

# The (in)visibility of women in the press specializing in literature: an analysis of the presence of women writers in Spanish cultural supplements

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Recommended citation:

García-Borrego, Manuel; Gómez-Calderón, Bernardo; García-Cardona, Juan (2022). "The (in)visibility of women in the press specializing in literature: an analysis of the presence of women writers in Spanish cultural supplements". *Profesional de la información*, v. 31, n. 3, e310319.

<https://doi.org/10.3145/epi.2022.may.19>

Article received on February 24<sup>th</sup> 2022

Approved on April 04<sup>th</sup> 2022



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## Abstract

This paper aims to dissect the presence of female writers in the main four cultural supplements of Spanish reference press: *Babelia* (*El país*), *Cultura/s* (*La vanguardia*), *El cultural* (*El mundo*) and *ABC cultural* (*ABC*). For this, we analyzed the "books of the year" recommended between 2010 and 2021 ( $n = 1,286$ ), as well as the juries in charge of elaborating these ranks. The results show the subsidiary role reserved for women in this sphere of cultural information: they barely author 25.3% of the selected books, although some degree of progress is observed in the historical series, after going from 4.8% in 2011 to 37.8% in 2020. The increase in the presence of women in the juries has contributed to this phenomenon –the correlation between ratio of women in both lists being statistically significant ( $r_s = 0.647$ ,  $p < 0.001$ )–, together with the commitment of supplement such as *Babelia* and *Cultura/s* to literature written by women. On the contrary, there still seem to be pockets of exclusion in *El cultural* and *ABC cultural*, which reduce the visibility of work of female writers in Spain. According to our findings, women authors stand out for their youth (they are between 8 and 20 years younger than men, depending on the indicator), cosmopolitanism (there are more foreign female writers, especially American, than Spanish) and origin (mainly, Madrid and Barcelona). This article evinces the collective imaginary, settled for centuries, by which literature was considered a men's affair, and reflects on the role of cultural journalism and its prescriptive function when it comes to breaking down gender stereotype –a task that, in view of the data provided in this paper, is still far from been completed.

## Keywords

Journalism; Cultural journalism; Literature; Gender studies; Women; Culture; Feminism; Gender gap; Writing; Media; Reading; Writers; Spain.

**Funding**

The translation of this article has been financed with funds from the *Department of Journalism of the University of Malaga*

**1. Introduction**

Since its appearance as a vehicle for mass communication, the press has contributed to cementing the prestige of many writers through the exercise of criticism (Vallejo, 1993; Armañanzas; Díaz-Noci, 1997). Although in theory this is an impartial task, unrelated to personal considerations, there are several dysfunctions attributed to this genre, including, but not limited to, cronyism, elitist discourse, submission to the dictates of the industry, etc. (Carrasco-García; García-Borrego, 2020). There have also been accusations, from certain fields, of authors being treated differently according to their gender, always to the detriment of women (Freixas, 2000; 2003; Obligado, 2003; Castellanos, 2005).

This research aims, through an analysis of the “books of the year” lists published by the cultural supplements of the reference press, to determine the relevance that specialized journalistic criticism gives to women writers in Spain, with the ultimate objective of clarifying whether, in fact, they suffer discrimination when compared with the male group.

**1.2. The prescriptive role of cultural journalism**

Cultural journalism is distinguished from other areas of specialization by playing a dual role: on the one hand informative, and on the other prescriptive. The huge volume of innovations generated by the cultural industries requires the intervention of a specialist whose expert criteria can help the audience discriminate those creations that deserve real attention (Rodríguez-Pastoriza, 2006; Garbisu; Blanco, 2019).

As part of this orientation task, the cultural journalist must strive to enhance the comprehension of the full meaning of the works on which they report. This is what is called, especially in foreign literature, “cultural intermediation” (Bourdieu, 1991; Moreno, 1994; Barei, 1999; Janssen; Verboord, 2015). In this area, the professional, in their classic role of gatekeeper, selects, hierarchizes, prescribes, and helps to enhance the judgment of readers, thereby finally influencing the cultural agenda (Tubau, 1982; Rivera, 1995; Garbisu; Blanco, 2019). The prescriptive role is exercised principally through the means of criticism, and in the field of literature studied herein, cultural supplements are usually the medium through which this is concentrated. This is there

“where books and their authors find the best and most specialized stage to become well known” [“*donde los libros y sus autores encuentran su mejor y más especializado territorio para darse a conocer*”] (Rodríguez-Pastoriza, 2006, p. 33).

After having gone through an expansive period at the end of the twentieth century (Montero, 2005), the situation today is less hopeful because of two convergent crises hovering around the large supplements, which jeopardize their dominant position: closures and staff reductions in recent years, and the strength of and competition from new Internet narratives compared with traditional formats (Garbisu; Blanco, 2019, p. 29; Carrasco-Molina; García-Borrego, 2020)

Within the framework of this research, studies that have analyzed literary criticism on the basis of the identity and attributes of the authors reviewed are of interest. In this regard, Muñoz-Fernández (2017) addressed the case of *Babelia*, published by *El país*, noting this supplement’s preference for works from publishers belonging at the time to its parent company *Prisa* (*Alfaguara*, *Taurus*, *Punto de Lectura*, etc.), and the preferential treatment, in terms of both praise and space, given to in-house writers, such as Javier Marías, Arturo Pérez-Reverte, Antonio Muñoz Molina, Almudena Grandes, and Juan José Millás. It is concluded that “the power flows of the large publishing industry” [“*los flujos de poder de la gran industria editorial*”] are very evident in *Babelia* (Muñoz-Fernández, 2017, p. 298). Another recent work (García-Borrego; García-Cardona, 2021) focuses on the origin of the writers most valued by the main cultural supplements, calling attention to the predominance of the Madrid–Barcelona axis compared with other geographical focuses. However, there is hardly any work on the issue of gender.

