

Crímenes Exquisitos:
Towards the Creation of a Female Cartography in Spanish Crime Fiction

A Dissertation Presented for the
Doctor of Philosophy
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Jessica Blanco-Marcos
December 2019

Copyright © 2019 by Jessica Blanco-Marcos.
All rights reserved.

DEDICATION

A los tres luceros de mi vida
–mamá, papá, Xenia–
por alumbrarme el camino.
Siempre.
Ahora de regreso a casa.
Ya casi.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation is the culmination of a long academic and personal transatlantic journey that would have not arrived to a good port without the help of a full village. I want to express my eternal gratitude to Dr. Cruz-Cámara and Dr. Cano for believing in this project, for their unwavering support these past months and for their invaluable feedback. I am forever indebted to Dr. Meadows for his incredible work ethic, unconditional support and availability, and for his masterful craftsmanship with words; his mentorship was key throughout the writing stages. I also want to thank Dr. Presser for welcoming me with open arms, for her fascinating class on gender and crime, a world of sociological and criminological perspectives that broadened my research questions and their interdisciplinary horizons.

I also need to acknowledge the professors at my *alma mater* –Universidad de Salamanca– and NAU, especially Dr. Asención-Delaney, Dr. Hood and Dr. Price for trusting in and fostering my intellectual and writing abilities; their guidance has been crucial to my academic journey. I cannot forget to mention the incredible #InstagramELE family, a wonderful community of Spanish teachers dedicated to teaching the language, building bridges, sharing resources and empowering one another; I treasure their friendship and female solidarity the most. I also need to thank every classmate, coworker and administrative assistant who has lend a helping hand with daily tasks over the past years. I am obliged to be thankful as well for all the obstacles and setbacks along the way, for testing both my will and strength, for teaching me how to be resilient; for making this finish line ever the sweeter.

I cannot close these remarks without a special mention to my true driving force: my family. Words cannot truly express how grateful I am for a life full of unconditional love and support. To my ma, for being my anchor, for instilling me to work hard and pursue my goals, for

the long nights on the phone. To my pa, for always pushing me to be the best version of myself, for always finding a way to make me laugh. To my sister, for being the best friend I could ask for, for taking care of me when I needed it the most and still considering me her role model. To Maya, for all her cuteness and the long writing sessions at home laying at my feet to keep me company. I am who I am because of all of them and I am incredibly proud to call them my family. My home. Thank you. This is for you.

To new beginnings!

ABSTRACT

My research examines the depiction of female characters in the Spanish crime fiction series *Crímenes Exquisitos* written by Vicente Garrido and Nieves Abarca. While the genre has been heavily male dominated since its origin by writers and characters alike, the inclusion of female led narratives and gender concerns by women writers has expanded women's roles beyond the traditional triangular schema –victim-culprit-sleuth– and its stereotypical characterization. The textual analysis of Garrido and Abarca's series demonstrates how the conception and configuration of female characters has evolved in order to fight against the traditional patriarchal system in place, includes urgently relevant topical issues that affect women and emphasizes the critical role of women's appearance and sexuality as determining factors for physical and sexual violence. These female representations, when taken together, exemplify women's objectification by the masculine gaze and their subsequent victimization as a controlling measure against women's independence and sexual deviance in a patriarchal society struggling to maintain power. By exploring the three sets of bodies –the detective, victims and secondary characters– I create a circular analysis that showcases how bodies not only are a roadmap to our lives but that once they become visible and available, women can be physically and sexually assaulted, regardless of their position and status in society, hence configuring crime fiction as a vehicle to depict possible ways of dealing with its trauma and contemporary gender concerns.

Keywords: crime fiction, Spanish crime fiction, *novela negra*, feminism, female bodies, female victims, female detective, secondary female characters.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER I. Victims: Female Bodies.....	13
Introduction	13
Exquisite Corpses: <i>Crímenes exquisitos</i>	28
<i>Lidia Naveira – The Dark Side of a Double Life</i>	<i>29</i>
<i>Patricia Janz – Of Sex and Drug Excesses.....</i>	<i>43</i>
<i>Floria di Nissa – The Aftermath of Erotic Literature</i>	<i>53</i>
<i>Raquel Conde – The Deadly, Illegal Side of the Law</i>	<i>64</i>
Religious Corporeal Experiences: <i>Martyrium</i>.....	71
<i>Eleonora della Rocca – Wrong Time, Wrong Place</i>	<i>74</i>
<i>Paola – Desecrating Sacred Spaces.....</i>	<i>79</i>
Snuff Bodies: <i>El hombre de la máscara de espejos</i>	90
<i>Belén Egea and Encina Yebra – Deadly Castings</i>	<i>92</i>
Plagiarized Bodies: <i>Los muertos viajan deprisa</i>.....	101
<i>Cecilia Jardiel – Between Plagiarism and Friends with Benefits</i>	<i>102</i>
CHAPTER II. Female Detecting: Valentina Negro.....	109
Introduction	109
Coordinates from the Policing Past: Female Predecessors Tradition.....	121
Contemporary Female Policing: New Directions	136
Coordinates for a New Female Character Configuration: Valentina Negro.....	145
<i>Introducing the (S)hero, Valentina Negro: Personal versus Professional Life...153</i>	
<i>Valentina as a Femme Fatale: (Venomous) Sensual Coordinates and (Toxic)</i>	
<i>Relationships.....</i>	<i>162</i>
<i>Policing from the Shadows: Rape Survivor, PTSD and Violence.....</i>	<i>182</i>
CHAPTER III. On Female Satellite Characters.....	196
Introduction	196
Antagonistic Females	200
<i>Raquel Conde – Ambition Personified, Relentless Antagonism</i>	<i>201</i>
<i>Sara Rancaño – Raquel 2.0</i>	<i>219</i>
<i>Rajiva – An Ambassador’s Secret Life</i>	<i>228</i>
<i>Estela Brown – The Ice Queen Writer.....</i>	<i>238</i>

(The) Ambivalent Character	246
<i>Lúa Castro – Dangerous Reporting</i>	<i>246</i>
Supportive Females	261
<i>Irina – Trapped in Prostitution.....</i>	<i>261</i>
<i>Alana Ovejero – Bending the Policing Rules</i>	<i>270</i>
<i>Rebeca de Palacios and Marta de Palacios – Family Ties.....</i>	<i>278</i>
 CONCLUSION	 292
 WORKS CITED.....	 298
 VITA.....	 316

INTRODUCTION

“I have wanted you to see out of my eyes so many times”
–Elizabeth Berg, *The Pull of the Moon*

Scholarship has situated crime fiction at the epicenter of contemporary prose narrative due to its mass appeal and penchant for engaging timely issues charged with social and political significance. The genre has proven to be particularly malleable as well; changes in its conventions, its hybridized nature and the continuity offered by its characteristically serial format have developed to reflect the material and socialized realities of cultural production in a globalized world while also being capable of sending a serious message on contemporary concerns. Popular interest in actual criminals, extensive media coverage of murders that unsettle readers and the procedural elements of police investigations are assiduous elements of the popular infatuation with this literary genre. Consequently, crime fiction plots tap into the dynamics of public opinion on urgently relevant topics related to crime and criminality in today's world such as drug trafficking, prostitution and white slave trafficking, sects and political corruption scandals, to name but a few. Furthermore, the situation of women in contemporary societies, their representation in the genre, as well as the importance of their physical appearance and its intersection with sexual violence are crucial topics that can be added to the previous list. Even though the critical attention received by the genre regarding gender has been on the rise lately, there remains unexplored critical terrain of the roles women play in crime fiction, namely the synergy between physical appearance, professional acumen and (self)-worth, the narratological approach used to portray the victims and their corpses, or the role and coordinates of secondary characters.

To that end, the main purpose of this research project, “*Crímenes Exquisitos: Towards the Creation of a Female Cartography in Spanish Crime Fiction*,” is to offer a critical analysis of the female representation in the literary world of *Crímenes Exquisitos*, the crime series penned by Spanish writers Vicente Garrido and Nieves Abarca. The saga¹ currently consists of four installments: *Crímenes exquisitos* (2012), *Martyrium* (2013), *El hombre de la máscara de espejos* (2014), and *Los muertos viajan deprisa* (2016), that interweave not only all the aforementioned elements along with criminal pathology, sociological concerns, as well as a considerable measure of intertextuality with an array of artistic media/genres intersections. Moreover, the authors place at the forefront of the narrative a smart, highly qualified, trained, skilled and physically attractive national police female inspector, Valentina Negro.

Valentina’s configuration as an agent who navigates this “exquisite” criminal world created by the authors became the germ that propelled this investigation because of her stance towards the sexual violence, torture and murder that populates the series. Moreover, *Crímenes Exquisitos* presents a sense of ambiguity towards the perception of the aforementioned crimes when the victims are women. The root for this ambiguity relies on the complex web of agents, their unique configurations and the traditional masculine lens that inform their behaviors and psychological precepts. As such, when all this factors participating in the criminal world coalesce the reality they unfold becomes more and more intricate. Hence, it creates ambivalence between two opposing but not necessarily mutually exclusive views: (1) emphasizing, reproducing and perpetuating or (2) rejecting and condemning women’s objectification and punishment for their sexuality. Initially conceived as a master thesis gravitating only around

¹ From now on, throughout this research, the term *Crímenes Exquisitos* –both words capitalized– will be used to refer to the entire tetralogy, whereas *Crímenes exquisitos* –with a lowercase adjective– will be adopted to address only the first installment in the crime series.

Valentina's persona and her reaction to these matters, this research project evolved and opened its own boundaries to accommodate all the female figures since all these characters function through a web of interconnections that affect one another and that ultimately gravitate around Valentina. Victims, (s)heroes and villains then share configuration traits and are affected by similar gender concerns. Hence, their appealing physicality, behavior, sexuality, professional acumen and victimological coordinates are the unifying thread for this dissertation.

While this research project does not delve into the origin and development of the genre from its opening to its contemporary manifestations, nor with its masculine tenets, the first inevitable consideration before approaching this female oriented investigation lies in the metalanguage itself, that is, the arduous decision of selecting the proper terminology when analyzing a series belonging to such a vast and rich literary genre. Due to its wide ranging origins, development, editorial and marketing obsession with labels and the diverse possibilities of categorization depending on the criteria used, there are almost endless options when classifying the genre and breaking it up into sub-genres. Some eminent scholars such as José Colmeiro provided a detailed account of the dissimilarities between *novela policiaca* and *novela negra* in Spain. According to his view, the *novela policiaca* encompasses different historical subgenres and heavily based one the investigation of a criminal act, while the *novela negra* continues and evolves from the classical strand focusing on the ethical considerations, lack of happy ending and emphasizing the vulnerability, moral and physical integrity of its main character (53, 61-62). However, as the genre expanded its production and versatility the boundaries became blurred; globalization and the hybridity of the genre itself have contributed to a wide array of criteria for categorization that Javier Sánchez Zapatero summarizes as follows: (1) a historical criterion that frames *policiaico* versus *negro*, (2) a criterion of characters, which

encompasses *novela detectivesca*, police procedural or criminal depending on the main protagonist's traits, (3) a pragmatic criterion including *novela de misterio*, *intriga*, or *suspense* based on the reader's response, and (4) a geographical criterion based on the localization of the narratives and/or authors: nordic noir, *negra mediterránea*, *neopolicial iberoamericana*, polar, krimi or giallo (11). For the purpose of this dissertation there has been a conscious decision to opt for the generic label of crime fiction to allude to the genre in general and the crime series selected in particular, mainly due to its ability to function as an umbrella term that encompasses all the other labels –*negra*, *policiaca*, police procedural, thriller– all of which are also displayed in *Crímenes Exquisitos*.

Another factor required to trace this roadmap towards the creation of a female cartography in the *Crímenes Exquisitos* world is a critical analysis of the female roles in the historical trajectory of crime fiction worldwide, and more specifically in Spain, with a special emphasis on the three elements in question: (1) the antecedent female lead detectives, (2) the coordinates of female victims and corpses, and (3) the surrounding body of secondary female characters populating the background of these narratives. Whereas a revision of female detective figures is a feasible endeavor based on the abundant literature on the matter in the last two decades, studies focused on victims and less prominent characters prove to be scarce, turning this attempt into a more complicated task. In addition, literary research on these three fronts in more contemporary crime fiction series in Spain is a herculean and somewhat fragmentary process as well due to the explosion and proliferation of the genre in recent years. Precisely, even the anthologies and volumes that attempt to account for the most prominent literary sagas in the history of the genre in Spain cannot span its immensity. Critically acclaimed scholars such as Shelley Godsland, Nancy Vosburg, Inmaculada Pertusa, Melissa Stewart and Eva París-Huesca

are focusing their efforts into a feminization of the genre placing the emphasis on female protagonists and women authors, allowing space and legitimacy for voices and writers, such as Dolores Redondo and Susana Martín Gijón, to contribute to the creation of a contemporary female canon of the genre. However, neither these volumes nor the academic conferences on crime fiction have produced yet an analysis of Garrido and Abarca's rich narrative, despite their editorial success and prominent position among readers and authors alike. Hence, this gap in the literary criticism of the genre is an omission that this project intends to fill by opening the first lines in a hopefully fruitful dialogue among scholars.

The third consideration is the undeniable link between women's objectification by the masculine gaze as highly sexual beings whose main purpose is men's own pleasure, and the violence they are subjected to. Joan Ramón Resina deems this connection a tautology: "la relación entre sexualidad y crimen apenas precisa indicarse; es una de esas relaciones que parecen naturales porque constituyen un presupuesto ideológico de gran alcance" (62). This assessment allows for a multitude of readings ranging from the erotic pleasure of committing a (sexual) crime, to the crimes committed by the influence of desire or a *femme fatale* figure or the connections between men and their toxic wish to control women and their sexuality.

Expanding on the latter, due to women's predisposition in the history of crime fiction for victimhood positions, several precepts are entailed. Firstly, from a traditional sociological perspective, women in the genre are configured in sexual coordinates and their worth is based on their physical attributes. Whereas more submissive, obedient and "morally good" characters are portrayed as the quintessential angel in the house figure, the patriarchy has reproduced *ad nauseum* the contradictory notion that beautiful and attractive women who emphasize their physical assets enjoy more access to better opportunities and jobs yet face backlash or are not

respected and taken seriously because of said physical attributes. This masculine concept of beauty and femininity seemingly opposes the terms attractiveness and intelligence as mutually exclusive, thus emphasizing the misogynistic treatment towards women who end up constantly scrutinized, never meeting male expectations. As a consequence, this continuous policing of women's bodies in the genre more often than not translates into their characterization as merely sexualized and alienated body parts: "It is often noted that the sexualization of women's bodies, indeed in some instances, the reduction of women to their wombs, is the cornerstone of patriarchy" (Chesney-Lind 1).

These bodily attitudes towards women need to be understood in a holistic manner. There is definitely certain transfer, namely an interrelation of archetypes, stereotypes and expectations from television series and film narratives in which the cult of sexy super-heroines promotes strong, fulfilled and highly qualified yet extremely beautiful and attractive leading female characters fighting crime. However, our (s)heroes are not immune to the violence of the criminal world and often become victims themselves. While this aesthetically pleasing approach to women's portrayal is expected in visual media, it might offer certain resistance in literature since, besides that graphic delight, it can also generate rejection and condemnation towards those features and their role in female victimization, which in turn becomes a factor when determining whether or not crime fiction narratives produce a feminist reading that is critical of the genre, its tradition and, in addition, the society it fictionalizes that also resembles our own.

This intersection between physically pleasing female bodies and their objectification oftentimes materializes through physical violence, and contemporary crime fiction, in general, tends to emphasize and exploit it from its initial pages. This violence surfaces as men's reaction to women's configuration and sexuality. The controversy with sexuality can be reduced to a

power struggle argument, meaning that it is perceived as normal or abnormal depending on the entities in power. Therefore, from a masculine point of view, those patriarchal norms encapsulate female sexuality, along with an aesthetically appealing and strong physical configuration, hence labeling women as deviant the moment their coordinates do not adhere to traditional feminine standards. As a consequence, sexual and physical violence are the sociocultural means in place to monitor women. Regarding the use of rape as a controlling and retaliatory measure towards women's sexuality and their deviance, Michael Kimmel, following Tim Beneke's take on the language used by patriarchal cultures to describe women's beauty and their sexuality, raises an important concern on how these visible physical attributes shape not only thoughts but also actions (and the legitimacy of those): "Women's beauty is experienced by men as an act of aggression: it invades male's thoughts, elicits unwelcome feelings of desire and longing, makes men feel helpless, powerless, vulnerable. Then, having committed this invasive act of aggression, women reject men, say no to sex, turn them down. Rape is a way to get even, to exact revenge for rejection, to retaliate" (Kimmel 281). Ultimately, the notion of (serial) rape as a weapon against women is related to the concept of the (serial) murderer as James Messerschmidt explains in his review of feminist theory and Jane Caputi's work on cultural feminism since "modern patriarchy is maintained by means of "gynocide" (systematic violence against women by men) and that the serial murderer is society's new "henchman" whose service is the custodianship of patriarchy" (*Masculinities* 41).

Crímenes Exquisitos, as a series, combines all the aforementioned elements; the characteristic hybridity of the genre (*policíaca, negra, thriller, police procedural*), the treatment of timely themes (white slave and drug trafficking, prostitution, sects, corruption cases), a female lead investigator, a narrative that prominently features female characters, the appropriation and

subversion of female character types into new configurations, women's victimization and objectification, and, of course, serial rapists and killers with delusions of grandeur. Garrido and Abarca find the evil that permeates today's society and transform it into literary matter for the salient theme that subtends the series: the misogyny and gendered violence that poisons an already perverted society that allows killing more and more women. This literary world obsessed with crime and controlling women –especially those it considers sexually deviant– is plagued with violence, graphic and brutal rape scenarios and crime scenes orchestrated as performances that merge horror with art, pushing the limits of violence to the brink of gore. Readers can either be enthralled or appalled by such display of female aggression and perhaps that ambivalent reaction is the reason why the saga has not been properly analyzed yet.

Taking into consideration all these aspects, this dissertation attempts to initiate a scholarly/critical conversation on the series, its representation of the female body and the physical and sexual issues that affect them, since bodies are a roadmap to our lives, as Spanish (crime fiction) writer Marta Sanz claims, “esa necesidad de nombrar el cuerpo porque el cuerpo es ese mapa donde se van quedando tanto las frustraciones como los trabajos como las alegrías de la vida. Es el lugar donde tú existes” (Fallarás 109). Hence, once female bodies become available and visible they can be physically and sexually assaulted, and most women face violence at some point in their lives, making crime fiction a vehicle that shows possible ways of dealing with its trauma. Thus, the present research has been organized into three major chapters according to the three types of characters connected by their bodies yet categorized into different groups along different lines: victims (corpses), the detective figure (Valentina) and the surrounding satellite characters.

Chapter I, "Victims: Female bodies," explores how Garrido and Abarca distinguish themselves from tradition with their treatment of female victims in the series. I provide a pathway through female victimological coordinates from its original conception in order to dwell on the intricacies of *Crímenes Exquisitos* and how Garrido and Abarca provide specific victimological coordinates and narratological decisions that not only diverge from tradition, but also vary from one novel to the next. As such, the chapter is divided in four main sections, one per novel, and it presents a detailed account of each victim, their physical and psychological coordinates to place them in the female cartography of the genre and their narrative arcs along with the intertextuality and specific functions they portray in the series.

Crímenes exquisitos offers a more humanized depiction of the victims, Lidia, Patricia, Floria and Raquel² are developed fully as characters with a complete background story, yet they also are tools at the service of men, to fulfill their own vendetta, who end up murdered and staged in artistic performances that reenact famous artistic representations of female death. *Martyrium* relies on religious sculptures to stage and unify the murders, however, this time Eleonora and Paola are not treated as the former female characters; they are turned into victims of opportunity and are not granted a background story or a proper narrative arc, thus their deaths have minimal repercussions except to prompt the murder investigation. *El hombre de la máscara de espejos* relies instead on filmography –snuff movies reminiscent of German expressionist cinema– to depict a sect who pays for raping and murdering women and then trafficking with the

² Whereas some narratives tend to be paternalistic and refer to the body of females using only their first name and allude to the men by their last name as a sign of respect, I have opted to switch the lens on this gendered approach. I refer to all female characters with their given name to give them their own agency, to allow them to have their own voice. At the same time I recognize a sense of familiarity and closeness with the reader in them. I have maintained the use of men's last name not as a sign of traditional respect or as a means to perpetuate the authority they are usually given but as a way of distancing them from the readers, relegating them to a less important background position to allow women to showcase their stories.

videotapes. Belén and Encina are victims of this cult who preys on women with acting skills and stage presence. The series comes to an end with *Los muertos viajan deprisa* a narrative whose main female victim's configuration pays homage to Agatha Christie by reinterpreting *Murder on the Orient Express*. While the most poignant aspect of this approach to the female victims is Garrido and Abarca's ability to alter backgrounds, coordinates and narratological decisions, the narratives comes full-circle stressing these female victims' common denominator –attractive bodies and deviant sexuality– as the main reasons for their victimization.

Chapter II, “Female Detecting: Valentina Negro” gravitates around the figure of the main detective, national police inspector Valentina Negro. I begin by relating the protagonist's experience to that of women serving in the modern police force worldwide and in Spain, after which I continue by situating her in the history of female detective characters in crime fiction. Unlike the first chapter that is divided into different sections for each installment of the series, my analysis of Valentina in Chapter II is organized along the lines of the attributes that define her character: (1) her coordinates as a (s)hero and the distinction and intersection between her personal and professional life, (2) her traits as a *femme fatale*, her physical appearance and the (toxic) relationships that arise from this synergy, and (3) her least public coordinates as a survivor of rape, PTSD and violence. Garrido and Abarca show through a detailed police procedural account a down-to-earth woman with flaws and insecurities both in the public and private spheres. Valentina's configuration as a police figure oscillates between a constant tension with her female predecessors and an appropriation, subversion and, sometimes, rejection of those roles. Her composition, like the rest of the female characters in the series, relies heavily on the symbiosis between attractiveness and emotional makeup, as well as the advantages and obstacles they generate related to her professional success. These components represent that new direction

in contemporary Spanish crime fiction in which women writers bestow their protagonists with traits that subvert traditional female-led narratives; they exemplify the constant tension, contradiction and social trap endured by successful, attractive and highly intelligent and qualified women in a heavily male dominated profession. At the same time, they allow new venues for discussion on urgently relevant topics for women.

Chapter III, “On Female Satellite Characters” discusses the less prominent role of secondary characters, and is divided into three main sections: antagonistic, supportive and ambivalent figures due to their gravitation around Valentina’s personal and professional spheres and their relationship with her. I consider it important to explore these oftentimes forgotten females because, first of all, they represent a significant body of characters in the series depicting a wide variety of professions, personalities, and behaviors, and secondly, because the creation, inclusion and development of these figures not only promote the advancement of the main plot and different storylines, but also add depth to the series and more importantly to Valentina and her network. Some of these relationships are openly antagonistic –Raquel, Sara, Rajiva and Estela–, archetypal *femme fatale* figures who challenge and impede Valentina’s work, while the supportive and ambivalent (mainly Lúa) ones add a new twist to the crime fiction tradition by establishing a tight-knit body of females that congregates and works together to help Valentina accomplish her mission, thus creating a sense of unity and empowerment. In order to depict best Valentina’s constant tension with these characters, and also because of the scarcity of research on secondary characters in crime fiction (and perhaps the supposition that not all readers of the series might be familiarized with these satellite characters), I proceed with a more detailed approach to these females, their narrative arcs, their coordinates as sexually deviant characters, their responses to sexual crimes and how all of them contribute to make *Crímenes Exquisitos* –

and Valentina— a literary world that could not function or advance the main storylines without the presence and accomplishments of these women.

CHAPTER I

Victims: Female Bodies

“The boundaries which divide Life from Death are at best shadowy and vague. Who shall say where the one ends, and where the other begins?”
–Edgar Allan Poe, “The Premature Burial”

Introduction

North American art critic and novelist Willard Huntington Wright, most commonly known by his pseudonym, S. S. Van Dine, wrote in 1928 a frequently cited article among critics of crime and detective fiction, “Twenty Rules for Writing Detective Stories,” for *American Magazine*. This renowned piece contains the biding laws that supposedly, all great writers of the genre from that era abide by and respect. Van Dine lists as the seventh precept the importance and necessity of a victim, more precisely a corpse, for various purposes: “There simply must be a corpse in a detective novel, and the deader the corpse the better. No lesser crime than murder will suffice. Three hundred pages is far too much pother for a crime other than murder. After all, the reader’s trouble and expenditure of energy must be rewarded” (n.p.).

Indeed, the presence of a corpse presides over the traditional triangular schema, consisting of a victim, the sleuth, and finally, the culprit. That lifeless body becomes the indispensable element that inaugurates the narrative and launches the criminal investigation in the works of the greatest classical exponents of the genre: Edgar Allan Poe, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and Agatha Christie.

However, scholarship agrees that this term of the equation does not customarily hold the same value as the criminal and the detective. According to David Lehman, the victim possesses

less significance than the other characters and its only purpose in the narrative is to get killed, and to do it quickly (6). This construction of the victim as an expendable persona concurs with Shelley Godsland's depiction of victims as empty signifiers since the victim "elicits little – if any – horror or compassion from either the detective or the reader of the text, inured and anaesthetized as the latter has become to the textualization of the corpse, and aware as he or she is of its alleged role as a purely literary device" (*Carmens* 87).

Whereas the victim remains a key component to start the narrative, given that without a body there would be no novel, no detecting plot, there seems to be a lack of agreement in its true value to the development of the story. Gill Plain calls this lacuna the "deep structural irony" since the body of the victim is indeed crucial to the fictional process and yet remains overlooked by it (12). Before analyzing the space and attention given, or not, to these bodies, it seems appropriate to elucidate what the term conveys. Broadly speaking, victims can be divided into two groups: those who survive and manage to narrate their story; and those who are killed, hence they are not capable of sharing it. That is, strictly speaking, victims *per se* and corpses.

The Oxford Companion to Crime and Mystery Writing, however, offers similar entries for these terms. The victim is defined as a requisite for the narrative and a cipher for the detective, but it remains an unexplored territory, rich and odious individuals in traditional whodunits or well-written but two-dimensional ones in hard-boiled stories, until the 1940s (Edwards 478). Thereafter, crime fiction offers a more realistic portrayal of those affected by crime, leaving behind depictions based on the victim as pretext or amusement, although the acceptance still concedes that "Sometimes they may be seen as having brought their fate upon themselves"

(479), a reflection that will be revisited further during this chapter.³ Likewise, the corpse is contemplated as a requirement of the genre. While it disappears from view in Golden Age narratives, in hard-boiled and police procedurals “the corpse offers an irresistible opportunity to signify inhuman conditions in a world of savagery” (Reilly 92). The disposal, as well as the display of said corpses not only becomes the subject of contemporary debates, but also creates a venue for forensic and police investigations. That is, lifeless corpses own, in fact, a vital role in the innovation and reinvention of the conventions of the genre (92). Hence, based on the closeness of said approaches, for the purpose of this chapter, both terms, victims and corpses, can be considered as interchangeable synonyms since all female characters analyzed are equally victims of the various serial killers of the series, and consequentially, corpses as well.

The itinerary throughout the history of the genre depicts a roadmap infested with corpses of different natures. Godsland divides the configuration of those victims into two variants, namely, the body in the library or bloodier, messier, nastier, dismembered and disemboweled cadavers (*Carmens* 85). For instance, Christie’s murders, regardless of their level of brutality, are not described with the amount of detail and description that readers can find in contemporary crime fiction. This type of journey among victims and corpses also illustrates the representation of gender in crime fiction, most often associated with the sexist and chauvinistic nature of the genre; the identity of the collection of bodies that populates it. Regardless of the two opposing depictions of the victims’ bodies used by crime writers, and as critics have penned, the victim is always female (Gregory Klein 173). Even though it is true that the body almost always belongs to a woman, the delineation of the body is still rendered in a female manner, regardless of said

³ For instance, Joan Ramón Resina, in his research on victims in Spanish crime fiction, remarks their previous role in the genre as characters entirely responsible for their own deaths, they were looking for it since their rejection of order translates into a request for violence (68).

anatomical features of the corpse. That is, male corpses are described in a similar fashion. In other words, the body embodies the lack of agency against the dominion of the patriarchy, hence accentuating its liminal position in the discourse. Consequently, following Gregory Klein's trail, Joy Palmer asserts that "the process of detection and tracing the criminal body is simultaneously a process of "feminization," whereby that body is rendered an object of the scientific gaze" (56).

Peter Messent in his critical route through crime fiction highlights its fixation with bodily harm and specifically the female body: "There are plenty of male corpses in the history of the genre, too, but it is rare to find the same type of emphasis on physical mutilation, and especially of a sexual nature, as when the victim is a woman" (75). It has been documented by scholars that when male authors are in charge of the narrative, the body certainly belongs to a woman and an erotic reading of her death transpires. Most often than not, when the author is male, the female bodies are faceless and the only contextualized part of their bodies is their genitalia. However, when the stories are written by women the female body is an inherent requirement of a plot that questions the absence of the victim and that adds intense dramatic density (López Martínez 185).⁴

The contemporary wave of crime fiction writing forces readers and critics to revisit the assumed insignificance associated with the victim. Put differently, the victim can no longer be reduced to a mere silhouette, nor a lifeless face for the reader to soon forget. This shift of critical lens, according to Sabine Binder in her study of female victims in South African crime thrillers,

⁴ Taking into consideration the literary partnership between Garrido and Abarca, male and female, respectively, it is relevant to assess how this mixed gendered tandem can generate singularly important work in the representation of gendered victimhood in the crime fiction genre. Their narratives offer an intentional and internal constant contradiction between exalting and criticizing the sexualized discourse of women's bodies is not mutually exclusive. This ambivalent approach answers to the specific necessities of each individual victim and their narrative arcs.

provides female victims and corpses with a new and unusual prominence (100). Anyhow, for the investigation to move forward, it is imperative for the detective to gain as much knowledge as possible about the victim. Instead of being forgotten, contemporary narratives delve into the reactivation of the victim, that is, making the victim talk by means of the body, paying close attention to its anatomical features and wounds, or by bringing to life the personality of the victim, by means of the detective's job (Dunant 12-13). With the crime series *Crímenes Exquisitos*, readers witness both approaches of reactivation of the victim. Their bodies tell the story of the crime, and the narrative also provides their personalities and other traits of their lives. That is to say, the series tends to offer a highly humanized description of the victims. They have a story, a family, they have quirks, they also make questionable decisions and sometimes, even more questionable acquaintances. These narratological decisions therefore serve a twofold purpose: (1) to untangle the mystery pertaining to their deaths, and (2) to bring them back to life as presences that go beyond the forensic slab. Godsland affirms this second point: "This very reconstruction of the corpse's former incarnation as a person is a powerful means of redeeming and resurrecting female victims who are textualized not as individuals but as mere symbols and symptoms of the gendered aggression directed against them" (*Carmens* 88).

However, it is highly common to see a combination between the voyeuristic attitude of gazing at sexually assaulted and mutilated female bodies and the use of forensic and technical argot to mitigate the reader's guilt about reading these sort of narratives. But the voyeurism remains. Female characters are being punished because of their roles; these women who deviate from the gender norm established by the patriarchy are bodily punished (Hill 64). The world of crime fiction can be summarized as a wound culture; Kathleen Kennedy uses this label in reference to the exploitation of brutalized bodies and people in the narrative world of Carol

O'Connell's detective Kathleen Mallory, where killers delight from "sadistic fantasies through acts of inordinate and often sexual cruelty, usually against women's bodies" (56).

Following an overly simplistic categorization, it can be said that the patriarchy and its culture compartmentalize women throughout the annals of western history and civilization in opposing and binary dichotomies: good-evil, passive-active, submissive-dominant, etc.

Consequently, bad girls and transgressive women are those who challenge, ignore, cross over and behave defiantly against the patriarchal limits intended to circumscribe them (M. Young 1).

Therefore, those figures, who refuse or are unable to abide by the rules, labeled deviant and disobedient (Eve or Pandora, to name but a culturally recognizable few), are invariably condemned. Linking popular culture and contemporary feminist crime fiction, Stieg Larsson's Lisbeth Salander emerges as the most radical of bad and transgressive girls since this character embodies, as Mallory Young states, "One of the most recent pop-culture trends in girls behaving badly presents women copying the behavior of aggressive, promiscuous, and uncensored young men" (3).

This assessment pertains to the identification, categorization and analysis of the female victims in the *Crímenes Exquisitos* series. The accumulation of female bodies throughout the four installments seems to have a common root; women's deviance from standard, traditional, patriarchal conventions. Hence, there are different factors to consider: (1) the significance of these choices in their subsequent murders specifically, but also in regards to society as a whole, (2) Garrido and Abarca's intention with the inclusion of these characters, and, ensuing Young's inquiries, (3) the possible answers to the following concerns: do these women pose a threat to the social order? If so, why? Do they merely upset social norms or do they also subvert the *status quo*? Is it possible to elicit a feminist and societal criticism from these narratives?

Sarah Dunant makes an acute evaluation of the existent connection between sexual violence and the explosion of feminism: “The more visible and noisy women have become in our culture, the more they have become the target of fictional violence and sadism” (18). It seems as if women are physically and sexually punished for leaving the safety of their kitchens and homes –confines demarcated ideologically within the patriarchy and perpetuated as spaces where they “belong.” When these presuppositions subtend the narrative, the mutilation and deaths of women become their fault, what they rightfully deserve for their deviance. The female victims in Garrido and Abarca’s crime series are dead as a result of their sexual deviance and transgressions, yet they resist and part of them still lives. The death of their bodies is evident, but their storyline is far from over, they still populate the narrative and they live on by means of the Artist, alias given to the serial killer from the first installment, his twisted creations and the ghostly shadow they create. What is more, the police resurrect these victims through the investigation. This set of victims is conceived and need to be understood as major characters not just mere literary devices. Additionally, another common denominator among these women is their accession to more public spheres of society. Their professional acumen and/or purported usurpation of male arenas become the catalyst for these male killers’ compulsion and obsession with controlling women. That is, the more women are liberated, enjoy their freedom and refuse to be subdued, the more uncontrolled instances of gendered violence transpires.

For this reason, it is necessary for contemporary writers to infuse female victims with a different set of coordinates in order to invest them with agency. Godsland highlights that when women write about female victims the main purpose is to voice concerns about male violence against women in contemporary Spain (*Carmens* 90). Garrido and Abarca address such issues with their deliberate oscillation between fascination and rejection of this gendered violence. The

question that still remains is whether readers would become accomplices or not in the perpetuation, replication and enjoyment of the same patterns of gendered violence inherent in this genre. This especially resonates with some of the current media, judicial and official discourses in Spain, like El Crimen Nagore Laffage⁵ or La Manada's case,⁶ that are, unfortunately, downplaying this gendered issue. They influence readers and viewers on their tendency to consider female victims responsible for their own victimization at the same time they incur in an emphasis on diminishing or extenuating the perpetrator's accountability (Dowler et al. 841).

This assertion can be easily proven by looking at several newspaper articles pertaining to rape, sexual assault and intimate partner violence. Precisely, more than 800 women have been killed in Spain in the last fifteen years (Clemente n.p.) and it is fair to assume that most of those women go unnoticed by the entire population. Moreover, the vast majority of the headlines fail to address the murders with the right terminology; they tend to use euphemisms such as "died" or "was found dead." It is also necessary to tackle both the lack of protection women have against

⁵ El Crimen Nagore Laffage refers to the rape and assassination of Nagore Laffage, a twenty-year-old nursing student. It set a precedent for future cases of gendered violence, especially La Manada's. When Nagore refused to have sexual intercourse in Pamplona during the San Fermes in 2008, a doctor and coworker, almost eight years her senior, raped and beat her to death. The sentence accused him of homicide instead of murder due to several aggravants, and he was set free from prison after completing only nine out of the twelve years established by the sentence.

⁶ La Manada's case refers to a gang rape committed in Pamplona during the San Fermes in 2016. A group of five men, all of them older and larger than the victim, sexually assaulted an eighteen-year-old female. Despite the physical evidence and video recordings, the sentence accused them of sexual abuse based on the lack of resistance and violence, granting them nine years in prison instead of the corresponding twelve to fifteen for rape. The perpetrators are currently free under bail until the sentence is final. A recollection of all the news coverage generated by the national newspaper *El País* can be found online. See https://elpais.com/tag/caso_la_manada/a. The complete sentence is also available to the general public online. See https://www.eldiario.es/norte/navarra/DOCUMENTO-sentencia-integra-manada_0_765024296.html.

their partners even after reporting them to the police. Just recently, one notable example is Jessica Bravo who was shot and killed by her abuser ex-husband at her child's school.⁷ Even though there have been numerous physical demonstrations and online protests against all these cases of violence against women, the official patriarchal discourse, namely, law enforcement, the judicial system, and sometimes, even the press; seems to keep victimizing, condemning and considering women guilty of their own rapes and murders.

These are just a few instances of the status of this gendered violence in Spain; they do not serve as the cases that permeate the literary realm, but rather are the real and exemplary cases that serve as the basis for the kinds of violence authors like Garrido and Abarca seek to shed light on in the literary realm. As a matter of fact, their series emphasizes said violence since virtually all the females that populate the narrative are raped at some point and, more often than not, the perpetrators do not face justice appropriately.

Crime fiction therefore highlights the flaws and injustices that women face in our society. As Deborah Jermyn asserts, "The female murder victim's corpse, then, comes to testify for the ultimate violent act against women in our culture, she resonates as the final outcome of everyday misogyny" (154). As a matter of fact, one of the main original traits of hard-boiled fiction was its institutional criticism. It is obvious that contemporary crime fiction still serves as a vehicle for such criticism, while at the same time, it also offers an important sociological analysis due to new ways of speaking, thinking and behaving in society (Avanzas Álvarez 554). That is, it embodies the perfect framework to examine acts and settings wedged in a capitalist heteronormative patriarchal society.

⁷ For further information on her murder, see the following reportage of her case https://www.elespanol.com/reportajes/20171109/260724864_0.html.

In relation to the graphical portrayal and representation of misogynist acts, Messent highlights the association between crime fiction and the horror genre as one of the sources of fascination with the slashed body. While explaining what he calls “the constant diet of bodily mutilation,” he pinpoints standard gender stereotypes:

Attitudes to women in twentieth- and twenty-first-century Western societies have persistently been expressed through the medium of their physical bodies, the two (women and their bodies) often seen as synonymous in a cultural imagination partly produced, and certainly dominated by men. Such an objectification of women can go hand in hand with deep-rooted misogyny and male anger, but it is more often associated with a general, rather free-floating, sense of gender anxiety, usually unexpressed at any fully conscious level. It acts accordingly – in its various manifestations – as a way of asserting linguistic, psychological, and physical authority and control over women in a gender context where traditional patterns of dominance and submission (the male as the physically and vocally powerful head of the household the woman in the weaker, quieter, nurturing role) no longer hold. (77)

Julia Kristeva’s concept of the abject further illuminates the idea of the mutilated body as process of objectification undertaken by male authority. She identifies, broadly speaking, abjection as the lurid reaction towards the rupture between the self (I, subject) and the other (object), the corpse being one of her main examples to said response:

The corpse, [...] is the utmost of abjection. It is death infecting life. Abject. It is something rejected from which one does not part, from which one does not protect oneself as from an object [...] It is thus not lack of cleanliness or health

that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite. The traitor, the liar, the criminal with a good conscience, the shameless rapist, the killer who claims he is a savior.... Any crime, because it draws attention to the fragility of the law, is abject, but premediated crime, cunning murder, hypocritical revenge are even more so because they heighten the display of such fragility. (4)

Wounds, pus, blood, acrid smell, mutilated body parts, etc., are elements that afflict and endanger the self's identity as a living being, indicative elements of the disconnection between that which constitutes the subject and markers of its own decomposition. Translocated then to crime fiction, instances of gendered violence and its consequent damage and wounds, that is, the physical and psychological actions that threaten the (female) body are not just representations of abjection on themselves, but also they refer to and reflect on the frailty of the ineffective masculine oriented social order where they take place, which in turn, embodies another exemplification of abjection in itself.

Naturally, the reader experiences two opposing and contradicting reactions to the assemblage of victims and corpses that populate crime fiction. On one hand, an anxious and apprehensive position can be expected whenever the self is inserted into the violence of the story, fearing the possibility of experiencing abjection. On the other, one can delight in the voyeuristic nature of gazing human bodies, in the taboo and excess they embody. Precisely, this controversial desire and obsession with dead bodies and their intricacies is a subject matter that has always captivated the human imagination. In fact, dead bodies have always held a privilege in Western culture. Christine Montross emphasizes that there is nothing new about our curiosity for dead bodies: "We peer into coffins, stare at fatal accidents, and populate our prime time

television hours with forensic investigations of gruesome deaths. Throughout history, examples abound of large crowds at public executions” (50). Perhaps plastination is an acute example to understand why crime fiction readers feel that concatenation of voyeuristic tendencies when facing corpses.

Plastination is a process developed in the 1970s by Gunther von Hagens to transform living tissue into moldable plastic for the main purpose of teaching anatomy in medical and veterinary schools. However, in the 1990s von Hagens started *Body Worlds*, a set of quite popular “[m]useum exhibitions of chemically transformed, meticulously dissected and artistically displayed cadavers” (Lantos 1) that are not free of controversy when it comes to obscenity, lack of consent when obtaining the bodies and, of course, Christianity. Nevertheless, this exhibit was widely popular as it traveled the globe in temporary installations, and remains open to the public on permanent display in London. Whatever the grounds for the success of these controversial bodies, whether sensationalism, curiosity, voyeuristic or clinical detachment, the public’s evaluative adjectives range from “tawdry, exploitative, sensational, even pornographic,” but truthfully, “[p]art of their fascination is the bizarre nudity, the fact that the bodies are, well, just bodies” (Lantos 14).

The connection between wounds and bodily punishment as sights of abjection and the human obsession with dead bodies and the morbidity of staring at them finds fruitful grounds in the intertextuality and portrayal of the Artist’s graphic and staged murders. This cult attraction to the human body, in conjunction with artistic performances, creates a new array of opportunities to depict female corpses in contemporary crime series. Discussing the presence of artistic references in literature seems like a tautology. There are indeed multiple intertextual allusions that populate a formulaic genre such as crime fiction. But the importance of iconography and

intertextuality with various visual arts plays a key role in the crime scenes in the series *Crímenes Exquisitos*. The vast majority of the murders, especially in the first two installments, are staged as dramatic performances of female death, infused with artistic reminiscences. In fact, due to the Artist's sick and twisted iconography, an artistic suspension is created in which females are dead but at the same time they are brought back to life, to eternal life. This, however, cannot be said about the masculine figures, except for Stefano. There are indeed several male murders throughout the series, some of them with the same creative undertones, like Sebastián Delgado's death by a harpoon, referencing Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* (1851); but they are not as numerous and they do not present the same level of viciousness as when the victim is a woman.

These artistic allusions also apply and translate to the adaptation of crime fiction to the big screen. Mónica Barrientos analyzes the use of portraits in noir cinema, and focusing specifically on North American psychological movies from the 1940s, she claims that those paintings: "Se emplean como recurso metafórico mediante el cual se muestra el discurrir psicológico de los personajes, bien a través de su filiación con el retrato como objeto, bien con la persona cuya imagen ha quedado plasmada en el lienzo" (665). Those inner monologues allude to oneiric plots and daydreaming situations in which the characters let their thoughts, their criminal impulses and obscure sexual desires loose. This pictorial element responds to fetishism and scopophilia, which is why all the portraits contain young women—women who are conceptualized as sexual objects, objects of male desire (Barrientos 668). Additionally, there is a close connection between these portraits and death; they comprise suicides, murders and attempted murders. Barrientos's research can indeed be extrapolated to Garrido and Abarca's series. On one hand, the Artist indeed has created several paintings that portray his obscure desires and even preconize his murders. He shares the same motivation; he uses his art to unleash

his true murderous and psychopathic nature. With the exception of Marat, all of them depict young attractive females. On the other hand, there is the main subject matter of this chapter, the Artist's performances of famous artistic representations of female death.

The problem that may arise from the construction of these highly artistic, aestheticized deaths and performances is the deviation from the actual tragedy, for readers to forget that the patriarchy is allowing, and even enjoying, the portrayal of men killing women. On this poignant criticism, Elizabeth Bronfen poses an insightful question, making both readers and critics ponder the following: "How can a verbal or visual artistic representation be both aesthetically pleasing and morbid, as the conjunction of beautiful woman and death seems to imply?" (x). This creation process does indeed embody quite a misogynistic approach, a beautiful and physically attractive woman as the subject matter and stimulus that propels the creation of art.⁸ As if less graceful women were deemed undeserving of attention, importance and representation by artists (and by the rest of the population by good measure). A convention that Garrido and Abarca seem to both follow and subvert since all their female victims are extremely attractive.

The authors also play with the readers' knowledge of art. While some of their artistic references are easily recognizable and accessible, like Ophelia and Lucy; others require a higher level of awareness and instruction. That is, readers need the narrator, Valentina and/or Javier to elucidate Strauss's operatic passage or the religious sculptural allusions, to name but a few. These narratological decisions grant access to a wider range of readers at the same time they strike the sadoerotic cord of female death. In this regard, Bronfen's paragraph summarizes this line of thought:

⁸ Bronfen refers to the following quote from Edgar Allan Poe to exemplify this synergy of aestheticism and misogyny, "The death of a beautiful woman is, unquestionably, the most poetical topic in the world." See "The Philosophy of Composition," 1846.

Narrative and visual representations of death, drawing their material from a common cultural image repertoire, can be read as symptoms of our culture. Furthermore, because the feminine body is culturally constructed as the superlative site for alterity, culture uses art to dream the deaths of beautiful women. (xi)

Whether these women are considered as good or deviant according to socially acceptable norms, it seems as if their deaths are justified one way or another, since women are categorized in a continuum that ranges from pure goodness, abnegation and submission to the other side of the spectrum; chaos, disobedience and sensuality:

Over her dead body, cultural norms are reconfirmed or secured, whether because the sacrifice of the virtuous, innocent woman serves a social critique and transformation or because a sacrifice of the dangerous woman reestablishes an order that was momentarily suspended due to her presence. (Bronfen 181)

The connection with fin-de-siècle art and culture is evident. The allusion to Pre-Raphaelite paintings is a reminder of their philosophy. They used their art to teach women about their expected role in a civilized society; they instructed them not to be women of questionable morals, not to behave like prostitutes.⁹ Precisely, Bram Dijkstra refers to Pre-Raphaelite paintings as “new ways to depict the madness of a woman in need of a man to whom she might sacrifice herself” (37).

Crímenes Exquisitos might be just a literary saga representing invented artistic crimes but sometimes fiction resembles reality, and crime fiction shows us, as it will be proven throughout

⁹ See “The Awakening Conscience” (1853) by William Holman Hunt. It is a prime example of the second fall of women, the terror of understanding can be seen in her eyes, and her body is trapped by fear.

the following chapters, the hardships women face in today's world; as Jermyn states, serial murders of women represent crimes that spill both from movies and literature into real life, and vice versa (154). Her claim on femicide on Hollywood, which can be easily applied to crime fiction, warns about condemning these sort of narratives just because of their perceived violence against women is both negligent and cursory since it “neglects the capacity for popular culture to be both complex and contradictory and, [...] overlooks the troubling and disruptive resonance of these female murder victims” (166). Implying that while the murders, artistic undertones and generic crime fiction conventions are the main and prevailing narrative, a subtext denouncing femicide can be read between the lines. Without delving into the unnecessary and obsolete distinction between high and low, cult and popular literature regarding crime fiction, this point of view explains Garrido and Abarca's position in numerous occasions throughout the series in which they do not position themselves on either side of the spectrum. They purposely decide to choose opposing and contradictory elements to force the readers to think and decipher for themselves their own stance on said matters. Thus, they create a “discomfort, a tension that demands we look closely at the complex ways these texts use the figure of the female corpse to play with representation, gender, knowledge, and power” (Jermyn 166).

Exquisite Corpses: *Crímenes exquisitos*

“People begin to see that something more goes to the composition of a fine murder [...] Design, gentlemen, grouping, light and shade, poetry, sentiment, are now deemed indispensable to attempts of this nature”

–Thomas de Quincey, *On Murder Considered As One of the Fine Arts*

“Exquisite Corpses” is conceived as an appropriate label for the analysis of the female victims in the first installment of the crime series, *Crímenes exquisitos*, due to its dainty and

aesthetically controversial murder scenes; each crime committed by the serial killer known as the Artist embodies strong artistic implications. National police force detectives, along with the support of criminologist Javier Sanjuán, and later the press and general public, believe the killer to be an individual, likely a young, educated and meticulous artist, misunderstood and underappreciated by society, who is also a sociopath capable of maintaining control. This characterization, however, is an uncomplete truth. The actual murderer, or more precisely, murderers, turn out to be a criminal tandem formed by David del Valle and Christian Morgado. This duo recreates performances with the female bodies and their crime scenes rearranging them to reenact famous artistic representations of female death such as Millais's Pre-Raphaelite rendering of William Shakespeare's Ophelia, Lucy Westenra from Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, Salome from the homonymous oevres by Strauss and Wilde and Brenda Blaney from Hitchcock's *Frenzy*. Lidia Naveira, Patricia Janz, Floria di Nissa and Raquel Conde, respectively, compose this first series of artistic corpses.

Lidia Naveira – The Dark Side of a Double Life

The exquisite corpse that catalyzes the series is Lidia Naveira Aldrigde, a seventeen-year-old from an upper-crust family of A Coruña's elite. She is the epitome of youth, beauty and goodness: "Lidia era una chica normal, buena, estudiosa. Muy atractiva. A punto de empezar la universidad [...] Ciertamente era una chica muy atractiva. Pelirroja, de ojos verdes. Una sonrisa limpia y encantadora" (30). Due to her amicable and affable characterization, Lidia's disappearance, and subsequent murder, affect the city profoundly. Her friends paper the entire city with her pictures, and her family presses both the media and local authorities—all in a communal effort to find her.

Even though Lidia appears and talks briefly only in the opening pages, her presence is felt throughout the entire novel. She is not a faceless, nameless body who merely kickstarts the narrative. She is a well-rounded character with a series of preferences; she leans towards happy songs by Lady Gaga and Beyoncé, and her quirks, like not having breakfast before her workout or double lacing her running shoes are highlighted. She is proud of the work she has done for the academic year and she is delighted with the outcome: her father has agreed to buy her a new car in October, after passing her driving test, and she is determined on acquiring a Fiat 500.

According to her parents, Lidia was a pure angel; they had nothing to reproach her. The first approaches by the police to discern what might have caused Lidia's disappearance reiterate this discourse: "Nunca había dado ningún tipo de problema. Estudiosa, deportista, llegaba a su hora por la noche, no hacía botellón ni tomaba drogas (o eso creían)... todos los tópicos habituales elevados a la enésima potencia. Lidia era una hija ejemplar en todos los aspectos" (37). As the investigation progresses, it is necessary to explore other leads and venues to better and deepen an understanding of Lidia's life.

The readers soon uncover Lidia's other not so angelic layers; she had a hidden story yet to be told. She led a somewhat double life. Far from being a flat character, Lidia appears to be a complex and perhaps misunderstood one. Besides being the perfect daughter, sister, student and friend, she had a turbulent love affair with Sebastián Delgado; moreover she engaged in a dubious connection with his boss, Pedro Mendiluce, a powerful villain and magnate making questionable business dealings in art, construction, drugs and prostitution, as she attended several of his rather scandalous parties as a guest. Finally, she maintained a relationship as well with college professor Christian Morgado after attending some of his courses and conferences.

It is through Maruja, a lonely elderly widow and neighbor of the Naveira family, that the Delgado plot is exposed. Maruja's discourse contradicts the official version provided by Lidia's family, not only that neither did she have a relationship nor any (un)known boyfriends, "el único novio que yo le recuerdo era un hombre que no me gustaba nada para ella" (152), but also about her actual night habits and personality:

Lidia solía aparecer los viernes sobre las 4 de la madrugada, en un Mercedes negro muy bonito, deportivo [...] Ella y su novio, un hombre muy guapo, por cierto, se despedían en el portal. Él iba siempre muy trajeado, con gomina en el pelo. No me gustaba nada, era demasiado mayor para ella. Tendría sobre treinta y cinco, cuarenta años. Parecía un político, alguien importante. Alguna vez la agarró del brazo con fuerza... Eso tampoco me gustaba nada [...] Discutían mucho. A veces se metían en el portal y él gritaba bastante. Lidia hablaba más despacio, pero también tenía su carácter, no se crea. (153)

This man is none other than Sebastián Delgado, who had also been messaging with her in online chatrooms under the alias "Lobo Feroz." He confesses that they spent some time together but feelings of hurt and pain cross Delgado's facial features when he discovers Lidia's death prove that he had a deeper relationship with her than he cares to admit. He did not kill her, but he is distressed by her death.

Even though the narrative progresses after dismissing Delgado as a murder suspect, the revelation of their relationship deserves more attention than what the actual plot allows. Lidia hides this relationship from her family and friends, perhaps due to their age difference; she was seventeen years old and Delgado might be in his mid-thirties. This, along with Delgado's low social background, could be a potential scandal due to her family's high status in A Coruña's

society. This conflict unequivocally relies on time-worn but prevailing patriarchal ideologies that place value on the objectification of women, chiefly, those surrounding the concept of honor. If Lidia's relationship with Delgado were public knowledge, her father's honor, respectability, reputation and public persona would have crumbled due to Lidia's indecency and deviance.

This new development unveils Lidia as an implicitly highly sexual character. But then again, her sexualization is marked as erroneous, thus is kept clandestine since it certainly does not fit into the pureness narrative within her aristocratic-like family: "sensuality works within a "determined context," which includes both the social and the cultural ambience and public opinion, with its criteria and taboos about what is considered an optimal sexual life within the established canons" (Alizade 12). Her sexualization is actually weaponized and needs to be somewhat eradicated from the official discourse since "focusing on female sexuality has the potential to unsettle patriarchal power with its fears about unruly autonomous female desire and action" (Bakare-Yusuf 36). What is more, Lidia's expensive taste and bad temper seem to clash with Delgado and their constant quarrels and physical abuse are symptoms of what clearly seems to be a toxic relationship. However, due to the lack of information we cannot but wonder how their relationship ended. Did Lidia leave him, tired of that behavior? Did she leave him for a better prey? Or perhaps Delgado broke up with Lidia for being just a brat, as Raquel suggested?

Evidently several unanswered questions remain. Due to her connection with Delgado or perhaps because of her father's friendship with Mendiluce, Lidia has attended several of Mendiluce's parties, as a guest. Her implication with orgies filled with alcohol, drugs and prostitution, rests unclear. One can only speculate about her reasoning for attending those parties: maybe because of her genuine interest in art, maybe a sex-capade with Delgado, maybe the need to explore her rebellious side and behave like one of the men to enjoy the same sexual

freedom, or maybe it all boils down to a case of voyeurism. Likewise, her status in those orgies is up to speculation, leaving the task to the readers to ponder the extent of her deviance and catalogue her as guilty or not, and hence, responsible for her fate, since ultimately what determines who is a victim are power structures. It is also expected of seasoned crime fiction readers to complete these and other ellipses, as well as to dig and reveal each clue, no matter how small, to retrace Lidia's steps or, otherwise, await for Sanjuán to uncover the Artist's final plot twist.

The third and final man involved with Lidia's life is Morgado. Due to the unprecedented nature of her crime scene and performance, Christian Morgado enters the narrative as the expert on nineteenth-century British art suggested to aid with the investigation and to discuss the meaning and the connections between Sir John Everett Millais's painting and Lidia. Morgado is presented as a young attractive man; Sanjuán accurately describes him as the stereotypical young professor, handsome and at the same time erudite, who primarily cares about having sexual intercourse with his own female students (148).

Morgado portrays himself as solicitous; he is more than willing to assist the police in any way he can. As a true sadistic psychopath, he feels the need to insert himself in the investigation. His ego cannot help it; he needs to boast about his knowledge as an expert on modern and contemporary art, more specifically on the influence of Symbolism and Pre-Raphaelism on Galician paintings, "Es impresionante. Se han dado cuenta, ¿verdad? El parecido es asombroso... hasta las flores [...] ¿Han pensado que el asesino de esa chica pueda ser un artista, o alguien relacionado con el arte? A mí no me cabría la menor duda" (148). He also feels the need of feeding his own ego and vainglory by admiring his masterpiece, his life's purpose: "¿Para qué iba a tomarse alguien tanto trabajo si no quiere comunicar algo? En el fondo lo que

quieren todos los artistas es reconocimiento, ser famosos, ganar dinero. Especialmente ser famosos. Trascender. La fama” (149).

Every move Morgado has made has been sharply calculated. Aware of Lidia’s whereabouts and daily routine, he awaits her on her way down to El Portiño disguised as a town hall worker, carefully obstructs her path with the vehicle and his work instruments so that he can use his tactical advantage to hit Lidia at the back of her head and knock her unconscious. As Lidia’s body is found and processed the autopsy reveals the trauma and torture she has experienced. We, as readers, are not present during her captivity, torture, rape or murder. Neither do we witness her autopsy. Notwithstanding that the description is charged with instances of visual violence, the retelling of her suffering avoids the second-hand morbidity of clinical instrumental procedures such as the step by step postmortem dissection. We learn that she was raped and then strangled with such strength that her hyoid was fractured, but the narrator does not dwell in the details and methods. This exchange between Xosé Manuel García, forensic examiner at CHUAC, and Valentina Negro, seems to imply that Lidia has suffered enough; there is no need to retell the agony, as if, unconsciously, the narrator and maybe the killer want to hint that Lidia did not deserve to be raped and murdered twice, that is, once again by the readers. A consideration not given to all female characters since other victims do receive a more traumatic description of events in the series. This apparently random decision seems to be a choice based on the killer’s perception of the victim, the more sinful and guilty he finds them, the more these women suffer in a vicious manner, before, during and after, through a retelling process by the narrator’s focalization.

The center of attention is redirected to the composition of the crime scene, the main focus in order to reconstruct Lidia’s story now that she does not have a voice. Valentina, in fact,

correctly points out this impression of reliving Lidia's performance site: "la escena del crimen poseía cierta belleza enfermiza que no era fácilmente explicable [...] experimentaba aquella sensación de languidez, de *déjà vu* que provocaba la visión del rostro maquillado, las flores, las manos oferentes saliendo del agua en estática palidez" (73). The popular subconscious recognizes the arrangement of elements; both readers and characters comb through their knowledge and memories in an attempt to recall when and where this artistic production of erotic desire and deadly beauty was initially seen. For art and literature adepts, the connection to Sir John Everett Millais's rendition of William Shakespeare's Ophelia might be rather instantaneous.

The narrator, through the Artist's focalization, leaves small cues behind for the readers to follow their path: a reference to art, the nickname Lidia-Ophelia, a mention to Snow White, a bouquet and a specific array of flowers, etc. The final revelation is unveiled when he plans the latest touches to his masterpiece, while he prepares the body for the water, and the final position of the flowers, mimicking the painting and its symbolism:

Rosas de mayo, como símbolo de amor [...] Una solitaria amapola, que significaba el sueño y la muerte. Gota de sangre o Adonis annua, una flor extremadamente hermosa que también se llamaba ojo de perdiz. Mejor gota de sangre, era más poético y apropiado para la ocasión. Margarita, desengaño. Dedos de muerto [...] Pensamientos. Ortigas. Las ortigas significaban dolor. Muy apropiado. Arroyuela. Narcisos. Geranios selváticos, la flor del condado de Sheffield. Nomeolvides [...] Aquella guirnalda [de violetas] tendría un simbolismo intenso, especial: la tragedia de la desesperanzada muerte en plena juventud. (54)

Those flowers are positioned with pinpoint accuracy to exactly reproduce the painting, and consequently, Shakespeare's play. David Mann states that the flowers in Shakespearean plays "are repeatedly associated with a premature death that leaves female sexuality unfulfilled" (212), which translates into a certain sense of morbid irony since Lidia, as it has been established before, was both sexually active and raped violently before her death.

The Artist, as a perfectionist, has gone to the extreme to achieve the maximum level of fidelity. He has kept Lidia's body in an ice tomb to preserve her, not just for her grand finale, but also from the natural decays of human flesh. He also finds the perfect location for his artistic reproduction, a pond with a willow at Eirís park, the willow being the eternal symbol of treacherous love and a key element to emulate Ophelia's tragedy. The reader cannot help but notice the brilliance, audacity and sadism of attempting such a task. Lidia's performance site is the enacting of Ophelia's death scene, narrated through the eyes of Gertrudis, as if she were present to witness her suicide in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*.¹⁰

¹⁰ There is a willow grows aslant the brook
That shows his hoar leaves in the glassy stream,
Therewith fantastic garlands did she make
Of crowsfeet, nettles, daisies, and long purples
That liberal shepherds give a grosser name,
But our cold maids do dead men's fingers call them.
There, on the pendent boughs her coronet weeds
Clam'ring to hang, an envious silver broke;
When down her weedy trophies and herself
Fell in the weeping brook. Her clothes spread wide
And, mermaid-like, awhile they bore her up;
Which time she chanted snatches of old lauds,
As one incapable of her own distress,
Or like a creature native and indued
Unto that element; but long it could not be
Till that her garments, heavy with her drink;
Pull'd the poor wretch from her melodious lay
To muddy death. (Act IV, Scene vii, 167-184)

With Lidia, we witness her death through several sets of eyes. Our vision is guided by (1) Elizabeth Siddal, the model who posed for Millais's painting and almost died of pneumonia in the process, (2) the Artist, (3) the high-school girl who found Lidia and her boyfriend, (4) the police who responded to the crime scene, (5) the photographs that both the forensic team and the professional photographer, Jaime Anido, took of her, as well as (6) Morgado's pictures and paintings of Lidia. As if her violation were to be repeated through different sets of focalizers and eyes. Yet, Lidia's performance, her props, her make-up and dress, etc. attempt to portray a peaceful death, free of her captivity and torture marks; it emulates Ophelia's drowning, her suicide. Hence, Morgado uses her murder and crime scene as instruments of purification, since he cleans what he deems are Lidia's sins as a not so innocent victim.

Ophelia's death scene has been what Bridget Gellert Lyons calls, beautified, since "it is described visually in terms of the flowers with which she has been associated, and in language that emphasizes the natural beauty rather than the horror of the scene" (71). From her conception as a dutiful daughter until her descent into madness, Ophelia maintains herself on the sidelines with a childlike demeanor. Her embellished death bed, the lack of explicit references to her suicide and her implied virginity emphasize the goodness in her. However, there are serious dissonances in the construction of her sexuality which hold a direct connection to Lidia's own conflicting public persona and her private sexual one. Lidia's death bed has been beautified as well, but underneath it all, her flesh bears the marks of her deviance. It is as if Morgado were hiding the pleasures that Lidia's body has experienced and the punishment she received as a means to find his own artistic catharsis.

Female characters in Shakespeare's dramas always appear in a subordinate relationship to the male principal character, they are daughters, sisters, wives, mothers; and they are also shown

in extremis, assaulted, frightened, abused (Mann 186). Lidia presents both traits, she is defined as a devoted and conscientious daughter who hides her private sexual life from her progenitors, as well as a kidnapped, victimized and brutally assaulted woman who winds up dead. The female aesthetics of suffering in Shakespeare tends to rest on the same coordinates: youth, beauty, virtue and good and noble families (Mann 204). That is why Lidia, like Ophelia, dies at the zenith of her beauty and youth. In order to preserve both, Morgado guarantees that Lidia has her own special hell memorialized and recorded in history by terrorizing the city's population with his art.

