Subversive Sex, Gender, and Genre in Cuban and Mexican Detective Fiction

Thesis submitted in accordance with the requirements of the University of Liverpool for the degree of Doctor in Philosophy by Ailsa Miriam Peate

May 2017

Acknowledgements

This research would not have taken place had it not been for the financial support of the E. Allison Peers-Santander Research Studentship, which allowed me to begin my doctoral studies and spend valuable time undertaking fieldwork. Thanks must also go to the AHGBI for their Travel Award, and to SLAS, for awarding me the Harold Blakemore Prize and the Travel Grant.

Furthermore, this thesis would not have come to completion without the support of those at the University of Liverpool as a student arriving from the University of Glasgow. My supervisory team has been a fantastic source of support, inspiration, and laughter. Above all, Professor Claire Taylor's advice and time has been invaluable, with her support beginning months in advance of my arrival at Liverpool. Responsive, receptive, and thoughtful, I will always be grateful for having been put under her tutelage. Our relationship has meant I have been exposed to opportunities I would have otherwise left unconsidered, from developing interests in Latin American digital art, to museum ethics in the region, to securing various positions and awards over the last few years. Thank you for everything, Claire. Professor Chris Harris' input and insight has been particularly valuable with regards to better understanding and formulating thought on sexuality in Mexico and the country's attitudes towards rape. His support has meant I have been well represented at conferences when unable to attend at the last minute, and have received input even after his departure for the University of Hull. Thank you, Chris.

Héctor Perea of UNAM has been kind enough to take me under his wing on two occasions during fieldwork in Mexico. His help during these times gave my fieldwork direction and, crucially, impacted positively upon my ongoing research.

During fieldwork in Mexico I was lucky enough to become friends with Ana Laura Lozano, whose kindness and love of literature meant I had a friend in DF from the offset. Ana ensured I gained access to writers for interviews, drove me to La Íbero to find extra texts, took on ruthless hotel managers, introduced me to *El Péndulo*, and gave me her own bed. I hope to return the favour one day soon.

I also want to thank María José Félix Díaz for her enduring friendship. María's expertise in Mexican visual art and *buchonas* was what formed the seed for this thesis. María's parents, Salvador and Olivia, are also owed thanks for taking me into their home in Culiacán and taking care of me when I was ill, as is her uncle Raúl for his hospitality and insight on the topic of crime fiction.

Thanks go to my parents for their support. Your sense of humour and endless kindness (plus all the newspaper clippings about El Chapo Guzmán) have meant – and continue to mean - a lot. To my grandmother, whose financial support meant I could continue this work, and whose views on life often provided comic relief; to my grandfather who was proud of my work and who always offered kind words and a smile, and to my Godfather Joe Dignan for leaving me the finances I would come to need in this endeavour.

Finally, thanks go to Will Amos for helping with my public speaking, for extensive proof-reading, and for taking literature seriously.

Abstract

Subversive Sex, Gender, and Genre in Cuban and Mexican Detective Fiction

This thesis engages with the concepts of sex, gender, and genre in relation to detective fiction produced in Cuba and Mexico. In order to do so, it focuses on a total of 4 novels from two Cuban authors and 5 novels from Mexican writers as case studies to question and consider the extent to which cultural production from each country should be considered original in its own right. After considering both countries' socio-political backgrounds and their attitudes towards gender roles, this research suggests that Cuban detective fiction from a post-Soviet era demonstrates preoccupations with neoliberal policy and its effect on sexuality on the island, and that Mexican detective fiction seeks to foreground women's issues in a country affected by gender violence, however on occasion this intention is undercut by the limiting and limited female characters available, fuelling systemic violence. Given the focus of specific cultural realities for both societies, this thesis concludes that Cuban and Mexican detective fiction are original generic subversions, and should be considered more closely in their own right.

This thesis moves beyond academic scholarship previously found in the field due to not only its focus on gendered and sexual identities within examples of Latin American detective fiction, but also as it considers the way in which such representations distort accepted archetypal norms of detective fiction. Furthermore, it coins the phrase 'detective metafiction' to refer to particularly self-aware detective fiction which incorporates historical event and fact, leading the reader to question the very basis of such novels, a highly unusual trait within a genre typically associated with truth and revelation.

This research contends that the four authors whose work forms the primary texts of this thesis demonstrate clear breaks with literary and social norms in their representation of gender, sex, and genre. Chapters One and Two consider the work of Cuban authors Leonardo Padura and Amir Valle after the fall of the Soviet Union respectively, and Chapters Three and Four engage with the work of Bef and Rogelio Guedea, both whom have produced detective fiction since the inception of the War on Drugs.

Chapter One: Introduction

Principally, this thesis provides a sustained focus on detective fiction produced in Cuba after the country's Special Period (1989-1991), and in Mexico after the announcement of the War on Drugs (2006- present). This thesis aims to make an original contribution as regards three key themes: firstly, the focus on Mexican and Cuban detective fictions on the basis of recent socio-political events; secondly, the focus on how genre subversion is often communicated through the use of bodies and sexualities; and finally, the questioning of the detective novel as a genre. Overall, it seeks to posit that detective fiction from Cuba and Mexico proves that the genre in Latin America should not be considered necessarily in light of literary developments in the USA, as is often suggested by those charting the genre's evolution in the twentieth century (Craig-Odders, 2006:8). Rather, it argues that Cuban and Mexican detective fictions demonstrate such subversion that, in the same way as Nelly Richard (1993) states, the periphery should be considered an original mutation in its own right.

In particular, this thesis seeks to fill gaps in knowledge regarding the representation of women in Cuban and Mexican detective fiction through an investigation into female characters. It posits that Cuban and Mexican authors make use of female characters to underline ongoing cultural anxieties surrounding *machismo* and feminicide.[1] Equally, it intends to suggest new roles for both male and female figures within the detective fiction which forms the basis of this thesis, and demonstrates much more fluid sexualities and bodies than those which are typically associated with such texts. Finally, it coins the term 'detective metafiction' in order to acknowledge an as yet unconsidered interpretation of particularly postmodern detective fiction based on historical fact.

1.1. Scholarship in the Field

Recent scholarship on Cuban and Mexican detective fiction has tended to focus on the works of particular authors, namely Leonardo Padura Fuentes (hereon referred to as Leonardo Padura) and Paco Ignacio Taibo II. These authors have also produced work during a time of social upheaval and/or mobilisation in their countries, and the most eminent scholars of Cuban and Mexican detective fiction tend to focus on issues in the

[1] These concepts will be expanded upon in due course in the Introduction.

novels which pertain to politics (see Braham, 2004, Wilkinson, 2006, Oakley, 2012, and Nichols, 2011).

Though Leonardo Padura's *Las cuatro estaciones* tetralogy (1991–1997) does in part focus on the polemical topics of homosexuality and transvestism in Cuba in 1989, it is worth noting that scholars have chosen to interpret Padura's focus on the context as one which betrays his political preoccupations, rather than also considering the novel as one which encourages tolerance on the part of the Cuban nation towards non-normative bodies and sexualities. For example, Verity Smith (2001) appears unwilling to acknowledge the works of Cuban author Leonardo Padura Fuentes as anything but specific to political commentary. Smith (64) compares the inclusion of transvestism in the *Máscaras* narrative with 'a figure of the unmasking of the system in 1989 with the trials of General Ochoa and Coronel la Guardia, which […] caused him [Padura] to lose what faith he had in the [Cuban] nation'. Though the executions of General Arnaldo Ochoa and Coronel Antonio de la Guardia for treason committed against the Cuban state are indeed key for a political reading of *Máscaras*, Smith fails to note the significance of masking and non-normative sexualities in the context. In reference to Padura's novel *Máscaras* (1995), Braham (2004:57) does note transgressive sexuality as present in the novel, yet states that the author chose 'to use the discourse of homosexuality and transvestism as a political metaphor, and not an investigation into homosexuality itself'. Nichols' (2011) work focuses on Peninsular Spanish detective fiction (that of Pepe Carvalho and the Montalbán series) and work produced by Taibo II (the Héctor Belascoarán Shayne series), set in Mexico City. Again, Nichols (21) does not address any issues of subversive sexualities or genre hybridity in such works, instead focusing on issues of globalisation and politics, which he posits as linking Spain and Mexico despite their radically different experiences during the twentieth century. Nonetheless, both Nichols and Braham's works are of vital importance to this research, as they inform areas for further investigation, such as that undertaken in this thesis.

1.2. Re-approaching the Cuban and Mexican Detective Fiction Genres

Primarily, this thesis argues for a reassessment of Latin American detective fiction – specifically Mexican and Cuban detective fiction – as demonstrating an originality and generic hybridity previously unconsidered by scholars. This thesis understands detective fiction as having a focus on the heterosexual male detective, featuring a murder and/or serious crime, and engaging with social problems of the time. Such texts also use the

sexually threatening *femme fatale* and/or the female victim and culminate in the revelation of the identity of the killer. This thesis also considers the USA as the predominant proponent of such works, in particular from the 1920s to the present day, for example Hammett's *Maltese Falcon* (1929), Chandler's *The Big Sleep* (1939), Spillane's *I, the Jury* (1947), Himes' *Real Cool Killers* (1959), and more recently Grisham's *A Time to Kill* (1989), Crais' *Indigo Slam* (1997), and Connelly's *The Overlook* (2007). In each case, as I will argue, such hybridity is context-specific, but, crucially, detective fiction from both Cuba and Mexico appears to be demonstrating a new trend towards what I have labelled 'detective metafiction'. Detective metafiction is a subgenre which focuses on both metanarratives *and* metahistories, and, I argue, is distinct from 'metaphysical detective fiction' as outlined in Merivale and Sweeney's (1999) collection of articles on the postmodern detective novel. In their case, the scholars outline that the metaphysical detective novel is 'distinguished […] by the profound questions that it raises about the narrative interpretation, subjectivity, the nature of reality, and the limits of knowledge' (1). This understanding of the postmodern metaphysical detective novel is key to the approach to each of the primary texts I investigate, and I will therefore return to Merivale and Sweeney's collection of essays throughout the Introduction and Chapter Two and Chapter Four of this thesis. However, I posit that in examples of detective metafiction, metanarratives *and* metahistories combine, with hyper-awareness on the part of the reader caused by the appearances of people the reader knows to exist outside of the novel (such as the author himself, or a real criminal). Therefore, detective metafiction is one such genre amongst those posited by Brian McHale (1987:9) that challenges the modern detective novel as the 'epistemological genre par excellence'. Furthermore, this new subgenre also engages with the creative potential of the postmodern in a Latin American context, as articulated by Nelly Richard (1993) and Néstor García Canclini (1992), amongst others.

A second key area examined by this thesis is the representation of bodies and sexuality. Given that the detective novel is often understood to be a patriarchal model, due to its focus on the male detective, the use of the *femme fatale* figure, and the association of rationality with the detective and hysteria or evil with female characters (see Smith, 2001:63, Hock Soon Ng, 2012:144), issues of sexuality come to the fore. In this thesis, I focus on the extent to which the novels examined provide original representations of bodies and sexualities.

As critics Close (2012) and Pérez (2001) argue, representations of women as passive, inherently weak, and shackled are intrinsic within the detective genre, which Close (90) views as 'fundado sobre la afirmación de un sujeto masculino'. For this reason, scholars of the genre such as Pérez (50) maintain, 'es de notar que en las típicas novelas duras escritas por autores masculinos los cuerpos femeninos se describen lujuriosamente'. This hypersexualised female character is typically presented through the *femme fatale*, who provides a tonic to the damsel in distress, or the *femme attrapée* (Wager, 2005:4) who is typically presented as often in need of the strong heterosexual detective to save her from peril, as in the works of Hammet and Chandler, for example. These female characters are ultimately forgotten about, buried by the detective when he solves a case and moves on: they no longer serve a function. Women as victims of male desire, and sadoerotic scenes, have long been part of the detective genre. With this tradition in mind, I argue that the bodies and sexualities in the primary texts of this thesis provoke uncomfortable questions on the part of the reader, who conventionally assumes a heterosexual male view point.

It is at this point that one must consider the problematic aspects of such a unitary universal model as 'the reader'. Though the reader may well assume a heteronormative male point of view necessarily despite gender or sexuality when reading such texts, as evidenced previously by Pérez and Close in relation to detective fiction, and in film theory by Mulvey (1989), there remains a plurality of interpretative perspectives when approaching any narrative, above all those which engage so continuously with truth claims, subjectivity, and destabilisation of accepted fact. Accordingly, this thesis discusses interpretations of the text and the effects upon the reader which remain the most convincing when aware of the context in and about which the novels are written. This thesis therefore approaches this issue from the same perspective as Wolfgang Iser (1978). Iser (34) develops the idea that the implied reader is created by the way that the text structures responses, with 'a textual structure anticipating the presence of a recipient'. Here, the text structures reader responses through various techniques, and the reader fulfils these textual structures. Iser distinguishes this from the actual reader (who may of course wish to *resist* the way in which the text constructs the implied reader). The implied readers in the context of the primary texts of this thesis are therefore understood to be heterosexual men, even if the reader chooses to resist such a stance.

The third argument of this thesis bridges this focus on representations of bodies and sexualities with the effect(s) this has on the reader, undertaking an investigation into the representation of gender in these texts. In order to do so, I take as my starting point

Laura Mulvey's theory on the male gaze which, I argue, is particularly fitting when considering the role of the implied male reader of the detective novel. Mulvey's (1989: 19) argument regarding the male spectator of classical Hollywood narrative cinema maintains that:

> Traditionally, the woman displayed has functioned on two levels: as erotic object for the characters within the screen story, and as erotic object for the spectator within the auditorium, with a shifting tension between the looks on either side of the screen.

Similarly, in the case of detective fiction, the position of the implied male reader and those of female bodies in the text have played similar roles. It is this 'shifting tension' and awareness that becomes particularly prevalent in the novels discussed. What Mulvey argues regarding the cinematic gaze can be applied, I argue, to the literary gaze, since the reader is, like the viewer, forced to 'see' or read and imagine the scene laid out for them by the author, transmitted through the narrative voice. Moreover, the gaze is particularly significant to the detective fiction genre as the detective uses vision not only to take in crime scenes and clues, but also to gaze upon bodies - dead and alive. This thesis argues that looking, gazing, looking away, and having no sight are intrinsic to the primary texts analysed in this thesis, and these acts of looking at/away from particular bodies is a particularly dominant feature of Cuban and Mexican crime fiction.

I posit that the authors studied in this thesis develop the detective fiction genre by indirectly asking their (male, heteronormative) reader to reconsider their position in relation to non-normative sexualities. The question of homosexuality, transsexuality and the figure of the *femme fatale* are inextricably linked with the preoccupation of gender and the body, and their abilities to become blurred, and transgress pre-stated binaries, leads the reader to experience anxiety at their own titillation.

1.3. Applying a Terminology

Though it is not in the scope of this thesis to contend with the various denominations of detective fiction which are pre-existing in English and Spanish language contexts, it is nevertheless important to demonstrate how and why the primary texts in this work have been understood to form part of the crime fiction canon, despite exhibiting traits from other genres.

Various academics of detective fiction have considered the limitations of terminology with regards to the genre, with some preferring to avoid using any Spanish alternative to define the genre seen in Spain (Hart 1987:14) and others maintaining a 'flexible' definition of that seen in Latin America, borrowing heavily from the North

American archetype (Close, 2006: pp.143-44). However, when considering the novels discussed by critics, Nichols (2011:8) maintains that a narrative with 'violation, transgression and disillusion' at its core can be generally associated with Hispanic crime fiction, again similar to the works demonstrated in a post-Boom United States. Critics favour the following to refer to a spectrum of Hispanic subgenres, the most salient of which appear as the *novela negra*, the closest translation of 'hard-boiled', the *novela detectivesca* as the detective novel, and the *novela policiaca* as a translation of the police procedural, all forming what will be referred to as the *género negro*. Craig-Odders (2006:5) notes that the Hispanic *género negro* is particularly transgressive as a genre as there is no real accepted overarching terminology for this classification. According to Pérez (2002:11), there are many ways in which a text could be considered to adhere to the broad requirements of the crime novel, classing his list of narratives under the heading of 'novela negra', which can translate as anything as wide-ranging as 'thriller' to 'police novel' to 'crime novel'. Close (2012:143) also chooses to use the term 'novela negra' in order to permit himself 'a certain flexibility in the definition of a field'. Given the wide-ranging association of 'novela negra', this thesis uses the terms 'crime fiction' and 'detective fiction' interchangeably to avoid significant repetition. This also allows for some flexibility when talking about the crime fiction previously and currently present in Cuba and Mexico. On occasion, I use the terminology 'hard-boiled detective fiction' when referencing traits in the primary texts which correspond to North American noir, as made famous by Raymond Chandler. In these instances, specific reasoning is given behind this decision, often linked to the aesthetics of a text and the presence of specific characters such as the *femme fatale*.

1.4. Primary Texts, Authors, and Circulation

Cuba and Mexico have distinct yet at times similar political and social histories which have made them ideal to compare in this thesis. They have each undergone significant revolutions with on-going effects on ideology, and have both experienced long-term one-party rule (either in the form of the Castro communist regime, or underneath a series of PRI governments in Mexico, lasting a total of 71 years, 1929-2000, and again 2006 - present). Moreover, their proximity to the United States, and therefore to its cultural output cannot be overlooked here. Of course, these relationships have been very different, with The Bay of Pigs and the Cuban Missile Crisis being prime examples of the

hostility between the USA and Cuba,[2] and though Mexico has established political issues with the USA (from problems with immigration to drugs), Mexico has received and digested much of the USA's popular culture, with films and TV programmes available in the country, and detective fiction in particular being translated into Spanish.

This thesis considers the work of four authors, two from Cuba and two from Mexico. In Chapter One, '"Travestido, transformado, definitivamente distinto"', I consider the work of novelist, scriptwriter, and journalist, Leonardo Padura (Havana, 1955). Despite the amount of academic attention his work has received over the past two decades, his detective novels remain significant for analysis as Padura makes an undisputed break with the genre's literary history in Cuba. His work has not been adequately investigated in relation to gender theory and contemporary attitudes towards non-normative sexualities in Cuba. His *Las cuatro estaciones* series (1993 – 1997) follows detective Mario Conde through the year of 1989 – the year of the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Rather than focusing on Padura's work as an entire series, this thesis focuses on the third novel of the tetralogy, *Máscaras* (1995) in order to devote adequate reflection on the novel's homoerotic undertones and its postmodern traits, both previously ignored or quickly passed over by scholars of Padura.

In Chapter Two, 'A Journey to Hell and Back: Genre Subversion in Amir Valle's *El descenso a los infiernos*', I focus on the second Cuban author of this thesis, Amir Valle (Guantánamo, 1967). Valle has been exiled from Cuba since 2005, an incident which occurred during a trip to Spain to promote the novel *Santuario de sombras* (2006), part of the *Descenso* series, which features *Las puertas de la noche* (2001), *Si Cristo te desnuda* (2002), *Entre el miedo y las sombras* (2003), *Últimas noticias del infierno* (first published 2004, the edition available and used in this thesis 2014), *Santuario de sombras*, and *Largas noches con Flavia* (2008). These novels are based on real criminal cases which took place in Cuba, as well as featuring various historical figures, and I therefore interpret them as examples of detective metafiction. This thesis focuses on the last three titles in the series, which coincide with the years of Valle's exile, and which are the more accessible contributions to the series than the first three novels.

My discussion of the work produced by Mexican authors begins with Chapter Three, '*Máscaras mexicanas*: Gender, Genre, and Gratification in *Hielo negro* and *Cuello blanco*'. Here, I discuss the work of Bernardo Fernández Brigada (Mexico City, 1972,

[2] This hostility was thawed somewhat during the Obama administration (2008-2016) ending with a repeal of the Dry Foot law, however it remains to be seen what the effects of the current Trump government will be.

known as Bef) who has been known primarily in Mexico for his work as a cartoonist, as well as the author of graphic novels. However, since the publication of *Tiempo de alacranes* (2005), the author has been increasingly associated with the detective novel. The *Detective Mijangos* series is comprised of *Hielo negro* (2011), *Cuello blanco* (2013), and *Azul cobalto* (2016). Not only is the series the only one included in this thesis which features a recurring female detective figure, it is the only series in Mexico with a recurring female protagonist and antagonist. Given the recent publication of *Azul cobalto*, this thesis analyses *Hielo negro* and *Cuello blanco* as representations of contemporary Mexican detective fiction.

The fourth chapter, 'Rogelio Guedea's *Colima*: Sex, Lies, and Subjectivity' focuses on the *Colima* trilogy by Rogelio Guedea (1974, Colima). Guedea's literary background is based mainly in poetry, and features a period as a lecturer at the University of Otago, New Zealand, where the author lived for a decade until mid-2016, returning then to Mexico. The *Colima* trilogy, *Conducir un tráiler* (2008), *41* (2010), and *El crimen de Los Tepames* (2012) were all written during Guedea's time in New Zealand, but focus intently on protagonist Abel Corona's life in Colima, Mexico.

The authors and novels investigated in this thesis enjoy varying popularity on national and international levels. Given the narratives' status as postmodern subversions of the detective novel and/or detective metafiction, it is important to underline why this thesis understands them as being part of Mexican and Cuban popular culture, and who reads these novels/is the intended reader of such texts.

Padura is often feted as Cuba's most-read, most famous and most successful author still living on the island. With an international readership (*Las cuatro estaciones* having been translated into English, French, Italian, and German), the author has won literary prizes for his detective fiction across Latin America and in Spain, Italy, France, and Germany, underlining his significance as an author of detective fiction. This international readership is also enjoyed to a point by Valle, whose work is available in German and Italian. However, Valle's exile and the banned status of his books on the island detract from his *official* status in Cuba, yet nonetheless Valle's works are heavily circulated on the underground Cuban literary scene, as outlined in Chapter Three, and have won prizes both in Cuba (prior to his exile) and in Germany, Colombia, and the Dominican Republic, rendering him known and read in two continents. Bef's work, available in Spanish and French (in the case of *Hielo negro*) has reached bestseller status in Mexico. When writing the *Detective Mijangos* series, the author was already well-known for his science fiction and his graphic novels, meaning his readership has, more or less, been

those of younger generations. Though no official figures for Guedea's readership can be found, prior to turning to detective fiction, the author was well-known for his poetry, receiving many national and international awards for his writing, as well as receiving two Mexican literary awards for *Conducir un tráiler* and *41* individually. Guedea's first novel in the Abel Corona series has been translated into English, and *41* has been translated into French, with the final novel in the trilogy reaching bestseller status in Mexico in 2012.

All the narratives investigated in this thesis push the reader to question socio-political realities and sexualities in Cuba and Mexico through the use of postmodern subversions of the detective narrative, and therefore could be seen to have been produced for an elite readership. However, I maintain that these novels have a significant circulation across class status and/or educational level, as despite what may be interpreted as confusing and anxious postmodern play at the heart of all of the novels, readers are still able to identify various traits associated with the hard-boiled detective novel: the crime and its ensuing investigation, *femmes fatales*, the male (or male-imitating) detective, scenes of a sexual nature, and a focus on social issues ensure that all types of reader can engage with plots, though this may take place on different levels.

Furthermore, the novels investigated in this thesis are viewed as forming part of popular fiction. This thesis understands popular culture in Latin America in the same vein as García Canclini (1992): inherently tied to hybridity, a key concept of this work's focus on genre blurring and *transgenericidad*, and therefore understands the work by these authors to contribute to and expand upon popular fiction in Cuba and Mexico. Due to this work's preoccupation with postmodern takes on the detective genre and its coining of the term detective metafiction, different levels of engagement have necessarily had to be recognised during research. This has resulted in only texts which clearly reference the detective fiction paradigm being chosen for further investigation.

Before further discussing the background to the postmodern detective novel in Cuba and Mexico, it is first necessary to take note of the histories of detective fiction in Latin America.

1.5. Detective Fiction in Latin America

Contemporary detective fiction is widely seen as having its roots in the North American hard-boiled genre of the 1940s (see Hart, 1987, Nichols, 2011, Oakley, 2012, and Godsland, 2007). These narratives relied on particular plot devices and characteristics

such as the lone detective situated on the margins of legality, the dangerous woman as embodied by the *femme fatale,* whose self-serving greed and emasculating licentiousness threaten and distract the detective, and had a focus on the search for truth within a cynical society. This genre, written during a period of major social upheaval after the Wall Street Crash, displayed US society on a bleak, black canvas (Hart, 1987:14) and highlighted socio-cultural disillusionment. As a result, the genre has been said to constitute 'often the first voice to respond to new societal and cultural encounters' (Knight, 2005:25), which means the genre lends itself well to such extensive criticism and investigation. Due to this preoccupation with socio-political injustices, this thesis understands that writers of detective fiction can often be interpreted as producing committed writing, and deems the primary authors investigated in this work to be committed writers as they are inherently motivated to their work by the cause of societal injustices.

Detective fiction in Latin America is understood to have appeared 'at approximately the same time that hard-boiled detective fiction began to appear in Spain in the early 1970s' (Craig-Odders, 2006:8). Close (2006:147) maintains that 'the emergence of the novela negra in Latin America coincides very closely with a moment of multiple crises throughout the region', which furthers Knight's assertion that the genre can be understood as a reaction to previously unexperienced social developments. Close's (147) understanding of the appearance of the detective novel in Latin America however also demonstrates the differences between the new encounters found north and south of the Mexican border, elaborating that this moment 'was defined generally by the exhaustion of the import-substitution model of State-direction modernization, the resurgence of authoritarian military regimes in the Southern Cone and elsewhere, and the beginning of the imposition of neoliberal economic policies in nearly all countries'. Amelia Simpson (1990:17), also elaborates on the differences between the driving force behind detective fiction from Latin America and the USA, explaining that 'the development of detective fiction in Latin America is influenced not only by the rules of the marketplace, but also by what some authors perceive as the fundamental incompatibility of Latin American realities with the ideology codified in the structures and conventions of the predominant whodunit.' As a result, hard-boiled detective fiction has had influences on both structure, style, and content with regards to the production of the crime novel in Latin America during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. This is not to say that authors from the region have necessarily always shied away from more traditional 'enigma' style crime novels, perhaps best exemplified by the works of Agatha

Christie; it is worth noting that the genre is generally thought to have first appeared in Latin America in Argentina in the 1940s (Oakley:4). For example, Jorge Luis Borges' celebrated *La muerte y la brújula* (1942) falls into this subgenre of crime fiction with little to no focus on societal disillusionment (Quesada, 2012:168). Furthermore, though the hard-boiled North American novel is most often referenced when critics explain the origins of the Latin American genre, given that the work was available in Latin America during the 1940s and 1950s, it is also worth noting that testimonial literature in Central American countries such as Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador made use of crime fiction structures, as according to Quesada (168) 'también se han apropiado de las técnicas, estrategias e ideología de la narrativa policial para escribir muchas de sus obras' (see also Kokotovic, 2006:16). The detective novel in Latin America can therefore be understood as partially developing from the traditional hard-boiled detective novel, and is an example of what Richard sees as the cultural production of the 'Periphery' distancing itself from the 'Center' yet this distancing simultaneously seeks to emphasise the links between the two genres. I argue that a hybrid, mutated genre becomes prevalent and is epitomised by the texts I discuss in this thesis. It can be argued that these kinds of hybridisations and borrowings illustrate the richness and complexity of the Latin American detective genre. I argue, following Richard and García Canclini, that these works constitute original stances in their own right.

It is unsurprising that in the wake of dictatorships, massacres, and latent modernisation which coincided across the region, the genre became popular in the area; Simpson (1990:21) surmises that Latin American detective novels 'express views about moral issues and social problems', reaffirming the genre's similarities to that produced in the USA by authors such as Dashiell Hammet, Chester Himes, and Raymond Chandler in the 1930s onwards. Though Simpson's statements as quoted in this thesis remain pertinent to the study of detective fiction from the region and its historical development, and though the scholar raises relevant similarities and differences between the genre as found in the USA and more widely in Latin America, the work's publication date in the early 90s predates major social and political developments in most Latin American countries which have had undeniable effects on cultural production. I continue now to offer a more detailed background to the two countries whose literary output are at the core of this thesis, Cuba and Mexico, which, both before and after 1990, underwent exceptional societal changes within Latin America.

1.6. Detective Fiction in Cuba and Mexico

Both politically and with regards to its production of detective fiction, Cuba possesses a striking history within a Latin American context. Whereas in countries such as Chile and Argentina which have a history of both political and social repression through military dictatorships the detective novel has flourished from the 1980s onwards after such regimes ended (see Craig-Odders, 2006: n5 p.4), Cuba's oligarchical rule since the triumph of the revolutionary movement over Fulgencio Bastista's imperialist regime encouraged the creation of crime novels.

Ana Serra (2007) notes the precise moment at which crime fiction became a propagandistic tool for Fidel Castro's Communist Party to maintain a belief in socialism. In 1971, the Cuban socialist police novel was born when a literary contest, known as 'The Anniversary Contest for the Triumph of the Revolution' was specifically created by Fidel Castro to reward the best works of the Cuban police novel, as announced at the Primer Congreso Nacional de Educación y Cultura. [3] Serra (157) notes:

> Rather than a monument to the exceptional intelligence and intuition of the detective who solved the mystery, the Cuban detective novel was about a policeman as part of an efficient body of officers relying on Comités de Defensa de la Revolución (neighborhood committees in defense of the Revolution, or CDRs) and government agencies to restore the desired order in the Revolution.

Serra (157) goes on to underline the two-dimensional nature of this kind of fiction, quoting the minister of the interior at the time, who declared that, 'The competition is directed at developing this genre in our country, so the works that are presented will be on police themes and will have a didactic character'. Such texts became known as the Socialist detective novel and held more in common with the Soviet detective novel than anything produced in the USA, though translations of American detective fiction had been available on the island through the 1940s and 1950s. According to Braham (2004: 32), the Socialist police novel became popular, accounting for up to 40% of titles published 1971 to 1983 in Cuba. Serra (157) points out, 'If the North American model of the detective novel exposed certain problems that were typical in a bourgeois model of society and were solved when the criminal was brought to justice, the Cuban detective novel represented the social instability created by counterrevolutionary elements in a

[3] Castro's speech at the Primer Congreso Nacional de Educación y Cultura was emphatically anti-Bourgeois and provided clear directions to revolutionary writers on content. An excerpt is included in Chapter One.

Socialist society'. In short, the Cuban socialist detective novel became used as a propagandistic tool for the revolutionary government.[4]

The fall of the Soviet Union in 1989 had drastic effects on Cuban society, politics, and literature. Braham (2004: pp.32-33) demonstrates how the detective novel was affected by the lack of Soviet support, and how detective fiction began to move away from that favoured by official communist discourse:

> Publishing in Cuba was significantly disrupted due to paper shortages, and established systems of censorship began to ease in some areas due to scarcity and, in general, the complications surrounding transport, communications, and all types of manufacturing, including literary production. As Cuban authors came into contact with other original detective novels in Spanish, they became increasingly critical of the trade off [sic] between quality and ideology in the genre.

As discussed previously, exposure to other cultures and their literary production is key to the creation of detective fiction.

An author central to this thesis, and an author often mentioned in the context of moving away from generic norms within the contexts of Socialist and post-Soviet detective fiction is Leonardo Padura. Braham (33) notes that Padura 'took on what he perceived to be the weaknesses of his precursors – one dimensional characters, lack of suspense, and paucity of literary art, and created a new type of Cuban detective novel'. According to Braham (33), this 'new type' of detective novel for Cuba was the first 'to openly express disappointment in the Revolution and is a sign of the new, more critical role of detective fiction in Cuba'. Wilkinson (2006: 154) and Oakley (2012:21) both note that in 1986, UNEAC (La Unión de Escritores y Artistas de Cuba) held a conference to discuss issues of censorship and guidelines which featured a group of crime writers. According to Wilkinson (154), Cuban authors came to realise their mistakes at this meeting, having met with other Spanish-language authors of the crime genre.

Though Padura broke with the rules in the early 90s with his *Las cuatro estaciones* tetralogy, it is important to note, as does Braham (33) that he is indeed 'virtually alone' in this approach to writing detective fiction. However, given the publication date of Braham's work, the scholar was not able to consider the more recent – and highly subversive – small amount of non-*Congreso* adherent detective fiction that has been produced on the island, available only for external consumption, by authors such as Amir Valle, Modesto Caballero, and Lorenzo Lunar Cardedo. Padura still stands as Cuba's most famous living author, and despite his works' critiques of communist Cuba, he has also

[4] Wilkinson (2006: pp.110-115) references the works of Ignacio Cardenas Acuña and Cristóbal Pérez as perfect examples of this kind of fiction.

been feted on the island, a contradiction that will be discussed further in Chapter One of this thesis.

Mexico's history with crime fiction began in the 1940s, though hard-boiled detective fiction only really came to the fore in the country in the 1970s, having had little to no domestic production previously (Craig-Odders, 2006:8). The first Mexican detective fiction authors, such as Antonio Helú and Rodolfo Usigli, became popular in the 1940s. Increasing industrialisation and modernisation encouraged movement away from the countryside and towards cities, where concentrated populations saw a correlated increase in crime. Authors such as Helú and Usigli used the genre similarly to the American pioneers of the genre, Raymond Chandler and Dashiell Hammett, as a tool to respond to new cultural encounters, such as rising crime rates and inadequate police forces. Usigli's 1944 text *Ensayo de un crimen* constituted scrupulous portraits of city life, engaging with and detailing the effects of modernisation and expansion within Mexican society in the middle of the twentieth century. A surge of movement to cities and an obsession with the USA as an ideal society to emulate became widespread through Mexico through the media of radio and cinema (Navarrete Maya, 2005:55). Helú and Usigli oversaw a shift in Mexican detective fiction during this time, with a move away from a focus on the enigma text to novels whose contents were closer to that of hard-boiled detective fiction, featuring the lone detective and a seductive female character. However, the crimes in such novels were, according to scholarship on such authors, not clearly politically motivated – a key difference to the work produced by Rafael Bernal in 1969.

A pivotal point in Mexico's recent history, the Tlatelolco massacre in 1968 unearthed deep dissatisfaction with a corrupt PRI regime. As a vehicle through which to voice social disenchantment, Mexican detective fiction became increasingly critical of society, moving away from small-town detectives trying to deal with the effects of industrialisation, and towards international conspiracies. For many, Rafael Bernal's 1969 novel *El complot mongol* is evidence of the beginning of Mexican adaptations of the genre in order to discuss and highlight widespread societal discontent. Rodríguez Lozano recognises that 'La publicación en 1969 de *El complot mongol* de Rafael Bernal fue un punto culminante de un proceso que a lo largo de los años se ha afianzado gradualmente' (2009:9).

However, significant Mexican social theorists have previously contested the genre's appropriateness to the country. Social theorist Carlos Monsiváis rejected claims

for detective fiction's pertinence within Mexico, declaring '¿A quién le importa quién mató a Roger Ackroyd… si nadie sabe (oficialmente) quién fue responsable de la matanza de Tlatelolco?' (1973:10). However, Monsiváis was disproven by a plethora of authors of the genre reacting to a corrupt government which stood accused of massacring up to 800 people during the Tlatelolco student protests. Braham (2004:68) makes an important point that after the 1960s, the movement of authors known as *La Onda* in Mexico 'used literature to express this dissidence by violating traditional barriers between high and popular culture, author and reader, fiction and non-fiction.' These features are common to the Mexican detective novel, which Braham acknowledges that Stavans (1993:28) characterises as 'the daughter of La Onda'. His reference to the Tlatelolco massacre in Mexico City in October 1968 is an example which concisely highlights the long-standing impunity which lies at the heart of Mexican politics, and the violence which is still exhibited in the country daily.

As such, the Mexican detective genre has been made popular (to an extent, internationally)[5] by authors such as Paco Ignacio Taibo II, whose Héctor Belascoarán series (1976 – 2005) saw the appropriation of the structures of the North American crime narrative – the lonely detective on the margins of legality, investigating in a bleak society, solving the case and exposing socio-political issues along the way. In his 2011 work, *Transatlantic Mysteries*, Nichols outlines how the 1968 student massacre at Tlatelolco and the effects of neoliberal policies have affected the popularity of such a genre in Mexico and Spain, claiming that the 'social, political, and economic crises plaguing Mexico and Spain link directly to the disillusionment with a modernity that brings economic prosperity, although definitely not for all members of society' (33). It is arguable that Mexico's ongoing problems with the War on Drugs, violence, and impunity are factors which have provided authors of detective fiction the ideal bleak background of disillusionment typically associated with the genre which they mutate.

Crime in Mexico is reported in a very different manner to that in Cuba. Whereas in Cuba, crime and criminality is not officially reported (Anon, 2016), Mexico's sensationalist *nota roja* ensures to cover grisly murders and crimes on both local and national levels. There has been a sharp spike in violent crime in Mexico since the inception of the North America Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1994, particularly against women in acts of feminicides (see Watt and Zepeda, 2012:207). Furthermore,

[5] See Matzke and Mühleisen (2006), Craig-Odders, Collins and Close (2006) and Nichols (2011) for details on the international readership and popularity of the genre.

murders and violence have reached dizzying highs in the country since the implementation of the War on Drugs (2006 – present). As evidenced above, there are clear differences between Cuban and Mexican socio-political backgrounds, which have had a clear effect on their production of crime fiction. In the following section, I continue to lay out the issues associated with the postmodern text in a Latin American context.

1.7. The Problematics of Postmodernism

One of the three main themes this thesis confronts is genre blurring and the hybrid detective novel. I argue that the primary texts analysed in this novel achieve this through the use of postmodernist traits. Before expanding on such a subject, however, it is essential to note the arguments which have focused on postmodernity in Latin America more generally, and which inform this thesis's theoretical background.

Beverley and Oviedo (1993:2) acknowledge that the notion of postmodernity in Latin America may appear inapplicable to the region given the general consensus among scholars that the area has experienced an uneven modernity. However, they continue to posit that postmodernity in Latin America is a different notion to that found in modern, Western, capitalist countries (pp.2-5), and they contend that Frederic Jameson's (1984) explanation of postmodernity is deterministic. Jameson's overall thesis that postmodernity seeks to associate new cultural forms with the effects of transnational capitalism is, however, useful within a Latin American context: Beverley and Oviedo (3) note that postmodernity in Latin America should not be understood as 'the end of Western hegemony'. Rather, they maintain that:

> Engagement with postmodernism in Latin America does not take place around the theme of the end of modernity that is so prominent in its Anglo-European manifestations; it concerns, rather, the complexity of Latin America's own 'uneven' modernity, and the new developments of its hybrid (pre- and post-modern) cultures (1993:pp.4-5).

This interpretation of postmodernity in the region is also favoured by Nelly Richard (1993) and Lange-Churión (2001). Richard (157) sees postmodernity as a reaction to the modernity which has been developed by Western capitalist states, or the *Center*. Other states are referenced by Richard as the *Periphery*, which, in a postmodern context, takes the position of the *Center*, which is beginning to crumble and become less centric. Both Lange-Churión & Mendieta (2001:27) and Richard (1993:pp.156-157) agree that no Latin American states have experienced the same modes of modernisation as one another, and that it would therefore be inappropriate and inadequate to try to assimilate their histories into one pattern.

This is undoubtedly relevant to the modernist genre of crime fiction, promoted and designed by capitalist countries, in particular the USA. As a result, this thesis builds on Richard's arguments that postmodernity and postmodernism are applicable to Latin America and its cultural production, and draws on her notions of center and periphery. This thesis considers that Latin American authors of crime fiction appropriate a genre set out by the *Center*. This *Center* is the American detective novel, which is defined by critics of this centralised Western style and format: the *femme fatale*, the detective on the margins of legality, an urban setting and a convoluted plot structure (Copjec, 1993:xi), and such Latin American texts provide original, peripheral mutations which should be considered in their own right.

Concerning the main characteristics of the postmodern text, this thesis takes into account the argument of prominent theorists of postmodernism: Lyotard (1989a), Hutcheon (1989 and 2004), and McHale (1987). Lyotard's (xxiv) articulation of postmodernism famously argues that it is characterized by 'incredulity towards metanarratives': *grands récits* (metanarratives) must be rejected in favour of *petits récits*, which should replace metanarratives with a focus on local contexts and diverse human experience. Lyotard (1989b: 130) also writes that traits of postmodernism in literature are seen in the multiplicity and diversity of postmodernism, as well as in the questioning of postmodernism's own perspectives: 'Theories themselves are concealed narratives and we should not be taken by their claim to be valid for all times'.[6] However, it could also be understood that here Lyotard argues for the duplicitous nature of postmodernism in place of a grand, all-encompassing theory to attempt to pay attention to such an uncontainable and indefinable theory as postmodernism. It is this contradictory, multiplicitous, diverse and inconsistent nature of postmodernity that is so integral to the novels analysed in this thesis.

Notions of the fleeting and of contradiction are also applied by Hutcheon when approaching the debatable effectivity of postmodernism's capacity to criticise reality, a function which my research uses to analyse each of the primary texts in this work. Critics of postmodernist cultural products such as Jameson (1984) and Callinicos (1990) have

[6] In this instance, the theorist shows his theory to be highly contradictory, criticising universal rules but postulating that postmodernity contains a universal cynicism toward metanarratives; and this incredulity is in itself a contemporary metanarrative. However, such a complex and contradictory stance can be interpreted as problematic as Lyotard's fluid and multiplicitous concept of the postmodern condition can be criticised as challenging and inherently inconsistent: Lyotard's internalisation that the condition is defined by an incredulity toward metanarratives can be interpreted as a metanarrative in itself.

often condemned such works as they posit that they cannot challenge and/or critique socio-political reality.

However, this thesis views the postmodernist novel as capable of exposing external societal truths in the same manner as Hutcheon. Hutcheon confronts the issue of whether postmodernism is able to provide a critique, and posits that the postmodern text provides the reader with a critical distance from contemporary society, understanding postmodernism as engaging effectively in political assessments of contemporary, and therefore inherently postmodern, society. She states:

> Critique is as important as complicity in the response of cultural postmodernism to the philosophical and socioeconomic realities of postmodernity. Postmodernism here is not so much what Jameson sees as a systemic form of capitalism as the name given to cultural practices which acknowledge their inevitable implication in capitalism, without relinquishing the power or will to intervene critically in it. (Hutcheon, 2004, Chapter One, no pagination)

Hutcheon therefore stresses how postmodernist works act as effective criticisms of a self-aware contemporary society, and her work is therefore integral to this thesis, being built on in Chapter One and used throughout the rest of this research.

An element which connects each of the novels analysed in this thesis is that of historical fact. Replication of historical truth as the nucleus of a fictional novel has repercussions regarding the postmodern interpretations of such texts. Linda Hutcheon's thoughts on historiographic metafiction are therefore particularly pertinent to this thesis, as I argue that authors include references to external facts and realities in order to both underline the existence of official histories, while at the same time subverting them. Building on White's thoughts on the implications of the historical text, Hutcheon's views in *Historiographic Metafiction* (1989) deal mainly with parody in relation to the postmodern text, and like White she explores novels 'whose metafictional self-reflexivity (and intertextuality) renders their implicit claims to historical veracity somewhat problematic, to say the least' (3). Hutcheon continues in a similar vein to White, maintaining that any simple truth behind a piece of literature has necessarily been complicated and distorted: ambiguity is rampant when assembling historical events within a fictional text, and crucially for Hutcheon, and my own work, this renders such texts entirely subjective. Hutcheon understands narratives which feature historical references as closely related to postmodernism, since:

> The intertextual parody of historiographic metafiction […] offers a sense of the presence of the past, but this is a past that can only be known from its texts, its traces - be they literary or historical […] In the postmodern novel the conventions

> of both fiction and historiography are simultaneously used and abused, installed and subverted, asserted and denied. (1989: pp.4-5)

Castro (2010:139) investigates historiographic metafiction in relation to the production of post-Salazar detective fiction in Portugal, understanding such postmodern techniques of emplotment as rather than 'pretending exactly to reproduce events, historiographical metafiction aims to alert us to new directions in which to think about them.' The same notion of reconsidering events with purposeful references to historical fact and figures in literature is considered throughout this thesis.

Due to the historical and/or self-referential aspects of the texts analysed, this thesis engages with Brian McHale's (1987) understanding of the postmodern text. This is in part due to the self-awareness at the heart of each of the detective novels included in this research, but also due to their basis in reality/historical fact, ranging from allusions in passing to well-known historical events to including and re-animating historical figures. The mélange of reality and fantasy can, I argue, be understood through McHale's view on the postmodern text. McHale (1987: pp.9-10) states that the shift from fictional to real and the tension that exists between the two concepts correspond to 'a change from questions of interpretation ('How can I know this world? What is there to be known? Who knows it […]?') to questions of 'modes of being' ('Which world is this? What is a world? What kinds of worlds are there? How are they constituted? What happens when boundaries between worlds are violated?'. McHale here draws out the fact that in these texts, it is no longer a question of knowing the world (in the case of detective fiction, for example, the motive, modus operandi, and so on being revealed as truth), but instead a case of how worlds (fact/fiction) are violated. Violation, blurring, and hyperrealities are key concepts to both the postmodern text, and, as I will demonstrate throughout this thesis, are all core components of the Cuban and Mexican novels analysed in my research.

1.8. The Postmodern Detective Novel in Cuba and Mexico

In this context of the changing responses of detective fiction to the socio-political changes in the two countries, one subgenre which emerges is the postmodern detective novel. An aim of this thesis is to demonstrate how the postmodern detective novel functions as an ontological development of McHale's (9) postulation of the modernist crime novel as 'the epistemological genre par excellence'. I continue now to consider

the status of the postmodern text in both Cuba and Mexico to outline the aspects of postmodernism that this thesis references in its analysis of the novels.

This thesis positions detective fiction as an ideal genre through which to explore the previously specified issues of postmodernity textually. This is expanded on by Nichols (2011) who recognises the genre's significance within a globalised society, demonstrating the outcome of detective fiction encountering the postmodern; the scholar posits that the international market popularity of the genre:

> Endows it with the capacity (and credibility) to attack the contradictions of globalisation […] A long history of success […] has given the genre a privileged place within the market from which its hybrid nature […] allows it to attack the contradictions at the core of the values associated with globalisation: deregulation and privatization, transnational flows of people and international flows of capital, consumerism and commodification of cultural production, gentrification and the marginalization of the working classes, and the proliferation of mass media communication technology and the manipulation of information by the ruling class. (21)

For Nichols, Latin American crime fiction uses its force as a mass-produced entity in order to critique globalisation and to investigate where Latin American states stand in relation to it. This thesis will build on such a notion, investigating the postmodern Latin American detective novel in post-global Cuba and Mexico, researching the abilities of the postmodernist text, specifically in relation to genre, gender, and sexuality. As evidenced by arguments surrounding postmodernism, the issues of globalisation, and mass culture, mutation, appropriation, and translation are all key to Latin American literary production, and this rich tapestry of borrowing, blurrings, and peripheral reaction, as has been discussed, is perhaps best expressed through contemporary crime fiction, as argued in this thesis.

This thesis builds on scholarly thought from the 1990s onwards in which academics have argued for and analysed the postmodern in Cuba and Mexico. Williams (1995) provides an overview of postmodernist cultural products in Cuba, focusing in particular on the notion of performance within postmodernist Cuban literature, a concept which is integral to this thesis' approach to hybrid detective fiction. Williams (106) highlights the fluidity associated with Cuban fiction, reinforcing Antonio Benítez Rojo's (1992:11) thoughts on Caribbean culture as 'sinuous' and therefore inherently postmodern. This thesis considers the Cuban detective text's postmodern tendencies, with a focus on the novels' challenging the modernist, truth-seeking genre through the use of self-awareness, fluidity, double-encoding, and contradiction.

Similarly, Williams and Rodríguez (2002) see postmodernism in Mexico as establishing itself in literary works from the 1960s onwards. In particular, they reference Carlos Fuentes and Julio Cortázar's 'la búsqueda filosófica occidental de verdades universales' (17) and also understand that 'Hutcheon y otros consideran fenómenos como el pastiche ejemplos de las contradicciones inherentes que son esenciales a la cultura posmoderna' (22). According to Williams and Rodríguez, the crime narrative is a superlative manner through which to demonstrate a postmodernist bent. The academics (2002:31) cite Vicente Leñero's 1964 novel *Los albañiles* as an example of this, which uses the search for a killer in order to expand upon 'los límites epistemológicos que definen la verdad'. Chapters within this thesis which focus on Mexican literary production similarly pay close attention to metafiction, double-coding, pastiche and self-awareness to further unveil the themes of mask, disguise, and performance within the primary texts.

Within this subgenre of the postmodern detective novel, key features emerge regarding two of the authors studied in this thesis as regards the inclusion of historical fact through references to real events, authors and high-profile murderers as characters and so on. Such a focus on historical fact has led me to develop theories of a new subgenre, which I recognise in the work of Amir Valle and Rogelio Guedea: detective metafiction. I continue now to explain this term, building on the work of scholars Merivale and Sweeney in relation to the metaphysical detective story and postmodern theorist Linda Hutcheon's concept of historiographic metafiction.

Hutcheon (1989:5) sees doubling and parody as signifiers of the postmodern: 'the double (historical/literary) nature of this intertextual parody is one of the major means by which this paradoxical (and defining) nature of postmodernism is textually inscribed'. I argue that this is particularly visible in the confusing, subverted, heteroglossic, double-encoded style in which authors Amir Valle and Rogelio Guedea present their narratives.

In their extensive collection of essays on what they term the metaphysical detective novel, Merivale and Sweeney (1999:1) outline this subgenre as distinguished by 'The profound questions that it raises about the narrative interpretation, subjectivity, the nature of reality, and the limits of knowledge'. The critics (7) understand that metaphysical detective fiction is profoundly postmodern, as such texts 'explicitly speculate about the workings of language, the structure of narrative, the limitations of genre, the meanings of prior texts, and the nature of reading […] Metaphysical detective stories present special challenges to literary critics.' Metaphysical detective fiction therefore heightens the

reader's awareness of the text itself, and encourages the reader to ask questions about the purpose of literature, genre, and literary criticism.

Drawing on these two theories – those of historiographic metafiction, and metaphysical detective fiction - I posit that a new term, 'detective metafiction' can be developed to understand texts which combine the historiographic reworkings posited by Hutcheon, and the metaphysical musings noted by Merivale and Sweeney. This new subgenre, as evidenced by the work of both Valle and Guedea, is also intrinsically postmodern, and, significantly, uses a technique of emplotting narratives with their own metanarratives, making the reader hyperaware of the text which they read, and thereby of the purported veracity and purpose of the text itself. It is a particularly subversive, self-aware kind of detective fiction which prompts the reader to question the purpose of the text which they read through a clear focus on (at least what is purported to be) deliberate historical fact in the narrative. Again, questions concerning concepts such as knowledge, knowing, truth, subjectivity and interpretation are precisely those with which Valle and Guedea dialogue closely. Such concepts are intrinsic to their novels as the reader is left unsure as to the veracity of many of the narrators' claims, the timeline of the narratives, how much has been fictionalised and whether any character can truly be trusted.

In this work, I posit that such postmodernist strategies form a commentary on contemporary Mexican society, in which criminals are looked upon relatively favourably despite the crimes they are known to have committed and collude with those in society who ought to be bringing them to justice, where political or at least politicised assassinations regularly make the news, and those who are among the innocent in society are punished.

1.9. Detective Fiction in Cuba and Mexico: Sex, Sexuality, and Violence

An issue which further ties together the novels by the authors investigated in this thesis, aside from each being examples of generic performativity and hybridity, is their inclusion of scenes of a sexual nature. As the hard-boiled crime novel has established links with representations of sex and sexual violence, it is important to reconsider such representations within the context of Mexican and Cuban cultural production, as I do throughout this thesis.

Although many theorists of gender and queer studies have informed this thesis, the most prominent has been Judith Butler, for her work which combines gender theory with masks and performance. In *Gender Trouble* (1990), Butler (46) questions incidences

when one does not fit into the predetermined model of male or female, deeming gender trouble to constitute, 'the mobilization, subversive confusion, and proliferation of precisely those constitutive categories that seek to keep gender in its place by posturing as the foundational illusions of identity'. Such a concept of subversion can equally be applied to the primary texts in this thesis, as well as their representations of bodies not synonymous with that of the typical *femme fatale*. Furthermore, Butler's ideas are integral to this thesis when considering the transsexual body. Having used the notion of the transgender to demonstrate the possibilities of gender performativity and the notion of a 'queer' lesbian and gay intersection in *Gender Trouble*, in *Bodies That Matter* (1993) Butler went on to outline the transgender body is understood as a symbol of resistance: the act of drag is transgressive as it goes against traditional thinking that gender binaries exist and it also provides a subversive pastiche of traditional gender roles and associations.[7] Overall, for Butler, gender is merely enactment, which allows us to slip into ways of being/speaking so we may assume a more powerful position with more authority. It is precisely this notion of performativity and layering which is integral to this thesis; the assumption of genre, gender, and bodies in Cuban and Mexican detective fictions have previously been overlooked by academics, and this thesis argues that the performativity and fluidity on display in such novels in these contexts represents an anxiety over blurred genres and peripheral bodies and sexualities.

1.10. From Pre-Revolution to the Legacy of the *Maquiladoras*: The Status of Women in Mexico

Representations of sex/violence often sit alongside descriptions of weak and shackled women, or hypersexual female characters for a reader who assumes a heterosexual and typically male stance (Close, 2012: 90, Pérez, 2002:50). Close recognises that pornosadism (featuring women as victims of male desire and sadoerotic scenes) was originally – and highly successfully – brought to the detective genre by Mickey Spillane in the 1940s. The author sold 200,000,000 copies of his Mike Hammer novels in his lifetime (Close, 2012: 90), and the inclusion of sexually subversive scenes have been maintained by Mexican

[7] This is not to say that Butler's work has not been contested. Jay Prosser's 1998 work, *Second Skins: The Body Narratives of Transsexuality*, critiques Butler's work in *Bodies That Matter*. Here, Butler elucidates that though the transgender is a queer gender, transsexuality (involving sexual reassignment surgery) re-affirms the norms of the sexed body and therefore reinforces the status quo. Prosser takes issue with the idea that the transsexual body cannot be queer, indicating that gender ambiguity can be a particularly transgressive identification for the subject. Nonetheless, this thesis uses Butler's schema as a means through which to discuss the masking of bodies and sexualities as well as to investigate gender fluidity.

detective fiction authors such as Martín Solares (*Los minutos negros*, 2010), Omar Nieto (*Las mujeres matan mejor*, 2013), Patricia Valladares (*Tan frío como el infierno*, 2013), Alberto Chimal (*Los esclavos,* 2009), and as represented in this thesis by Bef and Rogelio Guedea. Pornosadism as part of the detective genre is problematic, above all in the Mexican context, where the physical suffering of women is observed daily in cases of feminicide across the country.

Integral to my examination of Mexican detective fiction and society is the view of women who fall into the good/evil dichotomy which is imposed by a patriarchal mind-set, arising from a simple difference between women who are seen, and women who are invisible. Castillo (1998:2) grounds this patriarchal outlook in pre-revolutionary Mexico's view of women and sexuality, arguing that:

> Loose women – women who work in the fields, women who assume a man's right to have fun – represent dangerously deviant forces in society […] In reversing accepted gender roles and taking on the man's prerogative of working the fields and of having multiple sexual partners, the loose woman became marked as abnormal.

Women found to comply with this 'loose' definition, Castillo (2) stresses, would be physically and sexually punished, namely by being vaginally penetrated with a wooden stake and dressed a vagabond, and would be adorned with:

> The outward signs of masculine identity (cigar, sombrero, crossed shawl) [which] stressed that her punishment was for her unnatural womanliness, while it warned other women against such transgressions. Her torture suggested the ubiquity of male-on-female violence in this society.

During this time, the act of assigning a socially and culturally transgressive woman an other gender is in this situation preferable to accepting that woman's sexual fluidity. Castillo's example demonstrates the significance of being what the author terms an 'easy' or a 'loose' woman: her financial independence as evidenced by her employment working in the fields and her sexual freedom as demonstrated by her relations outside wedlock with, Castillo suggests, more than one man, is threatening to the patriarchal matrix as it demonstrates that not all women live within the divided expectations of the proliferated active/male passive/female dichotomy. The free woman is therefore punished, rendered ultimately passive by her penetrative murder and the imposition of the male iconic dress upon her person, suggesting that if one lives as freely as a man in Mexico, one should die as one. Though this anecdote may refer to pre-revolutionary Mexico, Castillo (2) believes it serves to 'reinforce specific cultural stereotypes about the proper social roles of men and women; […] contemporary loose women are no less deviant or defeminized, they are just less subject to extreme punishment for their transgressions.'

Such dichotomised views of women, as separate and inferior to man, is made most infamously clear by Octavio Paz. Such is the significance of Octavio Paz's work in the twentieth century that throughout this thesis I reference *El laberinto de la soledad* (first published 1950) in relation to accepted Mexican identities, specifically in relation to conventional Mexican masculinities and femininities. Overall, Paz interprets Mexican society as clearly dividing the two, with men as dominant and active, and women as passive and submissive, the common phrase *no te rajes* (2008: pp.58-59) being simultaneously symptomatic of both how masculinity and femininity has been conceptualised in the country.[8] In *The Shattered Mirror* (1998:17), María Elena de Valdés alludes to Paz's interpretations of this dichotomy and male superiority, understanding female subjugation and violence towards women as 'natural' within a Mexican context.[9] Women as passive entities and therefore as the recipients of physical and psychological abuse, as well as when objects of the patriarchal male gaze within film and literature will therefore be discussed in relation to the Mexican detective fiction analysed in this thesis.

The precarious nature of Mexican masculinity is also, however, recognised, as Mckee Irwin (2003:xii) points out, through Paz's proposal of 'Mexicans to be the sons of rape of indigenous Mesoamerican cultures by the invading Spanish *conquistadores*'. McKee (xxiii) interprets Paz's schema of masculinity as being synonymous with penetration:

> For Paz […] Mexican masculinity is a precarious state that can only be attained and that must be constantly reaffirmed through competitive rivals […] women are seen as open, penetrable beings, and their femininity is a sign of weakness, while men are closed beings who show their power over others by penetrating them. Men must never allow themselves to crack and must flaunt their power by fucking others over, in one way or another. Heterosexual sex, under this scenario, becomes crude rape.

The rape paradigm associated with heterosexual sex will be developed in this thesis, as will the view of women that Paz brings to our attention, which critics such as McKee believe are still significant in the twenty-first century.

[8] The *machista* and genital connotations of the verb *rajarse* in Mexican Spanish primarily refer to the act of backing out or being scared, concepts not associated with *machismo*. Stanton also underlines that the literal meaning of *rajar* – to crack, split or tear – is the origin for the vulgar use of *rajada*, which as Paz explains is a derogative term for the vagina. Paz therefore implies that within Mexican society, women are implicitly associated with not only a negative sexual organ, but also with negative concepts such as cowardice and fear, hence their lower status within Mexican society.

[9] This 'natural part of the relationship between men and women' as being expressed through physical or mental abuse, I understand, is demonstrated as acts of feminicide in this specific Mexican context.

1.10.1. The Wounds of Neoliberalism: Feminicide

This patriarchal mind-set, and male/female dichotomy, become particularly under pressure in the neoliberal era. Olivera (2006), writing at a time during which femicide had become a noted phenomenon, critiques the male/female, active/passive dichotomy. Olivera (106) understands that political structures play a part in this divide, claiming that 'the other side of the symbolic violence of the neoliberal social structure, […] creates a social ecology in which men are driven to hypermasculinity, exaggerating the violent, authoritarian, aggressive aspects of male identity in an attempt to preserve that identity'. Such a need to 'prove' and 'demonstrate' masculinity over others is, as noted by McKee (2003) and Gutmann (1996), demonstrated in violent acts against men and women across the country.

The adoption of neoliberal policies and structures during the de la Madrid administration (1982 – 1988) are something that Octavio Paz's work did not and could not have anticipated, nor the effects of a PAN (Partido de Acción Nacional) administration from 2000 – 2006. It is not in the scope of this thesis to provide a detailed history on the War on Drugs (2006 – present) in Mexico, however it is a significant source of violent crime in the country and must be acknowledged, given this thesis's focus on political corruption, collusion, and impunity.[10] When considering the violent nature of the War on Drugs, it is essential to consider Mexico's geographical positioning: particular to Mexico is its border with the US: a location at which all types of violence are amplified due to booms or downturns in local or global economies having a very direct effect on the quality of human life, and as the first world and the third world collide. This notion is probably most clearly referenced by Anzaldúa (1999:25), who envisages the relationship in the following way: 'The U.S.-Mexican border *es una herida abierta* where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds. And before a scab forms, it hemorrhages again, the lifeblood of two worlds merging to form, a third country – a border culture.' Anzaldúas's metaphor makes clear the particular nature of the Mexican border, referencing blood and pain. As will be further discussed in this introduction, the blood and pain associated with a wound that never heals is directly linked to Paz's work on the figure of the woman in Mexico (2008: pp.58-59), and is also directly linked to acts of femicide. Lee (2012:305) contends that within this borderland context:

> La NAFTA entre Estados Unidos y México, cuyos procesos de negociación e implementación afectaron considerablemente el contexto, no solamente económico sino también sociocultural, de las ciudades fronterizas […] es

[10] See Watt and Zepeda (2012:4) for a detailed overview of the violence related to the War on Drugs.

> innegable el efecto decisivo del Tratado de Libre Comercio en la transición acelerada de la frontera en una zona de (re)producción industrial masiva, específicamente en el fenómeno explosivo de las maquiladoras. El modus operandi de las maquiladoras crea una demanda a gran escala de mano de obra barata y no especializada, lo que contribuyó a cambiar radicalmente los patrones de distribución y movilación de la población femenina en las zonas fronterizas.

Lee here references the change in context and social structure for women in the wake of the creation of NAFTA. This vital relationship will be discussed further in Chapter Three and Chapter Four as the agreement has had a negative effect on border cities such as Juárez, playing a significant part in the resulting femicide phenomenon.

However, what is perhaps most worrying about these extreme acts of violence is their ubiquity throughout Mexico. Olivera (104) notes that 'Although there have been episodes of multiple murders of women, femicides, linked to particular regions, as in the case of Ciudad Juárez for example, at this point is a pathology that has spread through Mexico', her vocabulary here also comparing feminicide to a disease. This is a fact that demonstrates the engrained nature of the derogatory and patriarchal views of women in Mexico as documented by Paz. Anzaldúa's evocative images of the never-healing wound and the hemorrhage are becoming more and more pertinent to understanding Mexican reality, as the wound, becoming infected, swells in size and continues to spread. Tellingly, the exact number of women murdered annually across the country remains unknown.