**1.2. Literature and women**

The place occupied by women in the field of literary creation constitutes a conquered (though incomplete) space, after centuries of discrimination (López-Cabrales, 2000) and severe conflict with a patriarchal tradition that has singlehandedly tried to keep the female collective imprisoned in the private sphere (Lozano, 2017). During the Modern and much of the Contemporary Age, the practice of literature by women, when it was achieved, was often underestimated by the masculine class and interpreted not only as a betrayal of their natural reproductive role, but also as a renunciation of femininity (Héléudt, 2018). Contempt for women’s literary ability has been commonplace in Western culture “since Juvenal in the first century AD until André Gide, Witold Gombrowicz, or Roberto Arlt” [“*desde Ju-*

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venal en el siglo I d. C hasta André Gide, Witold Gombrowicz o Roberto Arlt”] in contemporary times, through Molière, Quevedo, or Croce (Freixas, 2000, pp. 87, 229). Undoubtedly, the wages of women writers were meager until well into the nineteenth century, although the reason has little to do with the supposed quality of the work itself. As Woolf (2016) stated, the lack of “a room of their own,” that is, economic independence and access to culture, has traditionally hindered the possibilities of women to devote themselves fully to writing. Moreover, once finally able to enter the world of creation, the path is not free of pitfalls, because women have to compete in a world of men and are forced to

“deal with the literary, social, and political guidelines established by that dominant group” [“lidiar con las pautas literarias, sociales y políticas establecidas por ese grupo dominante”] (Martín-Gaite, 1987, p. 31).

For Blanco and Williams (2017), literature written by women has been forgotten and ignored for years because it reflected stories that could hardly be published because of scarce interest from publishers.

Even so, after centuries of discrimination, the profession of the woman writer is now readily accepted, though there are still many fields in which women are clearly sidelined. One of these, related to the rankings addressed in this article, is that of the literary canon, whose nature is clearly masculine (Grandes, 2003) as a result of secular prejudices (Arambel, 2001). This canon, written by men, has discriminated against women through silence and oblivion (García-Jaramillo, 2019; Sánchez-Martínez, 2019). In fact, Bloom’s well-known “Western canon” (1995) only accepts four women writers (Jane Austen, Emily Dickinson, George Eliot, and Virginia Woolf) compared with 22 men writers. In Spain, women writers were decisively excluded from the literary canon in the post-war period (Nueva, p. 2004), and it was only in the 1970s that their inclusion began (Ruiz-Guerrero, 1996; Castro, 2002). As a result of this silencing, women are on the periphery of compulsory education teaching programs. Recent studies (López-Navajas, 2014; Sánchez-Martínez, 2019) reveal that only 7.5–12% of the works included in literature in school grades 10–12 were by women writers, an undeniably low rate.

Nor does the women’s collective have a prominent presence in cultural institutions. The first woman to enter the *Real Academia Española* (RAE) was Carmen Conde, and only in 1979. After her, ten more women have been incorporated<sup>1</sup>, but in the global historical calculation, women represent just 11 out of 486 members, and today women account for 7 out of the 40 academics. In its 309 years of existence, the RAE has never had a female director. In short, (at least partial) invisibility seems to be one of the characteristics of women who write.

Another, more subtle obstacle that has been highlighted by various studies is the discriminatory attitude with which some of the criticism, written by men in the vast majority of cases (Freixas, 2003), regards women’s writing<sup>2</sup>, as well as the derogatory association of women’s literature with nonfiction genres by those who use this to point toward women’s creative incapacity (Freixas, 2013; Usoz-de-la-Fuente, 2017). In fact, for Huertas (2003, p. 192), the problem of women’s literature in Spain does not lie in whether it is published or not –it is obvious that it is, “because it sells” [“porque vende”]– but in the differentiated treatment it receives once published compared with works written by men. This treatment, supported by the simplifying and condescending focus on “the feminine,” clearly conditions and limits the scope of women’s writing (Obligado, 2003).

In one of the few quantitative approaches to this problem, Freixas (2003) analyzes reviews from five national newspapers and four specialized magazines, and concludes that the adjective “feminine” applied to literature is always identified with unequivocally pejorative terms such as “feminist,” “intimate,” “commercial,” or “personal,” as opposed to “universal.” The axiom seems to be that a female work, that is, of women or for women, “is bad”; and the opposite finding, which is also reached at times, does not in any case serve to dismantle this fallacy, but is rather considered the exception that confirms the rule (Freixas, 2003, p. 103).

Beyond the convenience of updating and systematizing the evidence that supports all these considerations, the truth is that they refer, without doubt, to a historically unequal inclination on the part of the cultural press.

### 1.3. Women and the publishing market in Spain

Women began to enter the publishing market in Spain in the 1970s, albeit timidly. Then, in the 1990s, the boom of “women’s literature” arrived (Caballero, 2003, p. 109), a phenomenon often referred to as a simple marketing strategy (Hélédut, 2018) and supported by an intense advertising campaign that sought to maximize sales (Castro, 2002).

Obligado (2003, p. 87) states that the market imposes on women

“an easy-to-digest literature, superfluous to the female condition, plagued by good feelings, eroticism, or scandal” [“una literatura fácil y digestiva, redundante de la condición femenina, plagada de buenos sentimientos, de erotismo o de escándalo”].

She is not the only one to find the field to be too restricted for women writers, whose creativity is constrained by the imposition of the publishing industry on genres such as “highly lyrical” [“muy, muy lírica”] poetry, autobiographical novels, diaries, or children’s literature (Grandes, 2003, p. 61).

“ The aim of this study is to clarify whether literature written by women receives discriminatory treatment by specialized reviewers ”

Despite all these limitations, women's literature has gained ground in the twenty-first century. Two decades ago, **Freixas** (2000) estimated that it represented 20% of the total works published in Spain<sup>3</sup>. Today, this fraction, measured by official data, has clearly progressed. The latest statistics from the Spanish *Ministry of Culture*, corresponding to the 2020 fiscal year, indicated that 38.5% of all titles published by a single author were written by women writers. This fraction has seemed to grow steadily since the historical series began in 2017 (*Ministry of Culture*, 2021a), as demonstrated in Table 1.

Table 1. Works registered in the ISBN by men and women since the beginning of the historical series (2017–2020)

	2017	2018	2019	2020
Women	33.2%	34.2%	37.3%	38.5%
Men	60.0%	65.3%	62.2%	61.1%
Not classified	6.8%	0.5%	0.5%	0.3%

Source: *Statistics of the Spanish edition of books with ISBN 2020* (Spanish Ministry of Culture, 2021a).

The inequality, in any case, is clear. The breakdown by gender shows differences that help to better define the influence of each group when focusing on narrative works, which is the most common reference field from the rankings of cultural supplements. In the strictly literary field, just over one-third of titles are written by women (35.5%), a fraction that increases if one includes children's and young adult books, which are usually included in the field of fiction and where female authorship is in the majority. Doing this, this percentage increases to 41.2% of all works registered in the ISBN.

