

◆ Chapter 5

The Fantastic in Susana Martín Gijón's Detective Novellas

Michele C. Dávila Gonçalves

Since the 1980s, Spain has cultivated the female detective and crime novel with an array of voices that contest gender roles and identities. Some known writers are Maria-Antònia Oliver with her detective Lònia Guiu and Alicia Giménez Bartlett with Petra Delicado, among many others.¹ According to Diana Aramburu, “[t]his new visibility in female crime fiction has opened an alternative discursive space, which promotes and creates awareness of women’s vulnerability in the patriarchal system, but also functions as an effective site of resistance” (7). In the ongoing production of the Spanish female crime novel, writer Susana Martín Gijón has created Annika Kaunda, a unique police-woman and detective, a woman of African ancestry in her thirties who lives in Extremadura and whose specialty is investigating gender-based crimes. With this main character, the author accentuates the challenge of the societal gender norms of the female detective novel, positing a female viewpoint on crime. Kimberly J. Dillely observes that “many women’s mystery novels introduce a multiple of feminist issues” (143), and they “are well suited to comment on dominant culture” (144). This is palpable in Martín Gijón’s novels.

The *Más que cuerpos* (More than Bodies) saga, which includes *Más que cuerpos* (2013), *Desde la eternidad* (From Eternity) (2014), and *Vino y pólvora* (Wine and Gunpowder) (2016), are studies on current social, economic, and psychological issues.² These novels deal with female trafficking and their sexual exploitation, the pharmaceutical industry, sexual identity, the treatment of immigrants, cuts in public funds, and the Neapolitan Camorra, among other topics. Even after creating an already important crime novel production with her subversive protagonist and themes, Martín Gijón again has subverted the genre, this time in style and structure, by adding fantastic elements to her recent short novels or novellas. The fantastic occurs when she fully immerses herself as a character in her texts in the narration of *Pensión Salamanca*

(Salamanca Pension) (2016), *Destino Gijón* (Destiny Gijon) (2016), and *Expediente Medellín* (Case File Medellín) (2017). Within the metafiction, the author uses metalepsis, or, as Brian McHale calls it, “the violation of ontological boundaries” (226), to invade the fictional space with her alter ego. At first Martín Gijón becomes one of the suspects, but later she assumes the position as Annika’s sidekick, like Dr. Watson. By the end, after her travels to conferences about crime novels in the places referenced by the title of her novellas, she becomes Annika’s friend. This essay analyzes how, in this new trilogy (of novellas instead of novels), Martín Gijón is renovating the crime novel by playing with other literary genres, such as the fantastic and magical realism, without forgetting her feminism and social advocacy. This purpose goes hand in hand with a conscious subversion of the genre through the insertion of the fantastic into a criminal reality, with the aim of highlighting the absurdity, arbitrariness, and strangeness of our world. With this trilogy, the author has found a hyperbolic way of emphasizing how the reality of our times has become as strange as fiction.

It seems that in the past years the fantastic and the real are commingling in society. What used to be considered absurd and impossible is now part of people’s daily lives. After the accomplishment of civil rights and advancements in diversity and social acceptance, a backlash of conservative governments has revived the racism and intolerance that has simmered for years. Also, economic crisis has overtaken many countries, such as United States, Brazil, and Spain. In Spain specifically, there have been scandals of corruption and economic distress, especially after the explosion of the real estate bubble in 2008, a period that has been dubbed “la crisis” (the crisis). Martín Gijón’s novellas present this critical moment by focusing on the globalization of crime and of society’s ills, as highlighted by the *Indignados* or 15M movement, as well as by focusing on the consequent revitalization of feminist movements, which highlight “collective empowerment,” “alliances and intersectional approaches” (Gámez Fuentes 363). The novellas demonstrate the economic crises of different constituents of Spanish society and Colombia; nonetheless, they also focus on gender biases through the depiction of the effects of envy, misogyny, violence, and emotional abuse, in addition to bullying and vengeance. In the texts, these are the culprits of femicides, alongside the current disintegration of moral and ethical values of society. Singularizing the voices of two female characters and making them the heroines of the novellas, the author uses the fantastic to blur the lines between what is real and what is fiction, thereby creating a metaphor of our times both in Spain and worldwide.

Eva París-Huesca proposes that there is a new “*gynocriminal* tradition” in Spanish female crime fiction, where women are taking into their own hands the fight against gender biases in the police force. The goal of the *Más que*

cueros saga is to denounce violence against females while also “giving visibility to the history of female ‘others’” (París-Huesca 76). Yet, this contemporary tradition in crime fiction reexamines women’s roles in society and demonstrates that females are capable of violence, undermining the gendered idea of women solely as victims. París-Huesca analyzes detective Annika’s identity and also the depiction of other female characters in Martín Gijón’s social novels, writing that “the author seeks to combat patriarchal violence by moving away from the classic and implausible formulas of the lonely hero or heroine, and shifting towards the creation of affective social networks” (78). It would be helpful to explain that Annika does indeed start as a lonely figure in the first novel; yet, throughout the first trilogy, the reader witnesses her formation or development into a more open and social person. We even witness her start a family. This creation of community, whether masculine or feminine, establishes a sense of solidarity that helps her, her colleagues, and her friends to confront gender-based violence, while also establishing a sense of empathy to help those members of society in need. In the first three novels of the saga, this “polyphony of female identities” (París-Huesca 80) gives voice to a variety of global and alienated sectors in Spanish society. Some of them are female characters who have been exploited, raped, and even killed, like Bosnian sex slaves and Romanian workers. Others are reliving the years of the Civil War. The detective herself represents a marginalized group in Spanish society: the African. Annika, originally from Namibia, had to flee her country when young due to endemic violence, especially towards women. It can be surmised that this is the reason why, as an adult, she entered the police force—a subversive act in itself—to fight against that type of violence. Therefore, Martín Gijón’s goal is to advocate in favor of those in society who have been ignored, forgotten, or abused because of their gender or social marginality. París-Huesca summarizes the importance of crime fiction in general:

