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"If not for her, nobody here would be reading this book": Exploring Literary vs. Popular Fiction and Translation in Book of Love (2022)

Abstract

A work of popular culture celebrating its own genre, the romantic comedy Book of Love (2022) can be used to explore the relationship between literary and popular fiction, as defined by Ken Gelder (2004). The film focuses on Henry Copper, a lackluster British debut author, and María Rodríguez, his Mexican 'traduttore, traditore' who rewrites Henry's novel into a steamy romance bestseller. As such, the film juxtaposes literary and popular fiction authors and celebrates the skills and practices behind popular fiction, especially romance and its portrayal of desire. Adopting Janice A. Radway's view that reading romance is a feminist act, the film's heroine not only reads but also writes romance to assert her identity and reclaim her power from her patriarchal surroundings. Finally, Book of Love explores the contested issue of literary translators' authorship by following María from an unrecognized contributor to Henry's book's success to an independent author. In discussing these three topics, as Book of Love depicts them, this paper argues that romance, as a popular fiction genre, should be recognized not only for its entertainment but also for its (feminist) agential and academic potential![1]

Keywords: literary fiction, popular fiction, romance, desire, author, translator, Book of Love

1. Introduction

Book of Love (2022, directed by Analeine Cal y Mayor) is a 2022 romantic comedy centered on a first-time British author, Henry Copper (Sam Claflin), and his Mexican translator, María Rodríguez (Verónica Echegui). Unbeknownst to Henry, María rewrites his 'sensible' yet unsuccessful debut novel into a steamy romance that becomes an instant hit in her country. Following Henry's initial outrage at this unwarranted transformation of his book, the publishers push the pair to collaborate on a sequel, during which they fall in love and overcome obstacles in the form of personal and professional differences, as well as María's former lover and the father of her young son. At first glance, Book of Love is a mediocre romance film without much substance in terms of entertainment, much less academic discussion. That is if one were to believe a Guardian critic who dubbed it "a waste of potential" and an "utterly, aggressively un-engaging piece of fluff" (Lee). Yet, this critique only reflects the attitude that plagues the romance genre in all its popular forms: "the inane and often misogynistic notion that romance is slight, and melodramatic eroticism is lowbrow art" (Laffly). This paper claims that such superficiality and a lack of critical potential, often attributed to popular fiction and especially romance, should not be truths universally acknowledged.

By viewing Henry as a literary author and María—who goes from a literary translator to a co-author to an independent author—as a popular fiction writer, this paper argues that Book of Love explores the relationship between literary and popular fiction, as delineated by Ken Gelder in his Popular Fiction: The Logistics and Practices of a Literary Field (2004). Specifically, the protagonists embody the opposing attitudes of literary and popular authors toward their writing process and content, reader expectations, collaboration with other authors, and the position of the literary translator. Also, contrary to the critics' attitude to romance, the film exhibits Janice A. Radway's view of romance as a subversive genre by showing María's writing as a feminist act of agency, which helps her reclaim her power from men and their patriarchal desires. Finally, this paper argues that, with its depiction of María as a 'traduttore, traditore';[2] Book of Love thematizes a major postmodernist discussion on literary translation, that is, whether literary translators should be considered authors of the texts they produce or not. These three arguments will be discussed in the following three sections of this paper.

2. Literary vs. Popular Fiction

According to Gelder, literary fiction and popular fiction are "best conceived as … opposite[s]" (1), whereby each field has its own set of defining features and expectations from the audience. Specifically, they have differing notions of the author, content, style, reader expectations, and paratextual or promotional activities. To start with, literary fiction or "Literature" is said to be created by authors, and popular fiction is written by writers (Gelder 14-15). As per critics, this nominal difference implies a deeper meaning: the sense of originality, linguistic and stylistic ingenuity, and concomitant time and effort needed by a literary author to create a literary text. On the contrary, popular fiction writers are seen as lacking all that and "churning out one, two, three or more novels a year" (Gelder 15), enabled by the formulaic nature of their writing content. Popular fiction is thus seen as a craft and its writers as craftsmen, in contrast with literary artists, who can also be prolific but never to the same extent as popular fiction authors can (Gelder 17). Catherine M. Roach, in her half-academic half-biographical exploration of the romance Happily Ever After: The Romance Story in Popular Culture (2016), notes that the perception of authorial quality is tied to "traditional criteria of high literary style … care of word choice, elegance of sentence construction, original use of imagery and metaphor, layering of symbolism, depth and complexity of characterization, unexpectedness of plot turn" (189). Due to this, readers of literary fiction are supposed to read "slowly and carefully, 'seriously' and 'deeply'" (Gelder 5) in order to discover all hidden meanings and nuances. This needs to be done without any help from the authors, since they expect their readers to be educated, intellectual, and appreciative of inventiveness and originality.