Other cultural indicators also reflect a clear situation of inequality, although again tending towards convergence in recent years. For example, in 2020, 36.5% of the first intellectual property rights registrations for book authorship were made by women; a decade earlier, in 2010, this fraction stood at 29.7%. In the field of literary works, this percentage increased during the mentioned period from 34.6% to 41.3% (*Ministry of Culture*, 2021b).

On the other hand, it is women who maintain reading rates that are clearly higher than those demonstrated by men, a phenomenon observed for decades in both studies prepared by the public administration (**Gil-Calvo**, 1993) as well as reports from the private sector (*SGAE*, 2000). The *Cultural habits and practices survey* (*Ministry of Culture*, 2011; 2015; 2019) also reflects this, and even more strongly in its most recent rounds (Table 2). The most recent measurement of the *Federación de Gremios de Editores de España* (2021) coincides with this diagnosis, although clarifying that this phenomenon still occurs to a lesser extent than in other places, for example, English-speaking countries.

Table 2. Fraction of people who read books in the last year (2010–2019)

	2010-2011		2014-2015		2018-2019	
	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men
For work or study	24.5%	30.3%	27.3%	30.9%	31.9%	35.1%
For other reasons	57.2%	47.2%	62.3%	49.4%	65.1%	53.5%
Total	61.2%	56.0%	66.5%	57.6%	69.4%	62.0%

Source: *Cultural habits and practices survey* (*Ministry of Culture*, 2011; 2015; 2019)

The conclusion is that women produce fewer books but consume them to a greater extent than men, partly because they attach a greater importance to reading. On a scale from 1 to 10, women scored an average of 6.9, compared with 6.0 from men. However, regarding the type of works read, the differences are less obvious, except in the categories of romantic novels (read by 20.1% of women versus 2.9% of men), science fiction novels (15.9% of men, 9.4% of women), and historical works (13.8% of men, 8.7% of women). Some features are thus distinctive, but not so marked as to depict wholly opposing reader profiles, and even more so if one takes into account that the ministry's survey, taken here as a reference, examines 13 categories of fiction as well as nonfiction, in most of which the percentages are similar. Likewise, and related to the aim of this study, it is striking that women are also the greatest readers of the cultural supplements of Spanish newspapers (*AIMC*, 2021), although their number is declining year on year. In relation to the publishing market, sales figures are a matter of importance. At the time of the boom in women's literature, there was the idea that books written by women obtained greater commercial success. However, this myth was already refuted two decades ago by **Freixas** (2000, pp. 33-35), who considered it to be a manipulation by the media, who still saw women writers as a novelty worthy of being highlighted and receiving greater visibility than their male counterparts. Today, the landscape may have changed. In Spain in 2021, women were the authors of 51% of the total number of copies sold, considering the 50 most popular titles (**Manrique-Sabogal**, 2021).

Finally, one should mention one aspect of the book industry that is noticeably prejudiced in terms of the aforementioned biases against women writers: literary awards. According to data from the *Observatori Cultural de Gènere*, in Spain only 20% of awards are given to women, who approach parity only in the category of narratives for children and young adults (**Gómez**, 2018). Even so, there is a common argument that women usually receive the most commercial awards in order to stimulate sales, while the prestigious prizes for criticism go to men (**Obligado**, 2003). However, the truth is that, if you look at the list of winners of the most important prizes, there is no trace of such a dichotomy and indeed a clear male predominance reigns. This is the case of the *Cervantes Prize* (41 men versus 6 women<sup>4</sup>), *National Narrative Prize* (8 women in 98 years), *National Prize for Spanish Literature* (6 women in 37 editions), *Critique Prize* for narrative works (59

men and 5 women), *Planeta Prize* (18 women in 70 editions), and *Nadal Prize* (18 women winners in 78 years). None of these figures allows us to conclude that literary awards, whatever their nature, are preferably endowed on women; on the contrary, they reinforce the unequal profile of the Spanish book industry. In the international arena, it is enough to consider the *Nobel Prize in Literature*, which has been awarded to 16 women as opposed to 102 men.

## 2. Aims

Given the state of this issue, the broad objective of this study (O1) was to analyze the presence of women in the rankings of the Spanish national press cultural supplements, considering both the authorship of the selected works and the composition of the juries in charge of choosing them. This was intended to clarify whether literature written by women receives discriminatory treatment by specialized reviewers, and the extent to which this hypothetical difference may be conditioned by inequalities in the configuration of the juries, which are usually formed by experts from the humanities, from cultural journalists to writers.

In addition, three secondary objectives were established. The first was to evaluate the existence of differences between the selected titles, trying to establish whether there are different levels of female visibility (O2); the second, to describe how the attention paid to women by literary critics has evolved in Spain over the last decade, if at all (O3); and the third, to outline the profile of the women writers highlighted by the literary supplements, paying attention to factors such as age, nationality, or region of origin (O4).

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1. Research design

This research was carried out using the content analysis technique, which offers high reliability for the thorough study of journalistic messages (cf. **Krippendorff**, 1990; **Neuendorf**, 2002; **Igartua**, 2006), taking as a study population the main cultural supplements published in Spain according to official distribution figures (*OJD*, 2021): *Babelia*, published by the newspaper *El país*; *Cultura/s*, from *La Vanguardia*; *ABC cultural*, from *ABC*; and *El cultural*, from *El mundo*<sup>5</sup>. The sample was made up of the issues that typically highlight, in a balanced way, the most relevant works of the last 12 months, or the “books of the year.” All of them, usually published in December, were retrieved from the media’s own digital newspapers, from external repositories such as MyNews, or from the physical library archives of the authors’ offices. To provide a certain diachronic perspective, a study period of just over a decade, covering 2010-2021, was chosen.

In total, 44 examples from the sample period were analyzed<sup>6</sup>. Titles of works and names of the jurors that appeared were extracted for analysis.

### 3.2. Data analysis

In the absence of quantitative precedents for this type of research, the analysis sheet that was applied to the books recommended in each supplement was prepared ad hoc after reviewing the topic to identify the most relevant parameters and discussion with experts from the publishing sector and gender studies. It included the following variables:

- Name of the supplement. Measured as a nominal variable (four possible values: *Babelia*, *Cultura/s*, *ABC cultural*, *El mundo*).
- Year of publication of the supplement. Measured as an ordinal variable (12 values between 2010 and 2021).
- Position of the work in the ranking. Measured as an ordinal variable (50 values between 1 and 50).
- Author’s gender. Measured as a nominal variable based on the gender of the author(s) of the work (Man/Woman/Mixed<sup>7</sup>).
- Nationality of the author. Measured as multiple nominal variables according to the nationality or nationalities available for each author (each value representing a country, added ad hoc as they appeared in the list).
- Author’s region of birth. Measured as a nominal variable according to the region in which the author was born (19 values, one for each of the Spanish autonomous regions or cities). Applicable only to writers of Spanish nationality.
- Age of the author. Measured on a scale according to the author’s age at the end of the year in which their work was mentioned.
- Author’s year of birth. Measured as an ordinal variable (10 values when using 10-year periods, or 4 values when using 25-year periods).

