

RESEARCH ARTICLE

The romance novel and popular culture during the early Franco regime in Spain: towards the construction of other discourses of femininity

Sonia Núñez Puente*

Seminario de Estudios de Identidad y Género, Universidad Rey Juan Carlos, Madrid, Spain

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In this paper, my intention is to show and analyse the boom of the romantic novel – given the theoretical assumptions of popular cultural studies – in the Spanish literary scene during the first years of Franco's regime with two novels by Carmen de Icaza. The starting point is the hypothesis that the romantic novel, even if it keeps some elements belonging to the prevailing social speech of those days, also represents a subtle break from the distinctive parameters of femininity created by Franco's regime. The relevance of my proposal is that, if the romantic novel, on the one hand, fits the distinctive parameters of femininity such as passivity or those feminine standards such as love or sentimentalism, on the other it subverts its discourse of origin when it undermines the pillars of the patriarchal society with the subversive power of the impassioned imagination which, in the romantic novels analysed, is converted into an alternative reality.

Keywords: popular novel; Franco's regime; moderate modernity; stereotype subversion; femininity rewritten

During the period between 1940 and 1970, a large number of romance novel collections were published in Spain, with all publishers dedicating one or more collections to this genre. The number of titles and print runs was incredibly high, particularly for some authors. Among these publications, which reflected the predominance of a specific kind of feminine cliché of the time, there were collections of particular relevance such as *Esmeralda* by the publishers Clíper, *Princesita* by Cíes, *Violeta* by Molino and *Azucena* by Toray (see Vázquez de Parga 2000, Charlo 2006). Some authors such as Graham (1995) state that, in this respect, the proliferation of works of popular culture, including romance novels, are the result of the Franco regime's perception that it might be a useful device to offer people a kind of escapism in a time of hunger and suffering (p. 238). Nonetheless, this process of escapism is a complex mechanism that, in our opinion, led to a kind of re-writing of the feminine by articulating an emerging conservative modernity. The concept of a conservative modernity has been introduced by Labanyi (2004), who explains it by pointing out the deliberate choice of a certain kind of protagonist on the part of romance novel authors. Romance novel protagonists of early Francoism are, according to Labanyi, active and upwardly mobile. This sort of mobility, which characterises the concept of conservative modernity, manifests itself in two ways: firstly, through the attitude of protagonists

*Email: snpuente@ya.com; sonia.puente@urjc.es

who try to become independent women, fighting to make their own way through work; and, secondly, through the spatial framework in which the novels' action takes place – halfway between various countries, in stark contrast with the actual difficulty of leaving Spain under Franco. Therefore, the independent nature of these romance novel protagonists, as well as their ease and courage in coping with difficulty in different cities and countries, link romance discourse to a sort of conservative modernity. Labanyi argues this point more precisely, based on Richards' theory (1999), which asserts that the Francoist dictatorship implied a break with a particular modernity and not with modernity as such, particularly given that among the pillars of Francoist ideology were youth and the very drive that we see constantly reflected in romance novel protagonists.

Therefore, this paper proposes to explore the fact that the romance novel, although preserving certain elements that bring it close to the dominant discourse of the time, also represents a subtle rupture with the defining parameters of the feminine produced by Franco's regime, thanks to what we can nowadays recognise as a postmodern concept of identity, which includes the creation of alternative realities to the society of the early Franco regime for the protagonists of romance discourse.

From the 1970s onward, most feminist critique has tended to explore the responses that arise from certain images of women as recipients of social discourses. In other words, the focus of the critical analysis of stereotyped images of woman has moved towards the process of receiving and producing these images, in which power relations and phenomena of symbolic 'invisibilisation' play a primordial role. Paradoxically, this invisibilisation is achieved by means of the archetypical overexposure of a model of the feminine, present in the discourse of the romance novel, that has also been studied by theorists of popular culture.

In this respect, the romance novel essentially helps the process of constructing and perpetuating woman as an image, which we can include in the area of the reception of popular culture. Theorists such as Modleski (1990) include the romance novel in the forms of production for popular culture, although adding nuances to the hitherto inadequate perception of romance discourse on the part of cultural critique, stating that there are no studies on popular female narrative that can be compared with the titles of classic studies of popular male genres, such as the detective novel (p. 11).

We are therefore faced with a certain critical gap that even places romance novels outside cultural studies, with notable exceptions such as the study entitled *Reading the romance*, by Janice Radway (1987), which explores from an ethnographical point of view the readings of the romance novel made by consumers in the United States and how these readings help them to cope with frustrations in their own lives.

