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Love in Paradise: Visions of the Canaries in a Corpus of Popular Romance Fiction Novels

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RESUMEN:

Este trabajo estudia las visiones de las Islas Canarias que se ofrecen en un corpus de doce novelas rosa publicadas por mujeres de habla inglesa entre 1967 y 2003. Nuestro propósito es estudiar la manera en que estos textos contribuyen, mediante su discurso, a crear, mantener y difundir el imaginario de este archipiélago como un paraíso. Recurrimos a este tipo de ficción romántica popular, un género generalmente estigmatizado, para valorar cómo las autoras construyen la imagen internacional de estas islas como un paraíso exótico, ya que, a pesar de ser abiertamente despreciadas por la crítica literaria, estas publicaciones cuentan con un amplio número de lectores a nivel mundial. En el artículo, resaltamos las actitudes, generalmente estereotipadas, hacia estas islas, tal y como se desprenden de los textos, al tiempo que subrayamos su papel propagador no solo de estas actitudes e imágenes sino también de un buen número de hispanismos que sin duda llegan a un amplio público internacional.

Palabras clave: novela rosa, discurso del paraíso, contacto intercultural, Islas Canarias

ABSTRACT:

This paper examines the images presented of the Canary Islands in a corpus of twelve popular romance fiction novels published by English-speaking female writers between 1967 and 2003. Our aim is to study the ways these texts contribute with their discourse to the construction, maintenance and diffusion of the imaginary of the Canaries as a paradise. Typically a stigmatized genre, popular romance fiction is drawn upon here to assess some of the ways in which the Canaries are represented internationally as an exotic paradise, since it enjoys wide readerships globally, despite being denigrated by literary critics. Attitudes, generally stereotypical, to the paradise islands are highlighted throughout the article, which further addresses the propagation of these attitudes and images, alongside the spread of Spanish lexical items and phrases, which clearly reach a wider international readership.

Keywords: popular romance fiction, paradise discourse, intercultural contact, Canary Islands

1. INTRODUCTION

The Canary Islands –a well-known all-year-round Spanish tourist resort– have been the focus of attention of many writers in an array of publications since ancient times. Caught between legends and reality, the Canaries were referred to as the Isles of the Blest, the Hesperides or the Elysian Fields by the Greek poets of the Golden Age. The archipelago's connection with classical mythology has been studied by many scholars (Cabrera-Perera, 1988; Even, 1963; Martínez, 1992; Tejera, 1991) and has also been recurrently echoed in the ample foreign literature about these islands. Despite the many French and even German texts on the Canaries, the English bibliographical corpus (González-Cruz, 2000; 2002) is certainly the widest, due to the close Anglo-Canarian contacts throughout time (González-Cruz, 1995; 2012). Published between 1583¹ and the present, the works in this corpus constitute valuable documents that typologically fall into the following categories: tourist guides, studies about the climate and health, travelers' books and diaries, studies of a historical, socio-cultural, linguistic or scientific nature, and works of fiction. Within the latter, there is another specific sub-genre which has not been previously taken into consideration: mass-market romance fiction novels. This type of texts can be analysed from a range of disciplinary backgrounds, which proves their potential goes beyond their intrinsic value as typical instances of a stigmatized and marginal literary genre. Thus, they could be approached from theoretical frameworks as varied as those of Critical Discourse Analysis, Popular Culture Studies, Sociology, Intercultural Communication, and even Language Contact. Here, however, our aim is to explore aspects such as representations (Young, 1999; 2001) and othering (Mills, 1991; Pratt, 1992) and our main contention is that with their discourse these texts contribute to maintain the imaginary of the Canaries as a Paradise.

Although we are still in the process of compiling a wider corpus, in this paper we study the first twelve romances we have been able to find so far. We will explore the image the islands present in these texts, how they are portrayed by the English writers and how their predominant representation as a paradise is constructed, despite a small number of drawbacks. In the following sections we offer an approach to some preliminary theoretical considerations, namely, the 'literary' framework of the popular romance fiction

novels and the connection between the Canaries and the paradise myth discourse. Then we will describe and analyze the works in our corpus in chronological order. Finally, we make some concluding remarks and suggestions for further work.

2. SOME THEORETICAL PRELIMINARIES

2.1 *The 'literary' framework of popular romance fiction novels*

Recognized as "one of the oldest and most enduring of literary modes which survives today" (Radford, 1986: 8), the label 'romance' has been used throughout time to make reference to many different types of literature (Greek romances, medieval romance, Gothic bourgeois romances of the 1840s, late nineteenth-century women's romances and mass-produced romance fiction now). Therefore, it is necessary "to limit the way the term is applied" (Beer, 1970: 5); in this paper we use it to refer to contemporary mass-market romances, particularly those published by Harlequin and Mills & Boon (henceforth, M&B or HM&B) romances.

Considered by critics as a sub-literary form, romance fiction (also known as women's romance, popular romance or contemporary romance) has always been doubly stigmatized as being both popular and feminine (Sánchez-Palencia, 1997: 10). In fact, this type of work has very rarely been judged positively; rather, romance fiction has typically been described as a negative icon, as "an economic art form" (Jensen, 1984: 32). Thus, criticisms of the genre abound, as Vivanco (2011: 14-5) shows by quoting scathing assessments such as the following:

Harlequin romances ... are about as far from 'great books' as it is possible to get. In the literary world, M&B has long been the black sheep. Its books – to call them novels would be to raise them far above their station – are lightweight, the plots recycled and the endings predictable and to read them is a waste of precious life.

Similarly, Sánchez-Palencia (1997: 153) collected other expressions which ridicule the genre, such as "Soft Porn Culture", "Paperback Virgins", "Pulp in the Pink", "Pornography for Women" or "Guilt Without Sex". Vivanco (2012: 1060) also underlines the antifeminist content of the H&MB

romances by quoting Ebert's complaint that "the reality represented in any romance narrative ... is overwhelmingly patriarchal ... and never significantly challenges male hegemony" and Bindel's idea that "the type of propaganda perpetuated by M&B is misogynistic hate speech".