This thesis therefore approaches the Mexican crime fiction genre as forming part of this local culture, precisely because the crime trope has long been an outlet for describing murders of women. In his article on the erotic and the female cadaver in detective fiction, Close (2012:104) makes reference to gender based violence and femicide in Mexican author Jorge Volpi's work:

> Cualquiera sea la intención paródica que haya motivado su reapropriación de los códigos negros (*femme fatale*, necropornografía), se pierde para el lector consciente del auge del femicidio en el México contemporáneo, y la propuesta de un hipertransgresivo divertimento necrófilo parece una pavada adolescente al lado de la obra de otros artistas que han enfrentado con sobriedad y con todas sus energías creativas la hiperviolencia mexicana del momento actual. [… Existe] un contraste entre la visión supuestamente hard-boiled del cadáver femenino y las miradas realmente duras a los cadáveres de las víctimas de la violencia de todos los días.

This thesis dialogues with Close's ideas regarding the specificity of the crime genre as a manner in which to consider gender and sexuality within Mexico. However, my work develops the concept of hyperviolence, addressing the issue as an act also performed by women. Close here has clearly linked the concepts of sexually-motivated murder, rape, death, the crime genre and femicide and eroticism. Close's mention of the

'necropornografía' subgenre is particularly important because it raises a key issue: if the author presents a dead, erotically coded female body, could this perpetuate the attitudes that inform femicide? Or is it more to draw the readers' attention to the proliferation of this view of women and to question it? This thesis therefore posits that we must question to what extent the use of violent sexual imagery against women in these texts not only adheres to but, also to appeals to, the assumed male reader's patriarchal heterosexual matrix.

1.11. Revolution and Evolution? Sex and Gender in Cuba

There are several similarities between Mexican attitudes towards sexuality and gender and those in Cuba, most obviously, that which relies on *machista* notions of patriarchal activity, which trickles down through every layer of society and provides Cubans with clear directions on heteronormative sexualities.

Scenes of an explicitly sexual nature are discussed in this thesis in relation to the works of Cuban authors Leonardo Padura and Amir Valle, who are by no means alone in their inclusion of explicitly sexual and/or violent scenes in their novels: Lorenzo Lunar Cardedo (*Usted es la culpable* [2006], *La vida es un tango* [2005], both in the detective Leo Martín series), Ena Lucía Portela (*Cien botellas en una pared* [2001]), and Modesto Caballero Ramos (*Culpable sin castigo* [2008], *Ciudad en pánico* [2011], and *La aguja en el pajar* [2014]) all present non-normative and/or extreme scenes of sexual violence in their work.[11] Though inclusion of such scenes has become typical of the hard-boiled detective text from the USA and Scandinavia (Stieg Larsson's *Millennium* trilogy in particular raising questions about the representation of women/misogyny in contemporary fiction), the dissemination of women as abject or detailed description of homosexual sex and transvestites during intercourse has no real history within Cuban detective fiction, given its once didactic focus and the country's 1975 Family Code, which sought to ensure gender parity within Cuban families.[12] The works by Padura and Valle in this thesis demonstrate a clear break from the propagandistic revolutionary guidelines as outlined in the previously quoted speech delivered by Castro in 1971 and encouraged by MININT

[11] Caballero Ramos' detective fiction has been published in Cuba, along with that of Portela. However, it appears that the *Detective Leo Martín* series by Lunar Cardedo has only been published in Spain, despite the author having published other works in Cuba. Navigating www.ecured.cu, a website not dissimilar to Wikipedia which declares itself 'con la voluntad de crear y difundir el conocimiento desde un punto de vista descolonizador, objetivo y veraz y, aunque es una enciclopedia, es una enciclopedia relativamente peculiar', specific page links to the Leo Martín series are either blank or have been wiped. For example, see Ecured, *Que en vez de infierno encuentres gloria*, year unknown.

[12] The Family Code, its intentions, and its inadequacies, will be discussed further in Chapter Two.

(Ministerio del Interior), and also demonstrate a subversion of both literary and societal expectations of the representation of bodies and sexualities.

1.11.1. Communist Cuba's *Femmes Fatales*

Typically, the *femme fatale* embodies the most obviously sexualised concept within the North American genre, appearing in both filmic and textual reproductions of the hard-boiled style. A semiotically loaded character, her insatiable sexuality and body communicate an absolute femininity which is juxtaposed with danger and apprehension inherent to her repeatedly transgressive dominance of typical male acts (Forter 2000: 33). Mary Ann Doane's (1991) *Femmes Fatales* investigates the promulgation of this archetype's representation in film. Doane (1) believes that the *femme fatale* 'Never really is what she seems to be. She harbors a threat which is not entirely legible, predictable or manageable.' These definitions considered, and given this thesis's focus on genre subversion, it is important to also take into account Katherine Farrimond's take on the character. Farrimond (2011), notes that giving the *femme fatale* a strong definition merely serves to stop new, original *femmes fatales* being created and analysed. Instead, Farrimond states that trying to define the dangerous woman 'can be [a] useful means of identifying generic tendencies and patterns around the representation of women, they also speak to the various anxieties that the mysterious woman provokes. This list offers a means of categorising that which resists easy categorisation as a way of pinning down the *femme fatale* to a list of easily identifiable attributes. Such lists are also implicitly exhaustive, and therefore suggest that the limits of the *femme fatale* can be easily defined' (4). In this way, my work interprets the *femme fatale* as any female character who simply challenges, troubles, and causes anxiety to patriarchal structures, such as the detective.

The existence of such a challenging female role constitutes a marked addition to the established codes for socialist detective fiction under Castrista rule. To date no scholar has undertaken an in-depth investigation into how women were constructed and disseminated through socialist detective fiction. Though this thesis investigates the *hombre nuevo*, given its focus on gender theory and the representations and mutations of gender, it is also important to consider the role of women during the development of revolutionary politics and as guerrilla soldiers. It is unlikely a *femme fatale*, if even visible in these texts, would perform the same role within socialist detective fiction of the 1970s and 1980s. During the revolutionary period, women were encouraged to join work brigades: Guerra (2010:275) documents that by the late 1960s, women were 'surrendering [their] body' to the state for use during sugar harvests, and though 'their

bodies were incapable of performing the same amount of work as men, they served palpable and symbolic purposes by simultaneously inspiring and "shaming" healthy men into joining labour brigades.' (275) Women were not to aspire to beauty and a traditional feminine sexuality connoted through their bodies, rather:

> They were celebrated for overcoming perceived innate deficiencies, such as the inability to operate motor vehicles properly, by learning how to drive tractors in state training programmes. They were also applauded, despite poor performances as agricultural labourers, for simply 'illuminating the soil' or resisting the feminine temptation to value jewelled baubles.' (276)

Through the concept of 'illuminating the soil', this stereotype would appear to reference women's beauty, and also considers women as the fairer sex, and therefore ultimately as easy to oppress. Through the foundation of the Federación de Mujeres Cubanas (FMC) in the same year the Revolution triumphed against Batista, and through the prominence of female leaders involved in the FMC such as Vilma Espín and Celia Sánchez who had fought in the guerrilla movement with Castro, female roles in Cuba during this time may appear to have been particularly revolutionary, having previously undergone extreme oppression, suffering from illiteracy and the impacts of abortion having been illegal. The establishment of the Family Code in 1975 demonstrates an awareness of the significance of parity between men and women, with Clause 26 stating, 'Ambos cónyuges están obligados a cuidar la familia que han creado y a cooperar el uno con el otro en la educación, formación y guía de los hijos conforme a los principios de la moral socialista. Igualmente, en la medida de las capacidades o posibilidades de cada uno, deben participar en el gobierno del hogar y cooperar al mejor desenvolvimiento del mismo' (Cubanet, *Ley No. 1289 Código de la Familia*, year unknown). However, though developments such as maternity leave, education, and the sharing of domestic tasks amongst partners, critics such as Guerra (2010: pp.275-276) demonstrate that though women mimicked the acts of men, wearing the same clothing and carrying out the same tasks such as labour and military training, the Revolution was not necessarily progressive for women who were still simply applauded for imitating acts associated with masculinity. It is for this reason, I believe, that no *mujer nueva* initiative was put into action in Cuba: though it is certainly significant that women were seen as capable of carrying out the same tasks as men (at least in theory), given that women acting as men was enough to demonstrate their worth, it is also important to understand that women were expected to take on this role, rather than any attention being paid to women as individuals. As a result, there could be no *mujer nueva*, as little attention was paid to what it meant to be female in Cuba in the first instance: considering Doane's definitions,

illegible unpredictable, sexual and threatening characteristics of the *femme fatale* were not in any way encouraged during the period in which socialist crime fiction became used as propaganda.

However, taking into account Castro's choice of the detective fiction genre as a propagandistic tool because its rigid structure and format were so easily appropriated (see Wilkindon, 2006: 284 and Serra, 2007: pp.156-157), this thesis focuses on the *femme fatale* as an important figure for further investigation in the post-Special Period output of Padura and Valle. The appearance of the *femme fatale* in works investigated in this thesis is therefore viewed as an attempt at mutating the Cuban detective novel, but is not seen as a simple simulation of that created in the USA; the dangerous women investigated here have been transformed entirely, leaving the reader with questions about the fluidity of bodies and sexualities in post-Soviet Cuba.

1.11.2. Non-Normative Sexualities: Cuba's Internal Exiles

An analysis of sexuality in these novels also requires an acknowledgement of the status of homosexuality in Cuba. Homosexuals in Cuba underwent severe repression after the establishment of the Communist Party in power in 1959. Any man demonstrating feminine behaviour was arrested and treated as a pariah (López, 2015: 48), beginning in 1962. This culminated in 1965 in the government's 'recogidas colectivas', which Valero (1991: pp.14-15) notes as consisting of 'Operaciones de logística fascista que consistían en cercar militarmente áreas completas de la ciudad y 'recoger' a cuanta persona tuviese – a ojo de buen cubero militar – facha de antisocial, homosexual, hippy, vagabundo, intelectual, en una palabra, contrarrevolucionario'. Considered counterrevolutionary, formalist authors and homosexuals were viewed as 'lumpen' and 'escoria'.

In 1965, as López notes (49), UMAP (Unidades Militares de Ayuda a la Producción) camps were created for anti-revolutionaries, a significant number of which were homosexual men. 'The idea imported from the Soviet Union at this time was that homosexuality was a treatable illness. Following an extensive visit to the Soviet Union, Samuel Feijóo [a Cuban artist] claimed that homosexuality did not exist there due to the ability of socialism to cure vices and restore people's health' (López, 49), and thus UMAP camps were implemented to reintegrate counterrevolutionaries (namely homosexuals) into Cuban society, cured of their social problems. The camps, founded on hard labour, have been described as 'verdaderos campos de concentración y de trabajo forzado en la agricultura, muchas de ellas [sic] en la provincia de Camagüey […] el Estado necesitaba

una fuerza laboral gratuita en aquella provincia' (Maseda, 2001:224). The camps, aiming to erase social aberrations, proved the existence of systemic homophobia in revolutionary Cuba. However, as Leiner (1994:28) notes, even after the closure of the camps in 1969,[13] homosexuals continued to be considered as 'enemies of the state because they could not fit into this ideological social unity'.

As a result, then, a focus on characters who practice non-normative sexualities such as homosexuals and lesbians,[14] or who play with body conventions such as transvestites, had typically not been represented in detective fiction in Cuba. Cuban gender theorist Abel Sierra Madero (2006:160) notes the effect that the intelligibility of the transvestite body can have, claiming:

> El temor de erotizarse ante un cuerpo no comprendido en su homófobo y heterosexualizado deseo, un cuerpo extraño, diferente y al mismo tiempo, seductor. Su mirada, entrenada para 'entender' cuerpos dentro de cierto campo de inteligibilidad cultural, ha sido 'violentada' por un cuerpo que se presenta incoherente a sus deducciones culturales.

Here, Sierra Madero links fear of the unknown to desire, positing the transvestited body as one which has the ability to disrupt and/or violate accepted norms. Madero goes on to discuss upset/disrupted visions in relationship to the (transvestited) object of desire which has now been moved, changed, mutated, and placed into a file of the false/unreal. The theorist continues by comparing transvestited bodies to 'la invasión de un virus social que puede generar un espacio de confusión – dentro de la matriz de inteligibilidad cultural – donde los hombres podrían seducir cuerpos falsos o ambiguos, y nadie estaría exento de equivocación' (161-162). Seduction, fear, and desire are important concepts to consider not only when confronting non-normative sexualities in contemporary Cuba, but also when examining the representation of bodies, sex, and violence in the country's post-Soviet production of detective fiction. A focus on characters who practise non-normative sexualities or who own non-normative bodies is therefore subversive in relation to the detective fiction produced after the country's *Special Period*, and crucially, as this thesis argues, provides an original mutation of the US hard-boiled detective genre.

[13] López (49) notes that no official closing date has been provided for the closure of the camps, however this thesis understands them to have been definitively closed by the end of 1969. López (49) also claims no specific reason has ever been given for the closure of the camps: it is inferred that this was due to national and international protests at their existence.

[14] Though homosexuality was viewed as an anti-revolutionary trait, lesbianism does not feature in any revolutionary rhetoric.

1.12. Chapter Overviews

In Chapter One – 'Leonardo Padura Fuentes' *Máscaras*: '"Travestido, transformado, definitivamente distinto"?' I critically discuss Padura Fuentes' *Máscaras* in relation to its predominant themes of sexuality and the body within Cuban society, crucially focusing on the postmodern debate as part of contemporary Cuban fiction. In doing so, this chapter discusses postmodern symptoms within the text and views them as demonstrative of deviance within the crime genre, which in turn reinforces the presentation of sexuality and the body within the novel as fluid and performative. To make this aim clear, this chapter uses a direct citation from the text, 'travestido, transformado, definitivamente distinto' (2013: 197) to focus on the leitmotif of masks and changing faces in *Máscaras*. These fluctuating identities are investigated through an argument in favour of *Máscaras*'s being read as a postmodern novel, and in the nuanced presentation of the revolutionary figure of the *hombre nuevo* and the archetypal figure of the crime narrative, the *femme fatale*. Exploration of genre and prescribed identity norms permits a greater understanding of evolving roles and transformation in relation to both the marginalised body and unorthodox sexualities as presented by the novel, all the while considering the context of an evolving genre and the novel's nuanced heterodoxies.

This investigation aims to conclude that Padura's post-Soviet appropriation/overhauling of the crime genre and its rigid format during the Cuban Revolution, which had previously constrained authors of the genre on the island, demonstrates that, in agreement with Wilkinson, a careful reading of unorthodox Cuban detective texts can unravel a multiplicitous identity formed contrary to archetypal roles. This work contends that thought this may be a valid interpretation, there still remains much to be researched into how the non-normative body – in this study that of the transsexual – is used to create another aspirational/available selfhood within Cuba as displayed through the medium of the detective novel. Using the archetypal figure of the *femme fatale*, this section of research into deviance begins with a discussion of the significance of the blurred and unorthodox self within Mario Conde's 1989 Havana in which dictation and submission to patriarchal norms appear to make some space for individuality and self-expression.

Chapter Two – 'A Journey to Hell and Back: Genre Subversion in Amir Valle's *El descenso a los infiernos*' – engages with the themes of subversion and genre masking. These are discussed in relation to genre trouble, which I posit is exemplified by Valle's work through the use of historical events and fact. I dialogue with issues of

representations of violence in Valle's novels, focusing on scenes of violence which appear typical of the detective novel, but which I argue are particularly original within a Cuban context. A main argument of this chapter is that the novels' focus on scenes of sexual violence/violence pose the reader important questions around the purpose of detective fiction and hegemonic masculinity, questioning whether Valle's approach to writing scenes of a sexual nature provides a certain titillation on the part of the implied male reader, either helping or hampering *machista* sexual satisfaction and reaffirming or questioning hegemonic masculinity. This chapter also takes the opportunity to return to this thesis's focus on genre trouble, focusing on the *femme fatale* and the detective/*Hombre Nuevo* hybrid, positing that Valle introduces a neoliberal, capitalist New Man for 21st century Cuba. Here, I also investigate threats to such iconic figures from characters who demonstrate pariah femininity,[15] and sexually and physically non-normative characters, namely transsexuals. I provide a reconsideration of the use of sexuality in Valle's crime narratives and discuss the subject as a vehicle for dissidence in Cuba, but also as a means through which Valle plays with genre. I conclude that Valle's series is highly problematic for the reader who is encouraged to reassess their understandings of the relationship between neoliberalism and the communist state, and *machista* ideals of hegemonic masculinity, which I argue are reflected in Valle's unusual take on the detective genre.

Chapter Three, '*Máscaras mexicanas*:[16] Gender and Genre in *Hielo negro* (2013a, originally published 2011) and *Cuello blanco* (2013b) by Bef' dialogues with the link between the Mexican detective genre, femicide and the socio-cultural issues that link the crime narrative in Mexico with the view of women. In this chapter, I investigate the notions of mask, disguise and performance, and question what such concepts mean for masculinities and femininities in contemporary Mexico. I use the figure of the violent woman to demonstrate to what extent the performativity of non-traditional gender acts develops the role of the woman as symbolic mother in Mexico, and question to what extent Bef therefore creates a new kind of female performance, questioning the effect this has on Mexican masculinity. I move on to consider the homoerotic dangerous woman as providing a malleable quality to the traditional *femme fatale*, and I discuss the

[15] I do not intend for the role of *femme fatale* to become confused with pariah femininity here, given the *femme fatale* is an archetypal norm within hard-boiled detective fiction, and therefore it could be argued that the role of the *femme fatale* perpetuates another kind of hegemonic femininity (Schippers, 2007). Instead, I simply wish to demonstrate a potential overlap of the two in Valle's work.

[16] The title of this chapter references Octavio Paz's chapter by the same name in his much-quoted work, *El laberinto de la soledad*, which will be used to underpin the theoretical background in my work relating to gender issues within contemporary Mexico. The title also implicitly references mask and disguise, a concept intrinsic to the focus of my thesis.

purpose and effects that bodily performance and adornment have upon the reader. This chapter questions whether the use of self-awareness, performativity, hybritidy and double-coding in Bef's work has created a new genre in the Mexican market, and what this signifies for the subject of femicide. Primarily, I use the two primary texts in this chapter as a means to continue the thesis's main focus on the masking of sexualities and identities, closely analysing changing masculinities, the notion of the 'fantastical' *femme fatale*, the bisexual detective, and how the postmodern hybrid detective text can be used to form a critique of contemporary Mexican society. Here, I use the contemporary Mexican crime novel to demonstrate how the presentation of sexuality and gender is reversing long-standing binaries within the culture: from victims to victors, from captured to kidnappers, from invisible to visible, from normative to deviant. I propose that the crime fiction used in Chapter Three demonstrates this through gendered actions, bodies and changing roles.

Chapter Four, 'Rogelio Guedea's *Colima*: Sex, Lies, and Subjectivity', examines the work of Mexican author Rogelio Guedea, and analyses genre blurring in his three detective fiction novels: *Conducir un trailer* (2008, also refered to as *Conducir*), *41* (2010), and *El crimen de Los Tepames* (2012, also referred to as *El crimen*). I analyse Guedea's use of style and the representation of gender and sexuality across the trilogy, and posit that, due to the generic mutation and clear preoccupation with historical events such as political assassinations, land feuds, and murders, and gender roles, these novels function as an in-depth, postmodern, and original criticism of Mexican society. These novels disguise and mutate the norms of detective fiction, and do not fit within a genre often informed listed traits (as favoured by Torodov),[17] but instead function as a peripatetic genre which simply holds at its core a drive to discuss society and human nature. Further to this, these three novels are particularly pertinent for study in relation to Bef, Valle, and Padura's works; all authors featured in this thesis make use of serialisation in order to develop characters and plots; use the crime genre as a vehicle through which to dialogue with social tensions, and form an at times convoluted commentary on the masks of gender and sexual identity. However, unlike the *Detective Mijangos* series and the *Mario Conde* tetralogy, in this chapter I examine the ways in which Guedea's metahistorical detective fiction goes even further to subvert genre norms so commonly associated with detective fiction, as previously discussed in the Introduction. Guedea instead presents the reader with an example of the *neo-policial* par excellence. His trilogy provides the reader with detectives who have to fight

[17] Torodov's list of the qualities of detective fiction can be found in his 1977 work *The Poetics of Prose*.

– and die – for the truth to be told, heteroglossic plots based on historical events that intertwine within the narrative, yet stand separately in reality, and an unsatisfying dénouement.

In order to demonstrate how Guedea masks and disguises the detective genre within the *Colima* trilogy in order to create an original detective series which still encourages the reader to question their own reality, I discuss genre subversion and Guedea's use of style at length. In contrast to the more conventional examples of the genre, including work by Bef and Padura Fuentes, as well of that by American authors such as Robert Crais (*L.A. Requiem*, 1999), Guedea's style is highly convoluted. Guedea shifts between both first person narration and indirect free style. Names of family members, politicians, lawyers, detectives, and criminals abound, some with similar names, leaving the reader confused as to who is who. Characters are forgotten, resurface, and disappear again, confusing the reader as to their significance within the plot, and posing important questions concerning humanity within a corrupted Mexico.

The works investigated in this thesis are understood as postmodern takes on the detective genre as previously understood as the norm in Cuba and Mexico. Furthermore, the representations of bodies and genders within their pages contribute towards the creation of a new subgenre of detective fiction from Mexico and Cuba, previously unseen in these countries. Overall, this thesis concludes that the four authors featured in this thesis contribute towards new subgenres of Latin American detective fiction, each creating original detective fiction from the regions, beginning with an investigation into Padura's *Máscaras*.

Chapter Two: Leonardo Padura's *Máscaras*: 'travestido, transformado, definitivamente distinto'?

Introduction

Máscaras (1995, version used in this thesis 2013) is the third novel from Leonardo Padura's *Las cuatro estaciones* tetralogy. Towards the end of the novel, state detective protagonist Lieutenant Mario Conde declares his Havana neighbourhood to be 'travestido, transformado, definitivamente distinto' (197) from that which it once was. It is this quotation in particular which highlights the novel's subversive undertones and the generic mutation at the core of the narrative. Padura enjoys the status of being dubbed Cuba's greatest living author, and maintains a distinguished international position (the series has been translated into various other languages including English, and BBC Radio Four's *Foreign Bodies* dedicated an episode in 2014 to Padura's *Las cuatro estaciones* series, and four translated editions of the *Havana Quartet*, as it is known in English, were also broadcast as part of the station's *Saturday Drama* series in 2014). However, this popularity, in addition to the sheer amount of academic thought his work has generated over the past two decades, has not meant any of his work has been significantly analysed with regards to genre subversion and hybridity in his detective tetralogy *Las cuatro estaciones*, comprised of *Pasado perfecto* (Havana Blue, 1991), *Vientos de cuaresma* (Havana Gold, 1994), *Máscaras* (Havana Red), and *Paisaje de Otoño* (Havana Black, 1997).

Primarily, this chapter considers the novel's postmodern tendencies in relation to the description 'travestido, transformado, definitivamente distinto', and focuses on the text as a generic example which challenges the modernist 'epistemological genre par excellence' (McHale, 1987:9) as a self-aware text including a fatalistic ending and its own metanarrative. The second half of this chapter engages with deviant sexualities and gender trouble, focusing on the *femme fatale* as portrayed by three characters. Furthermore, I also consider the protagonist's crumbling heteronormativity as informed by the *hombre nuevo* in relation to these dangerous characters.

I begin by providing greater background information on the status of the recent literary history in Cuba, moving on to the detective novel specifically. I do so in order to demonstrate the ways in which *Máscaras* can be interpreted as subversive of the detective fiction genre in Cuba, and therefore proves to be a significant example of Cuban Post-Soviet detective fiction.

2.1. In Transit: Dictatorship, Revolution, and the Status of Intellectuals

Fulgencio Batista (1901–1973) first ruled Cuba as President from 1940–1944. In 1952, he returned to power in the form of a dictator, having overthrown then-President Carlos Prío Socarrás through a military coup. Batista's second term in power – unopposed by the USA – saw Cuba divided – catering for American tourists on the one hand, and leaving Cubans to struggle both in urban and rural environments: Leiner (1994: pp.3-4) notes that during this period Cuba was particularly deprived, especially in its rural areas where 60% of families lived in homes comprised of earth floors with palm leaves for roofs; only one in every fourteen homes had access to electricity; and 43% of the adult population was illiterate. In the cities, in particular in Havana, 'domination by American money, brothels, crime lords, and tourists undoubtedly endowed the city with a seamy, exploitative side' (Lumsden, 1996:33).

Accounts of artistic and literary activity during this period fluctuate. Despite Cuba earning its nickname as 'America's brothel' due to the previously described context, López (2015:35) notes that 'Havana became Cuba's cultural centre during the 1950s and was home to a good number of acclaimed writers and artists, such as Nicholás Guillén, Emilio Ballagas, Lydia Cabrera, Amelia Peláez, René Portocarrero, José Lezama Lima and Virglio Piñera'. However, despite this seeming hub of intellectual activity in the city, Montaner (1976: 125) maintains that authors of the status of Lezama Lima and Piñera were virtually unknown during this time. That said, although Cabrera Infante (1985:55) recognises that although the atmosphere for writers in Cuba at the time was both precarious and unsatisfying, there did exist a small number of private publishing houses in pre-revolutionary Havana at the time to be made use of. Overall, it appears that despite uncertain conditions at the time, the intellectuals were able to continue creating literary products: López (36) believes this allowed them to 'preserve a fragile sense of Cuban identity among the population'.

Fidel Castro's 26th of July opposition movement was, in principle, against Batista's dictatorship, and also crucially disagreed with the crime, the corruption, and the poverty that had developed in Cuba as a result. MacEwen (1981:9) recognises the 26th of July Movement as one motivated by a national identity affected by colonialism and hegemony: 'Few have experienced the degree of subjugation suffered by Cuba during its 400 years under formal Spanish control as a colony and its 60 years under the de facto control of the United States'. The meaning of the 26th of July Movement's overthrowing of Batista's dictatorship in 1959 therefore had significant repercussions for Cuban identity, free from

the ties of imperialism, and this thesis considers these consequences in relation to the island's literary production.

Wilkinson (2006:pp.53-54) notes five distinct periods with regards to Cuban cultural policy in the years following the Revolution: 1959–61, during which time the State held little control over its authors; 1961-71, when art and cultural production came to resemble socialist propaganda; 1971-76, when a Soviet cultural policy model was adopted and, crucially for this period and this thesis, ideological conformity became established, 'characterised by anti-western and homophobic tendencies'; 1976–91, when a gradual reassessment took place of the previous five years' excessive policies, and, finally, 1991 – present: a challenging period for Cuba and its socialist system, heralded by the Special Period in Times of Peace.

As a result, during the first three decades of revolutionary rule, intellectuals and authors suffered persecution – and accusations – if their literary output did not adhere to the specificities of Cuban cultural policy of the time. For writing in a formalist style, for example, authors could be accused of being homosexual – and therefore counterrevolutionary. Internal exile was one punishment – José Lezama Lima was forced to move to then sparsely populated east of the island, UMAP (Unidades Militares de Ayuda a Producción) camps were another. In short, these units were plots of land to which men being punished for their social deviancy would be sent as punishment.[18] The history of the UMAPs and the camps themselves have been explained as follows:

> In November 1965, the army's high command, with the Prime Minister's approval, formed groups called Military Units to Aid Production. These units would be filled by drafting social deviants, that is, everyone whose behaviour was not strictly in accordance with the public definition of good citizenship. The first UMAP draftees were treated so brutally that some of their officers were court martialed and convicted of torture, but the organization was soon brought under control by Ernesto Casillas, who headed the UMAP in its formative months.
> The UMAP functioned throughout the sugar harvests of 1965-66 and 1966-67, but it was not universally approved. When many intellectual and university faculty were sent to the UMAP as alleged homosexuals, the Cuban National Union of Writers and Artists (UNEAC) protested to the Prime Minister. Although Castro had approved the establishment of the UMAP and at first spoke well of it, he agreed that the treatment of UMAP draftees was scandalous: the UMAP was disbanded after the 1967 harvest (Domínguez: 1978:375).
> Although UMAP camps were disbanded in 1967, this did not mean that

discrimination against homosexuals ended at that date; for example, in 1971, the

[18] The use of 'men' in this sentence is deliberate: women were not punished in UMAP camps – in fact, lesbianism as an anti-revolutionary act does not feature in any available research.

Congreso de Educación y Cultura passed a ruling against the employment of homosexual men in educational or artistic professions (Wilkinson:136). The status of the male intellectual had therefore become something for which to be persecuted, and was intimately associated with homosexuality in post-revolutionary Cuba. In the light of this, this chapter focuses on how Leonardo Padura's *Máscaras* engages with questions surrounding outstepping both literary and societal norms in post-Soviet Cuba.

2.2. Creating a Genre

Manipulated by Castro's revolutionary Communist Party's demands, the production of Cuban socialist detective fiction was different to that evidenced by the US hard-boiled genre (Braham, 2004, Oakley, 2012, and Wilkinson, 2006). Created in an age of disillusionment in a post-Wall Street Crash society, the US genre responded to new cultural encounters (Knight, 2006:25), thereby going some way to explain the genre's popularity in other Latin American countries which have also experienced social and political upheaval, such as Mexico, Argentina, and Chile. What marks Cuba as unusual in this particular context is the island's political history: critics such as Wilkinson (2006) argue that Cuba's history as a non-capitalist state means the country has not experienced the same transition to 'democracy' as many other Latin American States.

In 1971, The Cuban Ministry of the Interior began a literary competition which aimed to encourage narratives promoting the view of 'the policeman as part of an efficient body of officers relying on Comités de Defensa de la Revolución […] and government agencies to restore the desired order' (Serra, 2007:157). It is well-documented that the crime genre produced in socialist Cuba adhered to the propagandistic revolutionary guidelines for literature, outlined in a Fidel Castro's 1971 address at the *Primer congreso nacional de educación y cultura* (First National Congress of Education and Culture), which stated the following:

> Y para volver a recibir un premio, en concurso nacional o internacional, tiene que ser revolucionario de verdad, escritor de verdad, poeta de verdad, revolucionario de verdad. Eso está claro […] Y las revistas y concursos, no aptos para farsantes. Y tendrán cabida los escritores revolucionarios […] tendrán cabida únicamente los revolucionarios. […] Nuestra valoración es política. No puede haber valor estético sin contenido humano. (Castro, 1971)

Such parameters therefore discouraged and did not recognise any work which would stand to promote individual effort and social problems in socialist Cuba. Castro's speech encouraged work by authors such as Armando Cristóbal Pérez and Ignacio Cardenas Acuña, whose novels Wilkinson (2006: pp.112-113) sees as highlighting 'the exemplary

nature of post-revolutionary society', whose hero 'must be "a gentleman" and a detective for the pleasure of the intellectual challenge, rather than a policeman', or somewhat paradoxically 'has to be a member of the people's police force, entrusted by people "en poder" to act on their behalf' (116). It was a genre which, as Portuondo (1973:132) states: 'mantiene los rasgos esenciales del género, pero trae este sentido de identificación de justicia y legalidad socialista, y, sobre todo, el concepto de realización colectiva como autodefensa del nuevo orden social revolucionario'. Padura (2000:150) himself was suspicious of the literature encouraged by the Congress, maintaining that 'Tal confluencia es, por supuesto, más que sospechosa: ningún género nace convocado por un premio y obtiene resultados desde la primera convocatoria'. Nonetheless, many authors turned to the genre during this period in Cuba: in his 2012 article which addresses post-Revolutionary Cuban detective fiction and Padura's significance within this context, López Calvo (2015:30) recognises that the claims made during 1971 were strengthened in 1972 when a set of rules were published to help those who wished to begin publishing detective fiction. It is therefore unsurprising that socio-cultural criticism was not widely expressed in the detective genre following major social upheaval in Cuba, as was the case in such narratives from the US and other Latin American countries. Instead, Cuban socialist detective fiction became a strategic instrument to disseminate revolutionary success.

Bearing striking similarities to Soviet detective fiction, Cuban socialist detective novels featured teams of state police officers working together to stop dissident behaviour.[19] Also similarly to Soviet detective fiction, strict boundaries were set for the content and format of such novels,[20] with academics considering the genre to have been prioritised by Castro as its rigid structures could be easily appropriated (Wilkinson, 2006: 284; Serra, 2007: pp.156-157). As Padura (2000:151) explains:

> El resultado artístico de tales regulaciones fue la creación de una ruptura y un vacío en el terreno artístico que en algunos casos se trató de llenar de forma artificial con la promoción de nuevas figuras que sustituyeran a las excluidas.

Post-Revolution, Cuba therefore produced crime narratives which were dissimilar to those published in other Latin American countries at the same time, such as Mexico, where the genre has had long-standing links to the U.S. hard-boiled original (see chapters Three and Four of this thesis).

[19] See Wilkinson, (2006: pp.110-115) for examples of socialist detective fiction, such as that produced by Ignacio Cardenas Acuña and Cristóbal Pérez.
[20] See Koreneva (2005) for a thorough explanation of the Soviet detective novel and its various uses.

If such was the context informing the detective novel in the early-mid years of revolutionary Cuba, works published in the later years demonstrate, I argue, a new kind of detective fiction within the Cuban context. Considering the detective novel as a response to new cultural encounters, I understand the fall of the Soviet Union and its consequences on Cuba to have encouraged the publication of narratives which did not necessarily comply with the Communist Party's literary ideals as set out in 1971. *Máscaras* follows detective Mario Conde's investigation into the murder of a gay man, Alexis Arayán, whose body is discovered in the Havana Woods dressed as Electra Garrigó.[21] The narrative charts the detective's developing relationships with those within Havana's gay and transvestite underworlds, a significant departure from the work previously produced prior to the *Periodo especial* which dealt with archetypal dissidents, caught and punished for their crimes by the effective state police apparatus. Though Padura's work may appear to engage more with the tenets of the U.S. detective narrative, the core argument of this chapter lies in the generic hybridity and mutation of both the U.S. *and* the Cuban socialist detective novel. My work argues for the originality of Padura's work, particularly in *Máscaras* in the *Las cuatro estaciones* series, contending that the author's work foregrounds t*ransgenericidad*, both in relation to the troubling of the detective genre itself and the themes of the body and sexuality in the novel, with the narrative's action centring on transvestism, homosexuality, homophobia, and disguise.

Part of the reason behind the popularity of the *Las cuatro estaciones* series is the creation of a Cuban sleuth who, though forming part of the socialist machine, also demonstrated clear disregard for previous Cuban investigators, more closely resembling the U.S. detective: Conde is presented as a drinker, a womanizer, a loner suffering from what Janet Pérez (2010:63) brands as 'insufficient fervour' towards the Revolution, and a fighter, returning in *Máscaras* having been suspended from the force having started a public brawl with another officer.

I begin my analysis of *Máscaras* with a debate on genre subversion, considering the slippery and complicated concept of postmodernity within the post-Soviet context of the *Periodo Especial*. I continue with an analysis of the postmodern self-awareness at the heart of the text, considering notions of fluidity of sexualities, metanarratives, underwhelming endings, and masks and multiplicities, interpreting postmodern symptoms within the text as demonstrative of deviance from both U.S. and Cuban detective genre norms. I then consider the extent to which Padura's presentation of the

[21] Virgilio Piñera, *Electra Garrigó*, (1960 [originally published 1948]).

detective acts as a subversive comment on the ubiquitous figure of the *hombre nuevo* with unspoken homosexual desires. I conclude that Padura's work acts as a destabilising commentary on accepted sexualities and genres in Cuba, suggesting both to be *travestido, transformado, definitivamente distinto* to generic and gender archetypes.

2.3. Genre Trouble and *Transgenericidad*: The Postmodern Cuban Detective Novel

I use the term genre trouble in order to discuss the postmodern core of Padura's work, and also to engage with the thought conveyed by Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble*. Here, Butler (1990:46) questions incidences when one does not fit into the predetermined model of male or female, deeming gender trouble to constitute 'the mobilisation, subversive confusion, and proliferation of precisely those constitutive categories that seek to keep gender in its place by posturing as the foundational illusion of identity'. Such a concept of subversion can equally be applied to Padura's work, and *Máscaras* is a particularly clear example of genre trouble and of the postmodern Cuban detective novel.

Postmodernity itself, the period of late capitalism, which implies a period of late modernity, is often linked to Western societies. Though such a concept of postmodernity may be maintained by some as necessarily divorced from Latin America and from communist Cuba in particular, the literary classification of Padura's work as an example of postmodernist detective fiction and generically subversive comes from the author's preoccupation with double-encoding, metanarrativity, parody, anxiety, and multiplicity. The nature of Caribbean and Cuban postmodernity is highlighted by Williams (1995:95), who identifies that 'an aquatic quality of the Caribbean is part of its inherent postmodernity', also stating that 'social scientists have described cultural constants of the Caribbean as fragmentation, instability, isolation, uprootedness, cultural complexity, disperse historiography, contingency, and impermanence'. Benítez Rojo (1992:11) supports this view, understanding Caribbean culture as 'not terrestrial but aquatic; a sinuous culture', a result of centuries of European and Asian involvement due to the area's plantation history. Such fluctuating and at times clashing notions are integral to both the paradoxical postmodernist text, befitting of the multiplicitous phenomenon itself.

Referencing Williams and Benítez Rojo, I argue that the postmodern Cuban detective novel as represented here by *Máscaras* is demonstrative of a genre and a selfhood that are each *travestido, transformado, definitivamente distinto*. I also take on board

García Talaván's (2011:56) more recent understanding of postmodernist (neo)detective fiction:

> La práctica de la novela neopolicial es un ejercicio complejo que comprende la revisión del pasado, el análisis social del presente y la deconstrucción y reformulación de principios y formas; y este tipo de ejercicio sólo podía desarrollarse en tiempos de plena posmodernidad, cuando, desde el punto de vista literario, se inicia la revisión de los grandes relatos del pasado y opta por el reflejo de una realidad plural y diversa.

Performance, self-awareness, contradiction, subversion, doubling and transformation are key to the postmodern novel, and are immediately apparent in Padura's work, a novel instilled with tension and anxiety, far removed from that prescribed by the Cuban socialist regime, above all in relation to the iconic figure of the *Hombre Nuevo*. I consider the novel's postmodern tendencies, and focus on the text's challenges to the modernist 'epistemological genre par excellence', which I argue champion both Lyotard and Talaván's 'revisión de los grandes relatos del pasado', through Padura's use of self-awareness, the fatalistic ending, double-encoding and contradiction, and a discussion of postmodern instability. Such fluctuating and at times clashing notions are integral to both the paradoxical postmodernist text. Here, I reference Linda Hutcheon's (1989:5) notions of double-encoding and parody as integral to postmodernist texts, McHale's view that postmodernist detective fiction constitutes the move from epistemological questioning to ontological instability (1987: pp.10-11), and Lyotard's understanding that postmodernism is endowed with an intrinsic incredulity towards metanarratives (1989: xxiv), in this case that promoted by the Communist Party after the 1971 *Congreso*.

Inherently multiplicitous, the postmodern text supplies the reader with an infinite amount of possible interpretations of the narrative. For this reason, I approach *Máscaras* using the theoretical standpoints of Hutcheon in particular, who prioritises the validity of the critical elements of postmodern narratives, despite their seemingly fluctuating nature, rendering such texts both complicit and resistant: Padura, I argue, critiques a homophobic discourse in Cuba through a trans-genre, and in doing so comments on such a discourse.

According to Pérez, Padura's work becomes increasingly postmodern as it progresses. The scholar pays close attention to Padura's publications which feature Mario Conde after he leaves the police force at the end of *Paisaje de Otoño* (1997), and returns in the texts *La neblina del ayer* (2004) and *Adiós, Hemingway* (2001). Pérez (2010: 74) claims that the author's 'move from a position of orthodoxy to one of complete unorthodoxy is undeniable', both regarding the texts' form, style, and structure as examples of Cuban detective fiction, and thereby suggesting that Padura's early work bears 'many […]

hallmarks of Modernism' (4). Pérez is not the only scholar to note the postmodern play in Padura's novels, with Franken (2009) considering the *Cuatro estaciones* as a postmodern series, but neither recognise the wider problems of postmodernity and postmodernism within a specifically Cuban context.

The postmodern undertones of the novel are made clear before the main body of the text begins. *Máscaras* hints at the multiplicitous, fluctuating identities and the performance of self at the heart of the novel. In the *nota del autor* Padura acknowledges the influence of American author of detective novel *The Maltese Falcon*, Dashiell Hammett (1929), demonstrating generic awareness, and also making clear that *Máscaras* makes extensive reference to the works of renowned twentieth century Cuban authors such as Virgilio Piñera and Severo Sarduy. The borrowings from other Cuban authors may be part of the reason why Padura's work has been accepted in Cuba despite its break with generic convention. This is in addition to what reads as a disclaimer at the very end of the *nota del autor*: 'Mario Conde es una metáfora, no un policía, y su vida, simplemente, transcurre en el espacio posible de la literatura' (and López Calvo, [2012: 30], recognises that the novel was indeed briefly banned on the island after its publication).

Perhaps the most obvious example of postmodern play in the novel occurs as the detective attends a party, thrown by a member of Havana's gay underworld. Attendance at this party, Conde explains, will inform him of the gay atmosphere and lifestyle in Havana (2013:137). Upon arriving at the party, Poly, a woman with whom Conde becomes romantically involved, asks him about his hobby as a writer:

> - ¿Qué tú escribes?
> - ¿Yo? Pues, cuentos.
> - Que interesante. ¿Y eres posmoderno?
> El Conde miró la muchacha, sorprendido por aquella disyuntiva estética imprevista: ¿debía ser posmoderno?
> - Más o menos – dijo, confiando en la posmodernidad y en que ella no le preguntara cuánto más y cuánto menos. (141)

Here, Padura's use of indirect free style allows the reader to reflect on the novel and consider whether *Máscaras* itself does constitute a postmodern text, and indeed, to consider what postmodernism is in a Cuban context. Her interrogatives demonstrate curiosity and a need for answers, the foundation of the modernist detective novel; however, the content of these questions is metaliterary and focuses on the status of the text that the reader continues to read. Engaging with McHale's (1987:9) declaration that the detective narrative is 'the epistemological genre par excellence' since rationality, revelation, and fact are all sought, used, and obtained in the typical detective text, Ewert (1999:189) claims that the postmodern metaphysical detective story causes anxiety

because it 'abounds with examples of other, unfamiliar universes and of uneasiness produced when boundaries between universes are violated […] Metaphysical detection plays its games in a different narrative (and narrated) world'. The transformation of a traditionally epistemological genre into a postmodern metanarrative is, I argue, what is at play in this extract and, in her questioning of Conde, Poly's words underline the uneasiness and boundary violation at the heart of *Máscaras*. Conde cannot respond to these questions, the detective has no answer to give Poly and once again, the role of the detective is undermined. His response, 'más o menos', is a further example of the anxiety rife in Conde's identity, highlighting his insecurity when considering his own work, and also demonstrating an awareness (on the part both of the author and of the reader) of the disputed postmodern paradigm in Cuba: such an unsure, contradictory response to Poly is an implicit sign of the postmodernism at play in Padura's novel. As Wilkinson (2006: 252) believes, 'By referencing the condition this way he [Padura] is deliberately drawing the reader's attention to the overall nature of his project'. The deliberate ambiguity and anxiety at play in this exchange is evidenced by Conde 'confiando en la posmodernidad y que *ella* no le preguntara cuánto más y cuánto menos' (141, my emphasis). This slippage – understanding *ella* as postmodernity or as Poly - is deliberate on Padura's part. It endows the conversation with a quality similar to the lack of control and adequate understanding arising from the confusion between postmodernity and Poly. It is this slippage that posits Poly as being almost interchangeable with postmodernity, and sites her as the problematic, indefinable, intangible image of postmodernity in the novel. At this juncture, trusting neither the anxiety-causing and interrogatory Poly, nor the contradictory and unclassifiable notion of postmodernism is preferable to Conde. Such an attitude undermines the role of the omniscient detective, in this instance transformed into a lost and confused entity.

It is perhaps the text's recurring trait of self-awareness that most clearly renders *Máscaras* a text so open to interpretation as postmodern. Conde's vocation to become a crime writer is a theme throughout the tetralogy, with Padura's fourth novel *Paisaje de otoño* seeing the detective leave the force to become a writer, and it is therefore significant to discuss the inclusion of Conde's untitled short story within *Máscaras*. The story often goes overlooked by academics, or is simply referenced in criticism of Padura's oeuvre (notably, Serra (2007:166) dedicates two paragraphs to Conde's would-be vocation as an author, mentioning in passing the unnamed short story in *Máscaras*). It is my contention, however, that Padura's choice to include an embedded narrative within *Máscaras* is far

from tangential, and that a close analysis of it is essential to our understanding of the novel as postmodern. The short story appears within *Máscaras* with no introduction, announcing itself through the use of italics. The narrative focuses on a Havana bus driver, who, one day, decides to kill one of his regular passengers. The story follows his life and thoughts over several months, culminating in his murder of the chosen passenger, Isabel María.

The reader is presented principally with the story's protagonist, performing the banal act of watching a pigeon flying in the sky. However, José Antonio's normative act becomes more complicated upon closer examination:

> Mientras esperaba, José Antonio Morales siguió con la vista el vuelo extravagante de aquella paloma. Observó como el ave tomaba altura, en una vertical insistente, y después plegaba las alas y hacía unas piruetas extrañas, como si en ese instante descubriera la sensación vertiginosa de caer al vacío. (185)

The reader of both *Máscaras* and Conde's short story are made instantly aware through the phrase 'aquella paloma' that narrator(s) and character here merge, and that the narrative unravels in the form of indirect free style, allowing the character's thoughts to be displayed intimately and immediately by the author. Indirect free style creates the effect of heightened feelings, intensifying or dramatising the character's words, and therefore the reader cannot fail to become aware of the protagonist's most intimate thoughts and decisions.

Though common in literature, the use of the imagery of birds as omens is perhaps best known from the opening pages of García Márquez's *Crónica de una muerte anunciada* (1982), in which the dream imagery of birds, also at the very beginning of the narrative, are used as a negative omen to foreshadow protagonist Santiago's inescapable death. Conde's text is equally as fatalistic as those of both Padura and García Márquez: the unstoppable, unsettling and strange imagery which creates the description of the bird's movements, 'insistente', 'extrañas', 'vertiginosa' contributes to the reader's sense of unease and anxiety from the very beginning of the story, similarly to as in *Máscaras*. Here, Padura as author and puppeteer ultimately controls Conde's short story, and as a result this story communicates to the reader additional information about Conde that the omniscient third-person narrator has not made explicit. In this manner, the adjectives applied to the bird can then all be read as transferred epithets relating to Conde's changing selfhood. The short story can be read as an insight further into Conde's character, and adds additional layers to an already multiplicitous and fractured postmodern text.

The reader is finally able to visualise the bird properly through inferring that it is a dove, not a pigeon, as José Antonio, observing the bird remarks, 'En sus veintiocho

años como guagüero nunca había visto palomas mientras aguardaba los resultados de la colecturía' (186), judging by the rarity of the occurrence over twenty-eight years. The image causes anxiety, given the dove's traditional association with peace, and its paradoxical juxtaposition against feelings of uncertainty and intertextually-significant bad omens. Finally, the introduction to Conde's short story is rendered fatalistic as, having seen this rare sight of a dove José Antonio concludes 'sintió con más fuerza la certidumbre de que iba a matar a aquella mujer' (186). The dove is thus concretely transfigured from a symbolically positive image to a semiotically negatively loaded image, through/onto which the protagonist projects his desires and anxieties. Again, due to the use of indirect free style, the reader can understand what the protagonist is going to do, and also question why Conde has chosen this genre and this ending for this character. This inversion of the dove's accepted connotations is a challenge to an accepted, internationally perpetuated archetype. Transposition of the symbolic dove as associated with peace challenges other pre-stated and accepted norms by association. This suggests a lack of truth within Conde's short story as nothing really appears as it seems – the dove, the amiable bus driver, the school teacher – and foundations of society are shaken. The accepted truth, such as the dove as bringer of peace, no longer exists. Positive is tainted by negative and basic cultural semiotics (such as the dove) are inverted, similarly to the way in which the society in the short story is transvestited and transformed from their revolutionary norms.

The reader becomes quickly aware of a pre-determined ending to the short story, entirely constructed by Conde's writing due to the use of the phrase 'Iba a matar a aquella mujer', which appears in the same or in similar forms a total of ten times throughout this short text. Paradoxically, the insistent repetition of the same phrase highlights the multiple personalities of *guagüero* José Antonio. Most obviously, this repetition serves to enhance the protagonist's predilection for routine, and the therefore almost ritualised final act of murder. His tendency towards routine and a repetitive lifestyle is demonstrated throughout the short narrative, perhaps most vividly through his daily routine, specifically that pertaining to his sexual relationship with his wife (189, 192). In addition to regulated life, the repeated phrase 'iba a matar a aquella mujer' is both orally and aurally a violent, staccato sentence, as well as an image incongruous to José Antonio's repetitive, dull life. Though in the past he had thoughts of harming other drivers (186), he has become accustomed to the imprudent nature of motorists daily. This acceptance and docile

manner complements his occupation of providing a service for others, as well as his tendency towards routine and repetition:

> Ya tenía cuarenta y siete años y cuando empezó como guagüero, recién salido del servicio militar, apenas tenía diecinueve, y todo ese tiempo había sido chófer de la ruta 4: desde entonces, cada día cinco vueltas a La Habana durante once meses seguidos, conduciendo por las misma calles, a las misma horas, con las mismas paradas y hasta recogiendo a las mismas gentes que se fueron haciendo sus amigos al paso de los meses y los años, y asistió a bodas, ingresos hospitales, algunos cumpleaños y hasta entierros de aquellos pasajeros habituales, *sin pensar jamás en matar a ninguno de ellos*. (188, my emphasis)

As a result, José Antonio appears easily influenced, and the repeated phrase comes to sound increasingly like a mantra. On several occasions, José Antonio begins to reference his desire to kill as 'la necesidad' (186) or 'el mandato' (186, 190, 191). A lexis full of repeated synonyms which invoke imagery of religion, cults, or of a divine order, repetition of unsettling phrases centring on murder, and the inverted, negative omen of the dove clearly communicates to the reader the predetermined dénouement of Conde's work. Within this context, the short story included within *Máscaras* is a clear demonstration of the postmodern play at the heart of the text, doomed from the outset at the hands of Conde.

José Antonio kills Isabel María at her home: her murder is a finalising, totalising act, with José Antonio stabbing the woman in the chest, but José Antonio is still confused by his actions, immediately asking himself '¿Por qué?' (193). The semiotics of murder and its usual motivations, such as jealousy, greed, rage, revenge, and wrath are laid aside. Humanity's lack of understanding of its own actions as demonstrated by the incomprehensible yet clearly signposted and foreshadowed denouement to the text is demonstrated in José Antonio's complete apathy towards his situation and lack of motivation for his crime.

José Antonio, it becomes evident, lacks any motivation for the murder he wishes to commit. On several occasions, the character ponders his situation:

> Aunque pensó en ir a un siquiatra, José Antonio descartó enseguida la idea: no estaba loco ni mucho menos, y su decisión de matar a Isabel María no era siquiera una sentencia personalmente adoptada, sino un mandato que él había recibido. ¿Un mandato de quién? […] ¿Por qué a ella? Después de siete martes y aproximadamente noventa y un minutos de conversación, aquella mujer no había logrado despertarle ningún sentimiento especial: ni odio, ni amor, ni repugnancia, nada que justificara el empeño (¿el mandato?) de matarla. […] ¿Por qué? Tal vez precisamente por eso, pensó entonces: por ser nada… Pero ¿ya lo sabía antes de conocerla? (pp.190-191)

This excerpt indicates that the protagonist plays an additional role to that of husband and bus driver: here, José Antonio becomes detective, questioning facts in order to solve the

obscure motivation behind this case of pre-meditated murder. In doing so, the text displays an obvious awareness of tenets of the traditional epistemological modernist genre of crime fiction, yet, unconventionally, José Antonio finds no truth. As a result, the lack of a semiotically satisfying text reinforces Conde's status as an author of postmodernist fiction. Furthermore, the questions posed by the protagonist are clear echoes of those posited by McHale when explaining the significance of postmodernity as related to instability and plurality: they reiterate that Conde's protagonist is unsure of motivation and purpose – he is not looking to uncover any ultimate truth through the act of murder. He cannot make sense of his own world, even reflecting '¿Por qué pasan estas cosas en el mundo?' (191), which is also immediately evocative of McHale's (1987: 10) argument that postmodern unpredictability is associated with questions such as 'Which world is this? What is to be done in it? Which of my selves is to do it?' Again, this furthers the sense of multiple selves available through and to José Antonio, demonstrating his increasing powerlessness concerning the overwhelming desire, underlining the 'necesidad' to kill his chosen victim.

Stefano Tani (1984) would recognise such a text as representing the 'anti-detective' novel, which he also accepts as interchangeable with the postmodern detective novel. Tani defines the subgenre as being divided into three techniques when considering the dénouement of the anti-detective story: innovation, deconstruction and metafiction, and the idea of inversion and complete lack of truth encourages a reading of Conde's short story as an example of the metaphysical detective novel. However, I would not consider *Máscaras* an anti-detective novel, and instead I would agree with scholars such as Ewart (1999:189) who argues that:

> Metaphysical detective fiction abounds with examples of other, unfamiliar universes and of uneasiness produced when boundaries between universes are violated, and it is for this reason that the term 'metaphysical' describes these works better than 'anti-detective', which indicates only what they deconstruct rather than what they construct.

Here, Mario Conde's short metaphysical detective story encourages and constructs epistemological questions relating to the text, rather than engaging the reader in a narrative which is presented as attacking the detective genre. The concept of the omnipotent author is particularly interesting, because as we understand Conde's power and control over the text, we also begin to become aware of the acts of reading and writing, and can reconsider the statement at the beginning of the novel in the *nota del autor* – Padura is truly the omnipotent author, as best evidenced in Conde's short story, really written by Padura. Conde's short story within *Máscaras* references the omnipotent author,

stresses obscurity and questions truth. It is thus highly postmodern, and clearly a postmodernist detective novel – above all because of the glaring lack of any detective to re-establish the *status quo*. The concept of the omnipotent author is particularly interesting, because as we understand Conde's power and control over the text, we also begin to become aware of the acts of reading and writing, and can reconsider the statement at the beginning of the novel in the author's note. As a result, the reader comes to question authorial decisions and their own interpretations of a purposefully-written text, becoming further aware of the text as construct, intensifying the anxiety experienced when reading Conde's resigned text and Padura's self-aware metanarrative. The lack of epistemological truth within the two texts reinforces Padura's work as a clear example of the postmodern crime novel, and demonstrates the great extent to which his work is 'travestido, transformado, definitivamente distinto' in relation to Cuban detective texts preceding it. The inclusion of the short story plays a crucial role firmly situating *Máscaras* as a postmodernist text, but also works as an outlet for Conde's tensions and anxieties surrounding his identity. The fact that Conde's narrative fails to achieve the most basic goal of the crime novel – the adequate solution – reinforces his own failures as the *hombre nuevo* who cannot adhere to the prescribed archetype.

2.4. Iconoclasm in *Máscaras:* Postmodern Subversions of the *Hombre Nuevo*

Critics such as Serra (2007: pp.156-157) view the detective of Cuban socialist crime fiction as representative of the idealised *hombre nuevo*. The idealised image of Cuba's New Man was first disseminated in Che Guevara's work *Socialismo y el hombre en Cuba* (1965). Described by Serra (2007:3) as 'The new person embodying the radical change that the Cuban regime was interested in', the *hombre nuevo* was therefore a vehicle to promote strength and power (within the collective) and have a willingness to fight on behalf of others – in Latin America and elsewhere – who were experiencing repressive capitalist regimes. As Christensen (2012:99) has put it;

> Through official sponsorship and popular appeal, the 'Hombre Nuevo' became the idea of masculinity for Cubans. In simplest terms, this ideal was 'to be like Che': brave, authentic, well-read, emotionally connected and committed to the welfare of the entire human race.

Conde is, in many ways, demonstrative of such a figure: through his status as a state-employed detective who smokes cigars, drinks, has an interest in literature given his aspirations to become a writer, is physically fit and capable of defence, and comes complete with a history of romantic relationships with women. Though Conde clearly

possesses many of the traits of the *hombre nuevo*, I read Conde as a reformulated and subversive take on the Cuban detective and New Man.

Bearing in mind Serra's assertions concerning the detective/*hombre nuevo* links, and the clear pitfalls of Conde as a socialist detective, I argue that Padura adds an additionally subversive reading to the text. Postmodern notions of anxiety, disquiet, insecurity, revision, and self-awareness are present in Conde's character from the outset as he considers joining in a baseball game with a group of young boys: 'Los dos líderes del grupo dispusieron a escoger a los jugadores de cada equipo para redistribuir las fuerzas y continuar la guerra en condiciones más equitativas. Entonces el Conde tuvo una idea: les pediría jugar' (15). Padura here employs a vocabulary of war - 'líderes', 'fuerzas', 'guerra' - providing an underlying lexical field associated with virile masculinity. This specific atmosphere of brotherhood and sport, so closely associated with the capabilities of the *hombre nuevo* is, however, implicitly tied to homoerotics in the text. Deciding to join the game;

> El Conde se quitó la camisa […] Por suerte, ese día no había llevado la pistola al trabajo […] Pero, al verse rodeado de los muchachos, sin camisa como ellos, el Conde sintió la evidencia de que todo resultaba demasiado absurdo y forzado: percibía en la piel la mirada socarrona de los jóvenes […] no le sería fácil integrarse a aquella cofradía […] Quiso pasar el brazo por los hombros [del muchacho], pero se contuvo al presentir el contacto de su piel con la capa de sudor que cubría al muchacho. (pp.16-17)

The semiotics of homoeroticism are clear and are condensed by Conde's sentiments of insecurity and anxiety when faced with the *cofradía*, and furthered by the sense that Conde must *contenerse* from touching the boy, repressing an impulse. Moreover, the ambivalence of Conde's normative masculinity as a metaphor for the *hombre nuevo* is also called into question in this scene by his lack of gun. A recurrent trait throughout the text, possession of phallic power desserts Conde and his homoerotic awareness and tensions are awoken. The team spirit subtly underlined by the term *cofradía* and stressed by the adverse situation in which Conde finds himself encourages the reader to envision traditionally masculine spaces; from army barracks, to fraternity houses, monasteries and Masonic halls. Conde's conscious decision is to leave this male space. This notion is intensified by the detective becoming the object of the boys' united gaze which he feels on his skin as their *mirada socarrona*. This is an inversion of Mulvey's theory of the male gaze (1989), which turns the female object into erotic sight for the domineering male. Conde is therefore the object of the male gaze and is thus on display for male pleasure. Being posited as the passive female body can be interpreted as the source of his unease and self-awareness, because, unspoken, he may in fact enjoy performing the role of the spectacle, the sight, the vision.

Conde's decision to leave the scene is a clear inversion of the traditional detective's role in both North American and socialist literary tradition, as we see the sleuth departing from a scene which he does not understand and to which he does not belong, rather than approaching a crime scene to elucidate answers and control the context.

The deconstruction of the figure of the *hombre nuevo* is perhaps most obvious when Conde attends the party where he meets Poly. The multiplicity of identities present yet another challenge to Conde's already weakening imposed revolutionary view of Cuban society. This conflict is clearly visible in his reaction to seeing two men – in drag – kissing:

> Un escalofrío dañino recorrió toda la estructura del policía cuando descubrió la pareja que se besaba con total impudicia: dos hombres – según códigos jurídicos y biológicos –, de unos treinta años, ambos de bigote y pelo muy negro, unían sus labios para propiciar un tráfico de lenguas y salivas que estremeció al Conde con la violencia de una repugnancia agresiva … Supo entonces que había ido demasiado lejos en aquel viaje a los infiernos y que necesitaba otro aire para no morir de asfixia y consternación. Él, que era policía y se jactaba de haber visto todas las barbaridades posibles, ahora sentía aquella sacudida dolorosa, nacida del núcleo invariable de sus hormonas masculinas, incapacitadas para resistir la negación más alarmante de la naturaleza. (pp.145-146)

This aside may at first appear to be a throwaway reference to Conde's biting 'machista-estalinista' world view, but this scene is also demonstrative of how disturbing the experience of the party is to Conde's troubled heterosexuality. The use of both biological and juridical lexis and 'códigos', such as 'unían', 'núcleo', 'hormonas masculinas', 'naturaleza' by Padura here is, I argue, an example of what Butler identifies as the juridico-scientific discourses regulating sex. Sex is a gender marker, part of a production which as Butler (1993: 1) states has the 'power to produce – demarcate, circulate, differentiate – the bodies it controls'. Butler continues that biological sex is installed as a code at birth, not only in relation to physical genitalia, and gender is assigned to the subject in an act of pre-gendering:

> To claim that the subject is itself produced in and as a gendered matrix of relations is not to do away with the subject, but only to ask after the conditions of its emergence and operation. The 'activity' of this gendering cannot, strictly speaking, be a human act or expression, a willful appropriation, and it is certainly not a question of taking on a mask; it is the matrix through which all willing first becomes possible, its enabling cultural condition. In this sense, the matrix of gender relations is prior to the emergence of the 'human'. (1993:7)

The inculcation in this matrix is likely what pushes Conde to identify himself as a heterosexual man due to both biology and pre-determined body laws as part of patriarchal Cuban society which prefers heteronormativity: in Cuba, heteronormativity is preferred to the extent that homosexual sexual activity is largely only considered so if one acts as the passive entity of the pairing, the active participant being viewed as *hombre hombre*

(Lumsden, 1996, Bejel, 2001, and López, 2015). It is in this sense that Conde has not used a mask until the investigation in *Máscaras* as, up to this point in the tetralogy, he was wearing a mask of gender, but was unaware of it. Bearing in mind, then, that 'performativity is thus not a singular 'act,' for it is always a reiteration of a norm or set of norms, and to the extent that it acquires an act-like status in the present, it conceals or dissimulates the conventions of which it is a repetition' (Butler, 1993:12), Padura's novel displays key characteristics of the postmodern here, and the multiplicitious self in this scene. Primarily, Conde appears disgusted when he sees the two men kissing. However, it is both the juridical and biological tone of the excerpt that invites a Butlerian reading, since the instilled matrix is negated as their kiss is interpreted as 'la negación más alarmante de la naturaleza' (pp.145-146). Nonetheless, Padura double-codes the scene through the use of a lexicon that can be read to evoke either pleasure and/or pain in order to provide the reader once again with a sense of Conde's unspoken homoerotic desires as highlighted by such phrases as, 'escalofrío dañino', 'estremeció al Conde', 'había ido demasiado lejos', 'morir de asfixia', 'aquella sacudida dolorosa', 'incapacitadas para resistir' (pp.145-146). Conde's emotionally juxtaposed reactions to the scene illustrate what Butler (1993:19) refers to as 'a certain gender trespass in order to facilitate the otherwise unspeakable desire'. When considering these unspeakable desires, it is also significant to note that Conde has chosen to attend the party again without his gun:

> El Conde había sentido un rubor tangible y consideró, antes de salir de su casa, que, si tenía cara de policía y hasta lo investigaban por ser policía, esa noche debía llevar su pistola de policía, cuyo peso frío sostuvo entre las manos por un minuto, antes de convencerse de que los riesgos de esa noche no se defendían con plomos y optó por abandonar el arma en la profundidad de su gaveta. (2013:135)

Possession of phallic power has deserted Conde as it, and his conscious rejection of the phallus, could be interpreted as Conde further performing gender trouble. Furthering the notion of bisexuality, Farrimond maintains that considering any character within a bisexual trope is problematic in terms of both the representation of men and of bisexuality (139), and I maintain that Conde's true sexuality is in fact closer to that of pansexuality, with an unspoken and unrealised preference for men. The party at which Conde meets Poly is therefore replete with both postmodern and repudiated sexual tendencies which causes the detective to experience paradoxical reactions as 'un escalofrío dañino', at once implying Conde's latent homoeroticism, and his anxiety at having let his 'wilful appropriation' of cisexuality drop. In this sense, Poly and Havana's homoerotic underworld have shaken and threatened Conde at the very core of his pre-determined normative matrix.