Ophelia was precisely, for her feminine qualities among other traits, the most important character for the Pre-Raphaelites, as well as the nineteenth-century's favorite madwoman, an all-time favorite example of the love-crazed self-sacrificial woman who most perfectly demonstrated her devotion to the man by descending into madness, who surrounded herself with flowers to show her equivalence to them, and why in the end committed herself to a watery grave, thereby fulfilling the nineteenth-century male's fondest fantasies of feminine dependency. (Dijkstra 42)

Lidia is the projection of others, a myriad of representations, obedient daughter, sex companion to Delgado and Morgado, and an obscure acquaintance of Mendiluce. As such, she becomes the subject matter and sexual self-sacrifice of Morgado's deadly artistic creations.

The use of dead women as source of inspiration, as it was remarked earlier by Poe's reference, is not uncommon. This idea of muses, the theme of the dead woman, turns women into objects of erotic desire. It is rooted into the aesthetic pleasure in female suffering since there is a "morbid appeal to the viewer's participatory self-projection into that suffering" (Dijkstra 54). The crime series draws inspiration from famous dead women, whether they were real or fictitious. French actress Sarah Bernhardt (1844-1923) serves both as muse and linking device

across the first novel. Her aestheticism was deeply founded on death, mystery and erotic desire. She was most famous, besides her high drama, for her quirks. She was fascinated with and displayed certain attraction to female insanity and the cult of women as corpses, which can be assessed as another form of deviance. In order to stimulate this dark aestheticism and emphasize the erotic desire she exuded from dead women and the cultural tastes of the time, she had the tendency to travel with a coffin where she supposedly slept and read her scripts to find inspiration and get in character for her works. Bernhardt's artistic connection to the theme of dead women and the obsession with death is self-evident. She is also interrelated to the leitmotif of female madness which links her directly to Ophelia, and hence, to Lidia. What is more, her coffin serves as a deictic element since it connects *Crímenes exquisitos* and its crimes and victims, as it will be further explored later in this chapter, with the main storyline in *El hombre de la máscara de espejos*. This casket becomes a key component to add morbid eroticism to the creation of snuff movies.

Mann argues that in Shakespearean drama, punishing sexually deviant women does not involve the same amount and quality of pleasure as when it comprises the innocent and righteous ones:

Whilst the punishment of female sexual transgression can be enjoyed by the male spectator without any feelings of guilt, the pleasures of punishing the innocent are altogether greater and more perverse: the despoliation of female purity, the surprise of the victim, her inability to fathom the motive or extent of the enfolding punishment; the equipoise of a fragile, well-proportioned young female in bloom suddenly, deliciously, discomposed by embarrassment, fear, anticipation, and violence; the extra blush to the cheeks, perturbation of the bosom. (204-205)

With Lidia, these lines and boundaries are blurred. The narrative initially presents her on one side of the spectrum, but as it has been proven and the investigation unfolds, her hidden sexual self and her deviance resurface, providing a different reading of her punishment. This twofold perspective on the deviance, or lack thereof, in women belongs to a heteronormative classification of females in two distinct categories: virgins and whores. Ultimately, this dichotomy alludes to men's ownership of women as their private property. Both Del Valle and Morgado use their skewed logic to judge the women they feel they own. Therefore, for this murderous tandem, it not only becomes the ultimate tool to select their victims, but also to portray them in a manner that justifies their punishment. This pattern, albeit there are some differences, appears throughout the female victims of the series.

Precisely during his showdown with Morgado, Sanjuán pressures him to admit his not so ethical relationship with Lidia, which he only does after being confronted with factual evidence:

tuve un lío con Lidia [...] era una locura, ella tenía solo dieciséis años, yo tenía treinta y dos [...] ¿qué habría pensado la policía si se lo hubiera dicho? ¡Habrían armado un gran revuelo, se habría sabido y me hubieran expulsado de la universidad...! ¡Eso es todo, coño, me tiré a Lidia...! No seré el primero... ni tampoco el último que se acuesta con una alumna jovencita... (768)

Driven by his self-preservation state, Morgado still claims his innocence and lack of involvement with Lidia's murder until Sanjuán loses control, shouting and accusing him of such sadistic crime, and waving the Scotland Yard fax that proves del Valle could not have killed Lidia since he was working in London that tragic day.

Morgado then unleashes his psychopathic nature, aims his weapon at Sanjuán, and attempts to freeze him to death. However, his own entitlement forces Morgado to reveal the

source of his murderous artistic plans: his venomous vendetta against Mendiluce. Morgado feels the need to prove his superiority above Sanjuán, and everybody else. Hence, the rapes and murders serve a fourfold purpose: (1) to create the ultimate form of art, (2) to punish Lidia for her deviance, (3) to purify her from her sins, and (4) to punish Mendiluce for his questionable behavior and life choices. Morgado is the mastermind behind the crimes. He provokes and incites del Valle's hate towards his own father. He takes advantage of del Valle's status as the illegitimate child, who was mistreated as a kid, like his own mother, and grew up by himself in England holding grudges towards that perturbing and absent father figure and the prostitute-like women who orbited around him. Morgado fuels this madness and compulsion to eradicate and purify these evil women's souls through art, recreating therefore his favorite images and scenes in their deaths. After Patricia is found dead in England, Morgado visits del Valle to finalize the plan of their revenge, declaring, "[del Valle] debía purificar las vidas de otras mujeres podridas, más aún, debía acabar con la vida de quienes dirigían el club de sado al que pertenecía Patricia, y yo mataría por él a las mujeres de Mendiluce, a aquellas de las que había gozado o utilizaba" (775). This final declaration confirms Lidia's sexual involvement, and hence her deviance, with Mendiluce, his parties and corrupted world.

Even though the novel proposes a more humanized and complex approach and depiction of the female victim, Lidia's purpose resides in her potential as a weapon for this murderous tandem to achieve their ultimate vendetta. She becomes the bargaining chip used to hurt other men's legacy. Morgado not only kidnaps, tortures and kills Lidia to wash her sins away but also to instigate del Valle's hatred towards sinful, corrupted women, and ultimately, to play his last card in his showdown with Mendiluce. Morgado therefore needs to vindicate himself against the crimes he deems Mendiluce committed against him; Mendiluce used his connections, resources

and, especially, funds, to ensure the director position to El Centro Galego de Arte Contemporánea (CGAC) is bestowed upon one of his lovers. Although the authorities had verbally agreed on awarding Morgado with that post, they had no alternative but to concede and accept Mendiluce's less qualified candidate. This affront, along with a harsh artistic critique by Morgado against one of Mendiluce's expositions, sets the grounds for Mendiluce's open attacks towards the Art Professor. He purposely sabotages all his artistic endeavors, determined to destroy Morgado as an artist, denying him access to galleries, exhibitions and granting him no publicity or recognition.

Morgado's psychopathic nature swells with the desire to be famous. He has failed in his mission and the artistic world has not recognized him as the genius he thinks he is. His detail-oriented persona has calculated every single aspect and variable, from the kidnapping to the murder and final performance, to achieve his ultimate mission. That is why this showdown becomes a battle of egos and wits between another male tandem, Morgado and Sanjuán, since the latter is the one who not only uncovers the true identity and master mind behind the Artist, but also solves Lidia's murder mystery. During a night conversation over drinks between Sanjuán and Morgado, the reader is allowed to peer into the mind of the true Artist as Morgado ponders: "el Artista no consideró a Lidia tan merecedora de un castigo «postmortal» tan cruel como el de sus compañeras y por eso se esmeró mucho más a la hora de recrear un cuadro tan exquisito" (591). It is implied here that he does not consider Lidia as corrupted as the other females, as it can be seen in his treatment towards his other victims throughout the rest of this chapter, yet she still meets a sadistic end. However, she receives an exquisite and privileged treatment in the delicacy and amount of details the Artist adds to her scenographic performance.

It is precisely here where the writers' ambivalence and oscillation can be seen, as well as how they manage and orientate readers as they please. Lidia seems to be disassociating herself from the traditional narrative due to her carefully designed character. However, she becomes a tool at the service of men and generates two contradictory sentiments: admiration and/or repulsion towards the corpse and the vexation and beauty it embodies. Readers must question themselves and discern which reading they should elicit from the narrative and how they should position themselves towards the dilemma that represents Lidia as an innocent character and her death as a performance. Readers must also take into consideration these factors when assessing and reacting towards the other corpses and question how to characterize these victims according to Nicole Rader and Gayle Rhineberger-Dunn's categorization of victims, namely innocents; innocents with character flaws; unlikeable but not guilty; and manipulative (244).

Patricia Janz – Of Sex and Drug Excesses

As it has been stated previously, Lidia is introduced as the first victim; we witness her abduction during the first pages of the novel, and she indeed starts the narrative. However, it is not the first corpse chronologically speaking. An analepsis in the narrative takes the readers to England, Christmas of 2009, to showcase the previous victim, Patricia Janz. Patricia's story shares certain similarities with Lidia's. Almost seventeen years old, she was abducted after a night out with her friends and was missing for four days during which she was tortured and raped violently. When her body was found it presented a never-ending collection of ecchymoses and lacerations but neither the initial report nor the autopsy dwell on said details. The focus is placed on the lack of evidence since her body had been thoroughly washed, there were no traces of fabric, hair, DNA or semen; and there was the corpse's appearance: thanatopraxic make-up, long

blond hair, toe nails were painted bright red. In order to convey that morbid eroticism each female death has to be carefully articulated to evoke that voyeurism towards the body. The Artist does not only follow the same *modus operandi* with the death beds but also with the cause of death, cited as “asfixia mecánica por estrangulación manual” (40), and the preservation of the bodies to avoid the decay of the flesh and the possible implied rejection of said gory details, since Patricia’s body had been impregnated with formaldehyde and kept inside an industrial freezer to delay the decomposition process, just like Lidia’s.

However, there are several slight divergences in the victimological traits (between the cases). Patricia, unlike Lidia, does not possess the same socioeconomic status or have a stable family unit. Patricia’s mother was an alcoholic. Her father had left them both years ago for another woman and he compensated leaving his own daughter behind by giving her a hefty monthly allowance. Thus, Patricia’s interaction with her parents became nonexistent. She was emancipated when she was fifteen years old, only remaining very close to her grandmother in Whitby, a haven of peace where she spent extended periods of time, about which the narrator indicates that “Allí la vida de Patricia parecía transcurrir de un modo mucho más transparente: trabajos esporádicos en *pubs* y hoteles, salidas nocturnas con sus amigas...” (174-175). Yet, her life in London was an utter mystery; she had worked as a go-go dancer and barmaid at nightclubs, not so highly rewarded or socially acceptable positions, and she did not have any close friends or housemates, so apparently, no one to worry about or care for her. Geraint Evans, chief inspector, at his wit’s end for the lack of leads in Patricia’s murder investigation, summarizes the inconsistencies as follows:

Era como si Janz tuviese dos vidas distintas, separadas: una en Londres, impenetrable, huidiza, llena de oscuridad. Otra en Whitby, transparente,

totalmente normal. No cuadraban ni parecían pertenecer a la misma persona.

Intuía que la oscura vida londinense podía esconder algún secreto que lo podía llevar hasta la resolución del caso Janz, pero no había accedido aún a las puertas adecuadas. (175)

As the different plots and subplots in the novel unfold and intersect, Patricia's true story resurfaces. Her connection to Anido is key and introduces her sexually deviant behavior with older men since they both belonged to a secret sadomasochistic brotherhood named after an Oscar Wilde's short story, "The Nightingale and the Rose" (1888). In fact, it is through Anido's recollection of memories that readers access the ins and outs of the brotherhood. Anido rememorates his dominant-submissive relationship with Patricia there, as well as her virtues and flaws:

Patricia se había convertido en una esclava sexual perfecta. Toleraba todos los excesos, todos los caprichos que se le ocurrían en cada momento [...] Lo único que no le gustaba de Patricia era su molesta afición a las drogas. Él la obligaba a acudir totalmente limpia a las sesiones de la hermandad. No soportaba verla con las pupilas dilatadas y la nariz goteando sangre, los continuos viajes al baño para meterse una raya tras otra. Había conseguido que se alejara de aquel mundo durante una temporada. (177)

Like Lidia's, Patricia's life takes an unexpected turn, not just for a woman but especially for such a young one. She engages in not so normative or socially accepted sexual practices that, alongside her drug addiction, mark her deviance. Consequently, when del Valle, Patricia's significant other at the time, learns about her hidden past, the Artist's life purpose is born. That is, her betrayal becomes unbearable for del Valle, who feels affronted, as if her life and his

father's past were taunting and tormenting him. Hence, he believes he is entitled to right her wrongs, to cleanse her sins, and use her as a tool to find the road to revenge. It is throughout Valentina and Sanjuán's investigation in England that some details about their life as well as the connections between the two similar murders across the ocean are revealed: they lived in Acton Town, they bought a handmade wedding dress from Dark Angel¹¹ at a local charity shop for their nuptials and del Valle (David was formerly known by locals as Héctor) purchased his art supplies in the vicinity. However, their idyllic romance ended when he discovered Patricia's true tendencies after being in the dark about her secret life for a while.

Del Valle's disappointment is deeply rooted in the so-called deviant behavior of all the women that have been involved with his father. Patricia's deviance is the triggering factor that awakens the Artist's other half. Del Valle, incapable of bearing her sexual and drug excesses, is reminded of his mother's situation at Mendiluce's mansion during his youth. Unable to confront his mother who committed suicide after Mendiluce's wedding, or his father, since he needs to haunt and destroy him first, he chooses to take revenge through surrogates. That is, deviant women become the focus of his killing spree. However, as Edwin Schur states, "Deviance is not simply a function of a person's problematic behavior; rather, it emerges as *other people define and react* to a behavior *as being* problematic" (187). Therefore, Patricia is labeled as deviant because her behavior, although natural, does not align with the traditional feminine patterns that the patriarchy has assigned for women, especially for the young, unmarried ones. Her sexual practices, her cocaine addiction and working third-shift jobs that require her to work throughout the night are marks of indecency and deviance that upset del Valle's life. As a consequence, his

¹¹ This is the same dress that Lidia wears as Ophelia in her death bed. That is, the murderous tandem not only shares ideas but also repurposes the dress from a marriage, from a marital scene to a death one; from the hands of one killer to the other.

killing rampage starts as a cleansing process to dissolve any signs of deviance, punish his victims for betraying his trust and finally, restore their purity by immortalizing their deaths as artistic performances. This twisted purification ritual suggests that, at least in his mind, his victims are worthy of being restored as deserving individuals of patriarchal society –even if perversely through gruesome deaths. Del Valle’s intention is to cleanse females as individuals of what he deems to be their sins. His function as natural selector would insinuate that he is thinning the herd of deviant women as not worthy of female patriarchal standards for the benefit of the greater and majorly masculine population. In a way, besides the individuals he thinks he is also cleansing society of sin by eradicating those who participate in it. These two competing interpretations of the meanings of these deaths are mutually exclusive to the foreign eye but intrinsically supplementary for del Valle’s psychopathic persona. This is yet another example of the purposely ambivalent narratological choices Garrido and Abarca emphasize throughout the series.

However, del Valle needed guidance to redirect his disappointment in life and his feelings of betrayal. His fortuitous connection with Morgado through one of his art courses in London becomes the missing element his plan required. In other words, Morgado incites del Valle’s hatred for his own father, urging him to take matters into his own hands, to pursue his rightful revenge. Certainly, after del Valle is killed by a policewoman and posthumously socially convicted for his crimes as the sole individual behind the Artist, Morgado confesses his masterplan to Sanjuán before attempting to kill him:

Le propuse un plan: purificar mediante el arte el alma de las putas, recreando en la muerte sus imágenes favoritas. Cuando leí en internet a finales del año pasado que Patricia había sido hallada como Lucy, la protagonista de *Drácula*... entendí de

inmediato que David había empezado a matar. Fui rápidamente a Londres: me contó que había descubierto que era una puta, que era como las mujeres que Mendiluce frecuentaba, como la ruina física y moral a la que había condenado a su madre, torturada y prostituida [...] él debía purificar las vidas de otras mujeres podridas, más aún, debía acabar con la vida de quienes dirigían el club de sado al que pertenecía Patricia, y yo mataría por él a las mujeres de Mendiluce, a aquellas de las que había gozado o utilizaba... y le prepararía el terreno para que matara a su padre, al fin cumpliendo su sagrada misión. (774-775)

Therefore, del Valle and Morgado's sadist and psychopathic crime scenes are a new art created with Mendiluce's favorite daughters, as a means of retaliation in a showdown between men to establish their power and supremacy.

After all, del Valle's *modus operandi* differs slightly from his other half, Morgado's. There are indeed some common traits in their victimology but the disparities on their settings are notorious as well. For instance, as Sanjuán points out, del Valle's performances possess a sense of gore and gruesomeness that cannot be found on the other crime scenes, and the attention to detail seems to be a bit more hurried and imprecise. At the same time, del Valle finds solace and excitement in creating and composing paintings that depict and prophesy these women's deaths, a strategy that Morgado steals later as the plot thickens.

Patricia's performance is not fully completed until she receives an ultimate vexation: her body is desecrated after her death; the beheading and stake to the heart were done postmortem. The vampiric setting and performance remind Evans and his coworkers of *Dracula*,

su cuerpo estaba desprovisto de sangre, lo cual era incompatible con lo que la ciencia entiende por una saludable y vital existencia. A la exanguinación

completa, había que sumarle que la cabeza se encontraba separada del tronco, y además, una estaca de madera sobresalía de su esternón huesudo, dándole un aspecto terrorífico y extraño al cuerpo, cubierto solo por un largo camisón de lino.
(33)

This scene replicates almost perfectly Lucy Westenra's last death.

In *Dracula* (1897) by Bram Stoker, Lucy is bitten, after which she wanders through the ruins of Whitby and finally she requires several blood transfusions by different men, but even Van Helsing's intellect cannot help her destiny as she finally succumbs to vampirism. In order to terminate her immortal and immoral being, her three suitors, Dr. John Seward, Mr. Quincey Morris and Arthur Holmwood, with Van Helsing's help, have to mutilate her poor body for her to find true death. One of the multiple diary entries that compose this epistolary novel describes, rather graphically, almost in sexual terms, how Arthur, her rightful husband-to-be performs Van Helsing's plan to put Lucy's body to rest:

Arthur took the stake and the hammer, and when once his mind was set in action his hands never trembled nor even quivered [...] Arthur placed the point over her heart, and as I looked I could see its dint in the white flesh. Then he struck with all his might [...] He looked like a figure of Thor as his untrembling arm rose and fell, driving deeper and deeper the mercy-bearing stake, whilst the blood from the pierced heart welled and spurted up around it [...] the professor and I sawed the top of the stake, leaving the point of it in the body. Then we cut off the head and filled the mouth with garlic. (224)

Dracula depicts the nineteenth-century war on women and the cultural preoccupation with “the struggle of evolutionary progress against the forces of bestiality and degeneration”

(Dijkstra 342). Lucy represents the New Woman,¹² and as such, she embodies a set of characteristics that threaten both the notion of masculinity and the core beliefs of the heteronormative patriarchy. Lucy is depicted as a sensually and sexually aggressive woman who is constantly flirting. Her lack of modesty and her dissatisfaction with monogamy challenge the tenets set by their contemporary society. In fact, at some point in the novel, Lucy questions why she has to choose among her three admirers, instead of being able to marry the three of them. This symbolic and irrational fear of the *femme fatale* portrays lust and desire as the qualities of a man-eating praying mantis.

The degeneration and sense of danger that Lucy elicits, like Dracula, are the epitome of the already mentioned sexual deviancy in women. Meaning that those nymphomaniac tendencies that corrupt women like Lucy and Patricia are nothing but the incarnation of male sexual desire. As if women were in fact infected with masculine attributes and consequently not deemed to possess a high sexual libido naturally on their own. This fear of the feminization of desire is the conceptualization of women, like vampires, as monsters plagued by desire and fear, and whose appetite is a diabolic inversion of natural order (Craft 121). What is more, in this equation of the New Woman figures to vampirism, Dijkstra defines vampires as women and hence,

woman as the personification of everything negative that linked sex, ownership, and money. She symbolized the sterile hunger for seed of the brainless,

¹² The New Woman is a journalistic and fictional phenomenon coined in 1894 from Sarah Grand ("The New Aspects of the Woman Question") and Ouida's essays. This term was an unstable category used for all those female traits that threatened the rigid and classical expectations of Victorian femininity. That is, overeducated middle-class women, the refusal of motherhood, infanticide mothers, challengers to the traditional marriage, sexually abnormal women, openly sexually aggressive women, daughters of the decadence by affiliation to Oscar Wilde, etc. For further information see: Ledger, Sally. *The New Woman: Fiction and Feminism at the Fin de Siècle*. Manchester UP, 1997; and Cunningham, Gail. *The New Woman and the Victorian Novel*. Barnes and Noble, 1978.

instinctually polyandrous – even if still virginal-child-woman. She also came to represent the equally sterile lust for gold of woman as the eternal polyandrous prostitute. (351)

Ultimately, this attitude merely implies that the patriarchy feels the imperative need to control women's sexuality. As such, wives and women are considered as possessions, hence as the material value that they hold, they are conceived as a treasure that better be annihilated than lost to the enemy (Stevenson 139). Therefore, these men consider that if vampirism can be vanquished, so can be the New Woman. Those women who renounce and reject their traditional (sexual) feminine roles, they deserve and must be destroyed (Senf, "New Woman" 42).

Killing Lucy is an act of honor and kindness towards future generations; they must avoid her wickedness and suppress her predatory nature. The men in her life while accepting her sensual advancesacerbate her blood lust. Therefore, they must tandem together to send her to her true death. In the end, the same way that men act upon Lucy to fulfill their own purpose, is replicated with Patricia. It is Lucy's groom-to-be who fulfills that duty. Analogously, it is del Valle who must then kill Patricia as her rightful future husband. By killing her, he thinks he is restoring her purity and innocence. It is his way of punishing her deviant behavior. Del Valle, in his attempt to avenge Patricia's offense, targets women who are associated with other men, like Dracula's Lucy and Mina. Patricia and Floria, as it will be seen shortly, belong to several men—both in the brotherhood—due to their submissive sexual tendencies, as well as outside of it, in their regular lives. He envisages women as volatile beings; they can be poisoned and their goodness can be converted. This idea of turning women, a man's property, into something else, something different, a vampire, echoes from Stoker's text. These women's sexuality is explored through foreign and strange venues, the blood symbolized semen. Similarly, that is what happens

to Patricia through the sadomasochistic cult, and to del Valle's mother at Mendiluce's house. Accordingly, following *Dracula's* precepts, at the end of *Crímenes exquisitos* all characters who expressed individual sexual desire are appropriately punished as well, that is, killed (Senf, "Mirror" 167).

Aside from the intertextuality with Stoker's work, like every choice made by the Artist and the authors, every death is connected to the rest. Elizabeth Siddal's association with the Pre-Raphaelite artists is notable, besides being an artist and a poet herself, she was the model that posed for Millais, and was also married to Dante Gabriel Rossetti. She suffered from poor health all her life, some ranged her diagnosis from tuberculosis to anorexia or even some undiagnosed intestinal condition. Apart from pneumonia, she also experienced postpartum depression and was addicted to laudanum, an addition that would lead to the overdose that ended her life. She was buried at the Highgate Cemetery in London, the very location that Lucy Westenra frequents in search of victims to feed from first, and to vampirize afterwards. These artistic connections serve a twofold purpose: (1) they connect the corpses among themselves and (2) they facilitate the retelling of these victims' narratives that otherwise would remain hidden due to the absence of their voices in the novel. Patricia functions as a ghostlike presence, a character that never appears alive in the story but that both holds a perfectly constructed personal background and is projected into Floria's persona, behavior and destiny. Accordingly, Patricia, and Floria, by analogy, is the prime example in *Crímenes exquisitos* of paying with death for the pleasures of the flesh. Her hunger for sexual pleasure and fulfillment is unacceptable due to her female condition. Her deviance from what society and men expect from women grants her rightful death according to the Artist.

What is more, her construction as a character with questionable morals, not merely in the sexual realm but also as an individual uprooted, with no stable and healthy connections, who is also governed by her cocaine addiction, and whose ability to lie and lead two radically opposing lives, divert her configuration from the traditional coordinates of a victim. Readers can be inclined to alter the equivalence between victim and complete innocent, and perhaps consider Patricia as either a fraudulent character with flaws or an unlikeable one but yet not quite culpable. This ambiguity towards the female victims in the novel is exacerbated as the plots advance until it progressively forces readers to consider their crimes as more transgressive each time, perchance until even conceding that some poetic justice is achieved with the Artist's last and final victim.

Floria di Nissa – The Aftermath of Erotic Literature

Floria's narrative arc follows a similar development to Patricia's due to the overlap in their sexual and personal experiences. She is a young Roman writer who has been living in London for the past year and a half due to her professional projection, "Floria había huido a Londres huyendo de la fama. A los diecinueve años, tras ganar en Bolonia un premio de poesía, escribió un libro polémico sobre sexo sadomasoquista que la catapultó a la fama en cuestión de meses" (387). This erotic book, *Claroscuro de hierro*, apart from capturing her submissive behavior in a sadomasochistic relationship and the pain she experienced when her master abandoned her for a younger woman, also granted her fame, recognition and a certain sense of public, moral prosecution that forced her into exile in order to maintain a somewhat anonymous normal life. During her stay in the city she ironically works as a translator while she tries to hide from the fame her writing generated her. Nevertheless, it is due to her renowned status that Sue

Crompton contacts Floria in order to invite her to join the brotherhood. The same brotherhood, El Ruiseñor y la Rosa, that Patricia was affiliated with, both with Anido and Sue. During one of its parties at Garlinton Manor, Floria is matched with Anido as his new submissive partner. Their sexual encounter starts with the usual sadomasochistic paraphernalia, but soon enough it surpasses the limits of what is considered acceptable when Anido loses control and violence drives him, described in the text as follows:

Floria no aguantaba más. Intentaba por todos los medios que Anido parase, detuviese aquel ataque tan feroz y brutal. Pero no podía. Estaba amordazada, cegada y colgada de unas cadenas que le estaban destrozando brazos y piernas. Su piel aparecía lacerada ya por demasiados lugares, pero la cara de Jaime no parecía reflejar ningún tipo de sentimiento. Era como un autómatas extraño y sádico, ebrio de sangre. Veía en aquella chica a su amada Patricia, la joven del retrato, la chica decapitada del cementerio. Deseaba que volviese a la vida, y a la vez solo quería que aquella imagen se desvaneciera de una vez de su mente. (302)

Floria's suffering is described rather graphically in comparison to the previous victims. The sadistic nature of her torture haunts and perhaps distresses readers for its gory emphasis, especially since Floria is the first character who is still alive when the aggression is described. Anido's behavior not only depicts his loss of touch with reality, but also his entitlement, and by extension men's as well, to do as they please with women. This objectification of women is exacerbated by Anido's confusion and equivalence between Patricia and Floria. Even though both females differ considerably on their physical appearance, they have different hair color and complexion, Anido mistakes Floria for Patricia. He is transfixed by Patricia's ghost and the painting that the Artist sent to the mansion with Patricia as a model; he cannot discern between

reality and illusion. Patricia has left such a stamp on him that when all he wanted to do was resuscitate her, his derangement caused him to almost strangle Floria instead.

After her brush with death, Floria promises herself that she will halt her so-called deviant sexual practices to lead a normal life, “A partir de este momento se buscaría un novio formal, un universitario inglés, rubio y divertido, para salir por los *pubs*, beber cerveza y pasarlo bien. Ya estaba bien de tanto sado y tanta parafernalia” (388). She has seen death in Anido’s eyes; she does not want to repeat such an experience again. She is terrified when looking at the marks he left on her body, so that she decides that it is time for her to cut ties with the brotherhood altogether. This change of heart seems to align with Patricia’s since she also, supposedly, stopped attending the brotherhood to engage in a heterosexual relationship with David. Floria transitions to a less flamboyant daily life in an attempt to redirect her existence without sadomasochism. However, this shift seems to be out of convenience and self-preservation to maintain her well-being, not because she repudiates the tenets of this way of life or because she rejects those deviant traits of her sexuality.

Unbeknownst to Floria, the Artist has already identified her as a new potential victim due to her connection within Patricia and the brotherhood. He is well aware of the hidden marks and bruises that prove her sordidness and her excesses. He also considers *Claroscuro de hierro* as evidence that further validates her as a *putana*. He condemns the narrative, especially a scene depicting a rather graphic sexual encounter in which Floria is forced into a threesome to satisfy her master, and deems her behavior as depraved: “Eres un ser repugnante, Floria. ¿No lo ves? No hace falta leer mucho más para darse cuenta de lo que eres... una zorra, pura basura, un alma enferma que necesita redención” (400). The Artist has therefore already made a decision about her destiny; he plans to purify her, to consecrate her like the others and he intends to do so by

means of his body and art. That is, he conceives Floria's future rape and murder as a vehicle to both chasten and immortalize her body through his own phallic member and hands.

Del Valle stalks and hunts his prey; he has every detail of his plan carefully calculated, or so he thinks, to reroute Floria's date and night out, and disrupt her attempt at her new life. Still, there is a slight change in his *modus operandi* in comparison to the two previous victims. Lidia and Patricia were both kidnapped and taken to the Artist's hideout; Floria, however, is taken hostage in her own studio. The weapon of choice, this time is chloroform; he sprayed a bouquet of flowers with the right amount of anesthetic to subdue Floria but also to ensure she is not unconscious for a long period of time: "*Necesita la dosis exacta para que despierte pronto. Es necesario que Floria esté bien despierta para poder disfrutar de todo su ser, para llevarla al límite... Sin embargo, a ese hombre exquisito le gusta que primero estén indefensas ante él, para prepararlo todo de forma perfecta*" (409).

It is also worth mentioning as well that Floria also represents the first time that improvisation becomes an element of the Artist's murderous equation. Del Valle intended to abduct Sue, but she managed to escape and, as a consequence, he was forced to assassinate Anido. Since his original strategy failed, he has no alternative but to alter his course of action and focus his efforts on Floria. In this case, he attacks the Italian in her own studio, the same location that he uses for her vexation, murder and performance, and not his lair,

su ansia de matar se intensifica, ha creado un guiñol de terror en un apartamento ajeno, no la ha secuestrado para hacerla objeto de sus sevicias y luego matarla. Se ha expuesto mucho creando su obra en el domicilio de Floria. Lo ha hecho todo en muy breve tiempo, en vez de tomarse muchas horas o días. (442)

His improvisation turns his performance into a scene less calculated and more rushed. He is still careful enough not to leave any evidence behind but the risk is exponentially higher, as it is proven when he collides with Charles, Floria's date, on his way out. This set of small details serves a dual purpose. On one hand, careful readers can easily start to identify the divergences both on the *modus operandi* and the performances themselves, to finally discern the true nature of the Artist as a tandem of two sadistic psychopathic men. On the other, the real mission behind these cruel performances is outlined:

Estaba convencido de que había nacido para dar al mundo una lección moral sobre lo que significaba la perversión en la corrupción de los niños y la sociedad. Si había gente empeñada en transformar en religión lo obscuro y lo degradante, él convertiría lo degenerado en algo bello, exponiendo con rudeza la podredumbre interior de quienes se rebozaban en ese lodazal. La belleza de su arte no haría sino poner en evidencia la perversidad del material empleado para su obra, es decir, a las propias degeneradas. (430)

As readers, we witness the horror of Floria's abduction while she is blissfully unaware of what is being done to her, and the preparations to recreate the stage for his performance and her torture. When she awakes two hours later to a haunting version of her studio, she is surrounded by veils and candle lights, and a camera that sees it all. Utterly terrified, she experiences a living nightmare filled with torture, rape and death, all described in a wildly graphic manner. Readers sense her pain, panic and distress. Floria's gory visuals repeat throughout the entire narrative arc even after she is killed and the police arrive at her apartment. Kat Peary, the pathologist in charge of examining the body, retells the amount of cruelty and suffering Floria experienced. She also highlights that quite possibly the worst part of the torture process was not the sexual

aggression but rather kissing the rotten decapitated head: “Aquel hombre la había violado sin clemencia alguna [...] Sin embargo, lo peor de toda aquella tortura debió ser el momento en el que le obligó a besar los labios de la cabeza cortada, forzándola a actuar como la princesa Salomé con la cabeza del Bautista” (505). This assessment is contradictory and derogatory in itself and it implies that interacting with a rotten appendage trumps female sexual violence and brutalization. It trivializes a serious gendered concern blatantly insinuating that gendered violence is not the worst thing that can happen (to women). Floria’s end is the cruelest torture and murder of the narrative by far, not just due to the fact that readers are witnesses to it all while she is still alive, but rather the methods employed seemed harder, as if implying that her tolerance and her punishment were greater because of her sadomasochistic background. Her behavior and the traits of her deviance make her, under the Artist’s judgement, guiltier than the previous females. Hence, the narrative seems to suggest the retelling of her vexation, over and over is somewhat acceptable since she can be considered, following again Rader and Rhineberger-Dunn’s classification, either as an innocent with character flaws or as unlikeable but not culpable character, perhaps justifying the way all the unnecessary violence towards women that populates this genre.

So far, the Artist has recreated a painting and a novel, both of them set in the nineteenth-century. This part of the *modus operandi* remains invariable. With Floria, the Artist reproduces several theatre plays, movies and operas at the same time: “Aquella estampa no dejaba lugar a dudas: era la perfecta recreación de Salomé dispuesta a besar la cabeza decapitada del Bautista” (439). The daughter of Herodias and Herod, Salome, claims John the Baptist’s head on a silver plate; hers is one of the most widely known narratives ranging from the Old Testament to twenty-first-century cinematography as an example of the dangers of women’s allure, or rather,

the fear of the *femme fatale* figure. The Salome complex, as Lawrence Kramer puts it, is the nineteenth-century fascination with this female figure, the craze that sought the legitimization of new forms of control by men over the (sexual) bodies and behavior of women (269). Among the multiple artistic forms that address this important female figure, for the purpose of this crime series and its analysis, Oscar Wilde's *Salome* (1892) and Richard Strauss's *Salome* (1905) seem to be the most pertinent sources to allude to.

Wilde's play was originally written in French and its sources date back to the biblical text, Renaissance paintings and French symbolist poetry. This horror and highly sadistic play presents a shift in perspective that turns Salome from object to subject. Salome, after finding that the Prophet, Iokanaan,¹³ is in a well, she desires to talk to him, to touch him, like she is trapped inside a wicked obsession: "It is thy mouth that I desire, Iokanaan [...] There is nothing in the world so red as thy mouth... suffer me to kiss thy mouth" (61). Yet, he wants nothing but to avoid her at all costs. Salome, as a powerful and profoundly sensual female figure who is capable of manipulating the actions, feelings and desires of those males around her, dances for Herod, the dance of the seven veils; so as promised, he gives her whatever her heart desires: "I would that they presently bring me in a silver charger... [...] The head of Iokanaan" (78). Herod tries to bribe her with other gifts but she only wishes for the head. She longs to kiss it, to get revenge for Iokanaan's disdain and his cruel words towards her, and for refusing her love. She admires the decapitated head, highlighting the differences when its owner was alive: "I will kiss it now [...] Thine eyes were so terrible, so full of rage and scorn, are shut now [...] And thy tongue, that was like a red snake darting poison, it moves no more, it speaks no words, Iokanaan, that scarlet viper that spat venom upon me" (83). After she finally kisses his lifeless mouth, Herod, horrified and

¹³ John the Baptist in the biblical text.

disgusted with her overly sexual and necrophilous behavior, orders the soldiers to kill the princess.

Dijkstra refers to Salome as the epicenter of male masochistic fantasies since she symbolizes certain fetishes at once: she is a virginal adolescent, she longs for exotic dances and a man's head, and her mother is a virago (379). She is the embodiment of women's inherent evil. She has the power to destroy men, to manipulate them all and compel them to do as she pleases. Men comply, trying to please her, then terrified of the outcome, of what they have done, they blame Salome. Subsequently, she becomes a scapegoat, she is accused and punished for crimes she certainly did not commit:

Wilde's *Salome* is a very carefully designed dramatization of the struggle between the bestial hunger of a woman and the idealistic yearnings of a man. The play works up to a conclusion in which the masculine mind is led, through temptation and submission, to an understanding of the need for woman's immediate physical destruction [...] a wholesale manipulation of the image of woman as aggressor serves as a cleansing ritual of passage designed to expose her mindless perfidy and insatiable physical need. (Dijkstra 396)

That is, Wilde constructed a new sensibility, he transformed a passive and sometimes anonymous child into a *femme fatale*, bestowing the character with depth, with a defined psyche and personality. He recreated a more perverse and sexualized character to the point that Salome "embodies a unique paradox: she is at once both the virgin and the whore. Representing innocence in her virginal beauty, she also embodies illicit lust by her own volition" (Trammell Skaggs 126). Wilde's play was scheduled to be debuted in 1892 by the already mentioned dancer and actress Sarah Bernhardt. Her sexuality and dark eroticism are key elements, for both the

configuration of Salome and the shift in her agency from object to subject. At the same time, Bernhardt's presence links Wilde's narrative to both Ophelia's, Lidia and Patricia's deaths but it also serves as a future bridge to upcoming female performances due to the repurpose of her coffin as a snuff prop. In other words, Wilde's reference and inclusion in the series serves as a link between previous and future crimes. What is more, it also offers another connecting element besides Salome herself. It adds more morbidity by introducing a second decapitated head to the narrative, the first one being Lucy Westenra's, that is, Patricia's, and the second belonging to John the Baptist, embodied by a homeless man in the novel. On this matter, Lawrence Kramer also makes an interesting point regarding these mutilated bodies. That needs to be emphasized for its repercussions; while a decapitated man is all head, as it can be seen in the novel with the Baptist's head the Artist uses in his performance; a decapitated woman is all body, her sexual bodily parts are what matters (274). This assertion further proves the traditional objectification of females in this type of narrative. Precisely, Patricia's arc verifies that the investigation and the lens used on her, only focused on her body, the damage and violence inflicted on her flesh, leaving the decapitation process as a mere postmortem anecdote.

Respectively, Strauss's opera offers the same amount of sexual perversion, moral depravity and female provocation. There are indeed obvious resonances with Wilde's text as Salome claims her lust and need for the Baptist in the first scene,

[...] Ich bin verliebt in deinen

Leib, Jochanaan!

[...]

Laß mich ihn berühren deinen Leib

[...]

Deinen Mund begehre ich, Jochanaan,

[...]

Nichts in der Welt

ist so rot wie dein Mund

Laß mich ihn küssen, deinen Mund.¹⁴ (51-53)

Precisely, Strauss used Wilde's performance as source of inspiration, as Udo Kuttermann claims, "While Wilde had given the figure of Salome an identity, Strauss gave her the chance of a voice and a dance, both defining in extreme and challenging forms within her person a new dimension of female reality" (197). This is the idea of female emancipation, of taking the veil as code for female virginity, of attaining (sexual) freedom. Therefore, Strauss does sympathize with Salome in her role as a victim since, as Carmen Trammell Skaggs proves, the story emphasizes the motivations of the characters as well as the exploration of what it means to be human (138).

Del Valle consequently recreates not only both the Salome narrative of Wilde and Strauss but also, within the same performance, he embodies three main events: the dance of the seven veils, the moment when Salome kisses the Baptist's decapitated head, and Salome's death:

Floria, iluminada suavemente por la luz de las velas. Vestida apenas con unos velos de seda que rodeaban su cuerpo, estaba tendida en el suelo, el cabello suelto, unos largos pendientes color turquesa caían sobre su pecho desnudo. Su

¹⁴ [...] I am in love with your body,
Jokanaan!
[...]
Let me touch your body
[...]
It is your mouth that I desire, Jokanaan
[...]
There is nothing in the world
as red as your mouth
Let me kiss your mouth, your mouth

boca estaba entreabierta, y muy cerca de su brillante melena castaña, una cabeza humana reposaba sobre una bandeja de plata. La mano de Floria se perdía entre los rizos mugrientos de la cabeza putrefacta. La boca parecía acercarse a los labios grisáceos, sin vida. (437)

Floria is indeed a myriad of possibilities and behaviors. She is a well-rounded character that claims her life and sexual freedom and takes pride in her configuration as a submissive woman in bed. She also tries to regain the control and direction of her private life. But, in the end, her body becomes the receptacle of the Salome tradition and the judgment of a backward patriarchal point of view that aims to suffocate women's independence at several levels, but especially on the sexual realm. Wilde and Strauss used their own works to reclaim female characters, to give them agency, depth, voice, and more importantly, sexual freedom. Del Valle reverts this lens, he turns Floria from subject to object, as if he were returning time, resuming the traditional objectification of women. He equates Floria with a being plagued and dominated by perversion, corruption and degeneration. This fear towards women, their agency and sexuality, towards the notion of the New Woman, is a reaction in an attempt to maintain the heteronormative conception of masculinity and the tenets of the patriarchy.

This compulsion with torturing and brutally assassinating young females because they merely engage in dirty sex and other sexually deviant behaviors not only answers to the Artist's symbolization of all he despises, but also embodies a harsh, and at the same time between-the-lines, criticism towards the judgment and treatment women have received and still receive in patriarchal societies. Garrido and Abarca carefully craft this murder to taunt their readers. Their conscious ambiguity forces a close reading to elucidate if there is indeed a critique amid all the violence and gory details against the treatment and judgement that so-called deviant women

continue to receive; or if they advocate to reproduce this sexual violence for the sake of it and carry on with the traditional formula of the genre. This dichotomy and the oscillation between the conception and characterization of female victims is a trait that, inevitably, connects Floria with the Artist's next and last victim, Raquel.

Raquel Conde – The Deadly, Illegal Side of the Law

Raquel's narrative arc is perhaps the most complex out of all the exquisite corpses. She doubles as an antagonistic satellite character, as it will be examined later in the last chapter, as well as a victim. For this reason, her connections and implications with different characters, plots and subplots within the novel contribute to her in-depth characterization. When she is first introduced, she is described as a bombshell with blond platinum hair à la Jean Seberg that rejuvenates her several years, big blue eyes and an exquisite taste for expensive clothing. That is, she is conceived as an extremely sexualized and attractive woman. Personality wise, Raquel is mostly described by the lack of (positive) interaction with other female figures and by three main relationships with the opposite sex: her work association with Mendiluce as his lawyer; her first marriage and divorce to Sanjuán; and her love and work codependent involvement with Delgado. Her more than questionable life and work choices and decisions supply enough ammunition for the construction of a highly negative view of her persona which could impede her configuration as an innocent victim for certain readers. She is conceived as an antagonistic and manipulative character and her association with evil forces qualifies her as a self-made *femme fatale* and villain.

Merely focusing on her status as a victim, without commenting on her innocence or lack thereof, merely her rank as prey, Raquel becomes the Artist's new target mainly due to her

fraudulent and corrupted alliance with Mendiluce. Morgado had initially planned to kidnap her at her parking lot after work, lurking in the shadows with a chloroform-sprayed handkerchief in hand; but her encounter with Delgado disrupts his plans, forcing to postpone them and, consequently, to slightly alter his *modus operandi*. In fact, he loses his temper due to this unforeseen complication but primarily, because of the conversation between Delgado and Raquel he just overheard. Delgado has already abducted Lúa at this point in the narrative, since she knows too much about the scams Raquel and he are hiding from Mendiluce. In the face of this mayhem, Raquel's viciousness assumes control and she orchestrates Lúa's murder. In order to mislead the police and to guarantee that not a single lead can be traced back to them, Raquel suggests that Delgado's hoodlums execute her and then dispose her body in an artistic manner to blame the Artist for it. Raquel purchases several expensive art books with the intention of finding an easy enough lamina to create a performance with Lúa's body. As a consequence, Morgado's wrath increases. His twisted moral code, however, disagrees with the murder of an innocent woman; but what incenses him is that Raquel is trying to impersonate his Godlike art and blame him: "Eso no está bien, Raquel. Matar a una chica inocente que hace su trabajo... no está nada bien. Y lo que es todavía peor, zorra. Quieres cargarme a mí el muerto intentando convertirte en una imitadora cutre de mi arte sublime... Mereces un escarmiento, querida" (561).

Raquel's manipulative and vindictive nature is exploited throughout the entire narrative, it can be seen by how she moves the threads to control and exploit to her advantage all male characters (Mendiluce, Delgado and Sanjuán); and how she challenges and rivals Valentina. These coordinates map her as a villain, a certain *femme fatale* as it will be further seen later on chapter three: the evil character that awaits to be defeated or served to justice. Readers easily position against her when she reaches her climax and shows no remorse or concerns about

orchestrating Lúa's death to maintain her immunity and continue building her wealth. As a consequence, a sense of frustration and anticipation can arise due to the disruption of the Artist's plans. This reading certainly implies Raquel's guilt, setting a boundary between her configuration and that of an innocent victim.

When Morgado strikes again and stalks Raquel, this time, his *modus operandi* has to change, following del Valle's trail; Morgado is urged by the circumstances and a certain degree of improvisation to kidnap, torture, vex, murder and set Raquel's performance at the same location, her workplace. He takes advantage of the last day's events: Delgado, his hitman Petrescu, and Uxio, one of his thugs, have been murdered; now Raquel is being blackmailed by the last man standing, the remaining thug in that ordeal, Óscar. That is the reason why Raquel is alone at night in her office, waiting for him to come by and complete the monetary transaction that will buy his silence. Morgado then benefits from the quiet and emptiness of the building and Raquel's frail nerves and paranoia to set his scheme in motion.

He, like del Valle, uses chloroform to subdue his victim and ties her afterwards. He considers this sickly sweet scent to be subtle, efficient, and of course, stereotypical from the nineteenth-century—an offering to the greatest criminals and serial killers he deems as his masters. This weapon of choice implies the precariousness of the situation; he lacks the amount of time he spent with Lidia, for instance. Less time to torture and murder his victim translates into a less detailed crime scene, making the readers question if Raquel's performance is in fact part of the original plan: “Había pensado recrear una *performance* genial con aquella gacela rubia y delicada. Un ser translúcido con un alma de ciénaga” (561); or if he was forced to choose an alternative source of inspiration given the circumstances.

Be that as it may, Raquel's beauty and perverse nature as well as the gravity of her sins and crimes, equate to one of the most gory and vicious sections of the narrative. Morgado's sadistic and psychopathic nature perceives Raquel's ending as a way of purifying her past and immortalizing her as a masterpiece: "vas a pasar a la historia gracias a mí, a mis atenciones. Voy a darte un final trágico y hermoso. Intenso también, no lo dudes. Muy intenso. Tú a mí vas a ofrecerme un placer exquisito y yo a ti [...] Voy a llevarte a unos límites que jamás hubieses imaginado que existieran" (664). This is what Jeanne Thomas Allen calls the projection of male fantasies upon women's behavior, that is, "the use of force, the ability of one person to forcefully overcome the boundary of another self against the other's will rather than the willing drop of that boundary" (34). What is popularly and culturally understood as men's right to aggress women, a way to reach climax when women struggle and fight back because their "no," for such males, means "yes." Hence, Raquel is vividly and graphically tortured and raped, and immediately after, she is forced to change into a new set of clothes: a white old-fashioned bra and a fitted bottle green dress; all the items needed to emulate Brenda Blaney from Alfred Hitchcock's *Frenzy* (1972). Morgado rapes her one last time, in this occasion staring at her face, strangling her with a checkered cream Burberry tie—emulating Hitchcock's script—in order to both reach his climax and fulfill his destiny as the sadistic killer and artist he thinks he is, as a righteous god who rights Raquel's wrongdoings:

cuando él se corrió en un estremecimiento poderoso, indescriptible, las petequias estallaron en los ojos azules de Raquel, y sus manos, que apretaban con fuerza los brazos del asesino, cayeron inermes a los lados de la silla de cuero. Él la miró, agotado, la frente perlada de sudor. Jamás en su vida había sentido algo parecido.

Era lo más cercano a ser Dios que un ser humano podía llegar a experimentar.

(669)

This scene is perhaps one of the most graphic scenarios, as visual, explicit and blatant as Brenda's rape-murder scene in the movie. In the novel, it depicts the climax of the exquisite corpses. With every crime, the violence and graphic vexation escalate. Each victim loses a layer of innocence and gains an extra one of culpability. Consequently, the extreme cruelty and viciousness inflicted on these women who are more independent, sexually open and free, increases, thus amplifying their punishment. Their sentence for their deviance appears to be greater, more vivid, as if they were deserving of such treatment. In fact, Raquel is portrayed as a despicable and manipulative character; she dies because her sins catch up with her, or so does the narrative suggest. The Artist executes her for her ties to Mendiluce's corrupted world, for her implication with the extortion and subornation to hide the archeological findings in the Artabra's urbanization, for her sexual and criminal association with Delgado, for the kidnapping and assassination she planned with Delgado and tried to blame on the Artist, for her addiction to Delgado, for her lust for brutal sex and lasciviousness, as well as for, according to Morgado, being "una verdadera puta. Una zorra sin escrúpulos" (668).

Morgado recreates in this case a movie scene that, like the rest of the Artist's performances, has deep rooted connections with the nineteenth-century art scene. The influence of Pre-Raphaelite artists on the Hitchcockian female characters has been explored thoroughly as Morgado explained in an exhibition entitled "Hitchcock y el Arte: Coincidencias Fatales." He highlighted Kim Novak as his favorite, a modern-day Ophelia. This revelation serves as a means to complete and close the vicious cycle of the Artist's sources inspiration and influence. In other words, Morgado uses several references to Hitchcock's movies to link together previous

murders, like Lidia's, and the last one that completes the Artist's sadistic sequence, Raquel's. As a matter of fact, he alludes to another Hitchcock's movie, *Vertigo* (1958), before killing Raquel. In this film, the actress Kim Novak plays Madeleine Elster, a woman who believes to be possessed by Carlotta Valdés, her great-grandmother. Without properly analyzing the movie in depth since the plot thickens when it is revealed that Judy was impersonating Madeleine who was previously killed by her husband, all these female examples and lives –Carlotta, Madeleine and Judy– come to an end as they all physically leap to their deaths. These fallen women not only represent that male power and dominance are destructive enough to kill women, but they also embody twentieth-century watery and flowery Ophelia impersonations. The Artist, in his sadistic nature and passion for torturing others, paints Carlotta with Raquel's features and a pendant with two initials, P and M, Pedro Mendiluce, and he sends this gift to Sanjuán, a late souvenir to remind him of his ex-wife's true nature before killing her. This painting serves as a premonition of Raquel's fate and also forces readers to ponder whether or not *Vertigo* was the original performance destined for Raquel, since in fact she is cast as another Hitchcock victim, *Frenzy*'s Brenda Blaney.

Frenzy narrates a serial killer's murderous spree in London. His victims are raped and then strangled with a tie. Bod Rusk, the murderer, enters Brenda's office at her matchmaking enterprise and takes control of her space. As she refuses him for his not so socially acceptable sexual tendencies, he rapes and strangles her as well. In order to mimic Brenda's death scene, Morgado takes the time to rearrange Raquel's appearance so that when her corpse is encountered, the performance is completed. He has staged her death to replicate Brenda's almost to perfection by adding a small gold crucifix and applying green eye shadow that matches her dress, as well as using some glue to maintain her tongue in place: "el rostro desencajado de

Raquel, roto como una muñeca, con la lengua grotescamente asomando entre su boca y la corbata, que casi le cortaba la garganta. Sus piernas estaban abiertas; la falda rota y subida hasta la cintura; los pechos, desnudos, oprimidos en parte por el sujetador” (670). This grotesque visual shot with her legs splayed and her face contorted is but the objectification by death as much as by physical and sexual aggression, a convolution of said presentation of women as objects, arousal, dominance and detachment (Thomas Allen 36).

This scene and this set of crimes allude indeed to different ways of appealing to the spectator or the reader’s voyeuristic nature. As Tania Modleski summarizes, in Hitchcock movies, the audience indulges in sadistic fantasies against female figures (304), implying that if the viewer is a female and enjoys the film and its brutal assault on women, then she is masochistic. The same can easily be applied to the *Crímenes Exquisitos* series since, like other sources of entertainment, it revels in the customarily brutal treatment women receive in most instances of different present-day popular cultural mediums. There is indeed a voyeuristic reading and a sense of justice being served when these women are mistreated for their socially unacceptable behavior. That is, the novel can perpetuate, replicate and rejoice in certain patterns of gendered violence that are typical of this genre. However, there is a possible feminist and societal criticism that can be elicited from a more in-depth reading, between the lines, based on the open and chauvinist treatment, violence and fate these women encounter. The entire premise of this first novel lies on the fact that attractive women, who do not follow patriarchal standards and actually pursue their own sexual desires and freedom, have a target on their backs. Their victimhood status is therefore downplayed.

The showdown among the different men in the narrative uses these women as mere tools to achieve their own agendas at the same time their godlike entitlement grants them the power to

punish these females for their excesses and deviance. This carefully calculated ambiguity on the writers' end grants a myriad of possible readings: (1) the perpetration of violence against women in this genre (and maybe, by extension, in Western societies), (2) a way of upsetting social norms by apparently threatening the social order but without finally subverting the social status, (3) a literary and sociological criticism of the treatment of women, (4) or just a mere editorial strategy to attract readers to the deadly sexual fascination with the genre. That is the reason why this grotesquely alluring plot cannot come to an end when the first installment of the series closes. Mendiluce, like most readers, firmly believes his son is the perpetrator behind such atrocities, when he states, "Ha sido ese cabrón, ese hijo de la gran puta. Primero Lidia. Luego Sebastián Delgado. Y ahora Raquel. Elimina sin piedad a la gente que me rodea. Está claro que me arroja esas muertes a la cara para decirme que yo seré el siguiente objetivo de su lista" (680). Although part of his logic proves to be true, one of the novel's last plot twists uncovers that the Artist does not die indeed once del Valle is killed by the police; the true murderous tandem is revealed and a couple of months after the Artist's reign ends, the true Artist, the mastermind behind the puppet's threads, and whose identity remains hidden to the general population, awakens from his coma, to yield to a new artistic era: the era of terror of Il Mostro di Roma.

Religious Corporeal Experiences: *Martyrium*

"Death commences too early -- almost before you're half-acquainted with life -- you meet the other"

–Tennessee Williams, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*

The Artist's narrative arc is far from over at the end of *Crímenes exquisitos*. Mendiluce's case and the kidnapping of the daughter of one of the judges in his trial interweave and collide in the streets of Rome with Morgado's reign of terror. Now known as Il Mostro di Roma, in his

artistic, psychopathological and murder-driven evolution, he embarks on a murder spree with religious subversive undertones. In *Martyrium*, the victimology and the performances remain a current theme among the dissemination of the female bodies left behind throughout the entire city. He claims two corpses, Eleonora della Rocca who is stabbed to death and then rearranged as Santa Cecilia, a sculpture created by Stefano Maderno in 1600; and Paola who is assassinated by strangulation and then turned into a macabre jibe of another famous marble sculpture, in this case Bernini's Beata Ludovica Albertoni.

As Morgado devolves, his sexual sadism takes over and his crime scenes are less detailed. His crimes are more vicious; they do not present the same attention to detail and planning. He spends less time with his victims and corpses, he kills more rapidly, and his crimes, therefore, are less elaborate. As a result, his victims are a direct consequence of the synergy between coincidence and opportunity. They are arbitrary; there is no apparent connection linking them. He does not target or stalk his prey. Instead, he just attacks these unknown women if given the right circumstances. His victims are random female characters whose fate simply coincides with Morgado's murderous path. This arbitrary selection of victims serves a threefold narratological purpose: (1) it connects them with the wide collection of faceless victims typical from the genre, (2) it also aligns them with the main plot, Marta de Palacios's abduction, and (3) it serves as a way of fulfilling his personal vendetta against Valentina.

Perhaps there is even a fourth motive for the selection of these somewhat anonymous victims and their connection to religion through their performances, which may be to confuse and divert readers. Angélica Marforio's death can be misleading and readers might link her to the other three deaths, Eleonora, Paola and Stefano, or even consider the possibility of identifying

Morgado in Father Bruno. This web of red herrings belongs to two different subplots that lead to two different unsubs, Christian Morgado and Father Bruno.

Morgado assumes a new identity to match his new face, his scar, his artistic aspirations and his hunger for more victims: Giovanni Nero.¹⁵ He is finally able of making a living through his art. His crimes take place during the Roman Carnival, a time that represents vice, sins and debauchery; hence the use of religious undertones as the setting for his performances. The police investigation is lead to believe that Nero kills those who are tarnishing the purity of church, but readers are already familiar with Morgado's obsession with deviant women due to his killing spree in A Coruña. Morgado is not a religious person; rather, he mocks it: "Dios no es sino un símbolo de todo lo que desprecia, la debilidad y el sufrimiento de los seres anodinos, a los que considera solo medios para sus fines" (307). His only source of inspiration is art, and by choosing religious motives, he not only mocks religion itself but also all Roman citizens. He thinks of himself an artist, The Artist, as God.

Morgado follows his same *modus operandi*. He finds a way to subdue his victims, takes them to an alternative location to torture, vex and kill them, and finally transports them to their resting and performative place. Sanjuán, to be able to understand his devolution, shares some insight about Morgado's mental state and his transition to Italy:

Cuando huyó de España estaba malherido, y creo que la fantasía delirante que le impulsó a cometer los crímenes no habrá hecho sino empeorar en este tiempo. No es que esté loco en un sentido forense; pero su obsesión enfermiza por elevarse por encima de lo mediocre y lo mundano, un mundo que lo rechazó y ridiculizó,

¹⁵ For the purpose of this and subsequent chapters, Morgado and his alter ego identity, Nero, as well as his nicknames (the Artist and Il Mostro) will be used interchangeably to identify this character.

le ha llevado a un estado de paroxismo asesino que sin duda irá a más con el tiempo [...] ha decidido abrir un abismo con la vida y, si es necesario, morirá en él satisfaciendo su narcisismo y su odio. (306)

Therefore, as a sadist killer and rapist, necrophilia is just the next step for him, and another way of brutalizing the female body of his victims.

At the end of the first novel Morgado claims, “El Artista ha muerto después de acabar con Raquel, no hay motivo para hacerlo resucitar” (778); his new alter ego and devolution, Il Mostro, seeks revenge from a society he feels has betrayed him. Therefore, Garrido and Abarca’s new narrative approach showcases a more superficial delivery of those female victims that supports his statement of not allowing his victims the same treatment, time or aesthetic details. Whereas we are given the information to reconstruct the exquisite corpses’ steps, and thereby those victims are given a voice to tell their stories, these religious corporeal experiences fail to fulfill that purpose. These sculptural presences, although they do have the artistic and religious allusions that link them to the first collection of corpses, they lack the prominence and social repercussions; they are anonymous entities. Thus, this depiction highlights at the same time it serves as a rendition to the anonymous female bodies that populate the genre whose main purpose is to kickstart the narrative and assist in the development of the police investigation.

Eleonora della Rocca – Wrong Time, Wrong Place

Eleonora is Il Mostro di Roma’s first victim during the Roman Carnival in February. She was attending a sumptuous costume party near Castel Sant’Angelo, wearing a thin Roman tunic and a cape, an intricate hair ornament with her dark long braids and golden sandals to match her costume. She was inebriated and shivering from the cold; moreover, among the costumes, masks,

glasses of Lambrusco, streamers and confetti, she lost her companion, Luigi Cedroni. Jealous and upset after finding her medieval knight date kissing someone else, she left the party crying. Dressed as the Phantom of the Opera, with a mask covering his facial scar, Il Mostro seizes the opportunity to approach her. Even though the attack appears as random—the product of mere chance and coincidence—Eleonora bears an aesthetic trait that makes her a target. Morgado highlights the resemblance between Eleonora and the historical figure she was dressed as, Valeria Mesalina, and the main protagonist, Valentina Negro. It seems that their beauty and sexual lives not only are a common denominator but also serve as a stressor for Morgado, leading him to a blitz attack and overkill murder:

El Fantasma la arrastró hacia dentro del portal. Eleonora empezó a patalear y bracear con fuerza para escapar de aquella fuerza ominosa. Pero la ira desmesurada del hombre la llevaba en volandas hacia el terror, sin que ella pudiese hacer nada para evitarlo. La tiró contra la pared pintada de cal. Volvió a besarla mientras el filo del cuchillo entraba y salía de su costado con fuerza implacable. (76)

As it can be expected, Eleonora bleeds out but it does not happen on the scene; Morgado transports her to an alternative location, Le Catacombe di San Sebastiano, to finally commit the murder and to stage her final performance. Her wounded body had been laid out in a lateral decubitus position, her arms extended forward, her legs exposed and slightly flexed, and her breasts bared and covered in blood and puncture wounds. She was flanked by two plaster angels and two petitionary candles. That is how her body is found the day after.

The autopsy reveals that indeed Eleonora was brutally stabbed to death: “Su pecho mostraba un ramillete de ojales característicos. «Piquerismo» [...] Pero fue una cuchillada en el

costado la que acabó con su vida” (163). Piquerism, as the editorial note at the bottom of the page reminds readers, is a paraphilia associated with reaching sexual pleasure by means of incisions and punctures with a sharp object, repeatedly, on the victim’s genitalia or erogenous zones. Precisely, the cut on Eleonora’s neck and her rape both occurred postmortem, another indicator of the escalation of this sexual sadism. Morgado devolves, from torturing his previous victims with lashings and slashings, to killing them with those sadistic stabs. However, this devolution and alteration of his *modus operandi* is still distinguishable, and therefore, traceable.

As the plot thickens, Lúa Castro and Javier Sanjuán, journalist and criminologist respectively, assemble together once again, in this case to investigate the current connection between the Artist and Il Mostro. Sanjuán, after analyzing the evidence Lúa collected, certainly identifies the artistic source of inspiration for the new set of crimes. Morgado had experimented an iconographic evolution towards Catholicism and Eleonora is an imitation of a baroque sculpture by Stefano Maderno, *Santa Cecilia*: “El cadáver de Eleonora era una imitación bastante acertada de aquella estatua de mármol. Postrada en el suelo con el cuello ligeramente cortado, el traje de romana, el velo blanco en la cabeza, el cabello dispuesto por delante del rostro, las manos en un gesto característico... no era exacta, pero sí muy parecida” (241).

Although there are significant gaps in St. Cecilia’s historical and hagiographical account, as H. Wendell Howard asserts, she is indeed one of the most famous Roman martyrs; her story is, for instance portrayed in “The Second Nun’s Tale,”¹⁶ and can be summarized, in broad terms, by three main points: (1) promise to maintain her virginity for God, (2) her guardian angel that helps her to fulfill that promise and (3) her ability to escape death by divine grace multiple times (15). These facts represent the connection, or more precisely, the lack thereof, between Eleonora

¹⁶ See Geoffrey Chaucer’s *The Canterbury Tales* (1387-1400).

and St. Cecilia. It can be affirmed, even with the scarce information that the narrator provides on Eleonora, that she is similar to the previous victims and corpses, hence differing from the martyrdom of St. Cecilia. She is what Morgado and part of (the patriarchal) society consider a (sexually) deviant woman even though her sexual behavior is elicited merely on her relation to her male companion, Luigi. Added to her physical similarities with the police inspector, Eleonora is the perfect body to discharge the rage, betrayal and revenge Valentina stirs in Morgado.

