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Twitterature in Spanish: the representation of womanhood in *La Mujer de M* by Mauricio Montiel Figueiras

Twitteratura em Espanhol: a representação do feminino em A Mulher de M de Mauricio Montiel Figueiras

Perla Sassón-Henry^a

^a United States Naval Academy, Annapolis, Maryland, United States of America - sasson@usna.edu

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Abstract: Mauricio Figueiras Montiel's project *La mujer de M* comprises a print book, an e-book and a nouvelle on Twitter. The project which originally started as part of *El hombre de Tweed*, Montiel's first twitterature work evolved to represent the influence social media platforms have at the creation and distribution level of a literary work as well as the role it has in the dissemination of the author's intention for his work. This essay explores how Mexican author Mauricio Montiel Figueiras uses different publishing modalities to present the concept of womanhood as represented by the protagonist of his project *La mujer de M*.

Palavras-chave:

Literatura Eletrônica.
Twitteratura. Espanhól.
Feminino.

Resumo: O projeto de Mauricio Figueiras Montiel, *La mujer de M*, inclui um livro impresso, um e-book e uma novela no Twitter. O projeto que originalmente começou como parte de *El hombre de Tweed*, o primeiro trabalho *twitterial* de Montiel, evoluiu para representar a influência das plataformas de mídia social no nível de criação e distribuição de uma obra literária, bem como o papel que ela tem na disseminação da intenção do autor. pelo seu trabalho. Este ensaio explora como o autor mexicano Mauricio Montiel Figueiras utiliza diferentes modalidades de publicação para apresentar o conceito de feminino representado pela protagonista de seu projeto *La mujer de M*.



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Introduction

Back in January 2010, Spanish journalist and writer Jordi Cervera launched *Serial Chicken*, the first twitter novel in Spanish and Catalan as part of the festival of noir fiction held in Barcelona. As a supplement to his tweets, Cervera included the use of the Google maps geopositioning system, to locate some of the occurrences in the narrative, and images as well as music broadcast by Spotify, a commercial music streaming service. Cervera also used Facebook, Vimeo and Flickr to circulate each tweet. This novel was a clear example of the new uses of media platforms in Spanish and Catalan at the creation stage but also for its dissemination. *Serial Chicken* marked the beginning of a new mode of literary writing in Spanish and Catalan. Since then a growing number of Spanish speaking authors including the Mexican writers Jose Luis Zárate, Alberto Chimal, Julia Cuellar and Mauricio Montiel Figueiras have taken advantage of Twitter as a platform and as a new tool to appeal to new audiences without losing sight of the more traditional way of publishing, the printed book. These authors move with ease among different platforms (the printed book, e-books, blogs, Twitter, Instagram) to expose their e-lit to different readers. All of them have published twitterature but they have also reached out to the printed book and the digital book in an effort to appeal to a wider readership.

In this essay I will focus on the groundbreaking twitterature piece *La mujer de M* by Mauricio Montiel Figueiras who has been working on twitterature projects since 2011. Montiel Figueiras is a fiction writer, poet, essayist, critic and translator whose work has been published in numerous international magazines and journals. Among his main publications are *Ciudad tomada* (2013), *La mujer de M* (2012), *Señor Fritos* (2011), *Paseos sin rumbo: Diálogos entre cine y literatura* (2010) and *Terra cognita* (2007).

In March 2011 Montiel Figueiras started using a Twitter personal account to narrate personal comments intermingled with a story he was developing. The story in question would be *El hombre de tweed*. At that moment, Montiel realized that the increase in his readership and interest in his novel required him to start narrating from a separate account with the hashtag @elhombredetweed. It was in this account where *La mujer de M* made her first appearance in tweets. The M in the title refers to both the town of Monowi, Nebraska where the real story that inspired Montiel for his project takes place as well as Montiel's first name (MONTIEL, 2016). The references to *la mujer de M* in the hashtag @elhombredetweed were later on

deleted by Montiel in order to circulate them in print as the novel *La mujer de M* which was published by the Mexican press Taller Ditoria in 2012. In 2017, Montiel published an e-book edition of *La mujer de M*. As we can see Montiel's *La mujer de M* is a clear example of the new modes of creation and circulation of literary works, which are facilitated by today's technologies. This variety of mediums has allowed Montiel to propagate his work and thus his character of la mujer of M and what she represents to a wide and diverse audience. Another example of the loop created by Montiel in the propagation of his novel *La mujer de M* is the fact a reference to the publication of the e-book has been pinned in the account@LamujerdeM, thus enticing his Twitter followers to purchase and read the e-book version of the story.