Though the case is solved and order is restored to society, again, I argue that the novel's end is not necessarily as conclusive as it seems. Some critics such as Bejel (2001) interpret this ending as a reductive conclusion to the work, suggesting that *Máscaras* promotes non-normative, transgressive sexualities as being largely viewed as redundant within the Cuban context:

> Such a restrained ending leads me to conclude that an ideological conflict has hindered its [the novel's] most daring possibilities. After bringing the theme of homosexuality and the abuse of gays to the surface, the text ultimately opts for a solution that is contained and ideological (in the worst sense of the word), reinstalling and reaffirming the heterosexism that it had challenged earlier. (172)

However, I argue that Bejel reads Padura's work too simplistically, since, for Bejel, Conde appears to end his story by conforming to sexual and gendered norms: on this level, the heterosexism on display here is in fact another example of heteronormativity being underscored with homoerotic subtext, demonstrating some veiled potentials for homosexual desire on the part of Conde. I would argue, contrary to Bejel, that the ending merely *appears* restrained, and the dénouement in fact acts as a screen, on the one side of which lie heterosexual models – the *hombre nuevo* – and on the other side, homoerotic subtleties. Bejel fails to recognise Padura's text as entirely self-conscious, contradictory and undermining, and therefore fails to take note of the fatalistic ending of the text. Though Pérez refers to *La neblina del ayer* and *Adiós, Hemingway,* I argue that *Máscaras* also subverts 'conventional investigative procedures and parodies the detective paradigm, the effect of which is enhanced by their occupying positions of closure' (Pérez, 2010: 73), and could be interpreted as a comment on how the traditionally rational, male-associated detective genre can be subjected to gender trouble.

2.5. The Neo-*Femme Fatale*

This section focuses on the femme fatale as represented in Padura's *Máscaras*. Foregrounded in films, texts, and graphic novels as a hypersexual and hyperfeminine threat to the traditionally male detective protagonist, the femme fatale destabilises his patriarchal male order, causing him anxiety, and obscuring his otherwise reasoned, logical, and omniscient view of the case. Although there exists a great amount of academic thought concerned with the representation of female characters in detective narratives, the femme fatale has as yet not been debated in relation to Padura's *Cuatro estaciones*.

The novel has been criticised by scholars, who have dismissed *Máscaras*' representation of women in general as being somewhat throwaway, with Oakley (2011:35) claiming that the female characters in the novel 'do not possess the same degree of depth

as the male characters'. Oakley's statement is implicitly binarising, suggesting that the male characters of *Máscaras* are presented as vital to the plot, complicated, and intelligent, and that the female characters in the novel thus lack agency, are passive, and secondary to the plot of the novel. Considering such a criticism, it could even be understood that female characters are present solely for the titillation of the implied male reader of the crime novel.[22] This considered, Oakley therefore interprets *Máscaras* as adhering to U.S. tenets of crime fiction, in which women have been typically written as two-dimensional, or, as Wager (2005:4) interprets the role of women in detective novels, as either imprisoned or fatalistic, understanding 'the femme attrapée as trapped by the patriarchy and the femme fatale as doomed by her resistance to it'. However, contrary to Oakley's thoughts on female characters in *Máscaras* being presented as one-dimensional in contrast to their complex male counterparts, I do not dismiss female characters from the novel so freely. Instead, I argue that certain female characters in fact perform the role of a *mutated* neo-femme fatale figure. Furthermore, I suggest that Padura introduces what I refer to as the hombre fatal, a creation which troubles both the long-standing notion of the archetypal femme fatale, and causes disquiet concerning the iconic *hombre nuevo*.

Here, I argue that the questioning of revolutionary icons, such as the *hombre nuevo*, is achieved through Padura's preoccupation with non-normative sexualities and the iconoclasm of prescribed and unquestioned roles within Cuba, a society in which idolatry status and reverence go some way to ensure revolutionary ideals are still perpetuated. This leads to my conclusion that Padura's *Máscaras* subverts the accepted role and tenets of the femme fatale in order to allow both male and female characters to expose and dismantle pre-supposed patriarchal ideologies of detective fiction, from both the U.S. and the Cuban literary traditions of the genre. Furthermore, such a deconstruction of genre and mutation of the typical threat to patriarchal gender status (the detective) provides a criticism of the fleeting nature of identity, rather than reinforcing that possession of revolutionary characteristics – those of the *hombre nuevo* – as the only form of valid masculine identification on the island.

2.5.1. The Cuban (Socialist) Detective Novel: The Missing *Femme Fatale*

The long-standing representations of the femme fatale as beautiful and deadly have ultimately produced an orthodox, accessible model which authors lay out time and again

[22] Such an opinion of the detective genre as pandering to the sexual preferences of the heterosexual male are clearly expressed by Close (2012: 89) and Pérez (2002: 50), as outlined in the Introduction.

in their work as an obvious plot device. Within U.S. examples, the female figure comes to stand for societal anxiety, highlighting the influence of male self-consciousness necessary to the construction of patriarchal society. The image of the femme fatale is a recurring patriarchal ideological construction which possesses the archetypal characteristic of emasculating licentiousness, avaricious rapacity and a narcissistic attitude. Laura Mulvey (1989:14) posits that:

> The function of woman in forming the patriarchal consciousness is twofold: She firstly symbolizes the castration threat by her real lack of a penis and secondly thereby raises her child into the symbolic. Once this has been achieved, her meaning in the process is at an end … Woman's desire is subjugated to her image as bearer of the bleeding wound; she can exist only in relation to castration and cannot transcend it.

It is therefore widely accepted that the typical femme fatale is a symptom and symbol of male fears of female equality (Bould, Giltre & Tuck, 2009:8; Forter, 2001:33), and these fears resurface at periods when the smooth workings of the patriarchal social infrastructure experience tension. In *Máscaras*, I understand the femme fatale accomplishes her archetypal aims of troubling and destabilising the detective's patriarchal matrix through the use of foreign bodies and unusual bodily acts. I maintain that this provides an interstitial space for mutated icons such as the *hombre fatal* and a revisited *hombre nuevo* in Cuban society.

Representations of gender have always been particularly binarised in detective fiction. Wager's previously-cited quotation highlights the two specific ways in which women have traditionally been presented in such narratives. Typically, within the U.S. genre, the femme fatale is the most obviously sexualised figure. Her insatiable sexuality and body communicate an absolute femininity which is juxtaposed with danger and apprehension inherent to her repeatedly transgressive dominance of typical male acts (Forter, 2000:33). Mary Ann Doane's (1991) *Femmes Fatales* investigates the promulgation of this archetype's representation in film. Doane (1) understands that the femme fatale 'Never really is what she seems to be. She harbors a threat which is not entirely legible, predictable or manageable'. Considering these definitions, this section takes into account the illegible, sexual and threatening duplicities as seen conventionally within detective fiction, and applies them to unusual characters who threaten the detective's assumed patriarchal order.

Given the detective fiction genre's particular history on the island, and the revolutionary government's appropriation of the genre in order to promote the effectiveness of socialist rule, no significant attention was typically paid to female

characters or sexuality. The existence of such a role as the *femme fatale* and of my own notion of the *hombre fatal* would therefore constitute a marked addition to socialist detective fiction under Castrista rule. As discussed in my Introduction, there is little information available concerning the construction and presentation of female characters in Cuban socialist detective fiction, which in itself is demonstrative of a possible lack of representation overall. Guerra (2010: 276), quoted in the Introduction, recognises that in Cuban society at the time, women held a double role of both contributing to the labour force and also, as the 'fairer sex' providing motivation for men to join labour brigades. Furthermore, Guerra (276) maintains that women were not to aspire to beauty and a traditional feminine sexuality connoted through their bodies, rather:

> [They] were celebrated for overcoming perceived innate deficiencies, such as the inability to operate motor vehicles properly, by learning how to drive tractors in state training programmes. They were also applauded, despite poor performances as agricultural labourers, for simply 'illuminating the soil' or resisting the feminine temptation to value jewelled baubles.

Though the concept of 'illuminating the soil' would appear to reference women's beauty, it also implicitly considers women as the fairer sex, and therefore ultimately as easy to oppress. This is important to consider, especially in relation to the role of women in Cuban society and their representation in detective fiction, and goes some way to reinforce Wager's classification of the 'femme attrapée'. Considering Doane's definitions, illegible, unpredictable, sexual and threatening characteristics of the femme fatale were not in any way encouraged during the period in which socialist crime fiction became used as propaganda by the socialist state (Wilkinson, 2006: pp.110-115).

Máscaras's main preoccupation with non-normative sexualities therefore demonstrates a clear break from the propagandistic revolutionary guidelines as outlined in the speech delivered by Fidel Castro at the 1971 *Congreso* and encouraged by MININT, as noted above. The stringent guidelines of Cuban state institutions with regards to literary competitions (Serra 16) are proof that the content of Padura's novel is equally as deviant as its form. There still remains much to be researched into how the non-normative body - in this study that of the transsexual - is used to create another aspirational/available identity within Cuba as displayed through the medium of the detective novel. I continue to discuss three different characters in *Máscaras*, who each trouble Mario Conde's heterosexual matrix, and who implicitly subvert Cuban socialist detective fiction norms as well as play with U.S. tenets of the femme fatale.

2.5.2. Threats from Beyond the Grave: The Destabilising Power of the *homme attrapé*

The murder of Alexis Arayán sparks *teniente* Mario Conde's investigation in *Máscaras*. Conde, who is returning to the force after taking leave at the end of *Vientos de cuaresma* (1994) having assaulted a co-worker, otherwise works to uphold the law, is an intelligent, well-read, physically fit man in his mid-thirties, and is presented as a staunch heterosexual or 'machista-estalinista' (2013:141): in many ways, Conde embodies the characteristics of the *hombre nuevo*. As the narrative progresses, it is revealed that Alexis was a troubled character, whose homosexuality was a factor in his own suicide, which he ultimately failed to commit due to his family's staunch Catholicism, a red herring in Conde's investigation. Alexis is discovered in *El bosque de La Habana*, clothed as Cuban playwright Virgilio Piñera's female creation *Electra Garrigó*, with a full face of make-up, wearing a red dress. The inclusion of such a subversive figure as Alexis within the Cuban detective novel as a demonstrative of a rejection of socialist detective fiction has not gone unnoticed by other scholars, many of whom have interpreted Conde's investigation into Alexis' death and his ensuing submergence in Havana's gay, bisexual, and transsexual underworld as critical of revolutionary values of heterosexuality, which, according to Leiner even after the closure of UMAP camps considered homosexuals as 'enemies of the state because they could not fit into this ideological social unity' (28).

The reader is first introduced to Alexis at his crime scene, and through indirect free style, the reader is invited to consider the scene from the same perspective as Conde. I read the following evocative and intriguing introduction to Alexis' physicality as adhering to and playing with the semiotics of the femme fatale drawn from U.S. examples of detective fiction:

> Cuando el guardia levantó la lona el fotógrafo aprovechó para apretar una vez más el obturador, como si aún le faltara apropiarse de ese ángulo preciso de la muerte de aquel ser carnavalesco que, según su carnet de identidad, se había llamado Alexis Arayán Rodríguez … Un rostro de mujer, violáceo y abultado, remataba la figura. (32)

Here, Padura first draws the reader's attention to typical noir traits through the presence of the camera, traditionally used in film to frame and capture the body of the beautiful woman,[23] and then subverts expectations and genre restrictions by referencing Alexis' transvestited state. The visibility of the verb *matar* in 'rematar' underlines Alexis' posthumous state, and 'violáceo' and 'abultado' reaffirms how his body has been changed

[23] Such an approach to the femme fatale is most obvious and most quoted in relation to the film *Gilda* (1947) in which Rita Hayworth appears on screen and the camera pans up from her feet to her head, capturing her body entirely within its lens.

by the effects of his violent death, and the physical changes between his once active and now passive body. Furthermore, Alexis' physicality is changed by his choice of dress and make-up, as he is emplotted with *un rostro de mujer*, and his corpse is displayed for the purpose of the forensic photographer. As a result, Alexis' can be interpreted as both a sight for the male viewer, and a site for gender trouble.

In her article on Cindy Sherman's *Unititled Film Stills,*[24] Liu (2010:87) suggests that the representation of the *femme fatale* is always tied in with masquerade/performance - in Still #14, Sherman performs the classic *femme fatale*, the mirror intended to reflect her beauty, the object she holds towards the camera, hinting at a dangerous sexuality. Liu also posits that the very structure of this specific film still demonstrates the female as powerful and intimidating in her stance, clothing and make-up (88), however I argue that such a character is always simultaneously captured, rendered passive and impotent by the apprehending camera shutter. The same concepts of imprisonment, capturing, and power play are particularly fruitful avenues to pursue when considering Alexis' character, above all in relation to Mulvey's (1989:19) thoughts on the male gaze and dominance:

> In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its fantasy on to the female form which is styled accordingly. In their traditionalist exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-ness … She holds the look, plays to and signifies male desire.

Scopophilia is rampant in many U.S. crime narratives, especially in particularly iconic filmic versions of the crime genre (such as *Gilda*, 1946, *The Black Dahlia*, 2006, and *Under the Skin*, 2013). As Berger (1972:47) understands it, 'Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at. The surveyor of woman in herself is male: the surveyed female. She thus turns herself into an object – and most particularly an object of vision: a sight'. The notion of the woman presented as a sight to be seen compliments Sherman's self-aware parody of the enjoyment associated with the dominating male gaze which draws attention to and subverts the power of this male act of looking. The manner in which Alexis is presented is further troubling to this concept of the woman as vision or sight with her 'to-be-looked-at-ness'. Padura uses the same scopophilia to inform his presentation of Alexis, 'el fotógrafo *aprovechó* para apretar una vez más el obturador, como

[24] Concerned with the capturing and framing of female bodies, Jiu-Ch'i Liu (2010) considers photographer Cindy Sherman's collection of photographs, *Untitled Film Stills* (1978), in which Sherman herself performs various traditionally accepted roles of women. One of the photographs shows Sherman as embodying most motifs from a *noir* film (Still #14): representing the *femme fatale*.

si aún le faltara *apropiarse* de ese ángulo preciso de la muerte' (my emphasis). The concept of enjoyment felt when gazing upon the corpse is reminiscent of Georges Bataille's theories on eroticism and death. In *Eroticism*, Bataille posits that the corpse produces both disgust and attraction/fascination, not only because both death detracts from the identity of the person, converted in corpse, and because sex and death are taboo subjects; but also because of the violence inherent to sex and death. Connecting the two is reproduction, of new life from sex, or of worms from the decaying of the body. Bataille (1962:17) understands possible sexual excitement emanating from the sight of the corpse in the following terms;

> Not only do we find in the uneasy transitions of organisms engaged in reproduction the same basic violence which in physical eroticism leaves us gasping, but we also catch the inner meaning of that violence. What does physical eroticism signify if not a violation of the very being of its practitioners? – a violation bordering on death, bordering on murder?

Despite Conde's innate attraction to the corpse, as demonstrated by his thoughts on and the attention paid to Alexis' physicality (pp.33-34), Bataille's understanding of the paradoxical reaction to the corpse goes some way to offer an explanation as to why Conde reacts in such a negative manner to the body, wanting to obscure it from his view, as if having caught himself out in a non-normative, taboo act of scopophilia, not aligned with revolutionary values.

Furthermore, the reader is aware that Conde interprets Alexis to be a man, purposefully attributing the body with a 'rostro de mujer': Alexis is not referred to as a woman, or as having a 'cuerpo de mujer'. Here, I argue that Padura expands Mulvey's interpretation in a new gendered context: of the sight/site of the transvestited male body and troubles the formulaic coding of the heterosexual erotic vision of the woman captured by the gaze. As Copeland (2004:256) argues, it is at the point where the gazer and the gazee no longer constitute their pre-determined heteronormative roles that Padura goes beyond the familiar formulae associated with crime narratives 'beyond the expected and into new and frequently subversive terrain'. This new terrain is indeed subversive and equally troubling to the detective. Alexis' posthumous dress may at first reinforce the active/male passive/female dichotomy as he is doubly captured by the camera's shutter and in Conde's vision, but I would argue that from the outset Alexis offers a queer and meta-literary take on Mulvey's interpretation on the significance of the male gaze.

Alexis's 'to-be-looked-at-ness' is certainly not based on his excessive femininity: his make-up and clothing lead to Conde describing him as 'aquel ser carnavalesco' and he

is immediately identified as male, intimating that his male sex is unavoidably detectable. However, though Alexis's body does not necessarily semiotically identify with those typically presented as belonging to *femmes fatales*, this does not exclude his body from being 'coded for strong visual and erotic impact' (Mulvey, 1989:19), constituting his deviant and quite literally transvestited 'to-be-looked-at-ness'. Padura (pp.33-34) continues with a description of Alexis, again from the point of view of Conde upon considering the crime scene:

> Vio a Alexis Arayán, mujer sin los beneficios de la naturaleza, toda ataviada de rojo, con un vestido largo y anticuado, los hombros cubiertos por el chal también rojo y la cintura acentuada por una banda de seda, mientras caminaba con alguien bajo la noche multiplicada del Bosque de la Habana […] Cejas bien delineadas, párpados sombreados de púrpura leve, pestañas con rímel y aquella boca, tan esplendorosamente roja como el extraño vestido llegado de un paso impreciso pero sin duda remoto.

Trapped by his death and passively displayed in the public park, in place of signifying heterosexual male desire at its most base level, Alexis troubles and confuses the detective. Focusing on Alexis' feminine physical traits, Conde appears to find Alexis' body attractive, as demonstrated through the detailed description of Alexis' make-up, and as betrayed by the particularly positive opinion of 'aquella boca, tan esplendorosamente roja'. Realising this, rather than give his entire attention to the body in front of him, Conde averts his gaze and regresses to the safety of his childhood memories of afternoons spent in the park (34), only to attempt to reaffirm his heteronormative masculinity by lighting a cigar, perhaps an attempt at assuming the guise of the *hombre nuevo*. However, this act can be read as an act of homosexual oral fixation and not as purely demonstrative of heterosexual masculinity as previously perpetuated by revolutionaries such as Guevara.

Alexis' appearance as that of Electra Garrigó is also problematic for Conde. Most critics of *Máscaras* note in passing that Electra Garrigó references a work of the same name by gay Cuban playwright Virgilio Piñera, and that Piñera himself is doubled within the novel as the character Alberto Marqués. The intertextual reference to *Electra Garrigó*, however, is significant as Piñera's play has been read as a particularly duplicitous work, with Leal (2002: ix) stating that in *Electra Garrigó*:

> Los personajes parecen por momentos desdoblarse en su contrario, asumir otra personalidad, cambiar el rol, transformarse en su doble que lo niega … Las cosas son, pero al mismo tiempo parecen ser otras, los límites del conocimiento se borran, se tornan imprecisos y simulan otra realidad que a veces sólo alcanzamos a entrever, y el texto es la punta del iceberg que oculta, bajo las aguas, su masa más importante.

Alexis therefore has connotations with an additionally confusing identity for Conde, which again threatens the detective's panoptic vision. In addition to featuring in Piñera's

play, Electra is also significant as part of Greek myth, having plotted with her brother Orestes to kill her mother, and as a result was the inspiration for the name of what Freud considered the Electra Complex.[25] The image of Alexis is therefore visually and culturally embued with psycho-sexual problems, and this body provides Conde with much to consider when attempting, and failing, to adequately capture Alexis within his dominant male gaze, despite Alexis's status as *homme attrapé*. This densely-packed scene provides the viewer with a fluctuating tension between scopophilia and scopophobia, an effect Alexis has upon Conde in his guise as a neo-*femme fatale*. The subject of the photographer's work cannot be defined, and can be interpreted in a multiplicity of ways, again undercutting the clear-cut role of the archetypal *femme fatale*. Paradoxically, it is Alexis' unusual and transgressive form that is the catalyst for Conde's development throughout the novel, as both a writer, a detective and as a heterosexual Cuban. Being immortalised through photography is reminiscent of the *femme fatale*, as is Alexis's body and sexuality which act as threats to Conde. Alexis posthumously performs the role of the neo-*femme fatale* so hauntingly by continuing to act as a threat to patriarchal structures, here presented by the Cuban detective and the Cuban detective novel. Had Alexis been heterosexual and dressed according to gender codes, Conde would have had no need to immerse himself in the deviant sexual underworld of Havana.

When Conde is finally able to address the murder scene, the detective sees something different to the obvious within the framed moment, which Barthes (1982:43) labels the punctum.[26] This is most obvious in the walk that Conde imagines Alexis taking with an obscure figure through the multiplicitous night in the Havana woods, and the dress that Alexis wears – faraway and vague. These adjectives, 'multiplicada', 'impreciso', 'extraño', 'remoto' are incongruous with the nouns which they describe and create a distance between Conde and Alexis, again obscuring the direct gaze of the corpse. The underlying notions of distance and multiplicity also demonstrate Conde's inferred understanding of Alexis' lifestyle and sexuality: the detective is, again, unable to act as a panoptic figure correctly interpreting the scene before him. This is because the picture he is presented with is, to Conde, remote and hard-to-define, not congruous with the lifestyle

[25] In *An Outline of Psychoanalysis,* Freud (1964) accepts the Electra Complex as a name for a woman who assumes and maintains a 'feminine Oedipal attitude' (194). The Electra Complex occurs in the Phallic stage of the five psychosexual stages of development, and signifies the arrival into mature sexual identity. Alexis' status as cross-dressed therefore draws the reader's attention to wider concerns of sexual fluidity and perversion, and the inclusion of the name Electra, both significant within Cuban literature, and in psychoanalysis, further plays on the nuances and doublings at the heart of *Máscaras*.

[26] In *Camera Lucida,* Barthes explains the punctum as 'a "detail," i.e., a partial object' (43), and 'as a kind of subtle *beyond* – as if the image launched desire beyond what it permits' (59).

of the *hombre nuevo*. Alexis is a frozen and transposed image of the *femme fatale*. It is worth noting how phrases such as 'cejas bien delineadas, párpados sombreados de púrpura leve, pestañas con rímel y aquella boca, tan esplendorosamente roja' could be attributed to any typical *femme fatale*, paying close attention to facial features exaggerated and sexualised through the use of masking make-up.

Alexis as an *homme attrapé* turned *hombre fatal* also disrupts the socialist ideals of the detective. At the crime scene, a forensic officer asks Conde, '¿Qué te parece Conde? Sí, es un hombre. Vestido y maquillado de mujer. Ya tenemos asesinados, casi somos un país desarrollado. A este ritmo ahorita fabricamos cohetes y vamos a la luna' (2013:33). It is implied that the act of murder – specifically that of a cross-dressed person - means that Cuba has arrived into an age of development. In this case, the epitome of development is not, as Cuban rhetoric would have it, scientific advances, but enlightened sexual politics. These sexual politics, when non-normative, can be seem to render any supposed bastions of Cuban socialism – such as the police force as epitomised by Conde – uncomfortable and apprehensive. The anxiety central to the archetypal dangerous woman as a threat to established patriarchal institutions is therefore embodied by Alexis in his blurred gender state. This is evident in Conde's response, 'No hables más mierda y sigue […] A veces le gustaba hablar de ese modo y aquel forense, por alguna razón tan indefinible como inevitable, lo hacía reaccionar con brusquedad' (33). Such a reaction is a direct consequence of Arayán fulfilling the role of *femme fatale*. He threatens and troubles the constructions of Conde's reality, which can at least be inferred from his position as detective within a patriarchal socialist body as working for the police, and Arayán thereby causes him further anxiety as once more Conde does not fully understand the body in front of him. By using Alexis to deconstruct the role of the *femme fatale*, Padura creates what could be viewed as the *hombre fatal*. In his lifeless and transvestited state, despite his *homme attrapé* status, Alexis still threatens the normative socialist detective genre as well as Cuban society as presented within the text. Alexis's presence within the novel is entirely secondary and the action which unfolds is consequential to his murder. He does not act, rather his life and character are related by others. Though his physical body is what renders him so subversive and deviant in relation to both the U.S. crime fiction format and Cuban society, Padura removes him from the page. He does not speak or move in the present. Nearly all other characters are endowed with the ability to explain themselves and to be widely understood by the reader due to the vast majority of the novel taking place through indirect free style (all of Marqués' flashbacks taking place in the first

person). Alexis, however, is a refracted and a remembered character, whose memory and previous acts lead Conde to question his selfhood, which for a time during the novel becomes much more fluid and multiplicitous due to his investigations. Arayán is therefore a development of both the *femme fatale* and the *femme attrapée*, troubling Conde because of his blurred physicality and passive state, and destabilising Conde's socialist patriarchal norms.

2.5.3. Threats from the Past: The *Hombre Fatal* and the *Hombre Nuevo*

Whilst the visibility of the bodies of those who act as *femmes fatales* are discussed and described at length in *Máscaras*, as is typical of the U.S. detective genre, Conde's physicality is missing. Previous to making the decision to leave his gun in his car at home before leaving for the party with Marqués, Conde attempts to assess himself in the mirror; 'El Conde se miró en el espejo: de frente, directamente a los ojos, observó el ángulo esquivo de su perfil, y cuando terminó el examen debió aceptar: es verdad, tengo cara de policía' (pp.34-35). Conde can only see himself as a police officer, not as an individual, which references the socialist model of the *hombre nuevo* as working as part of a larger team with the same vocation of socialism, bettering life for their fellow men. His apparent lack of notable physical attributes, the use of 'esquivo' and the vague identification of a 'cara de policía' is troubling to the reader, especially in contrast with the well-documented bodies of Alexis, Luisito and Poly. Paul Julian Smith (1992:5) quotes Rosalind Coward (1984:229) when he offers an interpretation of the missing male body:

> The erasure of the male body [has] a contradictory effect. It both ensures the persistence of male dominance and prevents men from knowing themselves: 'Men know exactly that in rendering women the aesthetic sex they also render women the subordinate sex […] Men neglect their bodies and the bodies become strange to the men themselves'.

For Conde, Alexis is very obviously physically transgressive, and ideologically causes the detective to consider and reassess his understanding of blurrings and transgressions of both gender and society. The investigation into Alexis' murder causes Conde to reminisce uneasily about his own sexual history, which is not as demonstrative of homosexuality as one would expect in relation to a character who is representative of the *hombre nuevo*. As a child, Conde and his friends

> Habían tenido la segunda escala de su iniciación sexual en el culo promiscuo de Luisito: después de experimentar con las chivas y las puercas, habían probado el boquete oscuro de Luisito, en los boquetes más oscuros de los túneles de la cantera […] la relación con Luisito había sido aceptada como una prueba alcanzada a punta de pene. (pp.75-76)

Similarly to Alexis, Luisito may be interpreted as causing the detective anxiety, but he is

also a character who has no actions in the present. This memory is demonstrative of one of the many ways in which homosexual males are presented as threatening to Cuban ideals of manhood. The inclusion of this memory from Conde's past is particularly interesting due to the imagery of obscurity and darkness that is associated with Luisito. His derogatively referenced 'culo promiscuo' becomes dehumanised as 'el boquete oscuro', providing the reader with mental imagery of not only obscurity, but inescapable darkness, and as a result; fear. This sentiment is that which lies at the heart of the pervasive anxiety and tension throughout the novel: Conde is scared and fearful to admit to himself the homosexual origins of his sexuality, and the likely homoerotic undertones to his alleged heterosexuality in the present. Luisito's anal orifice is not only considered retrospectively by Conde as a dark hole, but as even more a consuming, obscured and bewildering multiplicitous item: tunnels within a quarry. Luisito is therefore clearly rendered a passive body within these sexual interactions, mined multiple times by those who wish to practise on him.

Lumsden (1996:30) relates this role to pervasive *machista* attitudes towards homosexuality in Cuba:

> By making certain mannerisms unacceptable, machismo ensured that homosexuals who could neither fit traditional male roles nor conceal their erotic attraction to other men would act in a way that confirmed the machista assumption that no homosexual could possibly be 'un hombre de verdad' […] The belief that homosexuality involves gender inversion even led many to think themselves as 'women' who could only be attracted to their opposites, 'real' men […] Surely, there must have been a considerable number of 'real' men who passed as hombres hombres […] But who used *maricones* as occasional or even regular outlets to satisfy their sexual appetites. They were known as *bugarrones* by the homosexuals with whom they had sex.

Bearing such attitudes towards homosexuality in Cuba in mind, and considering Conde as representative of the *hombre nuevo* due to his taking part in such sexual activity as an *hombre hombre*, the memory of Luisito becomes problematic for Conde's present for several reasons, reinforcing the notion of Luisito as a retrospective *femme fatale*. Penetration is a typically masculine act as the penetrated entity – that which is invaded – is a woman in a heteronormative relationship. This furthers the conventional heterosexual notion of the sexual act as centring around male dominance and female submission. The concept of the *femme fatale* as a victim is one which is in tension with her definition as the origin of male anxiety. However, in Padura's text, submission is fundamental to the *hombre fatal*'s existence. Padura uses the now-displaced character of Luisito who acts as a very real and present threat to Conde's heterosexuality despite only figuring in the protagonist's life as a memory and having moved to the U.S.: 'En 1980, gracias a su

indiscutible condición de homosexual y, por tanto, de escoria, antisocial y excluible, se le [Luisito] permitió abordar tranquilamente una lancha en el puerto de Mariel y salir hacia Estados Unidos' (76). Despite being temporarily and geographically separated from Conde, Luisito continues to trouble the detective's present.

The anxiety and tension that Conde feels in relation to his memories of Luisito certainly evoke Butler's (1990:24) arguments on troubling sexuality and gender:

> The heterosexualization of desire requires and institutes the production of discrete and asymmetrical oppositions between 'feminine' and 'masculine,' where these are understood as expressive attributes of 'male' and 'female'. The cultural matrix through which gender identity has become intelligible requires that certain kinds of 'identities' cannot 'exist' – that is, those in which gender does not follow from sex and those in which the practices of desire do not 'follow' from either sex or gender.

Though Butler's investigations into queer theory do not engage with the trouble at play in bisexuality, Conde appears to rise to Butler's call to cause gender trouble, which constitutes 'the mobilization, subversive confusion, and proliferation of precisely those constitutive categories that seek to keep gender in its place by posturing as the foundational illusions of identity' (46). Conde's gender and sexuality are so elusive and fluctuating that his omnisexuality can also be seen to demonstrate the many liberating performative masks of sexuality.[27] His adolescent role as *hombre hombre* and as active in his sexual relationship with Luisito would suggest that he is still troubled by his underlying homoerotic identity, however his preoccupations concerning his multiplicitous sexuality draw the reader's attention to the disparity between Conde as performing the hyper-masculine *hombre nuevo* and Conde's subversive identity within Cuba.

The penetration undergone by Luisito and his self-imposed exile can be linked to another tenet of U.S. detective fiction, in which the wife plays the part of the scorned woman. The scorned woman is capable of retribution and revenge, and I believe as presented in *Máscaras*, a figure used to demonstrate a new space for an evolved *femme fatale*. Considering Lumsden's (1996: 28) assertion that 'In general, there is a correlation between the oppression of women and the oppression of homosexuals', Luisito represents both homosexual endurance of heteronormative male oppression as well as problematizing patriarchal notions of women/gay men as inherently dominated by the male sex. It could be argued that though scorned and victimised, Luisito cannot be viewed as a *femme fatale* as he does not seek retribution against any of those who have previously used or scorned him. In this sense, he continues to perpetuate the opposite image of that

[27] This work understands omnisexuality as a concept that does not identify a preferred a body or a particular gender as a prerequisite for sexual intercourse.

of the *femme fatale* as he appears unthreatening, scared and destroyed. However, Luisito in the role of the scorned (wo)man presents a problematic symbol and an opening for the development of a new kind of *femme fatale*.

Luisito is equally as iconic as Alexis in the role of neo-*femme fatale* through his persistence in Conde's memory. As Luisito no longer serves a sexual purpose for Conde, he becomes a mental threat to the detective. His existence in Conde's memory is one closely associated with shame, 'Y como ninguno de ellos admitió jamás que también hubiera besos y caricias complementarias para elevar las temperaturas' (75) and incomprehension:

> La última noticia que el Conde había tenido de Luisito el Indio fueron dos fotografías que circulaban por el barrio, donde se describía un antes y un después […] Una mulata, algo gorda y bastante fea, quien no era otra que Louise Indira, la mujer en la cual, quirúrgicamente, se había convertido el único maricón reconocido de su generación, allí en el barrio (76).

Conde's distaste for this personal memory of sexual intimacy with a now renowned transsexual is clear, 'El Conde se alejó de la ventana y de sus recuerdos' (76), reminiscent of the detective's reaction to Alexis' cross-dressed corpse when turning away from the scene in order to instead consider the river, 'El Conde miró hacia el río' (32). Though Luisito may well have been scorned during his childhood and his adolescence, he now becomes a dangerous *hombre fatal*, even if he does not feature in the present. Luisito causes Conde to recognise his duplicitous self, causing discomfort and anxiety to a character which was previously used so often by socialist detective fiction authors to denote authority, heteronormativity, and masculinity.

Luisito's obvious gender performance leaves Padura's work open to questions concerning gender binaries. Perhaps most famously, Butler's work deals with performativity and fluidity of gender, claiming that binaries between the genders have no foundation in reality, either physically or metaphysically. In *Gender Trouble*, Butler questions incidences when one does not fit into a predetermined model of male or female, or 'this "being a man" and this "being a woman"' as she posits in *Bodies That Matter* (1993:126). This certainly concurs with the notion of the body as non-gendered, a notion also agreed upon by Luce Irigaray (1985: 179) who uses the image of the transparent body. Butler (pp.136-137) believes that in self-identification ambivalence reigns as,

> There is a cost in every identification, the loss of some other set of identifications, the forcible approximation of a norm one never chooses, a norm that chooses us, but which we occupy, reverse, resignify to the extent that the norm fails to determine us completely.

It is pertinent here that Butler uses imagery of inversion and indistinguishable semiotics, imagery which is particularly relevant when discussing such a traditionally sexualised and female character as the *femme fatale*. Just as Butler champions the existence of more than two gendered spaces and the element of choice in the performativity of gender, Shapiro (2008) also discusses the fluidity of the physical manifestation of gendered identity. Shapiro (255) employs the term *genderqueer* to 'claim a gender outside of male/female, masculine/feminine binaries and [is] defined by participants as male, female and inbetween', a term which can be applied to both Alexis and Luisito, but can also describe Conde's internalisation of his non-normative sexual relationship with Luisito.

Alexis and Luisito are therefore both neo-*femmes fatales* whom Padura uses in order to destabilise patriarchal norms. Though this aim is orthodox when considering generic transgression within detective fiction, the ways in which Padura achieves this through the use of the unusual dangerous woman is highly deviant from both U.S. and socialist Cuban forms. These two possible interpretations of the *femme fatale* could then be viewed as genderqueer. For the archetypal *femme fatale*, more often than not, performance is integral to her being, as has been previously noted when considering Cindy Sherman's *Untitled Film Stills*. Though Conde is told that Alexis is a man, the traits of subversion of female conventionality within his character make him impossible to identify as traditionally belonging to either gender. Similarly to Alexis, Luisito/Louise, it appears, is not dictated by his/her body, rather by what he/she identifies with most. In their duplicitous nature, these dangerous men raise questions for the reader with regards to the stringency of sexuality within Cuba, and the danger of binaries.

2.6. Threats in the Present: Gender/Genre Trouble

The deconstruction of Conde's most obvious display of heterosexual masculine desire is performed by the role of Poly. Poly, first introduced at the party at which she questions Conde over his work as an author as discussed above, is a representation of the *femme fatale* who exists in the protagonist's present. Poly is presented in a similar manner to Alexis, as Conde immediately holds her within his gaze, and for the second time in the novel the reader is aware of Conde's scopophilia when capturing a body. Sitting on a cushion on the floor, Conde observes Poly, who is discussing Alexis' murder:

> Dios, qué horror, exclamó una muchacha que se había quedado en la periferia y cuyos muslos, desde su posición favorablemente inferior – era el único sentado – el Conde miraba golosamente, hasta dos milímetros antes del nacimiento de unas nalguitas de gorrión sin nido. Su hambre sexual de dos meses a dieta manual sintió la sacudida alarmante de aquel olor a comida, racionada pero fresca, distante pero

posible. (139)

Though Conde truly enjoys looking at Poly, gazing at her 'golosamente', inversion is again key in this excerpt. Conde is 'el único sentado' and therefore is on a different level to everyone else visually. However, it is from his 'posición favorablemente inferior' that he is able to fully appreciate Poly's body and still hold her within his gaze. She is not demonstrative of traditional feminine corporeality as seen in crime narratives – she has no full lips or abundant curves – and is in fact described as very slender with no conventional maternal connotations, as implied by 'sin nido'. In noting this, the reader is aware that her genitals are therefore in part displayed to Conde, reaffirming Mulvey's (1989:19) concept of 'Woman displayed as sexual object is the leitmotif of erotic spectacle: from pin-ups to strip tease … she holds the look, and plays to and signifies male desire'. In this case, Conde now plays the role of the heterosexual male, but again Padura, going beyond Mulvey's model, renders Poly's physical traits as open to association with typical masculinity, once again hinting at the protagonist's homoerotic desires. Conde's domineering gaze immediately turns to thoughts of 'su hambre sexual', again complementing Mulvey's (19) postulation that woman as object is dangerous to man as 'her visual presence tends to work against the development of a story-line, to freeze the flow of action in moments of erotic contemplation'. This is perhaps nowhere more significant than in the detective novel, in which the sleuth must stick to his investigation to uncover the identity of the murderer: in this instance, Conde's original reason to attend the party was to try to find out more about Havana's gay underworld.

This excerpt is also significant when considering the non-normative *femme fatale* and the effects of such a character on the detective protagonist as it underlines the transfer of sexual drives onto Conde's appetite; 'Su hambre sexual de dos meses a dieta manual sintió la sacudida alarmante de aquel olor a comida, racionada pero fresca, distante pero posible' (139). The scene becomes a sexually-fraught direct reference to Freud's Oral Stage (2000: pp.16-18), which the psychoanalyst believed to take place between the ages of zero to one years, and during this period identification with the father is paramount. As with his childhood memories resurfacing at the crime scene, Conde again regresses to his most primal state, as Poly excites him in the most primal way. His gaze over Poly is therefore consuming, and his masculinity is domineering. However, this cisexual, oral stage does not last long, as once again this tenet of psychoanalysis, much like the *hombre nuevo* as masculine tenet of Cuban culture, is transformed and blurred.

What is of principal interest in this excerpt is Poly's position on the periphery. When discussing postmodernity and feminism, Richard (1993:281) asserts:

> Women and periphery, along with the respective debates that emerge from these identities (feminism, third-worldism, and poscolinialism [sic]), are part of this theoretical and cultural landscape of new expressions that have nothing to loose [sic] - and that have much to gain - from the erosion and fractures of the normative identity of universal modernity.

In this way, Poly's position as external to the main crowd within the room is also indicative of her status within Cuban society. Her expression of her gender as well as her sexuality are indeed considered as 'new' and unfamiliar to Cuban society and can be seen to act as erosions of Cuban modernity within the Special Period, where UMAP camps had become common knowledge and fleeing Cuba had been an option, as demonstrated by Luisito's character. Poly's erosion of traditional revolutionary values poses a threat to patriarchal Cuban structures, similar to the stock figure of the *femme fatale*. This is what renders Conde's attraction to her both subversive and somewhat predictable, however his sexual attraction to her is also in relation to her body. Poly's presentation is much more like that epitomised by traditional views of the *femme fatale*, as Conde is able to take in her body through his gaze, but at the same time she is not sexualised in the same way as the archetypal dangerous woman. This is evidenced in Conde noticing her 'nalguitas de gorrión', emphasising Poly's sinewy, boyish frame, once again implying homoerotic preferences on the part of the detective. Conde's summary of Poly's body continues:

> Tendría más de veinte años y vestía un baby-doll violeta, robado de alguna película de los sesenta. En el cuello llevaba un camafeo atado con una cinta también violeta (¿de qué película sería?) y, aunque no era linda ni poblada de encantos carnales visibles, caía en la categoría de objeto singable de primer grado, según la devaluada exigencia erótica del Conde. (pp.140-141)

Poly is clearly objectified by Conde, who immediately rates her as a top choice for penetration, again concurring with a Mulvean argument about woman as sexual object. Though this suggests female submission and male dominance, Poly acts as a chameleon in her role as *femme fatale*, revealing herself to be more than simply an object. Her way of dressing, feminine dresses, wearing colours that are typically associated with femininity such as purple, is contrasted with her lack of traditional feminine physical traits as recognised in her skinny body. This is furthered by her direct approach to Conde, asking him outright, '¿Así que tú eres un heterosexual? – le preguntó, examinándolo como a un bicho raro y en peligro de extinción' (140). Not only is this an unusual question, but also her examination of Conde sees her performing the gaze, rendering Conde her object, therefore becoming increasingly alien to Conde's patriarchal world. When Conde asks her in return whether she is heterosexual, her response again disarms him: 'Casi siempre – admitió, y el Conde tragó en seco. ¿Será un travesti, con ese culito?-. Es que si una persona quiere conocer todas sus posibilidades, todas las capacidades de su cuerpo, debe tener

alguna relación homosexual' (141). At this point, Poly controls the content of the conversation, unlike Conde, who had come to ask questions about Alexis and find out more about Havana's gay scene. Poly's explicit openness towards queer sexuality and gender is reminiscent of Cixous' thoughts in *Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing* (1993) in which the author confronts issues of being genderqueer, 'Let's imagine we love a woman who is a man inside. This means we love not a man exactly, but a woman who is a man, which is not quite the same thing: it's a woman who is also a man: another species' (199). Taking this into account, Poly's blurred sexuality and blurred body render her both intriguing and completely foreign to Conde. Though she may be the different species where he is concerned, it is Conde who is instead alien and uncomfortable, as seen in his tongue-in-cheek ironic response, positioning himself as far away from homoeroticism as possible, 'Soy de la línea machista-estalinista' (141) and a role that Conde equates with the most masculine archetype he can think of within Cuban society, the *hombre nuevo*.

Poly, duplicitous in both name and in sexual nature, is also a mirror for Havana's refracted selves. She details those attending the party for Conde's benefit, and it becomes apparent that the room is filled with diverse and duplicitous personalities, such as 'Repatriados y patriotas; expulsados de todos los sitios de los que alguien es expulsable; un ciego que veía; desengañados y engañadores; oportunistas y filósofos, feministas y optimistas' (144). Her representation as a watcher and a channel for others to speak and be interpreted (pp.143-144) demonstrates how critics such as Oakley have been wrong to dismiss Padura's work as having weak female characters who lack 'depth'. The onslaught of information she provides Conde with underlines her capability as a seer, which again confirms danger and anxiety as part of Poly's character as she is able to comprehend and empathise with those who constitute the periphery of Cuban society, as well as capable of collating and understanding seemingly contradictory and detailed information, threatening the job of the detective who has come to her for clarification. Conde notices that her list of characters does not include transvestites, and Poly happily supplies him with additional information on those who have any cross-dressing habits within the room (144). In this sense, Poly is an answer to questions that Conde has never before asked or has thought to ask. She and the people she represents act as yet another challenge to his imposed view of revolutionary Cuban society as 'machista-estalinista', and this conflict is clearly visible in Conde's previously-analysed reaction to seeing two male transvestites kiss.

The display of same-sex affection and Conde's mental and physical reactions of

disgust are likely what immediately drives him to then engage in intercourse with Poly, only after verifying she is not a transvestite herself (146). Padura here provides the reader with an entirely ambiguous and duplicitous scene in which it is hard to discern who holds the real power. Conde's stamina is questioned as it is he 'que tuvo que pedir una tregua' (147), and his seemingly self-endowed right to penetrate Poly, 'empujó a Poly sobre la cama, dispuesto a crucificarla, cuando la mano de la muchacha se interpuso en su destino'. Sex with Poly is carried out on her terms, and in this case she asks Conde to use a condom. The *femme fatale* as an inherently barren female is therefore displayed in Poly as an updated character, who is careful that she cannot be affected by the act of intercourse. In requesting that Conde use a condom, Poly also makes him carry out an action that is directly beneficial to her, and impedes him from entering her until she judges him ready (and also underlines issues concerning AIDS in Cuba at the time).

Poly continues to demonstrate her unpredictable and unmanageable traits, as Conde:

> Volvió a entrar, consciente de que el telón ya iba a caer, cuando Poly, posmoderna, se le escapó, dando media vuelta sobre la cama y poniéndole en los ojos su trasero de gorrión, crecido por la cercanía y la postura favorable.
>
> - Dame por el culo – pidió ella, y no sonrió.
>
> El Conde miró entonces a su sacrificado camarada, mal vestido pero listo para el combate y se aferró a las nalguitas de Poly, para abrir mejor la entrada de aquella puerta de salida […] El Conde se sorprendió con su propio aullido de macho potente y victorioso, mientras las carcajadas de Poly bajaban a risa, luego a sonrisa (pp.149-150).

Though it is clear by now that Poly is biologically a woman, she continues to disquiet Conde by controlling him sexually. Padura's description of her act as 'posmoderna' again draws attention to how Poly is different to those *femmes fatales* which have preceded her, and signifies how thoroughly unpredictable she is: one may remember that, alike Alexis, she has caused Conde to ask himself questions concerning the fluidity of sexuality and the performativity of gender, an ontological act in the midst of what McHale deems 'The epistemological genre par excellence' (9). Her fluidity is highlighted by her buttocks becoming more alluring and rounded to Conde due to her position, as well as her demand to be penetrated anally. In Freud's Anal Stage (2000:18, 51), the erogenous zone shifts from the oral cavity to the anal region, and the act of partaking in anal sex was considered by the psychoanalyst as symptomatic of too much or too little control during the potty-training period of youth.[28] Too much or too little control each lead to anal fixation, which

[28] This work recognises that Freudian thought on perversion and pleasure is somewhat totalising, as agrees Dollimore (1991: 182), who states that to Freud, perversion is accepted as 'something that is innate in *everyone*' (emphasis in the original). However, a Freudian reading of such scenes in *Máscaras* in which

would reaffirm the notion of Poly's life as leaning more forcefully towards having a lack of limits, a lack of control and therefore a non-normative sexuality, which has previously been alluded to in the text when she reveals her bisexual experiences to Conde. According to Grossman (2014:200), Poly's wish to be penetrated anally can be interpreted as being disruptive of maturing sexually, and this sexual maturity to Freud is one that is profoundly heterosexual:

> As processes of socialization conspire to reduce childhood's multiform pleasures to singular, heteronormative pleasures, we necessarily lose our polymorphorous tendencies and become culturally guided toward procreative and genitally centred sexuality. Civilization must annihilate the freely roaming, unprejudiced perversities we enjoy as children to make way for an adulthood of linear goals and progress, even if that process obliges us to lose a more innocent, diverse and playful hedonism.

Bearing this in mind, as a result, in anally penetrating Poly, Conde may be having intercourse with a woman in relation to her female genitalia, but this act can also be interpreted as troubling heteronormativity. Furthermore, Poly constitutes a challenge to Conde's heteronormativity through not only being penetrated anally, but also by asking to receive this kind of penetration. Conde's victorious, macho cry is also destabilised by Poly's laughter and smiles, as if her activity with Conde has been amusing. This is developed by her final statement '¡Pero qué rico tú singas!' (149), an afterthought designed to allow Conde to maintain his 'macho' status, but for her to know she had engineered her own pleasure, 'Yo siempre había querido templarme a un policía' (147) a fitting, archetypal attribute of the *femme fatale.*

2.7. Conclusion

The examples given are among many in a text rich with postmodern interplay, and demonstrate how developed and far-removed Padura's work is from both U.S. and socialist predecessors. *Máscaras* is particularly transgressive in both form and content, ultimately offering his readers a Cuban selfhood *travestido, transformado y definitivamente distinto* from that promulgated during the 1970s and 1980s during the ongoing Castrista regime, and from that offered in U.S. narratives. Rather, the modernist crime genre is transgenred and transformed, becoming self-aware and contradictory, with the purposes of the crime text and of the detective turned on their heads. Roles such as the *hombre nuevo* are equally as distorted, and succeed in troubling the patriarchal male matrix. Padura's

characters perform particular sexual acts or demonstrate particular sexual attitudes is helpful to further comprehend the extent of Padura's attempt at a subversive text, which draws the reader's attention to the themes of duplicity and indistinguishable (sexual) identities.

text presents archetypal roles, through an archetypal genre, in order to then subvert, deconstruct and reconstruct both.

The masks that characters assume can be as emancipatory as others are repressive, as evidenced by Conde's personal struggle with his identity as *hombre nuevo*/detective and as closet homosexual. *Máscaras* provides the reader with a multiplicitous Cuban identity, perhaps one that still does not completely disengage from its heteronormative *machista* matrix, but one that is nevertheless nuanced, transgenred, and delicate.

Furthermore, the constraints of the socialist detective novel and U.S. detective fiction have encouraged specific representations of women – or a lack thereof. Padura's work demonstrates the fluidity of the *femme fatale,* a character that has been presented and used predictably and repeatedly in the same manner as a plot device, and has introduced a Cuban readership not only to a threat to socialist authority (the detective/*hombre nuevo*), but has done so through the use of highly unusual bodies, equally as foreign to U.S. detective novels. The detective is left threatened by memories, the dead, and the living. His assumed heteronormativity is questioned and assessed by the reader in relation to his reactions to those who threaten his heterosexual matrix. Though Padura's aim is generically orthodox when considering genre transgression within the detective genre, the ways in which the author achieves troubling the detective's assumed patriarchal norms through the use of foreign bodies and *hombres fatales* is particularly deviant and original.

Gender performance is integral to not only the *femme fatale* of crime narratives, the semiotics of femininity are also significant to the role of the *femme attrapée*, as demonstrated by their hyperfeminine attributes and heterosexual preferences. Though Conde is aware of Alexis' male anatomy, the traits of subversion of female conventionality and his position as an abject male render him impossible to engage with and understand clearly, from the perspective of the detective. Similarly, Luisito, though never present in Conde's reality, threatens the detective as a blurred entity from the past who is neither hyperfeminine nor hypermasculine. Poly, though anatomically female, disrupts Conde's assumed heterosexual patriarchal matrix with her body and her attitude towards sex. The duplicitous nature of all of these possible interpretations of *femmes fatales* in *Máscaras* raises questions concerning sexual politics in Cuba, as well as demonstrating Padura's iconoclasm of both fictional and historical entities: the *hombre nuevo* being implicitly commented upon through the use of subversive characters. *Máscaras* therefore acts as a comment on this particularly idealised figure, and demonstrates the existence of identification outside of state-sponsored and encouraged archetypal identities.

Chapter Three: A Journey to Hell and Back: Genre Subversion in Amir Valle's *El descenso a los infiernos*

Introduction

Amir Valle (Guantanamo, 1967) is a Cuban journalist and author. Among his work, which features short stories, essays, non-fiction and fiction, is the *El descenso a los infiernos* series[29] (a reference to Dante's *Divine Comedy*). The series focuses on the investigations of Alain Bec, member of the *Policía Nacional Revolucionaria* and *rey de la marginalidad* Alex Varga. The series includes *Las puertas de la noche* (2001), *Si Cristo te desnuda* (2002), *Entre el miedo y las sombras* (2003), *Últimas noticias del infierno* (2014), *Santuario de sombras* (2006), and *Largas noches con Flavia* (2008), all of which are based on real criminal cases which took place in Cuba, as well as featuring various historical figures.

Given the overarching themes of this thesis, and considering Valle's background as both a dissident and an exiled Cuban author of detective fiction, in this chapter I engage with the themes of subversion and genre masking, which I discuss in relation to genre trouble, which I posit is exemplified by Valle's work through the use of historical events and fact. I begin with the section entitled Los Novísimos, Exile, and Distance: Problematising Cuban Detective Fiction, in which I consider *Descenso* as subversive given the accepted tenets of the genre as promoted after the *Primer Congreso* in 1971, bearing in mind the heavily-censored literary production of the *Quinquenio Gris*. Here, I reference the work produced by Padura during the Special Period,[30] considering how the fall of the Soviet Bloc in 1989 had grave consequences for revolutionary ideology and dogmas resulting in 'a weakening of formerly strict cultural policies, which resulted in a revision of the police novel' (Serra, 2007:258),[31] and also discussing the complications that arise given the series' basis in real events. I also focus on Valle's exiled status in sub chapter Exile and Marginality, and the postmodern colourings of his novels in the *Descenso* series. The section Style, Scepticism, and Subjectivities investigates how Valle's insistence on repetition, blurring reality and fiction, and the uncertainty at the heart of his novels subverts the typical aims of detective fiction. The third section, *Breaking Boundaries: Sex,*

[29] From here on referred to as *Descenso*.

[30] Valle has described Padura's contribution to Cuban detective fiction as follows: 'De no existir Padura ni sus novelas protagonizadas por Mario Conde, el camino de la actual novela negra cubana hubiera tenido que someterse a una ruptura dramática con el canon establecido en los setenta para el género, pues no de otro modo llegaría a los presentes niveles de configuración de un universo novelado típico, distintivo, redefinidor de toda la novelística cubana de los 90 y fin de siglo XX. Padura es, esencialmente, la puerta y el puente' (Valle, 2006:196).

[31] Wilksinson (2006:168) quotes Bell Lara and Dello Buono (1995: pp.1-5) to underline the terrible conditions in Cuba during the Special Period; 'In a matter of 18 months, the crisis in the Soviet Union produced a drop of 85 per cent in Cuba's trade, and a decline of GDP of 35 per cent'.

Violence, and Plot Advancement engages with issues of representations of violence in Valle's novels, focusing on scenes of violence which appear typical of the detective novel, but which I argue are particularly original within a Cuban context. I question whether Valle's approach to writing scenes of a sexual nature provides titillation on the part of the implied male reader, and whether it helps or hampers *machista* sexual satisfaction, reaffirming or questioning hegemonic masculinity. The final section of this chapter, *Trans-formations of Cultural Icons in the Descenso Trilogy* returns to this thesis' focus on genre trouble, focusing on the *femme fatale* and the detective *hombre nuevo* hybrid, positing that Valle introduces a neoliberal, capitalist New Man for 21st century Cuba. Here, I also investigate threats to such iconic figures from characters who demonstrate pariah femininity,[32] and sexually and physically non-normative characters, namely transsexuals. I conclude that Valle's series is highly problematic for the reader who is encouraged to reassess their understandings of the relationship between neoliberalism and the communist state, and *machista* ideals of hegemonic masculinity, which I argue are reflected in Valle's unusual take on the detective genre. Previous to this, however, it is important to begin by discussing Valle's particular approach to his work, his reputation as a subversive dissident on the island, and the possible effects this may have on his style of writing, as well as briefly detailing the historical elements of the series.

3.1. *Los Novísimos*, Exile, and Distance: Problematising Cuban Detective Fiction

Valle's work clearly has many parallels with Padura's *Las cuatro estaciones*, such as a focus on (Cuban) identity, demonstrating the extent to which non-revolutionary ideals of gender and sexuality are present in contemporary Cuba, and placing a focus on the work of a state police officer.[33] Valle's work pays specific attention to ongoing social issues in Cuba and his perceived shortcomings of the revolutionary government during and after the Special Period. Although Padura's work does communicate a sense of disillusionment with the Cuban regime through frustrated/frustrating endings to his novels, through a purposeful focus on marginality and the underground criminal scene in Havana, as well

[32] I do not intend for the role of *femme fatale* to become confused with pariah femininity here, given the *femme fatale* is an archetypal norm within hard-boiled detective fiction, and therefore it could be argued that the role of the *femme fatale* perpetuates another kind of hegemonic femininity (Schippers, 2007). Instead, I simply wish to demonstrate a potential overlap of the two in Valle's work.

[33] In Padura's work, Mario Conde's status as a state detective meant that the novels in *Las cuatro estaciones* went some way to conform to the genre norms as laid out in the 1971 *Congreso*, and provided Padura with guidelines to both adhere to and, crucially, transgress.

as the treatment of homosexuals, bisexuals, and transvestites, Valle's work is more explicit in presenting acts of violence against such groups as an extension of instances of abuse of the Cuban people by the socialist state regime, of whom he appears particularly critical in relation to the adoption of capitalist policies from the Special Period onwards.

Amir Valle has been in exile in Berlin since 2005. His enforced expulsion came during a trip to Spain to promote 2006's *Santuario de sombras*. During the annual *Premio Internacional de la Novela Negra Ciudad de Carmona* in Spain, Valle was informed he would not be able to return to Cuba (Viera, 2012). Valle has not yet returned to the island, though he has indicated that it is his utmost desire to do so (Viera, 2012). Despite his exiled status, and the heavy censorship in place on his novels in Cuba, Valle enjoys the status of Cuba's third-most popular author through print-outs and photocopies of one standalone work in particular, *Habana Babilonia* (2008), being circulated on the island (Anon, 2014). Furthermore, Valle's status as an author of a *libro viral* which focuses on the marginal subject of prostitution and sex tourism in Cuba demonstrates the subversive and potentially problematic attributes within his work: though the author may no longer be physically present on the Cuban literary scene, he is, in some ways, defined and revered by his absence. Valle's existence, therefore, marks him as a kind of metonym for dissent in Cuba. Nonetheless, Valle (2009:163, quoted in Fernández and Offerdahl) claims not to be critical of socialism in Cuba as such, rather his work aims to engage with the issues of post-Special Period capitalism on the island, and the consequences of the implementation of such policies:

> Cuba hace ya unos cuantos años vive en una especie de capitalismo de estado que no tiene nada que ver con los mínimos conceptos de acción del socialismo […] Yo digo que yo no escribo novelas críticas; yo escribo novelas. Pero el entorno en que yo ubico a mis personajes y mis temas son de algún modo motivos de crítica para quienes detentan el poder. Eso es algo que es muy interesante porque para mí eso no es crítico. Para mí eso es sencillamente hablar de lo que yo vivo, hablar de lo cotidiano.

However, as I will discuss in this chapter, there remain examples throughout the series that would suggest that Valle's work is indeed critical of Cuban politics, post *Periodo Especial* specifically.

As part of the movement *los Novísimos*, Valle and others 'Rompen con la literatura precedente [cubana] en lo ético y en lo estético, en la estructura y en la forma, en los temas y en el lenguaje' (Rosales Rosa, 2002). Here, Rosales Rosa refers to 'la literatura precedente' as that which was encouraged to be produced by authors during and also after Cuba's *Quinquenio Gris*, following Castro's declaration at the *Primer Congreso* in 1971. My work considers the *Descenso* series as contributing to this ongoing *rompimiento*, which I

see as particularly destructive of generic norms, and I maintain it acts as an example of detective metafiction.

Within *los Novísimos*, Valle was a member of the group *Seis del Ochenta*,[34] formed in 1984 (Uxó, 2010:187). His subversive approach to the strict confines of revolutionary literature produced during his time in the group is evidenced in Uxó's article on the *Novísimos cubanos*.[35] At 17, Valle became the youngest member of *Seis del ochenta*, a subversive literary group that wanted to 'abrir nuevos caminos en la narrativa cubana' (Uxó, 2010:187).[36] After the stagnant *Quinquenio Gris,* during which many authors stopped writing due to the severe censorship and self-censorship in Cuba's creative spheres, there began a backlash against the production of hagiographic texts, the likes of which were previously mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, as well as in the introduction to Chapter One, in which I gave examples of socialist detective fiction in 1970s and 1980s Cuba. Works by groups included in the *Novísimo* movement often focused on sexuality, poverty, Cuba's involvement in Angola, and literary creativity (Uxó, 2010: pp.189-190). Given his role in group *Seis del Ochenta*, one can posit that Valle has a long-standing inclination to undermine the political status quo in Cuba. Uxó (191) notes:

> Siguiendo la línea marcada por el posmodernismo literario, los Novísimos se proponen a socavar el horizonte de expectativas del lector más tradicional, alejándose de patrones y acercamientos preconcebidos y ofreciendo una miríada de nuevas perspectivas y haceres.

Indeed, this chapter discusses Valle's claim to offer new perspectives on Cuba, which unveil the lasting consequences of the Special Period on the country. Valle, considering his part in *Seis del Ochenta*, has long stood against revolutionary rhetoric, and the need to produce hagiographic texts idealising Cuban socialism. As noted earlier, in the context of detective fiction, Wilkinson (2006:123) notes that over a period of 20 years (1971 – 1991), novelists of detective fiction perpetuated revolutionary ideals: socialist triumph was at the core of these novels. Valle's detective fiction offers a multiplicitous, confusing, and unclear set of texts, which I read as demonstrative of the author's disillusioned, negative interpretation of Cuban ideology.

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[34] The origins of the name 'Seis del Ochenta' is unclear, with only Martín Sevillano (2010: 104) going any way towards providing its nomenclature with an explanation, stating: "'Seis del ochenta" surgió como apéndice de un taller literario y coincidió en los habituales encuentros nacionales con escritores de similares prácticas procedentes de La Habana y otros puntos geográficos de Cuba. Sus componentes más relevantes, Alberto Garrido (1966), Amir Valle (1967) y José Mariano Tarralbas (1962), engrosaron junto con Ángel Santiesteban (1966), Alfredo Galiano (1967), Roger Daniel Vilar (1968) y Alberto Guerra (1963) un nuevo grupo, tutelado por Eduardo Heras León, radicado en La Habana'.

[35] Uxó (2010) and Gewecke (2010) both reference *los Novísimos* in relation to Valle, and Gewecke (180) sees *los Novísimos* as taking advantage of the *novela negra* in 1980s Cuba.

