Literatura Policial:
Gender, Genre, and Appropriation in Argentine and Brazilian Hard-boiled Crime Fiction

A DISSERTATION
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA
BY

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IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Fernando Arenas and Amy Kaminsky, advisers

June 2011

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Acknowledgements

I am deeply indebted to my co-directors Amy Kaminsky and Fernando Arenas for their continuous support throughout my time as a graduate student at the University of Minnesota. This project grew out of a paper written for Professor Arenas in my first semester of graduate school, and I had been inspired by Professor Kaminsky's scholarship even earlier. Through years of courses, meetings, exams, applications, and chapter drafts, they have offered helpful feedback and guidance while encouraging me to follow my passions and speak with my own voice. I am grateful as well to my committee members Ana Forcinito and Joanna O'Connell and to my other professors and mentors, especially Barbara Weissberger and Susan McMillan-Villar at the University of Minnesota and Patrick O'Connor, my undergraduate adviser at the University of Chicago, who have helped me discover the texts, authors, and ideas that would go into this dissertation.

Among many fellow graduate students who have helped me, I am especially grateful to my friends Kajsa Larson, Adriana Gordillo, Kristin Beamish-Brown, Naomi Wood, Megan Corbin, Satty Flaherty-Echeverría, Scott Ehrenburg, Joseph Towle, and Rebecca Weaver for discussions and feedback on this project. The administrative staff and my students and other colleagues at the University of Minnesota Department of Spanish and Portuguese Studies and at Macalester College's Department of Hispanic Studies have also provided much support and encouragement. I thank the consultants at the University of Minnesota Center for Writing, especially Assistant Director Katie Levin, and my fellow participants in the 2010 Dissertation Writing Retreat, for showing me how to write a great amount in a short period of time. I thank the staff and patrons of Saint Anthony Park Bruegger's Bagel Bakery for the space, coffee, and companionship that helped me keep writing through the long haul. I thank all my family members and those friends not named above for their love and support, including LeAnne Laux-Bachand, Beth Kinderman, Andrea Algalith, Lora Bounds, Susanna Goodin, Rebecca and Randall Morris-Ostrom, Erik Ostrom and Kate Stewart, and above all my parents, Don and Florence Ostrom.

Although I had long intended to write a dissertation on Argentine and Brazilian crime fiction, this project only truly began to take shape after my travels in Brazil and Argentina in 2008. Authors Mempo Giardinelli, Luisa Valenzuela, Guillermo Martínez, Ana María Shua, Cristina Piña, and Liliana Heker, and the program staff and participants at the Summer Seminar on Contemporary Argentine Literature at Fundación Mempo Giardinelli in Resistencia were all generous with their time and ideas. I am grateful for funding from the University of Minnesota and the University of Virginia that allowed me to make that trip and participate in the seminar, and I thank Milena Ortiz and Imyra Santana in São Paulo, the Castagné family in Resistencia, and the Carrea family in Chacabuco and La Plata for sharing their homes with me. I will always be deeply grateful to Alicia, Hugo, Jimena, Alejandra, and Jerónimo Carrea for making me feel at home in Argentina when I first came to stay with them at the age of sixteen, and to my adopted aunt Teresita Colombo for asking me what I was reading.

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Introduction

This is a study of gendered ways of narrating and knowing in the work of Rubem Fonseca, Patrícia Melo, Ricardo Piglia, and Claudia Piñeiro, four Latin American authors whose stories and novels about crime are influenced by the genre of hard-boiled crime fiction. Fiction about detectives and murderers is seen by most critics as fundamentally conservative because of the way it treats crime as an individual aberration in an otherwise ordered world. The hard-boiled school that developed in the United States in the 1920s and '30s offers a darker view of society and new avenues for social criticism, including the issues of shared responsibility and government corruption; for this reason it has been influential in Latin American fiction, particularly in the Southern Cone, since the rise of dictatorships in the 1960s and '70s. However, early US hard-boiled crime fiction also reflects its authors' reactionary views toward women, sexual minorities, people of color, and immigrants, and these aspects of the genre have often gone unremarked and unreformed in the critical appropriations made by Latin American authors.

I seek to fill a gap in the critical literature about Latin American crime fiction, which has given significant attention to changes in the genre but not to the gender of authors, characters, and modes of writing. Critics have tended to look at the literary traditions of various nations – including Great Britain, the United States, Argentina, Brazil, and Mexico – in terms of their attitudes toward individual, collective, and state-sponsored violence. Besides noting these national differences, they have studied the frictions between them, the productive use that Latin American authors have made of the perceived foreignness of detective fiction, including their use of parody and upsetting of reader expectations. Crime fiction's approaches to urban violence and state violence are certainly fundamental aspects of the genre and are an important part of my study, but they should not be separated from the issues violence against women or the exclusion of women from the public sphere and the world of literature.

I take the word *appropriation* to have several meanings that can be approached along various axes, of which the most commonly studied is the national. A classic detective story, in which a single detective aids the well-intentioned but less clever police in apprehending a single criminal and thus restoring the general order of society, has generally been considered inappropriate if set in a Latin American context. Latin American authors have found a more appropriate model in hard-boiled fiction, which may focus on either a detective or a criminal and which may not end with a simple solution. They have further transformed it by displacing the figure of the detective while keeping the gritty urban milieu, the structure of suspense, and the view of society as irredeemably corrupt. In this way authors from Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, Chile, Cuba, and other parts of the Americas have appropriated the genre in a way that corresponds with the Spanish and Portuguese adjectives *propio*/*próprio*: they have made it their own.

When I speak of crime fiction, then, it is important to stress that the works I examine here do not fit neatly into the category of hard-boiled crime fiction, repeating its style and formula without innovation, nor is the Argentine *novela negra* merely a translation of the French *roman noir*; rather it is a distinct tradition that uses the audience's knowledge of that foreign genre to generate meanings of its own. The authors I study are influenced by the literary fiction of their own countries and of the United States and Europe as well as the traditions of crime fiction in those countries. They engage with the conventions of those traditions, pulling out what is useful while discarding what is not, or in some cases exaggerating what is inappropriate in order to draw attention to it. Although many of my critical sources deal exclusively with detective fiction, my study also includes stories about murderers. The English term *hard-boiled* has come to be associated principally with private detectives but originally also referred to novels about criminals such as the work of James M. Cain (see Abbott 10, Marling ix). In addition to the terms *hard-boiled*, *noir*, and *novela negra* I also use the English *crime fiction* and the Spanish and Portuguese *policial* in the broader sense that refers to fiction about police, private detectives, other investigators, and criminals in all their national settings and variations.

Besides appropriating a foreign genre and making it relevant in their own countries, these authors are appropriating a masculinist genre – one that developed in part as a reaction to women's gains in society and in the literary world – and using it to speak about their cultures' changing attitudes about gender, sexuality, race, and class. Each of the authors I have chosen to study – Rubem Fonseca and Patrícia Melo from Brazil and Ricardo Piglia and Claudia Piñeiro from Argentina – takes a different approach toward the sexism that underlies the structure, plots, characters, and style of narration traditionally associated with hard-boiled fiction. In each case their appropriation is critical and provocative but still preserves some of the sexism that is part of the literary tradition and part of the societies they are writing about.

I choose to limit my study to four authors from Brazil and Argentina, two countries with strong but separate traditions of crime fiction. Argentina has the longest history of detective fiction in Latin America and, more than in any other Latin American country, it has appropriated the genre as its own, now counting it as an essential part of Argentine literary history. Brazil offers valuable contrast because it follows a different literary orientation, often looking towards Europe and away from the Spanish-speaking part of Latin America while insisting on authenticity and realism from Brazilian authors. Brazilian crime fiction has also been used to address different social problems: the general chaos of modern urban life rather than the political violence that is a more dominant subject in Argentine crime fiction.

I see these national literary traditions as distinct but parallel: in both, there is a group of male authors that begins to integrate the conventions of hard-boiled fiction in the 1960s and ’70s, during periods of political upheaval and government repression and censorship. Both national traditions remain strong in later decades and through the return to democratic government, but they come to be revised from other perspectives, including feminist perspectives. In this introduction I briefly review the history of crime fiction in Great Britain, United States, Argentina, and Brazil, as well as some of the scholarship on that fiction. My chapters then look closely at several works by each of four authors. For both Brazil and Argentina, I look at one of the male authors who helped bring the influence of hard-boiled fiction to that country and shape the meaning it would take on in that national context. Brazilian Patrícia Melo’s work responds in a very specific way to that of her predecessor and mentor Rubem Fonseca, while Argentine Claudia Piñeiro takes a very different, quieter but perhaps more radical approach to the genre of crime fiction in general, including the way it has been written by Ricardo Piglia. I have chosen to study these four authors because they are all well known and associated with the genre of crime fiction in their countries and because they all use distinct strategies in dealing with gender, sexuality, and the question of who can tell a story within their fiction.

It would also be useful to compare the approaches to genre and gender in the established national traditions of Mexico and Cuba, the other countries studied by Amelia Simpson in her important study *Detective Fiction from Latin America* (1990), to examine more recent developments in countries like Chile and Colombia, or to look at the history of crime fiction in Spain and connections across the Spanish-speaking world, as Glen S. Close does in *Contemporary Hispanic Crime Fiction: A Transatlantic Discourse on Urban Violence* (2008). However, I have wanted to give some attention to the development of the genre in these two countries and, above all, to have room to engage in close readings of the fiction of Fonseca, Melo, Piglia, and Piñeiro. As Greg Forter notes in reference to the scholarship on American crime fiction, interest in the formulas and ideology of the genre has often kept those academics who do study it from giving sustained attention to its prose, while more traditional literary critics "treat crime writing as beneath their notice" because it is popular (9). I consider Patricia Melo and Claudia Piñeiro in particular to be understudied and believe it is important to bring sustained critical attention to their work.

History of the genre

English-language crime fiction and its influence in Argentina

Brazil and Argentina are two countries where readers have long enjoyed imported crime fiction and where adaptations of the genre have by now had a deep influence on the national literature. As in the rest of Latin America, middle-class Argentines and Brazilians read the work of Edgar Allan Poe, Arthur Conan Doyle, and Agatha Christie, and other practitioners of the classical mystery or whodunit, often thought of as the British school of detective fiction, from the early part of the 20th century on. In Argentina in particular, a country with a strong British cultural influence, these stories and novels translated and printed by respectable publishers, including Emecé's Séptimo Círculo imprint, directed by no less of an intellectual heavyweight than Jorge Luis Borges.

Sometimes called *novela de enigma* or *relato-problema* in Spanish, these works resemble a logic problem in which the solution is hidden from the narrator and reader at the beginning but can be arrived at through logical reasoning and close attention to clues presented in course of the investigation. After the pioneering works of Poe and Doyle, who established the genre along with the figure of the hyper-intelligent detective (Auguste Dupin and Sherlock Holmes, respectively), the 1920s and '30s brought the so-called Golden Age of Detective Fiction, when authors like Christie, Dorothy Sayers, Ngaio Marsh, Belgian George Simenon, and Americans Ellery Queen and S. S. Van Dine worked in variations on a fairly rigid formula of murder, investigation, and solution. The rules that developed for defining this genre, including S. S. Van Dine's "Twenty Rules for Writing Detective Stories" (1928) and Ronald Knox's "Ten Commandments" or "Decalogue" (1929), had mostly to do with fairness: the reader should be put on equal footing with the detective without special tricks like paranormal phenomena or superhuman powers. In contemporary British writer P.D. James's words, there should be "a solution at the end of the book which the reader should be able to arrive at by logical deduction from clues presented by the writer with deceptive cunning but essential fairness."

As can be noted from the list of influential authors above, women writers (including Christie, Sayers, Marsh, and James) have participated in crime fiction throughout most of the history of the genre and had an important hand in establishing several of its subgenres, in particular the more genteel and formulaic stories and novels of the Golden Age. Initially they wrote about male detectives, then with isolated women who solved individual cases involving the men in their family. In the early twentieth century Anna Katharine Green and Christie created spinster detectives like Amelia Butterworth and Jane Marple who displayed intelligence and competence as detectives, taking advantage of traditionally feminine roles and expanding the possibilities of the genre without offering major challenges to the conservative social order in which they operated. More recent incarnations of the spinster detective appear in "cozy mysteries" such as the US television series *Murder She Wrote* and Lilian Jackson Braun's "The Cat Who" series of books. Like classic detective stories generally, these mysteries present murder as an isolated disruption in an otherwise safe and healthy society. The detective restores order and faith in the system by solving the puzzle and turning the perpetrator over to law enforcement.

As appealing as this pattern (whether starring a male or female detective) was for Latin American readers, they tended to associate it with the British country house where the most famous examples were set and not with their own surroundings. Glen

S. Close traces the history of crime fiction publishing in the Spanish-speaking world as one that involves a good deal of anonymous translating and, at times, blurring the boundary between the tasks of translation, editing, and original writing. Spanish and Latin American publishers hired local writers to provide new installments of popular detective series, and whether they translated a work from English to Spanish or produced another Spanish copy with the same formula and style was unimportant. With these expectations on the part of readers and publishers, many Latin American writers have found it easier to publish crime fiction under foreign-sounding pseudonyms than their own names (a subject taken up by Patrícia Melo in her satirical novel *Elogio da mentira*).

In the introduction to her essential 1990 study of detective fiction from the Río de la Plata region, Brazil, Mexico, and Cuba, Amelia S. Simpson gathers statements by Latin American writers such as Brazilians Luís Martins and Moacir Amâncio, Mexican Carlos Monsiváis, and Argentines Adolfo Pérez Zelaschi and Leonardo Castellani to the effect that detective fiction set in their country could never be realistic because it views crime as an anomaly, depicts police officers as honest and law-abiding, and trusts that the guilty will be identified and punished (20-22). It may be argued that such stories are not realistic in *any* national context, nor are they intended to be. Even Poe's "The Murders in the Rue Morgue", considered by many to be the first example of detective fiction, was published in Philadelphia (in 1841) but set in Paris and featured a French detective; Christie's Poirot was Belgian and many other English-language writers have featured more or less "exotic" characters and settings in order to entertain readers and provide a distance that helps their contrived plots seem more believable. But the clash in cultural attitudes is indeed significant for Latin Americans, and many readers have come to consider the foreign setting an essential characteristic of the genre.

Despite these obstacles, Argentine writers have created a strong tradition of crime fiction. Jorge Lafforgue, in his prologue to the 1997 anthology *Cuentos policiales argentinos*, considers the *cuento policial* to be one of the most important and typical genres in contemporary Argentine literature: "Ningún otro género…ha estructurado tan raigalmente el sistema de la ficción argentina a lo largo de este siglo" (11). Sergio S. Olguín, in the prologue to a 2003 anthology of true crime stories, concurs: "Si hay un género recurrente en la literatura argentina, ése es el policial; incluso mucho más que géneros autóctonos como la gauchesca, reducido a veces a la fascinación de algunos escritores académicos" (9). Olguín's claim for the importance of the genre, then, is not based on its being *original* to Argentina but rather on its being *recurrent*, part of an Argentine literary tradition that goes back over a hundred years. Who would use a pseudonym, he asks, when they could stand in the company of Jorge Luis Borges and Rodolfo Walsh (ibid)?

Walsh worked as a translator and writer of crime stories in the early part of his career and edited *Diez cuentos policiales argentinos*, the first anthology of crime stories by Argentine authors, in 1953. Although he would later refer to his crime stories as a form of diversion and an easy way of making money, considering them a waste of time in comparison to his investigative journalism and political activism, Walsh was an important figure both in establishing crime fiction as an Argentine genre and in bridging the transition between two very different approaches to the genre: where once it had been an amusing game, an opportunity for cleverness and parody, in the second half of the 20th century it became a vehicle for addressing state violence against citizens. In his nonfiction novels *Operación masacre* (1957), *Caso Satanowsky* (1958), and *¿Quién mató a Rosendo?* (1969), Walsh used techniques of detective fiction, including the strategic placement of clues and the withholding of information, in order to increase the suspense of investigative reports about the government's murder of political activists (see Foster 44, Bocchino 24).

Argentine and other Latin American writers and readers began to see new possibilities for setting crime fiction in their own countries once they began to pay attention to the hard-boiled variant of the genre that had developed in the United States beginning in the 1920s. Latin Americans had not been the only ones to criticize classic mysteries as unrealistic. According to Raymond Chandler in his famous 1944 essay "The Simple Act of Murder", artificiality was the major weakness in the genre, the problem that provoked Dashiell Hammett and other American writers to create the new version of crime fiction with tough-guy detectives who took a more active role in the work of investigation. The Golden Age of Detective Fiction, said Chandler, was one of arid formulas that lacked any connection to real life and death: "if the writers of this fiction wrote about the kind of murders that happen, they would also have to write about the authentic flavor of life as it is lived" (11).

Implicit in this comment and throughout the essay is Chandler's association of artificiality with femininity and realism with masculinity. In his view, the genre he was criticizing had become too soft; it was dominated by female or effeminate male authors and the reading preferences of "flustered old ladies – of both sexes (or no sex) and almost all ages – who like their murders scented with magnolia blossoms" (Chandler

16). The detective in classical detective fiction was almost always a man, but in general a man of "exquisite and impossible gentility" (12) who solved crimes without getting his hands dirty, perhaps without even going outside. In Chandler's conception, "the authentic flavor of life as it is lived" means as it is lived by men who walk and drive around the modern city; life as it is lived inside private homes, the traditional domain of women, does not count as real or authentic.

Erin Smith, with attention to the original context of pulp magazines in which hard-boiled detective stories were first published, argues that they served to construct the fantasy of a homosocial community of male writers, readers, and protagonists (women figure only as objects and villains within the stories) at a time of increased power for women in both the literary world and the day-to-day workplace, and Chandler's language in "The Simple Act of Murder" certainly reflects this attitude (Smith 194-196). Given the negative portrayals of female characters, the fact that the first hard-boiled stories were published in *Black Mask*, subtitled *The He-Man Magazine*, and the emphasis on masculinity and hardness in terms like *hard-boiled*, *tough guy*, and *private dick*, it is not surprising that very few women chose to write this kind of fiction for quite a few decades.

The genre of strong women detectives, "tough girls" whose competence and independence rivals that of the hard-boiled dicks, only emerged in the US from the 1970s on and is still much less common in Great Britain and other parts of the world. The women authors such as Sara Paretsky, P.D. James, Marsha Muller, and Sue Grafton who created these characters faced the challenges of verisimilitude in a society where very few women did work as police or private investigators, as well as the challenge of writing sympathetic women characters in a genre that demands that its heroes be tough guys and loners. However, these writers have drawn from each other's work, establishing a stable, popular subgenre of series of novels with common characters and characteristics: the protagonists are tough women from working-class backgrounds who tend to be aware that theirs is considered *An Unsuitable Job for a Woman* (the title of the first of James' Cordelia Grey novels) but who do it anyway. Maureen T. Reddy notes that writers in this group have frequently praised and thanked each other in authors' notes, articles and interviews, establishing a "community of women crime novelists" (*Sisters in Crime* 100). Their characters are also aware of their own similarities and differences from the traditional masculine hard-boiled detective, at times questioning whether their use of violence or their defense of civic order is compatible with their own self-image or their feminist beliefs.

But if this group of women has changed the face of the hard-boiled detective in contemporary popular fiction of the English-speaking world, their influence in Latin America so far has been limited. Even though women have been successful practitioners of crime fiction almost from the origins of the genre, they have been less represented than men in anthologies, histories, canons, and translations. Latin American authors, including those I study in this dissertation, are far more likely to cite early twentieth-century American writers, such as Hemingway, Faulkner, Chandler, Hammett, and Ross MacDonald than Paretsky or Grafton. While the time it takes for works to reach international audiences is a factor, so are prestige and the status of classics, which Hammett and other pioneers of hard-boiled fiction achieved only posthumously, both at home and abroad. Stories and novels originally published in pulp magazines in the 1920s were reissued as serious literature after their influence had been recognized by critics. Meanwhile, the revisions to the genre made by women and people of color in the United States and other parts of the English-speaking world have had very little effect on the new traditions being built up Argentina or Brazil.

Setting aside the exclusion of women and other drawbacks of the genre, the characteristic of hard-boiled fiction that has been most important to Latin American writers and critics is its "realistic" view of society as essentially broken. Argentines sometimes refer to this kind of fiction as *policial duro* but more often as *novela negra*, a translation of the French *roman noir* that pays more attention to the dark view of society than to the central figure of the hard-boiled detective or criminal. The presence of corrupt police and organized crime, the gritty depiction of urban violence, and the fact that even a clever and dedicated detective may not see justice carried out have all made the "American" version of crime fiction more believable and adaptable to Latin American contexts.

In *Asesinos de papel*, Lafforgue and Rivera note that the major novels of "los duros", American writers like Hammett, Chandler, David Goodis, and James M. Cain, had been translated into Spanish and sold in Argentine *kioskos* in the 1940s; however, it was only in the '70s that major Argentine publishers, including Editorial Tiempo Contemporáneo with the Serie Negra directed by Ricardo Piglia, effected the "redescubrimiento" and "'dignificación' intelectual" of the same authors (18-19, 33 n. 6). While Borges and some other writers like Bioy Casares and Marco Denevi continued to uphold superiority of classic puzzle mysteries and to deride pulp novels for their chaotic style and emphasis physical violence, others like Piglia, Osvaldo Soriano, and Mempo Giardinelli were attracted by its gritty depiction of modern cities and its possibilities for social criticism. Through this opposition, Argentines became familiar with the *novela negra* as a distinct subgenre to a much greater extent than readers in other parts of Latin America. As a result, the attitude that crime fiction would be "unrealistic" if given a local context was discounted.

Meanwhile, during and after the military dictatorship that began in 1976, Argentines came to know of unprecedented levels of violence committed by the state. At this point the *policial negro* became even more useful as a tool for exploring issues like corruption, torture, and collective guilt. Because of their fear and revulsion toward police and government institutions, writes Mempo Giardinelli in his introduction to the volume *Latin American Mystery Writers*, "detective fiction writers in Latin American countries have no choice but to be hard-boiled. They can no longer write classic fiction" (xviii). At the same time, particularly before the return to democracy in 1983, the fact that the genre was still associated with popular literature and escapism allowed these writers to explore controversial issues while avoiding the kind of direct criticism of the government that might provoke censorship or retaliation.

Brazil

In Brazil we see similar patterns and dates – early translations, then a few parodies of classic detective fiction, and the later, more politically-minded appropriation of hard-boiled fiction – but with a much smaller number of authors and more limited acceptance of the genre as a Brazilian one. An important factor in Brazilian perceptions of crime fiction is the country's huge class inequality and the related gap between high and low cultures. Even more so than Argentina – where the influence of Borges and his colleagues was certainly important in establishing detective fiction as a legitimate pastime for intelligent readers – Brazil is a country where the taste of a very small reading public has long been dominated by the pronouncements of an even smaller literary elite. As I discuss in my analysis of Patrícia Melo's *Elogio da mentira* in chapter 2, that elite has given scant attention to genres like crime fiction and science fiction that are associated with popular culture. The Brazilian literary establishment has tended to value realism and authentic depictions of the national landscape and culture, without the tradition of *literatura fantástica* that has been essential in Argentina or the magical realism that became popular in most other Latin American countries in the 1960s. For this reason, although several renowned Brazilian writers played with the foreign conventions of detective fiction in the collaboratively written *O mystério* in 1920, they did so principally as a game and not as an attempt to say anything substantial about Brazil. This game did not have the serious intellectual weight that similar experiments and parodies had in Argentina. Most Brazilian detective writers continued to set their mysteries abroad, with a few exceptions including Luiz Lopes Coelho in the 1950s and Maria Alice Barroso in the '60s.

Simpson argues that resistance to crime fiction set in most Latin American countries comes partly from the identification of crime fiction with classic mysteries and their lack of familiarity with hard-boiled fiction, and this is especially true in Brazil, where the language does not generally distinguish between the subgenres. She writes that Brazilians do not use the term *policial negro* and only distinguish hard-boiled fiction as *romance policial norte-americano*, unlike Argentines who have devoted much discussion to the differences between the *novela negra* and the *novela de enigma* (10). This custom may be changing, as Sandra Reimão in *Literatura policial brasileira* describes Record's Coleção Negra, which publishes both imported and Brazilian crime fiction, as "voltada para o policial *noir*"; Brazilian titles published in that collection include Rafael Cardoso's *A maneira negra* (2000), which is labeled on bookseller websites as a "romance noir". Rubem Fonseca's 1992 short story "Romance negro", which I examine in chapter 1, also makes use of readers' knowledge of this term and explicitly discusses national variants of crime fiction. It is also possible that the term *negro* is not as available to Brazilians as a way of talking about literary genre since, as with "black literature" in the United States, Brazilian *literatura negra* is that written by black authors, and the French word *noir* is sometimes used in order to avoid confusion and the taboo of race.

Brazilian proponents and practitioners of crime fiction have needed to argue for its appropriateness in a national context, which they have done by both invoking and rejecting national and foreign models. Moacir Amâncio, who organized a 1978 anthology of crime stories by Brazilian writers, argues in his preface for a new, Brazilian form of crime fiction which must, like the title of the anthology, be an inversion of the model – not "chame a polícia" or "pegue o ladrão" but *Chame o ladrão*. According to Amâncio, Brazilians who attempt to imitate foreign detective stories are doomed to failure because the police and judicial system have such a different place in Brazilian society. He groups Europe and North America together as "lá" and their literature as upholding the institution of private property: "Por lá um cara pode e até admira a lei. Aqui teme-se e sempre que possível transgride-se a lei" (7). Brazilians, says Amâncio, should think beyond the confines of foreign genre definitions in order to find a Brazilian and Latin American tradition. He sees Kafka as a better model than Christie and calls on Argentina's Ernesto Sabato and Perú's Mario Vargas Llosa for inspiration. Flávio Moreira da Costa, the organizer of the 2005 anthology *Crime feito em casa: Contos policiais brasileiros*, begins not with the early-20th-century parodies and pastiches cited by Simpson as the first Brazilian crime stories but earlier, with Machado de Assis and Lima Barreto, whose stories dealt with crime without subscribing to all the conventions of genre.

But Rubem Fonseca, the single most influential writer in terms of bringing aspects of hard-boiled crime fiction to Brazilian literature, expresses the need for new models, those *not* found in the Brazilian literary canon. In his 1975 short story "Intestino grosso", his unnamed "Autor" tells an interviewer that he has had difficulty getting his work published because editors and critics wanted him to write like Machado de Assis or "queriam os negrinhos do pastoreio, os guaranis, or sertões da vida. Eu morava num edifício de apartamentos no centro da cidade e da janela do meu quarto via anúncios coloridos em gás néon e ouvia barulho de motores de automóveis" (*Feliz ano novo* 139). The author's references to Machado and to the folk legend of the Negrinho do Pastoreio, José de Alencar's *O guarani* (1857), and Euclides da Cunha's *Os sertões* (1902), and juxtaposition between those pastoral settings and his own urban existence communicate the insufficiency of existing Brazilian models. As Karl Erik Schøllhammer summarizes this position, "the problem with the present-day naturalist and realist novel is that it no longer offers a representation of reality that is capable of arousing the reader's emotions" (226). In order to speak to his own experiences and those of most of his readers, he must write about the noisy, chaotic, and violent world of life in the city. Although this fictional author is arguing here for the legitimacy of pornographic writing, his point also supports the inclusion of crime fiction as part of Brazilian literature. Thus, Fonseca affirms the literary establishment's preference for realism while upsetting the idea of what is realistic for contemporary Brazil.

Despite some resistance from critics and readers who found Fonseca's themes and language overly coarse, and despite government censorship that kept his important story collection *Feliz ano novo* (1975) from circulating after 1976, Fonseca's work has had a lasting impact on contemporary Brazilian literature. Schøllhammer considers his renovation of literary language to be crucial and notes that other important authors like Ignácio Loyola Brandão, Roberto Drummond, Sérgio Sant'Anna, and Caio Fernando Abreu have "followed in the footsteps" of Fonseca (224). His influence on more recent writers like Patrícia Melo, Luís Alfredo Garcia-Roza, and Rafael Cardoso, who engage more directly with the formulas and conventions of crime fiction, is unmistakable. Furthermore, the violent realism that has become the dominant mode of contemporary Brazilian film, including *O invasor* (2001), *Cidade de Deus* (2002), and *Tropa de élite* (2007), as well as adaptations of Fonseca's own work, owes much to his positioning of urban violence as a proper subject for creative work in Brazil.

Fonseca and Melo's works, like the stories in Amâncio's collection *Chame o ladrão*, have more to do with chronic urban violence and gross social inequality than with government repression and assassination, frequent subjects in Argentine crime fiction. Police are seen as corrupt and dangerous, but this is presented as part of a wider problem of lawlessness and inequality rather than as the principal evil to be dealt with.

Caio Fernando Abreu's 1990 novel *Onde andará Dulce Veiga?* uses the structure and other elements of a detective novel to explore the case of a political activist who was disappeared and the narrator's realization of his complicity in that arrest, but this type of plot is more common in Argentine crime fiction than Brazilian.

This difference in typical subject reflects different national attitudes toward the countries' recent dictatorships. Despite a recurring history of military interventions and state violence, many Argentines consider the dictatorship of 1976-83, with its gross human rights violations and large numbers of extrajudicial executions and disappearances, to be an exceptional period and a turning point in the nation's history. In Brazil, on the other hand, the military takeover of 1964 did not coincide with such a dramatic increase in government repression or violence. The military regime took a harder line against opposition beginning in 1968, but the numbers of the missing were never as high as in Argentina. In the 1970s, literary fiction took on new relevance as a space for cultural critique because it was not subject to as much censorship as newspapers and magazines. Brazilian intellectuals were sometimes censored (as Fonseca was), and in other ways co-opted or marginalized (see Avelar 42-43), but writers were less likely to be direct targets of repression than in Argentina, where Rodolfo Walsh and other prominent writers were killed. In Brazil, the gradual process of *abertura* that began in 1974 allowed for limited citizen participation in government leading up to the return to civilian government in 1985 and direct presidential elections in 1989. The changes in government were less abrupt and radical and the levels of violence – committed by both the state and individuals – have ebbed and flowed in both dictatorship and democracy. While Brazilians have tended to focus on different aspects of the violence in their society than Argentines, they too have found that crime fiction opens up useful possibilities for social criticism, even if the models must be stretched, inverted, or discarded in order to work in a different society.

Critical approaches

Most of the scholarship on crime fiction has been written in English and French about authors and works from Great Britain, the United States, and France, where the genre first developed. Critics often write about crime fiction in terms of formal structure or the sociology of literature rather than in traditional literary terms. In "The Typology of Detective Fiction" (1966), Tzvetan Todorov uses the terminology of the Russian formalists to single out the classical whodunit as a double narrative, one where the *fabula* – the story of the crime – cannot be narrated directly but must be reconstructed through the course of a second story or *sujet* – the story of the investigation. For Todorov, the defining characteristic of the hard-boiled detective fiction is not it's realism or setting but the shift in emphasis from the first story to the second, creating suspense in the question of whether the detective will be successful in his adventures. Drawing from Todorov's analysis, Slavoj Žižek in *Looking Awry* (1991) sees the work of investigating and reading clues in detective stories as analogous to the work of psychoanalysis and the interpretation of dreams, with the hard-boiled detective allowing himself to become directly (physically, emotionally, libidinally) involved in a way that the classical detective or analyst may not (48-66).

Disdained by many literary critics as popular literature, crime fiction has attracted the attention of other scholars specifically because of its popularity. As

Stephen Knight argues in the introduction to his influential study *Form and Ideology in Crime Fiction* (1980), “A good literary critic should be able to say why a mass-seller works, and how it works”, since a popular work is more likely than an obscure and difficult one (the kind more often studied in humanities department, he complains) to reflect the values and ideology of the society that consumes it (2). Knight, John Cawelti, and many others have found the genre of detective fiction to be a fundamentally conservative one. Cawelti (1976) analyzes the structure of several formulaic genres and finds that a crime story typically begins with a disruptive crime that the detective must eventually resolve and explain, turning the criminals over to the authorities and thus restoring order. Knight asserts that not only the plots but also the language and structure of detective novels, among other types of crime fiction, encourage belief in a conservative ideology that tells readers that order will always be restored and that murderers pay for their crimes. The genre is as popular as it is with the reading public because in it “form and content together create the crucial realisation of a pleasing, comforting world-view” (5). In addition, feminist critics like Maureen T. Reddy in *Sisters in Crime* (1988) have found the form to be problematic for women and feminist writers because it values objective rationality (5) and because its traditional structure presents a multiplicity of voices and versions only to end with the (usually white, male, heterosexual) detective’s explanation, “establishing a single version of reality, which he calls ‘truth’” (6; see also Klein, “Habeas Corpus”, 183).

Perhaps it is especially easy to notice the social conservatism of the classic British variant of the detective novel, which tends to take place among a high-society crowd and be resolved with the superior intelligence of a man like Sherlock Holmes or

Auguste Dupin, but Knight and Cawelti argue that a similarly conservative worldview and social elitism can be seen in the hard-boiled detective novel developed in the United States from the 1920s on. Dashiell Hammett's Sam Spade and Raymond Chandler's Philip Marlowe may be struggling tough guys who scorn rich Hollywood types, but they do so from a position of intellectual and moral superiority. The plots differ from classic detective stories in that the detectives are more directly involved in the crimes – they are manipulated by devious women and offered the chance to profit from criminal activity – but they are strong enough to resist the temptation. Reddy also points to the white detective as an expert in reading and exposing racial and ethnic minorities in early hard-boiled authors like Hammett (*Traces, Codes, and Clues* 6-40).

On the other hand, hard-boiled male characters display a kind of fragility that was not part of the classic detective's makeup. Like an egg – even a hard-boiled one – they have a thin outer shell that protects an inner fragility. Critics like Megan Abbott in *The Street Was Mine* (2002), Kelly Oliver and Benigno Trigo in *Noir Anxiety* (2003), and Christopher Breu in *Hard-boiled Masculinities* (2005) have analyzed how the constant reassertion of authority by these white male characters shows up the very insecurity of that authority as it is threatened in the context of a society (California cities of the twenties to the fifties) where women and people of color were gaining freedom, power, and influence.

However, scholarship paying attention to the issues of gender and sexuality in early hard-boiled fiction has been somewhat limited, with more feminist critics of crime fiction preferring to study works that involve *Women Times Three: Writers, Detectives, Readers*, as editor Kathleen Gregory Klein titles one 1995 collection of essays.

Criticism of "women's detective fiction" in English has tended to focus on the evolution of the figure of the female detective rather than on the larger field of crime fiction written by women. Thus, several of the essays iin Klein's collection and in Glenwood Irons' edited volume *Feminism in Women's Detective Fiction* deal with Agatha Christie's Miss Marple stories and P.D. James' Cordelia Gray, but none of them analyze the same authors' more numerous and more popular works about male detectives Hercule Poirot and Adam Dalgliesh. On the one hand, this brings critical attention to works that had been less popular – Irons states that the Miss Marple stories had been largely ignored until they were made into a television series in the 1980s (x). At the same time, it downplays an important aspect of these women's work in the diverse perspectives they have brought to the creation of male characters. It also means their relevance to the study of Latin American crime fiction is limited, since in general Latin American women writers have not chosen to create female detective characters.

Still, there are other ways in which scholarship on women writers of women detectives is applicable to my study. In an essay on the Kinsey Millhone books by Sue Grafton, Scott Christianson argues that the female detective's use of the "tough talk" and wise-cracks associated with male hard-boiled detectives allows her to make feminist statements through a genre that has traditionally portrayed women as victims or as evil and manipulative:

> Grafton appropriates hard-boiled language for feminist purposes as an exercise of language as power; in Foucauldian terms, she seizes the 'rules of formation' for the 'discourse' of hard-boiled fiction, thereby occupying a space or 'subject position,' formerly reserved for men only,

> from which she may speak with power as a woman. In plainer terms – offered by Grafton herself – she plays hardball with the boys, on what had been their own turf. (136)

Foucault's statements on the tactical polyvalence of discourses in *The History of Sexuality* are taken by some readers as cause for despair – it is impossible to escape from the controlling discourse around sex by speaking in opposition to it or even by remaining silent. However, it also possible to join in the production of that discourse and bend its meaning by one's very presence, as Grafton does with her tough talk: according to Christianson, this discourse loses its misogynist meaning when spoken by the character of Kinsey. Unlike Grafton, Patrícia Melo does not write about a female detective, but in her writing about male characters she too appropriates the hard-hitting language that Fonseca had introduced into Brazilian literature, playing hardball in a field intensely dominated by male writers.

Other critics have been less optimistic about the feminist possibilities of fiction about female detectives. Perhaps the rules of formation can be altered, but the formation of power is the same whether a man or a woman is on top. The traditional structure of detective fiction, which goes unaltered even in most feminist revisions of the genre, is one that replaces the multiple discourses of the witnesses who are interviewed with a single truth, stated and interpreted by a single speaking subject. If this speaking subject is a woman, is she doing anything more to challenge the dominant order than Sherlock Holmes or Philip Marlowe? Kathleen Gregory Klein states that, regardless of the gender of individual characters, a detective story is always written on the body of a female victim. The detective, like the criminal, "is always male, always in the dominant position in the pairing" ("Habeus Corpus" 173).[1] A female detective, then, is only taking on a man's role without upsetting the gendered social hierarchy on which the structure of such a story depends.

Studies of Latin American crime fiction have had far less to say about the gender and sexuality of writers and characters, more often focusing on questions of realism and political violence, parody and intertextuality, the infrequency of the character of the detective. Asked in a 1975 interview whether he considered any of his own work to be part of the "género o especie policial", Jorge Luis Borges spoke somewhat dismissively of his and Bioy Casares' famous Isidro Parodi stories (published in 1942), stating that "en ellos nos dejamos ganar por el elemento paródico", as if parody were a trap that serious writers ought to resist (Lafforgue and Rivera 46). But for other readers and critics, parody has been an important strategy for cultural commentary. In *A Theory of Parody* (1985), Linda Hutcheon defines parody as "repetition with critical distance, which marks difference rather than similarity" (6), not necessarily ridiculing the parodied text (or convention, or art form) but drawing attention to the difference. Amelia Simpson uses the term *parody* more narrowly but she writes about a similar dynamic for Latin American crime fiction generally, arguing that the juxtaposition of the foreign text and the national one within the same narrative framework creates a palimpsest, in which the two texts "interact on other levels to express views about moral issues and social problems, and to question the ideological assumptions of the model" (23). Without ridiculing specific works, writers like Piglia, Fonseca, Melo, and Piñeiro have used the distance between their own work and their models as a critique of both their own societies and the US society that created hard-boiled fiction. Moreover, the more recent writers Melo and Piñeiro use differences between their own work and that of their predecessors within Brazil and Argentina as a subtle critique of the sexism and other flaws in their national traditions of crime fiction.

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[1] Klein sees some space for upsetting this binary, however, in the figure of the lesbian detective and the crime story that does not decide on guilt or innocence; she uses the example of Barbara Wilson's Pam Nilsen mysteries.

Another common feature in Latin American crime fiction, even when it is referred to as detective fiction, is the absence of an actual detective. "La evolución del género", Piglia writes in his prologue to the 1999 anthology *Las fieras*, "está basada en el desplazamiento y las transformaciones de la figura que lo funda" (14). Piglia makes this observation about US crime fiction, and it is true that even before the appearance of hard-boiled fiction, much of the work of the Golden Age of Detective Fiction insisted on making the clues available to the readers so that they had as much opportunity to solve the crime as the detective. US hard-boiled fiction too has always included these non-detective crime stories, including Ernest Hemmingway's "The Killers" (1927), which according to Piglia sets the pattern for all the hard-boiled fiction that would come after (quoted in Simpson 12), and the novels of James M. Cain in which men are enticed into becoming murderers by devious women. Cain's influence is obvious in the works of Fonseca and Melo, and the majority of the works I study in this dissertation are more focused on a killer than a journalist or detective.