The categorisation to which popular culture is submitted therefore places the fiction of the romance novel towards the bottom of the hierarchy of an already devalued taste for contemporary culture. It is for that reason necessary to shift romance novel discourse to the area of cultural studies, taking into account its particular features. Romance fiction produced immediately after the Spanish Civil War and in the first few years of Franco's regime, exemplified by two novels by Carmen de Icaza, will be our paper's object of analysis and will help us explore how romance discourse belongs to the means of production befitting popular culture during a specific period in Spain.

Popular culture is characterised by a need that seems to emerge to define it in contrast to culture. Popular culture therefore becomes the 'other', a type of culture that always needs a contrastive element in order for it to be defined. This brings the concept of popular culture closer to the new icon of woman as an image, which also needs an 'other' in order to be defined. This is particularly valid with regard to the assumptions of Francoist ideology, which contrasts woman/the other with the masculinity that constitutes Francoist ideology *per se*. The concept

of the feminine is articulated, then, in opposition to the implicit masculinity of Francoist ideology. In this way, women would be trapped in a sort of infantilism in comparison with the adult status of the masculine (Martín Gaité 1994, p. 51), characterised as passive in comparison with masculine activity (Martín Gaité 1994, p. 71) and, finally, seen as intrinsically delicate in comparison with essential masculine virility (Martín Gaité 1994, p. 68). These characteristics, considered masculine by the society of the time, formed the backbone of the ideology of the Franco dictatorship – an ideology that Francoism definitively transformed into the epitome of masculinity (Richards 1999). Therefore the fact that the theoretical concept of woman as an image belongs to what would be later called mass or popular culture turns out to be particularly revealing, because woman is confined to the outer regions of what is considered as devalued. Just as popular culture is always defined in relation to culture, Spanish women of the 1940s were always defined in relation to the Francoist patriarchal concept of masculinity; notwithstanding the fact that popular culture and the development of woman as an image, which is the backbone of Francoist ideology, correspond in structural terms to an analysis of the Gramscian concept of hegemony, used to refer to an ongoing condition in which a dominant class directs a society by exercising moral and intellectual leadership (Storey 1994, p. 160).

In this respect, the discourse of the romance novel constantly negotiates with the normalised discourse of the dominant ideology. To this we should add that, naturally, the regime's discourse was not homogeneous but rather there were notable tensions between the sectors supporting it. We should point out that the puritan discourse associated with Franco's regime was not definitively established until 1945, when the Church became an essential pillar within the regime. However, in the early years, such as just after the Civil War, regulations were created aimed at governing the practice of Catholic religion in National Schools, Institutes and Normal Schools.¹ Nevertheless, discrepancies were constant between the Church and the Falange movement in these early years after the war, as the Falange movement insisted on the need to exercise strict control over the organisation and administration of teaching, above other institutions such as the Church or the family itself (Alfonso Sánchez 2005, p. 14). According to Cámara Villar (1988), these frictions were resolved in favour of the Church, as the Falange did not even have the support of the Ministry of Education, nor the necessary resources to put its proposals into practice. Consequently, the discourse of the romance novel is defined in terms of its relationship with the regime's ideology which, as we have seen, was not homogeneous at all, thereby transforming this relationship into a complex negotiation between two heterogeneous discourses.

Following the Gramscian concept of hegemony, discourse places class conflict near the safe margins of society, where direct confrontation is present, and this is carried out by means of fluctuating relations between different conceptual areas. In other words, in spite of the fact that hegemony implies a society with a high degree of consensus, this does not mean that conflict in that society has disappeared entirely. This conflict is actually channelled towards and contained within ideologically safe harbours (Storey 1994, p. 165).

In Gramscian terms, hegemony therefore allows us to tackle popular culture not as a culture imposed by political manipulation but as a mixture of intentions to negotiate between 'the top' and 'the bottom'. This negotiation means we can consider the concept of femininity in the romance novel of the early Franco regime and the years immediately following the Civil War as the result of a number of power negotiations producing a specific result in the recipients, in this case the female readers of the romance novel.² In this case, the aim of the Francoist ideology to totally impose a specific concept of woman as an image is seen at least negotiated in neo-Gramscian terms, although perhaps not subverted in revolutionary terms. These power negotiations are established between the different fronts that make up Francoist ideology and that help to construct a non-homogeneous ideology, at least during the early years, and the

different discourses produced under the regime, among these, the discourse of the romance novel. Power negotiations are essential when the processes that lead to the formation of different forms of subjectivity as well as the specific practices that make up the social realm on which the different forms of subjectivity are based, need to be observed. This is closely related to Foucault's analysis of power and the relationships established between specific powers of a local nature, and how these are interwoven into everyday life, affecting the behaviour of subjects (Foucault 1977, p. 92).