[36] *Seis del Ochenta* dissolved permanently at the end of the 1990s (Amir Valle, *Escritor*, year unknown)

Through the distribution of *Habana Babilonia* and his ensuing notoriety, Valle's status is particularly paradoxical as he is well-known on the island, but is physically, and, as I will discuss in this chapter, ideologically distant. I discuss quotations and interpretations of Cuba in relation to both Valle's ideological stance, and his physical distance to Cuba in this chapter. When asked directly about his enforced exile, Valle attributes it to the content of his novels:

> Mis libros mostraban una cara bien fea, y basado [sic] en casos reales, de los mundos de la droga, la prostitución, la corrupción policial, el mercado negro y las implicaciones del gobierno en muchos de esos casos. (Valle quoted in Viera, 2012)

This considered, *Descenso* appears to adhere to many of the norms of hard-boiled detective fiction, featuring dark underworlds and bringing to light political and societal disillusionment. However, this quotation also betrays one of the series' more problematic issues, which is that of Valle's decision to base the series on real events. As a result, and considering the author's exiled status, I maintain that Valle's series is a particularly complex and nuanced example of detective fiction, as well as a particularly distinctive case of genre trouble, with a specific focus on marginality: promoting and focusing on marginal bodies, marginal sexualities, and the subversion of icons of both the detective genre and of Cuban socialist rhetoric.

3.1.2. Exile and Marginality

When analysing Valle's work, and extracting meaning from his texts, it is vital to be aware of the specificities of context in which he writes. None of the few academics who have produced work on the author adequately address the consequences of Valle's status as exiled writer, with some (Perez-Simon, 2010) glossing over the fact entirely. Valle's focus on the liminal, on the shadowy underside of Cuban life, is clearly evident in his work from the start of his career in *los Novísimos* (see Uxó, 190). The marginalised figure is recognised in this chapter as that of Alex Varga, an historical figure who worked as Valle's informant, passing the author information on Havana's underground until his death in 2002 (Gewecke, 2010:184). *Últimas noticias* is dedicated to his memory.

The exile of dissenting Cuban authors is, of course, not a new phenomenon. In her monograph on homosexuality and invisibility in Cuba, López (2015) examines the case of Reinaldo Arenas, whose works, despite his death in 1989, are still banned on the island. Indeed, there appear to be many parallels between Arenas and Valle: Arenas has stated 'En Cuba fui simplemente un burócrata, y después una no-persona' (quoted in López, 2015:87), whereas Valle understands the reasoning behind the Cuban government's attitude towards him in the following terms:

> Me convertí, según palabras de algunos funcionarios culturales, en 'un intelectual confundido que no entiende que sus críticas hacen daño al país' (primero), en 'uno más que busca reconocimiento internacional siguiendo la moda de hablar mal de nuestro proceso revolucionario' (más tarde) y, finalmente, en 'un escritor menor que hace el juego al enemigo de la Revolución'. (Valle quoted in Viera, 2012)

Both authors appear to have equated their experiences of exile with a loss of identity and sense of self or belonging, both having been deemed persona non-grata by their country of birth.[37]

Hammerschmidt (2010) expounds on the problematic consequences of exile for Cuban authors by considering the case of Guillermo Cabrera Infante. The academic is quick to point out the paradoxical nature of exile, stating 'Si, por un lado, constituye la falta como base de toda definición, por el otro, brinda un punto de referencia o foco de atención que sin el exilio quizás no existiera. Así, el exilio equivale a una vida en espera' (191), and claims that exile permits authors a certain kind of multiplicity in their work, stating that exile '[dobla] la nueva realidad vivida' (191), an important concept to reflect upon when considering the *lejanía* at the heart of Valle's work, given his status as outsider. Hammerschmidt (191) also engages with an additional problem in relation to works by exiled authors, which I continue to discuss in subsequent sections of this chapter, noting the issue of providing a false image of the society in question when works are written in exile, stating: 'Se agudiza el aspecto falsificador de la memoria por la lejanía no exclusivamente temporal, sino también espacial del centro de atracción'. I therefore investigate the representations of post-Special Period Cuba as part of the author's specific interpretation of Post-Soviet, quasi-capitalist,[38] revolutionary life in Cuba.

Of the other authors featured in this thesis, Bef's approach to Mexican detective fiction, informed (perhaps unwittingly) by the effects of NAFTA upon Mexico after 1994, demonstrates issues of hegemonic masculinity and pariah femininities within a globalised, neoliberal, post War-On-Drugs context in Mexico. Both Valle and Bef, as I will demonstrate, prioritise and foreground non-normative sexualities and bodies in their works, using, for example, scenes of sexual violence within their work, yet the outcome and effect this has on the reader is wholly different in each case. Valle raises questions surrounding the incapacity of Soviet-influenced Marxism in Cuba, as well as of policy

[37] López demonstrates the effect this had on Arenas, which she posits culminated in his suicide after moving from Miami to New York, whereas Valle continues with a successful international career despite the negative rhetoric which surrounds his name in Cuba.

[38] Barbassa (2005:25) describes the post-Special Period state of the Cuban people as 'would be capitalists', and Foley (2005:46) refers to the island as undergoing a 'protocapitalist cacophony'.

adopted in the country after the fall of the Soviet Union; paradoxically, the author approaches his series from a point of view that appears to be informed by, and critical of, the neoliberal structures in place in his country of birth.

This chapter considers the three most recent additions to the *Descenso* series, *Últimas noticias del infierno*, *Santuario de sombras*, and *Largas noches con Flavia*, though it does also reference the earlier novels in the collection. The purposes of using the final three narratives in the series are threefold: firstly, these are the novels which are least frequently considered in the small amount of academic literature available on the author, and thus provide a contrast to Padura's work in *Máscaras* in that sense; secondly, to allow for a more detailed discussion on the complexities of post-Special Period Cuba, and to consider the effect of exile upon the representation of Cuba in the novels, particularly as *Últimas noticias* was written while Valle still lived in Cuba, and *Santuario* and *Largas* were both written after his exile in Berlin; and thirdly, as these novels are each clear examples of genre subversion, and feature topics relating to the themes of mask and disguise which consolidate this thesis, above all with regards to the figures of the police officer, the marginal, and the *hombre nuevo*. Furthermore, each of the three narratives also engages with issues of sex and gender, and I here understand Valle as contributing to the increasingly fluid and multiplicitous literary space of non-normative sexualities and bodies in Cuban cultural products on an international scale.[39]

3.2. Style, Scepticism, and Subjectivities

In this section, I demonstrate the extent to which Valle's work can be interpreted as subversive within the context of Cuban detective fiction, and to what extent it also moves on from the hard-boiled detective fiction from the U.S., as previously outlined in the Introduction to this thesis. The deliberately blurred, uncertain, and unfocused quality to Valle's work, I argue, is achieved through a use of a multiplicity of narrative voices and the blurring of historical events and figures with fiction. This leads to a discussion on the metafictional detective novel, of which I argue Valle's work is a particularly important example, leaving the reader confused, inundated with schizophrenic, contradictory, and at times seemingly unrelated voices. Valle criticises Castro not for a non-democratic approach to politics in Cuba; rather the author focuses on the oligarch for the adoption of policies not consistent with the Marxist communist framework of the country.

[39] Stout (2012: pp.42-49) for more on *telenovelas*, film, and general [paradoxical] attitudes towards non-normative bodies and sexualities in Cuban popular culture.

I continue to discuss the metanarrativity at the heart of the series, engaging with issues of testimonial literature and exile, positing that Valle's own construction of Cuban reality emphasises the artificial structuring of Cuban reality. Furthermore, I argue that it is not necessarily the content of Valle's series that positions his work as subversive, rather his decision to include historical events and figures, which in turn leads the reader to question subjectivity and construction in the detective narrative and Cuba. I demonstrate how *Descenso* is an example of detective metafiction, which is highly critical of the effects of the Special Period in Cuba, providing a distanced yet unrelenting commentary of the effects of neoliberalism on Marxist structures. I argue that *Descenso* both seeks destruction of the genre's style, causing the reader to disbelieve the narrative voice(s), and critiques views of both capitalist politics and socialist state structures in the country.

I begin my analysis of Valle's use of style by considering what Uxó recognises as traits inherent to the dissident *Novísimo* authors. Carlos Uxó (2010: 191) notes such qualities in relation to the work produced the *Los Novísimos* during the 1980s and 1990s, claiming that in work produced by such authors:

> Se rompen esquemas genéricos incorporando en los relatos elementos en principio ajenos a la narrativa, como diálogos teatrales (acotaciones escénicas incluidas), poesías, textos pseudoperiodísticos o científicos, fragmentos de ensayos, cartas, canciones o intervenciones directas del narrador; se incluyen ayudas visuales, desde simples variantes tipográficas hasta fotografías o caricaturas; se tiende a narrar desde diversos puntos de vista, sin señalar necesariamente el cambio del narrador; se recurre de manera constante al pastiche y al discurso autorreferencial; se prefiere un lenguaje con fuerte contenido de oralidad que permite la entrada de coloquialismos y exabruptos; y se observa una atracción por el minimalismo, con el consecuente desarrollo del microrrelato.

Uxó does not continue to mention Valle directly in this excerpt, however I intend to demonstrate that Valle's work is not only indicative of his time spent as part of *Seis del Ochenta*, but also it remains quintessentially *Novísimo*, according to these guidelines laid out by Uxó. Moreover, it is, as I posit, a clear example of detective metafiction. I continue now to demonstrate the effects of historical fact and metanarrativity on Valle's work and in relation to his use of style specifically.

The title of the trilogy, *El descenso a los infiernos* references Dante Alighieri's *Divine Comedy*. Divided into three canticas — Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise — the poem, describing Dante's travel through all three states, charts the soul's journey to God. However, I interpret Valle's work as providing the reader with no positivistic ending, immediately undercutting readers' expectations: there is no parallel to the understanding that Dante comes to obtain concerning the nature of Christ and the alignment of his soul with that of God's in Valle's work. Instead, the reader is left distressed by the nightmarish

situations described across all the novels in the series, with the last in the series to date, *Largas*, left open-ended, uncertain, and disillusioned. This metaliterary feature demonstrated by the reference to Dante is one which, as I continue to argue in this thesis when considering Rogelio Guedea's *Colima* trilogy, is a significant element of detective metafiction. I argue that approaching the series with a knowledge of the *Divine Comedy,* readers will undoubtedly feel their expectations of a positive journey undermined in the *Descenso* trilogy.

As in *Máscaras*, *Últimas noticias* begins with a reference to Cuban authors and literature. Valle begins by including a section of Cuban poet Norge Espinosa's work *Vestido de novia*. *Vestido de novia* was 'the first poem on a homoerotic theme to win the Premio de Poesía from Cuba's state cultural magazine, *El Caimán Barbudo*' in 1989 (World Literature Today, *Norge Espinosa Mendoza*, year unknown). The poem is often included in anthologies on Cuban poetry (*ibid*), and its award by *El Caimán Barbudo* as part of the collection *Las breves tribulaciones* (originally published in 1989) demonstrates some softening of attitudes towards non-normative sexualities in Cuba. Speaking of the censoring and silencing of intellectuals and authors in Cuba in the 1960s, López (2015: 9) maintains:

> Their initial rejection is evidence that any reference (fictional included) to homosexual discourse was taken as a threat to the stability of the Cuban Revolution. There was some relaxation through towards the end of the 1980s. The Código Penal was modified, and this improved the situation for homosexuals. Two texts broke the initial barrier of silence regarding homophobia in 1988: Uría's short story 'Por qué llora Leslie Caron?' and Espinosa's 1988 poem 'Vestido de novia'. In 1989, Espinosa's book of poems *Las breves tribulaciones* […] was awarded the *Premio Nacional de Poesía El Caimán Barbudo*.

Though López does not clarify *El Caimán Barbudo*'s links to socialist ideals (and therefore its associations with an anti-homosexual agenda, and viewing other non-normative sexualities as a threat to revolutionary ideas), the author does, nonetheless, realise the ground-breaking nature of Espinosa's poem. Cuba in 1989 was beginning to soften somewhat to LGBTQ identities, though this, as Stout (2012) concludes, does not mean that homophobic actions and rhetoric no longer existed, or no longer continue to exist.

Espinosa's famous poem appearing at the start of the narrative betrays the novel's focus, and underlines Valle's preoccupation with metanarrativity and reassessing imposed boundaries. Valle accompanies this with a dedication: 'Para Francisco Alexander Vargas Machuca (Alex Varga), in memoriam'. Alex Varga is based on a historical character, whom the author used as his 'informant' while gathering information for his series (Geweke, 2010:184). Alex Varga's fictionality and historicity are always both proven and

simultaneously disproven by his appearance as a re-animated character. Valle therefore renders Varga a duplicitous character, who speaks both through the author, and as himself. The character of Alex Varga also elicits questions surrounding the re-telling and the fictionalisation of history, causing the reader anxiety, as Valle purposefully renders his readers aware of Varga's inherent metanarrativity.

Valle opens *Últimas noticias* (2014) with what appears to be an excerpt from a police report, detailing the discovery of an unauthorised, illegal burial of a black man in his 70s, whose limbs and head had been ripped from his body. There is, as of yet, no way to discover whether such a crime did take place in Havana on August 21st 2001 (as is detailed in the police report).[40] However, Valle's website describes the novels in the *Descenso* trilogy as 'sobre casos criminales reales ocurridos en Cuba' (Agnoloni, 2014), information regarding which it is assumed came from Varga (Amir Valle, *Novela*, year unknown). This, like the inclusion of quotations found at the beginning of Rogelio Guedea's *41*, betrays the contents of the novel to followThe report is written including spelling errors which betray the Cuban accent, for example 'serca de la 1:00 del 20 agosto', 'Asegura aber sentido', 'prosedian con apuro', 'fallecido en extrañas sircunstancias', 'Inspección ocular', and which also use legal terminology, such as 'el ciudadano', 'el procedimiento habitual e chequeo', 'se traslada el cuerpo del occiso a Medicina Legal a las 15:17 pm', 'Tomado del E.P 102/01 – Registro 248' (1). Though Valle provides the reader with all the details surrounding this crime, beginning the novel with an *Expediente Policial*, there is no way to find out anything more about this murder. Extensive online searching has shed no light on this crime or any that appears similar, and one would have to question how Valle would have been able to come across such a police report, though, given Valle's relationship with Francisco Alexander Vargas Machuca, it is possible that the author obtained details of the crime through his then-informant.. This is particularly likely given that an article available on the Miami Herald website reveals that in Cuba, 'The official narrative leaves no room for violence,' and continues to outline that 'As the online news site Havana Times wrote in 2012, local newspapers don't have 'a crime page and nothing is published about crime, robberies, rapes or murders. Nothing was even written when 33 patients starved to death in a Havana psychiatric hospital' (Miami Herald,

[40] Investigations into levels of crime during fieldwork in Havana in 2015 unsurprisingly revealed no official information available on crime in Cuba. Investigating using online search engines unveiled sparse, unofficial reports of several murders, none of which match any of the murders presented in *Descenso*. See Miami Herald, 2013, for more on the lack of information on crime in Cuba, as well as some information on first-hand experiences of crime.

2013). Other information on post-Special Period violent crime is, more often than not, documented in an unofficial guise on personal blogs, and the lack of precise information available about violent crime on the island is made clear in the OSAC's (Overseas Security Advisory Council) 2015 report on the country (Overseas Security Advisory Council, 2015). The notion that Cuba is not necessarily as safe as it would seem is becoming written about and acknowledged increasingly through unofficial channels (De la Cruz, 2013).

In a similar fashion, the opening notes to both *Santuario* and *Largas noches* also make references to historical crime in Cuba. *Largas noches* begins with another affirmation that the novel is 'basada en hechos reales', and marks 2001 as the year in which violence against tourists in Cuba rose, mentioning:

> La desaparición de turistas en diversas zonas del país a lo largo de varios años desde que se extendió el turismo como primera industria, la muerte en circunstancias no aclaradas de algunos visitantes extranjeros de paso por la isla y la implicación de numerosos individuos de varias naciones de Europa y América en el tráfico de droga hacia la isla' (2008: pp.3-4).

The fact that Valle notes the correlation between the increase in violence toward tourists and the mass expansion of tourism as the island's 'primera industria' is a clear attempt to critique on the part of the author the effects of the Special Period and the implementation of capitalist policies on the country, in this case in relation to opening Cuba to tourism. Valle goes on to maintain that, 'como autor, solamente he cambiado el nombre de algunos personajes, atendiendo al hecho de que, tal vez, correrían peligro de revelarse sus verdaderas identidades y localización actual' (4).

Furthermore, *Santuario* begins with testimony from *sobrevivientes* who attempted to make the crossing between Cuba and Miami:

> Sobre las aguas, los trozos de cuerpos podridos, inflados, semejaban inmensas flores marchitas. No olía a mar ni a salitre: olía a muerte. Alrededor, el mar, tenebrosamente el mar, arrojaba sobre nosotros sus sombras siniestras, como en un santuario infernal' (2006:9)

And;

> 'Lo que puedas escribir, por escalofriante que sea, nunca llegará a la realidad. Estuve allí y desde esa noche nunca he vuelto a dormir tranquilo. Supe que la muerte siempre está en nosotros mismos. Haciéndonos trampas para enzarparnos. Y le tengo miedo. Mucho miedo' (9).[41]

This second quotation from a survivor of the crossing between Cuba and Miami is particularly interesting, as it attests to the fact that Valle's work will never be able to adequately demonstrate his experience trying to leave Cuba.[42] As with Guedea's work to

[41] See Gómez Cabezas, 2006 for further details on this *sobreviviente*.

[42] Of course, *testimonio* literature is often used as a genre to do the opposite, which is to give voice to the subaltern in that it is an implicitly Marxist gesture, challenging the ruling class's cultural hegemony, which

be analysed in Chapter Four, beginning novels with an out-and-out declaration of simulating truth is problematic. In comparison to Padura's *nota del autor* in *Máscaras*, Valle's approach to writing detective fiction is here both transparent and opaque: on the one hand, the author goes to lengths to afford the reader as much clarity concerning the novel's events as possible through underlining the historicity of the text and its basis in real events. On the other hand, the quotation from a survivor reminds the reader that their view of events will, inevitably, be obscured, because Valle's writing 'nunca llegará a realidad': Valle's work can never accurately reflect truth, but only comment on it. This is another instance of the way in which *Descenso* can be interpreted as an example of destructive detective metafiction: Valle asks the reader to question everything they may be tempted to believe, and destroys the principal tenet of detective fiction of providing the reader with satisfying, undeniable truth claims through the revelation of a clear solution. Through this technique, Valle encourages the reader to question purported truths in Cuba more generally. Lyotard's thoughts on postmodernism (1989) demonstrate the link between knowledge and destruction and are pertinent here as I argue that Valle's work, along with the other texts analysed in this thesis, is a clear example of postmodern detective fiction, housing an inherent 'incredulity towards metanarratives' (1989: xxiv), and implicitly commenting on the Marxist metanarrative at the heart of the Cuban socialist regime. Where Padura makes his concession that Mario Conde is a fictional detective, Valle makes problematic truth claims. Valle's work even goes so far as to raise questions concerning the damage that re-counting such difficult stories in at least a semi-fictitious manner may have on those affected by the contents of the book, such as the *sobrevivientes*.

The questioning of truth claims, which in turn provide the reader with a sense of powerlessness and cynicism, also brings into question concerns regarding issues of testimonial literature. In an interview with Fernández and Offerdahl (2009: pp.158-159), Valle stated:

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in this case is the Marxist rhetoric of socialist Cuba. One must therefore ask what are the implications of using tenets of *testimonio* to critique a regime that is purportedly Marxist influenced, and this raises some important points: firstly, that Valle feels that Cuba is no longer part of a Marxist socialist structure in this post-Special Period era, and can therefore be critiqued from a Marxist point of view. Secondly, that Valle may be stunted as an author and has failed to assess the implications of *testimonio* literature as a vehicle through which to emphasise injustice – in this case the institution which creates and perpetuates the dominant social ideology – than through a staunchly Marxist technique. Thirdly, that Valle purposefully emplots a vocabulary of *testimonio* (through truth claims implied using *sobreviviente*) and subalternities (again implied using *sobreviviente*) to draw the reader's attention to and create further tensions surrounding Cuban socialism and truth claims in 'communist' Cuban society.

> Con *Santuario de sombras* te puedo decir que es la novela más realista de todas las que yo he escrito […] en la misma cuadra en que yo vivía […] vivía una persona que había sobrevivido el tráfico de personas […] Me di cuenta ya desde ese momento que yo tenía que escribir una novela que fuera algo plural, una novela que fuera como un coro de voces sobre un mismo tema.

It is this 'coro', or plurality of voices on behalf of which Valle sees himself as a spokesperson, which also makes his detective fiction so hard to approach. This is because although the author repeatedly states his objective as revealing truth and providing a faithful depiction of what appears to be his understanding of the failures of the socialist system after the fall of the Soviet Union in Cuba, his depictions are often compromised or at least complicated by his authorial narrative choices. A genre which implicitly seeks to expose truth, testimonial literature does this *on behalf of* a group that cannot – or will not – speak, and therefore can be criticised for, amongst other things, the appropriation of the voice of the subaltern.[43] In *Santuario* above all this becomes problematic, not only because Valle assumes the voice of the abject and those who are victims of criminal violence, but also due to Valle's exiled status.

It is this subjectivity and the unavoidable distancing involved when retelling the story of a group (though the author may be and may understand themselves as part of that group/accepted as part of that group) which can be problematic. I argue that such issues are alluded to in *Santuario* when Alex, addressing Alain through reported speech, relates part of Alain's investigation to the reader:

> Ni siquiera con sus palabras quedabas convencido: un bichito de duda andaba jodiéndote allá adentro, en la sangre, y esa narizona de perro viejo te decía que el Santo Papa de los Feos podía estar convencido de que decía la verdad, pero eso no significaba que fuera la verdad. (2006:174)

Such narrative style reaffirms Uxó's (2010:191) claim that *Novísimo* writers 'tiende[n] a narrar desde varias puntos de vista, sin señalar necesariamente el cambio de narrador', and forces the reader to work hard to engage with the subject and object in such examples. Such a level of searching is unusual in both U.S. hard-boiled detective fiction, that produced in Cuba between 1971's Primer Congreso and Gorbachev's announcement in 1991 to withdraw training troops from Cuba, and additionally that produced by Padura in the *Cuatro estaciones* series (1993-1997), and as well as that produced by contemporaries of Valle, such as Lorenzo Lunar (*La vida es un tango* (2005), *Usted es la culpable* (2006) and Rafael Grillo (*Asesinos ilustrados,* 2010). In *Descenso,* the reader must engage fully with the text to discover who speaks and can only then unravel meaning. Through this Bakhtinian

[43] Famous examples of criticism on *testimonio* literature focus on issues brought about by the role of the elite, metropolitan, white compiler, and are discussed by Stoll in his well-known criticism of Rigoberta Menchú's *testimonio* (see Stoll, 1999) and at length by Maier and Dulfano (2004).

plurality of voices, Valle transforms *Descenso* into an example of ontological detective fiction as the reader is forced to engage with concepts of metafictionality and subjectivity throughout the novels.

Valle's work also challenges the norms of detective fiction by including both historical and semi-historical figures within his work. Though I have previously mentioned the inclusion of Alex Varga, who continues to feature in the series years after his death, Valle develops this blurring of historical fact even further than other authors – notably Guedea, but also Padura – in this thesis. Valle's series is particularly difficult for the reader to engage with due to the previously-discussed techniques of doubling of reality, heteroglossia, and metanarrativity in *Descenso*. For example, as Gewecke (2010: 184) notes: 'El teniente Alain Bec […] es un lector apasionado de novelas policiacas, junto con Daniel Chavarría, particularmente a Justo Vasco'. Not only does Valle reference Uruguayan-born Chavarría who lives in Cuba, and Cuban Vasco, Valle also emplots his novels with fictional versions of real authors, further blurring the lines between reality and fiction, adding a surreal element to his work. In the first novel of the series, *Las puertas de la noche* (2001), one of Bec's colleagues tells the detective that he is working on the case of 'Un pajarito que apareció muerto en el Parque de la Habana con unas monedas en el culo. Todo un casito. Estoy trabajando con gente de otra unidad, un tal Mario Conde' (2001: 93). Though Valle's reference here is clearly to the case of Alexis Arayán in Padura's *Máscaras*, highlighted by the mention of Mario Conde by name, fans will know that Alexis was in fact found in *El bosque de La Habana*, again highlighting the constructed nature of literary texts.

The reader's awareness of the constructed nature of the text again causes anxiety and confusion, attained from the blurring of reality and fiction, and bestowing upon the text an additional self-awareness. It is important to bear in mind Uxó's (2010:191) statement on the traits of the *Novísimos*' work: 'Se rompen esquemas genéricos incorporando […] diversos puntos de vista, sin señalar necesariamente el cambio del narrador; se recurre de manera constante al pastiche y al discurso autorreferencial'. Furthermore, the self-referentiality visible in this example is clear proof of the fluidity and the performance that Benitez Rojo (1992:11) and Williams (1995:106) see as tied to Cuban postmodernism. However, I posit that such a choice to so heavily reference the Cuban literary scene is an example of how *Descenso* can be interpreted as detective metafiction.[44]

[44] The references to Cuban literature include the author himself and his own literary output (though under another name, which is just as endowed with self-awareness and parody, as one possible interpretation of the name Justo Marqués could be a combination of *novela negra* author Justo Vasco [who

The effect of this metafictionality is one which causes the reader to become hyperaware of the text which they read, and is therefore particularly destructive of the detective fiction genre – a genre which, in its original incarnation, relied upon the reader's collusion with the narrative voice in order to successfully unveil truth and injustice at the story's dénouement. Furthermore, though Valle is recorded as stating that his work is based on historical fact (see Fernández and Offerdahl, 2009), the reader begins to question the author's role, the concept of authorial power, the scenes which are being related for the reader, and Valle's exiled status and the effect it has upon his literary output. Very little can be trusted in what attests to be a series which dialogues with historical fact in order to reveal truth, and thereby *Descenso* subverts and undermines not only the norms of detective fiction, but the norms of truth claims.

Basing the novels on *hechos reales* at first glance would thus at first glance appear to provide Valle's work with a dimension of legitimacy and authenticity in a culture in which, we are told, crime does not take place. However, I argue that these truth claims and extensive use of interviews with victims of various crimes and historical events and figures in fact act to question legitimacy and authenticity. Furthermore, the novels feature copious quotations pertaining to Cuba being a 'lie' or 'not real' such as, 'Cuba es una gran mentira, rodeada de mentiras por todas partes' (2006:77), 'En Cuba la doble moral es tan fuerte que hay quienes tienen colecciones de máscaras en la casa. Nunca logras saber con qué persona estás hablando' (2008:89), 'Realmente la sociedad cubana estaba tan corrompida que cualquiera de las tres variantes era posible' (2008:89). Such a self-aware, self-reflexive, and inherently contradictory approach to the crime novel demonstrates the postmodern play at the heart of Valle's work.

Valle is concerned with the manipulation of truth, especially in *Santuario*, a story which is re-told from the point of view of a multitude of narrative voices. The plot in *Santuario* is relayed to the reader using intersecting, schizophrenic, and fluctuating narrators, timescales, and narrative styles. The novel's focus on themes of social and political injustice and corruption combine to make particularly cutting points on the notion of equality in Cuba – of gender, race, and sexuality – a notion which lay at the heart of Cuba's socialist regime. The multitude of narrative voices, as referenced by Uxó in relation to authors of the *Novísimos* generation, clearly reflects the ambiguities which

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Bec is a fan of] and Alberto Marqués, a main character in Padura's *Máscaras*. Padura's character Alberto Marqués himself is often interpreted as a representation of Virgilio Piñera). Valle also names himself directly in *Santuario de sombras*. This tongue-in-cheek reference does nothing to further the plot, and renders the reader hyper-aware of the author's powerful position.

form part of contemporary Cuban identity. Such a proliferation of voices demonstrates that Cuban identity is by no means united or homogenous.

3.3. Breaking Boundaries: Sex, Violence, and Plot Advancement

Valle's work across the *Descenso* series is clearly problematic – there is little of real certainty within the author's texts, despite their claims to veracity – as the author constantly draws the reader's attention to the various ways in which the Cuban detective genre up to the Special Period and beyond is subverted, and, to an extent, destroyed.[45] However, the purpose of this thesis is not only to discuss the ways in which genre tenets are subverted and re-imagined by authors; it also questions and engages with the representation of sex in the chosen novels in order to posit that authorial power can either lead the reader to be titillated by certain scenes, or pushed to question why they are titillated/repulsed by scenes of a sexual nature.

As discussed in the Introduction to this thesis, the concepts of sex and violence are by no means novel additions to the genre of detective fiction: works by renowned authors of the genre from its inception to present day frequently feature such traits, as demonstrated by the early and mid-twentieth century works Raymond Chandler and Mickey Spillane, to the post-millennial production of Robert Crais and Michael Connelly. Such displays of base humanity and the representation of taboo subjects pique the reader's interest across nations. As elsewhere stated in this thesis, readers of detective fiction and viewers of crime serials and film are always voyeuristic in their role, watching from a safe distance as acts associated with criminality, immorality, and sordid titillation are played out before them. Sadistic pleasure is gained from such scenes as the reader/viewer is safe in the knowledge that they are not involved directly in scenes of violence or abuse. However, this sadistic enjoyment can, in the contexts of violent sexual abuse, be interpreted as misogynistic, in that it fetishizes sexual violence against women and depicts women's vulnerability, with female characters forced to rely on men for protection. This status of abjection and dependency will be analysed in relation to Valle's representation of significant female characters in this section.

Unlike in Padura's work, in which the crime scenes described are not overly graphic as they instead tend to focus on the detective's reaction to the scene, or the way in which

[45] This is particularly clear in relation to Padura's work, which also offers an important insight into both genre trouble and *transgenericidad*, and the deconstruction of generic and historical figures such as the *hombre nuevo*.

the victim is dressed, Valle's descriptions of dead bodies and acts of violence are detailed and have the ability to shock the reader due to the stark manner in which the author relays violence. In *Descenso,* the reader is provided with the intimate details of a crime scene, whereas in Padura's *Máscaras*, detective Mario Conde diverts his scrutiny from the murder scene and corpse of Alexis Arayán, and the reader follows his gaze. However, Valle often invites the reader to experience a synaesthesic, detailed description of a murder scene. Such colourful descriptions of violence may appear to be like those which appear in Bef's *Detective Mijangos* series which is examined in Chapter Three of this thesis.

Rather than describing the state of a dead body and thereby allowing the reader to imagine how such victims came to be in their states, *Santuario* opens with strong imagery being captured on the part of an omniscient narrator, who relates the scene of a group of people trying to leave Cuba illegally by boat to get to Miami. The tone is one of abjection, repulsion, and fear:

> - La gente se caga cuando va a morir – dijo alguien, una vez, no recuerda. Y ella tuvo la prueba ante sus ojos: el mar negrísimo anegándolo todo con sus sombras de muerte, el yate que los sacaba de Cuba ('la nave de la salvación', había dicho su hermano, con los ojos disparando una alegría que ella jamás había visto), la cubierta llena de gente que gritaba y lloraba y pedía clemencia y ¡por Dios! […] y el llanto 'su madrecita santa, no dispare' y esa voz que no olvida: '¡A callarse, cabrones!' y el hedor a orín y a mierda y a mar bajo el manto de las sombras, ¿huelen las sombras?, o era el miedo, ¿hiede el miedo?, y los gritos y el llanto '¡las niñas no, las niñas..!', los rafagazos. (2006:11)

The smell of excrement is linked with death, and the sea becomes a threat, full of 'sombras de muerte', noises such as screams, shouts, cries, and pleas for mercy, the threat of violence from a gun, the unpleasant stench of urine intermingled with seawater and the implication that small girls are in danger combine to create a nightmarish vision for the reader whose senses of vision, smell, and hearing are all targeted to demonstrate the overwhelming and frightening situation described. In this way, Valle immerses the reader in the developing situation, and implicitly asks the reader to sympathise with those who are victims. This is further achieved by such abjection and fear being contrasted against the positive image of 'la nave de la salvación' and the happiness described at the thought of leaving Cuba, which is undercut not only by the tone of the rest of the opening, but also through Valle's use of parenthesis – positivity and happiness is also an aside for those aboard this boat.

Given Valle's aim to include historical crimes which took place in Cuba in his series, *Últimas noticias* is a novel which unveils largely unknown types of criminality within Cuba. As is typical within Valle's novels, the narrative opens with a 'nota del autor', which

outlines the 'hechos reales' on which the novel is based, in this case the history of and the reality of sex work in Cuba. The novel opens with intimate details of the effects of violence, as Alain Bec arrives on the scene of a murder, finding the dismembered body of Sabrina, an aged male-to-female transvestite and former prostitute who had had links to American Mafioso Meyer Lansky during the Batista regime. The reader is immediately introduced to three important elements which run throughout the series at a crime scene: changed bodies, the detective, and violence:

> El hedor era insoportable. A carne podrida. De bestia muerta […] en medio de un inmenso charco de sangre negruzca, coagulada, los restos del cuerpo de lo que horas antes era un viejo travesti se lanzó contra sus ojos, acostumbrados quizás a todas las variantes del crimen, pero todavía no preparados para una mutilación como aquella. Por eso los cerró con fuerza, respiró profundo y volvió a abrirlos, dueño ya de la coraza que se ponía siempre que se enfrentaba a casos similares, impensables décadas atrás, en la época dorada de la ciudad y los bares y las fiestas y la prosperidad y esa habanera forma de enfrentarse a la noche de la que hablaban tantos libros y películas, pero que se hacían cada vez más cotidianos en una Habana empecinada en desplomarse dejando un reguero triste de tozudas ruinas que iban esculpiendo por todas partes un árido paisaje postnuclear. (2010: pp.1-2)

This particularly brutal scene introduces the reader and the detective to the discovery of the dismembered body of an elderly black man, assumed, after having read the *nota del autor*, to be the same man found and detailed in the police report. The opening few lines are a minefield of imagery of violence, death, and disillusionment. Highly synaesthesic, the reader experiences a sensation of not being able to escape from the scene laid out for them: they are instructed on and surrounded by the many smells and visual horrors in the room. This overriding notion of an inescapable nightmare is furthered by the murdered transvestite's body still having agency, throwing itself at Bec's eyes (and therefore those of the reader) as he attempts to take in the scene. Not only is the dead body not entirely passive, Havana itself is described as animate: 'empecinada', the city wishes to collapse, spitting out its stubborn ruins, an example perhaps of Valle's take on the island's view and treatment of its intellectual class and dissident writers. The onslaught of imagery communicates a sense of being overwhelmed, which is further communicated through the detective closing his eyes. This decision to look away from the dizzying scene is reminiscent of Mario Conde's reaction to first encountering Alexis Arayán's corpse in the Havana Woods as described in *Máscaras*, yet, as in Guedea's work, the description of the scene continues. There is no relief for the reader, who continues to be bombarded with equally difficult imagery:

> El sadismo de los criminales también crecía en estos tiempos […] El asesino había cortado los brazos en la coyuntura de los hombros, hasta desprenderlos, y en las

> piernas los tajazos se veían a la altura del comienzo de los muslos en la cadera, de modo que tuvo que partir el hueso del fémur para separar cada miembro.
> […] En medio del charco estaba el torso con la cabeza semidegollada por una cortadura que le pareció igual a la que hacen las navajas […] Encima del pecho desnudo del viejo los brazos formaban una cruz. […] Dirigió la mirada hacia la otra cruz, más grande, que el asesino había formado con las piernas, montándolas en crueceta a la altura de las rodillas, de modo que hacia donde Alain estaba parado apuntaba la carnosidad abundante y la hiriente blancura de la cabeza del hueso, en el comienzo de uno de los muslos. (2010, pp.2-3)

Valle's reference to sadism in the opening sentence of this excerpt provides a warning of the violent scene which is about to be relayed. The clear, close imagery of the body and the use of a vocabulary of dissection provide the reader with very little distance from the scene. This is intensified again by the author's decision to disclose the fact that the novel is based on real events, and the use of the excerpt of the police report which appears as part of the *nota del autor*. Due to this, it could be argued, the description appeals to an emotive reaction, rather than providing the reader with critical distance. In Chapter Three I discuss Bef's use of violence as a plot device, and I conclude that such scenes of violence demonstrate a lack of awareness on the part of the author who may ultimately disseminate potentially damaging views of violence and women in his work. However, in the opening to *Últimas noticias*, the reader is not invited to experience the act of murder first-hand: we do not read about the physical act of dismembering a body, the reader is left to consider these horrific acts and to question the identity and possible motives of the victim's murderer. Though in Padura's *Cuatro estaciones*, marginal figures do feature (particularly in *Máscaras* given the plot's focus on a homosexual victim), Valle's novels are much more explicit both about the divide between accepted behaviour and liminality. Furthermore, descriptions of violence/the consequences of violence in *Descenso* are much more explicit and much more shocking, drawing the reader's attention to the often undiscussed, unacknowledged, and frequently officially overlooked issue of criminality and violence in Cuba.

As discussed throughout this thesis, the topic of violence in detective fiction often goes together with sex, particularly in relation to rape and other sexual activity which may be described as taboo, for example homosexual sex. This pairing is typically understood to titillate the fantasies of the implied male reader of the genre, at once bolstering the role of the heterosexual male character through both his rationality, success at detection, and

frequently violent streak, and creating an aspirational figure for readers, this given the detective's frequent sexual encounters with women.[46]

As is typical of detective fiction, each of the texts discussed in this thesis feature scenes of explicit sexual activity, though I argue that these scenes can often be read as generically subversive for a multitude of reasons in each individual case. Given the significance of sex to both detective fiction as a genre and as a thematic strand of this thesis, it is important to discuss the topic as presented in Valle's work, and how the representations of this theme differ from those otherwise represented by the authors featured in this thesis, as well as throughout the genre more widely. This chapter therefore engages explicitly with normative and non-normative examples of sexuality and sexual behaviour, and considers notion of hybridity within the Cuban detective genre.

As in archetypal detective fiction in which identities and motives are slowly revealed, the same notions are present in the suspense and titillation associated with pornographic material. When considering the lure to watch films of a sexual nature, particularly in relation to films produced in America during the 1950s and 1960s, Eric Schaefer (2007:28) notes that 'the promise of sexual excitement and stimulation through nudity or erotic situations was standard in sexploitation advertising'. Schaefer (29) also states that 'by promising shocking images and scenes, the advertisements for such films suggested that they would take the ticket-buyer out of his everyday life. By tying that shock to sexuality, the films suggested a sexual thrill that was beyond the realm of the average individual's experience'. This is what is also noted by many critics and academics specialising in hard-boiled detective narratives above all (see Close, 2012, Waters, 2011, Farrimond, 2012). Robert G. Weiner (2010:41) notes that filmmakers of snuff films 'knew how to grab the public's attention […] these exploiters lured audiences in to see films about "forbidden" topics, including the naked human body, drugs, implied bestiality, "social diseases" (VD), abortion, and a whole range of crimes and atrocities.' There therefore appears to be many parallels between the paratextual elements of many hard-boiled detective novels from the U.S. around the same time (Mickey Spillane being one

[46] The character who exhibits these traits of intelligence, physical strength, and sexual prowess par excellence is of course James Bond. The series' continuing success is well-documented by ongoing film releases and new authors continuing Ian Fleming's work. However, the series has recently dealt with criticisms regarding the misogyny at the heart of the internationally-popular series, in which some critics believe there to be a rape discourse present. See Ashton, 2015 for more on how misogyny has figured in the most recent Bond film, *Spectre*, and how this appears to be of no consequence to the international audience of the franchise. Linda L. Lindsey (2015:420) states that in relation to James Bond films, 'rape is considered inconsequential when victims love the rapist or fall in love with him later. In half a century of James Bond films, for example, women are depicted as enjoying rape. Bond is the suave, charismatic good guy – the fantasy of every woman and enviable role of every man'.

author in particular whose work from the outset enticed the implied male reader with soft pornosadic images of women), and furthermore, I argue, there appear to be many more parallels between sexploitation cinema and the content of Valle's novels.[47] In his article on snuff fetish, David Kerekes (2010:256) investigates one of the first snuff custom filmmaking groups, Factory 2000, and posits that 'what sets Factory 2000 apart is that exploitation is taken to a new level of fetishism, where scenes of murder, rape, and torture unfold in real time and pass without judgement.' Little information is available on the pornography market in Cuba, though this thesis assumes its output is low in comparison to other Latin American countries.[48] Though Valle's work features scenes undeniably similar to those which can be found in snuff, pornosadism, and the sexploitation film subgenres, I argue that in Valle's novels, such scenes do not 'pass without judgement'; rather, Valle places the reader in such a position that they are negatively emotionally affected by such scenes which thus raise questions surrounding rape and sexuality.

There are two particularly arresting scenes featuring sexual violence in the *Descenso* trilogy which encourage discussion not only of breaking genre boundaries, but also concerning the effect of such texts upon the reader. Before discussing these, however, I include brief quotations from a scene of heterosexual sex between two characters in *Santuario*, as this scene appears to be included for different reasons and will act as a comparative passage for the two examples which I consider anxious and shocking scenes.

In *Santuario*, tourism minister Saúl, who also orchestrates illegal human trafficking, has sex with his secretary, Tamara, 'la secretaria perfecta' (2006:117). The sexual encounter is described in basic terms, 'A Tamara le gusta que él [Saúl] la clave por el culo. Duro.' (114), 'esa mandarria que sigue increíblemente tiesa, robusta, erizada de venas' (115), 'la eyaculación es tan grande que un fuerte dolor le exprime los cojones cuando ella murmura, moviendo la cabeza, enloquecida, a un lado y a otro "Así, cabrón, desléchate"' (115). The scene is one which is typical of pornographic and erotic fiction, and Tamara's involvement with Saúl seeks to advance the plot in no way. Though in my analysis of *Máscaras* I concluded that Poly's preference for anal penetration, in combination with the masculine description of her body, went some way to place Mario

[47] Though it is not the objective of this thesis to provide paratextual analysis of the front covers of these texts, that of *Largas noches con Flavia* bears several pornosadic hallmarks of the sexploitation genre, as it features the (we assume) naked body of a woman, long-haired, slim, who appears to be dead, her hands covered in blood, the only flash of colour on the monochrome photograph.

[48] This assumption is based on research into the effects of capitalism on the country. Stout (2012: pp.143-144) acknowledges a handful of gay Cuban pornographic websites, though whether or not such websites are available for Cuban consumption is unclear.

Conde as having homoerotic tendencies, in this instance, Tamara is presented as a body, described as 'esas nalgas' (53) and though 'no tenía un gramo de cerebro […] en la cama resultó una de las mujeres más creativas que [Saúl] había conocido' (53). With regards to *Largas*, however, I include such quotations to contrast with other scenes in which sex is presented as a violent act.

In *Largas*, Flavia recounts her experience of rape while in Cuba, having become involved in drug smuggling when flying over from Spain to the island. Her story begins with a description of her attacker, whom she is taken to meet in a mansion in Havana after smuggling drugs into the country. The man commands Flavia to undress, and the young woman denies him. As result, 'El hombre sonrió, con burla y te juro que se me hizo más asqueroso aún. Repulsivo' (2010:133). Valle clearly sets up a victim/attacker divide, calling for the reader to empathise with Flavia and feel disdain towards the unnamed male character: Flavia's discomfort and anxiety is communicated through the adjectives she uses to describe the man, and his power in the situation is evident in his mocking smile, encouraging the reader to feel uneasy for Flavia's wellbeing. The attacker, though described as repulsive, slight, and as 'el Rey de los Feos' (132), demonstrates a hypermasculinity through his physical strength and speed, 'Sin que me diera cuenta estuvo junto a mí, me haló el pelo y me sostuvo así, hasta que creí que me iba a arrancar pedazos del cráneo' (133). The pain he inflicts upon her reaffirms her abject state and his empowered, male status. The narrative documents Flavia's submission, as her agency is taken away from her, underlined using the third person, which had previously been the first person:

> Luego, con otro tirón que a Flavia le pareció demasiado fuerte para la aparente debilidad de aquel tipo, la obligó a bajar la cabeza y, sin esperar a que ella reaccionara, y aprovechando que ella abría la boca en un grito que no salía de su garganta, se bajó la cremallera y sacó un rabo largo y pegajoso que le metió en la boca. (132)

The vocabulary underlines Flavia's lack of consent in the situation: the unnamed man 'la obligó', doing so 'sin esperar', 'aprovechando' the situation. Flavia continues in the first person, '- Era blandito como un moco de pavo… y apestoso a orín viejo – dijo, bajando la cabeza otra vez. – Sentí deseos de vomitar'. The synaesthesic imagery is disconcerting, and the reintroduction of Flavia's voice in the present, as she provides Alain with the details of her ordeal, encourages the reader to identify with the victim; she feels 'deseos de vomitar', and Valle appears to be encouraging the reader to experience the same. This notion of identification leads to questions concerning the notion of empathy, and why we feel Flavia's situation is not titillating, unlike the sensationalist scenes of rape I discuss

in Bef's work later in this thesis. Smith (1995:95) states that 'Empathy is generally thought of as the adoption in a person of the mental states and emotions of some other person'. Smith (96) continues by embellishing upon the difference between 'the cognitive ability to "perspective-take", that is to imagine being in the situation of the perceived or target subject; or whether the empathy is more appropriately defined as the replication of the emotions of the other', also known as 'emotional simulation'. 'Perspective-taking' is that which allows the reader critical distance from the text, and does not simply furnish the reader with enjoyment or titillation, as Smith (2011:101) goes on to develop when speaking of 'empathic imagining'. Empathic imagining allows the reader/viewer to empathise with the character through imagining how they think and feel. Smith (1995:97) has also stated that 'Observing the behaviour of a person in a certain situation about which we have limited knowledge – as is often the case with a character in fiction – we imaginatively project ourselves into their situation and hypothesise as to the emotion(s) they are experiencing': this is emotional simulation. However, I argue that in this instance, the reader empathises with Flavia, and is able to 'perspective-take' or 'empathically imagine' through the additional use of the first person voice in the narrative which compels empathy on the part of the reader. I argue that in this context, this is also bolstered by the account also taking place in the third person in which we see Flavia being described as abject, as the reader is not compelled to empathise with the rapist, 'about which we have limited knowledge', never mind his acts being morally subversive. The reader knows that in the very least they should not empathise with Flavia's rapist, however, they may *identify* with him if they do feel sexually titillated by the scene, and this in turn provokes questions on why such a scene of victimhood and abuse could prove to be titillating rather than repulsive. Flavia's status as victim, and, as I understand, as an example of the *femme attrapée,*[49] which I use in both Wager's (2005) terms, and to emphasise Flavia's literally trapped status in this context, is reaffirmed by the final description of her rape:

> Entraron unos hombres, la agarraron: uno por los pelos y otro por las piernas, mientras un tercero le amarraba las manos con algo que no recuerda, y la sacaron de aquel cuarto para meterla en otro, más grande, al lado. Vio al flaco narizón venir con una jeringuilla que le clavó en un brazo. Se sintió flotar'. (133)

[49] Wager (2005:4) interprets the role of women in detective novels, as either imprisoned or fatalistic, understanding 'the femme attrapée as trapped by the patriarchy and the femme fatale as doomed by her resistance to it'.

Valle continues the nightmarish scene, rendering Flavia now entirely passive with absolutely no agency.[50] Though such scenes are by no means unusual within hard-boiled detective fiction – I have already referenced the work by authors such as Mickey Spillane, whose pornosadic approach to the genre Close (2012:104) sees as intrinsic to the author's success – however, within the Cuban literary context, Valle's description is particularly subversive. This is obvious when considering the guidelines set out in 1971, however I argue that here, Valle goes beyond even Padura's representations of violence in the *Cuatro estaciones* tetralogy, in which scenes of sexual abuse are not featured. In doing so, Valle brings to light the problem of sexual violence in Cuba, a subject that is rarely spoken about, and goes undocumented.[51] What remains of Flavia's rape is documented as follows:

> Todo comenzó a ponerse en brumas entre brumas, y tenía un sueño enorme pero no podía dormirse. Sintió cómo la dejaban sobre una inmensa cama, cómo la desnudaron sin que ella pudiera ni siquiera protestar, pues no lograba coordinar ni las palabras. Después, también desnudo, el hombre se le acostó encima, le chupó y mordió los senos un rato, y la penetró luego de estar otros minutos moviendo el miembro con una mano a lo largo de toda su vulva, mientras decía «¡Goza, perrita española, goza!», como si creyera que ella podría disfrutar aquello. Estuvo moviéndose con fuerza, a golpes muy violentos de cadera, que Flavia sintió igual a mandarriazos en la cabeza, removiéndole todo el cerebro. Al final creyó escuchar el bufido de un animal y supo que era el hombre, vaciándose en su vientre. (pp.133-134)

The use of gynaecological terminology and the use of the imperfect subjunctives demonstrate how far removed from consensual sex Flavia's experience is: she is unable to respond verbally or physically to the insults and attack upon her body. It is very clear that Valle posits Flavia as the victim in this scene, and the implied male reader is presented with a disturbing scene which prompts anxious questions surrounding the normalisation of rape in literature: we ask whether, if we fail to be shocked by such a detailed account of prolonged sexual assault, on some level we condone it. The reader, knowing Flavia has been placed as defenceless victim in this scene should be capable of empathy with the young woman's state and situation. Valle's description makes the victim/perpetration division very clear: any titillation taken from such a scene must encourage the reader to question their motives for deriving pleasure from rape. It is a sense of mortification and

[50] In Rogelio Guedea's *Colima* trilogy, women are also presented as entirely passive (either under anaesthetic or dead) during scenes in which they are sexually abused by various men who form part of the judicial system or the medical profession, during their working hours.

[51] However, in July 2016 several members of the national Cuban volleyball team were accused of committing aggravated rape while in Finland to compete for the sport's World Cup. It is worth noting that martinoticias.com only picked up on this story after it was reported in the international press (Martinoticias, *Cuba descabeza equipo de voleibol por escándalo sexual en Finlandia,* 2016)

horror that Valle attains in such scenes, rather than the titillation present in his descriptions of Saúl and Tamara having sex.

The climactic dénouement of *Últimas* (2014) is another example of Valle's description of sexual violence with the *Descenso* series. A particularly troubling and subversive scene sees Alex Varga engineer the public rape and beating of Pablo, grandson of a victim of Meyer Lansky's mafia decades previously, who brutally murdered one of Alex's eldest friends Sabrina. The rape is described in detail, and there are several important issues to consider when analysing the scene in relation to generic deviance and commentary upon Cuban society. Principally, the scene is one of horror and disgust, in addition to the vengeful reactions of Varga, who authorises Pablo's rape as if he were refereeing a boxing match:

- La sangre solo se lava con sangre. Que comience la función. (124)

The scene is set for a 'show' – in a transvestite club owned by Alex, Pablo is tied to a table and a light is shone upon him in an otherwise unlit room, and

> El negro Mediometro, conocido bujarrón de Centro Habana, muy codiciado por los clientes de los burdeles gays precisamente por la causa de su apodo […] que había llegado a la fama a partir de un juico público que se le hizo en el 84, en uno de los parque más céntricos de la capital: La Fraternidad, acusado de haber violado a varios jovencitos fisiculturistas […] Cumplió diez años tras las rejas. (125)

Here, rape is presented as if it is a gift for Mediometro, and an act of vengeance towards Pablo. The domination of a phallic object is an archetypal trait of hard-boiled detective fiction, often demonstrated through the detective's adept handling of a gun (or through the *femme fatale*'s abilities with a pistol, which causes tension on the part of the male detective whose patriarchal gender matrix is threatened and questioned by such dominance). Mediometro's penis becomes another phallic object: the phallus, often a (idealised and impossibly obtainable) substitute for the real (weak, often flaccid, excretory) penis. Here, Mediometro's penis is being used as a weapon, Mediometro himself only being introduced into the narrative to undertake violent rape, being described in relation to his sexual predilection for young men, to the point that he was imprisoned for multiple rapes. Mediometro is dangerous, and his penis is his weapon of choice: his phallus. Further to this, considering the interpretation of homosexuality in Cuba as based on 'active' and 'passive' entities, Mediometro is placed as 'activo' and Pablo as 'pasivo'. The purported belief that active homosexual men are not homosexual within a Cuban context has been widely discussed by Lumsden (1996), Leiner (1994), and

Valladares Ruiz (2012). Leiner (22) simply maintains, 'To have sex with another man is not what identifies one as homosexual. For many Cubans, a man is homosexual only if he takes the passive receiving role.' This therefore places Pablo as both rape victim and homosexual – two statuses which are often associated with women and femininity.

According to Prohaska and Gailey (2006:15), 'The key to hegemonic masculinity is power, whether over other men or women'. This is a particularly pertinent notion to consider, as power-play in this male/male rape scene features on both physical and metaphysical levels: in this sense, Alex retains his hegemonic masculinity through ordering Mediometro to rape Pablo, and then reaffirms this masculine status by eventually murdering Pablo after the rape. I would argue that Valle's inclusion of a rape scene in *Descenso* is unusual within the genre of detective fiction, considering its implied heterosexual male readership, who seek to identify with the rational male detective and hegemonic masculinity. Here, however, anything other than repugnance is difficult to obtain from the scene, which describes

> Un murmullo libidinoso, agresivo y pegajoso, comenzó a extenderse por todo el lugar mientras Mediometro se refocilaba a caderazo limpio contra el culo blanco del muchacho […] Podía escucharse que lloraba. Suplicaba entre bufidos de dolor. Intentaba decir algo, mascullando, pero sus palabras se cortaban por el grito que le sacaba cada estocada fortísima del negro que bufaba, bestializado, a su espalda, hundiéndose dentro del recto del blanquito, halándolo hacia él con sus manazas. (127)

The scene is particularly voyeuristic: the reader joins a room of transvestites, Alex Varga, and Bec, amongst whom a libidinous babble spreads – it would appear the onlookers are deriving enjoyment from the sexually violent 'show' they witness. Pablo's rape can be interpreted as a 'show' as both reader and those present in the bar are told where exactly to direct their gaze thanks to the use of the light shining on the table on top of which Pablo is tied. No human voice is present as the shouts, snorts, babbles, and the allusion to animalistic noises echo around the room, underlining the lack of humanity amongst those present.[52] The reader is aware of the physical pain Pablo suffers:

[52] Though not a concern of this thesis, the description of Mediometro merits a diversion into the tensions surrounding race in Cuba, and to note Valle's position as author in this instance. Valle's attribution of 'bestializado' to Mediometro and later 'la forma animal' in relation to the man, who is previously described as black, is problematic, and indicative of ongoing racial tension in Cuba (for an overview, see Diario de Cuba, *Roberto Zurbano: 'Para los negros cubanos, la revolución no ha comenzado'*, 2013). Gewecke (2010: 181) picks up on Valle's handling of race across the series, noting that in *Las puertas de la noche* Alain Bec is presented as a racist, suspecting that the mastermind of a child prostitution ring comes from '[la] comedera de mierda de negros brutos' (2001: 10). This is also evident in *Largas*, where Alain admits to the reader, 'Aunque pueda parecer racista, debo confesarte que me imagino al criminal negro, de enormes músculos, muy fornido y grandísimo' (37). This thesis agrees with Gewecke's interpretation of Alain Bec's tendency towards racism as not reflective of Valle's own point of view, he is simply a racist creation. What is open to criticism, however, is the management of such a character, which Gewecke (181) deems

> Fue la forma animal en que Mediometro se separó de aquellas nalgas, que quedaron frente al público, supurando muslo abajo el semen y un hilillo oscuro que todos supieron era sangre. Fue el modo de torturador en que dio la vuelta a la mesa y se paró delante de esa cabeza caída que empezó a recibir la ofrenda del resto de la esperma en ojos, nariz y boca. (128)

Following this, Mediometro then goes on to walk away, find a bottle, return and insert it into Pablo's rectum, which Mediometro then breaks with a small piece of metal, both of which then are inserted into Pablo's rectum. Alain's original sadic reaction to the scene of violation is one of amusement:

> Alain no logró evitar reírse bajito observando el forcejeo del negro intentando acertar el agujero de entrada al cuerpo tenso del blanquito y aguantaba la risa cuando vio a Mediometro dar un soberbio y brusco empujón de cadera que casi tumba al muchacho de la mesa. (126)

However, this quickly becomes much more aligned with that of the reader having seen the rape:

> Alain sintió nauseas. Quiso irse y ponerse de pie. No le importaba la oscuridad, quería salir de aquel lugar como fuera. Necesitaba respirar aire limpio. Caminar. Alejarse de toda aquella barbarie. Incluso no regresar: aquello rompía todos los límites por él imaginados. (129)

The concept of breaking limits is certainly raised during this scene, as the reader questions whether their morals are indeed aligned with those of the detective figure, who at first delights in the prospect of rape as a punishment. Furthermore, it is uncertain as to whether Bec's reaction to 'aquella barbarie' in fact references the homosexual act on display before him, or the cruelty of Alex and Mediometro.

In his article on male/male rape, Javaid (2016:284) gives possible motivations behind such sexual abuse, positing that

> Documented research (Lees, 1997, Stanko, 1990) confirms that men do rape other men as a way to boost, preserve and execute "hegemonic masculinity": that is, the male sexual offender seeks power and control over their subordinate, powerless victim. For Groth and Burgess (1980), this enhances the sexual offender's masculinity by stripping away that of their victim.

In Valle's representation of Pablo's rape, therefore, it can be argued that although Mediometro physically rapes Pablo, Alex Varga is literally responsible for the act in which he 'seeks power and control over [his] subordinate', and this is also suggested through Varga's constant reference to Pablo's rape as 'el escarmiento'. Furthermore, it is Alex who finally kills Pablo after his brutal rape. The scene raises questions concerning sexual violence in Cuba, and introduces Varga as a particularly subversive character within the series: Alain, though he wavers, appears to uphold revolutionary ideals throughout the

'poco convincente tanto de la psicología del personaje como de las técnicas narrativas que vendrían al caso.'

series, yet Varga, *rey de la marginalidad*, aids Bec in his investigation to the point that he himself commits murder and sanctions the use of rape as a weapon. This goes beyond the violence featured in other examples of Cuban detective fiction featured in this thesis into new, subversive terrain. Here, the shocked reader is encouraged to question their values. This is something Valle accomplishes in the openings to his novels through indirect free style, a technique which allows the reader to act as both witness to scenes of violence and abjection, but also to put this into perspective from the thoughts and sentiments of various characters cast as victims.

Valle's work features many shocking, brutal, detailed, and violent scenes. However, Valle's ability to encourage 'empathic imagining' as outlined by Smith (2011) on the part of the reader means we imagine how victims think and feel, rather than being encouraged to be titillated by the scene. Violent openings in particular are common to hard-boiled detective fiction and present in Cuban socialist detective fiction in order to pique the interest of the reader, however, in *Descenso*, Valle's decision to write on real murders complicates the reader's titillation, going some way towards underlining the self-aware nature of the series and encouraging the reader to become aware of the text as construction and the victims as real people. Valle's uncompromising detailing of these scenes may be found equally as shocking given the literary production in Cuba previously within the genre: violence in the work of both Cuban socialist detective fiction and the post-Soviet genre as exemplified by Padura is visible, however the detail provided by Valle and the overriding sense of lack of humanity surrounding such crimes is missing. As a result, I interpret Valle as informing the work of contemporary Cuban authors such as Pedro Juan Gutiérrez and Lorenzo Lunar Cardedo, who write violence through a realist style and do not shy away from painting Santa Clara and Havana respectively as violent, desperate, crumbling cities.[53]

3.4. Trans-formations and Cultural Icons in the *Descenso* trilogy

As I have previously recognised, the idealised role of the *hombre nuevo* was subsumed into the Cuban socialist detective fiction genre, coming to the fore after 1971's *Congreso* through the works of Cristobal Pérez and others. Another iconic figure, in this case within

[53] Pedro Juan Gutiérrez is known for his use of dirty realism in novels such as *El rey de La Habana* (1999) and *El insaciable hombre araña* (2002) and Lunar Cardedo, also a writer of detective fiction, though not as generically subversive as Valle does still describe violent acts in great detail (see *La vida es un tango,* 2005) and, also similarly to Valle, also refers to and pokes fun at himself frequently throughout the Leo Martín detective series (see *Usted es la culpable,* 2006).

the context of detective fiction, is the *femme fatale*. In the latter half of this section, I discuss how such a figure which in principle would appear to contravene many socialist tenets, including the Cuban Family Code of 1975, is displayed by Valle to suggest the ineptitude of the *hombre nuevo* in neoliberal-tinged, contemporary Cuba.

The first half of this section, *The Neo Hombre Nuevo: (Re)Presentations of an Icon* considers the link between the *hombre nuevo* and the typical hard-boiled detective. In doing so, this thesis argues that Valle uses iconic figures of both Cuban political culture and literature (the New Man and the detective) in order to demonstrate the shortcomings of this revolutionary model in post-neoliberal Cuba. I posit that Valle critiques the state apparatus, subverting genre norms of the Cuban socialist detective novel (see Wilkinson: 2006), and comments on the ineptitude of the idolised *hombre nuevo* in twentieth-century Cuba. This, I maintain, is achieved through the characters Alain Bec and Alex Varga, who are each sited in wholly different ideological backgrounds, and who represent two diverse statuses within contemporary, neoliberal Cuba.

The second half of this section, *Pariahs and Agency: Valle's Femme Fatale* is dedicated to a discussion of the dangerous woman as presented in Valle's work. Here, I investigate threats to the iconic figure of the detective from characters whom I associate with displaying traits of pariah femininity, Valle's work reaffirming limiting gender roles associated with women, despite being clearly preoccupied with subversion and criticism of Cuban society otherwise in his work.

Although these examples of subversion are in ways similar to those I investigate in the other primary texts in this thesis, Valle's approach raises important questions within the post Special Period context in Cuba in ways Padura does not. *Descenso* engages with and challenges generic expectations of the detective and the dangerous woman through troubling representations which require the reader to reconsider exactly what detective fiction is within a Cuban context, as well as to question representations of sexuality and gender within the detective genre. In turn, such deconstruction of these iconic and archetypal figures leads to a reconfiguration of these models, in the light of the consequences of the fall of the Soviet Union in Cuba. Overall, the *Descenso* series is highly problematic for the reader, as they are encouraged to re-approach their understandings of Cuban politics after the Special Period, and how far *machista* notions of hegemonic masculinity are valid in twenty first-century Cuba in this subversive take on the detective narrative.