The pattern of the displacement of the detective is stronger throughout Latin America, including Colombia, Chile, and Mexico, despite these countries' distinct literary and cultural histories, than in the United States. Readers' interest in crime itself, the difficulty of solutions and justice, and the general distrust in police and private detectives have compounded the preference for this type of story. Glen S. Close sees the *novela negra* as an increasingly broad genre in post-Boom Latin American fiction, no longer necessarily related to detectives but more often focusing on criminals and, in more general terms, on urban violence depicted in a style of "dirty realism". The style is influenced by a foreign literary genre but does not need to repeat its stock characters, its formulas, or its structures of plot ("The Detective" 155).

Another way Latin American authors have often dealt with the awkwardness of the detective is to cast a journalist or writer in the role of the investigator. This model makes sense in the cultural and literary context because Argentine writers like Rodolfo Walsh and Miguel Bonasso have used techniques from detective fiction in nonfiction works, where the journalist's work is to uncover true crimes of the government. The parallel in Brazil is for journalists to write exposés of the crimes – whether committed by the rich and powerful or the poor and desperate – that the police do not bother to investigate. These reports may be published in newspapers and magazines or as mass-produced paperback books, a popular genre referred to as *crime-reportagem* (Simpson 79-80). Readers in both countries are thus accustomed to seeing journalists and writers as protagonists in crime stories, whether fictional or not.

Diego Grillo Trubba (2007) asserts that the journalist as detective is appropriate in Argentine crime fiction because, in a country where readers no longer expect murderers to be punished, finding the truth and making it public is the most that can be hoped for: "Aquí…se conocen rápidamente los criminales – y por ello me refiero a los Criminales con mayúsculas, los que tienen a masas por víctimas – y suele estar ausente el castigo. El género policial, abordado desde su vertiente negra, es justamente eso…: la búsqueda de un castigo a seres que están más allá de la justicia formal" (10). Among the writers studied in my project, Fonseca, Melo, and Piglia have all used writers and journalists as protagonists in their crime fiction. Besides functioning in cultural context and in the plot (a journalist's job is to investigate, an author's job to find exciting plots), this choice allows them to insert commentary on the work of a writer and references to the works of others, complicating the metafictional game that is already implicit in the appropriation of a literary genre with very different origins. These authors refer explicitly to foreign authors like Edgar Allen Poe and Agatha Christie, and several of Melo's characters interact with Rubem Fonseca or his works.

Mempo Giardinelli has argued that one of the fundamental differences between Latin American and North American hard-boiled fiction is the authors' attitudes toward capitalism, an angle also emphasized by Piglia in both his fiction and critical writings. Close also points out how the novels of Paco Ignacio Taibo II, which help define the Mexican *neo-policiaco*, differ from US hard-boiled novels in that the detective, Belescoarán Shane, while still an urban loner, has a stronger sense of community, social solidarity and responsibility than US detectives. All of these critical approaches rightly pay attention to the prevalence of populist sentiment and distrust of government and powerful institutions among most contemporary Latin American writers. They also coincide with Giardinelli, Simpson, and Close's observation that the hard-boiled school has become increasingly dominant in Latin America while classic detective fiction appears more and more irrelevant.

What is left out of these observations is the fact that the Latin American embrace of hard-boiled fiction and dismissal of the less realistic classical mysteries, which makes sense in the context of avoiding simplistic solutions that maintain conservative institutions, has the consequence of excluding or at least devaluing most crime fiction written by and about women. In areas of Latin America where a hard-boiled tradition has taken hold, it has been heavily dominated by male writers. The few women to have written crime fiction in these countries before Melo and Piñeiro, such as Maria Alice Barroso in Brazil and Silvina Ocampo, María Angélica Bosco, and Gloria Pampillo in Argentina, have tended to write classical detective stories rather than hard-boiled fiction.

The dismissal of such work can be seen as part of a general pattern of devaluing genres, such as humor, erotica, children's literature, and in recent years historical romance, in which women writers are prominent. Like Raymond Chandler when he scorns the artificiality of classic detective fiction, these judgments take for granted that the experience and interests of male readers and writers are more worthy of attention. In Latin America, women are said to write easily consumed products, which may be heavy in terms of volume size (historical novels containing extensive information on the milieu in which they take place) but are not challenging to readers intellectually or politically. Male writers, meanwhile, are seldom described or categorized as such, nor are their works analyzed in terms of gender as often as those written by women, as can be seen in most critical writing about (masculine) Latin American crime fiction.

Although Latin American crime fiction has not been studied as much as some other types of literature that are thought of as more authentic or original, certain authors have received considerable critical attention, and crime fiction is increasingly recognized as a legitimate part of contemporary Argentine literature. Ricardo Piglia in particular is the subject of many studies that take his use of the hard-boiled genre into account, while studies of Rubem Fonseca have more to say about his treatment of violence and erotic themes. Neither of these authors has been extensively criticized for the misogyny and homophobia that were part of the founding texts of US hard-boiled fiction and that are only partially revised in their works. Even authors like Piglia and Giardinelli who challenge sexism in their fiction and other writings tend to ignore questions of gender in their critical work dealing specifically with crime fiction, choosing instead to focus on socioeconomic issues, dictatorship, and, in Piglia's case, plagiarism.

In contrast to Fonseca and Piglia, so far very little critical attention has been paid to Melo and Piñeiro. This may be a question of time, since Melo only began to publish fiction in 1994 and Piñeiro in 2005. Still, other considerations may be working against them such as their youth, their gender, and even their popularity. Melo, who uses humor and mentions Fonseca's work within her own, is often referred to as a protegé of his rather than as an interesting author in her own right. News items about Piñeiro, whose novel *Las viudas de los jueves* won the Premio Clarín/Alfaguara de Novela in 2005, frequently refer to her success in book sales, a rhetorical pattern that critics Claire Lindsay and Laura Freixas have seen as a way of dismissing women authors, implying that their work is good enough for a mass audience but not really to be taken seriously.

In a more general sense, published studies of Latin American crime fiction seem to lack the kind of feminist analysis that Reddy, Klein, Abbot and others have done in the United States. It is true that there is less material written by women for feminist critics to work with in Latin American crime fiction, especially of the kind influenced by hard-boiled fiction. Amelia Simpson's chapter on Brazil does recognize Maria Alice Barroso as an influential contributor to the genre's development in Brazil in the 1960s – with *Quem matou Pacífico?* (1969) she treated the mystery as an opportunity for social commentary and not only as a game or opportunity for parody (70-72) – but Simpson does not comment on the fact that Barroso is the only Brazilian woman writer studied. Lidia Santos notes that Patrícia Melo's novels "quote, in a post-modern manner, a narrative genre until then restricted in Brazil to male writers: the detective novel" (39) but does not analyze why women had been excluded, nor refer to the precedent of Barroso. Rebecca Biron's study *Murder and Masculinity* does provide useful analysis of Latin American narratives in which men kill women, but without engaging with the conventions of crime fiction and its foreign influences.

The lack of diffusion and canonization of women writers, especially within hard-boiled fiction, has in turn led to a lack of female models – whether writers or characters, North Americans or Latin Americans – to inspire new writers. Of course, the pattern of women's exclusion from the literary canon extends far beyond the genre of crime fiction. In the preface to *Women's Writing in Latin America*, editors Castro-Klarén, Silvia Molloy and Beatriz Sarlo state that part of their reason for bringing together women's voices (from different countries, time periods, and discourses) is that too often Latin American women writers have believed themselves to be alone in their struggles because women's voices had been "heard in isolation or not heard at all" (xi). Bringing together works of fiction, poetry and essay from professional and nonprofessional women writers from across time periods allows the editors to bring out common themes in their writing and to help strengthen "a tradition of female expression, that is, a continuum of female voices of recognized authority" (ibid). Crime fiction does not appear among the works collected here, however, and for the most part women are absent or isolated in anthologies of Latin American crime fiction. To give a few examples from Argentina, Angélica Gorodischer is the only woman among 25 writers represented in Jorge Lafforgue's important and widely read anthology *Cuentos policiales argentinos* (1997) and the only woman among nine writers in Sergio S. Olguín's *Escritos con sangre* (2003). Mempo Giardinelli's two-volume *El género negro* contains essays about male writers from the United States, Argentina, Mexico, and Spain, but none about women writers. A counter-tradition of hard-boiled fiction by women has not been established in Argentina or in Brazil as it has in the United States. As such, each writer engaging with the genre seeks out her or his own way of confronting its limitations, including its inherent misogyny.

In the one volume I have found which collects crime stories written by women in Spanish, *Crímenes de mujeres* (2004), the editors make a point of distancing themselves and the writers represented from the *género policial*. Virginia Vidal and Ana Vásquez-Bronfman write an introduction which traces a gendered tradition of crime against the patriarchal order, with only cursory mention of a genre tradition in which women have participated alongside men: that is, Lilith and Eve are presented as the first women authors of crime. The editors rebuke mainstream literary criticism for having followed a form of Freudian analysis that pathologizes women's psyches and behaviors, but they state that the stories in this collection offer an alternative view of the relationship between women and crime. On one hand, this essay is valuable in that it establishes an alternate genealogy for the new stories, one that looks primarily to the history of women and women's writing, rather than to the male-dominated history of crime fiction. As Maureen T. Reddy argues in *Sisters in Crime*, the common practice of crediting Edgar Allen Poe and Arthur Conan Doyle with the invention of the detective story neglects the important influence of gothic novels and sensation novels, both genres dominated by women, in the development of crime fiction (7-9). Reddy also states that a broader-than-usual definition of crime fiction, one that covers "all those works of fiction in which a central interest lies in the examination of events, often but not always criminal, that are partly concealed at the beginning of the story" (5), works against the marginalization of women's writing that results from strict genre definitions.

But the mention of crime fiction in the introduction to *Crímenes de mujeres* does not seek to broaden definitions of the genre, but rather to deny its relationship to the stories in the collection altogether. The tension in these stories, the editors write, "no es el tipo de suspenso de la *serie noire*, ni de un Conan Doyle o de una Agatha Christie. No hay en estos relatos un detective descubridor del misterio, que desate el mecanismo para castigar al culpable […] y perpetuar el orden de las cosas" (23). The use of the French phrase *serie noire* (despite the availability of the Spanish *serie negra*) and the English names Doyle and Christie reinforce the common perception of crime fiction, whether hard-boiled or classical, as foreign to Latin American culture. Similarly, the phrases "castigar al culpable" and "perpetuar el orden" imply that these are the only functions a fictional detective can have. This type of shorthand, which reduces the diversity of crime fiction to a few familiar names and phrases, declines to recognize the alternative possibilities that exist within – and at the edges of – the generic tradition. Thus, the stories in the new collection are presented as innovative and transgressive because they are *not* part of the conservative crime genre. “¿Qué pasa cuando no se hace justicia?” the editors ask, “¿Cuando no se desenmascara al asesino?” (25) But these are questions that have been addressed repeatedly in crime fiction of Latin America, including Chile, where the collection was published. Detective stories written in these countries, at least those written in recent decades, are actually more likely to expose the responsibility of rich and powerful actors, institutions and governments or to end inconclusively than to end with a single murderer being sent off to jail in order to restore a healthy society.

By ignoring other authors that work on the boundaries of genre definitions, including national traditions within Latin America and “counter-traditions” of crime fiction written by women and people of color, analyses like this one reinforce the association of crime fiction with a few names – almost all of them male – and a single conservative ideology. They miss the possibility that conservative models can be used as the structure on which to base a critique, whether by placing women in central roles and changing the detective’s relationship with society, or by pushing in the other direction to show the genre’s defects through excess, as Patrícia Melo has done with her novels of violent crime.

Chapter outline

In each of the chapters that follow I have chosen to focus on two narratives that exemplify the authors' diverse approaches to the problems of adapting hard-boiled crime fiction for a contemporary Latin American context and a progressive political message, whether writing from the perspective of those committing violence or those trying to understand it. In the case of Rubem Fonseca, the traditional structure of a crime or detective story is left largely intact while the characters are revised. "Feliz ano novo" is told from the point of view of a man who commits murder without hesitation or remorse. Especially when read alongside several of his other short stories, it challenges readers' preconceived notions about the reasons for violent crime and the type of people who can commit it. *Bufo & Spallanzani* is also told from the point of view of a killer, but a reluctant one who is also a professional author and an amateur detective. Through the character of Gustavo Flávio, Fonseca communicates a positive attitude toward women and people who defy traditional categories of gender, sexuality, race and class. The structure of the novel – the replacement of multiple stories with a single one in Gustavo Flávio's voice – reinforces the dominant position of a powerful heterosexual man. At the same time, *Bufo & Spallanzani* and other works by Fonseca feature women as intelligent readers, allowing possibilities for multiple interpretations beyond the story the narrator tries to tell.

Patrícia Melo, coming on to the scene some thirty years later than Fonseca, playfully engages with his specific works and with larger patterns in the genre of Brazilian crime fiction that he helped to create. Her brutally violent novel *O matador* is a retelling of Fonseca's short story "O cobrador", with the narrator's anxious masculinity and his unfairness toward women are exaggerated to the point of ridiculousness. It also takes a more nuanced and realistic view of class inequality and its effect on violent crime. The parallels and contrasts between her work and his show up some of the flaws and biases that Fonseca has taken for granted. Melo takes a friendlier approach toward Fonseca's work while still mocking crime fiction in general in *Elogio da mentira*, the story of a plagiarist who copies from *Bufo & Spallanzani* among other literary classics. She pays homage to Fonseca's influence and establishes a place for herself among the ranks of sophisticated writers who build on the works of those who have come before them.

Ricardo Piglia's approach to hard-boiled fiction in *Plata quemada* is more experimental and transformative than Fonseca's or Melo's. He appropriates certain characteristics of setting and character and the structure of a search, but his investigative reporter ultimately rejects the effort to find a single truth as one allied with the government's surveillance of citizens. Linear narrative too is identified with confessions acquired through torture, and the anonymous recirculation of narratives is offered as a more humane alternative. However, actual female characters are depicted as pathetic victims who have very little voice within the novel. Women are also discredited as traitors and whores in the novel *Plata quemada*, in contrast with the incorruptible homosexual male protagonists, the bank robber heroes through whom Piglia redefines hard-boiled masculinity.

Finally, Claudia Piñeiro challenges readers' expectations and stretches the boundaries of the hard-boiled novel by applying its structure of suspense to stories about Argentine women with conventional domestic lives. *Las viudas de los jueves* initially appears concerned with the deaths of a small group of wealthy men, but more of the novel is taken up with the day-to-day lives of their wives, residents of an exclusive gated community outside Buenos Aires. Through the hushed voices of these women, Piñeiro examines social transformations of the 1990s and highlights tensions between women. *Elena sabe* too is a novel that appears at first to be about one mystery – the death of the main character's daughter – but eventually gives more attention to other issues. The elderly female protagonist fails in her attempt at detective work because of physical and social limitations, and the climactic revelation centers on a different crime against another woman. In both cases, Piñeiro draws attention to forms of violence against women that have traditionally been kept out of the public sphere, including the publication of literary fiction.

All of these works open up new possibilities of meaning in a genre that has become important in Brazil and central in Argentina but which has too often ignored and excluded women's voices. If hard-boiled fiction has a stronger potential than classical detective fiction to be transgressive in its attitude toward the powerful, it also has a stronger history of misogyny – not only in terms of the way female characters are treated in foundational works of the genre, but also because of a structure that values the individual, antisocial, hyper-masculine private eye. Women and feminists writing hard-boiled fiction in Latin America are innovators and rare exceptions to the rules of the game, often bending and breaking those rules with their work, and for this reason deserve special attention rather than to be ignored or mentioned only in passing. The current popularity of writers like Melo and Piñeiro indicates that the barriers keeping women from writing hard-boiled may be fading away, as does the prominence of women writers in newer crime fiction anthologies like *In fraganti* (2007), where they make up eight of the twenty-one writers represented. My study of the way gender and genre converge in the works of Melo, Piñeiro, Fonseca, and Piglia is also an effort to improve the balance in an area of literature and scholarship where feminist perspectives are still greatly outnumbered.

Chapter One: Rubem Fonseca and the Violence of Narrative

Rubem Fonseca’s writing about crime in Rio de Janeiro has had a profound impact on contemporary Brazilian literature, offering his own recreation of hard-boiled crime fiction and in the process creating a model for other Latin American writers to follow. Of the four authors I study, he was the first to begin publishing crime fiction with the short story collection *Os prisioneiros* in 1963, and he is the one who follows the traditional model of hard-boiled fiction most closely, leaving its structure nearly intact while revising the characters to fit a contemporary Brazilian setting. The strong parallels between Fonseca’s characters and plots and those of early twentieth-century writers in the United States make it easier to examine the differences in how this writer deals with race, sex, sexuality, and criminality in the context of late twentieth-century Rio de Janeiro. Whether writing from the perspective of unrepentant criminals, clever detectives, or writers who are not what they seem, Fonseca displays a progressive consciousness and awareness of Brazil’s racial and sexual diversity. He resists the tendency to blame crime and other social problems on marginalized people, but his adherence to traditional structures of plot maintains the central position and intellectual power of a lone white man. In this chapter I examine the short story “Feliz ano novo”, with brief comparisons to several other short stories, to show how Fonseca disturbs his readers’ settled conceptions about the nature of crime and the character of criminals. I then turn to the more complex narratives of *Bufo & Spallanzani* and “Romance negro”, where Fonseca privileges a certain singular kind of storyteller while still leaving openings for multiple readings.

From its beginnings in 19th-century Paris and London, the genre of crime fiction has been used as a way of making sense of the large city, where – even without fear of crime and violence – sheer numbers make it impossible for any one person to know everyone else, and they must instead depend on the expertise of a highly knowledgeable and clever detective. Variations and subgenres have developed in response to changes in cities, and yet before Rubem Fonseca few Brazilian authors had thought to use crime fiction, especially the hard-boiled style (which had had little diffusion in Brazil), to try to make sense of rapidly developing megalopolises like Rio and São Paulo. Those who did experiment with mystery fiction tended to treat it as a light form of entertainment, obviously removed from reality and certainly not a vehicle for social criticism (see Simpson 62-66). Maria Alice Barroso successfully addressed small-town corruption and inequality with her 1969 novel *Quem matou Pacífico?*, but she relied on the structure of the classic mystery without examining how violence was transforming Brazilian cities. In the introduction to his 1978 collection *Chame o ladrão: Contos policiais brasileiros*, Moacir Amâncio asserts that Brazilian writers should *not* try to write detective fiction because to do so would be to embrace the conservative and capitalistic worldview that believes the police will solve crimes and protect the general public from a separate class of criminals. As in Argentina and other parts of Latin America, many Brazilian readers see the conventional story of the police detective who solves crimes as implausible in a national context because their police are corrupt and ineffective. On the other hand, like readers in the rest of the world, Brazilians enjoy following the twists of a good plot, and are happy to consume detective fiction if it takes place abroad, in a context where it is easier to imagine police officers or private detectives as good guys.

Fonseca straddles the line between these positions in complicated ways, acknowledging the corruption of the system while upholding the morality of his few good detectives; advocating for sexual and racial equality while discrediting most of his female and dark-skinned characters as unintelligent and unimportant; reproducing stereotypes of criminals in some places while exploding them and others; and poking fun at the white men who dominate his texts while still allowing them to dominate. In his fiction and nonfiction writing, Rubem Fonseca shows awareness of feminism, of racial and sexual diversity, and of progressive messages in a society struggling to throw off authoritarian rule. His stories and novels involve people from all walks of life including rich and poor, black and white, and often gay, lesbian, and transgender characters. His detective heroes like Mandrake and Gustavo Flávio express their love and admiration for women and actively contest discrimination when they encounter it. In this way they distinguish themselves from other (less intelligent) privileged characters and from the archetypal hard-boiled detective from US crime fiction of the early twentieth century. Still, by preserving the central role and perspective of the educated heterosexual white male detective, Fonseca preserves that subject's dominance over the rest of society, as surely as the American pulps retained that conservative aspect of classic mystery fiction.

Fonseca has been labeled as a sensationalist and a pornographer for his graphic writing about sex, violence, and violent sex. The military government censored his

1975 short story collection *Feliz ano novo* for what it called "apologia do crime" and "matéria contrária à moral e aos bons costumes" (cited in Reimão, "Dois livros censurados", 158). Fonseca would later write that he was accused of having provoked something he had merely foreseen and described: urban violence, including home invasions (*O romance morreu* 126). During the same period, the influential literary critic Alfredo Bosi labeled Fonseca's style as "brutalista" and considered it a sign both that Brazilian literature was suffering under the influence of the worst of US writing and that the language of the young Brazilian bourgeoisie had been degraded by "capitalismo selvagem" (15-18). In more recent years, critics have complained about the formulaic and repetitive nature of his plots, especially in his novels, which are seen is less interesting than his early short stories.

Nevertheless, Fonseca has attracted the attention of many critics and general readers throughout his career and has influenced the way other Brazilians write fiction and make film. Critics are more likely to credit him for introducing the everyday language of the urban underclass into literary fiction (the positive side of brutalism) but the effect of his having established crime fiction as a Brazilian genre is also profound. Even before 2005, when HBO Latin America began producing the television series *Mandrake*, this Fonseca character was the first name most Brazilians would offer when asked to think of a Brazilian detective. In 2003 he was given the Prêmio Camões, the most prestigious award for writers in the Portuguese-speaking world, and books like *Feliz ano novo* and *Bufo & Spallanzani* have been canonized to the extent that they are tested in university entrance exams.[1] His fiction has undoubtedly influenced the way many Brazilians understand not only crime fiction but literature in general and crime itself.

"Feliz ano novo" and the face of crime

While increasingly prevalent in Latin American fiction, where cultural attitudes about crime and justice make the figure of the detective less appropriate (see Giardinelli, "Introduction", xviii; and Close, "The Detective is Dead"), stories about criminals have received even less attention than detective stories in literary criticism. Hilfer opens the introduction to his book-length study of crime fiction in the United States and Britain by stating that no genre has been more understudied than crime fiction, which he sees as a "deviant genre" that opposes and subverts the conventions and conservativism of detective fiction.[2] As Hilfer argues, stories focused on criminals provoke different reactions and pleasures from their readers than detective stories. They tend to be more concerned with the psychology of criminals than with resolution of the puzzle. Perhaps most importantly, they encourage the reader to sympathize or identify with a subject who commits murder. Usually the protagonist starts out as a likeable man who is slowly tempted (by a seductive woman) into the possibility of committing a crime. Following along with his trials and tribulations, the reader is also led along the path of crime, at some level hoping the protagonist will be successful and will not be caught. Hard-boiled detective fiction itself is often seen as more psychologically oriented than classic mysteries, but Hilfer notes that hard-boiled detective fiction is still interested in maintaining another kind of order: that of the integrity of the individual protagonist. The good detective, according to the formula, holds himself above the culture of criminality; he rejects bribes from organized crime, pressure from his superiors, sexual seduction from women, and all kinds of other pressures and temptations in order to continue to fight the good fight.

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[1] At most Brazilian universities, scores on a standardized *vestibular* exam are the sole criterion by which applicants compete for limited available spots. Because of the high stakes of these tests, many Brazilian teenagers enroll in private *vestibular* preparation courses in addition to high school. The list of literary texts to be studied changes each year and with each university, but Fonseca's major works regularly appear alongside classics by José de Alencar and Machado de Assis. In 2010 Editora Agir republished *Feliz ano novo* in a new edition labeled "para vestibular."

[2] Following Knight, Cawelti, Reddy, Close, and others, I use the term "crime fiction" to refer to the larger genre that contains classic mysteries, hard-boiled detective fiction, and a third category that treats the criminal as the protagonist. Hilfer and Malmgren use "crime fiction" to refer only to this last category.

As we shall see, this way of characterizing the private eye is repeated with difference in Fonseca's detective fiction, but his stories about men who commit crimes ostentatiously lack social or psychological explanations. Rather than reassure the reader with a convincing narrative to explain why people attack each other (and how such violence can be prevented), these stories aim to disturb, blowing apart narratives of logic and order and replacing them with insolvable rage. Like the characters who hold up a party in a private mansion on New Year's Eve, Fonseca's writing invades the comfortable middle-class pastime of fiction reading with realistic depictions of extreme violence.

"Feliz ano novo", the first story in the 1975 collection of the same name, is told in first person by a man who has committed many small robberies but continues to live in poverty. In the first part of the story the narrator and his two friends Pereba and

Zequinha watch New Year's celebrations on TV while lamenting the stench and the lack of food in the narrator's filthy apartment; in the second part they go to a nearby wealthy neighborhood where they hold up a New Year's Eve party. The narrator is ashamed of the ugliness of the building in which he lives, but he brags that at least it is in fashionable Zona Sul and near the beach. Once they steal a car they don't have to travel far to find an area "cheio de casa de rico" (13). This close geographical proximity of extreme wealth and poverty is typical of Brazilian cities and of Rio in particular. As Marta Peixoto writes in an article on fictional depictions of Rio's favelas, the city's combination of class segregation and physical proximity "accentuates the perception of social inequities by the poorer residents but also fosters a self-protective blindness among the middle and upper classes, a refusal to take full measure of the poverty that is obviously right there" (171). Both these phenomena are evident in "Feliz ano novo", where the main characters are aware of their poverty and exclusion at all times, but it takes the home invasion to make the rich characters begin to pay any attention.

After charging in with guns, the robbers eat from the buffet table, order the hosts and guests to lie on the floor, and collect their valuables. One of the rich men, called Maurício, remains calm and encourages them to take whatever they need, promising not to report the crime to the police. Maurício reflects the attitude of many Brazilians who fear crime but are also reluctant to have any contact with the police. A 1988 survey conducted by the Brazilian census bureau found that the majority of people who had been victims of larceny or robbery did not report the incidents to the police; their most frequent reason was that they "did not believe in the police" but many also said that the incident was not important or that they resolved it themselves (IBGE, cited in Caldeira 106-107). Maurício's calm indicates that he is trying to placate the men with guns and considers the loss of food, jewels, and money to be unimportant. This lack of concern enrages the narrator, who realizes that a man who doesn't mind losing so many material goods must have more than the invaders could ever hope to possess: "As bebidas, as comidas, as jóias, o dinheiro, tudo aquilo para eles era migalha. Tinham muito mais no banco. Para eles, nós não passávamos de três moscas no açucareiro" (15-16). He also resents the obvious condescension in Maurício's attempt to flatter him with words like "Vê-se que o senhor é um homem educado, instruído" (16). The narrator mocks him by politely requesting that he stand up and lean against the wall before shooting him dead.

What Maurício fails to understand is that the robbers are motivated as much by anger and humiliation as by economic necessity. In the first part of the story they make idle statements about wanting to be rich themselves, but they don't consider taking action until after the subject of homosexuality comes up in their conversation. The narrator and Pereba are planning to rob a bank with a more established criminal, Lambreta, on January 2nd. The narrator respects Lambreta for the robberies he has already carried out, but Zequinha has doubts:

> É, mas dizem que ele dá o bozó, disse Zequinha.
>
> Não sei se dá, nem tenho peito de perguntar. Pra cima de mim nunca veio com frescuras.
>
> Você já viu ele com mulher?, disse Zequinha.
>
> Não, nunca vi. Sei lá, pode ser verdade, mas que importa?

> Homem não deve dar o cu. Ainda mais um cara importante como o Lambreta, disse Zequinha.
>
> Cara importante faz o que quer, eu disse.
>
> É verdade, disse Zequinha.
>
> Ficamos calados, fumando. (12-13)

The narrator appears uncomfortable with the conversation, using vague language ("frescuras") and ellipses ("Não, nunca vi. Sei lá, pode ser verdade") in contrast to Zequinha's frank sexual talk. He does not take a stand for equality or dispute Zequinha's assertion that a man should not allow another man to penetrate him, but he does insist that Lambreta's skill, accomplishments, and toughness compensate for any other shortcomings. In order to be respected on the same terms, and especially when his own heterosexuality is put in question, the narrator will use violence to show that he is also an "homem importante" who can do whatever he wants.

At the party, the narrator kills Maurício to show the rest of the guests that they won't be able to control him, but he also has to prove himself in front of Pereba and Zequinha. After several murders, Pereba asks the narrator, "Não vais comer uma bacana destas?" (17) The use of the verb *comer* to refer to sex is extremely common in colloquial Brazilian Portuguese but it takes on a stronger meaning in this context, where three men who have been starving are now able to eat as much fine food as they want but are still not satisfied. Both Pereba and Zequinha rape women at the party, consuming them as casually and conspicuously as they do the food. But the narrator tells Pereba (and the rest of the room), "Não estou a fim. Tenho nojo dessas mulheres. Tô cagando pra elas. Só como mulher que eu gosto" (17). He emphasizes that the decision is his to make, lest Zequinha think he doesn't like sex with women. It is the second time he has expressed his loathing for the rich party guests in terms of bodily rejection, earlier taking pleasure in defecating on the hostess's satin sheets and now declaring that he would rather do the same with these women than "eat" them. Unlike Pereba who wants to be rich so he can be more like the people he is robbing, the narrator hates the rich. No amount of money, nothing the narrator can do or say, will make up for the humiliation the narrator has already suffered and convince him to show mercy.

The title story of Fonseca's 1979 collection *O cobrador* is similar in its treatment of class relations and the anger they provoke. The title character is a poor man who decides that he has been cheated out of the things he deserves all his life, and from now on instead of paying he will charge (*cobrar*) instead: that is, he will shoot and kill the people he encounters. The story begins with a dentist, Dr. Carvalho, wanting to charge the narrator for having his teeth pulled, but the narrator simply shoots him and leaves. Like the narrator of "Feliz ano novo" the Cobrador feels justified in his actions because life and society have been unfair to him up until now. Throughout the story he repeats the phrase "estão me devendo" with the subject "todos eles", "todo mundo" (12), or left empty and ambiguous (12, 15, 21, 25): all of them, all of *you*.

The rage and violence of these characters is meant to be shocking, but for whom, and with what intended effects? Maria Paulino writes that "Feliz ano novo" not only depicts violence but also *commits* violence against the reader, who is torn between an accustomed horror of violence and hate for criminals and the natural empathy that arises from hearing a person tell their own story (17). Hilfer makes a similar observation about English-language crime novels, but in the Brazilian context this phenomenon is complicated by a greater income disparity and a stronger tendency to see criminals as a separate category of people, as well as the fact that a much smaller part of the population has the money, time, and ability to purchase and read fiction. Stories like "Feliz ano novo" and "O cobrador" challenge middle-class readers to think about the poverty they usually ignore, but these stories also exploit fear of the lower classes, perpetuating what anthropologist Teresa Caldeira calls the "talk of crime". As I discuss further in my chapter on Patrícia Melo, Caldeira sees the "talk of crime" as one that reinforces class prejudices, laying the blame for society's violence on an objectified other. The characters in these stories fit conventional stereotypes of criminal appearance – the narrator of "Feliz ano novo" tells Pereba, "você não tem dentes, é vesgo, preto e pobre" – and they live in a filthy home and bring brutality and filth to the home they invade (10).

Although the structure of the narrative encourages readers to identify with the robbers and killers, the fact that most readers are from the middle and upper classes means they are likely to have more in common with the party guests and to identify with Maurício, the polite man who does his best to placate everyone, or Dr. Carvalho, who is only doing his job. In this way readers are made to feel that they are always potential victims, in danger of suffering for the rage of the oppressed underclass, no matter how well-intentioned they are in their politics or how careful in their individual actions. One may as well give up trying to feel compassion or support economic reform.

The spectacular violence of stories like these can have a negative effect, as Marta Peixoto states in the 2007 article cited above. The novels and films she analyzes, including Patrícia Melo's novel *Inferno* (2000) and Fernando Meirelles's immensely successful film *Cidade de Deus* (2002, based on the 1997 novel by Paulo Lins), aim to denounce Rio's gross violence and social segregation. However,

> When such discourses are directed as entertainment at middle- and upper-class readers and film viewers, they harm favela residents: by reinforcing the commonplaces that equate favela residence with criminality and violence, they increase the urban paranoia that segregates the classes… and further erode the citizenship rights of those who already suffer race and class discrimination. (174)

The same can and has been said about the work of Fonseca and other novels by Melo, although it is important to note that the narrators of "Feliz ano novo" and "O cobrador" are not Fonseca's only violent criminals. "Passeio noturno (Parte I)" and "Passeio noturno (Parte II)", both included in the same volume as "Feliz ano novo", also feature a man who kills with calm confidence and without remorse. But the narrator of "Passeio noturno" could not be more different from that of "Feliz ano novo" in his life situation. He is businessman, husband, father of two teenage children, and extremely rich, the owner of the kind of private mansion that the criminals invade in "Feliz ano novo". His wife knows that he likes to relax by going out for a drive in the evening but not that his favorite part of driving is picking out a pedestrian on the street and running them over. He is pleased with his skill and efficiency in killing, and after each of the murders narrated in the two parts the ending is the same: the narrator returns home to find his wife watching television and they exchange a brief and apparently routine conversation about needing to rest.

In Fonseca's fiction then, successful businessmen are just as likely to be coldblooded killers as poor, uneducated, and marginalized people, and in this sense, looked at together, the stories in *Feliz ano novo* and *O cobrador* do not confirm the common prejudice against the poor. The message is instead that violence and criminality are everywhere, often lurking under the surface of respectable society. Danger cannot be eliminated by building walls, further marginalizing the people who have so far been denied a place in the public and political life of the city. Chaos may explode into the reader's life at any moment, just as it emerges unexpectedly in these stories in common bourgeois spaces such as a dinner party, a dentist's office, and a rich family's home and car; there is no way of knowing whether it will come from inside or out.

Still, the very fact that his rich and poor characters act so similarly and that their stories end with similarly peaceful domestic scenes is a kind of unfairness, since their real social situations are so different. In "Passeio noturno (Parte I)" the narrator has no contact with his anonymous victim before he drives into her, and he gives absolutely no thought to the consequences of his actions. In "Parte II", he takes a woman out to dinner before killing her, and this time he knows it is important that she die because, if only injured, she would be able to recognize his face and his car. The criminals in "Feliz ano novo" wear facemasks to the party and (with some fumbling) address each other with false names, but their behavior is also brazen, showing that they have very little concern that they might be caught. The story ends with the three men eating and drinking at the narrator's apartment, happily celebrating the New Year. And although the ending of "O cobrador" is uncertain as the narrator and his girlfriend work toward a larger crime, he too acts openly and with the expectation of impunity. Fonseca is obviously making a point about the inefficiency of the police and government, but he is also ignoring the inequality that affects this issue. In reality the marginalized characters who murder rich men would face much more persecution and probable brutality than the businessman who hides in his fortified car and his mansion. The complicated question of who can get away with murder is taken up with much more attention to class and gender inequality in Patrícia Melo's revision of "O cobrador", the 1994 novel *O matador*, which I examine in the next chapter.

Possibility and closure in *Bufo & Spallanzani*

In this study I argue that Rubem Fonseca, Patrícia Melo, Ricardo Piglia, and Claudia Piñeiro all find different ways of writing a progressive message into a genre that is usually viewed as conservative. But in each of these cases that message is somehow limited or undercut, whether by lingering aspects of the genre or by other characteristics an author has introduced. In the case of Rubem Fonseca's detective stories, the protagonists express love for women and respect for sexual and racial minorities, but the central privileged character is the one who retains the power to speak. Fonseca reworks both the personality of the protagonist – a modern, enlightened Brazilian takes the place of a reactionary Californian or New Yorker – and the structure of the detective novel, making it more complex and adding subplots in distinctive formal registers. But these changes only intensify the pattern in which those conflicting voices are subsumed or silenced by the detective's single truth.

Detective novels, more so than crime stories like "Feliz ano novo" and "Passeio noturno", where the protagonist knows the crime he commits, are distinguished from most other kinds of fiction by their multiple voices and multiple stories. We recall Todorov's statement that the murder mystery tells two stories at once, that of the crime itself and that of the investigation. Bakhtin characterizes the novel itself as a dialogic form because it is built up of multiple voices, each with their own perspective, each with their own story to tell. The murder mystery can be seen to intensify this basic characteristic of the novel, particularly if one thinks of the structure of, say, an Agatha Christie novel, where the detective (and, along with him or her, the reader) must hear the accounts of one witness/suspect after another and put together select clues from each in order to reach a solution. And yet, as Maureen T. Reddy writes in *Sisters in Crime*, the form is ultimately a closed one, in which those multiple viewpoints and conflicting versions of the story are, in the final scene, replaced with a single story, the one told by the detective.

Despite countless variations on the formula and on the figure of the detective, this structure makes it impossible to tell an open, counter-hegemonic story. When Stephen Knight argues that detective fiction's basic popularity stems from its ability to provide a comforting worldview in which chaos is restored to order by the end of the novel, he does not mean order only in the external sense of sending a murderer to jail so that citizens can go on with their lives without fear of crime. The detective's explanation is also a restoration of logic: contradictory accounts are brought into harmony through the power of the detective's reasoning. In Slavoj Žižek's formulation, the classical detective novel begins by presenting us with a host of seemingly unrelated pieces of evidence and the inability to tell which ones have meaning; the detective's reconstruction of the crime is the restoration of the ability to tell a linear story, with ordered relationships between signifier and signified, cause and effect (48-57)

In the case of hard-boiled fiction, the detective also has to make use of street smarts, tough talk, and violence on the way to his solution, and according to Todorov the emphasis shifts from curiosity about what happened between the murderer and the victim (the first, hidden story) to suspense for what will happen to the detective (the second story). In the end, however, both the classical and hard-boiled variants support the primacy and superiority of the detective. Chandler's Philip Marlowe may find out who is responsible but, unlike Sherlock Holmes or Hercule Poirot, may not be able to bring them to justice; he certainly cannot get rid of crime and corruption in the city or society as a whole, but he retains his power to understand and to explain. Knight says that Chandler has been particularly popular with English majors because his work affirms that "an isolated, intelligent person, implicitly hostile to others and basically uninterested in them, can verify his own superiority by intellectual means and create a defensive withdrawal" (138), a description which could also be applied to Sherlock Holmes and other classic detectives, as well as many of Rubem Fonseca's characters.

Fonseca's detective stories and novels deliberately combine elements of both subgenres, including the gritty urban milieu and frank depictions of sex and violence from hard-boiled crime fiction as well as the puzzle-like presentation of suspicious, eccentric characters from classical detective fiction. The majority of his fiction is set in contemporary Rio de Janeiro and his detective characters attempt to present themselves as sympathetic to an educated Brazilian reader. Part of this positive portrayal is that the men are not as explicitly sexist, racist, or homophobic as the American models that inspire them. Both Fonseca's nonfiction and nonfiction writings express familiarity with and even admiration for Brazil's ethnic and sexual minorities. Bisexual women, *travestis*, Jews, and Afro-Brazilians appear regularly in his fiction, and not only as villains or caricatures. Characters like the private investigator Mandrake, the police detective Guedes, and the novelist and amateur detective Gustavo Flávio, as intelligent members of a diverse and increasingly democratic society, are comfortable working with all these other characters and at times take an active stand against discrimination. Gustavo Flávio is one of several Fonseca narrators who speak directly to a beloved woman, a narrative format that implies a certain respect for female readers of crime fiction. Still, the ability to make sense of the crime and, thus, to make sense of the chaotic modern world, always belongs to the straight white male protagonist. This pattern of a single voice taking control of a complicated narrative is especially evident in *Bufo & Spallanzani*, where the novelist protagonist is always at pains to prove himself as a man of talent and authority, a master of the art of storytelling.

