

**In search of feminist happiness: Burgos's La entrometida**

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# In Search of Feminist Happiness: Burgos's *La entrometida*

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It might seem strange to write about Carmen de Burgos's work with happiness in mind. Burgos's work is, by and large, about women who are the innocent victims of a hostile male world. Female happiness is a 'sight unseen' in Burgos's narratives, and 'feminist happiness' almost seems a contradiction in terms. Darrin McMahon assures us in his history of happiness (McMahon xi) that, while elusive in its definition, happiness is what humankind has always striven for. Sara Ahmed (572), however, challenges this view and asks: "What would it mean to suspend belief that happiness is what we wish [...] or even that happiness is a good thing?" This chapter fills a significant critical gap in Burgos Studies by focusing on happiness and its main symbol in popular culture, the happy ending.<sup>1</sup> It will also discuss the social function and political value of popular culture, in particular the symbolic role played by fictional feminists. To what extent is feminist happiness possible in early twentieth-century Spain? What would a happy feminist novella look like? Mary Eagleton (191) rightly questions how we would recognize feminist writing and asks:

Are there certain definable characteristics that mark 'x' as a feminist and 'y' as a non-feminist text? [...] Can we establish that the writing of declared feminists must be feminist? Is authorial intention everything? On the other hand,

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<sup>1</sup> The term 'happy ending' in the literary sense was first recorded from 1756, around the time of the precursors to the genre of romance novels, including Samuel Richardson's sentimental novel *Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded* (1740) and shortly before the novels of Jane Austen.

does feminism lie in interpretation: could feminists agree on a definitive list of books that are more open than others to a feminist reading? Perhaps the nature of readership is key.

Feminist scholars often enjoy reading texts full of ambiguities that permit multiple readings (Eagleton 178), warning us that in popular culture, as in life, strong women as role models might not be suitable, simply because it does not allow for moments of weakness, and hence women can feel inadequate in comparison (Eagleton 183).

However, I would still argue that we all look for inspirational role models; in fact, to this day the feminist movements search for enough role models breaking through the glass ceiling.<sup>2</sup> As long as we are aware of the pitfalls of romanticised views of feminism, positive role models are highly desirable. In order to shed light on this issue, this chapter is the first to examine the development of the female protagonist in *La entrometida/The Busybody*<sup>3</sup>, the story of a fictional feminist written by real-life feminist campaigner Carmen de Burgos, with particular reference to the role model function of fictional feminists.

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<sup>2</sup> At the time of writing Hillary Clinton is running for president in one of the most developed Western democracies, trying to break yet another glass ceiling.

<sup>3</sup> Establier Pérez (2000) and the catalogue of the *Biblioteca Nacional de España* [Spanish National Library] give the publication date of 1924, while the Biblioteca Virtual de Andalucía and Núñez Rey (2005, pp. 505-506) date it 16 June 1921. The latter links it to the death of the Spanish novelist and essayist Emilia Pardo Bazán in May 1921. The fact that Burgos was then in a 'posición de reveló, la convertía en la decana de las escritoras; las generaciones se sucedían' [at the forefront, it made her the doyenne of women writers; the generations followed one another.]

## ***Social and legal context***

Feminists throughout the centuries have shown how women's desires and needs have so often been conveniently forgotten by patriarchy, which instead has convinced women that their happiness lies in that of others (parents, husbands, children) and therefore in female self-abnegation.<sup>4</sup> In Spanish first wave feminism, as in that of other countries, the questions of equal rights (predominantly the right to divorce and suffrage) dominated the legal debate in the run-up to the Second Republic (1931-1939). Never before was male supremacy so publicly challenged and thus the new feminism also created a backlash of anti-feminism. Paramount to a project of female exclusion from the public world was the concentration on the family as the most basic unit of society. In order to achieve the exclusion of women from citizenship at a time when women (like *La entrometida*) were becoming more politically active, patriarchy needed to make sure that women remained in the private sphere. According to the legal critic Enríquez de Salamanca, this was achieved by means of collaboration between the legal discourse and a more general cultural discourse. Parallel to the legal discourse creating a 'sujeto diferente y discriminado' [different and discriminated subject] (240), there was a cultural strand creating an *ángel del hogar* [Angel of the House] discourse in order to strengthen the patriarchal agenda of keeping women in the private sphere. Apart from the practical demands made on women to be the person running the household, educating the children and caring for the husbands, the perfect angel of the house also aspired to a degree of self-abnegation that made any kind of self-development a cardinal sin. Demands for basic

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<sup>4</sup> For an excellent compilation of primary texts of nineteenth century feminist history, see Jagoe, Blanco and Enríquez de Salamanca.

rights raised the spectre of selfishness and created the fear that freedom for women would lead to an abandonment of responsibility in the family.

Spanish feminists throughout the centuries have always exposed the negative effect of judging supposed female selfishness. An ethic of self-sacrifice is directly in conflict with the concept of rights that has supported women's claim to social justice. As Carol Gilligan explains: "the notion that virtue for women lies in self-sacrifice has complicated the course of women's development by pitting the moral issue of goodness against the adult questions of responsibility and choice." (132) As we will see, the protagonist in *La entrometida* sacrifices her own happiness in the name of the feminist fight for self-development and choice as a basic right of all women.

