

Working Paper OP-13

*Romancing the early Franco regime: the novelas románticas  
of Concha Linares-Becerra and Luisa-María Linares*

by

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March 5, 2004

### **Abstract**

This paper considers works of romance fiction produced between 1933 and 1943 by two prolific writers, both with Nationalist sympathies, whose works sold widely (and can still be purchased today), attracting numerous film adaptations. It explores the ways in which their romances illustrate a conservative modernity, through their choice of upwardly mobile, active female protagonists and through their plots driven by change and speed. The paper also examines the self-reflexive dimensions of these romances, arguing that we should not assume that self-reflexivity is the prerogative of high culture. Particular stress is based on the repeated plotlines based on fraudulent marriages which blossom into 'true love'. The paper concludes that, although these novels in no way reflect the reality of their time, at a structural level their stress on spatial dislocation, chance, and impersonation speaks to the popular imaginary in two periods – the Second Republic and the early Franco regime – characterized by personal and political upheaval.

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**Romancing the early Franco regime: the *novelas románticas* of Concha Linares-Becerra and Luisa-María Linares**

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This article complements an earlier article on Spanish female fascist activists who were also writers of fiction (Labanyi 2002). In this case I shall discuss the *novelas románticas* of two popular women writers of the early Franco regime, who – as far as I know – had no political role, though it is clear from references to the Civil War in their texts that they had Nationalist sympathies. The two writers concerned – Concha Linares-Becerra and Luisa-María Linares – were related but the information I have found is contradictory. A January 1944 interview with them both in the falangist film magazine *Primer Plano* (García Viñolas) states categorically that they were sisters and within the interview they refer to each other as such. But the publisher's blurb facing the title page of Concha's first novel, *Por qué me case con él* (1933), gives her father as Luis Linares Becerra (1887-1931), author of popular comedies, melodramas, zarzuelas, operettas, and 'dramas líricos'; while the website of their publisher ([www.editorialjuventud.es](http://www.editorialjuventud.es)) gives Luisa-María's father as the prolific dramatist Manuel Linares Rivas y Astray, President of the Sociedad de Autores Españoles (1867-1938).<sup>1</sup> Both Luis Linares Becerra and Manuel Linares Rivas y Astray had adapted for the theatre novels that had been made into successful silent films;<sup>2</sup> conversely, the latter's play *La mala ley* was made into a film by Manuel Noriega in 1924 (Gómez Mesa 150). Emeterio Díez Puertas mentions a Manuel Linares Becerra (presumably related) known for creating in the early 1920s the new theatrical genre of the 'película hablada' (331). This link with cinema would be continued by both Concha and Luisa-María, a large number of their novels being made into successful film comedies.

The novels of both women can still be bought in Spanish bookstores and over the internet – seventeen novels by Concha are still in print; twenty-two by Luisa-María. Since their first editions, they have continued to be published by Editorial Juventud in Barcelona, which issued the older Concha's prewar fiction (she started publishing in 1933) in its *Novela*

*Rosa* series. Other writers published in this prewar collection were Rosalía de Castro, Armando Palacio Valdés, Concha Espina, and Edith Wharton. Several of Concha's fictional works are set in the Civil War; these are no longer in print. The younger Luisa published her first novel in 1939, and her work refers to the war only occasionally; one novella set in the war, "Ojos azules", is still available in the volume *Una aventura de película* (59-87). The vast majority of their works in print have no temporal reference, allowing them to be reissued over successive decades. I have found one clear case of updating: the current edition of Luisa-María's 1940 novel *Un marido a precio fijo* includes in its closing ironic "Manual del perfecto marido" a reference to cosy winter evenings watching television. Current editions of the older Concha's work give only the date of the recent reissue, as if wanting to deny their age. The covers of her novels are blatantly anachronistic in their modernity. For example, the cover of the current edition of *Maridos de lujo* (dated 1988) features, in between colour photographs of a chauffeur with limousine and the Alhambra, that of a smart young woman with fashionable short haircut which might have featured on the cover of a recent issue of *Elle* magazine. The cover of the current edition of *La novia de la Costa Azul* (dated 1986) contains a bizarre collage of colour photographs of an elegant couple in evening wear, a yachting marina, and a fragment from a Spanish newspaper article on The Rolling Stones, including a picture of Mick Jagger in pink trousers and sleeveless T-shirt – despite the fact that the novel was published in 1943 and there is no equivalent of a rock concert anywhere in the novel. The romances of the younger Luisa mostly have anodyne modern female faces on their covers but, curiously, are issued with the original date of publication preceding the date of the current edition.

