EW subjects are as fascinating as one’s own reflection in the eyes of a desired “Other.” Lacan, perhaps taking the concept to the extreme, observed that the Other is the reason for and a prime subject of all discourse (244); this figure becomes even more compelling when he or she is sexually charged. Throughout literary history the desired Other of the opposite sex has been a woman, seen by a man. From Cervantes’ Dulcinea to Juan Benet’s María Timoner, female characters have reflected the cultural values and concretized the fantasies of their male creators. Responding to the allure of this Other, critics have analyzed male authors’ depictions of women from a number of perspectives (Magnarelli; Schriber). The success of various renditions of the female Other is a matter of individual critical opinion. However, the authority of male writers to create characters of the opposite sex has never been questioned.

Recently critics have observed that just as women have been the focus of male writers over centuries, the literary image of men

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1 The allure of the female Other is noticeable in popular culture as well. For example, a recent issue of the magazine Prólogo featured a quiz entitled “¿Quién es la dama?” through which readers were invited to test their literary acumen. Eight one-paragraph book excerpts, taken from novels by men, were presented alongside the names of eight female characters; the object was to match up the woman character with her male author and his novel.
may be the legitimate product of women writers (Miller 39–40; Showalter, Literature; Todd 1–9). Acceptance of this tenet is due in large part to the impact of the relatively new discipline of Gender Studies, which has made known the fact that “all reading and writing, by men as well as by women, is marked by gender” (Showalter, “Introduction. . .” 2). With the recognition that the masculine Other can be the province of the female imagination, an investigation of the men in Spanish literature by women is timely. These literary depictions of men by women are intimately revealing in that they point to the social precepts and the cherished myths of their creators. In addition, images of men by women illustrate what Hélène Cixous has described as the woman author “blaz[ing] her trail in the symbolic” (292), enriching literary conventions with new visions.

The topic of men by women in Spanish literature is vast, spanning several centuries and different genres. This essay reports findings from a pilot study of the contemporary era, the epoch in which most known Spanish literature by women has been produced (Brown, “Women Writers . . .”), and concentrates specifically on novels published during the past two decades. The works were chosen because they have historical importance. To meet this criterion I examined all of the full-length novels written in the 1970s and 1980s by the four authors who are now the most studied contemporary women writers of Spain: Carmen Martín Gaite, Esther Tusquets, Rosa Montero and Ana María Moix. This selection yielded eleven novels: Carmen Martín Gaite’s Fragmentos de interior (1976) and El cuarto de atrás (1979; Premio Nacional de Literatura of the same year); Esther Tusquets’ El mismo mar de todos los veranos (1978; Premio Ciudad de Barcelona 1979), El amor es un juego solitario (1979) and Varada tras el último naufragio (1980); Rosa Montero’s Crónica del desamor (1979), La función Delta (1981), Te trataré como a una reina (1983) and Amado amo (1988); and Ana María Moix’s Julia (1970) and Walter, ¿Por qué te fuiste? (1973). This cohort of well-recognized novels was used to test the hypothesis that men by women in the current Spanish novel comprise two

2 The source of this statistic is the MLA Bibliographies for 1977 through 1988, the most recent year for which data are available. According to this information, the most studied contemporary (post-1970) Spanish women writers are, in order of importance, Carmen Martín Gaite, Esther Tusquets, Rosa Montero and Ana María Moix.
categories: stereotypes and heroes. While the former are hackneyed, reflecting a dichotomy that parallels the familiar, bipolar division of stereotypical women characters created by men, the heroic males are new and possibly exclusive to Spain.

The novelists and their works are heterogeneous. A brief overview of the novels reveals the distinct preoccupations of Martín Gaite, Tusquets, Montero and Moix, whose novelistic styles also differ widely. Martín Gaite’s *Fragmentos de interior* is a collection of externally-observed tableaux detailing the private lives of an upper-middle-class Madrid family, including its servants, over the course of three turbulent days in 1975. In *El cuarto de atrás* a woman character whose initials are identical to the author’s is visited one stormy night by a mysterious man in black; their discursive conversation about her life and works transforms itself into the text of the novel. Esther Tusquets’ three novels are a self-proclaimed trilogy, although critics are divided as to the degree of continuity among female main characters who share the same name in the three novels. *El mismo mar de todos los veranos* traces the love affair of a fortyish professor and her young female student, through the impressionistic first-person discourse of the older woman. *El amor es un juego solitario* relates the seduction of a young male poet by a beautiful older diletante. *Varada tras el último naufragio* chronicles the reactions of two women friends in their late thirties or early forties to the disintegration of their love relationships with their husbands.