Moreover, since literary authors are often considered, by themselves, the critics, and their audiences, to be masters in their field, their literary 'creations' are unencumbered by mass audience expectations. In fact, literary authors have expectations from their readers: to pay deep attention to convoluted storytelling, linguistic and stylistic experimentation, heavy symbolism, and so on. As a rule, literary authors do not feel the need to animate their readers through paratextual or promotional activities, since the prevailing attitude is that their work is done once they write their text and it becomes published![3] Borrowing the autonomous/heteronomous dichotomy from Pierre Bourdieu, Gelder asserts that literary authors are seen as unique as their texts are, providing their readers a unique experience with many layers to be discovered during rereading (13). For this

reason, literary fiction rarely has a need for sequels, since the original text is believed to have enough artistic merit to indefinitely satisfy the reader's expectations.

On the contrary, popular fiction readers are said to quickly consume popular fiction texts and search for other, similar titles. Popular fiction authors, therefore, need to be prolific to be successful, since "serialization secures a loyal readership and consolidates a novelist's reputation" (Gelder 16). Tied to industry and entertainment (1), popular fiction is seen as dictated by strict deadlines and the audience's expectations and helped by a mass marketing apparatus. This popular fiction apparatus entails a whole set of other stakeholders and activities, apart from writers themselves that actively work on attracting audiences and prolonging their interest. This includes paratextual and promotional activities such as book promotions, guest appearances in media outlets, having social media platforms, and building engagement with their audiences. In the process, popular fiction writers are often asked to share details from their private lives; they are expected to regularly communicate with their readers, and they can face very personal backlash if they fail to satisfy the expectations of (sometimes millions of) readers![4] According to Gelder, this is especially true of romance writers, who "nurture and encourage on their websites or through newsletters and fanzines such as Romantic Times [a close relationship with readers], as they reveal often quite private aspects of their lives, their tragedies, the people they care for (a number of romance writers support charitable causes), and especially their achievements" (Gelder 51).

The protagonists of Book of Love vividly embody these differences between literary fiction authors and popular fiction writers. Henry Copper is a serious Englishman whose first novel is a love story, which took "[f]ive years of writing, rewriting, waiting for the right phrase" (00:25:43). He considers the book his precious creation, which is, although it speaks about love, deliberately free from sensuous language and explicit sexual content. As Henry states: "Not every story about love has to be about sex. You know, someone once wrote that chastity is the body in the soul's keeping, and that's how I feel" (00:04:16). While his book may be seen as a popular fiction romance, albeit a poorly written one, it is Henry's attitude toward writing and his audience that puts him in the category of a literary author. Namely, Henry embodies a recognizable attitude of literary authors who "spend a great deal of time and effort distinguishing themselves from popular fiction and everything it seems to stand for" (Gelder 11). Henry expects his readers to be intellectual and

appreciative of his text, “relish[ing] the non-generic aspect of his work, imagining that he can do without dramatic conflict” (Gelder 12). This means that his book relies on the above-mentioned word-plays, symbolism, and meandering descriptions without much concern for a page-turning plot. From her perspective as a popular fiction writer, María describes it as dull and unsatisfactory for the reader: “But nothing happens. Nobody does anything. Nobody says anything. Everybody wanders around, like, ‘Can I just please have a glass of water while I describe this beautiful bicycle?’” (00:29:27).