Despite this persistent critical disapproval, mass-market romance fiction has remained popular throughout the last hundred years. Indeed, as Brancky (2010) suggests, today romance continues to attract women, since they still "author and consume the same types of novels that women adored over a hundred years ago", which, of course, "raises interesting questions about gender, identity and literature". Notwithstanding, Wherry (2012) highlights the idea already presented in both Jensen's (1984) and Dixon's (1999) foundational texts in popular romance studies that these novels "are often complex, culturally informed stories undeserving of the contempt heaped upon them". Having read many of these works, Vivanco (2011: 15) similarly challenges this negative view as well as the perception of HM&B romances being merely mass-produced commodities which follow a strict and unchanging formula. Instead, she proves that "many are well-written, skillfully crafted works which can and do engage the minds as well as the emotions of their readers, and that a few are masterpieces". The genre, Vivanco argues, draws inspiration from both canonical texts, such as Shakespeare's comedies or Austen's novels, and other forms of popular culture, adapting and incorporating plots and metaphors. In addition, Vivanco and Kramer (2010) stress the role played by romance novels as "cultural agents, primarily for women, for the transmission of gender ideologies" because of their dealing so explicitly "with sexuality and men's and women's roles within sexual relationships". This is a function that had already been noticed by Rose (1985: 260) who said that "the romance and adventure scripts differentially shape women's and men's sexual expression and expectations for relationships". These two types of 'gendered genres' were clearly established in Cawelti's (1976) typology of literary formulas, when he pointed out that the romance is the "feminine equivalent of the adventure story" as long as "adventure formulas have male protagonists while most romances have female central characters", which, in his opinion, seems to suggest "a basic affinity between the different sexes and these two story types". Of course, this does not mean, he clarifies, "that women do not read adventure stories or that romances cannot be popular with men"

(Cawelti, 1976: 41); but the point is this type of work has always been associated with women. As Sánchez-Palencia (1997: 33) explains, romance fiction is almost exclusively written by women, about women and for women.

The romance genre has also been defined as one in which the love plot is central to the narrative. When analyzing the ideological turmoil in M&B novels, Jones (1986: 198) offered the following summary of a typical romance plot:

The heroine, a virgin in her early twenties, is set in a social limbo: her family is dead or invisible, her friends are few or none, her occupational milieu is only vaguely filled in. As a result, her meeting with the hero occurs in a private realm which excludes all concerns but their mutual attraction; the rest of the world drops away except as a backdrop (often exotic and luxurious, defined through the hero's taste and wealth). The hero, seven to ten years older than the heroine, is dazzlingly successful in the public world; in private life he is a rake or a mystery, saturnine in appearance, sexually expert, and relentlessly domineering. He takes the reins erotically, naming the heroine's desires to her ("You know you want me, why resist?"); all she can do is submit or flee. She tries constantly to interpret his behavior, which alternates abruptly between tenderness and rejection. Finally, after a separation, the hero tracks the heroine down, explains his earlier motives and offers her love and marriage. (198)

This fixed format means that considerable knowledge of the conventions is required from romance authors; however, it seems that the rules have remained "flexible enough to permit them to innovate", as Vivanco (2011: 21) notes. In fact, despite the undeniable stability in their form, romances have always experienced changes (Regis, 2003: 207). Thus, "although the base plot remains constant, themes vary from decade to decade and author to author" (Dixon, 1999: 8). Part of the change has to do with the writers' treatment of the lovers' relationship: human sexuality is now portrayed more

explicitly than in the past, when authors simply did not handle sex. This confirms the evolution of romances, their changes simply reflecting "cultural changes" (Rose 1985: 264).

Vivanco (2012: 1061-65) observes more recent and dramatic changes and "considerable variation between different lines of HM&B romances". Thus, in 21st century romances action can be told "from the male or female point of view or seen through the eyes of both protagonists" (1065). Besides, nowadays many romance writers show awareness of feminist issues, with some even identifying themselves as feminists and overtly expressing their concern and "struggle with 'gender definitions and sexual politics'" (Vivanco, 2012: 1060). This move toward a more explicit sexual content is actually seen by many as a reflection of that "growing feminist perspective" (Darbyshire, 2002: 75). Besides, Vivanco (2012: 1063) quotes HM&B author Sandra Marton's suggestion concerning an important function that is currently being played by HM&B romances: because of their popularity and wide readership, today's romances can contribute to opening "readers' eyes to many things, including an understanding of feminism" as a fight for "equal opportunities in all phases of life". Admittedly, words like *feminist* and *feminism* are rarely used in HM&B romances, as "both authors and editors are aware that for many people they have very negative connotations". In this sense, Kate Walker, another HM&B author quoted by Vivanco, concurs that because of their "huge international appeal", in HM&B romances, "certain aspects sometimes need to be toned down, stated less blatantly – so as to appeal to women of all races, creeds and cultures".

In short, we can conclude that over the last decades the romance genre has expanded and changed dramatically. As Park (2002) put it, "Now there are single dads, and they use condoms and they eat low-fat foods [...]. There's abortion, there's Alzheimer's – anything happening today". Besides, romance is so healthy that it has borne thriving sub-genres; in fact, romance novels have proved themselves to be the backbone of the publishing industry. However, despite their popularity and new face, as well as the alleged functions they appear to perform, many believe the genre will never get enough respect. Yet, two reasons justify our interest in the romances of our corpus: a) the fact that they present situations of sociocultural and linguistic contact in which participants both express their impressions about the Other

and offer representations and contrasts of the places; b) their wide readership, which facilitates the spreading of ideas and words.