The ability of the crime fiction novel to constantly transform and adapt to current national and global realities, changes, and contradictions is a symptom of how much violence, corruption, and inequality exists in the real world. It continues to serve a space to expose the evils of society and practice new forms of social realism from the perspective of gender. (85)

Interestingly, the critic argues that Martín Gijón’s novels are located outside of the center; the city represented in her texts, Mérida, is not the capital or urban center so typical of hard-boiled or *noir* novels. In the *Más que cueros* saga, the detective goes to Tarragona, Pompei, and Naples, and, in the novellas,

she goes to Salamanca, Gijón, and, ultimately, Medellín, Colombia, underscoring the globalization of crime. Martín Gijón's purpose, advocating for the downtrodden, did not waver in her subsequent literary production; however, in the novellas, it has developed an ironic twist, which is an example of the "life cycle of genres" that John G. Cawelti talks about when he refers to cinematic genres. He states that, in our times, "the generic patterns have become so well known that people become tired of their predictability. It is at this point that parodic and satiric treatments proliferate and new genres gradually arise" (Cawelti 510). In fact, this is what has occurred in Martín Gijón's detective novels.

At first glance, there is a change in the structure and mood in her novellas. They are much shorter than her previous novels, and humor sets the tone. In these narrations, the author delves into another genre, one which seems far away from the detective or crime novel: the fantastic. This genre proposes that reality and fiction can overlap as a normal and natural process, and the impossible and strange can coexist with daily life. Tzvetan Todorov analyzes what he calls "the uncanny," referring to supernatural forces that could either be explained or not in reality, a characteristic that is also part of the gothic (which deals with horror and murder), the "marvelous," and "magical realism." The reaction of a reader whenever he or she confronts fantastic elements in a narration is to hesitate. Writes Todorov, "the hesitation may also be experienced by a character; thus, the reader's role is so to speak entrusted to a character, and at the same time, the hesitation is represented, it becomes one of the themes of the work" (33). Hesitation causes ambiguity and consequently doubt. This can also be created with the use of dreamlike sequences, where neither the character nor the reader know what is going on. These characteristics are also present in detective fiction when it provides red herrings and when it doesn't end with the criminals paying their dues. Considering another manifestation of the fantastic, what is called "magical realism," Kenneth Reeds adds two essential characteristics of the genre: the importance of social criticism and bringing forth typically ignored voices. So, Martín Gijón compounds the typical uncertainty of crime narrative when she adds the fantastic element to her novellas, using it as a metaphor to establish the absurdity of contemporary reality and to comment on how it seems that the world is living in a nightmare with distorted values. At the same time, she maintains her feminist goal of social critique, multiplying the female voices in her fiction, whether as victims, criminals, or sleuths. In other words, in the new saga, the author transcends the delimitations of the twentieth-century crime novel by returning to the roots of the fantastic to create something different, a new form of crime novel, and using the fantastic to underline social crises, such as mental illness and gender, ethnic, and cultural biases, and their relation to

violence and crime. Martín Gijón showcases economic disparities through her feminist discourse, and she reveals what is below the surface, moving in the undercurrent of society. The author uses metalepsis, metafiction, and intertextuality to play with temporal and spatial ruptures in her novellas transiting the “real,” the “fictional,” and the dream world.

In *Pensión Salamanca*, there is a character named Susana who is the author’s Doppelgänger. Humorously, she includes herself in the narration by using the rhetorical figure of metalepsis. The term metalepsis was created by Gérard Genette, who defines it as “any intrusion by the extradiegetic narrator or narratee into the diegetic universe . . . or the inverse (as in Cortázar) produces an effect of strangeness that is either comical . . . or fantastic” (234–35).³ In other words, it is the transgression of what is expected, the fusion of two narrative levels. In Martín Gijón’s case, one is the accepted real or authorial one and the other the fictional or created one. With the three novellas, Martín Gijón subverts her original proposal in terms of genre and tone; instead of recreating the detective, crime fiction, or the *noir*, with their dark and gloomy spaces and themes, she employs the fantastic and the ludic. Liviu Lutas describes this tendency as “a crossroads between the rational and the irrational and between conventional popular culture and reflective high culture” (ix). It could be that this rupture reinforces the realist and social purpose of the crime novel through the inclusion of fictional element of the writer’s profession. Moreover, it can also be said that this configuration is a way for the author to create a more direct community with her readers. Dilley states that, in the female mystery novel, “[t]he community created through women fictional detectives is made up of authors, readers, and characters with deep-attachments to each other, even when not aware of the others’ existence” (151). In this fantastic world, where the author as a character meets her creation, she also meets her readers, thus establishing a more singular connection with them and demonstrating that she is one with her community. She suffers the same way they do.