3.4.1. The Neo-*Hombre Nuevo*: (Re)Presentations of an Icon

Alain Bec is in many ways demonstrative of traits of both hard-boiled and Cuban socialist noir. Considering the latter, Bec is both a clear exponent of the socialist detective and the idealised figure of the *hombre nuevo*. Principally, his detecting skills appear innate: like Sabino and Román in Rogelio Guedea's *Colima* trilogy to be discussed in Chapter Four, he is often compared to a bloodhound, capable of sniffing out crime and murder. Both Bec and Varga reference Bec's ascent through the ranks within the police force (2006:65). Bec possesses 'garras de sabueso' (2006:24), and detecting runs in his blood, guiding his investigations, 'despierta el olfato de este otro animalito inquieto y siempre con las orejas paradas, que te avisa desde tu propia sangre o desde quién sabe qué escondrijo en tu cuerpo, que "debes seguir esa pista Alain… me huele a caquita"' (2006:66), 'el olfato del muchacho debía estar erizado, buscando pistas falsas y baches por rellenar' (2010:96), 'Olía el tufo de la venganza en el aire' (2010:117). Bec, often seen in his state *Policía Nacional Revolucionaria* uniform, is an obvious representative of the state police, and is depicted frequently speaking with his superior Orestes in *Largas noches*. Bec's success with women is made clear throughout the novels: married to Camila with whom he has a son, Camilo, Bec nonetheless conducts affairs with women he comes across as part of his relationship with Varga and due to his investigations.[54]

These traits associated with the typical detective also posit Bec as adhering to the discourse surrounding the *hombre nuevo*, understood in this thesis to be a typically masculine, well-educated man, preoccupied with the welfare of others (see Christensen, 2012:99). Not only is Bec is well-read, often referencing famous Cuban authors such as Justo Vasco, Pedro Juan Gutiérrez, and at one point conversing with Daniel Chavarría (2008:106-107, 177), he has a moral obligation to others, as recognized by Varga 'sabe que Alain no disparará contra alguien indefenso' (2006:240). Furthermore, Bec is the son of a revolutionary fighter (2006: 83), proud of his father and his commitment to the revolutionary cause.

That said, the New Man as presented in the detective fiction of Padura and Valle demonstrates the extent to which the *hombre nuevo* is a contradictory and hypocritical figure.[55] I argue that Bec's status as representative of the New Man, who suffers from an

[54] As outlined in the introduction to this section, I will return to discuss the effect of typically female figures on the detective.

[55] Hypocrisy and contradiction are by no means novel concepts in a country in which such an heroic aspiration as the New Man, who ought to aspire to do all he could for his fellow comrades within a framework of egalitarian Marxist principles, was juxtaposed alongside prejudices towards so-called 'deviants' such as homosexuals, as evidenced not only by continuing negative attitudes towards non-normative sexualities in Cuba, but also demonstrated by the treatment of such groups in UMAP camps

intense homophobia and hypocrisy, positions the *hombre nuevo* as an inadequate concept within neoliberal Cuba, given the rise in non-normative sexualities which act as a tourist attraction on the island, in turn aiding Cuba's economic recovery.[56]

Alain Bec is equally demonstrative of this duplicitous and contradictory attitude. Bec, who often addresses himself in the second person singular, which therefore leads the reader to accept the detective's claims to be true as far as the character himself knows, maintains that 'odiabas los intolerantes' (2006:105). The use of the verb 'odiar' here demonstrates the inherent and ironic contradiction of his statement, as Bec claims his hatred of those who are intolerant, and hate as he does. This contradiction, I understand, is furthered through the homophobic undercurrent which is present throughout the series, nearly always communicated from Bec's point of view. This is made particularly clear in the following two quotations from *Últimas noticias*:

> No lograba entender que un hombre tan recto, tan recio como Alex Varga, 'y tan macho, carajo', pensó, sintiera un dolor tan escandalosamente intenso por la muerte de un mamarracho descocado y de vida equivocada como la vieja maricona de Sabrina. (2014:21)

This is reinforced in the following quotation:

> - Maricón y mierda para mí es lo mismo, viejo – agregó Alain-. De chamaco me enseñaron que eso era una depravación y a estas alturas de mi vida, para qué negarlo, me cuesta verlo de otro modo.
> No podía entender cómo el viejo Alex […] lograba tratarlos con aquella naturalidad, 'como si fueran seres humanos normales', dijo Alain. (2014:44).

Such reactions towards displays of non-normative sexualities, in which the detective/ *hombre nuevo* figure categorises transsexuals and transvestites as non-humans or as monstrosities can be interpreted as similar to Mario Conde's reactions to seeing two men in drag kissing in *Máscaras*.[57] Conde also feels that such an act goes against his male heterosexual matrix, and as Bec states outright, homosexuality goes against everything he was taught as part of a socialist upbringing in Cuba, thereby reaffirming the revolution's homophobic rhetoric of the 1960s. What such descriptions of the reactions of detectives

during the 1960s – the same decade in which the concept of the *hombre nuevo* was created and widely circulated.

[56] See *Communism, God, and a Good Cigar* (2005) for more on the effects of neoliberal policies on Cuba's economy.

[57] There are many parallels between *Máscaras* and the *Las cuatro estaciones* tetralogy regarding the dynamic between Varga and Bec: in *Máscaras,* Alberto Marqués erodes Conde's homophobic mind set, and because of this (or at least in part due to this), Conde is able to solve the case. In *Descenso*, Varga, like Marqués, is viewed as a marginal figure, whose underground connections allow the detective to unveil truth. However, Varga commands respect while Marqués is shunned, and Conde's evolution to becoming more accepting of homosexuality is not mirrored by Bec's unchanging attitude towards sexuality.

Mario Conde and Alain Bec reveal, however, are quite different. Conde's reaction is replete with double-encoding, which after analysis, as I have argued, evidences Conde's underlying homoeroticism. However, written approximately a decade later, Valle's detective simply cannot develop considering the adoption of neoliberal policies which has encouraged sex tourism, as is evidenced by the presence of so many transvestite/transsexual characters in the series. Valle demonstrates the extent to which the New Man is not compatible with post-neoliberal Cuba. Bec's incapacity within twentieth-century Cuba, I maintain, calls for the introduction of a neo-*hombre nuevo*, however this figure is also not presented as entirely progressive within the novel.

Alex Varga acts as a vehicle for Valle to demonstrate liberal attitudes towards sexuality in Cuba, and here I wish to suggest Varga as both neo-New Man and as a subversive take on both the hard-boiled detective and the socialist Cuban sleuth. I begin by briefly detailing the ways in which Varga acts as a mutated, politicised detective within the Cuban context, and then continue to investigate the character as a neo-*hombre nuevo*, a character who profits from his own marginality and his marginal status in a time of neoliberalist expansion in Cuba. The neo-New Man exploits others, making neoliberalism work to his own ends. Alex Varga, I contend, works as a character who goes against the tenets of both socialist detective fiction and the norms of hard-boiled detective fiction.

Varga is an unusual character to consider as a detective within the contexts of the Cuban genre in its widest sense (both socialist detective fiction and detective fiction produced post-*Periodo Especial*) and within the genre's hard-boiled precedent. Aged and marginalised due to his black identity, the character appears at first as secondary to Alain Bec. However, as the series progresses, so does Varga's significance and his visibility as a detective. Varga, however, provides a much more critical take on both the *hombre nuevo* and the typical detective. He is presented similarly to an archetypal *noir* detective crossed with an underground henchman, described as 'cerrado, acostumbrado a las frases cortas, a que lo reverenciaran con esa mezcla de admiración y temor que podía verse en los ojos de quienes lo veían' (2010:16). This description considered, Varga poses hackneyed questions which are closely associated with the detective fiction genre, '¿"Quién puede encontrar una aguja en ese pajar tan revuelto?"' (2010:41), and, as has already been demonstrated and as will be further discussed, has a tendency towards violence. It is this violent streak and Varga's multiple murders which mark him as displaying traits of hegemonic masculinity, a characteristic which affects and shapes each of the detectives (both male and female) considered in this thesis. It is clear he is accoustomed to purveying

violence: 'Antes de la revolución maté a muchos, ¿sabes?' (2006:242). Comparably to Bec, he has an inherently masculine aura, as he is equally compared to a bloodhound, as expressed through his 'mirada de viejo sabueso' (2010:35). However, unlike Bec, who despises transsexuals yet is capable of, at least outwardly, treating such characters in a civil fashion, Varga lacks such rationality, a trait associated with traditional masculinity and the successful detective, whose perception and clear-headedness play a large part in his detecting successes. Here, I would argue that Varga, who benefits from the introduction of neoliberalism on the Marxist-socialist island, lacks such rationale precisely because he has been (dis)affected by this shift in Cuban politics, to one of contradiction and hypocrisy.

It is because of this, at least in part then, that Varga does not fulfil the role of *hombre nuevo*, as he does not attempt to fight against neoliberalism after the Special Period; rather, he profits from the situation. Varga commands an underground army of transsexuals, transvestites, multattos, and prostitutes: he is an underground entrepreneur who exploits others in order to make neoliberalism work to his own ends. Varga acts as an example of the neo-New Man not because of any similarities with Guevara's original, but rather because such a character arises from new cultural and political experiences on the island. I also deem it significant to keep the term 'man' in this title, given Varga's increasing association throughout the series with typical masculine acts, such as murder. Reconsidering Christensen's statement (2012:90) that the *hombre nuevo* as soldier was to represent the most prominent example of masculinity in service of the nation, it could be argued that Varga, who is elderly and does not, at least according to the novels which are available in *Descenso* series, appear to have fought in either Latin America or Angola, does not fully fit this model. However, Varga does exhibit a trait closely associated with hegemonic masculinity – the elderly man has a violent streak, to the point that Varga commits murder at the end of *Últimas noticias*. The scene is described from Bec's perspective:

> No supo cómo, pero Alex llevaba en su poderosa mano izquierda el hacha con la que el blanquito había trozado a Sabrina. O un hacha parecida, qué importa. Pero un hacha. Pudo verlo subir al escenario como una aparición demoníaca que salta sobre la presa desde la sombra.
> Fue como un bólido.
> El hachazo.
> El brazo del blanquito que salta.
> Los gritos.
> Los desmayos.
> Luego la voz. Dura. Gélida. Siniestra incluso para ese Alain que había aprendido a querer y respetar al viejo Alex:

> —¡Llévenselo! —tronó la voz—¡la fosa 23 de mi panteón personal está vacía! (2014:129)

Here, the use of the axe is not only symbolic in the narrative as it appears to be the same item which was used to murder Sabrina, but can also be interpreted as another phallic image. Further to this, the axe has connotations with hegemonic masculinity, having typically been used in acts such as wood-cutting and thereby providing for others, but also in popular culture is an item associated with masculine madness; we only need think of the phrase 'mad axe man' in urban legends, or Jack Torrance in *The Shining* (King: 1977), or Norman Bates in *Psycho* (Bloch, 1959, most famously brought to life by Hitchcock, 1960), or even his distant cousin Patrick Bateman in *American Psycho* (Easton Ellis, 1991, Harron, 2000), all characters who murder messily with axes, and all characters associated with suffering from mental illness: each lack rationality. Not only does Varga reaffirm his status as both macho and therefore implicitly virile through this physically violent act (despite the character's age, which we are lead to believe is in the early eighties), he surprises Bec by demonstrating this ability, the gravity of which is transmitted through his voice. Hard, icy, and sinister sounding, these adjectives describing Varga's voice would be typically applied to the traditional hardened criminal of crime fiction and film. Furthermore, it appears Alex is accustomed to killing, an idea which is brought about by 'fosa 23' being available in his own personal cemetery.

Bec is shocked to his core by such a display of hedonistic depravity as that in the scene in which Varga murders Pablo, a reaction which again seeks to distance the two characters and reaffirm that Bec, as the original *hombre nuevo*, is not capable in the twenty-first century of dealing with new issues brought about by neoliberalism, given that Varga's power comes from profiting from the post-Special Period era:

> No quería escuchar más nada. Necesitaba despejar su cabeza, hacer rugir el motor de aquel amasijo de hierro y que todo el ruido de la ciudad se colara en sus oídos, impidiéndole el paso a esa alocada sucesión de negras ideas que lo asediaban. O no pensar. Quería no pensar. (2010:134)

Bec's reaction seeks to highlight the changes in Cuban society that have also necessarily brought about changes in masculinities on the island: neoliberalism, from Valle's suggestion, appears to have been conducive to an acceptance of violence in Cuba, and Bec's horror at Varga's acts have a certain moral basis more associated with the New Man. Through this extreme and violent example, Valle highlights how masculinity and masculine ideals on the island are mutating, though Alex Varga's character is not suggested as an ideal, rather his violence is demonstrative of the negative associations with neoliberalism on Cuba: distracting the country from its socialist revolutionary ideals.

Cuba is mutating away from the *hombre nuevo* and its significance, and I argue that Varga's character in infused with the paradoxes at the heart of neoliberal Cuba, making him truly representational of twenty-first century Cuba.

Varga speaks with unbridled disdain for Cuban society, expressing his acceptance of non-normative sexualities frequently and using his intimate knowledge of such circles in order to help Bec bring criminals to justice, above all when the victim is from a marginalised group. This attitude of both monopoly and being representative of Havana's marginalised everyman, combine to underline the new, neoliberal approach towards life of many in Cuba.[58]

In *Últimas noticias,* Varga reaffirms his masculinity through sanctioning, watching, and enjoying the act of male rape, and then again through the act of murder. This hedonistic depravity suggests that the tenets of the *hombre nuevo* are outdated for contemporary Cuba, and engages with the issues of idolising others. Varga's developing character also underlines an ongoing shift in contemporary Cuba, which sees the individual becoming more and more significant within the state regime: the centre and the periphery appear to be making a shift, capitalism is influencing communist policy and entrepreneurial activity is becoming increasingly common (Barbassa: 2005). Overall, the two characters discussed here demonstrate changing social attitudes within Cuba. The fact that Bec would be incapable of solving crimes without Varga demonstrates the ineptitude of the socialist detective and the *hombre nuevo* today. The many contradictions which form the character of Varga parallel the contradictory and hypocritical nature of post-Special Period Cuba. As a result, Varga acts as both a comment on the *hombre nuevo* and the detective (both from Cuban socialist detective fiction, and from hard-boiled *noir*), whose rationality underlines the character's inherent hegemonic masculinity. Bec is a uniformed state detective, macho, and living in the Miramar district of Havana, and thereby represents in many ways the ideal Cuban citizen, yet he is incapable of understanding liminality. This again holds parallels to *Máscaras*, in which gay playwright Alberto Marqués opens detective Conde's sheltered 'machista-estalinista' world view. However, Valle's representations are much more extreme, and clearly demonstrate that homosexuality in Cuba is associated with liminality, and that homophobia is affiliated with what is perceived to be the dominant, uniformed norm.

[58] In her article *The New Cuban Capitalist* (2005), Barbassa argues that the effects of the Special Period led to many in Cuba developing their own capitalist means for surviving periods of economic hardship, and this attitude towards personal economy remains on the island.

3.4.2. Pariahs and Agency: Valle's *Femme Fatale*

Having acknowledged these archetypal and subversive examples of masculinity in the series, and considering the overarching focus of this thesis on the representation of gender in the primary texts, it is equally important to investigate the presentation of other genders in the *Descenso* trilogy. Whereas elsewhere in this thesis I have argued for the existence of an *hombre fatal*, here I argue that examples of the dangerous woman are to an extent transformatory and fluctuating, yet still evoke a sense of loss of phallic power in the detective. In this final section, I posit that Valle's detective series is partially generically adherent as it features *femmes fatales* with no agency, however the characters I interpret as demonstrating such characteristics are often male-to-female transvestites. I also argue that the detective is affected by a much more normative *femme fatale*, Flavia, however it is also her transformation and the depth of her character which marks her as unusual within the characteristics of the dangerous woman. I continue now to consider her transformation from *femme attrapée* to *femme fatale*, or from an exponent of hegemonic femininity to pariah femininity (Schippers, 2007).

Pariah femininity is an important concept to link to the *femme fatale*, and specifically to Flavia. As the *femme fatale* typically threatens archetypal masculinity, it is important to begin by considering masculinity as represented in the *Descenso* trilogy – detective Alain Bec — in relation to the pariah femininity that I claim Flavia exhibits. According to Schippers (94), masculinity is characterised by 'desire for the feminine object, physical strength, and authority', thus masculinity is interpreted as reaffirming superiority over women. Schippers continues to posit that hegemonic masculinity is legitimised by hegemonic femininity. In Schippers' terms, any femininity that challenges this status is a 'pariah' femininity, and such femininities taint typical feminine traits, such as sexual passivity. Pariah femininity is therefore to an extent demonstrated by the *femme fatale,* above all when considering the dangerous woman's challenges to the detective's sense of phallic power.[59] Schippers (95) recognises that those who outstep their hegemonic femininity 'must be defined as deviant and stigmatized', and therefore feminine ideals are reinforced, and the notion of dangerous women is considered taboo. Similarly, Berrington and Honkatukia (2002:50) maintain that women who adhere to the essentialist notion of the woman are situated as 'normal', and those who do not conform

[59] I use the phrase 'to an extent' here as, though the *femme fatale* typically poses a threat to the male detective's hegemonic masculinity, she is, in archetypal examples of hard-boiled detective fiction, archetypally defeated by the detective, who then reaffirms his phallic power and masculine matrix. She is a limited and a limiting female character.

to this matrix are understood as deviant. I continue now by discussing Flavia in *Largas noches*, and consider that the ways in which her shifting characteristics, which exhibit both biological essentialism and hegemonic femininity as well as deviant pariah femininity, place her as a *femme fatale*, and the purpose of this character.

Flavia is initially presented to the reader as childlike, broken, powerless, dependent, and alone. Varga, whom the girl was told to go to for protection after her involvement in the trafficking of drugs into Cuba via her native Spain, tells Bec 'necesito que la cuides' (2006: 16), clearly placing Flavia as an object with no agency, and who can only be adequately taken care of by a male figure who is closely associated with the police force and, as previously discussed, with hegemonic masculinity. Bec on multiple occasions associates her with the divine, stating 'Parece un ángel' (15), 'Es un ángel' (47), whose attributes are so heavenly that, when she cries, she cries 'una lágrima gruesa, que relumbró con el sol' (134). She is a hyperfeminine victim of circumstance, whom Bec, adherent to his role of detective, cannot help but notice:

> Alain […] aprovechó […] para mirar la perfección de su cuello, la pequeñez seductora de sus orejas, el matriz cautivante de su pelo, la sensual hondura de su pecho a la altura de sus senos, anunciando un hermoso panorama bajo la blusa. "Es hermosa", se dijo. (pp.45-46)

Such an act of scopophilia is, of course, not uncommon in detective fiction, and Bec appears to be adhering to and actively taking on the role of hard-boiled detective as he enjoys looking at Flavia and at the areas of her body which he interprets as particularly feminine, while Flavia is, again, passive. Bec passes comment only to himself, rather than to Flavia, furthering the notion that he is privy to thoughts that she does not have access to. Flavia's rape, previously investigated in this chapter also contributes to her status as passive victim, aligned with traditional tenets of hegemonic femininity, though in the case of Flavia's violent violation, this is an extreme example.

However, there is a scene in which her status as passive and typically feminine appears to transform into pariah femininity. Bec describes her body as he watches her shower, and the reader is sited in the role of voyeur:

> Flavia, desnuda, es capaz de hacer que hasta el mismísimo Juan Pablo II renuncie al papado y se dedique a cultivar las muchas rosas del placer que debe ocultar ese cuerpo.
> Alain la tiene desnuda delante, las espaldas y sus dos nalgas, blanquísimas y perfectas, redondas y puras como montículos de nieve […]
> -Tienes un cuerpo precioso – le dijo.
> […] Ella se volteó y enseñó dos senos puntiagudos y pequeños, firmes y de pezones muy oscuros, casi negros. (62)

Again, this scopophilia on the part of the detective, also encouraged in the voyeuristic reader, is associated with the hard-boiled noir genre, and one which seeks to emphasise the domination of the male gaze over the female body, as is highlighted by the fact the detective 'la tiene' in front of him, and the fact that he speaks directly to her about how he views her body. However, as Flavia turns to face Bec, she actively 'enseñó' her chest. Furthermore, the description of her breasts as pointed with dark nipples gives the reader the impression that Flavia's breasts are now sharply watching Bec, like a set of eyes. Bec continues to speak to Flavia about his experience with women's bodies, asking, '¿Me creerías si te digo que no es la primera vez que tengo delante a una mujer desnuda y no le haga nada? – volvió a decir Alain, y aprovechó para mirar las caderas de la muchacha' (63), as if his abilities at restraint are to be lauded, while also informing the reader that he is, as is typical to the hard-boiled detective, used to being exposed to naked women. However, Valle then continues to describe the scene and provides the reader with important information, 'Alain se había sentado en la única butaca de la habitación, justo frente a la puerta del baño, *a petición de Flavia*, que seguía aterrada' (63, my emphasis). Though Flavia is described as fearful and therefore still relying upon Bec for protection, only upon her request was Bec allowed to view her in this state; in short, for various reasons, Flavia *wants* to be watched by Bec, and therefore his sentiments of *aprovechar* change from simple lechery to truly taking advantage of the situation he has been invited to partake in.

By the novel's end, Flavia is actively requesting that Bec sleep with her, 'Hazme el amor, Alain, anda' (208). Upon his first refusal, Flavia immediately thinks this has nothing to do with her, rather that the detective has HIV: '¿Estás enfermo? […] pensando en la causa más simple de su negativa' (2008:208). However, the reason behind Bec's refusal is one which further demonstrates the ways in which the detective has been troubled by women. He explains:

> Todas las mujeres con las que traicionó a Camila habían muerto horriblemente tiempo después. La primera, una putica que se la chupó largamente hasta vaciarlo la segunda vez que se entrevistaron para resolver uno de sus casos, apareció ahorcada en su cuarto, colgada de la lámpara con una corbata. «La mató su propio chulo, que estaba enamorado de ella, porque se acostaba con todo el mundo menos con él». Después, Patty, la hija de Alex, asesinada en un ataque de celos por el amante de su novio Cristo.
>
> - No quiero que seas la tercera. (209)

In this way, Bec is troubled by women in a similar way to that which Conde was troubled by his childhood friend, Luisito. Conde's memories of Luisito, with whom he had anal

sex as an adolescent, trouble the detective's present life. Here, Bec is also troubled by memories of sexual relationships, however in this instance it is his belief in monogamy – or at least the fact that he knows he ought to practise monogamy – which causes him anxiety. Bec sees his infidelity as a curse, both for him and for the women with whom he commits adultery. His confirmed status as *hombre nuevo* and his personal betrayal of his wife Camila is a betrayal of the *Código de la Familia* as stipulated in Clause 25, and his relationship with Flavia causes Bec to again betray a Revolutionary ideal. Flavia insists they sleep together, to which Bec responds '¿Olvidaste lo que te conté?' (210), however Flavia reaffirms her changed status from *femme attrapée* as seen at the beginning of the narrative to fully-fledged *femme fatale* who exhibits traits of pariah femininity, challenging Bec when she states, 'Creo que esa elección es mía, ¿no te parece?' (210).

Flavia's evolving status from victim to *femme fatale* demonstrates a female character unlike those found in Padura's work, even though both Flavia and Poly are endowed with a depth not commonly associated with the dangerous woman. In the case of Flavia, her hypersexuality can be seen through Bec's own descriptions of her, and she attains the height of her threatening powers over Bec during intercourse specifically (2008:11). However, similarly to many *femmes fatales*, she disappears at the end of the narrative, and the reader is left to wonder whether the curse associated with Bec's masculine virility will culminate in her death. This therefore reaffirms her status as typical *femme fatale* within the hard-boiled genre. However, the fact that Flavia adheres to so many attributes of the *femme attrapée* and the *femme fatale* – roles which are arguably limiting and limited for women - in texts which are otherwise highly subversive, suggests that Valle does not encourage readers to problematize typical roles of women in detective fiction. This, however, could also suggest that such a subversive author whose novels are so critical simply does not see other roles in Cuba for women other than women as sexual object for pleasure (Flavia) or reproduction (Camila).

3.5. Conclusion

Amir Valle's work is clearly based in, and encourages, criticism of Cuban society, specifically of the adoption of neoliberal policies in the early 1990s and the effect this has had on both Cuban society and politics in the years since. Valle's work is inherently problematic for the reader, given the author's exiled status. This status immediately colours the author's writing, as does Valle's belief in Marxist socialism, and his great disillusionment with his home country. In this chapter, I demonstrated the ways in which

Valle's work is generically defiant (in relation to both Cuban socialist and hard-boiled detective fiction), and I understand his wish to write such detective metafiction as an attempt at challenging the current political and social status quo in Cuba. Valle has distinguished Padura as 'la puerta y el puente' to his own work, and this is clear in his focus on marginality and non-normative sexualities in his novels. However, contrary to Padura's *Las cuatro estaciones* novels, *Descenso* presents violence, in particular sexual violence, in a particularly blunt manner, and, I posit, seeks to shock readers through the fact that such scenes are often crimes which the author maintains have taken place in Cuba.

Though denigratory, to a point, of attitudes towards homosexuality and demonstrating disillusionment with the failing *status quo* of the Cuban Communist Party, Padura has been able to heavily veil such comments through the disclaimer that protagonist Mario Conde is merely an imagined character in an imagined Havana. However, the fact that Valle's novels are all based on historical events suggests that social commentary is intrinsic to his work. This, in *Largas noches* and *Santuario*, is most clearly demonstrated through the character of Alex Varga, who, as I have argued, represents the ultimate challenge to the communist regime.

Within both a Cuban and an international context, Valle's work is a clear example of genre trouble. His detective metafiction seeks to draw the reader's attention to the veracity of the purported events in these novels, thus making shocking scenes particularly immediate and affecting for the reader, who is unsure where the claims to truth finish and the fiction in the *Descenso* series begin. This is turn provokes the reader to ask an ontological question not frequently associated with the typical detective novel: what is truth?

Descenso is highly problematic for the reader who is encouraged to reassess their understandings of the relation between neoliberalism and the communist state, and *machista* ideals of hegemonic masculinity, which I argue are reflected in Valle's unusual take on the detective genre.The *Descenso* series carefully (and at some points obviously) unpicks certain elements of Cuban society and politics which are no longer relevant to the island in the twenty-first century. Valle's representation of the *hombre nuevo* through detective Alain Bec also highlights the fact that certain Revolutionary talismen no longer have a place in what is neoliberal Cuba. Through suggesting Varga as a more apt, yet nonetheless heartless, neo- *hombre nuevo*, Valle underlines how Cuban society has changed since the fall of the Soviet Union, and how entrepreneurial attitudes are not only

necessary, but also perhaps even morally damaging, as represented by Vargas' violent actions.

Further to this, *Descenso* engages with and challenges generic expectations of the detective and the dangerous woman through troubling representations which require the reader to reconsider exactly what detective fiction is within a neoliberal Cuban context. This in turn poses the question of how influences from the hard-boiled detective novel within the series are employed to comment on post-*Periodo Especial* Cuba.

Chapter Four: Gender, Genre, and Gratification in Bef's *Hielo negro* and *Cuello blanco*

Introduction

Bernardo Fernández Brigada (Mexico City, 1972, known as Bef) is the author of three detective novels which form the *Detective Mijangos* series, having secured a popular readership through his science fiction and graphic novels published before and after his detective works. *Hielo negro* (2013a, first published 2011), *Cuello blanco* (2013b), and *Azul cobalto* (2016) constitute the first serialisation of detective fiction in Mexico to feature both a female protagonist – Detective Andrea Mijangos – and a female antagonist – cartel head Lizzy Zubiaga. Not only do the two women outstep and trouble the generic norms which often place both the detective and the criminal as male characters, but their inclusion and foregrounding as such significant characters within the series also marks a great potential for a multiplicitous view of women within Mexican literature and society. Such a notion of the profusion of masculinities and femininities displayed within Mexico is a significant departure from conventions noted by Samuel Ramos in *Perfil del hombre y la cultura en México* (first published 1934) and Octavio Paz's *El laberinto de la soledad* (first published 1950), mentioned earlier in this thesis. The efforts of gender theorists such as Matthew C. Gutmann's (1996) extensive work on the nuances of masculinity in neoliberal Mexico, and post-Millennium Robert McKee Irwin (2003) and Corona and Domínguez-Ruvalcaba (2010) demonstrate that, within a patriarchal culture, multiple masculinities – and femininities – exist.

However, emplotting a traditionally male-dominated narrative with female characters is potentially problematic in the sense that when approaching his series, the author 'buscaba robar una voz femenina […] quería robar a una voz a una mujer'.[60] Bef's work risks becoming simple literary ventriloquism, and trivialising the view of women in Mexico, an ultimately retrogressive act which reduces women to 1950s Pazian views of femininity. Having asked Bef about the inclusion of such scenes in his own work, the author responded that in *Hielo negro* and *Cuello blanco* such scenes are present to cause 'repulsión en el lector'[61] rather than sexual excitement. However, this chapter concludes that scenes of pornosadic activity are inscribed with sensationalist elements which detract from this intention, above all within the context of femicide-stricken Mexico, which would typically cause the reader uncertainty, apprehension and anxiety in relation to the

[60] 2015, interview with Bef.
[61] Interview with Bef.

text. The author also stated the wish to foreground 'voces femeninas muy sólidas',[62] and as such this chapter investigates the representation of women in his work – and their limitations. Though some of the female characters I explore in Bef's detective texts do not adhere to Pazian views of femininity, one of the inadequacies brought to light by intentionally foregrounding female characters – whether in the role of victim or perpetrator of violence – is the series' lack of serious engagement with Mexico's ongoing issues with femicide, which are closely linked to a rape culture. Bearing this in mind, I argue that despite Bef's choice to break generic conventions with the inclusion of female characters in the place of the typical male protagonist and antagonist pairing, any potentially positive implications are undercut by his recourse to gendered stereotypes and his lack of serious engagement with feminicide.

As outlined in the Introduction to this thesis, detective fiction in Mexico has a different background to the genre as produced in Cuba. I previously referenced Rodolfo Usigli's 1944 novel *Ensayo de un crimen* as a turning point in Mexican detective fiction history, as the genre began to engage with and detail the effects of modernisation and expansion within Mexican society. This urban detective fiction genre was developed by the likes of Rafael Bernal, whose novel *El complot mongol* (1969) continued to focus on urban life, reflecting the ongoing movement from rural areas to cities in the country, and greater exposure to American literary products during this period. Unsurprisingly, then, the popularity of the hard-boiled North American crime novel increased throughout twentieth century Mexico.

4.1. Sex, Drugs, and Neoliberal Policy in Mexico

The Mexican detective genre has been made popular (to an extent, internationally[63]) by authors such as Paco Ignacio Taibo II, whose Héctor Belascoarán series (1976 – 2005) undertook an appropriation of the structures of the North American crime narrative – the lonely detective on the margins of legality, investigating in a bleak society, solving the case and exposing socio-political issues along the way. In his 2011 work, *Transatlantic Mysteries*, Nichols outlines how the 1968 student massacre at Tlatelolco and the effects of neoliberal policies have affected the popularity of such a genre in Mexico and Spain, claiming that the 'social, political, and economic crises plaguing Mexico and Spain link

[62] Interview with Bef.
[63] See Craig-Odders, Collins, and Close (2006) and Nichols (2011) for details on the international readership and popularity of the genre.

directly to the disillusionment with a modernity that brings economic prosperity, although definitely not for all members of society' (33). However, the critic does not investigate more current and widespread topics affecting Mexico today: The *War on Drugs* (2006-present) and feminicide. The extent to which the two may be related is not the main concern of this chapter. Rather, this chapter seeks to consider how current detective fiction with a focus on the drugs trade featuring female protagonists and antagonists challenges the existing representation of women in Mexico, if at all.

Given that *Azul cobalto* was published at the end of 2016, this thesis critically examines the first two of the three novels in Bef's *Detective Mijangos* series. The series is significant to contemporary Mexican narrative as, in addition to being the first published Mexican serialisation of a detective series to feature a female protagonist, their publication has also coincided with the end of a two-decade long growing international awareness of acts of feminicide.[64] According to the *Online Encyclopedia of Mass Violence* 'the femicide phenomenon' is 'An alternative to the gender-neutral term of "homicide". As such, it seeks to highlight the killing of women for being women, a phenomenon linked closely with sexual violence enacted to punish, blame and control the actions, emotions and behaviour of women' (Kaye, 2007).

I begin by introducing notions of femininity as discussed in the Introduction, and then continue to discuss female characters in Bef's novels who do not adhere to typical gender expectations. In this chapter, I engage with the link between the Mexican detective genre, feminicide and the socio-cultural issues that link the crime narrative in Mexico and the view of women. I focus on gendered bodies in Bef's novels, and question what such representations communicate about gender and genre in contemporary Mexico. I then investigate the detective novel as a means for performance, subversion, and disguise, both with regard to the content of the novels, and the generic implications – and limitations – of the genre itself, and the ways in which Bef's work can be seen as an original take on the genre.

[64] This thesis uses the term 'feminicide' rather than 'femicide' given this research's focus on Mexico. Though 'femicide' communicates the murder of women for being women, the term feminicide, as Lagarde (2010) makes clear within a Latin American context, implicitly references the systemic nature/lack of state responsibility for and impunity from such murders. The term feminicide is seen as problematic in feminist circles as this is not applicable across all countries in which femicides take place. Here, feminicide refers to the murder of women in Latin America, specifically in Mexico.

4.2. Female Identities in Contemporary Mexico

Integral to my examination of this section within Mexican fiction and society is the view of women who fall into the good/evil dichotomy which is imposed by men, arising from a simple difference between women who are seen, and women who are invisible. The Introduction to this thesis demonstrates the engrained patriarchal views of women in Mexico from the prior to the Revolution until present, (see Castillo, 1998, Paz, 2008, McKee, 2003, Domínguez and Ruvalcaba, 2010), which, as I lay out in this thesis, provide the foundations for feminicidious activity in Mexico.

In their work on gender violence specific to the US-Mexico border, Corona and Domínguez-Ruvalcaba (2010: pp.13-14) elaborate on the severity and ubiquity of the femicide issue:

> Violence against women or sexual minorities is of course not a new phenomenon nor an uncommon one. It is particularly evident when patriarchal structures are stressed by fundamental changes in the social and economic framework that challenge their very existence. [Women] are not killed in random acts of fury, but because they constitute or 'symbolize' a particular group of women: those on the fringes of a community implicitly defined in social, economic and even ethnic terms […] Women have come to personify social change and ultimately liberation from the traditional webs of institutional and social control. For this, they are perceived as doubly threatening.

It is, as Paz (2008) found pertinent in 1950s Mexico, what women *symbolise* that troubles society. Their symbolism, however, has evolved: they no longer necessarily represent the Mother, instead their visibility threatens the patriarchal *status quo*, personifying social upheaval. Ruvalcaba and Corona (2010) maintain that any subversion of the role of women is punished by acts of femicide. Those which have most famously plagued Ciudad Juárez are interpreted as

> The undesirable result of a machista culture channelled by ingrained forms of pernicious representations of gender-based violence that multiply themselves throughout the local culture. This happens from their most innocent forms (such as jokes or song lyrics) to their antisocial manifestations (such as rape, torture, and murder) and by media and institutional practices that mislead the interpretation of violent events. (2010:18)

With Corona and Domínguez-Ruvalcaba's argument in mind, I would approach the Mexican crime genre as forming part of this local culture, precisely because the crime genre has long been an outlet for describing murders of women.

What is perhaps most worrying about these extreme acts of violence against women is their ubiquity throughout Mexico. 'Although there have been episodes of multiple murders of women, feminicides, linked to specific regions, as in the case of Ciudad Juárez for example, at this point is a pathology that has spread through Mexico'

(Olivera, 2006:104). This is a fact that demonstrates the engrained nature of derogatory and outdated views of women in Mexico as documented by Paz. Anzaldúa's (1998) evocative images of the never-healing wound and the haemorrhage are becoming more and more pertinent to understanding Mexican reality, as the wound, becoming infected, swells in size and continues to spread. Unsurprisingly, in a society in which the story of the 43 missing students of Ayotzinapa has made international news (see Agren, 2015), and frequent reporting on a global stage details ongoing corruption within the Mexican government and law forces (The Guardian, *Mexico suffering from 'serious crisis of violence and impunity', report says*, 2016), the exact number of women murdered annually across the country remains unknown (Arámbula Carrillo, 2014).

In addition to feminicide's having become a now infamous violent occurrence 'de todos los días' (Close, 2012:104) within Mexican society, *Hielo negro* (2013a) and *Cuello blanco*'s (2013) appearance on the Mexican crime fiction market also correspond with another growing culture within Mexican crime tropes: that of the *narca*, clearly represented in Pérez Reverte's *La Reina del Sur* (2002). In his insightful collection of short, real-life stories of women connected to Mexico's drug trade journalist Javier Valdez Cárdenas (2010) concisely juxtaposes some traditional and contemporary roles of women in Mexico:

> Una mujer al frente de un grupo de sicarios dirige una emboscada contra un convoy de agentes de la Dirección General de Reclusiones. Una bellísima narca ordena que 'levanten' a un mesero y lo 'encajuelen'. Una madre de familia junta los pedazos, uñas, pellejos y coágulos a los que fue reducido su hijo de 15 años. No. No son escenas de una película de acción que estará próximamente en cartelera mundial. Se trata de notas periodísticas que aderezan el narco nuestro de cada día, notas en las que el papel femenino cobra cada vez mayor fuerza y presencia. (11)

There exists then, in present-day Mexico, a clear cultural apposition and divide between the maternal figure and the violent, non-maternal character as perpetuated roles for women. This juxtaposition of good/evil women is something which feminist critics such as Castillo have investigated, and have found to be embedded in Mexican culture predating revolutionary Mexico. Bearing in mind that Castillo's text was published 1998, when feminicide as an issue was only beginning to become more widely analysed in literary and academic fields, her work and theory here predicts one of the alleged causes for targeted gender violence in Mexico: the visibility of women. This work considers the visibility of women in the same manner as did Paz – women who work in public arenas (specifically the *maquiladoras*), who are violent and outspoken: women who, according to Mexican society, are outstepping the shadows of patriarchy that otherwise would like to

have them confined to the family home, adhering to patriarchal repressive norms such as heterosexual marriage, housework, and reproduction.

Currently, then, in Mexico, there appear to be two particular roles, or more generally two particular masks that women are expected to identify with within the country's popular imagination in the context of Mexico's drug-related violence. First is that of the cold and calculating *narca* figure, which has gained notoriety through the works of Valdez-Cárdenas, in the sensationalist *nota roja* of the national press; a second, the increasingly popularised figure of the *buchona* (often generally understood as a *novia* of a *narco*, Bendito Manicomio, *Las novias del narco 'Buchonas'*, 2009); the visible woman. Set in stark contrast to this is the role of the victim of neoliberal Mexican society: the disappeared/murdered girls and their grieving mothers (see Sergio González-Rodríguez, *The Femicide Machine*, 2012), an interpretation of the invisible woman.

Bef first introduced his readers to protagonist detective Andrea Mijangos and antagonist head of the *Constanza* cartel Lizzy Zubiaga in his 2005 publication *Tiempo de alacranes*, in which they both held relatively minor parts. The two novels at the centre of this analysis focus on the cat-and-mouse game which ensues shortly after Zubiaga has Mijangos' married lover killed, providing an insight into the lives of powerful women, the drugs trade, the Mexican police and - as is intrinsic to crime fiction and contemporary Mexico - sexuality and gender.

On occasion in this chapter I engage with Bef's own interpretations of the novels, having interviewed the author on his female-focused series in 2015. In this chapter I use the figure of the violent woman to demonstrate to what extent performativity of non-traditional gender acts develops the role of the woman as symbolic mother in Mexico, and question to what extent Bef therefore introduces the Mexican market to a new kind of female performance, questioning the effect this has on Mexican masculinity. I move on to consider the homoerotic dangerous woman as providing a malleable – yet nonetheless questionable - quality to the traditional *femme fatale*, and in my third section I discuss the purpose and effects that bodily performance and adornment have upon the reader. My fourth section questions whether the use of self-awareness, performativity, hybridity and double-coding in Bef's work has created a new genre in the Mexican market, and what this signifies for the subject of feminicide. Primarily, I use these two novels as a means to continue my thesis' main focus on the masking of sexualities and identities, also closely analysing changing masculinities, the notion of the 'fantastical' *femme fatale*, the bisexual detective and to what extent the postmodern hybrid text allows Bef to

criticise contemporary Mexican society. I use the contemporary Mexican crime novel to demonstrate how the presentation of sexuality and gender attempts to address and problematize long-standing binaries within the culture: from victims to victors, from captured to kidnappers, from invisible to visible, from normative to deviant. I propose Bef's series demonstrates this through gendered actions, bodies, and changing roles.

4.2.1. Dangerous Women, Dangerous Representations

As posited in the Introduction and in the introduction to this chapter, in a climate of violence against women, the violent woman in Mexico has been viewed as almost a cultural anomaly.[65] I begin with an analysis of violent women to understand what such a character represents within a Mexican socio-cultural background, and I consider how Bef constructs a particular image in order for readers to question accepted cultural representations.

Throughout *Hielo negro* (2013a), cartel head Lizzy Zubiaga demonstrates a violent disposition. The narrative begins somewhat ambiguously: Bef sets the scene by opening with the generically normative act of a crime being committed – in this case, multiple murders – yet the criminal herself is somewhat unusual within generic constructions. The reader is presented with the less traditionally conventional criminal: Lizzy Zubiaga, female head of the *Constanza* cartel. She is presented as the only person firing shots during an unconventionally calm massacre at a *bodega*:

> Dos hombres hacen guardia al lado de una pícop negra de vidrios polarizados. Tras ellos, una bodega se eleva aislada en medio de la nada.
> De pronto oyen un tiro.
> […]En medio de la oscuridad no pueden distinguir el rostro del compañero. Sólo la brasa del cigarro del otro, que se ilumina con cada bocanada.
> Otro tiro.
> - ¿Oístes?
> - Que no mames.
> - Oí…
>
> Como lejanos, tras las paredes de lámina del bodegón se escuchan gritos. Otro disparo. *(*2013a:16)

This introduction makes clear Zubiaga's domination of traditional male roles and acts. Her two male assassins smoke cigars; she enters with a smoking gun. This gender-aware one-upmanship sees the two male assassins wait in the dark where they can barely see each other's faces; Zubiaga strikes down an as yet unidentified number of men surrounded by this blackness. Her two male assassins are silenced and remain in silence;

[65] There has been a recent, but relatively tiny, upsurge in women who make use of violent acts as part of the drug trade specifically: Arámbula Carrillo, 2014.

Zubiaga shoots, instructs, and sings. It is clear that in this example, the female character does that which the male characters present do not and cannot: the darkness, it would seem, renders them unable to carry out their jobs properly, whereas Zubiaga seems to become part of the dark atmosphere. If she is not surrounded by the darkness, whether in the polarised windows of her car or in the surroundings of the isolated *bodega*, she becomes part of the darkness in the reader's minds when imagining her smoking gun within the dark. It is of course no accident that Bef leaves the two men with such phallic objects as cigars in their mouths, while Lizzy strategically holds a larger phallic symbol in her own hands:

> Los dos hombres aguzan las orejas. Como un murmullo escuchan la voz de Lizzy Zubiaga.
> - Doce elefantes se columpiaban sobre la tela de una araña….
> La palabra araña coincide con un tiro. Con éste se apaga la última voz que grita.
> […] Pinche vieja, está reloca…
> […] La puerta de la bodega se abre. Lizzy sale caminando.
> En la oscuridad los dos sicarios saben que la pistola de su jefa, una Colt Government, todavía humea.
> – Listo. Una instalación nueva. Vámonos.
> Se suben a la Lobo negra y se alejan de ahí en silencio. Ninguno de los dos se atreve a preguntarle por qué cantaba. (pp.16-17)

She is a powerful woman who can take on male roles. This is perhaps made more pointed by her singing of a children's nursery rhyme, contrasted against the sinister and deadly acts that she repeats – to the reader's knowledge – at least three times. The repetitive nursery rhyme, however, would lead us to believe she has in fact killed twelve people, or 'doce elefantes' who have stepped into her 'tela de araña', an image which begins a host of unsavoury comparisons with predatory animals and insects throughout the two novels.

This single-handed homicidal violence is continued in several scenes, two of which particularly stand out in the narrative. Lizzy leaves an art exhibition, turning down the opportunity to go to an after party in the upper-class area of la Condesa in Mexico City, casually declaring in English 'Got some business to take care of, sorry' (95). Upon her arrival at the location, Lizzy is led inside a bodega by *el Bwana* and is followed by Pancho. After passing through various security doors, the reader becomes aware of exactly what type of business Lizzy will attend to:

> Un hombre y una mujer sobre unas sillas de vinil, amarrados con alambre de púas y amordazados con cinta canela […] Estaban cubiertos de sangre seca, con un charco de sus propios excrementos a sus pies.
> […] el hombre] Era Wílmer, el asistente de Iménez, el capo colombiano con el que Lizzy había estado negociando apenas semanas antes. La gente del Bwana había descubierto que estaban introduciendo anfetaminas brasileñas por su cuenta al territorio nacional.

> […] Mala idea.
> Wílmer era el responsable de la operación. Antes, un verdadero cabrón. Ahora, lo que quedaba de él gimoteaba. (pp.97-98)

This excerpt demonstrates the power that Lizzy holds. Without unleashing any violence herself, she has her two victims, covered in blood, tied up with excessive force and using excessive means such as barbed wire. The presence of excrement underlines the fear experienced by the two victims. Though she did not carry out these violent acts herself, she has created the barbaric environment in which they took place, and is therefore complicit in their pain and suffering. This is highly reminiscent of the figure of the violent, non-traditional *narca* as alluded to in the introduction to this work, who oversees the excessive pain of others. The attention Bef pays to the scene and the objects – tape, wire, plastic chairs – creates a mental image of extreme torture and suffering, synonymous with particularly gory horror films. The fact that Lizzy appears righteous in this scene, as will be discussed, leads the reader to question what purpose such imagery serves. Wílmer's betrayal of Lizzy merits this punishment, and the life of the unfortunate woman he just so happened to be with when her henchmen picked him up is not considered important, simply dispensable. The opposition of Wílmer's character – once 'un verdadero cabrón' who is now left decimated, 'gimoteando' — demonstrates Lizzy's power, without her having lifted a finger, and reinforces how powerful and subversive her character is. This is developed as Lizzy becomes physically violent:

> Lizzy pudo ver una lágrima escurrir por su mejilla mugrosa.
> Dio una patada de aikido en la mandíbula del hombre. Sintió el hueso quebrarse bajo su suela. El golpe lo mandó al suelo.
> […] En el suelo el hombre lloraba. Ella lo volteó bocarriba con la punta de sus botas.
> - 'Llora como mujer por lo que no pudiste defender como hombre' – citó Lizzy. Enseguida pidió a Pancho el bat. (pp.98-99)

This scene very obviously purposefully sites Lizzy as in control and as a violent woman by using not only vicious imagery, but also by referencing significant cultural icons particular to Hispanic culture such as Sultana Aixa and her son Boabdil. Lizzy's excessive violence and the enjoyment she clearly takes in emulating strong, unaccommodating women such as Sultana Aixa is evident in the decisiveness of the murderous act. Lizzy clearly has no sympathy for those in pain, whether mental or physical. She cannot stop herself from literally kicking a man when he is down; however this is no sloppy, half-hearted kick; this is a well-placed, practised and precise kick unleashed with intent. This again demonstrates the cartel leader's physical power, and reminds readers of her ruthlessness towards others. This is underlined by Lizzy's manipulation of Sultana Aixa's

famous words, *'Llora como mujer por lo que no pudiste defender como hombre*'.[66] In this case, Lizzy's bastardised revision of the maxim resonates with the reader as Wílmer assumes the character of the banished Boabdil, a defeated king, which can be interpreted in this instance as referencing drug territory: Mexico is the new Colombia. In instructing Wílmer to cry rather than directly mimicking Sultana's words *no llores*, Lizzy confirms her ruthless nature, condemning Wílmer's actions even in his final, anguished moments. The use of the borrowed phrase is here also significant as Lizzy clearly sees some parity between herself and Sultana Aixa: both women are examples of subversion and, as a result of not conforming to gender stereotypes, as Paz details, are interpreted as strong characters who break the mould within the Mexican and Spanish contexts. The scene continues:

> El guarura sacó de la mochila de lona un bat de madera con el logo de los Venados de Mazatlán, atravesado por una docena de clavos de acero de cuatro pulgadas.
> – Esto es lo que pasa a los que se meten en mis nichos de mercado. Considéralo una declaración de guerra.
> Avanzó hacia el hombre con el bat en la mano. En silencio, Pancho agradeció ser tuerto y tener el ojo malo volteado hacia ese lado. Discretamente, el Bwana volteó hacia la puerta.
> Cuando la mujer de la silla vio lo que iba a suceder, comenzó a gritar sin control. (99)

Through Lizzy's dominance over a phallic weapon - in this case the baseball bat riddled with four-inch long nails - the cartel head is again placed in a hyperviolent and masculine situation, seeing her assuming a male mask, adorning herself with weaponry synonymous with masculinity and male sports and a language of violence, straight from Hollywood gangster films, 'Esto es lo que pasa a los que se meten en mis nichos de mercado'. Bef's inclusion of Pancho's inability to look at the violent scene and *el Bwana*'s subtle movement towards the door of the underground chamber also suggests that Zubiaga's performance is too masculine and violent an act for even them: a bodyguard and an 'ex porro' (96). The unnamed bludgeoned and tortured woman, present only due to 'bad luck' (97), is paid very little attention in this scene. She has no dialogue, only some whimpers. She has no background, no face, a vacant stare and no future. Her nameless status demonstrates an inclusion of the feminicide trope in Bef's work. The woman is killed simply for being a woman, for accompanying a man, for being visible. This scene therefore does not only highlight the view of the dangerous, violent woman in Mexico, it counterbalances this

[66] This citation refers to the line spoken by Sultana Aixa to her son Boabdil (Muhammed XII) after the fall of Granada in 1492. As the pair fled into exile, Aixa is alleged to have proclaimed to her weeping son, 'No llores como mujer lo que no supiste defender como hombre'. As scholars and authors have shown, this famous line represents the subversive power of woman in comparison to man: Aixa would have fought to the death for her kingdom, yet her son yielded (for more on this, see Rushdie, *The Moor's Last Sigh*, 2011: p.80). Bef's reference is therefore entirely fitting in this scene.

character with that of the futile victim. Here, this is doubly subversive as not only does the author include such a descriptive scene in which one body present is somehow nearly entirely absent, but he allows the immediate violence to be inflicted by a female character. As the henchmen look away, so do we, imagining what will happen to not only Wílmer, but also the unnamed woman. The scene's extreme violence, and the fact that it is enacted by a woman, may be read as an expansion of typical femininities in Mexico. However, the fact that Lizzy undertakes violent acts against an unnamed woman herself obviously reaffirms issues concerning feminicide. However, in Lizzy's dominating violent actions associated with men against women, Bef fails to develop past mimicry, which Gregory Klein (1995:173) sees as particularly dangerous as this reinforces dichotomising attitudes towards gender: women have no other way to express themselves than within accepted patriarchal roles – either enacting male acts associated with strength and violence, or behaving in line with gender expectations.

The indiscriminate violent streak that in part characterises Lizzy is developed in *Cuello blanco* (2013), along with the notion that the character either identifies with concepts of extreme femininity or extreme masculinity. She is introduced in the second novel through *el Paisano*'s eyes as taking part in 'una postal del infierno':

> Cuerpos de cerdos muertos se amontaban sobre un mar de sangre […] Los animales sobrevivientes chillaban como un coro de almas condenadas.
> Al centro del edificio, Lizzy sostenía un martillo neumático, rodeada de varios asistentes mientras sus guardaespaldas los observaban horrorizados desde una esquina.
> […] Lizzy atacó al animal con el martillo. Primero lo golpeó en un costado. Luego le quebró las patas. Finalmente le perforó el estómago. Mientras los jugos gástricos escapaban de su tripa reventada, el cerdo emitía unos chillidos que pusieron la piel de gallina al *Paisano.* (26)

Lizzy is systematically slaughtering pigs to create a sound installation to be exhibited. *El Paisano,* as a man heavily involved with the drugs trade and the use of violence and murder as an inter-cartel weapon, is disgusted by the scene, Lizzy's artistic bent being a stretch too far for his own violent streak. His indirect reproach questioning Lizzy's actions, '¿Qué es todo esto, Lizbeth?' (27) incites a somewhat unexpected and disproportionate reaction from the cartel head, who 'bajó la mirada, avergonzada' (27). *El Paisano* finds Lizzy difficult to look at when addressing her: 'Su dentadura blanquísima, su cutis perfecto causaron un escalofrío al *Paisano*' (28). Her physical perfection negatively affects him psychosomatically, reacting to Lizzy's bodily presentation with goosebumps, caused by his mental interpretation of her almost wax-like corporeality, and the reader can picture

her as a kind of plastic doll, perfect looking yet inherently evil: almost possessed.[67] In her article *Deconstructing the Male Gaze: Masochism, Female Spectatorship and the Femme Fatale* (2008), Sherwin explains that female passivity with regards to the gaze has been reevaluated and nuanced, emphasising that control and gender roles are no longer so obvious in narrative, and questions what happens when a woman does not adhere to the passivity associated with the female gaze, championing female spectatorial pleasure instead. In this work, Sherwin quotes Mulvey at length and interprets *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* as demonstrating that:

> What women represent is sexual difference itself, which, in turn, is the principle around which spectatorship can be theorised. [In Mulvey's formulation] women on both sides of the screen become elided with absence. As filmic representations, women are the bearer of the bleeding wound of castration, the signification of the lack of penis/phallus.

Sherwin continues that as spectators, women are offered the choice between identifying passively with the female on-screen protagonist, or to take on or assert a kind of 'masculinized identification' with the male protagonist and his domaineering gaze. This is significant in this excerpt in which Lizzy fails to be considered by *el Paisano.* In this excerpt, she initiates an argument with her Godfather, defies him and stares at him. In taking on not only domineering male acts but also by performing the male gaze and objectifying him, it could be argued that Lizzy becomes what Sherwin refers to as a 'spectatorial transvestite' (175). This is for Lizzy – at times passive object, at times active subject – an ideal way to be conceptualised.

Though Lizzy is the epitome of conventional beauty with her perfect physicality, this masks the monstrous Medusa character underneath, capable of inflicting violence, pain and, as will be discussed, a negative gaze upon both men and women alike. This is furthered by the indirect admission from *el Paisano* that Lizzy's ruthlessness knows no bounds. When replacing the defunct *el Médico* (murdered by a vengeful Andrea at the end of *Hielo negro*) Lizzy used certain means of extortion in order to obtain the best man for the job, a university chemistry professor who had previously rejected her offers of illicit work. The narrative details how she went about this:

> Encontró la manera de reventar al viejo: le secuestró a su hija con todo y nieto recién nacido […] El viejo no aguantó la presión. Cayó fulminando de un infarto

[67] Men being affected negatively by the female gaze are reminiscent of the Medusa myth. Freud interpreted Medusa as standing in for the castrated female genitals. Any direct contact with Medusa's stare was deadly, however Perseus killed Medusa by looking at her through the reflection of his shield, thereby converting her into the passive object of the gaze. *El Paisano* cannot accomplish this when considering Lizzy directly, and this therefore adds additional nuances to her interpretation as monstrous.

> en uno de los laboratorios. Lizzy mandó tirar su cuerpo al mar desde un helicóptero, junto a los de su hija y el bebé. (2013b:29)

This repulsive homicidal act, shocking as it targets the epitome of innocence, a baby, could cast Lizzy as a possible figure of hate, whose actions are so repugnant that it is difficult to understand the character in any other manner. However, when considering Lizzy as an interpretation of a dangerous woman, there remains a certain tension within her character, as to some extent the stereotypical *femme fatale* is clearly being evoked here, most obviously by sanctioning the murder of an innocent baby (the *femme fatale* being a barren figure).

Lizzy and Andrea both clearly dialogue with issues surrounding gender and archetypal gender roles in Mexico, and a third character who also demonstrates Bef's preoccupation with the relationship between violence, sexuality and women is Karina. Karina is, similarly to other *femmes fatales* of the genre, introduced through the male gaze. Járcor, sees Karina, and 'No pude evitar detener mi mirada un poco más de lo necesario en la curva de su talle marcada por el vestido negro' (2013b:39). This inability to not look/consume women with his gaze becomes a trait of Járcor's, as he continues:

> Casi todo mundo pone cara de terror cuando escucha estas palabras, 'policía judicial'. Ella no. Clavó su mirada en el bolsillo interior de la solapa de mi chamarra de piel, observando fascinada la sobaquera de la pistola […] Curvas generosas. Ojos grandes. Tez clara. Cabello rizado, negro. Labios carnosos. Mirada decidida. El nervioso era yo. (39)

Other than in relation to her body, Karina's character is left undeveloped: we learn that she killed a man to inherit his money.

However, though she appears to conform to playing the part of the archetypal dangerous woman –sexually threatening and unpredictable — there are several ways in which her representation does not fully conform to that of the traditional *femme fatale*. In the above excerpt, Járcor is watching being watched. If the pistol, as is traditional within the genre, is seen as a phallic object, Karina's gaze upon Járcor's gun – a fascinated one at that – is demonstrative of her ability to turn men into erotic spectacle, therefore herself capturing and controlling Járcor. This is expressed as the detective then becomes the character who feels pressure and anxiety, 'El nervioso era yo'. Despite this, Karina still invites the detective to study her. However, the fact that he cannot look her in the eyes may imply another reference to Medusa within Bef's work, 'Intenté fijar mi mirada en sus ojos pero era inevitable sentirme atraído por aquel tercer botón abierto de la blusa que relevaba un sostén rojo'. (39) Járcor's view of Karina's undergarments and the use of the verb 'revelar' underlines the eroticism at play in this first meeting with Karina. Roland Barthes emphasised in *Le plaisir du texte* that the most erotic space on the female body is

'là où le vêtement bâille' (1973:19), believing that the undressed body fails to excite erotic pleasure at all, since all has been revealed (*Mythologies*, 1957:147). Karina absolutely plays to male desire, however rather than possessing a phallic object such as a car or a gun, she destabilises Járcor through an introverted gaze upon the phallic object. Again, she has the desired, archetypal effect upon the detective, distracting him from his investigation,

> 'Qué quieres saber?'
> Si gritas cuando te vienes, pensé. (39)

Learning that Karina models for life drawing classes means a switch from focusing on the female form to the concept of the naked female body, presented as object of the gaze, Járcor is left astounded, threatened and silent, 'Estaba quedando como idiota' (39). Considering such an emphasis on the effects of the physical female body on the male heterosexual male mentality, one can read this scene in line with Mulvey's (1989) decoding of the male unconscious, which provides 'two avenues of escape from this castration anxiety: preoccupation with the re-enactment of the original trauma (investigating the woman, demystifying her mystery), counterbalanced by the devaluation, punishment or saving of the guilty object' (1989:21). This goes some way to explain how crime fiction is often viewed as a genre written for men. Járcor can investigate Karina and 'demystify her mystery': through the narrative, as he discovers her body, he also discovers exactly who she is. Through sex, gazing, searching and solving, he interprets Karina, and pronounces judgement on her. She is denounced as a murderer, devalued and punished.

Her physical description demonstrates a clear fetishisation of the female form, with the narrative paying close attention to her physicality. This is furthered by her attitude towards being the object of the male gaze. In a scene which precedes her attempt to kill Járcor, Karina reveals all about herself:

> - Llámame *Temptress*.
> […] - ¿Por qué crees que alguien posa desnuda frente a treinta artistas?
> […] Porque me gusta que me miren. Que recorran mi cuerpo con los ojos. Que me penetren con la mirada – acarició sus pechos mientras decía esto. (2013b:189)

The gaze to Karina becomes a sexual act as it penetrates her and she writhes with pleasure, touching her breasts when talking about it. This implicitly references Paz's thoughts on the difference between manhood and womanhood in Mexico: if women are open and penetrable and therefore weak, what happens when this penetrability is in fact enjoyed? Is this merely a male fantasy of the passive female body enjoying being dominated? Though this is one possible interpretation, the text also leaves readers open to interpreting the scene as another way in which sexuality and power can be subverted, as submission is assumed by Karina. In this case, the power of penetration is subverted, and the male

can no longer demonstrate his power over others through this enjoyable penetrating act. Rather than being captured and rendered powerless by the male gaze, this dangerous woman devalues any significance that the gaze previously had over archetypal *femme fatales*, by actively enjoying it. This would place Karina as a 'spectatorial transvestite' as previously outlined by Sherwin, as she straddles acts of passive object and active subject while internalising the gaze.

The notion of the woman as object of the male gaze and therefore as a passive object is subverted and nuanced by Karina on a separate occasion. During the investigation into Alejandro's murder, a video recording is found at the victim's home. At the police station, Járcor and his forensic counterpart Leo, accompanied by a senior detective, watch the piece of evidence.

> Leo dio un click en su computadora. En la pantalla apareció una mujer enmascarada vestida con un traje de látex rojo.
>
> - Te gusta? – Preguntó la chica a quien sostenía la cámara.
> - M-me encanta – replicó una voz insegura que podría ser la de un adolescente.
>
> Ella comenzó a recorrer su cuerpo con las manos. Acarició sus senos en círculos, apretándolos.
>
> […] Ella deslizó las manos por el vientre mientras contoneaba las caderas. Siguió bajando hasta tocar su entrepierna. Elevó una mano hacia la boca y lamió su dedo enguantado mientras miraba la cámara.
>
> […] Dio media vuelta y ofreció su trasero a la lente de la cámara. Se inclinó para tocarse los tobillos al tiempo que contoneaba las caderas.
>
> […] Esa mujer era el deseo mismo.
>
> De golpe, la imagen se congelaba. El video terminaba ahí, en una imagen borrosa del trasero de la mujer enmascarada, dejando a todos con ganas de más. (pp.114-115)

This entire scene may appear explicitly sexual; however, it is also an example of the performativity inherent to Karina's character. She executes her actions as if she were performing a strip tease, moving her body so all parts are visible to the viewer in her skin-tight latex suit. The performance, as will be revealed, is a particularly calculated one, carried out in an effort to give the unseen man in the video a heart attack and obtain his money. We, like the detectives, are reduced to experiencing an anxious passivity and may wish to turn away from such a voyeuristic scene, but, like the detectives, we continue to watch/read, our involvement in the case becoming increasingly complicated by our voyeurism (see Copeland, 2004: 254). The scene enacts a strange kind of reversal: none of the men in the room are in control of Karina's body, and it becomes apparent that Alejandro, who speaks with 'una voz insegura que podría ser la de un adolescente' is also lacking control of the situation. The images on the screen are pornographic. Pornography is complicit with voyeurism, and Copeland surmises that within this context, 'watching is

a privilege, and suggests a subtle form of control' (254). However, in this scene, Karina holds the power; she gazes back at the camera which captures her, demonstrating her defiance and awareness of her being captured; the detectives want to watch more when the video recording suddenly stops, and though she acts and uses her body in a hypersexual manner, her body is still masked and adorned by the red latex suit, which, skin tight, reveals everything, yet at the same time shows nothing.