2.2 The Paradise Myth discourse and the Canary Islands

The concept of paradise is present in most cultures and religions. It is also a topos in art and literature, not only "as a symbol of a state of being, a condition of the soul" (James, 1988: 222), but also through the rhetorical figure called *locus amoenus*, i.e., the "pleasant place", the description of an ideal landscape, a happy nature, "depicting gardens, flowers, birds, warm breezes, and springs" (Baehr, 1991: 2). This link between happiness and gardens is the result of the mingling of Greco-Roman traditions with biblical memories of the orchard in Eden and the myths of the good life in a specially favored area of the planet, where "the generosity of nature was joined to water, pleasant fragrances, an unvarying springtime climate, an absence of suffering, and peace between human beings and animals" (Delumeau, 2000: 6). As Baehr (1991: 2) remarks,

whether labeled 'paradise,' 'golden age,' 'Elysium,' 'Fortunate Islands,' 'promised land,' 'Eden,' 'heaven on earth,' 'Arcadia,' 'peaceable kingdom,' or even 'Hesperides,' the ideal place or time was often defined or described through identical details, drawn from a single reservoir of paradisaic motifs [...] [which] became hallmarks of the paradise myth.

Since ancient times, the Canaries have been associated with this paradise myth. As Martínez (1992: 10-11) suggests, everything in these islands (their natural beauty, their aborigines, their mountains, their trees and even their names) seem to have contributed to the mythological, fantastic images conjured up by poets and writers throughout history. Islands, mountains and the 'ends of the earth' were the three typical places for myths to be developed and located by ancient people. This explains the propensity to myths about the Canaries, a group of mountainous islands which until the XVth century (before the discovery of America) were considered to be at the end of the earth. In fact, in the list of mythological places which appear in mythological tales, folklore, and religious texts, we can find many names which are associated with the Canary Islands: Atlantis, Elysian Fields, Fortunate Islands, Garden of Hesperides, Garden of Eden Islands of the Blessed, the

legend of St Brandan and his search for paradise, etc. Similarly, knowledge about the Canaries and references to them are found in the works of Greek and Latin authors such as Homer, Plato, Pindar, Strabo, Plutarch, Ptolemy of Tebaida, Horace, Sallusts, Virgil, and Pomponius Mela. Vague allusions are also made by Herodotus and Aristotle (Cabrera-Perera, 1988; Martínez 1992). All of these references prove the close connection of this archipelago with classical mythology.

Since Gordis' (1936) study of the significance of the paradise myth, many other contemporary scholars have done research on this topic from different perspectives and with various applications, including critical views on representations of paradise (cf. Deckard, 2010; Gomes, 2009; Hewer, 2003; James, 1988; Strachan, 1995, among others). Equally relevant for our analysis are both the cultural (Robertson & Richards, 2003) and the symbolic use of landscape (Backhaus & Murungi, 2009). As proved by Brace (2003: 138), landscapes are not passive; crucially, they can not only "help to picture identity" but also "be used to fix meaning". As she put it, "all landscapes, whether real or imagined, are representational", as long as "they all form part of the medium through which we make sense of things and through which meaning is produced and exchanged" (Brace, 2003: 121).

In addition, landscapes can be a medium that engenders mythology; as Dora (2009:125) explains, "a material landscape [...] can become a 'landscape of myth,' a place alive in collective imagination". All these lines of thought contribute to the construction of the paradise islands and the exotic other (Boehmer, 2005; Mills, 1991; Pratt, 1992) that we address in this paper. They constitute useful paradigms and illuminating concepts that will shape our analysis of the depiction of the Canaries as a paradise in our corpus of romance novels. In some cases, their very titles (*An Apple in Eden*; *Golden Apple Island*) overtly reveal this preconceived idea. Naturally, as we will prove in the following section, this paradise discourse is also supported throughout the texts, with specific references and with the description of landscapes in which the authors try to capture the spirit of place.

3. The CORPUS: DESCRIPTION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 A brief description of the corpus

The corpus used for this research consists of twelve romances which appeared

between 1967 and 2003. Authored by female English writers, only one work in the sample was published by Harlequin, while the rest belong to the M&B series. All of them are completely or partially set in the Canaries and follow the pattern which characterises romances as a genre; thus, they tell "stories that center on love and the couple" with "two individuals falling in love and struggling to make the relationship work" despite "a series of obstacles both internal and external to the characters" (Brancky, 2010) and always conclude with "an emotionally-satisfying and optimistic ending" (Romance Writers of America). In addition, their plots include a trip to and a stay in one or more of the Canary Islands. Although descriptions of the settings and locations are generally less frequent and briefer in this type of literature (Nash 1990: 125), these romances do contain direct or indirect comments which reveal the characters' impressions of the places and the people. Since the texts cover a time span of more than three decades, it is only natural that the changes undergone at the sociocultural level and in people's mentality as well as in the physical environment are reflected. Similarly, the changes mentioned above regarding the characters' sexual behavior are also observed in our corpus, in such a way that we could draw a line between the works published before and after 1989. Another worth noticing feature is most writers' tendency to incorporate Spanish words, sentences and idioms into their discourse in English, and to make references to the linguistic skills or difficulties of the protagonists. This is an extremely interesting issue which, due to space limits, we are unable to study here in depth.

3.2 Analysis and discussion

Our research started with a careful reading of the selected texts, which were tagged manually for comments and sentences giving evidence of either a positive or a negative assessment of the place, either by the narrator or by any of the other characters. Likewise, we logged those comments related to linguistic issues, recording all the Spanish words, phrases and sentences used.

Although the views of the islands vary from book to book, all in all, positive comments seem to prevail and outnumber the negative ones, as we shall see below. Thus, despite their suggestive titles, which openly identify the place with a paradise, the first two romances (*Arbor's Golden Apple Island* and *Thorpe's An Apple in Eden*) contain plenty of comments that highlight

differences in British and Spanish attitudes and beliefs during the 1970s, mostly emphasizing the Spaniards' traditionalism and conservatism so strongly prevalent at that time.