Feminist critics have always struggled with the tension between Burgos's bold demands for the modern woman's rights in *La mujer moderna y sus derechos/The Modern Woman and her Rights* (1927) and the lack of positive role models in her fiction. As an important precursor of Beauvoir's *Le Deuxième Sexe/The Second Sex* (1949), Burgos takes issue with the well-known 'facts' and myths about women in order to establish a very comprehensive enumeration of demands for rights.<sup>5</sup> *La mujer moderna* locates the author's political and moral position squarely within First Wave feminism. Yet in her fictional work this theoretical new, and happy, woman that Burgos constructs is conspicuous by her absence. One could map the rights demands neatly onto a large part

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<sup>5</sup> For a detailed discussion of *La mujer moderna*, see Louis (*Women and the Law*, 67-98).

of Burgos's fiction and argue that Burgos's narratives were used as a means of political propaganda, in which she introduced the question of women's rights into the public domain. This is most noticeably achieved in her novellas of legal critique, but even in her other fictional work, the disastrous effect the lack of education and lack of work has on women is all too obvious. The rights discourse in this essay constructs a theoretical new woman who has equal rights to suffrage, education, work, equality in marriage and full access to the public sphere. It is noteworthy that although Burgos demands equal rights she accepts an assimilation to an implicit male standard and does not claim a privileged legal status. This was a common demand in first wave feminism, because equality with men was perceived as the end goal that would deliver a better, egalitarian, future for women. As we will see in the analysis of *La entrometida*, the novella represents a world in which cultural androgyny is lacking. Both men and women need new standards against which to measure themselves instead of being trapped in traditional gender identities.

Burgos explicitly correlates happiness with women's rights. While a cursory look at *La mujer moderna* yields only 24 occurrences<sup>6</sup> of the words 'felicidad' (happiness) or 'in/feliz' (un/happy) in the entire volume (320 pages), it is interesting to analyse which subjects she correlates to happiness. Predictably happiness, or a lack thereof, in marriage is of utmost importance and combined with that her favourite topic of divorce (46, 137, 141, 194). This includes her idea of happiness in the home (47, 75, 131, 134, 258), interestingly invoking not so much the 'angel of the house', but rather 'happiness in the

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<sup>6</sup> For further details, see *La mujer moderna*, pp.12, 46, 47, 52, 61, 75, 94, 121, 129, 130, 131, 134, 137, 138, 141, 177, 187, 194, 200, 258, 274, 278, 280.

house' which requires a happy wife and mother as a *sine qua non*. While the above examples all apply to the private sphere, Burgos also inextricably links happiness to equal rights and social justice for women (121, 134, 274). Indeed, citing the Russian sociologist Novicow, her point of departure is that "a nation's happiness is in direct proportion to the sum of justice distributed among its people." (12)<sup>7</sup> Burgos correlates happiness to the social justice of an entire nation and hence predates more recent Happiness Studies. Csikszentmihalyi reminds us that throughout history happiness has been the ultimate goal of humankind. "[E]very other goal – health, beauty, money or power – is valued only because we expect it will make us happy." (1) The point here is not that Burgos precedes current Happiness Studies, but that as a strong voice of Spanish first wave feminism she laid claim to the pursuit of happiness as a universal right including the female portion of society.

Burgos's representation of women characterises them as victims, which is, paradoxically, totally opposed to the vision of women presented in *La mujer moderna y sus derechos*. I have argued elsewhere (Louis, 'Melodramatic Feminism') that negative representations of women's lives incite rebellion and that Burgos uses the melodramatic potential to outrage her less educated readers. Others have usually countered that this has self-perpetuating potential and thus keeps women in an inferior position. Read as cautionary tales female readers might be shown how they would end up if they rebelled against patriarchy, which is, of course, generally speaking in misery and/or death. The

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<sup>7</sup> "[L]a felicidad de las naciones está en razón directa de la suma de justicia que distribuyan entre los individuos que las forman."

general debate over the revolutionary versus the conservative in melodrama is commonplace by now, as is the more specific question of whether it reinforces or subverts the patriarchal gender regimes. Burgos appropriates the subversive potential of the genre for her feminist purposes and is acting in consonance with feminist demands of the time, namely that civil rights extended to male citizens by political liberalism should also be extended to women. Through women's daily-life narratives she illustrates the horrific consequences of the contemporaneous legal system and draws attention to the injustices of law.

However, the question of the social function and political value of culture remains: can popular culture have a positive function in the renegotiation of female identities, and if so, how? Does social change occur by representing misery or by giving women clear alternatives (or both)? Why did she not portray more positive role models in her fiction? Her melodrama was in line with social reality, but could fiction not also be used to represent positive role models? One of the perennial debates in legal theory is the interdependency of social and legal reality. Is law reactive to social change or does it produce social change? Both law and culture are very powerful discourses of identity formation, so equally one could ask if the social function of culture is that of representing reality or of changing reality and helping in the political struggle of oppressed social groups. Lillian Faderman suggests that fiction should provide role models to instil a positive sense of feminine identity by portraying independent women, while at the same time this representation needs to be realistic and "not idealized beyond plausibility" (213). More worryingly, she also observes that even as recently as in the 1970s and 1980s feminist



teachers needed to include the genre of biographies (as opposed to fiction) to find role models their students could emulate (213). This begs the question of whether our frustration with Burgos's lack of positive role models might be based on unrealistic expectations. The balance between positive and negative, idealised and caricatured, representations is a hard wire act for the author, because her works need to provide genuine insights into female personality development and illustrate the choices open to a liberated woman in a phallographic world. Faderman warns of too high expectations of political analyses in fictional work, and suggests that there are limits to the consciousness-raising an author can do (215). The remaining responsibility of political and personal action lies with the reader. With that in mind I now turn to *La entrometida*.