Another interpretation of this scene sees Karina as a male fantasy construct, or 'el deseo mismo'. The three men gazing at her through the screen and Karina's clear awareness of the lens allows her to also be interpreted through Foucault's concept of the panopticon. Karina, life model and seductress, has been informed by the gaze of men how to act. Richardson (2010:11) considers women specifically as the object of the panoptic gaze, maintaining that 'The panoptic gaze of contemporary culture is distinctively gendered. Female bodies are subject to this interiorising gaze much more than male bodies', and quotes Copjec, "The panoptic gaze defines *perfectly* the situation of the woman under patriarchy"' (Copjec quoted in Richardson, 1989:54, emphasis in the original). Considering both theoretical approaches which either maintain characters such as Karina as being aware of the significance of the male gaze, playing to it and controlling it, or as being victim of the panoptic heterosexual male controlling gaze, Bef raises a complex issue for contemporary women: can they ever do anything, no matter how subversive, to please themselves? Or does the controlling reach of patriarchy know no bounds in contemporary Mexico?

Sherwin (2010) recognises that such scenes in crime narratives reference thought on the symbolic role of women. I argue that in the case of Bef's novels, the author renders this role literal. Sherwin posits, interpreting Mulvey's schema, that in such highly sexualised and potentially violent scenes in crime narratives,

> Ultimately, the meaning of woman is sexual difference, the absence of the penis as visually ascertainable, the material evidence on which is based the castration complex essential for the organization of entrance to the symbolic order and the law of the father. Thus the woman as icon, displayed for the gaze and the enjoyment of men, the active controllers of the look, always threatens to evoke the anxiety it originally signified (35, Mulvey). Moreover, the detective's gaze combines 'enjoyment' and 'anxiety' precisely because the sight of her vagina 'always threatens to evoke the anxiety it originally signified.' (180)

This anxious threat is communicated as Járcor realises that Karina is the murderer he has been seeking, and that she remains free to kill again. In this sense, Lizzy's multiple escapes from the law also exemplify this kind of anxiety and threat – a dangerous woman is roaming free in society and could strike at any given moment.

The suit acts as a kind of adornment on the female body, leaving nothing to the imagination yet at the same time, covering the largest amount of naked flesh as possible. This scenario can be interpreted through Barthes' (1957:147) theorisations on striptease and the naked female form, 'Le strip-tease […] est fondé sur une contradiction: désexualiser la femme dans le moment où on la dénude'. This Barthesian approach can be applied to Karina once more when Járcor confronts her about her murder of Alejandro:

> - Sí, yo lo maté. Luego cobré el seguro. Pero no sufrió el pobrecito.
> - […] Porque murió con una sonrisita en los labios. Quieres saber cómo fue? […] Se levantó y llevó las manos al cuello del vestido. Lo desabotonó. La ropa cayó al piso. Debajo llevaba un traje de látex rojo que parecía una capa de laca automotriz pintada sobre su cuerpo. Me estremeció, era como verla desnuda. (2013b:189)

This 'estremecimiento' that Járcor experiences is borne from both pleasure and fear, similar to that experienced by detective Mario Conde in *Máscaras* as investigated in Chapter One when seeing two men in drag kiss one another. He realises that Karina has, in a sense, reversed and undermined his masculinity, yet he finds her latex-clad body erotic. This is problematic for the Mexican male, as Paz posits that Mexican masculinity is a state to be attained and always reaffirmed through not opening up, ('no rajarse'), which in effect is exactly what Járcor has done in getting close to Karina and investing in their sexual relationship. According to Paz's thought, women as penetrable beings are the epitome of weakness, however it is as this point in the narrative where Karina seemingly offers herself up to Járcor in this most penetrable manner, that we discover it is Karina who is in fact closed and calculating, performing how and when necessary, and Járcor has allowed himself to be controlled and opened up by Karina. In this way, Karina is the character in *Cuello blanco* that most closely emulates the *femme fatale* of the North American genre, causing the detective anxiety concerning his manliness and intellect. She propels the plot, acting as a dangerous woman and accomplishing her goals with her body. However, Bef has distorted the *femme fatale* to an extent, by allowing her to subvert specifically Mexican patriarchal codes. Nevertheless, one must question the extent to which this troubling is successful given the relentless, and at times gratuitous, focus on the female body, which appears to be referenced in relation to women more so than personal characteristics. The emphasis on voyeurism elicits titillation on the part of the implied reader – we are not encouraged to feel uncomfortable about scenes which focus on violent women, rather these 'dangerous' women are placed in limited roles, with such a focus on hypersexuality.

4.2.2. The Homoerotic Dangerous Woman

Mancall (2005:5) understands voyeurism as integral to the titillation provided by hard-boiled detective narratives specifically. In *Hielo negro* and *Cuello blanco*, the long-standing notions of scopophilic pleasure implicit within crime novels are evidenced by the particularly voyeuristic presentation of female characters. This is characteristic of generic archetypes of detective fiction, which have traditionally privileged female characters as 'an object – and most particularly an object of vision: a sight' (Berger, 1972:47). Such representations within a contemporary Mexican context in which feminicide and restrictions of gender continue to be perpetuated, I maintain, can be read as demeaning, a potential replication of the discourses of rape culture, and one instance of a broader patriarchal discourse.

Typically, in the hard-boiled detective genre, female bodies are marked as an object to be looked at, consumed, and dominated. This links directly to the voyeuristic trope of the detective novel, not only in relation to the representation of women's bodies, but also concerning the way in which the reader, often exposed to the truth-seeking detective's point of view, is also given a voyeuristic role as they – anxiously and impatiently – oversee the unravelling plot.

In films based on literary narratives such as *L.A Confidential* (1997) and Frank Miller's *Sin City* graphic novels and two-film franchise,[68] spectatorship and scopophilic pleasure is implied on behalf of the male protagonist and the assumed male reader/viewer when capturing a female body. As Pérez (2002:50) maintains, the detective genre is one which prioritises a particularly attentive and sensuous description of women's bodies; Copeland (2004: 254), sees voyeurism is closely linked to power within the framework of the dominating male gaze, 'Watching is a form of privilege after all, and suggests a subtle form of control'. Copeland therefore indicates how such texts reinforce the conventional gender roles (active/reader/male, passive/object/female) in the act of reading. Within the context of this thesis, control, sex, and violence are all linked by both detective fiction and feminicide: in a culture in which punishment is enacted upon female bodies for being divergent with tradition, where do figures such as the *femme fatale* – purposely present to command spectatorial pleasure and partially troubling, but ultimately reinforcing patriarchal structures – fit in, and what is the purpose of their inclusion? Contrary to the

[68] See Frank Miller, *Complete Sin City*, (2005); *Sin City*, dir. Frank Miller, Robert Rodríguez and Quentin Tarantino (2005), and *Sin City: A Dame to Kill For*, dir. Frank Miller and Robert Rodríguez (2014).

femme attrapée, or the submissive, domestic ideal as perpetuated throughout twentieth-century Mexico, the *femme fatale* is tied to the control and scopophilia implicit in crime narratives. Her duplicitous nature, not at all congruous with the image of the domesticated wife, is evident as she 'never really is what she seems to be' (Doane, 1991:1) She is motivated by 'a lust for exciting sex, a desire for wealth and the power it brings, and a need to control every thing and everyone around her' (Dickos, 2002:162). Though this appears contrary to the traditional view of Mexican women, who have been considered objects rather than subjects, within generic norms, the femme fatale is not any less of a stereotype than the female figures that Paz identifies, as she is repeatedly associated with hypersexuality, anxiety, and dominance over phallic weaponry. It is significant to note, however, that Paz's *El laberinto de la soledad* is by no means the standalone understanding of Mexican masculinities and femininities of the twentieth century: Gutmann (1996), Castillo (1998), McKee Irwin (2003), and Franco (2014) in addition to others all provide additional comment and critique of masculinity and femininity in Mexico up unto the end of the twentieth century and/or the start of the new millennium. All scholars conclude that women have been interpreted as of a lower status to men within the country, Castillo giving examples which reference revolutionary views of women, Mckee Irwin commenting on the notion of masculinity as a fluctuating, attainable status to be fought for, as opposed to the given status of femininity, and Franco understanding the dichotomy between genders as evident since colonialism within Latin America. However, Paz's work in particular is pertinent for discussion in this chapter as the homoerotic dangerous woman acts as a counterpoint to his widely-discussed and perpetuated understanding of views of women within twentieth-century Mexico.

In *The Shattered Mirror*, María Elena de Valdés (1998) alludes to Paz's interpretations of this dichotomy and male superiority, when she states:

> The male response to the social alienation he suffers is to prove to himself that he dominates his woman, often by resorting to physical violence. This abuse of women, both physical and psychological, so thoroughly permeates Mexican culture that it is seen as a natural part of the relationship between men and women. (17)

The work of de Valdés and many others has illustrated how the concepts of womanhood first identified by Paz still permeate contemporary Mexico. These Manichean figures of womanhood resurface, despite the fact that the author purposefully focuses on female characters, foregrounding 'voces femeninas muy sólidas'.[69] However, rather than

[69] Interview with Bef.

stereotypes of womanhood being challenged in these texts, or the multiplicitous gender identities championed by Gutmann (1996) and Corona and Domínguez-Ruvalcaba (2010), *Hielo negro* and *Cuello blanco* are examples of Pazian views on gender identity being worryingly re-inscribed for the twenty-first century.

Throughout the series, detective protagonist Andrea Mijangos is presented through detailed physical description. The reader is not only aware that she is, unusually, a female detective, but that as the object of the gaze, she does not immediately appeal to the implied male reader in a traditionally feminine sense. First introduced in *Hielo negro* at a shooting range, she is the object of the male gaze despite describing herself as a 'gorda grandota' (2013a:20), as Martínez, her shooting instructor, scans her body:

> De inmediato siento su mirada clavarse en mis nalgas. […]Una vez lo descubrí escaneándome el escote mientras limpiaba mi arma. Desde entonces no me sostiene la mirada. Como todos, desconfían de nosotras. (2013a:20)

Distrusted in her line of work for blurring the lines between masculinity and femininity, Andrea remains the object of the male gaze, unusually for the detective protagonist. Her role as object is furthered in *Cuello blanco*, where she is transformed from Batman t-shirt and jean-wearer to her alias Marcela for the purposes of an undercover operation, described as 'una apetitosa dama de sociedad' (2013b:179), underlined by Jarcór's reaction, who is affected by her transformation, 'yo hacía un gran esfuerzo por no comérmela con los ojos, pero era casi imposible' (169). Scopophilia and voyeurism appear to be inherent to the men in Bef's novels, and their need to objectify women appears almost inescapable, even in a professional setting.

The notion of spectatorship is perhaps even more evident in descriptions of Lizzy, the female cartel head antagonist of the series. Lizzy, similarly to Andrea, is introduced by her physical description, which she alters and/or intensifies throughout the series, manipulating her appearance to add gravitas to a specific scene or exchange. Furthermore, in addition to her bodily adornment and masking, Lizzy is implicitly tied to scopophilic pleasure as she is often looked at, considered, and at times laid bare for the implied male reader to attempt to obtain more knowledge concerning her while dominating her with the gaze. Given that Lizzy spends much of *Hielo negro* in skin-tight latex suits (2013a:40), 1950s American diner waitress costumes (2013a:59), and wearing fetishistic school-girl outfits in *Cuello blanco* (2013b:26), it would be tempting to dismiss the character as merely conforming to the genre archetype of *femme fatale*, present to play to the scopophilic, voyeuristic male gaze. Furthermore, in each scene in which Lizzy is presented in a hyperfeminine, hypersexual manner, she is also shown to have hyperviolent

tendencies. Here, the argument lies in questioning whether Bef achieves a thought-provoking debate on the status of women in Mexico, or whether the author re-establishes and strengthens fetishistic, sexualised views of women, linking eroticism with violence.

Women as the object of spectatorship, yet as capable of dominating acts of violence are exemplified during a final scene of *Hielo negro,* in which Lizzy finally comes face to face with Andrea. The two women confront each other on a Cancún beach in a short chapter written simultaneously from the point of view of each woman. At certain points, it becomes indeterminable who is speaking, as their thoughts intercollide and connect, leading the reader to become aware of the similarities between the two women, polarised by their jobs and morals, but seemingly united through their predilection for vengeance and violent capabilities:

> '¡¿Quién chingados eres tú?!', grito y como respuesta recibo *una patada circular de taekwondo directamente en el pecho que la tumba de espaldas* pero yo no estoy manquita *y al ir por ella para ayudarle a levantarse recibo una patada frontal* […] al momento que otra ola revienta en la playa y nos arrastra a las dos […] y durante unos instantes nos observamos fijamente, apenas iluminadas por la luz de la luna […] *le reviento una patada circular en la cadera que la desequilibra* trato de responder con las manos *pero antes de que pueda defenderse la ametrallo con mis piernas* […] y le caigo a patadas desesperadas en los riñones *pero alcanzo a voltearme para atrapar uno de sus pies entre mis manos y jalar hacia mí* […] hasta que otra ola nos alcanza y nos arrastra *trenzadas en un abrazo del que ninguna afloja* hasta que el agua nos vuelve a escupir, cada vez más lejos de las luces *y por un instante nos miramos una a la otra* […] y lo único que alcanzo a hacer *es acercar mi rostro al de ella* y besarla violentamente hasta que una ola vuelve a arrastrarnos hacia la profundidad del mar. (2013a:228 [italics in the original])

Here, certain verbs are used that are double-encoded and can be read as evoking pleasure/pain, for example, the women 'gritan', 'arrastran', 'caen'. The women, who both maintain sexual and emotional relationships with men in the series, lie 'entrelazadas', ending with them intertwining, an image traditionally associated with pornography and romance rather than with pure violence. This mimicry of a lesbian sex act can be read as an example of pseudo-lesbian conflict performed for the male reader. Here, Bef does not write the women as necessarily being empowered or powerful, causing the implied patriarchal reader anxiety; rather the scene is that of a male eroticisation of female empowerment. It could therefore be posited that this scene demonstrates female empowerment as an illusion, present to be consumed with pleasure, rather than feared and respected.

This intense and fierce passage with clear sexual undertones marks the end of the novel, and thereby has many parallels with a frenzied, sexual release, underlined by

wave imagery, often associated with the female orgasm.[70] In this instance the release emanates from the tension which has increased throughout the narrative's progression. This relief is short-lived, however, as Lizzy manages to slip away after evading Andrea in the water, with an identical outcome at the end of *Cuello blanco*. In this instance, the women again come to physical blows, once again 'trenzadas' (2013:232), before Lizzy manages to escape for a second time. The endings to both novels are therefore inconclusive, the dangerous female villain being left to continue evading the law, and the detective having been unsuccessful in her job — an unusual outcome within detective narratives. I posit that such a divergence from generic norms and the unfamiliar sentiment of futility at the conclusion of both novels – accompanied with a sense of anticipation regarding how the subsequent novel in the series will continue the story – act as a comment on the current social-political state of Mexico today: the corrupt quite literally get away with murder, and what lies next for a state so heavily saturated with lies and impunity is uncertain. In this sense, Bef's genre subversion, mainly achieved through inconclusive culminations and the emplotting of female characters, does form a comment on contemporary Mexico. However, it could also be argued that the overriding effect of this excerpt is debatable: the physical closeness between the women and their clear dominance over violent acts associated with the male heterosexual matrix can be interpreted as pandering to the sexual preferences of the implied male reader. Therefore, Bef's use of this heavily physical scene at this point is comparable to a satisfying release, similar to that of ejaculation or orgasm. Cawelti (1976:186) maintains that such a sentiment is common within crime novels, recognising that the reader typically experiences such a release after being provided with 'an alternating pattern of sexual provocation and orgies of shooting or beating'. Furthermore, Close (2012), based on his understanding of Cawelti, sees the dissipation of such tension as not only symbolic of orgasm, but also as integral to the identification of the pornosadic detective fiction subgenre. In this example taken from *Hielo negro*, this is particularly visible through the juxtaposition of the women's violent acts and the consuming lesbian kiss, associated with the women drifting out into the depths of the sea, again underlining the link between the imagery of waves with the experience of orgasm. Moreover, concerning this concept of enjoyment at the prolongation of the novel's dénouement, Porter (1981:101) concedes that:

> Although we may read a detective story compulsively in order to reach a conclusion/solution, we paradoxically enjoy the obstacles scattered by an author

[70] This is perhaps most clearly seen in Mexican literature in Ángeles Mastretta's *Arráncame la vida* (1985).

> in our path, both for our own sake and because they prolong the state of tensed expectation.

This is what the reader experiences upon reading the scene on the beach. Nonetheless, in addition to the reader's paradoxical enjoyment of such a scene, the absence of a satisfying resolution, the presence of which is so often associated with crime narratives, also conveys the idea of female empowerment as an illusion, clearly echoing the Freudian vision of femininity as lack.[71]

It is no accident that it is this scene in which Bef introduces a homoerotic element to the women's relationship. This is problematic in relation to the two female characters in their contrasted roles of detective protagonist and villain *femme fatale*, as it demonstrates what Gregory Klein (1995:173) refers to as 'imitation without reconsideration', when emplotting a typically male-dominated narrative, such as the hard-boiled detective novel, with female characters. This is particularly evident in the beach scene in *Hielo negro* as Bef replaces the violent male detective with the violent female detective, and the violent male antagonist villain with the violent female antagonist villain. This scene is presented in voyeuristic terms, and there is an overt sexual titillation to their interactions. Such elements would normally be missing in archetypal examples of the genre when pitting a male protagonist against a male antagonist. However, this re-encoding of the protagonist-antagonist relationship with sexual overtones is not necessarily positive, and Farrimond's writing on the bisexual woman in crime tropes can be particularly illuminating in an analysis of Bef's strategies here. Farrimond (2012:147) argues that 'bisexual activity is central to issues of trustworthiness, and emphasizes the potential for duplicity in the behaviorally bisexual femme fatale'. Furthermore, it is worth noting that this lack of trust in relation to femininity also links to the concept of *malinchismo*. *Malinchismo* springs from the period of Spanish colonialism in Mexico, linked to an inferiority complex associated with the 'foreign' being an attractive identity to emulate. La Malinche, Hernán Cortes' advisor and translator, is used in the Mexican popular imagination as having assisted the Spaniards to exploit the Native American people. As such, *malinchismo* is associated with femininity, betrayal, and, as a result, distrust (Gaspar de Alba, 2005:54), a concept which echoes Farrimond's own understanding of female bisexuality.

Though she specifically targets the *femme fatale*, which in the case of Bef's novels is most clearly demonstrated by Lizzy's character, Farrimond's argument on bisexuality within the detective narrative is particularly pertinent to Lizzy and Andrea's relationship.

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[71] See Sigmund Freud, 'Some Psychological Consequences of the Anatomical Distinction Between the Sexes', in *Sexuality and the Psychology of Love*, 1963: pp.187-188.

Farrimond (152) maintains that bisexual activity on the part of the *femme fatale* 'Add[s] some extra pornographically inspired spice to the neo-noir erotic thriller', but also has the potential to 'provoke important and uncomfortable questions about the potential disconnect between desire and behavior' (152). The bisexual *femme fatale*, for Farrimond, can thus offer potential blurrings of character, gender, and our understanding of sexuality. However, as I will demonstrate, Bef's bisexual *femme fatale* fails to develop these potentials.

Although it could be argued that Bef's depiction of bisexuality troubles gender norms, in fact, as I will argue, these scenes are present to offer titillating voyeuristic imagery to play to the unspoken desire of the implied and assumed male reader. Bef's presentation of the female detective as having bisexual undercurrents ends up being another example of the sexualisation of women in literature, if the scene is read from the point of view of the implied heteronormative male reader. From this position, the eroticisation of violent conflict becomes a male fantasy, an example of sheer titillation, and one enacted as a result of patriarchal control: in this context, Bef's control over the narrative and the implied male narrator's voyeuristic control of the female character through his gaze.

It is also important to note that throughout *Hielo negro* in particular and at certain points in *Cuello blanco* there are further examples of the bisexual inclinations of Andrea and Lizzy. After a session at the gym towards the beginning of *Hielo negro*, Andrea is joined in the communal showers by another female agent. Uncomfortable, Andrea states, 'Nunca sé qué decir a otra mujer desnuda' (2013a:24). The other female agent begins a conversation about Andrea's body, congratulating her on her 'buenas pompas' (24). The object of the admiring female gaze, the colour drains from Andrea's face (24). The other female agent continues their conversation:

> - Eres muy guapa – y me da una nalgadita que me paraliza - bueno, nos estamos viendo.
> […] Pasan dos o tres minutos sin que pueda moverme. Siento el contorno de su mano como si la hubiera marcado al rojo vivo sobre mi trasero.
> Le hubiera roto el cuello.
> Pero debo aceptar que a una parte dentro de mí le gustó lo que me dijo. (25)

Andrea remains in the shower, mortified by the agent's actions, still feeling the woman's slap on her behind. Her thoughts of violence indicate her reaction to her status of heteronormativity being displaced, yet she admits she enjoys the woman's words, if not her actions. Though it is suggested here that Andrea is not capable of accepting the realities of physical homosexuality, she enjoys attention from other women, with the image of the red-hot poker alluding to this overlapping of pleasure and pain, associated

with sadomasochism. The juxtaposition of pleasure and pain being linked to bisexual behaviour is furthered at the end of *Cuello blanco*, when Andrea admits, 'Mi mayor humillación fue ser besada por Lizzy en medio de las olas, cuando estuve a punto de arrestarla en Cancún' (2013b:159). The chosen vocabulary in this phrase is particularly representative of both pornosadism within the novels, again mentioning waves associated with female orgasm, humiliation, and 'estar a punto' returning the reader to notions of tension and release. Andrea's seemingly negative recollection of the kiss she shared with Lizzy — and therefore of any bisexual undercurrents — indicates that Bef creates these scenes in a deliberate attempt to gain and/or maintain heterosexual male readership at points in the novels where the plot is at its most tense. This is corroborated by the frequent and obvious reminders that Lizzy is an entirely non-normative female figure in relation to Mexican patriarchal social discourse. Of the many ways in which Lizzy is described as unusual, the reader is also informed that on occasion the cartel head sleeps with Bonnie, her secretary: 'Lizzy extrañaba la suavidad de Bonnie entre sus sábanas' (2013a:213). On the surface, Bef encourages the reader to infer bisexual undercurrents in his two female lead characters, yet the lack of development of these sexualities suggests deliberate eroticised performance – always interlaced with violence and/or shame – which is present for the titillation of the implied male reader of these novels. Although it could be argued that the series is a patriarchal appropriation of bisexuality, I conclude that the two characters perform lesbian positions for male pleasure. Although Lizzy does have the potential to provoke uncomfortable questions, and her bisexual undertones mean that she could potentially challenge accepted views of femininity in Mexico, ultimately, as a character she is subjugated to the male gaze.

4.3. Disguise and Concealment: Masking the Body

As Farrimond outlines in her 2012 paper, staying still is important within the crime genre for the detective – and the reader – to make sense of what is before them, a notion that reaffirms the need for gender norms to be respected in societies affected by patriarchy such as Mexico.

Up to this point in this chapter, I have paid most attention to metaphysical masks and personality adornment. The theme of bodily disguise and embellishment is rampant throughout Bef's texts, and, as I will discuss, lends female characters an additional paradigm of subversion and multiplicity. However, this may also be considered in relation to mistrust of women who are visible within a Mexican context.

Mask and disguise are central to all characters within Bef's work, and Lizzy and Andrea each have specific ways of using costume or disguise to ensure their goals are achieved. Lizzy's use of mask and disguise is firstly brought to the reader's attention when she meets Alberto Suárez, co-owner of a brokerage firm in Mexico City, through whom she runs her ghost business to launder the money made through her illicit – and highly lucrative – dealings. Suárez hears a movement in his office and grabs his 'pequeño revólver Smith & Wesson', only to find himself faced with Lizzy's one-eyed corpulent bodyguard, Pancho:

> -Ah, don Pancho […] me asustó – dijó [Suárez] mientras guardaba la pistola.
> Sin decir palabra, el guarura se deslizó dentro de la oficina. A sus espaldas apareció ella.
> El cabello rojo cereza de la jefa del cártel de Constanza se derramaba sobre su cabeza en púas plastificadas. Iba vestida con un traje de látex del mismo color de su pelo cuajado de cierres y estoperoles, diseñado por Jean-Paul Gautier y botas Doc Martens altas.
> - Lizzy… N-no te esperaba.
> Ella caminó hacia él como una pantera que se aproxima a su presa. Rodeó el cuello de Alberto con sus brazos para estamparle un beso en la mejilla, dejándole la huella de sus labios marcada en negro. (2013b:40)

Here Zubiaga's presence is certainly a cause of anxiety to the stockbroker. The corpulent bodyguard who precedes her into Suárez's office frightens the broker, as he still holds the pistol after he has recognised Pancho. However, it is the sight of Lizzy which makes Suárez stutter. Like a spectre, she 'appears' in his office. What is perhaps most immediately troubling to Suárez here is Lizzy's unusual physical appearance: in as much as, similar to the archetypal *femme fatale*, she causes fear and anxiety to a man who is closely involved with the infrastructure of an establishment such as the stock market, closely linked to the notion of a superstructure of patriarchy which dominates capitalist society, however any obvious and traditional interpretation of beauty that she may possess is masked by her physical presentation. Though the use of 'derramar' would suggest Lizzy's hair spills out from her head in glorious locks, they in fact point out from her head in artificial gelled, plastic-looking spikes. The latex suit which adorns her body is closely associated with sadomasochistic fetish-related sex acts, the infliction of pain and fear upon an other human being. This is reinforced by the amount of metal the suit contains, described as full of zips and tacks, and the antagonist's hair style, reminiscent of a cat o' nine tails, used contemporarily as a sex toy within sadomasochism to inflict pain, but also historically as a torture item to inflict severe physical punishment on a guilty party. Though she clearly causes anxiety and fear for the male stockbroker, she does not do so through the traditional means of the archetypal *femme fatale*: he lacks the phallic symbol of

a revolver, converting her body instead into a weapon. The notion of pain and torture associated with sexual intercourse is of course significant within Mexican society when considering the feminicide phenomenon within the country. Perhaps the most renowned critic and author surrounding feminicide, Sergio González Rodríguez (2012), explains the nuanced and layered context in which sexually violent murders have become increasingly common in Ciudad Juárez in particular. Attacks against women, he believes, are the result of traditional problems:

> The dominant patriarchal ideology, borne of religion, prevails in explaining the sociological context [of feminicide]. In Ciudad Juárez, the masculine perception that every woman is merely a sexual object results when stereotypes surrounding the 'pure woman' – wife and mother – are exhausted. A woman who works and has no need for masculine protection becomes the antithesis of the 'pure woman' fantasy. Once freed from financial dependence upon male family members – and from a very young age, even following puberty – women are identified as dirty; interested only in money, sex and fun during her leisure time. A circle of hatred is closed and violence is unleashed. (2012:34)

Considering this in relation to Lizzy, we can clearly see an inversion of type. She does not depend on her father, who is deceased, or indeed on her godfather, el *Paisano*. She does indeed hold interest in money, sex and having fun (from massacring pigs to indulging in *haute couture* fashion). However, it is not hatred that Suárez feels towards Lizzy because she does not conform to this image of 'pure woman'; Suárez fears such a woman. This is furthered by the image of Lizzy's kiss on Suárez's cheek 'dejándole la huella de sus labios marcada en negro' implicitly references both sex and death. Lizzy's lips painted in black provides the reader with the imagery of her mouth as a black hole, linked to the kiss of death. She leaves Suárez physically marked by her lips, demonstrating ownership, again creating the image of Lizzy as a praying mantis, who predetermines the fate of her sexual partners.

Lizzy's next appearance in *Cuello blanco* is again accompanied by a physical description, an example of the graphic novel quality and a certain absurdity that Bef is capable of integrating into his work. The extract takes place in a Mexico City restaurant, with 'El capo, al que por razones de seguridad no identificaremos por su nombre y sencillamente llamaremos *el Jefe*' (57). The restaurant in question is named 'El Sinaloense', from which we may infer the *capo* in question is a fictional version of Joaquín 'el Chapo' Guzmán, before his capture in early 2014. A shoot-out occurs at the restaurant, 'un ballet macabro ensayado durante meses' (58), after which *el Jefe* and his companion Liliana are left alive, 'los cañones de varias armas largas apuntan hacia él' (58). After this violent attack,

> Aparece una mujer en patines que lleva una charola cubierta. Viste como mesera de drive-in de los años cincuenta. Se desliza hasta la mesa donde el capo sometido la observa inexpresivo. Se detiene frente a él, descubre la charola. Sobre ella lleva una Magnum Desert Eagle que apunta al capo.
>
> - ¿No me saluda, tío? – pregunta la mesera.
> - […] Tío, voy a contarle rápido. Antes de que a los muchachos de la Federal o la DEA se les ocurra darse una vuelta por aquí.
> - Esos cabrones me la pelan.
>
> Un tiro sorprende a todos. Liliana cae al piso con la mirada vacía.
> […] – Le estoy hablando en serio, viejo cabrón – dice Lizzy con el arma humeando en su manos [sic].
> El Jefe observa, convertido en una estatua. La única señal de vida que da es la mancha de humedad que aparece en medio de sus piernas y que se convierte en un charco de orina a los pies del capo.
> […]Rodeados de cadáveres, el Jefe firma el contrato que trae preparada su sobrina. Después de un par de horas se despiden de beso. (2013b: pp.59-60)

Lizzy is more intimidating than a notorious cartel chief, as is made obvious to the reader through Bef's insistence: Dressed as a caricature of a '50s waitress, a role associated with femininity and maternal concepts of care, she is capable of making such a well-established man, with some obvious masculine traits, scared. Again, as in the opening scene of *Hielo negro* we can here see the 'smoking weapon' a somewhat incongruous image in relation to her state of dress, however significant to her interpretation as a *femme fatale*, overstepping boundaries into markedly male territory.

Lizzy is also used by the author to demonstrate the significance of looking and being looked at. In *Cuello blanco* she is the object of Salgado and Suárez's male gaze upon entering the board room, a result of an orchestration to have Lizzy displayed to the reader and the male characters, yet her hyperfemininity rendered false and plastic but providing the two men with a severed hand to demonstrate the power she has over others. In this instance, Lizzy reprises and plays on her shadowy, dark characteristics. The excerpt opens with a focus on Alberto Suárez in his home, preparing himself to meet with Lizzy, pouring himself a drink: 'Apenas unos minutos después sintió una presencia deslizarse sus espaldas […] Lizzy salió de las penumbras' (2013b:117). These shadowy and obscure concepts in relation to the woman have, in *Hielo negro,* proven to be a premonition for violent behaviour enacted against men, however on this occasion, Bef further develops Lizzy's dangerous and uncertain qualities:

> Suárez pensó en los pocos momentos de ternura que se podían permitir los depredadores. Estiró la mano hasta el mentón de Lizzy y le acarició una mejilla.
> Ella […] dobló el cuello para aprisionar la mano de Suárez entre cuello y hombro. El hombre se inquietó un poco, no pudo dejar de pensar en las fauces de un tiburón prensando su mano.

> […] Ella estiró sus manos hasta el rostro del hombre con la velocidad de una Mantis religiosa y apretó sus mejillas sin dejar de mirarlo. (118)

In this instance, Lizzy is twice compared to two well-known predators within the natural world: one infamous for vicious attacks and the other for killing its mate after intercourse. These are incongruous images for a woman described as 'vulnerable' only lines beforehand, yet denote the character's volatility: her vulnerability was only an assumed pose, yet another mask she can assume. This incongruity is also evident in her state of dress – at first, seen to be wearing 'un abrigo negro que la cubría del cuello a los tobillos' (117), which is discarded to reveal 'un minivestido *chemise* de encaje rojo y liguero', with no underwear underneath (119).

Congruous with the woman's characteristics, the scene soon moves from amorous to volatile. Hearing coins fall from Suárez's pocket as he disrobes, a startled Lizzy asks what the noise was.

> Sintiéndose poseído por el espíritu de Robert Mitchum y con la mejor voz de detective duro que pudo imitar, Suárez dijo:
>
> - Es tu propina, muñeca…
>
> No había terminado de decir la última palabra cuando Lizzy se levantó furiosa.
>
> - Eres un pendejo, ¡animal!
>
> Suárez intentó calmarla. Sólo recibió puñetazos y una bofetada.
>
> - ¡Espera, Lizzy! ¿No me dijiste que tu fantasía era ser prosti?
>
> […] - ¡Chinga tu madre!
>
> Suárez se quedó solo, en medio de su departamento, sin saber qué hacer. (119)

In this scene, a Bef presents the dangerous woman as a deviation from the traditional *femme fatale*. Lizzy is neither established as an innocent, submissive woman, nor is she developed as a character that is entirely void of emotion. She has, according to this excerpt, given Suárez some control over her in the admission of her fantasies concerning prostitution. However, when Suárez attempts to engage with this fantasy, the spell is broken and it is Lizzy instead who leaves Suárez, demonstrating that she controls the action, revealing, as Sherwin so accurately puts it, that Suárez 'only *appears* to control the action or to hold her desire [which] suggests that male control of the look or of the action has always been illusory and something patriarchy must fight to maintain' (2008:177, my emphasis). Lizzy therefore undermines the male gaze and its constraints, and hence leaves Suárez 'sin saber qué hacer'. Her expletive '¡Chinga tu madre!' though common in Mexican informal speech, also implicitly references *la Chingada* and the mother figure, as Paz and Anzaldúa both explain in their works: each a prized, symbolic and almost deified figure within Mexican culture, to an extent demonstrating how deeply subversive the character is. In this sense, Lizzy does not only destabilise Suárez's constructed

masculinity, she also undermines Paz's notion of the submissive woman as *la Chingada*. Paz (2008:28) explains that the verb chingar is riddled with patriarchal sexual nuances:

> La idea de romper y de abrir reaparece en casi todas las expresiones. La voz está teñida de sexualidad, pero no es sinónimo del acto sexual; se puede chingar a una mujer sin poseerla. Y cuando se alude al acto sexual, la violación o el engaño le prestan un matiz particular. El que chinga jamás lo hace con el consentimiento de la chingada. En suma, chingar es hacer violencia sobre otro. Es un verbo masculino, activo, cruel: pica, hiere, desgarra, mancha. Y provoca una amarga, resentida satisfacción en el que lo ejecuta.

Lizzy employs this 'verbo masculino' in conjunction with her act of controlling the scene (leaving) in order to demonstrate that female heterosexual desire is not necessarily as impeding as Paz had understood.

Unlike in *Máscaras,* where disguise leads to a revelation, in Bef's work it acts as a cover. In *Cuello blanco* disguise is integral to the novel's plot, and demonstrates a development in Andrea's character. DEA agent Henry Dávalos, who features very briefly in *Hielo negro*, becomes a significant figure within *Cuello blanco*. Dávalos requests help from Mijangos in an operation that he believes will take down Alberto Suárez and other international criminals for money laundering, among them Lizzy Zubiaga. In return for working with him, Andrea will be provided with a license to operate her private detective service in the US. Andrea meets with Dávalos and his team – Óscar Salgado 'nuestro hombre dentro de Blue Chip', 'dispuesto a cooperar a cambio de protección' (2013b:150) and *monsieur* Mireault, a Canadian 'asesor de imagen' (151) who, he tells Andrea, 'Me voy a encargar de disfrazarte de mujer rica' (153). Andrea is already a millionaire, after having won the lottery at the end of *Hielo negro*. This attitude goes hand in hand with that experienced on the plane. The transformation which takes place is used by Bef to divert some attention towards Andrea's body, which has been referred to throughout the two novels, often through Andrea's eyes only, and of course by Karina towards the beginning of *Hielo negro*. Andrea and Járcor sit at her home, discussing the murder case that Mijangos has employed Járcor to investigate. Before she goes out to meet Dávalos, she changes:

> Entra a su habitación para cambiarse sin cerrar la puerta.
> […] El *Jar* observa de reojo cómo Andrea se desviste, dejando los jeans y la camiseta de Batman en el piso. Se descubre a sí mismo mirando con más interés del que hubiera pensado a Andrea en boxers y top de algodón. (138)

Andrea's body, though not typically coded as feminine in her male underwear, in fact elects a certain sexual interest in Járcor, who has previously shown no sexual interest in Andrea at all. In a chapter written in the first person, Járcor reflects on his relationship with Andrea while waiting for her at Mexico City airport after a shopping trip with Mireault to San Antonio:

> La neta es que nunca he sabido si es bonita o no […] No sé por qué a todo mundo le apena confesar que le gustan las gordas. Mis mejores momentos en la cama, al menos muchos de ellos, han sido con mujeres grandes […] Vi salir del reclamo de equipajes a una gringota buenísima jalando su maleta de rueditas con toda la pinta de ejecutiva […] yo hacía un gran esfuerzo por no comérmela con los ojos, pero era casi imposible al verla caminar como una diosa de la fertilidad por la sala […] me sonreía con una expresión pícara que me hizo pensar en sábanas revueltas y frases entrecortadas murmuradas al oído. (2013b: pp.167-170)

Beginning by declaring himself to be telling the truth, Járcor admits to Andrea as having caused him trouble deriving from his sexual desires – he has never known whether or not she is attractive. The entire passage is replete with attempts not to look at Andrea, all the while looking at her in a gluttonous manner – 'yo hacía un gran esfuerzo por no comérmela con los ojos': again, this is likely because Andrea troubles Járcor's notions of a woman's body: as previously referenced, the male police detective has considered Andrea's body as associated with masculinity (138), yet suddenly she is converted into 'una diosa de la fertilidad'. Andrea as vision or sight, 'coded for erotic impact' (Mulvey, 1989:19) renders Járcor dim, powerless and astonished, her very corporeality making the male detective think immediately of intercourse, as implied by 'sábanas revueltas y frases entrecortadas murmuradas al oído'.

Bef also appears to construct women as vulnerable, typically adhering to the notion of the woman as the object of the male gaze, pandering to notions of submission and passivity (2013b:180). However, the author uses various techniques throughout his work in order to thwart the desire of the implied male reader. This is evidenced by Andrea's awareness of the male gaze on her body. While with Suárez, she becomes uncomfortable with his gaze upon her body, in particular upon her breasts, 'Suárez sonrió y apuró su copa. Yo bebí un poco de vino, incómoda por la mirada con la que me observaba. Era como si enfocara en mis ojos pero la vista periférica se regodeara en mis senos' (221). Her awareness of not only his gaze but also the scopophilia implied by his peripheral gaze, which 'delights' in the sight of her breasts makes the reader aware of her two contrasting masks at this time. As Marcela, she displays herself in a particularly sexualised manner, as Andrea she does this in order to entrap Suárez. Acting as a double agent, she allows Suárez to believe he is in control of her – gazing into her eyes – but ultimately knows exactly what he is doing – considering her breasts. She allows him to suspend his belief that he is in control to the extent that the scene and their conversation, watched and listened to remotely by the DEA team, disgusts Agent Dávalos, who 'siente un vuelco en el estómago' (224) to see Andrea acting. His discomfort with Andrea's ease with trickery has been previously alluded to when, as Marcela, Andrea had met with

Suárez for the first time. Listening in to their conversation, 'El tono con que la mujer agradece le produce una punzada de celos que le aguijonea el pecho mientras lamenta que todas las mujeres sean iguales, todas' (180). This concept is outlined by Copeland (2004) in relation to the female detective, who posits:

> As liberating as […] transformations may appear superficially, they are after all nothing more than well-calculated performances […] Detached and calculating, she acknowledges that in scrutinizing her subjects – either male or female […] She assumes a position that allows her not only to see but also to impose order on what is seen. (255)

The duality of the masked female detective being in control of the scene whilst simultaneously playing up to male desire is highlighted when Bef juxtaposes two opinions through the use of indirect free style, '[Andrea] aprieta sus muslos para sentir el bulto del SIG. La tranquiliza tener el arma ahí [… Suárez] desliza su dedo índice por la mejilla de ella. – Eres preciosa -' (228). Dávalos has been privy to the masks women are able to assume, and has little concern for Andrea undertaking a dangerous mission, instead identifying more with money-launderer Suárez, viewing him as the victim.

Andrea performs an assumed femininity, which, ultimately, provides her with the answers she needs in order to crack the case and arrest Suárez. Her performance and deception are so successful that she causes anxiety even in the men who know she has assumed an act.

4.4. Generic Borrowings and Disguise: The Postmodern Crime Novel

This section considers Bef's work as a postmodern take on the Mexican crime novel, constituting a clear criticism of Mexican society through some unusual means. Here, I discuss nuanced issues of both genre and content within *Hielo negro* and *Cuello blanco*, but first it is necessary to situate postmodernity in a Mexican context, and to briefly outline how my work will approach the phenomenon.

In considering *Hielo negro* and *Cuello blanco* as Mexican postmodernist detective novels, my work will demonstrate how the novels function as an ontological development of McHale's (1987: 9) postulation of the modernist crime genre as the 'epistemological genre par excellence', and to what ends. I also take into account scholarship on the Mexican postmodern detective text in particular, taking into account Vinarov's (2006:14) investigation, which posits the genre as one which accomplishes the following:

> Supera los límites de un género que siempre ha sido muy cerrado. Altera las reglas, mezcla y dispersa los componentes, elimina la idea de un orden final, de la resolución concreta, de la armonía reestablecida. Al mismo tiempo, multiplica los niveles de la narración, crea trasfondos ocultos, establece nexos inesperados y

> rompe conexiones tradicionales. Como resultado, se abre para contactos con otros géneros literarios y los textos múltiples de la literatura universal.

As such, this thesis posits that Bef's work reaffirms Vinarov's findings as a representation of a postmodern detective series which is connected to genres other than that of detective fiction.

Williams and Rodríguez (2002:17) see postmodernism in Mexico as establishing itself in literary works from the 1960s onwards. They reference Carlos Fuentes and Julio Cortázar's works as questioning 'la búsqueda filosófica occidental de verdades universales', and also understand that 'Hutcheon y otros consideran fenómenos como el pastiche ejemplos de las contradicciones inherentes que son esenciales a la cultura posmoderna' (22). According to Williams and Rodríguez, the crime narrative is a superlative manner through which to demonstrate a postmodernist bent, using Vicente Leñero's 1964 novel *Los albañiles* as an excellent example of this, the novel using the search for a killer in order to expand upon 'los límites epistemológicos que definen la verdad' (31). This section therefore pays close attention to metafiction, double-coding, pastiche and self-awareness. Here, I consider the structure of Bef's novels, a possible reading of his novels as a re-worked fairy tale and the use of a self-aware feminicide trope in order to evidence attempts at re-writing and re-purposing Mexican detective fiction.

In their work on Mexican postmodernity, Williams and Rodríguez use Jencks' theory of the postmodern in order to outline their understanding of it, 'Para Jencks, un diseño posmoderno común es el del rascacielos de impecables líneas modernas, pero con columnas griegas clásicas en abierta oposición con el diseño moderno' (49). This image of the postmodern skyline is one which is helpful when considering Bef's work. As a detective novel, it follows certain generic regulations: murder, detectives, a comment on society and dangerous women abound. However, it is the structure of Bef's *Detective Mijangos* series that firstly draws the reader's attention to its postmodern play. Shifts in person from first to third are common, and the scene in which Lizzy and Andrea meet on the beach at the end of *Hielo negro* — quoted in this thesis on p.149 — is a clear example of this. The entire mini-chapter appears as a block of text, void of punctuation and constantly fluctuating between two unnamed persons, assumed to be Lizzy and Andrea. As the chapter progresses, any remarks that may identify the character who is speaking fade away, and the reader therefore goes through the text, questioning who is who, wondering whether it really matters that either of the women identify themselves. Bef's detective text gives the reader the opposite of what they expect at the end of a such a narrative: there is no clarity concerning the novel's *dénouement,* and the villain and the law

enforcer merge into one in 'el espejo inexorable que nos une *de ambos lados de la ley'*. Bef plays on the epistemological genre as recognised by McHale by situating the most important moment of his text in an ontological context. This double coding and duplicitious nature of the scene renders the novel's *dénouement* thoroughly postmodern, as the reader truly has no idea in what ways Andrea and Lizzy are so different: good and evil, contrary to tradition, appear to have much in common.

The notions of good and evil, are, of course, concepts which are seen throughout various literary cannons, and here I wish to posit that such a focus in Bef's novels also invites thought on the series as not only forming part of the detective fiction genre. For example, Vinarov (2006: 14) opens her study into Mexican postmodern crime fiction with the declaration that 'Las novelas detectivescas de la metaficción […] ocupan una posición importante en la literatura mexicana porque logran combinar los mejores elementos del género tradicional con las innovaciones y experimentos'. Vinarov therefore echoes Jencks' explanation of the postmodern as the image of the skyscraper constructed with the ancient Greek columns. With regards to the *Detective Mijangos* series, the presence of the old and the new is also clear, and I argue that Bef purposefully includes tenets of fairy tales in his narratives as a means not only to discuss notions of good and evil in contemporary society, but also as a vehicle through which to present gender and sexuality.

The notion of the good/evil or princess/witch divide is significant within the series, particularly as it further subverts and plays on the divide that González Rodríguez (2012) and Váldez-Cardenas (2009) see as forming the 'pure woman' and 'other' dichotomy. Bef's work appears to denaturalise the models of femininity conveyed by the Grimm brothers' fairy tales, such as *Snow White*. Bacchilega (1997:29) maintains that *Snow White* 'is a particularly fixed and mimetic narrative', as it re-iterates the passive (even unconscious), beautiful female character who is limited when it comes to making her own decisions which reproduces the passively beautiful female character with limited options.' Cardi (2013: 195) argues that the inclusion of a fairy tale trope such as Snow White in narratives can be viewed as a 'methodological experiment to break away from the conventional narrative form'. Our attention is first drawn to this parallel with the fairy tale in *Hielo negro*, as the Colombians await Lizzy in the boardroom:

> Esperaron unos minutos, observando los cuadros que colgaban de los muros. Eran imágenes de los enanos de Blancanieves y Bambi, dibujados con la destreza de un niño de primaria copiando un crono.
> Quince minutos después, precedida por Pancho, su guarura tuerto, Lizzy entró a la sala de juntos. A los colombianos les sorprendió lo joven que era. Ninguno de ellos resistió atisbar por al menos unos segundos el fondo de su escote. (2013a:61)

The attention paid to the artwork displayed within the room is of course a purposeful act by Bef, as significant as the fifteen minutes the men are left to contemplate the drawings. Having the men wait for her demonstrates Lizzy's instrumentality to their business, and highlights the extent to which she holds control over the proceedings. During the time the group of men wait they are able to pass their time considering the artwork on display in the meeting room. The drawings of Snow White and Bambi – which later turn out to have been created by real-life serial killer and rapist John Wayne Gacy – at first contrast with the cartel group. These men, criminals whose product plays a part in international corruption and vice, sit with images commonly associated with childhood innocence and happy endings. The works are clearly not Disney originals, a company widely known to perpetuate images of women as princesses fulfilled by the love of a man with money and land. We read the drawings at first as the work of a young child who likes Disney, and then we enter into the realisation that the drawings are the efforts of a murderer and rapist, adding a horrific and unsettling atmosphere to the drawings. The reader, in the same way, can also then interpret the meeting in a similar way, above all in relation to the Snow White portrait.

In the fairy tale, Snow White's goals are to marry her one true love, and to be the fairest of them all, and the maxim of the story appears to be that if you are good, sweet, pure and beautiful, you will marry a handsome prince. *Blancanieves* really is the epitome of goodness, even turning dwarf Grumpy into a personal fan, as she acts as a prism for the perfect image of female passive domesticity. The *Blancanieves* comparison in this case is significant to the entire plot spanning *Hielo negro* and *Cuello blanco* as, similarly to the idea of the inverted superheroine who follows her quest and battles against her own personal evil, in this case detective Mijangos, here we see Lizzy cast as *Blancanieves* and Mijangos, the enforcer of the law, as the Evil Queen. This good/evil role reversal within these particular female characters is evident as Lizzy leads a group of seven men, all of whom are taken with her beauty, presented as 'el fondo de su escote', from the cocaine business to 'el mercado emergente de las metanfetaminas' (63). Her idea to leave the cocaine business at first shocks the Colombians, who 'se quedaron boquiabiertos' (62) and her godfather, '-Mija, ¿estás loca? ¿Qué crees que estás haciendo?' (63) However, at the end of a presentation made by Lizzy enlightening the seven men present on 'las infinitas posibilidades de recombinaciones químicas que podían lograrse en sus laboratorios' (63):

> La reina del cártel de Constanza redefinía las relaciones comerciales con sus socios sudamericanos.
> El Paisano, desde su silla, sonreía orgulloso.

'Ésa es mija.' (63)

Lizzy, in her role as *Blancanieves*, has convinced *Gruñón* to trust her, and so they should all live happily ever after from the goodness Lizzy has brought them – a designer drug.

If we consider Bef's work as in part an attempt to re-write the fairy tale, we can therefore also interpret *Hielo negro* and *Cuello blanco* as mutations from the archetypal generic crime novel. This is clear throughout the novel and present in the mixture of the US hard-boiled genre being distorted by the presence of the fairy tale trope, an addition of profoundly Mexican vocabulary, imagery associated more with graphic novels and particularly Mexican socio-cultural issues. The notion that Bef creates a new sub-genre within the Mexican field can be furthered by considering the notion of the mirror within *Hielo negro,* which Lizzy describes when coming face-to-face with Andrea for the first time on the beach as 'el espejo inexorable que nos une' (228). Cardi (2013:200) sees the magic mirror as used in *Snow White* as 'The judge of […] aesthetic standard, sets the two women [Snow White and the Evil Queen] against each other and frames them, respectively, as the beautiful angel-woman and the wicked monster-woman'. Using characters who can be seen to identify with tropes of the fairy tale, the novels can be interpreted as hybrid examples of the detective text, rendering his novels thoroughly postmodern.

4.4.1. Genre Blurring, Sexual Violence, and Titillation

Vinarov's earlier citation concerning 'trasfondos ocultos' and 'nexos inesperados' as integral to the postmodern detective novel are concepts that are absolutely upheld by Bef's work: true to the darkness and unexpected nature Vinarov associates with such a genre, the author incorporates such paradigms in an uncomfortable and surprising manner. Lee's (2012) study on the generic hybridity at play in Lourdes Portillo's *Señorita extraviada* explores the subject of feminicide, and notes the sociocultural issues which affect the view of women in Mexico:

> Es de notar que el género detectivesco se inicia con la usurpación violenta del orden y el bienestar, que en el caso de Juárez son los cuerpos de las mujeres víctimas. Aquí es importante recordar que el cuerpo (sexual o sexuado) de la mujer está marcado y construido dentro de una complejidad inmensa de diversos discursos socioculturales. (309)

Feminicide, which I understand as in no way limited solely to Ciudad Juárez, is therefore a consequence of sociocultural issues in Mexico. Lee attempts to explain this complex context, concluding that:

> El número asombroso de cuerpos de mujeres asesinadas después de ser agredidas sexualmente, así como otro número mayor de desaparecidas, ha sido recurrentemente conectado con la creciente industrialización y urbanización por la que está pasando Ciudad Juárez, lo que la ha identificado como 'model of

> globalization' que 'is spinning out of control', tal como lo pone Portillo al inicio de *Señorita extraviada*. En este proceso acelerado de urbanización y globalización que conlleva una concentración poblacional masiva y diversa en el espacio limitado de la ciudad, surgen irregularidades y anomalías que sugieren la presencia de uno o más asesinos en series, en un contexto urbano, como es la norma convencional del género negro. (308)

Hielo negro and *Cuello blanco* are each novels that, as previously discussed, use violence and sex throughout. Feminicide in Mexico is a problematic, systemic phenomenon, and now is receiving more international attention both in media and in fictional or semi-fictional narrative, such as *2666* by Roberto Bolaño (2004), *Huesos en el desierto* by Sergio González Rodríguez (2002), and Gerardo Naranjo's *Miss Bala* (2011) are only a few narratives dealing with the issue. In this section I question the purpose of the apparent glamorisation of such acts, which Bef's work could be interpreted as promoting.

Hielo negro opens with a scene in which security guard, Ceferino/*el Oaxaca*, bored at work, fantasises about his wife:

> Venticuatro horas antes había llegado a su turno de vigilancia aún agitado tras haber penetrado a Margarita sobre la mesa del diminuto cuarto que rentaban […] Ella trabajaba como doméstica […] Después de diez años casados y tres hijos, el Oaxaca seguía encontrando irresistibles las nalgas de su mujer. Le parecía fascinante […] la textura de durazno de aquel trasero moreno que solía recorrer con la lengua antes de atacar a mordidas.' (2013a: pp.11-12)

From the outset, discomfort and impracticality is implicit in sex – Margarita is penetrated on a table in a less-than-spacious room. Her enjoyment is by no means considered. Bef's scene is one of sheer consumption, attributing positive adjectives to Margarita's body such as 'irresistibles' and 'fascinante', and this domineering, *machista* outlook is heightened by the author's use of violent imagery such as 'atacar a mordidas'. This, in conjunction with the piece of information that Margarita used to work as a maid, again seems to echo Paz's interpretation of the view of women in Mexico of the 1950s, and that of the *femme attrapée* – domestic, animal and symbolically associated with reproduction. The security guard continues his daydream, remembering the previous evening:

> La esposa se inclinó sobre el lavadero para buscar el detergente cuando sintió las manos de su marido palpándola con torpeza.
> - Los niños… - murmuró, sabiendo de antemano que no serviría de nada […]
>
> Ya Ceferino había levantado la falda y bajado la pantaloneta. Pronto Margarita comenzó a sentir las dentelladas dolorosas hundirse en su carne. Pensó en las marcas que solía dejarle.
> - Me lastimas – dijo en tono de ruego. Consciente de la inutilidad de suplicar, cerró los ojos. Sintió el primer embate. (2013a:12)

In the midst of performing a domestic chore, Margarita is interrupted by her husband, 'palpándola con torpeza' clearly indicating the negative feelings Margarita has towards her

husband. She becomes a clearly established victim, having no choice in the act about to be committed upon her body, without her consent. The pain she feels and the evidence that will be left on her body after her husband bites her clearly marks the complete dichotomy between their interpretations of the scene. Whereas Ceferino derives pleasure from sexually aggressing his wife, she feels nothing but pain, 'me lastimas', and will be physically marked by their encounter. Her body experiences an 'embate' – she is attacked, violated. The uneasy scene continues:

> Escuchó los gemidos de su marido. Apretó los labios. A Ceferino no le gustaba que se quejara. En unos minutos todo había terminado, sólo quedaba el dolor. Se desplomó en el piso, ocultando sus lágrimas, ahogando sus sollozos. Temía enfurecer a su esposo.
> - Y no andes de puta por ahí, o te parto tu madre – dijo Ceferino al salir, mientras se subía la bragueta. (2013a:12)

Bef here introduces some linguistic slippage. Given the context, the reader may at first understand that Margarita tightens her vaginal lips, *labio* and *labios vaginales* being used interchangeably in Spanish to designate the genital term. This slippage furthers the reader's awareness of the unpleasant scene, and we only become aware of which lips are being spoken of as it is explained that Ceferino does not like his wife to complain. The scene of violation ends, with a threat of further violence, seeing Ceferino accusing his wife of prostitution and/or sleeping with other men. This scene creates instant pity for the archetypal *femme attrapée*, but also piques the interest of those readers who may find the scene erotic, identifying instead with *el Oaxaca,* who, now back at work, 'al recordarlo en la caseta de vigilancia, el policía tuvo una erección' (2013a:12). The male authority figure is presented as a figure of hate, deplorable, sexually perverted and egocentric, whereas the domestic housewife is represented as a figure of pity and shame. The reader becomes complicit as a voyeuristic secondary witness to the scene. This complicity in *el Oaxaca*'s actions draws the reader's attention to the voyeuristic pleasures at the heart of the detective genre. Though perhaps scenes of rape in Bef's work may be understood as present purely for the sexual titillation of the reader, it is also plausible that the author asks the reader to recognise the treatment and views of victims in such extreme scenes rather than to engage in active enjoyment of female characters' abject states.

Perhaps one of the most recent and most famous instances which has created similar questions concerning the representation of rape in literature has been in Steig Larsson's *Millennium* trilogy. Regarding the scenes of rape in the Swedish *noir* series, Abby L. Ferber questions the sensationalist repercussions of including scenes of rape in narratives, concluding that Larsson's *The Girl With the Dragon Tattoo* goes beyond mere

entertainment and titillation, but questions the potential impact Larsson's work may have on sufferers of sexual and domestic abuse (see Ferber, 2012). Similarly, with regards to Bef's work one must also question the repercussions of Bef's pornosadic episodes in the context of femicide, despite the author's wishes for such scenes to cause the reader 'repulsión'.

Furthermore, one interpretation of the author's use of rape imagery and rape threats is demonstrative of Mexico's thriving rape culture. Scenes of sexual violence and threatened rape open both *Hielo negro* and *Cuello blanco*. In *Cuello blanco* businessman Óscar Salgado is carjacked by two men on his way to work and driven home, where, handcuffed and held by two men, he is forced to give up the bank details of one particular client, Lizzy. If he refuses, his wife will be raped in front of him. One of the two men begins to take off his trousers:

> El segundo hombre había amordazado a Bárbara. Ya manoseaba sus senos con lascivia. Parecía disfrutar la manera en que la mujer pataleaba.
> - ¿Prefiere que ultrajemos a su vieja que darnos esa info, licenciado?
> - Ultrajemos.
> - Me voy a tener que sacrificar, mi lic – ya el cerdo le había arrancado las pantaletas. Óscar sintió ganas de vomitar cuando lo vio olisquear la lencería de su mujer.
> - […] Lo vio embestir a su mujer. Bajó la cabeza. (2013b: pp.14-15)

Bárbara is saved just in time and Salgado is given the opportunity to kill the two men. The disturbing scene is soon forgotten about, mentioned by Salgado to his business partner at their next meeting, and thereafter dismissed. This scene, like those which see Lizzy and Andrea in homoerotically-charged moments, is problematic as it appears to be indulging the reader in pornosadic voyeurism, not only rendering the reader a secondary witness to the horror, but also rendering gender violence spectacle. Bef appears to champion sexual violence in order to play to the largely unspoken heterosexual desires of male reader. Despite claiming to write scenes involving strong, sexually violent imagery in order to illicit a reaction of 'repulsión' from his readership, the author's use of rape as an opening scene on both occasions is demonstrative of the existence of a rape culture within Mexico. Though the author states that 'los personajes que ejercen violencia hacia las mujeres en mis novelas acaban siempre mal',[72] and though these characters are indeed violently killed, it can be argued that the violence that ensues after sexually violent scenes in which women are *always* the victims in *Hielo negro* and *Cuello blanco* also plays to the titillation of the male reader, who is then encouraged to interpret violence as a heroic act.

[72] Interview with Bef.

The use of rape as a plot device, unintentionally or otherwise, demonstrates the extent to which patriarchal ideals and rape culture permeate Mexican society and literature, even in the work of an author who claims to have attempted to achieve the opposite.

This is made obvious in a third example from the first novel in the series. *El Médico*, a doctor and chemist employed by Lizzy to engineer the artificial drug *hielo negro*, remembers his adolescence and a trip with his father to a strip club, where the teenager is unmoved by the female bodies in front of him. Returning to his father's medical practice, they meet the surgery's secretary, Azucena:

> El rostro del doctor cambió de inmediato cuando oyó a su hijo decir 'quiero que Azucena se desnude'. El padre volteó para encontrarse con la mirada inexpresiva de su hijo, que tantas veces le había hecho pensar en un arácnido, observando la secretaria con la misma pasión con que contemplaba la colección de timbres de abuelo.
> […] - Entre al privado y desnúdese – La mirada del jefe llenó de terror a la secretaria. Azucena se levantó y obedeció. El hijo la siguió sin que en su rostro se contrajera ni un músculo. El padre esperó en el vestíbulo. Escuchó a su secretaria rogar a su hijo que no la explorara con instrumentos quirúrgicos. Cuando la chica comenzó a gritar, el doctor tomó una revista para hojearla. (2013a: pp.83-84)

Fittingly, Azucena is forced into her own rape not by physical domination, but simply by the doctor's gaze, which terrifies the secretary. The doctor, and his son, soon to become a medic himself, are able to reify Azucena and control her through the use of their gaze. Such undertones of the medical gaze, as elicited through the doctor's surgery, and the mention of the 'instrumentos quirúrgicos' underline Azucena's role as object within the scene, and Bef reinforces this by not permitting the viewer to see what *el Médico* sees, or to experience what he experiences. His rape of Azucena is just for him, a privilege not to be disturbed, demonstrating that spectatorship implies control. The doctor's physical reaction to look the other way and to read a magazine instead of assisting the woman is the act that most clearly underlines the novel's preoccupation with the treatment of women. As Azucena suffers a sexually violent attack, she is ignored, much like the many missing victims of femicide. Azucena is simply seen as property, coinciding with Lee's (2012: 309) arguments that:

> Ha sido generalizada la idea de la mujer como propiedad del hombre, y de ella derivan las tradiciones hispanas del honor y la concepción de la violación de la mujer como ataque al nombre de la familia, y no como un asalto contra el individuo femenino.

Azucena, therefore, is used to demonstrate the power of masculinity in a male environment. This is underlined by *el Médico*'s father writing Azucena a cheque after her rape for three month's salary and murmuring 'por las molestias' (2013a:84) — an indication of how women are still viewed as property in this sense. The secretary has been

'disturbed', as though access to her own body/property has been suspended. Azucena's suicide immediately after her rape brings to light the difficult reality for women living in a systematically abusive patriarchal society as Mexico, potentially a sympathetic example within the texts.

Lee's (2012) argument that the use of sexual aggression and violence against women as a plot device in crime narratives is useful as a conclusion to this section on pushing the limits of the detective novel:

> La violación sexual – de la que las víctimas evitan hablar abiertamente – o el feminicidio – en que las víctimas no pueden hablar – se reducen a motivos sensacionalistas para crear historias y narrativas de acuerdo a las predisposiciones culturales de los no afectados o inclusive de los agresores. (312)

Bef's inclusion of such a polemic topic in his work demonstrates the darkness and unexpected nature that Vinarov associates with Mexican postmodern works. The inclusion of a feminicide trope also allows readers to question themselves. Why do we keep reading? Do we garner any sexual titillation out of rape scenes or scenes of possible rape? Why? Though it is tempting to view this as what Close (2012:204) describes as a 'pavada adolescente', the self-aware nature of the text *may* encourage the reader to question themselves over sexual violence against women. The presence of these scenes that have been discussed can be interpreted in many ways – as pandering to a male market, as developing an archetypal paradigm within crime fiction (the punishment of the woman and the eroticisation of the female corpse) or as encouraging thought and awareness of gender-motivated murder and aggression. It is because of these multiple interpretations that such a text riddled with double coding should be considered postmodern.