Eleonora's body, like the previous four corpses, is also left to be found since Morgado's work cannot be completed until it reaches passersby, police and readers alike. His performance, as always, offers an array of similitudes with the original when it comes to the composition itself; but this time, there are several differences in the narrative he portrays in comparison with the source, being the criticism to women's sexual behavior the most obvious one. As a matter of fact, Maderno was commissioned with the creation of a sculpture to commemorate the recovery of St. Cecilia's remains. To mimic said piece of art, Morgado replicates the position of the model, but denies Eleonora the extra time and attention that he provided to the other exquisite bodies. In this case, he only leaves, unceremoniously, a couple of props to accompany her sexually vexed body. One trait, the sense of being left abandoned hastily, seems to appear as well in the sculpture. In fact, Maderno's sculpture presents a small and elegant feminine figure that seems trapped in the torsion of the body, the position of both legs and hands seem to indicate as if she wanted to leave her designated niche (Economopoulos 373). Actually, Morgado exactly replicates that feeling with the way he positions Eleonora's body, as if she were trying to escape the fate that Morgado assigned her. St. Cecilia's martyrdom is perverted and juxtaposed to Eleonora's as women's penance for deviating from men's norms.

What is more, Kelly Ann Whitford draws attention to a key component in Maderno's work that sets it apart from all the former and coetaneous representations of St. Cecilia, "Maderno's restrained and emotive *Santa Cecilia* stands apart from both earlier images and contemporary examples because the sculpture does not represent the saint's life of even the moment of her execution, but rather her continued corporeal presence in death" (15). Indeed, this is the first time that Morgado conceives a performance that does not represent the actual crime scene nor the specific characteristics of a woman's death. Lidia, Patricia, Floria and Raquel depicted the destiny of their corresponding main protagonists; Eleonora is a somewhat anonymous woman who dies in a rather anonymous manner. Her death does not seem to have a life-altering impact besides aiding in the development of this particular subplot, and no one mourns her loss in the city. In other words, it serves as a connecting point between *Il Mostro* and his following penitents. Eleonora might be granted a full name, but that surname does not include a background story to build and expand her role as a literary character, and more specifically, as a female victim. Whereas art serves a purifying and immortalization purpose in the first installment, Morgado uses religion as a tool whose actual function is an anonymizing process that laughs at and ridicules women in *Martyrium*, and that, analogously, presents a harsh critique on religion itself due to the polarization of women as either (good) anonymous or deviant figures according to Christian patriarchal standards. Eleonora becomes that canonical female figure whose only possible role is the faceless victim that kickstarts the narrative. Her abduction, murder and performance happen almost entirely offscreen and rather quickly, as if she were not worth more time or attention, as if Morgado could not dispose of her body fast enough.

Paola – Desecrating Sacred Spaces

Stefano¹⁷ Carasone and Paola are the second and third victims of *Il Mostro di Roma*, respectively. They enter the narrative on Valentine's Day as the snow covers la Piazza di Sant'Andrea della Valle while they are running errands and wedding planning. Garrido and Abarca give these victims, to some extent, a backstory. Readers know that the couple is deeply in love: they have been dating since their teenage years and they want to engrave "Omnia Vincit Amor et Nos Cedamus Amori" (145) on their wedding invitations. Stefano is fascinated with Paola's ability of finding beauty and happiness in the smallest and simplest aspects of life. Paola works at her family's florist shop; Stefano has a good job at a local Apple store.

Besides these few facts, their physical appearance is the only other piece of information that readers possess about the victims. Stefano has pleasant features, good manners, nice clothes, big honest eyes and dark blond hair. Paola is described by her boyfriend as a "joven normal, de media melena lacia, castaña, y ojos también castaños, expresivos, pero para él era la mujer más hermosa del mundo, con su dulce cuerpo curvilíneo, su pecho rotundo, su sensualidad y su carácter firme y honesto" (144-145). It is important to notice how this recollection of feminine attributes resonates in the readers' minds, as it will be seen shortly, as a certainly accurate description of Valentina Negro.

Later that night, on their way home Paola and Stefano deviate from their route to visit la Chiesa di San Bonaventura al Palatino, the church where they are getting married in August, to take some photographs for their wedding blog. Coincidentally, Nero is at the same location, working on a fresco when Stefano and Paola engage in sexual intercourse: "La visión de una joven morena, semidesnuda, arrodillada y ofrecida como una vulgar prostituta en una esquina de

¹⁷ Stefano sometimes is referred as Mario (see pp. 144-145). The oscillation between these two names could be due to a narratological mistake on the authors' part or an editorial errata.

«su» capilla lo esta trastornando de una forma tan extrema que no era capaz de dominarse ni un segundo más” (171). Paola and Stefano become his next victims, like Eleonora, by sheer luck. It is a combination of opportunity and coincidence. To this equation, two new dynamics must be added as contributing stressors that elicit Nero’s response: the already mentioned physical similarity between Paola and Valentina, and the fellatio Paola is performing on Stefano.

In his state of rage, Nero blindsides Stefano with a heavy crucifix and threatens Paola to avoid retaliation: “¡Cómo te muevas o grites mato a tu novio, puta!” (172). After subduing both of them, that is, rendering Stefano unconscious, and immobilizing and undressing Paola, Nero starts their punishment (and purification) process for profaning God. This assessment is highly ironic since it proves his cognitive dissonance and flawed moral code: Nero configures himself as a god due to his artistic qualities and aspirations, at the same time he extolls his atheism and mockery of God and religion; yet he guards female deviance and punishes females by following Christianity’s moral code. Paola is brutalized, raped and tortured consciously while Stefano is forced to watch. Like Lidia and Raquel, Paola eventually dies in the same manner, strangled while being raped for the last time.

However, the introduction of this double abduction requires certain divergences in his *modus operandi*. The disposition of the female body seems consistent, but for the male he offers less care and details. As a result, the corpses do not share the same resting space; Nero uses a different location and a different approach. He disposes Stefano’s body rather quickly; the corpse is found barely ten hours after his death. The reasoning behind this behavior relies on the fact that Stefano does not fit the victimology. Nero is obsessed with the female body, and during his Italian sadistic murderous sadistic spree of rape and murder in Italy, more specifically, with female bodies who resemble Valentina. As a consequence, Stefano’s torture is not physical but

psychological; he is tortured by witnessing Paola's rape and torment. Additionally, Stefano's cause of death was blunt force trauma to the head. The arrows that pierced his body were added postmortem and the wounds were pigmented with red oil paint. That is, Nero does not gift this boyfriend figure with his time and expertise. The death, disposal and rearranging of the body are all actions accomplished efficiently while still in the realm of religious corporeal experiences.

Thus, when Stefano's body is found, an immediate religious connection can be made with the numerous artistic representations of San Sebastián that can be found throughout the entire city: "En una de las columnas centrales, sujeto con gruesas cuerdas, había un hombre desnudo, cuya cabeza caía sobre el pecho. A pesar de la oscuridad, se podía ver que de su cuerpo blanco e inmóvil como una estatua del Museo Capitolino, surgían una especie de saetas de fina madera" (185).

San Sebastián is perhaps one of the most depicted saints in the religious iconographic tradition. Specifically, it is his martyrdom, after a period of persecution as a Christian soldier responsible for the conversion of many during Diocletian's sovereignty, that entices artists and adepts alike. Joaquina Lanzuela Hernández approaches San Sebastián's representations throughout several time periods and geographical areas and asserts that during Medieval times, a very specific iconographical tendency arose: a rejuvenated and naked San Sebastián riddled with arrows (236). By using hagiography as a source of inspiration, special emphasis is placed on the exaggeration of the severe and excruciating torments inflicted upon his figure. These wounds have a parallel connection to the passion and crucifixion of Christ—hence the popularity and constant reproduction of frescos, mosaics, triptychs and sculptures depicting San Sebastián's martyrdom.

As it is said throughout *Martyrium* by the police and Sanjuán, it is difficult to elucidate which specific work of art Nero used as a reference point and source of inspiration for his performance. However, taking into consideration Morgado's association with painting, Stefano's performance and one of the canvases he exhibits at the EUR gallery, there are some specific pieces that need to be brought to attention. The first one is Andrea Mantegna's triptych of *San Sebastiano* (Vienna c. 1456-1459, Louvre c. 1480, Venice c. 1490), since its composition has a similar approach to classical sculpture. Besides, it adds dramatism and the sublimation of natural into spiritual. Pietro Perugino's *San Sebastiano* (c. 1495) could be the second reference since, according to Sanjuán, its location at the Galleria Borghese is circumscribed by Nero's geographical profile, but also because of the pose and structure. The story of the crime identifies la Chiesa di San Bonaventura as the source of the chosen San Sebastián from which Nero extracts an arrow. The story of the investigation corroborates this information. It is indeed a church under renovation, therefore the construction elements match with the residue of white paint, cement and brick dust found on the victims' wounds, and it also has a neoclassicist sculpture of San Sebastián from the Zelioli Florentine workshop and its arrows are indeed, as predicted, from the nineteenth-century.

Although there are certainly some new traits added to his murderous pattern due to the inclusion of a male figure, it is safe to affirm that Nero does not deviate from his original calculated *modus operandi* when it pertains to female victims. After performing his sadistic ritual, he preserves Paola's body from its natural biological course and the elements; instead of the original industrial freezer that he used with Lidia, this time he relies on the winter weather to maintain its low temperatures so that Paola's corpse, wrapped in plastic and covered with snow, is conserved until the following night. For her final performance, Nero makes specific

arrangements; a set of handicrafts serve as props for Paola's definite tomb: white bedding sheets, pillows, glue, plaster angel heads, etc.

Precisely, that is how Paola's body is found by a guard from the Cimitero dei Protestanti in Rome,

vio un extraño bulto debajo de su estatua favorita [...] *El ángel de los lamentos* seguía llorando la muerte de su escultor, William Wetmore, y su esposa Emelyn [...] a los pies de la tumba, una figura nívea tan inmóvil como las figuras de mármol [...] Una mujer, envuelta en sábanas blancas, sobre blancos almohadones. Estaba incorporada levemente, las dos manos sobre el pecho, los ojos secos, semiabiertos en expresión fúnebre. Simone se fijó sin querer en los labios rojos y en el rubor de las mejillas antes de darse cuenta de que aquella mujer estaba muerta. (201)

Nero repeats some of the elements from the previous crime scenes. Like in Eleonora's, two plaster angels appear again in the performance. This time, they seem to have been placed over the grave at the cemetery in a disordered fashion, as if Paola were not worth more attention than what she had already received. From her boyfriend's, Nero reutilizes one of the torture weapons. Stefano was staged as San Sebastián with arrow wounds puncturing all his body; Paola was also stabbed with the same nineteenth-century arrow stolen from an original San Sebastián sculpture from Bonaventura. It seems that Nero is compelled to establish yet another connection among his victims; he leaves trophies, little reminders of his art and murders on his following artistic (re)creation.

Paola's performance is an imitation of a sculpture by Gian Lorenzo Bernini, *L'estasi della Beata Ludovica Albertoni* (1672-1674). This marble and jasper piece depicting this martyr,

a pious widow, dedicated to help the poor, might not be as famous as Bernini's *La Transverberatione di Santa Teresa d'Avila* (1647-1652), but it represents as well the ecstasy and mystic union with God in an explicit manner. *Beata Ludovica Albertoni* is located in the church of San Francesco a Ripa in Rome, and Charles Scribner III describes the sculpture as, "*In extremis*, with head thrown back, lips parted, and half-closed eyes rolled up, Ludovica clutches her breast. Physical agony and metaphysical "movements of the soul" resonate through the cascading folds of her dress" (498). These mystically transfigured contours, as he describes the features of Bernini's oeuvre, concur with the features of the previous baroque bodies, reclined, with the head leaning backwards, a position that petrifies Ludovica in the dying act, betraying a poorly hidden orgasm (de Ceglia 70).

However, the disposition of Paola's body is not an exact replica but a macabre mockery, as Sanjuán states. Paola's facial expression is made up to grimace of eternal pain. A face that Nero has taken the time to wash thoroughly, like the rest of her body, and apply make-up. His sadistic and necrophiliac tendencies turn death into twisted blasphemy. María González García in her analysis of the connection between mysticism and eroticism in San Juan de la Cruz's works, for instance, asseverates that the reduction of the mystical ecstasy to a mere sexual sensation is but a coarse genital and neurotic simplification (49), which is what Morgado seeks and achieves. He does not hold any respect for Paola's corpse, the desecration is but the ultimate taunt of death and God himself. For that reason, Sanjuán offers the following description of Nero's *modus operandi* in regards to the meaning of Paola's deathbed: "Quiere sorprender, mostrar al mundo que es el «Supremo Artista», para ello actúa uniendo la profanación última del cuerpo (el sexo y la tortura) con la muerte posterior, para así crear una obra única e irrepetible: el arte de Morgado exige la aniquilación del otro para ser incorporado, devorado por el propio

asesino en su «Arte»” (308). Again, Morgado is reproducing yet again the idea of the artist as a demigod. In his first phase, he found inspiration in his favorite art, then he turned to religion and mysticism as his fake muses to equally taunt the police, population and readers. He subverts perversely the correlation between mysticism and eroticism by eroding and translocating its terms, namely, exchanging a Saint and her martyrdom with a sexual victim, God with himself, ecstasy with torture, and a long journey with an immediate process of reaching communion with God.

There are two aspects worth sketching. First, the importance of the brief but shallow background story that Garrido and Abarca grant the young lovers. With former victims, even their abbreviated appearances carried more weight in the narrative. Paola and Stefano’s connections, family ties and the consequences of their deaths and how they affect Roman lives, like Eleonora’s, are left unexplored. Stefano is allowed to have a mother who reports his disappearance and family name, perhaps hinting at the superior status of men in a patriarchal society since he is indeed allowed a less painful and more merciful death; whereas Paola’s last name and relatives remain unmentioned, as if she were destined to a somewhat anonymous death, like the numerous nameless and faceless female silhouettes that populate the genre and are soon forgotten.

Secondly, the physical descriptions offered by the narrative regarding Eleonora and Paola possess an oddly familiar resemblance with Valentina Negro: dark hair, ample breasts, strong personality—features that reappear in Nero’s art since Valentina is both his muse and his curse. When Laura Cortés y Ribera, Nero’s gallerist, is selling two of her protégé’s paintings portraying the torture and martyrdom of Santa Ágata and Santa Inés to a young bishop, he highlights that, “Es la misma modelo en los dos cuadros [...] una mujer remarcablemente bella” (78). Although

Laura negates the existence of the woman since Nero never uses models, just his imagination, the avid reader can appreciate, again, Valentina's attributes in that description. Perhaps, the most explicit connection between his Italian victims, and the source of his obsession can be seen during the second part of the novel, *Purgatorium*. At this point in the narrative, Laura arranges for Nero to exhibit three of his most shocking paintings at the EUR gallery, in Mussolini's bunker. One of them represents a woman dressed in a long white nun's habit, tied to a pole. There is a thorned heart embroidered with a red silk thread on her chest, and her habit is pierced by seven arrows and the respective blood from each wound soaks the tunic. The painting also depicts a naked angel with a wicked smile and black crow wings tautening a fire bow. Alluding again to the various depictions of San Sebastián throughout history, it seems important to emphasize the apparition of angels in paintings. Their purpose, as entities that serve as a link between heaven and earth, was to comfort the martyr's spirit with familiar gestures and to alleviate their pain (Lanzuela Hernández 240). Nero's inclusion of the angelic figure achieves the opposite; it seems to be the executor behind the bow and arrow, at the same time it rejoices with the pain that exudes from every wound.

This fascinating portrayal, as Bruno Barberini, the other killer that is terrorizing the city, describes it, pays homage to Nero's killing spree and temerity in Rome. In fact, he has left behind three bodies in a week, two women and a man, all of them in public spaces. The body pierced by arrows renders San Sebastián again and, therefore, Stefano's death. The nun's habits and the mystical erotic representation of the female body allude to the performances created with Eleonora and Paola. All these elements collide and showcase Nero's true source of inspiration and agony, Valentina. Actually, he entitles this piece, *Santa Teresa y el ángel del pecado*.

Barberini's account highlights the beauty of the model, the same female model that populates Nero's work:

El rostro de la monja, de boca y ojos entreabiertos, era de una belleza prerrafaelita. Los labios gruesos, rojos, del mismo color que el corazón bordado en el pecho hacían contraste con la blancura mortecina de la tez. Los ojos grises parecían emitir un brillo sobrenatural, como si la muerte estuviera ganando ya la batalla y la santa, rendida, quisiera entregar su alma a aquel ser alado. (328)

Those full lips, light skin and grey piercing eyes are the spitting image of Valentina. The reader can easily complete the picture with the dark hair and sensual female attributes that the three women share. Nero not only manages to merge three bodies in one by inserting Valentina into the narrative and his paintings, he also succeeds in obliterating these women's identities; he turns them into faceless and anonymous bodies, like the vast majority of female corpses that have populated the genre since its origin.

As *Il Mostro di Roma*'s reign comes to an end, one would expect for his art to end. Nevertheless, Laura, a devoted friend to Ana Salazar, Morgado's mother, who also serves, as mentioned before, as Morgado's merchant and manager, ensures that the Artist has the means to still pursue his artistic endeavors. They arrange a clandestine rendezvous at *Il Cimitero Monumentale di Staglieno* in Genova, Italy to make a transaction. Laura delivers an envelope containing 90,000€ minus her commission, of course, in exchange for an A4 charcoal drawing, a sketch of his next painting, still in progress. Laura reveals that his admirer "quiere más. Dice que te pagará lo que quieras por el siguiente, siempre y cuando haya fotografías y una grabación que muestren lo que el cuadro representa. Como esta última vez" (492).

Thus this commercial trade is intimately connected to Morgado's latest appearance in the novel. With the help of the fake professor Van Allen, who has been instructed to monitor Valentina and Sanjuán and to transport to Switzerland the Artist's new work of art for an enormous amount of money, Morgado is able to drug and kidnap both Valentina and Sanjuán. The performance, rape and torture are the already mentioned new creation and, this time, are captured both in video and painting. Even after Morgado's death, his art remains. An unidentified male residing in Berna, Switzerland is shown admiring Morgado's new painting, with Valentina and Javier as models, as well as a couple of close-up photographs of Valentina's professional and personal life. At this point, a new plot line emerges and serves as a cliffhanger for this volume and as a linking device that connects the narrative with the next installment, *El hombre de la máscara de espejos*, since Morgado has found a fetish niche of people that share his sadistic and psychopathic tendencies. As a matter of fact, this is not his first trade; it is revealed on the penultimate page that, "Había siete cuadros más, cuatro de ellos con sus correspondientes grabaciones o fotografías que acompañan a la obra. Las *performances* como las había llamado el autor" (507). The reader cannot help but backtrack and count all the corpses that have populated these two volumes, and wonder if those seven paintings belong to the female corpses analyzed or if, perhaps, there were other unknown assignments. The effect these performances elicit from the reader, as it has been previously posed, can be of repulsion or compelling attraction, and oftentimes a mixture of the two.

It seems pertinent to make a final note on this section on the correlation established in these two novels between actual murders and their artistic representation since it seems to be a trend on the rise. In fact, this approach can be seen in *Still Lives* (2018), a recently published novel by Maria Hummel in which she explores the interweaving of the LA artistic scene and a

series of crimes committed throughout several decades of the most recent history of the United States. Kim Lord, an avant-garde feminist artist, through her latest controversial art exhibit, exposes some of the flaws of Western culture, namely, the tradition of violence against women and the fetishization of said violence. The homonymous exhibition at the Rocque Museum, *Still lives*, is composed of eleven paintings, each one of them representing the death of a woman. Roseann Quinn, Bonnie Lee Bakley, Gwen Araujo, Chandra Levy, Kitty Genovese, Nicole Brown Simpson, Elizabeth Short –nicknamed as The Black Dahlia– and Judy Ann Dull –victim of the Glamour Girl Slayer– are some of the women portrayed in those paintings. All of them represent all too familiar stories for the general population. This collection is Kim’s way of both paying homage to the victims and “an indictment of America’s obsession with sensationalized female murders” (Hummel 14). That is, as a society we canonize killers; we turn them into legends so they are remembered in history. Whereas, their victims remain oftentimes anonymous or unnamed.

Accordingly, Lord’s creative process consists of photographing herself recreating the victim’s death and crime scene in order to use those pictures as the outline to compose the paintings afterwards. These women have been shot, severed in half, stabbed, mutilated, raped, robbed, slayed, bound, etc.; they represent some areas that society deems as deviant and/or transgressive, such as young women who bring men home, women who live alone, transgender women, etc. Underneath all the blood and all the beautiful, passionate and monstrous layers that embody these works of art, behind the pleasure and shock that Lord’s canvases create, lies the harsh reality of women being slaughtered in our society.

Still Lives and the crime series *Crímenes Exquisitos* represent different ways of highlighting the same issue, women are killed and then we turn them into art. The perception,

then, is not identical. As Lord claims, “unless women artists simultaneously inhabit the roles of artist and subject, the art world will never escape the prison of the male gaze” (32). Therefore, due to her approach, readers and viewers alike are forced to reconsider their own ethics, to question their stance on the role of liberated women in our society, and to position themselves one way or another against the objectification of these women, whose main purpose seems to be being hunted and killed. *Martyrium*, however, presents a mockery representation of heavenly bodies or religious corporeal experiences that overthrow the Catholic imagery to foster a type of art that anonymizes and vexes women.

Snuff Bodies: *El hombre de la máscara de espejos*

“Dying
Is an art, like everything else”
–Sylvia Plath, “Lady Lazarus”

El hombre de la máscara de espejos contains one of the most complex narratives in the tetralogy. This third installment offers several storylines that both complement and collide with each other. It also portrays a myriad of characters so diverse and plural, and at the same time scattered over the Spanish, Italian and British geography, that Garrido and Abarca offer a *dramatis personae* before their prologue. All chains of events can be categorized into three main and distinguishable plots: Valentina’s post-traumatic stress disorder after Morgado drugged, kidnapped and raped her; Marcos Albelo, known as the Hairdresser, the serial rapist of teenagers that terrifies A Coruña; and the unexplained disappearances of several women who serve as subjects in snuff movies created by a secret society governed by the Man with the Mirror Mask. With this collection of stories intertwined, it is expected to have a quite large number of both victims and corpses. Even though the focus of this chapter is placed on the latter, the cadavers, it

is pertinent to make a brief remark to the robust body of female teenagers that suffer at Albelo's hand.

Andrea Mella opens the novel after she decided to skip class to drink some beers and smoke marihuana with her friends. Three days later, she is found unconscious in the parking lot of a brothel dressed as a cheap prostitute, raped, overdosed and with her hair cropped, sheared like an animal. She has become the Hairdresser's third victim in just two months, after Emma García and Teresa de la Fuente. All of them were taken in broad daylight, kept in a safe location for several days where they were drugged, raped and beaten repeatedly. Forty-eight hours later, he freed and dumped them in the vicinity of an isolated brothel or dating house, dressed and made up as cheap prostitutes. Vanessa Serrano, the fourth victim, has better luck since Valentina interrupted the Hairdresser's attack by almost beating him to death. The Hairdresser's victims share the same aesthetic traits: brown eyes, long hazel hair, similar physique, tall and slim bodies—and all of them wear religious high school uniforms. This pattern seems to follow the idea of lolitas, as Albelo ponders while talking to himself aloud, "Eres ya una verdadera putilla. Necesitas que alguien te dé muy pronto una lección. Si deseas atraer la atención de un macho, lo has conseguido... Aunque no del modo que esperarías hacerlo" (32). Precisely, there seems to be a fixation with women's beauty throughout the different novels in the series, as this research tries to demonstrate. Besides, the more beautiful and sexually attractive these women are, the higher their chances are of being victimized. In other words, there is always a parallel connection between all corpses and victims, and that is their physical appearance.

There are two other important reasons to mention this set of victims. They bring to the forefront the negative consequences that sexual abuse and aggression leave on living characters. Oftentimes, these narratives are left unexplored because of the nature of their configuration as

victims and also due to the plotline which focuses on advancing the story of the investigation to save their lives. It is a narratological necessity to invest the main protagonist and several of the satellite female figures with similar experiences so that the imprint and aftermath of a kidnaping or a violent rape can be explored, as it will be seen in the subsequent chapters. Additionally, the Hairdresser storyline merges with the snuff movies and the Palace of Darkness's horror expressionist story by means of Albelo's lawyer, Eusebio Brandáriz, one of the Man with the Mirror Mask's trusted men.

Belén Egea and Encina Yebra – Deadly Castings

The main plot starts to unravel when Félix Panticosa, journalist and mystery researcher, receives an anonymous email with an apparent fake horror type snuff video¹⁸ and an invitation to a meeting: “Ven al Castillo de San Blas. El día 11 de abril a la medianoche. Recuerda la consigna: pagar y guardar silencio” (57). Even at the risk of being the target of a practical joke, his investigative nature forces him to pursue this lead in Ponferrada. Once there, he witnesses the first death scenario of the narrative: several spotlights, a glass tank filled with water, a man with a ski mask, the Man with the Mirror Mask recording every second of the scene from several angles and a woman chained from the ceiling: “una mujer de cabello largo y negro que descendía, colgada de la cadena, hacia el tanque. Estaba desnuda. Atada. Amordazada. Los ojos enfangados del terror más brutal” (64). She is submerged in the tank repetitively, choking and drowning; every time she is extracted from the water, the rape process begins once again. Her

¹⁸ Eithne Johnson and Eric Schaefer define snuff film as “a pornographic movie that culminates in the actual murder and mutilation of a woman” (40), following the definition that circulated during the snuff film crisis in the 1970s.

anguish and suffocation are filmed in every minute detail during both stages of her torture. This is the first time readers encounter Encina Yebra alive.

Encina's disappearance and death, unbeknownst to the police in A Coruña at that moment, cannot be further explored and investigated until it is linked with Valentina's cases. Precisely after Valentina's almost deadly encounter with the Hairdresser, she is under investigation by internal affairs, forced to seek psychological counselling and to keep a low profile in order to maintain her badge. Iturriaga, her boss, assigns her an old case to keep her occupied, "como no la quiero ociosa, la conozco, le voy a dar un caso antiguo que hace tiempo que nos trae de cabeza" (73). He wants her to investigate Belén Egea's disappearance, which took place three years earlier. Even though the case went cold, the investigation could be reactivated due to some evidence the police had recently received. In reality, Iturriaga does not anticipate much from this process, just to retain Valentina away from the public eye. However, as expected from the inspector, she manages to make a breakthrough that will eventually connect all the complex narrative arcs that compose the novel.

Belén's case and the subsequent ones with Encina or Catriona highlight the current issues with disappearance incidents. This group of females belongs to a collective of missing women who were believed to have disappeared on their free will or who were presumed dead or kidnapped by a former lover due to the lack of evidence. These cases gone cold dwell into the deficit of information and resources that the national police sometimes face. We, as readers, witness the pain that their families go through, the stagnation and stillness that pervades their domestic spheres, especially in these women's bedrooms, and the efforts citizens make as volunteers to help the families.

That was Belén's situation, all the possible suspects were dismissed because of their sound alibis, and after her car was found abandoned five months after, the provisional conclusion was a voluntarily disappearance. However, it was obvious that Belén was not the type of person who would leave her daughter behind or vanish into thin air since she had no reason to flee in the first place. Belén's conservatory professor, remembered a not so small detail that would alter the course of the investigation: "Belén me dijo que había conseguido una audición. Para hacer un papel en una obra de teatro en la que también iba a cantar" (88-89). This revelation opens a new line of investigation: finding with whom Belén was meeting by retrieving the audition from the local newspaper. The classified ad went as follows: "Se buscan actores-cantantes para musical. De edad comprendida entre los 18 y los 30 años. Buena presencia. Se valorarán estudios de canto. Ambos sexos. Interesados contactar con formulario en página web «Encontros» o llamar al teléfono tal y preguntar por Mary" (113). This leads Valentina to the announcing company and consequently, to a contact in the already dissolved theatre group. Sheila does indeed recognize and remember Belén, the best singer of the group but, for some reason, was cast as the understudy for that hybrid piece, *Lóbrego romance*, a musical-theatre play that paid them extremely well. Sheila also relates the two men in charge, their demeanor and that after four weeks of rehearsals they paid the actors a considerable amount of money since the show was canceled.

Once this lead is exhausted, the snuff video that caused Panticosa's death proves to be the connection between the two investigations. Although Panticosa is the first person interacting with the video, readers have to wait until Sanjuán is reviewing the clip to obtain explicit details of its content. It lasts two minutes and it serves as a sneak peek, as it contains seven trailers of various atrocious crimes. Sanjuán only stomachs to narrate the first three before needing a break

from such a nauseating recollection of torturing, vexation and killing scenes: a woman is being tortured while a threatening dagger is being pointed at her eyes; another covered in flowers and reclined inside a coffin is decapitated alive; and finally, a third one, with long brown hair and her face partially covered by an eye mask, is suffocated to death. It is evident that some of the torture methods and causes of death remind readers of the Artist's *modus operandi*, especially the beheading and suffocation examples, as Patricia, Lidia and Raquel's crime scenes demonstrate.

Sanjuán, after confirming the authenticity of the clip, sends it to Valentina, who has her suspicions about the true identity of the third woman. The reconstruction of a screenshot from the video after removing the mask and being run by a biometric recognition program, it is verified that it is a match, with a probability of ninety-nine percent, that the woman is indeed Belén. This way, Valentina finally connects the different investigations, and realizes the disappearances are not voluntary; women are being kidnapped under false premises of castings and theatre plays and their own deaths are being staged on camera for sexual, sadistic and monetary purposes.

Up until now, the only factors pertaining to Belén's persona were her status as a divorced mother, and her physical appearance. Perhaps that is the most surprising aspect, not only that, like all the victims of the series, she is described as beautiful and attractive, but that her traits—“El rostro alegre, sonriente [...] una mujer de mirada limpia, ojos verdes, pelo largo liso castaño” (75)—possess an odd resemblance to the Hairdresser's type. Misleading the readers by hinting to a possible connection among the different cases. A visit to Belén's mother provides more details to complete her character and personality. She lived and adored music even though it was extremely difficult to make a living on music and theatre. Valentina finds a copy of *Lóbrego romance* in her bedroom. The cover has a devil with its hand raised, burning, and an eye in the

middle of the palm—the emblem that appears at the beginning of the snuff videos—and that will serve as evidence to connect Richie Domingo to the disappearance of more women. But, perhaps, the more striking aspect of this part of the investigation is the pain and stagnation that impedes Belén’s mother to move forward; she still hopes her daughter comes back one day:

Como en tantos otros casos de hijos desaparecidos, la casa se conservaba congelada en el tiempo, como si esa condición fuera a facilitar que, la persona a la que se deseaba volver a ver con todas las fuerzas, entrara de nuevo por el umbral, sana y salva. No obstante, ese tiempo se cobra su precio, y cada alma que espera en ese hogar se ve expuesta al brutal desgaste de la fatiga, del dolor, y la desesperación. (161)

The humanizing aspect of the narrative is echoed and repeated among the families of the kidnapped girls, like Catriona’s mother and inspector Macfarlain corroborate. Although the length given to this consideration might seem too insignificant for a proper judgement, it does provide a benevolence hardly given to previous victims of the genre in similar scenarios. Thus, the reclamation of these humanized characters serves both as a means of paying homage to those victims and their families, but also, maybe as a critique to those stories who left this part of the crime neglected and unexplored.

In their search for Belén, Valentina and her team analyze Panticosa’s cellphone pictures and triangulate its signal to find the location where they were taken. While in Ponferrada, the police help Valentina and Sanjuán with the identification of the building, La Finca de Valdés. That enclave, more specifically, its basement becomes the connecting point between Belén and Encina, “Las luces iluminaron un tanque de agua. Dentro, un cuerpo de mujer, joven, desnudo, lechoso. Flotaba, los cabellos negros enredados como algas, las manos atadas a una gruesa

cuerda que pendía de una polea, el pecho níveo ribeteado ya de venas oscuras” (205). This woman is none other than the same woman that Panticosa saw being tortured at the beginning of the narrative, Encina Yebra. It is then revealed she was from a nearby location, Peñalba, and had disappeared ten days prior.

Encina Yebra was a twenty-two year old college student in Madrid, she worked at a pub and she recently had changed in her mannerisms and way of life. Compared to her humble family origins, Encina did not need money, she always seemed to have new clothes and jewelry, and she invited her friends to expensive restaurants. She had also lost weight and often came home under the influence. Encina used to say that she was making her first steps as a model, although in reality, she was an escort. She flirted and partied frequently and was extremely successful among men; the subinspector Alana Ovejero describes Encina, upon seeing one of her photographs, as a woman with, “piernas largas, sonrisa rutilante, ojos pícaros, una orla de pecas que adornaba sus mejillas, y sobre todo su postura abiertamente seductora, incluso demasiado” (277). This apparently harmless comment connects Encina with former sexually deviant characters who have suffered a similar destiny at the hand of the Artist. In fact, Encina’s personal involvement with Gerardo Trashorras, another minion working for the Man with the Mirror Mask, through her escort job grants her a ticket to the Palace of Darkness. She left Madrid and Gerardo without an explanation, and after feeling scorned, he organizes the buying and selling of Encina’s murder and its video.

These women are easy targets since they expose themselves to the world; they perform in public places, attend multiple auditions. They are coveted preys, easy to deceive. What is more, they are chosen for their expressive skills and attributes: “son jóvenes, hermosas, delgadas, con estilo. Y con talento. Con habilidades” (213). There is no one better than these actresses and

singers to exploit a wide register of emotions and to look astonishing beautiful while expressing such horror. While the Artist was known for using his performances to punish, purify and immortalize women through his paintings, the same can likewise be said about the Man with the Mirror Mask. Belén, Encina and the rest of the victims are frozen in time due to the recordings. In them, they (re)create the spectrum of human emotions and, at the same time, their own essence is contained and captured in those films. However, there seems to be another motive besides the sadistic torture and murder. The executioner, but primarily the mastermind and the hand that pulls the strings behind the camera, make these women transcend their corporeality, their death is, in a way, the path to purgation.

Encina's crime scene, albeit the sexual sadism and torture, reminds subtly to T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922). The fourth and shortest section of the poem, "Dead by Water,"¹⁹ relates the death of Phlebas, the Phoenician, by drowning as prophesized by Madame Sosostris. Viorica Patea in her in-depth analysis of the poem considers this section an elegy; Phleba's destiny is a final test, a journey to the unknown and unconscious realities of the psyche, a spiritual itinerary to purification (147). Taking into consideration this interpretation alongside the idea of the impossibility of separating life and death, Phleba's fate is a catharsis, the farewell moment to the mundane self and life for a new one (148). This type of metamorphosis is echoed, in a twisted

¹⁹ Phlebas the Phoenician, a fortnight dead,
Forgot the cry of gulls, and the deep sea swell
And the profit and loss.

A current under sea
Picked his bones in whispers. As he rose and fell
He passed the stages of his age and youth
Entering the whirlpool.

Gentile or Jew
O you who turn the wheel and look to windward,
Consider Phlebas, who was once handsome and tall as you. (IV. Death by Water, 312-321)

manner, within Encina's death. Her continuous submersion and final drowning are a purification of her deviant life, a baptism to a newer and purer self.

The crime scenes are composed following a logical and aesthetic sense that serves the killer. His scenarios are a critical part for his enjoyment, he finds pleasure in orchestrating and staging these deaths for others to see. The clips are conceived as black and white terror movies. They all comprise some horror elements, be it an altar or the recitation of Poe's poem "The Raven," for instance. All the clips, scenarios and props lead back to the Man with the Mirror Mask's past as a theatre director when he forced one of his actors to kill an actress during a rehearsal. That event as well as what he witnessed in San Sebastián's island serve as stressors for his killing agenda. However, the horror expressionist crime scenes are not completed until the right stage props are added. Some collectors' items, the ones listed in one of Panticosa's reportage, are stolen and, oddly enough, they are used in the snuff movies: *La alegoría de la muerte*, a painting by Tomás Mondragón; Espoz y Mina's heart; some Venetian jewels made out of human bones; a Queen of England's mourning ring and a matching cameo with hair; and Sarah Bernhardt's aforementioned coffin. This last item serves once again as a linking element to the former exquisite corpses.

The Man with the Mirror Mask's artistic ambitions do not end there. His aesthetic is complemented by the Artist's paintings, which he has either purchased or stolen for his personal collection, and by German expressionist cinema.²⁰ The influence of F.W. Murnau's *Nosferatu* (1922), Fritz Lang's *Dr. Mabuse* (1922) or Robert Wiene's *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1920) is

²⁰ John S. Titford analyzes German expressionist cinema focusing on its anthropomorphism. He explains this movement as an attempt "to develop an art which represented subjective experience, embracing what was later to become a *sine qua non* of general semantics – the concept that the individual chooses his own reality, by using his senses to abstract from the world in process" (17).

easily identifiable by the collection of dark zones, shadows and black and whites. As a matter of fact, “Two of the principal means whereby the German Cinema heightens the threatening life of the world of objects—namely, the use of décor and lightening—are borrowed from the theatre, in particular the productions of Max Reinhardt” (Titford 21), traits that are indeed known to the man of the mirror mask due to his theatrical background. These movies are referents as well as sources of inspiration for the crime scenes depicted in the narrative, as Sanjuán correctly indicates.

The horror before death, the ultimate taboo is what connects one serial killer with another, as if the Artist’s narrative arc refuses to die and finds another vehicle for reincarnation. As Richie, another of the flunkies, the main recruiter at the service of the Man with the Mirror Mask, confesses to the next victim, “El cine es el arte total, la verdadera esencia de lo que durante siglos buscaron los hombres en el arte y la expresión. En el cine puedes crear absolutamente todo: puedes mostrar amor, sufrimiento, dolor, felicidad, muerte; es la vida, Victoria. El cine es el espejo en donde todos nos reflejamos” (181). The irony in this comment resides in the fact that Garrido and Abarca achieve that very essence of horror and pain through their fiction. They also manage to reflect the outrage and perversion that surrounds the world of cinematography, an industry in which oftentimes actresses are required to sell their souls and bodies at the service of the male gaze.

Intertextuality has played an important role once more in the crime series. In this third installment, the focus evidently is placed upon a different variety of art, filmography. It showcases Garrido and Abarca’s capability to adapt their writing styles and narratives and present readers with a full itinerary of different ways of portraying female victims throughout the history of the literary genre. This type of change is showcased on the varying degrees of

importance and detailed attention given to their background and victimization process. They also alter the scenography, the narrative and literary techniques used to create and depict these female characters, without forgetting to connect them to the former novels to ensure continuity and seriality of the series.

Plagiarized Bodies: Los muertos viajan deprisa

“Perhaps all writing, is motivated, deep down, [...] by a desire to make the risky trip to the Underworld, and to bring something or someone back from the dead”
–Margaret Atwood, *Negotiating with the Dead*

Los muertos viajan deprisa is the novel that offers the fewest female corpses in the series, in fact, just two. Out of those, Cecilia Jardiel is the only female character who dies at the hand of Carlos Andrade, the main unsub of the story, nicknamed as the writers’ killer or the Ghost. The other female corpse belongs to Verónica Johnson, the private detective who saved Andrade’s life years ago and also uncovered the murder attempt against him that was originally disguised as a suicide. After she realizes that Andrade is actually the Ghost, she decides to confess to the police her implication in aiding Andrade to fake his death all these years. That is when Paco Serrano, Andrade’s sidekick in this literary revenge, kills her to avoid being identified and arrested by the police for his assistance. Due to the numerous new characters added to the regular ones, this fourth installment, like the previous book, also offers a *dramatis personae* in alphabetical order. This list, besides helping readers to remember the myriad of old and new personas, it also aids them in identifying and following the two main storylines: the Ghost’s; and the Hairdresser’s prison break to plot with Mendiluce Valentina’s downfall.

The Ghost’s murders are closely tied to the literary world. His victims are all writers involved in La Semana Negra de Gijón. He feels the need to avenge himself for the grave crimes

they have committed against him, all of them linked to plagiarism, jealousy and betrayal.

Andrade kills these villains to find retribution, to achieve the fame and recognition he deserves, and to ultimately punish those who tried to kill and obliterate him. Cecilia is therefore the first victim in his list of targets.

Cecilia Jardiel – Between Plagiarism and Friends with Benefits

Cecilia opens the first prologue, and by analogy, one of the plotlines of the narrative. She is aboard El Tren Negro, the train that traverses the North of the peninsula on its way to Gijón, to La Semana Negra de Gijón, a literary conference on crime fiction. Cecilia is resting in the bunk bed inside her small compartment after an intense sex session with another writer, Toni Izaguirre. There is a knock on her door, and without a second thought, thinking it might be Izaguirre again, she opens it to suddenly find herself under attack instead by someone dressed as a train inspector. Once she regains consciousness, she finds herself tied, pain coarsing through her body. Her attacker, Andrade, is carefully staring at her, accusing her, “«Haces bien en ocuparte de mis flores; que te paguen lo que a mí no me pagaron.» ¿Quién te crees que eres, putilla? ¿El inmortal Baudelaire? ¿Cómo te atreves?” (16). This brief comment already hints at two main traits that, according to the assailant, define Cecilia: her promiscuity and her misappropriation of goods.

The Ghost begins with the torture and rape process. He is punishing her for her behavior; he claims she has used her body and sex as a weapon to take advantage of what men had to offer, then claimed it belonged to her. He even blames her for filling a false rape report: “¿Con cuántos has hecho esto para llegar adonde estás ahora? Uno más no te importará, zorra. Todo ha salido de tu coño de puta, nada ha salido de tu alma ni de tu mente. Y yo ahora también voy a degustar lo

que tantos otros han disfrutado y libado. ¿Te acuerdas de cuando decías que te habían violado? ¿Te acuerdas de tu acusación?” (16). This value judgement alludes once again to a double-edged rhetorical weapon and double standard of patriarchal societies: being a beautiful and attractive female is a key that opens a wide array of opportunities, at the same time it constantly questions women’s professionalism because of said physicality. The notion that they only reach that point due to their physical appearance, not for their own work and efforts, will still haunt them.

Andrade’s assault continues and readers can witness Cecilia’s anguish, terror and absolute disgust while he profanes her body. He wants Cecilia to serve him with her body, because she is an expert at using her body for pleasure to achieve something in return, a means to an end. For the Ghost, Cecilia is an empty vessel, she does not produce anything of her own; but she takes it all from others: “De ti no ha salido nunca nada. Eres una persona estéril. Todo es engaño y frivolidad, lo que exudes por cada poro de tu piel de ramera. Vendes tu obra como tu cuerpo, todo al servicio de tus mundanos deseos de placer y reconocimiento. Pero todo es una gran mentira. En ti entra todo, pero no sale nada real. Y a partir de ahora nada entrará ni saldrá de ti. Nunca más” (17). This obsession with Cecilia’s behavior translates into his *modus operandi*; her death has to match the level of her sins as well as her infamous mark. To that end, the Ghost has brought not only ropes but also a silicone gun to obstruct all her sinful orifices and, after blocking her mouth, he continues with the strangulation process, reaching his climax exactly as she expires. He then uses the silicone to seal her anus and vagina as well.

When inspector Ignacio Bernabé arrives at the crime scene, he highlights the cause of death by strangulation as a defining element that indicates close proximity with the victim. He rightfully perceives the personal and intimate relationship that linked victim and aggressor in the past. However, the amount of violence and sadism cannot compare to anything he has witnessed

in his years of service: “toda la ira que impregnaba aquel lugar como una especie de tela de araña: la joven estaba desnuda, atada a la cama de pies y manos, el rostro amoratado por los golpes y por la cianosis. Era la típica escena de un crimen de naturaleza sexual, pero él nunca había sido testigo de semejante despliegue violento” (41).

This brief but intense encounter, Cecilia’s violation and murder, initiates the narrative. She does not talk throughout the novel at any point, neither during the Ghost’s aggression, nor by means of analepsis. She is a silent character, a tribute to those anonymous, faceless and speechless female characters that have served as victims through the history of the genre. Precisely, her role as victim and the purpose of her murder are to advance the Ghost’s murderous vendetta. Her corpse and the subsequent bodies lead to the ultimate target, Estela Brown, Carmen Pallares’s pseudonym.

Apart from her physical attributes, described at the beginning of the novel (small body, almost childlike, short brown hair, honey-colored eyes, small breasts), it is necessary for the investigation to develop further, in an attempt to connect her and the other victims, and for readers to possess more information about her. She was a twenty-four year old writer who had already published two novels and a poetry book, and was known among her acquaintances for her promiscuity. She had multiple lovers, some of them married men, and most of her affairs were somehow related to the literary world; they were all literary critics, editors or even writers. It is also rumored that Cecilia was involved in a homosexual relationship with an influential editor from Barcelona. Rumors aside, what the investigation proves is Cecilia’s sexual connection with Izaguirre, Sauce and Andrade himself; as Valentina notes, “En este mundo de la literatura tan endogámico parece que todos tienen que liarse con todos una y otra vez” (202).

There is indeed some tangible tension and criticism towards her active sexual life due to its misalignment with societal patriarchal standards. This moral violation places a judgment not just on what is considered her deviance *per se* due to her sexual freedom, but on the fact that she is materially benefiting from it; she uses her body and sexual favors to achieve literary rewards. For instance, she plagiarized Antonio del Río's lyrics in some of her poems. Like former victims in the crime series, Cecilia receives an anonymous threat, via email, by the killer, predicting her own death: "*Cecilia, isla maldita, flor del mal. Musa enferma, musa venal. Sierpe divina, de ti no puede salir nada / Pues eres la tentación de san Antonio, beldad mía, digna de ser amada por mil arañas y escorpiones*" (194). Curiously enough, the sender's email address is *señorzaccone*, one of the Count of Monte Cristo's aliases, probably one of the most notorious avengers of literary history. Hence, Andrade suggests the lengths he is willing to go to fulfill his revenge in an attempt to eradicate the imbricate network of sexual and moral deviance initiated by Cecilia and came to plague his literary circle.

Cecilia and Andrade first met in Madrid at Colegio La Herradura, where she was a high schooler and he was her teacher. Cecilia came from a wealthy background and was purely interested in becoming famous. From a young age, as Karina Desmonts, her English teacher mentions, she learned how to use her feminine body as a weapon:

Era... no sé cómo decirlo, una Lolita [...] ella tenía ese gancho para los hombres, esa sensualidad, ya saben. Una cara de duende, pecosa, mucha labia, desvergüenza. En fin, a Carlos le fascinó. Se enamoró, o se encoñó, a saber. Estaba en el grupo de teatro, le daba todos los papeles principales y ella los bordaba. Sacaba lo mejor de ella en todos los sentidos. Hasta que apareció Estela.
(264-265)

However, Andrade lost his interest in her as soon as Estela reappeared in his life. Cecilia, feeling scorned and betrayed, resorted to lies and false accusations as a means of retaliation. She claimed Andrade had raped her, and the school, in order to maintain its prestige and spotless reputation did not pursue legal actions on this matter. They decided to maintain a low profile and fire Andrade instead. This vital moment sows the seeds of hate and resentment in Andrade, and would be his first step on the path to the underworld.

Cecilia's crime scene, along with the email and the rest of the enigmatic evidence becomes a riddle that needs solving. As Bernabé points out during the investigation, there are only two possibilities in her murder: either the killer is one of the passengers in the train, or it was someone who boarded at Oviedo's train station during the night stop. This locked-room homicide hints to classical crime fiction stories such as those from Christie and Poe, to name but a few, but with the added elements of sexual, gendered and literary undertones. More specifically, Garrido and Abarca pay homage to Christie's *Murder on the Orient Express* (1934) and the murder of Mr. Ratchett, alias Cassetti, who is wanted for the kidnapping and murder of a child. Indeed, there are some common elements, such as the murder inside the train at night, the compartment door and its lock that were not forced open, etc. Once private detective Mr. Hercule Poirot, Dr. Constantine and Mr. Bouc interview all the passengers and crew aboard the train, it soon becomes clear that every single character has a personal connection to Ratchett and seeks revenge for the little Armstrong girl. Poirot describes the American as a wild animal that knows, however, how to keep his appearance: "The body—the cage—is everything of the most respectable—but through the bars, the wild animal looks out" (Christie 22). This statement could easily be applied to Cecilia; her delicate and, at the same time, sexual appearance hides the true devious, venomous and plagiaristic nature that drives her. She knows who she is and what she

has done; some of her colleagues are aware of some of her wildest secrets and yet, when Bernabé interviews every single passenger, the truth does not come out. However, those are not the only points of comparison between Christie's narrative and Garrido and Abarca's final installment:

(1) Cecilia, like Ratchett, is found guilty and deserving –from a reader's perspective– of a deadly punishment for her multiple devious crimes, (2) the authorities do not serve justice nor prosecute Cecilia or Ratchett for their actions, therefore other characters make it their life's mission to avenge their crimes and take justice into their own hands, and (3) plagiarism is equated to the kidnapping and killing of someone else's (literary) child. This approach not only contributes to the preexisting elements of metafiction and intertextuality of the series, but also maintains a consisting victimology. Cecilia is a character who does not accommodate to traditional female standards and her crimes embody different forms of deviance ranging from underage sex, false sexual reports, adultery and promiscuity to plagiarism.

One more point of convergence between the two novels resides on the use of trains. In Christie's narrative they serve a twofold purpose: (1) to develop and experiment with the precepts of the traditional whodunit, and (2) to create, in a world of transit, a unique geography that defies conventional definitions of space (Ewers 98). Garrido and Abarca, in this last installment in the series, also undergo a similar experimentation process. They challenge, once again, the customary hegemonic locations in the genre by exploring new venues and methods for their literary murders, yet they find a way to make a relevant connection to current societal trends. As a result, they participate in the creation of a new approach to female murders. By embarking themselves and the characters in this metaliterary journey, they not only pay homage to several foundational figures in the genre, they also insert contemporary Spanish crime fiction into the history, in a wider sense, of the genre. Garrido and Abarca allude to *La Semana Negra*

de Gijón, the oldest and most prestigious conference on crime fiction in Spain, and its distinctive train that travels through the north coast of Spain until reaching Galicia for the convention. They honor the classical works of the genre; they consciously choose to start the narrative following the stereotypical patterns that authors used when portraying female victims. Although they do choose a woman who poses a threat to the patriarchal social order, there is a harsh criticism towards her behavior and she is not granted her own voice to retell her story on her terms. The authors, once again, rejoice in their narrative ambivalence, highlighting and judging male violence at the same time they perpetuate and replicate it, forcing readers to determine their own stance on this last novel, or in the genre for that matter.

One even wonders if there is a slight chance for irony and sarcasm in the creation of the novel as well. The authors are exalting both crime fiction in Spain and Spanish crime fiction writers by setting them into a narrative that parallels them with the classics yet they allude to several cases of plagiarism. It is also curious to mention once again that scholarship and critics have not given Garrido and Abarca the critical attention they deserve and they have not certainly been invited to La Semana Negra de Gijón regardless of their editorial success and selling rates with their five novels.²¹

²¹ Besides the *Crímenes Exquisitos* series, they also co-authored an autoconclusive –and not related to Valentina’s world– crime fiction novel, *El beso de Tosca* (2018).

CHAPTER II

Female Detecting: Valentina Negro

“I hate to hear you talking so, like a fine gentleman, and as if women were all fine ladies, instead of rational creatures. We none of us expect to be in smooth waters all our days”
–Jane Austen, *Persuasion*

Introduction

Out of the three pillars of the already mentioned traditional crime fiction triangular schema, namely, a victim, the sleuth and the culprit, the roles offered for females were reduced to the first category only. The other limited possibilities comprised two more stereotyped configurations outside this formula, *femme fatale* or alternatively side-kick to the main detective; both of them, bound to the parameters of the male figure. If, following G. K. Chesterton and his *Father Brown* series (1910-1936), one considers the criminal as the creative artist in crime fiction and the detective as his mere critic, then the insertion of a female in the detecting and critical role of the formula becomes a divergence, and subsequently, a development in the narrative and its themes is bound to transpire.

Initially, in crime fiction female detectives were created as a result of the Sherlockmania and the high sales rate of the genre at the time. Still a masculine job to be narrated by male writers, the fact that female writers even dared to pen characters that deviated from traditional *ángel del hogar* female figures translated into a shift in the representation of women even though it did not mean there was an intention to expand the roles available for women (Kungl 5).

Nevertheless, the achievements of these women writers are worth mentioning; they go beyond a

mere critique of the intersection between women and the genre or even society and the genre itself:

Creating female detectives who were successful narratively—within the scope of the story they solved the crime and brought the narrative to its expected conclusion—helped women writers accomplish this task in many ways: they expanded roles for women in their fiction by placing a strong female character in a role which was not previously open to them; they sought to expand their existing ideology responsible for dictating those roles; they showed how stereotypically female traits, such as knowledge of the domestic sphere and innate curiosity, could be turned into functional crime-solving tools; they made money writing genre stories in periodicals and later as novels, giving them financial success and therefore expanding the economy and literary marketplace for women writers. (Kungl 7)

The initial female detective figures drew their detective qualities from careful observation, realistic descriptions and a synergy between the knowledge of class, the domestic sphere, and human nature. Women detectives in the American dime novel, late nineteenth-century, beginning of twentieth-century, faced their unsuitability for the job; there was a certain emphasis on action but the narratives still highlighted the impossibility of being both a female and a detective: “None was portrayed as a complete detective and a complete woman simultaneously” (Klein 50). Therefore, the evolution of these female figures during the Golden Age, 1920s-1930s, and the interwar era, as Carla Kungl describes, can be compartmentalized into basically two different categories: (1) the young spinster, and (2) the elderly woman sleuth. For the first ones, the conjunction between their professional lives and the prospect of marriage

turns out to be an impossible outcome, even though the presence of romance is still present, deterring their work efficiency, while still advancing the marriage plot (Kungl 87). The latter are conceived as amateur figures who spend their ample free time, even though most of them, except Agatha Christie's Miss Marple, have proper careers, aiding the police. Afterwards, the evolution of the genre allowed women to occupy other spaces such as the spy narratives in the 1960s and 1970s, and the contemporary female private eyes starting in 1970s. It is due to this new configuration of women P.I.'s that a Second Golden Age emerged in 1980s and 1990s with women at the forefront as full-force leading figures. It is not until 1990s when a normalization of the police task force was established, therefore leaving behind the amateur sleuths and P.I. types to allow women to become full members of the police forces holding institutional power and authority.

Precisely, the role of actual female police officers has had undoubtedly a major impact in the insertion and development of these fictional female detectives and their progress unfolding the genre. Therefore, before proceeding with an in-depth analysis plotting the coordinates of these female detectives on the larger crime fiction character map, it is necessary to address, to a certain level of detail, the history of female police officers worldwide. In general, global history shows, although it is generally glossed over and underexplored, that with the coming of World War I and the consequent lack of a male workforce, more professional job openings were offered to middle class females since they needed to provide for themselves and their families. What is more, law enforcement records affirm this insertion of females progressively into the realm of police work first as matrons, then as figures in charge of dealing with women and children, and later on, in charge of women's work as long as it did not include dangerous assignments. That is, historically, women entered police duties by association with gendered roles, such as caregiver

figures and initially they took these assignments as volunteering positions, which with time turned into wage-earning occupations.

On that realm, Louise A. Jackson revisits the role of women police in the United Kingdom during 1915-1975. Her research explores their key responsibilities, as well as the criticism they received and (sexual) harassment that surrounded them in their professional lives. One of their earlier obligations within law enforcement responded to what can be called, as stated before, matrons' duties: "For much of the twentieth century women police often played a key role in the detection and prevention of child abuse, neglect and the 'policing of families', a role that has received scant attention in existing histories of welfare and the State" (Jackson 1). Later on, as that position evolved, women's roles and duties were more conscientiously delineated with their chief constables up until the Inter-War era; and, subsequently, the Women's Auxiliary Police Corps (WAPC), created during the Second World War, generated more 'masculine' duties to free men for military obligations and allow the rest of them to employ their absolute focus and energy to tasks that only men could perform (Jackson 23-25). Still, these auxiliary duties (e.g. driving, clerical work, etc.) were not reliable sources of employment in the sense that they were temporary. That is, those positions would only last until the end of the war when they would have to be given back to their rightful owners. It was then decided that there was indeed an urgency to create gender-specific occupations such as patrolling to prevent prostitution, supervision of shelters or evacuation of children, to name but a few (Jackson 25).

These aforementioned tasks were certainly labeled as more 'feminine' and in many cases were the embodiment of the prosecution of women and the dangers that their sex could entail for men. However, Jackson argues: "The emphasis on the 'feminine' aspect of their duties should not necessarily be seen as a lost 'feminist' cause. Rather, the creation of a specialist, or gender-

specific, portfolio for women officers turned them into ‘experts’ within policing, working closely with other emerging and equally feminised semi-professions such as social work and probation” (41). Women police, due to the synergy that they personify as female entities and bodies of law enforcement, attracted not only unsolicited sexual attention from the chauvinist structure derived from the heteropatriarchal values of the male policing world, but also media attention.

Caricaturists depicted them on both ends of the gender spectrum, either as seductresses or as unnaturally manly: “These images worked ‘to professionalize or defeminize’ women officers and, by default, to lower their status” (Jackson 48). Women’s public and media image from the 1960s deescalated the level of sexualization by stressing “a sensible and fresh-faced heterosexuality associated with middle-class respectability” (Jackson 55). Lastly, print tabloids also played a key role in the glamorization, sexualization and sensationalization of the work and duties of Britain’s first female detectives (Jackson 107). Therefore, the question of policing as a respectable or even suitable job for a woman relied heavily on a perception of class, race and community standards propagated by media outlets.

Analogously, Sandra Wells and Betty Alt examine the evolution of women’s police roles in the United States, offering a similar development. The first stages include traditional gendered duties associated with maternal tenets such as caring and nurturing others; therefore, even though these women were not considered as full officers, their initial positions consisted of custodial, probation and interviewing positions (Wells and Alt 1). As in the United Kingdom, there were also auxiliary positions during the war periods, but it was evident that afterwards, women lacked enough training. As a consequence, during the 1950s and 1960s women only had access to minor and female positions, such as “parkettes” or “meter maids,” that is, those in charge of controlling parking and traffic (Wells and Alt 13). The 1970s became a new era for women in policing due

to the 1972 Equal Employment Opportunity Act, a law that prohibited discrimination based on sex, race, color, etc.; hence, “It appeared that women had won the battle for equal employment in law enforcement. At last they would be allowed to go on patrol, receive promotions, and earn the same salaries as male officers” (Wells and Alt 14-15). However, inequality was still rampant, while women had no access to promotions and they were relegated to more gendered, feminine and less dangerous jobs. Wells and Alt further stress the challenges women faced, not merely due to the male resistance to their insertion into and suitability within the machista world of policing, but especially as a result of the sexual harassment women suffered (45-49).

Georganne Rundblad, paraphrasing Lynne Eisaguirre’s work, refers to sexual harassment as “unwanted sexual behavior that interferes with a person’s abilities to conduct her work or acquire an education, regardless of whether the person was the intended target” (421). On this matter, Wells and Alt focus on the three types of sexual harassment women could (and still) encounter, specifically on their work environment: (1) hostile environment, such as making offensive jokes, requesting dates, establishing physical contact, or referencing body parts, (2) *quid pro quo* sexual harassment, including unwelcomed sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, exhibiting verbal/physical conducts of sexual nature or offering job benefits in return for sexual favors, and (3) gender harassment, which refers, for instance, to the lack of uniforms or lavatory facilities or unequal treatment based on sex (49-55). Rundblad further explains that none of these types of sexual harassment were recognized as legally sanctionable behavior until the 1970s and yet it was not widely publicized since, “historically, it has been viewed as a problem caused by individual women of “questionable virtue” entering paid employment” (422). That is, it was not considered a social issue even though it clearly permeated the patriarchal configuration of society. Besides, to further prove this point, sexual harassment was more prominent in male-

dominated professions “because, where women and men work together as peers, occupationally structured status differences disappear. Men, therefore, establish or maintain their social dominance over women through harassing the women who are “trespassing” into “male territory”” (Rundblad 426).

Additionally, Marisa Silvestri explores the gendered nature of the police organization, establishing that it is a masculine site, a cult of masculinity grounded in heterosexuality. Precisely, she mentions Maddock and Parkin’s research²² on documented multiple masculinity dynamics inside the police structure such as locker room, barrack yard, smart macho, and other tactics (Silvestri 27). That is, these attitudes denote the heteronormative and patriarchal connotations that permeate the police world and how masculinity is something that can be built, achieved, and therefore, performed. Hence, according to James Messerschmidt: “Police work becomes a means whereby men differentiate masculinity from femininity, a reason for constructing oneself as a *real man*” (emphasis added) (*Masculinities* 182). This is linked to the concept of hegemonic masculinity²³ as a symbol of honor and respect that is intrinsically tied to authority, aggressiveness and violence to prove that central notion of manhood further (Messerschmidt, *Nine* 10).

Mangai Natarajan addresses similar issues on her research on women police, in this case in India, and assures that, “Law enforcement is one such job where, until quite recently, careers were not open to women, but where now a new world of employment opportunities has opened up for them. However, policing is still portrayed in the media and elsewhere as a masculine job.

²² Maddock, S. and D. Parkin. “Gender Cultures.” *Women in Management Review*, vol. 8, no. 2, 1993, pp. 3-9.

²³ Messerschmidt differentiates three general types of masculinity: hegemonic, subordinate (exemplified by effeminate and gay men), and oppositional masculinity (exercised by transgressive figures such as David Bowie, Prince or Boy George).

Physical strength, fearlessness and aggressiveness are portrayed as the qualities displayed by the ideal officer” (6). Although it has been demonstrated that mere physicality is not the main and/or most important aspect of policing; research shows that, in general, most male officers everywhere in the 1980s, as well as more recent popular beliefs and stereotypes, refused to accept the entrance, suitability and performance of male duties by females, implying the weakness associated with women. That is, “Women’s perceived lack of physical presence, of tough physique and, above all, of masculinity is used as rational and legitimate reasons for their exclusion” (Silvestri 34). This general perception implies that women are not capable of performing such a job since they are conceived as too weak, as the weaker sex. Hence, restating the unsuitability of women for police work and the tendency to limit their area of influence to less masculine tasks, even though “Modern policewomen are no longer confined to the world of social service tasks, yet they continue to be branded with the legacy left to them by their pioneering forerunners” (Silvestri 36). However, as research has widely proven, the physical part of the job is minimal in comparison with the wide array of duties that policing involves. What is more, both fiction and reality showcase how women are more than capable of using their physical power when needed. Whereas the (masculine) physicality associated with the job tends to be highlighted by popular belief, patience, compromise, empathy and diplomacy, that is, human sensitivity and the use of interpersonal skills, also known as women’s qualities, are the most appreciated and necessary attributes for the job (Natarajan 7). That is, ironically, the consensus among researchers and data on the less aggressive behavior that characterizes women in the force, qualifies them to be more capable and prone to neutralize violent situations.

Nevertheless, Natarajan assures women are not fully integrated (mainly in India) into the policing profession yet and summarizes the two main models associated with the process:

According to Heidensohn (2002) there are two prevailing models of the assimilation of women into the police. The first derives from the equal opportunity position that women have a right to enter any occupation they choose to, and they ought to fulfill the same role as men in the police. This can be called the “integrated” model. The second model derives from the origins of female law enforcement, when women police dealt with women and children. It holds that women have a specialist role in the police that they are uniquely qualified to fulfil. This role relates to the protective and preventive functions of policing and, according to Appier (1992), was the role advocated by many female reformers. This might be called the “gendered” model. (12-13)

The appointment of a specific model and its appropriateness and compatibility for a certain nation depends on its society and its body of government. Precisely, Natarajan argues that due to societal norms and the prevailing style of policing operations cannot and are unlikely to guarantee the complete integration of females in countries like India in the near future (18).

