

CONCLUSION

Persistent Stereotypes

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