In this sense, Bef shares an approach to the uneasy topic of rape and violence against women with Chicana author Alicia Gaspar de Alba. Her 2005 publication *Desert Blood* is a fictional text which focuses on the transnational nature of feminicide. With its focus on the link between patriarchy, sex and pornography, I would agree with Mesmer (2012: 10) that Bef's novels, like de Alba's interpret sexual violence against women as 'a result of a clash between an overtly sexualized U.S. border culture and the more conservative Mexican gender roles as well as the Mexican patriarchal social discourse according to which independently acting women are regarded as whores.' Bef's awareness of these outdated opinions and approaches to women brings their plight to the forefront of the readers' minds. Though some of these scenes are arguably sexualised for a market of predominantly male readers, after close analysis one cannot interpret these scenes as wholly present for male sexual titillation. Bef attempts to unearth this 'nexo obscuro' of Mexico's social culture and attitude to women. Unfortunately, not all readers may garner

Bef's self-aware point, and these scenes may ultimately give readers more sexual pleasure than shocking them.

Bef's work, from examples of structure, to transgenericity, to shocking violent sexual content, is one that must be considered as postmodern. As Hutcheon argues, the postmodern text is particularly pertinent for an examination of and to pass comment on society. Bef's novels certainly do this, above all concerning the elastic and changing roles of women (though these roles may not necessarily be positive ones). However, his attempts to dialogue with negative issues such as violence against women may be interpreted as contributing to the sexualisation of women victims, perpetuating the pornosadic gaze and reinforcing rape culture. This is unfortunate in texts which dialogue with femininity and develop female gender performance so extensively otherwise.

4.5. Conclusion

Hielo negro and *Cuello blanco* may be interpreted as simply reiterating sensationalist hard-boiled pulp fiction. However, both novels reveal layers of societal comment on contemporary Mexico. Though authors such as Taibo II precede Bef in the serialised Mexican detective genre, Bef's work is unlike that produced in the country previously, as is evident in the series' focus on women and its characters who act as superheroes and/or fairy tale characters.

Similarly to Padura Fuentes, in including characters capable of mask, disguise and transvestism, Bef draws attention to his novels' functions as self-aware, transgenred, and metaliterary, in turn permitting the reader critical distance to consider, particularly I believe, the emancipatory and restrictive disguises of women in Mexico.

These disguises and identity constructions exist in reaction to those constructed during the last two centuries in the country, and incorporate new masks, such as that of the *narca*, who has developed along with the country's struggle with the drug war, forming a stark contrast to the victims of feminicide, and dialogue with North American creations, such as the *femme fatale*. Bef develops these identities, crucially offering an alternative to the corrupt vision of Mexican policing in the form of Andrea Mijangos, and an alternative to the view of women as specifically victims of Mexican patriarchy in Lizzy. Their hyper-violence links them, whether they are dispensing it or, like Azucena and Bárbara, they are the victims of it.

What also links the female characters of Bef's work is the hyper-sexuality rampant throughout his novels. Again, at first glance the inclusion of such sexualised scenes may

appear to pander to the assumed male reader of the detective novel, however it is these scenes which provide the reader with the greatest insight into the layers of masks and societal constructs within Mexico. What may at first appear to satisfy male sexual desire in fact comments on women's status in Mexico and addresses notions of bisexuality, homosexuality and desire within the country, providing the reader with a much more pliable figure of female gender and sexuality: in incorporating generic nuances and references to fairy tales, Bef makes room for a more colourful and important sub-genre within the Mexican literary paradigm.

However, though I consider Bef's awareness of feminicide as presented in the series in his work as at least demonstrating the problematics of a domineering patriarchal outlook in both Mexican society and in Mexican detective fiction, I also interpret the inclusion of a femicide trope as a way of allowing readers to constantly question their own understanding of the phenomenon.

Bef's approach to the uneasy topic of rape and violence against women demonstrates a clash between the American detective genre and Mexican patriarchal social discourse. It could be argued that the author's awareness of these outdated gender roles and approaches to women brings their plight to the forefront of the readers' minds. However, close readings of the novels demonstrate an eroticisation of female sexual subservience. That said, though some of these scenes are arguably sexualised for a market of predominantly male readers, after close analysis one cannot interpret these scenes as wholly present for male sexual titillation. Bef attempts to shed some light on a particularly dark moment in Mexico's social history. Unfortunately, Bef's objective of foregrounding 'voces femeninas muy sólidas' is well-hidden under scenes of hypersexualisation, titillation, and reductive imagery, and these scenes may ultimately provide readers with sexual pleasure rather than opening discussion on the systematic abuse of women within the genre, and within Mexico itself.

Chapter Five: Rogelio Guedea's *Colima* Trilogy: Sex, Lies, and Subjectivity

Introduction

This chapter examines the work of Mexican author Rogelio Guedea, and analyses genre blurring in his three detective fiction novels. I analyse Guedea's use of style and the representation of gender and sexuality across the trilogy, and posit that, due to the generic mutation and clear preoccupation with historical events such as political assassinations, land feuds, murders, and gender roles, these novels function as an in-depth, postmodern, and original criticism of Mexican society.

Born in Colima, western Mexico, in 1974, Guedea has been known primarily as an award-winning author of poetry. Due to his previous focus on poetry, his readership, it can be argued, is quite varied, attracting readers of his previous work as well as new readers already interested in the detective fiction genre. His *Colima* trilogy focuses on events linked to licenciado Abel Corona, and is a detective series which plays with genre convention. The trilogy, comprised of *Conducir un tráiler* (2008), *41* (2010), and *El crimen de Los Tepames* (2012), fictionalises several historical crimes which have taken place over the last century in various locations across Mexico. In the novels, however, these crimes and their investigations occur over a 35-year non-linear period during the novels, or over approximately an entire century during Mexico's history. The trilogy features several infamous murders in Colima's history, including the murder of the brother of a state governor (2000) and the murder of the Suárez brothers (1909). These are all cases concerning which Guedea has extensive knowledge, having practised as a lawyer in Colima.[73]

As discussed in the previous chapters of this work, the case studies chosen for this thesis are novels which play with and subvert the accepted, archetypal detective genre, offering postmodern takes on the tenets of detective fiction. The novels I have selected for analysis disguise and mutate the norms of detective fiction, and do not fit within a genre necessarily informed by an arbitrary list (as favoured by Todorov),[74] but instead function as a peripatetic genre which simply holds at its core a drive to discuss society and human nature. Just as Leonardo Padura's hero was an out-of-place detective, a self-aware author harbouring unspoken homoerotic undertones, and Bef's Andrea Mijangos is a female cartoon-like superhero in a world of female supervillains, Guedea subverts the

[73]For more details on the crimes and Guedea's interest in them see Nuñez, 2008.

[74] Todorov's purportedly rational list of the qualities of detective fiction, based on S.S. Van Dine's work, can be found in his 1977 work *The Poetics of Prose*.

genre, allowing room for criticism of Mexican society. These works develop the traditional concepts of detective fiction as it is globally understood and accepted. However, unlike the *Detective Mijangos* series and the *Mario Conde* tetralogy, in this chapter I examine the ways in which Guedea's metahistorical detective fiction goes even further to subvert genre norms so commonly associated with detective fiction, as discussed in the introduction to this thesis. Guedea presents the reader with an example of highly-subersive detective metafiction. His trilogy provides the reader with detectives who have to fight – and die – for the truth to be told. Here, heteroglossic plots based on historical events that intertwine within the narrative, yet stand separately in reality, provide an unsatisfying dénouement.

In order to demonstrate how Guedea subverts and re-approaches the detective genre within the *Colima* trilogy in order to create an original detective series which still encourages the reader to question their own reality, I discuss genre subversion and Guedea's use of style at length. In contrast to the more conventional examples of the genre, including work by Bef and Padura Fuentes, as well of that by American authors such as Robert Crais (*L.A. Requiem*: 1999), Guedea's style is highly convoluted. Guedea shifts between both first person narration and indirect free style. Names of family members, politicians, lawyers, detectives, and criminals abound, some with similar names, leaving the reader confused as to who is who. Characters are forgotten, resurface, and disappear again, confusing the reader as to their significance within the plot. The reader is left with little to no certainty of the overall plot of the series, its multilinear structure obscuring our view, whether or not we are aware of the historical basis at the heart of the novels.

The plot's complexity, the mixture of narrative styles, the multilinear structure, and the compression of time and intermingling of historical fact and characters require the reader not only to concentrate intensely when reading the novels, but also to question the concept of narrative truth, which is often accepted axiomatically in crime narratives (see Winks, 1981, Todorov, 1977, Hart, 1987, Merivale and Sweeney, 1999).[75] Guedea's work stands as a clear example of genre trouble, a phrase I use throughout this thesis in order to engage with concepts conveyed by Judith Butler (1990) in *Gender Trouble*. In her

[75] This is most obviously seen in the traditional approach to crime fiction, which sees the genre as one which is revelatory of hidden facts, 'The detective story means to ferret out the "truth", to reveal the unknown, to expose the criminal' (Copeland, 2004: 246). As previously outlined in the Introduction, Brian McHale expounded on this when calling detective texts 'The epistemological genre par excellence' (1987: 9).

seminal work, Butler questions incidences when an individual does not fit into the predetermined model of male or female, deeming gender trouble to constitute, 'the mobilization, subversive confusion, and proliferation of precisely those constitutive categories that seek to keep gender in its place by posturing as the foundational illusions of identity' (1990: 46). Such a concept of subversion can also be considered in relation to Guedea's work, and I posit that his trilogy acts as an example of genre trouble, undermining the genre's strict conventions. The most obvious example of this subversion is related to the figure of the detective himself. As a result, I see Guedea's work as an example of the more fluid detective genre: although the trilogy contains some traits common to the archetypal crime fiction serialization, the author also references tropes from other genres. Concepts and styles associated with romanticism, the historical novel, and drama are all present in the trilogy. This hybridity contributes to Guedea's work forming a mutated and reconstructed version of the archetypal detective novel. Though convolution and confusion are intrinsic to traditional detective narratives, the end of such novels conventionally offers the reader a satisfying rectification. As has been previously mentioned, such a dénouement is entirely absent from Guedea's novels.

In my analysis of these novels, I will also consider the discrepancy regarding the often-ubiquitous figure of the dangerous woman, in this thesis clearly present in works by Bef and Padura. *Colima* appears to lack the *femme fatale* character, and I believe the lack of such an intrinsic figure within the crime genre can be interpreted as Guedea's own comment on contemporary Mexican society as having no space for such a multiplicitous, threatening female character. However, as the dangerous woman is not present to trouble and threaten the detective's patriarchal structures, I understand Guedea chooses instead to cause axiety for Corona by highlighting the detective figure's non-normative underlying sexuality. This challenges and undermines the assumed, and crucially, the consciously written heteronormativity of the male detective at the heart of the novel. Here, I refer to gender theories concerning Mexican masculinities to discuss masking and masks of virility (McKee Irwin, 2003, Gutmann, 1996, Ramos, 1938, Paz, 1950). I understand the detective figure as often representative of the dominant patriarchal framework in society, hence why the heterosexuality of the male detective is often reaffirmed through his virility and sexual activity with female characters, either conquered during the act of sex, or rendered ultimately passive in their death.

In order to fully consider the role of patriarchal gender order within Guedea's trilogy, I also investigate the representation of female characters in the series, which I

argue unearths 'the drama of masculinity [being] performed on the body of the helpless woman' (Franco, 2014:16) most often presented in Guedea's work through the act of rape (post-mortem). This, I understand, as demonstrative of Guedea's approach to commenting on the state of womanhood in contemporary Mexico.

I conclude this chapter by positing that the *Colima* trilogy constitutes a thorough genre subversion, which subtly underlines the author's preoccupation with the current state of Mexican politics. The three historical criminal events that the trilogy focuses on - the murder of the Suárez brothers in 1909, the exploits of paedophile Succar Kuri across Mexico and the homoerotic murders perpetrated by Miguel Ángel Amaro Huerta, the latter two arrested in the mid-2000s - makes the reader wonder why such crimes separated by a century should suddenly be connected in Guedea's work. I propose that through the inclusion of such diverse crimes from such different time frames in Mexico (pre-revolutionary and neo-liberal), Guedea stresses that the long-standing institutions of patriarchal Mexico are incapable of change in a society in which impunity rules.[76] I begin by focusing on the concept of truth, integral to the crime genre and a long-standing subject of great debate.

5.1. Truth and Subjectivity in Fictional Narratives

When in his 1974 paper *The Historical Text as Literary Artifact*, Hayden White coined the term *metahistory,* he questioned the 'epistemological status of historical *explanations'* (1974:277, emphasis in the original) within the literary context of historical texts, recognising that the notion of truth as simple became complicated and nuanced by its multiplicitous and subjective interpretations within the fictional text. White's overarching argument is that history is simply an example of narrative prose formed by literary convention and the historian/author's imagination: 'The important point is that most historical sequences can be emplotted in a number of different ways, so as to provide different interpretations of those events and to endow them with different meanings' (282). For White, doubling, bias, and construction are intrinsic to texts which focus on historical events, and certainty regarding historical accuracy is erased within such texts. White argues that historical truth is a construct, and I apply this approach to Guedea's novels, since it becomes clear that these texts use purportedly true events (*41* opens with the declaration 'Esta novela está basada en un hecho real', 7) as their basis, only to then subvert truth claims by weaving a complex multi-linear narrative that implicitly questions

[76] For more on the impunity culture in Mexican society and politics, see Alvarado, 2015.

truth. This lays bare the fact that historical truth is a construct and, in Guedea's trilogy, the certainty that we associate with reality and its representations are queried. Of course, ambiguity and uncertainty are central to the detective genre, however Guedea's work is so heavily based on such ambiguous sentiments, confusing plots, and a thorough blurring of events that one could argue deliberately lays bare what White refers to as the 'historical imagination'. White argues that historians employ the 'historical imagination' when depicting the past, and that therefore the historian relies upon the narrative strategies of the literary writer/author of fiction (294). Given these concepts, I understand Guedea's work as emplotting historical events within his narratives to give his work additional meaning: to allow the reader to question where the boundaries between factual reconstruction and imaginative recreation lie, highlighting historical truth as an artificial construct and therefore forming a negative comment on truth.

Concepts such as ambivalence and ambiguity in addition to doubling are seen as integral to the postmodern text. As I will discuss, Guedea's work can be interpreted as a postmodern manipulation of real events within a fictional narrative. As outlined in the Introduction and Chapter Two, I use Hutcheon's thoughts on historiographic metafiction as a means through which to investigate novels 'whose metafictional self-reflexivity (and intertextuality) renders their implicit claims to historical veracity somewhat problematic, to say the least' (1989:3). This permits a questioning of truth, a notion embedded in the detective genre. Furthermore, considering this thesis's focus of the effects of postmodernism within the detective text, it is significant to bear in mind Hutcheon's (pp.4-5) interpretations of the traits of historiographic metafiction: 'In the postmodern novel the conventions of both fiction and historiography are simultaneously used and abused, installed and subverted, asserted and denied.' Guedea's work is a clear example of this. As will be discussed, the changes in style and the mingling of fact and fiction cause the reader to question any claims to certainty whatsoever in the texts.[77]

Doubling is intrinsic to the series. As a consequence, fiction is doubled into history and vice versa as fiction becomes threaded into historical fact, the two becoming intertwined and hard to distinguish. Abel becomes the living double of his dead brother; the theme of corruption appears to mimic that of reality in the current political climate in

[77] Of course, Jorge Ibargüengoitia's *Las muertas* (1977) is a text which also comes to mind within a Mexican literary context which corresponds to Guedea's own style of interlacing fact and fiction in his novels. Ibargüengoitia begins his text by alerting the reader that some of the events in the narrative were real, and that all characters are imaginary. Guedea, like Valle, goes one step further than this, by not only alluding to real events, but also to real people, further blurring our understanding of the line drawn between fact and fiction.

Mexico. Parody and reflections are rife in Guedea's Colima, and I argue that his work therefore falls into the original subgenre that I define as detective metafiction, a literary category which truly champions the postmodern. Hutcheon (1989:5) famously sees doubling and parody as signifiers of the postmodern, 'The double (historical/literary) nature of this intertextual parody is one of the major means by which this paradoxical (and defining) nature of postmodernism is textually inscribed'. This is particularly visible in the confusing, subverted, heteroglossic, double-encoded style in which Guedea presents his narratives.

In their extensive collection of essays on metaphysical detective fiction, Merivale and Sweeney (1999:7) consider this subgenre as being intrinsically linked with metaphysical detective fiction, outlined in the introduction to this thesis as provoking questioning on the limits of knowledge and genre. I posit that metaphysical detective fiction is inherently linked with what I term detective metafiction. Such fiction, as evidenced by Guedea's work, is also intrinsically postmodern, and, significantly, uses a technique of emplotting narratives with their own metanarratives, making the reader hyperaware of the text which they are reading, and thereby of the purported veracity and purpose of the text itself. Again, questions concerning concepts of knowledge, knowing, truth, subjectivity and interpretation are precisely those with which Guedea's trilogy dialogues closely. Such concepts are intrinsic to the trilogy as the reader is left unsure as to the veracity of many of Corona's claims, the timeline of the narratives, how much has been fictionalised and whether any character can truly be trusted.

The questioning of truth within detective fiction distorts the typical style of the genre, and places emphasis on the ambiguity of narrative truth in a genre which is traditionally associated with unveiling truth. Merivale and Sweeney (1) hypothesise that the metaphysical/postmodern detective novel which questions subjectivity and the limits of knowledge is that which has the greatest 'unsettling effects' on the reader. These unsettling effects may come from the reader's identification with the subject in question.

The anxiety which runs throughout the novels is evident in Guedea's style more generally: the reader is never certain who or what to put their faith in, or whether they can put their faith in anything at all as the narratives progress. As readers, we are denied the omniscience so closely associated with the traditional detective genre. The concept of truth, so intrinsically associated with the archetypal detective novel, both enigma-style and hard-boiled, is an ambiguous concept by definition. As I will demonstrate, in *41* and *El crimen de Los Tepames,* nothing is certain, and manipulation is omnipresent.

This chapter incudes a discussion on genre subversion, here approached in three subsections: Convoluted Style, then Convoluted Truths, and Detecting Trouble. I give examples from the three novels which best demonstrate how the author expands and blurs archetypes of the detective genre through his detective metafiction. In order to do so, in Convoluted Style I begin with a discussion of Guedea's postmodernist narrative techniques, focusing on how this affects our understanding of the narrative, as well as the reader's thwarted expectations of the detective genre being typically conducive to a truth narrative. This, I posit, causes the reader to question whether the texts are in effect lies, and whether there is anything in the trilogy that they can trust at all. In Convoluted Truths, I continue to concentrate on the final two novels in the trilogy,[78] discussing the use of historical references and intertextual novels as a development on the standard format of the police procedural, concluding that the historical backdrop to the series complicates our view of reality, and overall heightens the readers' awareness of theoretical and social constructions within contemporary Mexico. In the third section related to genre, Detecting Trouble, I discuss the figure of the (unusual) detective protagonist himself, Abel Corona, whose character appears to expose contemporary Mexican anxieties of non-adherence to patriarchal frameworks, as well as compounding the trilogy's underlying anxious tone, founded on lies. Here, I conclude that Guedea's mutation and manipulation of the genre subverts the norms in order to encourage his reader to question the nature of truth in modern Mexico, saturated by a climate of lies and manipulation.

Moving on to considering representations of gender and sexuality, in the fourth section, *Practising Unsafe Sex,* I focus on the representations of sex in relation to archetypal depictions of sexuality within the genre, rape culture, and non-normative sexualities, concluding that Guedea's work purposefully troubles the reader's understandings of sexuality, and provokes uneasy questions with, perhaps, even more uncomfortable answers. Unlike Bef but more similarly to Padura, Guedea successfully allows his reader to question their own reality, here accomplished without posing any direct questions.

[78] *Conducir un tráiler* deals mainly with Abel's family problems and does not dialogue so explicitly with the fictionalisation of historical fact. The only instance of historiographic metafiction in *Conducir un tráiler* is evidenced by the death of Ismael, Abel's brother. By the end of the trilogy, the reader is aware that Ismael was killed by *el Japonés*, who, as previously mentioned, appears as a fictionalised mixture of two notorious Mexican criminals: prolific paedophile Succar Kuri and homophobic murderer Miguel Ángel Amaro Huerta.

5.2. Convoluted Style

Corona's role changes throughout the trilogy, and he is never referred to as a detective, despite carrying out various acts typically associated with the traditional sleuth. At first, Corona is introduced as a clerk appointed at Colima's *procuraduría* by his elder brother and lawyer, Ismael. Each novel has a complex plot structure, with the first two using non-linear timeframes to follow the Corona family's issues with land, murder, and money. *Conducir* follows Abel Corona across Mexico after discovering a previous girlfriend is now pregnant, as well as the sexually-motivated murder of his gay brother Ismael and his return to Colima to take his dead brother's place in the prosecutor's office. In the second novel in the series, *41*, Abel is entirely absent from the action, only being referenced once in passing by the department's two 'sabuesos' (2008:192), the closest examples of traditional detectives available within the series, Román and Sabino. Opening with the discovery of the mutilated body of the gay brother of a successful government official, which did take place in 2001, [79] the novel's title references both the calibre of the bullets used during the novel's murders and another historical event which took place in 1901, which saw 41 men arrested in Mexico City for taking part in a dance at which half the men attended dressed as women (see García, 2012). During this second multilinear and heteroglossic novel, the reader follows the life of *el Japonés*, a character who is the result of the combination of two real-life criminals who murdered and/or committed sexual crimes in Mexico: Miguel Ángel Amaro Huerta and Succar Kuri. The reader also surveys Sabino and Román's investigations into a string of brutal murders against homosexuals, continuing from the Ismael's murder in the first novel. *El crimen* ties together the murder of the notorious Suárez brothers in 1901 in Colima with the murderous work of Miguel Ángel Amaro Huerta and Succar Kuri's paedophilic crimes, while dialoguing with the intricacies of the now returned Abel Corona's private life and sexuality. The series ends with hard-working, bright, epistemological seekers of the truth Román and Sabino being murdered for performing their jobs well (imprisoning the mastermind within the Federal Government who did not only allow, but also encouraged and at times took part in murder and paedophilia, and who connected the Suárez brothers' murders with the crimes in *41*).

The series clearly engages with *noir* tropes. This is perhaps most obvious in *El crimen* (2012), in which Corona is on occasion used as a device to remind the reader of

[79] For information on the murder of Luis Eduardo Vázquez Montes, including the sexually-motivated murders of other men in the Colima area about which Guedea also writes his fiction, González Cárdenas, 2004.

the text's own self-awareness as a *policiaca* novel. The sleepy towns in which *El crimen* is set in the region of Colima are contrasted against Corona's own conceptions of situations, 'de pronto vuelve a tener la certeza de que lo van a matar' (76). In a text in which certainty in negated by the style of the novel, as will be discussed, the reader becomes further aware of the genre of text they are reading. The inclusion of *noir* tropes, such as sentiments of disillusionment, bleak outlooks on life and society, and corruption are incorporated into Guedea's work along with particularly *noir* imagery in order to further stand out. The image of murderous *comandante* Darío Pizano's truck looms large in the narrative, and appears to be a reminder not only for the reader but also for the characters involved in the book of the novel's status as hard-boiled detective fiction. Just when Corona feels safe in his home, it is here he feels most threatened by the truck, which, like its passengers, appear to have come from another world in comparison to the sleepy road on which Corona lives: 'Antes de llegar a la puerta de salida, alcanza a ver por la rendija de arriba una camioneta negra, vidrios polarizados y quemacocos' (76).

Tropes of the archetypal detective novel are continued and also subverted in *41,* which immediately introduces the reader to a scene of criminality and violence: a child on his way to school notices a car has a large smear of blood across its boot. The Colima authorities are called to open the boot of the car and later identify the body within. Guedea keeps the reader in suspense:

> El niño que va rumbo a la escuela atraviesa de nuevo la calle. Rodea el Chevrolet rojo buscando una señal. Los ojos de avispón. Aplasta la nariz en el cristal de la ventanilla izquierda. Mira hacia el interior, de un lado a otro. [...] y luego de unos minutos sigue el camino rumbo a la escuela.
>
> El niño que va rumbo a la escuela no repara en el daño que un cinturón puede ocasionar. El niño desparece al dar vuelta en la esquina siguiente.

La calle vuelve a quedar vacía. (2010: pp.14-15)

The reader waits for the child to make a grizzly discovery with his wasp-like eyes, searching in vain through the interior of the car, yet 'todo *parece* estar en su sitio' (my emphasis). This notion of seeming, of appearing is vitally important to Guedea's text, as I will continue to demonstrate later in this chapter. Guedea's final line here, 'La calle vuelve a estar vacía' causes the reader anxiety, as we are encouraged to question how long the road will remain in such a calm state.

The style which Guedea employs does not only expand the limits of the detective fiction genre, it in fact leads us to question our concept of knowledge. This is perhaps most obvious in the author's use of repetition in the texts. The reader becomes

increasingly aware of the dichotomy between what the reader perceives as truth within narratives and that as interpreted by the characters when, in *Conducir*, Corona leaves Colima, and arrives at Guadalajara by bus. From there he hitch-hikes to reach Nuevo Laredo with truck driver Roberto Alanís, a man with strong links to the drug underworld, from whom Corona steals money in order to fund his flight from Colima. Their meeting is first described in indirect free style:

> Abel pregunta al hombre […] hacia dónde va. Voy a Laredo, responde el hombre de bigotes hasta las rodillas. Abel Corona mira el mapa de su imaginación y no encuentra a Laredo por ningún lado. […] Abel le explica que va a un pueblo llamado Sabinas Hidalgo, el cual, según el papel que muestra al hombre, está precisamente en Monterrey. […] ¿No eres mariquita sin calzones?, revira el hombre de bigote hasta las rodillas con ligera socarronería. La boca se le haga chicharrón, contesta Abel. Sube tus chivas, pues […]Se estrechan la mano. Roberto Alanís añade: y que sea la última vez que me hablas de usted. La próxima te meto una de estas cosas por el culo, dice señalando un bat de béisbol que lleva a un lado del asiento. No te preocupes, dice Abel visiblemente trastocado. (2008: pp.32-33)

This excerpt is one which in addition to demonstrating how Guedea's use of indirect free style causes convolution within the narrative (the reader has to work hard to interpret the complexities of who speaks, when, and when their dialogue ends), is also an example of how homosexuality is viewed within the narratives.[80] Following on directly from this description of Abel's experience of meeting Alanís is another description of the same scene, however this time from Abel's point of view in the first person:

> En Guadalajara le pedí aventón a un tipazo de hombre, aunque al principio me dio mala espina. El hombre se llama Roberto Alanís y es de Uña de Gato, un pueblo cercano a este pueblo. […] El hombre llevaba botas de avestruz, unos bigotes hasta las rodillas y tejana. Le pedí que si me traía y me dijo que sí, pero antes me preguntó el muy desgraciado que si no era maricón o una de esas cosas por el estilo. Yo le dije que no era maricón y que a las pruebas me remitía, pero sí recuerdo que le dije que no. (33)

The two separate accounts demonstrate the importance of subjectivity within the series. Through the deliberate and immediate repetition of the meeting between Corona and Alanís Guedea underlines the subtleties of interpretation, an underlying problem for the series and for crime fiction more widely: who is really telling the truth, if each person involved in a scene believes the way in which they interpret the situation to be true? In this second instance Abel appears much more aggressive towards and suspicious of Alanís in his own first-person account, claiming 'me dio mala espina', yet in the section written

[80] The fear associated with non-normative sexuality and the understanding of homosexuality will be further discussed in this chapter when considering the unusual detective as a challenge to the archetypal style of the detective novel. As previously stated, Corona an usual detective harbouring homosexual undertones will be fully discussed in the section Detecting Trouble.

in indirect free style, Alanís is described as 'El hombre [que …] parece simpático y relajado, seguro de sí mismo, por lo que Abel no duda en reírse de sus bromas, con ligera complicidad' (31). The positive colouring of the text through indirect free style is immediately undercut by Abel's negative and derogatory tones. The inclusion of such negatory and incongruous passages deliberately creates confusion and is unsettling for the reader when reading crime texts, demonstrating the extent to which the author subverts the tenets of detective fiction, a genre typically associated with methodological searching and expansion of knowledge. This subversive approach to the content of the novels, which sees truth constantly undercut and questioned, can also function as a means to question hegemonic masculinity. As the genre typically reflects a traditional view of masculinity, which sees the male detective successfully solve a crime, thereby reaffirming his heteronormative role within the patriarchal order, subversion and confusion of such tenets can therefore be read as a threat not only to genre traits, but also as an example of gender trouble. In short, the rationality associated with both detective fiction and hegemonic masculinity is lacking in Guedea's novels, and this is nowhere more apparent than in the examples of repetitions of scenes. As the two interpretations of the same scene are relayed to the reader, we become conscious of what Corona decides to leave out of his own account, a fact which makes the reader aware that Corona may not be a reliable narrator when sections appear in the first person or in indirect free style. Guedea repeats exact phrases immediately to draw the reader's attention to the fact that the same situation is being played out twice, yet we experience the scene differently on the second occasion. Through repetition Guedea stops the narrative timescale, and renders the reader stranded in a frustrating narrative impasse, unable to progress – which by design is key to plot development – going against the core purpose of fiction.

It is at this point, when considering the multiplicitous nature of the *Colima* trilogy that the model of 'the reader' as discussed in the Introduction to this thesis comes into play. As presented by Eagleton (1996), in all texts there exists a plurality of interpretative perspectives, and such multiplicity is particularly present in Guedea's *Colima* novels. Eagleton (58) stipulates that the significance of interpretation of literary works lie in their most convincing interpretations, and this is key to a thorough understanding of Guedea's work, which provides the reader with texts rich in multiplicity, at times converting the reader into detective themselves, as they struggle to decipher the most convincing reading when provided with multiple truth claims.

Such changes in person and also in style as demonstrated by fluctuating repetitions,[81] which take place frequently throughout the trilogy, maintain the reader's consciousness of the text's own self-aware nature. As such, Guedea colours his texts with ambiguity and anxious undertones, with the truth and lies becoming intertwined and at times indistinguishable. Questions concerning right and wrong, and truth and lies are of course integral to crime fiction, however such concepts are often clearly divided in crime narratives, thus Guedea's troubling and confusing approach to the genre is unusual. In this work, I posit that such postmodernist strategies form a commentary on contemporary Mexican society, in which criminals are looked upon relatively favourably despite the crimes they are known to have committed and in which criminals collude with those in society who ought to be bringing them to justice, where political or at least politicised assassinations regularly make the news, and those who are among the innocent in society are punished.[82]

The idea of those who are moral being punished is further demonstrated by the series' most obvious detectives, Sabino and Román. Guedea's troubling of what readers expect from truth claims are furthered in *41* and *El Crimen*. Focusing on Román and Sabino, the reader supposes that the department's star detectives (Román is listed as 'condecorado cinco años consecutivos' (2008: 180) and Sabino as 'dos o tres pasos detrás de él' (2008:180)) conduct the investigation into Ramiro Hernández Montes' home, hoping to find clues regarding his murder. Despite the hermeneutic, investigative nature of Sabino and Román, Guedea otherwise troubles understanding of the most straight-forward and clear-cut characters within the series by introducing more repetitive scenes featuring doubly-oriented speech, this time into the narrative around the series' established truth-seekers:

> Los judiciales Sabino y Román se detienen sobre la avenida Constitución, a la altura del Parque Royal.
> Román enciende un cigarrillo y, mientras expulsa el humo por las narices, contempla las mansiones del complejo residencial. Sueña.
> Sus ojos son canicones agrietados por el insomnio y el alcohol.
> (2010:89)

[81] Stylistic changes are perhaps most paratextually visible in *41*, as the reader moves between prose and police reports, with varying fonts. For more on this, see Yánez (2014), 'Estéticas de la degradación en *41*: una novela negra'.

[82] The notion of impunity and punishment within Mexico is arguably most clearly demonstrated by the feminicide phenomenon. This is less obvious but equally as worrying with regards to recently-recaptured drugs kingpin *el Chapo*, whose recapture generated such interest that the hashtag *#chapomanía* has begun to be used when referencing the criminal, despite the crimes the drug lord is charged with.

The stellar pair are at first presented, from the point of view of Román, as typical detectives – wearing sunglasses, smoking, hung over, functioning on little to no sleep. The description continues:

> Sabino ha descendido de la camioneta para preguntar por el precio de unos cuadros de girasoles que oferta un pobre hombre pata de palo, pero él, Román, ha preferido encender otro cigarrillo para contemplar salvaguardadas por un viejo miope. Alucina.
> Al fondo, en un patio que da a un breñal, Román atisba la presencia de un perro negro. Para verlo mejor, se quita los lentes Ray-Ban oscuros que compró por cincuenta pesos en San Juan de Dios y los guarda en el estuche de la guantera. (89)

We become aware, however, that the two may not be our standard detectives, as underlined by the use of the verb *alucinar*: Román sees things that are not in fact present in reality. He becomes obsessed with the dog he sees, comparing himself to the animal, searching the ground for food, as Román is searching for clues surrounding the murder of Ramiro. By the time the two detectives reach the Montes' residence, they have become the black dog:

> Cuando llegaron a la casa de quien en vida respondiera al nombre de Ramiro Hernández Montes, sus cuatro patas negras de investigador y su enorme hocico sensible al más mínimo hedor de estiércol no se dan cuenta que no están entrando a la casa del hermano del candidato a la gubernatura del estado sino a un enorme albañal forrado de tapis rojo e iluminado por una lámpara de luz cobriza.
>
> […]- Esto huele a verga, Sabino – pedorrea Román, señalando el camino hacía el segundo piso.
>
> - Hay que empezar de arriba abajo.
>
> […] Mientras sube las escaleras, Román siente que alguien los observa desde un punto incierto. El mismo sentimiento de siempre. Unos ojos observándolos desde un edificio o un árbol. (pp.89-91)

This animalistic comparison is highlighted by their large black snout, which sniffs out the truth before the detectives discover it with their other senses. In his outburst, 'Esto huele a verga', Román pre-empts their findings in Montes' bedroom, all linked explicitly to sex, with a particular focus on paedophilia and homosexuality. The items the detectives find are linked to concepts of voyeurism and spectatorship, as reinforced by the photographs of state governors and others in the Colima government in various stages of undress, cross-dress, and taking part in paedophilic activities. Román's sense of being watched, an omnipresent 'mismo sentimiento de siempre', is integral to the crime fiction genre: typically, we watch the detective(s) going about their business, peeking into windows themselves, making discoveries. Furthermore, what really draws our attention to this sentiment of being watched is Guedea's repetition of the scene of Román and Sabino's investigation into the Montes property. During their investigation they find various sex toys, photographs of politicians cross dressing, and child pornography, all intertwined

with the act of watching and being watched themselves. Sabino and Román leave the Montes house, feeling depressed:

> Es como si entraran en un callejón sin salida. Es como si fuera un estrangulamiento.
> En este oficio, al que no estrangulan, se estrangula. (2010: 96)

These final two sentences act as a voiceover at the end of the scene, as present in famous *noir* and neo-*noir* films such as *L.A Confidential* (Lee Hanson, 1997), *Blade Runner* (Scott, 1982), and the *Sin City* (Rodríguez and Tarantino, 2005, Rodríguez and Miller, 2013) franchise, again stressing the trilogy's hard-boiled style.[83] As previously noted, what differentiates this from the archetypal *noir* style is Guedea's use of repetition, which I argue demonstrates the extent to which use of style and person affects our typical understanding of truth as objective. Leaving the scene on such a futile note, Guedea immediately begins to repeat the scene we have just witnessed, though this time he prioritises the thoughts of Sabino, rather than Román:

> Los judiciales Sabino y Román se detienen sobre la avenida Constitución, a la altura del Parque Royal.
> Sabino está interesado en uno de esos cuadros de girasoles que vende un hombre pata de palo. Quisiera colgar uno en la pared de la casa que comprará apenas aparezca su nombre en la lista de aprobados del crédito Infonavit.
> Román lo espera arriba de la camioneta. Enciende un cigarrillo.
> […] Sabino coloca la pintura en la caja de la camioneta.
> […] – ¿Qué tal? – dice.
> Y Román:
> - ¿Qué tal que?
> - Pos el cuadro, güey.
> - ¿Ese de los gladiolos?
> Y Sabino:
> - No son gladiolos, pendejo. Son girasoles.
> - Pos parecen gladiolos, cotejo.
> - Parecen, pero no son. (pp.96-98)

At this point, a conversation unfolds concerning Van Gogh, the artist of the print that Sabino has bought, a conspiracy theory about the painter being Jack the Ripper, and the fact that Van Gogh, like the victims of the crimes Sabino and Román investigate, had a mutilated ear, the difference being that he inflicted the damage upon himself. The detectives then set off to the Montes residence, where we have already seen the fruits of

[83] Guedea often writes in a manner not dissimilar to a voiceover on a film, or as if his characters are being written in a play, and their stage directions have been left in. For example, 'El olor de la sangre fresca siempre trae pesquisas que las osamentas niegan, piensa Abel Corona durante el trayecto a Tepames' (2012:29) provides the text with an additional sense of *noir*, made famous in ominous voiceovers in *Blade Runner* and *Sin City*, but seen equally throughout older film *noir* examples. This leads to a very self-aware text, which juxtaposes a rural backwater such as Los Tepames with images of city-slicking flatfoots, urban life and leads the reader to compare and contrast the North American hard-boiled crime narrative, either cinematic or literary, against this new, fresh take on crime fiction.

their investigation, speaking over their radios to the control centre, holding a mundane conversation (99). The repetition of the two scenes in addition to the decision to omit the discoveries made at the Montes residence again highlights how integral subjectivity is to the series. Furthermore, such a stylistic choice to repeat scenes underlines how they are being replayed from different points of view. It is this self-aware style which grants the reader the ability to go back in time and foresee events in the future. Additionally, in the first instance, we are in Román's head, thinking the way he does, seeing what he sees: for example, he lingers on a street dog, with whom he compares himself. Román's understanding of Sabino's painting is entirely different to that of Sabino's, who, as it turns out, has greater knowledge of the painter and the piece of art, Van Gogh's famous *Sunflowers*. Nothing is as it seems, apart from the two detectives being en route to the same place together, and the exact repetition of the phrase 'un cuerpo putrefacto' (90, 96). To Román, the sunflowers are gladioli, to Sabino, they look like gladioli, yet he possesses the knowledge that they are not. This is an additional example of Guedea reiterating the subtleties and nuances of truth, evasion, and the murky aspects of subjectivity and the investigation at the heart of the novels. Contrary to the norms of detective fiction, we are disallowed any clarity or security as we continue reading, instead, provided with an ever more complicated web of lies, masks, and mutations to uncover.

5.3. Convoluted Truths

41's status as an example of an inherently self-aware text, narrated in a particularly self-aware style is visible from the outset of the novel. The front cover of the novel features a white background, a pink 4 and a number 1 created by the shape of a bullet (which, as the reader will discover, is the calibre of bullet used by the serial killer in the story). Due to this, the historical-cultural significance of the front cover of the first edition of the text is worth noting. Before reading a word of the text, which investigates, amongst other topics, gender and sexuality, the front cover the typically feminine with the archetypally masculine through the use of colour and masculine imagery, hinting at the novel's contents. The cover and the novel's title, *41*, does not only refer to the calibre of the bullet which is found at the scene of the murders within the narrative, but also '*el baile de los 41'* or '*el baile de los 41 maricones'*. In his seminal work on the representation and understanding of masculinity in Mexico, McKee Irwin (2000:353) notes the significance of such a number within the country as a direct consequence of the dance:

> On 17 November 1901 Mexico City police raided a private party and arrested the forty-one men in attendance, half of them dressed as women. 'The ball of the 41',

> as it came to be known, quickly became the scandal of the year, inspiring over a month of strident, often fanciful newspaper reporting; a barrage of corridos and poems, some illustrated with etchings by José Guadalupe Posada; vociferous editorials and sermons; and several fictional narrations of the event, including a novel. Through all this clamor the party gained immense symbolic importance in Mexico as the number 41 itself came to signify male homosexuality.

From the outset, then, *41* (2010) is riddled with historical references and metafictional undertones, referring the reader to its materiality within Mexican history. Guedea furthers this effect with two citations before the beginning of the narrative. The first, a quotation from American punk band The Briefs, states:

> Even they [sic] who don't wanna see
> Will peep at child pornography
> Looking through gary glitters [sic] eyes. (11)

This is followed by a quotation from a Leonard Cohen song:

> I've seen the future brother:
> It is murder. (11)

Both of these lyrics, and more widely the songs they are chosen from, speak of non-normative sexual acts, torture, bleak futures, and death, and Guedea's deliberate decision to display them at the start of his narrative underlines the tone and the themes yet to be explicitly unveiled in the narrative. The framing of a purportedly true story within quotations taken directly from popular culture perhaps leads the reader to question the truth claims implied by 'basada en hechos reales' from the very outset. Furthermore, it could be argued that Guedea's choice of song lyrics in English rather than Spanish also colours the text's underlying self-aware tendencies: as Guedea embeds English language song lyrics into the text, the reader is either included or excluded from certain information depending on whether or not they read English or know the songs.[84] As Guedea embeds song lyrics into the text, the reader becomes increasingly aware of the narrative itself as an object, already containing additional texts. As a result, before the narrative commences, Guedea presents the reader with a myriad of self-aware hints concerning the text's content, filling the reader with anxiety and uncertainty, and causing a certain amount of incongruity and ambivalence regarding the veracity of such a text. This is an example of how detective metafiction, mutated from and contrary to the objectives of the original

[84] Further to this, online searches using Mexican based or Spanish language search engines return very few results for 'Gary Glitter', the vast majority being returned in English. This reference to convicted British paedophile former glam rock singer Paul Gadd is therefore particularly distant to the average Mexican reader; providing a minority with additional insight into the text which is yet to begin, however for others this textual clue will be entirely devoid of meaning, again highlighting the subjectivity of knowledge.

detective genre in the twentieth century, presents truth and knowledge as inherently subjective concepts.

From *41*'s opening scene of murder and mutilation, in which Ramiro Hernández Montes' bloody corpse is found in the boot of a car, the reader is sunk further into the abyss of Guedea's Colima, both temporally and morally. Guedea introduces two main protagonists of the novel, *el Japonés* and *el Ferras*. Their story, which sits amongst the narrative concerning the investigation into the murder of Ramiro Hernández in the 'present', and official police and witness reports concerning the murder, relates the life of *el Japonés*, a child who is sexually and violently abused at home by his mother, is sexually abusive towards his wheelchair-confined sister, and groomed by a paedophile ring into taking part in child pornography. Scenes with a focus on paedophilic and sexually violent activity feature throughout the narrative, and I posit the reasoning behind the inclusion of such imagery and themes pushes the boundaries of sexual titillation on the part of the perceived male reader. Firstly, however, I will discuss the inclusion of *el Japonés* as an additional example of how *41* is a self-aware piece of detective metafiction.

The questioning and mutation of factual truth is also obvious from the beginning of *41*. The novel opens with the revelation, 'Esta novela está basada en un hecho real'. This immediately colours the reader's reception of the novel, as the verisimilitude implied by the statement allows the reader to question to what extent *41* is a mere simulation of the truth, and in what sense. Simulation of historical truth in particular as the nucleus of a fictional novel has repercussions regarding the postmodern interpretations of such texts. Linda Hutcheon's theory on the techniques and effects of historiographic metafiction (outlined in the Introduction) are particularly revealing when considered in relation to the *Colima* trilogy. Hutcheon (2004) states that postmodern fiction aims to:

> Juxtapose what we know of the past (from official archive sources and personal memory) with an alternative representation that foregrounds the postmodern epistemological question of the nature of historical knowledge. Which 'facts' make it into history? And whose 'facts?'. (Chapter Three, no pagination given)

This questioning is particularly evident in the works of both Rogelio Guedea and Amir Valle, as discussed in Chapter Two. In a Mexican context of state corruption and systemic violence and impunity, texts emplotting historical facts into the narrative, refusing to provide the reader with a traditional approach to solving the crime at the heart of the crime are examples of detective metafiction and a means to provoke the reader to question generic, historical, and social truths.

Guedea creates an unsettling metafictional universe by introducing *el Japonés'* character as his existence within both fiction and reality is entirely believable, and most significantly, possibly, tying the novel to contemporary events in Mexico. A pastiche of notorious Lebanese-born Mexican paedophile Succar Kuri, currently serving 112 years for child pornography and the corruption of minors, and Miguel Ángel Amaro Huerta, also known as *el Chacal de Colima*, who killed and mutilated four homosexual men in the state of Colima, including the brother of aspiring politician Gustavo Vazquez Montes (who went on to become *gobernador* in Colima in 2004),[85] *el Japonés* is at once a signifier for all that which is putrid in society; a demonstration of the self-destructive nature of patriarchal practices, and combination of two highly unsavoury real people, and therefore is simultaneously inherently fictional. This oscillation between real and fictional causes the reader anxiety, and as a result, he/she becomes unsure how to approach the text. Throughout *el Japonés*' presence in the novel, the reader becomes highly aware of the blurred and intangible line that stands between reality and fiction. These ties to Mexican historical crime in Guedea's fiction, and the mixing of reality and fantasy, are therefore evocative of McHale's view on the postmodern text. McHale (1987: pp.9-10) states that the shift from fictional to real and the tension that exists between the two concepts correspond to a shift from the epistemological to the ontological. Such ontological questions are posed by Guedea's detective metaficition, which encourages the reader to question when one crosses the boundaries of reality and fiction. This is at the epicentre of Guedea's opus, in which 'real' people appear within the fictional universe of the novel. *El Japonés*, for example, holds as his own personal idol Tomohiro Kato, who in June 2008 in Tokyo killed a total of seven people after driving a truck into a crowd and then going on to stab several victims to death publicly in a shopping district:

> El Japonés es un poco más moreno y lleva los roles del pelo oscuro más largos, pero podría ser el hermano del héroe que es Tomohiro Kato. Y Tomohiro Kato se sentiría orgulloso de tener un hermano como el Japonés.
>
> ¿Verdad, Japonés? Porque lo que hizo Tomohiro Kato aquel día en Akihabara fue un acto heroico y digno de cualquier hijo de puta.
>
> Lo que hizo al atropellar a toda esa multitud del centro comercial y luego auchillar a cuanto peatón que se atravesaba en su camino es un acto heroico.
>
> Es hora de honrar a los hijos de puta como Tomohiro Kato. (2010: pp.163-64)

This passage does not only reference Tomohiro Kato, a contemporary mass murderer,

[85] For an interview with Guedea in which the author explains the character of *el Japonés* and his links to crime in Mexico, see Jiménez, 2010.

but also demonstrates how *el Japonés* is inconsistently represented as Miguel Ángel Amaro Huerta, who between 2000-2001 murdered gay men specifically across Colima. Guedea's historical representations juxtapose *el Japonés*' childhood, which must have taken place in the 1970s, a criminal at large in the early 2000s, and the murders in Tokyo in 2008. Such inaccuracies serve to remind the reader that Guedea's fiction does not purport to represent reality, and therefore undermines history itself. In *41,* Guedea produces uneasiness and anxiety in the reader as boundaries are constantly highlighted, crossed and blurred. What should be believed as truth in such a text that would traditionally be presented as a champion of clarity and revelatory truth no longer exists. Moreover, the final line, implicitly linking violence to heroism and masculinity, is one which demonstrates the extent to which patriarchal gender order has saturated Mexican society, in this case to the point where killing as a crime becomes confused with murder as an heroic act. The ethics of violence have been eroded and confused, again indicating how Guedea's text references issues which sit at the heart of the violent spiral Mexico is currently experiencing. This affects the reader by further impeding them from identifying with characters in the novels, as the reader can never be sure who is telling the(ir) truth. Again, this can be interpreted as a comment by the author on contemporary Mexican politics, where corruption and lies have reach such levels of ubiquity and acceptance that acknowledged disappearances of people such as the Ayotzinapa 43 and the 20 murdered in Tlatlaya along with the discovery of numerous bodies cannot and will not be explained. In this way, perhaps, Guedea places Mexican citizens, equally as his readers, as detectives, searching continuously for answers.

5.4. Detecting Trouble: the Unusual Investigator

Abel Corona does at times mimic several qualities integral to the hard-boiled detective investigator. In *El Crimen,* he gives his staff orders, he maintains several overlapping sexual relationships with women, he drinks, takes various illegal drugs, spends time in brothels, and is himself the object of pursuit. However the character also deviates from the accepted style and formulation of the detective genre. Merivale and Sweeney state that, 'The metaphysical detective story is distinguished […] by the profound questions that it raises about narrative, interpretation, subjectivity, the nature of reality, and the limits of knowledge (1999:1). As has been demonstrated, Guedea raises such questions through his deliberately self-aware style, and the fusion of reality and fiction within his texts. Moreover, I argue that equally profound questions pertaining to truth claims are

raised in Guedea's detective metafiction by the protagonist himself. I maintain that, in agreement with both Merivale (1999) and Botta (1999), the 'detective's search for another is a definitively unsuccessful search for himself: he is the principle missing person for whom the reader, too, is forced to search' (Merivale and Sweeney, 1999:10).[86] In this section, I contrast Corona with Román and Sabino, Colima's most obvious detective figures, in order to demonstrate to what extent Guedea continuously references, and simultaneously troubles, the generic codes of the detective genre.

Featuring in all three novels, to varying degrees, Román and Sabino are introduced in *Conducir* at the scene of the murder of Ismael, behaving as typical detectives: 'Román y Sabino empezaron a limpiar el perímetro, en busca de evidencias' (2008: 112). The detectives are not mentioned again until towards the end of the novel, where their aptitudes as detectives become clear. Abel recounts:

> Román […] había sido condecorado cinco años consecutivos como mejor agente investigador. Sabía todas las argucias judiciales, y podía encontrar, se decía, una aguja en un pajar. Sabino, su compañero, iba dos o tres pasos detrás de él. No más. Sangre fría como Román, Sabino contaba con un olfato único. Podía oler pistas a cien kilómetros de distancia. Dúo envidiable. (180)

As a result, it is clear that the *dúo envidiable* are the trilogy's most archetypal detectives, built seemingly purposefully to work at the *procuraduría.* The clear-cut detectives of the series, often referred to as *sabuesos* due to their skills for sniffing out criminals, they carry out police reports (*41,* 2010:71), conduct affairs (2010:125), and are capable of violent acts (*Conducir*, 2008: 187), and are presented as troubled: 'Sabino […] mira sus ojeras en el espejo de luna. Mira también su nariz, ancha y llena de barros. Hurga en la pesadilla que esconde el coágulo que son sus ojos.' (2010:91), and their absolute, unequivocal heterosexuality, speaking of Sabino's hand as 'Su mano que nunca ha agarrado otra verga que no sea la suya'. (2010:92).

Though Abel Corona is by no means introduced as a trustworthy investigator figure in *Conducir* due to his previously-discussed incapacity for objectivity which causes the reader to question what, if anything they do know about the narrative and the facts provided for them within Guedea's work, what is particularly interesting about Corona's role in the *Colima* trilogy is his notable absence in *41*, as the character functions as the unifying presence in the other two works in the series. At no point does Guedea reintroduce him to the narrative, as he is only referenced twice by detectives Sabino and Román, one of whom cannot, at first, even remember Abel's existence,

[86] Corona's absence in *41* may then be interpreted as demonstrative of the metaphysical detective in search of himself.

- Y luego Abel.
- ¿Cuál Abel?
- El hermano del lic Corona.
- ¿Cuál?
- El que estuvo de oficial secretario con nosotros.
- Ah, sí. ¿El Labión?
- Ese puto. (2010: pp.126-127)

Corona appears to have disappeared so entirely from the series that not even one of the greatest *sabuesos* Colima has ever seen can remember him. The stable figure of authority, implied at the end of *Conducir* to be Abel as he takes on his murdered brother Ismael's post in the *procuraduría*, is not present, hinting that the events that unravel in *Conducir* and *41* take place simultaneously, yet along multilinear frameworks. They are united through the repetitive use of the same characters as in *Conducir*, yet with the glaring omission of protagonist Abel, who is simply dismissed as *el Labión*. On the following occasion he is alluded to, it is in reference to a cashier who serves Sabino,

> ¿No andaba con Abel, comandante?
>
> Dicen, sí. Pero si salió igual de maricón que su hermano… Ínguesu. (pp.202-203)

These two minor references serve to keep Abel and the story of his murdered brother (which forms the plot for 2008's *Conducir un tráiler*) in the reader's mind, and demonstrate how he is considered by his peers (as either *el Labión* or as entirely absent). The second quotation in which Corona is mentioned in *41* also introduces the reader to a previously unspoken and otherwise unknown dimension of Corona's character; the doubts which surround his heterosexuality.[87] This sudden reference again demonstrates the extent to which Guedea's work frequently surprises the reader, and at no point in *41* are these comments developed. In her article, *Detecting Identity in Time and Space*, Ana Botta posits that memory gaps and amnesia in detective novels provide the reader with a sense of temporal uncertainty (1999: 217); I argue that Guedea's work also produces this effect on the reader, adding to the anxiety the reader already feels. The mention of Corona's name prompts the reader to realise that he is absent, yet the reintroduction of the character into the novel ensures that the reader questions why Corona is not present. One could posit that up to this point, the reader has been waiting for Abel to reappear in the storyline, yet he is only alluded to in this vague, throwaway and derogatory manner. Though Román and Sabino are present, constantly referred to as

[87] This is explored further in *El crimen*, and I discuss Abel's underlying sexuality as marking him as an unusual detective later in this chapter.

the department's greatest detectives, the protagonist around which the trilogy's narrative hinges is entirely absent. His absence underlines the notion of lack within the series, which also presents itself through the absence of other generic archetypes, another example of the series falling short of expectations, and thereby again demonstrating Guedea's demasculinisation of the detective genre. The question concerning Corona's absence is left unanswered by Guedea, another particularly self-aware approach to the genre which typically answers all questions, and Abel's reappearance in *El crimen* demonstrates a changed identity with plenty of blanks surrounding his recent history. I continue to discuss in this section Corona's staccato development within the trilogy.

When reintroduced in *El crimen,* now plagued with fears of his own homosexuality and as *licenciado* Corona, Abel appears to have become his deceased brother's double, in charge of Sabino and Román:

> Abel Corona no puede creer que ahora Sabino y Román estén bajo su mando. Y tal vez ni Sabino ni Román lo crean tampoco. Saben que Abel Corona es un muchacho inteligente y con mucha intuición para sondear en la mirada de los delincuentes, pero no están seguros de que tenga los huevos que tenía el Tigre Guerrero. Aun así es su superior y hay que respetarlo. (2012: pp. 23-24)

This excerpt demonstrates a technique that Guedea frequently employs in his work, that of simply mentioning characters that may not feature principally in the narrative. Here, Guedea again uses indirect free style to colour the reader's interpretation of the scene, and therefore we become aware of Corona's fears of being out of his depth, considered as a '*muchacho*' (italics in the original), and the respect both Sabino and Román have for him, despite his inexperience: this again demonstrates how Abel troubles patriarchal logic and hierarchies. The reference to *el Tigre Guerrero* in this instance takes the reader back to the previous novels in the series: those who have not read them will be left confused, yet another example of clues within the text having meaning for some and being entirely meaningless for others, such as the epigraphs referencing Gary Glitter and The Briefs at the beginning of *41*.

Abel's lies and omissions are ubiquitous across *Conducir* and *El Crimen* (and, of course, he is omitted from *41* himself), and such a focus on uncertainty and lies ensures that the reader is aware of the inaccuracies they may encounter throughout the series, prompting the reader to once again question the narratorial voice's reliability. Such admissions are frequent throughout both *Conducir* and *El crimen*, and also serve to add to the series' overwhelming feeling of anxiety and uncertainty: 'Abel Corona no recuerda en realidad cómo se sucedieron los hechos después de volver al hotel' (2008:61). The reference to Corona's state of mind and lack of memory causes the reader anxiety as they

are also excluded from the narrative in the same way as Corona. Furthermore, such apprehension demonstrates how, rather than focusing on the case at hand, the reader becomes more concerned with the mystery that is the protagonist. For Botta (1999:218), instances of amnesia as experienced by the metaphysical detective performs the role of two characters in the detective novel;

> The detective and the corpse. He [the amnesiac detective] is simultaneously the one who advances and the one who blocks the story. The corpse and the amnesiac share the status of privileged narrators of their hidden experiences, despite their obvious inability to tell tales.

In his presentation of Corona, Guedea does therefore adopt certain genre tropes, but he also subverts them, turning the questions against the investigator himself, which are archetypally directed towards the suspects of crime narratives.

An unusual investigator, complicit with deception, Abel's lies range from the mundane to the significant. His deceitful personality is made clear throughout the series in such admissions as, 'No me gusta meterte en aprietos – miente Abel' (2012:253), 'miente Abel Corona sin saber por qué […] ha tenido que mentir, como siempre' (2012:103), and it appears that lying is an integral part of his personality, a compulsion from which he cannot escape. Abel's inconsistency as most obviously outlined by his capacity for lying is highlighted through his multiplicitous nature: 'Repentinamente, me doy consciencia que soy otro. Que respondo y actúo como si fuera otro' (2008:151). Nonetheless, this does not encourage the reader to identify with the protagonist in any way, as we are encouraged to do often in more traditional versions of the genre. For example, we may admire the sleuth's cunning, the male detective's invariable success with women also being viewed typically as positive on the behalf of the implied male reader, and most importantly, the reader enjoys the detective's capabilities for unveiling the truth. This enjoyment is difficult to obtain in Guedea's work, as Abel is so often shown to be uncomfortable with truth himself.

> Abel sigue con el gesto amable en la mirada pero en realidad, dentro de sí, no le sobran ganas de aplastarle a la boletera a la cara contra el piso y destrozarle el tabique de la nariz, desgranarle los dientes como a un elote con un mazo. Romperle las encías. Patearle las costillas y escupirle en la cara, diciéndole ¿sabes que te pagan para que me digas cuáles son las próximas salidas, puerca? […] Abel se queda un instante en silencio, pensando, y luego pide educadamente a la mujer que si no hay más remedio le venda un boleto a Tepic. […] Le agradezco mucho, dice Abel Corona (2008:169).
>
> The juxtaposition between true sentiment and 'el gesto amable' as underlined by the disproportionately violent imagery highlights Corona's abilities to lie, and to appear as another, yet this does not necessarily help him develop his case or even

interact with ticket officers. This excerpt also demonstrates how Corona is capable of – at least briefly – unlearning patriarchal logic, a concept expounded upon by John Stoltenberg (2003). Here, Stoltenberg outlines the 'twisted logic' of rapists in the essay *Rapist Ethics*, which appears to echo Corona's reaction towards the unnamed woman in the ticket office. Though Corona's inner thoughts do not betray any expressed wish to sexually abuse the woman, the extreme violence he wishes to inflict upon her is worth considering in relation to the power associated with hegemonic masculinity:

> In the twisted logic of rapist ethics, the victim is ultimately culpable; the victim is the culprit; the victim did the wrong. Absurdly, the most obvious and absolute facts about the act— who did what to whom—become totally obfuscated because responsibility is imputed to the victim for an act that someone else committed. Myths that promulgate this ethic abound: Women want to be raped, women deserve to be raped, women provoke rape, women need to be raped, and women *enjoy* being raped. (2003:12, emphasis in the original)

However, Corona *does not* accomplish his inner wishes, and instead, the character demonstrates restraint, however the reader can see some similarities between Stoltenberg's understanding of rapist ethics – provocation on the part of the woman, her culpability, her need to be punished. Though this is obviously preferable to seeing the woman beaten in the narrative, again Guedea provides an opportunity for the reader to question whether they feel frustrated that Corona did not carry out such violent acts, provoking more thought on the basis for such reactions.

A suspension of self occurs on several occasions throughout *El crimen* in relation to protagonist Corona, the next example taking place only pages later, when Corona drives to his ex-girlfriend's house for an opportunity to see her:

> ¿Cómo sería Abel Corona – se pregunta a sí mismo Abel Corona – si en lugar de ser este que es fuera, por ejemplo, el padre de Hortensia, o el hermano, o el amante, o tal vez el vecino que la mira salir en las mañanas a la pescaría de la esquina, y la desea su mujer, al menos, por una tarde? […] *Podría ser muchas personas más al mismo tiempo, Abel Corona.* Una persona para cada día […] Nada lo haría más feliz que ser un vendedor de tarjetas de crédito con tal de no ser esto que es. (2012: pp.26-27, my emphasis)

This excerpt is a particularly clear example of the manner in which Corona is presented as being untrustworthy and therefore as not conforming to the generic detective archetype, highlighted through the repetition of 'imaginación, imaginarse, imaginar'. His wonderings concerning 'este mundo desconocido' are evocative of McHale's (1987) thoughts on what constitutes the postmodern, and the reader, excluded from the interior of Hortensia's home, also wonders what is occurring behind these closed doors in a world

entirely divorced from Corona's reality. We witness Abel investing himself in being someone else, in imagining not only one, but several different presents, being a carpenter, a builder who plays as a forward on a five-a-side football team on Tuesdays and Sundays, a boxer who works as a car park attendant, a paper delivery man. This leaves the reader with the sense that Corona wishes to be anyone other than himself, and that therefore he may not be a particularly reliable detective or lawyer. The notion of the detective as being a truth-seeker is a given when considering detective texts, yet once more Guedea undermines this generic archetype, presenting the reader instead with an unreliable character. As a result, we are inclined to question whether Guedea's narrative style ever informs the reader reliably.

With Corona as our detective figure, we are impeded from developing our knowledge and our understanding of the plot. This is of course the opposite of our expectations when reading a crime novel, and therefore adds to the frustration we feel and the anxiety at the trilogy's core. Furthermore, Guedea's choice to frustrate the protagonist, and therefore the reader, can be interpreted as forming a comment on contemporary Mexican society and politics. The character who, by definition, should detect, hold knowledge, and develop leads is entirely excluded from knowing and gaining knowledge, yet the corrupt press gains additional insight into the crime that Abel investigates. Both our frustration as readers and that of the protagonist is highlighted by Guedea's deliberate repetition of 'no puede saber' and 'no puede escuchar': Guedea's text ridicules omniscience, typically at the heart of the genre, as the detective simply cannot perform his duties.