Following this integration and assimilation process, it can be seen, once again and regardless of the location worldwide, that women underwent different stages, ranging from the mere entry with separated and restricted duties, to phases of reform and subversion. Natarajan, citing A.R. Hochschild, also refers to the two main attitudes women embody when accessing policing jobs: a process of defeminization or the fact of mimicking heteronormative masculinity to fit into the male cop culture; and a deprofessionalization route that entails the acceptance of a subordinate status, also understood as part of the female cop culture (158). Both approaches, as well as the objectification of the female appearance that pervade this topic will be further

explained later on with regard to several pertinent cases of crime fiction investigated by female detectives.

Another problem inside the law enforcement world worth mentioning alludes to the (ostensible) access of promotions and the possibility of climbing the ladder in rank. On one hand, Silvestri asserts that, “Theoretically, the glass ceiling has been broken – there are no legitimate reasons why women cannot achieve the same positions as their male counterparts” (100); however, this glass ceiling has not been broken but rather removed and placed at a higher level, obtruding female access to higher power tasks, positions and responsibilities. On the other, when women finally achieve promotion “to ranks with more authority, many male officers continue to view them as interlopers and feel that the female officers may have been given unfair advantage in the competition process” (Wells and Alt 76). Comparably, most of the women that populate crime fiction are obstructed by several layers of men above them in the chain of command, and in those cases when they achieve the rank of Inspector, they either face subordinates that constantly revolt against them or other male individuals that assume the connections or favors that must have been involved in their upward trajectory to the top of their careers, as if women were not capable of achieving those positions without sexual favors or the help of men. Hence, implying that they are not qualified enough and that their credentials need to be questioned for their authenticity.

In the case of Spain and female accessibility to higher rank jobs in the National Police Corps (CNP), Pilar Allué Blasco²⁴ was the first female to hold a position among the General

²⁴ For further information on Allué Blasco see the following: Policía Nacional. “José Ángel González Jiménez y Laurentino Ceña, nuevos directores adjuntos operativos de la Policía Nacional y la Guardia Civil.” *Ministerio del Interior*, 8 Aug. 2018, www.policia.es/prensa/20180808_2.html. Accessed 28 Dec. 2018.

Direction of CNP. Initially nominated as the first female to possibly be named as Deputy Operative Director (DAO), she was appointed at last as the CNP Subdirector General of Human Resources and Training in 2018. Allúe is a criminologist, Commissary General of Forensic Science Police and has been awarded three times with the Order of Police Merit. She climbed ranks from a young age due to her own effort, dedication and abilities. Yet, regardless of her accolades, she was denied the highest rank as DAO; another instance of how the glass ceiling for females in policing jobs is still present at higher positions and how it inevitably translates into crime fiction narratives where women most often than not are still dependent on male authoritarian and higher ranks.

To further explain the situation of women in the Spanish armed forces and how it permeates and affects Spanish crime fiction narratives, it is necessary to walk through the history and evolution of women in the military as well. Gonzalo Jar Couselo elaborates a female roadmap of the Spanish Civil Guard from a sociological perspective and in his overview of the different roles women have occupied in the force, he mentions the presence of female agents, already in 1948, as “matronas;”²⁵ however, these women did not hold the same status and consideration as the rest of their male coworkers, they were not civil servants, they could not carry weapons, and most often than not, they were widows and orphans of former civil guards (223-224). It is through the Royal Decree Act 1/1988 that the incorporation of women to the armed forces is regulated so they can reach all military positions, same as men. On the other

Ballesteros, Roberto. R. “Marlaska elige a Pilar Allúe para ser la primera mujer al frente de la policía.” *El Confidencial*, 14 Jun. 2018, www.elconfidencial.com/espana/2018-06-14/marlaska-elige-pilar-allue-primera-mujer-directora-policia_1578422/. Accessed 28 Dec. 2018.

²⁵ The “matrona” figure was conceived as a necessity for inspection and frisking of other females, “al ser necesaria la presencia femenina en los recintos aduaneros para efectuar funciones de control y registro sobre personas del mismo sexo, razón por la que era muy frecuente contemplar en puertos y aeropuertos mujeres vestidas con el típico uniforme verde” (Jar Couselo 224). In 1986, “matronas” were eliminated.

hand, there was still certain resistance towards said inclusion; various job positions and destinations were vetoed for women due to physiological conditions, at the same time the lack of proper accommodation and men's hostility deter women from achieving higher ranks (Jar Couselo 232).

According to a press report published by the National Police Corps (CNP) to commemorate International Women's Day, they were the ground-breaking institution in the country to incorporate female officers almost forty years ago (Policía Nacional n.p.). As of March 8th, 2016, when this announcement was made, there were almost 9,000 women in its ranks, that is, 13% of total officers. These numbers include several branches of the police force, such as the judicial, scientific or forensic branches. However, as the statement mentions, almost all those women are indeed basic scale officers.²⁶

There are several reports and studies on the female presence among the different branches of the Spanish armed forces. For instance, the news station *La Sexta* reported that the numbers are stagnated at 12.5%, the same percentage as thirty years ago when women first entered the force (n.p.). According to another source, *Campus Training*, an online academy of formal education, its report on the different Spanish law enforcement agencies shows a similar set of percentages of female presence. There is a steady 12% of female occupancy in CNP, local police and Ertzaintza (autonomous police from the Basque Country); whereas the Civil Guard percentage falls to a 7%, even lower among higher ranks; and rises to a 21% in Mossos d'Esquadra (autonomous police from Catalonia), a percentage closer to the 30% of female presence in European countries like Holland and Sweden (Campus training n.p.).

²⁶ The digits on the statement are as follows: 1 Commissary General, 21 Commissaries, 150 Chief Inspectors, 644 Inspectors and 516 Sub-Inspectors.

All the sources mentioned above were published online on International Women's Day or soon thereafter, perhaps a mere propaganda strategy to hint at the (false and pretended) female inclusion in the country or maybe to point out an actual concern regarding the female population and the glass ceiling. This twofold reading and concern seems to be addressed in contemporary crime series by Spanish women writers where the amount of female characters has been significantly multiplied in comparison with former decades, yet their presence highlights the lack of higher ranks they have access to, as well as their lack of power in numbers in a realm still heavily dominated by male presence.

Coordinates from the Policing Past: Female Predecessors Tradition

“For masterpieces are not single and solitary births; they are the outcome of many years of thinking in common, of thinking by the body of the people, so that the experience of the mass is behind the single voice”
—Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*

Kathleen Gregory Klein has established 1864 as the key date for women detectives and crime writers since it represents the professionalization of women in detecting. James Redding Ware, under the pseudonym Andrew Forrester, created that year the first professional female detective in British fiction, Mrs. Gladden, in *The Female Detective* (Klein 18). There were indeed other detecting figures before, some of them even had great success at the time they were written; however, those narratives dawdled in the amateur realm. Such is the case of Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862), which was considered, despite its sensational label, the first detective novel penned by a woman in both Britain and the United States, even though its detective protagonist was a male (Bradford 83). Even earlier, Catherine Crowe's *The Adventures of Susan Hopley* (1841) depicted a maid as its amateur sleuth. Perhaps what is most

striking about Crowe's novel, at first glance, is not just the critically acclaimed reception it enjoyed, but the fact that it was conceived coetaneously with Poe's "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," the short story that years later scholarship used to extol and appraise Poe as the paternal figure of the genre.

Although there are several great female figures and authors populating the genre before the arrival of the period known as the Golden Age, like Anna Katherine Green's more than thirty detective and mystery narrative works, the aim of this research chapter is not to provide a fully detailed account of female detectives and women crime fiction authors from the origins of the genre to its present time, nor to include the configuration of male detective figures, by either male or female authors, regardless of their notoriety in this scope. Rather, the purpose is to present an outlined account, by no means exhaustive, of the most prominent female detecting figures created through the history of the genre that have had not only critical and scholarly recognition but also a major influence both on later female writers and the configuration of successive policing protagonists. This selection has been made from a specific lens, taking into consideration how female, feminine and feminist traits were interwoven in the narratives and their inheritability for subsequent characters and writers. Whereas the focus remains on the creation and evolution of female characters, regardless of their status as police(wo)men, that is to say, amateurs, P.I.s, journalists, medical examiners, police officers, etc., penned almost exclusively by female writers, certain concessions are made towards some men writers who also contribute later to add new layers of complexity to the female policing universe.

Following Kungl and the age distinction parameters mentioned earlier, among the youngster female detectives the most recognizable ones are probably Harriet Vane, a mystery writer in her thirties penned by Dorothy L. Sayers; and the sixteen-year-old amateur detective

Nancy Drew. Harriet Vane made her first appearance in *Strong Poison* (1930) as Sayers expands the detective fiction genre to vindicate the literary value of these stories, as well as a means of exploration of the various problems and possibilities encountered by young female detectives (Campbell 497). She deviates from the stipulated detective story formulas by inserting a heroine in the narrative and placing the focus on issues other than crime, such as the development of characters or female themes. Harriet, throughout the narratives, solves some problems while opening others that need further exploration in the following installment; she gains maturity, personal agency and reflects on the synergy between her age, independence and romantic interests. SueEllen Campbell further explains that Sayers is also “concerned with such issues as women’s roles, the importance of work, the destructive power of love, and the complex relationships between men and women, parents and children” (498). Precisely, Sayers turns to detective fiction as the perfect grounds to change the place of women in society, a mission she does not identify with feminism, and that perhaps concurs better with the concept of New Woman, which according to Gail Cunningham and Elaine Showalter, serves as the personification of the woman question, that is, the new available place(s) for females in an everchanging society full of new rights and opportunities (L. Young 39-40).

The other detective figure, Nancy Drew, was created by collective female writing under the pseudonym Carolyn Keene; her first appearance was in *The Secret of the Old Clock* (1930) but her reign as role model for young girls spans over time, counting more than one hundred installments. She is configured as “Young, attractive, affluent, brave, confident, and multi-skilled, Nancy has her own blue roadster and gun, faces dangers boldly, and solves cases neatly” (Gain 262). But, without a doubt, Nancy Drew’s most noticeable attribute is her total female agency and the use of her body merely “as a tool for solving crime, and subsequently expressing

her internal investigative desires” (Woolston 173). She is portrayed as a female character with her own voice, no weaknesses and zero constraints from elder figures. The latter, along with the thirst for solving mysteries, seems to be a prerequisite for children’s literature that delves into the crime and mystery realm, like Enid Blyton’s *The Famous Five* series, for which the first book, *Five on a Treasure Island*, was originally published in 1942. Nancy Drew serves as a multipurpose figure that fights the denigration of certain literary genres that, for a long time, have been considered as lesser literature, namely, detective fiction, women’s fiction and children’s literature. At the same time, she sheds a positive light not only to the aforementioned female agency, but most importantly, against passivity, submissiveness and the sexually biased notion that promotes the idea of women as unable to realize certain masculine endeavors: “Nancy Drew’s recipe for success involves the antithesis of passivity, therein promoting the idea of outward action and effectively serving as a subversively positive role model for young female readers” (Woolston 173).

Among the elder sleuths, Agatha Christie’s Miss Marple, whose first appearance takes place in *The Murder at the Vicarage* (1930), is possibly the most notorious and renowned of Golden Age female sleuths. Christie blends the domestic sphere with the detective genre and takes advantage of Marple’s configuration as an elderly woman and her ability to blend in, being unnoticed and unseen while she snoops around and registers every minutia. In fact, as an older detective and spinster she has ample free time for hobbies such as knitting, gardening, and birdwatching. The patience, attention to detail and careful observation they require, along with her intelligence, moral force, excellent knowledge of human behavior and social and cultural concerns, as well as women’s positions, are the epitome of Marple’s coordinates (Gain 263). She deploys this set of tools to not only solve crimes but also to unmask people’s hidden identities.

She masters social cues and customs that even the tainted eyes of the police cannot discern, while her snooping (mis)behavior is key to uncover lies and make critical connections: “What makes Miss Marple distinctively insightful, and useful to the police, is her ability to transfer her minute observations of the “subtler links” that once held society together to a context in which those links have broken” (Jacobs 25). Miss Marple’s specific abilities are apparently the only means to navigate through Christie’s use of different focalizers, visual ambiguity and optics of illusion that permeate her narratives. The purpose of Miss Marple’s unique qualities is to ultimately aid, from the beginning of her literary saga, an incompetent police force to solve the crimes and mysteries without questioning the patriarchal and masculine precepts it embodies: “Miss Marple disguises her astute observations and gentle but firm interventions in the search for the murderer through a veil of self-deprecating adverbs meant to reassure an icon of patriarchy like Colonel Melchett [in *The Murder at the Vicarage*] (Mezei 109).

After the vast success of hard-boiled narratives, it was only a matter of time before female writers and detectives also carved their own space inside the private detecting sphere. Previous to feminist and physically aggressive P.I. figures, there are two female characters worth mentioning. First, Cordelia Gray, a twenty-two-year-old heir to a P.I. business, written by P.D. James, made her debut in *An Unsuitable Job for a Woman* (1972). Although James’s sociohistorical environment differs greatly from the women’s expectations of the 1930s, the professionalization of women’s work, specifically the inappropriateness of a female performing masculine tasks from the detective realm, still remains. In fact, Cordelia is reminded on several occasions of her anomalous position, and the incongruity between her gender and her occupation; yet she does not grant this criticism any importance (Hidalgo 96). James’s narrative depicts a sense of change yet in conservative coordinates of female detective figures, there is a

heavy influence of religious and Victorian precepts, but it is evident the importance placed on social change as a result of education and personal effort (Hidalgo 99).

The second figure belongs to Marcia Muller who created the detective Sharon McCone in *Edwin of the Iron Shoes* (1978), hence becoming, as Kimberly Dilley states, the maternal figure of the so-called soft-boiled fiction that situates women P.I.s as the center of detective novels (17). This type of narrative deviates from the staples of hard-boiled tradition; it offers significantly less violence and sex, and a more human approach. Dilley understands this approach as a means to reconcile traditional conceptualizations of femininity with conventional marginalized P.I.s, while at the same time it emphasizes three types of relationships among these female P.I.'s: (1) family, (2) lovers, and (3) friends and colleagues (22). Female P.I.s imbue new value to all those formerly forgotten and forbidden bonds. Each family member has a special connection to the protagonist, either by teaching her a valuable skill or lesson or by aiding her with the daily responsibilities of her career choices and personal lives.

Spanish literary history also has pioneering females penning crime fiction, such as Emilia Pardo Bazán, *La gota de sangre* (1911) and Mercè Rodoreda, *Crim* (1936). Mostly, there is an abundance of translations of the classics, followed by novels written in 1950s under male pseudonyms or exotic locations to avoid censorship, until the genre finally acquired the adequate conditions to establish its foundation. Female detective figures required, as Nancy Vosburg expresses, certain changing conditions that granted their creation:

The creation of women detectives was a product of the political changes within Spain beginning in 1975, the year of Franco's death, as well as the economic and social changes that accompanied the transition from dictatorship to democracy, such as the rise of feminism, the globalization of the economy, the cult of

consumerism and the burgeoning of popular culture, changes that were affecting Spain as much as other Western nations in the post-modern period. (76)

As a consequence, the first female authored woman detective was not created until Lourdes Ortiz penned *Picadura mortal* in 1979. Ortiz created a highly criticized and ostracized novel for its mimicry of the American hard-boiled tenets. However, the mere fact that she created the first female detective in the Spanish narrative of the genre entails a valid enough reason to rescue this novel from oblivion. Written in first person, its protagonist, Bárbara Arenas, is a twenty-five-year-old private detective who works for an organized agency, has a sharp tongue, enjoys her sexual independence and freedom, and displays a certain temperament with the individuals implicated in the investigation who choose to withhold information. Her worth and qualifications are questioned constantly; if the police do not find anything, Bárbara is not needed because a female private detective will not be able to uncover the truth. She smokes marijuana, parties and has several sexual affairs amid the investigation; all while she continuously makes wrong assumptions and hypotheses about the motives behind Granados's disappearance and his possible death: "Todo lo que había hecho en las últimas horas era un modelo de cómo no debía actuarse" (Ortiz 204).

Despite the humorous approach and her unorthodox ways, every person who shares a connection with the missing business man seems to be willing to make Bárbara disappear as she becomes the target of several murder attempts. They try to blackmail her and buy her silence on multiple occasions and she even gets sexually fondled and kidnapped. Nevertheless, Bárbara has the ability to grow in the face of adversity; she uses her wit, her tools of female seduction or simply her physical strength to overcome and leave her contender unconscious: "Lo que no sabía

el que estuviera buscando mi partida es que no hay nada que me excite más que las dificultades” (Ortiz 62).

Notwithstanding the good intentions of the novel, Patricia Hart criticizes several negative aspects of the narrative, such as the lack of positive qualities that Bárbara inherits from male detectives, her preoccupation about what other females might think of her and her obsession with clothing, a defect that is considered to embody “the stereotype that women cannot compete on merit, and therefore must continually and cattily compete on the basis of beauty and clothing” (174). In fact, Bárbara pays much attention to her wardrobe and she is described physically in a quite explicit manner: “ancha de caderas, pechos pequeños pero bien colocados, desenvoltura de lengua” (Ortiz 35). Hence, Hart’s commentary is poignant and worthy of further exploration later on how physically attractive descriptions and the use of fashion apply to contemporary female detecting figures and how authors maneuver around said configuration.

There are also three more female private detectives in the Spanish tradition who need to be mentioned, if briefly, to understand the origin of Valentina’s reasoning and behavior. Catalanian writer Maria-Antònia Oliver created Lònia Guiu, a sassy, daring, attractive and independent female P.I., in a highly popular trilogy: *Estudi en lila* (1985), *Antípodes* (1988), *El sol que fa l’ànec* (1994). Oliver not only subverts the formula by introducing Lònia as the female protagonist and relegating the sidekick to a male character, but “also highlights her fundamental feminist beliefs founded in contesting gendered hierarchies skewed against women” (Godsland, *Carmens* 18). Another Catalanian writer, Isabel Franc, under the pseudonym Lola Van Guardia, wrote a soap opera lesbian trilogy, *Con pedigree* (1997), *Plumas de doble filo* (1999), and *La mansión de las trébedas* (2002). Lesbian crime fiction as a subgenre was born around Barcelona and in a parodic mode, and Franc’s literary works are a prime example of said symbiosis of

homosexuality and humor. Following this transgressive trend, Basque narrative also has its own bisexual rural private detective, Amaia Ezpeldoi, penned by Irxaro Borda. Her saga, the Ezpeldoi series, entirely written in Euskera not only belongs to what can be catalogued as feminist satiric crime fiction, but also makes a powerful stance on the pertinence, agency and necessity of writing in other vernacular languages. What is more, there is a conscious effort to go against patriarchal norms, to fight the imposed standards that emerge from power: “Borda chooses a female detective who is regarded as a foreigner in her own country because she speaks a difficult dialect and has a different sexuality, and has to face the mistrust and wariness of her own people” (Cillero Goiriastuena 221).

Among this assembly of new and deviant coordinates for female P.I.s, there are two main figures that have dominated the genre for an extended amount of time and have also paved the way for future professionalization of female characters in institutionalized positions.

Unquestionably, among the most well-known female private investigators is V.I. (Vic) Warshawski, starring in a series located in Chicago, created by Sara Paretsky in the 1980s. Of Italian and Polish descendants, orphaned and divorced, Warshawski narrates in first person her (mis)adventures against white-collar crime. She graduated from law school and previously was a defense lawyer. As a detective, she is trained in martial arts, she exercises regularly to stay fit, and she considers violence as a necessary tool at her disposal; hence, she is prepared for conflict and is more likely than not prone to anger. She always finds herself emotionally and physically involved in all her cases. Her entire configuration can be summarized as excessive; the same way she finds joy in violence, she rejoices in alcohol –Johnnie Walker Black Label is her most trustworthy companion– and sex. She is a sexually aggressive female and she embarks herself on sexual adventures without emotional implications. Despite her sexual freedom, Warshawski does

not care for aesthetics, and her clothing, always functional, is proof of that. Nevertheless, her most distinctive features are perhaps (1) her messy and disorganized nature, she procrastinates making her bed or doing the dishes, (2) her ability to lie through her teeth to achieve her goals, as well as (3) her highly sarcastic nature and confrontational behavior towards men who question her capacities as a woman.

According to Gill Plain, Vic's novels are a feminist fairy tale version of the hard-boiled tradition since the narrative "rehabilitates the 'wayward girls and wicked women' of legend, at the same time as it pays homage to the generic template of tough-guy fiction" (142). As she strays from conventional and patriarchal roles, pursuing a detective career to the detriment of her personal life (i.e. she leaves her husband), Vic is portrayed as a distinctively feminist and deviant character. As such, belonging to the feminist crime fiction genre, according to Laura Ellen Ng, also allows and creates awareness for political agendas, protests against social hierarchies, promotes social change and produces direct commentary on criminal corruption, social justice and political practices, similarly to the tools employed by proletarian writers of the 1930s (1). Furthermore, Vic's deviance implies that she also rejects not just the possibility of embarking on another relationship, a decision that would diminish her independence, but also the pre-conceived notions of femininity: "Vic's dread of being contained within the prescriptive role of normative North American femininity," that impede other sources of support and collaboration (Plain 144).

Sue Grafton, for her part, also penned in the 1980s a female private investigator, formerly associated to the California Fidelity Insurance Company, Kinsey Millhone, as the protagonist in her Alphabet mystery series. At this point, all female authors seem to adhere to certain tenets when establishing the coordinates for their characters, namely, being in their thirties and

divorced (sometimes on more than one occasion), while also having achieved a higher education before changing career paths. Whereas some novels rely on the narrative's own speed to reveal these characteristics about the protagonists, that is not the case with Kinsey. She opens the first installment by giving a succinct list of what can be considered her life biography, as well as admitting that she has just killed someone; thus, she is still processing the information and trying to discern how she feels about said recent developments. This way, she sets the tone for the entire series, following a straightforward approach, without sugarcoating her assessments or behaviors.

Kinsey shares with Vic a tragic past, heartbreak and broken love relations, a voracious love for food, as well as the tendency to exercise, stay fit without caring about personal appearance and aesthetics much, and donning mostly jeans throughout the series. Thematically speaking, these sagas also share concerns: "these series' novels tend to link a particular investigation – of insurance fraud, of murder, of a missing person – to wider social problems that are usually related in fairly direct ways to women's continuing oppression" (Reddy 198). Female oppression as a subject matter, is a recurring topic among female protagonists in the genre. On one hand, they can be oppressed by societal and patriarchal customs as sometimes the rules, or even the law, do not apply the same way when the (s)hero is a female. For instance, Kinsey explains her ambivalence towards the system and how she feels about following the rules, like a good girl should, instead of just following her instincts to achieve what is fair and what she longs for. Expanding on this good versus bad girl narrative, she denounces the struggles to be the (s)hero of the story when there are too many temptations and an equal amount of injustice, empathizing with the tribulations of (former) criminals.

This assessment further emphasizes the notion of female P.I.s as highly humanized characters who sometimes doubt themselves, their own behavior and ulterior motives. On the other hand, this oppression can be understood as well as their impossibility to lead normal lives outside their jobs, to establish loving connections. Ng understands this as the feminist hard-boiled conflict “to find a significant other who does not attempt to undermine her professionally, yet allows her emotional closeness” (Ng 216). This is a pivotal concern that can be certainly extrapolated and applied to other configurations of female detectives or police inspectors. It refers to the (lack of) balance between family and working life. As it has and it will be seen, females are expected to work harder to achieve their goals, and in most cases, the police investigations dominate their entire lives to the extent that some of their respective romantic counterparts do not fully understand the obsession and responsibilities that drive these women. In such cases, the lack of support and acceptance becomes an obstacle for the relationship, forcing it to end. Whereas this evaluation could be true and potentially applied to male detectives as well, it is not a topic generally exploited in male figures since some of these concerns could be perceived as weaknesses when addressed from a heteronormative toxic masculinity point of view.

Before entering in the official narrative of police females at the forefront of crime fiction novels, there are two other roles that greatly impact the genre and the configuration of later female figures, not just in the literary realm but also in film: medical examiners or forensic scientists, and bounty hunters. Patricia Cornwell’s Kay Scarpetta series is the true precedent of police procedural narratives and television shows like *CSI*. Her protagonist, Dr. Scarpetta, is the chief medical examiner in Richmond, Virginia at the beginning of the series, a Florida native of Italian descendants in her forties, characterized by her passion for cooking, her restaurant quality

custom-built kitchen, her affection for her niece, as well as her professionalism and perfectionism when it comes to her work –attributes that are widely shared among male and female detectives alike. The series is narrated in first person too, following a highly elaborated police procedural formula packed with carefully detailed crime scenes, exhaustive autopsies and second-hand violations of the bodies on the table. Precisely, it is her professional, aseptic and analytical discourse that distances Scarpetta's from other narratives; she is blatantly honest and straightforward yet in a proper and scientific manner in her answers and inner monologues. This can be observed in her assertion of (female) victims and how, even though she tries to preserve the dignity of all them, it is extremely hard in a world that finds a morbid fascination in voyeurism and blaming females for their own victimhood status, as it has been explored in the previous chapter:

The dead are defenseless, and the violation of this woman, like the others, had only begun. I knew it would not end until Lori Petersen was turned inside out, every inch of her photographed, and all of it on display for experts, the police, attorneys, judges and members of a jury to see. There would be thoughts, remarks about her physical attributes or lack of them. There would be sophomoric jokes and cynical asides as the victim, not the killer, went on trial, every aspect of her person and the way she lived, scrutinized, judged and, in some instances, degraded. (Cornwell 10)

With reference to the bounty hunter trend and its genre bending qualities, Janet Evanovich pens her own in her Stephanie Plum series. Stephanie is a thirty-year-old divorced, unemployed woman, who turns to skip tracing at her cousin bail bonding company in New Jersey for monetary purposes. Aside from her meddling family and her huge extended family

members, what demarcates Stephanie from other female protagonists is her unapologetic randomness, her rambling and hysterical sense of humor: “I suppose this tells something about my personality. That I’m not especially good at taking advice. Or that I was born with an overload of curiosity. Or maybe it’s about rebellion or boredom or fate” (Evanovich 2). Evanovich bends the boundaries of the genre by adding a feminist reading, a carnivalesque comedic tone and a layer of romance as well. Her conception of crime fiction as a highly hybrid genre, both hard and soft-boiled, creates a distinct female figure who disrupts the social order, challenges masculine paradigms and constantly wears inappropriate outfits, while she learns the ropes of a new profession without proper training: “Evanovich emphasised Stephanie’s vulnerability through her mistakes and naivety, her fear and cowardice” (Robinson 62).

Finally entering the realm of the police force, Alicia Giménez Bartlett is the unavoidable referent for all future female inspectors in Spain. Her Petra Delicado series fights from its first installment for the inclusion of women in the national police body. Petra, a former lawyer, twice divorced, tries to reorient her life with her career change, but clashes with the harsh reality of a highly masculinized profession. She does not fit in, and regardless of her intellectual capabilities, her coordinates as a woman initially determine her role inside the institution: “De hecho, pese a mi brillante formación como abogada y mis estudios policiales en la Academia, nunca se me habían encargado casos de relumbrón. Estaba considerada «una intelectual»; además era mujer y solo me faltaba la etnia negra o gitana para completar el cuadro de marginalidad” (Giménez Bartlett 11). Only when the precinct is outmanned, Petra and her male subordinate, Fermín, land a major case. The irony behind this assignment cannot be ignored: “nos lo han encargado porque no tenían a nadie más [...] Al fin y al cabo usted es casi un jubilado y yo solo soy una mujer” (Giménez Bartlett 33).

While there are some positive advances, such as the introduction of a male figure to be Petra's sidekick, the series depicts the police as an institution still male dominated and whose superiors ignore Petra on numerous occasions. To further emphasize this delimitation of Petra's independence, her personal life also seems out of her control since both her former partners find a way to crawl back into her life and treat her in a condescending and belittled manner. Hence her need to assert her own agency by immersing herself in every investigation, using physical force and crudest language: "ser contundente es necesario en una mujer, de lo contrario no consigues que nadie te tome en serio" (Giménez Bartlett 157). In this sea of contradictions that Petra represents, two aspects are not only relevant but consistent for her series. Social class is one of her weaknesses, she lets her own prejudices oftentimes impede and obstruct the course of the investigation. The second is the commonality that Petra shares with Bartlett's victims, in the sense that they are often codified in the same anonymity. Whereas the victims frequently lack a name as well as a physical description, ever since *Ritos de muerte* Petra's portrayal is based on her intellectuality, her former professional background as a lawyer and her status as a middle-aged twice divorced woman. Aside from scarce references to her clothing, not a single allusion is made regarding her physical attributes which is an interesting take on female exploited sexuality that consequently merits some comparisons and analyses with the new directions and depiction of contemporary female policing where their physicality is exploited to the maximum in a sexual manner.

Contemporary Female Policing: New Directions

“You cannot buy the revolution. You cannot make the revolution. You can only be the revolution. It is in your spirit, or it is nowhere”
–Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Dispossessed*

Crime fiction has emphatically evolved into a new hybrid genre that has room for all possibilities of labels and patterns. Contemporary female writers do not present a uniform front but a wide array of subject matters, socio-political concerns and female perspectives that yet function as a cohesive representation of women. Precisely, Elena Losada Soler regarding Spanish female writers affirms that:

las escritoras de narrativa criminal no constituyen un bloque homogéneo, no todas escriben desde la conciencia feminista, no usan la misma matriz literaria, no se sitúan en la misma perspectiva social, y tampoco los resultados obtenidos alcanzan el mismo nivel literario, pero entre todas crean un tejido de textura diversa que contribuye a la visibilización de la escritura femenina. (10-11)

This raises awareness on the necessity of changing the scope and the focus on crime fiction criticism. Women’s inclusion matters (1) because the genre is evolving, (2) because while it was making its way into the literary canon a lot of female writers were forgotten, (3) because it is time that women writers and characters are recognized, and (4) because they do not belong to the patriarchal stereotypes previously assigned to them. Put simply, because they have too much to say and they say it remarkably well.

In fact, both Spanish and Latin American female crime fiction writers have seen the gaps in the narratives and have been, collectively since the late 1980s, as Vosburg demonstrates, “especially successful in shifting attention to crimes often overlooked by their male counterparts, such as rape and sexual battery, domestic violence, child pornography, pederasty, and incest”

(ix). As Losada Soler affirms, part of the importance and relevance of women's crime fiction is its ability to serve as a testimony of the social changes in gender stereotyping and the relationships and dynamics between women and power (12). These narratives go beyond and further the traditional dichotomic paradigm of either reproduction or subversion of female stereotypes. They dive into social criticism and commitment, fight against injustice and force critical awareness towards these gendered problems. Although it is true that these elements are more exacerbated in some authors than in others, it can be said, in general, that there are common or reiterated topics explored throughout, such as personal relations, motherhood, women's relationships at a personal and professional level, the visibility of gendered violence and the sexualization of these female characters (Valero Valero 15).

Hence the importance of the MUNCE project (*Mujeres y novela criminal en España*) that studies women's crime fiction in Spain from 1975 to the present in an effort to generate a database and analysis of these narratives from a women's, feminist and gendered perspective. As a result, there is a special emphasis on the representation of women in powerful positions, as well as victims and criminals.²⁷ Among the most recognized female crime writers in Spain one can find Cristina Fallarás, Empar Fernández, Laura Malasaña, Reyes Calderón, Susana Hernández, Rosa Ribas, Marta Sanz, Mercedes Castro, Dolores Redondo, Susana Martín Gijón, to name but a few. Even though they all tackle important and controversial issues and present a diverse body of female figures, the last two authors merit a special mention due to several factors, namely the vast editorial success, its multiple translations and the inclusion of motherhood as well as other women's concerns, and the feminist approach that includes prostitution, racism and motherhood concerns, respectively.

²⁷ For more information on the MUNCE project, whose principal investigator is Elena Losada Soler, see here www.ub.edu/munce/que-es-munce-vanacem.

Dolores Redondo has become a worldwide editorial phenomenon with her Baztán trilogy and its cinematographic adaptation.²⁸ The coexistence of some of those aforementioned liminal elements, such as motherhood, the repercussion of childhood and family dynamics in the formation of one's identity and personal development, as well as the equally important genre-bending approach that interweaves the indelible presence of Basque traditions and mythology, thereby creating an intricate and arresting new configuration of the female inspector. Amaia Salazar, homicide inspector of the Chartered Police of Navarra, is in charge of both the investigation of a serial killer of teenagers in her hometown, and her male coworkers. The police procedural aspect of the narrative serves as the catalyzer to unmask the fracture between Amaia's different layers of her identity, what Melissa Culver denotes "yo-persona" and "yo-detective" ("yo" 58); that is, to uncover Amaia's trauma and the physical and psychological abuse she endured as a child at the hands of her own mother. Motherhood is represented as a combination of hate and fear, insufferable haircuts, horrible backpacks and verbal threats, "Duerme, pequeña zorra. La *ama* no te comerá hoy" (Redondo 44); until it climaxes in an murder attempt. Yet, Amaia manages to revert this negative spiral with the maternal figure she finds in her aunt Engrasi and her own desire to conceive a child and be a good mother despite the inherent difficulties of conciliating police work and maternal care. The spirituality and mysticism of the Basque forest creatures and traditions that round off the matriarchal structure of the narrative, tarot being the key element to answer questions of abuse, bones and ghosts of the past, as well as about the present day killers that haunt the valley.

²⁸ The series consists of *El guardián invisible* (2013), *Legado en los huesos* (2013) and *Ofrenda a la tormenta* (2014). There is a homonymous film of the first novel; the other two are set to be adapted and produced as well. The fourth installment in the series, *La cara norte del corazón*, is a prequel starring a younger Amaia Salazar and is scheduled to be released during Fall 2019.

Susana Martín Gijón on her part, makes a daring stance on feminism, prostitution, racism and gendered violence throughout her *Más que cuerpos* series. At the forefront of the narrative she inserts a black female inspector, originally from Namibia, Annika Kaunda, in a hostile work environment in Mérida, Extremadura. Annika has a clear feminist agenda, fights prostitution rings and tackles racist attitudes. These attributes, alongside her own female status, independence and penchant for insubordination by constantly clashing with her boss; he clearly sees her as competition and feels his patriarchal position being threatened. Annika has the right set of attributes to intimidate males and females alike: professionalism, sharp detecting skills, youth and beauty. Her evolution as a friend, coworker, lover and mother is perhaps the feature that makes her stand out. She adopts her goddaughter after her best friend and her husband die in a tragic accident. She manages to reconcile her police responsibilities with her personal duties by raising Celia, still caring for her dog, while navigating her love life, which also provides Celia with a paternal surrogate through her partner Bruno. However, when tragedy strikes and Bruno abandons her, Annika spirals; she experiences depressive psychosis, seeks counseling, takes medication and an extended sick leave. The significance of including this psychological trauma in the narrative is the normalization and importance of ridding mental health of its negative stigma. Moreover, Annika's depression stems from hate and rage towards Bruno, not for leaving her, but for making Celia an orphan again. Motherhood changes her, to the point of representing an epiphany: her own pregnancy unlocks traumatic memories from her childhood in Namibia and allows her to find and own her long lost identity: "No vuelvas a llamarme así. Nunca más. Soy Eerike. Eerike. ¿Lo entiendes? Eerike –repite mientras agarra el colgante que lleva veintiocho años alojado en su pecho, al lado del corazón" (Martín Gijón 391).

When specifically analyzing female composition through a transgressive lens, it is necessary to allude to quite possibly the male Scandinavian author that managed to create an inflection point for all writers wanting to depict a powerful deviant woman unapologetically taking the reins of her life and the narrative. The Millennium trilogy's²⁹ female protagonist, Lisbeth Salander, created by Stieg Larsson is considered one of the most subversive and unconventional females in the genre. She works on research projects as a freelance investigator for Milton Security; she is a hacker with a photographic memory and a complete lack of social skills. Her entire configuration is the utter opposite of traditional female appearance: heavily tattooed and pierced skinny body, spiky jet black hair and total black outfits. Yet, she is highly desirable and attractive to men and women alike; that is, there is an intentional effort to dissociate this character from conventional conceptions of beauty. To top off this unconventional image, Lisbeth is a much younger-than-average character at twenty-four years old, she is openly bisexual, and her emotional baggage haunts her present self; she has been used and abused by the system, a sadistic psychiatrist as well as her new social guardian.

Larsson's narrative purposely addresses and denounces violence and crimes against women. His focus is not on a few mere bad men, but on the systematic institutionalized inequality that reminds women they are not safe anywhere (Ferber 12). Hence, Lisbeth makes a conscious effort to alienate herself from others and from social interactions. In this third wave feminist approach, Larsson advocates not just for sexual freedom but also personal agency, thus emphasizing the conceptualization of female bodies as weapons and self-defense as feminism: "He urges readers to imagine the possibilities of autonomous women who use their bodies to respond to violence. This encourages us to perhaps reevaluate what women stand to gain by

²⁹ The trilogy has been expanded to a pentology by David Lagercrantz since Larsson's death.

embracing physical power as a warranted response to misogyny and sexism” (De Welde 16). Hence, Lisbeth takes justice into her own hands and uses violence as a source of retaliation against her legal guardian after he has violently raped her several times in exchange for her monetary assignment. She pays him with the same medicine, by blackmailing and threatening him afterwards:

In the future I’m going to have control over *your* life. When you least expect it, when you’re in bed asleep probably, I’m going to appear in the bedroom with this [taser] in my hand [...] I’ll be checking up on you. If I ever find out you have been with a girl again—and it doesn’t matter if she’s here of her own free will—if I ever find you with any woman at all [...] If you ever touch me again I will kill you. And that’s a promise [...] You’re going to get a present from me so you’ll always remember our agreement. (Larsson 286-287)

She does indeed grant him a particular gift, a red and blue ink tattoo in capital letters, expanding from his nipples to his groin: “I AM A SADISTIC PIG, A PERVERT, AND A RAPIST” (Larsson 288). His punishment has nothing to do with voyeurism or entertainment; it is a sentence carried on her own terms against a system that she mistrusts, that has failed and continues failing women. The idea that permeates this approach is that women need to assert total control over their own bodies or lest they suffer a loss of agency. The utilization of one’s body as a weapon is not only desirable but compulsory for autonomy and survival, and Lisbeth (and by extension, late female detective figures who share the same coordinates), as Kate Waites asserts, does so by exercising “violence in extremis, and her power derives from her cunning, combined with exceptional mental, physical, and/or technological skills” (35).

To come full circle with the succinct female configuration examined throughout the history of the genre here, it is critical to select a private detective and a police officer to evaluate the evolution of female coordinates and the challenges they face in contemporary fiction. In the P.I. realm, the Veronica Mars universe is a popular referent on several fronts. Starting as a television series, it premieres a Californian teenage private investigator who focused her entire high school existence in the discovery of her best friend's murderer as well as uncovering criminal cases in her hometown, Neptune, and aiding her fellow students with petty cases. Her apparently pleasant appearance –petite frame, blonde hair, blue eyes– obscures a heaping dose of sarcasm, irony and fierce loyalty balanced out by her compassion and trademark sense of justice. Her physicality always plays against her; people question her abilities and underestimate her. Armed with a reflex camera and a taser and flanked by her sidekicks, Wallace and Mac, both outcasts figures –one a bullied black transfer student and the other a female hacker– Veronica's high school career is a tasteful and brilliant mixture of classic Californian film noir, with Philip Marlowe's brushes and a Nancy Drew aura.

There is emotional progress and character building throughout the three seasons of the show, but the seriality and continuity across media –movie and novels– emphasizes it even more by transitioning from high school cases to ruthless adult P.I. criminal reality. The danger and violence have increased and surrounded Veronica, especially after the fame she has earned for herself, and their ramifications now require different measures. Her father purchases her a revolver, a small, discreet and easy to conceal weapon which is a gift that serves a twofold purpose: to ensure Veronica's safety while also functioning as a scare tactic in an attempt to deter her from the family business. With law degrees from Stanford and Columbia, an FBI background and a job offer from Truman-Mann, some of the fiercest lawyers in New York,

Veronica has come back home older and wiser. Yet, she is still trapped in the same body frame, so she sharpens her cunning and expertise along with her natural sarcasm to ensure her survival in the industry and to outsmart everyone. Aside from this reconfiguration and modernization of the female P.I., there is an aspect of actualization and denouncement on the criminality portrayed. The second novel, *Veronica Mars: Mr. Kiss and Tell* (2015), carefully explores the world of crime that surrounds prostitution and victims of rape, which highlights the fact that no one investigates what happens to prostitutes, whether it is through coercion, rape, assault and/or violence; they do not care and these victims' voices do not count, even in a place like Neptune. These crimes can be easily transposed to contemporary Spanish narratives since they share similar sociological complaints that emphasize the lack of investigation and concern on these gendered crimes by both the system and the society.

Returning to police procedurals and inspectors, a female FBI approach to an iconic serial killer figure merits an aside for her insightful take on the personal advantages and disadvantages of being a woman on the case. Meg Gardiner's *Unsub: A Novel* (2017) narrates the hunt for the Prophet killer –a rewriting of the hunt for the never caught Zodiac killer– in a feminine key. In charge of the investigation she places Caitlin Hendrick, a twenty-nine-year-old former narcotics task force member turned special agent. Daughter of the most specialized police officer investigating the Prophet, her entire life has been configured around his haunting presence. Aside from the popular appeal of world famous pursuits of serial killers, the narrative highlights some of the crude hardships of the profession: Caitlin is a gun violence survivor –having suffered a gunshot to the shoulder during a robbery–, she has to face the expectations of being born into the task force but avoid losing herself in her father's mistakes, and ponder whether the right path is to build a romantic bond with a coworker. Female officers encounter more obstacles when

establishing love relationships since they battle between their public professional personas and the domesticity traditionally associated to their private lives, what Culver calls “una escisión entre la obligación profesional y la privacidad, entre el “deber ser” –policías profesionales que se mueven en un plano de igualdad con sus colegas masculinos–y el “querer ser” –mujeres competentes en el plano doméstico y profesional” (“escritura” 105). Caitlin chooses to coexist with this split by dating another federal agent inside the task force but in a different department: “Conventional wisdom said: Socially, female police officers are screwed. Not many men are secure enough to date a woman who carries a gun and represents capital-A Authority. Date a civilian, you can expect it to melt down in less than a year” (Gardiner 97-98).

Another aspect worth mentioning pertaining to the construction of the female protagonist is the consistency with contemporary characters: her youth and physicality play against her and automatically her skills are questioned, especially considering her tattooed body to cover up her self-inflicted cuts from her younger years. The different types of narratives across medium not only consistently associate female aestheticism to professional acumen but also link body art and mental health concerns with the negativity of the madwoman in the attic trope. These last two cases, Veronica and Caitlin, further prove the strong and undeniable influence of transmedia and filmographic narratives as well as the reproduction and expectations of highly recognizable patterns across fiction, film, television and videogames. This intertextuality adds depth and edges to the configuration of contemporary female (s)heroes and concerns in the genre.

Coordinates for a New Female Character Configuration: Valentina Negro

“I have chosen to no longer be apologetic for my femaleness and my femininity. And I want to be respected in all of my femaleness because I deserve to be”
–Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *We Should All Be Feminists*

Scholarship has marked seriality in crime fiction as an important feature since it serves a dual purpose: (1) to highlight the evolution of an author’s narrative style over time and (2) to witness the progression of the protagonist over the series. To illustrate an appreciation for this convention, Malgorzata Janerka summarizes and expands the importance of novels belonging to a saga as follows:

permiten ver con más claridad la continuidad retórica de la obra de su autor, que se manifiesta en la evolución de ciertas técnicas literarias y ciertos procedimientos discursivos cuyo fin consiste en convencer al lector. Además, las series que prolongan la existencia de los mismos protagonistas y se graban así en la memoria de los lectores, repercuten en las tendencias literarias del género policiaco y es probable que se vayan convirtiendo en piedras de toque, tanto con respecto a la evolución del género policiaco en España, como a la reflexión histórica acerca del mismo. (Janerka 17)

Indeed, writers and their narratives are both indebted with their predecessors, at the same time they pave the way for future trends and writers in the genre. These series carry, in an implied manner, the history and evolution of the genre and the author’s own stance on writing. Throughout their narratives they consistently show how they alter their approach, and reinvent and subvert the formulas of the genre.

However, it is not just the narrative that changes, so too does the protagonist, as well as the motivations, expectations, fears and experiences that this character has experienced over

time: “leer en orden cronológico las novelas de un determinado personaje implica descubrir el desarrollo de su tragedia vital y los cambios que en ella se van produciendo. Los personajes van creciendo, madurando y cambiando ante el lector” (Sánchez Zapatero 17). But, more importantly, seriality offers a continuation and a unifying thread among its installments; oftentimes certain narrative arcs draw to a close at the end of a novel, but it is not common for them to carry to the next. On the detective’s personal front, certain storylines remain open to offer both continuity to the series and to the development of the protagonist, and also to render characters the means to embark on a process of progressive and continuous humanization.

All these possibilities take place in Garrido and Abarca’s series. For instance, as it has been proved in the previous chapter, they gradually alter their treatment towards female victims, from an initial empowered and vindictive stance towards these voiceless bodies to an obliterating silence in the end. Equally, and briefly summarizing this entire section’s analytical approach, Valentina evolves as a police inspector, as she sharpens her skills and expertise areas; in the personal realm, she works through emotional baggage to address and face her trauma, to be more aware of the consequences of her actions, to identify her needs in a romantic partner, and to build a more fraternal relationship with her brother Freddy.

In addition to the evolution of the female detective conventional to the genre, seriality grants the opportunity to put into perspective certain narratological decisions. As a byproduct of police procedural the narrative voice changes from the typical first person associated with P.I.s to a third-person omniscient narrator. While the first-person narrator allows readers to identify with the detective’s voice, either in a conscious choice by authors to link their novels to certain well-known masculine private detective figures, such as Spade and Marlowe, inscribing a first-person female narrative voice grants a space for women’s voices and concerns to be heard while it also

empowers and imbues them with authority, which is the case of V.I. Warshawski, Kinsey Millhone or Petra Delicado, to name but a few. A third-person narrative focalized through different sets of eyes contributes to a wider access to information, advances in the investigation and alternative points of view and storylines, while at the same time it adds to the build of suspense. This approach guarantees the split from an androcentric and phallogentric voice to a polyphonic text that grants readers access to view the narrative world through a multiplicity of female (and masculine) lenses and perspectives without the unreliable concerns of a first-person narrator.

Garrido and Abarca opt for the latter, allowing their narratological voice to switch between chapters and characters, permitting readers to enter the characters' minds and inner monologues, to view through the eyes of (s)heroes and villains alike. By means of this third-person omniscient and sometimes focalized point of view, the chapter distribution of the series not only offers a categorization that serves as a premonition of what is to come, but also offers a collage of textures that interweaves multiple plots and subplots along temporal and spatial lines; they are like intertwined threads of a cloth fabric. Hence, the location, time and date assigned to most of the chapters and its subsections serve a threefold purpose: (1) to organize the multiple analepses in the narrative, locating the events in accordance to the current criminal investigation, (2) to identify the characters involved in said chapter and summarize its outcome, and (3) to remind readers of the series' police procedural format in which the titles of the chapters allude to what could be identified as police reports. On this matter, this identification of chapters with detailed locations and specific times refers to other mediums, transmedia and intertextual narratives. It creates a recognizable timeline of events that records with precision each step of the police investigation in a race against the ticking clock before it expires. While this is salient in

the entire series, one of its most notorious examples is situated in *Crímenes exquisitos*, between chapters 47-49, in which an assemblage of London locales –Heathrow, Bloomsbury, Kensal Green, Notting Hill, Marble Arch, etc.– appears accompanied by the ticking of the clock –20:10 h, 20:20 h, 20:40 h, 20:45 h– until 23:30 h when Floria is found dead in Kensal Green. While this identifiable pattern can be seen across narratives, from fiction and filmography, *The X Files* or *24*, to videogame narratives, *Hotel Dusk: Room 215* or *LA Noir*, to name but a few examples in which time and place become almost another character of the story, it can also hint towards a conscious effort to construct the series' narrative as a collection of novels conceived to be adapted to film or television series.

Anyhow, both the type of narrator chosen and the typography selected for each chapter, as mentioned before, answer to the formula of police procedurals which brings realism and a comprehensive step-by-step description of the daily procedures in a police investigation; evidence collection, data analysis, forensics, laboratory technologies, surveillance and interrogation are part of this real-life approach. Lee Horsley describes the police procedural as a split-level narrative in which a minutely detailed investigative technique coexists with a disturbingly intimate view of the psychopathology of the serial killer (139). This definition corresponds appropriately to Garrido and Abarca's series where the authors not only portray every minutiae of the police investigation and their resources, but also by means of Sanjuán's contributions they offer a psychological and criminological approach to the concatenation of serial killers, sadists and criminals that populate the series.

While police procedurals in Spain did not gain momentum until 1990s due to the lack of faith in the police force, still corrupted with fascism after Franco's death, contemporary crime fiction relies quite heavily on this formula. They also serve as a means of inclusion, by inserting

regular individuals in a thankless profession and by assigning different roles to women – inspectors, officers, judges, lawyers, lab technicians– they prove and certify women’s belonging to the work force. Aside from the new themes that women writers bring to these series today, there is also transference from other genres. For instance, crime fiction borrows from thrillers and suspense novels the excessive violence, the emphasis on feeling, menacing events, the evocation of fear and anxiety, as well as contrast and ambivalence (Horsley 115).³⁰ This hybridity of the genre has proven to be pivotal in the female victimological coordinates of Garrido and Abarca’s series since the complex, heterogenous and multidimensional world of crime fiction opens new venues for diversion, intertextuality and transmedia narratives. Likewise, the configuration of their female inspector relies heavily in the tenets of police procedurals and the techniques borrowed from other genres.

Consequently, there are a few aspects related to the hybridity and plasticity bending qualities of the genre affecting the crime series that still merit attention. First of all, its ability to traverse between social strata: “Con extraordinaria facilidad de movimiento se pasa de los ambientes más exquisitos y elegantes a los ambientes más sórdidos, de las oficinas de lujo de una inmobiliaria o una financiera a los prostíbulos, de las mansiones señoriales a los rincones urbanos más escuálidos, de los barrios residenciales al barrio chino, del despacho de un juez a los sótanos de la comisaría de policía” (Colmeiro 215). This assessment on *novela negra* and the Spanish transition still proves relevant in Garrido and Abarca’s series, probably even more now that crime fiction is also exploring corruption in the corporate world and government. Hence the

³⁰ Precisely, this idea of the border and limits of the genre has been widely addressed at Congreso de Novela y Cine Negro at the University of Salamanca, being the main thematic unit of two of its annual meetings, 2011 and 2018. Its founders, Sánchez Zapatero and Martín Escribà, mention the ability of the genre to change and adapt to new cultural, societal, historical and ideological realms, as well as its openness to other narratives and discourses (“fronteras” 12).

importance of the constant praise to Valentina and her chameleon attributes that allow her to adapt to each one of those aforementioned scenarios, oftentimes just with the right change of attire, more often just with her wits, sharp tongue and (female) weapon(s).

Secondly, the ability of crime fiction to borrow from other genres comes with an unavoidable plurality of labels. It is widely known that the genre has generated a vast nomenclature to designate loans, trends, plots, formulas, etc. (*criminal, negra, policiaca, noir, giallo, hard-boiled, soft-boiled, femicrime, neopolicial, nordic*, to name but a few of the existent labels already mentioned throughout this research); this phenomena answers to the human affinity to categorize items in isolated compartments, which in this case also has a commercial element. That is the case of the label *femicrime* that was coined as a type of narrative written by females and/or with female protagonists. However, this term seems to imply that these texts are “narraciones con actitud voluntariamente feminista decidida a mostrar la visión de la mujer en un género codificado por y para hombres” (Sánchez Zapatero and Martín Escribà, “femicrime” 115). Reporting sexism, gendered violence, sexual harassment and discrimination, or the glass ceiling are some of the most important tenets that preoccupy these novels. Codifying these “subgenres,” however useful, is an ultimately reductive exercise that obscures the diverse narrative approaches displayed by crime fiction authors, who each have their own unique commitments and rejections of the conventions of the genre. Nevertheless, not all authors present the same level of implication with feminist agendas. Some of them prefer to focus on immigration and human trafficking, while others place the emphasis on gendered violence, for instance. There are also cases in which there is an obvious intention to blur the delimitations of the genre and its formula, to cross its boundaries; at the same time, they may also rejoice on the gore, violence and voyeurism patterns they exploit. What is crucial in this critical crime fiction

movement is the undoing of traditional stereotypes where empowered women populate both the narratives and the language used, and that synergy is what can fluctuate from the mere reproduction to the total subversion of gendered roles (Losada Soler and Paszkiewicz 10). All the female protagonists share certain traits regardless of the authors' approach: they have power and agency, they belong to traditional structures of command and use their tools, they have different support systems inside and/or outside the force, and more often than not, a gendered crime is entangled in the plot.

Garrido and Abarca's series seems to toy with this ambiguity and oscillation between these two polar opposite views, expanding the boundaries of the genre by addressing gendered violence while delighting in its viciousness, perhaps to reach a wider audience, to disturb their readers or merely because they embody a literary partnership, male and female, that is not so common nowadays and could be the source of this ambiguity. In fact, literary tandems is the third aspect that needs mentioning due to the wide array of possibilities they offer not only on a narratological level but also on gender and sociological concerns, to quote but a few elements. Perhaps the most widely known literary tandem in crime fiction is the Swedish pair, Maj Sjöwall and Per Wahlöö, and their police procedurals. Coauthoring a novel implies not only a break with the traditional conception of authorship but also a collaborative writing mode that Charlotte Berger refers to as follows: "the authors devised a collaborative, egalitarian ethos which enable them to negotiate issues related to gender and potential professional inequalities, driving their shared vision of a distinct literary sensibility" (142). Hence, writing becomes a negotiation and supplementary process where knowledge is shared and authors come to terms with the direction they want to take their narrative. It also shows where the motivations for and from the narrative originate and why villains and (s)heroes behave in a certain manner. For this Scandinavian

tandem, topics related to sexuality became an intrinsic part of their narrative: “Representations of sex crime and other taboo subjects, and depictions of the domestic and sexual lives of the fictional characters (including the police officers) became part of Sjöwall and Wahlöö’s realist ethos” (Berger 147). Therefore, the importance of exploring collective anxieties and concerns and addressing how police officers are going to ensure safety and protection of those individuals targeted become key components in their narratives.

Analogously, Garrido and Abarca follow a similarly collaborative writing process in which both of them employ their criminological expertise, as well as Garrido’s psychological background and Abarca’s art history training –all of them traits highly identifiable in their narratives. Each member of this female-male tandem works on the same level of prominence; they make the same contributions to the writing and editing process, even though Garrido’s name appears first in three out of the four installments. This collaborative environment is reflected in the dynamics between Valentina and Sanjuán who form a not-so-uncommon alliance throughout the series to supplement each other’s deficiencies to unmask and apprehend criminals; in fact, police procedurals emphasize the importance of working together and sharing information among the members of the force in order to solve crimes in a satisfactory manner.

Fourthly, related both to the conventions of the police procedural, the representation of police collaboration and Valentina’s configuration, as well as the globalization of these narratives, there is an inevitable consequence to the concept of limit, expanding it toward the contemporary decentralization process of the genre. Hard-boiled and police procedurals are narratives that understandably gravitate around the metropolis. Contemporary crime fiction, although in general terms, tends to adhere to the same configuration, has however opened its physical boundaries regarding which cities dominate the criminal cartography. Although Madrid

and Barcelona have been and continue to be reference points in the Spanish tradition, with the arrival of the twenty-first-century new borders have been explored, opening new venues in cities with less narrative representation. Susana Martín Gijón, in her already mentioned *Más que cuerpos* series creates a new world of criminal opportunities in Extremadura and Dolores Redondo, like wise, opens a new horizon to policing and mythology in Navarra. Garrido and Abarca carefully choose to depict their own autonomous communities, Comunidad Valenciana and Galicia, respectively. This conscious decision plays a chief role in the configuration of their characters Valentina and Sanjuán, their environment and their relationships. A Coruña leaves an undeniable mark on Valentina's coordinates; its gastronomy, traditions and orography, to mention a few, are integral to her distinct and unmistakable identity.

Introducing the (S)hero, Valentina Negro: Personal versus Professional Life

To establish the coordinates for Garrido and Abarca's female protagonist, a simple but fundamental question serves as a point of departure: what's in a name? Onomastics has proven to be an important source of contradictions, redundancies, oxymorons, and other hidden meanings behind females' names in the genre: P.I.s V.I. (Vic) Warshawski and Kinsey Millhone portray androgynous names, hinting to a more masculinized identity, or at least diminishing their female identity by using a name that is less gender specific. Spanish police officers allude to identity questions as well; for instance, Petra Delicado embodies an oxymoron, the delicacy of a stone; Cordelia Weber-Tejedor stresses her ties to both her German and Spanish ancestry by reiterating the meaning of her last name; and Amaia Salazar, personifies through her prophetic name of Basque origin: the beginning of the end. According to Culver, the peculiarity of their names highlights the contradiction these females embody as well as their singularity and an internal

conflict yet to be resolved (“escritura” 103). Valentina Negro represents, through her first name, Christian ties that hint to a valiant and courageous behavior, and more modern associations with love and passion; her last name, aside from the visible contradiction with her pale complexion, seems to allude to a darker side and the ominous nature of her destiny, both premonitory elements of her (mis)fortunes and events that the series will prompt. But who is Valentina?

Valentina Negro, police inspector of CNP, is the latest addition to the UDEV (Unidad de Delitos Violentos) in A Coruña. While she holds the newbie status, she is not a rookie; she decided to pursue her education and advance professionally before joining the force, instead of climbing the ranks from the bottom. Valentina is a lawyer and a criminologist and she also holds a master’s degree in criminal psychology. She belongs to the new generation of policewomen in literature that are highly qualified, with several college degrees and a varied set of expertise, interests and abilities to face their cases (Stewart 80-81). It is said that Valentina lacks experience in investigation; only she takes charge of Lidia’s case by default since inspector Larrosa refuses to continue with the investigation due to his impending vacation and subsequent retirement. Iturriaga deems the case perfectly fitting for Valentina to harden and gain some experience under her belt. Besides, he ponders the benefits of having a person like her, that is a (beautiful) woman, to maneuver and control the press in such a controversial case. Despite these patronizing assessments towards her aptitudes and age, she is merely in her thirties, Valentina is already a decorated member for her bravery in the field.

As can be expected, Valentina feels like an outsider. She is painfully aware, as it will be further analyzed, of her female condition and appearance in a work sphere heavily dominated by males; she is overqualified and overprepared, but still needs to be the best version of herself, not just for her own sake, but for all the women that came before her and the ones yet to come. This

self-inflicted pressure, this anxiety generated by a masculine concept of authority, sometimes positions Valentina as an outsider, as if she were afraid of inserting herself in the narrative, of taking the power she worthily earned, as if she deemed herself undeserving of commanding others in the workplace. Her first interactions with her coworkers appear indeed as uncomfortable scenarios where she labels herself as the newcomer until she takes ownership of and becomes empowered by the so-called masculine traits she already excels at: physical strength, problem-solving, her pin point shooting accuracy, the use of violence; or other elements such as her gun as phallic and equality symbols for women, her medal of valor, and her ability to compose the best team, subinspectors Velasco and Bodelón, to work under and for her.

Put differently, being aware of the unspoken obstacles against her translate into a need to prove herself to do her job by means of acceptable masculine attributes, but also, surrounding herself with a carefully chosen, efficient, and skilled team who, more importantly, is composed by people that she trusts and that acknowledge her status as their superior. As it was mentioned before, collaboration at work is vital to proceed with the investigation process in police procedurals, not just among Valentina and her subordinates, but also when she seeks special counselling from Sanjuán, who is a specialist on serial killers. This collaborative approach implies that “A detective “partnership” connotes shared responsibilities; it inspires equivalent if not equal participation; it presupposes mutual respect and trust; it suggests an equality between partners” (Klein 186). Even though Klein refers specifically to detectives –she excludes police officers specifically–, the concept of collaboration runs deep and therefore can be applied in the police task force. Sanjuán is not officially part of the team; he functions as a consultant, as an erudite who offers his services out of good will; however, on certain occasions he does indeed withhold information from Valentina or makes assumptions based on her young age. These

instances serve as examples of the supposed collaboration and standard of parity being “overwritten by the more familiar tale of female-male inequality and of male privilege” (Klein 186-187), as well as the tendency for males to take over merely on the basis of their gender and age. It also highlights how someone who, in theory, respects Valentina’s authority as a figure of law and order, can easily transgress those boundaries without any repercussions. But, alas, without that behavior some critical scenarios would lose their suspense, and even alter the endings fundamentally in certain cases; that is, Sanjuán’s heroic antics, sometimes altruistic and romantic in a tragic sense –for instance, leaving a cryptic note while facing the Artist without warning the police or carrying any weapons– seem to be but a narratological decision to advance the suspense. Nevertheless, if readers and scholars alike are to be critical of Sanjuán for these types of behaviors, then it seems that the underlying feminist message of the series remains present insofar as its posture is critical of patriarchal inequalities.

Even though the series is set in a timeframe that presumes a total inclusion and acceptance of females into the police force, Valentina faces some gendered obstacles at the beginning of the tetralogy. On the one hand, she faces resistance due to her qualifications. Again, she did not start from the bottom; rather, she decided to study, train and prepare herself first, and then join the force. Therefore, her accolades, her Order of Police Merit at such a young age, and the fact that she is named the inspector in charge in spite of external opposition, all set her at a disadvantage to initially gain her coworkers’ trust and respect. Even Iturriaga condescendingly questions her as her superior when she suggests more proactive investigative leads, such as enlisting the aid of Sanjuán as a specialist due to the uniqueness of Lidia’s case. On the other, she fights a constant battle to hide her female attributes as some of her colleagues stare at her cleavage instead of her face/eyes when talking to her. Other pivotal characters in the series

ponder on Valentina's appearance and the obstacles it embodies; Lúa accurately assesses Valentina's beauty as a problem not a benefit and Sanjuán conceitedly questions if her beautiful and youthful appearance is a symptom of her incompetence and lack of expertise: "¿No eres muy joven para un caso de tanta responsabilidad?" (*Crímenes* 128).

To expand on (gendered) power struggles in a heavily male-dominated profession, and despite her initial resistance, Valentina manages to blend in and fraternize with her coworkers remarkably well. The team she creates with Velasco and Bodelón functions like a well-oiled machine; it is based on professionalism, efficiency, respect, and ultimately friendship. Both subinspectors admire Valentina and her accolades, her intelligence and ability to rise above all imaginable obstacles. They support her inside and outside of the field; it is worth remembering that, for instance, Bodelón is the one that saves Valentina from herself when attacking the Hairdresser and that Velasco gives her relationship advice and acts as a go-between to facilitate her happiness. Granted, they are indeed the only male characters that neither show any physical attraction nor make sexual advances on her, Velasco is gay and Bodelón is happily married and has a baby. Valentina is a true leader for them, creating a collaborative and respectful working environment while she maintains the power and control of her authority; there are no confrontations or arguments between the trio. She embodies a different way of getting the job done, striving away from dictatorial measures and emphasizing instead the individual strengths that each member possesses. Hence depicting and adhering to the new trend of female-led police procedurals in which the investigator is no longer a lone nor an authoritative she-wolf.