In this essay I will analyze what la mujer de M, the protagonist of this literary work stands for in today's globalized society. What type of message does this female protagonist imagined by a male writer try to convey to its readership?

La Mujer de M

La mujer de M emerged as a fundamental counterpart of *El hombre de Tweed*, Montiel's first twitterature piece (2013-2017) and whose protagonist, el hombre de Tweed is immersed in a society characterized by overpopulation and the ubiquitous presence of technology. *La mujer de M*, on the other hand, has been inspired by Elsie Eiler's life, a woman who after her husband passed away became the only inhabitant of the town of Monowi, Nebraska. As the only inhabitant of the town, this woman performs many different roles ranging from mayor, librarian, and bartender to even producing a municipal road plan to secure funding from the government. According to a 2018 BBC interview, Mrs. Eiler does not have any intention of moving away from Monowi. Though she carries many duties by herself as the only inhabitant of the town, she feels she is always accompanied by the many local, regional and foreign visitors who stop by her bar which has become a sort of hub where people leave messages for one another and check on her ("Welcome to America's Only Town of 1"). Family photographs abound in her home as well as in the bar. Her husband's 5,000 book library has been turned into the town library where books can be borrowed following an honor system. As she clearly states in the interview "[she] has no desire of living anywhere else" ("Welcome to America's Only Town of 1). It is her resilience and her connection to the place she has called home for so long what has motivated her to remain in Monowi. In a similar fashion

Montiel's *mujer de M* portrays a close connection to the place she inhabits and to the memories instilled by her photo albums.

In an interview in 2016, Montiel explained that “the story of *La mujer de M* consists of two sources: 1) the tweets that appear as part of the hashtag #elhombredetweed (he observes her and registers her actions from a point of view which is not precise) and 2) the tweets from the account @LamujerdeM” (MONTIEL, 2016)¹. In Montiel's words, “the work published by Ditoria in 2012 stems from the tweets in *El hombre de tweed*” (MONTIEL, 2016). In both projects Montiel presents the image of a solitary woman who endures the passing of time in solitude by relying on images from photographs and/or dreams that relate to past memories. Among the main differences between *La mujer de M* in its printed version and the story narrated in Twitter are the point of view in which the story is told as well as the writing and reading environment that encapsulates each piece. According to Montiel, the printed version is narrated in a third person point of view whereby an observer comments on the actions of *la mujer de M*. The observer in this story is *el hombre de Tweed* (MONTIEL, 2016). The story in Twitter is told in the first person. It is *la mujer de M* who narrates her daily life with a profound emphasis on her feelings and memories. I read *La mujer de M* as represented in its different mediums as a literary work which represents womanhood in a very unique and poetic fashion that makes *la mujer de M* transcend space and time.

La Mujer de M: from tweets to a print and a digital book

The tweets extracted from the original Twitter account @elhombredetweed which constitute the print book version of *La mujer de M* and its e-book counterpart present the observations of a third person narrator. This narrator which is a male observer presents the life of a woman who as the introduction to the e-book describes is “in the North of a country without name” and “is observed by a witness who never appears in the narration but who gives a detailed account of the feminine routine he spies” (*La Mujer de M*, 2017). These two projects are a clear example of the relevance of Twitter as a digital platform in the process of distribution and aesthetics of a literary piece. In reference to the distribution, there has been an intentional relationship established by the author between the print version of the *La Mujer de M*, its digital format and the story developed in Twitter. *La Mujer de M* first appeared in Twitter as brief snippets or observations from *el hombre de Tweed* to finally evolve as the main

¹ All translations are mine.

character in *La Mujer de M* published by Ditoria and as an e-book. In the introduction to the latter the reader is informed of the scope of [t]he project which was born and keeps developing in Twitter in the accounts @LamujerdeM and @ElhombredeTweed (*La Mujer de M*, 2017) The idea behind the project is to sustain continuity to the idea represented by the woman at @elhombredeTweed and the message transmitted at @LamujerdeM. Parallel to this project is the last part of Montiel's novel which will be called "La tempestad" which by the feminine article in its title as well as in the previous titles of this novel, refers directly to the importance of the role of the woman –la mujer de M-- in the global project of El hombre de tweed (MONTIEL, 2019) In this final section Montiel hopes to reunite both characters to converge the ideas represented by el hombre de Tweed and la mujer de M.