Mythological references abound in Arbor's book, not only throughout the text but even on the back cover, where we read, "In ancient times one of the labours of Hercules was to go to Golden Apple Island to bring back a golden apple. In our time, so did Fran go to this romantic island – and found it equally difficult to attain the prospect she yearned for". Fran, the English heroine, visits "her indifferent grandparent, Don Diego de Metteor of the exotic-sounding address, La Quinta de los Santos, El Naranjal, Canaria," (6) who is later defined as "the uncrowned king of the island, ruling by divine rights drawn up by himself!" (21) and also as "the legendary *Abuelo de Metteor* who lived a thousand or two miles away on an island where the sun always shone" (25). Cultural differences are overtly acknowledged, as when Abuelo tells Fran, "I thought we should get to understand each other, granddaughter, as you may find our life very different from your own in England until you grow used to it. As of course in time you will. You understand what I am saying? If not, I could perhaps speak in English instead" (34). Similarly, Jervis Rendle, an English site agent working for Fran's Canarian family, notices "if we had both been Spanish, we shouldn't have been left alone together" (29). Fran observes that "with him she could relax and, listening to him talk 'England' to the disparagement of anywhere else, she could almost persuade herself she would be glad to go back. In Rendle's view the civilized world only began at the cliffs of Dover or London Airport..." (147). However, despite the obvious drawbacks, in time Fran finds herself "longing passionately to belong here too with as sharp a pride as she had felt glad to be English, she found herself" (128) and rejects the idea of leaving "this alleged paradise" (133), where there was "no night chill in the air as there would have been in England" (33). The connection between the Canaries and Greek Mythology is overtly brought up in the following dialogue between Jervis and Fran:

'Well, there you are. That's my empire for the time being. You know, I sometimes wonder what Hercules would have made of it all?'

'Hercules?'

'Yes –that task of his, to fetch a golden apple from the Garden

of the Hesperides. This group of islands was that garden, didn't you know?'

'So it was. And this one- "El Naranjal", the Orange Grove – the "golden apples" were really oranges, weren't they?'

'So it's supposed, though there are fewer oranges now than there are bananas and sweet corn and tomatoes for Covent Garden.'(38-39)

The idea of a paradise island linked to Greek mythology is also suggested when the narrator comments on how "January became February and the sun still shone," and how one day, while walking alone on the road up to the Quinta, Fran was

struck by the forlorn dignity of the abandoned gateways and doors, whose carvings showed some animals "an animal – a bull, a stag, rearing horses, a snake, a three-headed dog a man, a tree and three women. Immediately their significance dawned on her, and we read her interpreting thoughts: "Of course! The labours of Hercules! The tree, the 'golden apple' of El Naranjal. The women, the three Hesperides, the sisters who guarded it, and in the other panels the – yes, t Crete and the horses of – someone or other in Greek legend" (100).

In Thorpe's romance, *Eve*, the heroine, who travels to Tenerife because her rather flighty younger sister, Lynn, has got engaged there to "an unknown Spaniard", admits from the start "she knew relatively little of the Spanish as a people, and found it difficult to form any kind of real idea of what to expect" (6). This thought seems to relate the island with the unknown and mysterious. Surprisingly, on her arrival it's raining and "decidedly chilly" and she notices a cloud "scudding across the sky in a manner which made mock of the Greek name for these islands" (7) (so much for the perfect weather stereotype that is so often used in advertisements for the Canaries!).

In her first conversation with Ramón Perestrello, the half-English half-Canarian hero, he points out: "In Spain you would already be the mother of three at your age. Our girls marry young and stay married ... The little ones keep them out of mischief" (11). Respect for tradition also seems to be behind Ramón's statement that "it's still the Spanish custom for a whole family to

occupy the same home, and for the elders to be venerated as such by children and inlaws alike' (13). The different customs regarding love relationships are constantly underlined, as in the following dialogue, between Juan –Ramón's brother and Lynn's fiancé– and Eve:

'I would not have dreamt of asking your sister to become my *novia* without first seeking your permission. You must believe this'..

'She doesn't need permission' she said in as light a tone as she could manage. 'She's fully of age'.

'Perhaps in your own country. Here ...' He paused, smiled a little. 'Our girls marry even younger, and yet in many ways they are far older than your sister'. (26-27)

The opposing mentalities are brought forward again when the two sisters discuss Lynn's confusing feelings for her fiancé, Juan, and for his brother, Ramón:

Eve hesitated. 'I think' she said at last, 'if you are going to marry anyone at all just yet, then Juan would definitely be a good choice. But ... you are only nineteen, Lynn. There are years ahead of you before you ought to start thinking of settling down.

'Who said anything about settling down? With Ramón I wouldn't have to. He's modern. He doesn't think that a wife should be bound to the home like most of his countrymen – like Juan, for instance! Do you really think I'd even consider a life like his mother's? She's been into Puerto once since I've been here. Once!' (45)

The exchange continues with Lynn telling her sister how she had recently met some friends of the Perestrello family, who had two daughters round about her age. 'You should have seen them', she complains, 'sitting there with their sewing, speaking only when spoken to, and then only to agree with everything said. Like a couple of zombies! One of them is engaged – to a man chosen for her by her parents. I ask you!' (46); to which Eve replied: 'From what I've heard, these arranged marriages often work out better than our own method' (47). The reality of 1970s Spain justifies the emphasis placed on the cultural

differences and contrasting mentalities several times by both the Spanish and English protagonists. One such example occurs when Juan asks Eve: 'Our ways are not your ways and you have wondered if Lynn will adapt, if she can be truly happy so far from her homeland?' Eve's answer includes one of the few positive comments that we find in this book, when she says: 'Few people could fail to adapt to such an environment' (90). Later on, Eve and Ramón have an argument caused by their differences regarding their own behaviours and expectations:

'Now', he said, 'we'll have one thing made clear between us. Tonight you are with me and under my protection, which gives me the right to squash flat any such advance as made by the man we have just left. No Spanish girl would think of acting in the way you did!