In *Pensión*, the metalepsis is an exterior one, in which “all metalepsis . . . occurs between the extradiegetic level and the diegetic level—that is to say, the narrator’s universe and that of his or her story” (Cohn 106). The absurdity of what the author is narrating is obvious to the reader, and “it stirs up in the reader a feeling of disarray” (110). Nonetheless, even though it is a surprise to the character Susana, she, and the readers, accept it without hesitation. In other words, the conflict between what is real and what is fiction is experienced at the beginning and only for a moment. Both the author and the reader know about the playful duplicity. Yet, Annika doesn’t know because Susana won’t tell her, even though the detective notices that this woman talks and acts in a strange manner. While Unamuno’s *Niebla* and Jorge Luis Borges and Julio

Cortázar's respective texts play with ontology, I don't believe that, in Martín Gijón's case, there is an intention to create a doubt about our own existence. This metalepsis is the reason for the humor of the text: "When metalepsis occurs in a humorous novel . . . the anxiety of the reader gives way to his amusement" (111). It is also the rhetorical figure that helps to generate the metafiction of the text. It is a technique that serves the purpose of analyzing the genre itself, and, even though it is based in real crime and violence, it re-affirms it as fiction (Lutas 41).

The way the metafiction is presented in the novellas studied here is by means of metalepsis. It is interesting that it doesn't appear "in homodiegetic narratives but only in heterodiegetic narratives" (Cohn 106). This is obvious in Martín Gijón's work, where the novellas are narrated by a polyphony of voices: first-person Susana, third-person Susana, and other first-person criminals. The novellas bring a voyeuristic experience to the reader as they follow both the author Martín Gijón and her alter ego Susana in her travels to different, real literary conferences in which she has been invited: the *Congreso de novela y cine negro de Salamanca* (Salamanca's Crime Novel and Film Conference) in the first novella, the famous *Semana negra de Gijón* (Gijón's Crime Week) in the second, and the *Fiesta del libro y la cultura* (Literature and Culture Festival) of Medellín for the last. Therefore, intertextuality is another component used to help blur the lines between reality and fictionality, as the novellas quote real events and places, in addition to real names, movies, novels, and even the author's other novels. Lutas points out that intertexts are a metafictional technique "because of the way they reveal the artificiality of the text, risking thus to break the mimetic illusion" (44).

However, I reiterate that, in Martín Gijón's fiction, the interplay between what is real and what is fictional, while highlighting her inventiveness and background knowledge of the crime novel genre, serves to reaffirm her objective as a detective novelist: to denounce what society is doing to the marginalized and oppressed and to give them a voice. In the novellas, Martín Gijón takes it a step further by exploring the justifications of the criminals—not by making an apologia for their actions but, rather, by explaining how society has contributed to their actions. The famous adage "truth is stranger than fiction" is something the author plays with, stating in several occasions that "por suerte esto no es ficción" (*Destino* 8) (fortunately this is not fiction) and "[e]sto no era una novela" (21) (this was not a novel). This trilogy is set against the notion of devaluing fiction and the detective novel. The author implies that her profession is important for society as an advocacy tool, even if, tongue in cheek, her characters describe the lack of economic success they achieve writing such books when compared to authors of romantic novels (even though romance is part of the novellas).

In *Pensión*, the subtitle “un caso (muy negro)” (a [very black] case) plays with the multiple meanings of black in Spanish—crime novels (*novela negra*), *noir*, and the skin color of the detective. Moreover, it can be said that black also represents the precariousness of the economic situation of the country. The protagonist, narrating in the first person, even jokes about the effects of the crisis by alluding to the most expensive “pata negra” (black leg) ham, stating that not even crime novelists can pay such luxury. Another note of her financial constraints is the fact that she doesn’t have the means to stay in a hotel. As she pinpoints: “El mundo de la literatura no estaba para grandes lujos. Ni grandes ni pequeños” (13) (The world of literature wasn’t for big luxuries. Neither big nor small). This is the reason why she stays in an old hostel with a spiral staircase and dark hallways, an allusion to the famous film *noir The Spiral Staircase*, which sets off alarm bells for readers who anticipate that a crime will be committed in such a place.

Readers learn who she is when the young man at the lobby desk asks her if she is Susana and if she is there to participate in the aforementioned *Congreso de novela y cine negro* at the University of Salamanca. Susana says she will be attending workshops about “[l]a ficción criminal, el detective hard-boiled, las discusiones sobre los límites del género y el eterno debate entre vísceras o psicología” (*Pensión* 17) (the crime fiction, the hardboiled detective, the discussions about the limits of the genre, and the eternal debate between entrails or psychology). The next day, when she finds a dead body in the common bathroom of the floor on which she is staying, the setting replicates the famous shower scene of the movie *Psycho*, therefore transmitting to the reader the terror Susana feels. Notwithstanding, the image she sees is subverted as well; instead of the traditional voyeuristic representation of a female body (like in the film), the gender of the victim is male. The use of these types of intertexts as part of the metafiction of her fiction helps readers to recognize feelings that are incited by the referenced material and to make him or her participate in the development of the story and create a sense of community. In these novellas, the author uses intertexts, self-reflection, metafiction, and metalepsis with the same purpose. Not only will readers try to solve the crime, but they will also recognize what makes a detective novel a fictional form without eliminating its stronghold on real life issues.