Normally it is Valentina that is the one with a tendency to break the rules, as her dossier and Iturriaga mention, but in relation to her power and authority as the commanding female figure at UDEV, there are few insubordination instances in the series. Those occasions tend to be

associated with other females who meddle with the course of the investigation. Her confrontations with Lúa are quite frequent throughout the series from the beginning, even when both of them achieve a friendship status. One of the scenarios that Valentina despises the most is when Lúa seems to forget about her own deontological code as a journalist and surpasses the limit of what is considered ethical to distribute among the public. For instance, when she publishes pictures of a crime scene yet again, this time during the Ghost's investigation, Valentina does not hesitate to rebuff Lúa and remind her of her obligations, friends or not: "Mañana por la mañana te quiero en comisaría, Lúa. No seas cría, no puedes seguir escondida. Primero, eres testigo principal del caso. Segundo..., lo de las fotos. Ha sido un golpe bastante bajo. Ahora ya está hecho, y sabes muy bien lo que pienso sobre algo así. Pero aquí ni es lugar ni viene al caso, hablaremos mañana. A las nueve" (*Muertos* 157). Perhaps what hurts her the most is not being betrayed in her capacity as lead investigator on the case, but the betrayal of Lúa as a friend, and more importantly, as a fellow female. Not just because she did not want certain details of the case to be public knowledge, but mainly since she felt that Lúa, as a longtime friend, should have asked for her permission in advance.

Throughout the entire series Valentina manages to remain assertive and exercises her power with a strong hand when it comes to the press and its opportunistic behavior. She also manages to eradicate any doubts pertaining to her leadership or the direction she is gearing the investigation towards, always in a respectful manner. She is consistent with her behavioral patterns and during the fourth novel she also acts accordingly when Marina Alonso, the latest addition to the forensics team, and her bad temper make a scene due to Sanjuán's presence in the case. Valentina proceeds with a conciliatory tone first but after another skeptical and insubordinate moment, she pulls Marina aside, discretely, making sure she leaves no room for

misunderstandings or disobedience: “Marina. Aquí mando yo, no hace falta que te lo recuerde. Tengo permiso de Iturriaga para meter a Sanjuán donde me parezca. ¿De acuerdo? Puedes hablar con mi jefe cuando quieras. Y ahora a trabajar” (*Muertos* 88).

Although to reach this stage, Valentina has to be self-demanding to the extreme, to the point that she oftentimes drowns in her insecurities. While some aspects are mere anecdotal, like her fear of flying since the feeling of uncertainty and insecurity that comes from it terrorizes her, she swallows her own anxieties several times for the sake of the investigation and the girls at stake; what permeates is her need to control all variables and aspects of her life. Hence from the beginning, she is open, for instance, about her struggles to coordinate her professional with her personal life. Finding balance is almost impossible especially with high profile cases like Lidia’s; the entire city and the press are expecting her to make progress or fail catastrophically: “Por un momento, Valentina sintió sobre sus hombros la enorme responsabilidad que había contraído al asumir la investigación de ese caso. Sabía bien que representaba una gran oportunidad para ella, la demostración de que una mujer podía ser tan buena atrapando a un cabrón asesino como cualquier hombre” (*Crímenes* 95). Valentina deals with that pressure as best as she can, yet she manages to bring stress home and seeks confrontation with her brother. He becomes an easy target for Valentina with his antics and rebellious acts. In those scenarios is when and where Valentina deploys the maternal side that has become lately one of the key elements included in female written or led contemporary crime fiction narratives –like in Amaia or Annika’s narratives–, in her case by her necessity to lead her brother to the righteous path and to reprimand him when necessary. Although her intentions are pure she oftentimes lacks empathy and patience when approaching Freddy, ensuring their consequent heated arguments.

This is part of Valentina's emotional baggage; during a car accident caused by a drunk driver, her mother died and her father was injured, permanently confined to a wheelchair due to paraplegia, while her brother saw it all happen. Valentina's absence in that fateful moment conditions her to overdo everything. She is overbearing and she feels responsible for Freddy, as if she needed to step up and fill the void left by her mother and to overcompensate for her father. Despite what Enrique tells her, Valentina still worries about Freddy's behavior, the classes he is failing, his excessive partying even during the week, his relationship with Irina, and the drinking and smoking habits; she mothers him instead of supporting him as a sister and being understanding of how fragile and indecipherable life is for a teenager especially in those circumstances. Her police instincts kick in, sensing Irina as a source of trouble and pain for Freddy and she holds that against him to deter him from dating her, to compel him to redirect his life and focus on his studies, an attempt that completely backfires:

Métete en tus asuntos, hermanita. Tú no eres mi madre. Mamá está muerta, joder. Se murió en el puto accidente, y tú no estabas allí. Yo sí. Y tú, por mucho que quieras, nunca vas a ocupar su lugar. ¿Te enteras? A ti lo que te pasa es que no te quiere nadie. Estás celosa de que yo tenga una chica guapa que me quiera. No tienes novio, porque eres una bruja. Espantas a los tíos con ese carácter.

(Crímenes 110)

As harsh as Freddy's accusation sounds, part of it holds truth. Valentina is carrying the weight of the world on her shoulders as she tries to overcompensate on every aspect of her life. She is judgmental and tries to take control and replace her mother's role as moral guardian of the family after her death. She treats not only Freddy with an iron hand, but herself as well. Her personal life, or lack thereof, as her friend Helena tells her, is dominated by both her professional

cases and her self-control. Valentina does not date, shows no interest in men at the beginning of the series, and her female friends are few and far between. The same way Valentina's professional life permeates her personal one, she seems to be making a conscious effort to prevent personal issues to affect her job. This attitude is reminiscent of Petra and her avoidance of talking about her personal matters in the workplace since she strongly believed that discussing those matters would make her look weak and that she would not be worthy of respect.

However, it is when personal issues are brought to the forefront and when they are interwoven with the police investigation when protagonists become more human and approachable. That is the case with Valentina: every time she mentions the struggles she is facing dealing with Freddy, his bar fight with Delgado and how it affects the investigation, or when she mentions her loss of control the first time she had sexual intercourse with Sanjuán, and their complicated on and off love affair, Valentina becomes a more believable, humanized and relatable character. As the series progresses, her social networks expand; Helena continues to appear briefly in her life, Rebeca and her daughter Marta acquire a more prominent role in Valentina's life, the relationship with Irina improves as she moves in and becomes part of the family, and a complicated friendship evolves between Valentina and Lúa. These female characters, which I have dubbed as satellites since they orbit around Valentina's life throughout the series, and their relationship status with the protagonist will be further analyzed in the third and final chapter of this dissertation. As a matter of fact, female solidarity is a source of establishing female relationships; a social network for collaboration, support and, sometimes, mentorship. In order to build this network of female relatives, friends and colleagues in crime fiction, Margaret Kinsman considers key the inclusion of "a female detective with a life which includes other women from different backgrounds and with different life experiences" (6).

Valentina also forms alliances with male characters, besides Bodelón and Velasco who, especially the latter, become faithful friends, Valentina relies heavily on Sanjuán for support. Workwise, it is a fruitful equation; he always delivers and helps her with the investigation in whichever way he may assist while at the same time he earns (almost national) recognition for his career endeavors. Unawares, Sanjuán also helps Valentina to establish her own coordinates as a (s)hero when the traditional male and female roles are reversed and Sanjuán becomes the victim and needs saving, hence blurring the traditional gender and genre boundaries. Waites understands instances like this as sex-role reversals that amplify the disavowal of traditional action conventions, at the same time they signal the disembarkation of the woman warrior in the new millennium (42). However, in the personal realm, as it will be demonstrated in the following section, his support proves to be unsubstantial and unstable; he always, without exception, leaves Valentina alone due to, among other self-inflicted obstacles, his inability to face commitment.

Valentina as a Femme Fatale: (Venomous) Sensual Coordinates and (Toxic) Relationships

Valentina's beauty, as hinted before, proves to be, most often than not, a handicap instead of an advantage. At medium height, 170 cm (5 ft, 6 in), with a slim but fit figure, jet black hair, grey eyes, pale skin, and as the narrative keeps reinforcing and reminding readers, ample bosoms, it is impossible for Valentina to be unnoticed. Her boss even admits to himself the sexual tension and responses that Valentina generates at the workplace despite her bad attitude: "Iturriaga tenía que reconocer que aquella mujer le gustaba mucho, y no solo por sus cualidades policiales. Estaba como un tren. Un amor platónico, por supuesto [...] La verdad era que como a él, le ponía a media plantilla de la Nacional... Eso sí. Había que reconocerlo. Era algo borde la chica. Intratable a veces, «cierta tendencia a saltarse las normas»" (*Crímenes* 60). Comments like

this make a statement, not only about the impossibility of dissociating women from their (sexual) appearance, but also the correlation between possessing a sensual body and being somewhat deviant, in this case by being a boor.

This somewhat misogynistic comment alludes to the traditional dichotomy used to catalog females into either angelic figures or the opposite, the evil *femme fatale*; which is just another instance of the never-ending cycle of the male attempt at domination and control over nonconformist female figures that transgress stereotypes. This categorization is but the hypersexualization and objectification of women, taken to the extreme, that contemplates female bodies as vessels to be profaned and reduced to what Shanna Lino names “sites of use, abuse and consumption” (11). One way of advancing this sexual and sexist depiction of women is by their garments. Valentina shows no desire to indulge in fashion trends or fetishes. Her style, like Vic’s, can be described as more masculine; she prefers donning a bad girl attitude: a pair of jeans, biker boots, and a leather jacket –her staple uniform. Occasionally, she showcases a feminine side wearing blouses from Massimo Dutti. But on the few occurrences that she is forced to wear more revealing outfits, it is always as a consequence of her police duties. While posing as prey for the Chatterbox, she has to wear a tight short skirt and high-heeled boots and she complains reiteratively about the impediment of such outfits to fulfil basic tasks like walking. However, this set of clothing is specifically designed and chosen to ensure that Valentina stands out as a potential target, at the same time her identity as a police officer remains hidden. On this matter, Jackson highlights in her research females’ capability for covert surveillance, a trait exploited since the moment women started to occupy law enforcement positions, that is: “When it came to attempts to specifically conceal police identity women had

the edge because the public remained unsure as to what a policewoman looked like” (Jackson 113).

Accordingly, femininity serves as a tool for undercover operations: by dressing up they become a spectacle to attract attention, and by dressing down the lines are blurred into obscurity. Clothing therefore plays a key role into infiltrating spaces by setting the right tone and appearances. When Valentina attends one of Mendiluce’s parties, she carefully selects a fairly revealing dress that belonged to her mother. She initially shows some reticence, but she finally caves, realizing that she has to employ and display all the weapons at her disposal to gain access to information:

Suspiró frente a la puerta del armario y se armó de valor. Sí. Llevaría el vestido. Aunque fuera demasiado sexy y para nada su estilo habitual, mucho más sobrio. No estaba acostumbrada a vestir de un modo tan atrevido, y todavía menos a utilizar las armas femeninas en su beneficio. Preferiría con mucho usar su pistola HK USP Compact. Pero aquella noche era especial. Quería que Mendiluce le prestase mucha atención. (*Crímenes* 337)

The underlying truth is that, besides focusing on her case, what she truly desires is for Sanjuán to see her like a vamp(ire): black eye liner, red lips, scarlet nails, satin black dress with a V-neck and open back in order to elicit a (sexual) reaction from him. The other instances in which Valentina’s attire is altered and does not match her personality is when she is kidnapped, multiple times, and as a consequence, dresses, jewels and hairstyles are forced onto her to become someone else.

The combination of clothing, make-up and jewelry has already been studied as key elements of the construction of the female P.I. identity since they denote information about these

women and the social group to which they belong. Clothes, particularly, are complex tools when it comes to the creation of a personal image; they elicit a response by others, they hold memories and personal stories, and they sometimes require different postures and physical adaptations (Dilley 35). Besides the literary world of P.I.s, this approach is widely common among filmographic and theatrical examples who share this space where special attention is paid to the costumes and wardrobe to emphasize female attributes. In the *Crímenes Exquisitos* series, it also serves to distinguish primary from secondary characters, due to the lack of details of the latter, and also to exploit the symbiosis between appearance and personality. Equally, it allows females like Valentina to explore different roles and evolve throughout the series.

All in all, the connection between personality, garments and physical appearance answers to the same patriarchal need of categorizing women according to male standards and expectations. As a result, the most extended gendered violence in our society is the hypersexualization of the female image, whether they are women or young girls (Valero Valero 228). This constant demand for a certain set of bodily standards, for a specific female morphology, translates into the need to fit those physical patterns in order to be desired or aesthetically appealing. Silvestri, citing Louise Westmarland's research,³¹ mentions that: "The concern with body image arising from women's narratives also raises important clues for unpacking and mapping out the cultural identity of the police leader. Given the significance of 'physicality' in defining the identity of officers, the lack of attention paid to the 'body' as an analytical concept remains a serious omission" (121). This train of thought forces us to question how women can define and appropriate that (masculine) body image associated with policing and how they can achieve the authority that the uniform does not grant them automatically. At

³¹ Westmarland, Louise. *Gender and Policing*. Willan, 2001.

first sight, there seem to be two possible routes to subvert this male chauvinistic tendency: (1) to avoid any sort of physical description of the female protagonist, like what Giménez Bartlett advocated for with Petra Delicado, that is, to be more masculine to fit into their standards, or alternatively (2) to appropriate that sexualization, emphasizing all female physical trends to not only reject and transgress gender boundaries, but also to prove that female protagonists can be extremely sexy at the same time they are highly qualified and enjoy professional success, like Annika, Lisbeth or Valentina.

Valentina is obviously conceived as the latter, as a sensual and sexual character. Her features are emphasized and reiterated throughout the series on a multitude of occasions. However, she does not exploit or pay too much attention to her body herself; on very few instances does she go out of her way to include make-up or a more daring attire and sometimes she is not even aware of the effect she has on men. While some readers can disagree or even find upsetting the repetition of Valentina's physical appearance; others might interpret it as a slap to patriarchal values, an irrefutable proof that beauty and brains are not at odds and that women can have it all at the same time they do their jobs better than all their male counterparts. There is no doubt that Valentina portrays a strong and attractive physique and that because of it, she works twice as hard to compensate the obstacle that being a pretty female in the police force entails. Certainly, this approach has generally been an overlooked area in literature, whereas it has been widely explored in other media such as film, television series, videogames and women's magazines.

On this theme, Leslie Jeffries conducted a critical discourse approach to analyze the language in women's magazines at the beginning of the twenty-first-century and how it contributes to the social construction of a perfect body conceived by patriarchal standards as well

as the impact it has on the self-image of their readers. Her feminist linguistics research demonstrates that it is difficult to resist such influence when female readers are constantly bombarded with the same bodily discourse, that is, that the culturally charged pressure to look good, to improve their looks and attractiveness to appease the male population is a patriarchal imperative that has become a naturalized process (Jeffries 4). Garrido and Abarca use and appropriate this idea, emphasizing *ad nauseum* Valentina's sexual appeal to either normalize and remind their audience that females can indeed be smart and beautiful or to disturb the readers by constantly reiterating her physical attributes and the male reaction they elicit to address the harmful ideology behind sexual representation and the absurdity of naturalizing such process.

Similarly, Sherrie Inness poses two important questions on the analysis of tough women narratives: "First, are they sex symbols developed primarily for a male audience? Second, how much is their power lessened by making them appear feminine and beautiful?" (9). Action-hero females in television series, comics and videogames are originally configured to appease a male audience, like for instance, Lara Croft. This process of oversexualization equally responds to the masculine need to control women's bodies, who then later internalize and naturalize those idealized bodies as it has been previously seen. Nevertheless, these female figures are standing on a precarious balance between physical prowess and sex-appeal; they have to be toned down so they do not emasculate men or endanger their (wrongly perceived) precarious social order. Contemporary action-(s)hero female figures prove that there is a direct connection between their inner and outer strengths, between their physical attributes and their physicality powers: "modern action heroines are transgressive characters not only because their toughness allows them to critique normative standards of femininity but because their coexistent sexuality [...] destabilizes the very concept of gender traits as mutually exclusive" (Brown 50). As such, Valentina

embodies a physically fit body capable of taking down male assailants without losing her most feminine and sensual attributes even when covered with comfortable jeans and t-shirts or even the dark blue police uniform.

One more aspect pertaining to all these female physical coordinates, is the delicate concept of age. Ageism is a biological, cultural and historical, inevitable part of humanity, yet it embodies a set of systematically negative stereotypes and attitudes that specifically target women instead of men in contemporary societies. Naturally aging women are constructed as socially and aesthetically undesirable; hence different types of media, especially magazines, and in particular US magazines, as Denise Lewis et al. prove, purposely choose to avoid portraying women over forty years old, including only a slim 2-9% of them despite the increasing number of older readership (101-104). This translates into the devaluation of women with age; if they want to stay relevant and have social value they have to betray and conquer their age. Mass media and society share a determining role into the idealization of women's bodies, forcing them to become ageless and as thin and flawless as possible; therefore creating a dissonance between these artificial ideals and the normal processes of aging (Lewis et al. 102). Probably this is a key factor and the reason why some older female detectives are never physically described beyond their age and their golden status as grandmother figures. Consequently, and based on this pre-established narrative of conventional tropes that create an adverse reaction toward the process of women's aging, it is quite possible why readership, regardless of the medium, prefers picture perfect women, physically fit and ever young since they are easily recognizable as well as the "standard" to aspire to.

Taking into consideration these concerns on women's ageism, physicality and their representation, the combination of Valentina's aesthetically pleasing features, her exuding

sexuality and her wardrobe choices throughout the series confer her certain idealized and, at the same time, siren like attributes. Her appearance and demeanor are, on one hand, the elusive and mythical stereotype that women worship, and they wish they could become. On the other, they become an enchanted song for sailors who gravitate around Valentina; heroes and villains alike fall under her charm. She exudes sensuality and sexuality through every pore, all nonchalantly without making an effort, and men are scalded, their feelings hurt and, in the case of the series' villains, they turn up dead, one way or another, at the hands of her *femme fatale* persona.

The Oxford Companion to Crime and Mystery Writing defines the *femme fatale* as “any woman whose presence reveals the vulnerability of a man to sexual charm and thereby threatens the stability of his world” (Reilly 155). The *femme fatale* character needs to be understood as an archetypal figure, a cultural byproduct that combines beauty and fatality, and whose aestheticism is but a male projection of the desirable, attractive, dangerous and evil notion of female beauty in a specific time and context (Voces Fernández and Bermúdez 87). Hence, *femme fatales* in early hard-boiled narratives embodied the male fear and anguish towards the imminent emancipation of women. Virginia M. Allen traces the origin of the *femme fatale* to “the dark half of the dualistic concept of the Eternal Feminine—the Mary/Eve dichotomy; that the evil force of this form was so intensified by artists and writers during the middle decades of the nineteenth century as to become a new image; that the image was so often repeated as to become a stereotype by the beginning of the twentieth century” (vii). Hence, artists and, by analogy, their audience, with every reproduction of Eve, Siren, Circe, Salome, Cleopatra or any other seductress were portraying the increasing sexual and political freedom of the New Woman and the fear it raised. Consequently, every woman who has deviated from the angel in the house figure, who revels in

her own eroticism, rejects docility and submissiveness, questions toxic masculinity and seeks independence from it, is both the heir and the embodiment of the *femme fatale*.

Scholarship agrees that Dashiell Hammett's female antagonistic character in *The Maltese Falcon* (1941), Brigid O'Shaughnessy, due to her body, her exuding sensuality and sexuality, her multiple fake names and identities, her association with criminals, her ability to lie, seduce and kill has been extolled as the epitome of the *femme fatale* figure in crime fiction. Her physical description appeals to men's desires from the beginning: "She was tall and pliantly slender, without angularity anywhere. Her body was erect and high-breasted, her legs long, her hand and feet narrow. She wore two shades of blue that had been selected because of her eyes. The hair curling from under her blue hat was darkly red, her full lips more brightly red. White teeth glistened in the crescent her timid smile made" (Hammett 1-2). The full package –sensual body, red hair and lips, carefully selected attire, toothpaste commercial smile– is carefully exploited to manipulate men and his actions, and when her subtle attempts fail, she chooses a more direct approach, utilizing her body as a man-eater weapon: "Can I buy you with my body?" (Hammett 48). Even at the end when she is forced to admit having killed Miles Archer, she tries to deploy the same tactics and appeals to Sam Spade's feelings for her and their (sexual) relationship to coax him into taking the fall for her: "If you loved me you'd need nothing more on that side" (Hammett 185). Hammett's, as well as Chandler's, female characters embrace all the stereotypes mentioned above of the *femme fatale* figure, thus becoming lethal shrews.

Hence, the coordinates of the *femme fatale* are based on beauty, sensual and sexual attractiveness, long hair, white skin and the desire to be looked at; her consequent objectification based on those aesthetic traits by a masculine figure and his patriarchal mindset turns her into the source and object of his sexual fantasies (Valero Valero 51). This archetype is by definition the

existence of a subversive female configuration since it does indeed favor a liberating speech and advocates for women's sexual freedom. In that sense, when female detectives like Valentina embody, purposely or not, similar physical attractive coordinates, have the ability and power to seduce male characters and refuse to conform to traditional roles, such as wives or abnegated mother figures, they are in fact assimilating some of the most obvious *femme fatale* attributes. Valentina intentionally uses her womanly attributes as weapons on certain occasions, although her mermaid features function as a natural snare for men without her even trying.

The subversive nature of Garrido and Abarca's narrative when it comes to Valentina's *femme fatale* traits is not found in the reproduction of a cultural and literary stereotype, but in her appropriation and reverse of motivation of the meaning of death by poison, a murderous method primarily used by women, more explicitly *femme fatales*, as it will be demonstrated in the following chapter. After her misfortunes and physical confrontations in Rome, in *Martyrium*, with Rajiva and her ultimate apprehension, Valentina was generously gifted one of Rajiva's venomous rings. This seems but a mere anecdote and is never mentioned again in the narrative, until she is drugged and kidnapped at the end of the same novel. Before assessing in depth her psychological and physical ordeal during that time relevant here is that Valentina manages once again to turn the tables and becomes her own savior by using Christie's preferred cause of death, poison, allegedly a woman's weapon. However, it is neither a conscious decision based on her cowardice nor a calculated move responding to her deviance or her *femme fatale* coordinates. Valentina uses indeed a *femme fatale* and antagonistic character's tool—the hidden poisoned needle inside of Rajiva's ring—to survive and fight against the evil shadow that has haunted the first two novels of the narrative and achieve a twisted sense of poetic justice when she finally kills Morgado:

Sin que en realidad comprendiera lo que iba a hacer pero llevada a ejecutarlo por una fuerza que la dominaba, casi inconsciente, su dedo pulgar se movió hacia el anular. Un pequeño dispositivo accionó una aguja invisible del extraño anillo que adornaba su mano derecha [...] la pequeña aguja se clavó en la piel del cuello de Christian Morgado, atravesándola, penetrando en la carne, en las venas.

(*Martyrium* 504)

This is neither the first nor the last time that Valentina murders a villain or antagonistic character. While the mission of the police is normally summarized under the “to serve and protect” slogan, physical defense and protection are useful tools inside and outside of the police force. Detective figures have to be capable of handling any possible threat by means of self-defense maneuvers or gun force. Women have learned to use firearms, whether phallic symbols and elements of masculine appropriation or not, as well as their bodies as weapons. Contemporary female detective figures have mastered both, placing a special emphasis on martial arts and combat tactics, and they have widely proven to have the physical power to take down and subdue anyone who poses a bodily threat to them. However, there is also a negative reaction to a violent female character. When a woman trespasses societal and moral codes appropriating a violent discourse perpetrated (and oftentimes lauded) by male roles, she creates a sense of discomfort. Patricia Yancey Martin makes an accurate remark on the relevance and pertinence of violence as a cultural resource only for men since “men’s use of violence is simply not condemned in the same way that women’s use of it is, even when women act in self-defense” (42). Society as a whole is afraid of violent women because the patriarchy has contextualized females as passive objects. The moment that objectified image is shattered and

women regain their agency they once again become *femme fatale* figures, and what is more, they become a source of fear.

Nevertheless, there is a distinct boundary between being violent characters and becoming female killers. Women who kill are what popular conception calls an aberration (Godsland, “mujeres” 151). This is founded not only on the fact that murder is not a feminine or a submissive attribute, but also on the aforementioned long trajectory of deviant and transgressive female figures.

Whereas there has been a sexualization in the portrayal of male serial killers who are constructed as vampire figures exuding evil, danger and deviant sexuality, female murders “are depicted as not women, bastardizations of women, or counterfeit women” (Picart 2).³² This configuration of women as monsters highly diverges from the statistics that prove women who kill are mainly avenged ones, and only do so when they have been threatened and their life is in danger. Analogously, if the killer in question is a female police officer –like Valentina– fulfilling her duties of serving and protecting others, or saving herself, one is compelled to question –if not reject outright– the possibility of categorizing her as a monster.

Valentina does not shy away from violence nor danger. Her gun is indeed an extension of her arm, although she resorts to it as the last option. Yet she does not hesitate or second guess her decision to use gun force. For instance, when the hitman Petrescu has kidnapped Lúa and has both her and her father at gunpoint, Valentina outsmarts everyone, gains the upper hand and takes charge:

³² Precisely, Picart’s research focuses on the analysis of Patty Jenkins’s movie *Monster* (2003) and its protagonist, real life serial killer Aileen Wuornos as a Frankensteinian monstrous figure. Instead of the alluring qualities imbued to male serial killers, Charlize Theron’s character is plagued with negative connotations, a lack of sexual appeal centered on an ugly and clumsy body, as well as a sense of orphanhood and loneliness of the social misfit and laboratorian creature.

Vi[o] al fin unos centímetros desprotegidos de la cabeza de Petrescu y entonces dejó de dirigir su comportamiento con su cerebro consciente. Años de entrenamiento y el arrojo demostrado desde que era una niña tomaron el control. Aunque todo ocurrió en décimas de segundo, su corazón no se aceleró. Se levantó con rapidez, sujetó la pistola con ambas manos, apuntó y apretó el gatillo, en un gesto interiorizado mil veces. Valentina disparó a matar. (*Crímenes* 579)

She is indeed an expert marks(wo)man; her records from the academy emphasize the pinpoint accuracy of said ability. But even after such a drastic measure to stop a criminal, after killing a human being on the spur of the moment, she acts completely collected and in control of herself. Unlike Kinsey, who did not know how to process nor how she felt after murdering a man, Valentina acts as if the whole ordeal had not fazed her at all. However, readers do not hold this cold and stoic attitude against her; she is not a murderous monster. Her actions, violence and murder are, like in any other narrative where good vanquishes evil, always justified and celebrated by her readers, as what they represent, poetic justice at the hands of a woman enforcer of the law against masculine entities.

Valentina's alliteration of sexual and erotic attributes, her venomous *femme fatale* ways and her tendency to disregard norms set the grounds for some questionable and toxic relationships. Her libido appears dormant after the trauma she experiences with the Chatterbox, but she demonstrates having a rather significant sexual appetite once she lets men into her life. Sanjuán is her main love interest, and they embark into a passionate one-night stand while in London that deviates from her normal good-girl behavior: "Valentina, aún jadeante, se preguntó qué demonios acababa de pasarle. No era un comportamiento propio de ella [...] Luego buscó con la vista el paquete de Winston del criminólogo. Aquello bien merecía un cigarrillo"

(*Crímenes* 482). After a couple of casual sexual encounters, several heartbreaks due to Sanjuán's insecurities and fear of commitment, their affair evolves into a sporadic and convenient yet tumultuous long-distance relationship. During their first time taking a break, either because of loneliness, sexual needs or just mere attention, Valentina starts unknowingly dating a serial killer, with the serious moral implications such relationship carries.

Following Rader and Rhineberger-Dunn's assessment on the typology of victims, already mentioned in the previous chapter, victims are not perceived as entirely innocent when they are involved in a (romantic) relationship with their abusers, and, what is more, if said abuser is configured as a rather sympathetic male figure, the victim actually becomes a manipulative and unreliable character (247). As it was discussed before, both Morgado and del Valle are constructed as wronged characters, males that were mistreated and abused in a familial or professional manner. That conception might perhaps incline readers to believe these masculine figures as victims of the circumstances or even victims of the patriarchy, as if that could give ground to any type of justification for their vexed and murderous behavior.

The fact that Valentina embarked herself in a romantic relationship with Morgado questions not only her victimhood status, her moral integrity and her vanity (based on the multiple and open sexual advances he made on her) but also the interrelation and interferences between her personal and private spheres. There are serious doubts casted on her professional persona since she fails to identify and profile Morgado as a sexual predator, pedophile and sadistic killer. Her training and expertise should have led her to doubt him since the beginning merely by his status as an expert on Pre-Raphaelite art. As the investigation progresses, every single element of Sanjuán's profile matches Morgado, yet Valentina is still unable to connect the points, even though she can also claim to know him in a more personal and intimate level.

One possible reading of this scenario can elicit a negative assessment of Valentina's professional background. After all, she is a lawyer and a criminologist, and also holds a master's degree on criminal psychology. A more traditional and misogynistic approach can defame females' professional acumen and their ability to do a man's job, exploiting Valentina's apparent defective training, or even alluding to the impossibility of a symbiosis between female physical attractiveness and intelligence. Another potential way to address this concern is essentially understanding Valentina as a character blinded by love (or by lust) that purposely avoids every potential red flag in her relationship since she has idealized Morgado as a perfect and available partner after being painfully rejected by Sanjuán. Perhaps, the most plausible explanation is that Valentina, besides being a highly qualified and professional police inspector, is ultimately a human being and, like everybody else, she is flawed. This configuration of the detective figure as an imperfect being who does not have all the answers, gets tricked and suffers, physically and mentally as a consequence sets the coordinates for a more believable character that goes beyond the literary realm.

An in-depth reading of the behavioral traits depicted throughout the series not only reveals the struggle to maintain a healthy amorous relationship while belonging to any branch of the armed forces, as it has been proven through the history of the genre –see Valentina, Annika or Caitlin's claims on the matter–, but it also uncovers some of the elements behind the myth(s) of romantic love. At the beginning of *Martyrium* there is a misleading sense of stability regarding Valentina's life: she seems more collected, and she has purchased a new apartment to live independently from her father and brother. She has even hired an interior designer, the move is in full process and she even takes two weeks of vacation time –something unthinkable for the workaholic Valentina. This is her coping mechanism to deal with Morgado's aftermath and the

disastrous developments of her relationship with Sanjuán: “no habla con Sanjuán desde hace tres semanas [...] Su relación había sido hasta la fecha un tiovivo, con encuentros llenos de pasión y luego silencios prolongados: Entre ellos había una gran complicidad, es cierto, pero a Valentina le creaba un profundo desasosiego la incapacidad de Sanjuán para aceptar un compromiso auténtico” (*Martyrium* 151).

Valentina sways between claiming to be an incorrigible spinster and wanting Sanjuán to fully commit, between rejecting the idea of marriage but also despising the loneliness and lack of personal accomplishments in her personal life: “Valentina lo echaba de menos y lo odiaba a partes iguales. Intentaba siempre anular cualquier tipo de sentimiento por aquel hombre de hielo que le había roto el corazón con sus idas y venidas” (*Martyrium* 342). What permeates from this admission is more than just her strength to be vulnerable and understand her weaknesses and frustrations, it goes beyond portraying herself as a relatable woman who, despite her qualifications, professional acumen and Hellenic beauty, still suffers from heartache and the obstacles of a long-distance relationship.

However, the most striking contribution of Valentina’s inner ramblings is her necessity and pursuit of self-love and sexual release. As a highly sexualized character who is oftentimes configured with *femme fatale* coordinates as it has been demonstrated already, the fact that she openly masturbates, fantasizing in the bathtub, as a way to cleanse her body from the memories and imprints of two men, the ones from her past with Sanjuán and those that belong to Bertolli at the cargo cabin, is in itself a deviant behavior, an act of rebellion against patriarchal definitions of female sexuality. This de-stigmatization of female masturbation serves as a way of reclaiming her female body while it also reveals that even though she defines herself as a member of the police force and gets involved on a deeper level with all her investigations, she cannot be in

“inspector mode” uninterruptedly. She needs a disconnect between her personal and professional persona, and when she feels overwhelmed with her own feelings and the sacrifices of searching for Marta, she turns to self-pleasure measures to distance herself from reality, “Durante un tiempo, Valentina Negro olvidó su tortura, su misión, el tormento de la espera, y se sumergió en mundos imaginarios que solo ella era capaz de alcanzar” (*Martyrium* 342).

Even though Valentina and Sanjuán close the third installment in the series with an apparent sense of stability and inner peace after experiencing several setbacks in their relationship, *El hombre de la máscara de espejos* is a novel that tests their boundaries and Valentina is on the receiving end of gendered violence and more psychological trauma. As such, those developments and their serious consequences merit a dedicated examination in the following section of this chapter. While the fourth and final installment brings to the forefront a new serial killer, the Ghost, and his plagiarism and literary crimes, the narrative also comes full circle and closes all previous unfinished professional and personal arcs. Mendiluce and the Hairdresser finally die as a consequence of their crimes, a certain sense of justice is established after all criminals in the series have been apprehended or vanquished, and Valentina seems finally to reach the stability in her romantic life sketched at the end of the previous novel. The latter is perhaps the most anticipated component of the series, the final outcome of Valentina’s love-hate relationship with Sanjuán. Their constant give-and-take has been the common denominator of the series on the personal front; they spend the vast majority of each novel trying to find their way to each other, only to encounter another obstacle that separates them once again. Besides Valentina’s emotional baggage and trauma, it is safe to assert that the main hindrance on their personal lives was Sanjuán inability to compromise and fully commit to their relationship. They managed to embark into a somewhat open relationship, more like an

agreement to keep in touch and see each other several times per year without assigning a label to their interactions; however, Sanjuán displays possessive behavior in an attempt to demarcate his territory, that is, Valentina's belonging to him –as if she were an object to be possessed and controlled– every single time he feels threatened by another man expressing interest over her. The first slivers of his jealousy appeared when Morgado openly flirted with Valentina in the first novel, proceeding until the last when he kissed Valentina to make Bernabé uncomfortable in *Los muertos viajan deprisa*.

The sexual tension between Valentina and Sanjuán and their torrid encounters respond to the first stages of a relationship where passion drives them both. Out of the basic types of love that Victoria Ferrer et al. mention, following Lee's typology,³³ their relationship can be, as in the vast majority of narratives exploring heterosexual relationships, categorized as Eros –passional or romantic love– due to the intense feelings, irresistible urges and a sense of intimacy that surround the relation (“concepto” 589). Nevertheless, the concept of romantic love proves to be a culturally and sociologically charged idea since it carries certain preconceived notions and myths. It predisposes dependence from the men and the understanding that love is the axis around which life moves for women. Statistically speaking, and as research like Ferrer et al.'s demonstrate, Eros predominates; in fact, according to the LAS questionnaire on attitudes about love, 80% of all the people interviewed, without distinction of age, gender, socioeconomic status, etc. showed their strong agreement with the tenets of romantic love, and 30% of them showed acceptance towards intense and possessive love, Manía (“concepto” 592). That is because

³³ Ferrer et al. mention six basic types of love in which an attitude (positive or negative), an emotion (feeling, passion and/or physiological reactions) and a behavior (such as taking care of the other and their needs) toward the other person predominate: the three primary colors –Eros or passional love, Ludus or ludic love, Storge or friendly love–, and the three secondary colors –Manía or obsessive love, Pragma or pragmatic love, and Ágape or altruistic love (589-590).

romantic love has long been the normative form of love, consequently, jealousy, the inequality between men and women, the tolerance towards abuse and the equivalence between love and life happiness are considered as truthful and natural outcomes of such love.

Thus, when Valentina is guided by this conception of the soulmate, she is disappointed when Sanjuán does not meet her expectations and leaves her alone due to his commitment issues. Yet, the excessive tolerance and the idea of doing better, to the point of pushing and straining herself, compel her to consent to their label-free agreement of phone calls and casual encounters on a friendly basis that can perhaps be considered Ludus. However, when other potential parties are involved, another myth comes into view: jealousy as a requisite for true love (Ferrer et al., “mitos” 8). This conviction, introduced and promoted by Christianity, leads people to accept and justify selfish behavioral tendencies, like Sanjuán’s reactions mentioned above. Finally, another myth that accompanies this misguided configuration of romantic love is that of omnipotence, namely the belief that love can overcome everything and anything, assuming that external obstacles should not interfere in the relationship and that everything is justifiable (“mitos” 9). According to this, Valentina and Sanjuán cannot and should not let their kidnapping and Valentina’s rape harm their relationship. Their love is considered enough to conquer any distress and trauma associated with that event: “Siguió cantando *Il bel sogno di Doretta* mientras se apretaba contra él. Sabía que aún le quedaba mucho camino por andar, pero por primera vez en mucho tiempo sintió que, por fin, en aquella misma bahía en donde había sido tan desgraciada una vez, podía atisbar un rayo de esperanza, una isla en medio de la tormenta que la había azotado sin piedad” (*Máscara* 540). Which, in turn, is a presupposition that equates love with a certain degree of suffering hence normalizing pain.

Whereas every single aspect of her relationship with Sanjuán seems an inconvenience and an obstacle to overcome, the prospect of a personal involvement with Bernabé comes with ease. Sanjuán is dominated by doubt and a lack of conviction, while Bernabé offers certainty and stability. As Velasco claims, “Es muy evidente, Valentina. Está colado. Hasta las trancas. Y no está nada mal, esa mirada intensa, esa barba de dos días..., es un tipo inteligente. Y está en forma. Además [...] tiene pinta de ser de los que se casan. Esos no abundan, inspectora” (*Muertos* 288). What is more, Bernabé belongs to the task force as well, as he works for the judicial police in Gijón as Chief Inspector of the Homicide Unit in Asturias and his ex-wife also has ties to law enforcement: she is a local police officer in Asturias with whom he maintains a healthy relationship and shares custody of two young daughters. Along with an imposing virile physique and his love for dogs –he has a greyhound– all in all, Bernabé has a stable and reliable combination of assets to offer. Valentina finally admits to having feelings for both of them, but Bernabé’s gunshot wound and posterior surgery seem to function as a wakeup call. By May the following year Valentina finds some closure and decides to move on, exploring what Bernabé has to offer. She notices Sanjuán’s absence at Velasco’s wedding and she still does not believe that happiness is anything but an ephemeral moment, yet she wonders what the future might bring, although Bernabé seems rather sure: “Tú y yo nos casaremos en la iglesia de San Pedro, en la playa de San Lorenzo” (*Muertos* 445). However, the narrative and the series finalize with an open ending, hinting to perhaps the possibility of revisiting this tumultuous romantic chapter in the future.

Policing from the Shadows: Rape Survivor, PTSD and Violence

Gendered violence and vicious punishments for deviant women are the underlying common denominator among female characters, regardless of their narratological status in the series. Violence is used as a way of destabilizing female protagonists and revoking their agency. Glenwood Irons mentions an important aspect of the female violence that permeates crime fiction: these woman detective narratives can not only depict, from a gendered and sociological perspective, the problems that females face in contemporary society, but they also become a sort of inoculation against all sorts of aggression females are forced to face (“Introduction” xii). That is, women deal with the same hardships that any other man on the job, as well as the inherent problems that come with being a female in a traditionally male dominated sphere and the consequences it brings into their personal lives. Put differently, in the struggle for survival, female officers unsurprisingly become givers and receivers of violence. Valentina doles out physical punishments, engages in hand-to-hand combat, and discharges her firearm, while she becomes the recipient of sexual violence, murder attempts, and of course, a wide array of beatings.

Rape becomes a terrorist and torture act, a crime of violence “committed by men against women, because the former consider it their right and because they assume that they can get away with it” (Molinaro 113). Even regardless of the penal code in place, the existence of rape culture is still prevalent in heteropatriarchal societies and cultures:

We live in a culture that is overly permissive where rape is concerned. While there are certainly many people who understand rape and the damage of rape, we also live in a time that necessitates the phrase “rape culture.” This phrase denotes a culture where we are inundated, in different ways, by the idea that male

aggression and violence toward women is acceptable and often inevitable. (Gay 129)

In fact, as the newspaper articles on rape, sexual assault and intimate partner violence mentioned in the previous chapter demonstrate, women are considered guilty of their own victimization status and men unequivocally elude the law and its consequences almost unscathed. Nina Molinaro further explains that the manner in which rape is described in a novel not only reifies the status of identity, gender, sexuality, social class, etc. in any given society but also can depict a feminist agenda, “by marking and remarking gender differentiation in terms of the sexualized violence that men direct towards women, a pattern that links the female detectives to the female victims” (108).

Women readers can certainly relate to the terrifying scenes of rape and violence; for instance, they do know the fear of walking the streets at night alone, like Valentina playing bait for the Chatterbox. The social criticism they receive for their bodies, clothing and sexual behaviors is also far too common, as well as the gendered violence they sometimes suffer alone while terrified of reporting their sexual partners. However, most often than not, narratives fail to show the aftermath of a sexual crime; corpses do not talk and victims are forgotten and rendered voiceless. Hence the importance of Valentina’s hardships, the description of her rape scenes, how she deals with the outcomes and how they affect her mental health and romantic relationships.

Valentina is groped, fondled and raped on several occasions throughout the series. The operation to lure out and seize the Chatterbox, a serial rapist in Vigo, is her first encounter. After being kidnapped and manually raped while partially naked with a knife to her throat, Valentina’s terror gives way to an overwhelming rage, which she acts upon when arresting her rapist.

Valentina exerts maximum physical force, even using mace to subdue him. Meanwhile, she demonstrates she can silence even the Chatterbox with her assertive discourse, nullifying his ability to carry out chauvinist and rapist acts using the same tools –violence and language– only better:

¿Y a ti qué te parece, imbécil? ¿Me vas a matar? ¿No te gustaba que se te resistieran las chicas, cabrón? [...] Me llamo Valentina. Inspectora Valentina Negro. Y sí, está claro que a mí también me «pone» que se me resistan los hijos de puta como tú [...] Otra cosa, cabronazo [...] A ver si aprendes a besar mejor. Eres realmente patético... Pero no te preocupes, siempre puedes practicar en la cárcel. (*Crímenes* 22)

The violence and the technical (manual) rape from this moment haunt Valentina during the first novel, to the point that she unconsciously keeps other men away from her. This is what Helena, Valentina's best friend, calls "el «mítico» tema Vigo." The Chatterbox's capture granted Valentina not just recognition among her peers evinced by receiving the Order of Merit, but also extols her as a (s)hero –a status that Valentina rejects since she only knows she almost did not make it out alive when facing the serial rapist. She also considers this violent act as the origin and the catalyst of her misfortunes –including her family's accident that happened shortly after. She hides behind the Vigo's mission and its aftermath to boycott every possible romantic relationship claiming she does not seek sex for sex's sake: "No voy a follar por ahí con un tío que no me interese lo más mínimo" (*Crímenes* 106).

Her second experience as a victim of (sexual) assault comes in *Martyrium* at the hands of Bertolli while being kidnapped at his cargo ship. Bertolli's attack is the aftershock of Valentina's miscalculations with Rajiva. Her naïve strategy to apprehend the Indian crime mastermind

backfires: Rajiva drugs, kidnaps and sells Valentina to the highest bidder, Prince Nayef, in Tripoli. The Mediterranean voyage grants captain Vasily Kruk and his crew free access to Valentina's body, and that is precisely Bertolli's intention, to use and abuse her without being held accountable. The cabin scene is equally brutal and disturbing; from threatening her with a knife and shredding her clothes to pieces, to her groping and physical assault and final chokehold that almost strangles Valentina: "La cara de Valentina estaba ya de color púrpura, a punto de perder el conocimiento, sus músculos dejaron de luchar. No podía respirar. No podía más" (*Martyrium* 239). When she was ready to give up, she is saved by Guido Barone, Vicecapo della Polizia Italiana and Rajiva's not-so-happy accomplice in crime, who shoots and kills Bertolli. This is one of the instances where Valentina needs saving. As a police officer she faces violence, oftentimes she is on the receiving end of physical blows, but her status as female doubles her risk of being targeted since she can also be, and she indeed is, the victim of sexual attacks.

This time around, besides the physical marks of the assault, Valentina does not allow herself to explore her feelings. She masturbates in the bathtub and forces herself to forget everything and everyone who is not Marta. The whole purpose of her travel to Rome is to rescue Rebeca's daughter. Everything she does there is equally illegal and an extraofficial assignment that Iturriaga knows nothing of; hence, her past experiences seem to have escalated her capacity to enact violence, which corresponds to her entirely more aggressive and physical treatment of Rajiva: "Me vas a decir donde está Marta, Rajiva. O te mataré. No tengo ningún inconveniente en volarte los sesos. Al revés... no soporto a la gente como tú" (*Martyrium* 218). She is enraged at the prospect of Mendiluce being set free at Marta's expense; she becomes careless, commits tactical mistakes and endangers both her own well-being and her career if her mishaps in Rome were to be discovered. But it is that anger and urgency, added to her previous trauma, which fuel

her to overcome this near death experience. Indeed her romantic misfortunes are part of this dangerous and reckless crusade. She is angry at the men in her life, she is mad at the man who took her mother's life and condemned her father to a wheelchair, at the Chatterbox for raping her, at Morgado for turning out to be a sadistic, psychopathic murderer, but more importantly, at Sanjuán for leaving her repeatedly. She pours (the energy) of that anger and frustration into saving Marta's life, redirecting all those feelings to drive her.

The third sexual assault also takes place during *Martyrium*, and in captivity as well, when Morgado drugs and rapes her. The psychopathic nature of this scene is a gothic nightmare brought to life, as Morgado records everything and makes Sanjuán his involuntary witness. Yet, despite the humiliating and brutal sexual assault, Valentina manages to be her own (s)hero once again. Her survival instinct manages to break through her drug-induced haze, to save Sanjuán from his impending death, ironically fulfilling the twisted fate of Lucia de Lammermoor that Morgado tried to emulate. This time, as the story closes, she has indeed finally killed Morgado, once again saving Sanjuán in the process.

In this occasion the consequences of her rape and her altered mental state are not addressed in any way, shape or form. The cliffhanger turns into another break up with the criminologist. It is obvious that Valentina and Sanjuán have a complicated and rather toxic relationship in which the lack of compromise and miscommunication play a great role; but in this case, there definitely remains certain unfinished business between the two of them, namely, Morgado. For Sanjuán to be a profiler and criminologist, he lacks the ability to see signs of Valentina's psychological trauma. Valentina is unaware of her own rape, her memories repressed for her own safety, and Sanjuán, witness of all of it, purposely chooses not to acknowledge her sexual assault because it is painful for him to remember it and visually revive it. In his

selfishness, he tries to engage in sexual intercourse with her, unaware of her inner turmoil until she is paralyzed, arms limp and unshed tears in her eyes.

No one in her work environment mentions explicitly the sexual violence she has encountered, twice already. They are either too blind to see or they prefer to bury their head in the sand about a well-known problem and not make it their responsibility. This appears to be the tendency whenever Valentina is put into a stressful situation; she does not receive psychological support after her sexual assaults nor after disfiguring her then boyfriend, Morgado, and not even after using deadly force while on the job. Whereas it is known that real life police officers involved in a shooting situation undergo an internal investigation with interviews, psychological evaluation and paid leave, Garrido and Abarca indeed detach and deviate from the realistic interworkings of the police profession. Consequently, tragedy ensues in the third installment.

El hombre de la máscara de espejos opens its narrative with the Hairdresser, a local serial rapist, and the havoc it generates. Andrea Mella is his third victim, and like the previous ones, she has been drugged, beaten and bruised. When Valentina arrives at the hospital and sees the state of the fifteen-year-old, something snaps inside of her. She fears for the girl and how close she come to being overdosed and killed, she feels her pain as she has experienced it herself first hand, including the drug-induced state: “en aquella etapa de su vida, no tenía paciencia [...] sintió como suyo el dolor de los padres, como un martillo viejo en su pecho, y salió de la UCI a grandes zancadas, presa de una impotencia que amenazaba con ahogarla. Conocía de primera mano los efectos de aquel tipo de sustancias y eso la espoleaba todavía más” (*Máscara* 24). She is frustrated that the monster is still at large, and she knows his thirst is increasing; he is going to prey, kidnap, drug, torture and rape more teenagers and next time maybe they will not be lucky enough to survive such an attack. She is upset with her own helplessness, and the fact that she

cannot interrogate any of the survivors, not even the first girl, Teresa; she is in a too fragile state of mind to provide or dissociate any details from her drug-hallucinated trips. But most of all, Valentina is furious that history is repeating itself and that other young females have to go through the horrible nightmare that still haunts her.

When the Hairdresser kidnaps and assaults his next victim, another defenseless teenager, Valentina hunts him down in the dark, separated from her back-up team. This is the first and only time she hesitates and does not shoot; she does not want to wound Vanessa. Hence, the Hairdresser attacks her and a bloody fight follows. All of Valentina's pent-up frustration at her own assaults, losses, failed relationships and trauma resurface with the beating she receives, translating into pure rage and anger. While the response can be intrinsically related to Valentina's configuration as a physically aggressive female, which in turn labels her as subversive, uncommon, unnatural or even a travesty, the reality is that women like her have always been aggressive and sexually deviant. The only difference is the lens; whereas they were controlled and hunted in the past, now they receive more territory in the space of representation. But in fact, they are merely more visible. Valentina then becomes a fallen angel, she seeks vindication not just for her, but for all the wronged females of the narrative. She becomes their own savior instead of trusting the judicial system. She loses control and violently attacks the Hairdresser:

Una patada de las botas técnicas impactó de lleno en los testículos del Peluquero, que cayó de nuevo al suelo, gritando de dolor. Valentina no pudo detenerse: al ver a Vanessa violada, golpeada, y casi muerta, una ira feroz, indomable, la poseyó de arriba abajo. Sus botas patearon el estómago, el cuello, las costillas de aquel hombre ya indefenso, hasta que solo la fuerza de Bodelón, apretándola contra su

pecho, consiguió sujetar toda la rabia que la había estado atenazando durante meses. (*Máscara* 45)

Valentina almost died during her encounter with the Hairdresser; the beating was brutal, and his handprints remain around her neck. She is well aware she overreacted and used unnecessary force to subdue an already beaten down man. Iturriaga ponders what he would have done in her shoes, and concedes he would have probably shot the man. He is proud of Valentina, and knows she is one of the best assets in his unit but even Iturriaga is forced to admit there is an entire masculine culture that dominates the police force, which cannot tolerate such a masculine behavior in a woman: “Valentina Negro era una mujer, y el mundo machista que atufaba la Policía estaba alborotado” (*Máscara* 68). Among the positive traits that research claims females bring to the police force, there is always a special emphasis placed on their communication skills and their ability to deescalate complicated situations without the use of physical force. Hence, their manners –less tyrannical and despotic than their male counterparts’– translate into less police brutality and, consequently, less lawsuits,³⁴ which is an implicit irony with regards to the lawsuit Valentina faces because of her excessive use of force.

As a result of internal affairs’ investigation, Valentina is suspended without pay. In her interrogation, Molist shows her full color printed copies of the Hairdresser’s extensive injuries – bruised face, edemas, broken teeth, jaw, and right cheekbone, also a wrist, two fingers and three broken ribs– to help Valentina process the consequences of her actions. Valentina is ashamed of her loss of control, of betraying her principles, and the social rejection it might produce since female violence, whether it is a one-time even or a personality trait, “generally results in their social exclusion, either in relation to the event or because of their exceptionality” (K. Kramer

³⁴ For further information on the matter see Wells and Alt’s chapter 6 entitled “Advantages Women Bring to Law Enforcement.”

17). This addresses the issue of who has the right to use socially approved and acceptable violence and who does not.

While an internal affairs prosecution seems like an extreme approach and such an action would have not been suggested had she been a male due to the masculine organization of the institution itself, there are other underlying reasons. The citizen security councilman, Villalobos, and the Hairdresser's lawyer, Brandáriz, are in fact the Man with the Mirror Mask and his accomplice; stopping and punishing Valentina is essential to their criminal activities. Hence they use to their advantage the chauvinist and patriarchal ways that still permeate the police force: "la violencia de las mujeres, cuando no ha sido simplemente ignorada u ocultada, ha sido vehicularizada mediante narrativas, mitos, imaginarios, estereotipos y arquetipos, relatos históricos, que reproducen y perpetúan la feminidad normativa y la subordinación de las mujeres, su libertad con condiciones" (Agra Romero 24). If they cannot silence Valentina and her behavior, they will try to subdue her, to make her aware of what they consider women's rightful position, until they will resort to obliterate her into her entirety.

The aftermath of the Hairdresser's ordeal forces Valentina to question not just her violent actions but her own life choices. She is thirty-four years old and even though she is fully devoted to her work, the driving force in her life, she feels alone, isolated and empty inside:

¿Qué vida le esperaba? Su carrera policial pendía de un hilo desde el día que pateó a aquel degenerado. No tenía ni novio, ni hijos..., nunca había pensado en fundar una familia, su trabajo estaba siempre antes y lo seguía estando. Sabía que era una mujer hermosa, así se lo habían dicho muchas veces. Pero ella, en aquel momento, no se veía así, solo veía una mujer sola y amargada. Miró sus moteados ojos grises, los pechos llenos, su vientre plano, sus piernas largas y musculadas a

base de deporte y ejercicio. ¿Para qué le servía ser hermosa? Muchas amigas eran mucho menos agraciadas y tenían una vida mucho más feliz. (*Máscara* 121)

Valentina seems to be experiencing an existential crisis, questioning everything she thought she knew and wanted, unaware that the vast majority of her psychological trauma comes from work related life-or-death situations, nor that the hitherto untreated repercussions are the main cause of her emotional distress.

She is forced to pursue psychological counseling only after her actions are faced with political, social and legal consequences. Overall there is a lack of psychological counselling among crime fiction narratives; very few cases, like Annika and Valentina, explore psychotherapy to help these inspectors deal with their mental health. There is a negative stigma associated with mental health problems and not even among their closest colleagues can they identify the precarity of their mental states after traumatic experiences. This situation hence highlights how Valentina fails to identify and verbally address how she feels, perhaps subconsciously afraid of what her male coworkers may think of her. This negligence becomes the catalyst for her outbreak. Hence, Caravaca, the psychologist assigned to Valentina, suggests hypnosis to help her untangle the mental block she has imposed on her own mind to cope with PTSD. This prognosis is not only accurate but also sheds a light, once again, on the lack of importance and negative stigma assigned to mental health. Initially, Valentina does not believe in attending her therapy sessions and proves to be highly skeptical of methods like hypnosis. Emphasizing mental health in an area like police work helps equate it to physical health. If her visible physical wounds need to be treated so she can recuperate and continue with her job, why refuse treatment for her mental scars?

Valentina, usted tiene un bloqueo importante fruto de una experiencia traumática. Su bloqueo proviene no solo del hecho de que esa experiencia fuese inducida artificialmente por las drogas, sino también de que usted misma no desea recordar absolutamente nada de lo ocurrido. Se siente culpable por varias razones, todas ellas resultan lógicas y comprensibles. Pero ese bloqueo hace que su mente no esté en paz, ni equilibrada. (*Máscara* 93)

This assessment is extremely pertinent not just to codify Valentina but also to connect her to all the victims in the narrative. As it was explored on the previous chapter, females were punished and considered guilty for not following patriarchal standards and for engaging in deviant sexual practices. Valentina is also a victim, and as such, she has embodied the same female guilt. She believes that what happened to her is her fault and that the best way to survive it is by omission, by blocking and hiding all of it. This process of indoctrination is a direct result of patriarchal social discourses. Taking into consideration the multiple cases of victimization, persecution and disbelief females face today when they choose to denounce the abuses and gendered violence they were subjected to, it is laudable that the authors chose to explore the topic within a highly masculine dominated institution. It depicts the complexity of recovering from such a traumatic experience, the concatenation of therapy sessions, the obstacles to regain the reins of one's own life, the importance of having a supportive environment, and the need for boundaries and assistance. Valentina receives help from her immediate surroundings, but it nevertheless is a flawed system. While it is obvious that something is wrong with Valentina's behavior no one seems to identify the signs and the psychological assistance provided is only a forced requisite to avoid firing her due to external pressure.

According to the American Psychiatric Association, there are common psychological patterns shared among women who have been assaulted, and consequently, depict Acute Stress Disorder or distressing symptoms of PTSD, such as reexperiencing the trauma in nightmares or intrusive thoughts, avoidance and numbing and/or an increased arousal state that results in insomnia or that elicits an exaggerated startled response (Ozer et al. 53). Emily Ozer et al.'s research also lists seven predictors of PTSD: (1) prior trauma, (2) prior psychological adjustment, (3) family history of psychopathology, (4) perceived life threat during the trauma, (5) posttrauma social support, (6) peritraumatic emotional responses and (7) peritraumatic dissociation; the last two being the strongest indicators. Valentina's behavior and history of psychological and physical trauma aligns with several of them, but most importantly, the lack of social support to overcome it is the determining factor. What is more, as Susan Meffert et al.'s study in police academy recruits shows, trait anger is a risk factor for PTSD symptoms and analogously, PTSD symptoms are associated with an increased state of anger which can possibly translate into a potential public health threat (415). Valentina's sessions with Caravaca bring to the surface her fear when she was in Rome, her own self-imposed responsibility to save Marta, her loneliness, her longing for Sanjuán, and her own guilt believing that her trauma, even though she barely remembers anything from that November night, is the reason why her relationship with Sanjuán crumbled.

Even though her psychotherapy and hypnosis sessions are conceived as a space that should guarantee her safety and well-being, Valentina is kidnapped and drugged one more time. Her captivity during *El hombre de la máscara de espejos* is even a more carefully crafted and executed process of torture than the previous ones, and she is forced, yet again, to undergo several changes to her appearance to fit another performance: a new set of clothes, make-up,

jewelry and hairstyle à la Louise Brooks. At an old abandoned theatre, with needles preventing her eyelids from closing, she suffers a different type of treatment: the viewing of the premiere to her own movie starring the Artist's night of horror. There seems to be a parallelism between these interweaved scenarios, almost a meta-poetic progression. While Valentina was drugged and her eyes were closed during her own rape, this time, the Man with the Mirror Mask insures that Valentina's eyes are forcefully open throughout her drug-induced state. The narrative creates a sort of symbolic (albeit horrific) arc that perhaps merits a deeper reflection: whether (visual) witnesses or not, the horror and trauma survivors are forced to endure and overcome are unimaginable yet impossible to deny. It is in this precise scenario when Valentina is fully aware of her affront and rape, the devastation and fear that transpire afterwards, but more importantly, her need to maintain her police identity. She holds to her own configuration as a fighter, as a trained agent, as a police(wo)man to fight back and survive. She is trapped in a park in Betanzos and chased through its labyrinth like an Ariadne in reverse, yet she never gave up; she fought her assailants and used every possible tool at her disposal to resist and survive. Despite her efforts against Villalobos and Brandáriz, she is buried alive in Bernhardt's (already known) coffin. Her coworkers, Bodelón and Velasco, along with Iturriaga embody a Theseus figure that follows the clues and evidence this time back into the labyrinth first and eliminating the evil minotaur later.

Despite this ordeal and her pre-existing PTSD, Valentina's condition improves instead of worsening. Her near death experience serves as a way of exorcising her inner demons, accept what was done to her and embrace her new coordinates as a survivor. Caravaca's report exonerates her from police brutality and Valentina is able to turn the narrative around; she removes herself from that victimhood position and finds a way to vindicate herself, punish oppressors and violators, while at the same time she becomes an avenger for females that

experience similar violence. She becomes the help and the cavalry, the perfect combination between authority, power and an imposing and daring female configuration to eclipse male and female counterparts alike. Even if Garrido and Abarca do not openly support a feminist agenda due to the lack of open self-identification as feminist by Valentina or any of the multiple female characters, the mere fact that the authors locate women's experiences at the forefront of the narrative is subversive and feminist indeed.

CHAPTER III

On Female Satellite Characters

“Nobody looks like what they really are on the inside. You don’t. I don’t. People are much more complicated than that. It’s true of everybody”
–Neil Gaiman, *The Ocean at the End of the Lane*

Introduction

Returning to the traditional triangular crime fiction schema, victim-sleuth-culprit, in which women had liminal positions, namely, victims, *femme fatales* and sidekicks to the detective, a journey through the history of the genre demonstrates the evolution female figures have undergone, culminating into current representations that may encompass every available character type from victims and villains to detectives and secondary characters in contemporary narratives. Nevertheless, the most prominent figures outside that triangular pattern are those of lower-ranking associates and, in fact, the collective consciousness by and large only tends to remember the masculine examples –Dr. John Watson, Bunter, Arthur Hastings or Archie Goodwin, to name but a few of the most recognizable personae– instead of their female counterparts. The sidekick’s configuration relies on their close association and subordination to their partners and their key role in the development and characterization of the detective (Bisbee 412). Precisely, characterization is a critical element not just for the detective-sidekick dynamic but also for the rest of human portrayal and the advancement of the action itself: “Together with straightforward description, characterization has also to be conveyed to the reader the nuances normally portrayed in the living by the homogenous subtleties of body language, speech, and style, and experienced by those in contact one with another” (Aird 61). As such, sidekicks for

instance are configured as competent and trusted confidants that expand the scope of a detective's search, balance the detective's peculiarities and quirks and either provide comic release or increase the tension of the narrative (Bisbee 412-413).

With the professionalization of the police force as a reliable institution, most often than not, detectives' lower-ranking associates were also police subordinates, which, as it was demonstrated in the previous chapter, allowed women an official space both in the task force and in the narrative. However, contemporary narratives, especially by female writers, have relegated masculine figures to subinspectors and subordinates to subvert the stereotypes of the genre and empower women. Nevertheless, the entirety of secondary characters in crime fiction does not rely merely on sidekicks; there are witnesses, persons of interest and false culprits, informants, other satellite individuals in the detecting world, journalists, family members and friends of the victim(s), villains and their partners in crime, to name but a few of the possibilities that orbit around the central narrative or crime. Despite the lack of scholarly research on the literary importance and configuration of secondary characters in (crime) fiction, all literary characters share a common denominator: their impossibility to exist in isolation. In literary texts the individual literary characters introduced never exist in isolation from one another; they form part of larger designs or patterns of interrelations, be they actantial, ideological or formal-decompositional. As a result, the literary characters are related to one another along certain semantic axes, or via formal groupings, and much information about each of them can be derived through these structural relations in a relative contrastive manner (Margolin 109).

Consequently, information on them and about each other can be elicited by their individual characteristics –actantial, physical, social and mental– and by the relations between these characters. Some of them can evoke sympathetic responses on readers –if they share an

empathetic engagement, goals or concern (Giovanelli 84), turning them into positive and supportive narratological figures; whereas others avoid emotional attachment altogether, preventing readers from being able to imagine relating with them due to their lack of complexity, likeability or ability to hold the readers' attention, turning said characters into either villains or one-dimensional characters (Maslej et al. 488). While it is true that all characters in a narrative cannot hold the same importance as the main protagonist, pivotal secondary characters that leave a lasting impression on readers stand out for individual personality traits that are exploited and dramatized without falling into a cliché, by their (1) individuality, (2) autonomy, (3) variability or capacity for change, (4) multifaceted quality or complexity, (5) nontransparency or (6) internally multilayered quality (Hirorito and Lamarre 86).

To explore the rather incomplete research into secondary characters further, it is pertinent to allude to Rachel Ballon's screenwriting guide to story structure and character development since she highlights some basic yet key elements worth extrapolating to (crime) fiction. Firstly, she alludes to the three evident categories for any character's biography: (1) the physical: she specifically mentions how physical traits are not arbitrary and how beautiful women are treated differently from unattractive ones, (2) the social: any trait that sets the character's place in society: education, work, family, politics, etc., and (3) the emotional: the layers protecting and covering what the real person inside hides (41-43). Secondly, although a tautology, it is obvious that without conflict a character does not have drive, desire or evolution; hence, if characters do not adhere to what Ballon calls the ESSED syndrome –individuals whose state of mind as desperate, complex characters can be described as distressed, obsessed, stresses and any other-essed adjectives– they should be excluded from the narrative if they are not there for advancing the plot or helping the main character's storyline (49, 55). Thirdly, pertaining to the psychology

of characters, she also asserts the importance of not being able to judge a person for appearance or behavior, but for the conflicts and feelings of everyday life: “To be alive is to feel! Feelings are the true barometer of who you really are” (68). Extrapolating these three factors to *Crímenes Exquisitos*, all secondary characters –but especially the female ones– are configured on the basis of the physical, the social and the emotional aforementioned categories, all of which motivate their actions and are the parameters by which they are heavily judged, chiefly for their looks and sexual behaviors. What is more, these female characters also: (1) present conflicting sides, (2) constantly overlap their paths with the protagonist’s and (3) complicate her relationships as well –which are the three main ways of adding dimension to secondary characters according to Donald Maass (55-57).