### ***La entrometida***

*La entrometida* is a minor masterpiece in the work of Burgos, not only because it is a *tour de force* through feminist debates, but more importantly, because it depicts the trials and tribulations of a first-wave feminist.<sup>8</sup> A feminist campaigner writing about a fictional feminist campaigner in order to question accepted identity formation, this novella

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<sup>8</sup> See Núñez Rey (506-507) where she points out that *La entrometida* – a very autobiographical description of the life of an intellectual feminist – was written the very same year that Burgos, as president of the *Cruzada de Mujeres Españolas* [*Spanish Women's Crusade*], organised the first demonstration in favor of suffrage, hailed in the Madrid daily *Heraldo de Madrid* as: 'es el amanecer de un serio movimiento feminista, y este primer acto de las sufragistas españolas sorprendió a los diputados.' ['it is the dawn of a serious feminist movement, and this first act by Spanish suffragists surprised members of Parliament'] (507). The novella was written at a time when the feminist movement gained momentum and increased newspaper coverage. See also Núñez Rey (507) where she quotes from their feminist manifesto, which lists a comprehensive enumeration of rights, including political, civil and professional rights, equality in penal law, equal rights for natural children, and laws against prostitution.

illustrates how difficult political activism can be and, more importantly, at what personal cost.

It is noteworthy that the female protagonist is called Clarisa, reminiscent of Richardson's epistolary novel *Clarissa, or the History of a Young Lady* (1748)<sup>9</sup>, in which the tragic heroine desperately fights for female virtue, only to fall prey to her male stalker Lovelace.<sup>10</sup> The crafty villain pursues the innocent girl, kidnaps her, rapes her and eventually causes her death. Clarissa Harlowe<sup>11</sup> refuses to marry Lovelace, wanting to live in peace by herself. She is desperate to remain free from marital servitude, and her strength in the struggle for virtue, as well as freedom, is admirable. Some critics read the text as a feminist novel, because Clarissa dies in the full consciousness of her virtue and expecting a better life after death, while others assert that it is an affirmation of patriarchal ideology, as men form an unholy alliance to destroy women (Taylor 104-105). Similar to Burgos's work Richardson's novel can be read as appealing to conservative gender stereotypes by perpetuating a negative model of women as virtuous victims.

As is so often the case in Burgos's popular fiction, various readings are possible, attesting to the sophistication of her work. As indicated earlier, reading texts "not for

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<sup>9</sup> The novel was first translated from French into Spanish in 1829.

<sup>10</sup> While I am reluctant to labour the point of the namesake too much, simply because I doubt that Burgos's readership was aware of Richardson's novel, it seems safe to assume that somebody as widely read as Burgos herself was aware of it and chose the name as an intellectual nod of intertextuality.

<sup>11</sup> Note the similarity of sound with 'harlot'.

coherence but for contradiction” (Light 152) is a particular *jouissance*<sup>12</sup> in reading Burgos. However, I also suggest that reading *La entrometida* fast and slow will convey different interpretations.<sup>13</sup> Reading the novella as a contemporaneous female reader of mass-produced fiction (reading fast) is likely to be a very different reading experience from reading it from today’s vantage point and as part of a close (slow) reading exercise for academic purposes that allows us to detect the multiple layers and ambivalent messages in Burgos’s complex narrative. Mass culture invites the reader of whatever sex to respond in a feminine fashion, encouraging the emotional identification that is necessary for a cultural product to affect the identity formation of its consumers. Hence a superficial, fast reading of the narrative – a typical consumption of mass-produced fiction – would give us the story of a staunch feminist who gets burnt out in the course of her feminist campaigns and, due to financial necessity, then becomes a romance writer, an endeavour in which she fails as well. Disillusioned, she leaves Spain to start a new life in England, the foreign, and hence liberated and liberating, space *par excellence*. A cautionary tale of a woman who is neither an angel nor has a (family) home, and a pertinent reminder that independent women are doomed to fail in early twentieth-century Spain. Female failure and misery are a recurrent feature in Burgos’s work, but what makes this story worse is the fact that if not even feminists can lead an independent, and happy, life, then how much of a chance is there for less educated women and for those less skilled in the art of female independence and/or political activism.

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<sup>12</sup> Used in the Barthian sense.

<sup>13</sup> I have borrowed Kahnemann’s concepts of *Thinking, Fast and Slow* (2011) and applied it to different reading processes of different implied readers.

A close reading, however, gives us more complex readings and interpretative leeway. Clarisa embodies the feminism that Burgos's theoretical work aspires to. *La entrometida* is the story of a young woman who leads an independent and 'man-free' life. She is 25 years old, educated, well-travelled and outspoken. She is also politically active and wears her feminism on her sleeve:

She worked tirelessly for her ideals. She had visited every minister, never missed a day at Parliament and the Senate, and had driven the Institute for Social Reform round the bend with her requests for information about women's issues. She hounded the rector of the University and the heads of its Centres, presenting them with detailed plans for pedagogical reforms and institutions that needed setting up.

She had joined every feminist organisation, had offered conferences in working class districts and to ladies of Christian doctrine. She requested audiences at the Palace, [...]. She was everywhere and had thought of everything. (6)<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> "Trabajaba por sus ideales de un modo incansable. Había visitado a todos los ministros, no faltaba un día al Congreso y al Senado, traía revuelto el Instituto de Reformas Sociales pidiendo datos de cuestiones femeninas. No dejaba vivir al rector de la Universidad ni a los directores de los Centros que de ella dependen, presentando a su estudio vastos planes de reformas pedagógicas y de instituciones que era preciso crear. Se había metido en todas las Sociedades feministas, había ofrecido conferencias en los barrios populares y a las damas de la doctrina cristiana. No se descuidaba de pedir audiencias en Palacio, [...]. Estaba en todo y en todas partes."