Pensión is the novella that sets the stage for the metalepsis of the trilogy. Susana needs help with the horrible situation she has tumbled upon; therefore, she turns to her own creation, Annika. She telephones the detective and introduces herself, trying to explain: “Verás, es complicado de explicar. Tú no sabes quién soy, pero . . . digamos que hace mucho que sigo tus pasos” (*Pensión* 24) (You see, this is complicated. You don’t know who I am, but I . . . let’s say that I have been following your steps for a long time). Annika thinks

this is a bad joke and hangs up. But then she thinks, “Susana Martín Gijón . . . el nombre le decía algo, pero no sabía muy bien qué” (26) (Susana Martín Gijón . . . the name sounded familiar, but she didn’t know why. In this scene, both metalepsis and metafiction enter the text in Annika’s consciousness when she realizes that her boyfriend Bruno had given her a signed copy of one of Martín Gijón’s earlier novels, *Náufragos* (Castaways), written before Annika was created. It is an example of a form of metalepsis, as Genette explains: “the act . . . consists precisely of introducing into one situation, by means of a discourse, the knowledge of another situation” (234). The metalepsis here serves as a joke and a critique because it comes from a police member who is opposed to those who recreate what they do in real life in the world of fiction: “Escritores que se dedicaban a recrear en la ficción las miserias contra las que policías como ella luchaban a diario” (*Pensión* 24) (Writers that dedicated themselves to recreate in the fictional world all the miseries that the police, like her, fought against every day). Also, she finds the idea of a crime novel conference “friki” (24) (freaky), deducing that the homicide was not a coincidence and that the two events must be related. Here the author introduces different points of view that seem to clash—the writer, the police, and academia—and all are open to questioning. Can authors of crime novels help society? Can reality benefit from crime fiction? Are academics important for society? These are notions that Martín Gijón will grapple with in the following novellas, even though she will not necessarily answer them.

Detective Annika solidarizes with Susana and goes to Salamanca, where she meets two other members of the police force: Rubén Trinkwasser (a Uruguayan of German descent) and Dolores MacDaisy (of Irish heritage). These names have a ludic note but they also keep up with the global nature of crime. The police officers are surprised when they meet Annika, not only because she is a Black woman but also because she is pregnant, breaking with the assumption in hard-boiled male or female detective novels that motherhood is incompatible with the profession. Curiously, when Susana sees Annika for the first time, she doesn’t see anything amiss and is not flustered, obviously because she is the author and should know these things. Not only are the detectives in Salamanca surprised, but some of the characters of the novel (that represent real people) are as well. Maternity is a theme that has been developed more recently in detective and crime novels (and is the main theme of Martín Gijón’s most recent novel *Progenie* [Progeny], published in 2020). The old idea of the spinster, like Agatha Christie’s Mrs. Marple, the chic dick of the eighties, or the hard-boiled female detective of some contemporary authors has changed, and the new female detective can be a single woman, a lesbian, or a mother.⁴ Martín Gijón inserts herself in this postmodern production when she implies that women can accomplish anything they want, including both motherhood and a career.

While talking to the detectives, Annika mocks Susana when she says, “Escribe libros. De ficción. A la hora de la verdad se caga como cualquier otro. Y se le olvida toda la teoría de sus novelitas” (*Pensión* 34) (She writes books. Fiction. At the crucial moment she shits like anyone else. And then she forgets all the theory of her little novels). Annika jokingly plays with both connotations of the word “novelitas” (little novels) in the diminutive form, which can mean both the readers that are presently reading the text and a pejorative form of devaluing what the writer does. Susana is the first suspect, and they retain her in jail while Annika investigates the gruesome murder. Annika also attends one of the talks of the conference, and, humorously, when she introduces herself to a writer, he responds: “Me suena tu nombre. ¿Seguro que no eres escritora?” (45) (I have heard that name. Are you sure you are not a writer?). Annika doesn’t realize that she has done an inverse metalepsis: she is the character that has entered the real world of the conference. Although she doesn’t understand the bibliographical references mentioned in the talk, she is a good detective and starts solving the puzzle of the murder. Susana manifests that she is a proud author/mother when she thinks possessively: “Sí que era eficaz mi Annika” (51) (Indeed my Annika is very effective). Susana then becomes the Watson of Annika’s Holmes and helps with the investigation.

To keep playing with different levels of metalepsis, the author and narrator involves other past and present writers, their characters, and their novels, including Raymond Chandler, Phillip Marlowe, Edgar Allan Poe, Jim Thompson, G. K. Chesterton, Michael Chabon, Claudia Piñeiro, Empar Fernández, Victor del Árbol, Giménez Bartlett, Haruki Murakami, Julián Ibáñez, Claudio Cerdán, Julio Muñoz and Rancio Sevillano, Petros Már Karis, Richard Stark, Eduardo Moga, Tony Flower, Manuel Simón Viola, Leonardo Oyola, Sam Spade, Rafael Guerrero, and Mma Precious Ramotswe. In addition, she includes her real friends as well as other characters, fictional or not, like Dirty Harry, Roberto Carlos, Sebastià Bennassar, and Àlex (Martín Escribà) and Javier (Sánchez), the organizers of the conference. When doing this, the author invites her readers to be part of the fictional world by recognizing names, events, and places that they might know in real life. Thus, in *Pensión*, the narrator hangs out with real professors who research detective novels, such as Inma Pertusa, París-Huesca (the scholar previously cited), and David Knutson. In the novella, the three professors realize that they have just met Martín Gijón’s main character Annika, although they don’t know everything. There is a funny scene when Eva sees the pregnant Annika, not having known this new piece of information from Susana the author, even though her colleagues did. Annika sees their reactions and doesn’t understand what is happening. She just finds them impertinent: “¿Pero qué le pasaba a toda aquella gente? Actuaban de una forma

definitivamente extraña” (70) (But what is happening to all these people. They were definitely acting in a strange manner).