The concept of the incapable detective, or the detective whose skills are reduced or lacking, is often debated in relation to female characters, specifically the *femme fatale*, whose threatening sexuality destabilises the sleuth's patriarchal frameworks and identity. In many ways, Corona appears as the archetypal detective in this context; over the two novels in which he features as the main protagonist, the names of women he has relationships with inundate the reader, he conducts affairs with multiple women simultaneously, even sleeping with his brother Ismael's wife. Such experience with women may appear as overcompensation when Corona, out of the blue, begins to question his sexuality;

> Se da cuenta de pronto que la idea de que es homosexual ha sido reemplazada por esta idea fija que lleva clavada en la frente con un clavo. Si realmente fuera homosexual, ¿tendría acaso este sentimiento atolondrado en el corazón? Abel Corona se siente de veras dichoso de tener una prueba más para evadirse de tal necedad. Su cabeza va cerrando y abriendo válvulas, diciéndole sí eres, diciéndole

> no eres, sí eres, no eres, sí, no, hasta que llega a la fonda de la vieja de ojos saltones y mira torteando, de espaldas a él, Julia. (2012:57)

Much like the reader who is plunged into a version of Colima where fact and fiction overlap, Corona is struck by a profound sentiment of anxiety 'de pronto', yet again, a sentiment not associated with the archetypal male detective made famous by authors such as Mickey Spillane and Raymond Chandler. The inclusion of such an admission on Corona's part sets him apart from other detective figures within the genre, both within Mexico (most famously Paco Ignacio Taibo II's long-running *Héctor Belascoarán Shayne* series) and internationally (for example Robert Crais' *Elvis Cole* series from the US), and this divergence, Merivale and Sweeney believe (1999:2), leads to the reader 'asking questions about mysteries of being and knowing which transcend the mere machinations of the mystery plot'. The fact that Corona's possible homosexuality is referenced on several occasions but is never decided clearly upon, nor does it function as a plot device, is an example of an additional way in which Guedea leaves questions unanswered within his work. There is an absence of closure or certainty to this extra mystery within the novel, which serves to underline the falseness of the plot, despite *El crimen* itself also being based on real events. This is evident on the second outright mentioning of Corona's possible homosexuality when, on this occasion, rather than Abel simply dismissing the notion, the detective dreams about sex with men:

> Las pesadillas han regresado con sus disfraces de arañas peludas y patonas. Esta vez soñó que dos hombres con músculos hasta en los párpados, vestidos de la cintura hacia arriba con traje romano, lo penetraban en el sofá de una sala amplia y llena de luces rojas. […] Dos musculosos penetrándole sin piedad y él con la cara aplastada en los cojinetes de un sillón blanco enclavado en un gran salón blanco también, sintiendo escurrir la sangre de su ano desflorado. (75)

The reader immediately infers Corona's discomfort with such an explicitly sexual scene featuring men from the use of 'pesadillas', and this is intensified by the election of the hairy, long-legged spider imagery. The scene is one in which Corona is ultimately passive: unable to move, as he is knowingly asleep, he is passive in his actions, the two men dressed as Romans 'lo penetraban', 'penetrándole'. We are also aware that Corona's subconscious, expressing itself in its conscious state, may have been aware of his possible homosexuality for some time, as such nightmares featuring Corona having sex with men 'han regresado'. After having read the passage, the reader becomes aware that yet again, Corona confuses reality with fiction, though he is aware that the two are very separate things - 'un sueño evasivo, resbaladizo, que fungía como un contrafuerte de la realidad que estaba viviendo' - leaving the reader wondering whether, as a 'contrafuerte' to reality, the dreams have in fact taken place, and Corona has been anally penetrated. Despite the highly-descriptive

elements of this scene, ranging from the men so muscular they appear to have muscles in their eyelids, to the red light which provides the room with its semiotically erotic back-lighting, Corona does not appear to enjoy the scene at all. This, I believe, comes from the anxiety caused by not knowing whether the scene lies in reality or in fiction: Corona does not know whether he is heterosexual, homosexual, or bisexual and as a result, the well-defined bridges that lie between reality and fiction are breaking down for him, as demonstrated by the slippery nature of the dream, as well as that of sexuality. Similarly to *Máscaras*, where Conde is troubled and his sexuality is threatened by memories of Luisito, here Corona is led to question his sexuality due to the memory of a dream.

The *Colima* trilogy is highly self-aware of the direct link between detective fiction and the reader within the crime genre. Normally, as the narrative progresses and truth is unveiled, the detective and the reader discover these facts together, their roles overlapping, similarly to *Máscaras,* where Conde is misled and then discovers the true identity of the murderer: we experience all of this with him. However, Guedea denies the reader a full understanding of the similar scenes in the trilogy, and it is clear that Corona, as the recurring protagonist, either does not pay attention to clues and signs, or makes concessions concerning his capacity for lying. Such admissions cause the reader to doubt whether anything relayed via Corona holds any truth value. Those who seek the truth are thwarted – be they detectives such as Sabino and Román or the reader who acts as the detective. Guedea's convoluted style leads us to directly question politics in Mexico, and heightens our awareness that all is not what it may seem, above all regarding notions of simple truth. The series therefore, like much crime fiction, functions as a criticism of truth claims in Mexico, from its history to its politics and contemporary society. However, Guedea's work carries out this criticism through a highly original approach, which I continue to investigate with regards to the series' hyper-noir style, at times juxtaposed against a Romantic approach. I also analyse the lack of the *femme fatale* and the clear positioning of women as victims within the series, hinting at a return to patriarchal dominance and demonstrating an absence of an archetypal generic mask to demonstrate this. Further to this, I investigate what such an absence creates a space for with regards to homosexuality and homophobia within the series, discussing Corona's troubled sexuality and his own masculine masks as an unusual detective figure.

5.5. Practising Unsafe Sex: Entertainment and Disgust in the Colima Trilogy

I have discussed the ways in which the detective figure can be interpreted as a non-normative sleuth, who can never fully be trusted, understood, or even liked by the reader (and possibly even by himself). His many masks throughout the series leave the reader with a constant sentiment of unease, as we are unable to place any trust in him which we associate with the traditional detective, who seeks the truth amid a plethora of obstacles and clues in his search for an answer which will reveal the identity and motive of, typically, the story's criminal. As previously mentioned, one of Corona's more unusual traits within the generic norms of detective fiction are the questions which surround his sexuality. Though Corona may appear to adhere to the heterosexual matrix traditionally inscribed within Mexican society (see my discussion of Paz and Ramos in my chapter on Bef's work), Guedea introduces tones which suggest the detective struggles with homosexual undertones and urges. This, I will demonstrate, is further proven by the inclusion of highly explicit scenes of a sexually violent nature.

In this section, I consider the theme which most obviously unites all of the novels so far considered in this thesis: eroticism and non-normative representations of sex and gender. I expound on the significance of the possibly bisexual detective in this setting, and will also analyse other scenes in which Guedea uses non-normative and normative sex acts in order to question whether the author includes such scenes for the purposes of the titillation of the male reader, similarly to Bef, or whether, as in Padura's work, the sexual activity within the *Colima* trilogy forms a comment on societal structures such as ingrained patriarchal views of women and family. For example, the trilogy presents women as linked to the land, as necessary for reproduction, production, and clerical roles, they hold positions as secretaries, personal assistants, mothers, and cooks at *fondas*, and are often described in a Romantic manner, looking at Abel with 'ojos de compromiso' (2012:49). Women are, throughout the series, presented as passive beings who, even when playing the role of the sexually-commanding prostitute, always lose, an example of this being the Anguiano brothers raping their enemies' wives, girlfriends, and sisters as revenge. Hortensia, once a prostitute, becomes pregnant by Abel. Fleeing to Sabinas Hidalgo, where Abel spends most of the first novel in the series, she gives birth to Abel's son, with whom he wants nothing to do. This leaves her, the strongest female character in the series, desolate, lonely, and scared, claiming 'Pos me llené de hombres creyendo que en ellos te encontraba a ti y nomás me llené de hijos también, que es pa'lo que sirven

los hombres, ¿no?' (2012:99), providing a representation of woman as contained, controlled, and dominated by patriarchy and patriarchal structures.

In many ways, Guedea's work can be interpreted as very similar to Bef's two *Detective Mijangos* novels; upon first consideration, disparaging views of female characters and representations of male characters as domineering and powerful are clear, and acts of a sexual nature appear either superfluous to the plot or entirely out of place with the narrative's storyline. Furthermore, similarly to Bef, Guedea prioritises subversive, even taboo sexualities, ranging from paedophilic activity to necrophilia, giving detailed descriptions of the sex acts in his novels. Guedea presents sexual activity in a voyeuristic manner, implicating the reader in the ongoing sex act. Whereas in the works of Bef the reader plays the role of distanced voyeur for pleasure, Guedea deliberately draws the reader's attention to our own voyeurism, also unlike the representation of pornosadism in North American hard-boiled detective narratives, most obvious in the works of Mickey Spillane. However, and most significantly, unlike Bef's work, Guedea does not, I will argue, write such scenes to titillate the implied male reader of the genre. Instead, the inclusion of certain scenes increases the reader's experience of disgust, repulsion, and anxiety. Guedea's inclusions of sexual activity in *Colima* verge on the extreme, featuring scenes more akin to snuff, rape, and pornosadism. These scenes combine the at times overlapping concepts of the abject, horror, and pleasure, which surround sexual violence and coercion. For this reason, I term Guedea's writing in these instances to be 'unsafe': the reader, as voyeur, feels a profound sentiment of anxiety when reading such scenes.

In the Introduction and Chapter Three, I quoted Octavio Paz's *El laberinto de la soledad*, a treatise on accepted Mexican masculinities and Mexican femininities. Overall, Paz interprets Mexican society as having two mutually exclusive genders, with men as dominant and active, and women as passive and submissive. Furthermore, Paz finds in the common phrase *no te rajes* (2008: 58-59) to be simultaneously symptomatic of both what masculinity and what femininity has been conceptualised in the country. In *The Shattered Mirror* (1998), María Elena de Valdés alludes to Paz's interpretations of this dichotomy and male superiority, when she states:

> The male response to the social alienation he suffers is to prove to himself that he dominates his woman, often by resorting to physical violence. This abuse of women, both physical and psychological, so thoroughly permeates Mexican culture that it is seen as a natural part of the relationship between men and women.' (17)[88]

[88] This 'natural part of the relationship between men and women' as being expressed through physical or mental abuse, I understand, is demonstrated as acts of feminicide in this specific Mexican context. See my

Guedea's work provides ample opportunity to investigate the notion of women as passive entities and therefore as the recipients of physical and psychological abuse. The *Colima* trilogy also as a means through which to contribute towards criticism of the dichotomising Pazian view on gender. Here, I seek to demonstrate that Guedea achieves what Bef fails to do in his representation of female characters, the latter I believe using them in an act of 'imitation without reconsideration' (Gregory Klein, 1995: 73): instead, I argue that Guedea's inclusion of tropes such as rape, feminicide, and necrophilia demonstrates how 'la mujer mancillada se convierte en metáfora de la nación' (Kaplan, 2007:7).

As outlined in the Introduction, this thesis understands that detective fiction has typically represented women in one of two manners, either as *femme fatale* or as *femme attrapée*. This dichotomy – either visible, hypersexualised, selfishly-motivated, and with a short shelf-life in the text, or hidden, shackled, passive, and a victim – has provided authors with vehicles through which to present the reader with scenes of pornosadism (Close, 2012: 90). The inclusion of sexually subversive scenes has been maintained by authors, and is a theme which unites all authors included in this thesis, though I argue their scenes of sexual subversion in the very least aim to provoke questions in the implied male reader, rather than provide titillation. Pornosadism as part of the detective genre is problematic, above all in the Mexican context, where the physical suffering of women is observed daily in cases of feminicide across the country. The use of violent sexual imagery against women therefore causes the reader to question whether the author of texts which use such scenes writes women in such a derogatory fashion in order to not only adhere to but also to appeal to the assumed male reader's patriarchal heterosexual matrix.

Though speaking of filmic representations of the female encoded body as vision, Laura Mulvey's (1989) conclusions on the male gaze are valid when considering Guedea's work given the shared narrative voice which runs throughout cinematic and literary cultural products alike, drawing the reader in in a similar manner to filmic representations of characters' points of view. Mulvey (19) argues that classical Hollywood narrative cinema was, similarly to detective fiction, constructed around an implied male spectator (even if the spectator were female, she would assume a male gaze when watching the film), 'Traditionally, the woman displayed has functioned on two levels: as erotic object for the characters within the screen story, and as erotic object for the spectator within the

chapter on Bef's work for theory on the feminicide phenomenon, which applies equally to the contents of this chapter.

auditorium, with a shifting tension between the looks on either side of the screen'. I consider that Guedea's inclusion of pornosadic scenes in which women are very obviously objectified demonstrates how we can interpret women in contemporary Mexico as both object and abject. In *Pouvoirs de l'horreur*, Kristeva (1980) outlines the notion of abject as referring to the human reaction such as horror to the threatened breakdown in meaning caused by the loss of the distinction between self and other. The primary example of what causes such a reaction is the corpse, which reminds us of our own mortality:

> Une plaie de sang et de pus, ou l'odeur doucereuse et âcre d'une sueur d'une putréfaction, ne signifient pas la mort. Devant la mort signifiée – par exemple un encéphalogramme plat – je comprendrais, je réagirais ou j'accepterais. Non, un tel théâtre vrai, sans fard et sans masque, le déchet comme le cadavre m'indiquent ce que j'écoute en permanence pour vivre. Ces humeurs, cette souillure, cette merde sont ce que la vie supporte à peine et avec peine de la mort. J'y suis aux limites de ma condition de vivant. (11)

Knowledge of death rather than its significance is implicitly meaningful to Kristeva, as in seeing the corpse we are confronted with the kind of materiality that traumatically shows us our own death. Bearing this in mind, I analyse scenes featuring corpses and/or lifeless/unconscious bodies within Guedea's series in order to underline how the author, through such shocking and abysmal scenes, allows the reader to question his/her own status in relation to death which pervades the news and reality in Mexico.[89]

In *Conducir*, Guedea includes the post-mortem of a local young girl who has committed suicide. In the morgue, pathologist don Chuy sexually abuses her lifeless, defenceless body, as Abel, like the reader, looks on;

> Descolgamos la muchacha del cable, la embalamos en una sábana blanca y la condujimos a la Procuraduría para la necropsia de ley. Al colocar sobre la plancha metálica el cuerpo del delito, vi que el gesto displicente de don Chuy se transformó en una expresión de euforia. […] Don Chuy acomodó horizontalmente los brazos de la muchacha y empezó a acariciar sus piernas. Desde una banca de azulejo donde preparaba la fe ministerial, pude ver como don Chuy metió sus narices en el cuerpo sin vida de la muchacha. Fue oliéndola de la punta de los pies a los labios fríos con una delicadeza seductora. El movimiento de su nariz era el de un perro husmeando en busca de su presa. Se podían ver sus narices olfateando la tierra. Don Chuy se detuvo en el pubis y lo lamió varias veces. Lo mismo hizo con los pezones y los labios, que succionaba con fuerza, dejándolos escurridos de saliva espesa. Acarició su pelo al momento que profería

[89] As Julia Banwell notes, *la nota roja* has become an important means through which to disseminate news of death in Mexico. Banwell also states that newspaper *El Imparcial de Oaxaca* suffered such a downturn in sales after removing its *policíaca* section, it had to reinstate it in order to regain its readership (2015: pp.20-22). *El Imparcial* now features a daily *policíaca* section, both in its broadsheet version and online, with reports on crimes and uncensored explicit images of murdered victims.

> unas palabras inaudibles, con las cuales seguramente se disculpaba por anticipado de lo que iba a hacer. (2008: pp.79-80)

The young girl is introduced as already dead, and her passivity is underlined by the conjugation of the verbs 'descolgamos, embalamos, condujimos'. All of these things are done *to* the girl as she is denied agency. The fact that Abel recounts such an unsettling scenes in the first person also makes a link to the pornographic; 'Watching is a form of privilege after all, and suggests a subtle form of control' (Copeland, 2004:254). The reader begins to question what they are reading, and why they continue to read it, all the while passing judgement on don Chuy's strange, abnormal, and disgusting actions, with which we cannot, or at least know we should not, identify. Though this example holds similarities to some of Bef's scenes in which women are raped, or threatened with sexual violence, the reader feels anxiety over the titillation incited by Bef's writing. This may be because the necrophilic act is so taboo that the reader cannot help but feel repugnance, however one could also argue that the act of rape, as in Bef's works, should also inspire disgust in the reader rather than titillation, as in the case of *el Oaxaca* in *Hielo negro* (2013a). As has been discussed previously in this chapter, Guedea's trilogy is one which is deeply troubling to both the tenets of the detective genre, and to the reader's expectations of both literature and reality. We are unable to trust anyone or the plot and we cannot identify with a plethora of incoherent characters, which combine to intensify sentiments of anxiety. In this instance, we do not only feel repugnance, but we miss out on the sentiment of titillation present when reading Bef's work. In the *Colima* trilogy, we have been constantly encouraged to question the detective and his motive, and we are faced with a particularly postmodern set of protagonists, with whom we fail to identify. So too, here in this instance, do we question the motives of the taboo sexual act rather than identify with the perpetrator.

Guedea's matter-of-fact relaying of don Chuy's assault to the reader, or the voyeur in this instance, also highlights Abel's complete lack of action against the degrading assault. Abel makes no attempt to stop Chuy, and as a result the reader reacts against Chuy's actions and Abel's inaction, seeing them both as morally inferior, an option that is not available when reading similar scenes from Bef's novels.

Mancall (2005:7) posits in texts and films such as *L.A Confidential* that:

> By bringing pornography to the fore, these novels call attention to and confront the reader with the voyeuristic pleasures of detective fiction. While defenders of the genre defensively set apart 'good' detective fiction and pornographic trash,

> Ellroy embraces pornography and detective fiction as twin genres and ultimately asks the reader to recognize the possibilities for artistry and beauty in both.

Though I agree that similarly to Ellroy, Guedea walks the line between good detective fiction and pornography, I also argue that he asks the reader to in fact recognise the treatment and views of victims rather than to engage in a comparison between the pornographic and the detective genres (though it is undeniable that the two are intrinsically linked through the need to know that which is pervasive yet that which normally remains hidden). Though this may be the case for the reader in scenes I will continue to analyse in Guedea's work and certainly that of Bef, the scene featuring necrophilia is one which is highly unsettling. I believe Guedea includes such a scene in order to draw the reader's attention to voyeurism and question Abel's morals as the protagonist: we are not invited to identify with him at all. This distancing between reader and protagonist is another tool used to further obscure the reader's overall view of the narrative; unconventionally, as the narrative progresses we are becoming less and less certain of the world created in the novel.

According to Brown, writing sadoerotic murders places authors of detective fiction as one of the most challenging practitioners of the genre, and he sees such authors as having entirely 'subjective indulgence' in such sado-erotic fantasies (2000:188). He continues that such authors should be applauded for their work, as 'If innovation is not attempted, the genre dies, but if such innovation is pushed so far that crucial elements are discarded then the text may become excommunicated' (189). With regards to Guedea, I would argue that the Colima trilogy, and *41* in particular, successfully includes sadoeroticism and pornosadism to cause uncertainty, apprehension and anxiety in relation to the text. In her article on Stieg Larsson's *Millennium* trilogy, Ferber questions the sensationalist elements of including scenes of rape in literature, and the impact such scenes may have on readers who have experienced sexual abuse. This is particularly pertinent when considering Guedea's work, which, similarly to that of Bef, was published during a climate of increasing international awareness of feminicide in Mexico, a physical manifestation of hatred for women. This is made clear in scenes involving doctor Gallegos, who 'No parece doctor, sino sicario' (2012:85), as we learn more about his extra-professional activities as an abortionist.

During the scene in which Diana's abortion takes place, she is treated as an object, with her professional title 'la asistente' repeated to further qualify her as inferior to the doctor:

> El doctor Gallegos saca de la bolsa de su camisa un rastrillo, se sienta en un banquito ajustable y hace a los lados las bastillas de la bata de Diana la asistente, dejando al descubierto, solamente para sí, una vagina poblada de vello, rosada y limpia. La mano del rastrillo le tiembla nomás de ver aquella sabrosura apenas a un palmo de su nariz. […] Mientras más podía, más aparece al fondo una vulva jugosa de labios gruesos, cuyo clítoris se pronuncia la grupa. Listo el primer tramo, el doctor Gallegos echa mano del rastrillo y empieza a afeitar todos los bordes, de arriba abajo y de un lado hacia otro, siempre mirando ese molusco que parece sacar un dedo para invitarlo a entrar. Su vulva ha quedado, por fin, peloncita, como la nalguita de un bebé. El doctor Gallegos le pasa por encima un algodón humedecido para quitar los últimos restos de vellosidad y en un momento se detiene en el clítoris y lo frota a propósito con el algodón una, dos, tres veces, viendo los efectos que tal manoseo produce en las piernas de Diana la asistente, que sufren espasmos repentinos. (2012: pp.117-118)

This particular extract is demonstrative of the objectification of women within the context of a patriarchal institution. As Gallegos gazes upon his female patient, he is able to internalise and reify her through the use of the medical gaze, a more concrete physical manifestation of Gallegos and Corona's organisation of Diana's abortion without her being present. Such undertones combine to suggest patriarchal dominance over women, and Guedea reinforces this by again placing Diana in the role of object. Guedea writes a scene of discovery and power on the behalf of the doctor, who in this instance holds all the power, given that Diana's vagina is interpreted by the doctor as 'solamente para sí'. Her genitals are described in such explicit detail, that the reader understands the extent to which the doctor is objectifying and gazing at them is excessive; this is made certain by the doctor's use of the cotton wool which he uses *a próposito* in order to invoke the *espasmos repentinos* which Diana 'suffers' – she does not enjoy the touch that the doctor purposefully repeats upon her genitals. As Diana suffers and the doctor gains sexual excitement from her discomfort and the displaying of her genitals, she becomes the victim and Gallegos becomes the aggressor in this scene. Such an intimate description of the female body can also be found in Bef's work; however, again Guedea's style, achieved by mixing formal, technically correct vocabulary such as 'clítoris', 'vagina', 'vulva', and juxtaposing this against phrases such as 'aquella sabrosura', 'jugosa de labios gruesos', 'como la nalguita de un bebé', all of which, through Guedea's use of indirect free style, betray the innermost thoughts and feelings of the doctor, encouraging the reader to identify more with Diana than with Gallegos, feeling unease and anxiety when reading such a passage.

Furthermore, Guedea directly dialogues with Mexico's rape culture and the intertwining relationship between coercion and sexual violence which, in Mexico,

manifests itself in acts of feminicide. It is after Diana is anaesthetised that the tropes of sexual violence against women become particularly evident within the narrative,

> El doctor Gallegos da unos pellizcos en las piernas de su paciente para asegurarse de que ya se ha ido completamente de este mundo y luego, con una lengua que parece haber sido adiestrada para tales moliendas, empieza a lamer la puchita de Diana la asistente, con la cabeza metida adentro de la bata azul. Mientras la lengua del doctor Gallegos entra y sale por ese túnel sembrado de rosas rosas y explora sus escarpados, Abel Corona continúa en la salita imaginando que el cuerpo de Diana la asistente no resistió la anestesia y pasó, desafortunadamente, a mejor vida. (118)

While at her most passive – under anaesthetic – Diana is sexually assaulted by her doctor, and simultaneously wished dead by Corona, the father of her unborn child. Guedea's description of the scene functions differently to those presented by Bef in which tropes of rape were heavily referenced. In this instance, though, we can understand that Diana's situation is particularly abject, there is a complete block on identification for the reader, who can sympathise with Diana from an ethical point of view as a human being. Guedea's use of language is one which sits in erotic fiction, and which is traditionally employed to produce a pleasure response, however in this case, given the scene described, the reader may wish to resist it. It is here where Guedea's work demonstrates the extent to which rape culture in Mexico pervades: As this thesis maintains, using Iser's (1978:34) concept that each text has 'a textual structure anticipating the presence of a recipient', the reader, approaches the scene from a heterosexual male point of view. Guedea's use of *adiestrada* in this instance demonstrates the doctor's inherent strength practised sexual abuse of women. Rape and sexual abuse, according to Franco, is seen as an intrinsic act to men who see themselves as 'implacable, all powerful' (2014:16), which Gallegos clearly is in this case. This is not only due to Diana's unconscious state, but is also underlined by the medic's status as doctor, whose medical gaze internalises and dehumanises the female body.[90] The notion of Diana as an inferior, reified object, present for the sexual titillation of the male gaze, is intensified as Gallegos' anaesthetist, doctor Salazar, is called into the room,

> […] El doctor Salazar abre la puerta corrediza.
> […] – Sabe a durazno – el doctor Gallegos se muerde el labio inferior por dentro.
> - ¿Me concedería usted tal honor, su señoría?
> - Sólo si mi saliva no le produce urticaria, reverendísimo.
> - De ninguna manera, su señoría.
>
> El doctor Salazar sale del cuartito y se coloca en la misma posición que antes adoptó el doctor Gallegos, la cabeza metida debajo de la bata azul y las nalgas bien balanceadas en el banquito ajustable. Antes de hacer lo propio, limpia con una gasa sumergida en agua oxigenada la zona de auscultación y luego empieza a

[90] See Foucault, *Naissance de la Clinique* (1963), for more on the concept.

> succionarla como si quisiera sacar de adentro un mejillón gigante. Cuando ya les quedan los tiempos justos para terminar con el trabajito para el cual vino realmente la paciente, el doctor Gallegos le da un palmazo en la espalda al doctor Salazar y le pide que proceda [con el procedimiento]. (2012:118-119)

Though shocking – Diana is doubly abused by those who are meant to be caring for her body, and paying strict attention to her procedure – this scene also underlines Franco's turn of phrase 'implacable, all powerful'. Franco (2014:16) states that such a status is created by executing acts of rape which 'requires subjugated victims' (15). This, Franco continues, is most clearly evident in the politics of rape in Latin America, referencing the use of rape as a weapon from the colonial period onwards, compounding it as 'a declaration of superiority and a form of torture that often ended in death' (15). Guedea therefore underscores the inferior social status of women in Mexico in such scenes.

In this instance, the power-play is even more obvious through the increased use of 'doctor', the antiquated manner in which the two men address each other, and also through the medical vocabulary which surrounds Diana's sexual assault. The notion of power is also intensified by the fact that Diana will go on to live with the experience of rape by both of the men, but she will not know of its undertaking. In this sense, the two medics give Diana a false sense of freedom as, after completing the abortion made possible by Abel, not herself, Diana will be unaware of her own subjugation, quite literally at the hands of the two doctors.

Representations of domination over women within film and literature, specifically in Mexico, are explained by de Valdés, who states that male readership/viewership in the country has dictated the dissemination of 'ideologically distorted image[s] of women' within Mexican culture (1998:8). These images, she continues, 'may on the surface appear non-sexual, but when examined closely will yield the metaphor of the submissive abused woman as an apt representation of the Mexican people' (8). This is evident in Guedea's representation of Diana and the unnamed young woman, abused post-mortem by don Chuy. Neither are presented as sexual – the only agency the teenager having over her body being the choice to hang herself, and from thereon being entirely passive (and thereby ultimately submissive), and Diana, though presented as fertile, she is not represented as sexual during her time at the surgery, the doctors' focus remaining throughout on her genitalia and pubic areas. The bodies being dead or under anaesthesia take passivity to its limits, and, for male readers who approach the text from a traditional masculine point of view, the question of the ultimately passive woman as fantasy is posed, which in turn engages with notions of rape ethics, as presented by Stoltenberg (2003). Because of this, the male reader simply cannot identify with the male characters in such

scenes, or if they do, Guedea highlights important issues surrounding the ubiquity of rape culture.

On the one hand, the female characters being reduced merely to female encoded bodies could be interpreted as permitting an outright performance of masculinity to be enacted upon them: 'Masculinity for men functions as both an unquestioned ontological guarantor of gender identity and an unstable, ever-shifting demand for credible performances of that identity' (Biron, 2000:11), and this is particularly visible in acts of feminicide which continue to take place across Mexico, where women who do not adhere to the submissive nature typically associated with femininity so popularised in the twentieth century are rendered so through their often brutal and sexually aggressive murders. However, I argue that in such scenes Guedea also addresses the notion of *feeling powerful* over *being powerful*: the medical staff are not concerned with demonstrating that they are men, rather they are concerned with enjoying the feelings of power, and of the abuse of power since 'The one who rapes, on the other hand, experiences himself as reintegrated, miraculously made whole again, more vital and more real' (Stoltenberg, 2003:18). Guedea's inclusion of femicidious tropes within his work is just as present on paper as in Bef's detective fiction, but is presented in a subtler manner. As a result, Guedea succeeds in not only drawing the reader's attention to the view and treatment of women in Mexico, but also allows us to question the extent to which outdated representations are ingrained within the society, and are quite clearly potentially dangerous. Furthermore, Guedea's original and unusual approach to the detective genre means that he does not allow the reader to identify with his male protagonists; this, in turn, means that unlike in Bef's work where characters cause less anxiety and are more concrete, we must question related acts of sexual abuse, rather than comply with and/or gain voyeuristic pleasure from these abuses.

5.6. Conclusion

The *Colima* trilogy clearly constitutes a postmodern take on the detective genre. This in itself is troubling, as postmodernist fiction tends to reject the concept of truth, of there being any external reality, hence Guedea's constant use of confusion, obscurity, and anxiety. However, it is important to reassert that the absence of truth in a multiplicity of competing interpretations does not prevent the establishment of a collectively-agreed truth, and nor does it mean all interpretations are equally valid. Hutcheon (2004: Chapter One, no pagination) stresses how postmodern works act as effective criticisms of a self-aware contemporary society, demonstrates the inherently multiplicitous origins of the

condition, just as a profusion of truths and lies complicate our understanding of Guedea's narratives. In this manner, Guedea's work is demonstrably a postmodern take on the detective genre, fluctuating between collusion, criticism, and anxiety, simultaneously questioning patriarchal structures within Mexico, rather than being purely complicit in their presence.

Though having strict adherence to some of the genre's archetypal norms, such as the proliferation of female characters, various murders, the presence of many *noir* tropes such as the alcoholic, chain-smoking detective, the search for clues, and the discovery of truths, Guedea's novels thoroughly subvert many others. The missing protagonist, the most obvious detectives not taking centre stage, the lack of *femme fatale*, the homoerotic undertones of the protagonist, and the presence of historical fact and crimes all subvert tried-and-tested genre norms which have proven popular over decades on a global scale.

Such simultaneous subversion and adherence to the detective genre means that Guedea's work, like Valle's, can be interpreted and investigated as detective metafiction, a new kind of detective text for Mexico. A morphing genre whose ambivalence towards definition causes the reader anxiety from the outset, it also underlines the author's preoccupation with Mexican politics and society. In order to adequately comment on the country's corruption and impunity, Guedea has necessarily twisted, subverted, and even confused the detective genre to paradoxically give the reader a clear, cutting view of contemporary Mexico. The introduction of Abel Corona into the annals of literary (neo)detectives in Mexico is perhaps Guedea's most obvious attempt at such a comment. Corona's adherence to several of the norms of the typical hard-boiled detective – his drinking and drug-taking, his various and at times overlapping relationships with women, his (at times half-hearted) criminal investigations - all mark him clearly as fulfilling the role of the detective. However, his missing status during *41*, his criminal and semi-criminal activities in *Conducir* and *El crimen*, his unspoken homoerotic undertones, his decision to leave the problematic and threatening Colima at the end of the trilogy, and Román and Sabino's star detective status all combine to demonstrate how the protagonist is a reflection of the society in which he was created. More than any other quality, Corona's lies, when in a position as the novels' protagonist within a genre traditionally intrinsically associated with exposing truths, are that which mark him as most different to his Mexican, and American, fictitious detective counterparts, and are what underline Guedea's preoccupation with demonstrating the multiple interpretations of truth. Truth

in its most basic and widely-accepted form is not tolerated by Guedea: Sabino and Román cannot survive once they have exposed it.

Genre trouble and anxious questioning of truth are combined in Guedea's style. Obvious inaccuracies and direct contradictions in the texts appear deliberately on occasion in order to alert the reader to the notion that truth and knowledge are subjective concepts. In reality, of course, it does: corruption remains across the country, events such as the disappearances and murders in Iguala and Tlatlaya see nobody but the Mexican people blamed despite heavy state involvement in both occurrences, women remain the victims of outdated patriarchal systems which clash with first-world neo-liberal developments, resulting in feminicides and domestic abuse.[91]

The femicidious thread running throughout Guedea's texts, visible in *Conducir* and particularly in *41* and *El Crimen* is that which most clearly links Guedea's fiction to Bef's *Detective Mijangos* series. However, it is yet again the author's deliberate style which causes the reader to react to the texts in a manner not synonymous with pleasure associated with the voyeuristic, sadopornographic scenes in Bef's work. This is perhaps most visible in the description of scenes of necrophilia, or in the scenes of sexual abuse of unconscious women, both always at the hands of male characters in the medical profession: forensic pathologists, doctors-cum-abortionists, and anaesthetists. Each of these characters objectifies the female-coded bodies they abuse with their medical (and therefore implicitly masculine heterosexual) gaze. The women subjected to this abuse cannot deny their abusers such acts. Franco's thought on rape requiring 'subjugated victims' (2014:15) demonstrates how such scenes engage with the long-standing association of
men as superior and women as inferior, however Guedea's scenes also, through the emphasis on the medical gaze equally at play in such scenes, as well as the female bodies present fulfilling the roles of dead/unconscious, and therefore as the epitome of submissive, make the link to genocide, gynocide, and war much more effectively than Bef's work is capable of doing. The abuse of female, lifeless bodies elicits little to no titillation on the part of the reader, perhaps due to the shocking nature of the scenes in which the women are even silenced from speaking, perhaps because in each of these scenes other men stand idly by and watch the abuse take place – or join in with it themselves - and certainly because we cannot identify with the perpetrator, as for Guedea, all protagonists are unreliable and cause the reader deep anxiety. As previously quoted in

[91] For more on Mexico's international and notorious status as violent, particularly towards women, see Méndez Robles, 2015.

the introduction to this chapter, the exhibitions of sexual abuse against women in these texts represent 'the drama of masculinity [being] performed on the body of the helpless woman' (Franco, 2014: 16), and Guedea's uncomfortable and anxious representation of such abject horror succeeds in drawing the reader's attention to the low(er) status of women in Mexico today, rather than trivialising and relegating the issue to narrative frivolity.

In the *Colima* trilogy, Guedea achieves much more than a mere subversion of the detective genre. Rather, across the three novels, the author encourages the reader to question all narratives, both historical and fictional, and invites questions concerning our own considerations of the concept of truth, as well as gender perceptions in contemporary Mexico.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

This thesis began by setting out three main areas for investigation in the detective fiction produced by authors in Cuba and Mexico. I have argued that these texts, from the end of the twentieth century and the new millennium, demonstrate such subversion of the detective fiction genre that I suggest such cultural products should be considered as original works in their own right. Though this thesis understands the hard-boiled detective fiction genre to have some of the same traits as the primary texts in this thesis, they cannot necessarily be considered the same due to diverse socio-political backgrounds and historical contexts, in addition to the kinds of crimes on which they focus. As such, this thesis has demonstrated that these novels are what Richard (1993) would posit as 'original mutations'.

This thesis outlined three areas of investigation in order to explore whether detective fiction produced in Cuba and Mexico should be considered as outlined above. The first of the areas – the novels' focus on socio-political events – was developed considering the texts' focus on either historic events as presented in the novels, or how representations of country-specific social problems were communicated by the author. This led to the second area for consideration – how (subversive) representations of bodies and sexualities within these specific socio-political frameworks demonstrated generic subversion, which was closely linked to this thesis' third concern: the problematizing of the detective novel as a genre in these particular contexts.

In order to fully consider these three topics, the works of authors significant to the detective fiction genre have been closely evaluated, as concerns literary, social, and political analysis. As such, this thesis has identified issues concerning traditional gender norms along with gender-focused social issues in the countries such as machismo and feminicidio in relation to Cuba and/or Mexico in order to discuss individual cultural anxieties surrounding these themes. It also engaged with the ways in which the primary texts present fluid bodies and sexualities as a means for challenging the typical US detective novel. As a result of the focus on real-life crimes and criminals, authors, and historical events, in the case of two authors it was deemed appropriate to outline a new subgenre, that of detective metafiction. Though other authors' work may not have fallen under this title, their work was proven to at least engage with genre subversion and originality, and were considered as postmodern – original – takes on the US genre.

This thesis from its outset wished to radically reconsider the work of novels which have received academic attention previously (Padura and Valle), and to approach less-known and less critically-considered authors (Bef and Guedea) as equally deserving of sustained analysis as examples of peripheral subversions and original hybrids of the detective narrative. Despite the fact that crime fiction in Cuba and Mexico has been considered both as separate entities to one another (Wilkinson on Cuba, Nichols in Mexico) and in comparison (Oakley, Braham), the subjects of genre, sexuality, and generic subversion have up to this point not been considered by academics in relation to both Cuba and Mexico. Through an exploration of Cuban and Mexican detective fiction, this thesis has proven that works from these societies merit consideration as texts which deal with specific social issues, with regards both to providing new genres.

In order to prove this, this thesis is based on a theoretical framework which concerns the limits and traits of postmodernism, specifically the problematic association of the theory in Latin America. As outlined in the introduction, this thesis considers the work of Brian McHale and Linda Hutcheon overall, and Raymond Leslie Williams, Kseynia Vinarov, García Talaván, and Antonio Benítez Rojo in particular in relation to the regions. The work of these academics was used to highlight the ways in which the transgressive detective text demonstrates traits of fluidity, performativity, blurring, doubling. This 'aquatic' nature in the case of Cuban texts in particular, or the self-aware traits of Mexican novels has meant that the content and form of the novels analysed varies; although discussing similar themes, the primary texts in this thesis vary wildly in form, style, and content. Furthermore, this thesis has suggested that the representation of bodies in the primary texts constructs sexual identities/bodies which engage closely with social issues concerning gender and sexuality in Cuba and Mexico. Though adherence to some typical genre norms may still be present in some examples of primary texts, specifically using theories from Judith Butler, Laura Mulvey, Julia Kristeva and Georges Bataille, this thesis focuses on unusual bodies, bodies which change, or bodies which no longer exist physically in order to demonstrate hybrid queer identities in countries where such bodies are subversive.

Overall, this thesis has aimed to link literary convention and the study of gender and sexuality to the analysis of detective fiction narratives in Cuba and Mexico. Here, texts have been analysed as a means for drawing attention to and problematizing socio-political injustices which aim to encourage the reader to question the corresponding society in text. The texts clearly construct norms – both concerning genre, but also with

regards to society – which authors challenge and problematize. Although this investigation has been carried out in relation to Cuba and Mexico specifically, this theoretical framework could equally be applied to analysis of popular culture products such as the detective text in other Latin American countries which have undergone new social and political experiences, for example regarding transitions from dictatorship to democracy or concerning the surge in violence in Central America.

6.1. Challenging Form(s): Cuban Detective Fiction

Research into post-Special Period detective fiction has been important to approaching issues concerning the effects of both Marxist and neoliberal structures. This thesis has underlined how authors have challenged post-revolutionary views of bodies and sexualities in Cuba, and how authors have problematized the novel in after the Special Period. In all of these areas, normative and accepted assumptions have been challenged by the authors Leonardo Padura and Amir Valle.

6.1.1. Padura's *Máscaras*

This thesis has found that *Máscaras* goes beyond the socialist detective novel as promoted in the 1971 *Congreso* and reaffirmed in 1972 when a referenceable set of rules were provided for authors of the genre. Set in the months running up to the fall of the Soviet Union, *Máscaras* mentions, from the outset, Cuban society within a revolutionary context.

In *Máscaras*, the underlying homoeroticism of Lieutenant Mario Conde, who this thesis interprets as representing two typical icons of male heterosexuality – the *hombre nuevo* and the detective — overall associating Conde with notions of rationality, strength, and an inherent attraction to women, challenges Cuban concepts of *machismo* and normative sexualities. In undercutting heteronormative traits throughout *Máscaras* – either through revealing Conde's sexual history with Luisito, his current sexual relationship with the androgynous Poly, his phallic power being questioned in scenes which can be read with homoerotic undertones, or his waning homophobia as the narrative progresses – Padura reveals both an awareness of issues concerning sexuality in Cuba, but also the need to challenge the *status quo*. As such, the reader is presented with a Cuban authority figure who is subject to gender trouble, but also plays a part in genre troubling.

Conde contributes to Padura's sustained genre troubling by not adhering to the norms of the typical Cuban socialist detective by not working within the collective – the narrative focuses on Conde most frequently, though he does report to his superior, Major Rangel, and speaks with his colleague, Manuel Palacios. Nevertheless, he in fact undertakes some acts on his own – attending underground LGBTQ parties in order to further his investigation, for example. Although such actions as performed by a detective in US detective fiction would not appear abnormal, within the Cuban genre, Padura clearly troubles genre norms. However, this thesis has argued that Padura does not merely rely on US genre norms, rather he distorts and mutates the genre into a text which prioritises Cuban social issues. For example, in referencing Conde's relationship with Luisito, the reader becomes aware of the island's understanding of the act of homosexual sex, underlining differences between *locas* and *hombre hombres* in this context. The *femmes fatales* in *Máscaras*, are, in fact, more likely to be *hombres fatales*, who are either dead or a mere memory, yet who still cause anxiety to the hermeneutic, truth-seeking detective in his present. Where the *femme fatale* is evident in the text, she does not correspond to the typical character found in US detective fiction, and certainly does not reflect any female character present in Cuban socialist detective fiction. Instead, Padura provides a character who both subverts the typical role of the dangerous woman, but who, in being attractive to the detective who does at this point adhere to genre norms, causes anxiety to the troubled sexuality of the detective as an androgynous character who dominates Conde to the point she requires him to penetrate her anally. Although, in the context of Cuban sexuality, this could be interpreted as Conde assuming the role of *hombre hombre*, it also raises questions concerning sex and power on the island.

Máscaras is a landmark example of Cuban popular culture for dealing so explicitly with the issues of non-normative bodies and sexualities. Further to promoting discussion of these topics in new ways, it is also an example of mutation of generic form and structure. Although the narrative appears to progress from a crime being committed to false leads being given and finishes on the revelation of the identity of the murderer, this thesis has argued that there are several ways in which Padura subverts norms in order to provoke questions about the reader's own awareness of Cuban society in relation to the text.

Principally, Padura provides the reader with a quintessentially anxious narrative, far removed from both Cuban socialist detective and US detective fiction norms. This is not only evident in relation to troubling *femmes* or *hombres fatales*, but also in the *nota del*

autor which specifies that the novel *does not* wish to reflect Cuban reality at the time, despite the fact that in the same note, Padura mentions other authors – Cuban and non-Cuban – to whom the novel makes reference, including fictional characters such as Batman. This highlights some common traits of the postmodern cultural product: multiplicitous, fluctuating, contradictory, and self-aware of the issues of performance.

Moreover, the inclusion of the detective's own short story, an element of *Máscaras* previously overlooked by academics for close literary and theoretical analysis, provides an insight into Conde's outlook, but also reaffirms Padura's novel as representative of genre subversion and originality, drawing the reader's attention to the act of reading and the text as object. The story, clearly part of the crime genre, lacks a detective figure or a clear resolution, or even a motive for the murder committed during the narrative, provoking ontological questioning in the protagonist and the reader alike.

The representation of characters as not conforming to *Castrista* norms as well as Padura's obvious genre-troubling demonstrate the extent to which self-expression and non-conformity with regards to bodies, sexuality, and genre combine to form an example of the postmodern detective novel in Cuba. Although Padura's representation of revolutionary Cuba in temporal proximity to the Special Period is a subversive take on the detective novel in Cuba, I argue that this thesis has also demonstrated how Valle's *Descenso* series provides an original mutation of the genre, using different strategies.

6.1.2. Valle's *Descenso* Series

Descenso is, from the outset, different to the works produced by Cuban authors, both contemporaries of Valle, and those writing to reinforce and share Cuba's Marxist framework. Seeing Padura as a starting point for his own work, Valle nevertheless goes beyond it, both with regards to content and form. The socio-politically concerned series does not shy away from outlining its basis in historical fact, made evident also through the purposeful use of *notas del autor*. As such, socio-political issues and preoccupations – including the obfuscation of any official crime statistics from Cuba – are writ large in these novels. The series – clearly breaking with genre convention within Cuba - is concerned with criminality, and is critical of Cuban society which has turned to neoliberal policy. Research on Valle has necessarily taken into account the author's exiled status throughout analysis of the primary texts.

Valle's series engages with changing sexualities in Cuba, representing a variety of normative and non-normative sexualities in his work. This focus comes at a time when one of the consequences of Cuba's 'opening' to neoliberal policy such as tourism was

fomenting the reappearance of prostitution and sex tourism on the island, which had previously been wiped out by the revolutionary government. Considering this in relation to Valle's series, the author presents sex as ubiquitous in his work, however the act is often accompanied by violence, or is presented not only as erotic fiction, but as hard pornography. Though notions of sex and violence are not by any means novel in relation to the detective text from a US perspective, Valle's work certainly challenges guidelines laid out in 1971 and 1972. However, unlike in typical examples of US detective fiction and pornography, scenes of rape specifically from the series raise questions surrounding sadistic enjoyment of such scenes on the part of the implied male heterosexual reader. Particular to Valle's work is the theme of male/male rape, which also pushes the boundaries of the genre and its at times pornosadic associations. Including scenes in which both sexes are victims of sexual violence, Valle raises awareness of the ubiquity of hegemonic masculinity in Cuba, and places the male rape victim as *pasivo*. Otherwise, representations of women's bodies in such scenes overall tend towards maintaining pariah femininities, this being a surprising area of adherence on the part of Valle who otherwise successfully writes polemic subversions of male victims. The suggestion that the detective figure does not correspond to the *hombre nuevo* in these works, rather the elderly and marginalised *rey de la marginalidad* who represents a neoliberal challenge to the communist regime as having qualities associated with such an idolised figure, implies that revolutionary rule is outdated.

By placing violence within a particularly Cuban context, for example in relation to murders which took place as a result of Batista-era feuds, scams on rafts from Havana to Miami, and the importation of drugs to the island and its possible consequences, Valle colours his texts as critical of the ongoing Cuban regime. This is most obvious in his purposeful and intentionally-stated *notas del autor*, which make truth claims surrounding the plot and content of his novels. In including a plethora of 'real' characters – those such as Alex Varga and Justo Marqués, the author causes the reader to problematize their understanding of neoliberalism within the country, a line of questioning which, in addition to the consistent references to real crimes and real historical events, causes the reader to ask what truth in fact is – a highly unusual and postmodern effect of the detective metafiction novel. The plethora of voices and changing narrators plunge the reader into a schizophrenic, hellish nightmare, at the mercy of the author.

6.1.3. Cuban Detective Fiction

Overall, it is clear that both Valle and Padura reference yet crucially mutate both the Cuban socialist detective novel, and detective fiction from the US. Valle himself outlines the differences between his work and that of Padura when he references the latter as the bridge to his own writing. Padura's subtle approach to subversion and originality does not mean that his work should not be considered as a new addition to the Cuban canon, merely this suggests that Valle's works – especially those written while in exile — present non-normative bodies and sexualities and non-conformist genres more obviously.

Valle's series may at first appear more socio-politically aware and driven than that of Padura. However, it is significant to note that Padura writes in the immediate aftermath of the Special Period and Valle up to 15 years later. Valle therefore has distance – both temporally, politically, and geographically – as an exile in Berlin. Valle's work incorporates knowledge of the lasting issues associated with the consequences of the Special Period, and, crucially, writes for a non-Cuban audience (although his work, as evidenced by his popularity on the island, still reaches Cuba), whereas Padura, though experiencing *Máscaras's* being temporarily banned on the island, has been constrained to literary guidelines. Nonetheless, this does not mean that his subversions of generic archetypes such as the *femme fatale* and the detective have not provided valuable comments on bodies and sex in Cuba, and Padura's postmodern detective fiction encourages the reader to consider Cuban society as double-encoded, endowed with duplicity. Though Valle achieves the same effects, the aquatic quality of his work is most clearly seen in the constant questioning of truth and lies in an oligarchical society, prompted by changing narrators and outright statements of 'truth' and 'lies'.

In all, the Cuban detective fiction investigated in this thesis demonstrates significant fluidity and originality in a genre frequently associated with rules and guidelines – both inside and outside of Cuban contexts.

6.2. Genre, Masks, and Genre Masks: Mexican Detective Fiction

This thesis's investigation into Mexican detective fiction has considered the work of two authors published after the inception of the *War on Drugs*. Research has considered in particular the representation of gender and sexuality in a society about which much academic study has revealed the existence of a dominant heteronormative patriarchal *status quo*, which has led to a rise in violence against women, although violence in Mexico against men is also commonplace as a result of the *War on Drugs*. Although scholarship

indicates that the work produced in Mexico from the 1950s onwards maintains close links to/reproductions of US texts, I argue that two contemporary Mexican authors are subverting the form and content of US detective fiction to produce new and significant takes on the genre. This thesis has demonstrated how Mexican authors have attempted to either foreground female characters or comment on women's issues in texts which have been examined as original mutations of detective fiction, dealing directly with Mexican socio-political problems. Here, Bef and Rogelio Guedea's series have been considered as examplesthat challenge issues as set out above.

6.2.1. Bef's *Detective Mijangos* series

The *Detective Mijangos* series is, firstly, unusual within the context of Mexican detective fiction as it is the country's first detective fiction series to foreground recurring female protagonists and antagonists.

The series, as this thesis has demonstrated, is largely concerned with the representation of bodies, with an overwhelming tendency to focus on the female form. In such instances, women's bodies are seen to dominate typically male acts, are adorned by male clothing, and perform sex acts with/on women. This, I have found, on one level, demonstrates the extent to which the author wishes to develop the status of women in a Mexico in which feminicidious activity is prevalent, aimed at women who outstep their traditional roles as passive and domestic. However, despite this foregrounding for female character, this thesis has also found this problematic as the female protagonists in Bef's work continue to act within a patriarchal frame, imitating male acts without outstepping or perhaps even blurring gender roles. Bef's description of female bodies provides a fluid, multiplicitous view of women to an extent, as several of his characters are linked to animals, and they are presented as chameleon-like, adept at disguising their true identity through adornment. However, this notion of obfuscation also implies a distrust of women who do try to change their physicality, to some extent feeding back into feminicidious rhetoric.

Moreover, although the author, as explicitly stated in interviews, has wished to write obviously female characters, his representation of hypersexual women is problematic, again fuelling dichotomising and potentially damaging attitudes towards women. This is also evident in scenes in which non-normative sexualities are expressed: examples of lesbianism are given on multiple occasions, and, as I have discussed, are also problematic. Again, rather than challenging stereotypes of non-normative sexualities, Bef reaffirms a patriarchal attitude towards lesbianism, presenting it, as I have argued, for the

titillation of the implied male reader, not seeking to develop nuances of non-normative sexualities. Furthermore, instances of rape appear in the work as perhaps shocking, but also, this thesis argued, are present to act as a plot device, which is soon forgotten about, and secondly to provide gratification for the reader, who is titillated into reading more of the pornosadic text. This is a dangerous representation of women within a feminicidious context – given the popular status of detective fiction, the texts arguably reaffirm outdated patriarchal attitudes on a large scale.

However, this thesis argues that the *Detective Mijangos* series does provide a significant generic subversion of tenets of the US hard-boiled genre. References to fairy tales, the graphic novel, and postmodern self-awareness are, I have also argued, clear in Bef's references to violence against women, even if such texts do detract from women's troubled status in Mexico today.

6.2.2. Rogelio Guedea's *Colima* trilogy

Colima is a confusing labyrinth of voices, characters, and timeframes. Its interchangeable – and often absent — detective figure is one which challenges genre norms, along with its representation of women and sexualities. Moreover, the trilogy's focus on historical fact within a Mexican context complicates its reading and comprehension within the detective fiction genre. I maintain that Guedea plays with the US tropes of the genre to subvert such norms, overall providing a thoroughly original mutation of the detective fiction genre.

Research into the *Colima* trilogy has demonstrated a subversive approach to the representation of bodies and sexualities in Mexico. Primarily, the representation of female bodies as objects of sexual desire within a patriarchally-dominant society engages with and challenges issues of a rape culture in Mexico. Women who experience sexual abuse are represented as entirely passive – either unconscious or dead – and are raped by men who represent either law or medical professions – professions which are intrinsically associated with masculinity. Their shocking abuse seeks to underline the links between such acts and feminicide in Mexico. Furthermore, the detective's underlying homoeroticism invites questions concerning the links between distrust and homosexuality in Mexico, as Corona's homoerotic undertones are linked to a lack of rationality and inability to act as a typical detective.

This thesis has found that the *Colima* trilogy challenges the archetypal detective novel through its sustained focus on questioning the notion of truth. This is done through a proliferation of truth claims throughout all texts – truths which combine to create

fictions, historical facts which are removed from their temporal context and introduced into the present to provide anxious questionings concerning the purpose of retelling history, and truth claims on the part of characters which are often contradicted or re-told from a different point of view. Guedea succeeds in troubling the detective genre by removing all outlets for truth in his narrative. I argue that this, in turn, means that the author successfully comments on the lack of an attainable truth in a violent, and, crucially, systemically impune and corrupt Mexico. This is reaffirmed by the untrustworthy and/or absent detective figure, and the murder of the two characters most closely associated with the traits of the typical, rational, and hermetic truth-seekers at the end of the trilogy, having finally unveiled an ugly truth.

Guedea encourages a relentless questioning of both the purpose of detective fiction and of the extent to which the concept of truth can be applied to a society such as Mexico.

6.2.3. Mexican Detective Fiction

The Mexican detective fiction considered in this thesis overall demonstrates a preoccupation with ongoing social problems – namely that of feminicide, corruption, and violence as a consequence of the *War on Drugs*. Both Bef and Guedea dedicate time on the representation of women's bodies in their work. Interestingly, however, both authors produce similar scenes of abuse against women which encourage different reactions in the implied male reader of such texts. Although Bef's work foregrounds female characters, his representation of women overall detracts from and undermines the effects of feminicidious activity, perhaps even reaffirming the domineering patriarchal attitudes that the author claims to set out to counter, above all in the worrying fact that the author uses rape as a plot device. This is also evident in the representation of female protagonists, antagonists, and *femmes fatales* in the *Detective Mijangos* series who have little consequence other than pandering to the male gaze in order to titillate. Guedea's representation of women's bodies and the sexual abuse women face, however, presents a sickening reality, in which patriarchal practices and institutions are critiqued.

This thesis also investigated Bef's representation of lesbianism and bisexuality as a means through which to perpetuate non-normative sexualities as understood in Mexico. However, this research concludes that although the author's inclusion of such subversive sexual identities does indeed expand on the representation of women in Mexican detective fiction (in particular with regards to protagonists and antagonists), these expansions are limiting and reaffirm the ongoing and deep-rooted Mexican attitudes towards sexuality. In this sense, the *Detective Mijangos* series can be considered as making

an attempt to engage with problems specific to contemporary Mexico. However, the author's lack of development of such characters does, within a Mexican framework, perpetuate two-dimensional views of women and sexualities. On the other hand, *Colima* does not seek to investigate lesbian identities, rather it focuses on Mexican attitudes towards homosexual men. Here, Guedea again references the particularities of Mexican patriarchal systems in order to demonstrate Corona's subversive status as probable homosexual. This status is something that Corona himself cannot commit to consider properly, thoughts on his homosexuality suddenly popping into his train of thought, or manifesting themselves – graphically – in dreams. Again, Guedea subtly positions these admissions concerning Corona's character as affecting his abilities as a detective, another typically male role.

Making reference in *41* to issues concerning homosexuality from its very title, Guedea's work also engages closely with historical fact to present and detail attitudes towards non-normative sexualities in Mexico. It is this constant referencing of history – whether news, criminal events, songs, politicians – which also adds to Guedea's novels, again providing an original take on the detective fiction genre. This constant re-referencing of historical fact and its clear blending with fiction causes the reader to question the extent to which truth is obtainable in such an example of detective fiction. Again, this is a subversive notion in a genre closely associated with the exposure of injustice. Although Bef's work does not put so much emphasis on genre mutation in order to provoke questions on systemic corruption in Mexico, it nevertheless demonstrates a preoccupation with genre hybridity. The *Detective Mijangos* series can be read as a modern Mexican take on the fairy tale, provoking questioning on who plays the part of the good and the bad in the context of the police force and the drugs baron.

Overall, both authors provide works which are unlike that produced in the US: they are original interpretations of the detective novel, which are thoroughly coloured by their basis in Mexican socio-political preoccupations, and clearly demonstrate an awareness of and engagement in sexual and gender issues also specific to the country.

6.3. Subversive Sex, Gender, and Genre in Cuban and Mexican Detective Fiction

This conclusion has aimed to demonstrate the extent to which authors individually in their social context have subverted genre norms in their works, and to what ends. It has also pointed out the ways in which authors approach similar social and political

preoccupations. In order to finally conclude this thesis, I highlight the ways in which, overall, Cuban and Mexican detective fiction subverts sex, gender, and genre expectations, and to what ends.

6.3.1. Sex and Gender

The authors included in this thesis are all preoccupied with the representation of bodies in their detective fiction, with all authors focusing and prioritising the presentation of the female form. Although this may not appear subversive when considering archetypal examples of detective fiction, such as that written by Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler, or more recently by Robert Crais, the ways in which female bodies are presented underlines either specifically Cuban or Mexican social issues. This is particularly evident in works by Mexican authors, and, as I have outlined, can be problematic and may fuel feminicidious attitudes, or it can force the reader to ask themselves uncomfortable questions surrounding gender inequality and its prevalence in the country. Nonetheless, the representation of women's bodies in Cuban detective fiction appears to either queer the *hombre nuevo*/detective figure's assumed heterosexuality, as in Padura's work, or reinforces the detective's patriarchal matrix, while simultaneously demonstrating a lack of transgressive space for women in contemporary Cuba, as in Valle's narratives. As such, Cuban detective fiction as analysed in this thesis focuses on the effect of bodies (whether sexed or trans-sexed) *on* men as part of a heterosexual *machista* framework in which the *status quo* for men is clearly referenced in relation to revolutionary ideals. However, such ideals in relation to women – for example non-normative sexualities – are only hinted at, and are certainly not developed. For example, Poly in *Máscaras* demonstrates both male and female traits, and Valle's fiction features no female characters with non-normative bodies, rather the *Descenso* series focuses on male-to-female transvestites. This appears to echo revolutionary sentiments concerning non-normative sexualities, specific to men, leaving women unconsidered.

However, the detective fiction from Mexico analysed in this thesis has on some occasions demonstrated the opposite – a focus on the negative effect of men on women's bodies, above all in the work of Rogelio Guedea as a response to feminicide. Nonetheless, this is not so evident in Bef's work, however this series is the only example of the texts included in this thesis to specifically foreground female characters. Here, more so than in any of the other primary texts, female characters remain undeveloped within the context of detective fiction, performing for the implied male reader. Nevertheless, the series does also dialogue with issues of feminicide, and details the effects of systemic patriarchal

abuse on women by men. However, this is undercut by the use of such scenes as fuelling the plot, or as being a gratuitous addition to the narrative.

This thesis has focused on literary products which are produced by men. It is worth noting that the only author who has deliberately stated his wishes to prioritise women and their gender issues is perhaps the most problematic to consider within the theoretical framework of this thesis. Otherwise, Cuban and Mexican detective fiction prioritises the use of sexed bodies in order to open discourse on social issues which immediately affect their specific social realities.

Further to this, non-normative sexualities also demonstrate similarities and differences between the two cultures. Cuban authors appear to engage with preoccupations surrounding transvestism with much more frequency than Mexican authors of detective fiction. This focus on transvestism and gender-blurring, this thesis maintains, demonstrates a sexuality which is, despite its inherent gender-blurring, more clearly visible in contemporary Cuba than homosexuality, associated with femininity and passivity, meaning 'active' homosexuals are not considered in such a light. The association of homosexuality in Mexican crime fiction with lack of rationality, and that of lesbianism with distrust betrays a still-existent normative *status quo* of gender and sexualities in the country, despite authors' individual wishes to draw attention to inequalities. However, overall, Mexican detective fiction appears to fuel dichotomising feminicidious attitudes with greater frequency than in Cuba, where blurred sexualities remain a threat.

6.3.2. Genre

This thesis's focus on genre subversion has also revealed a preoccupation with truth across all narratives. All authors purposefully prioritise subverting genre norms in order to provoke existentialist and ontological questioning concerning either Cuban or Mexican society, in particular with regards to their social problems.

This thesis has identified how both Rogelio Guedea and Amir Valle write within the generic conventions of detective metafiction, an original finding of this thesis. Such a focus on historical fact and the emplotment of historical events and figures into these narratives requires that the reader acknowledges truth as a subjective concept, a subversive inclusion in the detective narrative which relies upon the revelation of truth and the acquiring of knowledge as the narrative progresses. As such, both authors criticise neoliberalism in their home country, presenting contemporary Cuba and Mexico as locations in which blurring and confusion are everyday occurrences in countries in which crime statistics are not widely – or fully – available, and in which adoption of neoliberal

policies has resulted in a rise in criminality: in Cuba, prostitution and sex tourism, in Mexico, feminicides and the corrupt fallout of the *War on Drugs*.

Although both Padura and Bef have not produced works which I class as part of the subversive detective metafiction subgenre, they have each produced works which are obviously postmodern examples of crime fiction. Their works still allow for existentialist questioning of their own individual social contexts and, I maintain, are original (if not entirely successful) additions to the crime fiction genre. Bef's focus on the drug trade in Mexico is a close examination of the developing role of the *narca* or the *buchona* in the country, though this female character may appear cartoon-like and therefore may not unlock all of the powerful subversive potentials of such a figure in Mexico, the series presents a novel means through which to consider such a representation of femininity unlike that of previous texts (for example, Arturo Pérez Reverte's *La Reina del Sur*). Padura's text, above all due to its inclusion of the postmodern short story written by Conde, cements the author as both different to those writing under the guidance of Cuba's Marxist framework and to those who began writing in and from Cuba after him. Here, Padura is able to directly pose the reader questions pertaining to their own reality and its truth claims.

To conclude, the primary texts used in this thesis demonstrate fluid identities with regards to bodies and sexualities, and multiplicitous societal truths previously not considered within Cuban and Mexican literature. Their differences prove a clear preoccupation with non-normative bodies and sexualities, and, above all, the examples of detective metafiction featured in this research demonstrate a means through which to investigate and draw attention to truth claims in a genre typically preoccupied with expanding knowledge.

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