



# ***CULTURAL SYMBOLS, MYTH AND IDENTITY IN FOUR 20TH-CENTURY ENGLISH POPULAR ROMANCE FICTION NOVELS SET IN TENERIFE<sup>1</sup>***

## ***SÍMBOLOS CULTURALES, MITO E IDENTIDAD EN CUATRO NOVELAS DE FICCIÓN ROMÁNTICA POPULAR INGLESA DEL SIGLO XX AMBIENTADAS EN TENERIFE***

**María Jesús Vera-Cazorla\***

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**Resumen:** En este trabajo se examina la visión que aparece de la isla de Tenerife (islas Canarias, España) en cuatro obras tomadas de un corpus más amplio de novelas románticas publicadas en lengua inglesa entre 1958 y 1994 por la conocida editorial Mills & Boon. Nuestro objetivo es analizar si la información cultural que se menciona en estos textos es real o un producto de la imaginación de sus autoras y discutir qué aspectos de la cultura canaria llamaron la atención de las escritoras principalmente. Tras un breve análisis del género de la novela rosa (popular romance fiction), se describe el paisaje simbólico y cultural que se ofrece de la isla de Tenerife. Para el análisis de los encuentros interculturales entre la protagonista británica y los personajes canarios, utilizamos la teoría de Geert Hofstede sobre las dimensiones culturales, un marco para la comunicación entre culturas que describe los efectos de la cultura de una sociedad en los valores de sus miembros y cómo estos valores están relacionados con sus acciones.

**Palabras clave:** Novela romántica, contacto intercultural, Tenerife, símbolos culturales canarios

**Abstract:** This paper examines the vision presented of the island of Tenerife (Canary Islands, Spain) in four novels, taken from a wider corpus of popular romance novels published by well-known Mills & Boon between 1958 and 1994. Our aim is to analyse whether the cultural information mentioned in the novels is real or a figment of the authors' imagination, and discuss what aspects of the Canarian culture attracted the authors' attention the most. After a brief review of the genre of popular romance fiction, we describe the symbolic and cultural landscape of Tenerife in these popular romance novels. For the analysis of the cross-cultural encounters between the British protagonist and the Canarian characters, we use Geert Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory, a framework for cross-cultural communication which describes the effects of a society's culture on the values of its members, and how these values are related to their actions.

**Keywords:** Popular romance, intercultural contact, Tenerife, Canarian cultural symbols

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\* Profesora de Metodología y Didáctica de la enseñanza de las lenguas modernas y de Lengua Inglesa. Departamento de Lenguas Modernas. Universidad de Las Palmas de Gran Canaria. C/ Pérez del Toro, 1. 35004. Las Palmas de Gran Canaria. España. Teléfono: +34 928 458 957; correo electrónico: mariajesus.vera@ulpgc.es

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## INTRODUCTION

Throughout their history, the Canary Islands have experienced a process of mystification few lands in the world have undergone<sup>2</sup>. The islands were considered heaven on earth, a blissful paradise and the place where, according to classical Greek and Roman authors, mythical lands such as the Elysian Fields, the Fortunate Isles, the Islands of the Blessed, the Atlantis, the Garden of the Hesperides or the island of Saint Brendan were found<sup>3</sup>. Four factors have favoured this concentration of the mythical and the extraordinary in the archipelago: the island, the mountain, the ends of the known world and the weather factor. As a symbolic landscape, the concept of island has been linked to several cultural constructs. According to Kappler<sup>4</sup>, they are especially appreciated as a closed universe with their very particular imaginary. An island is, by nature, a location where wonder exists, beyond the usual laws and under a regime of its own; it is the place of the arbitrary. From ancient Greek times, islands are a favourite place for the most extraordinary human and divine adventures.

The Canaries are part of Spain but geographically closer to remote and fascinating Africa, as well as a popular holiday destination among the British who have been visiting the islands for centuries. This explains why the Canary Islands have been mentioned in a great variety of texts. In 2002 González-Cruz classified the English texts containing references to these islands into guidebooks, weather and health studies, travel journals, fiction, historical, socio-cultural or linguistic studies, and studies about nature. In each genre, a specific reader-oriented image of the islands can be found, helping to perpetuate the myth of a paradise on earth. Although popular romance novels were not included in González-Cruz's first bibliographical repertoire, as she discovered this corpus later on, we can't but agree with her view that they contributed to the spreading of the idyllic image of the Canaries, by describing them as the Enchanted Islands, the Lost Atlantis, or the Fortunate Isles. According to this author, «despite occasional mention of some minor drawbacks, the image of the islands that seems to be predominantly offered in these texts is that of a paradise»<sup>5</sup>.

On the other hand, novels located in foreign and exotic backgrounds were especially popular in the U.K. from the 1950s «after the harshness and austerity of wartime in Great Britain, and as more people were going on overseas holidays»<sup>6</sup>. These novels function as impromptu travel guides providing readers with basic phrases and expressions or with information about the typical places, events and traditional foods that should not be missed when they go abroad.

This study will be focused on the vision of the island of Tenerife portrayed in four novels taken from the much wider corpus of popular romance novels that is being compiled for Research Project FFI2014-53962-P. Tenerife is the largest of the Canary Islands and a popular background scene in many of these books. Issues such as whether the data mentioned in the novels are real or a figment of the authors' imagination and what aspects of the Canarian culture attracted the authors' attention the most will be examined and discussed in this paper, whose main objective is to make an overall analysis of the cross-cultural encounters observed in these books. The extent to which Canarian symbols, heroes, rituals and values are understood by the visitors will also be considered. For this purpose, the following novels have been chosen: Catherine Airlie. *Red Lotus* (1958), Pippa Lane. *Nurse in Tenerife* (1978), Jean McLeod. *Meeting in Madrid* (1979), Margaret Mayo. *Bitter Memories* (1994). All of them were published by Mills & Boon and Harlequin, the most popular publishers of love stories worldwide. In the following section we will provide an outline of the genre and will briefly describe the plots of the novels selected for our study.