Divided into five parts, *Bufo & Spallanzani* is a novel that contains several others. In the main story (Todorov's *sujet*), the Rio de Janeiro police detective Guedes investigates the death of Delfina Delamare, the wife of an enormously wealthy, powerful, and corrupt businessman and the mistress of Gustavo Flávio, a renowned novelist whose most popular work is a crime novel. Guedes is the main character of the early chapters, but it eventually becomes clear that Gustavo Flávio is narrating the whole story to another of his lovers, Minolta. Part two, "Meu passado negro", is the story of how the narrator, once an insurance agent named Ivan Canabrava, became the writer Gustavo Flávio. In part three, "O Refúgio do Pico do Gavião", Canabrava/Gustavo Flávio attempts to work on his next novel, also called *Bufo & Spallanzani*, while staying at an isolated mountain resort in the interior of the state of Rio de Janeiro, where he goes to escape from the pressure of city life and the scrutiny of the police detective; excerpts from Gustavo Flávio's work in progress are included in Fonseca's novel. Part four returns to Guedes's investigation in the city, and part five brings the two murder plots together in a climax and dénouement at Pico do Gavião.

By structuring the novel in this way, Fonseca (like his narrator) shows off his mastery of crime fiction, including its major subgenres. Gustavo Flávio's ostentatious erudition and his condescension toward Guedes play up differences between the classic hyper-intelligent armchair detective and the hardworking, street-smart Guedes. Guedes' investigation of Delfina Delamare's death exposes corruption in Rio's police department and high society. Gustavo Flávio's dark past as Ivan Canabrava resembles James M. Cain's *Double Indemnity* and other novels in which a knowledgeable but somewhat naïve young man attempts to plot "the perfect crime." In the isolation of Pico do Gavião, Gustavo Flávio discusses art and literary creation with the other guests, whose limited number and evenly distributed eccentricities recall a locked room mystery in the style of Agatha Christie. As complicated as the novel is, however, it ends with the single voice of Gustavo Flávio silencing all the others: he unmasks another character who has attempted to create a new identity but continues to hide his own dark past; he foils Guedes in his work and denigrates him in the narrative; finally, he shames Minolta into keeping silent in order to keep his secret.

Bufo & Spallanzani's primary story is the investigation of the death of Delfina Delamare, and at first its protagonist appears to be Guedes (his first name is never given), an atypical character for Latin American crime fiction in that he works for the police, but typical in that he follows the hard-boiled tradition of "a traditional man of virtue in an amoral and corrupt world. His toughness and cynicism form a protective coloration forming the essence of his character, which is honorable and noble" (Cawelti 152). As Cawelti says of the hard-boiled detective in US fiction, Guedes becomes personally involved in an investigation that puts him at risk; the pressure and dangers from all sides – the police establishment, petty criminals, and wealthier ones like Eugênio Delamare, force him to take "a personal moral stance toward the criminal" (Cawelti 143) even though the easier thing would be to accept the bribe or the official story.

Many Latin American writers have found it difficult to write on the side of police officers or other authorities because government corruption and violence make these characters unsympathetic in the view of most readers, and in Brazil this tendency is especially strong. "One of the most disturbing aspects of the increase in violence in contemporary São Paulo", Teresa Caldeira observes, "is not that violent crime is increasing … but rather that the institutions of order seem to contribute to this increase instead of controlling it" (138). In addition to carrying out extralegal executions that make up a significant percentage of the murders in Brazilian cities, the police regularly torture prisoners. Ethnographers Guaracy Mingardi working in São Paulo and Roberto Kant de Lima in Rio both found that the civil police relied on torture of detainees as their default method of obtaining confessions, such that "when they are prevented from using torture the failure of the investigation is said to be certainly expected" (Lima 156). Mingardi also found that the police routinely solicited bribes in exchange for lessening or erasing charges. Fonseca shows the individual cop struggling to act ethically within this corrupt system. As a former police detective himself, he writes with intimate knowledge of police practices, of the criminal underworld of Rio de Janeiro, and of the difficulty of maintaining ethical behavior in an atmosphere of entrenched corruption.

In the case of Delfina Delamare, Guedes is presented with an easy out: a small-time criminal named Agenor da Silva has confessed to the murder, saying he intended to rape Delfina Delamare but got scared when she began shouting and shot her, only taking her silver cigarette case in his hurry to flee the scene. Guedes distrusts this story not only because of its inconsistencies – the victim was carrying cash and other jewelry that was not robbed, and da Silva is unable to provide certain details about the scene – but also because he distrusts the other police officers who have brought the case to him as solved. Da Silva's confession appears to be irrational, since he wouldn't have been a suspect if he hadn't turned himself in.

Overall, the novel presents a positive and sympathetic picture of Guedes, but in the sections where the narrator Gustavo Flávio's voice is especially strong, Guedes appears in a less favorable light. Gustavo Flávio, worried about being found out, tends to refer to his antagonist as "o tira Guedes" (Guedes the cop) or occasionally "o tira sebento" (the greasy cop, 281-282) rather than "o inspetor Guedes", "o detetive", or simply by his name. He insults the detective's intelligence even though Guedes is taking the time to read Gustavo Flávio's novel in order to find out more about him. Late in the novel, he even compares Guedes's searching to that of "um cão sarnento, faminto" (307). Guedes is evidently more interested in finding out the truth about Delfina's death than other members of the police, who bow easily to pressure from her husband, but Gustavo Flávio clings to negative stereotypes, lumping Guedes together with all the other cops. His lawyer Martins shares the same general impression, such that when Guedes explains that da Silva's spontaneous confession struck him as unusual, Martins can communicate with a mere look to Gustavo Flávio that he thinks Guedes would only believe in a confession obtained through torture (65). Minolta too calls Guedes an "imbecil" (302), and Gustavo Flávio explains, "Como todas as pessoas, respeitáveis ou delinqüentes, eu tinha, evidentemente, aversão pela polícia", with the assumption that she and the reader will find this aversion as natural as he does (147). Fonseca reproduces a common middle-class belief that the cop must be less educated, less moral, corrupted by the system in which he takes part, and yet the plot of the novel shows that civilian jobs, including literary publishing, can be just as dangerous and morally suspect.

But Gustavo Flávio's undercutting of Guedes is only part of his general need to assert his superiority over other characters and groups, which is repeated in his interactions with the other characters at the Refúgio do Pico do Gavião, whether he is displaying his open-mindedness, his skill as a writer, or his ability to make sense of a murder. The small group of tourists and staff at the resort, each one somehow strange, are all destined to become suspects once one of them is killed, and the isolated location means that there can be no other suspects than the characters known to the detective and the reader. After the murder, it takes some time for the police to arrive and all the remaining guests and staff begin to suspect each other while they wait. Gustavo Flávio is annoyed that the other guests are as eager as he is to play the detective: "Alguém sempre faz o papel de polícia, não adianta matar todos os Guedes" (220). Without committing physical violence, Gustavo Flávio has been attempting to destroy Guedes throughout the narrative by undermining his character and contradicting his voice. In this section, he does the same with the other would-be detectives. The mystery within a mystery is the clearest example in the novel of how multiple perspectives give way to a single authoritative one.

Ivan Canabrava was a slight, insecure, and nervous young man, but he has recreated himself as Gustavo Flávio, a great writer and lover of women, food, and cigars. In his interactions with the other characters at Pico do Gavião, his acceptance of different sexualities and gender presentations appears as part of his general attitude of confidence and superiority. Gustavo Flávio the character and Rubem Fonseca the author – when speaking as himself, in the nonfiction writings collected in *O romance morreu* (2007) – share an attitude of intolerance toward intolerance. Fonseca writes about a visit the set of the HBO miniseries *Mandrake*, based on his novels and stories, where he met the transgender actress Bianca Soares who would guest star in the episode based o his "Dia dos namorados", first published in *Feliz Ano Novo*. He describes her as "uma mulher alta, bonita, talvez excessivamente carnuda", avoiding the typical descriptions of *travestis* or transgender people as defying categories. Normally resistant to being interviewed or photographed or indeed to appearing in public at all, Fonseca had his picture taken with Soares and, when questioned why, answered, "'Tirei exatamente porque era um travesti, um homem que saiu do armário e enfrenta a discriminação gritando desesperadamente. Pelo mesmo motivo que me levou a dar apoio explícito ao projeto de lei da Marta Suplicy, legalizando a união civil entre homossexuais. Se há uma coisa odiosa, é a discriminação, de qualquer tipo" (123). Both here and in an essay about Michael Jackson published in the same volume, Fonseca expresses not only an opposition to discrimination, but also admiration for individuals who defy the limitations set up for them by society – in Jackson's case, says Fonseca, transcending the boundaries of race, ethnicity, sex, and age (112).

But in Fonseca's fiction, characters who defy such boundaries tend to appear not as subjects or heroes in their own right, but as opportunities for the straight white male character to make a gesture against discrimination. Gustavo Flávio, much more confident in his heterosexuality than the narrator of "Feliz ano novo", takes exception when Trindade, the caretaker at the resort, makes a passing remark about "homossexualismo e outras formas de perversão":

> "Homossexualismo não é perversão", eu disse. "Homossexuais são pessoas normais como o senhor."
>
> "Como eu, não!"
>
> "Como eu, então." (187)

To an extent, Gustavo Flávio is putting his own reputation on the line in order to take a stand against discrimination or, as he sees it, against the kind of "stupidity" that gets on his nerves. But although this exchange seems to make Trindade uncomfortable, Gustavo Flávio is the paying guest and retains power in their relationship. As the narrator and the amateur detective, he also retains his privileged position in relation to the other characters (including Minolta, the narratee whom he tells to keep quiet) and to the reader.

A love triangle between three of the other guests, Suzy, Eurídice, and Carlos, is another situation where Gustavo Flávio shows tolerance and compassion but ultimately retains his secure position. Suzy and Eurídice initially introduce themselves as cousins, but Gustavo Flávio is unsurprised to learn that they are actually lovers. He is still flattered by Suzy's attention to him and hopes to seduce her, but Suzy, like all the other guests, wants to tell him a story. Suzy says she fell in love with a woman named Maria who had tried to kill her husband for being unfaithful. The next day it is discovered that Suzy has been murdered. The police interview each of the suspects and conclude that the local man known as the Ermitão, who takes care of the resort's horses, is responsible, a solution that makes most of the guests relax. They believe they've come to the end of the story and had the detectives explain to them who is guilty. Moreover, since the Ermitão is a lower-class man and not one of them, he fits their preconceived notions of a brutal killer. They no longer have to suspect each other and "O mundo voltara a entrar nos eixos" (270). However, Carlos brings the innocent Ermitão to explain that he saw Eurídice hitting Suzy – not knowing that Suzy had died and reluctant to become involved in the rich people's business, he had said nothing.

Gustavo Flávio is not the one to reveal the solution to the murder in the style of Holmes or Poirot, but he does make sense of the truth as it is coming out, while the other characters listen in shock and confusion. Gustavo Flávio wonders how he had failed to put the puzzle pieces together earlier (300). Eurídice killed Suzy for threatening to reveal Carlos's secret, that he was actually a woman, the Maria whom Eurídice and Suzy both loved. Following the false resolution that blamed an outsider, the unmasking of Eurídice as the murderer coincides with the unmasking of Carlos as a woman, and Gustavo Flávio can finally make sense of the clues he observed earlier: that Carlos was "inquietantemente feminino" (169), sounding like "uma pessoa que empostasse mal a voz" (170); when excited, his voice "ficou como a de uma mulher" (221). As the truth comes out, the narration switches from "Carlos" (301) to "Maria-Carlos" (301, 302) to simply Maria (302). On the way back to the city, Gustavo Flávio reflects,

> Lamento não ter dado mais atenção a Carlos, digo Maria.... Senti pena de Maria e Eurídice, naquele momento, na certamente fria e feia delegacia de Pereiras, enfrentando desamparadas a sórdida burocracia dos tiras. Quando perguntei a Maria… se precisava de ajuda ela respondeu que não, que em Cruzeiro telefonaria para um advogado de São Paulo, muito competente. Uma mulher corajosa. (305)

Here Gustavo Flávio corrects himself and insists on Maria's true identity as a victim to be pitied and offered help, at the same time working in another jab at the police, who will certainly not be as understanding as Gustavo Flávio is. With that mystery solved and locked away, he can return to his main goal of hiding his own identity and his crimes from Guedes.

The role of the writer in *Bufo* and "Romance negro"

Even though Gustavo Flávio unravels the mystery only seconds before Carlos and Eurídice's confessions, he does hold on to a position of authority at the resort by exercising another role of the detective: soliciting, judging, and ordering other people's stories. By virtue of his status as a professional writer, he makes himself the leader of a writing game among the guests. Each of the players is assigned a word – only he knows he has given them all the same prompt, "toad", which is part of the story of his dark past and of the novel he is trying to write. Suzy's story eventually helps him understand who murdered her while other attempts help him understand the relationships among other guests at the resort, but the main purpose of the game is to show that Gustavo Flávio's talent as a writer is unassailable. It is not a profession that just anybody can take up, and therefore he is justified in having created this identity for himself.

Gustavo Flávio takes every opportunity to present himself as an intellectual, whether in speaking to the other guests at the resort, resisting being interviewed by Guedes, or narrating the whole thing to Minolta. Even though Minolta has already chosen to spend her life with him and they appear to be making love in between his episodes of storytelling, he always has something to prove. He constantly refers to great works of literature in order to back up his ideas (with both parenthetical citations and footnotes), and at times he cites his own work, staking claim to a place in the same international canon – one which contains almost no women and very few other writers from outside of Europe. His style of writing is different from Fonseca's own voice in nonfiction, as in the *crônicas* and blog posts collected in *O romance morreu*. Like Gustavo Flávio, Fonseca the *cronista* frequently cites other writers, but his tone is that of an interested reader wanting to share things he has discovered, not of a snob wanting to show how much he knows.

At times Gustavo Flávio withholds information that he believes might damage his reputation. In his interviews with Guedes this is a rational behavior, since he fears Guedes will discover the truth about his past or his relationship with Delfina Delamare. But at other times his reticence has more to do with pride than self-protection. Orion, an orchestra conductor and fellow guest at the Refúgio, is hostile toward Gustavo Flávio and asserts that writing is not difficult, that anyone from a maid to a politician to a disturbed teenager is capable of writing a book. Gustavo Flávio reflects that many of his fellow novelists are not particularly intelligent but keeps the thought to himself: "não ia dar essa munição ao maestro" (165). His care not to give the other character any advantage indicates that, despite all his sales and fame, he still fears he might be exposed as an imposter and pushed out of the role of author.

Bufo & Spallanzani is just one of many of Fonseca's works whose narrator is a professional writer of fiction. Again and again, instead of journalists – more common stock characters throughout the history of crime fiction – Fonseca has chosen to write about characters whose role is to invent, rather than to uncover the truth. Out of all these stories about storytellers, the other one where he questions what it means to *become* a writer has a remarkably similar plot and structure to *Bufo*. The long story "Romance negro", first published in a collection of the same name in 1992, also features a main character (who narrates several sections as confessions to a female lover) who has reinvented himself and taken on a new identity in order to become a famous writer. In both cases, creating this new persona involves killing another person and, in some important sense, killing a part or an idea of the former self. A comparison of the two narratives will help us understand Fonseca's depiction of the writer as impostor, as artist, and as seducer, as well as pointing to the role and possible responses of the women who hear his stories.

The main character of "Romance negro" is first presented as Peter Winner, a popular detective writer, an American living in France, who travels to Grenoble for the Festival Internacional du Livre et du Film Noirs. At a public forum that also features the real life mystery writers P.D. James and James Ellroy, the authors begin by rehearsing the differences between British and American variants of detective fiction, an old discussion that bores not only the audience but even the panelists themselves. The formula of detective fiction is simple, *too* simple, and there have not been any real innovations in decades. Appearing at the same festival two years earlier, Winner had caused some controversy by asserting that the third most famous national variant of detective fiction – the French – is in reality only derivative from the English and American. (Somewhat jingoistic, he also points out that the classical detective story originates with Edgar Allan Poe, making the British murder mystery American as well.) Now, he proposes a new variation on the classic formula, confessing that he himself has committed a murder and challenging the audience to identify not the murderer or the motive but the victim. Back at the hotel that evening, he confesses to his wife Clotilde that a member of the audience was right: he is not in fact Peter Winner but an impostor, an unsuccessful mystery writer named John Landers who murdered the real Peter Winner and assumed his identity two years earlier. The date coincides with the resuscitation of Winner's career: after having believed Winner to be a washed-up writer with no new ideas, readers, critics, and Winner's own editor, Clotilde, have been delighted by his recent books (especially the one called *Romance negro*) and assumed he has found new inspiration. In fact he has become a new man altogether.

Landers tells Clotilde that he originally went to Paris hoping to meet her, the editor who had rejected his manuscript. Instead he met the famous (but famously reclusive) Winner, he was amazed to realize they looked almost identical. Landers convinced Winner to talk with him by offering to show him an original copy of the 1841 magazine that was the first publication of Poe's "Murders in the Rue Morgue", a story that both men as well as many critics consider to have originated the genre of detective fiction. After a long conversation in which the two writers do their best to show off their expertise and Winner consumes a large amount of alcohol, they end up in Winner's hotel room. Landers, who resents Winner's success, realizes he can use the coincidence of their resemblance and his new knowledge of Winner's personality and mannerisms to take his place. He kills Winner by poisoning his drink, exchanges their clothes and possessions, writes a suicide note for John Landers, and leaves the hotel as Peter Winner.

The following day, he meets Clotilde and decides to seduce her instead of going with his previous plan of poisoning her. He does murder Winner's lover Sandro, primarily because Sandro threatens to expose him as an imposter but also, he admits, because he has undressed in the hotel room and "sua nudez me agredia" (99). The real Peter Winner had denied rumors of his homosexuality and here Landers, the "new Winner", attacks and destroys that part of his personality.

Despite beginning with a discussion of national variants within detective fiction, “Romance Negro” does not deal directly with the place of Brazilian writers in this international conversation. Unlike most of Fonseca’s work, it uses an American protagonist with an English name (two, in fact) rather than a Brazilian. And yet in some ways the dual character of Winner/Landers (they are, it is finally revealed, identical twins separated at birth, a fact of which Landers was unaware at the time of the murder) is one of uncomfortable resemblance to Fonseca himself. Like the first Peter Winner, Fonseca has been reluctant to be photographed, give interviews, attend book fairs, or in general participate in the game of literary celebrity. The consequence for the character is not only that his sales suffer but that he literally dies along with his career: since no one knows what Winner actually looks like, it is fairly easy for an unpublished writer, jealous of his fame, to assume his identity. On top of Winner being punished for having the wrong kind of personality, Landers’s new success apparently derives from his taking on a famous name more than from his actual talent. Both Winners’ failures and successes reflect the unfairness of the publishing industry.

The American John Landers/Peter Winner has much in common with the Brazilian Ivan Canabrava/Gustavo Flávio. Each character has murdered someone else but has also, in some sense, murdered his old self. Ivan Canabrava was a nobody, a henpecked husband, a lightweight, an employee; no one remembers him once he is replaced by Gustavo Flávio, a personality who is larger than life. As both Landers and Clotilde insist in “Romance negro”, Landers really is the one to die in a Paris hotel room, while Winner takes on a new life. Canabrava/Gustavo Flávio, for all his sympathies toward women and sexual minorities, displays the same resentment and insecurities as Landers – after all, despite their current success, they both know themselves to be impostors in the role of writers – and he too lashes out against those who he fears will expose him, particularly Guedes. Guedes is the one who might expose him and is also, like Orion, his competitor in the field of storytelling. Wanting to "matar todos os Guedes" means keeping all the other characters from taking over his role as the man who makes sense of other people's stories; Gustavo Flávio does this by narrating Guedes's thoughts and actions, usurping his place.

Still, Ivan Canabrava/Gustavo Flávio is a more sympathetic and human character than John Landers/Peter Winner in that his attitude and his actions. He is kinder to Minolta in his speech than Landers is to Clotilde, and he shows compassion toward Suzy, Eurídice, and Maria/Carlos. Even Gustavo Flávio's murders are motivated by good intentions, unlike Landers who kills out of resentment of other people's success and discomfort with Sandro's nakedness and homosexuality. Canabrava hits the gravedigger in panicked self-defense while trying to expose a conspiracy and a fraud. In the last section of the novel, he explains to Minolta that he was (as Guedes suspected) the one to shoot and kill Delfina Delamare, but that he did it out of love. Delfina had been diagnosed with a terminal illness and wanted to die rather than suffer, but she could not bring herself to pull the trigger. Gustavo Flávio's final act of kindness toward her involves putting beauty before truth: per her instructions, he carefully unbuttons her blouse and shoots her in the heart at a moment when she is beautiful and smiling. "Como no meu livro, não saiu sangue do ferimento e a sua blusa, que abotoei cuidadosamente, ficou limpa" (336).

The connection drawn between his murder and his book is intentional, for here he makes a point that is common to *Bufo* and “Romance negro” and is not refuted in either one of them: that the artist’s true vocation is to create art. Both of these men kill other people, love women, tell stories, solve mysteries, and argue with their editors, but the most important thing they do is to make beautiful things. In Latin America *literatura policial* is very frequently read as *literatura política*; if it is more highly valued there than in the United States (where mysteries are bestsellers but are kept on separate shelves from “literature”), that is because of its function of telling the truth, often in situations where nonfiction cannot do so. When critics praise Rubem Fonseca it is usually because his fiction has provided incisive commentary on the state of Brazilian society and politics. There are certainly political messages in stories like “Feliz ano novo” and *Bufo & Spallanzani*, and Fonseca deals more directly with Brazilian politics and history in works like *Agosto*, a novel about the last days of Brazilian president Getúlio Vargas in 1954. The political commentary is an aspect of his work and a valid way of reading it but, he seems to say in these two narratives, not the only one or the most important.

Both *Bufo & Spallanzani* and especially “Romance negro” question the criteria that are used to judge the value of literature. At the time of his death, the real Winner was being criticized in much the same way that Fonseca has been since the 1980s, after the initial impression of shocking short stories like “Feliz ano novo” had faded. After he has been poisoned and before he dies, Winner tells Landers about a critic who “afirmava que meus primeiros livros, com seu conteúdo de violência, corrupção, conflitos sociais, miséria, crime e loucura, podiam ser considerados verdadeiros textos de romance negro, ao contrário dos escritos por certos autores ingleses, acusados pelo crítico de fazerem *litterature d'evasion*" (72). "Romance negro", despite its title, is *not* the kind of hard-boiled crime fiction that has come to be called noir, although Camarani and Telarolli demonstrate convincingly that it does engage with the tradition of the English Gothic novel, also sometimes referred to as *roman noir* in French or *romance negro* in Portuguese[3]. It has much more to do with the kind of classical detective story that Winner's critic dismisses as "d'evasion" and that Winner defends as "literatura de enigma", a genre with its own rules and positive value (72).

In the last scene of "Romance negro", John Landers looks out into the Grenoble night and comes to the conclusion that *all* literature can be seen as escapist ("de evasão"), but this thought is not a source of shame (109). The escape that he helps to provide is not "sedativa ou alienante" but joyful and transcendent: "Escritores e leitores, por saberem que não são eternos, evadem-se, nietzschianamente, da morte. Quando se lê ficção ou poesia está-se fugindo dos estreitos limites da realidade dos sentidos para uma outra, a que já disseram ser a única realidade existente, a realidade da imaginação" (ibid). At times critics express concern that Fonseca's work is too often "misread" as pornographic or exploitative when casual readers fail to note his use of irony (e.g.,

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[3] In his conversation with Landers, Winner dismisses the argument made by some critics that Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) is a precursor of the detective novel, saying it is actually only a precursor of the fantastical novel. But by putting the two meanings of *romance negro* together in this story, Fonseca reestablishes the connection, contradicting Winner's view. According to Maureen T. Reddy (not cited by Camarani and Telarolli), the Gothic novel and the closely related sensation novel were hugely influential in the development of the detective novel, but literary historians have tended to neglect them as antecedents (in favor of adventure and suspense stories) because those genres are associated with female authors and readers (*Sisters* 7-9).

Simpson 78-79, Tolman 64-65), and indeed government censors did, with grave consequences, misread *Feliz ano novo* as advocating violence. Still, the sexual content and graphic violence are not there only for the sake of parody or subversion, and even if his work were devoid of irony it should not be subject to censorship. In "Romance negro", just after finding out that the man she has married is an impostor and a murderer, Clotilde continues to listen to his stories, feeling "um frisson erótico perpassar seus músculos e suas vísceras" (74). Clotilde is an intelligent and discerning reader, but she is able to take pleasure from the intimacy and danger in her husband's voice and the story he is telling. Other readers may also enjoy reading graphic descriptions of sex, recognizing their own fears and experiences of urban crime, following Fonseca's complicated weaving of multiple plots and literary traditions, or finding escape from everyday life in a fantastical puzzle story set in a distant and beautiful locale. Even though the narrators have done their best to subsume all other stories into their own, the interruptions of Minolta and Clotilde indicate that there is still room for multiple and contestatory readings in these narratives.

Conclusion (Interruption)

The situation of enunciation is another important point of contact between "Romance negro" and *Bufo & Spallanzani*. In both works, a man tells his story to the love of his life in between act of lovemaking. In both cases he instructs her not to interrupt, but she does anyway. Minolta's position in relation to Gustavo Flávio and especially Clotilde's in relation to Peter Winner correspond to readers who are letting Rubem Fonseca tell them a story, particularly readers who resemble them – educated professional women who have read many stories. Clotilde Farouche, as an editor who makes decisions about whether the manuscripts submitted to her publishing house have value, is a woman with strong opinions and reactions to the stories she hears. She and Minolta, despite at times being belittled, chastised and silenced by the narrators they love, provide a model for how a reader can respond to a dissatisfying narrative.

Patrocinio Schweickart is one of several prominent reader-response critics to speak of the difficulty of entry for women readers when so much of literature is written by men with an intended audience of other men. She points to a passage from James Joyce's fiction where the description of a woman encourages the reader to identify not with her but with the man who is looking at her, and makes a connection with Lévi-Strauss's notion of woman as an object of exchange, used to strengthen the bonds between men: "The woman in the text converts the text into a woman, and the circulation of this text/woman becomes the central ritual that establishes the bond between the author and his male readers" ("Reading Ourselves" 41). As Judith Fetterley argues in *The Resisting Reader,* the expectation that the reader will identify with a male point of view forces the women reader either to "immasculate" herself – that is, take on a masculine identity in order to read the text – or else to become a resisting reader, one who creates different meanings than those intended by the author. The pattern of text as an object of exchange among men, which Schweickart and Fetterley see as common throughout the world of literature, was especially powerful and explicit in hard-boiled crime fiction as it first appeared in US pulps like *Black* in the 1920s and '30s. Indeed, critic Erin Smith sees the creation of that genre as a reaction against the increased presence and power of women both in the literary world (where women writers like Agatha Christie, Dorothy Sayers, and Ngaio Marsh "were prominent enough to gender the occupation of mystery writing feminine", 195) and in the everyday American workplace. According to Smith, pulp magazines and the fiction they printed provided an all-male space and the fantasy of homosocial community to help American men cope with having to work alongside women in offices and factories.

Fonseca follows in the hard-boiled tradition by casting competent and charismatic men at the center of his narratives as detectives, criminals, and writers. Bonnie Wasserman writes of Fonseca's *Agosto* that "Whereas the male characters in this novel tend to be well-developed and multifaceted, all the female characters are one dimensional and, with the exception of Vargas' daughter, Alzira, use sex to manipulate men for money and status" (165) and a similar (lack of) balance is present in most of Fonseca's work, where women appear as the protagonists' lovers but seldom as actors in their own right. However, although narratees like Minolta and Clotilde do not *do* very much in the narrative, the narrative would not exist without them, and they provide an alternative point of identification for readers who would resist (identifying with) Gustavo Flávio or John Landers.

Clotilde's main role in "Romance negro" is as the receiver of Landers's stories, but the two of them disagree on how valuable or active that role should be. She says she fell in love with the manuscript of *Romance negro* and later fell in love with its author as a direct consequence. In contrast, Landers says he married her because of her body – in particular, her bones – and is not interested in her secrets (44) or in her intelligence, her sensitivity, or her culture (87). When he begins to tell her the story of how he killed Peter Winner, at first Clotilde believes he is inventing a piece of fiction in order to entertain her and only gradually comes to understand that he is confessing to murder and fraud. Reflecting the reader's potential discomfort with finding out that the character whom they have trusted to tell them a story is a murderer – he is, after all, an intelligent man of their class or above it, not the kind of stereotypically dangerous subject that narrates "Feliz ano novo" – Clotilde interrupts him, leaves the room, comes back but listens in a different posture, and eventually reframes the story to other potential listeners.

Landers repeatedly tells Clotilde to shut up and listen, that he can only tell his story if she stops interrupting (56, 58, 59, 85), but she continues to interrupt with her own readings, even when they contradict his. Unlike Landers and the original Peter Winner, who both consider Poe to be a genius and treat the copy of *Graham's Magazine* like a cult object, she calls "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" "ingênuo, idiota, artificioso, grotesco, simiesco" (85). Clotilde's main criticism, that Poe's characters are uninteresting, corresponds to many reader-response critics findings that women readers, including the female mystery fans interviewed by Erin Smith, tend to give more attention to characters than to plots (in contradiction of the critical commonplace that detective fiction is popular mainly because of the satisfaction readers derive from seeing a complicated plot resolved). Clotilde's complaint that the killer is "um animal sem o livre-arbítrio" (84) also overlaps with Judith Fetterley's critique of a story in which men (Dupin, Poe's narrator, all of the witnesses in the story, and the sailor who owns the orangutan are all men) evade responsibility for violence against women ("Reading about Reading" 155-158). Landers tells her she is wrong without offering any real defense of Poe's story, leaving some space for multiple opinions and readings. Like the fictionalized author P.D. James in her appearance on the panel in Grenoble, Clotilde is a professional woman with valuable knowledge who speaks to the famous Peter Winner as an equal, even when he fails to treat her as one.

Later in “Romance negro” Clotilde shows Landers that the person who reads and interprets a story has as much power or more than the one who tells it. Indeed, although Fonseca and many others have cast writers in the role of investigator, *reading* is the true work of the detective. And even if the traditional understanding is that a competent detective arrives at the objective truth, Fetterley’s analysis shows that Poe’s Dupin, for example, ends up with a biased conclusion about who is (not) responsible for the murders in the Rue Morgue. Ricardo Piglia has said that literary criticism is really a form of autobiography, in that it reveals more about the person reading the text than about the text itself (*Crítica y ficción* 15). John Landers cites a similar statement, taken from Italo Calvino’s *Invisible Cities*, when he wakes up to find that Clotilde is gone: “*Quem comanda a narrativa não é a voz, é o ouvido*. Sua ouvinte, sua adorável e ossuda Clotilde, entendeu a história que ele contou de maneira pessoal e única. Ele disse uma coisa, ela ouvira outra. Assim é a vida” (101). He then finds that she has spoken to a doctor and to a police detective, telling both of them that her husband is suffering from psychosis and therefore, should he contact them to confess to having murdered himself, he should not be taken seriously. By reframing his story, Clotilde has taken away Landers’ ability to tell the truth and have it be believed.

Minolta also holds power over Gustavo Flávio at the end of *Bufo & Spallanzani*. He credits her with saving his life, helping him discover his passionate soul and create his new persona as a writer and as a lover of women. He also tells her to be quiet, to listen to the story of his love for another woman (initially “Mme. X”, later revealed to be Delfina Delamare) without interrupting. Minolta, despite the strong opinions she expresses in the section on “Meu passado negro”, appears to comply, perhaps out of curiosity to hear his story. In the last paragraph of the novel, after confessing to the mercy killing of Delfina, Gustavo Flávio reacts to a look or a criticism from Minolta that we do not see. He insists that he has no reason to repent, and yet he offers to turn himself in and tell Guedes the whole story if she asks him to: “Você quer? Anda, diga” (336). The novel ends on this line, before Minolta can answer, and the fact that the character of Gustavo Flávio appears as a free man in subsequent Fonseca novels indicates that she did not send him to jail. Still, the invitation is there for the listener to become an interlocutor.

Bufo & Spallanzani resolves its multiple stories into one told by a single man, and Fonseca’s work in general contains very little space for women’s voices. At the same time, it often addresses itself to women and invites them, challenges them, to respond, whether with the mock encouragement of “Anda, diga” or with provocative words like “Agora cale-se, por favor” (“Romance negro” 59). Once Gustavo Flávio, John Landers, or Rubem Fonseca has finished telling his own story, the text is over, but there is nothing to stop a careful and intelligent reader from responding with her own creation or interpretation. Patrícia Melo, the subject of my next chapter, does precisely this when she takes up the themes, plots, and even individual characters from Fonseca’s books and uses them to talk back to him, expanding the potential of what crime fiction can say about literature, gender, and violence in contemporary Brazil.

Chapter Two: Patrícia Melo and Masculine Excess

Patrícia Melo is a woman who writes crime fiction, a genre heavily dominated by male writers and characters and, in her native Brazil, dominated by a single writer, Rubem Fonseca. Melo was born in 1962, just one year before Fonseca published *Os prisioneiros*, his first book of short stories, and he has been a prominent figure in Brazilian fiction, film, and television throughout her life. Rather than attempt to flee from Fonseca's enormous influence, Melo has embraced it, accepting his praise and collaborating with him on several screenplays. Despite the risk of being dismissed as unoriginal, a minor imitator of the established master, Melo has played with her own reputation, not only making frequent references to Fonseca and his work but also dealing explicitly with the topic of plagiarism within her novels. The two writers of different generations are close friends who read and admire each other's books, but Melo is a careful and critical reader, and her own writing challenges Fonseca's in subtle ways, paying homage to him while bringing attention to problematic class and gender issues that go unacknowledged in his work.

With her use of Fonseca's fiction as a point of reference for her own, Melo duplicates and intensifies the broader pattern seen in all crime fiction, particularly as it is written in Latin America: the foreign model – be it the conventional generic plot or the specific work of another writer – is part of the reader's frame of reference for interpreting and understanding the new variation. Trusting in the reader's familiarity with European, American, and Brazilian literature, including hard-boiled fiction, in several of his works Fonseca has revised the central figure of the detective into a character that is more sympathetic to Brazilian audiences. For her part, Melo plays up the violence and hypocrisy of her characters in order to show how Fonseca's work – and hard-boiled fiction more generally – tends to blame women and poor people for the problems they face while keeping them from telling their side of the story. Her message about violence in Brazilian society, particularly men's violence against women, is communicated not only through the plots of her novels but through parallels and differences with the earlier works which they evoke.

In this way, Melo addresses head on two of the major negative perceptions facing women who write hard-boiled crime fiction: that they are too soft to write the kind of graphic sex and violence that the genre demands, and that their work is derivative of male writers'. In this chapter I use the character of Máiquel in *O matador* (1995) and to a lesser extent its sequel *Mundo perdido* (2006) to show how Melo denaturalizes hard-boiled fiction's association of violence with masculinity and control, including control of the narrative. I then turn to her treatment of the topic of plagiarism in *Elogio da mentira* (1998), a novel that acknowledges the crime writer's inescapable dependence on earlier (foreign, masculine) models while simultaneously carving out space within the genre for Fonseca and for Melo herself as a Brazilian woman.

Máiquel's World: The Killer Protagonist in *O matador* and *Mundo perdido*

As discussed in previous chapters, the genres of crime and detective fiction, and particularly their hard-boiled variants, have traditionally been dominated by male writers and defined by masculine positions. Rather than downplaying or avoiding these problematic aspects of the genre, as some Latin American women writers have done, and rather than putting women characters in the main roles of murderer and detective – a strategy more common in feminist detective fiction from the United States – Melo's keeps the focus on the male criminal. In *Acqua toffana* (1994), *O matador*, *Valsa negra* (2003), and *Jonas, o copromanta* (2008), and *Mundo perdido*, Melo shows men's and women's lives are ruined by the pressure on men to prove themselves at every turn, through violence, domination, and control of women.

As a reader seeking out crime fiction by Latin American women, I was at first taken aback by the lack of female protagonists in Melo's novels. Of her published fiction, only the first half of her first work, *Acqua toffana*, is narrated by a woman. This narrator, who is trying to convince a male police detective that her husband is a serial killer, complains about traditional detective plots as they relate to her situation:

> Em todos os filmes policiais que vejo na televisão acontece o seguinte: há um mocinho bonito querendo provar ao seu chefe que, se tiver carta branca, vai pegar o assassino. Tem sempre o chefe dizendo que não e ponto final. E nesse conflito, mais a investigação proibida, mais o final heróico para o bonitão que volta a ficar amiguinho do chefe..., com promoção e tudo, eles ganham duas horas e a gente perde duas. É mais ou menos o que está acontecendo comigo e com o delegado. Ele ganha tempo e eu perco. (51)

The movies are like real life not in that the detective is a good guy but in that they are a waste of time, like her interviews with a man who refuses to listen to her, hiding behind stock phrases of police work while the narrator puts herself in danger and does the actual work of solving the crime. In this novella (it can be read as connected to or separate from the second half of *Acqua toffana*, which is told from a misogynist male killer's point of view), Melo consciously shifts the focus away from the traditional masculine protagonists of the detective and the criminal and from the homosocial bond between the rule-breaking detective and his boss, toward the female victim, a role that has more often been treated as an object. None of Melo's novels stars a good looking young detective who eventually triumphs over restrictions, but the rest of them do push women to the sidelines, forcing us to read between the lines for the contradictions in the masculine narration and the places where women talk back.

Without condemning Melo's choices in characters and themes, the critic Lidia Santos finds that the author has chosen to "discard the focus on women's experience" and "to go beyond women's issues" (39). Santos' mention of Melo as one of the most recent examples in a trajectory of "Seventy Years of Women's Narrative in Brazil" implies that the freedom to write about whatever subjects she chooses, indeed to "follow the model of some male writers such as Rubem Fonseca" (ibid) in her focus on extreme urban violence is only possible now because of the other women who have come before her. Writers like Patrícia Galvão, Clarice Lispector, Nélida Piñon, and Lygia Fagundes Telles have brought the subjective experience of women's lives to Brazilian literature, taking away the burden of self-representation for Melo and other contemporary women writers.

However, Melo's focus on male characters is not the same thing as ignoring women's issues or the gendered dimension of contemporary violence, and her use of male narrators is not the same as Fonseca's. Melo dramatizes the way women are victimized and their voices are shut out of the story, encouraging us to pay attention when they do speak up. There is a qualitative difference between these dissenting voices, which are backed up by the reality of facts and actions, and the complaints of female characters in many of Rubem Fonseca's works, which are more stereotypical, based on greed, jealousy, and irrational hostility toward other women.

She also dramatizes the pressure placed on Brazilian men to live up to a particular idea of masculinity influenced by Brazil's history of authoritarianism and violence, and the negative consequences of this pressure. Researchers on men and masculinity such as Michael Kimmel in the United States and Sócrates Nolasco and Denise Fagundes Jardim in Brazil have taken inspiration from feminist scholarship and the notion that gender is socially constructed, historically and culturally dependent. Rather than see masculinity as the unmarked norm against which only women are opposed and differentiated, it is important to recognize that men too are socialized to conform to particular roles. Unlike Fonseca's narrators, who proclaim their love for women but then present the women in their lives as frivolous, jealous, and nagging, Melo's narrators frankly complain about their problems with women, sometimes condemning women in general as annoying or unfaithful. Their actions, on the other hand, show that it is the men who are unfaithful and often violent with their wives and girlfriends. Melo's use of the unreliable narrator bears less resemblance to Fonseca's novels than to Machado de Assis's classic *Dom Casmurro* (1899), a work referenced by the tyrannical jealous husband in *Valsa negra*: both Machado's and Melo's narrators are powerful patriarchs who demonstrate their need to dominate through irrational jealousy, condemnation of other characters, and an insecure hold on the narrative.