Rosa Montero’s first novel *Crónica del desamor* is a third-person account of a young woman and her extended group of friends; the female main character works toward assuming control of her life. Her second novel, *La función Delta*, presents two eras in the woman narrator’s life: one is reflected upon in a memoir of a week in Madrid in the 1980s and another in a diary kept by the woman as she approaches death in the year 2010. In Montero’s *Te trataré como a una reina*, a group of interrelated characters are observed as they move in and out of a seedy nightclub, where romantic *boleros* contrast with their depressed and sometimes violent lives. *Amado amo* is a minutely rendered omniscient account of a critical period in the life of a spineless artist, who has dissipated his talent working for an advertising agency.

In Ana María Moix’s first novel *Julia*, the twenty-year-old female protagonist recaptures the details of her painful life, recol-
lected during a night-long bout with insomnia and recounted by an omniscient narrator. In Walter, ¿Por qué te fuiste?, several narrative voices are used to relate an intricate and often bizarre story centered around the mysterious identity of Walter, and detailing relationships among a group of cousins in Barcelona of the 1960s.

Most of the male characters in these works are identified by their relationship to a woman. Forty-five male characters are important enough to be sketched in these eleven novels. One is a grandfather, three are fathers, four are brothers, and two are cousins to women. Thirty-five others are, were, or may be involved with women protagonists in an intimate relationship. The relational standing of these male characters is true regardless of their or the women characters’ sexual orientation; for example, the homosexual Cecilio in Crónica del desamor is depicted in his non-sexual friendship with the woman protagonist Ana, and his friends also are introduced through their appearances when Ana is present. Similarly, the homosexual cousin Ricardo in Moix’s Walter is depicted in relation to Julia and Lea. There are only two exceptions to the centrality of women characters in knowing male characters: these are the possibly homosexual son of the family presented in Martín Gaite’s Fragmentos de interior and the misogynistic main character César of Montero’s Amado amo. The discourse of all other males is associated with, if not actually filtered through the first-person consciousness of, a female voice.

Twenty-three, or approximately half of the forty-five male figures described by more than a tag-line in these novels, are important enough within each text to be distinguished as central. However, since centrality is often a matter of other characters’ perception rather than actual presence in the novel, it is misleading to designate all of these characters as “protagonists.” A more fitting term is Sebold’s “male lead.”3 Often, this male figure assumes the role that has been noted in Golden Age drama as “the non-acting character type,” who “never really participates in the play’s action but whose name is constantly being mentioned by the main characters and whose silent presence is continually felt” (Dietz 14).

3 This term was suggested by Russell P. Sebold during the discussion following my paper “Male Protagonists in Novels by Women After Franco: A Masculinist Critique,” presented at the MLA Convention, Dec. 28, 1985, Chicago, IL, in the Special Session “Sexuality, Gender and Discourse in Spanish Fiction since Franco,” chaired by Currie K. Thompson.
Men by Women

Carmen Martín Gaite’s male leads are Jaime, Diego and Víctor Poncela in Fragmentos de interior and the man in black in El cuarto de atrás. Esther Tusquets’ male main characters are Jorge and Julio in El mismo mar de todos los veranos, Ricardo in El amor es un juego solitario, and Jorge and Pablo in Varada tras el último naufragio. The male leads drawn by Rosa Montero are Soto Amón, José María and Cecilio in Crónica del desamor; Ricardo, Miguel and Hipólito in La función Delta; Antonio, El Poco and Damián in Te trataré como a una reina, and César in Amado amo. Important men in the works of Ana María Moix are Rafael, Ernesto and don Julio in Julia, and Ismael (including his incarnation as The Great Yeibo) in Walter, ¿Por qué te fuiste?

