewed for the online newspaper *Público* she went as far as to affirm that the model for Stieg Larsson's Lisbeth Salander had already appeared in *Beatriz y los cuerpos celestes*. Given that she attributes this to the very small number of features they share (both have shaved heads and are bisexual), Etxebarria risks making herself look foolish and providing ammunition to those who might argue, based on the success of the *Millennium*⁸ series, that anything a female author can do a male author can do better:

I had already created Lisbeth a long time ago. Beatriz was not a hacker, but she was bisexual and had her head shaved. He [Larsson] has taken a kind of woman who actually exists and if I did it before he did, it was because I was out there and he

8 The *Millennium* trilogy is composed of *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* (2005), *The Girl Who Played with Fire* (2006), and *The Girl Who Kicked the Hornets' Nest* (2007). By March 2010, Larsson's *Millennium* series had sold 27 million copies in more than forty countries. He was the second best-selling author in the world in 2008, behind Khaled Hosseini, and film versions of the *Millennium* series were produced and released in Scandinavia in 2009.

was not. This is a type of woman who is present in the world of fashion and music. And I am sure that there are plenty of such heroines in the literary world as well. The system always engulfs what begins as anti-system. What has happened is that this man has taken this woman – now that everyone is willing to accept her – and turned her into a best seller. Eleven years ago, Beatriz was still disturbing. (*Público.es* 2010a)

Putting to one side the slightly offensive suggestion that Larsson – a journalist, photographer, writer, and political activist – was not ‘out there’, there is some truth to the notion that new role models take time to reach the height of their popularity. However, there is less truth to the suggestions that Beatriz was among the avant garde. A strong tradition of alternative, bisexual, and lesbian heroines has existed in English-language fiction since the 1980s, although it may well be that Etxebarria is unaware of this, as these novels tended to be fostered by small publishers such as the Women’s Press. The fact that *Beatriz* was awarded the Nadal Prize in 1998 indicates how far Spanish literature had evolved since the Transition, but it also suggests that Etxebarria has herself benefited from that first, very definitely marginalized and ‘antisistema’ wave of alternative writing by women (Maurell 1998). In Spain, the precedent of a novel in which the female protagonist questions ‘the patriarchal pattern of an exemplary female way of being exemplary’ winning the Nadal Prize was set in 1945 by Carmen Laforet’s novel, *Nada* (Almeida 2003). And, of course, female rebellion is represented in what Carmen Martín Gaité refers to as ‘*la chica rara*’ [the strange girl] in her essay with the same title in *Desde la ventana* (1988). In this essay, Martín Gaité focuses on Andrea, the protagonist of *Nada*, and lists the ways in which this character breaks with the traditional protagonists of romantic novels. Focusing on the *chica rara*’s questioning of the behaviours that were expected from women at the time, Martín Gaité concludes that following the publication of *Nada*, the prototype of this subversive female character can be found in numerous novels by women writers. More than a decade later, Lélia Almeida also notes that the most recurrent aspects of contemporary ‘women’s writing’ are the questioning of female behaviour and attitudes to patriarchal mandates (2003). Hence, where many critics have found Etxebarria’s contribution to the array of women’s prototypes praiseworthy (Urioste 2000; Redondo Goicoechea 2003), it is important to observe that her contribution is not necessarily especially new, nor is it

radical. Etxebarria's ignorance of the history that precedes her is due to the fact that writing that is not assimilated by the canon, tends to be forgotten and must be rediscovered by each generation. Despite the work of feminist critics, there is still a lack of coherence to the 'history' of 'women's writing', particularly in Spain, where the work of critics like Freixas is helping to bring it to public attention, but where, as we have seen in the case of Montero, women of the Franco era and Transition have been wary of marginalizing themselves by focusing on this issue. Etxebarria's assumption that she is a trail-blazer in the representation of shaven-headed, lesbian protagonist is, in itself, an indication of a central problem with 'women's writing'.

From Segregation to Completion

In this chapter we have seen that the different responses of Matute, Montero, and Etxebarria to the question of the existence of 'women's writing' are inseparable from a critical tendency to describe writing by women as over-emotional, lacking action, dealing only with female characters, and appealing overwhelmingly to women readers. Although this interpretation of the label has been contested by supporters and non-supporters alike, and despite the changing critical response to the work of women writers, they are asked – time and again – for their views on the existence, or not, of a specifically 'female' literature. It seems that the concept of universality is pivotal to the way Matute, Montero, and Etxebarria feel about that label.