About female mystery novels, Dilley asserts that they “examine and highlight life . . . [they] also signal the breakdown of order in the community” (139–40). In *Pensión*, the motive of the crime was envy and hatred. The future assassin felt slighted and ignored by his academic community, particularly his professors. He wanted to be a renowned writer of detective novels, whereas the faculty was only paying attention to the new, gifted student that they predicted had a glowing future as an author and was in the process of publishing his first crime novel. Annika found him when she was searching Susana’s list of “friends” on Facebook. She found that he was going to attend the conference and had a sexual relationship with the deceased. The envious student planned what he considered a perfect crime because he planned everything to incriminate who he considered to be the weakest link, Susana. The mistake was that she came out of her room too soon. With this information, Susana reflects: “Era una putada que nuestras historias se volvieran reales. Deberían quedarse en eso, en simple ficción. Ficción que sirviera para denunciar las lacras de la sociedad en el camino de acabar con ellas, no porque un psicópata la pusiera en práctica” (*Pensión* 84) (It sucked how our stories turned real. They should stay as simple fiction. Fiction that would serve to denounce society’s evils on the road to eliminate them, not because a psychopath would put them into practice). In this meta last sentence, the narration emphasizes the purpose of the author’s literary production, which is to denounce how crime is the result of the evils of society. This novella highlights the corrosive effect of envy and misogyny. The assassin wants the glory of being a famous novelist himself, and, after realizing there was someone more talented than him, he decides to murder him. Both to finish the plan and due to his gender bias, he meticulously frames a female author, Susana, either because he believed she didn’t deserve the recognition she was getting or that, as a woman, she was expendable. At the end of the text, the assassin’s personal crisis connects with the crisis forming in Susana’s psyche. When looking at Annika, for the first time, she cannot read her detective’s thoughts. This is the hint of the beginning of a personal crisis, in which the author will start to lose control of her characters and consequently her following novellas.

Destino Gijón, the second novella of the trilogy, is a text about infidelity and its consequences. The intertexts continue here, with some repeated characters like Eva. The hard-boiled detective novel is highlighted both through direct mentions of exemplars, like Phillip Marlow and Raymond Chandler, and new examples, like *Betibú* from Argentinian writer Claudia Piñeiro, or by its use of common characteristics like the *femme fatale*. Other cultural texts mentioned are detective Beckett and her writer boyfriend/husband Castle,

CSI, the group Xixón Sound, and Cazafantasmas (Ghostbusters). Still, even if the meta game is reiterated again, the social ills to which Martín Gijón wants to call attention are always present. The introductory quote from the eighteenth-century Spanish writer Gaspar Melchor de Jovellanos is a synthesis of what the author believes: “Admiro a quien defiende la verdad y se sacrifica por sus ideas, pero no a quienes sacrifican a otros por sus ideas” (I admire those who defend the truth and sacrifice themselves for their ideas, but not those who sacrifice others for their ideas). Surprisingly, she finds Annika with Celia in Gijón right after she thinks that the detective would never go to an event like the *Semana Negra de Gijón*. The detective is there on vacation with her adoptive daughter Celia and her friend Lourdes. Susana is dying to ask her questions about Bruno but knows that it would be too awkward trying to figure out what to say. Even as she thinks Annika wasn’t real—“no eres real” (*Destino* 22) (you are not real)—she ponders, “yo no soy un personaje—bueno, un poco sí” (22) (I am not a character—well, a little bit yes). Martín Gijón thus plays with the binary notion that there are indeed two Susanas, even though they are both one.

Martín Gijón reflects on the writing process of a detective novel, stating: “y por suerte esto no es ficción” (*Destino* 12) (fortunately this is not fiction). In another example, she states: “Jamás desvelamos un argumento antes de tiempo” (76) (We never reveal the plot before it’s time). She also critiques the writing process: “Es todo demasiado obvio. Desde luego, como guión de novela es malísimo” (52) (Everything is too obvious. Of course, as the script of a soap opera it’s very bad). Additionally, the character Susana resolves to help her as an author, “Me prometí a mí misma que me pondría a con la cuarta entrega en cuanto regresara de Gijón” (49) (I promised myself that I was going to start working on the fourth novel as soon as I returned from Gijón). Meanwhile, readers know she doesn’t finish her fourth novel because she follows up *Destino* with a third novella instead.