'But I'm not Spanish', she returned with some heat, 'I'm English. And in my country a man usually credits a woman with the ability to do her own squashing'. ...'Your ways are not our ways', she flashed back. (109-10)

A positive side of life in the Canaries has to do with its so often stereotyped festive nature:

The guests began leaving about two o'clock. Driving homewards along the dark coast road, Lynn gave a contented sigh. 'I'll say one thing, you people certainly know how to celebrate! Life here is one long holiday!

'Don't you believe it', Juan smiled. 'We work hard, so we deserve to play hard too. Two days of festivities followed by weeks of unremitting toil. Would you begrudge so little?' (112)

In contrast, comments that maximize the positive vision of life in the paradise islands do abound throughout Danbury's book, whose heroine 'had more than one reason for escaping from an English winter to the Canaries' (37). Thus, when justifying her working holiday to look for new ideas for the jewellery she designs, Lucie Durant says: 'I thought a winter and spring in sunshine might be a good idea' (134). She finds the place ideal for the hero's niece and nephew, who are 'very happy in their

Canarian home' (24) and love playing on the beach, so she asks herself, 'Could children ask for a better playground?' (17). When Joel Barron, a famous creative silversmith living in Fuerteventura, asks her to stay in the Villa and offers her a job taking care of the children, they comment on the pros and cons of the place, 'pleasant, but of course quiet', Joel argues, 'No life except what we make for ourselves'; to which Lucie replies, 'but a lovely climate, unspoilt coast and a peaceful atmosphere' (28). Likewise, although overtly described as 'an idyllic place to live' (62), occasional reference is also made to some frustrations involved in living there, 'stuck on one of the smaller Canary Islands' (107), which, apparently, tend to be compensated for by other factors, as when Joel remarks: 'Oh, well, one has to accept all that in exchange for living here, I suppose' (78). The idea of the islands as a paradise seems to prevail in comments like: 'Isn't it marvellous you can plan trips in this climate and be sure the weather will be good? In England you have to wait and see if it rains' (94). Descriptions of the landscape also contribute to this image and so do Joel's expressions of fear for its destruction: 'One day the tourist development will change it all, for better or worse, I don't know which' (96).

Georgina, another character, 'was overjoyed at the prospect of a visit to Las Palmas' (104) and she cries 'What a magical name that is! You read about it in cruise brochures, see pictures of the hotels, the beaches, the promenades. It must be a wonderful city' (103). In fact, during the visit, she was 'delighted with Las Palmas'. When invited to a family dinner by Joel's friends, who live in a magnificent house with real Canary carved wooden balconies, she comments, 'What a marvellous place!' (116-17). This enthusiastic appraisal of Grand Canary contrasts with her view of Fuerteventura, a smaller island, as 'an unsophisticated place' (131). In turn, Lucie thinks 'more people should have the opportunity to travel abroad and see places like this' (133), and states, 'I do like the island people here' (135).

On her part, Lane's 1978 romance, which fits in the doctor-nurse category, is also set somewhere 'so super as the so-called Isles of Eternal Spring, where I'm sure hope and love springs eternal twice a day, and three times on fiesta days' (6). Lucky Trudy has to leave 'mouldy Midthorpe' hospital to nurse her stepmother, Florence, in Tenerife for a year. 'You look happy', her friend Cherry comments at the prospect of her 'sunning yourself on the lidos of Tenerife' (5-6), where 'there would be scores of rich

and wonderful sun-bronzed young men ... to say nothing of passionate Spaniards' (13). The idea of paradise emerges again on Trudy's arrival, when she notices that 'along the road, were happy-looking people' (21), as well as when she contemplates the gardens of Los Arcos, her stepmother's *hacienda*, and exclaims: 'It's wonderful – a real oasis', and then adds: 'It certainly gives one a good first impression of Tenerife' (22). Later on, she confesses to Doctor Martina: 'I can understand why Florence never came back to England' (24). And when greeting her, she remarks: 'I never guessed that you lived in such a paradise. To think that the weather is like this all the year round – perpetual summer, with roses blooming for all the fifty-two weeks!' To which Florence replies: 'I wanted you to complete your nursing training before you came out here, and sampled the *dolce vita*' (24).

Throughout the pages of *Nurse in Tenerife* we find several references to 'the fun town of Puerto de la Cruz (42, 148), or phrases like 'this paradise island' (57), 'the paradise background of Tenerife' (67), 'Tenerife, my paradise' (76), 'the warmth of the Tenerife night' (86), 'the romantic Island of Eternal Spring' (106), as well as sentences like 'Life in Tenerife is going to be terrific. I'm so glad I came' (147), 'You sound happy, ... Tenerife suits you, I think' (159), 'Tenerife had been the Island of Eternal Spring' (159), 'Was this what Tenerife, and Spanish charm, did to women?' (164). All these comments certainly contribute to emphasizing a positive image of the place as a paradise. In fact, when Trudy asks 'Why shouldn't I grab myself a share of sunshine and *dolce vita* while I'm young enough to enjoy it?', Cherry replies with 'Escape to paradise doesn't take long in this jet age. You'd love it here' (145).