Both writers – especially Luisa-María<sup>3</sup> – were spectacularly successful in selling the film rights to their novels. Ángel Luis Hueso's catalogue of Spanish films for 1941-50 lists only one adaptation of Concha's fiction: *Una chica de opereta*, filmed by Quadreny in 1943 from her novel *Opereta* of the same year. The previously mentioned 1944 article in *Primer Plano* (García Viñolas) states that the rights had been sold for three more – *Por qué me case con él* (1933), *La novia de la Costa Azul* (1943), and *Vendrá por el mar* (1943) – with two

more – *Sanatorio de amor* (1945) and *Maridos de coral* (1941) – under discussion. A prewar novel, *Diez días millonaria* (1934), was filmed by José Buchs in its year of publication (Gasca 165). The same 1944 *Primer Plano* article tells us that all of Luisa-María’s novels to date have been or are about to be adapted for the screen:<sup>4</sup> *En poder de Barba Azul* (1939, adapted by José Buchs in 1940 and also filmed in Italy); *Escuela para nuevos ricos* (1939); *Un marido a precio fijo* (1940, adapted by Delgrás in 1942); *Mi enemigo y yo* (1940, adapted by Quadreny in 1943); *Doce lunas de miel* (1941, adapted by Vajda in 1943), *La vida empieza a medianoche* (1943, adapted by Orduña in 1944); *Tuvo la culpa Adán* (1944, also adapted by Orduña in 1944); and *Napoleón llega en el Clipper* (adapted by Delgrás in 1945 with the new title *El viajero llegó en el Clipper*, also known as *El misterioso viajero del Clipper*). Gómez Mesa adds to the list *Detective con faldas* (adapted by Núñez in 1941) and *Mi novio del emperador* (1943, adapted by Vajda in 1944 with the title *Te quiero para mí*).<sup>5</sup> The 1944 *Primer Plano* article tells us that she is currently writing the film script for *Ella y él al cincuenta por ciento* (filmed by Delgrás in 1944, also known as *Ni tuyo ni mío*), and that Delgrás is signed up to film her novella “Una aventura de película” (1943). A French website still selling translations of her work ([www.livrenpoche.com](http://www.livrenpoche.com)) says that around twenty films were made of her novels, in Spain, Italy and Mexico, as well as three theatrical and several television adaptations. Galerstein (178) states that her novels, in addition to being translated into French, German, Italian, Portuguese, Swedish, Dutch, and Finnish, have been adapted for television in France and Argentina as well as Spain. We may note that two 1944 film versions of her novels, *La vida empieza a medianoche* and *Tuvo la culpa Adán*, were made by the period’s top director Juan de Orduña, reminding us that his output does not consist only in the patriotic epics with which he is associated, but additionally includes a significant number of light-hearted romantic comedies. For this is *literatura lite*: I do not wish to claim otherwise though I will note some features shared with high-cultural texts. I am interested in examining these novels as a cultural phenomenon. If so many of them still sell today, and if they were so successful in attracting film adaptations (particularly the work of Luisa-María), I think we ought to consider what their appeal might be.

Like all romance fiction written for a publisher specializing in the genre, these novels are written to a formula. Here we may bear in mind Homi Bhabha's observation, made in a totally different context, that stereotypes are a way of managing contradiction. Tania Modleski and Janice Radway have written persuasively about romance fiction as a coping mechanism, allowing women readers to deal with dissatisfaction resulting from their disadvantaged life situations, though not providing a way of solving the problem. I shall not suggest that the romances studied here contain a feminist subtext, for they ritually end with the heroine's capitulation to the hero's embrace, resulting in the loss of her previous independence. But I am interested in looking at the plot twists that occur along the road to love, since there are some fairly extraordinary things going on – and the end *is* seen as a capitulation.