An ad hoc sheet was also applied to the jury members, consisting of three items: name of the supplement, year of publication (identical values to the sheet designed for the books), and gender of the jury member (in this case, the values were reduced to Male/Female).

Once all the data had been collected, they were analyzed using *Microsoft Excel* to obtain descriptive statistics and *SPSS* for inference analysis.

### 3.3. The sample

After collating the selected examples, a total of 1286 titles were obtained for analysis, distributed as shown in Table 3 (where the value 0 corresponds to rounds of the ranking that were not published or could not be located).

Table 3. Number of books analyzed per supplement and year (2010–2021)

	<i>Babelia</i>	<i>Cultura's</i>	<i>El cultural</i>	<i>ABC cultural</i>	Total	%
2010	29	0	25	0	54	4.2%
2011	25	0	25	12	62	4.8%
2012	20	30	30	13	93	7.2%
2013	20	30	25	13	88	6.8%
2014	20	20	30	13	83	6.5%
2015	20	30	47	0	97	7.5%
2016	20	30	45	25	120	9.3%
2017	20	30	45	23	118	9.2%
2018	50	30	35	22	137	10.7%
2019	50	45	45	6	146	11.4%
2020	50	30	50	5	135	10.5%
2021	50	30	50	23	153	11.9%
Total	374	305	452	155	<b>1,286</b>	
%	29.1%	23.7%	35.1%	12.1%		

The members of the jury reached a total of 1049 (Table 4). In this analysis, ten of the analyzed rounds did not identify the members of the jury that prepared the rankings, an effect found especially for *Babelia* and *El cultural*.

Table 4. Number of jury members per supplement and year (2010–2021)

	<i>Babelia</i>	<i>Cultura's</i>	<i>El cultural</i>	<i>ABC cultural</i>	Total	%
2010	55	0	0	0	55	5.2%
2011	57	0	0	12	69	6.6%
2012	0	2	0	13	15	1.4%
2013	0	15	0	13	28	2.7%
2014	0	1	55	13	69	6.6%
2015	0	28	53	0	81	7.7%
2016	43	17	53	3	116	11.1%
2017	50	21	49	21	141	13.4%
2018	40	28	29	22	119	11.3%
2019	0	14	26	0	40	3.8%
2020	100	22	27	22	171	16.3%
2021	75	21	26	23	145	13.8%
Total	420	169	318	142	<b>1,049</b>	
%	40.0%	16.1%	30.3%	13.5%		

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Women in the rankings and in juries of the cultural supplements

Overall, the data for female representation reflect a clear inequality, with only 25.3% of the works featured over the past 12 years being written by women (Table 5). However, this proportion varied according to the supplement considered; thus, *Babelia* reached 33.4%, while *ABC cultural* remained at 14.2%. Parity, understood as the presence of at least 40% of women in the lists, was only recorded in nine rounds (20.4% of the total)<sup>8</sup>.

This historical perspective allows us to draw a clear dividing line in 2015. In the *Babelia* ranking from that year, 60% of the selected authors were women, while in *Cultura's* this fraction was 30%, and 25.5% in *El cultural* (while this percentage had never surpassed 16% previously). Since that date, the global sum of works by women has always been around a third of those selected, with certain supplements tending to increase equity but others less so (*ABC cultural* and, especially, *El cultural*). *Babelia* was the only publication for which at least 50% of the rankings reached parity (the rest averaging 9.3%, with *El cultural* stuck at 0%), and reaching 50% in a quarter (of the other supplements, only *ABC cultural* does so, and only on one occasion). However, it should be highlighted that in some years the majority of women writers are concentrated in the least prominent positions in the classification, at number 30 or below. This is the case, for example, in 2016, so this equality is more apparent than real.

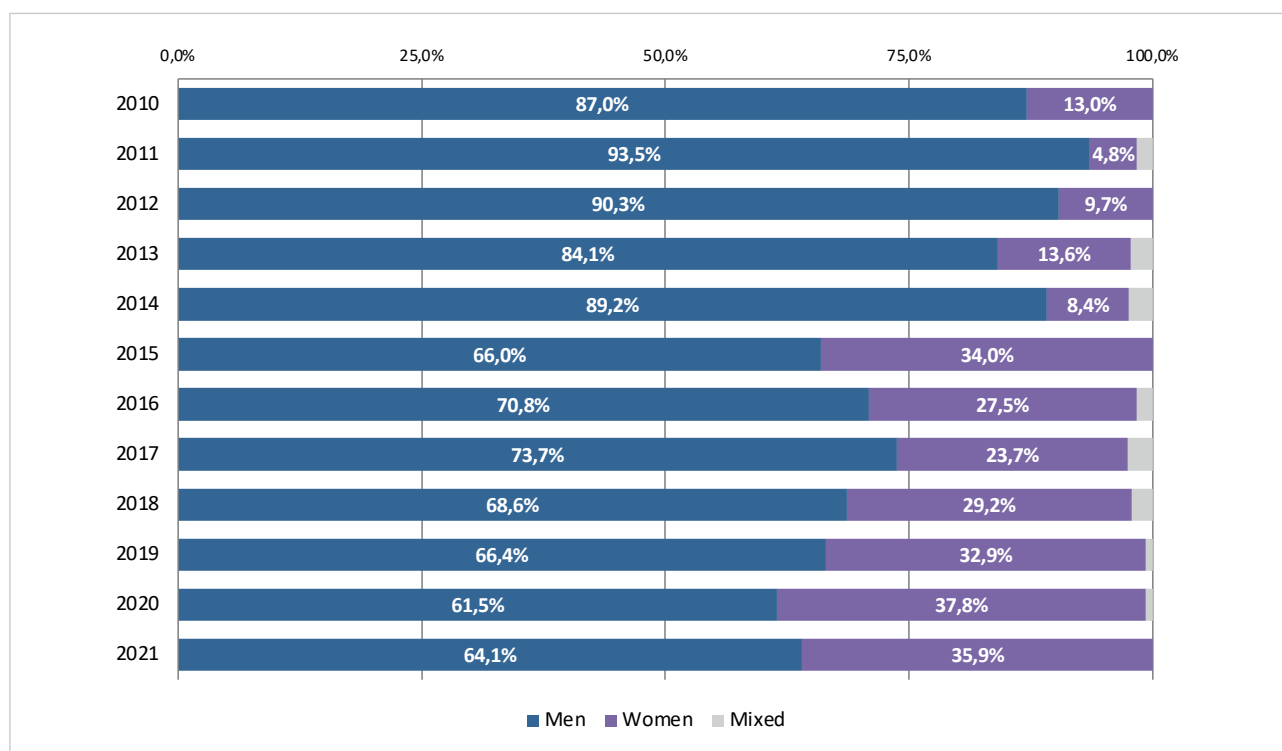
Table 5. Proportion of works written by women by supplement and year (2010–2021)