In the case of the romance novel, power negotiations are shaped and worked according to the margins established in the regime's discourse. In other words, the romance novel has power relationships with the established discourse that fluctuate between identifying the guidelines that define the concept of the feminine and a certain conservative modernity, as we will see below, expressed in different ways, such as the female protagonists' independent and proactive nature, subverting the regime's ideology and helping to modify the established subjectivation; i.e. refining a refigured way of constructing the female subject.

And it is precisely the outcome of this power negotiation that allows us to establish limits and reach the construction of woman as an image. Stuart Hall (1996) has developed the term 'articulation' to explain the processes by which cultural texts and practices are not given guaranteed meaning according to the intentions behind their production, but rather their meaning is always the result of an act of articulation (p. 45). In other words, it is a question of making popular culture ('production in use'), which can be a capacitating element for the part of society that is subordinated, enabling a kind of resistance to the dominant world view. On the other hand, denying that consumers of popular culture are cultural victims does not mean denying that industries of culture attempt to manipulate them (Storey 1994, p. 170).

Hall's concept of 'making culture' ('production through use') refined the idea of the possible feminisation of culture and cultural reception – a phenomenon observed by traditional culture as devaluating and, in many cases, marginal. Nevertheless, romance novel discourse actually appears to be relatively resistant to the hegemonic power that supports it. The protagonists of the novels analysed in this paper, for example Rolanda Saint-Pierre or Teresa Sandoval, are characters constructed as resistant women, something that ends up affecting the female readers themselves as consumers, who find an alternative world in the fiction that they can make their own.

It therefore becomes necessary to examine the processes that govern the production of popular culture and that transform, in neo-Gramscian terms, the high culture/popular culture dichotomy, to ultimately end up placing woman and the concept of woman outside the boundaries of cultural reception.

The romance novel in the early Franco regime and the years immediately before the Spanish Civil War therefore altered the traditional inclusion of woman within an area of marginalisation in terms of receiving and producing culture. In this sense, what the prevalence of the romance novel as an editorial phenomenon (already started in the first decades of the nineteenth century with the mass publication of novelettes³) would indicate would be a kind of negotiation process in terms of cultural hegemony that would allow guidelines to be established in the power relations between the ideological discourse of Francoism and the reception given to the romance novel by the female readers of the time. From this perspective, and taking into account the female stereotypes and their subsequent reception, we aim to review the content of the romance novel from the early years of Francoism and the years before the war as a clear example of production through use with regard to the power negotiations between the production and consumption of romance novel discourse.⁴ This analysis is situated between the popularity of the discourse it produces and the reception of this discourse, categorised as inferior compared to high culture, on the part of not only middle-and lower-class female readers but also of the upper bourgeoisie. In other words, popular culture is therefore defined through the romance novel

as inferior culture, as a residual category that exists to accommodate those cultural texts and practices that are not situated in the category of high culture.

The discourse of the romance novel is therefore established as the backbone of the memory of everyday life; a complex, hybrid memory that relocates the space assigned to woman in real life, allowing women the chance to vicariously experience situations removed from their own reality.⁵ And, precisely because of this, it is located in the area of popular culture as the construction, or reconstruction, of the power relations that support the society in which romance novel discourse is developed and evolves. In this respect, popular culture emerges as the area in which the construction of everyday life may be examined. The reason for doing so is not only academic, in order to understand a cultural process, but also political, in order to examine the power relations that go to make up this kind of everyday life (De Certeau 1984, p. 58).

Nevertheless, a review of the configurations of romance novel discourse as a construction of everyday life and of the underlying power relations reveals a kind of rejection, not only of the discourse *per se* but also of the recipients and consumers of romance texts. This shows the aforementioned devaluating connotation regarding the discourse of popular culture, which also affects the romance novel. Modleski (1990) states that there is a kind of rejection, even hostility, aimed at the consumers of narrative, sometimes seen as a kind of informal mocking (p. 35).

Still, the marginal nature of romance novel discourse is not presented as such in the discourse itself, which constructs an area of power for women that was refused in their lives in society. In the text of romance novels, women find a sphere of action of their own. According to Jenkins (1992), romantic fiction promises a safe world, it promises security with dependence, power with subordination (p. 171).

It is precisely the rhetoric of love, present throughout the discourse of the romance novel, that enables happiness to be guaranteed, entering into conflict with the regime's propaganda, which refers constantly to an unavoidable need for personal sacrifice. In the space won by the romance novel, women, in permanent conflict with the position assigned to them in society, fight to take over their own space, the place of romantic fantasy which, simply because it prioritises love and assures eternal conjugal bliss, comes into direct conflict with the rhetoric of sacrifice propagated by Franco's regime (López 1995, p. 32).