I am particularly interested in how these romances deal with women's relation to modernity. This is where the link with cinema becomes relevant for, in the 1930s and 40s, cinema represented the most modern art form. In the previously-mentioned 1944 *Primer Plano* interview, Luisa-María stated that her novels have a cinematographic quality not because she writes them with film adaptation in mind, but because 'somos de la generación actual, es decir, [...] la generación del cine' (García Viñolas). In a June 1, 1944 feature in the popular film magazine *Cámara* ('Los espectadores opinan'), Concha was one of seven people invited to reply to a questionnaire on their tastes in cinema (36). Her reply demonstrates this same association of cinema with the modern and with movement: 'La conceptúo una de mis mayores aficiones. Porque plasma los gustos y aspiraciones de la generación a que pertenezco. Hay movimiento, variedad, amplitud de horizonte (...)'. She names the romantic actor Charles Boyer as her favourite star, and Franz [sic] Capra as her favourite director because his style is 'ágil' and 'dinámico'. The stress on modernity remains as strong in those novels published by both of them after the Civil War as in those by the older Concha published under the Republic. In the collaborative project 'An Oral History of Cinema-Going in 1940s and 50s Spain' which I direct,<sup>6</sup> we have found that cinema provided a cultural continuity between the pre-war and post-war periods, giving it a key role at a time when people had suffered so much dislocation.

I would extend this perception to popular culture in general. Given that so many people's love lives had been broken by the war, the continuity represented by the romance fiction genre is likely to have been especially important. This is something that Luisa-María was in a position to understand since she started to write to earn a living for herself and her two infant daughters at the age of 21, when her Nationalist navy officer husband was killed in the Civil War three years after she married him at the age of 18 ([www.editorialjuventud.es](http://www.editorialjuventud.es)). I have chosen to discuss five books by Concha published between 1933 and 1943, and five by Luisa-María published between 1939 and 1943, since I want to show how the continuities of popular culture cut across historical periodization.

I would support the historian Michael Richards' insistence (7-8) that the Franco Dictatorship should be seen as a period of conservative modernity, breaking with the Republic by rejecting a certain kind of modernity rather than breaking with modernity as such. The key motifs in Falangist propaganda were, after all, youth, dawn, and spring. The modern quality of both Concha's and Luisa-María's romances is stressed on the jacket blurbs as well as in the text. Many of their novels start with the young orphaned protagonist, who has made herself independent through work, arriving in the capital – whose modernity is signalled by the cinema theatres – seeking social upwards mobility and, above all, excitement. This is ritually described as an escape from provincial 'vulgarity' to the 'distinction' represented by life in the modern city. This 'distinction' is conceived in terms of fashion: several heroines have friends who have become successful fashion designers. As in cinema, speed is a constant motif. The jacket blurb for Luisa María's *La vida empieza a medianoche* (1943) highlights its 'ritmo moderno' with a vertiginous succession of 'intensas y singulares aventuras' happening 'en espacio de breves horas'. The chapter headings are 'Nueve de la noche', 'Nueve y veinte de la noche', 'Nueve y media de la noche' through to 'Cuatro menos diez de la madrugada'. Cars (including the stock film motif of the car chase, sometimes with a female driver) figure prominently in these novels, as do train and plane journeys, plus the more leisurely, high-class travel afforded by transatlantic liner and yacht. Grand hotels – as places of transit and impermanence – are also (as in the movies) favourite locations. These are heroines on the

move, crossing national frontiers and oceans as the normal stuff of life – contrasting with the difficulty of leaving the country under the early Franco Dictatorship. Being on the move geographically represents being socially mobile in terms of career advancement: almost all the heroines are successful professionals (ranging from journalist to film star). The heroine of Concha's *Maridos de lujo* (originally published in 1941 with the title *Maridos de Coral*, and reissued in 1951 under the new title which is that of the film within the novel) is an international figure-skating and ski-jump champion, explicitly embodying speed and risk. The novel starts with her recovering from a sporting accident; by the end she has got back to the height of her sporting fame and additionally become a film star. In their overall tone, all of these novels put into practice Ortega y Gasset's identification of the modern with the sportive (63-4).