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2 MARTÍNEZ HERNÁNDEZ (2002), SANTANA SANTANA et al. (2002), BELLO JIMÉNEZ (2005).

3 MARTÍNEZ HERNÁNDEZ (1992), (1996), (2002), (2010); CABRERA PERERA (1988).

4 KAPPLER (1986), p. 36.

5 GONZÁLEZ-CRUZ (2015), unnumbered pages.

6 MCALEER (1999), p. 244.

## THE ROMANCE GENRE

The romance genre has been defined as «in which the love plot is central to the narrative»<sup>7</sup>. Although it may seem that their arguments are always the same, the genre has evolved greatly over the years adapting itself to the historical and social circumstances of the moment. According to Linda J. Lee, this genre has much in common with traditional fairy tales as:

...both are highly formulaic; invoke a fantasy realm; focus on the creation or reconciliation of a romantic pair; exist in an infinite variation of texts that fall into distinct types; and are often dismissed as being “trivial.” With their prototypical marriage endings, criticisms are levied against both narrative forms for their failure to challenge the system of social relations and norms from which they arise<sup>8</sup>.

However, when analysing the online catalogue of this publisher, the great variety of sub-genres such as escape gay romance, erotica, paranormal, African-American romance or fantasy seems to contradict the previous statement; nowadays, the genre has adjusted to include different races, situations as well as a greater diversity of sexual behaviors. For Vivanco and Kramer, romance novels are «cultural agents» that transmit «gender ideologies»<sup>9</sup> as well as stereotypes and cultural manifestations since their wide readership facilitates the spreading of ideas. According to González Mínguez,

Mills and Boon are serious historical documents which reflect shifting social values and denounce the difficulties women face in a men’s world. By analysing locations, heroes and heroines, marriage or sexual relationships, I’ll try to demonstrate how these narratives have influenced on women of all ages and social classes engulfing readers in a unique female atmosphere<sup>10</sup>.

In spite of the disrepute of the genre, these novels are acceptable examples of popular culture and offer a remarkable potential for exploring stereotypes and cultural manifestations. These books have a wide readership and their authors have based their stories on beliefs and preconceived images of the places in which their stories happen. In the case of the books whose plot evolves in foreign countries, exoticism is usually given by both the male protagonist and the traditions of the place. In this paper, popular romance fiction is used as a source to analyse some of the ways in which the Canaries are represented; in particular, we analysed the vision of the island of Tenerife. In these books we find many stereotypes related to the image of the islands and the islanders, very much related to the ethnocentric discourse of these British authors.

The plot of these novels is not expected to be realistic; popular romance fiction abounds in stereotypes and preconceptions about a particular culture or place but the genre draws our attention to what visitors to the Canaries might feel is genuine and representative, those aspects of the life on the island that differ the most from what the main character, and the reader, will find at home. Yet, living on the islands has changed dramatically since *Red Lotus* was published in 1958. This book appeared before the tourist boom of the 60s, whereas *Bitter Memories* was published in 1994 and since then tourism has become a key to the economic sector of the islands. In this period of nearly forty years, the islanders have had the chance to encounter visitors on a more regular basis and the tourist has even become part of Canarian folklore and a main character of stories and songs. The information about the islands that the English tourist receives now is greater and more trustworthy than previously. Prior to the analysis of the texts, I will summarize the plot of the chosen novels:

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7 GONZÁLEZ-CRUZ (2015), unnumbered pages.

8 LEE (2008), p. 52.

9 VIVANCO & KRAMER (2010), p. 30.

10 GONZÁLEZ MÍNGUEZ (2010), pp. 179-180.

*Red Lotus* (1958) by Catherine Airlie

After the death of her mother, Felicity Stanmore travels to Tenerife invited by her uncle. Soon after arriving, he dies and she must take care of her three cousins with the help of Philip Arnold, her uncle's estate's agent and fiancée of her deceased cousin Maria. While she learns to understand her Spanish cousins, Felicity must learn to trust Philip Arnold and believe that he had no role in the death of his cousin Maria.

*Nurse in Tenerife* (1978) by Pippa Lane

Trudy Foster, a nurse at Midthorpe General Hospital, is in love with a handsome doctor Derek Laridine. However, when she has to go and nurse her stepmother who lives on the island of Tenerife, she meets Doctor Miguel Martina who falls in love in her. During her stay on the island, Trudy has to decide between the two men.

*Meeting in Madrid* (1979) by Jean McLeod

A Spanish family hires Catherine Royce as a teenager's governess. They both fly to Tenerife where the girl's stepmother, Lucia, lives. In Tenerife, Catherine must control Teresa's bad relationship with her stepmother and the jealousy Lucia feels toward her because of the interest she arouses in Teresa's uncle, Jaime.

*Bitter Memories* (1994) by Margaret Mayo

Tanya travels to Tenerife to visit her sister, who works in a hotel in the south of the island. There, she is reunited with an old love, Alejandro, whom she believed had abandoned her to marry another woman. During his stay, Alejandro tries to convince Tanya that they have a future together.

Before analysing the novels, it seems essential to consider, albeit briefly, the representation of Spanishness by the British community.

SPANISHNESS

In a socio-historical and cultural approach to the discourses of Spanish national identity, Prieto Arranz<sup>11</sup> examines the image of Spain from the British perspective from the 16th century. For centuries this image has been linked to Catholicism and religious fanaticism, especially since the reign of Mary I. During the reign of Elizabeth I, support for the British government and the Church of England became a synonym of patriotism. Prieto affirms that the Anglo-centric discourse of British identity, prolific in the 18th century, is based on the concept of freedom and was clearly constructed to oppose to the tyranny of both France and Spain. This national-religious discourse remained in force during the second half of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th.