At a first glance, these characters seem wildly disparate. They include a sickly brother, a seductive employer, a long-lost young love, a fantastic interviewer, a narcissistic filmmaker and a circus cowboy-clown. It becomes apparent, however, that they can be sorted into two types: stereotypical Spanish men, and unique Spanish men. Of the twenty-three male leads in these novels, thirteen are stereotypes, eight are heroes, and two are ambiguous. One of the ambiguous men leans slightly toward being stereotypical, and the other is somewhat heroic. In both major groups, patterns of characterization (or, in the case of stereotyping, caricaturization) are readily apparent. The former are without exception denigrating images of men, while the latter are fundamentally admiring. It is tempting to apply to them the labels of villains and heroes.

The stereotypes of men in these novels fall into two categories, depicting Spanish men in two polar characterizations that are reminiscent of the “madonna” and “whore” dichotomy of male-authored feminine mythology. These clichéd characters are “the macho” and “the weakling.” Caricatures of the middle-aged Spanish macho male appear in the works of all four novelists. Martín Gaite’s handsome Diego Alvar in Fragmentos de interior is a shallow middle-aged publishing executive who hopes someday to compose a great novel, but who is unable to write: “siempre . . . la misma impotencia,” he laments, facing a blank page in the type-writer (69). In his personal life, he tries to assert his virility by abandoning his talented wife of three decades, taking up with a vacuous young woman who counts him among her lovers. Although he prides himself on being modern, Diego remains a hypocritical product of his generation; the idea of his liberated girlfriend sleep-
ing with others gives him “un ataque de celos de lo más ibérico” (111).

Tusquets’ Julio in El mismo mar is another philandering, fortyish husband who is superficial and untalented, though very attractive and commercially successful as a filmmaker. He and Tusquets’ Pablo of Varada tras el último naufragio are depicted as ridiculously narcissistic, needing to affirm their manliness with women half their age. They represent a type: “el marido que al entrar en la madurez se siente hastiado de la cotaneidad, insatisfecho de la vida que ha vivido, del trabajo que ha hecho y no ha hecho, de las oportunidades que ha malogrado” (Varada 209). These men are totally lacking in depth: even in casual conversation, Julio “cae inevitablemente en lo más hueco y tópico” (204), leading the narrator to doubt the reality of his existence.

Montero’s Te trataré como a una reina features two self-styled ladykillers. One is El Poco, the deluded brute who tries to force a young nightclub habitué to flee with him to Cuba; he offers her the clichéd promise “te trataré como a una reina,” to which she knowingly replies “Oh, sí, la reina de las pulgas, la emperatriz de las escobas” (207). Antonio is another middle-aged lothario in the novel; he uses a travel agent to apprise him of when the husbands of attractive young women are going to be out of town, then tries to arrange assignations with the lonely women. The very good-looking publishing magnate Eduardo Soto Amón of Montero’s Crónica del desamor is a slightly younger version of the middle-aged seducer, whose moves are so predictable that the woman protagonist can nearly exactly predict what he is about to say, before he even articulates it. Soto Amón uses intimidation to get what he wants: “pertenece a ese género de hombres que saben hacerse amar a través del odio y el dolor” (38), leading his subordinates to call him “Ramsés.”

These men are parodies of the strong Spanish male, who goes through life “de supermán,” (Crónica 256), or would like to think he does. The most heinous macho character is the rapist Víctor in Moix’s Julia. After taunting the young girl Julia with a sea urchin, this friend of her brothers’ violates her, admonishing “No dirás nada, idiota” (61). Although Moix’s rendering of this scene is oblique, undoubtedly reflecting one of the forty-five cuts in the novel made by the censor (Levine 293), the author nevertheless
establishes Víctor as the most flagrant “reaccionario hispánico” (Walter 206) in her pantheon.