	<i>Babelia</i>	<i>Cultura/s</i>	<i>El cultural</i>	<i>ABC cultural</i>	Total
2010	10.3%	-	16.0%	-	13.0%
2011	0.0%	-	8.0%	8.3%	4.8%
2012	10.0%	16.7%	3.3%	7.7%	9.7%
2013	15.0%	16.7%	16.0%	0.0%	13.6%
2014	15.0%	15.0%	3.3%	0.0%	8.4%
2015	60.0%	30.0%	25.5%	-	34.0%
2016	50.0%	30.0%	20.0%	20.0%	27.5%
2017	20.0%	33.3%	22.2%	17.4%	23.7%
2018	42.0%	36.7%	11.4%	18.2%	29.2%
2019	40.0%	33.3%	22.2%	50.0%	32.9%
2020	50.0%	36.7%	26.0%	40.0%	37.8%
2021	44.0%	40.0%	38.0%	8.7%	35.9%
Total	33.4%	29.5%	19.7%	14.2%	25.3%
40% or more	50.0%	10.0%	0.0%	20.0%	20.5%
50% or more	25.0%	0.0%	0.0%	10.0%	9.1%

The overall percentages (Graph 1) have also tended toward convergence between 2010 (87.0% of men compared with 13.0% of women) and 2021 (64.1% versus 35.9%), with a significant jump, as already mentioned, in 2015, although the female collective continues to occupy a secondary position.

There is a clear dividing line in 2015, in which three supplements, *Babelia*, *Cultura/s*, and *El cultural*, ostensibly increased the number of women selected

The indices for jurors have also evolved (Table 6). While between 2010 and 2015 women made up no more than 20%, from 2016 their numbers increased, mainly driven by *Babelia*'s figures, which tend toward parity, while the other supplements (especially *Cultura/s*) also show higher values as the decade progresses, albeit with fluctuations. The global average, however, stands at 28.6%, and only 16.7% of the editions analyzed include at least 40% women among their specialists. It is true that, in the last two years, women have risen to represent more than a third of the members, but in short, male dominance is still evident.



Graph 1. Authorship of selected works by genre (2010-2021)

Table 6. Proportion of women jurors per supplement and year (2010-2021)

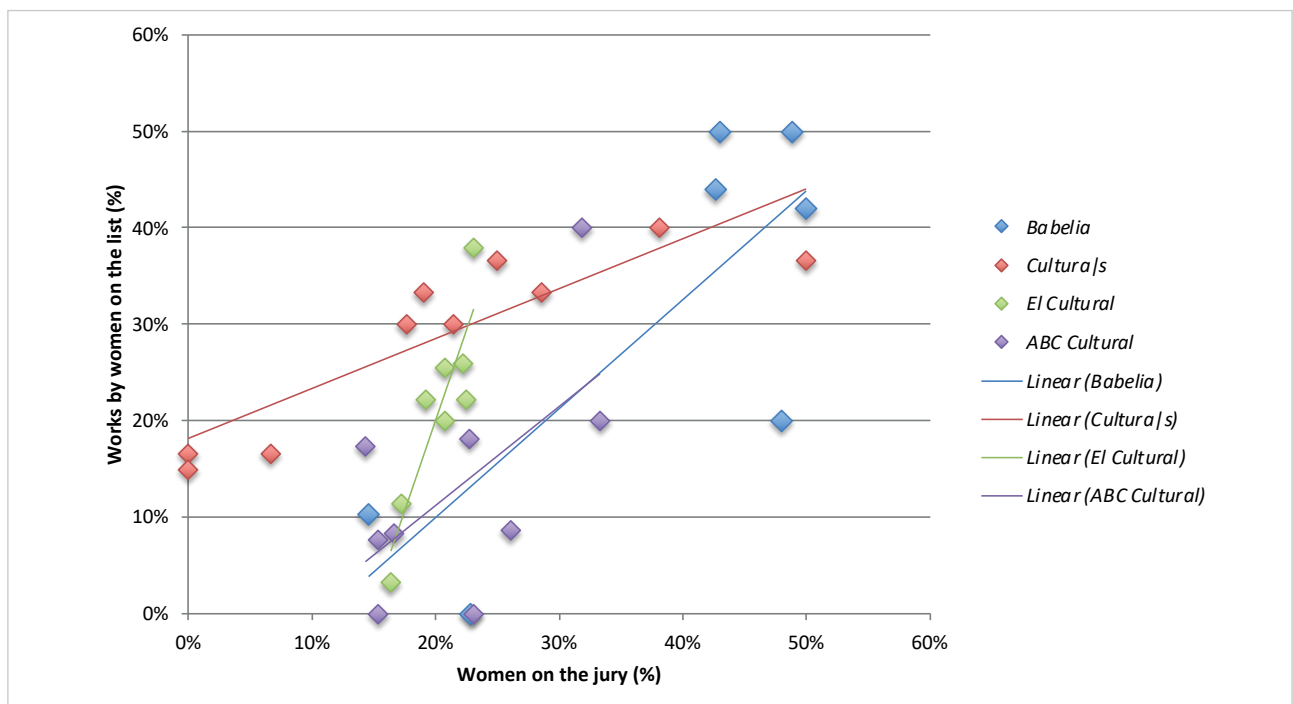
	<i>Babelia</i>	<i>Cultura s</i>	<i>El cultural</i>	<i>ABC cultural</i>	Total
2010	14.5%				14.5%
2011	22.8%			16.7%	21.7%
2012		0.0%		15.4%	13.3%
2013		6.7%		15.4%	10.7%
2014		0.0%	16.4%	23.1%	17.4%
2015		21.4%	20.8%		21.0%
2016	48.8%	17.6%	20.8%	33.3%	31.0%
2017	48.0%	19.0%	22.4%	14.3%	29.8%
2018	50.0%	25.0%	17.2%	22.7%	31.1%
2019		28.6%	19.2%		22.5%
2020	43.0%	50.0%	22.2%	31.8%	39.2%
2021	42.7%	38.1%	23.1%	26.1%	35.9%
Total	38.3%	26.0%	20.1%	21.8%	28.6%
40% or more	57.1%	10.0%	0.0%	0.0%	16.7%
50% or more	14.3%	10.0%	0.0%	0.0%	6.7%