Romantic fantasy resorting to text, being inserted into the narrative discourse of the romance novel, means that the materialisation of this romantic fantasy as an area of personal freedom is a mirror reflection of a reality that is not only imagined but also possible for the recipients of romance novel discourse. Thanks to the tension between the myth of love in the romance novel and the use of narrative discourse of a realist nature, which presents the fictional world as an extension and reflection of the real world, this romantic fantasy could be interpreted as something probable and therefore feasible (López 1995, p. 32).

In the early Franco regime, and during the years prior to the Civil War, the romance novel encapsulated and adopted the guidelines of a genre we have been dealing with up to now. We will take two paradigmatic novels of the romance discourse in Spain for our analysis: *Cristina Guzmán, profesora de idiomas* and *Soñar la vida* by Carmen de Icaza. These two novels by this author will be analysed taking into account an established chronological order, which will enable us to see the processes of change or continuity of theme in two specific periods: immediately before and immediately after the Spanish Civil War, allowing us to reflect on the relationship between cultural production and its historical context.

Carmen de Icaza was born in Madrid on 17 May 1899 and died on 17 March 1979. She was the daughter of a Mexican ambassador and a woman from the high bourgeoisie in Granada, Beatriz de León. The second of six children, she lived in Madrid where, given her father's intellectual vocation, she came into contact with different celebrities of the time, such as Rubén Darío and Juan Ramón Jiménez. Later on, Carmen de Icaza stayed for long periods in Berlin,

where her father was appointed minister. She learned to speak four languages and, during her teenage years, continued to travel around Europe and America. When she returned to her family in Madrid, the Mexican revolution broke out and her father, after giving up his diplomatic career for political reasons, died in 1925. This situation forced Carmen to work to support her family. The director of the newspaper *El Sol*, Félix Lorenzo, hired her as a collaborator and assigned her the women's section. Later, she also collaborated with *Ya*. At the age of 29 she married Pedro Montojo Sureda, with whom she had a daughter. When the Civil War broke out, she took part, in October 1936, in founding the 'Auxilio Social' or Social Assistance. For 18 years she held the post of National Secretary. Ángela Cenarro in *La sonrisa de la Falange*, tells us the fundamental role played by Carmen de Icaza in organising the 'Auxilio Social':

If the energy and tenacity of Mercedes Sanz Bachiller (2005) were crucial in the first stage to ensure the Delegation acquired its definitive profile, likewise from the spring of 1937 Carmen de Icaza fulfilled a crucial role at the front of the *Asesoría Social* (Social Assessment) and, a little later, the *Oficina de Propaganda* (Propaganda Office). But her big moment was yet to arrive. In 1949, after the crisis that ended with the removal of Mercedes Sanz, she was appointed National Secretary, a position she held until 1958. The presence of women at the top of the Falange Delegation, exceptional in the context of the dictatorship, had its counterpart at all levels of the organisation, although with varying intensity depending on the circumstances. (Cenarro 2006, p. 73)

Carmen de Icaza's novelistic production is extensive. She started at 17 with *La boda del duque de Kurt* which, under the pseudonym of Valeria León, was published as a complete novel in 1935 and republished under the title of *Taliaen* in 1950. In 1935 she wrote *Cristina Guzmán, profesora de idiomas*, which was serialised in *Blanco y Negro* at the beginning of 1936 and was published as a book in August 1936. *Soñar la vida* followed, published in 1941, and other novels such as *Vestida de tul* (1942), *El tiempo vuelve* (1945), *La fuente enterrada* (1947), *Yo, la reina* (1950), *Las horas contadas* (1953) and her last work, *La casa de enfrente* in 1960.⁶

Carmen de Icaza herself, in her prologue to the third edition of *Cristina Guzmán* in 1939, explained the origins of the novel in the context of the period, highlighting the fact that it was simply a film-plot thought up when the Spanish still used to go to the cinema, perhaps hoping that the cinematographer, with his wide range of adventures, would shake people's fantasies, albeit only briefly (Icaza 1991, p. 28).

In short, and following the words of Icaza, it is therefore a search for symbolic universes, as stated by Berger and Luckmann (1991), produced by popular culture for consumption and social cohesion. Symbolic universes that transcend the practice of romantic fantasies present in the cultural imaginary of the time, contravening the moral rigidity of Franco's propaganda, notwithstanding the fact that the discourses of the romance novel not only structure the subjects represented but also the rules governing their development and representation.