Lilian Peake chooses Lanzarote, with its 'strangely beautiful landscape' (64) which so much 'resembles that of the moon' (13), as the setting for the love story between Lisa and Zander. The latter, a constructional engineer who builds hotels and roads, confirms he is there 'to work and play. Why not, in this climate, this incredible scenery all around us?' (20). As the plot develops, they drive "into the mysterious and brooding landscape of the island", enjoying "all this grandeur, those secret mountains over there" and "taking in greedily the wild beauty of the environment" (53). Lisa was "spellbound by everything she saw". Contemplating "the almost alien panorama of mountains and half-hidden valleys, of blue, near cloudless skies and the distant haze of the sea", she sighed and said, 'It

seems like heaven when you come from our climate'. She couldn't help criticizing 'man's delight in desecrating beautiful places' as they approached a settlement, a property development which gave shelter to tourists, 'holidaymakers having the time of their lives' (53-55). When visiting the volcanic zone of *Montañas de Fuego* (Mountains of Fire), "Lisa could only stare with a mixture of pleasure and awe at the alien yet incomparably beautiful panorama which spread all around them" (67). Readers can feel the spell of the place in Peake's description of *Jameos del Agua*, a cave "formed by a hollow tube of lava which ran into the sea and which had a subterranean lagoon where a unique species of albino crabs lives" (71). The lighting and soft music intensified the romantic atmosphere and the impact the whole place had on the onlooker, and we read "After a drink at the bar, they left the cool magic of the place. Lisa knew that she would never forget its awesome beauty" (72-3).

Back in England, after their holiday affair, the couple happens to meet in very different, adverse circumstances. Lisa's feelings are closely linked to her memories of the island, as suggested in the following extract, when they were having a cup of tea and

...couldn't stop their eyes from meeting and holding. They were plunging back in time and Lisa could almost see the blue sky, feel the sun's powerful rays tempered only by the winds roaring across from the African mainland. There was a spreading warmth inside her as if he was caressing her skin.

When the dream faded, she saw that he had withdrawn his gaze and was staring out of the window. She had been alone on Lanzarote. He had not followed her there. (113)

In the last chapter, when all their problems are solved and they are together again, the happy ending is somehow announced by Lisa's thoughts that "it was as though they were back again on Lanzarote" (174).

References to the islands are not so numerous in the next two works, maybe because a considerable part of their plots also develop in England. Besides, the first mentions of the Canaries in *Dark Awakening* do not imply a very positive view of the place, since the heroine asks: 'Does your wife mind living there?' (25). Similarly,

the following dialogue between the couple, Minta and Dane, drops a hint that living in the islands can be a disadvantage:

'Will you mind going to the Canary Islands with me?'

She didn't hesitate. 'No. I'll go anywhere with you. Whither thou goest, I will go', she quoted softly.

A triumphant light came into Dane's eyes. 'You won't mind leaving England?'

'No. But we'll come back here often, won't we?' (32)

The stereotype of the islands' fantastic weather is brought up occasionally by the hero, with comments like 'I'll be glad to get you home to the Canaries where it's warm ... we have a very temperate climate all the year round. They call them the islands of the eternal spring. You can get a suntan there at any time' (46). However, Minta's fears seem reasonable and show she doesn't have a particularly idealised image of the place when she confesses: 'I'm apprehensive about leaving England and everyone I know, of going to live in a strange country' (57). This idea is posed again when we read: "For the first time some inkling came to her of how drastically her life was going to change; she was going to a place where she would be without friends, wouldn't even know anyone or speak the language" (61). In fact, when arriving Minta didn't like "the look of the town when she first saw it and there were certainly parts that were extremely ugly" (90).

However, later on she admits "there was something about the place that got to you, especially here [in Santa Catalina park], where there was always something going on, but it was life enjoyed in a leisurely, civilized way, without the fearful rush of mainland cities" (90). Nevertheless, with its focus on the development of the protagonists' relationship, the narration does not really sing the praises of the Canaries. Two criticisms that can be found in this book have to do with "the crazy way that some of the islanders drove" (132) and the idea that a wife seems to be regarded "as just another of the man's possessions in the Canary Islands" (155). Indeed, it is only rarely that we find indirect statements about the positive side of life in the islands, as in the following quotation:

It seemed strange, as the December days went by, to go Christmas shopping in a summer dress with the sun shining and the trees full of

leaves. The town, if anything, was busier, full of pale-skinned tourists escaping from the European winter, especially retired people who spent the whole season in the warmer climate, without fear of bronchitis and rheumatism, and all the other ills that dog the old during the harsh winter months. (131)

References to the place are also relatively scarce in Jameson's romance. We find the usual comments on the weather, which "continued to be glorious" (85) and the landscape, which in the south of Tenerife "was dramatic: barren, dry, beaten by the sun". Anthea, the heroine, wakes up "excited, flinging away the single sheet she'd covered herself with for the night. This –in December! It was marvellous, she couldn't wait to get out in the sun" (71). As for the setting, it is described simply and briefly, highlighting the idea that "Tenerife was full of contrasts" (85). And when Anthea makes the trip to the summit of Mount Teide with Aden, the hero, she finds herself "in a situation, an atmosphere all set for romance", as "everything was romantic, Mount Teide, perhaps, most of all. It was also awe-inspiring, the view was absolutely magnificent" (92).

In Wentworth's *Fire Island*, Casey, the director of a busy art and design agency, travels to the Canaries looking for a suitable background to advertise the products of Vulcan Enterprise, Ivo Maine's company, which deals with heat technology. The idea was to shoot a calendar 'in a hot, exotic setting' (18-19), like the Canaries, where 'there are definite possibilities' and 'also a fantastic climate', Ivo argues, only to add: 'Fancy getting an assignment like that in the depths of winter. You have all the luck' (26-27). Volcanic Lanzarote, also known as *Isla del Fuego* (Fire Island), with 'the most weird and wonderful rock formations caused by the molten lava' is, they decide, 'the most fantastic place' (28). We find the usual contrast between "the warm sunshine of the Canaries" (27) and the weather in London which "had been quite cold when they had left", while "in Lanzarote the temperature was at least twenty degrees warmer" (39).