This issue is relevant because the bivariate analysis reveals that the composition of the jury shows a statistically significant correlation with the number of women’s works in the rankings. The application of Spearman’s rho statistic (the most suitable for small samples) to the 34 editions in which the lists of both books and jury members are published in full reveals that, the more women responsible for selecting the titles, the greater the presence of women authors in the listings ( $r_s = 0.647, p < 0.001$ ). This correlation is best seen in Graph 2.

**4.2. Positions achieved by women writers**

A second indicator of the importance given to women writers in the rankings is the positions that their books occupy in the rankings themselves. This is not easy to determine since the way of presenting the selected works is very diverse. *Babelia* prepares a unique list, *Cultura|s* and *El cultural* classify them by genres, while *ABC cultural* refrains from ordering them. Even so, in three of them, there is always at least one notable title, on the basis of which this comparison can be made (Table 7)<sup>9</sup>.

The supplement of *La vanguardia* is the only one that yields balanced proportions; since 2010 it has highlighted 20 books of female authorship out of a total of 44 selected. The others exhibit very pronounced gaps, with 46 works written



Graph 2. Percentage of women on juries and among the authors of the selected works



by men out of 51 in the case of *El cultural*, and 10 out of 12 in *Babelia*. Overall, the balance is overwhelmingly male, with 82 titles out of 110.

The lists of highlighted authors present some similarities, but mostly differences:

- in *El cultural*, Isabel Burdiel (2010), Clara Janés (2013), Marta Sanz (2015), Sara Mesa (2020), and Louise Glück (2020);
- in *Babelia*, Lucia Berlin (2016) and Sara Mesa (2020); and
- in *Cultura|s*, Dolores Redondo (2013), Milena Busquets and Svetlana Alexievich (2015), Angelika Schrobsdorff and Alíca Kopf (2016), Mercè Rodoreda, Jane Harper, and Vivian Gornick (2017), Marina Garcés, Eva Baltasar, and Fred Vargas (2018), Irene Solà, Mariana Enríquez, María Sánchez, and Olga Tokarczuk (2019), Elia Barceló and Sara Mesa, (2020), and Maggie O'Farrell, Núria Bendicho, and Marta Sanz (2021).

In summary, the majority of women writers are Spanish (with a Catalan predominance due to the effect of *La vanguardia*) with a few essayists (only two). There is also hardly a trace of award-winning women writers, apart from the winners of the Nobel Prize in Literature (Alexievich, Tokarczuk, and Glück).

The case of *Babelia* deserves separate mention. As it is the only supplement that offers a unique numbered classification, it allows for better identification of the position of women's works during the entire period analyzed. In fact, its distributions well reflect the inflection observed in the middle of the last decade. Although only two women are distinguished as author of the year, a woman writer has always been placed second when first place was occupied by a man since 2015: Marta Sanz (2015 and 2017), Mary Beard (2018), Olga Tokarczuk (2019), and Maggie O'Farrell (2021). In 2015, *Cultura|s* also began to give greater importance to literature written by women, placing it systematically at the top of its classifications.

### 4.3. Profile of the women writers included in the rankings

Finally, the profile of the prominent women authors presents some distinctive features compared with the male authors. The first variable considered in the analysis (nationality) shows how, while the majority of the men selected are Spanish (54.2%), the majority of the women come from abroad (60.7%). The USA acts, in this case, as the reference literary market, providing 21.2% of the works by women included in the rankings (versus 13.0% in the case of works by men). Indeed, overall, *Babelia* chooses more American than Spanish authors (Table 8).

Table 8. Countries of origin of the authors included in the rankings distributed by gender (2010-2021)

	<i>Babelia</i>		<i>Cultura s</i>		<i>El cultural</i>		<i>ABC cultural</i>		Total	
	M	W	M	W	M	W	M	W	M	W
Spain	43.4%	24.8%	54.2%	50.0%	64.4%	50.6%	45.7%	31.8%	54.0%	39.3%
USA	15.6%	28.8%	11.8%	17.8%	9.4%	14.6%	20.2%	18.2%	13.0%	21.2%
UK	10.2%	3.2%	6.6%	5.6%	9.2%	7.9%	7.0%	4.5%	8.6%	5.2%
France	8.2%	9.6%	7.1%	6.7%	4.4%	7.9%	5.4%	4.5%	6.1%	8.0%
Argentina	5.3%	8.0%	4.2%	4.4%	2.8%	2.2%	1.6%	13.6%	3.6%	5.8%
Other countries	17.2%	25.6%	16.0%	15.6%	9.7%	16.9%	20.2%	27.3%	14.5%	20.6%

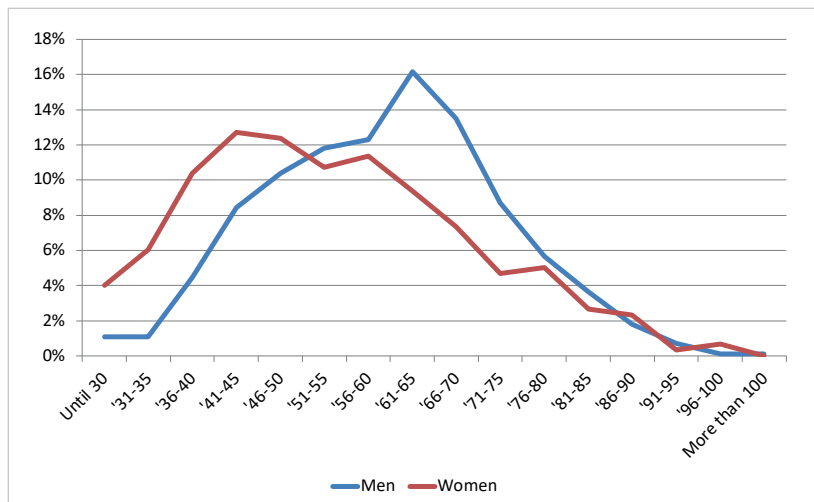
The distribution by autonomous community also allows differentiating patterns to be established, and while the male writers come from a varied range of backgrounds, the women tend to show more similarities (Table 9). Catalonia and the Community of Madrid, which are the centers of publishing activity in Spain, are also the regions of origin of the majority of the highlighted women writers, with two out of three (65.4%) women writers coming from either Catalonia or Madrid, while in the case of men, this percentage is lower (41.6%). Together with Andalusia and the Basque Country, the other two autonomous communities that contribute the most names, the other autonomous communities and cities only provide 13.9% of the women authors, compared with 41.6% of the men authors.