More recently, the enormous number of historiographical, literary, cinematographic and television works that recreate the Tudor period shows to what extent this historical period is considered determinant in the process of construction of the British identity. Many of these works serve to transmit a Whig version of British history. These contemporary television and film productions contribute to fostering

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11 PRIETO ARRANZ (2012), unnumbered pages.

a stereotyped image of Spain and the Spanish as the equivalent of pettiness, intellectual and economic backwardness, religious fanaticism, and material, intellectual and spiritual poverty. Nowadays, the frequent use of the terms Armada and Inquisition is found in the field of sports but also in the financial press<sup>12</sup>. In a 1993 travel guide entitled *Culture Shock Spain*, the author includes these terms in her six-page summary of the history of Spain and uses the word “pirates” when writing about the Armada<sup>13</sup>.

It could only be natural to believe that this English image of Spain has changed with the arrival of tourists and residents from that country since the 1960s.

During the 1980s, increasing numbers of British people began migrating to Spain’s coastal areas. Attracted by the warmth, the cost of living and the potential for a leisured lifestyle, and aided by portable pensions and capital gained during the property boom of the 1970s, they were the outcome of a phenomenon which began in 1960s with cheap air travel and mass package tourism<sup>14</sup>.

Sociologist Karen O’Reilly has studied the attitudes of Englishmen living in the south of Spain on a permanent basis. According to these migrants, Spain is a country of «bullfights and passion, quaintness and backwardness, blood and revolution, peasants and traditions»<sup>15</sup>. The British residents find in Spain the values of community, caring, sharing and responsibility that they used to associate with a historical bygone Britain. Spain offers them an escape to the past<sup>16</sup>.

The long history of British-Spanish relationships has influenced the emergence of different stereotypes. Stereotypes are «social structures which serve as mental pictures of the groups in question or the traits that we view as characteristic of social groups, and particularly those that differentiate groups from each other»<sup>17</sup>. Although social categorising is part of the way we process information about others, we should be aware that over-simplifying this information and identifying certain characteristics as belonging to certain categories of people and events could lead to prejudice, discrimination and racism<sup>18</sup>. Even if popular romance fiction could be described as a kind benevolent genre, there are references to some British stereotypes about Spaniards such as chauvinism and religiosity in these novels.

A question that arises in some of these novels is whether the inhabitants of the islands are Canarians or Spaniards. Although these four novels are set in the Canaries, there is no real agreement on whether the inhabitants of the islands feel Canarian or Spanish. In *Meeting in Madrid* flamenco, bullfighters and people shouting “Olé” are mentioned, which are elements alien to the Canarian culture, while the authors of *Red Lotus*, *Nurse in Tenerife* and *Bitter Memories* make some references to the Guanches, the original inhabitants of the islands who were ethnically related to the Berbers. On arrival to the islands, Felicity Stanmore learns that

...[w]e are an isolated group, not quite in mid-Atlantic, but almost so for every practical purpose, clinging to the skirts of Africa, but not African; fiercely proud of our Spanish forebears and looking always towards the mother country of Spain<sup>19</sup>.

That is not, however, the feeling of the male protagonist of *Bitter Memories* when he states that «politically we belong to Spain, but we prefer to think of ourselves as independent»<sup>20</sup>, and although the authors declare that the islands are part of Spain, the idea of a lovely isolated paradise not far from Africa is present in the books. *Bitter Memories* includes six pages at the end of the book with information about Tenerife in which, under the heading “The Romantic Past”, it is said that when the Spaniards arrived in the fifteenth century they found that the islands were inhabited by «a primitive people known as the

12 PRIETO ARRANZ (2012), unnumbered pages.

13 GRAFF (1993), p. 16.

14 O’REILLY (2002), p. 179.

15 O’REILLY (2002), p. 182.

16 O’REILLY (2002), p. 183.

17 VÁZQUEZ DE LA TORRE (2012), unnumbered pages.

18 VÁZQUEZ DE LA TORRE (2012), unnumbered pages.

19 AIRLIE (1958), p. 7.

20 MAYO (1994), p. 15.



Guanches, who had blond hair and blue eyes, lived in caves and dressed in animal hide»<sup>21</sup>.

On the other hand, the positive allusion to the Guanches in these romance novels continues, unbeknown to the authors, the tradition of the “noble savage” displayed in the works of 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup>-century historians and anthropologists on the first inhabitants of the Canary Islands. In *Red Lotus* the Guanches and their lifestyle are referred to as

...a sturdy peasant race, and they fought bravely for their liberty, but since the Conquest they have been more and more thrust into the background of the island’s living until they have agreed to take second place. You will see the true types among the cave-dwellers in the troglodyte villages, but there has been gradual intermarriage between certain types of Spanish settlers and these people<sup>22</sup>.

In *Nurse in Tenerife*, the author reflects an old and discarded hypothesis on the origin of the Guanches:

There is a romantic legend that the Canary Islands are the peaks of the lost continent of Atlantis which used to exist between Africa and America [...] When the Spaniards discovered these islands, they were inhabited by Guanches, tall, fair people<sup>23</sup>.

As Estévez González<sup>24</sup> maintains, the romanticized image of the Guanches coincides with the historiography of the islands, and it is the result of the interconnection between science, political power and ideology in the studies on the Canary Islands. Canarian historian, biologist and writer Viera y Clavijo and the French naturalist and anthropologist Sabine Berthelot in the 18<sup>th</sup> century as well as distinguished 19<sup>th</sup> century researchers such as Chil y Naranjo, Bethencourt Alfonso and Grau-Bassas all contributed to consolidating the positive image of the Guanche. According to Viera y Clavijo, the Guanches were the descendants of the ancient Atlanteans. Thus, with this noble lineage in mind, Viera could include them in the history of the new Christian and European society that began to emerge after the conquest:

Culturally disbanded after the conquest, the natives began to take an imaginary existence in the historiography of the islands, in the accounts of travellers and the more systematic works of anthropologists and prehistorians. The common thread in all these accounts is a positive and archetypal image of the Guanche, which includes from the nobility of their character and the spontaneity of their customs to the innate strength of their race<sup>25</sup>.

