

## 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.<sup>1</sup>

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).<sup>2</sup> 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-cafe%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.'<sup>3</sup> 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 Compay Segundo. *The Cannibal's Daughter* was the best-selling

3 See <[http://www.clubcultura.com/clubliteratura/clubescritores/montero/autora\\_bio.htm](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.<sup>4</sup> 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](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],<sup>5</sup> 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 Maria-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)<sup>6</sup>

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–),<sup>7</sup> 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'.<sup>8</sup> 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.<sup>9</sup>

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.<sup>10</sup>

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>>.

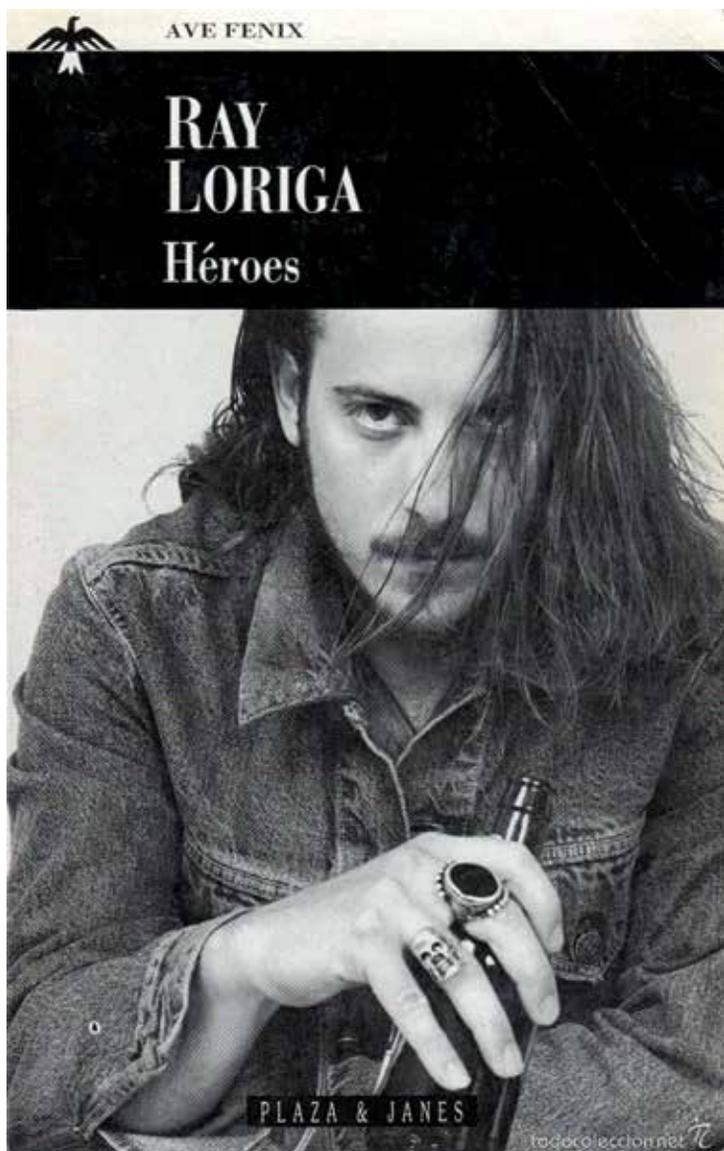


Figure 3.1 Looking like a rock star, Ray Loriga poses on the record-like cover of his novel *Héroes* (1993).  
Reproduced with permission.



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'.