Table 9. Autonomous community of origin of the authors included in the rankings distributed by gender (2010-2021)

	<i>Babelia</i>		<i>Cultura s</i>		<i>El cultural</i>		<i>ABC cultural</i>		Total	
	M	W	M	W	M	W	M	W	M	W
Catalonia	17.9%	32.3%	52.2%	62.2%	15.5%	22.2%	15.3%	28.6%	24.2%	39.1%
Com. of Madrid	20.8%	29.0%	11.3%	15.6%	15.9%	37.8%	23.7%	0.0%	17.4%	26.4%
Andalusia	6.6%	12.9%	3.5%	6.7%	13.8%	24.4%	5.1%	28.6%	9.3%	16.0%
Basque Country	5.7%	6.5%	4.3%	4.4%	7.8%	2.2%	13.6%	14.3%	7.5%	4.6%
Other regions	49.1%	19.4%	28.7%	11.1%	47.0%	13.3%	42.4%	28.6%	41.6%	13.9%

Finally, age is also a variable that acts differently depending on gender. The selected men writers are on average in their sixties, while the women writers do not exceed 54.3 years, without significant variations between supplements. A similar effect is observed for the mode of the distribution, which is 61 years for men and 53 years for women. This is despite the fact that, for the deceased men writers (who exceeded the deceased women writers by 27.5%), this item was not computed, which would increase this gap further.

The differences between blocks become clearer in the distribution by age group (Graph 3). Here we find that the largest group of women included in the rankings is between 41 and 45 years old, while in men, the largest group recorded is between 61 and 65 years.



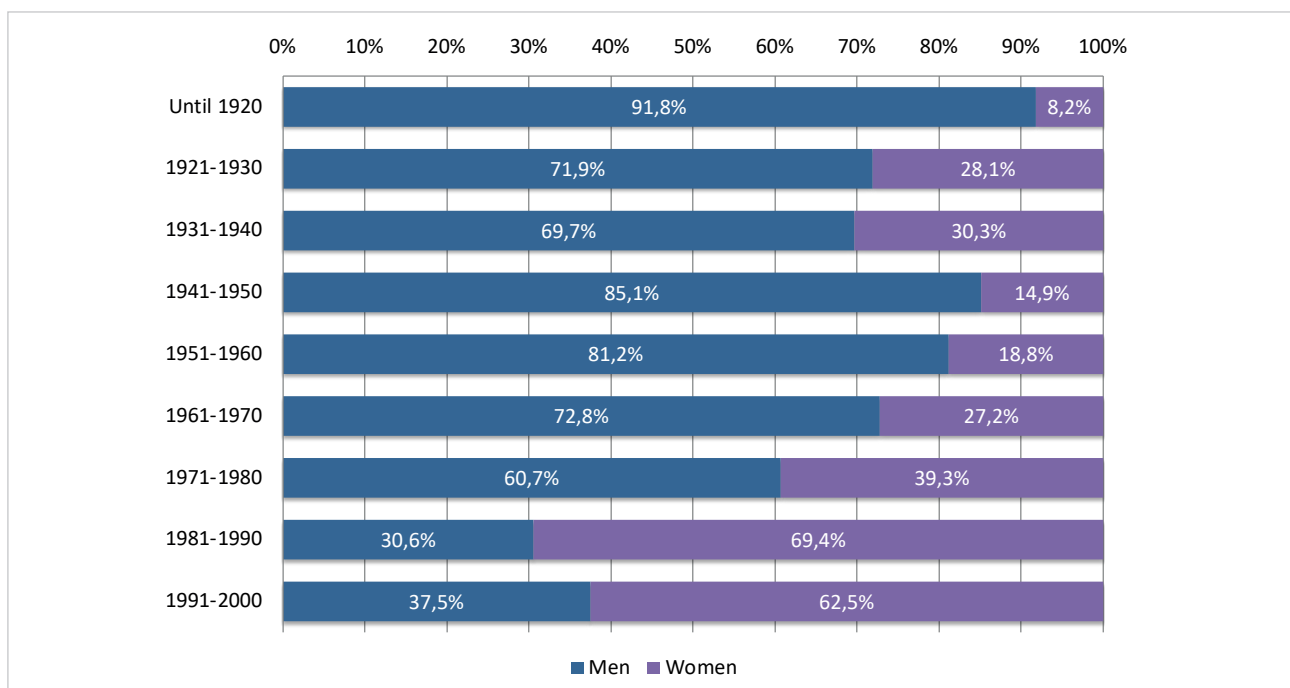
Graph 3. Authors of the rankings distributed by age group

Conversely, the distribution of writers by decade of birth shows a clear inflection after a certain point (Graph 4). Among the authors born before 1920, the fraction of men is overwhelmingly predominant (91.8%), and they continue to represent more than two-thirds of the selected total until 1980, but by the 1980s and 1990s, those corresponding to Generation Y or Millennials, the proportions are drastically reversed and women go on to fill 68.4% of positions in the rankings.

### 5. Conclusions

The broad objective of this research was to determine the presence of women writers in the rankings of the Spanish cultural supplements and to verify the extent to which this approaches parity (O1). On the basis of the data, the first conclusion is clear: women are underrepresented, since on average only 25.3% of the books selected by specialist critics are written by women. However, in the last 6 years, women’s writing has managed to increase its visibility, especially in contrast to previous decades, when its presence was negligible, if not null (Freixas, 2003; Obligado, 2003), although it still plays a secondary role in comparison with male authors, as pointed out by García-Borrego, Gómez-Calderón, and García-Cardona (2021).

The same phenomenon occurs in juries, where women make up only 28.6% of the total membership. Even so, our analysis has shown how the inclusion of women experts on the committees responsible for selecting the “books of the year” correlates positively, and in a statistically significant way, with the number of women writers selected, although it is not possible to determine with absolute certainty whether there is a causal link between these two variables.