In *Destino*, the social class of the people involved in the crime is different from *Pensión*. No longer set in a hostel or against the background of students, the context turns to high society. Here, Susana assumes the role of investigator, and when she reads about a murdered woman, she goes to see the scene of the crime, a yacht. Nevertheless, she isn’t the only curious one; Annika is already at the port when Susana arrives. They talk about how Annika misses the action of her work due to her maternity leave and about the sensationalism and morbidity of gutter press. When Susana tries to imagine a title for a novel about the murder, Annika takes offence and says, “Te recuerdo que esto no es una novela barata” (*Destino* 30) (I remind you that this is not a cheap novel). Susana defends herself and protests, “Mis novelas no son baratas” (31) (My novels are not cheap). Susana thus signals her new agency as a crime novel

writer—she is even staying in a hotel this time—and her purpose as an author. She tells Annika: “En los yates de lujo también se cometen crímenes sórdidos” (31) (Sordid crimes also happen in luxurious yachts). Furthermore, this scene can also be construed as a feminist commentary on the representation of the female body in many male crime novels. Aramburu explains: “The female crime novel emphasizes giving the female corpse or victim an identity to veer away from a more voyeuristic image” (20). Martín Gijón does exactly this when she provides a story and an identity for the victim Alejandra.

In order to subvert the genre even more, Martín Gijón includes a parodic scene where Susana meets a caricature of a male detective dressed as a classic hard-boiled novel character, with a trench coat and a gray fedora. Imitating Phillip Marlowe, Félix Mármol is an interesting character because he is conscious of his stereotypical figure. He confesses: “En verdad me sentía más cómodo sin la escritora” (*Destino* 55) (The truth is I felt more comfortable without the writer). It is as if, in the fictional world, the characters feel awkward around Susana; however, they do not feel so around the fictional Annika. With his professional colleague, he could be himself and enjoy some chauvinistic banter because he knew “[e]ra una feminista irredenta. Mis favoritas” (64) (She was a die-hard feminist. My favorites). The author pinpoints the difference of both the genre and gender perspectives. When, with Annika, Félix goes to interview the widow of the deceased, the scene is another parody of a *noir* movie, reminiscent of Humphrey Bogart as Phillip Marlowe. He feels attracted to the elegant *femme fatale* because he says he is “un clásico” (56) [a classic]. But, at the same time, he says, “[n]o soy tan *hard* como me pintan” (56) (I am not as *hard* as they depict me). Again, this underlines the author’s play with the genre and reversal of gender roles.

This novella uses an heterodiegetic narration, and, through it, the reader learns about Rafael Hormigo Sánchez’s well-to-do family crisis and his middle-age love affair with Alejandra. The reader assumes he is the killer because, in one chapter, he confesses to having a nightmare with the horrific expression of the victim’s dead eyes. When he describes his wife Beatriz, he sees hate in her eyes and suddenly starts to think, “[y] por primera vez en diez años, mi mujer me da miedo. Un miedo atroz” (*Destino* 41) (for the first time in ten years my wife scares me. A terrible fear). It is important to highlight that the use of the name Beatriz is a literary and cruel metajoke. This Beatriz has nothing to do with the famous Beatrice Portinari, Dante’s love. It is interesting that this is the name selected because it even reinforces the technique Martín Gijón has used to present this new trilogy. The *Divine Comedy* is a metaleptic text by Dante Alighieri where he becomes a character who is guided through different stages in the afterworld by the poet Virgil. The classic is full of literary, social, and personal intertexts that underscore the metafictional world of

literature. Dante's portrayal of the descent through the *Inferno* and *Purgatorio* (Purgatory) is also a parallel of the presumed murderer Rafael, who undergoes a similar process during the allegations against him for the murder of his lover. When the text changes to introduce doubt against Beatriz, the same process happens as in the *Divine Comedy*, when Beatrice enters the world of the fiction and becomes the guide to Dante's *Paradiso* (Paradise). Only Beatriz can exonerate him and free Rafael. Once again, the author has thrown the reader a red herring, because she wasn't the killer after all.

In the first two novellas, Susana notices that she is not as connected to her characters as she had once been. McHale reminds readers how postmodern authors play with a baroque notion that comes from *Don Quixote* and which is later commented on by Borges: "we, too, are fictional characters, and that our reality is as much a fiction as Quixote's is" (130). Lutas also explains that "[s]uch subversion could be viewed as an attempt to give a demystified view of the writer, who according to post-modern literary theory, does not have total control and possession of his text" (50). There is a moment when Susana the character assumes her authorial rights with the help of her community of real writer female friends, Susana Hernández and Rosa Ribas. Together, they create a plan to solve the plot, bringing this metaleptic intrusion into fruition.⁵ According to Dilley, "Women's mysteries engage the politics of gender" (151), and these female authors twist the traditional ideas of gender roles in the crime novel when they assign the main role for discovering the assassin to Annika, with the unintentional help of Félix, who has been seduced by the widow. The culprit is also a surprise and readers learn that the deceased's mother-in-law, Sonsoles, paid for the murder because she couldn't fathom her daughter's depression due to her husband's infidelity, "que ella misma conocía muy bien" (*Destino* 84) (that she knew very well). Sonsoles dared to do for her daughter what she never dared to do for herself when she went through the same experience. The implication in this novella is that indifference or being emotionally abusive to a spouse can have devastating and even lethal consequences, no matter from what social class they are. Consequently, another societal ill, in this case female physical and emotional abuse (Annika's expertise), contributes to a family crisis that leads to a crime. Even in this fictional fantastic world, Martín Gijón's feminist and social advocacy goes beyond the façade and tries to understand the reasons for murder.