None of the members of the calendar shoot team had been to Lanzarote before, so "they exclaimed in surprise when they saw how weird the landscape was", all fascinated with the features that caught their eyes: "the hibiscus planted in the black volcanic ash at the sides of the road

were in full bloom, and every house had at least one brilliantly coloured bougainvillea climbing up to the roof" (39). Fears of future developments destroying the beauty of the environment are also expressed, as when we read: "The place was pleasant enough now, it still retained some of its intrinsic sleepiness, but she wouldn't like to come here in five years' time when it might well be just another *Costa Cement*" (48). The negative side of this ideal paradise is also considered as the following excerpt shows:

It was pleasant here, she thought; ... She wondered what it must be like to live here in such a small community where everyone knew everyone else, instead of a huge, uncaring city like London. She mused on the thought for a while, but then became aware of Ivo's eyes on her and reluctantly turned to face him.

'You'd be bored to death in a month', he told her. 'You have too much drive ever to languish in a small place like this.' (107)

Mayo's 1990 romance is also set in a holiday complex with apartments "painted in traditional Lanzarotean colours of green and white" (17). As Talia, the heroine, felt the hot sun on her head and shoulders, she found it "a perfect place to spend a few months" especially when thinking about "the cold damp. November weather she had left behind in England" (21). When Dervan, the hero, offers her a job on a part-time basis, he insists this would give her time to explore the island, which "had a unique beauty" (36), so much so that, in his words, 'it would be criminal to go back without having seen any of it' (30). They go for a ride along the coastal road and then drive inland to see the mountains, "bare of trees but somehow lovely" (36):

Talia had known it was a volcanic island, but nothing had prepared her for its stark beauty. It was like a lunar landscape, pockmarked and rugged. There were no trees, apart from the odd palm, and only the occasional patches of green where recent rains had encouraged vegetation.

'You either love or hate Lanzarote', Dervan said when she plucked up the courage to break the silence and comment on the lunar-

like landscape. 'Some people say it's ugly and barren, but personally I find it all rather beautiful ... Timanfaya, or Fire Mountain as it's called, is the best region to explore if you're after stark beauty. (37-38)

Throughout the pages the reader only perceives the charming side of the island, while the couple "headed north, ... looking in wonder about them at all that was new and different and awe-inspiring" (59). To contribute to this positive image, the narration includes the description of the stunning places they visit on their tour, like Yaiza, "reputedly the most beautiful village on the island" (100-01). Little wonder then that Serine, Talia's sister, states: 'I do love working here, Talia – sunshine every day. I never want to go back to England' (68). This favorable view is also highlighted when they visit the famous *Jameos del Agua* tropical grotto, and realize "there was no hint on the surface of the beauty that was to meet their eyes". In fact, both Serine and Talia "gasped when they saw it", and the latter exclaimed, 'This is absolutely fantastic! I've never seen anything like it', while "her eyes shone with happiness and wonderment as she looked from one incredible thing to another" (163). The narrator comments that "Talia found it the most fascinating experience of her life" and, in her excitement, she "could not stop looking around her", crying 'It's absolutely fantastic!' while her "whole face was alight with enthusiasm" (164). Later on we read: "the atmosphere was indescribable. It was full of emotion. It soothed and relaxed and made Talia want to sit there forever. ... This place did really have a magical effect", so much so that Talia "wanted the moment to go on forever" (165-66).

Likewise, when Dervan shows her the inlanders' unique way of growing vines, Talia cries: 'It's fantastic! I love this island, Dervan, it's so full of contrasts' (178). Indeed, the island remains as part of their lives, since at the end, when watching how the villas in Dervan's tourist development were growing, Talia says:

'I wouldn't mind living in one myself ... Views of the sea, constant sunshine, luxury appointments – what else could you ask for?'
'That can be arranged', was his instant response. 'It can be our holiday home.' (177)

In contrast, Mayo's 1992 work does not focus so much on the background

islands (mainly Tenerife, with a brief visit to Lanzarote). While still on the plane, Warwick, the hero, who lives in a boat called *Estoque*, tells Libby: 'You'll like Tenerife; it's an island of contrasts – both in lifestyle and geographically' (10). Comments on the places are, however, rather scarce, with hints like "The black volcanic landscape was beautiful rather than desolate as she had imagined" (50). Thus, although the heroine seems to enjoy "the lazy warmth of the early morning sun" (61) and occasionally admits it was "a romantic, beautiful place" (126) her brief appraisals are always conditioned by the happenings, as when we read: "In other circumstances ... it would have been idyllic" (61); and later on, "It was really a pretty place, she thought. What a pity she was here in such harrowing circumstances" (122).

At one point, the narrator reports on Libby's feelings of despair due to the development of her relationship with Warwick: "God, how she hated him! She couldn't wait to get out of this place. Never again would she return to the Canary Islands. They held nothing but bad memories" (157). However, once back in England, after their reconciling, she wonders "whether he would want her to live on the *Estoque*, or whether they would make their home here in England. It did not matter – nothing mattered as long as she could be with him" (184).

In Mayo's 1994 romance, the hero is a native Canarian who had met Tanya in England a few years before. They had parted and now they happen to meet again when she visits her sister, who works in the south of Tenerife. On her arrival, everything was "new and exciting" but she notices "the brown, barren countryside with just the odd shrub or clump of prickly pear growing tenaciously in the dry earth". Then they pass through a dusty village with very ugly "box-like dwellings built out of blocks, ... looking to Tanya's English eyes as though they were not finished", so with a frown she asks her sister: 'Is this where you're living?' The narrator explains that "coming from her smart semi-detached house on the outskirts of Sheffield, with its tidy green and abundant garden, Tanya found it difficult to feel happy about spending a month there" (9-10). Charlene, Tanya's sister, clarifies that most of the houses were heavenly inside, despite their external appearance. Once inside the shady living-room, Tanya was amazed: "It was like going back a hundred years; it was like photographs she had seen of days gone by ... It was cluttered but beautiful and Tanya loved it" (11). As the plot develops, the center of

attention is, of course, the ups and downs in the couple's relationship. However, occasionally Mayo inserts comments that give the reader some hints of how she views the place. Thus, the hero's family house was in the north of the island, near the "beautiful, lush Orotava Valley", and Tanya could see that this zone was "moist and fertile with trees and bushes lining the road", and she cried, 'What an island of contrasts this is' (49-50). Puerto de la Cruz is described as sophisticated and fascinating (67), while Santa Cruz, the capital city, is not viewed so favourably; yet Mayo tries to compensate when she writes: 'It might not have great looks, but it has great people. It's nicknamed 'Capital de la Amabilidad', the Capital of Kindness. The Santacruceros are a warm, friendly people' (79). In the rest of the pages, the writer gives details of the city's spectacular carnival celebrations, which are the background for the protagonists' love story. The narration of events include information and references to the lavishness and size of the Carnival costumes, the *comparsas*, *rondallas*, *murgas*, the *coso*, and everything that makes up this famous festivity.