The effort men put into proving themselves as men is seen in all of Melo's work but most clearly in *O matador*, the first of two Melo novels narrated by a poor, uneducated Paulistano named Máiquel. He begins killing as a way of defending his masculinity in front of a crowd and his date, but the action is also related to his sense of racial identity. Later he takes on the role of defender of public security by becoming a professional killer of criminals. Máiquel sees this as a way of caring for his family and community when in fact he is being exploited by rich and powerful men who take advantage of his desire for middle-class status. Racism strengthens the connection between Máiquel and his wealthy bankrollers, but it is not enough to keep him safe once he breaks an established rule of class relations by killing the wrong person. In Melo's telling, these aspects of Máiquel's identity are tied together and every part must constantly be negotiated and proven, rather than taken for granted.

Máiquel does not start out the story as a killer but as a man without a stable job or indeed any stable identity, but he believes he can obtain the identity he wants – a middle-class white man, provider for a family and protector of his community – by taking on the outward characteristics of that role. In this sense he is closer than Fonseca's characters (or any of the others studied in this dissertation) to the archetype of the hard-boiled hero. As Christopher Breu writes in *Hard-boiled Masculinities*, the pioneers of US hard-boiled fiction reflected an "externalization of masculinity as a prophylactic toughness" (2). Victorian conceptions of white masculinity were based on inner qualities of morality and civilization, defined in part by the rejection of the "primitive" (violent and libidinous) masculinity of racial and colonial others. Hard-boiled detectives and criminals, on the other hand, could suffer temptation, weakness, and violent impulses but retained the privileges of whiteness and maleness by being hard on the outside. In *O matador*, the narrator is led to believe that he can create the identity he wants for himself through his appearance and actions, but the social order of the Brazilian city is more fixed than it pretends to be, and he ultimately fails to obtain the status he thought he could have.

Máiquel's story is set in motion by having his hair dyed blond on a bet, an action that drastically changes his appearance – in his opinion, for the better:

> Fiquei admirando a imagem daquele ser humano que não era eu, um loiro, um desconhecido, um estranho. Não era só o cabelo que tinha ficado mais claro. A pele, os olhos, tudo tinha uma luz, uma moldura de luz.... Havia luz na minha face, e não era uma luz artificial de refletores. Era aquela luz que a gente vê em imagens religiosas, luz de quem é iluminado por Deus. Foi assim que me senti, próximo de Deus. (10)

Even though the hairdresser thinks he looks ridiculous, for Máiquel the change is entirely positive. His perception that his skin and eyes have lightened along with his hair reflects the common Brazilian understanding of whiteness as a status that can be obtained through education, behavior, and upward economic mobility.

Although the context and tone are quite different, the religious element in this passage echoes the scene in *Macunaíma*, Mário de Andrade's crucial 1928 novel remaking Brazilian language and identity, in which the hero bathes in a pond that had been blessed by the legendary Sumé or Saint Thomas, said to have brought Christian teachings to the Brazilian Indians before Portuguese colonization (Andrade 40). After stepping out of the enchanted water, the formerly black Macunaíma is suddenly white, and it is after this physical transformation that he is able to leave the jungle behind and enter the civilization of São Paulo. As Else Vieira argues, Andrade's novel parodies both the colonial project of turning Indians white by making them Christian as well as the early-twentieth-century positivist plan of whitening the Brazilian population through increased European immigration and racial mixing (70-71). The humor in *O matador* is different, darker, in that Máiquel, with his optimism and faith that the model he aspires to is both desirable and attainable, is the only one to see the change. While the other characters and the reader can see his hypocrisy and ridiculousness, Máiquel is looking at a new person in the mirror, someone who is blessed, someone who has a future.

Immediately after leaving the hairdresser Máiquel picks up a date, Cledir, in a department store, and takes her to a bar where an acquaintance from his neighborhood, a black man named Suel, laughs and tells him he looks like a "gringo". Máiquel reacts angrily as if he has been called a "veado" – a vulgar slur for a homosexual man – when in fact he is the only one to have spoken that word aloud. Despite Suel's and Cledir's efforts to reason with him, Máiquel insists, "É a mesma coisa. Veado e gringo são a mesma coisa" (16) and challenges Suel to a duel rather than let the perceived insult stand. Suel still refuses to take the matter seriously, and Máiquel shoots him, becoming the killer of the novel's title.

Why does Máiquel insist that being called a gringo is an insult to his manhood, to which he must react with violence? Whether consciously or not, he believes he is being called out for pretending to be something he is not. Suel is ridiculing Máiquel for being a mixed-race Brazilian man trying to look like a white American, which brings to

Máiquel's mind the other thing that he is trying to be: a tough heterosexual man, the ideal partner for Cledir. He is insulted when Suel makes fun of the way he looks because he believes this look is the beginning of a change in his life, a way of moving up, and Suel has called attention to its falseness. Máiquel never specifies his race, but no other characters are identified as white either, while black characters in *O matador* and *Mundo perdido* are labeled as such, implying that the narrator treats whiteness as the unremarkable default; his race, like his personality in general, was *nothing in particular* (very different from Macunaíma's blackness) before his transformation. On the other hand, he is not light-skinned enough for bright yellow hair to look natural on him. Thus, he makes the jump from Suel's insult *gringo* (mixed race but trying to appear white, foreign, upper class) to *veado* (homosexual and inwardly weak but trying to appear heterosexual and strong). The name Máiquel is itself a Portuguese phonetic approximation of the English name Michael, a gringo's name in an oral context if not in the written context of the novel. Throughout *O matador*, Máiquel is a character who feels out of place, affecting to belong to a particular position when he does not and in truth is ambivalent about whether he wants to.

Despite his initial upset and remorse, upon looking back Máiquel is able to articulate that Suel's murder gave him a sense of identity that he'd previously lacked: "Até isso acontecer, eu era apenas um garoto que vendia carros usados e torcia para o São Paulo Futebol Clube" (16). Although the nickname "Matador" has not yet appeared at this point in the novel, the title is present in the reader's imagination as the thing Máiquel has become. The noun of profession *matador* contrasts with the verbs *vendia* and *torcia* that Máiquel uses to describe his old life: not an identity but a couple of activities. This has already happened in his first meeting with Cledir who, wanting to sell him a dress shirt, asks, “Você é comerciante?” He immediately explains to the reader, “Eu trabalhava numa loja de carros usados” from which he expects to be fired soon, but to Cledir he says only “Sou” (12), presenting himself as a single thing even though in his mind he only has only several things he currently does.

Not only his violent actions but his reactions to them are tempered by his idea of what a man should be like. His mixed emotions reflect Brazilian psychologist Sócrates Nolasco’s research on the tension between a social model that values authority and tradition in men’s work and personal relations and, on the other hand, Brazilian men’s individual personalities and desires. Privately, Máiquel expresses tenderness for women, children, and animals, as well as remorse for his crimes, but he also embraces the public position of the indomitable killer, the outward identity he believes he should want. At home with his cousin Robinson after shooting and killing Suel, Máiquel finds himself shaking and sobbing, behavior that he considers atypical and unacceptable for men of his family: “Não é por causa do machismo, embora sejamos machistas. Não choramos porque também não rimos, não abraçamos, não beijamos e não dizemos palavras gentis. Não mostramos nada do que acontece embaixo da nossa pele. Isso é educação” (18). In this passage Máiquel shows his awareness of sexism – even admits that it affects him – but will not reject the idea that a man should not cry. He approves of the way he has been taught not to display emotion because he pledges “meus filhos serão educados dessa maneira” (19). Throughout the rest of the novel, he works to contain his own emotions and to appear to others as the hard man he believes they want him to be.

To his surprise, Máiquel finds that the people around him approve of the murder of Suel, who was known as a violent criminal himself. A bartender offers Máiquel a free drink, a member of the military police congratulates him, a boy brings him a pig, and other neighbors leave notes expressing their gratitude. Máiquel's reaction, "Gostei dos presentes" (24), involves little reflection or moral questioning. He has never before had an established place in society and now enjoys being called a good person, thanked for making the neighborhood a safer place. Anthropologist Denise Fagundes Jardim has written that working-class bars – like the one where Máiquel shoots Suel and the other one where he is congratulated for the killing – are important spaces for homosocial bonding in Brazil. In this space where women's presence is minimal, the men in Jardim's study resist talking about the specifics of their personal lives, but their coded conversations do build up the ideal of the man who provides for his family, a model that Máiquel tries desperately to fill (cited in Viveros 42-43).

A few days after the first murder, a toothache forces Máiquel to visit a dentist despite not having the money to pay. The dentist, Dr. Carvalho, also knows about Suel and proposes that Máiquel kill another young man, also black and, according to Carvalho, a rapist and murderer, in exchange for the dental work. Absurd as this plot point may appear, the character of Carvalho and the violence of the dentist's office will be familiar to readers of Brazilian crime fiction, since Melo has taken both of them from the opening scene of the 1979 short story "O cobrador" by Rubem Fonseca. Her title echoes Fonseca's as well, since the Cobrador uses the language of cashing in debts to refer to what he is really doing: killing anyone who gets in his way.

The borrowing of the character of Carvalho is only one of many connections that lead the few critics who comment on Melo's writing to group her together with Fonseca. Grasiela Lourenzon de Lima also notes the similarity in styles of narration, with both "O cobrador" and *O matador* told in first person with the colloquial and often violent language (Alfredo Bosi, we recall, called Fonseca's influence on Brazilian prose *brutalista*) of a poor, marginalized character. The speech of various characters, thoughts of the narrator, and description of events run together in long sentences separated only by commas, adding to the sense of rapid action and lack of control. Lidia Santos includes both Fonseca and Melo the style of the "contemporary extreme", where violence, including violence against women, is depicted as part of a generalized urban chaos, and characters are caught up as "both perpetrators and victims of a force of violence without cause or goal" (40). According to Santos, such writing both responds to and reinforces middle-class readers' fear of uncontrollable elements in society; such fears are used to justify discrimination and increased class segregation between neighborhoods (39-40). Anthropologist Teresa Caldeira, in fieldwork conducted in São Paulo in the late 1980s and early 1990s (just before the publication of *O matador*), found that in everyday conversations Paulistanos would frequently repeat narratives of their own personal experiences of crime as a way of expressing their fears and frustrations. Brazil had returned to democratic government in 1985, after more than twenty years of military dictatorship, and the end of the decade was a period of political instability as well as economic crisis, with inflation severely curtailing the purchasing power and lifestyle of middle- and upper-class Brazilians. The "talk of crime", according to Caldeira, simplifies these insecurities and places the blame for all social problems on a distinct class of criminals, often conflated with other marginalized groups: blacks, migrants from the impoverished Northeast, or poor residents of tenement houses and favelas.

The back cover of the Companhia das Letras paperback of *O matador* certainly plays on this fear of the other, advising getting to know and understand Máiquel not because he might be similar to the reader but because "ele pode estar ao seu lado neste instante." However, as with the issues of gendered violence and power, I contend that Melo is not only reproducing a familiar narrative of class conflict but also drawing attention to the way that narrative is constructed and shared, as well as what is left out of it. Rather than simply repeat Fonseca's stories, Melo plays up differences between the characters and their situations, bringing some of the blame for violence and criminality back to the middle class for creating the expectations that vulnerable people like Máiquel try to live up to.

While Máiquel is an original character who repeats some of the actions of Fonseca's Cobrador, Carvalho is the same dentist; he explains to Máiquel that he has a limp because he was shot in the knee by a patient fifteen years ago. Carvalho is now older and more cynical, translated from Fonseca's wild and unpredictable Rio to a colder, more utilitarian but equally violent São Paulo. Like the subjects Caldeira interviewed, Dr. Carvalho uses the narrative of a single incidence of crime to explain all the changes in his life. He is a different man, bitter and in pain, *because* of the experience of being shot by the narrator of "O cobrador". Also like Caldeira's informants, Carvalho uses that narrative to create a bond between himself and Máiquel, characterizing both of them as victims, as respectable husbands and fathers who want to make an honest living and protect their families but who have been let down by the insufficient actions of the government and police in dealing with criminals.

He does all this while examining Máiquel's teeth, a situation that gives the dentist the only power to speak. Carvalho holds forth on his reasons for supporting the death penalty – even, he hints, in the sense of extrajudicial executions for known criminals such as robbery, rape, and kidnapping – and cites Cesare Lombroso, the Apostle Paul, Jesus Christ, and Thomas of Aquinas as authorities to support his assertions, a clear contrast with Máiquel and other lower-class characters, who occasionally refer to television, movies and popular literature but without being able to recall proper names.[1] Máiquel notes, "Muito inteligente o dr. Carvalho" (31), evincing for the first time his desire to be part of Carvalho's world. This is an attitude Carvalho works hard to encourage, despite the fact that he is only interested in using Máiquel in order to get his dirty work done. He uses racist rhetoric to foster Máiquel's sense of camaraderie; after telling Máiquel about his injury he immediately states, "Eu odeio preto, sou racista mesmo, esses pretos estão acabando com a vida da gente" (32).

His appeal to racial solidarity and use of the pronominalized "a gente" encourage Máiquel to identify with his bourgeois interests and fears, rather than with the other man who sat in Máiquel's place (with a toothache and unable to pay to have it fixed) some fifteen years ago. Later on, Carvalho introduces Máiquel to his friends, other professional men, who also speak to their new hired hit-man as if to an equal, emphasizing their common interests as businessmen, husbands, and fathers (59-65). They offer him not only money but a business, a profession, and the pretense of friendship. Máiquel goes on to discover that his second victim, Ezequiel, is not a dangerous criminal but a young boy who supports his mother by working in a pet shop. Nevertheless, he takes the deal, becoming the killer in order to gain what he believes is a stable social position. Toward the end of the novel he is even given an award from a local business association for Citizen of the Year, which he proudly accepts, not knowing that his own rights of citizenship will disappear as soon as he kills the wrong person.

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[1] For example, Máiquel recalls learning a poem in school and being told by his teacher that it was written by "um homem muito importante" (37); Érica tells Máiquel about an American detective story she heard about from her father, saying it was written by "um escritor muito famoso" (118). The characters are clearly aware of the respect owed to famous authors but lack Carvalho's ability to name them.

Melo signals to us that Máiquel wants status, money, and possessions because he has been taught to want them, whether through Carvalho's direct urging or through a more diffuse culture of consumption. In one scene the two men discuss the killing of Ezequiel while a television plays in the background: "mostrava propagandas de comida, boceta, cobertor, sapato, casa, automóvel, relógio, dentes, colégio, namorada, aparelho de som, respeito, sanduíche de mortadela, sorvete, bola de futebol, xarope, meia, cinema, filé mignon" (84). This long list condenses several shorter ones from "O cobrador" (Fonseca 166, 168, and 174), including the mixture of large and small, concrete and abstract (*colégio*, *respeito*), and the treatment of women and their bodies (*boceta*, *namorada*) as items to be advertised, bought, sold, and owed. However, as with Carvalho's mention of having been attacked in Rio, this citation of "O cobrador" emphasizes *O matador*'s difference: rather than spontaneously declare his right to have all these things (and then take them without a thought to the consequences), Máiquel sees them purposefully presented and offered to him in a moment of desperation and in exchange for his committing murder.

Early on, and even after the second murder, Máiquel cultivates the fantasy of a respectable middle-class life, achieved through hard work, in which he can leave behind both his poverty and his recent crimes. He marries Cledir and provides shelter for Érica, the fifteen-year-old girlfriend/widow of his first victim, Suel. Likewise, he visits the cemetery and promises his second victim, Ezequiel, that he will provide for Ezequiel's mother by giving her a portion of his monthly salary from his new job at a pet shop. On his way home he imagines telling Cledir his good news: "ela fazendo feijão e eu falando sobre o meu emprego novo, ótimo, ela ia dizer, agora a gente vai poder economizar, vai poder fazer uma caderneta de poupança, vamos comprar coisas, carro, moto, microondas, sabão de barba, um monte de coisas, vou te dar um presente, Cledir, um vestido vermelho, uma sandália, uma peruca, um disco do Roberto Carlos…" (75). Máiquel links the domestic harmony of a happy conversation and a wife cooking for him (never mind that she has so far been supporting them with her job) with the ability to purchase material things, which he appears to want for the pleasure of buying and gifting more than for their actual use.

What is not acknowledged in the cemetery scene or the imagined conversation at home is the fact that Máiquel's job at the pet store had been Ezequiel's and was only made possible by Ezequiel's murder. He abandons it a short time later and never gives any of his money to Ezequiel's mother. Typically, his repentance is short-lived, in part because of his selfishness and insecurity, and in part because he is allowed to get away with hurting other people, as long as they are not more powerful than he is. Suel and

Ezequiel could be killed because they were poor and black, and Cledir and Érica can be hurt because they are poor women.

Máiquel's marriage and other sexual relationships are also motivated by insecurity and made possible by violence. On this issue, Melo does more than Fonseca in most of his novels and stories to show how sexual violence hurts women, even though the narration remains Máiquel's alone. Several of Fonseca's male narrators, including those of *O caso Morel* (1973) and *Diário de um fescenino* (2003) are falsely accused of rape – women beg them for rough sex and then use the marks of violence as evidence against them. In the early chapters of *O matador*, on the other hand, Melo's Máiquel rapes Cledir, the woman he has just started dating, and he is not condemned for it. Initially he feels guilty since he recognizes that she fought him, that she was not sexually excited, and that she was hurt. But he still believes he can convince her of his good intentions if given a chance:

> Queria muito falar com Cledir. Queria explicar. Sempre exagerei no sexo, porque as mulheres me ensinaram que era preciso exagerar. Perguntem o que elas querem e elas vão dizer: foda-me. Faça meu coração doer. Faça eu gritar. Faça alguma coisa.... Mulheres gostam de tropas, cavalos, lanças, coisas que invadem e conquistam. Coisas que dominam e trazem paz. Coisas que ocupam e deixam marcas. Mulheres, Cledir, desculpe. (36)

Máiquel's desire to explain himself and to be forgiven makes it clear that at some level he knows he has done wrong, and yet he justifies his actions by saying he is not responsible. To be sure, he is making excuses and blaming the victim, but the cultural expectation he names is real, and this is Máiquel's position throughout *O matador* and *Mundo perdido*: whether he is attempting to satisfy a girlfriend or the rich man he works for, he both bows to the pressure and uses it as a crutch. Cledir is angry but she does not report the incident to the police, nor do they speak of it again. She comes back to Máiquel once she realizes she is pregnant and needs economic support, and the two marry with her mother's blessing, a twist in the plot that reflects the reality of poor women's dependence on men like Máiquel. His feelings of guilt and responsibility toward Cledir eventually fade into annoyance and resentment over the mediocrity of his life, and in a later episode of rage he breaks her neck and kills her. Again, the consequences for him are minimal.

While married to Cledir, Máiquel maintains a sexual relationship with the 15-year-old Érica, who is also economically dependent on his help since losing Suel. After allowing her to stay at his home, he begins watching her in the shower and masturbating while thinking to himself, "o homem é forte, o homem cria, o homem constrói" (76). As usual, Máiquel's ideas about a man's proper role are deeply contradictory, as he talks about accomplishing great things while accomplishing nothing, and he talks about his responsibilities as a family man while taking advantage of a young girl. Máiquel and Érica begin an affair a short time later, and he lies to both women that he doesn't care about the other one. The facts of the characters' lives make it easier to see through the cracks of the story Máiquel tries to tell – and indeed tries to believe – about himself as a basically good guy. In addition to killing for money and prestige, he kills Cledir out of anger and assaults Marlênio, the Evangelical minister who has befriended Érica.

In *Mundo perdido*, the follow-up novel in which Máiquel searches for Érica, Marlênio, and Cledir's daughter Samanta, he is a fugitive because of other murders he has committed, but the fact that the daughter is the child of rape is not known by other characters and has long ago ceased to be a source of concern for Máiquel. He holds on to the idea of himself as the hero who will rescue his kidnapped daughter and only gives up when he realizes that his plan would make him into the real kidnapper.

If Máiquel's story were told from the outside, it would be that of a coldblooded killer and rapist, one who is constantly victimizing those less powerful than himself. In telling his own story, Máiquel tries both to show his own prowess as a powerful killer (and asset to the community) and to paint himself as a victim. While this self-victimization is generally self-serving, Máiquel's genuine concern for the welfare of animals complicates his character more than his relationships with women or his desire to provide for his daughter. This sympathy is most often aimed at dogs, which are both the object of Máiquel's protective instincts and a symbol of his own status as an ill-treated, subhuman object. But the first animal Máiquel takes in is an animal of even lower status: the pig given to him as a reward for killing Suel.

The animal was probably intended to be killed for food, but Máiquel, proud to have earned the presents, adopts it as a pet and names it Gorba (presumably after a story about Gorbachev on the TV news) He then feels incensed and betrayed when Cledir kills and roasts it for Máiquel's birthday celebration, a short time after their wedding. While Máiquel sits and fumes, she cuts the meat and tells her friends at the party that she earns more money than her husband: "o salário de Máiquel é uma porcaria, e comiam o meu porco, eu ganho mais do que ele, a faca, eu sustento a casa, a faca..."

(82). As this long sentence continues, it becomes clear that the knives here are the ones the characters are using to eat, but the way they cut into the narration continues Máiquel's pattern of associating humiliation with violence. He feels powerless both because he makes less money than Cledir (his income from the pet shop is "uma porcaria", not a man's salary) and because she has killed the pig without his permission; and the powerlessness makes him want to lash out, although he does so by walking out, and attacks her only later. Máiquel's anger in this scene, then, is more connected to his loss of control and status than to sorrow for the animal. And while he considers Cledir heartless for murdering Gorba, he does not reflect on his own murder of human beings.

In these early chapters of *O matador*, Máiquel's affection for dogs and other animals shows his affinity with victims of scorn, poverty and abandonment. After the murder of Suel, Dr. Carvalho encourages Máiquel to murder Ezequiel, describing him as a rapist who deserves death. However, when Máiquel looks at a picture, he sees Ezequiel as a victim: "O Ezequiel parecia um cachorro vira-lata, aquela magreza, aquela tristeza, aquela cara de fome de cachorro de rua" (43). Máiquel is reluctant to hurt Ezequiel both because of his resemblance to a mistreated animal and because Ezequiel takes care of animals in his work at the pet store. Still, Carvalho and his friends go on trying to convince Máiquel. At the party at Carvalho's home they speak to Máiquel with false camaraderie of the need to control crime; while Máiquel admires the men and aspires to be worthy of their company, he feels a separation from them because of his class difference, manifested in his inability to speak their language and in the ugliness of his shoes (62). Despite his efforts to become a new man, Máiquel is aware of a fundamental similarity with poor victims like Ezequiel that separates them from rich men like Carvalho and Santana and even from more hopeful poor characters like Máiquel's cousin Robinson. Robinson is the kind of man to wake up each morning and tell his image in the mirror that today will be a great day; Máiquel, in contrast, wakes up saying, "ei, cachorro, enfia a cabeça embaixo do travesseiro porque hoje é um dia de merda e amanhã também vai ser um dia de merda" (79). Being a dog, then, is not simply a position or temporary condition, but the one piece of Máiquel's old identity that he finds it impossible to leave behind.

Máiquel expresses sympathy for human victims of violence and discrimination as well, but he considers himself – like an animal – not to be responsible for his own actions. When reading the newspaper or watching television, Máiquel recognizes the suffering of people in distant places like Iraq, Burundi, Zaire, Rwanda, Israel, and Vietnam, as well as with the poor people of Brazil: "eu não fui exterminado pelos policiais assassinos do Rio de Janeiro," but he knows what the victims feel (79). However, Máiquel's knowledge that the Rio police are murderers and their victims are people like him does not stop him from furthering the police's work of extermination in São Paulo once he believes that he can personally benefit from doing so. When apologizing to Ezequiel at the cemetery, Máiquel refuses to accept full responsibility for the murder: "eu te matei porque o mundo é muito ruim e a maldade do mundo esmaga o coração do homem, foi isso que aconteceu comigo" (75). Here and elsewhere, Máiquel blames the "world" for his crime without identifying the specific causes; with the phrase "foi isso que aconteceu comigo", he presents himself as a passive victim, even while addressing his own victim. As when he blames women for his sexual aggression, he blames others for turning him into a killer without acknowledging his own guilt.

Máiquel maintains his identification with dogs throughout *O matador* and *Mundo perdido*, but the meaning changes for him (temporarily) following his murder of Ezequiel and the accidental killing of Robinson – the gunmen, friends of Suel, were aiming for Máiquel out of revenge. Robinson's death is what causes Máiquel to adopt the identity of the Matador and of the more powerful and dangerous attack dog rather than the stray. Recalling the violent murder of Ezequiel, he declares, "Eu vou te matar, seu filho da puta, eu vou te matar porque, a partir de agora, eu sou o matador. Eu sou a grade, o cachorro, o muro, o caco de vidro afiado. Eu sou o arame farpado, a porta blindada. Eu sou o Matador. Bang. Bang. Bang" (92). This is a declaration of new identity and purpose, and after these events Máiquel ceases to feel remorse, killing quickly and casually. He also begins to adopt the attitudes, dress and privileges of the property-owners with whom he now associates himself. Yet it is interesting to note that he describes himself not as a person but as an instrument, an animal or an object used to both to prevent robberies (the fence, the wall) and to harm would-be assailants with sharp teeth, barbs, or broken glass. At some level he is always aware that he is not the hero of the story but rather someone else's tool. Indeed, his language in this crucial moment is not his own but borrowed from Carvalho, who at the party had complained that "Muros, cães, grades, caco de vidro, porte de arma" were all useless in the face of rampant crime and impunity (62).

Once Máiquel has settled into killing as a profession, the business officially funded and established by the dentist Carvalho, the politician Santana, and other associates is named "Alpha – Serviços de Segurança e Vigilância Patrimonial S. C. Ltda." (131), evoking the concept of the alpha male among dogs, wolves, and men. As the public face of the business and the one who personally directs its violent operations, Máiquel is given the position of alpha dog for his strength, ferocity, and masculinity. However, the capital is provided by the wealthy men who profit from the venture (both in direct financial terms and because their other businesses benefit from the elimination of robbers). Máiquel brings his friends into the business as gunmen and takes pride in his work and in the role of head of the pack – it not only gives him power over other people, especially women, but allows him to feel like a community leader and protector of those who cannot protect themselves.

Érica is the one who explains that the attack dog, starved into hate and violence, is still the victim of its trainers. When Máiquel goes to the award banquet where he will be honored as Citizen of the Year, she refuses to accompany him, explaining that the businessmen are actually honoring *themselves* for having trained Máiquel the way a policeman trains a dog: "Eles estão orgulhosos porque te ensinaram isso, o ódio, a lama, e você ama esse ódio e essa lama, essa porcaria toda, você ama, ama como um cãozinho medroso ama a matilha, essa lama..." (165). Máiquel listens but refuses to believe her, seeing the award as evidence that he is truly valued by the community and his business associates.

But Máiquel's killing is protected only when his victims are people the rich want to get out of the way. Máiquel's eventual fate is foreshadowed when Carvalho's politician friend, Santana, informs him that Máiquel's friend and employee Marcão has been arrested while transporting cocaine. Máiquel expects the powerful players who have supported him and his business thus far to arrange to have Marcão freed, and yet Santana informs him there is nothing they can do. Marcão himself attributes his downfall to an anonymous sellout and, more generally, to racism and envy: "ninguém suporta isso, um preto com dinheiro num carro bacana, um preto entrando num restaurante, um preto numa boa dando risada por aí, eles não toleram, ficam doidos de ódio (137). While Marcão believes his peers to be responsible for his arrest, like Máiquel he still expects to escape punishment with help from his rich associates. In fact it is these men, as much as the friends and neighbors Marcão suspects, who profess unabashed racism and use it to their advantage. Marcão is killed in jail, apparently by another inmate paid to finish him off before he could give away the game and expose Máiquel and his financiers. Máiquel is disappointed but reflects little on the incident and does not expect the same thing to happen to him, perhaps because he is not black and still believes he can leave his class background behind.

When Cledir's bones are discovered in Marcão's back yard and Máiquel is accused of her murder by Érica's pastor Marlênio, Carvalho and Santana appear angry and discouraging. But they only cut ties definitively when the news breaks that Máiquel has, in the middle of a drunken rage, murdered a middle-class youth – a skateboarder whom he mistook for a homeless nobody. The victim is the son of a pediatrician – perhaps not a direct acquaintance of Carvalho and Santana but part of their class. Máiquel, having believed in the work he did on behalf of his employers, is surprised to find that they are no longer willing to pull strings for him. In fact, they even pay another inmate in his jail cell to have him killed in his sleep, just as they had done with Marcão. The pretense of solidarity disappears once Máiquel loses his credibility and the rich no longer have use for him. The position of hero to the community, which Carvalho and friends had built up and exaggerated for him, was in fact as precarious as any superior social position obtained by a poor man. With the skills and brutality he has learned, Máiquel escapes from jail and takes his revenge on Santana and Carvalho, murdering them brutally before fleeing the city.

In *O matador*, Máiquel is motivated to commit violence by the entangled prejudices of gender, sexuality, race, nationality, education and class, but in the end he is only able to recognize the injustice of class – the one axis that disadvantages him directly. Ten years later, an early scene in *Mundo perdido* reproduces Máiquel's feelings of sympathy for the victims of discrimination and injustice:

> Liguei o rádio, fiquei escutando uma entrevista, agora não queriam mais que a gente falasse a coisa ficou preta, era preconceito, disse o político, nem anão, baianada, baitola, farinha do mesmo saco, funcionário público, chamam rico de corrupto, disse o locutor, e pobre de ladrão. É verdade, tem que chamar todo mundo de ladrão, pensei. Existia uma cartilha do governo que condenava isso. Condenava também sapatão e veado. Gostei. (28)

Immediately after, Máiquel's new girlfriend Divani shows up with her children and the story moves on without further reflection or context. The interview, carried over the airwaves, is isolated, unconnected to the plot or Máiquel's other thoughts. He expresses his approval with the simple word "Gostei", recalling the sentence "Gostei dos presentes" when his first murder is rewarded with a pig in *O matador*. His only specific comment is on the double standard applied to corrupt rich and poor thieves; though he does not make the connection in this instance, the difference in words and attitudes is one that affected Máiquel directly when he lost the support of the rich and his status changed from citizen of the year to killer. But the broader message about discriminatory language does not appear to sink in, as Máiquel uses words like *puto* and *veado* throughout the rest of *Mundo perdido* and does not challenge other characters for using racist slurs.

Máiquel has abandoned the role of the alpha dog and the Matador and returned to identifying with dogs for the way they suffer. In *Mundo perdido* he spends a good deal of his time caring for a stray dog that he accidentally hit with his car. Without crediting Érica for the insight, he has accepted her explanation that the rich men treated him like an attack dog – not a pet or a friend like Gorba, but a weapon or a tool that could be discarded when it was no longer convenient. It is clear to Máiquel by this point that rich men took advantage of him and considered him less than human. But he does not appear to have understood the extent to which he has been manipulated through expectations of masculinity and the racist rhetoric of his sponsors.

Even though Érica comes from the same general poverty as him and as her former lover, Suel, and she has no interests in common with Carvalho, she too encourages Máiquel to take a middle-class perspective. She presents herself as a well-traveled citizen of the world, trying to convince Máiquel that his own life is small and limited, but she eventually reveals that her knowledge of other parts of Brazil comes from having lived with her father when he worked as a truck driver, until his murder while she was still a child. She attempts to impress Máiquel with decontextualized facts that she has learned from reading dictionaries and almanacs. In this habit, the character recalls Macabea in Clarice Lispector's 1977 novella *A hora da estrela*, with her repetition of the lessons of Rádio Relógio. Like Macabea, Érica lacks education but aspires to a middle-class life and the kind of values and culture promoted by the Brazilian government and media. At times Máiquel repeats the behaviors of Olímpico de Jesus, Macabea's boyfriend in *A hora da estrela*: he expresses his own shame and insecurity by lashing out against both Érica and Cledir, either with insults or with physical violence. On the other hand, Érica has strength and confidence that Macabea lacks. While she displays questionable moral judgment in *Mundo perdido* (in which she and her Marlênio exploit poor people as leaders of a for-profit Evangelical church), Érica has learned not to settle for ill-treatment. She tells Máiquel that Carvalho is taking advantage of him, but he refuses to believe her. When she has had enough, she leaves. Máiquel, in contrast, has learned to expect ill-treatment and to settle for complaining about it.

Without giving her characters direct knowledge of authors like Lispector, Machado de Assis, Mário de Andrade, or Rubem Fonseca, Melo uses the resonances between her work and the earlier ones to contribute to her message, and this is why I believe novels like *O matador* are worthy of sustained attention and should not be dismissed as simple repetitions of a narrative that blames poor people for crime. Part of Máiquel's story is that he is repeating the actions of Fonseca's "Cobrador", but another part is that his motivations are markedly different, less his own and more consciously manipulated by the story's more powerful characters. Still, the facts of the characters' lives allow us to see through the cracks of the story Máiquel tries to tell – and indeed tries to believe – about himself as a basically good guy and a victim of circumstances. In contrast with Fonseca's "Cobrador", who gets away with whatever he wants because he has a gun and the will to kill, Melo's Máiquel is given the much more realistic message that he will only get away with killing the people who are not valued by the government and society. In the end he still refuses to acknowledge his own gender and racial privilege, but he also resists Carvalho's talk of crime, the story that reduces the world to good guys and bad guys, black and white. Despite being accused of repeating a story in which urban violence has no causes or hope of control, Melo is in fact adding to the complexity of cause and effect in a story that her readers *think* they already know. She is able to develop the play between the model and variation even more when her characters too are familiar with Fonseca's work.

In Praise of Plagiarism: José Guber as Brazilian crime writer

Patrícia Melo's characters and plots in *O matador* and *Mundo perdido* hit hard enough to satisfy any doubts as to whether a woman can hold her own writing in a male-dominated genre about the violence of contemporary urban Brazil. Indeed, they show how disastrous the consequences can be when men try too hard to fit their unrealistic expectations of what a man should be. Her critical dialogue in those novels with the works of Rubem Fonseca and other important texts of Brazilian and international literature addresses another criticism that is also often aimed at women writers: that their work is derivative of the men who came before them. Máiquel's limited education keeps him from noticing that his life is replaying Fonseca's short story, but her narrators in *Elogio da mentira*, *Valsa negra*, and *Jonas, o copromanta*, are widely read and able to recognize and comment on such connections, giving Melo the opportunity to lay out her own position on plagiarism and originality. Through the character of José Guber, the professional writer in *Elogio da mentira* who knowingly steals other people's plots, Melo lets us laugh at the limited roles (passive victim or seductive killer) available for women in formulaic crime stories while also establishing the difference between simple copying and her own appropriation of the model.

While the charge of lack of originality is common in criticism of women's writing, it is also a concern for many male writers of crime fiction and for Brazilian or Latin American writers in general. Most crime fiction relies on a basic formulaic plot, with writers, critics, and readers disagreeing on whether this reliance limits creativity or promotes it by challenging writers to come up with new variations. When Rubem Fonseca's character John Landers (the imposter who has taken the place of Peter Winner) says in "Romance negro" that the variations of the detective story have been exhausted and that the genre has long since become stale and tedious, he expresses a common frustration among both writers and critics.

However, the lack of new plots appears to be less of a concern for readers of genre fiction than for writers. Most studies of reader response to the classical detective story in particular have found that readers derive pleasure from the sense of closure that comes with the final resolution. Erin Smith's article based on interviews with female mystery fans contradicts the general assumption that they read mainly for the plot – these women expressed more interest in characters with whom they identified and in settings they might like to visit – but the fact that the plots of various books in a series tended to run together for these readers still suggests that those plots followed a familiar formula of complication and resolution.

According to Todorov, generic expectations make the criteria for evaluating crime fiction completely different from those of *literature*: "the masterpiece of popular literature is precisely the book which best fits its genre. Detective fiction has its norms; to 'develop' them is also to disappoint them: to 'improve upon' detective fiction is to write 'literature,' not detective fiction. The whodunit par excellence is not the one which transgresses the rules of the genre, but the one which conforms to them" (43). In this sense Melo's José Guber is a failure as a writer of crime fiction, as are Melo, Fonseca, Piglia, and Piñeiro. They are not attempting to tell the same old story that their readers (think they) want but are instead challenging those conventions and expectations, including the expected roles for women. Like many other Latin American writers, as well as women and people of color in the United States, these authors have been reluctant to follow a formula that finds an individual guilty of murder without addressing systemic problems like inequality, impunity, and state terrorism. Even putting aside such political concerns, creative people may be dissatisfied unless they can come up with something new.

One of the ways many writers have dealt with the particular strictures of crime fiction is to acknowledge the similarity to older works while simultaneously emphasizing the new work's difference. From the very first detective stories (even before there was an established genre or formula to be acknowledged) writers would reference works and characters that had come before, perhaps as a way of preempting charges of copying. Poe's "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" of 1841 seems to have been inspired in part by the memoirs of the French detective Vidocq, first published in 1828, as Poe's narrator is familiar with Vidocq's memoirs and mentions them to Dupin; however, Poe's detective Dupin is not flattered by the comparison, stating that Vidocq was a good guesser but did not have a truly analytical mind. Sherlock Holmes is similarly dismissive when Watson first discovers his profession and compares him to Dupin. Christie's narrator in *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* cites Doyle and Christie and is in turn cited by countless other characters in later works of detective fiction. In this way genre writers are able to acknowledge their debt to the masters who came before them, but often in a mischievous and proud way, showing that they are not only different but in some way superior. Melo sometimes takes a similar attitude in her engagement with Fonseca's work, as in the complexity she adds to Carvalho, the killer, and their class positions in *O matador*.

Melo has a more specific debt to acknowledge than even for most crime writers because of the limited space for the genre within Brazilian literature. Her career has been strengthened not only by Fonseca having set a precedent for crime fiction taking place in Brazil, but also by him personally having praised and promoted her work and that of several other younger Brazilian writers. As Nanda Rovere summarizes in her review of *Valsa negra*, "Patrícia Melo se diz influenciada pelas obras de Rubem Fonseca, o qual é uma espécie de padrinho literário. Provavelmente isso a ajudou a obter espaço no mercado editorial e divulgação na mídia." Because of this personal connection, it is especially important for Melo to show her own independence and originality without seeming to attack the more established writer. Her gesture in *Elogio da mentira* is not to critique Fonseca but to return the favor he has given her, making a space for him alongside Poe and Cain as masters worthy of being emulated.

Like *O matador*, *Elogio da mentira* tells the story of several murders, but it uses a playful and farcical tone and has less to do with the reality of contemporary violence than with the conventions of writing and publishing. Melo pokes fun at her own protagonist, José Guber, who describes himself as a factory worker rather than an author. He makes a living by recycling literary classics into pulp novels to be published in Brazil under foreign-sounding pseudonyms by the foreign-sounding "Editora Minnesota" – a name apparently chosen only for being part of the United States and not for any specific associations with Minnesota as a place. The text of *Elogio* includes memos and conversations exchanged between Guber and his editor, Wilmer da Silva. In the first half of the novel, before Guber switches to a different editorial line, these messages consist of recycled murder plots, which Guber presents as his own, and Wilmer's rejection notes, most of which object that Guber's ideas will never work because they break the firmly established rules of the *romance policial*. Minnesota's editorial policies include a literal and legalistic reading of S. S. Van Dine's 1928 list of "Twenty Rules for Writing Detective Stories". In Todorov's terms, Wilmer is seeking to publish books which conform to the rules of the genre – as he calls them, "as regras dos norte-americanos" (41) – while Guber wants to recreate works of literature, those that have transformed the rules of the genre.