The third installment of the trilogy, *Expediente Medellín*, expands on the topic of an authorial crisis. Susana has lost control of her text when she realizes that she doesn't know what happened after her third novel, *Vino y pólvora*, and when learns about the societal problems of another country, Colombia. Her fiscal situation has gotten better, and, this time, she is staying in a luxurious hotel paid by the organizers of the festival *Fiesta del libro y la cultura*.

Here Susana learns new things about the plot that she hadn't planned as an author. In Medellín, a place known for its drug trafficking crisis and *sicarios*, Susana perceives the clash between social classes while walking through the high-class neighborhoods and luxurious commercial district, which stand next to the slums that her family warned her about. Notwithstanding, Medellín is not so different from the rest of the world. In this transatlantic fiction, the author deals with the global connections of the crime world, as she encounters the Neapolitan Camorra gangster Simone from the previous novel (who is "protecting" Bruno), again signaling the globalization of crime. Even Annika's superintendent, Daniel Jiménez, who is following the tracks of a serial killer who killed his brother in Spain, is now incognito in Medellín. All these worlds, criminal, geographical, textual, and personal, clash together at the end.

Susana starts to grow delusional in this last installment, and her friends are nonplussed with her increasingly bizarre conversations. Readers can also see the cracks when she loses control of her characters as reality and fiction start colliding in her mind. There is an out-of-this-world conversation with her real writer friend, Leonardo Oyola. She tells him her story and asks if he would go with her to the "communes" to find Bruno. He tries to reason with her that he only mingles with the Mafia in his fictional world, not in real life. She tells him that writing cannot solve this problem and finishes by yelling at him: "¿Cómo quieres que lo escriba? —empiezo a exasperarme— ¿Es que no conoces las reglas? ¿Acaso no has leído a Sam Esparta? Ya sabes, primero tienes que vivirlo" (*Expediente* 18) (How do you want me to write it?—I start to get angry—Is it that you don't know the rules? Is it that you haven't read Sam Esparta? You know, you must first live it). Her surprised friend responds, "¿Esparta? Yo al único Sam que conozco es a Sam Spade" (18) (Esparta? The only Sam I know is Sam Spade). Ironically, following one of the cardinal rules of her profession as novelist, Susana the author doesn't know how to finish her novel because Susana the character hasn't lived it yet. In addition, as part of the metalepsis, she is having nightmares where her detailed, constructed world is not behaving the way she intended it and has begun to terrorize her and her readers by depicting Bruno in the process of executing her. It is after the horror of this experience that readers realize it is a nightmare. In the dream, Susana tries to buy more time when she tells Bruno, Simone, and superintendent Jiménez, "Mis personajes morirán conmigo y tú eres uno de ellos" (66) (My characters will die with me and you are one of them). She is saved by the superintendent when he kills Bruno. Even so, he scorns her by saying that it is all her fault and Annika will be killed because of it. With that, Susana awakens as if she were in a movie.

Up to this moment Susana has always lived by this rule: “Cuando invento una historia, tengo el esquema en mi cabeza. Sé cómo empieza y cómo acaba, y conozco las tramas que se van entretejiendo, por y para qué” (*Expediente* 52) (When I create a story, I have the outline in my head. I know how it starts and how it ends, and I know the plots that will intertwine, by whom and for what reason). She even chides herself for her plot by creating the dark story of a bullied boy-turned-serial-killer and his past connection with Annika’s boss: “En el fondo esto es culpa mía. ¿Por qué me inventaría esa historia? No era necesario un pasado tan siniestro para justificar su forma de ser” (53) (Deep inside all this is my fault. Why did I have to invent this story? It wasn’t necessary to create such a sinister past to justify his behavior). Be that as it may, the author focuses on the common problem of youth—bullying and its possible consequences—without turning this into an apologia (like the case with Sonsoles in *Destino*). Martín Gijón gives an example on how another society ill, the bullying of young people considered different, wreaks havoc and can turn a person into an assassin.

The characters are running without the author. Because Susana the character cannot ask for Annika’s help (she just had a baby girl), she decides to call her through Skype, another up-to-date real reference, to ask her if she knows somebody in Colombia that could help her. Annika recommends she speak with another detective, Rafael Guerrero, and he in turn recommends the Colombian version of the well-known literary figure Mma (Precious) Ramotswa from *The No. 1 Ladies Detective Agency* by Alexander McCall Smith. When Susana meets the detective Rai (short for Raimunda) Chaves for the first time, she assumes Rai is the secretary instead, ironically bowing to the stereotype of the genre she herself as a feminist author resists. This is rapidly remedied when she portrays Rai (another Black woman like Annika) as the hero of the story. Rai finds Bruno and physically attacks the serial killer, Luis Alfredo, who ultimately is killed by Simone. Amusingly, Susana tells her, “Estoy pensando que no funcionarías del todo mal como personaje de un libro” (*Expediente* 110) (I am thinking that you won’t be such a bad a character in one of my books).