The protagonist of the first book analysed, *Cristina*, is in line with the configuration of woman as an image whose strength, atypical for the social norms of the time, lies precisely in what Carmen Martín Gaité, with regard to romance novel discourse, calls 'conservative modernity'. Although *Cristina*, as a protagonist of a romance novel, largely follows the strict dictums of the female stereotypes of the time, she nonetheless maintains a kind of permanent dialogue with this conservative modernity that takes shape, for example, in the decision and determination with which she supports her family, is also the mother of a small child and works alone in a world that is an alien to her. Throughout the novel *Cristina* becomes a protagonist not only of her own life but also of a kind of dreamed fiction that she herself constructs and that is based around her relationship with Gary Prynce. In this fiction, where *Cristina* plays a leading role, different processes of identity saturation are developed, i.e. the multiplication of the female character in different roles, such as that of mother and language teacher, or actress in a fiction for which she is paid and in which she plays the role of Joe Prynce's wife.

The multiplicity of the presence of a single female character, Cristina Guzmán, who splits into other Cristinas, reaches such an extreme that when Cristina Guzmán takes the place of Fifi Monterreal, the wife of Gary's son Joe, it leads to the discovery that Fifi Monterreal is really Cristina's sister, from whom she had been separated in childhood. In this way, the alternative or dreamed reality constructed by Cristina Guzmán becomes her own reality at the end of the novel, when she ends up confirming her love story with Gary Prynce and, on finding her sister Fifi again, in some way reconstructing her previous family life as an orphan and single mother.

Carmen de Icaza therefore relates the trials and tribulations of a young mother who is forced to support her family by working far from home, in Paris, as a replacement for the wife of the son of a steel magnate called Gary Prynce-Valmore. The fortunes of her undeniably sealed fate lead her to be employed as the replacement for Fifi Monterreal, Joe's wife, the son of Mr Prynce. Her character enters into conflict with the stereotypes of the time which are thereby subverted by the very discourse of popular culture. From the moment she accepts the job, Cristina's life becomes a kind of dream. The apparently real nature of the story of a young teacher's life thereby enters into conflict with the dramatisation of a romantic fantasy that extends throughout the novel, in different episodes in which Cristina says she is dreaming.

The relationship between the dream, the fiction created by protagonists of romance novel discourse, in this case by Cristina Guzmán, and the reality experienced becomes the basis for a certain textural reflexivity in which the dreams of the female protagonists also form part of the textual structure narrated by the author. They are often used to generate or create an alternative discourse, in this case the dreamed discourse, within the discourse of the romance novel *per se*. And it is precisely in this dreamed discourse, and by means of the projections of the female protagonists, where we find the subversion of romance novel discourse, which enters into conflict with the pre-eminent discourse of the time. In other words, the patterns of female behaviour, established within the margins of the norms dictated by the regime's discourse, are subverted precisely by means of another discourse from popular culture, namely that of the romance novel.

Cristina Guzmán finally overcomes all obstacles, faithfully following the plotline of the romance genre. The stereotype of woman as an image who triumphs over adversity partly corresponds to the tradition of the time to which the author belonged, as Carmen de Icaza formed part of the team of collaborators who, together with Mercedes Sanz Bachiller, created the 'Auxilio Social'. On the other hand, this stereotype also subverts the ruling canon by means of romantic fantasy that constructs a space for women, who find a certain personal autonomy in this place in the cultural imaginary, a certain conservative modernity in the words of Labanyi (2004), which was denied them in Franco's social structure. Romantic fantasy and excessive imagination turn Cristina Guzmán into a dreamer who is the protagonist of her own life in a self-reflexive process in which Cristina sets herself up as the protagonist of the fiction she herself constructs throughout the novel. Finally, the novel concludes by completing the life cycle of Cristina Guzmán, who sees all her efforts rewarded with the love that will rescue her from her previous life. It is, ultimately, 'the triumph of goodness, optimism and a love of life' (Icaza 1991, p. 33), which runs parallel to the triumph represented by the author herself who, in the words of Carmen Martín Gaité (1978) 'was the idol of the post-war period, introduced conservative modernity into the genre, the protagonist ... was brave and hard-working' (p. 41). In this respect, the end of the novel corresponds with the creation of a stereotype that will last in the collective imaginary until, according to Catherine Bourland Ross (2006), the present day, with novels such as *Beatriz y los cuerpos celestes* by Lucía Etxebarria. The concept of femininity of the time – that is, of the Francoist woman – is defined by a woman who is 'very womanly', and characterised by prudence, industriousness, religiosity, sacrifice and discretion (Martín Gaité 1994, p. 27). This, as we have seen, appears to contrast with women like Cristina Guzmán: independent,

capable of working on their own, and even daring. However, as Labanyi (2004) notes, romance novel protagonists of early Francoism respond to a female prototype that can be decoded in two ways: the recipients of this romance discourse are invited to identify with a modern and independent woman; at the same time, they identify with the woman who puts more stock in domesticity and the decision to abandon her independence for marriage than she puts in individual freedom. This would be, then, one more example of the conservative modernity of romance novels; even though they base their plots on modern, independent women like the protagonists analysed in this article, they also, in the end, show a certain tendency to depict a woman's voluntary dependence upon a lover or husband – a key component of the Francoist woman. Paradoxically, in the novels in question, this dependence follows a prolonged fight for personal and economic independence narrated in great detail.