The most important trait of these secondary female characters in Garrido and Abarca’s series is their gravitational demeanor towards the main protagonist, hence why I have coined the term satellite characters to refer to these women who, one way or another, end up orbiting around Valentina’s personal and professional life. Their existence and narratological purpose cannot be fulfilled without Valentina’s existence, collaboration or even elimination. While they are characters who also pose questions about urgently relevant issues (such as human trafficking, prostitution, corruption and extortion) they also share victimological coordinates with Valentina and the victims *per se*, that is, the female corpses presented in the first chapter: attractiveness, professional acumen and sexually deviant behaviors. As such, the treatment of specific female concerns, namely the importance of aestheticism and ageism, sexual violence –assault, harassment and prostitution– and sexuality become key elements not just for the development of their own characters but also to understand Valentina and the victims’ situations and provide a sociological critique of women’s treatment in Spanish society. While it is true that not all the

satellite characters address all the aforementioned topics nor do they engage them in the same manner or in the same depth, in some cases, there is not a full exploration of how these characters feel after the abuse or deal with the aftermath, since they are secondary, hence less important characters. However, even though there is no time or space to explore their suffering in more detail due to their own foundational narratological configuration, their pain is more than palpable and it always manages to advance the main plot in the narrative. There seems to be an interesting parallelism here between Garrido and Abarca's evolving approach to their victims, which oscillates from a more humanized description of the victims by bestowing them with a proper background story to their complete anonymization as mere victims of opportunity, the world of missing women or the reinterpretation of a classical whodunit, and the development of their satellite characters. Not all of them receive the same attention or prominence, like the victims/corpses, some of them leave certain areas unexplored, others populate all novels in several storylines, while some characters appear only in one of the four installments. Precisely, this chapter examines the more prominent female satellite characters and their defining coordinates, hence it is divided into three main categories based on their relation to Valentina: antagonists, allies, and those who are either ambivalent to the protagonist or whose relationship to her is ambiguously portrayed.

Antagonistic Females

“you will always be fond of me. I represent to you all the sins you never had the courage to
commit”
–Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*

The previous chapters thorough analysis of Valentina and the victims have provided an ample set of masculine villain figures responsible for female torture and victimization. However,

the series also offers plenty of female characters who are deserving of the antagonistic label. Critical readings of these figures, named Raquel, Sara, Rajiva and Estela, respectively, demonstrate their role either in helping the male villains or advancing their own personal and professional agendas. Regardless of their motivation, they clash with Valentina's narrative arc as they attempt to obstruct her investigation, are jealous of her or, simply put, they want her dead.

Raquel Conde – Ambition Personified, Relentless Antagonism

Raquel is the only female figure in the series that doubles as a satellite character –as one of Valentina's first adversaries– and a deadly victim –she is one of the few secondary characters who is victimized and then killed. As such, the coordinates that constitute her victimhood as the Artist's last prey, already explored in the first chapter, coexist with some of her attributes that define her as an antagonistic female who orbits the villains and Valentina alike; namely, these are her sexual deviance and attractive physique. As has been demonstrated in the present analysis, the symbiosis between these two key factors is representative of the victimization of women throughout the series, and determines their likelihood of being sexually assaulted, tortured and killed for deviating from patriarchal established values of femininity; moreover, even if paradoxically, these are also principal criteria in the external validation of female characters by their peers that open pathways for professional advancement.

With regard to the depiction of Raquel's physical attributes, as it has been previously mentioned, Raquel is described in a highly sexualized manner.³⁵ Delving deeper into her physical characterization, there are several factors worth mentioning, yet the most prominent one is the correlation between beauty, frustrated male desire and violence as a result of the fact that

³⁵ A bombshell with blond platinum hair à la Jean Seberg that rejuvenates her several years, big blue eyes and an exquisite taste for expensive clothing (see chapter I).

all the female characters –regardless of their narratological status– are depicted as attractive. The first of those factors permeating from Raquel’s physical characterization is that she is the first and primary character who compulsively invests time and effort in assessing her appearance. Her hairstyle and her name brand clothing are described with assiduity to contribute to her carefully constructed image as a wealthy lawyer and self-proclaimed *femme fatale*. These coordinates prove indeed that Raquel is consumed by her appearance and age. She fears appearing old and constantly worries about the signs of aging; that she refers to her wrinkles euphemistically as "expression lines" exemplifies the extent to which she disavows the ageing process even in the language she uses to avoid acknowledge it directly. Even her attempt to avoid smoking is not because of her overall health or for the benefit of her lungs, but because she wants to ensure her face remains perfect, spotless. She even gets a new haircut, à la Jean Seberg, in an attempt to emulate her youthful appearance and invite comparisons with the actor.

Secondly and consequently, Raquel is the character through whom the series more clearly produces a critique on ageism. As explored in the second chapter, it is negatively charged with stigma and stereotypes, and reveals the overwhelming pressure for females to be socially and aesthetically desired. Hence the reason why women’s magazines, for instance, avoid portraying women over forty years old, as Lewis’s research demonstrated (191-104). What is more, previous studies on similar magazines, like Jeffries’s, also emphasized the role of the medium in promoting a cultural construction of what it means to have a perfect body, instilling the constant social pressure to look good and to appeal to the masculine eye. The media hence feeds this message to the female population that equates physical appearance with happiness and self-worth. According to pervasive ideologies of beauty perpetuated by dominant cultural discourses,

if women are not deemed to conform to these constructed paradigms they are not good enough, therefore they cannot be happy or be successful socially or professionally speaking.

As a result, this combination of ageism and physical appearance finds a prime target in Raquel who punishes herself, straining her body to fit the standards. In fact, to mention a few instances of such behavior, after quitting her smoking habit, Raquel seems focused on surpassing her own personal fitness achievements at the gym, she also mentions that she consciously avoided any pregnancies to prevent the disfiguration of her own body: “Para eso había evitado tener hijos en su momento. No quería ver su cuerpo deformado por la maternidad” (*Crímenes* 200). To contribute further to her quest for physical perfection, Raquel feels the need to make more permanent alterations to her body: “se aumentaría una talla de pecho más como premio. No estaba demasiado contenta con su talla ochenta y cinco. Quería una cien. Quería ser perfecta” (*Crímenes* 200). This obsession with her own body, her road to perfection and self-worth denote the imprint that social patriarchal standards leave in the female unconsciousness. As Breanne Fahs states: “Women do not choose to have their breasts enlarged without that action referencing cultural norms that value women’s large breasts and small bodies. An individual woman cannot ‘decide’ such things without accessing these reservoirs of cultural discourse about women, their bodies, and their sexualities” (12).

Raquel’s physical configuration as *femme fatale* is emphasized by her private and public behavior, that is, her deviant sexual life and the criminal record that accompanies her job history. As Mendiluce’s lawyer, she carries out some of his dirty work. One of the major scams mentioned in the novel pertains to the excavation at the Ártabra urbanization for a shopping mall parking lot. After discovering a Roman archeological site containing human remains, instead of stopping all construction efforts at once and reporting it to the pertinent authorities, Raquel

becomes the mastermind behind a full scale bribery scheme: “la inmobiliaria había untado a un técnico de Urbanismo y al director del Museo Arqueológico [...] Aún no había salido a la luz todo el dinero que le habían untado al concejal de turno. Los regalos. Los sobornos” (*Crímenes* 199). While all these economic measures are successful with government officials, professor Dorado from the History Department at Santiago de Compostela proves to be less susceptible to extortion as he files a legal complaint against SOTMEN, the real state agency in charge of the excavation. Raquel, in an effort to ensure that the entire ordeal does not go public, proceeds with more drastic measures: “Al profesor Dorado podían darle un pequeño aviso” (*Crímenes* 199). This warning translates into a threatening phone call from an unidentified male who can describe to the professor every minute detail about his life, as well as exhibit an alarming familiarity with personal/confidential information about his wife, daughter, and grandson. This in turn forces Dorado to reconsider his choice and withdraw his legal actions. This blatantly open threat implies that Raquel is willing to pursue all measures, bypassing ethical and moral considerations, not just to represent her client but also to achieve her own goals. What is more, at one point she is even thankful for the media coverage bestowed on Lidia’s kidnapping and murder since “gracias a ella, todo el jaleo de la supuesta corruptela había pasado bastante desapercibido” (*Crímenes* 201).

Raquel is proud of her hard-earned professional success, although she prizes monetary wealth above all, certainly over any intangible sense of personal achievement. As a lawyer, she refused to take cases that were not professionally expedient or monetarily lucrative such as advocating for low-income clients, lost causes or for battered women; rather, she only accepted cases that would propel her career and fulfill her desire to be a prestigious attorney and acquire material wealth. In fact, every aspect of Raquel’s life, as well as the physical descriptions of her

are accompanied by specific instances of the luxurious lifestyle she leads. Armani suits, Cartier watches, Carolina Herrera dresses, expensive dinners with oysters and French champagne, are but a few of those examples. Raquel is married to her job because of the material prosperity it affords her; she is happy while making (and spending) money. Yet, her ambition knows no limits. Apparently, it is not enough for her to conduct fraudulent transactions for ample monetarily compensation; she needs more, to the extent that she deems it appropriate to ally herself with Delgado behind Mendiluce's back to steal more than 60,000€ in dirty money from him. Whereas criminological data show that women have less opportunities to commit white collar crimes due to the limited access to top ranks of business, hence hindering their chances for involvement in price fixing conspiracies, financial fraud and corruption (Schwartz and Steffensmeier 63), sociological analyses denote a current trend of increased women's property crime, namely fraud, forgery, embezzlement and especially petty theft (Kimmel 271). Raquel's access to and obsession with money coincides with both patterns; she represents a synergy between that low percentage of the female population at the top of their professions, whose powerful positions and vast financial capital supply them with the means, motive, and opportunity to be lured into the tempting criminal possibilities of fraud and embezzlement.

She also conceives money as a means to an end. She wants to maintain her socioeconomic status as well as the reputation that comes with being a prominent lawyer, and in order to do so, she concocts another devious plan, as it was briefly mentioned in the first chapter, to dispose of Lúa once the journalist begins to cover Dorado's lawsuit: "Se me ocurre una cosa: unta de pelas a esos dos mataos de los vigilantes... que le saquen si tomó alguna foto. Que se la carguen de un tiro y la hagan desaparecer. Así tú no tienes las manos manchadas de sangre" (*Crímenes* 560). Even though she changes her mind afterwards, having Delgado hiring a

Romanian hitman to assassinate Lúa and orchestrate a copycat murder/performance imitating the Artist instead, Raquel is nevertheless fully invested in accomplishing her goals. Her level of commitment to money—her passport to tranquility as she calls it—does not waver: “Ella aspiraba realmente a tener mucho dinero y, con el tiempo, mucho poder. Como mucha gente, solo que ella tenía la honestidad de reconocerlo” (*Crímenes* 519).

This ambition and her quest for materiality as a source of happiness, accomplishment, well-being and self-worth is what initially drove Raquel away from Sanjuán, her first husband: “Aquella época había sido realmente divertida. Ella aún era una chica idealista y algo boba. Gracias a Dios la vida la había ido cambiando para mejor” (*Crímenes* 200). Even though she could have had a perfect marriage with him, she left him under the false pretenses of choosing her freedom over him and her desire to pursue her career as a lawyer, albeit Sanjuán never intended to halt those aspirations. In fact, Raquel was really focused on not becoming her mother, who she portrays as a failure, only securing mediocre employment to sustain the family; she concentrated on her own aspirations and acquiring a more profitable match: six months after her divorce, she associated with a major firm of lawyers in A Coruña and married a politician with higher prospects than the criminologist. In the wake of her professional ascent, Raquel accumulates one failed relationship after another; she is now a two-times divorcee. She seems to freely enjoy her sexuality even though the lack of love and romantic stability predominates in her life.

In fact, her coincidental reencounter in the early stages of the novel, briefly after Lidia’s death and the academic conference, with Sanjuán prompts her to reminisce on their past and engage in sexual intercourse once more while also lamenting their divorce, even if merely for social and economic reasons: “Tenía que haber seguido casada con él: al final se había hecho

muy famoso con aquello de la criminología. Nunca lo pensó. Menudo fallo” (*Crímenes* 200).

However, this twist of fate also serves as a prime opportunity for Raquel to antagonize Valentina, this time on the personal realm, not just on the criminal and legal sphere, as she senses the attraction between the inspector and her ex-husband and takes advantage of the situation by hinting at their torrid affair that very same week at the conference: “El otro día no estabas muy interesado en preguntarme por mi trabajo, Javier... ¿o no te acuerdas? Pasamos una noche muy divertida” (*Crímenes* 349). Raquel physically and rhetorically challenges Valentina. She has (ab)used and toyed with Sanjuán in the past, and she still has the ability to entangle him in her web of lies and seduction; her body language and her malicious discourse dare Valentina to take a stance and try to claim Sanjuán. Raquel is not just mocking Valentina by attacking the inspector’s jealousy and spoiling the sexual tension with Sanjuán, she taunts her at various levels, namely, from a professional point of view as the dutiful legal representative of the magnate, obstructing both passively and actively Valentina’s attempts to investigate Mendiluce for corruption, fraud, extortion and a long list of felonies. From a personal standpoint, destabilizing the imaginary scale that, from Raquel’s narcissistic perspective, turns Valentina into a less elegant, less wealthy, less ambitious and less threatening woman. This subtle and subjective assessment insinuates the never-ending stereotypical rivalry between females. Women are constantly trapped into this sexist competition in which they see each other as opponents who need to antagonize one another over men, physical attributes and sex appeal, professional status and overall personal achievements.

Taking this competitive nature into consideration, Raquel does come out ahead. She carefully plays her cards to obtain substantial advantage on all fronts: (1) she has conscientiously fashioned her physical appearance by means of cosmetic surgeries, extenuating exercise,

designer clothes and beauty tricks, (2) she has acquired fame and hefty economic compensation for her services as a lawyer, (3) she has managed to defraud her own boss, accumulating extra wealth to safeguard against all contingencies, (4) she has successfully navigated the turbulent waters of conjugal unions to reach a more advantageous and freeing status as a single woman, and (5) she has also managed to bend her male companions, namely Sanjuán and Delgado, to her will. Or so she thinks.

Her relationship with Delgado is, in principle, mutually beneficial from the start: they ally themselves to divert earnings from Mendiluce's illegal dealings to their own bank account while they also enjoy exploring their own sexual horizons. Raquel has already been configured within the narrative, based on her physical appearance and overall behavior, as an exuberant female who wishes for anything but the monotony of the mundane. Consequently, her sexual interactions with men, and with Delgado in particular, establish a repeated pattern of deviance. Her behavior proves that she would sleep with anyone who is available and keeps her entertained for a while; she is sexually aggressive and finds pleasure in nonconventional sexual practices, that is, in sexual tendencies that deviate from the heteronormative patriarchal conception of females as angelic, submissive and puritan figures. In fact, Delgado describes Raquel and her sexual persona as follows: "A aquella puta le gustaba mucho el sexo duro, y él estaba dispuesto a proporcionarle todo el repertorio de guarradas para tenerla bien satisfecha" (*Crímenes* 357).

Raquel's actions thus replicate the same deviation in terms of sexual (mis)conduct that each of the victims exhibit without exception throughout the entire series. As such, Raquel does not censure her own body to fit socially desired behaviors; she does not feel what Gail Wyatt et al. call sex guilt: "the degree to which women feel the need to control their sexual desires" (56). These coordinates are not only shared among the many victims, but they also emphasize the

demotion of traditional gender stereotypes promoted sociologically and historically in the country, questioning the legitimacy of this heteropatriarchal discourse and how it affects sexually aggressive women, at the same time they hint at the apparently inevitable consequences for females who do not display passive or uninterested attitudes when it pertains to sexual matters.

As a consequence, Raquel inevitably oscillates between both configurations, between a woman in charge of her own sexuality and a victimized one. She voluntarily engages in numerous sexual encounters with Delgado that arouse her even though she might have to experience certain discomfort or even pain:

Notó la incomodidad de su ropa interior, el tanga negro de puntillas, que no era precisamente como una braga de algodón. Pero era muy erótico. A él le gustaba mucho que usara tanga y liguero cuando salían de noche. Le gustaba también exhibirla por antros oscuros e incluso llevarla a casas de intercambio. Eso la volvía totalmente loca. Solo de pensar en ello podría mojarse. (*Crímenes* 218)

Regardless of how small this detail might be, just a pair of meaningless underwear, it is proof of how Raquel, as a sexually free and empowered woman, starts losing ground and surrenders part of her comfort and will to please her male counterpart and obtain sexual satisfaction. The lacy undergarments turn into more open and aggressive requests, such as violently force Raquel to undress in a car drive for everyone to see. This specific example enters the realm of voyeurism, a practice that can appeal to certain audiences and that has already been leveraged as a narrative device in the series with the victims and their ritualistic punishment –kidnap, rape, torture, death and artistic performance– to elicit an answer, whether positive or negative from the readers when forcing them to confront and position themselves on either side of the spectrum enjoying or condemning the gruesome collection of rape and murder scenes.

This concept of scopophilia and readers' interaction with the (sexual) violence depicted in the series merits an aside not just for being thought provoking but also for the important and consistent relevance it entails throughout the four novels with all the female characters who, one way or another, end victimized at some point in their narrative arcs. First of all, readers' relationship to these scenes can mimic Raquel and Delgado's behavior, falling into the realm of voyeuristic interactions, implying more participation on their end than just passively receiving these gruesome depictions as bystanders. In fact, the popularity of the series is an important factor here since it indicates that there is indeed a wide audience that consumes and enjoys the novels. *Crímenes Exquisitos* and its overarching posture towards questions of gender, sexuality and sexual violence presents a parallel between crime fiction reader pleasure (safe and socially accepted) and the voyeuristic pleasure of characters (socially deviant and deserving of punishment).

Regarding the active gaze of the male voyeur, Laura Mulvey applies a psychoanalytical approach to the visual pleasure of filmography to demonstrate how "the unconscious of patriarchal society has structured film form" and "controls images, erotic ways of looking and spectacle" (57). In her analysis of Hollywood style narrative cinema she highlights two main sources of visual pleasure: scopophilia and narcissism. The first, following Freud and taking other people as objects, subjecting them to a controlling and curious gaze, understands looking and being looked at as sources of pleasure, making film "a hermetically sealed world which unwinds magically, indifferent to the pleasure of the audience, producing for them a sense of separation and playing on their voyeuristic phantasy" (Mulvey 59-60). The latter, refers to the long love affair-dispair between image and self-image, which in film allows a temporary loss of ego while it simultaneously reinforces it: "curiosity and the wish to look intermingle with a

fascination with likeness and recognition: the human face, the human body, the relationship between human form and its surroundings, the visible presence of the person in the world” (Mulvey 60-61). The synergy between the two, the function of sexual instincts and the ego libido, is the active male gaze which projects its desires and fantasies unto the female body, whose imagery and aestheticism is fashioned accordingly. Although Mulvey focuses on narrative cinema –she specifically analyses Hitchcock’s *Vertigo*–, her research proves relevant to Garrido and Abarca’s series for the obvious references to Hitchcock in the novels and the visual narrative component that the series employs. As such, readers are presented with a narrative that allows a parallel between them and the serial killers, allowing them to both identify themselves with the killers and rejoice in the beauty, pain and art they extract out of the female bodies. Then, readers can identify and reflect on this enjoyment and its structural similarities to the voyeuristic enjoyment of characters they may have identified as deviant according to the masculine gaze. However, this parallelism proves to be more ironic and complex in nature. While it can be evident in the text, mass readership who might be more accustomed to readerly instead of writerly texts³⁶ and consider the enjoyment of contemporary literature a neutral exercise might fail to confront this inherent and ambivalent problem that Garrido and Abarca propose. Hence, enjoying and perpetuating or criticizing and condemning the configuration and behaviors of characters like Raquel (and the violence they are subjected to) becomes the most compelling concern of the series. This ambiguity can only be resolved through readers’ reception and interpretation in the role they play when configuring women through a patriarchal lens that requires specific coordinates for female aestheticism, behavior, sexuality and violence.

³⁶ Roland Barthes’s classification of texts. Readerly are those texts which require minimal effort on the reader’s part and writerly those text whose meaning and language are not automatically available forcing readers to embark on a more active and effortful reading. See Barthes’s *S/Z* (1970) for further information.

Returning to Raquel's deviance, the narrative shows that Raquel greatly enjoys the foreplay, dirty talk and unconventional requests that come with the rough sex and Delgado's sexual dominance. These instances align with Raquel's aforementioned life motto, that is, experiencing certain suffering in order to enjoy beauty, or in this case, sex. However, the evolution of their relationship raises some gender concerns when it trespasses established boundaries and violates consent:

bajo el agua, desnuda, con las manos atadas con unas esposas que le hacían daño. Sebastián la estaba obligando a hacerle una felación mientras estaba sumergida, costumbre que a ella le horrorizaba. Pero no se atrevía a protestar. Tampoco tenía muchas opciones: o se la chupaba o él la mantendría allí abajo con sus manos de hierro hasta que estuviese a punto de ahogarse. Ya se lo había hecho otra vez, el muy degenerado [...] Sin duda, a aquel hombre lo que le ponía de aquella situación era el control que ejercía sobre la vida y la muerte. O lo que fuera. A ella no le gustaba, era agobiante y claustrofóbico. (*Crímenes* 231-232)

Raquel did not agree to participate in this experience; she clearly exhibits aversion to it and she fears the retaliation from refusing to engage in this practice. Although perhaps unclear to Raquel, this encounter, her lack of consent and what Raquel perceives as Delgado's motivation fall indeed under the category of sexual assault: "Rape is a crime that combines sex and violence, that makes sex the weapon in an act of violence. It's less a crime of passion than a crime of power, less about love or lust than about conquest and contempt" (Kimmel 280-281). To make matters worse, this torturous experience turns also into visible physical violence; Raquel has multiple bruises and continues to be manhandled since Delgado enjoys when she resists, it arouses him even more. When she tries to refuse him, once again, Delgado places the blame on

her, “Ahora no te hagas la estrecha, Raquelita” (*Crímenes* 237). Instead of taking no for an answer, he proceeds with a stereotypical male response: he accuses the woman of being prudish, plus he adds the diminutive to hint at her being unreasonable. Until he achieves his goal: to excite her enough and, presumably, lead to another instance of non-consensual sexual intercourse.

This part of the narrative also alludes to two key sociological points of view that are encapsulated in the male-female dynamics between the two characters depicted here. Firstly, rape occurs in the context of gender inequality, that is, where male and their masculinity own and enjoy a more valued and dominant status over women and femininity (Feltey 324-325). The series has clearly stated whose gender prevails in Spanish society by exploring what little sexual freedom women can experience without suffering deadly consequences. Secondly, male entitlement creates an environment within which the following four common myths to conquer resistant partners can be propagated and flourish: (1) women enjoy forced sex, (2) victims provoke rape and sexual assault, (3) seductive clothing and/or behavior precipitate rape, and (4) rape victims do not suffer any real harm. Thereby, it increases the likelihood for men to commit acts of sexual violence, which becomes a self-perpetuating cycle that further engrains itself in ideologies of dominant masculinities over time. As such, Delgado clearly believes he is entitled to more sexual retribution from Raquel even after his wrongful and reprehensible behavior, to accomplish this he attributes all four tenets to Raquel’s demeanor throughout not just this encounter but their entire affair.

Raquel is in an abusive and dysfunctional nonexclusive relationship, yet she remains unaware of her own victimhood. She justifies sexually violent encounters, like the jacuzzi scene mentioned above, by classifying them as rough sex or by cataloguing Delgado as a depraved

man. However, she never admits to herself that she has certainly been raped on multiple occasions. While other survivors block the memories of similar traumatic experiences like this one because of PTSD—like Valentina—or due to guilt and/or shame, that is not the case with Raquel. Raquel’s inability to identify or react to what happened to her can be interpreted as either (1) the impossibility to recognize as a crime an acknowledged experience of sexual violence, (2) a consequent behavior of her internalized social label as a promiscuous and deviant woman or (3) a mixture between the two since both options are not necessarily parallel nor mutually exclusive. Her stigmatization as a horny, oversexed, promiscuous nymphomaniac –not to mention her coordinates as a fraudulent lawyer and as a vindictive jealous ex-wife– can lead readers to infer that rough sex and other “repertorio de guarradas” (*Crímenes* 357) are inherent to Raquel, hence she must enjoy and deserve such treatment.

Except, as is clear in the passage cited above, readers have access to her psychological turmoil as the experience unfolds. Readers are confronted with the reality that Delgado’s imposed violence is fundamentally different from previous experiences enjoyed by Raquel, even if violence was an aspect of them as well. The graphic and detailed exposition of these scenes and Raquel’s response to them seems to have the capacity to compel readers to perceive this difference, and owing to the intensity of these scenes, may feel compassion for Raquel, a character who had fostered little goodwill with readers to parse out the complexities of Raquel’s experiences and her agency within them, and come away with a greater acknowledgment that individuals transcend and transgress labels, can be powerful subjects and suffer objectification. Over the course of the series these considerations might dissolve the cognitive dissonance in readers and identify the overall response to the depiction of violence in the series as a

condemnation of abusive violence, as well as the ideological frameworks that police sexual normativity and cultivate cultures of masculinity that generate sexual violence.

What is more, this same characterization might possibly locate Raquel in an adverse situation disinclined to consciously acknowledge and report her assault due to the detriment her public persona could suffer as well as her professional credibility. Besides, Jody Clay-Warner and Callie Harbin Burt, citing Robin, affirm that, “rape victims were hesitant to report their victimization to the police because they feared both derogatory treatment by criminal justice officials and the invasion of privacy associated with rape trials” (152). Although it seems unlikely that Raquel being a lawyer herself who actively avoids taking on cases defending battered women could possibly consider pursuing legal venues for her (non)consensual intercourse with Delgado. The narrative leads to believe that Raquel does not believe in seeking justice based on that disregard towards sexual violence cases, perhaps because she is rather stricken with shame and guilt for ignoring so many victims with whom she now identifies. The consequences of proceeding in such a legal direction, that is, the public disclosure of her sexual assault, the detriment of her strong and powerful public persona and the dissolution of her sexual and professional partnership with Delgado, are furthermore in contradiction with the illegality and secrecy tenets she upholds when dealing with the judicial police.

Nevertheless, Raquel’s narrative shows another side of gendered violence different from the instances already explored in the series. Scholars have widely documented that sexual crimes tend to be underreported, and in fact, statistics prove that women are more likely to be assaulted by an acquaintance or an intimate partner, and in those cases, they are less likely to report such crimes to the police than if the assailant were a stranger (Clay-Warner and Harbin Burt 158). Most precisely, in Spain, according to the official data provided by the Spanish Institute of

Women in 2012, a year that coincides with the publication of the first installment in *Crímenes Exquisitos*, there were over five thousand reported cases of crimes against sexual freedom or indemnity –including, without numerical specification or percentages, sexual abuse, sexual assault, indecent exposure and prostitution– and that number rose to over six thousand crimes in 2016 (*mujeres* n.p.).

Taking into consideration the correlation between the increased numbers of –both reported and the unimaginable quantity of nonreported– sexual crimes, the amount of victims of gendered violence who, as current Spanish media and newspapers are regularly denouncing, reported their assailants on multiple occasions yet received no help from the pertinent authorities,³⁷ and the well documented yet unpunished cases of sexual assault already mentioned in the first chapter,³⁸ one cannot help but wonder the amount of sexual atrocities that are not being revealed or properly documented in contemporary Spanish society.

³⁷ One of the most recent instances on this front is a woman from Tenerife who had previously reported her abuser several times two weeks prior to her murder. The police labeled her case as low risk, did not grant her protection and merely recommended her to abandon the residence she shared with her abuser. For further information see https://www.lasexta.com/noticias/sociedad/la-justicia-archivo-la-denuncia-de-la-mujer-asesinada-por-considerarla-de-riesgo-bajo_201801215a64a7c30cf29cc1807332c1.html or https://www.elconfidencial.com/espana/2018-01-20/mujer-violencia-machista-tenerife-primera-victima-2018_1508846/.

³⁸ To expand some of the most notorious cases already presented in the first chapter it is pertinent to mention three specific incidents of gendered (sexual) violence: another herd, imitating La Manada, drugged and perpetrated a group aggression in Pamplona (see here https://elpais.com/sociedad/2019/04/20/actualidad/1555771938_792085.html), a National Police Officer murdered his own wife in Olot (see here <https://www.diariodenavarra.es/noticias/sucesos/2019/04/20/detenido-hombre-por-asesinato-pareja-olot-girona-647375-3204.html>), and one of the most recent documented cases to date, a woman was brutally sexually assaulted (broken arm, multiple bruises and laceration, ear torn apart) in La Rambla (see here <https://www.lavanguardia.com/sucesos/20190420/461735255755/mujer-pierde-oreja-salvaje-agresion-sexual-rambla-barcelona.html>).

Raquel's narrative arc precisely serves as a bridge to connect various types of sexual assault in the series with sociological concerns. As a satellite character and ultimately a victim, Raquel experiences a wide array of sexual violence, ranging from rough sex and a dubious set of (non)consensual sexual encounters to a brutally physical rape, strangulation and final death. Regardless of the fictitious and literary nature of this account, the novel succeeds in encapsulating (1) the reality of women's sexual experiences in which they were forced to perform a specific sexual act they did not consent to and obviously despised, (2) the possible outcomes of reporting such acts and even (3) the consequences of trying to offer resistance. There is also a parallelism worth mentioning between Raquel's history of sexual assault and Valentina's. Although both characters are dissimilar and operate within oppositional moral frameworks, they share certain sexual violence coordinates. While Valentina purposely avoided talking about "el «mítico» tema Vigo" and consequently evaded dating for an extended period of time, she acknowledged the facts, admitted to being raped and her future sexual actions were informed by that encounter, until she eventually pursues psychotherapy to overcome the PTSD resulting from her second rape. Raquel, on the other hand, represents the other extreme of a non-proactive approach towards her sex life by constantly engaging in sexual encounters with an abusive partner who is also involved in orgies, extortion, drug and human trafficking and even sex with a minor, to mention but a few of Delgado's crimes.

However, Raquel's configuration as an antagonist might devalue, to some readers, her personal experience with violence and its importance. In fact, following once more the already mentioned characterization of female victims established by Rader and Rhineberger-Dunn, Raquel would fall into the manipulative category (244). She is emotionally driven by economic motives, lacks a moral code and all her life accomplishments orbit around the same axis: to gain

more wealth and power, and to use those, in part, to reach physical perfection by altering her bodily image. Her physical attributes are, as it has already been mentioned, key factors in her configuration as a *femme fatale*, hence she uses her body and sex as tools to manipulate her ex-husband and, at the same time, instill jealousy in Valentina or to obstruct the detective's goals and investigation. Yet, her wealth and power fail to protect her in the intimate spaces she occupies with Delgado and her own body is used (and abused) against her. All these factors combined extoll Raquel as the quintessential *femme fatale* character who runs among villains, actively inserts herself in criminal activities, taints the hero-like masculine figures and constantly gravitates around the professional and personal life of the actual (s)hero of the series, Valentina. In fact, Raquel's mission is to continuously attempt to forbid Valentina from apprehending the criminal tandem Mendiluce-Delgado or starting a romantic relationship with Sanjuán. As such, Raquel's victimhood status as well as her fate, both as a satellite character and the Artist's victim, seem to be highly determined by and deserving of her questionable morals and life decisions, forcing, or at least orienting readers to dislike her character, to see her as a manipulative female instead of a real victim of masculinity and patriarchal desires, and perhaps, to reach a sense of catharsis when she meets the Artist's wicked ultimate justice and immortality.

If Raquel's death is truly conceived as cathartic, it implies that her villainous characterization in the narrative, namely her illegal activities alongside Mendiluce and/or Delgado, planning Lúa's murder and obstructing Valentina's investigation and personal affairs, becomes her most predominant quality. If her coordinates as a victim are obliterated by all those condemning behaviors, each example manages to build a case against Raquel in the way the narrative depicts her and ultimately to imbue her death with a sense of poetic justice and befitting punishment. However, if this is how we are to read Raquel, it is indeed a problematic posture

since readers cannot negate the possibility that Raquel's depiction might be less melodramatic (that is, wholly good or wholly evil) and more complex instead. The series sets up a major narrative arc for Raquel that culminates in her rape and murder, and it proves challenging since it forces readers to take pleasure in that because, relying on stereotypically masculine descriptions to highlight this double standard, she was shrewd in her business dealings, she had an alpha complex, was driven by financial prosperity, and engaged in promiscuous sexual behavior. Thus, Raquel's depiction is meant to be more difficult to impose a totalizing characterization upon due to the complicated set of influences and contingencies that condition her experiences and motivate her responses to them. Hence proving not only the difficulty of labeling victims according to the masculine gaze but also the necessity to reconsider one's position towards the ambivalence the narrative might present towards women's victimization and sexual violence.

Sara Rancaño – Raquel 2.0

The Artist's performances left an imprint not only on Valentina, who still suffered the psychological consequences of his aftermath in the subsequent novels, but also on her inner circle and A Coruña, whose collective mind remains haunted yet aroused by the morbidity of the crimes. His twisted art also created a domino effect for the main villain and his accomplices. When Delgado is murdered by del Valle, Mendiluce loses his right-hand man which translates into a lack of physical resources and manpower to continue with his criminal activities. But after Morgado murders Raquel, Mendiluce is also deprived of his lawyer, leaving him without a legal counselor to advise him on his new reality inside the walls of the Teixeira prison while awaiting his sentence. A rework of his infrastructure is needed to recover from the obstacles and

adversities in his wake. This is how Sara Rancaño enters the narrative, as Raquel's substitute, yet a new and improved version of the former lawyer.

Sara plays a key role in Mendiluce's masterplan to survive his new but temporary life in jail, manages to pull some strings and call some favors to insure Mendiluce receives the best possible treatment while behind bars, such as reallocating him to a different module to avoid a chicken pox outbreak or by changing cells for less mundane companions. However, Sara is not only in charge of his new accommodations, she is the pivotal member to execute his defense plan, which consists of extricating Mendiluce from jail by relying heavily on implicating Delgado as the sole mastermind behind all the crimes Mendiluce is accused of. While initially it might appear an ambitious plan, since readers as well as the police are aware of his illegal affairs, Sara masterfully redirects the narrative to try to persuade the court of Mendiluce's innocence by simply emphasizing his absence during those criminal activities. Since he always delegated his affairs to his subordinates, Sara takes advantage of those information gaps to Mendiluce's benefit and instead capitalizes on the overwhelming evidence against Delgado and Raquel, both negatively perceived characters, not only with regard to their criminality but also on the deviant and reproachable (sexual) behavior of their personal lives.

However, Sara's role and her dedication to Mendiluce's lawsuit do not end there. She also acts as the intermediary to facilitate Mendiluce's offensive plan, functioning as the liaison for communications between him and his major accomplice, Dolores Wells. By interceding for him the trail of communication between A Coruña and London becomes blurred and any negotiation, or in this case extortion, taking place cannot be tracked to Mendiluce. Thus, Sara threatens Dolores to offer her assistance or be exposed and prosecuted for her part in all the painting and human trafficking transactions she carried out for Mendiluce. As a result, Dolores

provides her own hitman, an Australian ex-military member, Patrick Doyle, to execute the rest of Mendiluce's plan of attack, which consists of blackmailing two of the judges, Márquez and Rebeca, to rule in his favor after the trial. While Márquez's extortion merely relies on threatening him with disclosing his homosexuality to his wife, kids and members of Opus Dei –a rather innocuous punishment since he is a man–, Doyle kidnaps Rebeca's daughter, Marta, and threatens to kill her to force her to comply with his requests.

Sara is both aware and complicit with this behavior and executes her part flawlessly, without leaving any trails for the police or journalists to follow. What is more, she does not have second thoughts about her actions, let alone Doyle's, nor does she feel enraged at the treatment these two women are about to receive because of Mendiluce. As the *femme fatale* she is, she does not have any type of female solidarity, in fact, she is extremely judgmental of Rebeca's fame as a renowned judge, of her beauty and her sexual life:

Es la jueza estrella en toda Galicia. Se hizo famosa hace unos dos años, en aquel juicio por narcotráfico en el que sacó a la luz toda la corrupción que había en los pequeños ayuntamientos de las Rías Bajas. No le tiembla la mano ante nada, es una dama de hierro [...] Rebeca no se casa con nadie. Vive para su carrera y para su hija. Pasa de los hombres. Solo los quiere para follárselos y luego, si te he visto no me acuerdo. (*Martyrium* 30-31)

With this judgment the most vicious and deviant aspects of Sara's personality start to surface. She is configured as an avaricious character who has no moral code and who will do everything and anything for money –regardless of the consequences, the illegality of her actions or the people she will destroy in the process. Similarly to Raquel's depiction in *Crímenes exquisitos*, Sara is conceived in negative terms by nearly all of the characters in the series, including her

own boss and accomplices. In fact, Griñán and Rebeca have nothing but scornful things to say about this “Menuda pájara de cuidado,” which prove further how she is configured as an upgraded version of Raquel, more capable and willing to demonstrate her alliance to villain figures, her abilities and benefit from them: “Vendería a su madre para ganar este caso. Es su oportunidad de demostrar a Mendiluce y a todos los de su calaña que es capaz de encontrar los suficientes agujeros en la ley como para que se escape un pez gordo. Pero ella es muy dura, créeme, no te lo va a poner fácil. Deja a la pobre Raquel Conde como una simple aficionada” (*Martyrium* 57-58).

Sara’s lack of empathy for other females grows along her responsibility in harming them and her implication in committing those crimes, which in turn distances her from Raquel and her delegating demeanor for more unpleasant tasks like assaulting Lúa. While Sara appears to have a more passive role in *Martyrium* –she prepares a legal defense and provides instructions for a kidnapping–, by the time she resurfaces as a less relevant satellite character in *Los muertos viajan deprisa*, she has taken a more active pose since she finally freed Mendiluce from jail and is now helping him accomplish his personal vendetta against Valentina. Her new agenda in fact consists of harming Valentina on various fronts: (1) undoing her hard work, demonstrating Mendiluce’s “innocence” through legal loopholes to secure his release from prison, (2) providing facial surgery, a new life and identity for the Hairdresser after Mendiluce stages his escape, and (3) motivating the Hairdresser to repay Mendiluce by raping and killing both Marta and Valentina. Sara does not seem to care about the implications of such decisions or about the brutal treatment fellow women are about to endure; she is willing to use Marta once again as a bargaining chip for her boss and this time also encouraging the Hairdresser to assault a police inspector. It appears that, by the time the series reaches its last installment, Sara has reached her

maximum potential as *femme fatale* and antagonistic character, cold and cruel, ready to take and give orders for the right price. Even the Hairdresser can see how she has devolved into this vicious persona: “esa hermosa mujer tenía un corazón de hielo en una funda aterciopelada y una mente fría como una espada” (*Muertos* 30).

Whereas it is true that Sara largely disappears from the third novel and reenters the narrative, as mentioned above, as a less prominent character, her brief scenes demonstrate how she has been corrupted by her own ambition and perversion. Sara was only motivated by monetary reasons; her greed perverted her from a young age, and like Raquel, she only wanted to leave behind a life of mediocrity and reach a better socioeconomical status as fast as possible at any price:

ella lo que más quería en la vida era dejar atrás el olor a viejo y a pobreza de su aldea natal y los alientos fétidos de alcohol barato y tabaco de los chicos que buscaban meterle mano en cuanto empezó a ser una mujer. No, ella quería sentir el tacto suave de la seda acariciando su piel y la comodidad de los muebles de importación. Y follar con hombres que olían a perfume caro después de una cena deliciosa. (*Martyrium* 149)

While both Raquel and Sara enjoy expensive dinners, name brand clothing and other luxuries, Raquel ultimately craved power, making this another crucial qualitative change between the configuration of the two women besides the already mentioned evil motivation and implication when committing crimes. Sara perceives her job as a means to an end; she understands that being the best lawyer for a corrupted individual such as Mendiluce guarantees her own distancing from her former, younger and poorer self, following the same train of thought as Raquel. However, Sara is not obsessed with power and control like Raquel was, she is neither ambitious nor she

commits crimes on her own. She just wants an opulent life filled with delicacies and expensive sex with multiple rich and/or dangerous men, such as Loredana or Doyle, as the narrative proves.

These two elements are intrinsically tied to her sexual coordinates as a *femme fatale*. She is described as an extremely attractive brunette with brown eyes and, like Raquel, she is so vain that she carefully selects all her garments to accentuate her curves so the male population will constantly stare at her while she emulates the wardrobes worn on the best lawyer-based television series: pencil skirts, designer high heels, Armani suits, pantyhose embroidered with silver, etc. She is in fact called “una hembra diez, vestida, como siempre, de *femme fatale* provinciana” (*Muertos* 155). She also alters her daily attire for a more puritan ensemble, “un vestido negro de cuello blanco y unas perlas blancas” (*Martyrium* 27), on a particular occasion for specific purposes: hiding the sexual attraction she feels towards Doyle.

Sara’s sexual tendencies and impulses are intrinsically tied to her need to better her past life and enjoy luxuries and sex. She deploys the same strategy that she criticizes in Rebeca: using men for sex to leave them later when bored or satisfied. Apparently, her deviant behavior is well known among her circle, even to Mendiluce who is (often) compelled to remind her of the repercussions of mixing work and pleasure, even to the point of forbidding her from establishing a sexual relationship with Dolores’s assassin: “Pedro le había prohibido terminantemente que intimase con él. *Sea quien sea el que venga será un tipo peligroso, Sara. Muy peligroso. Ojo con él. Que nos conocemos [...]* Tenía que confesar que aquel tipo la ponía muy cachonda” (*Martyrium* 27). As it can be expected, Sara refuses to follow orders, even from her boss, about her sexual life, and after a quick glance at Doyle, she deems him “un ejemplar digno de ser cabalgado en el mismo baño del aeropuerto” (*Martyrium* 25). However, their first encounter turns violent when Doyle almost strangles her with a napkin to establish his dominance over her:

“Ni una palabra a nadie, escúchame, a nadie, de que estoy yo en esta ciudad. O te mataré [...] Cuando te llame, vendrás. Si necesito algo, lo harás sin preguntas [...] Y ahora, levántate, desabróchate el vestido y quítatelo” (*Martyrium* 29). This sexual rendezvous acts almost as a replica of the most recognizable assault between Delgado with Raquel since Doyle and Sara follow the same vicious pattern of sexual violence deployed before. His attempt to asphyxiate her, the brutal sex without foreplay or former preparation horrify yet arouse Sara at the same time: “Todo aquello primero confundió pero luego, despertó en un instante las ansias salvajes de Sara, que empezó a desnudar al hombre con la urgencia de una gata en celo, dispuesta a borrar la cercanía de la muerte” (*Martyrium* 29).

While Sara embarks on this “relationship” just for the mere sexual pleasure of the exchange (as part of her way of enjoying life and distancing from her past) and it is never explored further or mentioned again, there is only one brief mention of another affair. She started a casual fling with a married Italian lawyer, Massimo Loredana, a couple of years prior, on the same premises but the affair had become complicated for reasons related to their participation in a money laundering scheme for Mendiluce. Aside from those two mentions, Sara’s sexual life is not analyzed in detail and no further sexual scenes are provided even though her reputation precedes her. Moreover, her last sexual exchange depicted in the series occurs in the last novel with neither of her former lovers but her boss, hence serving as a way of closing the vicious and depraved cycle that surrounds Mendiluce’s criminal behavior. In fact, *Crímenes Exquisitos* started because of Mendiluce’s crimes, not just with this drug, human trafficking and the rest of illegal activities, but also, and more specifically, for destroying Morgado’s art career and disgracing his own son by abusing his mother and then repudiating him, hence forcing the two to seek revenge. This mistreatment towards women, as it has already been proven, evolves

throughout the narrative until it turns against Sara, his loyal servant, regardless of the help she has provided to ensure his revenge against Valentina for causing his debacle. He initially valued Sara for being a bigger shark than Raquel when handling his criminal affairs, but has lost all respect for her when he sexually abuses Sara in front of a small audience:

Antes respetaba a Sara Rancaño y la trataba como lo que era, su abogada; ahora la mancillaba y la vejaba como si culpase en ella a todas las mujeres por su propia miseria. Como si el indulto le diese carta blanca para hacer todo lo que siempre había querido, sus más bajos instintos sueltos maniobrando a la vez como si fuera el rey en un estanque de pirañas que borboteaba sangre. (*Muertos* 415)

Sara has never been more humiliated than in that moment; she despises Mendiluce and how he treats her, to the extent that she promises herself that one day she will kill him for vexing her. This reaction, being scandalized now that she has become the target of such an assault, seems rather hypocritical since it did not phase her in the past when her whole mission as an antagonist character was based on providing men with the necessary means to rape and kill other women. This shows her lack of female solidarity once again and prompts readers to distrust and dislike her persona even when she becomes a victim, perhaps considering her sexual assault as poetic justice as with Raquel's end. However, that simplistic interpretation proved rather superficial with Raquel and in Sara's situation also appears to be unsatisfactory. This time, somehow, suffering in her own skin the sickening unwanted sexual advances that Sara has helped to perpetrate manage to create an inflection point for her; she regrets her role in feeding Mendiluce's inner monster: "Ella, que había contribuido a que ese degenerado participara en todo eso, se arrepentía con el dolor que da beber de su propio veneno. Por vez primera en mucho tiempo, sintió algo parecido al arrepentimiento" (*Muertos* 427). One could expect Sara to act on

this new revelation and perhaps try to redeem herself by aiding Marta or Valentina, yet she remains immobile while Mendiluce's men violently rip Marta's clothes and molest her. She only laughs at the Hairdresser when he realizes he has fallen in love with Marta and rebels against Mendiluce's own men when they try to rape her, which in turn causes Sara to be physically assaulted by the Hairdresser for mocking his ironic vulnerability. This is how Sara exits the narrative –bloodied and with a broken nose–, she is not even granted a proper closure for her narrative arc nor a sadist artistic performance to immortalize her like Raquel or the rest of the Artist's victims. Instead, she is left to oblivion as if her deeds –along with her own persona– were better off forgotten by the readers.

In fact, Sara is configured as a rather irrelevant character in the sense that her narratological purpose is to fill the void left by Raquel. They share, more or less, the same coordinates –lawyer to the villain, sexual promiscuity, excess and luxury– yet as a replacement of Raquel, Sara is quite forgettable since she does not add much to the overall narrative and her personality and personal goals are not radically different or memorable. She is a necessary tool to insure Mendiluce's revenge but nothing more, the series could have continued without her or with a different character taking her place. This is perhaps why, even though Sara begins to awaken to Mendiluce's villainy and seems to repent of her actions (although not enough to confront him), the narrative diminishes her importance in the closing events of the series, does not grant her full closure, a redeeming or properly explained ending. Readers do not know what happens to her after Mendiluce and the Hairdresser are killed, she is never mentioned perhaps implying that no one seems to care about her. This interpretation entails that Sara only mattered to the readers and had worth for the villains in the series when she could do damage to the rest of the female characters as a lawyer. Once both Mendiluce and the Hairdresser are removed from

the main plot, Sara loses all appeal since her professional expertise is no longer needed and no one in the novel seems to remember her enough to signal greater narrative importance or a more discerning message to her ending –or lack thereof.

Rajiva – An Ambassador's Secret Life

Rajiva's inclusion in the narrative symbolizes a shift away from the two former antagonistic characters. Whereas Raquel and Sara were perhaps victims of their own successes, namely, their greed for power and money, respectively, Rajiva enters the criminal world out of pure boredom. As the daughter of Indian ambassadors and spouse to another ambassador in Rome as well, she already has the power and socioeconomic status –money, name brand clothing, jewelry and other luxuries– which both Raquel and Sara successfully aspired to attain. Yet, all the material benefits that come with her inherited economically-comfortable position cannot hide the fatalism of her lack of power over the conditions of her own reality. Even though she is cultured having studied technology in New Delhi and she could have earned some autonomy through her career, her life was carefully arranged since birth by her parents, hence forbidding her the possibility of controlling her own destiny:

con el destino fijado desde el día en que nació, el aburrimiento la había convertido en una mujer casi marchita a sus treinta años [...] tras casarse agradeció que su viejo marido fuese designado embajador en Roma. Por lo menos allí su vida no se vería confinada al tedio absoluto. Más adelante, ya integrada en la vida en la capital, buscó su destino lejos de la alcoba de su decrepito esposo, al que detestaba profundamente en silencio. Pero casarse era la única vía que había

encontrado para escapar. Y su familia tampoco le había dejado mucho margen.

(*Martyrium* 206)

Wherefore, meeting Guido Barone, Vicecapo della Polizia Italiana, translates into a juncture in Rajiva's boring life. He embodies the promised land, a new world full of opportunities to explore her long-repressed –and wild– inner self. Barone not only sees in Rajiva her spectacular body, ebony hair and Hindu features, he also recognizes and exploits her perversity and intelligence, traits that grant her a front row seat at his center of dirty operations. In fact, her position at the Indian embassy in Rome presents the perfect cover for her double life. First of all, as the wife of an international diplomat she projects an image of a life of legality, diplomacy and, in theory, a corruption free zone. Secondly, the diplomatic immunity that comes with it allows Rajiva to discreetly proceed with Barone's human and drug trafficking activities, thus becoming his right-hand (wo)man since she knows that even if something goes wrong, she will be able to walk away free, in theory. However, her latest reckless actions might indeed hamper the extent of such luxury as Barone states: "Piensa, estúpida. ¿Cuánto te iba a durar tu inmunidad diplomática si salieran a relucir algunas de las cosas que has hecho de un tiempo a esta parte?" (*Martyrium* 281).

The first glimpses of Rajiva's real occupation are through Enzo, his lost packet of drugs and the money he owes her. Readers can already see her penchant for managing people, as well as her ability to make the most of a bad situation. As a way of recovering a return on her investments, she forces Enzo to deliver her a different type of package, his Spanish girlfriend Marta. Rajiva has no qualms about using Marta for her own benefit; she exerts her as a chance to amplify her profit margin from the original transaction. She kidnaps and drugs Marta to then arrange an auction among her powerful masculine connections for her virginity with a starting

bid of 60,000€. For Rajiva to be a woman who was rendered powerless at the hands of a strict traditional society (and family) in which she was controlled and objectified merely for her status as woman, she surely displays no remorse for subjecting other females to even worse oppressive and coercive measures. Rajiva has indeed internalized and therefore reproduces gendered (sexual) violence towards women. She is so comfortable and accustomed to these practices that she masters the ins and outs of this deviant trafficking world: she lures her potential buyers, arouses them with a sneak peek of the young virgin –she even allows them to touch the victim, or merchandise as she prefers to call them– finally to rally them all into a bidding war, to become the highest bidder, in this case half a million euros, to rape Marta. Rajiva manages to carry out this entire preamble while wearing a dominatrix outfit –black tight latex suit with high heeled boots– to play her role as a *femme fatale*, enticing men in a deviant world dominated by sex. Rajiva indeed exploits her coordinates, deploying all the already explored aesthetic and psychological traits of those deviant figures configured as alluring *femme fatales*.

However, as the series progresses, so do its antagonistic female characters. Whereas Raquel and Sara had, to a certain extent, a less prominent role in some of their criminal behaviors, for instance, they never physically harmed any women with their own hands, Rajiva takes a more active role than the lawyers and gets personally and directly involved with the well-being and torture of two female characters. She is willing to go to further lengths than Raquel and Sara to achieve her goals and, although her new life started as a way to combat boredom, what Rajiva ultimately wants in her life is adventure, to the point that she becomes addicted to the thrill of leading a double life and committing numerous crimes for a lucrative price. Her thirst grows exponentially, always leaving her wanting more, climactically leading her to betray the hand that feeds her. This hunger for more causes her to make rushed decisions, acquiring new

victims, like Marta or Valentina, that have not been properly vetted, hence creating more problems instead of fixing existing ones. By not researching Marta's background her auction is irretrievably doomed –she has intercepted Doyle's package for Mendiluce's revenge plans. As such, not only Doyle crashes her party, he also kidnaps Marta costing Rajiva half a million euros. This is the first step to set Barone against Rajiva for her inability to see the bigger picture and her disregard of caution; she has become more independent and temerarious, which makes Barone question both her loyalty and the convenience of working with her. By not investigating Valentina and proceeding to drug, kidnap and sell her to prince Nayef, as compensation for losing Marta and not being able to return the money she cost him, she not only blames Barone for her own derailed actions, but also forces his hand to amend her mistakes: “La he vendido para pagarle al príncipe Nayef. Ya que tú no me has ayudado, me he buscado la vida de alguna forma” (*Martyrium* 237), She crossed the line in so far as Valentina is a Spanish police inspector and it is not in Barone's best interest, as an Italian representative and enforcer of the law, to have the Spanish police force meddling with his illegal activities.

Rajiva's lack of planning suggests that she has come unhinged; she has lost total control of her actions, blindly driven by the sense of risk, adventure and winning at whichever game she is playing. However, this frenzied behavior seems to be amplified by her sexual drive. It is perhaps expected to assume, based on her Indian background and (maybe arranged) loveless marriage to an older man, that her sexual life is somewhat nonexistent –in the sense of lacking diversity, passion or even pleasure. Consequently, if proven right, this hypothesis suggests that this sense of absence might have come to a temporary end after Barone's arrival and their subsequent affair. Yet, it does not translate into full satisfaction; Rajiva needs more and is always seeking potential candidates to quench her thirst. She fantasizes about having rough intercourse

with Doyle even though he held her at gunpoint, gagged her and stole Marta from her: “No pudo evitar considerarlo atractivo, como cuando lo vio por primera vez tras la subasta. Recordó su voz: tenía un leve acento australiano. La hindú fantaseó un momento con cómo matarlo mientras follaba con él de forma salvaje” (*Martyrium* 205-206). Until she finally relinquishes the restraints that have somehow restrained her desire when the right opportunity arises, in this case, perhaps because of the thrill of knowing that she is willfully disobeying Barone’s way of doing business when arranging Valentina’s safekeeping and transportation for prince Nayef in a cargo ship to Tripoli. The captain, Vasily Kruk, has been on Rajiva’s sexual radar for a long time, and he even admits to having noticed Rajiva’s sensual stance but never dared to act upon it until she aggressively takes charge: “Siempre había sentido una atracción salvaje por aquel ruso de semblante de piedra. Pero decidió que esa noche iba a liberar sus emociones más básicas. Ya no era capaz de controlarse, ni tampoco quería” (*Martyrium* 234-235).

Their forceful sexual intercourse at the dock, on the hood of her limousine is witnessed by four different men, namely, her chauffeur Hires, Bertolli, Enzo and Barone, producing a wide variety of reactions from embarrassment and lust to seeking a hiding place and rage, respectively. Barone is furious at Rajiva’s promiscuous antics, not just from the already mentioned complications that she brings to his illegal business deals or for not consulting him before making decisions, but for cheating on him with such a loathsome character: “Barone la fulminó con odio cerval. Aquella puta le había puesto los cuernos con un cabrón desgraciado, no se lo iba a perdonar nunca. No es que la amara, pero no le gustaba compartir a sus mujeres, y menos con un tipo como aquel” (*Martyrium* 238), which is both a presumptuous entitlement and an irony in itself since Rajiva does not “belong” to him; she is already cheating on her husband

by having an affair with Barone, so he should not be offended nor surprised by her deviance and promiscuity.

Barone's attitude towards his associate changes drastically; he starts to see under all the layers the real Rajiva, the *femme fatale* who would sell him out if necessary: "Todo lo que le había fascinado de Rajiva estaba desvaneciéndose en el aire. Su salvajismo, su descaró, la perspicacia a la hora de meterse hasta el fondo en los negocios sin la menor sombra de duda o arrepentimiento se estaba volviendo contra ella misma, y por ende, contra él" (*Martyrium* 282). Therefore, he starts to manhandle and order her around. But his poor attempt at controlling Rajiva backfires and she becomes more daring and devises her own ambitious plan to satisfy Nayef, avoid retribution, retrieve Marta, kill Doyle and prove Barone wrong. She allies with the prince by promising him (1) Marta's body –and her virginity– for not just one night but forever, (2) Doyle as payback for assaulting and humiliating him and (3) herself. She becomes his own personal provider of sexual experiences, she continuously reproduces her dominatrix role with her cosplays –cut out camisole, black velvet high heeled boots and whip– by physically punishing a prostitute roleplaying as a British high-schooler for his personal satisfaction, and she even prostitutes herself by allowing certain behaviors, such as having a threesome with both of them:

Había descubierto que la mejor forma de contentar al sátrapa era convertirse en su aliada sexual. Y había descubierto también que lo que el príncipe le había propuesto le resultaba muy agradable: «torturar» a una joven reclutada en una casa de lenocinio «especial». Luego tendría que follárselos a los dos, pero puestos en materia, poco importaba. Había llegado la hora de experimentar nuevas cosas. (*Martyrium* 391)

Rajiva could have easily escaped the entire ordeal by following Barone's instructions from the beginning or by fleeing back to her home country claiming her diplomatic immunity, except that she is so engrossed in this underworld that she would rather explore it to its full extent, even if that means expanding her sexual boundaries or compromising the last slivers of what the very ideologies that police women's sexuality would call her moral integrity or the sanctity of her body. Rajiva is the first and only female character that willingly surrenders herself –soul and vessel– to suffer and supposedly enjoy sexual “violence.” She agrees to be sexualized and for her body to be used and abused as long as it is a means to fulfill her end, all in all, to prove that she can outsmart everybody and achieve everything she desires. Nevertheless, despite her twisted thinking, her devious ways or her ability to bribe even Barone's trusted personnel to locate Doyle and Marta, she fails. She did not calculate all the variables. She could not predict that in a triangular confrontation, Valentina-Doyle-Rajiva, to find and keep Marta, Doyle would choose to side with Valentina, the (s)hero of the narrative, to save her and also ensure Marta's safekeeping. Hence, he murders Rajiva, stabbing her in the dorsal spine with a hunting knife, as if she were a wild animal that needed to be quickly and mercifully sacrificed: “sus piernas le fallaron. Era como si hubiesen quitado el suelo bajo sus pies. Sintió un hielo helado, indoloro, que le atravesaba la columna, y supo en ese instante que estaba muerta, que aquel cabrón la había matado” (*Martyrium* 450).

Perhaps, what is most striking about Rajiva's narrative arc, and ultimately, her death, is on the one hand, the sharp contrast between her fast and painless death and Raquel's agony and painfully artistic ending –or even Sara's future humiliation and descent into oblivion. On the other, the irony of the death itself and Rajiva's inability to use her own weapons, those venomous rings that she has displayed and used to her advantage throughout the novel. These

pieces of jewelry that have a mechanism that activates hidden needles filled with poison inevitably link her with some of the most idiosyncratic *femme fatale* attributes already explored in the previous chapters. But, it is death by poison perhaps the most intentional and distinct behavior historically, sociologically and fictionally associated to the collective of *femme fatale* figures, hence meriting a small aside here.

Rumor has it that poison has been, historically, mythologically and fictionally speaking, a woman's preferred murder method. From Medea, Lamia, and Circe, to Biblical Eve as the poisoner of Adam and mankind, to Cleopatra, to classical crime fiction and more recent fantasy narratives like Diana Gabaldon's *Outlander* (1991-) or George R.R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* (1996-) series, poison killings are more often than not the chosen female weapon that fills the pages. The Pre-Raphaelite undertones of Garrido and Abarca's crime series have already been explored in the first chapter pertaining to female victims and now, once again, are pertinent as a Victorian weapon. Cheryl Blake Price on her extensive research on poison in Victorian literature emphasizes the obsession and attraction Pre-Raphaelite artists felt towards the complex psyches of mythological women like Medea or Circe (22).³⁹ Price further explains this assertion by linking Victorian society, tradition and literature, and thus, emphasizes the already patent myth of females as poisoners:

The Victorians inherited a literary tradition that linked poison and women. Indeed, in the nineteenth-century perhaps the most feared (and most sensationalized) criminal was the female poisoner. From the mid-century trial of Madeleine Smith to Florence Maybrick's 1889 conviction for murder, the

³⁹ Blake Price refers to two John William Waterhouse's paintings, *Circe Offering the Cup to Odysseus* (1891) and *Jason and Medea* (1907), to exemplify this synergy between myth, femininity and poison.

Victorian press was dominated by a succession of women accused of murder by poison. (22)

From a practical perspective, women used poison for its accessibility in the household, the lack of strength and brutality needed to implement it, “and, most importantly, it was in keeping with the cultural perception of women’s deceptive natures” (Price 85). Women were believed to be associated with poison to use it as murderous weapon as part of their seductive, deviant and depraved nature should they divert from the strict societal roles assigned to them.

The presence of poison in the genre dates back to early detective works, but quite possibly, Agatha Christie is the crime fiction writer that most often uses poison as a weapon of choice: she penned more than thirty deaths by poison. Among the substances she frequently used one can find strychnine, cyanide, digitalis, morphine, arsenic, thallium, belladonna and physostigmine. While it is true that real life and literature have provided innumerable examples of murder by poison since the dawn of humanity, the obsession with poison as a weapon is attributed to Victorian England. Due to the several advances and new technology of the period, chemical crimes proliferated in historical and literary accounts. They required extensive knowledge, familiarity with the scientific literature and attention to detail. That is, poison killers were extremely smart individuals.

From a contemporary sociological approach, based on the Federal Bureau of Investigation’s Supplemental Homicide Report Data from 1999 to 2012, Dan Keating tests this assumption of poison as a female weapon by contrasting it with real information collected in the United States. The results corroborated that poison as a murder weapon is not only more popular among females than men (seven times more likely) but also that it is a weapon for white females, either between their thirties and fifties or over fifty years old. They use it to kill victims under

twelve years old and/or over fifty-one years old, and they always share a personal or intimate connection with the victim, normally daughters, sons, and friends, in said order (Keating n.p.).

Based on this analysis, murder by poison has been exploited as the perfect *modus operandus* for deviant, coward and *femme fatale* figures in literature; and Rajiva, to some extent, fits this behavioral pattern. The narrative mentions several times her special venomous rings. Even though the poison contained within is never described, it is safe to assume that it is not a local substance easily found in a kitchen since Rajiva is definitely not portrayed as a female who would know the ins and outs of neither cuisine nor cleaning supplies or other house related activities that could grant her access to potentially poisonous items. Instead, it is conceived as a rather exotic ingredient, similar to the curare mentioned in the previous novel between del Valle and Mendiluce's face-off, quite possibly from her home country India, hence adding to Rajiva's aura of exoticism.

Another assumption substantiated by the amount of times she uses or tries to use these rings lies in the high probability of Rajiva possessing several rings with very different poisons that produce diverse effects, from just drugging or rendering her opponents unconscious to actually causing death, which at the same time is a sign of the Victorian belief of women's natural abilities for deception. Whereas Rajiva makes a conscious effort to protect herself against the multiple enemies that her secret affairs gained her, she never has the chance to use her most lethal ring, just one of the milder versions to drug and kidnap Valentina. It is actually Valentina who, as analyzed in the previous chapter, uses Rajiva's most venomous weapon, gifted by Barone, to end the Artist's reign of terror. The ring finally fulfills its mission, offering protection against a dangerous and depraved man who tortures and murders women, but robs Rajiva of that honor.