All coincide in their denouncement of an ongoing tendency to make negative allusions to the sex and gender of women authors in literary criticism; however their views differ when it comes to certain aspects of the debate, such as the persistent tendency to segregate writing by women from that of men. For Matute, the difference between a female writer and 'woman's writing' lies with the fact that she associates aesthetic concerns with the first and the transmission of ideological messages with the second. Furthermore, attention has been drawn to this apparent lack of 'sisterhood' on Matute's part, in a way that would have been exceptional in the

case of a male author. From this, we can assume that, even today, the issue of 'women's writing' is still haunted by biological and social, rather than purely literary, concerns. The existence of such extra-literary assumptions recurs in the contradictions in Montero's resistance to the 'women's writing' label, despite the fact that her views conform to those of its advocates. Like Matute, Montero feels that literature should not be used as a political weapon, and she feels that the label 'women's writing' should be avoided as it connotes 'women's issues', women protagonists, and female readership. The concept of universality is also key to Montero's rejection of the label, as canonical literature by male authors has never been described as 'masculinist'. Etxebarria denounces the mistaken prejudice that writing to which the label 'women's writing' is attached is inherently political and/or separatist. According to Etxebarria, the tendency to mistake socially constructed roles for biologically determined roles has also traditionally affected women writers, who for centuries have seen how their works were treated as if they belonged to a kind of sub-genre. She believes that literature is a two-way process of identification between the reader and the writer, and she is a strong supporter of the 'women's writing' label.

In spite of their different responses, Matute, Montero, and Etxebarria agree on the need to ascribe universal importance and all, still, in the early years of the twenty-first century, denounce the treatment of writing by women by the critical establishment. Women writers are clearly still stuck in what Henseler refers to as a 'double bind', and the usefulness, or not, of a label to distinguish 'women's writing' is clearly tied in with the existing gender-prejudices of both female and male readers and writers. What these three writers agree on is that as long as critics and reviewers insist on identifying and labelling male issues as universal and women's as something 'other', women writers will have difficulty attaining parity in questions of prestige.

CONCLUSION

Persistent Stereotypes

This book has focused on three high-profile Spanish women writers, representative of different generations, defining historical moments in the construction of Spanish memory and collective identity. Its purpose was to shed new light on the public status and the work of Matute, Montero, and Etxebarria, as well as to contribute to the growing corpus of academic studies of women writers publishing in Spain. Bringing together questions of gender, memory, culture, the literary market, and history, its intention is to add to the body of studies focusing on a 'matrilineal' literary history that might challenge the dominant 'patrilineal' canon (Gilbert and Gubar 1979: 51). Opening with the contextualization of the theoretical debate about the label 'women writer' both outside and within Spain, the focus then turned to examine evidence of an ongoing gender bias in the reception and marketing of women writers in Spain. Having established that such a gender bias still exists, the focus then turned to the combined effect of that gender bias and of historical context on the construction of the public personae of these writers: Matute from the Franco era, Montero from the Transition to democracy, and Etxebarria from the Generation X and internet era. Given the focus in this book on women writers, its overarching aim was to carry out a three-fold analysis of the 'women's writing' label addressing the following questions:

1. What role has their unique historical contexts played in Matute, Montero, and Etxebarria's place within Spanish cultural history?
2. As women writers, do they believe one can attribute a sex and/or gender difference to writing?
3. In which ways do these writers tackle shifting social role models and social expectations of women?

What this investigation has found is that the 'double-edged' double bind denounced by Freixas in 2000 is still in place. In other words, although the label 'women writer' clearly risks ghettoizing female authors, it remains, at the same time, an extremely useful tool for bringing their work to wider public attention. For this reason, therefore, the answer of these writers to question 2 above is rarely clear-cut and seldom unbiased. Indeed, what this investigation has found is that, although there is a widespread perception that Western women writers are now living in a post-feminist era of unprecedented opportunities, the traditional sexist stereotypes not only persist, but recur. This analysis of the response to the 'women's writing' debate both outside and inside Spain, combined with analysis of the marketing and reception of women writers in Spain within the press and the academy, has shown that the question of the existence of 'women's writing' is inextricable from the existence of different marketing strategies for male and female writers.