As is the case with romance fiction in general, and erotic romance in particular, Henry exhibits the attitude that both the genre and its readers are “tasteless and sensuous (rather than tasteful and intellectual), selecting their [reading content] out of some undefined ‘instinct’ rather than through careful, informed discernment” (Gelder 18). When he realizes that María infused his original text with the very notions he avoided—physical intimacy and vivid descriptions of sexual intercourse—Henry accuses her of ruining his text by turning it into a “bucket of filth” (00:25:50) and a “monstrous sack of pornography” (00:26:11). He complains for having to publicly tie himself to ‘such’ a text: “Now I’m expected to go on television and... and say that this morass of filth is something that I wrote” (00:30:01). Henry is angry not only because his idea of supreme artistic authorship has been defiled, but because he perceives that the book’s transformation through the inclusion of popular (erotic) romance elements is a downgrade in literary quality. Despite her evident success, Henry rejects María’s interventions and negates both her writing skills and her product, which supports the highbrow attitude that romance novels “are mocked as lowbrow smut, bad in all senses of the word, and the novelists are stigmatized and shamed” (Roach 191). Even though María’s transformation makes his book an instant hit, Henry’s, as Gelder generally calls it in literary writers, elitist attitude (18) confirms the idea that literary authors underestimate popular fiction, even when they do not possess the know-how of the genre.

This elitism echoes the authorial and creative legacy of Romanticism: “the central tenets of the Romantic definition of art, art as authentic and irreproducible, as the ‘unique creation of an individual author’ and as the ‘expression of genius’” (Salokannel qtd. in Bennett 104). Accordingly, the prevailing attitude is that “Literature is enmeshed with the art world; by contrast, popular fiction here is a ‘craft’” (Gelder 17). It was postmodernism’s collapse of the traditional, supreme position of

the author that blurred the boundaries between literary fiction and popular fiction, allowing popular fiction writers to gain more esteem and spurring interest in the processes behind popular fiction. Transformations may not be a part of literary fiction, but they are allowed and even expected in popular fiction: “manipulations such as cuts and condensation are not only tolerated but also sometimes required as part of the production process” (Bianchi and Zanettin 799).

The number of published books is not a definitive marker of a literary author/popular writer; that is, many published novels do not necessarily entail bad quality or vice versa—with Agatha Christie and Marie Corelli as examples (Gelder 15). Yet, in general, mass audiences and high-selling numbers are more common with popular fiction. This is mainly due to popular fiction being more approachable in terms of content, language, and style. Next, popular fiction writers are highly oriented toward their audiences, and their work has to fulfill the audience’s expectations. Finally, writers of popular fiction not only reach their audiences through writing, but also through post-writing activities: “[P]opular fiction is not just a matter of texts-in-themselves, but of an entire apparatus of production, distribution (including promotion and advertising) and consumption—or what I call, more broadly, processing” (Gelder 2).

When it comes to promotional activities, Henry exhibits the attitude of a literary author by being reluctant to engage in them, as he deems his text good enough to speak for itself. When his British publisher tells him, “People aren’t coming to you, so you have to go to them. It’s all about engagement,” Henry replies: “I’m a writer” (00:09:59). This shows his belief that it is not his task to animate the readers; they must find value in his creation on their own. Yet, the publisher warns him that this is not the case: “Yeah, a writer who needs to get his ass to Mexico and start plugging that book in person, and online” (00:10:01). She suggests to Henry to be “hilarious on Twitter” and “[e]xpress your true self on TikTok” (00:10:44), after which he starts receiving private messages from fans, echoing the idea that popular writers and their private lives are more exposed to their audiences.