It also proves further how everything and everyone in the series orbits around Valentina. Rajiva is a pivotal character in *Martyrium* to the extent that all plots and narrative arcs – Mendiluce, Marta, Valentina and even the Artist’s– coalesce in her persona and actions. She also deploys another side of sexual deviance that had not been explored before, that is, a woman orchestrating sexual trafficking rings and prostituting herself willingly to achieve her goals. Both approaches antagonize with Valentina as both a motherly figure to Marta and a police inspector against prostitution and human trafficking. However, there are parts of Rajiva’s life that remain completely unmapped since they prove irrelevant to the advancement of the narrative and do not add to the antagonizing process against Valentina. The most prominent ones are (1) her ambassador life; her duties, responsibilities and agenda are never mentioned and (2) the aftermath of her death; the narrative does not share with its readers what happens to Rajiva’s body after Doyle kills her or how the death of such a prominent foreign ambassador shakes the city of Rome, her family or her husband. This posture reiterates the elision of certain key aspects of satellite characters, oftentimes leaving some narrative arcs incomplete and/or forgotten, as long as Valentina’s story moves forward to address her more pressing concerns.

Estela Brown – The Ice Queen Writer

As the series advances and comes to an end, the amount of female antagonistic characters descends; there are no major ones in *El hombre de la máscara de espejos* and Sara is the only one who remains alive to be able to return in the last installment. Additionally, the various tropes and coordinates exhibited by these three antagonistic satellite characters collide in Estela’s persona. Like the rest of the female characters in the series, Estela is configured as an extremely attractive woman with the ability to sire male’s attention: “Su sonrisa perfecta, su cabello sedoso

y rubio, casi blanco, su capacidad para convencer a los medios de la calidad de su escritura con una simple mirada de profunda seriedad. Aquella mujer tenía duende” (*Muertos* 36). Moreover, part of her beauty and sex appeal, like Raquel or Sara’s, is carefully crafted to create an illusion, not just to conceal her real age but to manipulate her image to portray a likeable person: “La extraordinaria belleza de Estela, producto de unos rasgos cuidadosamente rectificadas por un sabio maquillaje, pero basada sobre todo en unos ojos azules profundos, una boca delineada de modo perfecto y, en fin, un aire lánguido que le confería fragilidad y un innegable atractivo, a pesar de que sin duda ya pasaba de los cuarenta” (*Muertos* 220).

However, unlike the rest of the *femme fatales* of the series who donned garments according to their deviant personalities and sexual behaviors, Estela deviates from this pattern choosing to mask her *femme fatale* coordinates instead. Perhaps, this decision is due, in part, to her age; she is the first female openly described as over forty years old. She opts for a natural make-up to combat ageism and accentuate the “Ice Queen” writer alter ego that she has consciously created over the years. This consists of her natural platinum blond hair and alabaster skin, which she combines with classic attires, pearl earrings, Hermès perfume or Loewe shawls in the hot summer weather. As a consequence, she is perceived as “una mujer muy apetecible, con un cuerpo hermoso, elegante como una actriz de cine clásico y sumamente inteligente y cultivada. Muchos hombres podrían amarla sin fisuras” (*Muertos* 222). These calculated choices make her indeed a desirable woman, but as her fellow writer, and former lover, Toni Izaguirre asseverates, they also aid her deceitful configuration as a delicate British rose, a description that serves as a metaphor for Estela’s apparent frailty and perhaps the ephemeral state of her beauty. All in all, her appearance, decorum, elegance and sense of perfection make her the epitome of a puritan lady. She carries herself as a cold and sophisticated somewhat (falsely) frigid woman

who pretends to be superior, above everyone else since she deems her fellow writers as unworthy. This know-it-all attitude couples with the mysterious halo she keeps around her persona; few people know any personal details about her life. Nevertheless, her figure as a mysterious, poised and well-mannered writer starts to shatter upon closer inspection.

She is self-defined as cold, cunning and unscrupulous, traits that start to surface with her most defining quality: she is a consummate liar. One of her most basic lies is linked to the core of her identity; her actual name is Carmen Pallares. Estela Brown is but the pseudonym, the façade from which she hides and that accompanies the aforementioned alter ego she has created over the years. Carmen was originally trained as a philologist and practiced as a teacher for a while until she quit her job and her efforts to obtain a secure teaching position at high school level through the national entrance exams. What Carmen truly desired was to write full-time and, like Raquel and Sara, to escape a past that due to its geographical and socioeconomical coordinates had become oppressing: “Carmen siempre había querido irse de aquí, medrar, el sitio le quedaba pequeño. Era una chica con mucho talento. Y le gustaban los hombres con dinero, no iba a quedarse dando clases en un instituto, necesitaba algo más. Y eso que los padres no eran precisamente pobres” (*Muertos* 326). She had, and still has, delusions of grandeur. As Estela, she earned reputation, prestige and success as a crime fiction writer with her thriller trilogy led by the blind detective Miguel Román, yet still she needed more. She wants to disassociate herself from her previous work and create something entirely different but better. In order to do so, she actively seeks other sources of inspiration and, analogously other victims to prey on. She has no desire to keep toying with Izaguirre, he does not provide her with anything meaningful in any realm, therefore she turns to Enrique Cabanas, a fellow writer and ex-convict, to seek for her literary muses and a new sex partner. Estela masterfully uses Cabanas to feel safe when the

Ghost strikes again and murders everyone in Estela's inner circle, but she also takes advantage of him sexually. Like the *femme fatale* that she is, Estela subtly flirts with Cabanas, even though he has a girlfriend at the time, to lure him into her web to convince him that his new short-term mission in life is to fulfil her every wish. Moreover, during one of their sexual encounters she ties and blindfolds him to the hotel bed while playing a dominatrix role enhancing her most controlling nature and whose main purpose is to obtain sexual satisfaction for herself by dominating Cabanas and using his body as a sex toy:

Se subió sobre él y ella misma se penetró [...] La mujer comenzó a masturbarse mientras se movía con lentitud sobre él, gimiendo de placer [...] Estela comenzó a correrse, primero con un gemido quedo, luego más alto y más fuerte, usando a Cabanas como un juguete sexual. Él intentó mantener el intenso placer con frialdad, pero los movimientos secos y bruscos del clímax y los gemidos de Estela solo conseguían que su orgasmo fuese cada vez más poderoso e inminente. Al fin, vencido, notando cómo la vagina de la mujer se estremecía sobre su pene, se dejó ir, corriéndose dentro de ella en una explosión que lo dejó noqueado. (*Muertos* 107)

Estela repeats the same dominant tactics when she needs to be comforted sexually. She deploys her most sinful undergarments to grab his attention and exploit their sexual connection to escape from reality and her ominous fate, even if just for a while:

Estela llena sus pupilas por completo. Lleva una ropa interior imposible, recargada y llena de puntillas y botones delicados bajo un picardías de color nácar, transparente. Ella se acerca, recién perfumada, descalza, coge la ropa de sus manos y bebe mirándole a los ojos [...] Estoy en peligro, o quizá no... Ahora

te lo contaré, pero tengo miedo... Por favor, quítame por unos minutos esa preocupación... te lo suplico. (*Muertos* 284)

As the dead bodies pile up and the Ghost leaves clues that hint to Estela's implication in the crimes, she lies *ad nauseum* to Valentina and her team impeding the course of the investigation. While her lying tactics work wonders among the masculine population, Valentina sees through her *femme fatale* ruses. Her affected gestures, wild gesticulations and carefully planned theatrical expressions are revealing for Valentina who sees them as examples of the false image, studied and rehearsed to perfection, to deceive everyone.

The initial motivation for Estela to hide her true reactions under a variety of affected poses is her desire to maintain appearances. She is concerned to the extreme about her public persona and what others might think of her if she does not behave according to her orchestrated coordinates as a bestselling crime fiction writer: “¿Una escritora célebre de novela negra huyendo asustada como un conejo cuando se tropieza con un crimen real?” (*Muertos* 47). In reality, what starts to permeate here is her fear of being discovered, of her lies resurfacing and being labeled as the fraud that she is. Upon closer reading, Estela demonstrates her inability to supply/proffer any compliments or say anything remotely considerate about the Ghost's victims. She proves to be a highly opinionated woman, extremely jealous of other people who might steal her spotlight. For instance, after Cecilia was violently tortured and killed Estela cannot seem to eradicate her own jealousy towards her. She considers Cecilia an arriviste and despises both her persona and her work: “aquella zorra barata, que había publicado dos libros llenos de casquería y vísceras, repugnantes, solo alabados por los críticos que, en realidad, lo que querían era follársela” (*Muertos* 47). Estela holds too much resentment towards their past history and the love triangle between both of them and Andrade, but is also too proud and her personal and

professional egos are hurt. She does not want others to offer any sort of competition for her, but especially, she does not want men to admire other women, like Cecilia, for their bodies or their literature production. She wants to be the center of attention at all times, at all costs, which is an extremely ironic attitude since Estela's behavioral patterns replicate, to an extent, Cecilia's plagiarism and sexual deviance.

Estela is not only a *femme fatale* who manipulates men for her own benefit but she also is a praying mantis, in the sense that she lures men with sex, she absorbs what she needs from them and when they have fulfilled their mission, she discards them by destroying them or sending them to their deaths. This assessment is proven as the plot thickens and a connection is established between all the victims, namely, Cecilia, Sauce, Izaguirre, as well as Andrade and Estela. It turns out that their common denominator lies in their past friendship which was interweaved with ambition, plagiarism, jealousy and sexual affairs. The two main love triangles, Andrade-Cecilia-Estela and Estela-Andrade-Izaguirre, serve to exemplify further Estela's need to dominate her inner circle of close friends to be the center of attention. She first steals Andrade from a teenage Cecilia, who after feeling scorned files a false rape report to destroy Andrade, and in turn, starts the Ghost's debacle. Then, Estela discards Andrade, after she convinces him to write three novels for her –Román's trilogy–, and exchanges him for Izaguirre. In this already intricate web of lies, Estela extends her claws to choreograph Andrade's murder; she convinces both Izaguirre and Sauce to drug Andrade, push his car over a cliff and cover the assassination as a suicide, as Izaguirre finally confesses to Andrade:

Ella me manipuló, Carlos. Ella. Fue ella la que organizó todo: seducirme, acostarse conmigo, los libros, todo. ¿No te das cuenta? Es una manipuladora. Siempre lo ha sido. A ti te hizo escribir las novelas para su propio beneficio y

éxito. A mí me usó para desembarazarse de ti una vez que consiguió lo que quería. No quiere a nadie, nunca ha querido a nadie. Solo a ella misma. Estoy muy arrepentido de lo que pasó. ¿Qué crees tú? ¿Que nunca me arrepentí de lo que hice? ¡Todas las putas noches de mi vida han sido una tortura desde entonces!

(Muertos 362)

Estela –along with Cecilia and Sauce– embodies a negative view of academia and the literary world where endogamy seems to dominate every connection, whether in a sexual or academic sense, and plagiarism appears to be more common than not. Her entire identity based on lies and fraud is used not just to denounce the immoral practice of plagiarism but also the endemic evil and competitive aspect of these two parallel worlds. Nevertheless, her extensive life experiences as a glorified liar and her survival instincts still find a way through her astonishment and subsequent rage upon discovering that Andrade is actually alive and that he is publicly accusing her of crimes; she is able to defend the indefensible and plead for her own cause: “¡Eres un sinvergüenza, un infame. Y todo lo que dices es falso! Y, además, no puedes probar nada. Nadie creará la palabra de un asesino y un violador de mujeres. Nadie tiene la culpa de que no tuvieses éxito y te quisieras suicidar por ser un perdedor. ¡Eres escoria!, ¿me oyes?” (*Muertos* 399). Her defense mechanism, attacking him and blaming him of her own crimes, serves only to humiliate herself even more in front of the entire crime fiction writing community as she is forced to present Andrade the Jim Thompson award. Furthermore, it is Valentina who has the last word after unraveling Estela’s web of lies; she concocted Estela’s public humiliation and reveals her true identity while reading her rights in front of the audience, thus insuring Estela’s last appearance in the novel: “María del Carmen Pallares Beiras. Queda usted detenida por

sospechosa de complicidad en el intento de atentado contra la vida de Carlos Andrade” (*Muertos* 401).

Although Estela proved to be more resourceful and cautious than her predecessors – namely Raquel, Sara and Rajiva, since she entices the crimes without getting herself involved in the criminal acts and their legal aftermath for years– and she also provides new dynamics to the concept of romantic love and its myths. Precisely, Estela’s tumultuous love affairs and ambitious life story seem to be but a preamble to discuss Valentina’s intermittent relationship with Sanjuán and the need to include a third person in the equation to evaluate happiness and love itself. It has been established that Estela was jealous of other women with the potential to outshine her aesthetically or literarily. Hence her necessity to manipulate the narrative and ensure men were playing on her side and to alter the original love triangle –Andrade-Cecilia-Estela– in her favor then ultimately to betray Andrade for her own benefit in the last threesome –Andrade-Estela-Izaguirre. It is indeed ironic that another woman, Valentina, who can definitely outsmart and physically overshadow Estela parallels her love triangle, –Valentina-Sanjuán-Bernabé–, to remove the center of attention from Estela to place it upon herself, and her highly anticipated attempt at love and a happy ending since she is indeed the true (s)hero of the entire series. This swift shift allows readers to analyze Estela’s relationships in terms of destructive behaviors and dangerous myths to extrapolate them to Valentina and Sanjuán’s toxic romantic love, which is arguably the most pressing subplot of the series. As it was explored in the previous chapter, the narrative inserts Bernabé as part of the equation, as a possible suitor for Valentina but, more importantly, proposes him as the better partner and the answer to supportive, understanding and unconditional love, hence rendering Estela’s narrative arc as a way of antagonizing Valentina on the professional front by constantly obstructing the investigation yet proving, in both private and

public spheres, that everyone, regardless of gender or importance in the series, gravitates around Valentina.

(The) Ambivalent Character

“I care for myself. The more solitary, the more friendless, the more unsustained I am, the more I
will respect myself”
–Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*

Lúa Castro – Dangerous Reporting

Lúa Castro, the Galician journalist is one of the most multifaceted secondary characters in the series. Besides the male counterparts –villains, killers or supporting figures like Sanjuán, Velasco or Bodelón– that appear, even if by brief allusions, continuously throughout the series, Lúa is the only female satellite character who is present consistently in all four novels. Moreover, she also leads a significant part of the crime investigations through different plots and subplots in every installment. At the same time, she showcases a great character growth, emotional and relationship development with her closest peers as well, oscillating between supporting and antagonizing Valentina at times, in what I have called an ambivalent satellite character configuration.

Lúa Castro is presented from the beginning of the series as a woman strongly defined by her career choice. She is an ambitious and intrepid events editor at *La Gaceta de Galicia*; she is obsessed with gaining exclusives at any cost, which she does due to her knack for accessing privileged information by means of quite unorthodox methods. Her work place is heavily populated by male characters, an environment in which she can be seen as both an underrepresented female figure in a male dominated space and a subversive and controversial character who challenges yet takes advantage at the same time of those gendered differences. As

a matter of fact, according to the data provided by APM (Asociación de la Prensa de Madrid) in their annual report in 2015, 51.8% of the total number of journalists with contract are females, whereas only 10.9% of the high-up jobs, such as management positions, adjunct and assistant manager or editor-in-chief in printed media are occupied by women (Torrús n.p.).

This evidence on the glass ceiling for women in traditionally male dominated areas is transposed onto the *Crímenes Exquisitos* series. Lúa's way of dealing with this imbalance is to exploit her female condition. For her, beauty and ambition go hand in hand throughout the narrative, not only because she proves, like the rest of the female characters, that physical attractiveness and intelligence are not mutually exclusive, but also because she actively and consciously decides to exploit her own beauty to fuel her ambition and help advancing in her career. On the one hand, the narrative provides the premise that in order to be a good journalist she needs a specific combination of brains and beauty: "Era una chica muy resultona y descarada, condiciones ideales para ser una buena periodista de sucesos" (*Crímenes* 39). On the other, since Lúa is configured as a highly sexualized character as well, she uses those female attributes to dazzle male individuals and gain restricted access to sensitive information to publish the exclusive herself before than anyone else:

utilizaba todas las armas que la naturaleza le había regalado, que eran muchas.

Lúa era joven y resultona, cincelada en curvas, pero también era una mujer ambiciosa y se rompía los cuernos trabajando desde la mañana a la noche.

Recorría sobre sus tacones toda la ciudad en busca de cualquier suceso o noticia que pudiese interesar a sus lectores, y sobre todo, a su director adjunto. (*Crímenes* 39)

This vulture-like behavior earns her the enmity of the other editors, journalists and the police as well. While there are some policing figures who guard the secrets of ongoing investigations with zeal and resent the press for oversharing certain details with the general population, there are others who are willing to disclose some aspects given the right circumstances. Lúa is an expert at gaining information from the inside by tricking local police officers; she turns them into her personal informants by merely showcasing her physical assets: “Cazó al superintendente de la Local mirándola con ojos golosos, así que se acercó a él con la confianza de que, enseñando algo de carnaza, empezaría a largarlo todo con su verborrea habitual” (*Crímenes* 76).

In this sense, Lúa functions as leverage to the widespread chauvinism within the male dominated spheres for her own gain as well as a way of retaliating against the oppressive male figures of society. She uses deliberately those same physical attributes that institutionalized sexism exploits to judge women to weaponize them and target men for her own advantage. Apart from doing so outside of the editorial office she follows the same pattern inside of it. She, for instance, tries to mockingly replicate hierarchical sexual harassment with her more than willing intern, Jordi, with whom she uses her superior position, sexual innuendos and provocations to ask all sorts of favors, exploiting those sexual female attributes as a persuasive vehicle for such requests and demands: “Lúa puso su voz más absurdamente manipuladora para ver si surtía algún efecto. Como siempre, lo hizo. Notó cómo el gafapasta se derretía desde el otro lado del teléfono” (*Crímenes* 370-371). In this case, Jordi is both complicit and willing to participate in this seduction-harassment sphere that surrounds them, “¿Para qué necesitas mi tiempo, oh diosa de la belleza? [...] Tú dirás, Lúa, dónde quieres que este tu esclavo te lleve con su canoa” (*Crímenes* 371-374). Jordi’s tone has to be read as a playful reply to the over-the-top absurdity of

Lúa's manipulative manners since he is infatuated with her and there is evidence of a positive working relationship among them.

Although Lúa and Jordi's relationship will be explored in more detail later, it serves as another example of her skills in manipulation and harassment which know no limits regardless of the moral code that she needs to abide to as a journalist. According to the deontological code established by the Federal Association of Journalists in Spain (F.A.P.E.), journalists must maintain a responsible behavior as far as it refers to the ethics and deontology of information. Their action protocol includes their compromise with finding the truth, the use of legal and honorable methods to obtain information, and the need to respect people, their privacy and image as well as what is conveyed off the record, among others (código n.p.). Therefore, journalists must avoid using degrading expressions, pictures and testimonies in order to maintain the common right to said private life.

These are the specific tenets that Lúa betrays constantly throughout the series on multiple occasions to ensure her access to publish the exclusive. Her coordinates as a journalist are oftentimes far from this ethical behavior. In fact, they do not deter her from wanting to use and publish, for instance, the pictures that Jaime Anido, the newspaper's official photographer, illegally took of Lidia's corpse and crime scene. She not only supports and commends Anido for his audacity breaching the police tape and snatching close-up and panoramic pictures of the murder, but also her drive and ambition compel her to take advantage of the situation. This is why she attempts to blackmail Valentina; she will not publish the pictures as long as Valentina provides her with exclusive information pertaining to Lidia's case and murderer: "Esta mente ha pensado ir a entrevistar a la señorita Negro [...] Ha pensado también que esas fotos servirán para hacer un intercambio de información que nos servirá a ti y a mí, Jaime. La inspectora no querrá

por nada del mundo que circulen por ahí sin ningún control. Esta mente maquina también como hacerse con la exclusiva de las noticias del caso durante todo el tiempo” (*Crímenes* 84).

Even though Lúa, at some point, feels bad about what she is about to do, she goes ahead with her extortion scheme since her success, not the access to the truth no matter the cost, as a journalist is more important than any adherence to a moral code. That is in fact what Valentina recriminates her, that she is a “carroñera de grandes ojos verdes” beneath her level hence not deserving of her personal time and attention: “Veo con asombro que eres una trepa de libro, Lúa Castro. Imagino que en tu profesión esos comportamientos son habituales, así que procuraré no tomármelo como algo personal” (*Crímenes* 99). When the extortion attempt fails as expected, since Valentina treats her like any other regular member of the press without any special privileges, Lúa feels demoted and as a consequence needs to project onto others by seeking revenge. Well aware that *La Gaceta de Galicia* will never publish those photographs since their deontological code is notably strict, she turns to *Caso Abierto*, a recent weekly newspaper that reports on all sorts of crimes without too many scruples. With this behavior, Lúa not only achieves an economic compensation for selling the pictures, she also manages to obtain unexpected but extremely important information regarding the crime scene –Millais’s *Ophelia*’s inspiration– and most importantly, establishes her own vendetta against Valentina, which consists of a two-fold retaliation process: publishing the pictures and writing an article about the crime scene in which she discloses specific details of the performance recreated by the Artist at the same time she generates morbid fascination by addressing him as a cultured psychopath.

Situations like this are reiterated throughout the series. Even in the last installment when she has already established a friendship with Valentina, she also publishes the pictures of Sauce’s death scene. Lúa’s lack of deontological code, her willingness to do whatever it takes

and use her body as bait for information are not only *femme fatale* qualities but also constitute her coordinates as an antagonistic character since her morals are being questioned and she uses her satellite position to antagonize and obstruct Valentina's investigations. However, these same traits also configure her as a victim and ally. Returning to her physical attractiveness, Lúa is quite conceited, as the following reaction to a compliment demonstrates: "Lúa no pudo evitar sentirse halagada, por más que ella creyera que, en efecto, era la periodista más sexy, con diferencia" (*Crímenes* 242). She knows she is beautiful, that is why she exploits her attributes when targeting males for important information. She is also depicted as a woman who likes to be seen and as such, and she carefully selects her attires for every specific scenario, although she is not as self-absorbed as Raquel or other of the antagonistic *femme fatale* of the narrative.

Yet again, those traits –shapely body, long legs, big green eyes– make her the perfect target for sexual harassment in the workplace. Taking into consideration the statistic mentioned earlier about gender in journalism, there are two types of violent behavior expected in said setting: sexism and sexual harassment. The former alludes to those behaviors and utterances originated from conservative patriarchal values, which are understood as the price women have to pay for abandoning traditional roles and entering the workplace (Pérez del Río 177). Stereotypical statements such as "mujer tenía que ser" or "estabas mejor en la cocina" are frequently uttered instances of sexist and misogynistic harassment in work settings endured by women that depict men's patriarchal morality. They denote the correlation between gendered violence and women's social discrimination as well as the so-called inferiority of women according to a traditional chauvinist percentage of the population that maintains those ideologies as essential to women's nature. This harassment enacted on moral grounds embodies conducts that, as Teresa Pérez del Río states, cannot be categorized as illegal or irregular from a legal

standpoint, therefore women cannot defend themselves through that channel (186). Even though in *Crímenes Exquisitos* this type of harassment exists under the surface and it must be read between the lines, it is not the most prominent one.

Sexual harassment permeates the narrative, the emphasis falls into sexual innuendos, body language and attitudes that can be read, either explicitly or between the lines, in several work encounters. However, the definition of sexual harassment⁴⁰ is ambiguous enough that not everybody can easily identify when it is taking place or how to proceed in those situations. As a consequence, Europe created a zero tolerance policy regarding sexual harassment in the workplace to tackle this problem since the data that precipitated the need for the agreement in 2007 exposed that 5% of workers had been victims of harassing situations, therefore focusing its efforts in implementing measures for its detection, report and sanction (Pérez del Río 180).

Spain proceeded in a similar fashion through the Organic Law 3/2007 for the effective equality of women and men –commonly known as LOIEMH– which asserts that sexual harassment constitutes any verbal or physical behavior of sexual nature that has the purpose or produces the effect of attacking a person’s dignity, especially when an intimidating, degrading or offensive environment is created (7). This new definition allows the recognition of a wide variety of situations in which women can be victimized so they can seek legal retribution. Delving into a more precise categorization of sexual harassment incidents, the first research study on sexual harassment carried out in Spain by the Department of Women of UGT in 1986-1987 established the following gradient: mild (sexual jokes and compliments), moderate (lascivious gestures),

⁴⁰ The Spanish Penal Code, Organic Law 10/1995, Article 184, defines sexual harassment as soliciting sexual favors for oneself (or a third person) in a work or educational environment generating a hostile or humiliating atmosphere for the victim, as well as when the assailant commits the acts based on a superior work, teaching or hierarchal position and/or with the tacit or express warning of causing harm to the victim based on said relation (75).

medium (phone calls and invitations with implicit or explicit sexual content), intense (sexual physical contact) and very intense (attempted or perpetrated rape) harassment (Cuenca Piqueras 35). Following this distribution, there are several instances of mild and moderate sexual harassment cases throughout the series and they tend to be accompanied by an opinionated value judgment from the men involved.

Crímenes Exquisitos reproduces various occurrences of sexual harassment affecting several characters and their respective work spheres, like Valentina at the station with Iturriaga when he evaluates her appearance, ordering her to trade her uniform for regular clothes to go unnoticed: “Iturriaga miró salir a la inspectora. No pudo evitar contemplar aquel cuerpo. Hasta el culo lo tenía en su sitio a pesar del horrible corte de los pantalones del uniforme” (*Crímenes* 62). If this happens in a police environment, it is expected to see sexual harassment as well in other workplaces with less control and official nature. Lúa’s narrative arc precisely depicts such scenarios inside and outside of the editorial office in which she is victimized. Although plenty of examples exist throughout the series since Lúa is judged and vilified constantly for her physical attributes, like the rest of the females in the series, a couple of them from the first novel can easily summarize the entirety of her harassment and aggression. There are situations where she encounters sexual harassment along with opinionated value judgments while conducting interviews with local authorities, as is the case with Adolfo Requejo, the city hall’s archaeologist who refers to Lúa in the following manner: “una verdadera sanguijuela: olía la sangre a kilómetros y luego, una vez que te cogía, nunca te soltaba la vena. Eso sí, estaba buenísima. Menudas caderas. Y aquella falda ajustada” (*Crímenes* 486).

Returning to Lúa’s workplace at *La Gaceta*, there are not overtly explicit or very intense sexual harassment situations but she lets the readers sense a certain resistance and discomfort on

her end whenever she interacts with her boss, Alfonso Carrasco: “su voz translucía un cierto tono de viejo verde que siempre ponía muy nerviosa a la redactora. Especialmente cuando estaba en el trabajo” (*Crímenes* 64). Lúa’s situation is a clear representation of the subtlety of certain cases of sexual harassment as well as the difficulty to identify them properly and react accordingly that can be easily applied to the sociological problems that Spain still experiences. Rocío Pérez Guardo precisely highlights sexual harassment in the workplace as an emergent social problem in Spain and notes the lack of a rejection or opposition reaction as one of the limitations of the quantifications (207). Furthermore, she also emphasizes the lack of specificity provided on harassment cases since according to the data obtained by the Spanish Institute of Women, published by the Ministry for Home Affairs, in 2009 there were 330 reports of sexual harassment but there was no information on whether those took place in academic or work environment for instance. Equally, the results make one question how many cases of sexual harassment go undetected or unreported, forcing us to ponder if it follows the same unreported tendency of rape cases.

Be as it may, Lúa’s harassment situation continue as the tensions between her and Carrasco ultimately merge sexual and psychological harassment. Using again an example from the first novel, when he punctually commends her for her article on Lidia’s case, he rejects Lúa’s request for a pay rise excusing himself with the Spanish economic crisis and Lúa’s greediness. She counterattacks, asking for the vacation days she legally deserves. As retaliation, Carrasco not only turns down her new demand but also assigns her another case –Mendiluce’s urbanism trial– while still working on Lidia’s murder case. The conversation ends with Lúa blackmailing him, quoting a well-known type of sexual harassment back to him: “Lo haré si me das la tarde libre. *Quid pro quo*, jefe” (*Crímenes* 259).

This precise interaction sheds a critical light on another social problem that needs to be taken into consideration due to its power to victimize working women: the so-called mobbing or psychological harassment in the workplace. In fact, according to a study carried out in Spain on the topic by Iñaki Piñuel y Zabala and Araceli Oñate Cantero, 16% of the workers surveyed were victimized for at least six months (37). Intimidation, rejection of sexual advances, jealousy or feeling threatened by someone's professional competence are some of the factors that foster the harasser's behavior. Among their findings, the most prominent figure is that 2 out of 3 workers are not aware of their victimization, while also 2 out of 3 are under thirty years old and are temporary workers. Moreover, even though it can affect both females and males, women are at greater risk. Perhaps Lúa's process of victimization in the workplace along with the dangers she encounters while investigating on the streets are the source and turning point for her to become a victimizer to other males, since sociological data demonstrates that victimized individuals are more likely to reproduce the same violence patterns and become victimizers themselves. Even though Lúa might not be entirely sure about her feelings and reactions toward Carrasco, she is completely aware of how she uses men and even feels a certain remorse about the consequences of her actions. Yet, she continues to use her *femme fatale* attributes to extract information from male individuals and more importantly, she still tracks exclusives as if her life, literally, depended on it. It is as though Lúa's unorthodox investigative antics that the various plots and subplots throughout the series advance and help the police with a different angle in their cases. Nevertheless, as her character evolves to lean toward supportive coordinates by helping Valentina, Sanjuán and the rest, her actions come with consequences frequently. There are three specific instances when her desire to uncover crimes and the truth put her at great danger and transform her into a sexual victim, like the rest of the women in the narrative, yet due to her own

strength or because of Valentina's providential help, Lúa manages to move from her victimhood position to that of a survivor of gendered violence.

Her first encounter occurs in *Crímenes Exquisitos* after she eludes the protective police detail she was given upon reporting being harassed by the Artist. She infiltrates Ártabra at night to take photographic proof of Mendiluce's illegal activities. She is then caught by his men, kidnapped and brutalized by Delgado:

La bofetada casi la tira al suelo. Notó cómo le ardía la mejilla y se mordió los labios para no insultar a su agresor con saña [...] La segunda bofetada acabó con Lúa en el suelo. Luego, una patada en el estómago la dejó sin respiración durante un momento. Permaneció encogida en posición fetal hasta que el hombre la obligó a levantarse incrustando los dedos en su brazo y la guió hasta la silla de nuevo [...] Lúa notó, horrorizada, que el hombre le acariciaba la mejilla y luego bajaba por el cuello del escote. Dejó la mano por un momento y luego siguió bajando hasta acariciar la copa del sujetador. (*Crímenes* 552)

As if such treatment were not enough, Delgado and Raquel hire Petrescu to figure out what Lúa found out in the urbanization project, the photographs she took, and eventually torture, rape and kill Lúa after she confesses her findings. Petrescu threatens to shoot her, forces her to undress, manually rapes her and even uses her as a naked human shield when the police have him surrounded. This traumatic episode not only provides capital evidence against Mendiluce and his corruptive branches among the local government and other institutions, but also brings Valentina and Lúa together. They admire each other for their strength and courage to fight crime head on. However, unlike Valentina, Lúa is not granted time or space in the narrative to properly express

how this violence affects her, it is only hoped that she will learn from her mistakes and change her *modus operandi* while seeking information.

Nevertheless, she unfortunately resists learning from such experiences, and continues to take risky steps for the sake of the story in Rome where her second assault takes place. In this case she was investigating with Sanjuán the similarities between the Artist's previous crime scenes and Il Mostro di Roma's work. After her suspicions are corroborated, she sneaks into Morgado's studio on her own to snoop around without alerting the police about her whereabouts. She ends being kidnapped by Morgado who is more than willing to share with her his new artistic creations before he undresses, tortures and violates her: "No tenía lágrimas ya. Solo esperaba que «El Artista» empezara con ella su ritual de abominación [...] Morgado se agachó y la besó en la boca, ahogándola, mientras sus manos seguían pellizcando con una fuerza descomunal. Lúa intentó debatirse, pero la cuerda se enroscó en su cuello como una serpiente. Se sintió morir. Sin querer, rezó una oración" (*Martyrium* 475). It is Valentina once more who comes to her rescue, saving her from a brutal rape and death. Yet, once again, Lúa does not acknowledge the gravity and consequences –both physical and psychological– of her assault and starts writing an article from her hospital bed about her night with Il Mostro since she is well aware that this case is going to catapult her to fame: "Su pánico, su dolor, la angustia de saberse al borde de una muerte atroz, habían dejado paso a la excitación, a la euforia más absurda. El artículo que estaba escribiendo, sin duda, la iba a catapultar a la fama y al ascenso más rutilante en *La Gaceta de Galicia* [...] tenía al alcance de su mano la excelencia periodística [...] Iba a pergeñar el reportaje de su vida" (*Martyrium* 480-481).

Lúa's third assault occurs during the third installment while investigating the Espoz y Mina case with Clementius. Both of them become a target and are kidnapped for their inquiries

about the robbery of the relics. One of the hired hitmen, instead of finishing their job detail, gets distracted by Lúa's physical appearance and attempts a more sexual approach: "comenzó a manosear a Lúa. Mientras la navaja permanecía apuntando hacia la carótida de la periodista, la otra mano le estrujó los pechos por fuera del vestido. Lúa intentó zafarse, pero el hombre era fuerte y, ante su resistencia, clavó más la navaja en la piel. Luego le apartó las bragas y empezó un amago de masturbación muy torpe" (*Máscara* 297-298). Like her previous experiences with sexual violence, this instance goes unreported and Lúa also neglects to address it by focusing all her energy on the case itself. That is how she deals with the aftermath of every violent scenario by reminding herself of her duty as a journalist.

Her assistance with police investigations, especially this one, strengthen her relationship with the Lonzas station and Valentina, who grants her an informative advance on the operation inside Castillo de la Palma for the aid she provided, hence becoming the first journalist to break the news to the public, thereby enhancing her already successful status as events editor. Her coordinates as a victim and her unwavering wish for exclusives turn Lúa into a key supportive satellite character especially after her personal relationships solidify with Jordi, her boyfriend, and with Valentina, an unexpected ally. In her romantic life, Lúa's character undergoes what she calls a domestication process. At the beginning of the series she was in an open non-exclusive affair with Anido –at least as far as he was concerned. After discovering the dissimilarities in their commitment to the relationship, Anido's involvement with the sadomasochist brotherhood in England and learning about his death, Lúa then develops a fully committed romantic bond with the very same former intern she terrorized and coerced with her *femme fatale* attributes to do her bidding. Jordi provides her a sense of stability to counteract her rather flamboyant and extreme antics not just for her quest for exclusives but also in her personal decisions:

Jordi había acabado por conquistarla, casi sin que ella se diera cuenta, con su honestidad y devoción a prueba de bomba. Y con aquel encanto extravagante y su existencia, consiguió primero salir con ella, luego enamorarla de forma sutil, y al fin, tras conseguir un trabajo medianamente estable en el periódico, convencerla para que probasen una convivencia que [...] acabó convirtiéndose en indispensable para una Lúa «domesticada». (*Martyrium* 124-125)

While it is true that Lúa's domestication process is far more perceptible in the domestic sphere, she has yet to take a more conservative approach to her profession. She still fully commits to her stories, she turns to Sanjuán and Valentina for help but ultimately, by the last installment, has learned how to work collaboratively, to trust her closest friends and to pursue less dangerous routes of obtaining information. Moreover, as her relationship with Jordi evolves toward more mature grounds, she also finds solace and tranquility at home, hence allowing herself to be more vulnerable about her own insecurities:

era consciente de que no era el tipo de mujer que ronroneaba buscando el arrullo y un hombre protector. Desde siempre disfrutaba con las disputas verbales y rara vez daba su brazo a torcer [...] Pero a veces la vencía un cierto ánimo de fragilidad, un poco harta de tener que vivir con el pie en el acelerador tanto tiempo, y además en ese mundo del periodismo donde cada vez costaba más mantener el tipo frente a docenas de recién licenciados dispuestos a trabajar sesenta horas a la semana por un sueldo de esclavo. (*Muertos* 212)

Lúa's road to a more healthy equilibrium between ambition and reporting, personal relationships and her job as a journalist, as well as the common trauma she shares with Valentina

and the utmost respect she holds for her personal (s)hero, enable her to establish a unique friendship with the inspector:

La amistad de Lúa con Valentina era algo extraña [...] Comenzaron muy mal, pero luego sus experiencias compartidas frente a una entidad maligna como el Artista había forjado algo muy profundo entre ellas, una relación que no se basaba en salir a tomar copas o en compartir confidencias; de hecho, podían pasar meses sin que se vieran o hablaran, pero en cuanto se ponían en contacto era como si un vínculo eléctrico, antes oculto, se activara de nuevo. (*Máscara* 111)

Their evolution not only adds depth to Valentina's configuration granting her another solid supporting friend to rely on when help is needed but also proves Lúa's narratological importance as a secondary character who is granted more psychological development than the rest of the satellite women in the series, evolving from a figure that constantly challenges and antagonizes Valentina to share their common ground as female figures serving the public –as well as rape survivors– who ultimately offer each other help, support and female solidarity. As such, Lúa is the only satellite character who oscillates constantly between antagonizing Valentina and obstructing her police investigations and being an ally who helps her investigating and sharing information. Nevertheless, regardless of this constant sway, Lúa greatly admires Valentina as a woman and inspector and ends up being Valentina's greatest ally throughout the series due to Lúa's personal evolution, proving once more how every decision a secondary character makes orbits around and affect Valentina one way or another.

Supportive Females

“Beware, for I am fearless, and therefore powerful”
–Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*

The array of supportive satellite characters seems to pale in comparison to the multitude of *femme fatales*, villains and criminals present throughout the series. While there are more supportive females, albeit less developed (such as Valentina’s friend Helena, her police coworkers at Lonzas or Sanjuán’s friends in Jávea) than the ones depicted here, I have selected four specific characters –Irina, Alana, Rebeca and Marta– who are not just innocent and inherently good individuals but who also stand for female solidarity, collaboration and their alliance to Valentina and her cause.

Irina – Trapped in Prostitution

In comparison to the rest of the female satellite characters in the series, Irina might primarily appear as an inconsequential one: she does not hold a prominent role in the series narrative and the authors do not grant her a proper background story nor a last name. However, she proves to be the epitome of a satellite character in the first installment since she gravitates around both Valentina’s personal and professional life. Initially, Irina enters the *Crímenes Exquisitos* world as Valentina’s brother Freddy’s new girlfriend. A tall and thin Russian, with ash blonde hair, green eyes and spectacular long legs, Irina is the embodiment of what Valentina, in her more maternal behavior, identifies as trouble for her little brother. She categorizes Irina as a *femme fatale* with the same archetypal attributes as the ones already explored in the previous section, as a model-like female predator who not only represents a critical danger for her brother’s life and hormone-driven body but also a distraction from his studies and academic

success. Valentina, entrapped by patriarchal premises, judges Irina on the mere basis of physical appearance and applies to her negative and demeaning coordinates. As a consequence, she rejects her as a possible prospect for her brother: “No me gusta esa chica para él. Es demasiado mona. Demasiado espabilada. No sé, no me da buena espina. No parece muy... no sé, «normal». Una chica como esa podría salir con cualquier tipo con pelas que le diese un nivel de vida alucinante” (*Crímenes* 107).

That is, Valentina uses Irina’s sexualization and objectification as indicators of female deviance. She is too much; too much of a woman, too smart, too beautiful, too dangerous. Hence, she makes a biased case against her compatibility with and divergence from Freddy’s working-class status and less-outlandish lifestyle. Contrary to her belief, both her father and best friend, Helena, contradict Valentina, highlighting how Irina’s arrival can be interpreted as a sign of a potential road to stability in Freddy’s life: “Déjalo, pobre. Lo ha pasado muy mal, ya lo sabes. Y esa chica lo tiene totalmente loco, por lo menos tiene ilusión por algo. Se pone guapo, parece algo más centrado...” (*Crímenes* 100). He does seem to be recovering from his mother’s death; however, Valentina’s instincts prove her right, even though for the wrong reasons as it will be further explored. Freddy continues skipping class and performing poorly in school. He picks up smoking marihuana, he stays out late during the week, and generally rebels against all of Valentina’s attempts to keep him in line –all because of Irina. He becomes paranoid as a result of Irina’s sporadic behavior, often seeking confrontation out of this growing sense of jealousy which causes Irina to get angry and give him an ultimatum: “¡No quiero conmigo a un novio celoso, Freddy! Odio a los hombres celosos. No voy a permitir que te metas en mi vida de ese modo, te lo digo siempre. No lo soporto, ¿me oyes?” (*Crímenes* 269).

What pervades this demand is Irina's attempt at trying to regain the control that her life lacks at that moment. The expensive clothing and the large amounts of money that Irina has and spends do not come from her job at the solarium. As it turns out, Irina, as many of the female victims already analyzed, leads a double life and her job is but a cover-up for her prostitution. Like many other Slavic women, Irina was brought to Spain under the false pretenses of a future and a proper job to sustain both herself and her family back in Russia. Once in the peninsula, she was basically kidnaped and her passport was taken to prevent her from attempting to escape from the prostitution ring orchestrated by Mendiluce and his right-hand, Delgado. She is forced to send some money home, tell her family that she has a great job and that she is really happy in Spain. She has created this fictional alternative life not just for the sake of her relatives, but to hide the embarrassment she would face if Freddy were to find out, but more importantly, as a coping mechanism to survive the harsh reality of coerced prostitution. She obviously does not want to be prostituted and she longs for her freedom but leaving this corrupted world translates into physical pain for herself and quite possibly death for her family: "Irina lo odiaba. Odiaba al «jefe» con toda su alma. [...] Él siempre decía que si no hacía lo que le mandaban, irían a Kazán a por su hermana. Su hermana tenía catorce años" (*Crímenes* 271). The fear of retaliation and her willingness to stay alive keep her immobilize from escaping her circumstances. Every time she tries to go against Delgado's wishes she experiences not only his coercive measures but also the excruciating pain that derived from his physical violence: "no le hacía ninguna gracia pasar de nuevo por una experiencia tan traumática como la vez anterior. La había encerrado en una habitación y la había golpeado con una bolsa de tela rellena de arena durante horas, hasta hartarse" (*Crímenes* 273).

Besides the traumatic physical abuse, Delgado constantly exercises his power over Irina and the rest of “his” girls in other manners as well. The most recognizable ones are the imposition of physical appearance and the use of drugs. Delgado carefully coordinates all the women’s outfits for the orgies, oftentimes forcing them to play dress-up with extremely denigrating costumes, and for private parties as well. For instance, Irina is specifically requested to attend a bachelor’s party because of her Slavic blonde model-like appearance and her boss arranges, once again, her image and behavior: “tenía que ir muy maquillada. Los labios rojo Chanel. El pelo recogido en un moño. Un vestido ajustado, extremadamente ajustado. Él [Delgado] siempre le decía lo que tenía que hacer. Cómo tenía que vestirse. Cómo tenía que actuar. Los hombres a los que tendría que...” (*Crímenes* 271). The importance of female physicality and the performative aspect of clothing is emphasized once more in the series. Regardless of the occupation, professional acumen, sexual practices and personality, all the women are conceived from a sexualized and objectified perspective.

This particular night out also serves as an example for the second type of abuse. Delgado regularly provides Irina with alcoholic drinks and cocaine to incite her and the rest of the women to lose their inhibitions and be more cooperative during the orgies. Specifically, he constantly exploits these tactics with Irina to force her out of her prudish ways even though she always refuses: “No quiero esnifar cocaína, jefe. Por favor. No lo soporto. Me pone muy mal... Me sienta fatal, ya lo sabe” (*Crímenes* 274). Yet, he forces her and also spikes her drink without her permission and without her noticing, which gives rise to another important issue regarding consent, or the lack thereof to be more precise, when females are involved. The nonstop flow of substances greatly alters Irina’s behavior, inducing a wild striptease, followed by dancing on her fours at the bar’s counter, and rubbing against men in her underwear, “moviéndose como una

gata en celo, sin preocuparse absolutamente nada” (*Crímenes* 280). All this spectacle was part of Delgado’s effort to provide a sexual female display for the mere enjoyment of the male eye. As a consequence, Freddy, who witnesses the entire sultry spectacle, punches the bachelor repeatedly and receives a brutal beating from an infuriated Delgado, while Irina suffers an overdose and has to be hospitalized: “Estaba hasta arriba de cocaína, escopolamina y alcohol. Un ciego del copón. Le habían lavado el estómago, tratado con carbón activado y solo quedaba esperar a que se le pasara el efecto del cóctel de drogas” (*Crímenes* 286).

This chain of events prompts Irina to reconsider the course of her life by reconfiguring her story as a victimized woman. Although terrified, she risks distorting the romanticization halo of innocence and purity that Freddy had projected upon her throughout their relationship and reveals her double life to him in an attempt to seek his support. Consequently, both of them turn to Valentina for help, who with the assistance of her coworkers, organizes an operation to apprehend Delgado, Mendiluce and the rest of the men implicated in the prostitution ring. Irina ponders her options and finally agrees to attend one of Mendiluce and Delgado’s drug-induced orgy parties and wiretap the entire exchange since enduring such an experience one last time is her only way out of prostitution:

Irina lloraba en silencio en su apartamento. Estaba muerta de miedo. No quería participar otra vez en una de aquellas fiestas horribles. No quería desnudarse nunca más delante de hombres mayores y babosos, ni tampoco follar con ellos una y otra vez. Y además con un micrófono oculto... Pero era la única manera de salir de allí, tenía razón la inspectora. Si quería tener una vida normal, un novio normal, solo había un camino, y ese camino pasaba por la fiesta del sábado por la noche. (*Crímenes* 553)

However, the operation does not go as planned: Delgado discovers Irina's microphone and manages to kidnap both her and Freddy to use them as a vindictive tool against Valentina and drown them in a well. Irina and Freddy are fortunate to escape the imminent danger of the experience but the agonizing situation depicts the dangers of wanting to leave behind the world of prostitution and the retaliation that is often associated with attempting to escape it.

This development in Irina's narrative arc serves a multifold purpose: (1) it advances Valentina's investigation to find solid evidence that links both men to Lidia's murder, (2) it emphasizes the lengths Mendiluce and Morgado are willing to go in their evil masterplans, demonizing both of them even more, (3) it proves Irina's purpose as a literary device that links Valentina's personal and professional life and adds to her character development, (4) while it similarly aids with the development of Valentina's personality and the advancement of the narrative, and (5) it also humanizes Irina beyond being a literary device by linking her narrative and fictional world with the police's real fight with Eastern European human trafficking groups.

On this last point, the series manages to bridge important sociological concerns regarding prostitution. First of all, it forces readers to reconsider the legislation of prostitution. For instance, the Organic Law 10/1995 of the Spanish Penal Code describes trafficking of human beings and prostitution as using violence, intimidation, deceit, payments, or abusing of a position of superiority or the victim's necessity or vulnerability, regardless of the victim's nationality, in order to control the victim for sexual exploitation or to practice prostitution, respectively (71, 75-78). Therefore, the law does not penalize prostitution itself in Spain. Its exercise is not regulated nor prohibited. In that sense, the work of Carolina Villacampa and Nuria Torres explores the only regulations towards prostitution in Spain: municipal ordinances. These administrative sanctions carry no legal penalties, but rather they fine both prostitutes and clients alike for

engaging into sexual intercourse or sex related activities in the streets of cities like Lleida (Villacampa and Torres 17).

Another aspect worth contemplating is the specific situation of prostitution of female immigrants in Spain. José Luis Solana's research precisely explains the complications of addressing prostitution from an abolitionist approach, known as *trafiquista*, that oversimplifies the case of immigrant prostitutes to just human and female sexual trafficking at the hands of mafia networks (39). His work also corroborates that indeed most women trapped in prostitution were lied to or coerced into this world, "la gran mayoría de las mujeres inmigrantes que se prostituyen en España habrían venido engañadas y/o forzadas por redes mafiosas de tráfico y explotación sexual" (Solana 45), and in turn, in fact clusters of people operating as criminal networks are responsible for 50-80% of the volume of trafficking (Lehti and Aromaa 154). However, besides these popular beliefs, there are other factors worth addressing. There are a multitude of scholars whose studies prove the existence of a wide array of means, motivations and entities involved into the prostitution world. Mainly, Solana emphasizes the reasons behind migratory movements, that is, (1) economic, social and political crisis, (2) the deterioration of socioeconomical situations of developing countries, (3) the increasing of poverty and marginalization of said nations, and (4) the deepening of the existing inequalities between central countries and those in the periphery in the capitalist world (39). Wars and armed conflicts, lack of resources and opportunities, the feminization of poverty and the demand for cheap labor are oftentimes concomitant to this set of conditions, constituting risk factors that can add to the victimization of women.

Despite of the vast exploration on the topic, there are certain inconsistencies in some areas. Martti Lehti and Kauko Aromaa precisely explain the challenge of accurately determining

the origin of European prostitutes since very little information is known about the figures pertaining to irregular migrant prostitutes or to individuals working for criminal groups involved in human trafficking (143). Taking this into consideration, it can be generally assured that 80% of the prostitutes in Spain are immigrants and that the vast majority of them come from two main areas, mainly Latin America (Colombia, Brazil and Ecuador, specifically), and Eastern Europe (Romania, Russia and Ukraine). Both Solana and Lehti and Aromaa's work coincide on these points with slight variations, namely the inclusion of the Dominican Republic and Moldova as exporting countries. There are also discrepancies in the statistics in the number of prostitutes in Spain. Whereas some studies estimate those values between a 45,000 to a 300,000, the data provided by Lehti and Aromaa shows that in Spain there are approximately 45,000 full-time prostitutes, from which only 20% are of European background (190). However, what scholarship does agree on, without incurring generalizations, is that immigrant prostitutes tend to be between eighteen and twenty-five years old, and come from economically depressed environments where they were unemployed and lacked resources and support, while it is also often the case that they come from broken, unstable and troubled-ridden families.

The fictional world of *Crímenes exquisitos* emphasizes all the key aspects, as mentioned above, pertaining to prostitution in Spain. It highlights the difficulty of dealing with, reporting, arresting and prosecuting people who are enforcing coerced prostitution in a country like Spain with a deficient criminalization process. It also reproduces the patterns of immigration and the motivations that identify foreign females as targets of victimization and exploitation. Irina's journey follows, likewise, the statistics mentioned above: she is a young, unemployed Russian immigrant who came to Spain in an attempt to better her life socioeconomically but who was lied to and coerced to prostitute herself. Her narrative also fits into the framework of criminal

networks. Irina's vulnerability is leveraged by all the hierarchies inside the prostitution ring; in fact, Mendiluce, the «jefe supremo», is who first raped her and initiated her into his business. What is more, she is forcefully involved into other criminal activities often associated with prostitution, such as drug use and trafficking with goods and information.

Irina's narrative arc not only advances an important topic such as prostitution in contemporary Spanish society, but also helps in the development of her character. She evolves from a misrepresentation of her character as an antagonistic *femme fatale* with a highly sexualized body to the actual naïve, terrified victim who finds the courage to overcome her victimization, until she eventually becomes an ally to other females. She helps advocate for other victims, giving them a chance to reclaim their lives, at the same time she transitions into a satellite supportive character. While it is true that Irina has a more prominent presence in the first novel, her character becomes a pivotal element for the entire Negro family as the series progresses. In fact, Irina's maturity and life experience play a key role in her relationship with Freddy, providing him the stability and purpose in life he needed to transition from a rebellious teenager to a mature young man. Irina not only helps Freddy but also his father, Enrique. By moving into the family house she helps Valentina and her general lack of maternal instincts by taking care of the family:

Freddy parecía mucho más maduro, y la convivencia con su novia rusa, Irina, en la casa familiar [...] había [...] acelerado su cambio de rebelde sin causa a la madurez. La influencia de Irina en aquella casa había sido proverbial: los dos jóvenes estudiaban restauración y le daban a Enrique un motivo más para la tranquilidad. (*Máscara* 124)

This sense of tranquility and stability perhaps explains how Irina and Freddy's relationship fades into the background as the series progresses to grant Valentina space for her own self-development at the same time other plots and subplots are explored. Yet, Irina and Freddy do not disappear entirely. They go on to work on a degree program in hospitality, and their help proves essential once again when they find themselves interning at the Hotel Finisterre, the very hotel that the Ghost infiltrates under the guise of a waiter in order to attend the conference banquet for A Coruña Negra. Although Irina's presence in the narrative materializes through references rather than direct participation/representation, she manages to gravitate around Valentina's professional and personal life. Irina through her linking device coordinates helps to provide a sense of resolution, a certain type of happy ending and prevalence of a positive *status quo* as the series comes full circle.

Alana Ovejero – Bending the Policing Rules

While it is true that the crime series portrays a vast cartography of female characterization –victims, corpses, lawyers, prostitutes, journalists, writers, to name a few– and revolves around a police inspector, it seems to be deficient in its depiction of female members of the police force. The higher ranks in the profession are held by males in Spain, England and Italy –Iturriaga, Evans, Barone– and most of the inspectors and subinspectors are masculine figures as well –Velasco, Bodelón, Bernabé, Aracil, Macfarlain, Servant. The allusions to other female officers are few in any of the three countries portrayed; they have minimal roles, normally among the ranks of forensic specialists or with the cybercrimes unit serving as liaisons for the main detective figures. There are three policewomen who merit a brief mention for their connection to Valentina: (1) Isabel, the officer from Lonzas who shot and killed del Valle in the

first installment, (2) Patrizia, for her help during *Martyrium* in locating Doyle and (3) Marina Alonso, a forensic specialist in A Coruña and her brief insubordination episode with Valentina in the last novel. Besides Valentina, the only policewoman properly developed and with a significant narrative arc is Alana Ovejero, subinspector with the judicial police in Ponferrada and formerly appointed in Madrid.

Alana first and only appears in *El hombre de la máscara de espejos* as a liaison officer, meaning that along with Antonio Requeiro and Diego Aracil, she serves as a linking device between A Coruña, Ponferrada and Madrid to aid in Encina Yebra and Belén Egea's disappearance cases. One of the main points of divergence between Alana and the rest of the female characters in the series resides in her physicality. Without taking into consideration the corpses *per se* or the younger victims like Irina or Marta, Alana is the youngest female professional of the series—she is not even twenty-eight years old. Hence, her young age and her unusual physical appearance confer her a unique mixture of traits for a female working with the national police:

De complexión menuda, llevaba el pelo corto y castaño un poco al estilo Audrey Hepburn [...] Tenía los ojos grandes, de color avellana, y la nariz pequeña y respingona, que desafiaba a unos labios finos, firmes y obstinados. En realidad, Alana no tenía precisamente el típico físico de un agente de la Policía Nacional, y por eso pasaba desapercibida en las investigaciones que le asignaban... hasta que se ponía en acción, porque su aspecto, su apariencia frágil, de mujer delicada, escondía una personalidad de hierro forjado, y una fuerza física fruto de años de practicar halterofilia en Ponferrada con Lidia Valentín, la campeona de Europa. (*Máscara* 202-203)

Her similar traits to the British actress might indeed automatically assign her certain unusual qualities: patience, understanding, frailty, and perhaps leniency, which are all qualities that populate the general conscience regarding gender attributes according to traditional roles in Western societies. However, under that apparent gentleness, Alana proves to be the opposite of such a fragile configuration.

Despite her age, she already has climbed the ladder to subinspector, walked the streets to gain experience and moved several times through the northern region of the country: “[Madrid] había sido su primer destino policial cuando aún era una agente rasa, joven y entusiasta. Allí se había bregado en la calle, en las patrullas, viviendo la noche barriobajera y drogadicta, antes de ascender a subinspectora y acabar de nuevo en el Bierzo. En Ponferrada [...] su ciudad natal” (*Máscara* 276). As such, Alana is described as a highly intelligent and qualified woman, and she is also a former student of one of the master degrees taught by Sanjuán and an avid admirer of his work. Like Valentina, she seems to have certain rebellious tendencies, especially when it comes to disregard rules. In fact, during one of her first appearances in the novel, Requeiro and Alana trespass the Valdés country house without proper authorization, an instance that seems to be a common occurrence for them: “¿Sin orden judicial? ¿Otra vez? Cualquier día [se] nos cae el pelo, Toni. Se ha escuchado el disparo en toda la Hoya berciana, hostia” (*Máscara* 204). The possible consequences of their actions, trespassing and firing Requeiro’s service weapon do not puzzle any of them since they are part of their normal working dynamics: inventing some plausible reason after the fact to justify their behavior and avoid any type of disciplinary measures. Once again, their insubordinate tendencies pay off as Alana finds a woman’s body, which she identifies as Encina Yebra and the water tank and spotlight as the props for a snuff video.

These rebellious streaks are accompanied by a good cop/bad cop police questioning technique during interrogations and interviews. Alana takes advantage of her configuration as a fragile and delicate woman since these non-threatening attributes instill a sense of security and safety in victims, relatives and witnesses who open up to her questioning, hence providing valuable information: “Tenía una manera suave y delicada de conseguir que la gente se abriese” (*Máscara* 279). That is the case with Catalina Miranda, Encina’s former housemate and best friend. Alana is welcomed into the apartment, offered coffee and all sorts of personal information about Encina’s expensive lifestyle as an escort. This lead allows Alana to explore the not-so-luxurious aspects of a high end prostitute in the capital as a member of the Strangers in the Night escort agency. During her meeting with Jesús Negrodo at the agency’s office Alana firstly uses her charming smile and composure to test the waters and obtain information on Encina. When Negrodo refuses to comply due to confidentiality and privacy policies, Alana proceeds to show him some pictures –allegedly from Encina’s crime scene– to pressure him without losing her smile or amiable attitude in the process. As he continues to evade any direct answers claiming Encina stopped working for them a year ago and Alana’s need for a warrant to obtain further information, Alana advances with a harsher tone, aggressive lexicon and violent behavior, emulating the stereotypical bad cop interview tactic now: “Mire, chulo putas. Tengo mucha prisa. O me da todo lo que tenga ahora mismo de Encina Yebra, me dice todo lo que sabe, o me encargaré yo misma de cerrarle este garito de mierda en menos que canta un gallo. ¿Quiere orden judicial? Vas a tener orden judicial. Te vas a cagar en la orden judicial, ¿me oyes? ¡Toda tu puta vida! (*Máscara* 312-313). Alana’s verbal and physical threats not only bypass the legal course of action or the rules that her conduct as a police officer must abide by, but also function as an effective way of obtaining reliable information. Terrorizing men by using their own abusive

tactics proves to be rather fruitful since it inevitably leads them to give away their partners in crime in order to save their own skin.

Alana's disrespect for rules seems to parallel Valentina's, except with a more positive outcome since Alana has yet to be caught and receive disciplinary actions or even a warning on her record. Another aspect that emphasizes this unorthodox way of getting things done –majorly associated with conventional masculine representations in the genre–, Alana also maintains some dubious acquaintances that might initially question her moral compass as a policewoman. She conserves a special friendship with Juan Antonio Espinosa, a former bank robber, after she shot and arrested him in a robbery gone wrong years prior. By fortunes of destiny this gunshot wound saved his life as the surgeons who operated on him discovered that Espinosa had pancreatic cancer and he was able to receive proper treatment. Alana's defeat of death not only saved Espinosa's body but his soul as well since he repented from his sins and underwent a religious conversion as well as a desire to be a law-abiding citizen: “desde que salió de la cárcel, totalmente rehabilitado, hace lo que le pido, pues considera que soy una especie de mano divina que le hizo ver la luz” (*Máscara* 358-359).

Precisely, Alana along with Espinosa and Aracil, from the historical heritage division, continues yet again to disregard the proper channels and orchestrates an unauthorized listening-in and breaking and entering mission to Gerardo Trashorras's house –director of *Mystery Planet* magazine, who is a work connection to Félix Panticosa and Encina's obsessive regular client. Firstly, Alana met with Trashorras one-on-one in his office under the false premises of a haunted house with ectoplasms and psychophonies to hide an illegal listening device under his desk. This dangerous move proves, once again, a successful attempt to obtain information since Alana and Aracil not only learn about Trashorras's implications with the art robberies and the snuff videos

but also his plans for the following night, which Alana intends to use against him. Although initially Aracil refuses to be a part of her unconventional methods, her reasoning convinces him otherwise:

Diego, a ver si lo pillas. La chica coruñesa, Victoria, está en peligro de muerte, ahora mismo debe de estar sufriendo lo indecible [...] Si es verdad que toda esta gente está relacionada, no sabemos si en esta casa podemos encontrar algo que nos oriente hacia el lugar donde puede estar, y eso... si sigue viva, por supuesto. Imagina que haya más chicas secuestradas. Piensa en esos vídeos. Trashorras habló de «montar una escena». ¿Y si hay más vídeos en su ordenador? ¿En su caja fuerte? Estoy convencida de que ese tipo se cargó a Encina Yebra [...] Además, no hay tiempo de pedir una orden de registro, y ni siquiera tenemos la seguridad de que con esos indicios nos la den, ¿no te das cuenta? (*Máscara* 352-353)

Alana proves that they have no other alternative than purposely avoiding the rules if they want to save Victoria and other possible victims, as well as avenging former ones. Alana must continue to take policing into her own hands outside of the law like former male P.I.s and police officers have done previously throughout the history of the genre. The fact that she, as a petite woman and subinspector, imposes her will on (1) her subordinate Requeiro, (2) also Aracil who is an outranked officer as well, and (3) the former convict, Espinosa, proves to be doubly subversive, as the following quote proves: “Eres muy mayorcita, Alana. Y subinspectora, así que como oficial y subordinado tuyo poco puedo decirte. Pero no me gusta nada este tema. Nada. Es totalmente ilegal” (*Máscara* 358).

However, based on the track record of attractive women in the series who do not follow the traditional roles assigned to them by men and even though Alana’s plan moves forward, her

luck eventually runs out, rendering it perhaps as a punishment for her continuous transgressions of boundaries. Yet again, the series forces readers to evaluate if the narrative is indeed critical of this punishment or supportive of it. Once inside Trashorras's house the unpredicted unfolds as he was harboring a robber of his own, Borrell, to aid with the preparations for the following snuff video. Borrell ambushes both Alana and Espinosa at gunpoint, but whereas he appears enraged at the intrusion at the beginning, he swiftly forgets his train of thoughts at Alana's sight. Just like the rest of the villains in the series, he conceives women as vessels for violence and sexual satisfaction. Borrell takes advantage of Alana's tied body to undress, sexually torture and physically punish her even though she tries to fight back, which in turn excites him even more: "la abofeteó con saña; empezaba a sentir la excitación no solo del sexo gratis sino del dominio que podía ejercer, y eso le estaba produciendo el efecto de una droga" (*Máscara* 372). Alana, despite of her physical prowess as a weight-lifting athlete, remains completely powerless and it is Aracil who rescues her at the last minute before she is raped, and Espinosa who renders Borrell unconscious. Alana's close experience with sexual assault parallels, to a lesser extent, Valentina's –who because of her profession and condition as an attractive woman becomes assaulted on several occasions. However, while Valentina's mental health and PTSD as a result of surviving such violence are part of a recovery process that expands over the four novels, Alana's narrative arc as a secondary character does not allow for such an aftermath development.