Right from the start readers are influenced by the title bias, describing a feminist with the slightly pejorative term of busybody.<sup>15</sup> The novella is narrated throughout the lens of an androgynous omniscient narrator and begins with a long description of Pérez Blanco, an elderly gentleman and confirmed bachelor, *bon viveur* and exquisite chef, whose dinner parties are renowned as a delicious mixture of social gathering, cooking lessons for adoring women (“they would learn how to make a sponge cake, a caramel pudding or some special sauce” (1)),<sup>16</sup> and a platform for intellectual discussions. Women are infantilized (“se ponían delantales llenos de gracia y jugaban a las comiditas con ese encanto de las niñas que juegan a las mamás” [they wore delightful aprons and played at making dinners with the charm of little girls playing mummies] (2)) and are generally hopeless at preparing dishes, alluding to their middle-class status of mere adornment in a male world (“encantadoras mujercitas llena de gracia, que eran como las flores de la mesa” [enchanted little women full of grace, who were like flowers on his table] (3)). The *ángel del hogar* [Angel of the House] discourse is here associated with the rise of the middle class, in which the economic inactivity of women increased the prestige of the family. Pérez Blanco feels superior and self-sufficient (2), and what is more, his experience of life and love make him “el amigo, el confesor y confidente de todas, el que las aconsejaba en los casos difíciles” [the friend, confessor and confidant to them all, the one who advised them on difficult matters] (2).

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<sup>15</sup> *Entrometimiento* [meddlesomeness] is a recurrent theme and will be discussed below. I will use the original term throughout.

<sup>16</sup> “[I]ban a aprender a hacer un bizcocho, un flan o una salsa especial.”

Enter beautiful feminist Clarisa (“venía con el prestigio de una extranjera después de la larga estancia en América. [...] era bonita y le parecía complicada en su espíritu [she came with the prestige of a foreigner after a long stay in America. [...] she was pretty and seemed to him to have a complex spirit] (3)) and predictably there is an immediate clash of opinions about love and women’s function in society:

Pérez Blanco referred to his youthful adventures, “There is nothing as interesting as love. Women should not devote themselves to anything else.”

Clarisa protested, “My friend, that is a terrible philosophy. [...]”

“Women, lulled by the false gallantry they are offered as love, are incapable of freeing themselves. What we need, so that love can be called love, are equal rights and liberation for downtrodden women.”

Impassioned, she set out her feminist theory, as the other women listened uneasy and wary, the men with evident hostility, and Pérez Blanco with a smile, his eyes half-closed, as if through the slit that Clarisa had opened up in her spirit he could penetrate the mystery that interested him. (5)<sup>17</sup>

The choice of words – and sexual connotation – is interesting here, foreshadowing Pérez Blanco’s desire to dominate her if not in flesh than at least in spirit. It is also noteworthy that Clarisa’s most basic, and immediate, demand is equality of rights as a

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<sup>17</sup> Pérez Blanco refería sus aventuras juveniles: ‘No hay nada tan interesante como el amor. Las mujeres no debían dedicarse a otra cosa.’ Protestó Clarisa: ‘Esa doctrina es desastrosa, amigo mío. [...] Las mujeres, adormecidas por la falsa galantería que se les ofrece como amor, son incapaces de redimirse. Lo que se necesita para que el amor pueda llamarse tal, es la igualdad de derechos, la liberación de las pobres mujeres’. Enardecida, exponía su teoría feminista, que las otras mujeres escuchaban inquietas y desconfiadas, los hombres con hostilidad manifiesta, y Pérez Blanco sonriendo, con los ojos entornados, como si por aquella rendija de su espíritu que entreabría Clarisa pudiese él penetrar en el misterio que le interesaba.

*sine qua non* for love. Burgos here alludes to the contemporary conservative legal writers who did consider love as a *sine qua non* for marriage, only to conclude in a circular argument that therefore love is eternal and marriage should not be dissolved.<sup>18</sup> Burgos inverts this argument by demanding equal rights as a basis for entering marriage, otherwise it is not done in the name of love. This discussion of love and marriage foreshadows the crux of Clarisa's demise and indirectly introduces the topic of romance (real or imagined). A debate about the role of women ensues according to the normal Burgos formula of discussing topical issues in dialogues with various parties, so that all different convictions are covered: the conservative house-wife, the widow, the independent woman living abroad, hostile men, Pérez Blanco as *agent provocateur*, and Clarisa herself as self-proclaimed feminist.<sup>19</sup> Henceforth he is her intellectual sparring partner (6-10); the scene is set for the driving force of the narrative: the gender tension between feminised Pérez Blanco and masculinised Clarisa, their co-dependency, latent love and admiration. To a certain extent they are kindred spirits: both are trapped in, and suffer from, the dominant gender discourse of their generation, both share the superior narcissism and self-sufficiency of outsiders, and hence it comes as no surprise that both are more at ease with the other sex: Pérez Blanco is disappointed that his male protégés are ungrateful (14) and therefore prefers the company of women, while Clarisa's forceful personality makes it easier for her to move in male circles:

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<sup>18</sup> For further details on the divorce debate, see Louis (*Women and the Law* 26-33).

<sup>19</sup> For the purpose of this chapter I am not interested in the many feminist debates that give flavour to the narrative, but in how a self-proclaimed feminist negotiates the lack of social acceptance of cultural androgyny.