Finally, Baird's work is only partially set in Lanzarote, whose 'landscape was surreal, completely covered by over a hundred and thirty volcanoes, with craters and fields of petrified lava'. As Spaniard Nick Meléndez, the hero and wealthy owner of a security firm, put it, "It was a place that allowed him to relax out of the public eye, and do his own thing" (7). As an instance of the *Modern Romance* category, its pages include considerable action and adventure and we find few comments that evaluate the place. One example occurs when Nick tells Liza that property development is one of his projects and he points out, 'For instance, here on Lanzarote the landscape fascinates me. It is quite challenging to build something that is pleasing to the eye, and yet does not harm the unique environment' (18). When touring the island, they go to Fire Mountain, where Liza remarks, 'I can see why you have a villa here; you really love this place', to which Nick replies, 'Yes, I come here a lot; it is ideal' (26).

As in Mayo's 1994 text, we find references to Manrique, the island's famous sculptor and artist, as well as information about how and when the eruptions started and ended, provoking 'the greatest volcanic holocaust ever witnessed' (24). Scattered through the highly passionate scenes of this explosive tale there are also many Spanish words and expressions. This feature is worth studying in a future article, especially considering Nash's finding of "a recurrent striving after

effect ... in the lexicon of these magazine stories" (48), as stated in his seminal 1990 study of the way language is put to use in thrillers and romantic fiction. The relatively frequent remarks on the linguistic skills or difficulties of the protagonists are also noticeable. Examples are found in Thorpe's text, when we read "It was easy to mislead when using a language foreign to one" (7). Later on we learn that Eve, the heroine, "only too aware of her own limitations" becomes "determined to take steps to achieve at least a fair grasp of the language" (126). And she admits, 'After all, I can't expect everyone to learn English just for my benefit - not in their own country' (102-3).

Concern about the need to learn Spanish is also felt in Danbury's romance, where several times we find comments about how good it would be for the children to grow up bilingual. In fact, we read that Jessica, the girl, "was beginning to fancy herself as a linguist" (104), or sentences like the following, which bring up the language issue: "the conversation had been carried out in a mixture of Spanish and English, for Lucie had by now grasped a few more phrases and the housekeeper had picked up a smattering of English" (126). Other instances appear in Wentworth's 1984 text, when we are told that Mintha, the heroine, "optimistically picked up the Spanish phrase book that she'd bought that morning and looked through it for anything she thought would be useful in her new life" (61), or that "with the help of José she was beginning to learn Spanish, although Dane teased her that she would have a Canarian accent" (132).

Praise of the good English or Spanish spoken by the characters is also found, as in Mayo's 1994 romance, when we read "His English was as perfect as Alejandro's" (100). Peake's text also includes comments like, "The stranger gave his order, speaking, to Lisa's surprise, in fluent Spanish" (13), or when she notes that a guide from a touring coach was explaining the formation of the cave "in excellent English" (71). Similarly, Anthea, the heroine in Jameson's book, says, 'I'm impressed by your English, Lucía. I wish my Spanish were as good' (69-70).

Likewise, some writers offer representations of the incorrect English spoken by some Canarian characters, as the following quotes illustrate:

She say nothing. I thought maybe she go back to England... She speaks of him

plenty but she not in love.
(Mayo, 1990: 148)

'Sí', the boy nodded. 'My
Engleesh it ees not very good,
but I see your – er – *hermana*.
Comprende usted?' (Mayo,
1992: 118)

4. CONCLUSION

In this paper, we have studied a small corpus of twelve popular romance fiction novels completely or partially set in the Canary Islands, all following the typical patterns of this controversial sub-genre. If nothing else, we should have demonstrated that, 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. This is sometimes achieved through titles that include words like 'Eden' or 'golden apple', which openly suggest the idea of paradise. It is, however, through the narrator's descriptions of nature and landscapes, and mostly through the characters' comments and references that this image seems to be constructed in the texts, as shown above.

Because of its popularity, we believe this type of texts seem to play two significant functions, in addition to the ones already mentioned by other scholars. Firstly, they contribute to the diffusion of a stereotyped image of the Canaries as a paradise, with some recognizable minor drawbacks. Secondly, while showing awareness of language differences, they also serve as a vehicle to spread foreign vocabulary among their wide international readership, in this case a considerable number of Spanish words and expressions, which, due to space limits, we have been unable to study here. It is surely a topic that deserves further research in the future.

Admittedly, while the descriptions offered above provide a valuable inventory of representations of the Canaries, their markedness cannot be taken for granted, as long as they can also be taken as conventionalized descriptions of nature that might be found in many other HM&B romances located elsewhere. To this end it may be interesting to compare nature and landscape descriptions in other well-travelled locations (eg. in Greece or Italy) where HM&B romances are situated.

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ENDNOTES

1. This is the date of publication (1583) of the earliest English work known about this archipelago, Thomas Nichols' "A Description of the Fortunate Ilandes, Otherwise Called the Islands of Canaria, with Their Straunge Fruits and Commodities: Composed by Thomas Nicols English Man, who Remained There the Space of Seven Yeeres Together", which was later on included in R. Hakluyt's famous compilation.

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