The notion that the Guanches were tall with fair wavy hair dates back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In 1873 Franz von Löer, German polygraph, visited the Canary Islands, commissioned by King Ludwig II of Bavaria. He made some comparisons between the epics of the Guanches and the Germans and launched the bold and sensational theory that the natives of the Canary Islands were of German origin<sup>26</sup>. We find this idea reflected in *Nurse in Tenerife* when we read «his hair was wavy and sandy-fair, and his complexion was light, which show that he was probably Canarian in origin»<sup>27</sup>. As late as 1963, German physical anthropologist Schwidetzky stated that the Canary Islands have been considered as a refuge for European races<sup>28</sup>.

There is no agreement among the authors of these romance fiction books as to whether the Canarians are Spaniards or not. Consequently, they blend cultural elements of mainland Spain that are not common on the islands with powerful symbols of Canarian culture. On the other hand, the image of the noble savage, the Guanche, is very appealing as a means of differentiating the islands from the rest of the mainland. The presence of the Guanche, or at least the Guanche blood, reinforces the myth of paradise

21 MAYO (1994), pp. 182-183.

22 AIRLIE (1958), p. 42.

23 LANE (1978), p. 58.

24 ESTÉVEZ GONZÁLEZ (2011), pp. 149-164.

25 ESTÉVEZ GONZÁLEZ (2011), p. 151.

26 WENDT (1960).

27 LANE (1978), p. 20.

28 ESTÉVEZ GONZÁLEZ (2011), p. 159.

and the Garden of Eden. Isolated in the Atlantic Ocean near Africa, the lush Canary Islands are inhabited by humble, kind and pleasant people who descend from a noble race.

#### TENERIFE: CULTURAL SYMBOLS, MYTH AND IDENTITY

Culture is a complex term. For G. Hofstede, the word 'culture' has three meanings:

Literally it means tilling the soil: cultivation. Metaphorically the word is used for the training or refining of the mind: civilization. However, in the past decades a broader metaphorical meaning has become popular, derived from anthropology: collective ways of acting, thinking, and feeling. 'Culture' in this sense is "the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from others"<sup>29</sup>.

As a construct, culture is «is not directly accessible to observation but inferable from verbal statements and other behaviours and useful in predicting still other observable and measurable verbal and nonverbal behaviour»<sup>30</sup>. In *Los símbolos de la identidad canaria*, Galván and Estévez defined culture as

...that complex whole that is acquired through learning, that we use as members of a society, and through which we make decisions, we choose between different and often contradictory possibilities. All human activity is educated, our behaviours are endowed with meaning and ideas about what is right and what is not, what is reasonable and nonsensical. Culture is a means by which we perceive and value the human social relationships, and to a large extent it can be considered as a series of symbols that include acts, behaviours, objects we give meaning to and through which we communicate<sup>31</sup>.

For the analysis of the cross-cultural encounters between the British protagonist and the Canarian characters in the texts offered below, Geert Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory will be used. This framework for cross-cultural communication describes the effects of a society's culture on the values of its members, and how these values are related to their actions. Hofstede stated that differences between cultures may be investigated from the perspective of four manifestations of culture: symbols, heroes, rituals, and values<sup>32</sup>.

#### Symbols

According to Hofstede and Hofstede<sup>33</sup>, «symbols are words, pictures, or objects that carry a particular meaning only recognized as such by those who share the culture». These symbols, such as slang expressions, dress code, status symbols, and hairstyles can be changed, imitated, and replaced with others. The most readily discernible symbols are the easiest and the most common way to include some cultural aspects from the target country in these texts.

The Canarian culture has its own specific symbols even if «globalization favours the adoption of borrowed symbolic references» as Galván and Estévez<sup>34</sup> stated:

Our customs, institutions and beliefs are interrelated, forming a symbolic system, because each symbol makes sense only in relation to the rest of the other symbols. It is an open symbolic system, built over the centuries, creating and articulating a set of diverse traditions, providing them with a proper sense, recreating them through our history<sup>35</sup>.

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29 HOFSTEDE (2012), p. 385.

30 LEVITIN, cited in Hofstede and Hofstede's Research and VSM webpage.

31 GALVÁN & ESTÉVEZ (1997), p. 21.

32 HOFSTEDE (2001), pp. 10-11.

33 HOFSTEDE & HOFSTEDE (2005), p. 7.

34 GALVÁN & ESTÉVEZ (1997), p. 22.

35 GALVÁN & ESTÉVEZ (1997), p. 21.

The dialectal Spanish from the islands, the traditional Canarian house, the typical costumes, the figure of the traditional peasant, Canarian songs and dances, the various religious pilgrimages to the churches of the patron saints of the different islands, El Teide volcanic mountain, the typical food and trees such as the juniper, the palm tree, the sacred tree Garoé and the dragon tree are the main symbols mentioned in these novels, mostly in a superficial way, with no real importance in the plot. In *Bitter Memories* and *Red Lotus*, the protagonists visit Icod and its dragon tree<sup>36</sup>; in *Nurse in Tenerife* Trudy's friend, Cherry, is given a piece of Canary embroidery as a present<sup>37</sup>; we also find the typical recipe of salty pork ribs with potatoes and corn on the cob in *Bitter Memories*<sup>38</sup> as well as the name of places, the description of the most common crops and fruits, among other cultural references. However, they are only brief allusions that contribute to create the setting of the novels and provide local atmosphere.