She prided herself that her resolute, forceful character was more suited to camaraderie than love, and surrounded herself with numerous male friends, who were charming and delicate in appearance, and accompanied her to cafés, theatres and restaurants, leading her on innocent escapades, which she believed made her the embodiment of the free, modern woman. (12)<sup>20</sup>

Sara Ahmed in her article “Killing Joy: Feminism and the History of Happiness” reflects on those women who are perceived as troublemakers and killjoys of happiness:

The feminist is an affect alien, estranged by happiness. We can understand the negativity of the figure of the feminist killjoy much better if we read her through the lens of the history of happiness, [...]. Feminists [...] are already read as destroying something that is thought of by others not only as being good but as the cause of happiness. The feminist killjoy spoils the happiness of others. (581)

Clarisa is a troublemaker, for sure, right from the start she manages to make both women and men in Pérez Blanco’s circle feel uncomfortable (5). The threat about male disempowerment is apparent through the characters’ statements and from the narrator’s interventions early in the narrative as well as a running commentary (“su feminismo desordenado y militante [...] alejaba a todos”, [her chaotic and militant feminism pushed everyone away] (12)). Yet she is also happy in her busybody identity. Her political

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<sup>20</sup> “Se preciaba de que su carácter decidido y enérgico se prestaba más a la camaradería que al amor, y se rodeaba de numerosos amigos, entrañables y delicados en apariencia, que la acompañaban a cafés, teatros y cenas, haciéndole realizar inocentes calaveradas, con las que ella se creía realizar el tipo de mujer libre y moderna.”



struggle is partly a genuine desire to better the future of women through active and passive participation in public life (6) as well as practical measures such as building schools and hospitals for women (4). Her aspiration to be part of the political class is also partly fuelled by vanity, rubbing shoulders with important people: ““Ramón y Cajal told me he is a firm feminist”, “Azorín is delighted with my projects”, “Luca de Tena recommended this to me” (11).<sup>21</sup> Pérez Blanco senses the ambivalence of her intentions:

It seemed to him that it made her happy to meddle, to feel important, certain that among the hundreds of women at the theatre she was the only one free from the old moulds, the only one who didn't obey the strict and absurd laws that turned them into little dolls moved in unison by strings that were pulled, without error, depending on whether they had to turn round, sit down or say hello. (12)<sup>22</sup>

As an active and independent woman, Clarisa's happiness also stems from a sense of superiority. As Mihály Csíkszentmihályi reminds us: “Happiness is not something that happens. It does not depend on outside events, but, rather on how we interpret them.” (2) In that sense her temporary happiness stems from the satisfaction she gains through her political activism and her independent life-style, until such time that reality rudely awakens her.

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<sup>21</sup> ““Ramón y Cajal me ha dicho que es un feminista convencido”, “Azorín está encantado de mis proyectos” [...] “Eso me recomendó Luca de Tena.”” Burgos uses three examples from different cultural and social spheres: Nobel Laureate Ramón y Cajal was a neuroscientist, Azorín one of the foremost novelists of the '98 generation and Luca de Tena a famous journalist.

<sup>22</sup> “La veía feliz de su entrometimiento, de sentirse importante, de estar convencida de que entre todos los centenares de mujeres que había en el teatro, ella sola era la que estaba libertada de los viejos moldes, la única que no obedecía a unas leyes severas y absurdas que las convertía en muñequitas movidas al unísono por cordelitos, de los que se tiraba, sin equivocarse, según tuvieran que volverse, sentarse o saludar.”

The recurrent theme of *entrometimiento* shows the multi-layered construction of womanhood in the novella. Pérez Blanco's view of women fluctuates between a scathing criticism of busybodies who, regardless of class, show "an instinct for interference [...] concerned about remedying other people's problems, without dealing with their own"<sup>23</sup> (7) and the breath of fresh air that Clarisa brings into his life: "The new busybody was nothing like any of those he had encountered in his youth: she was more forceful, more decisive, more daring, more warrior-like." (8)<sup>24</sup> And to make sure the term stays sufficiently ambivalent the narrator tells us that: "There was something very noble at the heart of her meddling; a desire for independence and dignity" (15)<sup>25</sup>. In stark contrast to most other women in the novella, her strong desire for independence makes her a self-proclaimed feminist warrior ("soy una mujer de fuerte lucha, no una mujer de amor" [I am a woman who fights hard, not a woman of love] (17), yet one cannot help but notice that her superiority and delusions of grandeur result in romanticised conceptualisations of political activism. In fact, Burgos's novella comes dangerously close to romance fiction, both in narrative structure and language: Clarisa's safe comradeship with Pérez Blanco who is nevertheless her male protector ("salió tras de Clarisa en su papel de escudero de la Princesa" [he went out after Clarisa in his role as the Princess's squire] (9)) and her fantasy feminism that fails to deliver results:

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<sup>23</sup> "[un] instinto de intromisión [...] preocupadas en remediar las cosas ajenas, sin atender a las suyas propias"

<sup>24</sup> "La nueva entrometida no se parecía a ninguna de las que había tratado en su juventud: era más enérgica, más decidida, más audaz, más amazona." See also Núñez (507) footnote 417 where she states that the novella was first announced as *La nueva entrometida* which suggests an emphasis of a generational 'change of the guard'.

<sup>25</sup> "Había algo muy noble en el fondo de su entrometimiento; un deseo de independencia y dignidad."

Fortunate for feeling her life was connected to all the other lives like a tangled skein, the fibres of which could not be separated; proud of knowing her own importance, of synthesizing in herself an entire social force, thinking that with her interference in all matters she embodied the perfect model of what the new woman should be, which made her smile disdainfully at other women. Poor things! So deceived and submissive, living their monotonous, vegetative lives, which she would not have been able to bear. (13)<sup>26</sup>

The imagery of weaving here is interesting, giving it a feminine slant and portraying Clarisa's sense of belonging to the female sex despite her feelings of superiority and otherness as an independent woman.