Let me start by analyzing the representation of la mujer de M as described in the third person by el hombre de Tweed in the print version and the eBook format to later on refer to the reading experience and development of the character of la mujer de M as presented in the first-person narrative in its own Twitter account.

La Mujer de M.

As stated earlier *La Mujer the M* presents a different perspective and reading experience than the one presented in the social media platform. In the introduction to the e-book, Montiel signals the reader she is about to read a "noveleta en tweets" (MONTIEL, 2017). The printed and Kindle version of *La Mujer de M* have been uprooted from their original multimedia digital environment, Twitter, thus leading to a different type of reading engagement from the one the reader can engage in the social media platform. As an e-book *La Mujer de M* engages the reader in a more traditional way of reading which takes us back to the nouvelle. This literary piece is composed of twenty-two brief chapters made up of excerpts from @elhombredeTweed. The story develops in brief narrative snippets that create an aura of intrigue around la mujer de M, a character that the reader will have to unravel based on all the sequential pieces of this narrative puzzle. What is the message that la mujer de M tries to convey? It is this aspect of the story which makes *La Mujer de M* a compelling literary piece.

This is a literary piece that transcends its own time and place. Location is only referenced as a place in the North without a specific detail of a country or a region of the world. There is no indication about the woman of M's nationality. The ambiguity presented allows the reader to

imagine the woman of M's possible location taking into account the characteristics delineated by the narrative. The landscape is described as an extremely isolated prairie which leads to solitude.

“En las planicies desmesuradas del norte despunta un pueblo llamado M. donde vive un solo habitante. La soledad elige sus capitales” (*La Mujer de M*, 1)

The passing of time marked by the description of the change of seasons without any reference to a specific year brings about the reader's possibility to imagine the story in a time and place that might relate to her experience. The melancholic reflection of the woman of M about her past might be seen as an invitation to the reader to engage in a deeper acknowledgement of her own past.

“Durante el invierno, la mujer de M. mira la nieve con alma lúgubre. Sabe que en la blancura se mezclan cenizas de otros tiempos” (*La Mujer de M*, 2).

“El único habitante de M. es una mujer. Su rostro ha sido tallado delicadamente por el viento que la visita como un viajero furtivo” (*La Mujer de M*, 1).

Montiel's interest in the role of visual images and photographs is evident throughout his work. Though the book version of *la mujer de M* does not have any images just the tweets extracted from the account @elhombredetweed, Montiel incurs in the frequent reference to photo album in its print and e-book formats of the story and in a recurrent use of images in his novel in Twitter.

In the e-book *la mujer de M* finds an old album which trigger memories from her past. These visual images are an agent of memory and reflection. In her solitude, *La mujer de M* stands for the loneliness needed to reflect upon one's humanity in a world, which is oversaturated by media. In the early appearance of *la mujer de M* at @elhombredetweed, a third person narrator, which represents *el hombre de Tweed*, informs the reader:

“La mujer de M is always alone. Her only company are the images she creates in her mind or recreates from an old photo album” (*La Mujer de M*, 20).

“La mujer de M. se acerca el álbum a los ojos” (*La Mujer de M*, 20).

“La figura deja al descubierto un brazo masculino envuelto en una tela que de pronto resulta familiar. Tweed, musita la mujer de M” (*La Mujer de M*, 20).

It is through the photographs that la mujer de M finds in an old album that she reconstructs her past and awakens her femininity and sexuality. She longs for a past love. As la mujer de M is able reconstructs her past emerging from the photographs, the reader is also able to reconstruct this woman's past, present and imagine her future.