Graph 4. Authors by decade of birth

Considering the differences between the four supplements analyzed (O2), it can be seen that the rates by gender vary among them. *Babelia* seems to be more determined to include women authors in their rankings, while *ABC cultural* and *El cultural* present very unbalanced figures, the first due to the overwhelming proportion of men writers recommended (85.6% compared with 14.2% of women writers), who also monopolize the lists in two different rounds, and the second, because it is the only supplement that does not reach equal rates in any of the 12 years reviewed, neither in authors nor in juries. *Cultura/s* sits at an intermediate point. Its intention to make women writers visible seems clear, with classifications in which the presence of Catalan women authors is very pronounced, and little by little it is approaching the threshold of 40%, which would define parity, although this has only happened on one occasion to date (2021).

Regarding the evolution of the female presence during the period analyzed (O3), there is a clear dividing line in 2015, in which three supplements, *Babelia*, *Cultura/s*, and *El cultural*, ostensibly increased the number of women selected, although the social, political, or cultural context responsible for this change cannot be determined exactly. The great feminist movements of the last five years, such as #MeToo in October 2017, had not yet emerged, and in 2015 the Belarusian Svetlana Alexiéovich won the *Nobel Prize for Literature*, but the *Swedish Academy* had also awarded the prize to women in 2013 (Alice Munro), 2009 (Hertha Müller), and 2007 (Doris Lessing), to cite only recent rounds, without altering the fraction of female representation in the rankings. And although in Spain the political dashboard was shaken in 2015 with the inclusion of new groups focusing on equality policies into parliament, it is difficult to link these two phenomena directly. The increase in women authors attracts attention insofar as it seems a conscious approach on the part of three of the publications analyzed, but the reason(s) behind this are not clear, suggesting the possibility of future studies to delve into this.

Finally, this article sought to clarify whether there is a certain profile in the women writers highlighted by the cultural press that differentiates them from their male counterparts (O4). The answer, in this case, seems to be affirmative. On the one hand, they are more cosmopolitan in terms of nationality, since Spanish authors are a minority compared with foreign ones, especially those from the USA (perhaps due to the influence of efficient and sustained marketing from the other side of the Atlantic). However, its representativeness in national terms is smaller, since two-thirds of those selected come from the large cities of Madrid and Barcelona that have the largest populations in the country, but where the sociocultural profile is more homogeneous, and therefore less rich. The conclusion is that the influence of women writers from the depopulated parts of Spain and the periphery of the peninsular is marginal compared with that of writers from the mentioned regions.

However, the most striking differentiating feature is undoubtedly age, as the cultural supplements highlight a much higher number of young women authors, born after the 1980s, than of male counterparts from that generation. It is not possible to determine from this analysis whether this is by chance or a response to a paradigm shift in the profile of writers or, on the contrary, the result of a media strategy, as suggested by **Grandes** (2003) almost two decades ago. Future work is thus required to explore this aspect.

Reviewer rankings are products of extreme subjectivity, subject to the influence of the literary market, the editorial line of the newspapers that publish them, and even the particularities of the experts who write them, who tend to reward

“their vision of the world, that which best represents their ideas” [“*su visión del mundo, aquello que mejor representa sus ideas*”] (**Labari**, 2021).

Until just over five years ago, the presence of women in these lists was little more than anecdotal; today, however, it seems to be on the way to normalization. Even so, in certain publications, perhaps conditioned by the level of commitment of their parent newspapers to equality policies, there are pockets of exclusion that inevitably detract from the work of women writers in Spain.

In the collective imagination established for centuries, literature was a matter of men, and women hardly had enough talent to deserve attention from readers, let alone from the media or other institutions. Cultural journalism, through the responsible exercise of its prescriptive role, has contributed greatly to addressing these harmful gender stereotypes. However, in view of the data provided in this analysis, it seems clear that this task is still far from complete.

Overall, the data for female representation reflect a clear inequality, with only 25.3% of the works featured over the past 12 years being written by women

Cultural journalism, through the responsible exercise of its prescriptive role, can contribute to addressing these gender stereotypes, but it seems clear that this task is still far from complete

## 6. Notes

1. These are, in order of entry, Elena Quiroga (1984), Ana María Matute (1998), Carmen Iglesias (2002), Margarita Salas (2003), Soledad Puértolas (2010), Inés Fernández-Ordóñez (2011), Carme Riera (2013), Aurora Egido (2014), Clara Janés (2016), and Paz Battaner (2017).
2. A collective volume published at the beginning of the century brought together 13 literary criticism references in Spain, all of them men, attesting to the traditional male supremacy in this sector (**Ródenas**, 2003).
3. In the absence of official figures, **Freixas** relied on her own collection of data provided by 15 major national publishers, calculating that 24% of narrative works were written by women and published in Spain during the previous year (in poetry the rate fell to 22% and essay to 15%) (**Freixas**, 2000, p. 36). In the humanities field in the UK, a longitudinal study by **Showalter** (1977) also revealed that 20% of the books were written by women.
4. María Zambrano (1988), Dulce María Loynaz (1992), Ana María Matute (2010), Elena Poniatowska (2013), Ida Vitale (2018), and Cristina Peri Rossi (2021).
5. *El país* launched *Babelia* in 1991 after merging the *Artes* (1979), *Libros* (1979), and *En cartel* (1985) supplements. That same year *ABC cultural* was born, also as a result of three previous supplements, *Sábado cultural*, *ABC de las artes*, and *ABC de la música*, being merged. *El cultural* appeared in 1998 in interview format and initially associated with *La razón*, but since 1999 has been associated with *El mundo*, where it has the role of a supplement. *Cultura |s*, from *La vanguardia*, was first published in 2002.
6. Of 48 possible issues, one per year published by each supplement from the sample over a 12-year period, only 4 were not edited or could not be located: those of *Cultura |s* from 2010 and 2011, and those of *ABC cultural* from 2010 and 2015. This analysis is based on the 44 issues available.
7. Applied only to books written by more than one author that included men and women, regardless of the proportion of each.
8. There are even cases in which all the selected books are written by men, such as in the rankings of *Babelia* in 2011 and *ABC cultural* in 2013 and 2014. In comparison, women contribute more works than their male counterparts only once (*Babelia's* 2016 classification).
9. Given that *ABC cultural* does not number the positions of the selected books, it was removed from the analysis presented in this section.

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