Both Labanyi and Núñez Puente have written persuasively about Spanish romance fiction and the construction of discourses of femininity. In their analyses of romance novels in the early Franco regime they highlight how romance texts illustrate a "conservative modernity" (Richards) through their representation of upwardly mobile and active female protagonists. Núñez Puente in particular reads the novels through a Gramscian lens and argues that femininity in romance novels should be considered in terms of power negotiations producing a specific result in female readers. Despite the conservative happy endings of marrying the hero, the heroines lead very active and

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<sup>26</sup> "Dichosa de sentir su vida ligada a todas las otras vidas como una madeja enredada, cuyas hebras no se podían separar; orgullosa de conocer su importancia, de reasumir en sí misma toda una fuerza social, pensando que realizaba con su intromisión en todas las cuestiones el modelo perfecto de la que debía ser el tipo de la mujer nueva, lo que le hacía tener una sonrisa de desdén para las demás mujeres. ¡Pobrecillas! Que vivían tan engañadas y tan sumisas en aquella vida monótona, vegetativa, que ella no podría soportar."

independent lives. What interests me here is that female protagonists are depicted as independent and hence subvert the regime's ideology. As Núñez Puente illustrates:

Romance novel discourse actually appears to be resistant to the hegemonic power that supports it [...] Protagonists are constructed as resistant women, so that female readers as consumers find an alternative world in the fiction that they can make their own. (228)

As I have shown above, although 1920s Spain was at the cusp of a new era, the legal and cultural discourses still kept women in an inferior place and are hence comparable to the Franco regime. Franco's regime certainly returned to the bad old days of the nineteenth century's legal codes and hence both legal realities are comparable.

Taking the romance formula and subverting it, Burgos usually depicts her heroines as young, innocent, and selfless; but unlike their luckier counterparts in traditional romance their courtship adventures go drastically wrong. *La entrometida*, however, is even more complex because the plot twists introduce two objects of desire. As in all romances the development of a relationship between the protagonists is at the heart of the story, and to a certain extent the dramatic tension between Clarisa and Pérez Blanco drives the narrative. Yet if romance fiction is about getting a man, then our heroine is not so much in search of a man, but of a man's world with the freedoms and privileges that that entails. She falls in love with politics and lives as much in a fantasy world as heroines in traditional romance novels. At worst, her fantasy feminism is a form of displacement activity as well as a coping mechanism; at best, the narrative shows how very difficult it is to bring about social change for women and hence her frustration is turned into fantasy

as a coping mechanism. My point here is not that *La entrometida* is a romance novel, but that Clarisa's masculinized search for identity and for a place in society is nevertheless framed in a romantic disposition. Interestingly, this false consciousness of happiness in feminist struggle is reminiscent of the (un-)happiness of married housewives. Both feminists and bored middle-class wives find it too painful to look at the realities of their respective entrapments in a phallographic world. As Ahmed explains:

You would not be saying “You are wrong; you are not happy; you just think you are because you have a false belief.” Rather, you would be saying that there is something false about our consciousness of the world: we learn not to be conscious; *we learn not to see what happens right in front of us*. It is not that an individual person suffers from false consciousness but that we inherit a certain false consciousness when we learn to see and not to see things in a certain way. (590, my emphasis)

Clarisa does not inherit this false consciousness of ‘happy housewives’, but she uses the same coping mechanism. In fact, it could be argued that the root of Clarisa's problem lies in her withdrawal into the world of romanticised feminism. The tension between her accurate perception of reality and her romantic outlook on feminism is a recurrent theme throughout the novella.

Clarisa is in love with her own fantasy. Twice (11, 17) there is a rude awakening in form of a reality check, when her maid Juana alerts her to their precarious financial situation (“¿Y con qué voy a preparar algo, señorita?” [And what am I supposed to cook with, Miss?]) (11). As a result she admits to herself for the first time that “el triunfo, el

lado práctico de su labor, se hacía esperar demasiado” [triumph, the practical side of her work, had been left waiting too long] (11). And to add insult to injury even her maid fails to understand why Clarisa’s feminist activism is so important:

- But Miss, don’t tire yourself out so. You’re young, have a bit of fun, instead of always going from here to there and never stopping.

- What would you know about it, Juana? Women like you couldn’t possibly understand what our mission requires us to do in order to liberate women from the servitude to which we are all condemned. It’s necessary to fight, reclaim our rights... to save you and other wretched women like you...

- Well as far as I’m concerned don’t you worry Miss, I’m quite happy as I am.

(13)<sup>27</sup>

Neither middle class nor working class women show the slightest interest in Clarisa’s political struggle. While the former are too comfortable in their false consciousness, the latter are likely to be too busy trying make ends meet.

After months of activism Clarisa has an existential crisis and confides in her friend Pérez Blanco, “el único hombre que podría aconsejarla [...] maestro de la vida, le señalaría el derrotero” [the only man who could advise her [...] a teacher of life, who would show her the right course] (12), who mischievously and egotistically advises her

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<sup>27</sup> “Pero, señorita, no se canse usted tanto, es usted joven, diviértase un poco, en lugar de andar siempre atareada de aquí para allá.”

-¿Tú qué sabes de eso, Juana? Vosotras no podéis comprender a lo que nos obliga la misión que hemos de cumplir para librarnos de la esclavitud a que todas las mujeres estamos condenadas. Se hace preciso luchar, reclamar nuestros derechos...salvarte a ti y a otras infelices como tú...