Alongside the devastating macho figure, the second stereotypical male—the ineffectual, weak man—is also well represented. A variety of weak characters are elevated to the role of male lead in these eleven novels. Only one of these males is avowedly homosexual: the melancholy, fortyish Cecilio of Montero’s Te trataré como a una reina. Two other weak men may possibly be homosexual. One is an ambiguous character, Jaime in Martín Gaite’s Fragmentos de interior, who is largely passive and confused but who also is thoughtful and sympathetic to his mother. The other is the foppish, manipulative brother Ernesto of Moix’s Julia. Jaime, Ernesto and Cecilio are the only characters who are described as effeminate. All of the other weak men in these novels are depicted as being unequivocally heterosexual.

Two weak male characters represent the perversity of a female protagonist in her selection of a sexual plaything. One is Ricardo of El amor es un juego solitario by Tusquets: “el simio poeta,” as he is repeatedly designated. The beautiful older protagonist plucks the youth from oblivion and converts him into the object of her desire, despite the fact that he is physically repulsive: “un muchacho desgarbado, de cabello grasiento, de mejillas cubiertas de granos, de mirada oblicua tras las gafas, de ropas anchas y arrugadas, un tipo que seguía a las chicas por las calles con la boca seca y el corazón palpitante” (58). Ricardo is an anti-sex-object in the sense of the modern anti-hero: a sexual toy selected by the woman hero, who is the antithesis of what might be expected in the culture to arouse lust. The stammering, cross-eyed young peeping tom Damión of Montero’s Te trataré como a una reina is another unlikely sexual consort who has an affair with a middle-aged woman.

Another male weakling is the film director Hipólito of Rosa Montero’s La función Delta. He is a typically mendacious married lover, promising commitments that never materialize, while afraid to leave his wife and family. The unfaithful married man is seen from the mistress’ point of view; he is elusive and unobtainable, except when she herself becomes indifferent. Ironically, the narrator/mistress of La función Delta recognizes his emptiness from the start: she sums him up as “un cúmulo de palabras carente de coraje” (21). Hipólito’s own negative self-assessment goes unchallenged: “Yo me siento una nuez seca, con la cáscara entera y
aún nueva, pero por dentro hecho una ruina” (21). A different perspective on the weak and unfaithful married man is offered through the father, a secondary character, in Moix’s *Julia*; the daughter laments that he married her mother instead of having had the strength to choose his lover Eva, and agrees with her grandfather when he shouts “Mi hijo es un imbécil, un débil” (100).

The most intimately known weak male character in these novels, and arguably the most mesmerizing, is the central figure of Montero’s *Amado amo*. César is depicted in painful detail as he suffers a spiritual and moral decline. He is reported to feel like a dwarf and a worm (79); this is also how he behaves. Paralyzed by his sense of dwindling creativity as an artist, and paranoid about his loss of status at the foreign-owned advertising agency where he works, César becomes more and more desperate. He finally sinks to betraying his closest friend when she asks for his help in securing equal rights through a sex discrimination suit. Throughout the novel, one of César’s repugnant qualities is his vicious antifeminism: he rails against women’s “dictatorship” in the realm of reproduction (23), and remarks that his friend “le sacaba de quicio con su feminismo tan latoso” (48). Of all the weak men in these novels, César is the only one who is depicted as evil.

As these brief summaries suggest, the stereotyped figures of the macho and the weakling in these novels are presented in an unrelentingly negative light. Whether through omniscient description, the testimony of other characters, or through their own reported discourse, a scathing indictment of the characters’ pretensions is transmitted with little subtlety. As befits negative stereotypes, these men do not possess any significant admirable quality that might balance their depictions. Positive stereotypes are missing: there is no classical kindly uncle, for example, or a typical adoring younger brother. The one relationship that would be most likely to yield approving characterizations, that of a mother’s son, is barely explored; with two exceptions (the secondary character Daniel in Tusquets’ *Varada* and, to a lesser extent, Jaime in Martín Gaite’s *Fragmentos*), sons in these novels are usually shown in their concomitant role of brothers. (The scarce presence of sons in women’s narratives is not a Spanish novelty; Miller [13] finds this absence in modern British and American fiction by women as well.)