Two extraordinary texts by the older Concha – both of which have Falangist resonances – have female air pilots as protagonists. *La conquista del hombre* (1936) figures the poor orphan Alicia Gor, an air pilot hired by a high-class Madrid beauty salon to scatter publicity leaflets over the city. Alicia has a poor childhood sweetheart, but is corrupted when the daughter of the beauty salon's White Russian owner, the spoilt heiress Tatiana, pays her to go to Paris to seduce the tedious fiancé her mother wants her to marry. Alicia ends up marrying the Mexican adventurer from whom Tatiana's mother was divorced, and they go off to Hong Kong where they live off the opium trade. Her husband having been murdered by the Chinese gangster who was pursuing her, Alicia returns to Paris where she makes money as a stunt pilot, loses it gambling at the horse races, and takes off in her plane to fly away from her failure – she was previously described as an angel with 'alas de hierro' (34). The novel ends with Tatiana, now married to the boring fiancé and pregnant, reading in the paper that Alicia has crashed having sought a 'bella muerte' in the skies, 'luciendo al sol de primavera' (108). Alicia is a female Icarus, punished for her pride; but the married, pregnant Tatiana's admiration for Alicia's spectacular death creates an intense ambivalence.

The phrase 'luciendo al sol de primavera' associated with Alicia's self-inflicted death explicitly echoes the line 'volverá a reir la primavera' from the Spanish fascist anthem *Cara*

*al sol*. The same line is echoed by the title of Concha's 1939 volume *Mientras llega la primavera*. In its closing novella "La patrulla del arco iris" (85-96), we have another female air pilot Vic – not a man, as we originally suppose, but the name by which the risk-loving María Victoria is known. Her ambition to fly seems to be a substitution process whereby she takes on the destiny of her brother who died at birth, together with her mother – it being assumed that the only male child in the family would automatically continue the military prowess of the father, blinded when serving as a pilot in the German air force during World War I. María Victoria finds herself increasingly attracted to the equally risk-loving Republican pilot Carlos who is engaged to her domestic sister Isabel. When the Civil War breaks out, Carlos supports the Nationalist uprising but it emerges that, in addition to betraying Isabel with Vic, he is a Republican spy preparing to fly Nationalist war plans out to the Republican command. On discovering this, Vic – who had agreed to elope with him – takes off in her plane and crashes it into his, in a kamikaze attack which foils Carlos's treachery. It seems that women air pilots are doomed to a self-inflicted spectacular death – but in this story Victoria becomes a war hero (hence her name). The long-suffering domestic Isabel is presented as noble but as obviously not capable of arousing the passion of a dashing – if treacherous – hero like Carlos.

We may note that long-suffering domestic females in these novels never get the romantic hero. The heroines who get their man are always independent women: a large number are orphans who have made their way in the world through their own efforts, comprising unusual female examples of the autonomous self-made individual.<sup>7</sup> They routinely claim not to be interested in men – putting career or pride first, for not all the heroines are sympathetic – and end up falling in love *despite themselves*. The repetition of this formula deserves some thought for these novels are not simply advocating domesticity. As Carolyn Galerstein notes with respect to Luisa-María's novels (Concha is not listed in her *Women Writers of Spain*), they frequently feature a taming-of-the-shrew format (178). Within this format, the language of war – siege, defence, conquest – is frequently deployed. These novels are explicitly aimed at a female public, so what is the attraction for female readers of seeing

these competent heroines capitulate, despite themselves, to the hero's attentions? Different readers are likely to have responded differently, but generally the reader seems to be invited to have it both ways: to identify with the modern, independent woman while simultaneously identifying with the woman who puts domesticity above everything. Through being encouraged to identify with these heroines who choose to give up career and often fame for love, female readers are also invited to indulge in the contradictory fantasy that they are in control of their 'destiny' (another much-used word). At a more basic level, this formula of the heroine capitulating after a prolonged pursuit offers female readers the gratifying spectacle of dashing heroes on their knees before women who have the power to grant or deny them happiness.