The quality and classic status of the works being reused challenge the editor's narrow views and by implication other critical judgments on what makes a good crime novel. Guber's memos propose rewritings of Camus's *The Stranger* (14-15), Poe's "The Black Cat" (21-22), Chesterton's "The Man in the Passage" (32-33), Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* (35-36), Christie's *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* (39), Fonseca's *Bufo & Spallanzani* (46-49), Poe's "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" (53-56), and Zola's *La Bête Humaine*, (67-68). His previously published works include rewritings of James M. Cain's *Double Indemnity* and Patricia Highsmith's *The Talented*

Mr. Ripley. While Poe, Chesterton, Christie, and Fonseca's names are strongly associated with the history of crime fiction, Guber alternates them with more "serious" and respected non-genre authors like Camus, Dostoyevsky, and Zola, thus expanding the field of references and antecedents for "original" Brazilian crime fiction.

While he does not explain the provenance of these plots to Wilmer, Guber defends the practice of plagiarism in his own narration, arguing that by rewriting these classics he brings them to a mass audience who would not otherwise have been exposed to any literature at all: "Eu não me incomodava de roubar histórias dos clássicos, na verdade, eu me sentia fazendo um favor, eu dava ao leitor menos privilegiado a oportunidade de ler Shakespeare, Chesterton, Poe e muitos outros autores importantes" (23). His readers are "Pessoas que jamais leriam os clássicos. Eu estava fazendo um favor para eles, essa era a verdade" (ibid). But, as in *O matador* when Máiquel blames the world for his actions, there is ambiguity in Guber's self-justification. He claims to be doing the public a service, and yet he is ashamed enough of his own writing to call himself a factory worker and ashamed enough of the practice of plagiarism that he doesn't tell Wilmer or other people in his life the truth about his sources, only defending himself openly to the reader.

Guber's literary career suffers as his (and the other authors') ideas are continually rejected by da Silva, but in the meantime he is seduced by Fúlvia, a married woman who has read his novels and believes his expert knowledge of crime will help her in her plot to murder her husband and collect the insurance money. Her plan, which involves sneaking poisonous snakes into her husband's bedroom in order to make his death look accidental, takes inspiration from both the murder of a husband for insurance money Cain's *Double Indemnity* and *The Postman Always Rings Twice* and from the toad extract subplot of Ivan Canabrava's "passado negro" in *Bufo & Spallanzani*, suggesting that old novels can serve as inspiration for real life as well as for knock-off translations and adaptations.

Elogio da mentira gives its readers the fun of recognizing literary references and tropes before the characters do, whether in the case of the individual stories and novels that are proposed under different titles and with a few details changed, or in more general situations and elements of the plot. Guber's first look at Fúlvia is a picture on the Internet in which she appears with a snake wrapped around her arm. Even more directly than the double-crossing women in Hammett and Cain's novels, Fúlvia evokes the figure of Eve, tempting the man with her dangerous beauty and sexuality. And yet Guber suspects nothing, even when Fúlvia questions him about convenient methods for murdering one's husband. The reader can recognize Fúlvia as a *femme fatale* from the beginning and reflect on what an unbelievable archetype she is, but Guber fails to do so or to see himself as another stock character of hard-boiled fiction, the sap who falls for her schemes.

Guber also lacks awareness about his own writing and why it would appeal to Fúlvia. When she asks him about his theory of the three elements of the perfect crime, he doesn't know what she's talking about, so she reads aloud a long passage from *Um trem para a morte*, a novel Guber published under the pseudonym Martin Clark, saying that the easiest to get away with murder is to be daring in order to end up "bem, na impunidade" (27). In fact, the entire quote from Guber's novel is a close paraphrase of a speech Walter Huff gives his accomplice Phyllis in Cain's *Double Indemnity*. The original speech is more spare and clipped than the Brazilian translation, perhaps reflecting Guber's style or a need to pad his writing in order to turn out a novel quickly enough for Wilmer and the Editora Minnesota. When Fúlvia asks again whether he thinks she can get away with murder Guber answers, "que no Brasil era mais fácil ainda" (27). Thus, even though Guber as a writer has chosen to use an English pseudonym and set his novel abroad – presumably in the United States – Melo takes the opportunity to comment on the difference in their situations, the widespread impunity that is such a concern for characters in *O matador*.

When he finally becomes aware of Fúlvia's belief that he is an expert in crime, Guber explains that he has only cribbed plots from the real experts, and so the literary references that had been a challenge to the reader up to that point are spelled out with titles and author names. The game of allusions becomes less challenging as Guber goes through the books on his shelf, revealing the source for each one. Disappointed, Fúlvia asks, "Você copiava tudo isso? Você não inventava estes crimes? Pensei que você fosse especialista nessas coisas" (90). Guber responds, "Em matar maridos?" (ibid). This is a realization and an accusation against Fúlvia, but it is also defensive, as Guber hates having his authority as a writer challenged. Even when admitting his plagiarism, he wants to make it clear that his expertise is in literature, not in crime.

Guber fears that his lack of originality is as much a problem in his personal life as in his professional life, an insecurity that Fúlvia voices toward the end of the novel (and the end of their relationship): "Não sabe nem inventar nada, é tudo B, homem B, literatura B, filme B" (151). These phrases are no more common in Portuguese than in English and clearly derive from the final term of the list, "B-movie". Like the subtitle of Caio Fernando Abreu's *Onde andará Dulce Veiga?: Um romance B*, Fúlvia's insult puts trash films before trash novels as the model being imitated. If the original itself is B-level, then Guber's writing and his life must be the lowest of the low. Indeed, part of the stigma attached to crime fiction has to do with its typical style of prose, which, like cinema, lays out the scene in a literal, visual way rather than using figurative language[2]. Rovere, echoing other Brazilian critics, praises Melo's *Valsa negra* by calling it "o menos cinematográfico" of her books. But by putting this kind of judgment in the mouth of the murderer Fúlvia, Melo takes away from its authority. Fúlvia criticizes Guber for copying his plots, but she has stolen others' ideas for how to murder her husbands and, less consciously, is parroting others' ideas of what constitutes high art.

In her study of Brazilian science fiction, a genre that has been even more marginalized and ignored by the Brazilian academic establishment than crime fiction, Elizabeth Ginway attributes the genre's lack of acceptance in part to the small, elite audience for fiction in general in a country where only a small minority of the population regularly reads books (28). Since the habit of reading (and buying) novels is itself a marker of class status, those who do so tend to be especially interested in works of high art as determined by literary critics, and mass-market paperbacks are not nearly as important there as in the United States (29). Nelson Vieira notes that the novels of Jorge Amado, while widely enjoyed by the reading public since the 1930s, have never been fully accepted into the literary canon because of their connection to popular culture (111). Drawing on the work of Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro, Vieira states that Brazil's history of authoritarianism not only affects economic conditions but also produces "mechanisms for exerting ideological and cultural control over the majority of the population", for example in determining which kinds of literature should be valued (109). Writing in 1992, Vieira sees the mix of pulp fiction and literary erudition in Fonseca's 1983 novel *A grande arte* as a sign of a blurring of the strict divisions between elite and popular culture and tastes.

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[2] An exception is the hard-boiled conceit as described by Christianson, "a particularly pointed or extended metaphor or simile which is usually serious, and which is spoken to the reader directly to convey the detective/narrator's complex sensibility" (133). Christianson finds that this figure is most associated with Chandler but common throughout the US hard-boiled tradition, including recent adaptations by women writers such as Sue Grafton. However, it has not been a salient characteristic of the noir style in Latin America, where writers have emulated the hard, clean, and spare language but not the cynicism of hard-boiled narratives from the US.

Indeed, the elite control of Brazilian literary culture is currently in a process of dramatic change. Ginway's and Vieira's assertions about Brazil's small reading public rely partly on data gathered in the 1970s in the midst of a long dictatorship that suppressed popular participation in literary culture while encouraging increased concentration of wealth among the elite. Huge disparities of income and class segregation remain important problems in Brazilian society today, but changes in recent decades include more economic stability and purchasing power for a larger segment of the population. According to Marco Antônio de Almeida, writing in 2003, these changes have led to "a 'des-elitização' da literatura e a valorização de novos autores, especialmente os nacionais" and more publishing opportunities for formerly devalued genres like crime fiction (6). The recent government of Luís Inácio da Silva in particular has helped increase literacy and a more widespread literary culture. The government is the largest buyer of books in Brazil because it provides textbooks –

including didactic editions of literary works – for public schools and universities. While this helps create more readers and supports a variety of genres, the textbooks themselves are usually older, canonized texts, which can also be republished cheaply when copyright has expired. Even with a larger segment of the population reading, most cannot afford to buy books, especially new ones; and a more serious problem than plagiarism is simple photocopying of books, which keeps publishers from making a profit and keeps authors from receiving royalties. In 2006, Robert Baensch reported that "16 percent of the population owns 73 percent of the books purchased" in Brazil (32).

If the market is slowly becoming more diverse in a way that allows space for Brazilian crime novelists like Fonseca and Melo, they also face more competition from other forms of popular literature that are more cheaply produced, such as classics in the public domain, translations of foreign works, and various types of nonfiction. *Elogio da mentira* acknowledges this when José Guber loses his job as a "factory worker" at Minnesota and goes looking for new work. After a failed attempt at writing pornography (and a passage that includes a hidden reference to Fonseca's 1975 story "Intestino grosso"), Guber publishes several self-help books and finally moves on to religious literature, finding that plagiarism is just as rampant in both of these genres as it is in crime fiction. Another character, who has made a fortune by copying Dale Carnegie, discusses the possibility of patenting terms like "amor próprio" and "auto-imagem" as ways of cornering the Brazilian market for self-help literature (84), showing that he has no understanding of the ethics of intellectual property and only cares about protecting his own profits.

Even as Guber moves away from *literatura policial*, Melo is continuing her commentary on how that genre differs from others, especially in the emphasis on characters' real and false names. With a main character named Máiquel, *O matador* linked names to the issue of race – of passing as something one is not; *Elogio da mentira* takes on the same subject as it relates to literature, nationalities and professions, dwelling especially on crime fiction's preference for Anglo and northern European names. While working for Wilmer da Silva at Editora Minnesota, Guber uses and proposes for himself pseudonyms like Martin Clark, Hillary McClure, Ed Mason, Richard Carr, Peter Walpole, and Keith Findley, which, like his character names, show a reliance not only on foreign cultures but specifically on the names of crime novelists and characters from the US and Great Britain. The use of foreign pseudonyms was, of course, a regular practice for many Latin American authors throughout most of the twentieth century, reflecting Latin American readers' expectation that crime novels must come from abroad. Writing in 2003, journalist Rodrigo Carrero quotes editor Luciana Villas-Boas of Editora Record on Brazilian readers' preference for foreign crime fiction, a problem that still leads some Brazilian writers to publish under foreign-sounding pseudonyms: "O preconceito contra o autor local existe, especialmente no gênero policial. Nesse aspecto, ainda estamos engatinhando …. Os brasileiros … não apóiam os autores da casa."

Guber's editor at Editora Minnesota, Wilmer da Silva, is the one who insists on English names. Berating Guber for setting a proposed novel in Russia, he asks, "Você disse Vilmer? … Meu no-me [sic] é inglês, Uilmer, o dáblio tem som de *u*. Você não fala Vashington, você fala Uashington. Meu nome é a mesma coisa. Minha mãe era inglesa" (35). However, Wilmer's secretary, Ingrid Weiss, who becomes Guber's lover after he has married Fúlvia and lost his initial passion for her, uses Wilmer's appearance to insult him behind his back: "O cara é totalmente mulato, ela falou, e fica dizendo eu sou inglês, inglês o escambau, ele é mulato. O cara tem olho amarelo de negro e fica falando que é inglês. Nunca vi um mulato inglês. Eu é que sou branca de olho azul, alemã de gema" (36). In fact, Wilmer has not asserted that he is white, only that his mother is English, and he has chosen to emphasize his given name and its English pronunciation rather than da Silva, one of the most common and archetypal surnames in Brazil and other Lusophone cultures.

Guber too uses English names for cultural reasons, because he knows they go together with the kind of book he is writing. Once he moves on to writing in other genres, he is able to do so under first a made up Portuguese name (João Aroeira, who becomes a successful self-help guru) and then his own (José Guber – or, as his new editor proposes, Bispo José Guber – the religious leader). He also goes from using a photo of his dead brother to using his own image, suggesting that moving away from the foreign-accented genre of crime fiction allows him to be more authentically Brazilian and more authentically himself. He is moving in the opposite direction from Ivan Canabrava/Gustavo Flávio and John Landers/Peter Winner, characters in Fonseca's fiction who take on new names and identities in order to sell crime novels. When writing self-help books he continues to plagiarize and to work for a greedy editor, but for the first time he comes to believe in the message he is writing, as he never believed in himself as a criminal.

Guber and Fúlvia's own story shows that life imitates art – including crime fiction – even in Brazil – but the publishing industry does not allow Guber's crime fiction to take place in Brazil. With the exception of the Russian novel, all his proposed books at Minnesota use English names and English-speaking settings, including those that plagiarize from the French Camus and the Brazilian Fonseca. Fonseca's *Bufo & Spallanzani* takes place in Rio and features only Brazilian characters, but Guber's rewriting could be based on a novel by James M. Cain: it takes place in California, features characters named William Mambler and Walter Nadenger, and is to be published under the name Joseph Farnsworth. Fonseca is the only Brazilian writer that Guber considers copying; Melo does not include, for example, Machado de Assis's "O enfermeiro" or other works by classic writers that Flávio Moreira de Costa counts as antecedents to the Brazilian crime story in the anthology *Crime feito em casa*. In this way Melo singles out Fonseca while still acknowledging the limits and challenges facing less established Brazilian writers. Guber's audience, not much different from Melo's, still tends to think of crime fiction as foreign, but by setting Fonseca on the same shelf with the other classics she bolsters his importance, which in turn brings a little more prestige back to herself.

Conclusion

By having engaged with Fonseca's work in diverse ways – by rewriting and expanding "O cobrador" without mentioning him by name in *O matador*, by adapting *Bufo & Spallanzani* for the screen, by depicting Fonseca as a character in the novel *Jonas, o copromanta*, and by referencing *Bufo & Spallanzani* in *Elogio da mentira*, Melo has linked her career to his. Rather than attempt to distance herself from the influential writer once she had established her own career, Melo instead addresses questions of imitation and plagiarism (already important themes in Fonseca's writing), acknowledging the extent to which all writers depend on previous writers while also making fun of hacks like Guber who do so without real awareness. Her defense of lies is itself a lie, one that presents José Guber as a conman and murderer as well as a dupe and a murder victim; the author Patrícia Melo appears sane and exceptionally clever in comparison. The novel advocates for rewriting, then, not by following the rules as Wilmer da Silva orders and not by copying uncritically as José Guber does, but by bringing out new meanings in the old work, such as the causes of urban violence in *O matador* and the unfairness of the publishing industry in *Elogio da mentira*.

As we shall see in the next chapter, plagiarism is also a major concern in the works of the Argentine writer Ricardo Piglia, who also engages with national and international genre traditions and critical debates within his fiction. But Piglia goes further, arguing in favor of plagiarism not only as a fictional conceit but as an anarchist or anti-capitalist action – something akin to robbing a bank, not in order to keep the money but in order to destroy it.

Chapter Three: Ricardo Piglia and the Absent Alternative

Ricardo Piglia is a writer of criticism as well as fiction, and sometimes both at the same time. His important role in the translation and dissemination of US hard-boiled fiction to Argentine audiences and the metafictional comments on the genre within his fictions make his work especially relevant to my study. Like Fonseca, he has written versions of hard-boiled fiction both with and without detectives, but he is less concerned with showing the reality of violence than with critiquing the way that story can be told. His 1992 novel *La ciudad ausente* sets up the reader with the familiar figure of a hard-boiled detective but undoes the conventional structure that leads to resolution and revelation. *Plata quemada*, published in 1997, gives us the other side, a bank robbery and its aftermath from the perspective of the robbers, but again upsets expectations by mocking the true crime writer's dependence on documented evidence. In both cases, Piglia uses a crime story to advocate for the existence and recirculation of multiple versions of every story, rather than trying to pin down an objective and official truth.

Most of Piglia's fiction is not as accessible or as widely popular as the other authors in my study, but he is well known throughout the Spanish-speaking world and, of these four, by far the most respected by critics and university professors. First published in 1967 and recognized in the 1970s for the original ideas about Argentine literature communicated in the stories in *Nombre falso* (1975), Piglia became internationally acclaimed for his 1980 novel *Respiración artificial*. During a period of intense state violence that caused most of the country's best writers either to leave the country or to avoid controversial topics in their writing, Piglia remained in Argentina and published a novel that not was not only honest and of high quality but provided a new way of thinking about the history of Argentine literature and the relationship between history and fiction.

Because of the way he combines and at times confounds the boundaries between fiction and literary criticism, most critics who approach his work have done so along the paths set out by Piglia himself, a phenomenon that Pablo Brescia, in a review of the literature, likens to the pull of a planet: "ejerce una atracción, a veces irresistible, hacia sus satélites críticos" (155). Thus, books like Maria Antonieta Pereira's *Ricardo Piglia y sus precursores* (2001) and Jorge Fornet's *El escritor y la tradición: Ricardo Piglia y la literatura argentina* (2007) have taken up the themes of literary historiography and Piglia's place in it and have paid most attention to works like "Homenaje a Roberto Arlt", *Respiración artificial*, and *La ciudad ausente* in which the characters discuss and interact with their literary antecedents. *Plata quemada* is also praised by critics but they write much less about it, since, as Joanna Page speculates, its lack of literary references makes it less of a game for them. Attention to the genre of the hard-boiled crime novel is also certainly one of the approaches that Piglia invites us to take, and it is a useful one; this is the frame I use to compare his ways of transforming and appropriating this model with those of Fonseca, Melo, and Piñeiro. However, I do find it important to resist the attraction of idealized feminine writing and of hard-boiled male homosexuality, to question the way women's real stories and voices are undermined in these texts.

The *novela negra* in Argentina: Learning to read in code

Like Rubem Fonseca in Brazil, Piglia has had a profound influence on the development of the genre of crime fiction in Argentina. Beginning in 1968, Piglia was the lead editor for the Serie Negra, a collection put out by Editorial Tiempo Contemporáneo, which commissioned quality Spanish translations of important works of hard-boiled fiction, such as those of Dashiell Hammett, Raymond Chandler, David Goodis, and Horace McCoy. In many cases, as Lafforgue and Rivera have shown, these novels had previously been published in Argentina, sometimes as pamphlets or supplements in newspapers and magazines, but literary prestige had been reserved for the more refined and logical *novelas de enigma*, published by Emecé's Séptimo Círculo collection under the direction of Jorge Luis Borges and Bioy Casares. Borges, Marcos Denevi, and Augusto Roa Bastos, influential cultivators of the puzzle novel in Argentina, disdained not only the quality of writing in hard-boiled fiction but also its dependence on sex and violence as a way of titillating readers without challenging them to think.[1] However, Piglia and the Serie Negra encouraged the reading public to regard the *novela negra* not as an inferior version of the *novela de enigma* but as a distinct subgenre with its own rules and values: "Durante años los mejores escritores del género (Hammett, Chandler, Cain, Goodis, McCain) fueron leídos entre nosotros con las pautas y los criterios de valor impuestos por la novela de enigma", Piglia wrote in 1976 (*Crítica y ficción* 67). According to those criteria the American novels were failures, "confusas, informes, caóticas" (ibid), "relatos salvajes, primitivos, sin lógica, irracionales" (68), but for this very reason were closer to the reality of crime and violence. Close notes that Piglia and other Argentine writers associated with the journal *Contorno* were impressed by hard-boiled fiction's potential for revealing the workings of capitalism, issues of economic relationships that are sublimated or taken for granted in other genres (96).

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[1] See the 1975 interview with these authors included in Lafforgue and Rivera, 41-46.

Hard-boiled crime fiction took on new meanings in Argentina as the political situation worsened, with increased political violence in the 1960s and especially after Perón's return from exile in 1973, his death in 1974, and the military takeover of government in 1976. Borges, who had been at pains to defend the classical detective story against the coarseness of the *novela negra*, also made statements during this period defending the actions of dictators Pinochet in Chile and Videla in Argentina, whom he characterized as "gentlemen" in contrast to Leftist and Peronist militants. For writers opposed to the military government, it was important to express that the reality of Argentine politics was anything but gentlemanly. The government's use of disappearances, torture, and murder were horrific for individual victims and their families but also created a climate of terror for the general population. Although these crimes were planned and carried out in the name of security and Western Christian civilization, the fact that they were done in a clandestine way and without explanation increased the sense that anyone could become a victim. Crime fiction was one way that writers found for describing this atmosphere of fear and uncertainty without speaking directly and thus attracting government attention and reprisals: it allowed them to speak in code.

For Ricardo Piglia, crime fiction also provides a framework for looking at other types of literature: the writer's work is a crime, and the critic's work is to trace the clues and find out how it was done (*Crítica y ficción* 15, *Nombre falso* 136). In this sense, even though Piglia does not write conventional detective stories, his recurring character Emilio Renzi, who lives a parallel life to Piglia's and whose work includes fiction, journalism, and literary criticism, is the detective character who comes back time and time again in almost every one of Piglia's published works. Susana González Sawczuk traces the development of Renzi from his first appearance as a student in the 1967 story "La invasión" (1967) to a reporter who is old before his time in "La loca y el relato del crimen" (contained in *Nombre falso*, 1975) but full of assurance in his work in *La ciudad ausente*. Even in interviews and works presented as nonfiction, Piglia cites Renzi's supposed publications and travels as those of a real colleague. Renzi is not always a narrator or a protagonist, but his way of looking at the world permeates much of Piglia's fiction, his views blurring with the author's and those of other characters who express their opinions about storytelling, politics, and Argentine literary history.

Both Renzi and a fictionalized version of Piglia himself demonstrate the work of reading like detectives in short stories contained in the 1975 collection *Nombre falso*. Piglia is the literary editor and investigator in "Homenaje a Roberto Arlt", which is presented as a non-fiction essay about the discovery of a previously unpublished story by Arlt, called "Luba", which ends the volume. In fact, as Ellen McCracken has shown, "Luba" is a slightly adapted translation of a story by the Russian writer Leonid Andreyev (1871-1919), who is mentioned without actually being credited in "Homenaje". In some ways this trick is similar to Patrícia Melo's game in *Elogio da mentira* of presenting other author's works as new novels by José Guber. But while

Guber's narrator is open about his views on plagiarism and eventually names all the authors and works from which he has borrowed, Piglia is a good deal more subtle, working with a fairly obscure text (although Fornet notes that Andreyev's writing was known to Arlt, and the choice of this intertext is more purposeful than McCracken acknowledges, 32) and placing most of his clues in footnotes.

In this work of what McCracken calls "metaplagiarism", Piglia suggests that literature itself, and for that matter all language, can be read as a crime, not necessarily for the events that make up its plot but for the custom of one author appropriating the ideas – the intellectual property – of another. Too many contemporary critics, he said in a 1980 interview reprinted in *Critica y ficción*, have used theories of parody and intertextuality as a way of denying the political and social groundedness of literary works, seeing the practice as "un simple juego de textos que se autorrepresentan y se vinculan especularmente unos a otros." (75). Instead of looking at "el plagio, la cita, la parodia, la traducción, el pastiche, el apócrifo" (76) as jokes or tricks, we should be looking at them in terms of property relations, that is, as crimes. The critic's job then is to track down the theft, not in order to condemn the author, but in order to understand the functioning of the system that considers people and ideas to be private property. By looking at Andreyev's text and Piglia's side by side, the reader can focus in on the differences between them, most notably Piglia's insertion of comments about prostitution and counterfeiting (McCracken 1079-1080). Piglia makes explicit the role of money in the story, just as hard-boiled fiction does for a genre that had previously tended to depict detectives as amateurs with only a personal or intellectual interest in solving mysteries (Piglia, *Crítica y ficción*, 69-70). Thus the fact that the bulk of the text is stolen is, on its own, less interesting than the way in which the crime was done and the new meanings the story takes on in the context in which it is now presented.

The need to look for variations among repetitions also appears in the short story "La loca y el relato del crimen" (also included in *Nombre falso*), in which the young newspaper reporter Emilio Renzi is sent to a police station to report on a murder. The only witness to the crime is a madwoman whose obsessive repeating speech makes no sense to the police officers and is therefore ignored. Renzi, however, having studied linguistics, is able to find meaning, not in the repeated phrases but in what changes with each repetition. The reader is encouraged to follow Renzi's example, to look not at the surface meaning but at what is hidden in patterns. As Amelia Simpson explains, Piglia treats the borrowed formulas of detective fiction as compulsive repetition, resembling the madwoman's incomprehensible speech. The solution is to be found in the variation from the formula – in this case, the fact that solution to the murder is suppressed by the authorities and Renzi is not allowed to print it in the newspaper (Simpson 154). When Renzi does sit down to write, he types up the first lines of "La loca y el relato del crimen", indicating that fiction can be an outlet for truth that is not allowed to be published as officially recognized fact.

In Piglia's most intensely studied work, the 1980 novel *Respiración artificial*, Renzi again models the skill of reading in code. *Respiración artificial* combines fiction and literary criticism in the letters exchanged by Renzi and his uncle Marcelo Maggi and in conversations between Renzi and the philosopher Tardewski. In discussing the work of the fictional nineteenth-century Argentine exile Enrique Ossorio along with other writers in and outside of the established canons of Argentine and world literature, Piglia's characters avoid direct mention of the then current dictatorship, but they do discuss nineteenth-century dictator Juan Manuel de Rosas and his effects on the writers and politicians of his time. Because of Rosas' repression, they argue, the foundations of Argentine literature and political thinking were laid not in Argentina itself but in Chile, France, the United States, and other places where Argentines went into exile.

Unlike Rubem Fonseca's Gustavo Flávio, Piglia's characters are not namedropping for the sake of displaying their erudition. Their discussions of literature are a serious attempt to understand their antecedents, the forces that have shaped the creation of literature in Argentina and in the world. Indeed, Avelar reads *Respiración artificial* as an intervention in Argentine literary historiography: if the canon had traditionally included Borges and the *Sur* group, drawing influence from earlier champions of "civilization" like Sarmiento while outsiders like Roberto Arlt were considered minor thorns in the side of the establishment, Piglia rewrites the genealogy in such a way that Arlt, with his working-class origins, his socialist politics, his rough prose style influenced by bad translations of French and Russian popular literature, is seen as the other side of the same tradition that included Borges. Jitrik had already noted Piglia's ground-breaking association of these two important figures in a 1976 essay on *Nombre falso*: "la asociación está autorizada por todo lo que puede haber en común entre Arlt y Borges, mucho más de lo que suele preocupar a la crítica, satisfecha con la existencia de todas las oposiciones aparentes" (87). Piglia's project is not to displace Borges's central role or to make Arlt into the kind of erudite writer he was not, but to read them in conversation with each other, as well as with Macedonio Fernández and with popular literature.

In the same way, although Piglia is associated with the establishment of the *novela negra* as a distinct genre in Argentine literature (and in Argentine readings of foreign literature), his work has done as much to integrate this tradition with other types of literature as to separate it out. More than Arlt's direct relationship with crime fiction[2], Piglia is interested in the way he changes the direction of Argentine literature: like the pulps in the United States, Arlt's role is to inject some reality into a literary scene that had done too much to isolate itself for the sake of refinement. In Piglia's writing, hard-boiled fiction on its own does not provide a solution to the problems of Argentine literature and politics, but it does open up possible ways of reading that are concealed in the works of high art.

***La ciudad ausente*: Storymaking in Translation**

In *La ciudad ausente*, published twelve years after *Respiración artificial*, Piglia repeats the gesture of integrating several literary currents that have thus far been treated as separate; or, we might even say, he integrates forms that have been ignored or derided as extra-literary (crime fiction and science fiction) with much more esteemed literary traditions. In Junior's journey through a city full of stories, Piglia combines elements of the hard-boiled style with European and Argentine avant-garde movements that questioned the nature of language and of reality itself. Although detective fiction has traditionally been structured around the search for truth, and hard-boiled fiction in particular differentiated itself from other genres by its realism, in Piglia's mix these disparate genres complement each other in that crime fiction depends on repetition of a basic narrative formula, in fact valuing creative variation more than it does originality or faithfulness to real events. Piglia engages with the tradition of the *novela negra* in *La ciudad ausente* through his familiar character types, the seedy urban setting, and the way the novel is structured as a series of interviews in search of information. Yet in each of these aspects he twists the meaning away from its habitual one, compelling the reader to accept uncertainty and ambiguity: a detective who might be a police spy, a city that is never entirely present, and an investigation that not only fails to reach a solution but eventually rejects definitive truth as a goal.

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[2] According to Jorge Rivera, Piglia and other critics have tended to ignore the fairly conventional crime stories that Arlt published in commercial magazines, focusing instead on his more political works and those that conform less to genre patterns (Lafforgue and Rivera 137-140).

The first and most prominent way Piglia connects *La ciudad ausente* with hard-boiled fiction is through the character of Junior, a journalist with an extraordinary talent for acquiring information, a loner who lives in hotels since being abandoned by his wife and daughter. Junior fits with the archetype of the hard-boiled detective in his solitary ways, his wisecracking humor, and his ability to navigate the urban underworld with familiarity and calm. And yet he is not allowed to be the singular hero whose honor is contrasted with all those around him. Piglia makes Junior part of a series of male characters – explorers, scientists, and storytellers – whose motivations and allegiances are shadowed.

As has been discussed in other chapters, the ideological underpinnings of the hard-boiled crime novel are more hotly debated than those of classical detective fiction, and its uses and interpretations are more malleable. Some critics praise the pulps for their realism, their populism, and their indictment of corrupt institutions, while others, especially feminist critics, decry the idolization of a single knowing subject whose masculinity and whiteness are crucial to his success. The isolated nature of the detective character has been altered in many revisions of the hard-boiled novel, with US feminist writers in particular emphasizing the benefits to investigations from the detective's network of family and friends. In *La ciudad ausente*, Piglia keeps the lone wolf character in Junior but also links him to others through repetitions and variations, making him part of a chain of characters who can never be completely differentiated.

From the first sentence of the novel, Piglia marks its reporter-detective as a repetition of someone else: "Junior decía que le gustaba vivir en hoteles porque era hijo de ingleses" (9). The name Junior and the phrase "hijo de ingleses" connect him with his father who, it is revealed on the next page, has the same story of having been left by his wife and daughter. "Junior" is an English term (Spanish uses "hijo", usually in parenthesis), but it is a common nickname in Argentina, part of the name of its most famous soccer club and one of many English words that have been part of everyday speech for centuries. The character's full name, revealed some ten pages later as "Miguel Mac Kensey (Junior), un viajero inglés" (19), combines a Spanish given name with a variation of a popular Scottish surname (MacKenzie), but the title "Junior" is followed by another assertion of English identity. This jumble of national signs does not make him less Argentine than any other character; rather, it emphasizes the character of the nation as one that draws from all others – particularly those of Europe –

in its people and ideas. Junior calls to mind an old joke saying that an Argentine as an Italian who speaks Spanish, thinks he's French, but wishes he were English.

The name contains the patronymic *Mac*, again insisting on the connection between father and son, and is also the beginning of the name Macedonio Fernández (1874-1952), the influential Argentine writer (generally referred to by his first name) who becomes a central figure in *La ciudad ausente*. In one section a female character searches for her lover "Mac" and it is never made clear whether this name refers to Junior, Macedonio, or someone else. Another character who appears only briefly is called Mike, phonetically similar to Mac and a more English version of Junior's given name Miguel. Other characters echo Junior in other ways, like Renzi who works in the same newspaper or Stephen Stevenson who is also the son of British travelers and has chosen to live in hotels. In fact, similar associations can be made between *all* the many characters in the novel, with male characters in particular forming one series of variations and female characters another (in a way that recalls and deliberately refers to the redoubling of male and female characters in Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*). My objective here is not to trace all these connections or their meanings but simply to note that these repetitions keep the protagonists from being the lone hero who stands against the rest.

Piglia's Junior is a "duro" in his personality – his life situation, his appearance, and his way of speaking – and represents masculinity precisely in that he is related to the other male characters, not that he is tougher or better than them. Indeed, he also differs from the archetypal hard-boiled detective in that he is just as suspect as the men who surround him. According to many critics, part of the reason journalists so often take the place of police detectives and private eyes in Latin American crime fiction is that they are cast as the defenders of truth, independent and, ideally, incorruptible in the face of the government's efforts to keep its abuses secret. But according to Idelber Avelar, the pattern of casting the journalist as macho hero (the one who does not break down under pressure, even torture, as in Miguel Bonasso's *Recuerdo de la muerte*, 1984) creates an association of resistance with masculinity and betrayal with femininity; it is one of the ways in which some literature of the left may reproduce conservative ideology even as it attempts to denounce the "excesses" of dictatorial governments (Avelar 67).

Rather than let Junior stand above the world he lives in, Piglia characterizes him as susceptible to the all-pervasive control exercised by the police. When he first arrived at the newspaper his colleagues "pensaron que trabajaba para la policía, porque publicaba las notas antes de que se hubieran producido. Le bastaba levantar el teléfono y recibía las historias con dos horas de ventaja" (10). What would have been evidence of his genius in a classical mystery (like Dupin's preternatural ability to know what the narrator is thinking in "The Murders in the Rue Morgue") is interpreted here as evidence of his corruption, and that interpretation is never refuted. Early on, Junior mentions the rumor that an informant, Fuyita, might be a police spy, and his colleague Renzi answers, "En este país los que no están presos trabajan para la policía…. Incluidos los ladrones" (18). The sentiment is repeated by many characters throughout the novel, not as a specific condemnation against Junior but as part of a general feeling that police vigilance is inescapable. Russo tells Junior that "hay micrófonos y cámaras ocultas y policías por todos lados, todo el tiempo nos vigilan y nos graban y yo no sé si usted mismo es de veras un periodista o si es un espía o las dos cosas a la vez. No importa" (153). Junior does not respond to these suspicions, remaining as ambiguous as the rest of the characters. Thus, like Junior as an investigator, the reader has to interpret the characters' ideas without any certainty about where they stand.

At times Piglia appears to mimic the tone of an American hard-boiled novel, most strikingly in the second chapter, in which Junior goes to the Hotel Majestic, coerces the front desk clerk into giving him Fuyita's information, and interviews the woman he finds in the room where Fuyita is supposed to be. The woman is half clothed, addicted to heroin and alcohol, with bruises on her face. Their encounter reads like a translation or parody of an early American pulp, with quickly drawn but visually striking descriptions: the rundown hotel, the woman's pathetic appearance, and the detective's cool assurance. The dialogue too is reminiscent of Chandler's, with disconcerting jumps from one topic to the next, sexually suggestive language, and unlikely metaphors that are not fully explained – the desk clerk's eyes, for example, are "dos huevitos de codorniz" and his tongue reminds Junior of an iguana (21). All of these signposts of hard-boiled fiction give the early chapters a grimy but familiar feel, telling the reader to expect to discover more violence and corruption and a tough-guy hero who knows how to handle them.

But the scene differs from an L.A. noir story in that it is a conspicuous translation of something from a remote past. Like Junior himself, other characters use English when trying to evoke past glories, but the result is to show how far they are from the ideal. If Fuyita's hotel was ever majestic, it certainly is not now. When the woman tells Junior that she once worked as a professional singer with the stage name

"Miss Joyce, que quiere decir alegría" (24) she simultaneously displays her imperfect grasp of English, calls attention to how little joy there is in her current life, and brings to mind James Joyce's character Molly Bloom, who will reappear throughout the novel and especially in the final chapter narrated by Elena. As a character, Junior resembles Argentine literature itself and in particular the Argentine tradition of crime fiction, ever conscious of and borrowing from its English past but seeing his own difference, moving on uncertain ground in the shifting context of Buenos Aires.

The absent city of the novel's title is one that draws on clichés of hard-boiled fiction but is never fixed with detail. Buenos Aires, as a city whose neighborhoods mix architectural styles from disparate eras and areas of Europe and populations from all over the world, fits well in its function in the novel as a city that recalls many other cities. Without making direct reference to Los Angeles or the pulp novels that took place there, Piglia presents Buenos Aires – with its sprawling streets and neighborhoods, its dive bars and underground trains, its transitory population, and its many ethnic subcultures – as analogous.

However, this is not a picture-postcard Buenos Aires nor is it even firmly set in the reality of that city. Because of the tiredness of the formula of detective fiction, one of the methods with which successful authors have managed to hook in new audiences is by offering a detailed picture of a new setting – sometimes the local color of a place less often represented in literature, such as New Mexico or Botswana; sometimes a specific subculture within US cities, such as the subgenre in US women's detective fiction of novels in which the detectives are female professors of literature. In her interviews with fans of women's hard-boiled fiction in the United States, Smith found that well-researched and realistic depictions of cities were more valued by readers than plots. But Piglia, rather than describe Buenos Aires or any other city in a realistic way, relies on names and vague images, seemingly drawn as much from literature and the collective imagination as from any actual place, in order to evoke multiple sites and cities. The elusiveness of the city setting marks this work as an examination of the *idea* of the detective novel, rather than one more example of a text that completes its expected functions and entertains with local color. At times Piglia deliberately resists the tendency to describe the look of this particular city, instead emphasizing the similarity between all modern megalopolises: "En la pantalla del televisor sin sonido se veía la panorámica de una calle con edificios de vidrio, en una ciudad que parecía Tokyo o quizá São Paulo. Junior vio carteles escritos en español y un kiosco de diarios en una esquina. La ciudad era México DF" (113) São Paulo resembles Tokyo in its modernity and in that it has a sizeable Japanese population, something it also shares in common with Buenos Aires. The presence of Spanish and newsstands also suggest that Junior is narrowing down the city and finding something closer to home, but it turns out to be Mexico rather than Buenos Aires. The clues do not lead to the expected answer.

Junior, whose Englishness is somewhat Scottish, Irish, and Argentine, is not the only character whose nationality depends on which version of the story you've heard. The engineer called Russo might actually be the son of a Hungarian: "la gente de campo a todo el que habla raro le dice ruso. Él fue ruso y a su hijo le pusieron Russo cuando nació" (114). Like Junior, he was born in Argentina but labeled as ambiguously foreign by his father's name. There is similar confusion between Japanese and Korean identities in the character of Fuyita, and the novel abounds with mentions of Irish, English, Scottish, and Italian characters as well as Argentines from the interior of Buenos Aires and other provinces. Their countries of origin and the other mentions of European and North American cities change from one chapter to the next, suggesting that the cities, like the characters, are versions of each other rather than distinct entities.