In contrast to Henry, the female protagonist of Book of Love, María Rodríguez, can be viewed as a popular fiction writer, since she becomes Henry’s co-author on the sequel to his debut, and eventually an independent author herself. Her position as a(n unfaithful) translator will be discussed in the last section of this paper, but for now, we shall focus on her position as a popular

fiction writer. What María does to Henry's text, which then captivates many readers in Mexico, is change most of his characters, their storylines, and "spice it up" (00:30:57). What she does is rewrite the novel in accordance with the romance genre and reader expectations. With this, María exhibits the know-how of the romance genre, an important and often undervalued aspect of popular fiction. As per Gelder:

> *Genre is a matter of knowledge, which some people have (e.g. those writers who produce genre fiction and those readers who make their way through it) and other people don't. It is impossible not just to write, but to market and sell and to review or read, a crime novel (for example) without a good understanding of the history of the genre and the various ways in which it has worked. Genre, in other words, has no time for naivety or ignorance. (2)*

Moreover, popular fiction is largely shaped by the audience's expectations, requiring well-developed and exciting plots to keep readers' interest among a deluge of similar content. Popular writers need to employ their creativity in a way that fits the rigid boundaries of the genre yet still surprises and enthralls their readers. María's excellent knowledge of the field and skillful navigation of romance writing is exactly what makes her 'translation' so successful.

Furthermore, in line with Gelder's defense of popular fiction readers from negative allegations, they are not a mindless, uncritical mob. Many readers of popular fiction are specialized in different (sub)genres and exhibit "knowledge and competence" (2). During Henry's promotional activities, his avid readers are seen reciting parts of his text from memory, pointing to the fact that María rewrote his text, and translating parts of his interviews from Spanish into English. The latter is interesting because, at the beginning of the film, Henry's British publisher tells him: "[Y]our Mexican publisher saw that it was in English, and decided that would make it harder for Mexican readers. So, they had it translated" (00:08:20). This does not account for all his Mexican readers, but the publisher's attitude is also an elitist, stereotypical view of popular fiction readers as less knowledgeable. Yet, in their eagerness to read the latest titles by their favorite authors as soon as possible, many popular fiction readers learn foreign languages instead of waiting for official translations into their first language. Fan translations and fan fiction are beyond the scope of this

paper, but they are also postmodern practices that expand the notion of the author and exhibit popular fiction readers' skills and imagination.[5]

Finally, María's capability as a popular fiction author is also celebrated when it comes to the issue of a sequel. Further defending the popular fiction field, Gelder notes that "[p]roduction, output, deadlines, sequels, work: these are some of the foregrounded logics and practices, then, that help to distinguish popular fiction from Literature" (17). Next to their constant engagement with readers, popular writers are expected to produce plenty of texts of the same quality in a short amount of time. In Book of Love, soon after his Mexican edition achieves huge success, Henry is asked to deliver a sequel. When he declines, saying "Jen, I can't write a novel in ten weeks," his publisher suggests that María—as a popular fiction author who obviously knows what the audiences want and is capable of writing it—can help him reach that "crazy deadline" (01:05:12). Hence, although popular fiction writers do write and publish faster, their knowledge, dedication, and overall effort should not be disregarded in favor of literary texts and their authors.

This section has focused on how Book of Love depicts the different attitudes and practices in literary and popular fiction while at the same time celebrating popular fiction writers. The next section focuses on popular romance writing and how the film shows the subversive potential of the romance genre as a tool of female agency.

3. I Write Romance, Therefore I Am (a Woman)

In her seminal Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature (1984), Janice A. Radway sees the reading of romance as a feminist act of agency. In line with it, women who read romance indulge their desires and oppose patriarchal demands on their time, minds, and bodies: "[t]he act of reading romances carries with it a small-scale protest about the ordinary pressures of daily life (e.g. raising a family) and the things that are missing from readers' lives: the care and attention that romantic heroines get from their heroes, for example" (qtd. in Gelder 45). Radway further asserts that romance reading "is a profoundly conflicted activity centered upon a profoundly conflicted form" (14), because it exhibits anti-patriarchal tendencies within the firm patriarchal framework. In the words of Lisa Fletcher: "She [Radway] argues that popular romance fiction reaffirms the value and inevitability of patriarchal structures for women at the same time as

the reading of romance affords women a means to protest against patriarchy's failure to fulfil the desires it engenders in women" (5). Catherine M. Roach echoes this argument and expands the idea of romance's agential potential from Radway's focus on romance fiction readers to romance fiction writers:

> *This worthy work of solitude can forge a powerful self. The romance story may be particularly useful in developing a woman's voice, as it serves as a means for her to explore contradictions and quandaries of female desire. Although this work has a communal aspect, the writing is largely done alone. Through solitary imagination and the artisanship of word craft, this work can be therapeutic, transformative, reparative, empowering, and sometimes even remunerative. (Roach 191)*

In Book of Love, María not only reads romance but also writes it. Before she is even asked to work on the sequel to Henry's book, viewers can see her writing for herself. The act of writing romance stories helps María assert her own identity by stealing time from her numerous responsibilities and from the men she is supposed to care for and provide for. On top of being a single mother who must physically and emotionally care for her ten-year-old son and her grandfather, she has to work two jobs—being a waitress at a tavern and a freelance translator—to provide for all of them. Also, she is often forced to juggle her work responsibilities with childcare because her former lover and her son's father is irresponsible. He even asks Maria for money, which he spends on drinking in bars. In one particularly heated scene, expressing frustration about her lack of time for herself, María rants about being "alone, and penniless, with a grandfather and a child who won't let [her] even breathe" (00:45:40). She apologizes for the latter as soon as she said it, but this nevertheless indicates that she is unable to indulge in anything other than acts of service to men who are part of her life. Consequently, while writing, María is no longer a housewife, a mother, a server, or a translator; she is her true self and is reclaiming her time and her life passion. Writing romance is "a way for [her] to claim personal time and space for [herself] with stories that celebrate women and affirm [her] value. That is radical politics" (Roach 193). María desires to be a published author and share her written work with the world, but it is not something that dictates her need to write, nor her enjoyment of the act. She does it first and foremost for herself because it helps her reconnect with her inner self.

Yet, María's romance writing is not pure escapism from everyday cooking, cleaning, and childcare. In a conversation in which Henry accuses her of 'ruining' his book, María asserts that she undertook the task of translating it because she knew she could improve his text (01:26:18). Unlike Henry, María is well-versed in the intricacies of the popular romance genre, and she knows how to invoke interest and engagement in her readers, even when they do not know it is her text that they are reading. Writing is thus a feminist act for María, helping her recognize and assert her value over men who take up most of her time and resources, or who are in a position she wants to claim for herself. In other words, by writing, the heroine fights for her freedom and the recognition of her own skills and expertise that go beyond caring for others. Her knowledge of the romance genre and insistence on the value of her writing are key factors that eventually enable María to become an independent, published author after she helped Henry write a sequel. The film ends with María making a TV appearance as "the international best-selling debut novelist and [the host's] personal choice for Beatriz Book Club Book of the Year" (01:40:39), hence gaining the recognition previously only Henry had.

With this, Book of Love shows that "[i]n the world of romance, the autonomous woman … can live on and have a successful relationship that assists rather than thwarts her self-realization—which, after all, is something that many women actually do" (Dugger 12). This means that, although María and Henry's happy ending is conventional and heteronormative, María does not lose her identity after being paired off, but in fact gains time and support to do her own writing.

4. Do Authors and Translators Co-Authors Make?

Just as postmodernism has collapsed the traditional notion of the author in terms of breaking the boundaries between literary fiction and popular fiction, allowing popular fiction writers to gain more esteem, it has done so with literary translators. Postmodernists see the textual meaning as a result of the reader's, and not only the author's, effort (Barthes qtd. in Bantinaki 2). Since translators are the most attentive readers, the issue of literary translators' authorship has inspired many academic debates.

On the one hand, there is a movement to recognize authors and literary translators as equals, because "[t]he demise of Romantic conceptions of authorship and writing quite naturally led to a reconception of translation and of the work of translators: translation could no longer be viewed as imitative" (Bantinaki 2). Literary translation is never a simple transfer of words and sentences from one language to another. It entails inferring and interpreting meaning in one culture and construing it within another to elicit the same reader reaction; therefore, the idea is that translation is a separate and original creation. Lawrence Venuti is among the main proponents of translation authorship: "Since, much like authors, translators aim to create a work that is acknowledged as new, and different from the original, then presumably translators are authors, and translation … is 'an independent work of authorship'" (qtd. in Bantinaki 2). On the other hand, Anthony Pym, among others, disagrees that a literary translator should be given the same level of authorship, claiming that "[a]lthough translating involves significant creativity and subjectivity, the currently dominant translation form does not oblige translators to take responsibility for their words in the same way as authors can" (31). These opposing views of a literary translator are yet another topic found in Book of Love.