Janice Radway, in her fieldwork with female readers of romance fiction, notes that the appeal of the heroes to whom the romantic heroines finally capitulate is that they represent masculine authority softened by emotion (81-5). Their role is that of protective guardian, offering the nurturing that many female readers, trained to nurture others, do not receive themselves. In this sense, the hero is not so much a father figure but a kind of male mother. This is extremely evident in the endings of the romances discussed here. It constructs a significant variant on the Freudian oedipal scenario, for the hero replaces not the heroine's lost father but her lost mother. As a result – as Radway notes (81-5) – the heroine is not obliged to obey the oedipal injunction to separate definitively from the feminine (represented by the mother), but, after a period of separation, rediscovers the feminine in the male lover. This also means that the feminine is not devalued, as in the classic oedipal scenario, first because it is lost through the mother's death and not through the heroine's choice to separate from her, and second, because it reappears in the form of the strong, protective hero who lends feminine nurturing qualities his authority (the words most used to describe these androgynous Romantic heroes are 'firmeza' and 'energía'). If the heroines end up with maternal, caring men, there is a sense in which they too are allowed to keep a limited androgyny – though this will now be confined to the private sphere since in almost all cases these nurturing heroes expect their women to give up work on marriage. An exception is

Concha's *La novia de la Costa Azul*, whose end supposes that its journalist heroine Regina will go on writing. The nurturing hero of this novel, Miguel, is an interesting mix of the man of action (he wins Regina's love at the masked ball dressed as the bandit protagonist of the film *The Mark of Zorro*) and the carer (he turns out not to be a compulsive gambler, as everyone had thought, but a brilliant doctor who has put about the rumour that he spends his days at the casino so as not to upset his aristocratic mother who thinks that work is shameful). We should remember that this model of marriage, in which the heroine will, for the first time in her life, be looked after rather than having to struggle for survival, is an affluent bourgeois model in which servants will do all the housework and the heroine will be rewarded with a leisure she has never known. The feminist equation of women's emancipation with their right to enter employment on the same terms as men sometimes forgets that, for many working women (this was certainly true in the "años de hambre" of the early 1940s), work was not a choice but a necessity, and that the idea of becoming a lady of leisure could be a highly attractive one.

I hope to have shown that both heroine and hero have split personalities – the heroine simultaneously wanting independence and protection, the hero (who we can see as a projection of the heroine's desires) simultaneously representing strength and nurture. There is a similar splitting at the level of narrative. Most of the romances by Concha discussed in this essay are narrated by the heroine in the first person but frequently slip into third-person narration referring to the heroine by her name. The protagonist-narrator thus splits herself into a 'yo' and an 'ella'. Modleski notes that, although Harlequin romances are required to be written to formula in the third person, nevertheless this is a personalised third person such that the reader internalizes it as an 'I' (55-56); Luisa María's romances adopt this format. The slippage between first- and third-person narration found in Concha's romances produces a more radical destabilization. When avant-garde writers like Diamela Eltit exploit a similar slippage between the first and third person, it is hailed by feminist critics as a strategy for subverting the notion of a stable, unified female 'essence'.<sup>8</sup> Should we assume that, when this strategy occurs in a popular genre like romance fiction, it is doing something less interesting?

Diane Elam, in her book *Romancing the Postmodern*, argues that the romance genre has many features in common with postmodern fiction, in their shared rejection of realism: that is, their rejection of causal logic for plotlines driven by chance, coincidence, and spatial and temporal dislocation. The romances of the two Spanish women writers studied here are not failed realist texts but are governed by laws quite other than those of causality – more akin to the Byzantine novel. The travelling between different countries that occurs in many of them is a mark not only of cosmopolitanism but also of dislocation: the locations covered by the ten volumes discussed here are Spain, USA, England, France, Monaco, Italy, Germany, Switzerland, Hungary, a fictitious Sylvania, Kenya, Hong Kong, with characters additionally from Ireland, Austria, Russia, Cuba, Mexico, and Japan if we count the dog that narrates Concha's 1939 novella "Memorias de una 'gheisha'" (*Mientras llega la primavera* 72-84).