- Pues lo que es por mí no se apure la señorita, que yo estoy bien contenta así.”

that women have only two choices, “el arte o la galantería” [art or gallantry] (18). Surprisingly, Pérez Blanco’s recipe for happiness is not the traditional middle-class marriage; as a confirmed bachelor he does not advocate serving the greater good of family and society, but projects his own desires onto Clarisa: having love affairs or writing books. While earlier she had doubts about a writing venture (“no quiero ser una Lila Blanca [...] yo no soy de esa feminidad que usted quiere.” [I don’t want to be a Lila Blanca<sup>28</sup> [...] I don’t have that femininity that you want] (9), now in an inexplicable turn of events she goes from staunch feminist to writer of romance fiction. This plot twist then introduces romance fiction on a second level: on one level the novella can be read as a ‘romance of sorts’, Clarisa courting feminism and Pérez Blanco courting Clarisa; on another level Clarisa is now becoming a writer of romance fiction, so the exact opposite of a staunch feminist. To be precise, she accepts a writing partnership with Pérez Blanco in which *he* writes *her* (real and imagined) love stories: “Clarisa told Pérez Blanco about the intimate feelings she had experienced and those she imagined, and he gave them literary form, he impregnated them with his male license.” (17)<sup>29</sup> The choice of words alludes to the only way Pérez Blanco can dominate his object of desire, namely through “impregnating” the feminine text rather than her body. As Bieder aptly observes: “his masculinity is a text of power, not sexuality” (58). True to the romance formula, in her weakness the heroine falls for the guy who manipulates her at his leisure.<sup>30</sup> Throughout their writing partnership they fall in love with each other: “They didn’t talk about love,

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<sup>28</sup> Lila Blanca is a fictitious writer of romance novels.

<sup>29</sup> “Clarisa contaba a Pérez Blanco las sensaciones íntimas que había experimentado y las que imaginaba, y él le daba forma literaria, las impregnaba de su picardía de hombre.”

<sup>30</sup> This is reminiscent of Shaw’s *Pygmalion*, in which Henry Higgins and Eliza Doolittle have a similar co-dependency.

but Pérez Blanco thought she had taken an interest in him when he saw she was jealous of the female friends he received at his house [...] Pérez Blanco began to show serious interest in Clarisa.” (17)<sup>31</sup>

Clarisa’s ‘first love’ of feminism burnt her out and economic necessities dictate drastic action. Reality rudely awakens her from her fantasy feminism and, to make matters worse, her dabbling with writing fails as well, not to mention the fact that selling literature could be seen as intellectual prostitution, selling her soul rather than her body; her unfinished novel is fittingly called *Memorias de un alma/Memoirs of the Soul*.

Where does that leave the (female) reader? Different readers are likely to respond differently, but, generally speaking, by now the expectations for the heroine’s happy ending are on a downward spiral. The reader of Clarisa has, of course, the advantage of being able to distance herself rationally. The reader can outwit the heroine by guessing the hero’s true motives since she clearly understands the situation when the heroine does not. Our disappointment is also tempered by an explanation of her background story. In her confession of failure to Pérez Blanco (15) we learn that:

It was life that had pushed her to the path that she was unavoidably on.

Since she was a young girl they had made her unhappy with life through studies that, without being profound, divorced her from her feminine occupations. They gave her an androgynous spirit, incapable of being a man or of knowing how to be

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<sup>31</sup> “No se hablaban de amor, pero Pérez Blanco creía que le interesaba cuando la veía celosa de aquellas amiguitas que él recibí en su casa [...] comenzaba Pérez Blanco a interesarse por Clarisa de un modo serio.”



a woman. In such conditions, some vulgar love affairs that ended badly led her to emancipate herself from her parents and consider working. (15)<sup>32</sup>

Education, and an androgynous spirit, combined with love affairs gone wrong are the impetus for her emancipation. The notion that education beyond supposed feminine matters is bad for women echoes traditional male complaints about how reading is bad for women, because it makes them too imaginative.<sup>33</sup> Feminist readers typically resist this association between unhappiness and female imagination which “in the moral economy of happiness makes [...] imagination a bad thing.” (Ahmed 585) “We might explore”, Ahmed continues, “how imagination is what allows women to be liberated from happiness and the narrowness of its horizon”, while also admitting that “to become conscious of possibility can involve mourning for its loss” (585-586). In Clarisa’s case it is not so much a case of mourning for the loss of happiness, but never quite having had it in the first place, at least in Spain.

Before the narrative starts, Clarisa travels to Argentina and is inspired by a Spanish feminist adventurer.<sup>34</sup> She follows her example and becomes a feminist “al verse en la

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<sup>32</sup> “Era la vida la que le había empujado hacia el camino que recorría fatalmente.

Desde niña la habían disgustado de la vida con unos estudios que, sin llegar a ser profundos, la divorciaban de las ocupaciones femeninas. Le daban un espíritu andrógino, incapaz de ser hombre ni de saber ser mujer. En estas condiciones, unos amores vulgares y vulgarmente acabados le hicieron emanciparse de sus padres y pensar a trabajar.”

<sup>33</sup> First proposed by Rousseau in *Émile* (1762), where Sophy can only find happiness by not being over-educated.

<sup>34</sup> This character is most likely being modelled on Spanish feminist Concepción Gimeno de Flaquer (1850-1919).

necesidad de luchar y ganar el sustento” [finding herself compelled to fight and earn a living] (15). In Argentina her feminism seems to have real impact and earn her a living; some men, despite being surprised by her militant position, nevertheless try to help her (“a los que su propia distinción impulsaba a ser amables y a hacerle caso en sus demandas” [to whom her distinction encouraged them to be pleasant and pay attention to her demands] (15)) Back in Spain, however, she fails to convert her *entrometimiento* into real results for other women or herself. Not interested in love and failing at feminist activism, Clarisa’s withdrawal into the world of fantasy feminism can be read as both an escape and a protest against the vicissitudes of political struggle and the conservative gender formations open to women in Spain. Clarisa’s story hence obeys a dual impulse, feeding women’s desire for empowerment at the same time as it contains that desire by giving it a phallographic form.

