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# Genre, Gender, and Desire:

## Literary vs. Popular Fiction in *Book of Love* (2022)

Pop Lingua  
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# *Book of Love* (2022)

- Dir. by Analeine Cal y Mayor
- A rom-com about a lackluster British author and his Mexican translator, who rewrites his debut into a steamy romance
- Her "translation" becomes an instant hit in Mexico
- Topics: the relationship between literary and popular fiction, romance, agency, translation, and authorship



Sam Claflin and Verónica Echegui  
as Henry and María

# Ken Gelder's *Popular Fiction: The Logics and Practices of a Literary Field* (2005)

| Literary fiction   | Popular fiction  |
|--|--|
| Created by <b>authors</b>  | Written by <b>writers</b>                                |
| Elevated style:<br>originality, linguistic and stylistic ingenuity | Formulaic:<br>craft and the genre know-how               |
| Requires time and effort   | Writers publish several novels a year                    |
| Readers expected to read<br>“slowly and carefully”                 | Readers consume texts quickly<br>and seek similar titles |
| Free from mass audience expectations                               | Shaped by reader and market expectations                 |
| Rarely requires sequels  | Serialization and sequels are common                     |
| No promotional activities  | Reader engagement is essential                           |

# Henry Copper as a Literary Author



- Spends “five years of writing, rewriting, waiting for the right phrase”
- Avoids sensuous language and explicit sexual content
- Expects readers to appreciate symbolism and non-generic storytelling
- Rejects promotional activities: “I’m a writer”
- Sees María’s interventions as degrading literary quality of his artistic creation

# María Rodríguez as a Popular Fiction Writer

- “Spices up” Henry’s text according to romance expectations
- Demonstrates deep knowledge of the genre
- Understands audience and (Mexican) market expectations
- Expresses creativity within genre boundaries
- Helps Henry write a sequel under a short deadline



# Romance, Gender, and Agency

- Janice Radway: reading romance as a feminist act of agency
- María writes romance while balancing motherhood, caregiving, and work
- Writing helps her reclaim time and identity
- Romance writing as a form of self-expression rather than escapism
- María eventually becomes an independent published author

# Translation and Authorship

- Should translators be considered authors?
- María transforms Henry's book beyond conventional translation practices
- Her work remains unrecognized despite shaping the successful text
- Translators are often invisible and undercredited
- Boundaries between translators, co-authors, and authors

# Conclusion

- *Book of Love* presents romance as multilayered and academically valuable
- María's story demonstrates agency, recognition, and self-expression
- Popular fiction requires dedication, expertise, and genre knowledge
- It deserves greater recognition beyond entertainment