Clearly, what María does to Henry's first book is highly unethical from a translator's position. She alters his entire book, without Henry's consent or even knowledge, keeping only a handful of original characters but changing their personality traits, such as their sexual orientation, and their entire storylines. Such a practice stands for creative appropriation and "it is not how most translators currently understand their craft and their role as producers of culture" (Bantinaki 10). Leaving María's unethical behavior aside for a moment, her position as a translator-turned-author can still be used as an example of the trajectory toward the recognition of literary translators.

During their first meeting, Henry mistakes "M. F. Rodríquez" (00:08:29) for a man's name and addresses María's grandfather as his translator and contributor to the success of his book in Mexico. María's name being shortened to these ambiguous initials and Henry's mix-up can be taken to portray the elitist attitude that 'serious' writing and translation are reserved for men. This evokes the long-lasting practice of women writers being forced to hide behind male pseudonyms (Russ 129) for the sake of a wider readership, among other reasons, with P. D. James and J. K. Rowling being recent examples. In this regard, female translators and translators of popular fiction

almost follow in the footsteps of (female) writers of popular fiction—it takes time for them to get recognized, and their excellent work is usually reserved for another (man) or another field (literary fiction).

A translator is often in the shadows, with his or her work not duly recognized. Since María is a translator at first, her name is not on the cover of Henry's book, although it is noted in relation to the book. However, readers are not aware they are in fact reading María's work. Again, María's appropriation was unethical, but the lack of recognition of translators' work is often the case even when translators are ethical in their practice. In popular media and digital platforms such as social networks and book blogs, translators' names are often omitted, and their creative work is effectively disregarded. According to the Society of Authors website, the Translators' Association has encouraged the campaign #NametheTranslator "in response to a tendency amongst reviewers and marketers of translated works to omit the name of the translator. Often a translated work will mention only the name of the original author" (Society of Authors). Even if one agrees with Pym's and Bantinaki's claims that literary translators are responsible for their output but not in the same capacity as authors, the malpractice of omitting the translator's name perpetuates the audiences' misguided ideas that they are reading, for instance, Leo Tolstoy's and Gabriel García Márquez's original words in English.

That translators' contribution is often ignored is evident in Henry and María's guest appearance on TV, during which the host focuses only on Henry's authorship and blatantly demeans María's contribution: "María, since you really like talking, I have a question for you. Was it hard, as a mere translator, to convey the meaning of Señor Copper's amazing words?" (00:35:02, my emphasis). This likewise points to conventional expectations of a translator—to be invisible and silent unless asked to speak and to serve as a mere vessel for the words of the 'great.' Additionally, María embodies a typical literary translator by being underpaid for her work. As a rule of thumb, literary translators can rarely sustain themselves on their literary translation tasks only and often have to maintain other sources of income, as María does.

The film also hints at Venuti's stance on translator authorship: "Every step in the translation process—from the selection of foreign texts to the implementation of translation strategies to the editing, reviewing, and reading of translations—is mediated by the diverse cultural values that

circulate in the target language" (308). The idea is that, if a translator is responsible for the plot, characters, their motivations, the words, the translator's authorship should be so obvious that a ten-year-old child, Diego, voices it: "Mom, shouldn't you say it's your book? It seems really unfair" (00:29:08). Indeed, if the story and the words are hers, why is her name not on the cover? Well, because, according to Bantinaki, translators are responsible for conveying the author's original text, and they are the author of "a constrained representation of the original" but not the original (10).