As Elam notes, postmodern culture is also characterized by its frequent pastiche of popular forms, which in turn produces an intense self-reflexivity. There is a sense in which the romances of Concha Linares-Becerra and Luisa-María Linares, with their self-conscious reworking of formulae, become a pastiche of themselves: characters and events are frequently described as 'novelescos'. They also offer a pastiche of popular film comedy, with its farcical situations dependent on mistaken identities: the writers appear to be anticipating the conversion of their plots into films with characters frequently exclaiming 'Parece de película'. Both writers liberally pepper their texts with quotes from 'great writers', from Aristotle to Nietzsche. Several characters are writers. The considerable number of female journalist heroines function as investigators, overlapping with the thriller genre. The heroine of Concha's *La novia de la Costa Azul*, Regina, is a top journalist for a gossip magazine who, because of her investigative skills, gets hired – disguising herself as a maid – by a Cuban millionaire as a 'private eye' to investigate the thefts taking place in his Gothic villa on the Côte d'Azur. It turns out that the millionaire, an unhinged detective-fiction fan, is in fact setting up the crimes himself, basing them on his latest reading (we may note that with this plot device Linares-Becerra is imitating the *Quijote*, thrillers having replaced novels of chivalry as the staple popular fictional diet of the era). Regina's investigation of these fake

crimes becomes supplanted by her investigation of the millionaire's grandson, Miguel, with whom she falls in love while suspecting him to be the criminal (as previously mentioned, he turns out to be a successful doctor devoted to his caring profession). The novel ends with Regina announcing that she will write a novel about the experience, which has the title of the novel we are reading. The screen kiss with which the novel ends – true to genre – is Miguel's answer to her question to him about how to end her future novel. Such overt metafictional touches are a trademark of Concha Linares Becerra. Her romance *Maridos de lujo* ends with the cast list for a film of the same title, which the female protagonist is billed to star in, but which – in a Borgesian twist – she discovers she has been acting out for the greater part of the novel while thinking she was responsible for the script of her impersonations. Concha's 1939 novella "Como las estrellas" (*Mientras llega la primavera* 15-30) concerns the romance between the German manager of a timber factory in the Black Forest and a film set designer looking for a scenario for her next film: she will of course find it in the events that she lives through in the forest. Although Luisa-María's novels do not play these metafictional games, their narratives constantly point to their own ficticity: as, for example, in the title of the previously-mentioned 1943 novella "Una aventura de película", used as the title of the 1943 collective volume in which it appears. We should not assume, as is so often done, that self-reflexivity is the mark of quality literature. Popular culture, with its love of *double-entendre*, pastiche and impersonation, has self-reflexivity built into its system.

It is in their reliance on impersonation as a plot device that these romances most approximate to postmodern fiction. I have already mentioned the impersonations by both heroine and hero of Concha's *La novia de la Costa Azul*. In the same author's *Maridos de lujo*, the sports-champion heroine Coral agrees to impersonate the Mexican adventuress who has married by proxy one of the three aristocratic brothers Juan (since they have the same name and she has never met them, she does not know which one) who run the film studios where both women want to get a part. The proxy marriage has been arranged so that the adventuress can acquire the family title, and so that the brothers can save their film studios from financial ruin by acquiring part of her fortune. Coral will discover that the story of the proxy marriage

is itself a fake, contrived in connivance with the three brothers so as to test Coral's acting talents for the star role in the film which turns out to be the novel we are reading. The ultimate plot twist is that Coral and the brother to whom she thinks she is married (in her faked role) really fall in love and marry. A similar plot line, based on a proliferation of assumed identities, structures Concha's first novel, *Por qué me casé con él*, published in 1933 under the Republic. Its urban heroine, Marián (note the cosmopolitan name), is a modern, emancipated young woman who drives her own car but whose life suffers a radical break at the start of the novel when her aristocratic father dies (she had never known her mother) and it is revealed that she was adopted from an orphanage. Although legally entitled to her adoptive father's inheritance, she refuses it out of pride, whereupon her wealthy *novio* and her father's sister – who inherits the title and fortune in her place – drop her (the aunt spreads rumours that she is “un poco bolchevique” (78)). Desperate after a succession of jobs in which she is sexually harrassed by her boss, she answers an advertisement from an English Lord looking for a wife for reasons he cannot declare. Initially ashamed, she marries him on condition that it remain a marriage of convenience (they both comment repeatedly that lots of people do it). He whisks her off to his Tudor mansion, inhabited by a suitably Gothic cast of relatives, where it finally emerges that his Spanish mother (appropriately called Carmen), repudiated by his jealous father, is not dead but is the “madrina” to whom he had introduced Marián in Madrid. Carmen is finally reconciled to her husband, and Marián and Lord Fourbridges admit they have fallen in love (Marián's aunt conveniently dies at this point, leaving Marián the title and inheritance she had “usurped” from her). In a crowning plot twist, Lord Fourbridges reveals that he did not place the lonely hearts advertisement, which printed his telephone number in error, but was so taken by Marián's voice on the phone when she responded – it reminded him of his mother – that he went along with the mistake. In this case, true love blossoms from a printing error.