### The Spanish of the Canary Islands

According to Gumperz, identity is «in large part established and maintained through language»<sup>39</sup> and Canarian identity is very much related to the dialect. The Spanish of the Canary Islands is «a linguistic modality that, situated halfway between the Spanish of Spain and that of the Americas, has its own well-defined personality within the broad range of geographical variation that is Spanish»<sup>40</sup>. Belonging to the so-called Atlantic or Southern Spanish, this language variety has many features in common with the Western Andalusian dialect and the Spanish spoken in Latin America. Their analogies, especially at both phonetic and grammatical levels, are explained by factors such as the geographical origin of the first settlers on the islands, and to the close relationship established between the Canary Islands and America, especially Venezuela and Cuba, through migration<sup>41</sup>. Many hispanicisms taken from the Spanish variety spoken in the islands appear in these texts. One of the functions of using these words and expressions is the establishing of a Canarian identity.

In these four romance novels there is a variety of Spanish words that add both realism and some local colour. These words are mainly related to three semantic fields: forms of greetings (such as *buenas noches*, *adios*, *hasta la vista*, *hasta mañana*)<sup>42</sup>, food (such as *papas arrugadas*, *pulпитos*, *café con leche*)<sup>43</sup> and places (*playa*, *barranco*, *hacienda*)<sup>44</sup>. In *Bitter Memories* there are many terms associated with the carnival (such as *murgas*, *comparsas*, *rondallas*, *reina del carnaval*, *coso*, *elección de la reina infantil*)<sup>45</sup>.

Many basic words in Spanish such as *señor*, *señorita*, *señora* or *mañana* include a palatal nasal sound transcribed by the graphic sign “ñ” which does not exist in English. In Spanish, a diaeresis marks this palatal nasal sound but this diaeresis does not appear in *Red Lotus* or in *Meeting in Madrid*. In contrast, *Bitter Memories* includes short sentences in Spanish and very specific words such as “zafra”, which refers to the tomato season.

Many of the Spanish words appearing in these books are also used in mainland Spain. On the other hand, the endearment, “mi niña” (my girl), is a very typical Canarian expression which is nowadays becoming obsolete. This endearment appears in *Bitter Memories*, which seems the most realistic novel of the four at least in terms of Canarian vocabulary and expressions, but *Nurse in Tenerife*<sup>46</sup> is the only one that explicitly mentions the «quick, breathless Canarian Spanish» of the islands.

36 MAYO (1994), p. 67 & AIRLIE (1978), p. 28.

37 LANE (1978), p. 146.

38 MAYO (1994), p. 104.

39 GUMPERZ (1990), p. 7.

40 SAMPER-PADILLA (2008), p. 161.

41 GONZÁLEZ-CRUZ & VERA-CAZORLA (2011), pp. 16-34.

42 Translated respectively as “good evening and good night”, “goodbye”, “see you soon”, “see you tomorrow”.

43 Translated respectively as “new potatoes cooked in their skin in well-salted water, small squids, and milky coffee”.

44 Translated respectively as “beach”, “ravine”, and “homestead”.

45 Translated respectively as “singing groups”, “carnival groups”, “stringed instrument groups”, “the carnival queen”, “the parade”, and “the gala to decide on the children’s carnival queen”.

46 LANE (1978), p. 39.



## El Teide

A powerful symbol of Canarian culture is El Teide mountain peak, which is a volcano on Tenerife and the highest peak (3,718m) in Spain. According to Criado,

El Teide is the geomorphological element that not only symbolizes the island of Tenerife, but transcends its boundaries to become a symbol of the archipelago. There are several factors which distinguish El Teide as a Pan-Canarian symbol; first its dimensions that make it visible from the other islands except Lanzarote, its position in the centre of the archipelago and its volcanic nature, common to the rest of the islands. Its altitude makes it the first Canarian territory that can be seen from the sea or from the air, and it always generates surprise and a sense of homecoming, as we approach the islands<sup>47</sup>.

For Criado, «unconsciously, we tend to attribute El Teide with a patriarchal personality, to which we owe respect»<sup>48</sup>. The mountain is mentioned in all four books. In some cases, it is a way of describing the protagonist's arrival and first impressions on the island as in the following quotes:

El Teide is our resident mountain and you can see him a long way off, like a lost pyramid sitting on the horizon. Look, there he is now, taking shape! Today he has his little cap on his head, but most of the time he is quite clear!<sup>49</sup>.

Felicity was still looking at The Peak. The great mountain seemed completely separated from all contact with the land beneath, isolated beyond its barrier of cloud, aloof and cold even under the flush of sun on its lofty crest. She could see it, even then, as the spirit of the island, the presence which man looked at and feared<sup>50</sup>.

It was a scene straight out of Africa, a sight so surprising, so utterly unexpected to Felicity that she drew in a long, quivering breath of delight [...] El Teide was indeed magnificent. If he was frightening and remote in some moods, he was kind and wise and gentle, too. His hoary old head rose far into the blue<sup>51</sup>.

Trudy saw a carpet of cloud below her, and then the volcanic cone of El Teide Mountain with the peak just covered in snow like a burnt rock-cake sprinkled with icing sugar<sup>52</sup>.

In other novels, the peak is the background for some adventures of the various main characters. In *Nurse in Tenerife* the peak serves as a reminder of a romantic gathering:

Strange how a symbol could trigger off never-to-be-forgotten memories. It was the sight of El Teide towering high into the blue Tenerife sky that reminded Trudy of the Spanish surgeon's stolen kisses when, as her eyes widened in protest, she saw the volcanic peak beyond his head. Hardly anywhere on the island could she escape that peak, it seemed. Whenever she saw it now turbulent emotions stirred in her<sup>53</sup>.

Sometimes El Teide is personified or it reflects the male protagonist's mood. In *Red Lotus*, the main characters recognize its influence on the island:

“However you may come to the islands, it is always El Teide that dominates” [...] Felicity was still looking at The Peak. The great mountain seemed completely separated from all contact with the land beneath, isolated beyond its barrier of cloud, aloof and cold even under the flush of sun on its lofty crest.