The other novel we have selected by Carmen de Icaza, *Soñar la vida*, published in 1941, tells the story of the protagonist, Resa (Teresa) Sandoval, daughter of Carlos de Sandoval, president of the Royal Academy of History, after whose death she is forced to work to keep her two brothers. Here there is a clear parallel between the family environment of Teresa Sandoval and that of Cristina Guzmán. Both are forced to work and to leave their private world to enter the public and social sphere of paid work. Once again, they are protagonists of romance novel discourse that refers to this conservative modernity that Carmen Martín Gaité (1994) discussed.

The action of *Soñar la vida* takes place in Istanbul and the narration is replete with long-winded descriptions of the customs and countryside that serve as a spatial framework to the sentimental comings and goings of the protagonist. The novel starts with an invitation by Nadine Illescu, a Romanian poet, who is organising a meeting of intellectuals in her house at Dambovitza, among whom is Juan Iraeta, the pseudonym used by Resa Sandoval to write her novels. Illescu's invitation breaks the monotony of the life of the protagonist, described as a pale woman with traits of short-sightedness (Icaza 1941, p. 19).

As we have mentioned before, the contrast between culture and popular culture that ultimately places the concept of woman as an image outside the development of cultural processes, namely as 'the other', is evident in *Soñar la vida* in the significant fact that the protagonist, Resa Sandoval, uses a male pseudonym, Juan Iraeta, to enter the literary world. Under the name of Iraeta, Teresa Sandoval writes a number of successful novels for the publisher Saturno, such as *Tierras duras*, *Las Sirenas* and *Los nuevos*. When she receives the invitation from Illescu, she is offered the chance to live out the fantasies that had previously only been possible through her imagination and writing. As in the case of Cristina Guzmán, Teresa Sandoval longs to live her life, to experience the fiction created under the name of Juan Iraeta. And this once again relates clearly to the phenomenon of textual reflexivity.

As stated by Jenkins (1992), romantic fiction reclaims the world of the child from sexual relations, eliminating criticism of the possible ideal nature of the chosen man. This is particularly relevant in the case of *Soñar la vida*. Throughout the novel Teresa Sandoval is defined with frequent references to her childhood in which she, as a somewhat unfortunate child, constantly wants to outdo herself, in other words wants something more. This desire to succeed will be completely realised with the arrival in her life of Alfonso Vivanco, over whom she exercises a certain power. His illness has made him almost an invalid and Resa fulfils the function of a caregiver with him. In other words, and as indicated by Jenkins (1992), the amorous relationship they establish is based on the world of the child, in which a certain subordinate power is promised to the role of the wife of the chosen man. In this case it is her dedication to caring for Alfonso Vivanco, Duke of Tábara, aviator and sociologist, whom she meets on accepting the invitation from Nadine Illescu, with whom Alfonso had had an affair 15 years earlier.

However, the discourse of *Soñar la vida*, as a romance discourse, comes close to transgressing the limits of Franco's ideology, which is subverted, as popular culture, by modern

textual mechanisms such as reflexivity. In this case, as in *Cristina Guzmán*, the protagonist splits her personality in a process of textual reflexivity in the discourse of Juan Iraeta. Notwithstanding Teresa Sandoval's desire to escape from her male *alter ego*, whom she will get rid of at the end of the novel when she confesses to the group of writers invited by Nadine Illescu, and to Alfonso Vivanco himself, that she and Juan Iraeta are the same person. Meanwhile, Iraeta is defined on numerous occasions as the 'other I', Teresa Sandoval's public and masculine persona.

References to the underlying conflict between reality and fiction are also numerous in *Soñar la vida*. From the very title of the novel to the discourse of Teresa Sandoval, the complex relationship between fiction and reality is made clear. The novel's protagonist often directs her thoughts towards the survival of the part of her personality that is less conservative and therefore more removed from her own reality as a grey, working woman, that of a foolish and daring Resa who is similar to the women in Juan Iraeta's fiction, once again in a kind of reflexivity.

Nevertheless, Resa Sandoval's dreams end up coming true, her relationship with Alfonso Vivanco ends happily despite the constant intrusion of the reality into her dreams. This becomes particularly evident when Teresa consults a friend about her indecision and doubts regarding her relationship with Alfonso. The friend reminds her that life, Resa's reality in this case, does not normally resemble romance novels. Once again, references are frequent to the romance novel in the very discourse of the romance novel itself, demonstrating the processes of textual reflexivity that, as stated by Labanyi (2004), are not typical only of high culture. In the process of constructing this conservative modernity, it is essential to construct a female stereotype in line with the construction of woman as an image, which will last in the collective imaginary. This female stereotype is created with the acceptance of *Madame Bovary* as the embodiment of the identification between women and mass culture, as stated by Huyssen (2002). And this equation also prevails in the cultural imaginary and emerges as a threat that hovers over cultural modernity.