Stereotypical characters in these works are undisguised personifications of the authors’ urge to puncture the inflated myths
of the Spanish male persona, demonstrating what Tusquets has called "la utilización de la escritura como arma defensiva, como respuesta al mundo actual y de todos los tiempos" ("Para salir . . ." 81). This authorial intention is allied with British and American women writers' novels of social protest, in which satire also represents censure of prevailing mores (Pratt 59). Social criticism embedded in these characters involves a challenge to the supremacy of insensitive and/or ineffectual individuals who are granted power over their superiors, simply because of their gender. The mordant satire of machismo reflects these writers' discomfort with a notion of heroism that includes the denigration of women as part of the manly ideal. These characters illustrate how the perspective of women as they write about men "can supply . . . an outsider's vision of a culture" (Miller 3), revealing the implications of the cultural norm of male superiority for that half of the population which is most damaged by it.

Unlike stereotypical characters, heroes (admired male leads) are somewhat less well represented in these novels. However, these characters are more complex and more evenhandedly drawn, having positive as well as negative qualities. The methods used to depict them are, with only one exception, identical to the techniques through which stereotypical characters are known; omniscient description, the first-person testimony of a woman and reported discourse transmit their characteristics. The male leads who defy stereotyping are a varied lot: the painter and family friend Víctor Poncela in *Fragmentos de interior* and the mysterious, erudite man in black in *El cuarto de atrás* by Martín Gaite; the long-ago first lover Jorge in *El mismo mar de todos los veranos* and the separated husband and father Jorge in *Varada tras el último naufragio* by Tusquets; the ambiguous character José Maria of *Crónica del desamor*, and the protagonists' now-deceased mathematician husband Miguel and her long-time friend and current lover Ricardo in *La función Delta* by Montero; and the grandfather Don Julio and brother Rafael in *Julia* and the cowboy-clown cousin Ismael in *Walter, ¿Por qué te fuiste?* by Moix.

Martín Gaite's hero Víctor Poncela of *Fragmentos* possesses the creativity and discernment that his weak friend Diego lacks. His taste is reflected in his lifelong love for Agustina, the wife whom Diego has tossed aside. He values Agustina's poetry and her point of view; he paints her portrait in a mauve dress; he cries
when she takes her own life. Víctor is remarkably clear-sighted and insightful: conversation with him is a pleasure, partly because he elicits eloquence in other speakers (58) and partly due to his deftly ironic style. This verbal dexterity, a quality so highly valued by Martín Gaite, is shared by her second novelistic hero. As a conversational partner for a writer, the fantastic main character of Cuarto has no peer: he is free from the limitations of the real world, he is a brilliant literary critic, and he brings with him an arsenal of psychological as well as pharmacological inducements to speech (Brown, Secrets 162). Alejandro, the mysterious man in black, is refined, sensitive and knowledgeable. He is also forceful and strong. He frequently directs the conversation that forms the basis of the text, as when he aggressively steers the discussion to the topic of fantastic literature (55). At one point he also begins to move forward romantically, although a telephone call shatters the tenuous moment (141) and another opportunity does not arise.

Tusquets' first hero named Jorge (El mismo mar) is not fantastic, but he is mythic; although the narrator twists the original myth, she "casts herself as Ariadne to Jorge's Theseus" (Servodídio 168). Jorge was the narrator's first love; the sensitive, independent, smooth-chested young man whom she recalls had awakened her from the day they first met, "en que me había arrancado de mis oscuros laberintos y habíamos asesinado alegremente entre los dos al Minotauro, en que me había despertado de mi pesado sueño en el peñasco en llamas . . . y me había sacado a la luz, a la vida" (221). His suicide devastates her. Tusquets' second hero named Jorge (Varada) is also absent: he is the main character, Elia's husband, and the father of her son. Like the abandoned main character of El mismo mar, the protagonist of Varada uses Jorge to mark the beginning of her life: what preceded him was prehistory, and what came after his abandonment was not really living (57). Intelligent and scholarly, a dreamer full of promises, Jorge is Elia's muse (98). He is the man who comes closest to understanding the secret code shared by Elia and her friend Eva, being "más afín a ellas" (24). Elia remembers him as a male witch, a magician, whose lovemaking she recalls tenderly and eagerly (30). A detailed physical description of Jorge reveals why the fit and muscular Pablo declares that it is "impossible adivinar qué es lo que ven en él las mujeres" (106), and indicates that his romantic skill is unrelated to his awkward appearance:
fue en cierto modo un forastero, un tipo largo y flaco que llegaba desde muy lejos . . . un desconocido distraído . . . con ese andar balanceante de los hombres altos y flacos a los que todo se les vuelve brazos, se les resuelve en piernas, y tenía un bigote lacio y tricolor (como el pelaje de gatos de este pueblo), tras el que escondía quizás una sonrisa triste, y más arriba los ojos . . . melancólicos y burlones (100).