“Un rayo de sol se ha colado por la ventana de la estancia para incendiar el frutero donde la mujer de M. ve una manzana reseca” (*La Mujer de M*, 21).

“Quizá eso es el amor, dice la mujer de M. frente a la fruta alumbrada. Y así, con las manos sobre el álbum, espera que caiga la noche” (*La Mujer de M*, 21).

La mujer de M is presented as a pensive figure who recalls the presence of a man, a tornado hunter who impressed her on his way through the town.

“En tardes en que el cielo se amorata como si acabara de recibir una paliza salvaje, la mujer de M. recuerda al cazador de tornados” (*La Mujer de M*, 25).

“Cazo tornados”, dijo el hombrecillo que aquel crepúsculo violáceo, como por arte de magia, brotó en el porche de la mujer de M “(*La Mujer de M*, 25).

“¿Cómo sabe que se acerca un tornado?” preguntó la mujer de M” (*La Mujer de M*, 25).

“¿Cómo sabe que se acerca un hombre? Es un instinto que viaja en la sangre.” La réplica del cazador enmudeció a la mujer de M” (*La Mujer de M*, 25).

The woman of M fell silent as the man spoke to her. The tornado hunter emerged almost as a surreal figure whose presence the woman of M doubted and perceived as a product of her own imagination.

“En tardes en que el firmamento luce magullado, la mujer de M. se pregunta si el cazador de tornados es un recuerdo o un ensueño” (*La Mujer de M*, 28).

Towards the end of the story, the reader knows that the wind brings memories of the hurricane hunter. La mujer de M feels his voice near her. Though the male's voice seems real neither the woman nor the reader can really tell whether the man is present or if he is just a figment of her imagination. The voice la mujer de M seems to hear as well as the photographs she does not remember having seen before bring a type of “mystery that relates not only to memory but to the possibility of spectral presences and alternate worlds” (Gomez, 2013).

“Poco a poco, entre los arañazos del vendaval, se inmiscuye el filo de una voz masculina. La mujer de M. distingue dos palabras” (*La Mujer de M*, 47).

“Allá voy.” La frase es el ojo del huracán que azota la distancia, el agujero a través del que la mujer de M. atisba una cercanía” (*La Mujer de M*, 47).

Though in book format the structure of this narrative resembles a serial story and thus create a sense a suspense and reflection after each brief entry. According to Iser, if we read serial stories “in installments, they may hold our interest, but if we read it in book form, the chances are we shall soon put them down” (191). This is exactly the effect Montiel creates in *La mujer de M* through a technique that calls for an active reader participation. In reference to this topic, Iser affirms that the cutting technique used in the serial story “generally breaks off just at a point of suspense where one would like to know the outcome of a meeting, a situation, etc. The interruption and consequence prolongation of tension is the basic function of the cut. The result is that we try to imagine how the story will unfold, and in this way we heighten our own participation in the course of events. Dicken’s was a master of this technique; his readers became his “co-authors” (ISER,191).

In Montiel’s work each brief paragraph breaks down the narrative and it ends as a pause that invites the reader to assemble the story as she also comes to terms to what la mujer de M represents in today’s society.

In a 2016 interview Montiel affirmed that he wanted to work in a project that would mark the encounter of the man in Tweed and the woman of M. At that moment he was not sure whether the fourth part of this work would be published in Twitter or in book format (Montiel, 2016). As of today, Montiel has closed the account @elhombredeTweed to focus on his twitterature project @lamujerdeM and the fourth part of his project *El hombre de Tweed* where he hopes to unravel more details of the story of the woman of M as portrayed @lamujerdeM.

@lamujerdeM

In a 2012 publication of *Hispanic Issues on Line*, Edmundo Paz Soldán cited Mexican poet Aurelio Asian (@aasiaian)who wrote: “ Sólo por prejuicio, también, consideramos alta literatura un haiku de Basho o una copla de Lorca y no tantos tuits que no lo son menos ” (PAZ SOLDÁN, 2012). To the best of my knowledge as of today there are no journal academic articles that have addressed @lamujerdeM whose appeal lies not only in being one

of the first twitterature pieces in Spanish but on the unique perspective of womanhood presented by Montiel through his character la Mujer de M. Is it still that twitterature has not been acknowledged as a literary form which deserves to be critically analyzed as such or is it just that this relevant literary piece has not been taken into consideration to be critically studied due to the plethora of e-lit in Spanish which has also been created in the past years? Whatever the reason it might be this essay attempts to fill such a void by analyzing @LamujerdeM by taking into account its aesthetic as well as the author's intention in developing this literary work.