The three authors studied do not agree as to whether there is a gender difference in writing. The two older writers, Matute and Montero, are still hesitant to champion the label and both are wary of studies, such as this one, that focus on 'women's writing' to the exclusion of men's. When Matute began her writing career, the question of a difference in literature had not yet been raised in the Spanish literary arena. As this study has shown, her answers when questioned on the label remain ambiguous. What does emerge is that, for Matute, the label 'women's writing' has ideological connotations that she is reluctant to link to the female writer. Matute is clearly opposed to the transmission of such ideological messages in literature, and regards its reception as a question, first and foremost, of aesthetics. Yet, in her interview with Montero, she has become more aware over the decades of the particular difficulties she faced as a woman writer. Although she describes herself as a feminist, like Matute, Montero objects to the use of literature as a political weapon, and is keen to establish a clear separation between the need to promote feminism and her objection to feminist literature. Montero perceives the label as having pejorative connotations to do with 'women's issues' and the kind of writing that has female protagonists, and that appeals exclusively to a female readership. Etxebarria, on the other hand, sees this assumption as a mistaken prejudice that should actively be

fought against. According to Etxebarria and to many critics, the work of women writers has been traditionally treated as a kind of sub-literature, which is something she regards as a direct consequence of a tendency to confuse women's socially constructed roles with their biologically determined roles. A strong supporter of the 'women's writing' label, Etxebarria feels that literature is a two-way process of identification between author and readers, that it is important to champion fiction written by women and openly directed at women readers in order to promote the fictional representation of experiences that, given the traditional bias towards male writers, have seldom been raised in canonical literature.

As can be seen from these arguments, the question is not straightforward and the three writers' opinions on the topic can appear contradictory at times. Despite her rejection of the label, Matute commends Josefina Aldecoa's skilful description of women's experience, and Matute's own works have been praised for a list of characteristics traditionally associated with women rather than with men; these characteristics are women's capacity to convey empathy, emotion, sensuality, and intuition, characteristics that are closely related to the ones Matute herself praises in Aldecoa's work. Likewise, for all her rejection of the 'women's writing' label and her insistence that gender is just one of many components that contribute to the work of a writer, Montero admits that descriptions of the world by female writers and by male writers are different: her assumption of evidence of female authorship in *One Thousand and One Nights*, on the basis of a number of gender-biased attributes, therefore sits uncomfortably with her openly professed rejection of the label 'women's writing'. Lastly, contradictions can also be found in Etxebarria's response to this same question, despite the fact that she champions both the label and the notion of a gender difference in literature. Etxebarria agrees with many academics of the second-wave era that female characters in canonical works of literature tend to be characterized by two main features: first, they are literary objects, not subjects, and second, they are radically divided into muses, loving mothers, and beloved partners, or bitches, adulteresses, and madwomen. Etxebarria argues that the promotion of writing by women is needed not only to subvert this tendency, but also to raise a number of issues that, albeit universal to women, are not considered universal to the

literary canon. However, Etxebarria's assumption that women writers are always better equipped than male writers to address female experience in literature risks sidelining questions of aesthetics and essentializing questions of biological sex and gender in a way that remains problematic.

The three writers differ in their opinion of the 'women's writing' label but in spite of the generational gap between them, all coincide in their denouncement of an ongoing tendency to make negative allusions to the sex and gender of women authors in literary criticism, and to describe writing by women as over-emotional, lacking in action, dealing only with female characters, and appealing only to women readers. It would therefore seem that although a gender difference in writing may or may not exist, what matters is that from the conclusions gathered in the case studies and from what the different writers here discussed assert, literature by women was and is still treated differently. For this reason, women writers are repeatedly asked in interviews about their opinion on whether there is a 'female' literature, and this fact persists regardless of the critical response their work receives. Where all three agree is in their view that as long as critics and reviewers continue to identify male issues as universal and female issues as something 'other', women writers will have difficulty attaining parity in questions of prestige. As discussed in the introduction, despite the existence of an increasingly commercialized and web-based virtual literary market that has introduced promotional opportunities for women writers, there appears to be a gender bias in the marketing of writers that personifies women as more domestic and more closely aligned with their literary characters than are their male counterparts.