As is frequent in Tusquets’ narratives, the protagonist recounts her love affair as a fairy tale, substituting the gangly Jorge for the picture-perfect (though no more enthralling) Prince Charming (99–100).

The male heroes created by Montero are more mundane than the recollected heroes drawn by Tusquets, but their power to captivate is equally strong. An ambiguous character who resembles a hero but is also fickle and vain is José María of Crónica del desamor, a man ten years older than the protagonist who is most attracted to her when she stops being interested in him. Caustic and self-possessed, his magnetism is cerebral: “una mente brillante e irónica que la desconcertó, que le hacía temblar las piernas” (68). In La función Delta, two heroic men are introduced. The first, Miguel, was a mathematician to whom the protagonist Lucía was married before his untimely death, when she was in her thirties. Miguel had the power to calm Lucía, and to make her happy. A burly man, Miguel offered a warm shoulder, a tender heart, and an endearing demeanor. The narrator recalls being especially enchanted by Miguel’s domestic competence: “Me cautivó su autosuficiencia doméstica, tan extraña en un hombre: cocinaba, fregaba los cacharros, recogía la casa, barría, se lavaba la ropa” (138). While Lucía was attracted to Miguel immediately, she is not intimate with her lifelong friend Ricardo, a gawky dilettante, until her old age; their affair is consummated in her nursing home bed. Ricardo wins Lucía’s heart through the stories he tells and through his running commentary on the memoirs she writes about their jointly remembered past.

The recollections of male heroes in Moix’s Julia center around two family members: Julia’s grandfather don Julio, and her brother Rafael. Her grandfather is an iconoclastic, brusque but tender man, who empowers her by teaching her Latin and encouraging Julia to think for herself: “Haré de mi nieta una persona inteligente aunque sea mujer,” he declares (102). Julia lives with him for several years in the country during her brother Rafael’s illness. Before he dies
of a brain tumor, Rafael was the other heroic male figure in Julia's life: a protector, a source of fun, and someone with whom she shared a "complicidad amistosa" (116). In contrast with the platonic familial relationships in Moix's first novel, the interactions of cousins in Walter is fraught with sexual excitement. The hero Ismael Ulloa, also known by his stage name The Great Yeibo, is a circus cowboy-clown whose imagination is boundless. Subtle and complex, he is a loner with a fatalistic view of life. Interestingly, of all the male characters in these novels, Ismael is the only one who is granted his own first-person internal discourse. Although Ismael is barely described in physical terms, other than that he at one time had "gafas truman, cabello moreno, rizado, sin canas" (180), he is depicted in the impressive feat of making love to a creature who is half woman and half horse.

Despite the range of these characters' occupations or even their physical presence in the novels, these heroes or male leads are remarkably alike. The similarities among them are sufficient to establish them as a composite character, a new masculine hero. This figure is a highly intelligent, sensitive man whose enormous sexual appeal to women protagonists is rooted in his intellect. These protagonists inspire physical lust with their intellectual, rather than physical, prowess. (This attraction is manifest as worshipful admiration when incest taboos preclude sexual expression, as in Moix's Julia.) The allure of these men is transmitted through sensitivity, not bravado. In Varada tras el último naufragio, for example, the beautiful woman poet longs for her ungainly, skinny husband to make love to her, and cares not at all for the handsome young man with whom she wanders away her boredom. In La función Delta, the woman narrator falls in love with her husband when he remembers that she is having her menstrual period, and pampers her specially. This same narrator later becomes more and more affectionate with Ricardo, whose aging physique is erased in her mind by his compassionate friendship.