Piglia alters the structure and meaning of the detective plot even more than he does its characters and setting. At first Junior's work in tracking down the source of a recording Renzi gives him resembles a traditional detective narrative: He follows anonymous tips he receives by telephone, despite not knowing for certain whether his informant is part of a conspiracy or a paranoid woman calling from a psychiatric hospital. The pursuit of a story leads him to explore the urban underworld, interviewing smalltime criminals and loose women in rundown hotels, following one clue to another without understanding the causes of what he is seeing. In line with natural human curiosity and his vocation as a journalist, Junior attempts to construct a narrative out of what he finds, to "orientarse en esa trama fracturada" (90). But the more he investigates and the more stories he hears, the less coherent and believable his world becomes. In addition to crime fiction, the novel integrates elements of another subliterary genre, science fiction (blurred with the Argentine tradition of *literatura fantástica*) in the woman whose spirit is preserved in a machine. Notably, it is not these aspects of the story that cause him to give up, but rather the difficulty of fitting the parts together.[3]

Junior's difficulty and ultimate abandonment of the project of solving the mystery go against what many consider the first function of the detective novel: to create reassuring order out of the chaos of modern life, particularly life in the city, where it is impossible to know everyone else's business. Rubem Fonseca's detective characters follow the structure common to the classical mystery and the hard-boiled detective novel of interviewing a series of witnesses and finally coming up with a solution that makes sense of their contradictory stories. Even Patrícia Melo's Máiquel, a criminal who lives in a world of violence and chaos, eventually comes to a fairly coherent understanding of how he has been lied to and manipulated. Some critics, including Peter Hühn, have argued that the hard-boiled detective novel presents crime as deeper and more pervasive than the classic one, in that it allows for truth but not justice, not order (465).

In *La ciudad ausente*, Piglia purposefully moves still further away from the conventions of the detective story than what is seen in US hard-boiled fiction, in Fonseca and Melo, and even in earlier works of his own like "La loca y el relato del crimen". Junior's search leads him to multiple, confused versions of a story rather than a single truth. Death – the execution of political prisoners and their burial in mass graves, the death of Macedonio's wife Elena and her transformation into a machine, and Macedonio's own death, which leaves Elena eternally helpless and alone – is part of the story, but the story itself – the manner of its creation and recirculation – becomes more important than the specifics of who killed whom. Identity is constantly shifting since the characters appear as versions of one another, with uncertain names and nationalities, and their voices are most meaningful when they are allowed to be multiple and contradictory, a state of affairs that a traditional detective novel cannot tolerate.

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[3] The character of Ana Lidia tells Junior, "He visto varios xerox de relatos de los años cincuenta, versiones de la guerra, historias de ciencia ficción. Realismo puro" (111), indicating that she sees no contradiction between the last two terms.

In *La ciudad ausente*, not only the detective novel but narration itself, which reproduces events in a fixed order leading from beginning to end and explains cause and effect, is implicated as part of the authoritarian need for control. It is linked with police interrogation and torture, methods used to elicit truth in the form of confessions from both political prisoners and common criminals, and with practices of surveillance that intrude constantly on the characters' lives and privacy. According to Russo, the State uses machines to find out people's stories and thus to control them: "Ellos construyen aparatos electrónicos y personalidades electrónicas y ficciones electrónicas y en todos los Estados del mundo hay un cerebro japonés que da las órdenes. La inteligencia del Estado es básicamente un mecanismo técnico destinado a alterar el criterio de realidad" (153) Elena, speaking *as the machine* in the final chapter but apparently reproducing ideas Fuyita has told her, relates narration even more directly with torture and interrogation: "La narración, me decía él, es un arte de vigilantes, siempre están queriendo que la gente cuente sus secretos, cante a los sospechosos, cuente de sus amigos, de sus hermanos. Entonces, decía él, la policía ha hecho más por el avance del arte del relato que todos los escritores a lo largo de la historia" (170).

Although Fuyita and Russo are ambiguous as all the other characters in *La ciudad ausente*, Piglia appears to endorse similar ideas about the coercive nature of narrative in a 1987 interview: "La novela mantiene una tensión secreta con las maquinaciones del poder. Las reproduce. Por momentos la ficción del Estado aventaja a la novela argentina. Los servicios de informaciones manejan técnicas narrativas más novelescas y eficaces que la mayoría de los novelistas argentinos" (*Crítica y ficción* 114). In direct contrast to the "efficient" techniques employed by the State, the alternative method Piglia proposes in *La ciudad ausente* is slow and laborious: meaning is produced through variations on a basic "conjunto de núcleos narrativos" (44). Like "La loca y el relato del crimen", *La ciudad ausente* is a story of repetitions with difference. Junior's search for the origin of Renzi's tapes leads him to a storytelling machine, supposedly developed by early twentieth-century Argentine writer Macedonio Fernández, which produces variations based on the stories fed into it. As an example, feeding the Edgar Allen Poe story "William Wilson" into the machine produces a new story called Stephen Stevenson, a "translation" not in the sense of changing the language (the names are still English) but of changing a few details, which results in other changes at the level of the story. The variations are allowed to exist side by side, and while some observably appeared earlier than others this does not make them more original, authentic, or true.

The fact that this process is labeled as translation when it is in fact adaptation and transformation is significant as a comment on the creation of literature and in particular on the history of the crime genre in Argentina. Fuyita's statement that "Queríamos una máquina de traducir y tenemos una máquina transformadora de historias" (43) works as a metaphor for what Argentine writers have done with imported fiction – first literally in the sense that people hired as translators would make their own alterations to the story in order to satisfy their audiences, and that people hired as writers would pass off copies and translations as if they were their own. Because of its dependence on formulaic plot, detective fiction functions particularly well to illustrate Piglia's view of literature in general as a series of variations on a theme. Rubem Fonseca's "Romance negro" and Patrícia Melo's *Elogio da mentira* are two of many works of fiction that explicitly address the difficulty of coming up with any new twists on a basic formula that has already been reworked so many times. But unlike Fonseca's character Peter Winner or Melo's José Guber, Piglia does not appear frustrated or limited by this challenge. An author setting out to rewrite an old story need not feign originality by branching out into exotic new settings or obscure fields of knowledge, but can instead revel in the story's repetitions, as Poe does with "William Wilson", Joyce does with *Finnegans Wake*, and Macedonio does with *Museo de la novela de la eterna*.

The repetition of words and ideas in new contexts leads to a change in their meanings, as is seen in the transposition of foreign elements to an Argentine setting but also in changes of meaning within a single work. Piglia takes from Joyce the motif of the recirculating river and the masculine and feminine archetypes whose individual representations are versions of each other. At the same time, slippages of meaning keep the novel from being split up only along a binary gender opposition. Within the novel, "Investigation", "truth", "narration", "translation", and "machine" are all terms with multiple meanings and can be used in the interests of the state or as ways of escaping or eliding it. In most instances it is not clear which function a character or object has at any given point in the story. As we have seen, Piglia's characters Fuyita and Russo refer to narrative and machines as instruments of the police. In recent Argentine history the term "la máquina", or sometimes "la máquina de la verdad" has been used by interrogators to refer to the electronic device with which they would torture prisoners. But in *La ciudad ausente*, "la máquina" is both the torture device *and* its humanizing alternative; Macedonio's machine becomes a necessary way of countering the hegemony of the masculine machinery of the police. Russo explains to Junior: "Hay que resistir. Nosotros tratamos de construir una réplica microscópica, una máquina de defensa femenina, contra las experiencias y los experimentos y las mentiras del Estado" (153).[4] In addition to generating actual stories, this machine opens up language, preventing state forces from having the power to fix the meaning of words like *máquina* or *verdad*.

But what is it about the machine at the museum that makes it feminine, the "máquina de defensa femenina" against the masculine narrative practices of the State? The label recalls Hélène Cixous's ideas in "The Laugh of the Medusa", "Sorties", and other essays on what she called *l'écriture féminine*, a mode of writing that would rise out of a semiotic discourse, based on feminine bodies and pleasures, rather than the symbolic order which has ruled language and literature by men and women in patriarchal society. Feminine writing, according to Cixous, would allow words to have multiple meanings rather than be fixed in place by the central signifier of masculine power. She saw possibilities for this new type of language in the work of James Joyce, which preserves its multiple meanings and takes on new ones in *La ciudad ausente*: In *Finnegans Wake*, Joyce linked the River Liffey with the character of Anna Livia Plurabelle and the Biblical Eve; Piglia extends the chain of associations to the historical figures Eva Perón and Elena Fernández, the character Lucía Joyce, the Río de la Plata, and Buenos Aires's Avenida Corrientes.

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[4] Like Junior and indeed all the characters in *La ciudad ausente*, Russo is ambiguous and not necessarily to be trusted, but Piglia has expressed similar ideas in his nonfiction writing, such as this statement from a 1984 interview included in *Crítica y ficción*: "hay siempre una versión de los vencidos. Un relato fragmentado, casi anónimo, que resiste y construye interpretaciones y alegorías.[…] de pronto la gente empezó a contar la historia de alguien que le había contado que alguien había visto pasar un tren que iba hacia el sur cargado de féretros vacíos. En una estación, en la provincia, alguien había visto ese tren en medio de la noche" (44-45).

The problem here is that, although this type of writing exalts the feminine in the abstract, its value for the real lives of women is less apparent. A frequent criticism of Cixous is that her examples of "feminine writing" have tended to come from male writers such as Joyce. Similarly, *La ciudad ausente*'s storytelling machine and its method are presented as feminine, but the writers Piglia cites are men: Macedonio, Borges, Joyce, Boccaccio, Arlt, and so on. The hard-boiled writers whose world and style he reproduces are also men, although their names are not cited explicitly. The male characters who speak in *La ciudad ausente* treat women as archetypes, symbols and muses but not as artists or as human beings.

Women, on the other hand, are ignored as precedents in literature and have an extremely curtailed ability to speak within the story. Although Elena's eternal presence has been incorporated into the machine, she is dead and unable to speak for herself. After Macedonio's death, Elena tells us, she remains, "una mujer en una cama de hospital, atada con correas de goma a este respaldo, las muñecas alzadas sobre la cabeza, encadenada" (175). The image of Elena as a torture victim collapses Fuyita's opposition between the masculine and feminine machines: both of them cause her to suffer. Other female characters are bound by similar patterns: Laura, the little girl in the section called “La nena”, is one who is incapable of normal language and is only able to express herself by repeating variations on her father’s stories of statues and rings. Lucía and Julia are more victims of violence, lonely, desperate, and lacking in will. They speak at length but are not the ones to plot their own stories; the work of designing machines and programming them with ideas falls to men like Macedonio, Fuyita, Richter and Russo.

The character of Julia, a former Leftist militant and inmate in a psychiatric hospital, also works to discredit a particular type of unimaginative repetition that accepts officialized interpretations of history. The publication of *La ciudad ausente* comes several years after the return to democratic government in Argentina and many attempts by journalists, artists, and government officials to bring to light human rights abuses committed by the military dictatorship, including the *Nunca más* report presented by the Comisión Nacional sobre la Desaparición de Personas to President Alfonsín in 1984. Despite the horrific content of the *testimonios* it contains and despite the editors’ comparisons to hell and nightmares, the effort of the report is to combine thousands of people’s stories into a single coherent narrative. The testimonies are framed by the editors’ comments and most saliently by the 1984 prologue, authored principally by Ernesto Sabato, which characterizes the abuses of the past government as a singular and temporally bound exception in a national history of civilization and democracy:

> Las grandes calamidades son siempre aleccionadoras, y sin duda el más terrible drama que en toda su historia sufrió la Nación durante el periodo que duró la dictadura militar iniciada en marzo de 1976 para hacernos

> comprender que únicamente la democracia es capaz de preservar a un pueblo de semejante horror, que sólo ella puede mantener y salvar los sagrados y esenciales derechos de la criatura humana."

Julia echoes this discourse when she tells Junior, "'Tuvimos que pasar por esta hecatombe para darnos cuenta del valor de la vida y el respeto de la democracia.' Repetía la lección como un lorito…" (95). The act of repeating a story is what women in this novel do, and Julia is linked to other women narrators by the comparison to a parrot, where the storytelling machine is made by the same inventors as several different models of mechanical birds. But the diminutive *lorito* and the absurdity of the story Julia tells make her repetition especially pathetic. Her talk about respect for life and democracy makes no sense in a context where she is still confined against her will and all the characters live with the specter of government surveillance.

With moments like these Piglia rejects the narrative of cause and effect that seeks to take a positive meaning out of Argentina's history of state violence. Unlike Julia, who accepts and repeats the simplistic story she is told, Junior learns to live with the ambiguity of multiple stories. Unlike a conventional detective novel, which would end with the detective presenting a solution to explain everything that has happened so far, *La ciudad ausente* lets go of its investigator completely in the last chapter to turn the narrative voice over to Macedonio's machine. Piglia's project as a storyteller, even when he mixes the fiction of his novels with the nonfiction of literary criticism, mass graves, or the true story of a bank robbery, is not to find the objective truth behind the story, but rather to create truth in the retelling.

Plata quemada: The Criminal Element

With his next novel, based on a true story about a gang of drugged out bank robbers and murderers, Piglia gives us the harder side of the hard-boiled genre, focusing on criminals instead of the detective who starred in *La ciudad ausente* (as well as in "La loca y el relato del crimen" and *Respiración artificial*). *Plata quemada* is in part a story about what it means to be hard: it uses the characters of two men who are fiercely devoted to each other to contest the prejudice that recognizes strength only in heterosexual masculinity – the cultural expectation that leads Rubem Fonseca's narrator in "Feliz ano novo" and Patrícia Melo's Máiquel to commit murder. Through the characters of Dorda and Nene, Piglia remakes the model of the hero (or villain) of a *novela negra*; their violence is not motivated by insecurity and the need to prove themselves but by a self-image in which homosexuality is part of being indomitable outlaws.

But *Plata quemada* is also a story about how stories can be told, and it is not a hopeful one. Piglia disturbs the fictive convention that allows a marginalized criminal subject to speak of their experience in first person, whether in the context of a confession or bragging to their fellow criminals. As we have seen in analysis of Fonseca's "Feliz Ano Novo" and Melo's *O matador*, this convention can facilitate an effective critique of the liberal values held by middle-class readers, as well as a renewal of literary language. In reality, however, contact between people of such disparate social backgrounds is usually extremely limited, not allowing for these kinds of honest life narratives to be communicated directly. A story like Máiquel's or Nene and Dorda's can only make it into print through the intervention of more powerful actors such as lawyers, prison officials, and journalists. By mixing the criminals' voices with more formal discourses of journalism and psychiatric reports, Piglia highlights how little control Dorda and Nene have over their own story.

Plata quemada contrasts with Piglia's previous novels in that it makes almost no direct references to other works of literature, but it does frequently cite sources like newspapers and psychiatric reports. The novel is "an excursion into the seedy and violent underworld of the hard-boiled crime genre: a novel of action, sparse and violent dialogue, and apparent transparency of representation" (Page 27). But, as Page goes on to explain, our access to the characters and events is mediated by a narrator whose identity and positionality are anything but clear. At times the protagonists – el Nene Brignone, el Gaucho Rubio Dorda, and other members of their gang including Malito and el Cuervo Mereles – appear to speak in their own voices, and the narration reproduces their criminal slang, violent attitudes, and private thoughts. However, the perspective will shift unexpectedly from the protagonists to outside observers, often framing the criminals' words and actions with judgments against them. Sometimes a sentence with an especially strong viewpoint or unusual style is followed by a parenthetical attribution: "(según declaró más tarde)" (21), "(dicen los testigos)" (35), "(dijeron los diarios)" (36), "(según el cronista de *El mundo*)". Piglia uses these citations as evidence for the conceit that everything in the novel is based on documented sources, but even when no such sources are credited the narration continues in the same journalistic style, presenting condemnations of the characters as if they were neutral.

In an epilogue, Piglia tells us that his novel "cuenta una historia real" (245) and is rigorously based on documented sources, but readers familiar with Piglia's work have learned to distrust such official sources and to value instead the kind of untraceable, freely circulating stories that evade government control. Here, Piglia appears to place more value on newspaper reports, police officers, and government employees than on the direct testimony of the people involved, but he simultaneously puts the validity of his sources into question by saying that he found the newspaper articles signed "E. R." of the Argentine daily *El mundo* to be especially useful and has "reproducido libremente esos materiales" (248). E. R. is of course Emilio Renzi, the fictional character who appears in most of Piglia's work and at times stands in for the author. Within the main text of the novel, Renzi appears as a character, and many phrases and ideas about the meaning of the story are attributed to him. In the epilogue Piglia also cites interviews and interrogations of Dorda supposedly done after the shootout in November, 1965, and before Dorda's death in prison the following year (247). But in reality Dorda died in the shootout along with Nene Brignone and Cuervo Mereles, making such interviews impossible (Haberkorn). Furthermore, Piglia has changed all the characters' given names, indicating a purposeful distancing between his fiction and the historical record. My objective in this study is not to trace individual differences between the "actual events" and what Piglia presents as true, but to show that the obvious contradictions in this epilogue should be read as clues that nothing here can be taken at face value. The narrative voice who calls himself Piglia and insists on the accuracy of his story must be seen as a fictional character and his attitude as suspect.

Another sign that we should pay attention to who is telling the story is "Piglia's" statement in the epilogue he has used "el registro estilístico y 'el gesto metafórico' (como lo llamaba Brecht), de los relatos sociales cuyo tema es la violencia ilegal" (246).

In Bertolt Brecht's writings on theater, the *Gestus* is the combination of movement, facial expression, and voice with which an actor can call attention to their character's social interactions and relationships. It is not only the playwright's words, then, but also the actor's physical presentation that creates emotional distance between the audience and the subject being presented on stage, allowing space for reflection and political action, rather than treating the audience members as passive consumers (see Martin and Bial 2-4, Weber 43). In *Plata quemada*, Piglia uses the character types of true crime narratives as such a system of gestures; his parody of journalistic prose calls the reader's attention to the way such narratives, despite their pretended objectivity, are biased toward official viewpoints. The play between voices in the novel dramatizes how powerful people like Montevideo's chief of police, Dorda's psychologist, and even reporters like Renzi and Piglia himself exercise power over subalterns like Nene and Dorda. Among other effects, this style of narration has the dominant voices condemn homosexuality while allowing the reader to see through the cracks and ultimately to admire the protagonists' resistance, bravery, and loyalty to each other.

A striking example of these condemnatory voices appears in the reports of Amadeo Bunge, the doctor from the psychiatric hospital where Dorda was committed at age fifteen. Like other official discourses used in the novel, Dr. Bunge's notes read like parody, especially when contrasted with the patient's own simple way of talking about his past and his relationships. When Dorda speaks openly about masturbation, Bunge tells him to stop: "—Bueno Dorda —dijo el Dr. Bunge—. Está bien por hoy. Y anotaba, en la ficha, obseso sexual, perverso polimorfo, libido desmedida. Peligroso, psicótico, invertido. Mal de Parkinson" (78). In addition to the doctor's discomfort with Dorda's openness about sexuality, the notes show the duplicity between what the affable spoken words and objectifying, disapproving written language. Bunge enumerates everything negative that can be said about a character in a single reductive list, including the absurd diagnosis of Parkinson's disease based on Dorda's barely noticeable tremor.

The motif of writing things down in a notebook links Bunge with Renzi (the fictional character being treated as a real source) and Piglia (the fictionalized author who narrates the epilogue). Bunge is, to Dorda, "un pelado con anteojos que tomaba nota en una libreta" (73). An observation of the face of a dead policeman is attributed, "(agregó Renzi, en su libreta de notas)" (166). Finally, after first hearing about the story from Mereles's girlfriend Blanca Galeano in 1966, Piglia says he took notes "(porque en aquel tiempo yo consideraba que un escritor debía ir a todos lados con una libreta de notas)" (251). Piglia's use of "en aquel tiempo" and the imperfect tense implies that he no longer considers this to be true, which augments the ambiguity of an epilogue that begins with a list of written and official documents and the insistence that this is a true story. By associating himself – or at least his fictionalized narrative voice – with the authoritarian doctor and with the thoughtful but timid young journalist, Piglia acknowledges his own complicity in their project, which is to transform unruly real lives into a written narrative, contained between the covers of his book.

Piglia combines and juxtaposes the formal written styles of these sources with the tough language of characters from the criminal underclass, drawing attention to the differences between them, but both groups are part of a society that condemns gay men as weak and women as unfaithful. Dorda and Nene themselves express some homophobic attitudes, but the novel shows these men gaining strength from their homosexual relationship. In the 2000 film adaptation of *Plata quemada*, director Marcelo Piñeyro and his co-screenwriter Marcelo Figureras play down the theme of competing voices in order to focus directly on the experience of the two main characters, structuring the movie around their love affair. In Piglia's novel, the reader must work harder to construct such a story out of a much less structured narrative. Dorda and Nene are acknowledged to be lovers, but less space is given to their story and more to Malito, Mereles, the girlfriends Blanca and Giselle, and outsiders like the police chief Silva, the doctor Bunge, and the reporter Renzi. As with rest of the novel, Piglia's ostentatious use of multiple voices and registers when addressing Dorda and Nene's relationship and sexuality signals that we must pay attention to *how* the story is being told. The love story is rendered subtextual in the early chapters and condemned in the citations from official sources, but it comes to the forefront when the characters are able to speak freely, especially in the tragic final chapters. On the other hand, women's voices and their motivation for speaking are consistently discredited, both by the events of the plot and the characters' interpretations.

Dorda and Nene's relationship hides in plain sight during the early chapters of *Plata quemada*, as the two characters appear together from the very first scene, but they are not confirmed to be lovers for another sixty pages. Written in the style of a nonfiction crime novel, the early chapters include information on the characters' thoughts and background but focus mainly on their external appearance and actions, leading up to the bank robbery and shootout in the Buenos Aires suburb of San Fernando in September, 1965. The novel begins with an outsider's view of the characters: “Los llaman los mellizos porque son inseparables. Pero no son hermanos, ni son parecidos” (11). The word *mellizos*, used throughout the novel by the characters themselves and by others from their social group, emphasizes their closeness while denying their sexual relationship. Other early descriptions are also ambiguous: “Eran llamativos, extravagantes, parecían una pareja de boxeadores o una pareja de empleados de una empresa de pompas fúnebres” (11-12). The use of the word *pareja* allows for the interpretation of a sexual relationship, but the image of boxers as well as the other physical descriptions Piglia has given, the mention of the fact that Nene has spent time in jail and that the men are suspicious of being followed all put them in the conventional masculine roles of fighters and criminals. They appear as tough guys and loyal companions first, and as homosexuals only later.

The first explicit mention of Nene and Dorda’s sexual relationship treats it as relatively unremarkable. The main line of the plot already has the gang hiding out in Montevideo after the robbery, but the narration recalls that Nene only agreed to participate in the first place on the condition that Dorda, also known as “el Gaucho Rubio”, be with him:

> —Qué son ustedes, —dijo Malito— ¿marido y mujer?
>
> —Claro, boludo —dijo el Nene
>
> Cuando la carne escaseaba, se acostaban juntos, el Nene y el Gaucho Rubio pero cada vez menos. (77)

The narration then goes on to talk about Dorda’s superstitions against sex and masturbation, without elaborating on the relationship between Nene and Dorda or the conflict with Malito. When Nene makes fun of Malito for calling attention to something Nene considers obvious, the reader too is chastised for being surprised. Looking back, their relationship has not been *concealed* in the narration just as, from Nene's point of view, it hasn't been concealed in their interactions with Malito. The person who is shocked is the one who should be embarrassed, not the two men who are sleeping together.

As the novel fills in background information on all the characters, it reveals similarities between them and the patterns of violence in their biographies. Malito, the leader of the gang and organizer of the robbery, is said to have raped and murdered a policeman in revenge for a beating (19-20). Dorda was raped by the staff in a psychiatric hospital (73). Nene says of his time in prison, "me hice puto, drogadicto, me hice chorro, peronista, timbero, aprendí a pelear a traición, a partirle la nariz de un cabezazo a tipos que si los mirás torcido te rompen el alma…" (93). All of these incidents happened when the characters were teenagers, and the matter-of-fact way they are presented communicates that homosexual rape is one among many forms of violence that make up their experience.

Nene's list puts homosexuality next to drugs, crime, and dangerous political affiliations, as one more part of his identity as an outlaw. It parallels a similar list from a more authoritative source: "Los que huyeron (ha dicho off the record el comisario Silva) son sujetos peligrosos, antisociales, homosexuales, y drogadictos … delincuentes comunes, psicópatas y asesinos con frondosos prontuarios" (91). Silva is Nene and Dorda's most obvious antagonist within the main action of the novel and his characterization of the gang is opposed to theirs even though they group together almost identical labels. But Silva uses the formal language of psychology and law enforcement, whereas Nene speaks in *lunfardo*, the slang of the criminal underclass. For him, words like *puto* (homosexual, and the masculine equivalent of *puta*, whore), *chorro* (thief) and *timbero* (gambler) carry a hint of pride, both for their meaning and the way in which using this language makes him one of the tough guys, men who have survived life in prison and now believe they can endure anything.

But Malito, despite having a similar criminal background to the others, disdains homosexuals in general, and here his view is contested by Nene and Dorda. Malito is bothered by Dorda's way of joking about his sexual history:

> lo ponía nervioso a Malito que era muy profesional, no le gustaban las guarangadas, no le gustaban los putos, a Malito, hablaban demasiado según él.
>
> Pero no era la verdad, le discutía el Nene, había reinas que se habían aguantado la picana sin decir ni pío y él conocía a varios que se hacían los machitos y cuando veían la goma empezaban a cantar.
>
> —La loca Margarita, un travesti, se llenó la boca de gilletes y se cortó que era un desastre y le mostró la lengua a la yuta y le dijo: "Si querés te la chupo, querido, pero a mí, vos, no me vas a hacer hablar…".
>
> La mataron y tuvieron que tirarla al río en Quilmes, desnudo, con la pulsera y los aritos pero no le sacaron una palabra.

With the story of Margarita, Nene makes clear that he considers loyalty to one's fellow criminals and resistance to the police far more important than sexual acts or gender presentation. Like his fellows, Nene states repeatedly that he would rather die than let himself be captured, and the *travesti* who dies in police custody without selling out her friends is presented here as a model of honorable behavior.

Still, both Nene and Dorda continue to associate Margarita's kind of strength of character with masculinity. The phrase "se hacían los machitos" indicates that Nene's acquaintances presented themselves as masculine and heterosexual, but that it was *only* an act: anyone who would give away his secrets to the police so quickly must not be a real macho. Nene and Dorda lack the language to conceive of feminine behavior as admirable or to associate loyalty with women. Significantly, Nene refers to himself as *puto* when speaking to Malito and Mereles but avoids other pejoratives like *maricón* and *marica*, which in Argentine Spanish denote cowardice and weakness, or *reina* and *loca*, which other Argentine and Uruguayan gay men use to emphasize their feminine identification.

Despite his praise for Margarita and for Dorda – "el tipo más entero y más valiente que se haya podido ver (según Brignone)" (79) – Nene feels the need to set himself apart from the men he regards as too feminine. Some time after their arrival in Uruguay, with Dorda withdrawing into himself, Nene leaves the hideout to explore Montevideo's gay neighborhoods and cinemas, but he soon finds himself "harto de andar con maricas" (103). Even while having sex with other men and humiliating himself by the positions and locations he chooses, Nene retains power over his partners by holding on to a weapon and to the knowledge that he is stronger and can kill them at any moment: "Era poderoso el Nene pero estaba arrodillado en el piso, mareado por el olor a desinfectante, mientras un desconocido le hablaba y le pagaba. ¿O era él quien pagaba? Nunca podía recordar con claridad lo que había hecho" (105).

Nene is evidently conflicted about his sexual identity, but the picture of his character in these passages is complicated by the fact that we are seeing it through the eyes and eventual testimony of Giselle, a young Uruguayan woman who lives and works in the same neighborhood. Like the other narrators who intervene between the reader and characters, Giselle is imposing her own interpretation, in this case a compassionate but generalizing and psychoanalyzing one: "Como todos los que representan el papel masculino con otros hombres (declaró más tarde la chica), el Nene era muy quisquilloso en la cuestión de su masculinidad" (103). Giselle may have adopted this formal language in speaking with Renzi or another newspaper reporter for an investigation to be published after the shootout and Nene's death, but she also questions Nene's motivations and groups him together with those of other men when speaking to him directly. She tells him that the exchange of money, the pretense of prostitution, is only an excuse men use to mask their homosexual desire: "Todos ustedes están todo el tiempo diciendo siempre que son machitos y lo hacen con las mujeres para demostrarlo y cuando lo hacen entre ustedes dicen que sólo es por plata" (113). How much of the section on Nene's wanderings and sexual encounters in Montevideo should be taken as his experience, and how much comes down to Giselle's interpretation? The interruption of asides crediting Giselle with this information also takes away from the sense of intimacy between her and Nene. He appears more open and honest with her than with any other character, but we are always aware that she will eventually share his secrets.

But despite some level of distrust and the way she chides him about his sexuality, Nene's openness with Giselle is remarkable, especially when he speaks about

Dorda: "Sólo me entiendo con mi hermano, tengo un hermano mellizo. ¿Te hablé de él? Le dicen el Gaucho […] Yo lo cuido y lo quiero a él más que a mi mujer y a mis hijos. ¿Eso tiene algo de malo?" (114) Nene is lying to Giselle about having a wife and children (as well as his profession, his reason for being in Uruguay, and other important parts of his story). And yet, while hanging on to the non-sexual words *hermano* and *mellizo*, he feels free to tell her that his relationship with Dorda is the most meaningful one in his life. He says so after having sex with other men and before having sex with Giselle, actions that do nothing to take away from his love for Dorda as he understands it, just as being married to a woman would not take away from it, were his cover story true. As Pedro Koo points out in reference to Piñeyro's film, other characters' question of whether Dorda and Nene are "marido y mujer" (in the movie asked by Mereles, in the book by Malito) draws attention to the fact that their relationship does not follow the gendered hierarchy with which they conceive of heterosexual relationships (Koo 91). In their minds, they *are* more like brothers – equals who help and protect each other – than like husband and wife. Nene unwinds with Giselle but he does not trust her completely or consider her an equal, in part because she is not part of his gang and in part because she is a woman.

Nene and other characters' disrespect for and distrust of women like Giselle is confirmed by the events of the novel and reinforced by the attitude Piglia adopts as a fictionalized character within it. The novel affirms the strength of bonds of love among men – even if, like Dorda, they feel like women on the inside, they have suffered enough to be hard-boiled – but judges women as false, self-interested, and too eager to talk. Nene finds solace and relief in his relationship with Giselle, but once the police arrive both Nene and Dorda immediately assume that she was the one to rat them out. The narration's use of Giselle's formal declarations implies that, even if she was not the one to go to the police, she did collude with official actors at some point to give away the men's story. From his first meeting with Giselle, Nene is both charmed and disconcerted by her openness and sincerity, he tells her "Hablás de más" and asks jokingly if she is a cop (101). This general distrust of women appears to be shared by all the men, whereas Malito's earlier complaint that "putos…hablaban demasiado" is contested with examples of brave and loyal homosexuals and *travestis*. Giselle's real first name is Margarita, the same name taken on by the *travesti* in Nene's story, and her adopted name resembles the Gillette razors that the tough Margarita put in her mouth; these connections highlight the contrast between the woman who (may have) sold them out to the police and the *travesti* who died rather than spill her secrets.

The men in the gang dislike women who talk too much and refer to them as whores. "Fue esa puta", says an unidentified speaker as soon as the police arrive (151); "Fue la puta", says Dorda some time into the fighting (159). This insult is perhaps the most common one directed at women in Spanish but it is relevant here not only for its general denigration of women but for the specific connotations related to prostitution: a *puta* has no loyalty and is motivated by money rather than love. The masculine word *puto*, which Nene uses to describe himself, is often used as an insult denoting homosexuality but does not have the same link with selling out. In contrast with the men who burn the stolen money as an act of rebellion against official society, the women in the story want to trade their personal connections for money and personal gain. The destruction of money is greeted with outrage from the police and the press, but the betrayal of trust for money is condemned by the main characters, and we see how they suffer and die as a result of this betrayal.

When Piglia inserts himself into the narrative in the novel's epilogue, he reinforces the main characters' distrust of women who are too eager to share their secrets. Blanca Galeano, in a supposed meeting with the young writer Piglia on a train in 1966, repeats Giselle's action of giving out information about her boyfriend (Mereles) in order to benefit herself. (The young, fictionalized) Piglia is wary: "Me contó una historia rarísima que le creí a medias y pensé que su relato estaba encaminado a que yo le pagara (como sucedió) las comidas en el restaurant del tren" (249). The free meal meant Blanca was telling Mereles' story out of economic interest, not because it was true. On the other hand, in the same epilogue Piglia as narrator treats the accounts of the police officers and reporters as credible, even though those witnesses were evidently working for money. In both cases – the difference between "putos" like Nene and Dorda and "putas" like Giselle, and the difference between men and women who tell their story for reasons of economic gain – there is a double standard that goes unacknowledged in the novel: it is acceptable for men to be whores but not women. It is impossible to pin down the author's real opinion in a text that disturbs the boundaries between fact and fiction and that thematizes the narrator's positioning to the extent that *Plata quemada* does. Still, it is disheartening that, while the intimate picture of Dorda and Nene contradicts the outside views that call them antisocial degenerates, the female characters are condemned from every angle.

Koo asserts that the film version of *Plata quemada*, by emphasizing the solidarity among all three of the men who resist the police, undoes the boundary between homosocial and homosexual bonding as theorized by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick in *Between Men* (1985), and he sees the film's success as a victory against homophobia. Indeed, the film – and to a lesser extent Piglia's novel and the true story of Dorda and Brignone – has been embraced by Argentine and international audiences who had previously lacked such an image of macho gay heroes. *Plata quemada* figures on lists of gay-themed international movies, and Montevideo travel guides encourage gay tourists to visit the building where the shootout took place. Although the real men died violently, thanks in part to Piglia's work they have become heroes in the popular imagination. However, the alliance between heterosexual, bisexual, and homosexual men that Koo and others have celebrated is still a bond between men only, one that reinforces women's exclusion from power, from the men's circle of trust, and from the ability to tell their own story.

Conclusion

In the English-speaking world, crime fiction has typically been labeled as escapist because it is comforting, titillating, or both. Classical detective fiction encourages the reader to side with the forces of order while the hard-boiled variant provides the opportunity to live vicariously through the violence and sex the protagonist observes or experiences. But in Argentina, thanks in part to Ricardo Piglia's influence as a critic and editor, crime fiction has been used to critique capitalism, corruption, and state violence. In Piglia's own fiction, the codes of crime fiction interact with other modes of reading and writing. In addition to creating a fictional narrative, he makes a critical argument for including and integrating crime fiction with other kinds of literature, rather than setting it apart on separate shelves of bookstores and libraries.

Still, the genre that Piglia has helped integrate into contemporary Argentine literature remains, in his formulation, the province of *los duros*, authors and characters whose strength is rooted in their masculine identity. In *Plata quemada* and La *ciudad ausente*, Piglia reworks that identity to allow for new variations and increased freedom for his male leads: gun-toting gay men who won't betray their partners for anything in the world, and a detective who learns to accept multiple versions of truth. In addition to broadening the models for masculine heroes, Piglia disturbs the authoritarian, masculinist values of language, but he still does not create a space for women to speak as subjects. Blanca, Giselle, and Julia are all women who are tortured into speech that betrays their cause or their companions, and Elena's speech, although posited as a remedy against the narratives of coercion and torture, is also a result of such methods. Piglia's assertion that all literature is the story of a crime or of a journey is a definition that leaves subjects like romance, childrearing, and humor outside the bounds of literature. But like Rubem Fonseca, whose Brazilian crime fiction helped Patrícia Melo and others to find their voice and audience, Piglia's work also makes it possible for other artists to take the tradition of the Argentine *novela negra* in new directions. We see this in the case of the much more recently published writer Claudia Piñeiro, who puts typical problems of Argentine women's lives front and center in her crime novels.

Chapter Four: Claudia Piñeiro and the *novela negra de mujer*

Claudia Piñeiro, who began to publish fiction in 2005, is influenced by the US tradition of hard-boiled fiction and the related Argentine tradition of the *novela negra,* but she transforms the genre by putting Argentine women at the center of her novels. This basic change leads to many others, including attention to issues of parenting, domestic violence, and health care –issues that profoundly affect women's lives but that are usually ignored in crime fiction. She uses the suspenseful style and structure of the crime novel, as well as the differences between her work and its antecedents, to critique the worldview – shared by many of her own female characters – that considers women's problems to be less important than men's. In this chapter I examine the novels *Las viudas de los jueves* (2005), which exposes the dark underbelly of an apparently peaceful Buenos Aires suburb, and *Elena sabe* (2007), where obedience of the law and morality replaces murder as the central crime.

Patterns of exclusion and concealment

In a lecture about "Narradoras argentinas" at the seminar on contemporary Argentine literature in Resistencia on June 25, 2008, Ana María Shua, known for her humor writing, children's literature, and *microrrelatos*, expressed her reservations about grouping writers together only because of their gender, particularly since Argentine women have written nearly every kind of book imaginable across all genres, including the classical mystery story, but *not* the *novela negra*. One possible exception to this rule, Shua said, was Claudia Piñeiro. A few days later, Mempo Giardinelli, who has published extensively on the *género negro* in Argentina and Latin America, said that it was so popular and prevalent in Argentina that nearly every contemporary male Argentine author had written at least one *novela negra*. Women, on the other hand, did not, since it was "un género bastante machista". When I asked him about Claudia Piñeiro, Giardinelli said he had not thought of it before but that yes, Piñeiro's *Las viudas de los jueves* could be called a *novela negra*. A few months earlier, in an article in *La nación*, Elvio Gandolfo had similarly characterized Piñeiro's *Tuya* (also published in 2005) as "un 'policial negro' duro, pero de mujer," combining translations of the French *noir* and the Anglo-American *hard-boiled*, and implying that these labels normally apply only to literature by and about men.

As these comments suggest, Piñeiro is, despite her popularity, the odd woman out in several ways: she is the wrong gender to be writing in what is becoming a typically Argentine genre; or she is a woman writing in the wrong genre; or perhaps she is not writing that genre at all, since, although all of her novels involve some crime, only one of them, *Tuya*, is about a murderer, and none are about detectives. Depending on genre definitions, the adjectives *duro* and *hard-boiled* are perhaps inaccurate in that she has limited interest in the type of tough-on-the-outside figure that has starred in most Anglo-American and Latin American crime fiction, including the other works studied in this dissertation. On the other hand, the structure she uses, with its double narrative of hidden secret and dangerous investigation, is that of the *policial*, and the adjective *negro* is entirely fitting for the gloomy worldview she presents.

The changes she introduces serve as commentary on the genre and on the dominance within it of situations removed from Argentine women's real lives. Novels like *Tuya*, *Las viudas de los jueves* and *Elena sabe* show that the intimate world of women, though it may appear tame from the outside, is actually full of violence – not usually in the form of a gunshot murder but in domestic violence, betrayal, poverty, restricted sexuality, and lack of access to medical care. Rather than take sexual violence to its spectacular, shocking limits, as Patrícia Melo does in her adaptation of Rubem Fonseca's plots and tropes, or cast a female character in the role of the tough detective as is common in crime fiction by women in the United States, Piñeiro purposely directs her attention to quieter, more private, and more insidious forms of violence, those hidden behind Catholic morality, family togetherness and leafy wire fences. In so doing she widens the potential for one of Argentina's most important genres to address women's problems.

Unlike the other authors studied in this dissertation, Piñeiro does not make direct reference to other works of crime fiction. In interviews she has expressed admiration for the work of Raymond Chandler and awareness of the relationship between her novels and the *género negro*, but her characters and narrators do not read detective novels or watch crime films, nor do characters from other novels appear in their world. The metafictional component to her novels works is the sense described by Amelia Simpson in her study of Latin American crime fiction, where the interaction between the foreign text and the new one is used "to express views about moral issues and social problems, and to question the ideological assumptions of the model" (23). In this case, there is a marked difference between what Piñeiro's characters are able to do and what is expected from characters in a traditional crime novel. However, her characters and narrators do not call attention to those antecedents (or to their own erudition, as Fonseca and Melo's narrators in particular tend to do with their frequent namedropping). The relationship and contrast are with the generic model of the detective story, familiar to most readers, rather than with a specific work. This makes the novels more accessible – especially in contrast to most of Piglia's work – since they have straightforward plots that can be understood without those references. As a consequence Piñeiro's works are sometimes dismissed as light, easily consumable reading, an approach that misses the way she uses readers' expectations to critique both the traditional crime novel and the position of women in contemporary Argentine society.