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47 CRIADO (1997), p. 525.

48 CRIADO (1997), p. 528.

49 MCLEOD (1979), p. 46.

50 AIRLIE (1958), p. 19.

51 AIRLIE (1958), p. 94.

52 LANE (1978), p. 17.

53 LANE (1978), pp. 142-143.

She could see it, even then as the spirit of the island, the presence which man looked at and feared<sup>54</sup>.

El Teide dominates the entire island [...] You must learn to live with him, to accept him in many moods, or he will have his own revenge!<sup>55</sup>.

High above the tableland the great peak looked down on their small company as it wound across the sand, as remote and unperturbed by their presence as a giant who watches flies crawling at his feet [...] But today El Teide was smiling. No storm-clouded ruffled his brow. The face of the mountain was serene<sup>56</sup>.

In *Red Lotus*, the author gives Philip Arnold many of the qualities of the mountain. Philip is severe and earnest, but also trustworthy and loyal:

Looking at the dark, closed face and the stern brows drawn above the narrowed blue eyes, she was suddenly reminded of the barren places of El Teide, the remote giant of a mountain which stood aloofly apart from the ordinary doings of mankind<sup>57</sup>.

In some ways it was the face of El Teide again, the granite countenance crowned by its white cap of snow, beneath which the ancient volcano slumbered. It was years, Philip Arnold had said, since El Teide had been in eruption, yet there was still evidence everywhere of the devastating effects of his wrath. And Philip himself had all the granite qualities of the sleeping giant of a mountain that guarded their silent valley, the harshness and the domination and the undeniable strength<sup>58</sup>.

Although the traditional house, the songs and the dances, the food, the dragon tree appear sometimes in the books, El Teide is the most powerful symbol in the novels set in the island of Tenerife not only because it is the one that appears most often, but also for its prominent role in every story.

### Heroes

According to Hofstede and Hofstede, «heroes are persons, alive or dead, real or imaginary, who possess characteristics that are highly prized in a culture and thus serve as models for behavior»<sup>59</sup>. Traditionally, in this genre the main male character is also the hero. Usually Spaniards personify many of the positive as well as negative idiosyncrasies of a foreign country. Dark and attractive, too often they assume a condescending attitude towards the real main character of these four novels. That is, the British girl who comes to the islands.

In these four novels the male protagonist is associated with typically Spanish values such as the sense of family obligation (*Meeting in Madrid*), the inbred Spanish politeness (*Red Lotus*), the joy of living and old-fashioned pride, but there is also flattery and in some cases too much boldness. In *Nurse in Tenerife* the infatuation of the protagonist comes close to harassment while in *Bitter Memories* the protagonist «wondered if all these Canario men were so profuse with their compliments»<sup>60</sup>. On the other hand, *Red Lotus* is the only romance of this group of selected texts with an Englishman as the male protagonist, while the typical Spanish marquis turns out to be the villain at the end of the story.

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54 AIRLIE (1958), pp. 18-19.

55 AIRLIE (1958), p. 19.

56 AIRLIE (1958), p. 97.

57 AIRLIE (1958), p. 26.

58 AIRLIE (1958), p. 45.

59 HOFSTEDE & HOFSTEDE (2005), p. 7.

60 MAYO (1994), p. 52.

In the category of heroes, the real Canarian artist César Manrique<sup>61</sup> is an atypical one. In the 1994 *Bitter Memories*, the negative impact of tourism on the islands turns Manrique into a new type of hero, the advocate of sustainable tourism and of the preservation of the Canarian landscapes against the invasion of mass tourism.

And on an island in the middle of the lake is a subterranean nightclub [...] All designed by César Manrique, Lanzarote's celebrated artist and architect. Everything he designs is made to look as natural as possible; the man's a genius<sup>62</sup>.

For Castro Borrego, «until the twentieth century in the Canarian culture there was no artist who acted as symbolic reference on which to build national identity»<sup>63</sup>. Manrique's impact on daily life and culture on the islands has been enormous, as before him «the Canarian man, influenced by models of aesthetic appreciation of European art, did not see in the volcanic landscape surrounding him anything but a petrified relic of the destruction caused by the eruptions in the past»<sup>64</sup>. According to this author, «the fundamental value that César Manrique's painting transmits is to teach the inhabitants of the islands the essential beauty of the volcanic landscape that defines the topography of the archipelago»<sup>65</sup>.

For Manrique, it was vital to see the value of Canarian scenery, as «whoever is blind to the beauty of a landscape is also blind to the consequences of its destruction. Aesthetics and politics are two dimensions of culture that cannot be separated»<sup>66</sup>; the artist taught his countrymen to appreciate the natural surroundings as he «claimed the right of the artist to transform nature [...] guided by the purpose not to compete but to enhance the beauty of the natural landscape»<sup>67</sup>. In a genre in which the role of the hero is so noticeable and obvious, it is thought provoking to be able to read about a real hero so committed to the Canarian culture and identity.

### Rituals

The next manifestation of culture in these novels are rituals. «Rituals are collective activities, technically superfluous to reaching desired ends, but which within a culture are considered as socially essential»<sup>68</sup>. They are regarded as “socially essential” because they bind individuals together. Rituals include not only state or religious ceremonies, but also ways of greeting or showing respect, and behaviour patterns in public places or in a business meeting.

One of the key words for this cultural manifestation is “fiesta”. Social gatherings are a significant part of the social life in the islands in all four novels. As the male protagonist of *Red Lotus* states, «There are many fiestas on the island [...] We are rarely without one in some town or another during the summer months»<sup>69</sup>. This profusion of fiestas must be due, in another character's words, to «the spontaneous gaiety of the average Spaniard»<sup>70</sup>.