A similar plot twist, whereby a fake marriage becomes real, structures four of the five romances by Luisa-María studied here. The exception – her first novel, *En poder de Barba Azul* (1939) – is equally dependent on impersonation. A New York heiress, Myriam, runs away on the eve of her loveless wedding to an ageing tycoon, stowing away in a ship that she

thinks is bound for Argentina where she plans to join her Argentine grandmother. It turns out to be the ship of a Spanish Count returning to Europe; he has banned women from his presence having been jilted by a French ballerina with a fake Polish name (more impersonation). On discovering Myriam aboard, he orders her to don cabin-boy uniform; there are some wonderful *double-entendres* as they find themselves falling for each other. The novel ends with them setting sail back to New York together, with Myriam, having stowed away again, now taking the role of ‘capitana’. Moving to the other four novels: in *Un marido a precio fijo* (1940), the spoilt heiress heroine Estrella, having been tricked into marriage by an Austrian con-man and serial bigamist who absconds after getting money out of her, persuades a journalist (who has hidden in her railway carriage in the hope of getting a news scoop) to pretend to be her new husband, to avoid losing face since she has already announced her marriage to her adoptive millionaire father back in Paris. The journalist in turn pretends that he entered her carriage as a thief, so as not to blow his cover. The condition of the fake marriage (following a fraudulent marriage) is that the journalist will not touch her. The intrigue climaxes with the journalist – a former Nationalist pilot in the Civil War – flying her off to a snowbound log cabin in the Pyrenees where he teaches her the art of home-making to punish her arrogance. In the process, they both discover that they have, against their will, fallen in love. They separate, to discover that her adoptive millionaire father has died and left his fortune to the journalist, thinking he is her husband and will administer the money for her. The journalist persuades Estrella to marry him in a marriage of convenience (after annulling the previous fraudulent marriage) as the only way of enabling her to enjoy the inheritance destined for her. After the church ceremony, they part – but both are now hopelessly in love, and the novel ends with her coming to find him in Madrid to turn their marriage of convenience into a ‘matrimonio de verdad’.

A similar scenario occurs in the 1941 *Doce lunas de miel*, as the “wannabe” film star orphan heroine and the unrecognized inventor hero literally bump into each other trying to get through the swing doors of Madrid’s Hotel Palace for important career interviews. Both interviews being unsuccessful, they overhear that elsewhere in the hotel a widowed

benefactress is interviewing candidates for twelve dowries which she is offering to deserving couples who cannot afford to get married (it is impossible not to read this as a hilarious spoof of the pious charitable activities encouraged in the early Franco period). They decide to pretend that they are *novios*, and tell such a heartrending story that they are chosen as one of the twelve winning couples. They go through with the required marriage so that they can claim the money, and then part, splitting the proceeds. Five years later, Julieta has become a famous film star in Italy, while Jaime has had no luck. By coincidence Jaime ends up getting a job as butler at the villa Julieta is renting back in Spain for the summer. This reverses gender roles, with her giving the orders and him cast in the role of nurturer who provides for her needs. The novel ends, again, with them falling in love and – Jaime’s invention having conveniently found recognition at long last – Julieta giving up her film career to be wife to the man she had previously married for money. The 1943 novella “Una aventura de película” brings together by chance a desperate orphan heroine Celia, who has lost yet another job after being harassed sexually by her boss (a recurring situation in several novels by both writers), and the also recently sacked Enrique. He takes her to a nearby Exposición del Hogar Perfecto, where they buy the winning lottery ticket for an ideal modern home. To claim the prize, they pretend to be man and wife. Once installed, they agree to live in the chalet in alternate weeks, to maintain decorum. After the usual twists and turns, they recognize that they love each other and – Enrique having got his job back – their feigned marriage becomes a true marriage. (These romances are quite hard-nosed about the need for the hero to acquire money before the heroine will agree to marry him.) The plot of *La vida empieza a medianoche* (1943) is even more bizarre. The orphaned journalist heroine Silvia arrives in Madrid to stay at the apartment of her former school friend – who had made her way in the world, becoming a successful fashion-designer – only to discover that the friend has to leave that same night. An old man, his handsome grandson and a young boy enter the apartment claiming to be her grandfather, husband and son respectively. It emerges that the grandson – a famous composer of dance-band music who, as a child, was taken in by the old man as his adoptive grandson – wants to spare the old man, half blind and deaf, from knowing that his married real grandson has died