The main contrasts between the generic model and Piñeiro's novels stem from her focus on the lives of ordinary women and their difference from the stock characters of crime fiction. I mean ordinary in the sense of women who lack special abilities and whose lives are not generally oriented around crime – none of her primary characters are professional detectives, amateur sleuths, psychopaths, *femmes fatales*, or murder victims. They reflect the lives of women from various sectors of contemporary Argentine society, including the comfortable new rich the decade before the economic crisis of 2001 and women who struggle with poverty and ill health in the aftermath of that crisis. They have a more central role than the careful female readers who inspire, love, and listen to Fonseca's male characters or the ones who undercut the narrator in *O matador* and other works by Patrícia Melo. And unlike the idealized feminine storytellers in Piglia's *La ciudad ausente*, Piñeiro's female characters do not offer a more flexible or humane alternative to official histories. Rather, they create stories about each other in order to cut each other down. Storytelling itself becomes a form of violence, of which the same characters can be police, victims, and perpetrators.

All three of these novels use shifts between the perspectives of several women for part of their dramatic power. *Tuya* alternates between the first-person voices of a mother, conversations involving her teenage daughter, and in a few later chapters the thoughts of her unfaithful husband, narrated in third person; it also reproduces evidence apparently included in a police file. In *Las viudas de los jueves*, the narration drifts between the central character of Virginia Guevara, her neighbors, and in a few scenes a neighbor's maid. *Elena sabe*, told in third person, is almost entirely about what Elena knows, but in the final chapters this comes to include her daughter's and another woman's stories, both of which she had completely misinterpreted until that point.

The shifts in perspective draw attention to bitter conflicts and lack of comprehension among women, often resulting from differences in age and generation, social class, and life experience, but sometimes in unexpected ways. The title and basic premise of *Tuya* – about a woman, Inés, who finds out that her husband is having an affair – suggest that the principal conflict will be between the narrator and the "other woman", the one who signs notes to her lover as "Tuya". However, the more intense conflict is between the narrator and her pregnant teenage daughter. The characters in *Las viudas de los jueves* tend to think of themselves as united by their membership in an exclusive community, with their unanimity figured in part by the unusual first person plural narrative voice, but as the story goes on, the deep divisions between the characters become clearer. *Elena sabe* is structured like a detective novel in that its action is not in the crime itself but in the final revelation; however, it challenges readers' expectations by leaving the mystery of Elena's daughter's death unsolved.

Piñeiro's choice to focus on female characters has not resulted in books about female detectives. They do some investigating – particularly Inés in *Tuya* trying to track down her husband's mistress and Elena in *Elena sabe* hoping someone else can help her find her daughter's murderer – but none of them finds and exposes a killer, let alone try to make a living by doing so. This may reflect the general difficulty of making a woman believable in the detective role in a country where very few women work for the police. The verisimilitude of a female detective has over time become less of a problem in US crime fiction, both because of women's increased presence in real police departments and because crime novelists have built up a substantial canon of fictional female detectives. However, as discussed in my introduction, the US female hard-boiled novel has had limited influence in Latin America.

Maureen T. Reddy states that, apart from the problem of realism posed by an amateur detective who encounters murder in her own life in book after book, authors who write about female detectives have to confront "the prevailing conception of women as a group belonging to the private sphere, while the public sphere belongs to men. Murder, and particularly the investigation of murder, may begin in the private sphere, but it is by its very nature public, part of the male domain of order and authority" (*Sisters* 18). Claudia Piñeiro's way of confronting this problem is to play it up rather than knock it down. Her novels are very much concerned with the private sphere, the way it limits women's options and the way it conceals the very real violence in their lives. In general, her characters are women who are accustomed to life in a limited physical space with a predictable domestic routine. Murder is one of the disruptions that forces them to take a different perspectives on their lives and step out into the wider world.

Piñeiro's characters – even those like Elena who are trying to find the truth – all have a part in the concealment of violence against women. The neighbors in *Las viudas de los jueves*, for example, are all aware that one of the men in their group beats his wife, yet they do not confront him or try to help her because such an action is not allowed by their notions of polite society. Elena discovers that she has helped condemn a stranger to a life of misery and captivity by failing to listen to her. And in *Tuya* Irene directly and knowingly helps cover up her husband's murder of his mistress in an attempt to preserve their marriage. Through these well-meaning characters' small but harmful actions – or lack of action – Piñeiro explores one of the most important issues in crime fiction in Latin America, that of individual versus collective responsibility for violence. While other Argentine and Latin American crime novels in the late 20th century have more typically spread the blame for politically-motivated violence between the government, police, corporations and wealthy individuals, Piñeiro interrogates middle-class society itself, the rules of social interaction and traditional morality that keep people, especially women, from understanding and helping each other or from creating a society where women can make their own choices.

Marked and invisible boundaries: *Las viudas de los jueves*

Las viudas de los jueves does not take place in Buenos Aires, the typical setting for the Argentine crime novel, but in one of its outer suburbs, an exclusive gated community called Altos de la Cascada that has recently been built up around a country club. Piñeiro looks to the crime novel from the periphery, just as her characters look with disdain toward the capital, which they have left behind to the south, and with envy toward the United States in the north. In some ways, their closed community resembles the locked room of the classic detective novel, where the control of variables – no one can get in or out – makes the solution more like a puzzle than an actual crime taking place in the world. And Altos de la Cascada's watchful, privileged characters may be the closest thing to Agatha Christie that can be found in Argentina. Christie was already famous for her male detective Poirot when she created the character of Miss Marple, an older woman who used traditionally feminine activities like gossip and small talk to solve mysteries in her village. Like Christie, Piñeiro writes crime fiction about women in traditionally feminine roles – housewifes, domestic servants, an art teacher and a real estate agent – rather than the journalists, police officers, and political activists who more often star in Argentine crime narratives. And yet, Piñeiro's view of society as essentially broken – violent and unjust, lacking a benevolent order that the detective can hope to restore – brings it closer to the Argentine tradition of the *novela negra* than to the classical British detective novel.

The violence in *Las viudas* stems precisely from the characters' attempt to lock themselves off, to exclude the poverty of the northern provinces and urban crime of Buenos Aires. Their comfortable lifestyle depends on the poverty of other Argentines, but the community struggles over the extent to which those others can be let inside. Those who do make it in live under constant surveillance, both in the literal sense of security cameras and in the more diffuse awareness of *el qué dirán*. Piñeiro shows how the cultivation of order and security – the values sustained by classical crime novels – contributes to an unjust society: some people are unfairly kept out of the community and some are punished for not conforming to the expectations on the inside.

Las viudas de los jueves begins near the end of its chronological plot, with the deaths of three of the most important men in the community, electrocuted in a private pool on a Thursday night in September of 2001. A fourth man, the narrator's husband, breaks his leg in his own home. The four wives, who for years have referred to themselves as "the Thursday widows" because they were left alone during their husbands' weekly card games, are now literally widows, left to try to make sense of the tragedy. The novel then steps back, both pulling away from the individual characters and going back in time to the beginning of the 1990s, to give a collective picture of the community and the conditions that eventually led to the combined suicide-murder-fraud of the first two chapters. The characters are not acting specifically as detectives because they live in a community of open secrets – the reason for the deaths is understood, even if it cannot be talked about openly. For the reader, this knowledge is revealed slowly, along with awareness of many other less obvious crimes, through the thoughts and whispers of many characters, not the investigations of just one.

The time period of the novel roughly covers the terms of two Argentine presidents, Carlos Saúl Menem from 1989 to 1999 and Fernando de la Rúa from 1999 to 2001. Menem took office during the crisis of hyperinflation that caused his predecessor Raúl Alfonsín to resign early. According to Beatriz Sarlo, the memory of the 1989 economic crisis helped the new president to consolidate power in the executive branch and to carry out drastic changes in economic policy with adverse effects for large segments of the population – all in the name of preventing a return to the chaos of hyperinflation (34). Despite belonging to the Peronist Partido Justicialista and having run for office on a populist platform, Menem instituted neoliberal economic policies. With the help of his economic minister Domingo Cavallo, Menem privatized many formerly state-run operations, encouraged foreign investment, and tied the value of the Argentine peso to the US dollar. The sale of much of Argentina's industrial and business sectors to foreign corporations contributed to a rise in unemployment and disparity between haves and have-nots, but inflation was kept under control, creating a sense of stability and the possibility for quick enrichment for some middle- and upper-class Argentines.

Menem also took a different attitude than Alfonsín on the question of how to face Argentina's history of violent repression during the 1976-83 dictatorship. In the first week of his presidency in 1983, Alfonsín had ordered the creation the Comisión Nacional sobre la Desaparición de Personas (CONADEP) to investigate human rights abuses committed by the juntas; the CONADEP's findings would be published in the *Nunca más* report in 1984 and used as the basis for criminal trials in 1985. This level of legal accountability for the actions of a past dictatorship was unprecedented in Latin American history and provided a model for other countries making the transition to democratic government in the 1980s and 1990s, but Alfonsín subsequently made some concessions to military pressure, signing the laws of Obediencia Debida in 1985 and Punto Final in 1987. Menem further backed away from holding the military accountable for their crimes. In 1990 he issued pardons to military leaders who had already been convicted, stating that the country would be better off moving on than continuing to focus on resentment over the past. He pushed through an amendment in the Argentine constitution that allowed him to be reelected in 1995, but he was unsuccessful in his attempt to run for a third term in 1999. He was succeeded President Fernando de la Rúa, who resigned during the economic crisis and riots of December 2001, the end of the artificial prosperity generated by Menem's policies. Piñeiro's novel ends in October of 2001 with rumors of coming riots.

The characters in *Las viudas de los jueves* pay only minimal attention to Argentine national politics, devoting much more of their energy to local gossip and the country club board that makes security and other decisions for the Altos de la Cascada community. They tend to mention political changes without proper names, usually as a way of marking time: "Teníamos nuevo presidente" when Virginia's family first moved to the development in 1989 (31); the Scaglia family joined them "A los pocos días de que el ministro, que había sido de Relaciones Exteriores, ocupara el sillón de Economía" and effected the equivalency of the Argentine peso with the US dollar in 1991, thus facilitating "el éxodo a lugares como Altos de la Cascada" (35). As this second example shows, although the political and economic changes are referred to only obliquely, the plot of the novel depends on them, as the *plata dulce* of foreign investment allows a few Argentines to create a new community with new cultural values.

As the narrative voice observes, the "exodus" is part of a broader demographic shift in Argentina and throughout Latin America: wealthy people are now choosing to isolate themselves in newly constructed suburbs, whereas previously the most desirable real estate was to be found in city centers, and the suburbs were left to the poor (leading to the negative connotations of terms like *suburbio*, *periferia*, and *comunidades satélites*). Far enough away from Buenos Aires that it had not been developed until recently, Altos de la Cascada is still close enough to allow several of the male characters, such as Tano Scaglia and Alfredo Insúa, to drive to work in the Microcentro every day. Meanwhile, a new “barriada satélite”, Santa María de los Tigrecitos, has sprung up outside La Cascada’s gates, making it possible for its maids and other service employees to walk to work, even though they would never be able to live within the community itself. Apart from the convenience of proximity, Los Tigrecitos allows the Damas de los Altos to socialize with each other by organizing charity events. At one point Teresa Scaglia explains to Carmen Insúa that a certain event was organized to benefit “otros pobres, no los nuestros” (128), displaying the sense of ownership and patronage reminiscent of the nineteenth century, when the landed oligarchy was responsible for the wellbeing of Argentina’s peasants.

Besides helping them make enough money to build these new houses, Menem has had a part in the cultural shift that allows these characters to stop thinking about his government in order to focus on themselves and each other. The extraordinary growth of residential *clubes de campo* (like Altos de la Cascada), larger *clubes de chacras*, and more modest *barrios privados* outside Buenos Aires in the 1990s was part of a general trend of replacing government authority and services with privately-owned, for profit activities. Guy Thuillier’s study of Buenos Aires gated communities in this period shows that the residents were charged eight times more in association fees than in local taxes (269), and that they often refused to pay the taxes they did owe, arguing that since they provided their own services (private roads, schools, and hospitals) they should not have to subsidize the weak municipal governments of the impoverished surrounding areas (263). Indeed, Nora Libertun de Duren argues that development corporations chose to build gated communities specifically in the poorest parts of the Buenos Aires Metropolitan Area with the weakest municipal governments in order to be able to run the communities their own way, without government interference. Clubs like the Damas de los Altos mean that services for the poor are also privatized and looked at as a voluntary activity rather than an obligation of citizenship.

In general, the characters in Piñeiro's novel share Carlos Menem's preferences for forgetting over memory, for the new and current over the past, and for foreign money over Argentine reality, all of which influence the way they tell their story. *Las viudas* owes much of its distinctive power to the narration in first person plural, which communicates a sense of unity, vigilance, and control. The voice is usually strongest at the openings of chapters, as at the beginning of chapter three:

> Altos de la Cascada es el barrio donde vivimos. Todos nosotros. Primero se mudaron Ronie y Virginia Guevara, casi al mismo tiempo que los Urovich; unos años después, el Tano; Gustavo Masotta fue de los últimos en llegar. Unos antes, otros después, nos convertimos en vecinos. El nuestro es un barrio cerrado, cercado con un alambrado perimetral disimulado detrás de arbustos de distinta especie. Altos de la Cascada Country Club, o club de campo. Aunque la mayoría de nosotros acorte el nombre y le diga La Cascada, y otros pocos elijan decirle Los Altos. (25)

Typically, this passage begins with the name of the community and the collective "Todos nosotros" but goes on to include individual names, some of whom are major characters in the novel and others only secondary. The narration also mixes innocuous details (there is no significant difference between the shortened names Los Altos and La Cascada) with more ominous ones (the wire fence disguised as hedges), and distinguishes between a majority voice and a minority within the collective. The short, simple sentences, including sentence fragments like "Todos nosotros", communicate a sense of calm and control, as opposed to the kind of run-on sentences that indicate chaos in Melo's *O matador* and confusion in Piñeiro's *Elena sabe*. The *nosotros* voice is persistent throughout the novel but also, as in this passage, moves through the stories of individual characters, sometimes shifting within a single paragraph or sentence to narrate an individual's thoughts in third person, while other chapters are told by the real estate agent, Virginia Guevara (also known by her professional name Mavi), in first person singular. The unremarked shifts and drifts between characters and time periods are fitting for a novel whose plot depends on the appearance of security, but with rules and behaviors that encourage anxiety, secrets, and class tension.

The community's boundaries are maintained in multiple forms, including written and unwritten rules as well as the physical barrier of the wire fence, security cameras, checkpoints, and guards. All of these are real features of gated communities and, as Thuillier writes, have the effect of increasing tension in places where people have come in order to seek security:

> Together with security and a love of nature, the desire for social homogeneity is probably one of the strongest attractions of the gated

> communities. This dream of a renewed control of the urban landscape and society is also expressed through the rules inside the gated communities, usually very restrictive, and embracing every aspect of urban life. The construction of the houses, public spaces and use of sports facilities, admission of guests, etc., all have rules that aim to guarantee a rigid social order, and are often a source of conflicts between residents, for instance about pets, fencing of private swimming pools, noise or speed limits. (262)

In the case of Altos de la Cascada, much of the tension between characters stems from uncertainty about those rules and boundaries: who is allowed to come inside the fence and who really belongs there.

The choice of the real estate agent as the main narrator is not accidental, as it helps highlight the theme of some people having the privilege of living in Altos de la Cascada while others are kept out. Virginia makes a living by convincing new people to move to the community, but another important part of her job is to keep certain people out, maintaining the homogeneity of the population. Neighbors pressure her to enforce an old regulation limiting any “colectividad” to ten percent of the country club membership, which by extension would limit home ownership in Altos de la Cascada. In practice, this rule means that a single white Catholic majority makes up almost the whole population while Asians and most Jews are excluded. The use of a supposedly neutral rule and the prominence of one Jewish family, the Uroviches, allows those who are already members of the club to deny that there has been any discrimination.

Virginia is uncomfortable with this part of her job, but the combination of the official rule and the unofficial, unspoken way it is interpreted and enforced, makes the practice difficult for her to contest. In one episode, Virginia's friend and neighbor Lila Laforgue asks if a pair of potential buyers are "paisanos" and, when Virginia fails to take her meaning, has to clarify herself with a more common euphemism "rusos" (145). When Virginia tells her that the family's last name is Ferrere, Lila says, "'Sefardíes. Yo conocí un Paz que era, un Varela que era. Te engañan con esos apellidos, y te terminan haciendo meter la pata" (ibid.). Lila's speech is notable for its silences as well as its euphemisms: Paz and Varela *were*, but she does not say aloud *what* they were, and the next sentence lacks an explicit subject, making their action appear more mysterious and sinister than it is. By treating people's use of their own last name as deliberate deceit ("Te engañan"), Lila plays on stereotypes of Jews – as a "collectivity" – trying to take over society without anyone who is not in on the conspiracy noticing.

The attitude is not unique to one woman or one neighborhood: Virginia has also learned from her colleagues in neighboring exclusive communities the tricks of seeking out maiden names, children's names, and other clues about potential clients' ethnicity. The stated purpose of the ten-percent rule is to keep Altos de la Cascada from becoming an ethnic enclave, but Lila's comments and the other real estate agents' detective work suggest a more targeted form of anti-Semitism: they want to keep tabs on their neighbors, and they resent those whose Jewishness is not obvious for making the work of boundary-policing more difficult. Most indigenous Argentines and immigrants from poorer Latin American countries like Paraguay and Bolivia simply cannot afford the homes or the country club membership. Japanese and Korean Argentines, no matter how wealthy, are intentionally and efficiently excluded, presumably because they are more easily distinguished from the majority. But Jews, from Lila's perspective, are trying to cheat their way in. Virginia resists Lila's pressure because she feels the practice of exclusion is wrong and unfair, as well as being awkward for her, and yet she knows that her reputation and success depend on her willingness to maintain the community's standards. She is therefore resigned but embarrassed on the day of the closing when Mr. Ferrere's wife gives her full name as Laura Judith Litman (147-148).

Romina Andrade, a dark-skinned young girl, is another character who occupies an ambiguous place within the community: officially she is a resident, and the others avoid speaking about her difference, but they would not want more people like her. Mariana Andrade, a wealthy woman from Buenos Aires, had wanted to adopt a baby boy from the poorer province of Corrientes, but in order to have him she had to adopt his older sister as well. Although both children come from the same background, Romina retains memories of her earlier childhood and is more noticeably indigenous, dark-haired and dark-skinned, larger and more developed than the other girls in the neighborhood. Mariana finds the girl's coarse hair and large dark eyes to be out of place, even uncanny: "A Mariana le costaba mantenerle la mirada, le daba miedo. Como si esos ojos oscuros le pudieran mostrar lo que alguna vez vieron" (46).

The Damas de los Altos encourage Mariana to involve Romina in their charity work with the poor children on the other side of the fence in Santa María de los Tigrecitos, "para que vean lo que es la realidad, si no los criamos como en una burbuja" (69). Of course, the point of having moved to La Cascada in the first place was to live and raise their families in a bubble of security separating them from "la realidad", but the staged charity work, where the Damas and their children appear in the role of benefactors and the people of Los Tigrecitos as humble recipients, allows them to see poverty without being threatened by it. Mariana's response is to wonder silently "qué le pasaría a Romina cuando los viera, porque Romina había sido como ellos, o peor que ellos, pensó, había sido Ramona, seguía siéndolo en el fondo de esos ojos oscuros que le daban miedo" (69).

Why should Mariana be frightened of her own daughter's dark eyes and not those of her maid Antonia or the other dark-skinned people in her life? The difference is that most of those people live outside the fence. If they come inside, they show their identification at security checkpoints and dress in work uniforms. Romina's presence is somewhat distasteful and awkward for other residents but frankly horrifying for Mariana who has to treat her as a member of her own family. Her response is to hold the child at a distance, to lavish affection instead on her younger brother Pedro, and to speak about Romina's racial difference openly – singling her out to a stranger as "la morocha grandota" (49) – as no one else in the community is willing to do.

Like the wire fence disguised as a hedge, racism in the community tends to be dressed up as something more benevolent: the administrators of Lakeland Academy, the local private school, do not want Romina to attend because of her appearance, but they make other excuses, saying she won't be able to keep up with instruction in English. Romina defies all expectations – including Mariana's – by growing up to be one of the best students at the school. Like the Jewish women with Spanish surnames, Romina has expanded the boundaries of the community not by breaking down the fence but by finding a place on the inside and then excelling at following the official rules. Their success shows that the boundary is not as secure as the older residents have tried to make it, and belonging does not depend only on being born into money and power. Other characters, despite having the privileges that go with owning a home in an exclusive community, have to watch themselves – and perform correctly while others watch them – in order to keep their place.

Jewish Argentines continue to move into the community, Romina excels at school, Asian Argentines play golf at the country club, and in 1995 a "García a secas" (one without a second surname to indicate old money or northern European heritage) wins the annual golf tournament (86). From the perspective of more established members of the upper class, these are all indicators not that their racial prejudice is wrong but that "el golf iba camino a dejar de ser un deporte de caballeros" and the community is in decline (ibid.). Their unease with the changes in the golf club and the sport are part of a more general tension in the novel between the desire for a more exclusive, refined, old-money culture and the fact that many prominent members of the community are themselves members of the new rich, having made their fortunes through trade and investments. Tano Scaglia, who works for an investment bank, becomes a leader of the community not because of his manners or sophistication but because he has money and never backs away from the things he wants. Virginia too is an entrepreneur, only going into business for herself after her husband loses his job.

Residents of Altos de la Cascada rely on appearance and behaviors as ways of asserting their belonging. One of the most noteworthy examples of this pattern – for its impracticality – is their use of the English language and emulation of US customs, such as garage sales and Halloween. Lakeland Academy uses English not only for instruction but also for report cards and notes sent home to parents. Virginia has to ask a friend for help translating a note just to find out that her son Juani is in trouble at school. Her embarrassment at not having the same language skills as her son or her neighbors again hints at the differences in class background among the residents. Virginia and her neighbors are used to relying on fences and uniforms to differentiate between those who belong and those who do not. When these boundaries are blurred, they may fear that they themselves will be discovered as undeserving.

The collective voice, shifting perspectives, and use of gossip and anonymity in the novel make it clear that all these characters are attempting to control each other by telling each other's stories. Piglia's *La ciudad ausente* creates an atmosphere of paranoia with talk about government microphones and spies for the police, but in *Las viudas de los jueves*, surveillance has been privatized. Mavi Guevara famously keeps a little red book with notes about all the residents that may come in useful for her job; its contents are secret and therefore fascinating to the rest of the community. School officials are concerned about Juani's development because he has written a composition about his neighbor's sex life – observing is allowed, but repeating it in the official context of school is not. Everyone is aware of the security cameras, but the plot also depends on the fact that Juani and Romina watch their neighbors with a video recorder for fun.

The multiple narratives of control in *Las viudas de los jueves* support D.A. Miller's assertion in *The Novel and the Police* (1988) that the 19th-century British novel itself, and not specifically the crime novel, is part of a project of collective and mutual policing. Critics have often remarked that detective fiction of that time and place reinforces conservative ideology by presenting crime as a break in the established order, something extraordinary to be remarked upon, described for entertainment purposes, and then done away with in the final resolution. But Miller sees narratives of upward mobility and class education like those of Wilkie Collins, Charles Dickens, and Anthony Trollope as even more normative in their tracing of collective class expectations and boundaries. In these Victorian novels, the role of the police and of criminals is limited, but members of the upper-middle class police each other and the new people who find their way into that social circle. A similar pattern can be seen in *Las viudas*, which uses the deaths of three men and the involvement of the Guevara family to create suspense but is less concerned with that particular crime than with the broader culture of conformity that made the deaths inevitable.

In addition to marking group belonging and exclusion, another feature of the *nosotros* voice is that it allows individual members of the group to deny responsibility. This can be seen in its very first appearance, in chapter two, referring to the large and well-appointed home of the Scaglia family: “Muchos de nosotros la mirábamos con cierta envidia, aunque ninguno se atrevería a confesarlo” (19). If envy cannot be expressed openly, it is more acceptable when felt by *many*. As Piñeiro stated in an interview published in the newspaper *Clarín*, the group voice “está dotada de una gran impunidad. Cuando decimos: ‘Ay, me contaron tal cosa,’ en ese anonimato protector nos permitimos decir cualquier cosa acerca del otro” (Piñeiro, “Me gusta”). In this way, Piñeiro makes a connection between gossip, an activity dominated by women and often dismissed as trivial and uninteresting, and murder, a public affair and established subject for serious novels.

The use of gossip is as important as the focus on female characters in Piñeiro's work of creating a feminine variation on the *novela negra*, and resembles Agatha Christie's game-changing innovation in her Miss Marple stories, where the spinster who is always watching her neighbors turns out to be a more capable detective than the male professionals. But Piñeiro is showing us the dark side of this phenomenon: the social order that Christie's characters work to preserve is presumed to be a peaceful and positive one; here it is fundamentally unjust, rotten to the core. Piñeiro also flips the positive valorization of women's storytelling in *La ciudad ausente*, where Piglia links linear narratives with torture, forced confession, the police, and masculinity; in *Las viudas de los jueves* Piñeiro shows that women's way of talking about each other can be just as coercive and harmful.

Political scientist James C. Scott's discussion of gossip in *Domination and the Arts of Resistance* (1990) can help us understand its function in this novel. His chapter on "The Arts of Political Disguise" deals mainly with the tools subaltern groups can use to resist those in power: in general, anonymity is useful for subalterns because it allows each individual to deny responsibility and thus to escape punishment. But Scott sees gossip as a tool for social control that is most effective among members of a group who share the same cultural expectations; it is "a discourse about social rules that have been violated. A person's reputation can be damaged by stories about his tight-fistedness, his insulting words, his cheating, or his clothing only if the public among whom such tales circulate have shared standards of generosity, polite speech, honesty, and appropriate dress" (Scott 142-143). In *Las viudas de los jueves*, gossip is powerful when the neighbors speak about each other, not when the maids speak about their employers, since those groups have different cultural attitudes. The anonymous voices reinforce ideas of what *ought* to be expected from members of the community, but the speakers do not generally take action against the people who violate those norms. On the contrary, the denial of responsibility involved in gossip keeps the neighbors from feeling any individual responsibility to interfere, even in situations where they recognize that *someone* should do so. This is what allows Gustavo Masotta to go on abusing his wife Carla despite the community's knowledge of the crime.

The only incident where gossip leads from general disapproval to direct action is the same one where two characters take their disapproval of the community in a different direction, resorting to witchcraft in an effort to get revenge. After discovering her husband Alfredo's affair, Carmen Insúa becomes depressed and withdraws almost completely into her own home, only to be rescued by the couple's former maid, a Paraguayan woman named Gabina whom Alfredo had hated. The neighbors are grateful to see Carmen again but soon enough displeased with the women's closeness, in particular because Gabina takes liberties such as eating with members in the tennis club and going jogging with Carmen through the neighborhood, wearing her own clothes rather than a uniform (203).

The closeness between the two women evokes comments from the neighbors: "Fue más o menos para esa época cuando se empezó a escuchar. '¿Qué hacen éstas todo el tiempo juntas?, ¿Serán…?'. 'Ay, salí, no seas asqueroso', le contestó Teresa Scaglia a alguien que se le acercó a decírselo al oído mientras Gabina y Carmen pasaban trotando una mañana" (203). This is the only mention of homosexuality in *Las viudas de los jueves*, or indeed in any of Piñeiro's novels, despite the fact that they so often portray diverse types of relationships among women. And yet even this anonymous gossip is not an actual mention of lesbianism but rather the silence of the unfinished whisper. The phrase "se empezó a escuchar" takes identity and agency out of the act of listening to gossip, and the whisperer himself is not identified by name, although the woman who condemns both the accusation and the behavior is. Carmen and Gabina stop going out in the community that clearly doesn't want them, causing neighbors to speculate as to how they can pay for groceries without jobs or support from Alfredo: "'Pagarán con la Paraguan Card.' 'Ay, salí'" (205). This conversation closely echos the earlier one about lesbianism, but with the difference that a reference to Gabina's nationality and poverty can be spoken of out loud – she is not a resident like Romina or the Uroviches, so the subject is less of a taboo. The gossips' disapproval does not distinguish one problem (who Gabina is) from the other (her relationship with Carmen) because they are disturbed precisely by the intimacy between them, the way Gabina disturbs the boundary between positions and behaviors expected of employees versus residents.

Gabina and Carmen withdraw from the community and its judgments in order to make their own judgments. After months of silence from inside the house, Alfredo Insúa – fearing that his property may be at stake – finally gathers some friends and goes to break down the door. Inside they find the place long abandoned with photographs of all the neighborhood residents – with the exception of the abused wife Carla Masotta, cut out of a group photo – with pins through their hearts and eyes. The most elaborate picture is that of Alfredo: “Su altar era un plato Villeroy Boch cubierto de mierda seca, sobre la que se había derretido una vela roja” (206). Scott characterizes gossip as “the linguistic equivalent and forerunner of witchcraft” (143), which similarly relies on shared community beliefs; witchcraft takes those beliefs a step further into direct action and consequences while still allowing denial of responsibility. In this instance, witchcraft is not an effective tool for use against Alfredo or its other targets since Carmen and especially Gabina are isolated from the community. The chapter concludes with the description of the photographs and says nothing of the neighbors’ reaction, but presumably they do not share Gabina’s belief in magic and are more scandalized by her relationship with Carmen than by Alfredo’s infidelity and neglect. The altar illustrates Gabina’s earlier threat against her employer, “la mierda se le va a venir en contra” (202) and adds to the general sense of forboding in a novel that we know will end in death. However, Alfredo is not one of the ones to suffer directly when the hidden violence in the novel comes out into the open: he is able to keep his job as an insurance executive through the economic trouble that begins to destroy his neighbors fortunes and security, and he is not one of the group to die in Tano Scaglia’s pool.

Carmen and Gabina’s triumph lies not in their ability to bring Alfredo down, ruin his reputation, or even find a happy ending for themselves, but simply in getting out of the story other people tell about them. Carmen has decided to ignore the standards of her community and embrace Gabina’s company, and perhaps her spriritual beliefs, instead. The two women are exiled from what the the narrative voice considers an ideal community, but they have also escaped from the community’s control over them by escaping from the narrative itself. Their future is one of freedom precisely in that their story does not have closure. Just as the curse against Alfredo predicts the misfortune that will come to Tano Scaglia, Gustavo Masotta, and Martín Urovich, Carmen and Gabina's unnarrated escape indicates that there may be hope for Virginia and her family to leave oppressiveness of Altos de la Cascada behind after the narrative ends.

The main plot of the novel, to which it returns in the final chapters, escalates the theme of forced conformity from driving two women away to driving three men to their deaths. As the easy money of the 1990s starts to run out, the residents of La Cascada can no longer depend on their financial prosperity to unite them in common cause. In this environment the expectation of conformity escalates into violence, and the Guevara family risks losing not only their position within the community but also their ability to escape.

Tano Scaglia, the rich and powerful man whose house is quietly envied by so many of his neighbors, is the one to hatch the insurance plan and share it with his closest friends, Ronie Guevara, Martín Urovich, and Gustavo Masotta. Having lost his job eighteen months earlier, when the Dutch bank he worked for decided to curtail its operations in Argentina, Tano has managed to keep his unemployment secret, even from his own family. Everyone knows that Ronie hasn't worked in years, that Martín is moving with his family to the United States in order to seek work, and that Gustavo does not love his wife. Since these men are no longer able to fulfill the roles expected of them as husbands, fathers, and providers, Tano argues that they should be willing to sacrifice themselves for the sake of their widows, who will keep the insurance money if their deaths appear to be an accident. Tano shares the shame and anger felt by Máiquel in Patrícia Melo's *O matador* when his wife talked about making more money than he did, and which contributed to his decision to kill for money. And though Tano proposes this idea as suicide, he believes the plan will only work if all of them cooperate. Ronie manages to leave before they can go through with it, but when Gustavo resists, he is pushed into the water and dies along with Tano and Martín.

In the following days, Ronie attends the funeral in silence, unwilling to speak out and let anyone know that he deaths were not an accident. When he does tell the widows what he saw, he is met first by disbelief and then by threats from more prominent men in the community, Ernesto Andrade and Alfredo Insúa, who tell him the secret must be kept quiet. But the incident was witnessed and filmed by the teenagers Juani and Romina, hiding in a nearby tree. They show the recording to Juani's parents and Virginia makes the decision to flee Los Altos with her family and Romina by car, yet when they reach the security checkpoint they are flagged to stop. Their fear is that the guard may try to keep them in, that conformity will be enforced violently for them as it was for Gustavo. In fact the guard wants to warn them of the danger on the outside: the residents of Los Tigrecitos are building barricades, fearing violence from the even poorer neighborhoods surrounding them. Los Altos has brought in additional security in case of riots. This is early October and the riots that would end de la Rúa's presidency are still several months off, but Virginia notes from the scent of flowers in the gardens that "diciembre ya estaba en el aire" (317). As they leave the checkpoint, Virginia asks her husband, "¿Te da miedo salir?" (318)

The novel ends with this question rather than a resolution, leaving the reader with the same uncertainty that the characters face. We recall that Todorov distinguishes between two narratives within a detective story, one for the crime itself and a second for its investigation, and sees the main innovation of the hard-boiled novel in the fact that it shifts the emphasis to this second story, putting the detective (and vicariously the reader who identifies with him) at risk. The reader is more motivated by suspense over what will happen than, as in a classical detective story, curiosity over what did happen. This is another way that *Las viudas* engages with the hard-boiled tradition despite the absence of a tough-guy hero. At the end of the novel, the mysterious event that set the narrative in motion, the incident at Tano Scaglia's pool, has already been explained, but the second story, the question of what will happen to the "detectives" as a result of having uncovered the truth, is still up in the air.

Having chosen their place of residence and built their lives around the idea of security, they must now confront the idea that one side of the fence is no safer than the other; the difference instead is that the dangers on the inside are known, and the rest of the world is a mystery. Virginia has worked as much as anyone else to perpetuate this difference, keeping notes on all her neighbors but ignoring their lives outside of Altos de la Cascada. As she explains early on, she and her neighbors choose not to talk or even think about their origins: "Los que venimos a vivir a Altos de la Cascada decimos que lo hacemos buscando 'el verde', la vida sana, el deporte, la seguridad. Excusados en eso, inclusive ante nosotros mismos, no terminamos de confesar por qué venimos. Y con el tiempo ya ni nos acordamos. El ingreso a La Cascada produce cierto mágico olvido del pasado" (30). The novel does not "finish" getting the truth out either, never giving much background on who Virginia or the other characters were before they arrived or what they will do now that the foundations of their community have collapsed. With only a few exceptions, the outside world is unknown and unknowable. But, as Carmen and Gabina's and now Virginia's choice to leave suggests, this uncertainty may be preferable to the oppressive surveillance on the inside, and in this sense the ending is hopeful.

The sociological concept of "quotidian disruption" is useful for understanding what is beginning to happen to Virginia as well as other characters in Claudia Piñeiro's novels. Put forward by David Snow and colleagues in 1998, this theory examines how social movements can be catalyzed by a change in daily routines and cultural attitudes. Elizabeth Borland and Barbara Sutton, who conducted field research among Argentine women political activists in 2002 and 2003, see the economic crisis of that period as such a disruption: women who had previously taken social and economic inequality for granted began to reevaluate these conditions. While Borland and Sutton are especially interested in the change in routine brought about by changes in economic conditions and subsistence routines, Snow and colleagues also see "actual or threatened intrusion into and/or violation of citizens' sense of privacy, safety, and control" as a crucial element in mobilizing collective action (Snow et al. 1).

In *Las viudas de los jueves*, Piñeiro uses the deaths of three characters to dramatize the economic changes that have begun to take effect. The crisis for the community that their loss provokes foreshadows the economic crisis that will come to a head for the rest of the country a few months later. Piñeiro's focus on female characters and women's issues sets her apart from the other authors I study, and indeed from most Latin American authors who write crime fiction. But the task of putting women at the center of a *novela negra* is one she purposefully leaves unfinished. She is not writing a feminist utopia or even a story in which women gain consciousness of systematic inequality and organize to fight against it. What has happened so far is the disruption, and political conscientization may or may not follow.

Las viudas de los jueves is a novel about women, but about women whose lives revolve around men. Everything that is told in the novel is what the women of Altos de la Cascada know, and most of the action has to do with these women as well. But the plot and conflict among the four men, while it takes up relatively few pages, gives everything else its shape. Virginia first observes the action at the pool through the trees from the terrace of her own home, then in her husband's recounting, and finally in Juani and Romina's video recording – but the *actors* are the men. The title's use of the word *viudas* puts the female characters in the foreground but also defines them in relation to their husbands, and specifically to this action of killing, of which the women are observers and (secondary) victims but not protagonists. The way these women participate in telling their own and each others' stories shows that they may well not mind being defined in this way; Virginia takes pride in knowing that she and her husband are "parte del grupo de amigos más reducido de los Scaglia" (51) and enjoys the private nature of the joke that calls the wives of the group widows. The title of Piñeiro's other 2005 novel, *Tuya*, does a similar thing, referring to a woman who signs her love letters not by her own name but by her relationship with a married man. But again, it is a title that the women have chosen: although the narrator Inés dislikes her husband's mistress, she feels sympathy for her in her desire to be Ernesto's, "Tuya", rather than her father's daughter, as news reporters refer to her. Inés reflects: "Me saqué de encima el mote 'la hija de Blanca' cuando pasé a ser 'la mujer de Ernesto'. Y me encanta que me llamen así, siento que me da mi lugar en el mundo" (60-61), as if it does not occur to her that she might have a place in the world simply as Inés.

The pattern in Piñeiro's fiction goes beyond the question of how women name themselves to their general view of the world. In each of these novels, the narrators are women who have always accepted the dominant social order and their own roles within it. Within the course of the story, as the reader sees gross injustices through their eyes, the narrators only begin to sense that they may have been wrong. The sudden, unexpected death of Virginia's neighbors, Inés's husband's mistress, and Elena's daughter is, in each case, the disruption that causes them to take a second look at their lives and relationships as they have lived them up until now. Piñeiro leaves open the question of what they will do as a result of their new understanding, but the clear need for a new way of thinking about the world makes her characters fundamentally different from the archetypal detective, who uses his vast knowledge and intelligence to find order in chaos of a seemingly unsolvable murder. This difference is strongest in Piñeiro's third novel, *Elena sabe*, the one most closely patterned after a traditional detective novel and therefore offering the most marked contrast to its model.

The Paralyzed Detective: *Elena sabe*

Piñeiro's third novel, *Elena sabe*, begins with the promise of a detective novel and works with a classic structure: a crucial piece of knowledge that is hidden from the reader. Its main character, Elena, is an elderly woman of limited economic means whose daughter Rita has recently died; the police have declared the death a suicide but Elena believes it must have been murder. Rita was found hanging from the bell tower of the neighborhood church after a thunderstorm, but Elena insists that her daughter, even if she had been deeply depressed, would never have climbed to the tower during a storm because of her lifelong fear of being struck by lightning. Since Elena lacks the ability to investigate on her own, she intends to find another woman, Isabel, who owes her and Rita a favor, and ask her to solve the crime for her.