Later in the same novel Felicity, his female counterpart, exclaims, «The very word fiesta spells laughter and gaiety and a sort of careless abandonment to happiness [...] There could be nothing quite like this in England»<sup>71</sup>. To which the English male protagonist answers, «We are a different race, Zamora is a happy continuation of Andalusia without the hardness that war and religious fanaticism and passion-

61 Artist César Manrique is also mentioned in Margaret Mayo's *Mutual attraction* (1990) and Jacqueline Baird's *At the Spaniard's Pleasure* (2003).

62 MAYO (1994), p. 67.

63 CASTRO BORREGO (1997), p. 387.

64 CASTRO BORREGO (1997), p. 389.

65 CASTRO BORREGO (1997), p. 389.

66 CASTRO BORREGO (1997), p. 389.

67 CASTRO BORREGO (1997), p. 390.

68 HOFSTEDE & HOFSTEDE (2005), p. 8.

69 AIRLIE (1958), p. 66.

70 AIRLIE (1958), p. 9.

71 AIRLIE (1958), p. 114.

ate violence have left in the Andalusian cities»<sup>72</sup>. That is, Spanish traditions are followed in the islands without the religious fanaticism and violence associated with some of these traditions.

Although there are private parties in all four books with music and dancing, there are also some references to two collective rituals, the Carnival and the feast of Corpus Christi. The Corpus Christi flower carpets are mentioned casually in *Red Lotus* and *Meeting in Madrid*, while Tenerife's carnival is the connecting thread in the plot of *Bitter Memories*. As a typical inhabitant of Tenerife, the male protagonist ensures that «Our carnival is second only to Rio, it is the largest in Europe»<sup>73</sup>. This festival and its various activities, such as the election of both the child and the senior carnival queens, the final grand parade or “coso” as well as the burial of the sardine<sup>74</sup>, appear in this novel. The Carnival is the biggest festival on islands such as Tenerife and Gran Canaria and is considered an expression of cultural identity.

The carnival is a crucial symbol of Canarian culture. For Barreto Vargas, «the carnival allows to dramatizing symbolically the subversion of what is socially established»<sup>75</sup> and he also explains that

...one of the features of the different carnivals in the Canaries is the expression of social criticism, either local, regional or national. [...] Subversion rites are essential within the carnival parties as they allow for the world to be upside down. [...] We can distinguish four types of subversion: sex, status, age and nature<sup>76</sup>.

Furthermore, in addition to the criticism and the subversion rituals, this author discusses the role of this “fiesta” to perform rites of ostentation as well as to exhibit ethnic identity:

In the past it was during the Corpus and the Easter processions in the Canaries when neighbours made use of the event to perform rites of ostentation. At present these festive rituals have moved to the carnival. [...] It is about getting the best costume, about sophistication and about group bonding in order to excel and to give a lesson of elegance and distinction<sup>77</sup>.

Despite tourism, the Carnival remains an expression of Canarian identity and culture. Well-known outside the islands, it is a very popular festivity that permeates social and economic differences.

### Values

The core of culture, according to Hofstede and Hofstede<sup>78</sup>, is formed by values; «values are broad tendencies to prefer certain states of affairs over others». Acquired early in our lives, they determine the meanings of practices and can be properly interpreted only by the members of a given culture. Depending on the culture, these preferences –e.g. regarding what is good or evil– are either treated as preferable or entirely rejected.

A clear value that permeates all four books is that of a close sense of family. In *Red Lotus* eighteen-year-old Julio feels that, as his father has just passed away and in spite of his age, he is the head of the family and that he needs to take charge of his two sisters and control the family business. In *Nurse in Tenerife* Dr Miguel Martina tolerates his chauffeur's misconduct and it is not until the end of the book that the reader understands his reason when he explains that they are related. The chauffeur is his late brother's illegitimate son and he feels he owes it to his brother to help him and his mother. In *Meeting in Madrid* there are many references to this sense of family and family obligation. Don Jaime feels mor-

72 AIRLIE (1958), p. 114.

73 MAYO (1994), p. 70.

74 A Spanish ceremony celebrating the end of carnival. The burial generally consists of a carnival parade that parodies a funeral procession and culminates with the burning of a symbolic figure, usually a representation of a sardine.

75 BARRETO VARGAS (1997), p. 300.

76 BARRETO VARGAS (1997), pp. 300-305.

77 BARRETO VARGAS (1997), p. 304.

78 HOFSTEDE & HOFSTEDE (2005), p. 8.

ally obliged to take care of his brother's family when the latter dies in addition to taking over the family hacienda; he explains his decision to Catherine:

It was just the natural thing to do. A Spanish family is one unit, whether they are rich or poor, and they are sheltered by the head of that family. You have to understand that before you can understand me. Just as our wide Cordoban hat shields a man from the heat of the sun, so I must shelter my family from misfortune while I can<sup>79</sup>.

And, as Lucía, his sister-in-law, invested a large sum of money in the state when she married Jaime's brother, he feels he has to marry Lucía unless he could pay her back. Later in the novel, he even feels responsible for Lucía's mischief when she accuses the Englishwoman of stealing a ring with a ruby. After discovering the deception and paying the debt to Lucia, Jaime feels happy: «Tired though he undoubtedly was, he had fulfilled his responsibilities to his family as carefully as he could, providing even for Lucía until she married for a second time»<sup>80</sup>.

There are two other values closely related to this sense of family: marrying young and having large families with many children. In *Bitter Memories* the protagonist dreams of having four children, three girls and a boy, as «all Canarian loved children and Alejandro told her that he wanted many»<sup>81</sup>.

Another value, traditionally associated with Spain as we saw in the section on Spanishness, is that of religiosity. A perfect example can be seen in *Meeting in Madrid* when they say grace before dinner and when a child is praying in *Nurse in Tenerife*. In *Red Lotus*, young Sisa keeps a rosary in a velvet box. Against the Anglo-centric belief that «no fiesta would be complete without the priest presiding at the table»<sup>82</sup>, priests are mentioned in only one of these four novels, *Red Lotus*, when Felicity's uncle dies and in the Corpus Christi procession. Religion is not as explicitly mentioned as expected. Perhaps, as the protagonist in *Red Lotus*<sup>83</sup> remarks about his estate, in the islands we do not find the religious fanaticism and passionate violence seen in Andalusia.