in an accident, and so is impersonating him, having hired a fake son and wife – the role of wife was to have been played by the fashion designer’s flat-mate, who has failed to get there on time. Sylvia, moved by the story, agrees to act out the part. After a night packed with complicated events involving a famous woman novelist whose novels turn out to be forgeries (more fakes), Sylvia and the composer fall in love and, once again, the faked marriage becomes real.

What is going on with these repeated scenarios of fraudulent marriages that become ‘the real thing’? The frivolous treatment of marriage is extraordinary given the moral puritanism of the early Franco regime (there is a complete lack in all these romances of any mention of religion). It is possible to read this plot structure in two directions: as saying that love is so real that it can emerge even from the fake; or as suggesting that the ontological status of love is fraudulent. Either way, we have a postmodern notion of identity – particularly gender identity – as performance, with the characters getting so engrossed in the impersonation that it becomes the real.

What, then, might these novels tell us about the periods in which they were written (the Republic in the case of Concha’s early novels; the early Franco Dictatorship in case of Concha’s later work and Luisa’s entire output)? First and foremost, that there is no necessary correlation, at the level of content, between culture and political context. I would, however, argue that at a structural level these novels do tell us something about these two periods which, despite their vast differences, have in common the fact that they were characterized by political and personal upheaval. The temporal and especially spatial dislocations in these novels, their reliance on chance and coincidence, and their collapsing of the distinction between impersonation and the real, speak to us of a popular imaginary that has to process events that it cannot control or explain, and that has a keen sense of the importance of dissimulation as a strategy for survival. The authors of these novels were Nationalist supporters who, under the Republic, would have felt a greater or lesser need to dissimulate. For many of their readers, dissimulation would have become a daily tactic after Nationalist victory. In the ‘Oral History of Cinema-going’ project which I have directed, we have been

amazed by the number of our interviewees who have lived, since the end of the Civil War, under an assumed name. Such people would have understood the emphasis on impersonation in these novels.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The difficulty of verifying biographical information about these two writers illustrates the omission from biographical dictionaries and literary histories of popular writers – a problem compounded when the writers are women.

<sup>2</sup> According to the *Encyclopedia Espasa-Calpe*, Luis Linares Becerra adapted Blasco Ibáñez's *Los cuatro jinetes del apocalipsis*, filmed in 1921 by Rex Ingram as *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse*; and Manuel Linares Rivas y Astray adapted Pérez Lugín's *La casa de la Troya*, made into a successful film in 1924 by the author with Manuel Noriega (recently restored by Filmoteca Española).

<sup>3</sup> An advertisement for Luisa-María's novels placed in *ABC* on June 2, 1944 bills her as "La escritora más 'cinematográfica' de España."

<sup>4</sup> Where details of the director and date of the film are given, they are taken from Hueso or Gómez Mesa.

<sup>5</sup> I have been unable to trace the date of her novels *Napoleón llega en el Clipper* and *Detective con faldas*.

<sup>6</sup> Co-researchers for the project, funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Board of the UK, are Kathleen Vernon, Susan Martin-Márquez, Eva Woods, Vicente Sánchez Biosca, Steven Marsh and María José Millán.

<sup>7</sup> In this sense, these heroines are female versions of the orphaned//foundling heroes of early nineteenth-century Romantic drama.

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, Labanyi 1996.

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