But after this initial setup, Piñeiro frustrates the reader's expectations of a detective novel in one aspect after the other. The fact that the novel takes place in Argentina rather than California or England is the least of these ruptures. The cast of characters includes a professional male police detective, but the novel focuses instead on Elena, an elderly woman with Parkinson's disease for whom it is impossible to move enough to perform an investigation. The hidden element at first appears to be Rita's death, but the novel never supplies a definitive answer as to whether this death was murder or suicide. The identity of the killer is left aside as unknowable while Piñeiro puts another mystery and another crime – the story of what happened between Elena, Rita, and Isabel – in its place. *Elena sabe* even frustrates a pattern of many socially conscious detective novels of recent decades, in which the individual death being investigated is seen as part of a larger problem of injustice such as a series of murders against prostitutes or prisoners. The issue that links all three women is the loss of control over their own bodies, but it is impossible to blame an outside actor, even a group as diffuse as "the wealthy", the government, or men. These women have harmed themselves and each other and are disadvantaged by laws and the state health system, but Elena's worst enemy is a disease with no cure.

Even though the detective is not an essential character in most Latin American crime fiction, *Elena sabe* sets up several characters as detectives in order to call attention to their displacement or failure. Benito Avellaneda, the police detective assigned to the case, is the character who most resembles a traditional hard-boiled detective: an honorable man with weaknesses, isolated, tired, dissatisfied with his work and stymied in his career. The fact that he has been assigned to deal with Elena at all is a sign of the trouble his career is in: "Avellaneda no es ni era inspector, nunca pasó de cabo, su responsabilidad de atender a Elena fue su castigo, una especie de *probation* clandestina dentro de los cuadros de la policía" for having been caught having sex on the job (86). But here the detective appears only briefly while the narrative follows Elena, the stubborn old lady who would have been a minor, perhaps comical character if the hard-boiled model had been followed more closely. Elena remains present, even when Avellaneda and the rest of the police dismiss her. Indeed, she is literally incapable of moving on physically as well as psychologically.

But Elena herself, despite having the motivation to find out what happened to her daughter, also fails as a detective. She is limited by her age, her gender, her economic status, and above all by the illness that keeps her from being able to move around on her own. This lack of mobility in turn limits her knowledge of the city, without which she cannot control the space in the way a traditional detective must do. Despite the immense difficulty, Elena does manage to make the journey across Buenos Aires in one day, repeating the names of streets and stations to herself as she rides on a train, the subway and finally a taxi, from her own humble neighborhood toward the wealthier area where Isabel lives in the northern part of the city: "Lupo, Moreno, 25 de

Mayo, Mitre, Roca. Roca, Mitre, 25 de Mayo, Moreno, Lupo (14); "Constitución, 9 de Julio, Libertador, Figueroa Alcorta, Planetario, Monumento a los Españoles, Libertador, Olleros, una puerta de madera, herrajes de bronce, una puerta, Olleros, Libertador, 9 de Julio, Constitución" (19). With the repetition of street names and landmarks, Piñeiro emphasizes what her character knows about the city while lacking the physical ability to dominate it as a traditional (male, able-bodied) detective would do.

While Elena would not be able to drive a car because of her disability, her difference from the traditional hard-boiled detective is also one of social and economic power, a theme that has been present in many Latin American adaptations of the hardboiled genre. Chandler and Hammett's detectives and even later first-world rewritings of the figure, such as Walter Mosley's African American hero Easy Rawlins or Sara Paretski's woman detective V. I. Warshawski, are often hard up for work and struggle to pay the bills, but they own their own homes and drive their own cars. The freedom to move around large sprawling cities like Los Angeles and Chicago is part of what gives these detectives their authority, even though they have less money or social position to their advantage than many of the other characters in those works.[1] In contrast, Elena takes a train into the city and debates whether to go the rest of the way by subway, despite not being able to stand on her own, because of the money it will cost to take a taxi. By the time she nears Isabel's home, her medication has worn off and she is dependent on the cab driver and other strangers to help her reach her destination.

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[1] Barbara Neely's Blanche White books, about a working class African American woman who solves crimes while being mistreated or ignored by the people who employ her as a maid, share some features with Piñeiro's *Elena sabe* in that they emphasize the central characters' dependence on others, often owing to systemic inequalities. However, Blanche still consistently manages to solve the mystery through her cunning, providing satisfaction for the reader that is missing in *Elena sabe* and, in general, much less of a given in Latin American crime fiction than in the United States.

Elena's dependence on public transportation is fairly typical of characters in other Latin American crime novels and, indeed, of real inhabitants of Latin American cities; however, other Latin American writers have tended to acknowledge this difference in a way that still gives the power of knowledge to their characters. As critics have been noting for over a century, detectives' intimate familiarity with the cities they inhabit is essential not only for their ability to solve crimes within the story, but also for the reading public's ability to cope with the unknowability of the modern city. This characteristic has taken different forms as the genre is translated and updated in Latin American contexts – for example, Close contrasts Paco Ignacio Taibo II's detective's use of the Mexico City metro and other public transportation with US private eyes' reliance on cars (*Contemporary* 34). Lidia Santos finds that Melo's *O matador*, despite taking place in São Paulo, lacks textual markers specific to that city, a sign of Brazilian urban culture's increased homogeneity resulting from globalization and commercialization (Santos 39). Cities are only half-recognizable in Piglia's *La ciudad ausente* because of transformations the city suffers in the characters' cyclical journeys, fitting with the dreamlike tone of the novel and the general theme of storytelling as countless repetitions with difference. The absent city is never definitively Buenos Aires or La Plata but at times merges with Poe's Paris and London or James Joyce's Dublin, just as Argentine literature has incorporated the work of those writers.

Piñeiro's version of the detective is perhaps the most pessimistic of all in that Elena's economic and physical limitations in turn limit her knowledge. Despite all her practicing and planning, once she approaches her destination her directions fail her, since they are based on a sense memory from twenty years ago and she does not have a street address. She remembers the house being close to a medical clinic, but an exchange between the driver and several passersby reveals that there has not been any clinic in that neighborhood for years (125-126). Instead of giving readers hope that Elena will be clever enough not only to make her way to Isabel's home but to find out what happened to Rita, Piñeiro allows these mysteries to remain unresolved; Elena's feeling of helplessness is compounded when she is finally told that she cannot know everything.

In addition to shifting the emphasis from one character to another, Piñeiro has moved the central mystery of the novel away from the crime of Rita's death. In fact, it is never established with certainty whether a murder has even occurred. The late revelation for the reader is that the relationship between Elena, Rita, and Isabel is based on the fact that Rita prevented Isabel from having an abortion twenty years earlier. Like a good mystery writer, Piñeiro has left clues for these revelations early on in the book, as Elena is walking in her own neighborhood and before she reaches the subway: "Unos pasos más adelante las baldosas en damero negro y blanco le indican que está pasando frente a la casa de la partera. Rita no volvió a pisar la vereda de damero a partir del día en que se enteró de que en esa casa se hacían abortos. Abortera, no partera, mamá…"

(31). This last phrase, in which Rita appears to interrupt her mother's thoughts, is repeated almost exactly as "la partera, abortera, mamá" (135) in a much later chapter, and it is only at this point that the importance of who lived in the house becomes clear. Elena's journey on the day the novel takes place is the mirror image of one that Isabel made, traveling from her husband's home to Elena and Rita's neighborhood in order to visit a clandestine abortion clinic. Elena expects Isabel to help her just as, in her mind, Elena and Rita helped Isabel by steering her away from a decision she would regret.

What is remarkable is that Elena and Rita never questioned whether what they did was right, even though the narration from Elena's point of view seems to suggest that, even before her conversation with Isabel, she is aware that Rita was overstepping her place: "Aquella tarde," Elena recalls, "Rita, que no era madre ni nunca lo será, obligó a otra mujer a serlo, forzando el dogma aprendido hasta llegar al cuerpo de otro" (134). In Elena's memory, the three women ride together in a taxi to Isabel's home while Isabel repeats that she is not a mother and has no child, but "ni Rita ni Elena la escucharon" (135). Elena does not reflect on the possibility that their actions may have harmed Isabel, even though her opposition to abortion appears to be much less forceful than Rita's. Elena continues to think of the house as that of the midwife, rather than the abortionist, and after Rita's death Elena gives up the habit of avoiding that sidewalk, understanding that it had more to do with superstition than religion:

> No pisar la vereda de damero de la partera, no ir a la iglesia los días de lluvia y no acercarse a la casa de los Inchauspe…. Sin mencionar que Rita se tocaba la nalga derecha si se cruzaba con un pelirrojo, al tiempo que decía con el mismo tono con que decía el padrenuestro, pelirrojo la

> puta que te parió, o se tocaba con la mano derecha el pecho izquierdo si alguien mencionaba a Liberti, un pobre viejo que era considerado yeta en el barrio. (38)

Without having changed her mind completely, Elena, unlike Rita, is beginning to question the things she has been taught. Her argument with the neighborhood priest, Padre Juan, shows both that Elena cares more deeply about religion than her more observably observant daughter, and that she is no longer willing to accept an idea only because it is church dogma.

Elena and Padre Juan argue about who has the right to decide what to do with their body, and this points to yet another way in which Piñeiro upsets the expectations she has set up for a crime novel: *Elena sabe* has no villain. It has plenty of unsympathetic characters, including Elena herself and, most dramatically, Isabel's husband, who had her locked up and forced to carry the child to term after Rita and Elena brought her home. But his violence against her is not the main crime of the story, nor is he or any single person responsible for the tragedy. If in the founding texts of hard-boiled crime fiction the tendency was to hold women, sexual and ethnic minorities, the poor and the unemployed responsible for the downfall of hardworking white men, progressive revisions of the genre have placed the blame higher up, with corrupt men in positions of power. Although critics often assert that there is no acknowledgement of systemic inequality and oppression in the genre, since the 1970s many works in the US, Latin America, and elsewhere have dealt with sexism and racism both as motivators for violence and as barriers in the way of their detectives. In Argentina the clues often lead back to the police or the government, who may be allied with business executives and other powerful actors – men like Isabel's husband or the husbands in *Las viudas de los jueves*. But *Elena sabe* does not allow the blame to rest with any individual actors or even with more diffuse forces of discrimination.

Parkinson's Disease is much more prominent than any other antagonist throughout and may well have been the main cause of Rita's suicide – a brief chapter just before the end of the novel withholds the details of Rita's death but details her last meeting with the family doctor and the grim prognosis he delivered of Elena's increasing decline and helplessness. Early on, Elena's hatred for her disease causes her to personify it as "Ella":

> Elena sabe desde hace un tiempo que ya no es ella la que manda sobre algunas partes de su cuerpo, los pies por ejemplo. Manda él. O ella. Y se pregunta si al Parkinson habría que tratarlo de él o de ella, porque aunque el nombre propio le suena masculino no deja de ser una enfermedad, y una enfermedad es femenina. Como lo es una desgracia. O una condena. Entonces decide que lo va a llamar Ella, porque cuando la piensa, piensa "qué enfermedad puta". Y puta es ella, no él. (15)

Elena needs a person to blame and falls back on a gendered insult – she most often refers to her illness as Ella and occasionally as a "puta enfermedad puta" but never by the common, masculine construction "mal de Parkinson". Meanwhile, she personifies the medication on which she depends as a "chasqui" carrying chemicals to and from the brain, a masculine ally in the struggle against "Ella".

Like Inés in *Tuya* and Virginia in *Las viudas de los jueves*, Elena too takes part in sexist attitudes and actions. Flashbacks to her first meeting with Isabel show her to be fairly passive, riding along in the car and saying little while Rita prevents Isabel from having an abortion. But Elena is also cruel toward her own daughter, in her day-to-day grouchiness but most glaringly in another memory when Rita is subjected to a humiliating and painful medical exam to determine whether or not she has a uterus: "Pará de llorar, Rita, que si te ponés así por un estudio mejor que no puedas tener hijos en serio, si supieras lo que duele, ¿no, doctor?, ah, yo no sé cuánto duele, dijo Benegas y se rieron juntos" (80). That Elena can share a laugh with the male doctor over the fact that he does not understand women's pain while Rita suffers shows that Elena, at least at that point in her life, is not concerned about the way the medical system disadvantages women. Rita in turn displays the same lack of understanding when she tells Isabel that whether or not she wants to be a mother "no es tu decisión" and "no podés ir contra lo que Dios manda…Él sabe, vos no tenés que entender sino confiar" (133).

Elena's experience with Parkinson's keeps her from having the same uncritical trust in God, as can be seen in her argument with Padre Juan. The priest does not deny Rita's right to be buried in the Catholic cemetery, but he believes she has in fact committed suicide and thus defied God: when Elena mentions that she might hang herself, he chastises her, "el cuerpo es un objeto del dominio de Dios y el hombre tiene sobre él únicamente el derecho de uso"; Elena immediately responds, "yo no tengo derecho de uso sobre mi cuerpo", indicating that she is more aware than the priest of the connections between Rita's death and Elena's illness (72). What Elena fails to do at this point is to make a further connection that is readily available to the reader, that

Isabel too has been denied the right to use of her body when she was prevented from ending her pregnancy.

When Elena finally reaches Isabel's home, the promised detective narrative falls apart completely. Elena believes – has believed for the last twenty years – that Isabel must be grateful to her and to Rita for having stopped her on the sidewalk in their neighborhood. Elena and especially Rita believed their intervention was heroic – they'd saved a stranger from an action that she would regret for the rest of her life. However, what Isabel now regrets is having had a child. More so than *Tuya*, in which the pregnant daughter seeking a clandestine abortion is nearly as selfish and irresponsible as her mother understands her to be, and in which the broader social context of illegal abortions is mostly ignored, *Elena sabe* presents a strong argument for the legalization of abortion in the voice of Isabel, a mature woman who speaks rationally and passionately about how she was forced to bear a child. Elena is silenced by her physical inability to speak but also by the fact that she has no answer to Isabel's story. In attempting to argue with her, Elena repeats stock phrases learned from politicians and priests, but she speaks without conviction. Elena has sought Isabel out because of her presumed gratitude toward the family and her presumed mobility – she is much younger, healthier, and wealthier than Elena. What she finds instead is that Isabel is angry and trapped. She blames Elena for her own unhappy life and is unwilling to help her find out who might have murdered Rita, frustrating Elena's quest as Elena and Rita frustrated hers.

In *Bodies in Crisis: Culture, Violence, and Women's Resistance in Neoliberal Argentina*, sociologist Barbara Sutton devotes a chapter to Argentine women's attitudes toward and experiences of abortion in the post-dictatorship, post-economic crisis period in which Piñeiro also writes. She describes an ad that appeared in *La nación* newspaper in 2003 that referred to abortion as “The Perfect Crime”: it is murder, says the ad, but disguised by the language of abortion rights as “‘the right to decide’ or ‘the right to reproductive health’” (cited in Sutton 100). In fact, abortion *is* a crime in Argentina and women who have them may be sentenced to four years in prison, but this seldom happens. The most important effect of anti-abortion laws is not to prevent abortions from happening or to put women in prison, but to make abortions difficult, expensive, and very often unsafe (117-127). The state joins with the Catholic Church to intensify the societal expectation that women must want to be mothers: abnegated caregivers who sacrifice their own bodies and desires for the sake of others (96-97).

Claudia Piñeiro shows the flip side of the argument presented in the anti-abortion ad: her novel presents the violation of women’s bodily integrity as the crime that is covered up by calling it something else. Rita, Elena, Isabel’s abusive husband, the law, the church, and Isabel’s own bad luck and lack of strength all contributed to her being forced to bear a child and devote the next twenty years to raising a daughter. The end of the novel suggests that, if Rita did commit suicide, it was to escape being forced to sacrifice more of her own life to caring for her mother.

Although she refuses to conduct the investigation Elena wants, Isabel does offer her a kind of solution, explaining in a more convincing way than the police or anyone else has managed why Rita’s death might have been suicide after all. She points out that there is no way of knowing what another person feels. Just as Elena and Rita had no idea just how desperate Isabel was not to have a child, no one, including Elena, can know just how unhappy Rita was in her life, driving her to go up to the church tower despite all her fears. Isabel insists that Elena does not know what Rita felt. She *cannot* know.

Isabel's revelations disrupt the certainty that Elena has clung to throughout the day, and indeed throughout the last twenty years. While lacking the power to travel and interview witnesses, Elena has had another essential attribute of the detective: knowledge. The phrase "Elena sabe", used for the title and dozens of times in the narration, puts everything that happens in the novel in some sense under her control. Moments like the end of the cab ride and again in the confrontation with Isabel, where Elena's certainty gives out, are tragic because knowledge appeared to be the only resource left to her. Having set up and then demolished one after another the conventions of a detective novel, Piñeiro ends with Elena stroking Isabel's cat, unable to think clearly enough to answer Isabel's question of what she will do next: "entonces no dice, no responde, no sabe, o porque ahora sí sabe, no dice, no responde" (173). She is forced to accept that she is powerless and probably will never know what happened to her daughter.

Conclusion

In the same talk cited at the beginning of this chapter, Ana María Shua expressed sympathy for Piñeiro, saying she had become an easy target for criticism *because* she'd been successful. Shua's comentary relates to Laura Freixas' assertion that successful women writers are especially susceptible to the charge of *bestsellerismo*, or writing whatever the market demands rather than being true to their art. Freixas's

2000 essay *Mujeres y literatura* deals specifically with the treatment of women writers in Spain, but similar patterns can be observed in Argentina and other countries: reporters emphasize women writers' popularity more than their art; if several women receive critical praise or literary prizes this is treated as an anomaly, and if the pattern continues for several years it is seen as a sign of the decline of critical tastes – critics must be bowing to mass markets just as the writers themselves have done. Claire Lindsay (2003) notes that academics often make much of Chilean novelist Isabel Allende's popularity, especially before going on to call her work imitative and unchallenging.

The same patterns of condescension without outright sexism can be seen in comments about Claudia Piñeiro from cultural reporters, casual readers, and her fellow novelists. Piñeiro's first two novels, *Tuya* and *Las viudas de los jueves*, were both published in 2005, but *Las viudas* received more immediate attention because it won the Premio Clarín de Novela, an anonymous contest judged by a panel including Portuguese Nobel Prize winner José Saramago and Rosa Montero of Spain. This prize led to the novel being published in a collaboration between *Clarín* and the major publisher Alfaguara and promoted in one of Argentina's most important daily papers. *Tuya*, despite being issued by a smaller publisher and with less press, was also an easily accessible and short novel that had considerable success. Articles about Piñeiro almost always mention her sales along with the Clarín prize, but usually have little to say about her contribution to an important genre in Argentine literature.

Mexican novelist Carmen Boullosa is one of several Latin American women writers to declare that they would rather be judged in the company of all other writers than compared to other women – either as part of a trend for sentimental romances or as exceptions to the rule. In a 1995 interview Boullosa explained her desire to be considered an *escritor* rather than an *escritora*: she does not want to be grouped together with women who write *literatura light*, the kind of writers she met at a conference where a woman who had been trained as an accountant taught herself the rules of writing a successful novel and so published a bestseller.

Boullosa could not have been referring to Piñeiro, who only began to publish novels a decade later, but her work is in many ways the kind Boullosa rejects, in which "lo importante es … el mundo doméstico" rather than language and the world of literature (52-53). Piñeiro is herself a certified accountant and has said in interviews that she has long lived and raised children in a wealthy suburb similar to the community she writes about in *Las viudas de los jueves*. While she includes brief passages from the perspectives of poor employees in *Las viudas* and writes about more vulnerable women in *Elena sabe*, both of her first two novels focus mostly on upper-middle-class Argentine wives and mothers whose biographies resemble her own life before she became a professional writer. Her characters are housewives, real estate agents, landscapers, and maids rather than writers, reporters or detectives. From some perspectives this makes her novels less interesting than those of Fonseca, Melo, and Piglia, with their extensive treatment of the process of writing and frequent references to other works of literature. However, Piñeiro's writing, by combining the traditionally feminine domains of the private home and relationships between women with the structure and plot elements of the *novela policial*, takes the genre in new directions that few other writers have. The fact that her novels use simple language and suspense to hook their readers in does not take away from their value as stories or as interventions in a genre that has long ignored women's voices and subjectivity.

Another reason Piñeiro's novels may be regarded as light reading is that they are not overtly political, at least not in the sense of addressing government responsibility for violence, which has been one of the most salient features of the Argentine *novela negra* since the 1970s. Initially dismissed (by Borges among others) as crude and plebeian – a less worthy form than the classical detective story, which was itself a popular genre rather than high literature – the *novela negra* has become an important tool for writing about the military dictatorship of 1976-1983 and its aftermath. Shua – one of the more prominent fiction writers to remain in Argentina and continue publishing during that period – discussed the writerly paralysis provoked by state terror: one could not write about anything political for fear of attracting the attention of the government and putting one's life and family in danger, but at the same time writing about anything *other* than the political situation felt like a morally bankrupt enterprise. As the military dictatorship becomes more distant in history and memory, it continues to be a frequent topic in Argentine fiction but has ceased to be the only topic a writer can in good conscience address.

Piñeiro's novels neither mention the dictatorship nor refer to it obliquely (as Piglia's have done), but this does not mean they are apolitical or escapist, only that the political topics they explore are different. And while these novels preserve much of the darkness and pessimism that has dominated Argentine crime fiction since the last dictatorship, they also bring back elements of the classical detective story such as the closed community of *Las viudas de los jueves* and the importance of gossip to its plot.

Close’s chapter on Argentina in *Contemporary Hispanic Crime Fiction* (which does not mention Piñeiro) ends with the question of whether the *novela de enigma* has resurged in recent years, in works such as Guillermo Martínez’s *Crímenes imperceptibles* (2003) and Pablo de Santis’s *El enigma de París* (2007) (Close 137-139). Notably, both of these novels take place in Europe and in past decades rather than in the Argentine present. Other de Santis novels have been set in unusually wealthy and isolated communities within Argentina, a move which allows him to comment on these communities’ difference from the rest of Argentina while still making space for a classical mystery plot, much like Piñeiro’s use of the isolated suburb in *Las viudas de los jueves*. Gandolfo groups Piñeiro, de Santis, and Martínez together as practitioners of “El nuevo policial argentino” but dedicates more attention to differences between the three than to generalizations and trends. My own observation is that the critique of authoritarian government remains strong but that increasing political freedom in Argentina has also led to greater artistic freedom, including a new diversity of styles, topics, character perspectives, and ways of engaging with the Argentine and international traditions of crime fiction.

Conclusions

In my introduction I briefly reviewed the long histories of crime fiction in Argentina and Brazil, with attention to the recognition of hard-boiled fiction and its uses in the 1960s and ’70s. After having analyzed works by two authors in each of these countries in some depth, I want to use this space to return to the question of how they are affected by their national histories and literary traditions, as well as several other axes of comparison between the four authors. Rubem Fonseca and Ricardo Piglia’s careers have spanned several decades and major changes in the political and cultural conditions in their countries. Both these more established authors and the more recent Melo and Piñeiro are now writing in a climate of greater freedom and diversity than in the 1970s, but also one that is more dominated by market considerations. All four of them make use of the formulas and conventions of hard-boiled crime fiction without being bound by them. To varying degrees, they all depend on the active participation of the reader in constructing a different narrative than what is presented on the surface. Thus, although I have sought to bring out the feminist and liberatory possibilities of these works and of crime fiction in general, it is important to acknowledge that at some level all of them continue to repeat images and attitudes that are harmful to women.

Literatura policial in Argentina and Brazil

Ricardo Piglia is part of a group of Argentine authors and intellectuals who recognized the possibilities for relevance of hard-boiled fiction in an atmosphere of state violence and repression. Building on Argentine readers' familiarity with classic detective fiction, he brought the US hard-boiled style to their attention and has used some of its codes in his own fiction. As I argued in my discussion of *La ciudad ausente*, part of Piglia's work has been to mark the distinctions between the *novela negra* and other genres, but another part has been to undo the rigid separation between literary fiction and popular genre fiction. In that novel, references to the characters, settings, and structure of hard-boiled detective fiction slip and circulate alongside references to Joyce, Poe, and Macedonio Fernández as well as elements of science fiction and *testimonio*. The effect is to present hard-boiled fiction as an integral part of Argentine literature. Neither its foreign origins nor its popularity with a lowbrow audience keep it apart from other elements of Argentine culture.

This integration has been very effective, as can be seen in the set up of Argentine bookstores, the reputations of other authors who write crime fiction, and the tendency for elements of crime fiction to be combined with other genres. Anthologies like *Las fieras* and *Escritos con sangre* mark the genre as important, but the names one sees there also appear in books associated with other genres or presented simply as Argentine fiction. Critics and fans of Piglia, Osvaldo Soriano, Mempo Giardinelli, and Guillermo Martínez readily acknowledge that crime fiction is a part of their work, but they all also write other types of literature, and their books appear on bookstore shelves alongside other Argentine or Spanish-language authors.

In a conversation about her own interest in the detective genre in 2008, Luisa Valenzuela remarked to me that the Argentine tradition is one of "reflexión detectivesca": that is, Argentines seldom write straightforward detective stories, but they do often write fiction that is *about* detective stories. Her 1990 *Novela negra con argentinos* performs this kind of reflection, beginning with an apparent senseless murder but moving into a broader investigation of the parallels between the act of killing and the act of writing, the fluidity of sexual and gender identity, and the meaning of exile. The precedent set by Borges – who pays homage to formula of the puzzle story while unmaking it in “La muerte y la brújula” – and continued by Walsh, Juan José Feinmann, Piglia, Valenzuela, and many others, provides newer writers like Claudia Piñeiro, Pablo de Santis, and Guillermo Martínez with a model for how to engage with the conventions of the genre. Thus, they need not make specific reference to Borges or other Argentine writers, but they follow the same practice of using it to reflect on the meaning of crime, investigation, reading, justice, and truth in complex and challenging narratives.

In some sense, crime fiction has been more integrated into mainstream literary fiction in Argentina than in Britain or the United States, despite these countries more often being seen as the genre’s natural home. In English-speaking countries, crime fiction remains *a genre*, with genre authors, genre readers, publishers, etc. and a more rigid expectation from readers of the limitations of the genre. An illustration of the differences in reader perception can be seen in the case of Guillermo Martínez, whose work has been successful as literature in Spanish and as genre literature in English. His 2003 novel *Crímenes imperceptibles* was translated as *The Oxford Murders* and was a bestseller in the United Kingdom, later made into an English-language movie by Spanish director Álex de la Iglesia. When he wrote his next novel, *La muerte lenta de Luciana B.*, his English publisher Abacus suggested that the English title should have a place name, for instance "Death in Buenos Aires", to mark it as part of a series with *The Oxford Murders* ("Narrativa"). It was eventually called *The Book of Murder* and received generally positive reviews, although some readers complained that the ending did not satisfy – that is, it did not conform to the genre expectation of a neat solution. In Argentina, Martínez is known for his earlier novels and short stories that did not center on murder, and for his nonfiction writing in *La nación* and *Clarín*. Argentine readers can recognize his references to Borges and his continuation of the tradition of twisting around the expectations of the genre, especially in the dénouement.

In contrast to the Argentine situation, although Rubem Fonseca's realistic depiction of violence and his recreation of the language of the urban underclass have had a deep and wide-ranging influence on contemporary Brazilian literature, film, and television, they have not given mystery plots the same level of prestige and integration with literary fiction. Brazilian bookstores have the same practice of grouping together all Brazilian fiction, and writers like Flávio Moreira da Costa and Georges Lamazière have written the kind of metafiction that is common in Argentina and in the works studied in this dissertation. But Brazilian writers are more likely to build their reputations either as genre writers or as non-genre writers. Luiz Alfredo Garcia-Roza, Tony Bellotto and other contemporary Brazilian writers have each created detectives who come back in one book after another, giving attention to different aspects of life in the city. The series detective is a model that has long been popular in the English-speaking world and has also become important in Spain, Mexico, and Cuba, but which has not taken hold in Argentina, suggesting that there is a downside to the extent to which the genre has been embraced there: it is not separate enough to sustain independent series and authors as a truly popular genre.

The increased acceptance of crime fiction in Brazil and Argentina is partly related to a diversification of the literary field since the end of the military governments in the 1980s. Fonseca's 1975 collection *Feliz ano novo* was censored by Brasil's military government, and Piglia's 1980 novel *Respiración artificial* evaded the attention of the Proceso by appearing to speak about the Rosas dictatorship instead. Both men avoided direct criticism of the government but wrote politically provocative work that sometimes took the form of crime fiction. In the decades since it has become easier for a wider variety of writers to have their work published. In addition to increased political freedom, economic growth and higher literacy rates in Brazil have contributed to a greater presence of popular genres including crime fiction. The Argentine economic crisis of December 2001 meant that many formerly middle-class Argentines could no longer afford to buy food, let alone books, but Argentine culture continues to value the arts and freedom of expression.

On the other hand, this freedom goes along with a primacy of markets that many have seen as damaging to literature. It is important to understand that the return to civilian government is not a return to the kind of political or cultural climate that existed in the 1960s, that the authoritarian governments left in place a neoliberal economic structure that is now much more difficult to contest. The armed left in both countries was destroyed, and the kind of socialist future they advocated is no longer seen as a viable possibility. Idelber Avelar argues that it is misleading to the post-dictatorship period as a transition: "the real transitions are in the dictatorships themselves", as they forced the populations to accept the loss of the welfare state and its replacement with unregulated capitalism, a change that would have been impossible under democratic government because of its brutal effects on most of the population (58).

The cultural freedom of the new climate includes the freedom for writers to pursue mass audiences, to repeat successful formulas without innovation if that is what causes books to sell. As I argued in my chapter on Claudia Piñeiro (and as scholars of crime fiction often assert), I believe it is misguided to dismiss an author's work because of its popularity or its accessibility, and that pattern is especially suspect when it is used to discount women's writing. While Ricardo Piglia's intellectual prestige seems to remain untarnished, Fonseca, Melo, and Piñeiro have all been accused of repeating formulas, even of repeating conservative messages that are harmful to women and poor people. As much as Melo plays around with the question of originality in works like *Jonas, o copromanta*, where her character is too quick to accuse Rubem Fonseca of plagiarism, and *Elogio da mentira*, where she shows what a real plagiarist looks like, she continues to be seen as an imitator of an older writer whose formula has already gone stale.

The argument in Fonseca's story "Romance negro" that all literature is escapist will not satisfy those who believe his and Melo's success is a sign of Brazilian literature's decline under neoliberalism, but it is helpful as a way of interrogating whether literature *should* always be an incisive portrait of reality. Significantly, the 1992 collection *Romance negro* is a late return to the short story form for Fonseca after years of publishing only novels. Critics who had praised his early (graphically violent) short stories and derided his later novels as repetitive and unoriginal are portrayed in the text as biased. They value the *romance negro* over *literatura de evasão* or *literatura de enigma* but without explaining why one is better than another. With a far-fetched plot about identical twins and stolen identities, Fonseca writes a story about a writer who escapes death through fiction. Not bound by censorship or the moral obligation to write about what the government is keeping hidden, he and other contemporary Latin American authors can be true to their creative impulses and can delight their readers, whether or not critics approve.

Women's voices and the role of the reader

None of the authors studied in this dissertation have cast a woman in the role of police investigator, private eye, or amateur sleuth, but that approach, popular in English-speaking world, may not be the most interesting or productive in the context of Argentina or Brazil. I do not claim that any of these authors provide an ideal model for how feminists can approach crime fiction, but each of them does offer valuable insights on gender relations in their societies, as well as being pleasurable to read and fascinating in many other ways.

Fonseca's strategy, the least radical of the four, is to soften the sexism of characters who are meant to be sympathetic. In stories like "Feliz ano novo" and "Passeio noturno" where the narrator is a cold-blooded killer, Fonseca allows him to prejudiced as well. But his more laudable detectives like Mandrake and Guedes, and even ambiguous characters like Gustavo Flávio and John Landers, who have killed but with hesitation and regret, display a knowledge of the contemporary city that includes having loving relationships with at least one woman, being on friendly terms with ethnic and sexual minorities, and taking a stand against prejudice when they encounter it. In general, women have only small roles in Fonseca's fiction, and they are motivated by love, sexual desire, and greed. But there are also moments that indicate that intelligent women like Minolta in *Bufo & Spallanzani*, Clotilde in "Romance negro", and Ada in *A grande arte* have their own subjectivity and would offer other interpretations of his stories if given room to speak.

In response to Fonseca's fiction, Patrícia Melo moves the gender imbalance in the opposite direction, playing up the sexism that is essential to early hard-boiled fiction from the United States and that still underlies Fonseca's friendlier version in order to make it obvious, laughable, and distasteful. Her narrators in *O matador*, *Mundo perdido*, *Valsa negra*, and the second half of *Acqua Toffana* all present themselves as sympathetic when telling their story, but they are all clearly men who hate women, who are insecure and threatened, and who blame the people around them for their own mistakes. Her narrators in *Elogio da mentira* and *Jonas, o copromanta* follow a different model, that of the sap who, despite his cleverness and some type of expertise, fails to understand the reality around him. José Guber in *Elogio da mentira* falls victim to the machinations of a classic *femme fatale* who wants to add him to her collection of murdered husbands. Here Melo does less to undercut her hero but she does use literary references to communicate the artificiality of it all: Fúlvia is less a real person than an exaggeration, causing the reader to wonder why anyone would be seduced by a woman so clearly evil.

Ricardo Piglia uses very different techniques in the two novels I analyze: the linear structure and realistic style in *Plata quemada* contrast with the dreamlike repeating narrative in *La ciudad ausente*, but they are both stories about how stories are told. In both cases, the search for objective truth that is at the center of most crime fiction is rejected as a method of coercion, a tool of the state. In *Plata quemada* Piglia rewrites the figure of the hard-boiled criminal outlaw and in *La ciudad ausente* he rejects phallocentric fixity in language, but both of these novels also undermine stories told by their female characters.

Claudia Piñeiro takes a very different approach to crime fiction, leaving intact its structure of double narrative with a crime that is hinted at but mostly hidden until the end of the novel, but she moves the focus of its attention away from cops and robbers, journalists and politicians, and into the private sphere. She writes about forms of violence that have not only been obscured in the early chapters of her novels but throughout much of the history of literature and public discourse.

Detective work is about reading and interpreting, as Ricardo Piglia has often pointed out, and all of these writers thematize the work of reading in their texts, depending heavily on the reader to find the meanings that are not apparent on the surface level. Piglia's *Plata quemada* resembles Fonseca's and Melo's works in that it can be read on multiple levels: in this case, it is presented as a straightforward true-crime novel (based on documented facts) and can be read and enjoyed on those terms, but the careful reader is also directed to pay attention to the way journalists, doctors, and police mediate in the construction of the narrative, making faithfulness to reality an endeavor doomed to failure. In earlier works like "La loca y el relato del crimen" and *Respiración artificial*, Piglia demonstrated the importance of reading in code. *La ciudad ausente* is a difficult and confusing novel that demands the reader's attention to doublings, repetitions, and literary references. It differs from Fonseca and Melo's work and from *Plata quemada* in that it does not offer a straightforward reading of the plot, but rather demands that the reader work to make sense of the many characters, movements, and connections. Still, it also demands a kind of surrender, in that it refuses to tie up all the loose ends of the mystery. Repeating the common parallel between detective and reader, Junior can serve as a model for the reader's task: he observes with curiosity, asks questions, and follows leads, but he eventually gives up trying to get to the bottom of a story that is circular.

Although dependence on the reader adds to the complexity and interest of these works, it also has its drawbacks. As previously mentioned, Fonseca has been controversial for his graphic depictions of sex and violence, especially early in his career. Despite the Brazilian literary establishment's preference for realism, some critics on the left and right did not want to face a reality as brutal and vulgar as what Fonseca depicted in his fiction. Meanwhile, government censors perceived his work as advocating crime and immorality.

In the market-dominated atmosphere of the 1990s and the new millennium, Patrícia Melo has been free to embrace similar themes without fear of being censored or condemned. If there is resistance to her work it is more often from people who feel she does not push far enough in her own direction, instead retreading paths worn down by Fonseca and other earlier writers. It must be recognized though that most of her novels are about men who assault and kill women and then attempt to justify their actions. Moreover, the desire to sympathize with characters like Máiquel and José Guber is strong, despite their obvious dishonesty, their violent acts, and their other faults. *O* *matador* is a thriller in which the protagonist comes to take pleasure in killing, and it is indeed thrilling. Guber, for his part, is both clever and hapless in a way that inspires us to take pity. His girlfriend Fúlvia is a parody of the *femme fatale* but she is also a femme fatale, an irredeemably evil woman who seduces and devours (relatively) innocent men. Melo repeats many harmful stereotypes of women in her novels, and the message that these stereotypes are laughable is not always easy to perceive.

A somewhat similar situation obtains in Claudia Piñeiro's work, even though her style is very different and her focus is on female characters. These characters are generally less intelligent and perceptive than the reader. This can be a useful way of pointing out injustice in the everyday exclusions that are taken for granted – especially among wealthy, privileged characters like Inés in *Tuya* and most of the women in *Las viudas de los jueves* – but it often makes them appear foolish, short-sighed and frivolous. This would be less of a concern if there were more of a variety of female characters already present in Argentina and Brazilian crime fiction, but as it is Piñeiro's characters make a strong and at times very negative impression.

Despite these drawbacks, in general I find Melo and Piñeiro to be more successful than Fonseca or Piglia in opposing the misogyny of hard-boiled genre through their writing, but it is not fair or accurate to say that they are able to do so *because* they are women. It is true that I chose to study Melo and Piñeiro in part because of my interest in women writers, but they cannot stand in place of all women writers, nor do they have the only insight or obligation to create feminist work. Patrícia Melo often appears to reject the expectations of women writers – that she will write about the relationships and inner lives of female characters, or that she will write in traditionally feminine genres like romance or classical mysteries. As Santos acknowledges, Melo writes in a period when earlier women writers have already brought women's subjectivity to Brazilian fiction, and this gives her greater freedom to explore the topics she chooses, including masculinity and violence. Melo and Piñeiro, born in 1962 and 1960 respectively, are from a different generation than Fonseca (1925) or Piglia (1941), and write in an atmosphere where women's issues are an increasingly important part of literature and of public discourse in general. Piñeiro writes about women beginning to discover injustice in a context where women have a stronger role in public protests than ever before.

Fonseca and Piglia's views attitudes too have changed over time. Even Fonseca's early fiction displayed awareness of women's issues and a desire to reform the attitudes of traditional hard-boiled heroes. But his late short story "Romance negro", as well as including the voices of intelligent female characters, is more critical of the male narrator's faults (including sexism and homophobia) than in most of his earlier work. His nonfiction piece about the transgender character Viveca and the actress who played her on TV in 2005 is both more sympathetic and far more respectful than his original depiction of the character in a story published thirty years earlier. This kind of revision within the work of a single author is promising, since female writers should not be the only ones to portray complex and intelligent female characters in their work.

Because crime fiction has become such an integral part of Argentine literature, practiced by so many of its prominent (male) writers, it is especially important to consider how women's stories can be part of that tradition. Claudia Piñeiro's strategy of focusing on women without writing traditional murder plots is not the only one that could be taken. Marcelo Piñeyro's 1997 film *Cenizas del paraíso* and Juan José Campanella's 2009 *El secreto de sus ojos* (based on the 2005 novel *La pregunta de sus ojos* by Eduardo Sacheri) are both immensely successful dark thrillers that feature female judges. Although these characters are not the protagonists in either film, they do show the plausibility of a competent female professional at the head of a murder investigation in Argentina. That this figure could become more prominent in Latin American fiction and film is only one of many possibilities open for the future.

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