I concur with Leonardo Flores's definition that "[e]lectronic literature explores writing in electronic and digital media, which integrate computation, multimedia, interactivity through a variety of input devices, networked data, and digital culture itself. Taking into account these features there is no doubt that @LamujerdeM embodies some of the principles stated above though it also has brought with it some of the characteristics of traditional printed literature. Thus, @LamujerdeM falls within what Cristina Rivera Garza has termed as "tweetnovel."

According to Edmundo Paz Soldán, Cristina Rivera Garza coined the concept of the "tweetnovel," which she describes as a "TL written by the characters" (PAZ SOLDÁN,2012). In her view the TL novel is a contemporary and experimental form of the novel Mikhail Bakhtin imagined: polyphonic, with juxtaposition that result in a text that is "dialogic /choric/echoing" (PAZ SOLDÁN,2012).

In the case of @LamujerdeM, these characteristics naturally emerge from the digital environment in which this literary work is being written. It is the digital environment, the social media platform in which it is being written which allows for a constant dialogue between author, text and readers. It is this immersion in the social media platform plus the capabilities that the medium affords which makes @LamujerdeM a representative of what Flores defines as third generation electronic literature. Third generation electronic literature "builds upon existing forms, adopts existing interfaces, readers are familiar with the platform, works circulate where the audience is, postmodernist and pop culture poetics, remix, pastiche, readymade, adapt, connected to Fandom and Internet culture (Flores, 2019). Though some of the latter characteristics do not apply to @LamujerdeM, this e-lit definitely embodies at least the first five features of the previous description of third generation e-lit. Montiel's own words in reference to the value of social media to write literary pieces support the previous

statement, “las redes sociales funcionan como una máquina de escribir dentro de la misma máquina de escribir que es la computadora. El autor señaló que otro aspecto positivo de utilizarlas de esta manera es que se establece un vínculo de comunicación directa entre el creador y sus seguidores” (Vasquez, 2016).

@LamujerdeM has a similar structure to a blognovel which in turn resembles the novels in installments quite popular in the XIX century. Its author has affirmed that @LamujerdeM is a “nouvelle” narrated in first person (MONTIEL, 2016). Its origins can be traced back to 2013 and it has been active since then. As of today @LamujerdeM has a total of 3,827 tweets, 7,919 followers, it follows 20 accounts and it has received 367 likes. The capabilities of the social platform allow readers to interact with the text, the author and other readers by replying to a tweet, retweeting a post, signaling a like to a tweet or by sending a message to the account owner. Though the retweet and like icons are the ones which have been used the most at @LamujerdeM, the reply icon has not been used by the readers.

An edited rendering of Edward Hooper’s painting *Summertime* (1943), gestures the relevance of the use of images and the topic of womanhood in @LamujerdeM. The picture portrays Hooper’s wife Jo, who was instrumental in the painter’s success as well as his only model for all women he painted.

Montiel’s interest in photography is also evident in the structure and development of the narrative. Tweets are grouped by date. Each tweet cluster consists of a photo with the phrase “Encontré esta imagen dentro de un antiguo álbum de fotografías. Ignoro cómo fue a dar ahí. Ignoro quién la tomó” (@LamujerdeM) and a series of tweets which are theme related. The related tweets are usually posted on the same date and they range in topic from the value of words, happiness, nostalgia, solitude, relationships and a strong sense of self among others. In general, they all relate to the idea of solitude as stated in @LamujerdeM: “La soledad es otra forma de compañía.”

This idea of solitude is developed throughout this piece and it is expressed from la mujer de M’s point of view. According to Montiel “en la cuenta de la historia de M, la historia está contada a manera de rompecabezas, no hay una linealidad, no cuento la historia de la manera típica, poco a poco voy pasando información importante al lector, para que este vaya deduciendo la continuidad de la historia y vaya desplegando la situación” (VASQUEZ, 2016).