Alana not only represents women's vulnerability to sexual violence within the police force but also connects all her sexual experiences, in a way, to Valentina. That is, Valentina has suffered greater bodily and mental punishments than Alana at the hands of the opposite sex, quite possibly due to her (s)hero and inspector status in the series; and both of them explore, within the importance of their respective narrative arcs, the difficulties of maintaining a stable romantic and

sexual relationship while being a police(wo)man, as many narratives with female protagonists have pondered in the last decades. Alana, although currently single, previously dated Aracil during her stint in Madrid. Their affair did not seem to come to fruition, especially after she was transferred to Ponferrada. As Encina's case brings them together once more, Aracil attempts to rekindle their flame since he still harbors feelings for her and misses her. Even though Alana shares those same feelings for him, she acts against them: "negando unos sentimientos que, era cierto, permanecían enquistados en su alma desde el día en que tomó camino a Ponferrada [...] los amores a distancia no funcionan, Diego. Y, además [...] es mejor que aplacemos el tema para cuando todo haya acabado, ¿no crees?" (*Máscara* 339). However, she contradicts herself later as the narrative continues and she awakens in the middle of the night in Aracil's bed. Their sexual relation, or at least their one-night stand, is implicitly implied as the Trashorras's situation continues. Once all matters are properly solved in the capital and Alana's assistance in the case comes to an end, she no longer appears in the final stages of the narrative, leaving the readers wondering what might have happened –and what is to come– between her and Aracil. This inconclusive end, as well as Alana's (in)complete narrative arc, serve a threefold purpose: (1) to remind readers that secondary characters more often than not are not properly granted the space nor the depth to explore their life circumstances fully, (2) to highlight how all satellite characters, regardless of their status or narrative implications with the main plot or subplots gravitate indeed around Valentina's orbit and contribute not only to the advancement of the narrative but also to the development of Valentina's character and coordinates as the leading figure in the series, and (3) to exemplify that Alana's brief encounter with sexual violence, like Valentina's life-altering experiences in a similar work environment, shares a common ground with conventional female

officers in the history of the genre and reminds readers that not even police(wo)men are safe from gender violence.

Rebeca de Palacios and Marta de Palacios – Family Ties

To conclude this final section on supportive satellite characters, there are two characters whose depiction bears on Valentina's personal and professional development: Rebeca de Palacios and her daughter, Marta. Rebeca and Marta are the only mother and daughter pair properly depicted in the series and their love and female solidarity represent a sharp contrast with the jealousy, competition and hunger for power, attention and luxuries that dominate the rest of the antagonistic females that populate the series. As such, Rebeca and Marta's first and main narratological purpose is to fill the void of Valentina's family. After the first novel the allusions to Valentina's deceased mother are few and far between, her father makes only a couple of brief appearances as the series progresses and Freddy and Irina fade into the background as they find stability on their own lives. Rebeca enters *Martyrium* as one of Valentina's best friends even though she has lost contact with her due to the demands of their respective jobs. Yet, their friendship withstands the perils of time. Valentina is not only Marta's godmother but she also puts her entire life on hold and at risk to ensure Marta's safe return to her mother when Mendiluce arranges her kidnapping to rig the trial for his criminal activities; hence, mother and daughter become a linking narratological device between the personal and professional spheres of Valentina's life.

As part of this family tandem, Rebeca represents a compelling synergy between professional acumen and female attractiveness to which all the females in the series aspire. Known as the Iron Lady for her reputation as a respectable judge, her heavy-handed dealing with

corrupt individuals and the impossibility to bribe her, Rebeca's life is centered around her career, and ultimately her daughter. She actually became rather famous due, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, to a drug trafficking case two years prior that uncovered the corruption among small local governments in Rías Bajas, hence why she is currently in charge of Mendiluce's case. With respect to the description of her physical attributes, like the rest of the female characters, Rebeca is described as an extremely attractive woman: intriguing and austere beauty, slender body, long legs, black eyes and long auburn hair. Her appearance is portrayed through a multitude of lenses, ranging from her adversaries and the opposite sex to her own personal view. She is aware of the type of responses that her body elicits from the male population, which both excites and terrifies her, as she ponders at the tennis club, for example:

Rebeca se dirigió hacia las instalaciones, consciente de la atención que suscitaba entre los hombres que estaban practicando deporte a aquella hora. Sus largas piernas morenas, el cuerpo esbelto, el largo cabello color caoba recogido en una coleta alta, sus ojos negros, altivos, provocaban siempre un revuelo que a ella le resultaba halagador a la par que incómodo. (*Martyrium* 37)

Her personality and certain details of her personal and sexual life are also under scrutiny. For instance, Sara, as Mendiluce's defense attorney and perhaps due to her own jealousy and lack of female solidarity, questions Rebeca's fierce independence as a single mother –via artificial insemination– who uses men for her own sexual satisfaction: “Rebeca no se casa con nadie. Vive para su carrera y para su hija. Pasa de los hombres. Solo los quiere para follárselos y luego, si te he visto no me acuerdo” (*Martyrium* 31). Even though Sara displays the same behavioral patterns, this old-fashioned masculine perspective towards sexual relations appears to be only acceptable in the series if the subjects are male. Once there is a female actively involved in such

behavior she is automatically labeled by the masculine gaze of the narrative as deviant, nymphomaniac or simply deserving of whichever punitive consequences come her way, forcing readers to dissolve the ambivalence between crucifying these characters or extolling their sexual freedom.

In that sense, Rebeca is a subversive and feminist character who shares some of the sexual coordinates associated with *femme fatale* figures. She is in tune with her own sexuality, does not want a paternal figure for Marta or a stable romantic relationship. She deviates from the stereotypical convention of romantic love as the decisive source of happiness and realization in life. She is only interested in the sexual release and satisfaction of sporadic sexual encounters in the tranquility of her home without feelings or strings attached. Instead of the aforementioned conception of romantic love as the normative form of love, Rebeca favors Ludus –amor lúdico–, which understands love as casual interactions with very little emotional implication and the general avoidance of intimacy (Ferrer et al. 589).

Her coworker, the district attorney Manuel Griñán fits the bill for Rebeca's desires. In fact, it is with him when Rebeca loses her tight self-control and lets herself enjoy the moment, even though she has to be in a dominant position directing the entirety of their sexual encounter, as Doyle accurately assesses when he voyeuristically videotapes them: “¡Aquella jueza de hielo se había convertido en una verdadera fulana en cuestión de segundos! Arrodillada delante del fiscal, le bajó los pantalones, le sacó la polla y se la introdujo en la boca, llevando el ritmo de la felación. Griñán intentó ponerle la mano en la cabeza, pero Rebeca se la apartó al momento, dejando claro que era ella la que mandaba” (*Martyrium* 59). Not only Rebeca's sexual deviance is put into question here, but also her emotional detachment as she does not display nurturing qualities stereotypically associated with women after a sexual encounter:

Cuando sus respiraciones se relajaron, Griñán intentó atraerla hacia sí y acariciarla, pero Rebeca se levantó de la alfombra del salón y dio por terminado el encuentro [...]

–Si no te importa, me voy a dar una ducha. Mañana hay mucho trabajo por hacer, Manuel, y tú aun tienes que regresar a casa. Mejor lo dejamos aquí [...]

Aquella jueza era una mantis religiosa. (*Martyrium* 60)

It is not the first time nor the last that female characters who deviate from patriarchal norms are described as sexually deviant, *femme fatales* or praying mantis, as Doyle calls her above.

However, a close reading of Rebeca's configuration provides sharp divergences with, for instance, Estela's mendacious and manipulative measures to use men through sex or with

Rajiva's criminal ulterior motives for which sex is just a means to an end. Rebeca has a strong moral code and is upfront with the strict rules she has set for herself with Griñán; she never lies, nor manipulates him sexually speaking. Rebeca's only "mistake" was to deny Mendiluce's plea for probation with bail and send him straight to prison due to him constituting "un claro peligro para la sociedad y dispone de los recursos necesarios para sustraerse a la acción de la justicia"

(*Martyrium* 147-148). As retaliation, Mendiluce through Sara contacts Dolores Wells, his partner in crime, who sends a hired assassin to kidnap Rebeca's daughter and blackmail Rebeca to rule in Mendiluce's favor in his upcoming trial:

Cállese y escuche. Nada de policía o no volverá a ver a su hija viva. Y créame que lo sabré. Esperará las instrucciones que le daré en su momento. Haga lo que le digo, y su hija sobrevivirá sin un rasguño. Desobedezca, y su hija morirá [...] Lo que le voy a pedir es que sea razonable [...] en lo que respecta al juicio de Pedro

Mendiluce [...] el veredicto ha de ser «inocente de todos los cargos». Es la única vía para que Marta esté pronto con usted, sana y salva. (*Martyrium* 130-131)

However, Doyle takes some liberties regarding his assignment, he goes beyond holding Marta hostage and torturing Rebeca about it. The cameras he has installed throughout her house are not only for surveillance purposes to ensure that she does not share any blackmail details with the police but also for Doyle's own personal pleasure. In order to entertain himself in his remote location in Italy where he has Marta in captivity, he observes Rebeca having sex with Griñán and masturbates during the process. Besides his voyeurism, and in spite of his personal rule about not interweaving personal pleasures for the sake of professional efficiency, he also forces Rebeca to perform sexual acts in front of the cameras, as if he could not control himself. Firstly, he toys with her, claiming the desire to know her better so he can understand and treat Marta properly. His personal questions regarding her preferences in males lead yet again to blackmail to avoid retaliation towards Marta after she attempted to escape. Rebeca is willing to do anything and everything after his emotional manipulation, which means Doyle coerces her into playing dress up and masturbating several times for him in front of the cameras:

La magistrada se quitó el liguero, el corsé y las medias dándole la espalda a la cámara, curvándola para ofrecerle todo lo que el pedía. La humillación estaba siendo tan grande que le fallaban las piernas. Luego se sentó y empezó a masturbarse de nuevo [...] se dejó llevar hasta el final, cada vez más rápido, hasta terminar en una explosión de gemidos anhelantes entremezclados con lágrimas que rompieron el silencio del despacho. (*Martyrium* 283)

In a way, Doyle's behavior pertaining to cybersex and sexual recordings inevitably leads readers to think about sociological concerns such as cybernetic sexual crimes and revenge porn

that populate news outlets and social media in contemporary society as patriarchal means to control, manipulate and punish women. In *Martyrium*, this humiliating experience is a synergy of Rebeca's coordinates as an ardent, sexual and independent woman who enjoys sex for sex's sake without romantic feelings or strings attached and as a fierce loving mother. Rebeca is punished for having the best of both, not necessarily mutually exclusive, worlds: sexuality and motherhood. As the narrative progresses, Rebeca buries all of Doyle's sexual crimes instead of reporting them to Valentina so she can offer her advice or perhaps apprehend Doyle after she rescues Marta. She does not even consider confiding in her as her best friend. Rebeca is only contemplating the consequences her confession could have for her daughter:

No creyó oportuno decirle nada de los «trabajos extra» que le estaba encargando Doyle... de la ordalía por la que la obligaba a pasar para que su hija no viera aumentados sus dolores del cautiverio con un trato más severo... que se había prostituido por su amor a su hija, y que está pensando seriamente en que quizás no iba a resistir tanto miedo y angustia, sobre todo cuando estaba redactando una sentencia que le producía un profundo asco. (*Martyrium* 364)

Nevertheless, besides this admission, there also is an underlying concern regarding her sexual humiliation. Rebeca is ashamed of all the sexual acts she was forced into, as if she were the one to blame, like contemporary patriarchal standards tend to make women believe, for the sexual misconduct. This *quid pro quo* sexual harassment and abuse –sexual deeds in exchange for her daughter's life– is another instance of gendered violence that goes unpunished in the novel.

Readers are the only witnesses of Rebeca's horrors. Doyle is still at large (and with the recordings as mementos) and no one, not Valentina nor the Spanish or the Italian police, is going to track or arrest him since they do not have knowledge of his crimes. Hence, Rebeca is forced to

suffer her pain alone and in silence, telling herself that it was worth it for her daughter's sake and hoping to forget it all once their lives return to normal.

However, as the narrative develops, the series proves that Marta's debacle –and by extension Rebeca's– does not end with the horrors of Rome but is a two-part process. Marta initially appears in *Martyrium* as Rebeca's little girl, the apple of her eye, who has been living for almost half a year away from home, in Rome, while she pursues a degree in theatre, music and arts. Marta is described as “una joven superdotada pero ingenua, capaz de las mayores gestas estudiantiles, pero a veces muy torpe en su vida social” (*Martyrium* 38). Her antics along with her decision to drop out of law school to pursue dramatic arts abroad inevitably configure Rebeca as the stereotypical helicopter parent who cannot stop but worrying and meddling in her daughter's life. At nineteen years old Marta is the epitome of cheerfulness, carelessness and overall happiness about life. She carries herself in a joyful manner; she is appreciative of the small things, like *caffè lattes* with her friend Candela, the peace of the meditation classes, Adele's voice or the butterfly feeling in her belly when she talks about Enzo, her new love. Marta's coordinates as a naïve carefree young female highly contrast with the rest of the women figures in the series that are constructed as more mature professionals in charge of their own sexuality. As such, Marta seems to be in need of guidance or assistance constantly if not by her mother then through Candela. As Marta's best friend and housemate, Candela is a more mature student –a twenty-three years old Italian student pursuing a doctorate degree in chemistry– who continually acts as a surrogate maternal or big sister figure to Marta. She looks after her, from instilling some sense into her: “intentaba encauzar infructuosamente la cabeza loca de Marta con sermones de hermana que su amiga se tomaba con mucho humor,” to lecturing her for her lack of clothing and her recent obsession with Enzo: “¿Vas a salir? [...] Abrígate, por Dios. Va a nevar.

Hace un frío que pela [...] ¡Enzo, Enzo, Enzo! [...] Le vas a gastar el nombre. Enzo, te amo. Enzo, el de los ojos negros, los abdominales y el pelo engominado. Enzo y su Vespa azul. Te vas a congelar con ese vestido en moto... Ponte algo por encima. ¿Quieres mi abrigo?" (*Martyrium* 51).

No matter how, as a rebellious late teenager, Marta disregards all the maternal figures in her life to pursue a romantic relationship with Enzo who in reality is not a journalism student but rather a drug dealer who owes 30,000€ in cocaine to his handler, Rajiva. As the criminal and *femme fatale* that she is, Rajiva seeks retaliation for the 200,000€ in benefits she lost because of Enzo; hence, she physically tortures him and plays Russian roulette with him until his self-preservation and survival instincts kick in and he sells Marta out: "¡Os voy a pagar! ¡Os lo juro! ¡Tengo algo que vale más dinero! ¡Por favor, no me mates! [...] En mi cartera [...] Hay un par de fotos de ella" (*Martyrium* 64). Rajiva accepts the bargain and orchestrates Marta's kidnapping since human trafficking for rape auction purposes among wealthy buyers proves to be more lucrative, as it was already explored in Rajiva's antagonistic section.

Marta is drugged and handcuffed when she awakens. Her mind is foggy, unable to remember exactly what happened and understand the possible connection between Enzo and her captor. Despite the confusion that rise to fear and the fact that she has been dressed in skimpy attire with a corset that showcases her breasts, matching thong, garter belt and fishnet stockings, Marta tries to remain calm, analyze the situation and stay alert of her surroundings. But as Rajiva reveals her true plans for Marta and the pivotal implication of Enzo in them due to his unlawful activities, Marta becomes enraged at him and her prospective short-term fate: "Eres una joven muy bella, pero un poco rebelde, Marta. Enzo nos ha contado muchas cosas de ti [...] Que eres muy flexible. Que haces ballet y arte dramático. Tienes muy buena voz, y puedes ser muy dulce

y complaciente cuando quieres. Un cúmulo de virtudes que te convierten en una pieza muy codiciada, querida mía” (*Martyrium* 91). Forgetting momentarily her own fear and shame, she confronts Rajiva using her mother and her status as a judge to threaten her but in exchange for her outburst she is drugged once more, this time with a sedative that will make her rather complacent to behave “como una perra en celo” so she can enjoy at her rapist’s hands: “Te vamos a hacer disfrutar como nunca en tu vida, aunque por desgracia no te vas a dar cuenta, estarás dormida. ¡Qué importa! Luego te pondremos la grabación para que goces de tus proezas” (*Martyrium* 93).

Even though Doyle rises as an unexpected temporary hero as he kidnaps Marta from Rajiva, for his own motives thereby saving her from a vicious and most likely violent rape, he intercedes too late as she has already been manually raped, as well as groped, touched and kissed by the rest of the eight bidders at the auction and almost anally penetrated by Nayef. Despite this traumatic experience, Marta is one of the few female characters who survives such an episode almost unscathed. Her second captivity, even though it represents another sort of harrowing experience, proves to be rather pleasant, in the sense that Doyle takes better care of her, in comparison to her first kidnaping. Doyle keeps her chained but he also feeds her, treats her rather kindly, allows her to clean herself, but most importantly, does not make any sexual advances towards Marta –he leaves those voyeuristic activities for her mother. In fact, Marta is perhaps one of the few female characters who is not described in a sexual manner from the beginning of her appearance in the series. Her few physical references allude to her honey-colored eyes, porcelain skin and ballerina body, all innocent and almost childish attributes that match her status as a virgin. Since it is demonstrated that Marta does not partake into deviant practices, the narrative does not allow for her to be properly punished like the rest of the *femme fatales* and

sexually active women in the series. She is instead constructed as a mere tool to fulfill a greater purpose, namely, Mendiluce's vendetta against Valentina, who in turn, as it has already been demonstrated, risks her professional career as well as her own life to come to Marta's rescue. While Valentina has already proved her worth –and she continues to do so throughout the series– her demeanor with Marta evinces her dormant maternal side. Rebeca has been her friend since a young age and Valentina's connection with her daughter becomes stronger than anticipated due to their apparent long-lost friendship. Through Marta, Valentina gets to be yet again a surrogate mother figure, first with Freddy and his rebellious antics, now with another young-adult in need of saving. It is perhaps the depth of this connection that causes Valentina's self-doubt and fear to fail because she is too involved. In fact, when she actually finds Marta, once again saved by Doyle from Rajiva's men, Valentina cannot help but cry, both at seeing Marta safe and sound and at Marta's outburst, "Valentina. Tía Valentina," who hugs her so tightly that Valentina can feel Marta's fingers stabbing her waist (*Martyrium* 451).

At this turn of events, Marta shows more signs of maturity besides acting collected during her captivity. She agrees to go on a short vacation with Rebeca to distance themselves from their nightmare, but refuses to abandon her career or leave Rome: "eso sería como renunciar a mis proyectos, y no quiero hacerlo" (*Martyrium* 478). By the time Marta reenters the narrative in its last installment some substantial changes have taken place on several fronts. Firstly, Mendiluce targets Marta once again to serve as a pawn in his plan to get retribution for Valentina and Rebeca's role in his demise. While the first time he only sought to get Marta kidnapped without any harm as long as Rebeca ruled him innocent of all charges, he has now enlisted the Hairdresser's help in providing him a new face and identity, to rape and kill both Marta and Valentina.

Secondly, these crimes now seem to take a gender, ideological and political turn since they appear as retaliation towards Rebeca's independent, sexually deviant and feminist behaviors:

Rebeca de Palacios era una celebridad, implacable con los delincuentes, altiva ante cualquiera que no le mereciera su respeto, una mujer de semblante impávido con una belleza clásica que fascinaba a los fotógrafos. De Palacios llevaba una vida muy discreta con su hija. Era el espejo de un sector grande del feminismo que la veía como la perfecta mujer moderna: madre soltera, profesional independiente y despreciativa de todo varón que pretendiera encadenarla.

(*Martyrium* 31)

As such, Marta becomes the perfect weapon to punish Rebeca at the hands of a rapist of teenagers.

Thirdly, Marta has matured and decided to take a carefree but more practical way of living her life. She has recently travelled to Indonesia, has left yet another boyfriend and enjoys the company of her friends. As Rebeca puts it: “me parece que ahora es un espíritu libre [...] está en esa etapa donde una se deja querer y nadie te conquista del todo [...] Así que va rompiendo corazones por donde va” (*Martyrium* 133). Although she also believes a part of Marta is still hurting from Enzo's lies and death. Marta's way of dealing with those feelings has two opposing but not mutually exclusive approaches: experiencing and experimenting without attachments – free love as her mother says– and being able to defend herself physically: “le ha dado por el karate. Pronto va a participar en los campeonatos gallegos. La verdad, estoy muy contenta de que se dedique a las artes marciales. Desde lo de Roma está obsesionada con la defensa personal” (*Martyrium* 133). As Valentina expertly assesses, Marta's desire to control her mind and

physical prowess is the only consequence at the same time it also is a way in itself to deal with the aftermath of her captivity.

During the events of *A Coruña Negra*, according to Mendiluce's instructions, the Hairdresser starts his plan to seduce Marta: small lingering smiles, fake shyness, a toast with Albariño, and the exchange their phone numbers. Under his alias, Esteban, he recreates a web of lies to match his fake identity and even though he is Marta's senior –ten years older than the twenty-two year-old woman– he appeals to her sense of maturity and her interest in criminology and crime fiction to continue his successful seduction game: “era fuerte y dura como el acero. Y una de las cosas que se había jurado a sí misma es que no iba a permitir que lo vivido en Roma condicionara su vida futura [...] no vio ninguna razón por la que no debía seguir relacionándose con aquel hombre atractivo, cuya presencia dejaba a los jóvenes de su edad como figuras accesorias [...] Pensó que de ese hombre podría aprender cosas nuevas” (*Martyrium* 207). As their interactions progress, Marta develops feelings for him and the need to unearth the deeper layers of his persona and the Hairdresser undergoes a sensibilization process of awakening in which he realizes he is jealous of other men and that he could have a real relationship with Marta, respecting her instead of giving to his usual tendencies of humiliating, forcing and torturing women for the sexual release it entails. Without noticing and as the plot twist unfolds, he is falling in love with his prey: “Se dejó ir. La agarró con fuerza, dominándola y la penetró mientras ella seguía besándolo, arañándolo, la pasión desatada y completa, violenta, y durante varias horas Marcos Albelo, el violador de adolescentes, se convirtió en Esteban, el hombre que recorría el cuerpo de la mujer amada como un epifanía de placer doloroso” (*Martyrium* 296).

Due to the multiple plots and subplots of the last installment, the suspense of Marta's narrative arc is maintained throughout since her scenes are brief and few and far between– and

the Hairdresser apparently proceeds according to Mendiluce's plan. Once she is kidnapped for the third time, Mendiluce unveils his elaborate revenge: (1) to mentally assault Marta by forcing her to witness him sexually abusing Sara, (2) to have his henchmen violently undress and grope Marta, (3) then force her to engage into lesbian intercourse with the lawyer and finally (4) to let the Hairdresser rape and kill her in front of his small entourage. Even though Marta uses her karate and ballet skills to fight her captors and attempt to escape, she lacks the strength to become her own savior. It is the Hairdresser's rage and jealousy as Iván tries to force himself into Marta who initially saves her both from being raped and from Mendiluce's ruses. And ultimately it is Valentina who with Cabanas's help puts an end to Mendiluce and the Hairdresser's lives and their reign of corruption and torture, closing finally all the narrative arcs and the tetralogy as well.

Marta's constant need for saving, the maternal instincts she inspires in Valentina –as well as other characters– and the apparent inevitable objectification of her childish and originally non-sexualized persona into a vessel for men's sexual pleasure and violence as well as a tool configured to achieve men's terminal goals reemphasize the already established hypothesis that no woman is safe in this series. The women depicted in the four novels are extremely attractive and fulfilled in their professional lives. Whether true or not, they are at some point perceived as sexually deviant (even Marta who initially enters the narrative as a non-sexual character ends up victimized for her relationship with the Hairdresser and her connections to Rebeca and Valentina) by the male population and deserving of punishment according to the masculine gaze, and all of them, through their professional or personal lives clash with Valentina's sphere, gravitating around her, and configuring her as the true (s)hero that unifies the sexual violence

and gendered concerns that afflict the women in the series, the genre, and by extension, in contemporary Spanish society.

CONCLUSION

“The one person who will never leave us, whom we will never lose, is ourself. Learning to love our female selves is where our search for love must begin”
–bell hooks, *Communion: The Female Search for Love*

The analysis of Garrido and Abarca’s crime fiction series has plotted a female cartography that assists to understand the representation of female figures in the topographical journey through the genre and their saga. In so doing, I have shown how the female characters in Garrido and Abarca’s series signify an evolution from their traditional stereotypical roles in the genre to offer a more plural and polyphonic body of female characters. These three chapters have relied on literary, sociological and artistic sources to analyze the physical, psychological and social coordinates of the main detective figure of the series as well as its victims and satellite characters. My research also confirmed how these female figures are objectified and punished for their bodies, independence and (deviant) sexuality at the same time all of them are interconnected among themselves and their life experiences inform and affect one another. It also depicted how each of these characters is compulsory for the advancement of the plot and, more importantly, for the development of Valentina’s narrative arc and (s)hero’s journey, while they also explored critically relevant topics affecting women in contemporary Spanish society.

There is a conscious effort on Garrido and Abarca’s end to depict a literary account of gendered violence. As such, these three chapters have put special emphasis on the connection of these crimes –rape, domestic violence, sexual harassment, prostitution, etc.– with their physical, psychological and interpersonal ramifications for their survivors –as it can be seen in Valentina’s situation, for instance– and the importance of bringing these gendered concerns to the forefront to give voice to countless nameless and faceless victims and, ultimately, to highlight their relevance in contemporary Spanish society. As a matter of fact, since 2003, when Spain started

recording the amount of female victims due to domestic and gendered violence, more than 1,000 women have been brutally murdered and over 40 women have been killed so far only in 2019.⁴¹ What is more, according to the National Institute of Statistics (INE), domestic and gendered violence in 2018 increased in comparison to the data obtained the previous year in the country: domestic violence incremented by 6.9% and 31,286 cases of gendered violence were documented (7.9% more) making the rate of victims of gendered violence 1.5 out of 1,000 women of fourteen years old or older (1). A recent survey carried out in France, Italy, Germany, the United Kingdom, the United States and Spain also shows that the latter was rated “as the worst offender [country] for street harassment against women” since “[a]mong Spanish respondents, 92% said they had experienced some kind of verbal or physical aggression of a sexual nature at some point in their lives” (Ayuso n.p.). Taking into consideration these numbers along with patriarchal and chauvinistic views, the existence of a rape culture that in spite of contemporary awareness movements such as #MeToo and #Cuéntalo still allows the proliferation of gang rapes (as contemporary news outlets cover almost on a weekly basis) and the World Health Organization’s prediction (dated from 2013) that domestic violence affects 30% of women worldwide and that 35% of all women will experience acts of violence within a romantic relationship or outside of it at some point in their lives (n.p.), there is more than enough evidence to support the importance, relevance and veracity of the gendered claims and concerns depicted in crime fiction series like Garrido and Abarca’s *Crímenes Exquisitos*.

The approach to the female body showcased throughout this research proved critical to understand the multifaceted concept of female visibility which can be understood as a way of making women –and more precisely, victims– visible to subvert and rewrite the traditional

⁴¹ See “Cronología de víctimas mortales de violencia de género de 2019” for a more detailed account: elpais.com/sociedad/2019/02/06/actualidad/1549439631_636546.html.

masculine gaze used to look at and portray characters in the genre. Hence, allowing them to share their story on their own terms, or at least, make readers question the authority and authenticity of the patriarchal ways used to depict them. However, this visibility has quite often been used as an excuse for a vehicle to grant and emphasize the grounds for women's abuse once this female cartography is made visible if we understand that bodies are indeed roadmaps to our lives. Regardless of the lens used to address this visibility concern, without a doubt, these female bodies give rise to three main concerns: (1) the constant pressure women feel to have perfect bodies to appease the masculine population; (2) the overwhelming male entitlement to said bodies for men's own sexual benefit; and (3) the response these bodies elicit from readers when they have been marked for use and abuse by men. The latter becomes a critical element to discern the message of the series: is the series criticizing this gendered violence or perpetuating, replicating and enjoying it? Do we as readers rejoice in the voyeurism of the crimes committed or reject their gory details? Do we hold women responsible for their own victimization or do we criminalize male perpetrators?

This ambiguity is perhaps one of the strongest initial aspects of the series, the multiple readings, opposing but not mutually exclusive, it allows. Whether Garrido and Abarca's original purpose is to depict violence against women because it sells well, use that violence to upset social norms, make readers enjoy the artistic implications of the murders or being horrified by them, upon further examination, as it has been proved throughout these chapters, it is impossible to deny the feminist undertones and the outrage the series generates at women's treatment. The narrative then, at a deeper level, forces readers to dissolve that preliminary sense of ambiguity by embarking themselves into a self-exploratory analysis to question their morals and inner motivations in order to discern if they truly enjoy, find poetic justice in or simply excuse both the

violence and murders depicted here for being just fictitious scenarios. Contemporary narratives with female protagonists (and women authors) similar to *Crímenes Exquisitos* promote not only the visibilization of women's writers and concerns, especially those avoided by men (rape, domestic violence, child pornography, incest, etc.) but also a counterreaction to the tradition of violence against women and the fetishization of said violence. Meaning that the narrative, in general, does not allow the complete anonymization of the female victims or the sexual vexation of their dead bodies through the autopsies, the violence is not gratuitous since it comes with serious gendered and sociological concerns and it also calls to question the entitlement and sexist attitudes traditionally depicted in the genre that contemporary patriarchy still tries to justify.

Therefore, this dissertation offers an exposition of the multiple readings and significations assigned to the female bodies and the problems they face. It constitutes but a first step towards a critical conversation based on the analysis of Garrido and Abarca's work that will benefit from further expansion of its characters, narrative arcs, concerns and intertextuality to provide a more fruitful exploration and a conscientious dialogue with its artistic references and sociological concerns but also, and more importantly, with their current (*El beso de Tosca*) and future literary production, provided that the authors decide to expand the *Crímenes Exquisitos* world –paying especial attention to the formula depicted here for female sexual victims. As well as with other contemporary series with women protagonists that share common sociological and gender concerns with Garrido and Abarca's literary universe. Among the next stages of research, my approach could be expanded to explore if this conception of female victims applies to the work of contemporary women writers, whether they follow or not a similar development in their victims' configuration in their series –like Garrido and Abarca's use of different narratological tactics to humanize, and the opposite, to anonymize their victims, or use them to pay homage to

classical figures of the genre. The treatment bestowed upon secondary characters, perhaps the most underresearched area in the genre, and in fiction in general, also needs consideration to better understand if the female satellite figures depicted in other series written by women are also configured as gravitational elements orbiting around the female detectives' personal and professional lives and if in creating and including these satellite characters in the series, they serve to invest the female detective protagonists with greater psychological complexity.

Finally, a more extensive comparative analysis between Valentina and her contemporaneous inspectors, like Annika Kaunda, Amaia Salazar or Lisbeth Salander, from the series *Más que cuerpos*, *La trilogía del Baztán* and *The Millenium Trilogy*, respectively, to mention but a few of the most prominent and briefly analyzed/related figures here, is needed since these leading figures emerge from crime fiction writers' apparent desire to portray more realistic and relatable females. Not just on the physical realm, since not all readers will identify themselves (by voyeurism or narcissism) in those physically attractive coordinates, but more so on the psychological sphere, considering these females are configured as flawed human beings who err and face adversity while they also confront pressing matters for contemporary readers that traditionally were not engaged by the genre, including sexual violence, mental health, motherhood, sexual deviance –like homosexuality and bisexuality– mythology, marriage and infidelity, to list just a few examples.

The reflections of this dissertation participate in a current scholarly conversation for which understanding the representation of the female body in Spanish crime fiction is a central concern, like Diana Aramburu's recently published book, *Resisting Invisibility: Detecting the Female Body in Spanish Crime Fiction* (July 2019), or edited volumes attempting to feminize the canon of twentieth and twenty-first-century Spanish crime fiction to ensure the legitimization of

women's voices and spaces. In that sense, this dissertation was created with the intention to provide an advance towards the study of a series that has not been granted the critical attention it deserves while also opening a dialogue to future interpretations of the saga and its characters, as well as of contemporary and new literary and/or filmographic narratives led and authored by women.

WORKS CITED

- Agra Romero, María Xosé. "Violencia(s): hacer correr la sangre." *Tras la pista: Narrativa criminal escrita por mujeres*, edited by Elena Losada Soler and Katarzyna Paszkiewicz, Icaria, 2015, pp. 19-39.
- Aird, Catherine. "Characterization." *The Oxford Companion to Crime and Mystery Writing*, edited by Rosemary Herbert, Oxford UP, 1999, pp. 61-62.
- Alizade, Alcira Miriam. *Feminine Sensuality*. Karnac Books, 1999.
- Allen, Virginia M. *The Femme Fatale: Erotic Icon*. The Whitston Publishing Company, 1983.
- Avanzas Álvarez, Elena. "El cuerpo del delito: Género y políticas corporales en la literatura de detectives." *Cuestiones de género: de la igualdad y la diferencia*, no. 11, 2016, pp. 545-558.
- Ayuso, Silvia. "Spain Tops List for Levels of Verbal Street Harassment, Study Finds." Translated by Susana Urra, *El País*, 20 Nov. 2018, elpais.com/elpais/2018/11/20/inenglish/1542711053_288574.html. Accessed 9 Aug. 2019.
- Bakare-Yusuf, Bibi. "Thinking with Pleasure: Danger, Sexuality and Agency." *Women, Sexuality and the Political Power of Pleasure*, edited by Susie Jolly, Andrea Cornwall and Kate Hawkins, Zed Books, 2013, pp. 28-41.
- Ballon, Rachel. *Blueprint for Screenwriting: A Complete Writer's Guide to Story Structure and Character Development*. Taylor and Francis, 2005.
- Barrientos, Mónica. "Mujeres al óleo sobre fondo negro. Retratos pictóricos en películas de psicología criminal." *La globalización del crimen: literatura, cine y nuevos medios*, edited by Javier Sánchez Zapatero and Àlex Martín Escibà, Andavira, 2017, pp. 665-672.

- Berger, Charlotte. “‘Death of the Author’: Maj Sjöwall and Per Wahlöö’s Police Procedurals.” *Cross-Cultural Connections in Crime Fictions*, edited by Vivien Miller and Helen Oakley, Palgrave Macmillan, 2012, pp. 141-159.
- Binder, Sabine. “Whose Story is Written on Her Dead Body? Writing Gender Justice and Transformation by Re-writing Female Victims in South African Crime Thrillers.” *Current Writing: Text and Reception in Southern Africa*, vol. 29, no. 2, 2017, pp. 100-110.
- Bisbee, Dana. “Sidekicks and Sleuthing Teams.” *The Oxford Companion to Crime and Mystery Writing*, edited by Rosemary Herbert, Oxford UP, 1999, pp. 412-414.
- Bradford, Richard. *Crime Fiction: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford UP, 2015.
- Bronfen, Elizabeth. *Over Her Dead Body: Death, Femininity, and the Aesthetic*. Routledge, 1992.
- Brown, Jeffrey A. “Gender, Sexuality, and Toughness: The Bad Girls of Action Film and Comic Books.” *Action Chicks: New Images of Tough Women in Popular Culture*, edited by Sherrie A. Inness, Palgrave Macmillan, 2004, pp. 47-74.
- Campbell, SueEllen. “The Detective Heroine and the Death of the Hero: Dorothy Sayers to P.D. James.” *Modern Fiction Studies*, vol. 29, no. 3, 1983, pp. 497-510.
- Campus Training, Juan de. “Mujer policía: porcentaje en los cuerpos y fuerzas de seguridad.” *Campus Training*, 8 Mar. 2018, www.campustraining.es/noticias/mujer-policia/. Accessed 28 Dec. 2018.
- Ceglia, Francesco Paolo de. “Sventrare Venere e Scorticare Marsia. Corpo Femminile e Corpo Maschile nelle Cere Anatomiche della Specola Fiorentina.” *La Stella Nuova. Atti del III*

- Convegno Annuale sulla Comunicazione della Scienza*, edited by Nico Pitrelli and Giancarlo Sturloni, Polimetrica, 2005, pp. 69-76.
- Chesney-Lind, Meda. "Policing Women's Bodies: Law, Crime, Sexuality, and Reproduction." *Women & Criminal Justice*, vol. 47, no. 1, 2017, pp. 1-3.
- Christie, Agatha. *Murder on the Orient Express*. Dood, Mead & Company, 1960.
- Cillero Goiriastuena, Javier. "Woman on the Road. A New Look at Bilbao's Urban Landscape in Itxaro Borda's Ezpeldoi Series." *Crime Scene Spain. Essays on Post-Franco Crime Fiction*, edited by Renée W. Craig-Odders and Jacky Collins, McFarland & Co, 2009, pp. 204-226.
- Clay-Warner, Jody and Callie Harbin Burt. "Rape Reporting After Reforms: Have Times Really Changed?" *Violence Against Women*, vol. 11, no. 2, 2005, pp. 150-176.
- Clemente, Yolanda. "Más de 800 mujeres muertas por violencia machista." *El País*, 9 Mar. 2017, elpais.com/elpais/2017/03/03/media/1488565128_697938.html. Accessed 27 Sep. 2017.
- "Código Deontológico." *Federación de Asociaciones de Periodistas de España*, fape.es/home/código-deontologico/. Accessed 9 Nov. 2017.
- Colmeiro, José. *La novela policiaca española: Teoría e historia crítica*. Anthropos, 1994.
- Cornwell, Patricia. *Three Complete Novels: Postmortem, Body of Evidence, All that Remains*. Smithmark, 1997.
- Craft, Christopher. "'Kiss Me with Those Red Lips': Gender and Inversion in Bram Stoker's Dracula." *Representations*, no. 8, 1984, pp. 107-133.
- Cuenca Piqueras, Cristina. *El acoso sexual: Un aspecto olvidado de la violencia de género*. Madrid: Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas, 2017.

- Culver, Melisa. "El "yo" de la detective: Dolores Redondo y Carolina Solé." *Lectora*, vol. 21, 2015, pp. 57-71.
- . "La escritura de lo visible: El caso de las mujeres policía." *Letras Femeninas*, vol. 38, no. 1, 2012, pp. 93-107.
- De Welde, Kristine. "Kick-Ass Feminism. Violence, Resistance, and Feminist Avengers in Larsson's Trilogy." *Men Who Hate Women and Women Who Kick Their Asses. Stieg Larsson's Millennium Trilogy in Feminist Perspective*, edited by Donna King and Carrie Lee Smith, Vanderbilt UP, 2012, pp. 15-26.
- Dijkstra, Bram. *Idols of Perversity. Fantasies of Feminine Evil in Fin-de-Siècle Culture*. Oxford UP, 1986.
- Dilley, Kimberly J. *Busybodies, Meddlers, and Snoops: The Female Hero in Contemporary Women's Mysteries*. Greenwood Press, 1998.
- Dowler, Ken, et al. "Constructing Crime: Media, Crime, and Popular Culture." *Canadian Journal of Criminology and Criminal Justice*, vol. 48, no. 6, 2006, pp. 837-865.
- Dunant, Sarah. "Body Language: A Study of Death and Gender in Crime Fiction." *The Art of Detective Fiction*, edited by Warren Chernaik et al., St. Martin's P, 2000, pp. 10-20.
- Economopoulos, Harula. "Stefano Maderno Scultore e Giambologna Architetto nel Monumento Windischgrätz in San Domenico a Siena." *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz*, vol. 51, no. 3/4, 2007, pp. 366-408.
- Edwards, Martin. "Victim." *The Oxford Companion to Crime and Mystery Writing*, edited by Rosemary Herbert, Oxford UP, 1999, pp. 478-479.

- El País. "Cronología de víctimas mortales de violencia de género de 2019." *El País*, 6 Aug. 2019, elpais.com/sociedad/2019/02/06/actualidad/1549439631_636546.html. Accessed 9 Aug. 2019.
- Eliot, T.S. *La tierra baldía*. Edited by Viorica Patea, translated by José Luis Palomares, Cátedra, Letras universales, 2005.
- Evanovich, Janet. *One for the Money*. St. Martin's Griffin, 1994.
- Fahs, Breanne. *Performing Sex: The Making and Unmaking of Women's Erotic Lives*. State U of New York, 2011.
- Fallarás, Cristina. "Entrevista. Marta Sanz. «El cuerpo es el texto y el texto es mi cuerpo»." *Archiletras*, vol. 2, 2019, 106-113.
- Feltey, Kathryn. "Gender Violence: Rape and Sexual Assault." *The Criminal Justice System and Women: Offenders, Prisoners, Victims, and Workers*, edited by Barbara Raffel Price and Natalie J. Sokoloff, McGraw Hill, 2004, pp. 323-334.
- Ferber, Abby L. "Always Ambivalent: Why Media Is Never Just Entertainment." *Men Who Hate Women and Women Who Kick Their Asses. Stieg Larsson's Millennium Trilogy in Feminist Perspective*, edited by Donna King and Carrie Lee Smith, Vanderbilt UP, 2012, pp. 3-14.
- Ferrer Pérez, Victoria, et al. "El concepto de amor en España." *Psicothema*, vol. 20, no. 4, 2008, pp. 589-595.
- . "Los mitos del amor romántico en España." *Boletín de Psicología*, vol. 99, 2010, pp. 7-31.
- Gain, Adrienne E. "Feminist Crime Fiction and Female Sleuths." *A Companion to Crime Fiction*, edited by Charles Rzepka and Lee Horsley, Wiley-Blackwell, 2010, pp. 258-269.
- Gardiner, Meg. *Unsub: A Novel*. Penguin Random House, 2017.

- Garrido, Vicente and Nieves Abarca. *Crímenes exquisitos*. Versátil, 2012.
- . *El hombre de la máscara de espejos*. Ediciones B, 2014.
- . *Los muertos viajan deprisa*. Ediciones B, 2016.
- . *Martyrium*. Versátil, 2013.
- Gay, Roxane. *Bad Feminist: Essays*. Harper Perennial, 2014.
- Gellert Lyons, Bridget. "The Iconography of Ophelia." *ELH*, vol. 44, no. 1, 1977, pp. 60-74.
- Giménez Bartlett, Alicia. *Ritos de muerte*. Destino, 2010.
- Giovannelli, Alessandro. "In Sympathy with Narrative Characters." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, vol. 67, no. 1, 2009, pp. 83-95.
- Godsland, Shelley. *Killing Carmens: Women's Crime Fiction from Spain*. U of Wales P, 2007.
- . "Mujeres que matan: Violencia femenina y transgresión social en la novela criminal femenina Española." *Monstruosidad y transgresión en la cultura hispánica*, edited by Ricardo de la Fuente Ballesteros and Jesús Pérez-Magallón, Universitas Castellae, 2003, pp. 151-167.
- González García, María. "Misticismo y erotismo: de San Juan de la Cruz a Pier Paolo Pasolini. Alegoría y teorema de la seducción." *Hispanic Journal*, vol. 33, no. 1, 2012, pp. 49-60.
- Gregory Klein, Kathleen. "*Habeas Corpus*: Feminism and Detective Fiction." *Feminism in Women's Detective Fiction*, edited by Glenwood Irons, U of Toronto P, 1995, pp. 171-190.
- Hammett, Dashiell. *The Maltese Falcon*. Alfred A. Knopf, 1957.
- Hart, Patricia. *The Spanish Sleuth*. Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 1987.
- Hidalgo, Pilar. "'These Fragments against My Ruins': Cambios Sociales en las novelas de P.D. James." *Atlantis*, vol. 22, no. 2, 2000, pp. 93-106.

- Hill, Lorna. "Bloody Women: How Female Authors Have Transformed the Scottish Contemporary Crime Fiction Genre." *American, British and Canadian Studies Journal*, vol. 28, no. 1, 2017, pp. 52-71.
- Hirorito, Miyamoto and Thomas Lamarre. "How Characters Stand Out." *Mechademia*, vol. 6, 2011, pp. 84-91.
- Horsley, Lee. *Twentieth-Century Crime Fiction*. Oxford UP, 2005.
- Howard, H. Wendell. "Who's Cecilia? What Is She?" *Logos*, vol. 18, no. 3, 2015, pp. 15-32.
- Hummel, Maria. *Still Lives*. Counterpoint, 2018.
- INE. "Estadística de violencia doméstica y violencia de género 2018." *Instituto Nacional de Estadística*, 28 May 2019, pp. 1-22, ine.es/prensa/evdvg_2018.pdf. Accessed 9 Aug. 2019.
- Inness, Sherrie A. Introduction. *Action Chicks: New Images of Tough Women in Popular Culture*, by Inness, Palgrave Macmillan, 2004, pp. 1-17.
- Irons, Glenwood. Introduction. *Feminism in Women's Detective Fiction*, by Irons, U of Toronto P, 1995, pp. ix-xxiv.
- Jackson, Louise A. *Women Police: Gender, Welfare and Surveillance in the Twentieth Century*. Manchester UP, 2006.
- Jacobs, Alan. "Miss Marple and the Problem of Modern Identity." *The New Atlantis*, vol. 47, 2007, pp. 18-30.
- Janerka, Malgorzata. *La novela policiaca española (1975-2005) ante los problemas de la sociedad española contemporánea*. Academia del Hispanismo, 2010.
- Jar Couselo, Gonzalo. "La mujer en la Guardia Civil: Una perspectiva sociológica." *Revista Española de Investigaciones Sociológicas*, vol. 59, 1992, pp. 223-241.

- Jeffries, Lesley. *Textual Construction of the Female Body: A Critical Discourse Approach*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.
- Jermyn, Deborah. "You Can't Keep a Dead Woman Down: The Female Corpse and Textual Disruption in Contemporary Hollywood." *Images of the Corpse from the Renaissance to Cyberspace*, edited by Elizabeth Klaver, U of Wisconsin P, 2004, pp. 153-168.
- Johnson, Eithne and Eric Schaefer. "Soft Core/Hard Core: Snuff as a Crisis in Meaning." *Journal of Film and Video*, vol. 45, no. 2/3, 1993, pp. 40-59.
- Keating, Dan. "The Weapons Men and Women Most Often Use to Kill." *The Washington Post*, 7 May 2015, www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2015/05/07/poison-is-a-womans-weapon/?utm_term=.92e598e3f1ca. Accessed 28 Dec. 2018.
- Kennedy, Kathleen. "Reading Kathleen Mallory: Trauma and Survival in the Detective Fiction of Carol O'Connell". *Bad Girls and Transgressive Women in Popular Television, Fiction, and Film*, edited by Julie A. Chappell and Mallory Young, Palgrave Macmillan, 2017, pp. 51-71.
- Kimmel, Michael S. *The Gendered Society*. Oxford UP, 2004.
- Kinsman, Margaret. "Different and Yet the Same: Women's Worlds/Women's Lives and the Classroom." *Diversity and Detective Fiction*, edited by Kathleen Gregory Klein, Bowling Green State U Popular P, 1999, pp. 5-21.
- Klein, Kathleen Gregory. *The Woman Detective. Gender & Genre*. Illinois UP, 1988.
- Kramer, Kaley. "'How Do You Like My Darkness Now?': Women, Violence, and the Good 'Bad Girl' in Buffy the Vampire Slayer." *Bad Girls and Transgressive Women in Popular Television, Fiction, and Film*, edited by Julie A. Chappell and Mallory Young, Palgrave Macmillan, 2017, pp. 15-32.

- Kramer, Lawrence. "Culture and Musical Hermeneutics: The Salome Complex." *Cambridge Opera Journal*, vol. 2, no. 3, 1990, pp. 269-294.
- Kristeva, Julia. *Powers of Horror. An Essay on Abjection*. Columbia UP, 1982.
- Kungl, Carla Therese. *Creating the Fictional Female Detective: The Sleuth Heroines of British Women Writers, 1890-1940*. McFarland & Company, 2006.
- Kuttermann, Udo. "The "Dance of the Seven Veils." Salome and Erotic Culture around 1900." *Artibus et Historiae*, vol. 27, no. 53, 2006, pp. 187-215.
- La Sexta. "La mujer en las Fuerzas Armadas: el porcentaje se estanca en un 12,5% cuando se cumplen 30 años de su entrada." *La Sexta*, 21 Feb. 2018, www.lasexta.com/noticias/nacional/mujer-fuerzas-armadas-porcentaje-estanca-125-cuando-cumplen-anos-entrada_201802215a8d66ce0cf267492bf79dce.html. Accessed 28 Dec. 2018.
- Lantos, John D. "Introduction: Plastination in Historical Perspective." *Controversial Bodies: Thoughts on the Public Display of Plastinated Corpses*, edited by John D. Lantos, Johns Hopkins UP, 2011, pp. 1-16.
- Lanzuela Hernández, Joaquina. "Una aproximación al estudio iconográfico de San Sebastián." *STVDIVM Revista de Humanidades*, vol. 12, 2006, pp. 231-258.
- Larsson, Stieg. *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*. Vintage Books, 2008.
- Lehman, David. *The Perfect Murder: A Study in Detection*. U of Michigan P, 1999.
- Lehti, Martti, and Kauko Aromaa. "Trafficking for Sexual Exploitation." *Crime and Justice*, vol. 34, no. 1, 2006, pp. 133-227.
- Lewis, Denise C., et al. "Awakening to the Desires of Older Women: Deconstructing Ageism within Fashion Magazines." *Journal of Aging Studies*, vol. 25, 2011, pp. 101-109.

- “Ley Orgánica 10/1995.” *Boletín Oficial del Estado*, Nov 24th 1995: pp. 1-199.
- “Ley Orgánica 3/2007.” *Boletín Oficial del Estado*, Mar 22nd 2007: pp. 1-59.
- Lino, Shanna. “Establishing Otherness: Ecocritical Crime Writing about the Trafficking of Women in Ángela Vallvey’s *El hombre del corazón negro*.” *Spanish and Latin American Women’s Crime Fiction in the New Millennium: From Noir to Gris*, edited by Nancy Vosburg and Nina L. Molinaro, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2017, pp. 1-16.
- López Martínez. “Novela negra, madre nutricia y espacios de sociabilidad: Bodegones escritos en femenino.” *Asparkia*, vol. 17, 2006, pp. 181-194.
- Losada Soler, Elena. “Matar con un lápiz. La novela criminal escrita por mujeres.” *Lectora*, vol. 21, 2015, pp. 9-14.
- Losada Soler, Elena and Katarzyna Paszkiewicz. “Ellas también escriben sobre el mal.” *Tras la pista: Narrativa criminal escrita por mujeres*, edited by Elena Losada Soler and Katarzyna Paszkiewicz, Icaria, 2015, pp. 7-17.
- Mann, David. *Shakespeare’s Women: Performance and Conception*. Cambridge UP, 2008.
- Margolin, Uri. “Introducing and Sustaining Characters in Literary Narrative: A Set of Conditions.” *Style*, vol. 21, no. 1, 1987, pp. 107-124.
- Martín Gijón, Susana. *Vino y pólvora*. Anantes, 2016.
- Mastej, Marta M. et al. “Creating Fictional Characters: The Role of Experience, Personality, and Social Processes.” *Psychology of Aesthetics, Creativity, and the Arts*, vol. 11, no. 4, 2017, pp. 487-499.
- Meffert, Susan M., et al. “A Prospective Study of Trait Anger and PTSD Symptoms in Police.” *Journal of Traumatic Stress*, vol. 21, no. 4, 2008, pp. 410-416.
- Messent, Peter. *The Crime Fiction Handbook*. Wiley-Blackwell, 2013.

- Messerschmidt, James W. *Nine Lives: Adolescent Masculinities, the Body, and Violence*. Westview Press, 1999.
- . *Masculinities and Crime: Critique and Reconceptualisation of Theory*. Roman and Littlefield, 1993.
- Mezei, Kathy. "Spinsters, Surveillance, and Speech: The Case of Miss Marple, Miss Mole, and Miss Jekyll." *Journal of Modern Literature*, vol. 30, no. 2, 2007, pp. 103-120.
- Modleski, Tania. "Rape Versus Mans/Laughter: Hitchcock's Blackmail and Feminist Interpretation." *PMLA*, vol. 102, no. 3, 1987, pp. 304-315.
- Molinaro, Nina L. "Writing the Wrong Rites? Rape and Women's Detective Fiction in Spain." *Letras Femeninas*, vol. 28, no. 1, 2002, pp. 100-17.
- Montross, Christine. "Resisting the Allure of the Lifelike Dead." *Controversial Bodies: Thoughts on the Public Display of Plastinated Corpses*, edited by John D. Lantos, Johns Hopkins UP, 2011, pp. 48-54.
- Mujeres en cifras*. Instituto de la mujer y para la igualdad de oportunidades, 2017, www.inmujer.gob.es/MujerCifras/Home.htm. Accessed 8 Sep. 2017.
- Mulvey, Laura. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." *Feminism and Film*, edited by Constance Penley, Routledge, 1988, pp. 57-68.
- Natarajan, Mangai. *Women Police in a Changing Society. Back Door to Equality*. Ashgate, 2008.
- Ng, Laura Ellen. *Feminist Hard-Boiled Detective Fiction as Political Protest in the Tradition of Women Proletarian Writers of the 1930s*. Diss. Louisiana State U, 2005.
- OMS. "Informe de la OMS destaca que la violencia contra la mujer es 'un problema de salud global de proporciones endémicas.'" *Organización Mundial de la Salud*, 20 Jun 2013,

who.int/mediacentre/news/releases/2013/violence_against_women_20130620/es/.

Accessed 9 Aug. 2019.

Ortiz, Lourdes. *Picadura mortal*. Alfaguara, 1996.

Ozer, Emily J., et al. "Predictors of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder and Symptoms in Adults: A Meta-Analysis." *Psychological Bulletin*, vol. 129, no. 1, 2003, pp. 52-73.

Palmer, Joy. "Tracing Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Forensic Detective Fiction." *South Central Review*, vol. 18, no. 3/4, 2001, pp. 54-71.

Pérez del Río, Teresa. "La violencia de género en el trabajo: el acoso sexual y el acoso moral por razón de género." *Temas Laborales*, vol. 91, 2007, pp. 175-203.

Pérez Guardo, Rocío. "Las limitaciones en la cuantificación del acoso sexual laboral en España." *Athenea*, vol. 12, no. 2, 2012, pp. 199-219.

Picart, Caroline Joan S. "Crime and the Gothic: Sexualizing Serial Killers." *Journal of Criminal Justice and Popular Culture*, vol. 13, no. 1, 2006, pp. 1-18.

Piñuel y Zabala, Iñaki and Araceli Oñate Cantero. "Incidencia del mobbing o acoso psicológico en el trabajo en España. Resultados del barómetro Cisneros® II sobre violencia en el entorno laboral." *Lan Harremanak*, vol. 7, 2002, pp. 35-62.

Plain, Gill. *Twentieth-Century Crime Fiction. Gender, Sexuality and the Body*. Edinburgh UP, 2001.

Policía Nacional. "La Policía Nacional fue la institución pionera en nuestro país en la incorporación de personal femenino hace casi 40 años." *Ministerio del Interior*, 8 Mar. 2016, www.interior.gob.es/prensa/noticias/-/asset_publisher/GHU8Ap6ztgsg/content/id/5719918. Accessed 28 Dec. 2018.

- Price, Cheryl Price. *Subtle Art: Poison in Victorian Literature*. 2012. Florida State University, PhD Dissertation.
- Rader, Nicole E. and Gayle M. Rhineberger-Dunn. "A Typology of Victim Characterization in Television Crime Drama." *Journal of Criminal Justice and Popular Culture*, vol. 17, no. 1, 2010, pp. 231-263.
- Reddy, Maureen T. "Women Detectives". *The Cambridge Companion to Crime Fiction*, edited by Martin Priestman, Cambridge UP, 2003, pp. 191-207.
- Redondo, Dolores. *El guardián invisible*. Destino, 2013.
- Reilly, M. John. "Corpse." *The Oxford Companion to Crime and Mystery Writing*, edited by Rosemary Herbert, Oxford UP, 1999, pp. 92.
- . "Femme Fatale." *The Oxford Companion to Crime and Mystery Writing*, edited by Rosemary Herbert, Oxford UP, 1999, pp. 155-156.
- Resina, Joan Ramón. *El cadáver en la cocina: La novela criminal en la cultura del desencanto*. Anthropos, 1997.
- Robinson, Caroline. "Hard-Boiled Screwball: Genre and Gender in the Crime Fiction of Janet Evanovich." *Cross-Cultural Connections in Crime Fictions*, edited by Vivien Miller and Helen Oakley, Palgrave Macmillan, 2012, pp. 59-75.
- Rundblad, Georganne. "Gender, Power, and Sexual Harassment." *The Criminal Justice System and Women: Offenders, Prisoners, Victims, and Workers*, edited by Barbara Raffel Price and Natalie J. Sokoloff, McGraw Hill, 2004, pp. 419-430.
- Sánchez Zapatero, Javier. "La novela negra europea contemporánea: Una aproximación panorámica." *Extravío: Revista Electrónica de Literatura Comparada*, vol. 7, 2012, pp. 10-24.

- Sánchez Zapatero, Javier and Àlex Martín Escribà. “Cuando no existía el «femicrime»: María-Antònia Oliver y la novela negra.” *Tras la pista: Narrativa criminal escrita por mujeres*, edited by Elena Losada Soler and Katarzyna Paszkiewicz, Icaria, 2015, pp. 113-129.
- . Literatura y cine sin fronteras. *El género negro: El fin de la frontera*, by Sánchez Zapatero and Martín Escribà, Andavira, 2012, pp. 1-15.
- Schur, Edwin M. *Labeling Women Deviant. Gender, Stigma, and Social Control*. Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1983.
- Schwartz, Jennifer and Darrell Steffensmeier. “The Nature of Female Offending: Patterns and Explanation.” *Female Offenders: Critical Perspectives and Effective Interventions*, edited by Ruth T. Zapin, Jones & Bartlett, 2008, pp. 43-75.
- Scribner III, Charles. “Transfigurations: Bernini’s Last Works.” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, vol. 135, no. 4, 1991, pp. 490-509.
- Senf, Carol A. ““Dracula”: Stoker’s Response to the New Woman.” *Victorian Studies*, vol. 26, no. 1, 1982, pp. 33-49.
- . ““Dracula”: The Unseen Face in the Mirror.” *The Journal of Narrative Technique*, vol. 9, no. 3, 1979, pp. 160-170.
- Shakespeare, William. *Hamlet. With Contemporary Essays*. Edited by Joseph Pearce, Ignatius P, 2008.
- Silvestri, Marisa. *Women in Charge: Policing, Gender and Leadership*. Willan, 2003.
- Solana, José Luis. “Movimientos inmigratorios, trabajadoras inmigrantes y empleo en la prostitución.” *Documentación social*, vol. 144, no. 2, 2007, pp. 37-57.
- Stevenson, John Allen. “A Vampire in the Mirror: The Sexuality of Dracula.” *PMLA*, vol. 103, no. 2, 1988, pp. 139-149.

- Stewart, Melissa A. "Lo negro criminal femenino en el nuevo milenio: investigadoras del siglo XXI en la literatura española." *Historia, memoria y sociedad en el género negro. Literatura, cine, televisión y cómic*, edited by Javier Sánchez Zapatero and Àlex Martín Escribà, Andavira, 2013, pp. 79-82.
- Stoker, Bram. *Dracula: Complete, Authoritative Text with Biographical, Historical, and Cultural Contexts, Critical History, and Essays from Contemporary Critical Perspective*. Edited by John Paul Riquelme, Palgrave, 2002.
- Strauss, Richard, et al. *Strauss's Salome*. Opera Journeys Publishing, 2002.
- Thomas Allen, Jeanne. "The Representation of Violence to Women: Hitchcock's "Frenzy.""
Film Quarterly, vol. 38, no. 3, 1985, pp. 30-38.
- Titford, John S. "Object-Subject Relationships in German Expressionist Cinema." *Cinema Journal*, vol. 13, no.1, 1973, pp. 17-24.
- Torrús, Alejandro. "El techo de acero de las mujeres." 28 Feb 2016: n.p. *Público*. Accessed 27 Nov. 2017.
- Trammell Skaggs, Carmen. "Modernity's Revision of the Dancing Daughter: The Salome Narrative of Wilde and Strauss." *College Literature*, vol. 29, no. 3, 2002, pp. 124-139.
- Valero Valero, Dori. *Alicia Giménez Bartlett y Mercedes Castro. Diferentes formas de aproximarse a la novela negra desde una perspectiva de género*. 2017. Universidad Jaume I, PhD Dissertation.
- Van Dine, S. S. "Twenty Rules for Writing Detective Stories." *American Magazine*, Sept. 1928, www.staff.u-szeged.hu/~gnovak/vandine.htm. Accessed 1 Mar. 2018.

- Villacampa, Carolina, and Nuria Torres. "Políticas criminalizadoras de la prostitución en España. Efectos sobre las trabajadoras sexuales." *Revista Electrónica de Ciencia Penal y Criminología*, vol. 15, no. 6, 2013, pp. 1-40.
- Voces Fernández, Javier and Víctor Bermúdez. "El seno y la daga: origen y vigencia de la femme fatale en el imaginario occidental." *El género negro: El fin de la frontera*, edited by Javier Sánchez Zapatero and Àlex Martín Escribà, Andavira, 2012, pp. 85-94.
- Vosburg, Nancy. Introduction. *Spanish and Latin American Women's Crime Fiction in the New Millennium: From Noir to Gris*, by Nancy Vosburg and Nina L. Molinaro, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2017, pp. ix-xiii.
- . "Spanish Women's Crime Fiction, 1980s-2000s: Subverting the Convention of Genre and Gender." *Iberian Crime Fiction*, edited by Nancy Vosburg, U of Wales P, 2011, pp. 75-92.
- Waites, Kate. "Hollywood's Warrior Woman for the New Millenium". *Bad Girls and Transgressive Women in Popular Television, Fiction, and Film*, edited by Julie A. Chappell and Mallory Young, Palgrave Macmillan, 2017, pp. 33-49.
- Wells, Sandra K. and Betty L. Alt. *Police Women: Life with the Badge*. Praeger, 2005.
- Whitford, Kelly Ann. *Present in the Performance: Stefano Maderno's Santa Cecilia and the Frame of the Jubilee of 1600*. MA Thesis, U of Oregon, 2011.
- Wilde, Oscar. *Salome*. Edited by Kimberly J. Stern, Broadview Press, 2015.
- Woolston, Jennifer. "Nancy Drew's Body: The Case of the Autonomous Female Sleuth." *Studies in the Novel*, vol. 42, no. 1/2, 2010, pp. 173-184.
- Wyatt, Gail Elizabeth, Michael D. Newcomb, and Monika H. Riederle. *Sexual Abuse and Consensual Sex: Women's Developmental Patterns and Outcomes*. Sage, 1993.

Yancey Martin, Patricia. "State Complicity in Men's Violence Against Women." *Men Who Hate Women and Women Who Kick Their Asses. Stieg Larsson's Millennium Trilogy in Feminist Perspective*, edited by Donna King and Carrie Lee Smith, Vanderbilt UP, 2012, pp. 39-50.

Young, Laurel. "Dorothy L. Sayers and the New Woman Detective Novel." *Clues*, vol. 23, no. 4, 2005, pp. 39-53.

Young, Mallory. Introduction. "Introduction: Bad Girls in Popular Culture". *Bad Girls and Transgressive Women in Popular Television, Fiction, and Film*, edited by Julie A. Chappell and Mallory Young, Palgrave Macmillan, 2017, pp. 1-11.

VITA

Jessica Blanco-Marcos is originally from Spain. She earned her licenciatura in English Philology at the University of Salamanca, Spain and her MAT in Spanish from Northern Arizona University. Her research focuses on twentieth to twenty-first-century Spanish women writers and peninsular crime fiction. She also has a special interest in non-canonical literary genres (science fiction, fantasy, and young adult literature), as well as in the pedagogy of literature in order to build bridges between Spanish lower and upper division courses.