The sexuality of these male characters is verbal, sometimes even textual. Conversation is used by these masculine heroes to excite the desire of the women characters. In El cuarto de atrás, the mysterious man in black engages the woman narrator in an extended conversation; his discourse creates and keeps alive the possibility of romantic contact between them. In many instances in these works, women narrators recall the long hours of conver-
sation that cemented their physical as well as spiritual commitment to these heroes: to the sensitive, iconoclastic Jorge in El mismo mar de todos los veranos, who was the narrator's one heterosexual love; to the husband Jorge in Varada tras el último naufragio, for whom the poet has composed all her work; to the domestic Miguel and later the odd but lucid Ricardo in La función Delta. These perceptive, intelligent, communicative men are not particularly handsome in traditional terms; suave good looks are the province of villains in these novels. Admired male leads rarely match women protagonists in terms of physical attractiveness, but this does not matter. Their appeal is passionate, powerful and enduring.

Feminist theory affords a ready explanation for the stereotypical men created by women. It is commonly accepted that the mythic villain is the province of the opposite gender, regardless of whether the writer is a man or a woman. In contrast, what I have observed as the new male hero does not conform as easily to existing theory. Feminist critics working in other languages, notably English and French, have offered some theories regarding the gentle literary hero drawn by women authors in the past. What they find, in essence, is that women writers have traditionally created a feminized hero, who, like the new hero of current Spanish fiction, is sensitive and intelligent. Unlike the Spanish males, however, this hero is not sexually powerful and compelling, and this is no accident. Speaking of English literature, Janet Todd points out what she terms "a common habit of female writers—the feminizing of men, either to master them and take way [sic] their otherness or to soften their patriarchal potential by allowing them qualities usually assumed to be female: gentleness, patience, and sensitivity. Such hybrid men . . . are ideal not because they are supermen but because they are androgynous" (3–4).

For the new Spanish hero, this does not apply. The Spanish men in these novels are not emasculated. Nor are they androgynous. They are powerfully magnetic in their sexuality. What we have, I think, is a new convention: a sensitive hero of the present decay. Like the stereotypical male leads, this figure also "deconstructs the components of [a cultural] frame [of reference]" (Schriber 15), but does so through a utopian vision. The admired male leads in these novels represent the ideal of a new Spanish male. This hero appeals to bright, sexually open women through his intelligence, although his appeal is by no means exclusively cerebral. The new
literary hero, who is sympathetic to women's needs at the same time that he is virile and exciting, is a product of newly frank Spanish novels by women. Inscribed in these new characters is the wish fulfillment that only an author can enjoy.

In summary, an analysis of men by women in eleven major novels by the four most studied contemporary female authors indicates that male characters are known primarily through their relationships with women, and that approximately half of these characters are important enough in their respective novels to be designated male leads. As literary figures, nearly all the male leads belong to one of two categories: stereotypes or heroes. Stereotypical male leads are exclusively negative, and they are bipolar. The Spanish macho male and the pathetic weakling are lampooned mercilessly, reflecting social criticism of the ethic of male superiority. The second type of male lead drawn by women is the masculine hero. Here a new convention is introduced: the sensitive intellectual whose sexual prowess is based on winning over the minds (through which he reaches the bodies) of women heroes. This new characterization is not, as previous English feminist theory suggests, a feminization of the masculine hero to disarm his power. Instead, this desired Other reflects women writers' ideal of a new Spanish male.

Future studies will explore many questions relating to readings of men by women; one of these is whether the new Spanish literary hero is an enlightened view of masculinity, or whether women writers are falling into the trap of creating another stereotype. Now that the desired Other in literature is frequently a man seen by a woman, new issues of cultural values, sexual fantasy and gender have been raised. From this study of novels by Spain's most prominent contemporary women writers, one conclusion is inescapable: for men as for women, there is much to be learned from one's reflection in the eyes of the beholder.

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