With the purpose of studying how Matute, Montero, and Etxebarria negotiate their public appearances in the publishing market of the new global millennium, together with the role played by gender in their public (re)construction, this study has examined the construction of their public personae in the context of the changing socio-political background of the Franco regime, the Transition to democracy, and contemporary Spain exploring the different ways in which this increasingly complex literary market has adapted to the shifts in Spanish society. Indeed, the country's literary boom in recent decades has given way to the current globalizing, capitalist consumer economy in which an author's exposure to the mass

media is key to determining their selling potential and literary success. This means that all three writers must contend with promotional opportunities and public appearances. In other words, all have to negotiate a greater interest in their public persona and the increasing demands of the literary marketplace.

Far from being constant, the development of Matute's public figure suffered a shift from the 1990s onwards. Although Matute had been a familiar literary figure from the Franco era, this analysis of a series of articles on the author published in *El País* between 1982 and 1996 show that her joining the RAE and winning the Medalla al Mérito coincided with a growing interest in her personal life (as a woman), which sought to make her more accessible to the demands of a contemporary reading public. This new interest in the personal life of the author is indeed one of the main changes that has occurred within the publishing industry and that shapes the contemporary literary marketplace. This study of Montero's reception over the years has also highlighted the increasing importance ascribed to her image along with a similarly increasing interest in her private life and personal opinions. After triumphing commercially with a first novel which remains enormously popular for its depiction of 'women's issues' and which established her public persona as a high-profile feminist, Montero subsequently had to adapt to the more media- and consumer-savvy environment of the contemporary literary market, not to mention the current trend to classify literature not according to politics, but according to the sex, age, and nationality of the author. Both male and female writers are now confronted with the effects of complex and high-profile public appearances within the cultural establishment that have accompanied the growth of the literary author-as-star phenomenon, but, as this study of Etxebarria's experience has shown, the negotiation of the high-profile virtual public persona is especially fraught for women authors. Etxebarria has attempted to benefit from the promotion opportunities offered by her sex while maintaining a certain degree of autonomous control over that image. She has used her image (as a young, attractive female writer) to promote and popularize her novels and her political opinions. However, this aspect of her performance as a writer is inevitably impacted and complicated by the persistence of a tendency to sexualize women's bodies more overtly than those

of men. While Etxebarria is clearly the most internet- and media-savvy of the authors examined here, she has not been able to control the process of negotiating and re-negotiating the construction of her celebrity persona.

Montero does recognize the double bind that women authors face, and she shares with Matute a sense of unease with the notion of 'women's writing'. In short, all three agree that women writers are still subject to a particular form of treatment by the cultural establishment and the publishing industry. In spite of their different opinions on the 'women's writing' label, they also coincide in their belief in the need for more 'universality' to be ascribed to literary works by women. Indeed, Chapter 2 demonstrated that, for many critics, the coherent literary description of the world can only take place through the inclusion of a number of themes that, albeit universal to women, have not been considered 'universal' to the literary canon. Regardless of whether they consider literature to be a political weapon or not, and although their views on the validity of the 'women's writing' label differ, the arguments of Matute, Montero, and Etxebarria often indicate a lack of familiarity with Spanish women's literature. This is a direct result of the historic sidelining of female authors by the traditional canon, and despite increasing globalization and the effect of the internet, it is perhaps ironic that this ignorance is particularly clear in the case of Etxebarria, who strongly supports the need for the label yet who is clearly unfamiliar with literary female models and themes raised by Spanish women writers such as Carmen Martín Gaité only a decade or so earlier.

This book has indicated that in Spain traditional gender-stereotyping dating back to the Franco regime still persists, both in its examination of the marketing of these authors' work and in its examination of the reception of these authors. It has also shown that, perhaps more surprisingly, the virtual era has not mitigated this gender bias but has contributed to its resurgence by over-valuing the visual marketing of the literary author. In conclusion, this study contends that two central facts validate an ongoing examination of the 'women writer' label. The first is that, as seen in Chapter 4, three women writers of the stature and prestige of Matute, Montero, and Etxebarria in the twenty-first century still appear only partially familiar with the history of women's writing in Spain; the second is that, for all the promotional opportunities the virtual era has introduced

for the marketing of women writers, it is important also to remain alert to the tendency of this publicity to normalize a set of gender preconceptions and a gender bias that, as the ambivalence of Montero and Matute indicates, has pejorative connotations for the female writer. The 'women writers' label will always remain controversial, and yet, as this book contends, it is important to bear it in mind, as attempts to dismiss the label or wilfully to ignore its persistence also risk remaining oblivious the extent to which the marketing and therefore the public's reception of the work of women writers remains so tightly gender-bound.

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