From this perspective, only an autonomous individual can take on cultural massification by means of a kind of critical resistance and, naturally, this individual is a male who resists giving himself up to popular culture. Hence the space occupied by women (Chow 1990) is that of excess, compared with the measure and balance that characterise dominant patriarchal thought. This imbalance between excess and measure is precisely what characterises the female protagonists of the romance novel. In the two novels analysed we should remember the permanent presence of dreams, excess as an alternative fiction to reality, compared with the conservative conceptualisation of the female stereotype represented by the protagonists, ultimately complying with the fate assigned to them. The feminisation of culture is therefore assimilated to concepts such as emotiveness or subjectivity, which lead to the irreparable cultural degeneration associated with the romance novel. This kind of 'emptying' of cultural meaning also affects, naturally, the construction of the feminine, represented by the romance novel of Franco's regime and cultivated by authors such as Carmen de Icaza, among others.

The romance novel in the early Franco regime therefore established a female stereotype that fulfilled the three fundamental characteristics of the stereotype according to Tajfel (1969). On the one hand, the concept of femininity comes from a society segmented into different categories defined via power relations and opposition. On the other hand, it has also been assigned a series of its own characteristics that distinguish it from the rest of the social segmentations or subsets. This series of its own characteristics of femininity in the romance novel may be summarised as submission to an apparently submissive female archetype, obeying the norms of conduct of the patriarchal society. Nonetheless, this submission turns out to be only partial, as the female protagonists of the romance novel subvert this idea to a certain extent by means of a resolute

attitude that helps them to resolve all the difficulties they come up against. In romance novel discourse, this female stereotype is based on romantic fantasy which supposes a statement of what constitutes the concept of the feminine, supported by 're-telling' or repeatedly telling and by means of a pre-established narrative structure, a model of woman that ends up becoming a stereotype, consumed and created via the production mechanisms used by popular culture; which, for its part, produces an interpretation of this stereotype, reconstructing a kind of alternative female power only present in fiction.

For her part, Carmen Marín Gaite in *Usos amorosos de la posguerra* produces a portrait of the defining features of the stereotype of women that dominated the cultural imaginary during Franco's regime and that undoubtedly corresponds with the protagonists of the romance novels analysed in our study:

The more misfortune they may have had in reality, the more they needed that identification with heroines invented by M^a Mercedes Ortoll, M^a Luisa Valdefrancos and Concha Linares Becerra, on whom, when they least expected it, a joy would fall from the skies that would make them feel transfigured, different. (Martín Gaite 1994, p. 144)

In other words, what can be discovered in the romance novel discourse of the time is a subtext that appeals directly to the recipient, i.e. to female readers. By means of a process of identification, discourses rooted in the collective subconscious are transposed. Transformed by virtue of a conservative modernity (Labanyi 2004), the female protagonists of romance discourse find their identity in the other, in the male element that gives them back a constructed image of themselves, albeit created according to the Francoist patriarchal model which, however, they end up subverting via a mechanism of textual reflexivity.

This stereotype functions as an element of cohesion in Francoist society and also shapes a network of primary identifications between women and the fabricated image of women that is created, precisely, to be disseminated. In this process of primary identification, the romance novel cultivated by writers such as Carmen de Icaza becomes a key element as an instrument to channel the cultural imaginary of the time.

Lastly, romance discourse maintains a difficult balance between the mechanisms of persuasion used by the female Falange movement⁷ and the propaganda apparatus of the early Franco regime, as well as (as we have partly seen) the configuration of a female subjectivation distanced from the stereotype and disseminated by means of these mechanisms of persuasion. On the one hand, the romance novel fits the defining parameters of femininity as passivity and the observance of particularly female patterns such as love or sentimentalism; and, on the other hand, it subverts its own discourse on which it seems to be based, undermining the pillars of patriarchal society by means of what we might call the subversive power of the exalted imagination which, in the romance novel discourse analysed, becomes an alternative reality – that of the dreams of the female protagonists. This is summarised by Julia Maura⁸ herself:

The strict limits of the patriarchal wisdom imposed by the dominant stereotype of femininity were clearly threatened by what was classified as the dangerous zeal of the imagination. (Julia Maura 1944)

What Julia Maura is claiming is the omnipresence of a stereotyped female image encouraged by Franco's regime, which finds in the romance novel a space beyond the limits established by the social imaginary of the time. So, ultimately, the conceptualisation of woman in the romance novel is established as a central element in the discourse that manages to subvert the Francoist ideology precisely because it is popular culture, thereby recreating its own discourse as a new re-writing of the feminine in a symbolic universe of alternative denotative meaning.