Finally, as a literary translator, María can be celebrated for her deep knowledge of the cultural context she is translating from (Britain) and the one she is translating into. Beatriz Zeller defines translation as "a work of art emanating from another author's context and brought into the readers' universe by its other author, the translator" (139). Henry's book is well received in Mexico precisely because of María's translation and her knowledge of the cultural expectations of the Mexican audience. Mexico is, after all, the land of telenovelas. Henry deliberately counters these expectations, forgoing the readers' expectation of passionate love, which he deems lowbrow, but María is aware of the context she is delivering in and has no such qualms. Once again, this comes back to the differing attitudes of literary authors and popular writers: "Literary fiction is ambivalent at best about its industrial connections and likes to see itself as something more than 'just entertainment', but popular fiction generally speaking has no such reservations" (Gelder 1). In the traditional sense, it is an unethical translation practice to transform the original author's plot, characters, and motivations, but María's acute recognition of the culture she is translating into, and her knowledge of the romance genre demonstrate the advanced traits of literary translators that should otherwise be acknowledged.

5. Conclusion

In line with Catherine M. Roach's concluding remark on romance fiction: "If you haven't read a romance recently, try picking one up. You'll find a whole world in it" (195), this article has shown that a popular romance, in this case a film, has more layers than it is usually thought to have. With enemies-to-lovers protagonists who embody the opposing attitudes of a literary author and popular

fiction writer, Book of Love portrays popular fiction, specifically romance, as an established literary field whose authors, practices, and texts deserve more recognition.

As noted in the first section of this paper, literary authors work hard and long on their texts, but are unencumbered by constraints of genre, deadlines, and audience demands. On the other hand, writing popular fiction demands just as much dedication, expertise, and knowledge of genre rules. In addition, there are countless popular fiction writers, so the competition is greater, and, besides writing, they have to engage in promotional activities, satisfy audience demands or face rather personal backlash, and are often denied their privacy. Next, in exploring the relationship between literary and popular fiction and its authors, the film posits romance fiction writing as a feminist act. The film's heroine, a single mother who spends all her time caring for the men in her family and her ex-husband, is shown asserting her own identity by stealing time from her other responsibilities and writing a romance as something she does for herself. While betraying the "paradigmatic" case or traditional role of literary translation (Bantinaki 8) by appropriating Henry's text without his knowledge, María shows that a woman can assert her knowledge and skill and create a chance for self-expression even when she comes from an inferior position.

Finally, the film explores a key postmodernist issue of the literary translator's authorship. Forgoing the ethical demands of translation while working on Henry's book, María effectively writes her own book and paves her way toward a recognized, independent authorship. While her actions are highly problematic, the film justly points to the need to recognize the knowledge, skills, and effort of literary translators in creating a 'new' text based on the source text.

For all these reasons, Book of Love shows that popular (romance) fiction should be recognized as a valuable genre that, just as literary translation, might not be equivalent to literary fiction, but is nonetheless multilayered and incontestable.

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[2] This Italian adage, meaning 'the translator is a traitor,' refers to the idea that a perfect translation, one that retains the form, meaning, and all the stylistic features of the source text is impossible to achieve. To render its message successfully in the target language, translators must always 'cheat' or change the source in some way. A good translation is thus considered unfaithful, whereas a literal, 'faithful' translation is usually considered bad. In the words of Eugene Nida: "Since, therefore, no two languages segment experience in the same way, this means that there can never be a word-for-word type of correspondence which is fully meaningful or accurate" (150).

[3] The most famous recent example is Elena Ferrante, the anonymous Italian literary sensation who declared: "I believe that books, once written, have no need of their authors" (Ferrante).

[4] An example is Maya Banks, a bestselling American writer of erotic romance, romantic suspense, and historical romance such as the Breathless Trilogy (2013), the McCabe Trilogy (2011), and the eleven-part KGI series (2010–2017). According to her official Facebook profile, in the last decade, Banks has suffered several life-threatening health issues and had to take several breaks from writing. Between 2017 and 2021, several of her new books were postponed (including the twelfth KGI book) to which many readers reacted with backlash, swearing off Banks' books, complaining for not getting closure for several book series, KGI in particular, and attacking the writer and her family for not having the 'decency' to inform her readers of Banks' condition.

[5] See more in: Jennifer L. Barnes, "Fanfiction as Imaginary Play: What Fan-Written Stories Can Tell Us about the Cognitive Science of Fiction." Poetics, vol. 48, 2015, pp. 69-82.

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