Ann Snitow, writing about Harlequin romances (138), argues that literary romance allows women the one socially acceptable moment of transcendence in the female life cycle of courtship:

Harlequins fill a vacuum *created by social conditions*. [...] When women try to imagine companionship, the society offers them one vision, male sexual companionship. When women try to *fantasize about success*, mastery, the society offers them one vision, the power to attract a man. [...] When women try to *project a unique self*, the society offers them very few attractive images. True completion for women is nearly always presented as social, domestic, sexual.

One of the *culture's most intense myths, the ideal of an individual who is brave and complete in isolation, is for men only.* (my emphases)

Clarisa resolutely resists the traditional gender identity, which explains why she ultimately fails. Clarisa does indeed fantasize about feminist success, only to end up as a woman whose only power is to attract elderly gentlemen. Pérez Blanco breaks with her over the publication of her unfinished novel without his permission. By now desperate for money, and very much to the readers' dismay, she is on the verge of really prostituting herself by asking a sugar daddy, an elderly gentleman she knows from her feminist days, to support her financially. Feeling sorry for her, he buys her a ticket to go abroad.

This ending is abrupt and typically Burgos-esque. An undisclosed amount of time later – Pérez Blanco claims he has forgotten all about Clarisa – she writes a letter from London explaining: “I prefer to stay in this country, where all paths are open to women. I don't know yet what I should do; I am unsure as to whether to continue with my propaganda or follow your advice. I don't know whether to become a writer or a coquette.” (22)<sup>35</sup> This very last sentence of the novella leaves to our imagination what might happen to Clarisa in London. Some critics emphasise the ending as Clarisa having a choice between being a writer or a *cocota* (prostitution of mind or body). However, the previous sentence also mentions the option of carrying on with feminist propaganda. Whatever the case may be,

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<sup>35</sup> “Prefiero quedarme en este país, donde todos los caminos están abiertos a la mujer. No sé aún lo que he de hacer; dudo si seguir en mi propaganda o si seguir sus consejos. Estoy indecisa entre meterme a escritora o meterme a cocota.”

she ends up an individual who, like men, is “brave and complete in isolation” (Snitow 138), living in peace by herself in a way that her eighteenth century literary namesake was never allowed to be.

The reader seems to be encouraged to come up with multiple readings: throughout the narrative they can identify either with the new, independent, woman or with the woman who capitulates and flees to London, or both.<sup>36</sup> While in traditional romance the happy ending rests on the safe haven of marriage, *La entrometida*'s ending gives leeway for multiple readings. But how important is a happy feminist ending? Is the feminist message weakened by an ambiguous ending? A romantic notion of happiness could, yet again, be read as a mechanism of patriarchal control. Clarisa is constructed as a resistant woman, resisting male hegemonic ideals of female happiness, and yet, fails to achieve her own happiness. Nevertheless, she moves freely in the public sphere trying to fight for equal rights for her fellow sufferers. For Clarisa self-determination is not possible in Spain, she has to emigrate to London, which is not exactly a happy ending but certainly an optimistic one. We witness Clarisa's life in a moment of crisis; happiness for Clarisa is a has-been (in the Americas) and a will-be (in London). While it might reflect Burgos's own happiness on her many world-wide travels, it is also a bleak prospect for those less able to leave their home country. This is, of course, not so much a criticism of Clarisa's behaviour, but a devastating indictment of early twentieth-century Spanish society.

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<sup>36</sup> See also Labanyi (8), where she discusses similar ambiguities in early Francoist romance novels.

A slightly more optimistic reading could be that readers learn through witnessing Clarisa's 'working through' her crisis and her subsequent arrival in a more positive space. We must not forget that feminist campaigners throughout the centuries and countries have been surprised at how slow social change is. This is particularly true for first wave feminism, which was disillusioned to find that legal changes to achieve *de jure* equality did not bring about *de facto* equality. It is only with the advantage of hindsight that we ask why Burgos would write such an ambiguous story about a first-wave feminist. In a period of increased mobilisation and hence a backlash of anti-feminism, the political usefulness of this story is admittedly debatable. However, the crucial question for culture as a tool for social change could also be whether the self-confident performance of Clarisa stays in our minds and hence has role-model potential. Faderman rightly points out that the consciousness-raising and role-model functions of cultural practices are at odds with each other. Culture that represents oppressed groups should, of course, not be emulated by readers. Ideal feminist fiction, Faderman argues, fulfils an equilibrium:

Rather than being driven to mental breakdown or suicide or immobility, the heroines of new feminist fiction will somehow manage to resist destruction, perhaps with the support and confidence of other women. Their outlook and behavior will presage a new social order that integrates the best aspects of 'female culture' with selected 'male' values. (215)

In this sense Clarisa is half-way there; although she needs male help to resist ruin, the open ending points to a best-of-both-worlds scenario of combining female and male values. Interestingly, Radway's well-known study on female readers' reception suggests a similar half-way house, i.e. that romance fiction is a coping mechanism, which allows

female readers a way of handling their disadvantaged situation, though not providing a way of solving the problem.

Expecting a happy ending for the protagonist also entails a moral judgment of good and evil, we want to see our heroine rewarded for her trials and tribulations. A suitable ending for the reader, then, might just be that the character she identifies with is content. An ending not of the ‘happily-ever-after’ variety, but one in which things turn out alright for our heroine. There might not be an easy happy – and feminist – ending that was imaginable in early twentieth-century Spain. Although the discontinuities between the feminist demands of her essays and the representations in her fiction may be uncomfortable, it might just be the usual tension between theory and practice and, more importantly, can still be found in today’s feminist projects.

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