Notes

1. For discussion of this see José Manuel Alfonso Sánchez (2005, p. 7), which states that 'the Minister for National Education, José Ibáñez Martín, made all efforts to extend religious culture to all the levels of teaching and to rely for this on the inestimable help of the Church'.
2. The impact of receiving romance discourse for the female readers of the time is examined in *La novela popular en España* (VV.AA 2000, p. 76) as a permanent negotiation between the imposition of certain female stereotypes and relative modernity, expressed in terms of the independence of action and decision of the novels' protagonists; something which is ultimately related to a permanent negotiation of power.
3. See *La novela popular en España* (VV.AA 2000, p. 10) for a full discussion of the origins of the popular novel to the European serial, this being classified into different types such as the serialised novel, a follow on from the newspaper serial, and the complete short novel, the successor to 'dime novels'. It is also argued that the boom in the popular novel in the 1940s was due precisely to the autarchy of Spanish publishers who were undergoing huge difficulties such as censorship and paper shortages, which 'would notably help to explain what, without any doubt, may be classified as the golden age of the popular Spanish novel. Thanks to this, many young writers who, in the thirties, had been trained as translators of foreign material, now had the chance to start a professional career. And this was added to a series of Republican writers who, victims of the purifications of the post-war period, had to seek refuge in this kind of literature in order to survive' (p. 18).
4. Especially during the 1940s, there was a large number of romance novel collections. All publishers had one or even several collections dedicated to this kind of novel. In this respect, 'the number of titles published was incredibly high. And the print runs, particularly for certain authors, were astronomical' (VV.AA 2000, p. 45). With regard to relations between the mass production of romance novels and their consumption, some theorists state that 'more than any other genre, romance fulfilled a function of sedating, of strengthening traditional social and moral values and encouraging passivity, as with all products that offer imaginary alternatives of happiness' (p. 48).
5. See the analysis of the relationship between the romance novel and everyday life made by Janice Radway in *Reading the romance* (1987, p. 61). The author explores the nuances present in the experience of reading romance novels by female readers as something different from their real life that thereby provides them with a kind of therapeutic escape, without abruptly crossing the limits established by the power relations between popular culture and the dominant ideology in each specific period.
6. Some of Icaza's novels have been adapted for the cinema. In 1943 Gonzalo Delgrás directed *Cristina Guzmán*, starring the actress Marta Santaolalla. Later, *Cristina Guzmán* was also filmed by Luis César Amadori in 1968. A version of *La fuente enterrada* was made for the cinema, directed by Antonio Román in 1950. On the work of Carmen de Icaza, see Jo Labanyi (2002).
7. The *Sección Femenina de Falange* (Falange Female Section) was created in 1934 as the Spanish Falange Section of the JONS. The aim of the Female Section was to encourage the national-syndicalist spirit in women, whose slogan boiled down to serving as a complement to man, forming with him an indissoluble social unity. In this respect, see the study by Rosario Sánchez López (1990).
8. Julia Maura, daughter of the Duke of Maura and granddaughter of the statesman Antonio Maura, was born in Madrid in 1910 and died, also in Madrid, in 1971. Among her main works we may mention *La eterna doña Juana*, *Eva y la vida*, and *Chocolate a la española*. Her literary production focused on observing female psychology and primarily standing out for her skill in reproducing details of everyday life. In this respect see the article by Pilar Nieva de la Paz (2001).

Notes on contributor

Sonia Núñez Puente is a graduate in Hispanic Philology and a doctor in Spanish Literature. She currently lectures at the Universidad Rey Juan Carlos in Madrid and is an Honorary Research Fellow on the Ramón y Cajal programme. She is Director of the Institute for Identity and Gender Studies at the Universidad Rey Juan Carlos. She has led national and international projects on the image of women in the area of cultural studies. She has published numerous articles in national and international journals on the presence and representation of women in Spanish culture of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Together with the writer Lucía Etxebarria, she is co-author of *En brazos de la mujer fetiche* (2002). She is also the author of *Ellas se aburren. Tedio y figura femenina en La Regenta y la novela europea de la segunda mitad del siglo XIX* (2001), *Una historia propia. Historia de las mujeres en la España del siglo XX* (2004) and *Mujer y el discurso cultural en la España contemporánea* (2006). She has been a Leverhulme Research Fellow at Aberdeen University (Scotland) and a lecturer at Vanderbilt University (USA).

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