Finally, among many other values that could be associated with Spain and more specifically with the Canary Islands, I think it is worth mentioning, even superficially, the concept of time and a second value that could be called the “joy of living”. Time seems to slow down on the islands. Beyond spending it doing the “siesta” or having a good time at the frequent *fiestas*, time does not seem to mean as much in the islands as in Europe. People are not in a hurry and they enjoy more the little moments, as may be seen in this quotation from *Red Lotus*: «There was a suggestion of ease about him, of unlimited time to go about the business of gracious living which she was to encounter, again and again, in the weeks ahead as she came to understand the Spanish character and delight in it»<sup>84</sup>. This other quotation from the same novel reaffirms the same idea: «Marta did everything with the unhurried movements of the person to whom time means nothing at all, and indeed time was often discounted altogether in this enchanted valley»<sup>85</sup>.

This idea of time is related to the concept of the joy of life that is present one way or another in these novels. You do not have to be rich or powerful to participate in popular celebrations, to be proud of your family or your island, to enjoy a good meal with your family and friends. The «spontaneous gaiety of the average Spaniard»<sup>86</sup> is often mentioned, which seems to indicate implicitly that the average English is not so cheerful. Altogether, and although elements of religious and dark Spain are sometimes mentioned, the values traditionally associated with this country are highly appreciated by the English visitor.

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79 MCLEOD (1979), p. 164.

80 MCLEOD (1979), p. 188.

81 MAYO (1994), p. 108.

82 GRAFF (1993), p. 51.

83 AIRLIE (1958), p. 114.

84 AIRLIE (1958), p. 6.

85 AIRLIE (1958), p. 60.

86 AIRLIE (1958), p. 9.



## CONCLUSIONS

The vision of the island of Tenerife portrayed in these four novels changes significantly, in the same way that the real island has changed itself throughout these nearly forty years between the publication of *Red Lotus* (1958) and *Bitter Memories* (1994). In *Red Lotus* Tenerife is described as a paradisiacal island, isolated in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean, covered with exotic trees and fragrant flowers. However, the image of the island in this latest novel turns out to be not so idyllic. The protagonist comes to the island to visit her sister who works in a hotel in the Playa de las Americas and sees first-hand «the concrete jungle of tourism»<sup>87</sup> and the tourists' «frenetic pace, even though people were supposed to be on holidays»<sup>88</sup>. In the two novels published in the 1970s, we see the progressive change of the island with the arrival of mass tourism and how islanders advise the English protagonist to visit the real Tenerife. For example, in *Meeting in Madrid* Teresa, the main male character's niece, insists: «The Puerto [de la Cruz] is no longer Tenerife. [...] You would not be showing her the true island, only a few sophisticated hotels»<sup>89</sup>.

The use of the names of specific places are mostly accurate as are the references to traditional dishes and the typical crops of tomato, banana, or avocado. Two specific ideas mentioned in *Bitter Memories* are also correct; one is that many people do not paint the outside of their houses in some villages in order to avoid paying taxes; and the other is the opinion that the Canarians' love for sugar could be due to the islands' former sugar trade. The claim that small tomatoes are sent to England because English people specify they prefer smaller tomatoes, which is also mentioned in *Bitter Memories*, is also plausible.

However, perhaps due to the general fairy-tale tone and the lack of realism of the stories, the cultural aspects named in most of these novels seem more anecdotal than true elements of Canarian identity. After the analysis, I could say that *Bitter Memories* is fairly well researched; it includes very detailed information about the island, the carnival, general customs as well as accurate knowledge about daily life. When the writer draws the readers' attention to the fact that Spaniards have two surnames, the order of the surnames is correct, that is, the father's surname is followed by the mother's; other romance novels mistake the order of the surnames.

There is first-hand information on whether or not the sand used to fill the Teresitas beach on Tenerife was brought from what was the Spanish Sahara desert, or the opinion that the island's capital, Santa Cruz, is not really beautiful. However, when the male protagonist speaks Spanish, he does it incorrectly even though he is supposed to be a Spaniard. *Red Lotus* and *Bitter Memories* include Hofstede and Hofstede's four manifestations of culture: symbols, heroes, rituals, and values. However in *Nurse in Tenerife* and *Meeting in Madrid* the information about the island is primarily concerned with the weather, food, napping, crops, that is, symbols and rituals only. Nevertheless, these two novels do not mention real values. Somehow, this fact makes these last two books seem more superficial; it is almost as if they were the equivalent of basic uncomplicated travel guides.

In all four books, the Canarian identity is defined not by what being Canarian is but by what it is not. It is always compared with the «other», the Englishwoman protagonist. In these intercultural encounters we learn that falling in love is English while dancing and complimenting girls is Spanish or Canarian, that Spanish males are conceited and that while they are on the island, some English people think «longingly of England with its carpeted floors and central heating or cosy coal fires»<sup>90</sup>. Homesickness for Great Britain could be due to «the typical English desire for a peaceful atmosphere»<sup>91</sup> or because the female character, conscious of her attraction to the Spaniards, feels she needs to go back home as there is «a touch of English prude» in her nature<sup>92</sup>. At the end of the novels, the English protagonist assumes the advantages of living on the island, she learns to appreciate the values of her lover's culture, and becomes a Canarian herself.

87 AIRLIE (1958), p. 37.

88 AIRLIE (1958), p. 37.

89 AIRLIE (1958), p. 54.

90 MAYO (1994), p. 97.

91 AIRLIE (1958), p. 54.

92 LANE (1978), p. 29.

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