As we can see, *La mujer de M* as a twitterature piece differs in a variety of ways from the publications analyzed before. The first person point of view used by Montiel introduces a critical issue. How does Montiel as a man write the feminine by expressing the feelings and thoughts of a woman? This issue is not new. According to Morgan in *Men Writing the Feminine* “men have been writing the feminine ever since men began writing; think of Plato’s Diotima and Ovid’s Sappho “(2). In 1976 the French feminist Hélène Cixous in her essay “The Laugh of the Medusa” asserted, “I write woman: woman must write woman. And man, man” (Cixous, Cohen, Keith and Cohen Paula, 877). Throughout *La mujer de M* Montiel explores not only the concept of “human isolation” but also the construction of a feminine voice which could “sound believable” to the reader” (Montiel 2014). In his own words “El hombre de tweed” and “La mujer de M are the masculine and feminine hemispheres within the same narrative world “(VASQUEZ, 2013). The calm and nostalgic tone of the novel portrays the pensive and thoughtful comments of a woman who invites the reader to ponder upon the beauty of reflection and introspection, a quality that has been overshadowed by the hectic pace of today’s society and the omnipresence of media. As stated earlier, each series of tweets starts with a visual image of a photograph the woman finds in an old photo album. That image generates memories from the past as well as a narrative that accentuates the woman’s message on the importance of introspection to discover ourselves and the world around us. Montiel’s *mujer de M* is strong, resilient but above all thoughtful. Montiel portrays womanhood in a poetic yet quite plausible fashion. Her message is powerful and influential. In each tweet and/or cluster of tweets, *la mujer de M* takes a strong stand on topics such as happiness, solitude, relationships and a strong sense of self among others as demonstrated in the following tweets:

Happiness

“Que error tan grave es pensar que nuestra felicidad siempre dependerá de los otros. Así se cancela la posibilidad de encontrar en nosotros mismos la capacidad de generar una luz propia que también deslumbre.” Mar. 16@LamujerdeM.

Childhood – Simplicity

“En la infancia estamos muy atentos a las cosas mínimas porque constituyen nuestro cosmos más inmediato. A medida que crecemos y maduramos nos vamos alejando de ellas y por tanto perdemos al niño que alguna vez fuimos.” March. 7 @LamujerdeM.

Calmness – Tranquility- Stillness

“Para conseguir la calma es indispensable suspender todo movimiento. Dejar de caminar a toda prisa hacia destinos definidos y deternos de golpe para comenzar a dirigirnos hacia ningún lugar.” February 20 @LamujerdeM.

Solitude

“Amar la soledad lleva tiempo. No es un afecto que brote con facilidad. He tardado en ver con cierto cariño la sombra de mis manos que ya han olvidado qué se siente tocar una piel que no sea la mía.” February 17 @LamujerdeM.

“En la soledad he cobrado conciencia de lo que significa ocupar un lugar en el mundo. Día tras día la concreción de mi cuerpo me recuerda que soy más que un puñado de pensamientos que relampaguean.” February 17@ LamujerdeM.

Relationships

“Si despertar con uno mismo es difícil, hacerlo con otra persona resulta doblemente complicado. Debemos reconfigurarnos primero ante nosotros y luego en relación con la persona que nos hace compañía.” February 5 @LamujerdeM.

Throughout @LamujerdeM Montiel has portrayed the figure of a contemplative and resilient woman whose voice incites readers to appraise a return to nature amidst all social and technological distractions of today. Above all, la mujer de M stands for a woman who is able to value herself for what she really is and the role she plays in today's society. She can be the voice that nurtures a return to value human nature in the midst of today's accelerated pace of technological development. To sum up, Montiel's projects of *La mujer de M* in its print format, as e-book and as twitterature have proven that there is still room for traditional as well as for non-traditional literary experiences as the ones represented by the third-generation e-lit discussed in this essay. *La mujer de M* has bridged that gap and I hope that more authors who write in Spanish follow a similar o a new innovative path which includes e-lit as part of their literary projects.

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