After everything is clarified and resolved, Susana decides not to immerse herself in the fictional world again: “Pues ya me niego a salir en ninguna novela más: estoy cansada de estos sobresaltos. Con *Expediente Medellín* acaban mis incursiones en el papel” (*Expediente* 110) (I refuse to appear in any other novel: I am tired of so many surprises. With *Case File Medellín* I finish my incursions on paper). The last humorous note of the novella is the final quote by Andrés Caicedo from ¡Qu[e] viva la *música!* (Long Live Music!): “Nunca te vuelvas una persona seria” (Never become a serious person). The author has complied with this quote, showing humility with the novellas. It is

as if she were saying that she doesn't need to take herself too seriously as an author and that the detective and *noir* sides can coexist with the fantastic and its manifestations, providing them with some levity.

With this second trilogy, Martín Gijón has reinvigorated and updated the crime novel, providing an example of Cawelti's theory of the life cycles of genres, where parodic forms enter the development of a genre. In particular, Martín Gijón uses the fantastic as a metaphor for our convoluted times. She has demonstrated her competence in different literary genres and topos, using diverse tones that go from serious to hilarious to convey the social and feminist preoccupations of her initial saga. Albeit, this time, she conveys these preoccupations with a twist by highlighting the stranger-than-fiction reality of the moral devaluation of our contemporary times and showing the effects of social ills that are exacerbated by global and local economic problems and unfulfilled expectations. With the three novellas, Martín Gijón goes beyond the superficial presentation of evil of certain characters. She immerses herself in their psyche to try to understand those that are turned into monsters because they have either been disregarded and lost respect, adulation, and future income, as in *Pensión Salamanca*; abused by men and society due to stereotypical gender biases, as in *Destino Gijón*; or bullied because of social class and perceived difference, as in *Expediente Medellín*. Although the author justifies her assassins, she does not defend their actions. Through the fantastic and other sub-genres, the author employs metafiction, metalepsis, and multiple cultural intertexts to create multiple layers of meaning, which showcase various types of crises, including the literary genre crisis with metalepsis, the crisis of reversed gender roles in the literary genre as females are detectives who solve crimes as well as criminals, Spain's crisis post-2008 as highlighted by a writer who doesn't have the economic means to stay in luxurious hotels or eat a famous gastronomic staple of the country, and the crisis of values that occurs worldwide with gratuitous killing, female abuse, murder, and bullying. Also, with the inclusion of the writer herself as a new character, Martín Gijón plays with the notion of growing female agency and empowerment, as she experiences an identity crisis and goes from victim to detective, only later again needing help from her community of female writer friends when she gradually loses power over her creation. In sum, she re-genders the form and the tone of her texts by uniting different classic literary traditions in Spanish, including Cervantes, Unamuno, and Borges, with other Spanish female writers, such as Maria-Antònia Oliver and Susana Hernández (who interestingly have also employed other types of metalepsis in their work), thus paying homage and including the trope of female authorship in the canon. In this twentieth-first-century Susana, Martín Gijón has transgressed and renovated

a genre and her own proposal to explore new possibilities for it; hence, she grows to be a singular voice for the female detective novel in Spain.

Notes

1. Some other examples are Rosa Ribas with Cornelia Weber-Tejedor, Berna González Harbour with María Ruiz, Carolina Solé with Kate Salas, and Maruja Torres with Diana Dial.
2. All English translations are mine.
3. The use of metalepsis, authors who become characters of their own fiction, has been around since the Medieval period, and the most commonly known example is Geoffrey Chaucer in *Canterbury Tales*. Other authors that have played with metalepsis are Miguel de Unamuno in *Niebla*, Jorge Luis Borges in “El Aleph” (The Aleph) and “Borges y yo” (Borges and I), W. Somerset Maugham in *The Razor’s Edge*, Paul Auster in *City of Glass*, Philip Roth in *Operation Shylock* and *The Plot Against America*, Bret Easton Ellis in *Lunar Park*, Stephen King in *Song of Susanna*, Douglas Coupland in *JPod*, Orhan Pamuk in *My Name is Red*, and J. M. Coetzee in several of his fictionalized autobiographical novels, among others.
4. Some examples of lesbian detectives are Emma García from the Lola Van Guardia trilogy by Catalan Isabel Franc, Cate Maynes by Clara Asunción García, and Rebeca Santana by Susana Hernández. Regarding sleuths that are mothers in crime fiction written in Spanish (besides Annika), there are Argentinian Claudia Piñeiro’s novels *Tuya* and *Elena sabe*, and the pregnant detective Victoria González in Spaniard Cristina Fallarás’s narrative. In English fiction, there are the mother detectives Alex Morrow and Dandy Gilver in the series created by Scottish authors Denise Mina and Catriona McPherson respectively, as well as Marti MacAlister in the series by African American Eleanor Taylor Bland.
5. Martín Gijón’s mention of author Susana Hernández is a homage to a writer who previously used metalepsis as a literary tool. Hernández introduced herself as a character in the short story “La ternura del jugador de rugby” (The Tenderness of the Rugby Player) in *Fundido en negro: antología de relatos del mejor calibre criminal femenino* (Melted in Black: Anthology of the Best Female Criminal Narrative), edited by Inmaculada Pertusa (Alrevés, 2014). By the same token, it is important to say that the Catalan writer Maria-Antònia Oliver cites herself in *El sol que fa l’anec* (Blue Roses for a Dead. . . Lady?, 1994) when she is mentioned by her detective Lònia Giui, who is friends with the author and provides information for the cases that later became novels.

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