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REWRITING THE IBERIAN FEMALE DETECTIVE

Deciphering truth, memory, and identity in the twenty-first-century novel

Antonia L. Delgado-Poust

Following the death of Francisco Franco in 1975 as well as the subsequent Transition to democracy and *desencanto* felt throughout Spain, the *novela negra* was the genre of choice for many Spanish writers who sought to expose the existing socio-political concerns of the moment. As Shelley Godsland articulates in her analysis of women's crime fiction in Spain, the *novela negra* is a sub-genre that, like its North American predecessors, features a "lone private eye very much at odds with the social environment within which he operated, investigating crimes that uncovered high-level corruption and law-breaking as well as other ills that plagued society" (2007, 6). The perceived failure of the democratic system and the (un)official compulsion to suppress any memory of a painful, inconvenient past or truth have contributed to the overwhelming popularity of crime narrative on the Peninsula. Nevertheless, Godsland reminds us that female-authored crime fiction tends to be overlooked in both national and international explorations of the genre, an oversight that she insists literary scholars must rectify. Since the turn of the millennium, various female Peninsular novelists have endeavored to give voice to marginalized individuals – women, in particular – whose stories were silenced for far too long. As a result, women writers offer a perspective that departs from the official version of the truth. By unearthing the details of, or shedding new light on, an obscure past and crime, their unconventional detectives or killers are compelled to reflect not only on the problematic concepts of truth and fabrication, but also upon their own past and identity as well.

This chapter examines the inextricable connection among the notions of truth and lie, memory, and identity in three novels by contemporary female authors from the Basque Country, Madrid, and Galicia: Dolores Redondo's *El guardián invisible* [*Zaindari Ikusezina*] (2013), Rosa Montero's *Lágrimas en la lluvia* (2011), and Marina Mayoral's *Casi perfecto* [*Case perfecto*] (2007), respectively. While these novelists infuse the local color of a particular region of Spain into their novels, their respective works underscore universal themes that transcend cultural and geographical origins. For one, all three protagonists are women who occupy positions of power (as professional detectives, police inspectors, and novelists), yet they also grapple with varying degrees of gender discrimination and existential insecurity in a patriarchal society. It is in their search for justice and in their reconstruction of the truth that these women come to better understand themselves and the cases to which they are tied. As doubly marginalized individuals (first as women, second as citizens of "peripheral" autonomous regions of

Spain or a non-human race), these female protagonists identify with and defend the interests of the Other, feeling a personal urgency to bring the(ir) truth to light. Furthermore, each novelist emphasizes the multifaceted and ambiguous nature of truth, memory, and identity, thus challenging hegemony, orthodoxy, and the conventions of detective fiction.

For Renée Craig-Odders, the Spanish crime novel serves as a barometer of socio-political change (2009, 2) and, in the same vein, I consider that these works not only make valuable contributions to the crime and detective genres, but that they also impel their reading public to reflect on the repeated discrimination of women in contemporary Spain. The protagonists of these novels are women who, on a daily basis, must confront the vestiges of sexism and xenophobia inherited from previous generations. In my analysis, I first consider these works as examples of feminist revisions of detective or crime fiction. Then, I present a brief synopsis of each novel before moving on to examine the themes of memory, identity, truth, and (in)justice, or patriarchal oppression, that not only tie these works together, but are also intrinsic to the female-authored detective genre itself. Finally, I contend that in their respective novels, Redondo, Montero, and Mayoral propose the need for more comprehensive social change that seeks to combat ignorance and inequality throughout Spain.

Feminist revisions of detective fiction

The detective genre has been associated largely with male sleuths who solve crimes by means of rational and objective deductions. This tradition is deeply entrenched not only in the values of Cartesian reasoning, the search for social justice, and the pursuit of knowledge and truth, but also in misogyny. In various contemporary novels written by women authors, female detectives – unlike their male counterparts – defy the conventional gender roles and biases that have characterized detective and crime fiction since its inception. These fictional women are so far removed from the “norm,” or mainstream, that they not only represent what Godsland has described as a negation of hard-boiled masculinity (26), but they also offer new interpretations of reality and the truth, from the perspective of the Other. As in previous female-authored Peninsular detective novels, the female sleuth and the circumstances and details surrounding the crime she investigates are strongly correlated.

With the advent of democracy on the Peninsula came the desire for justice and truth as well as the need to make reparations to those who had been wronged previously, and while this tendency is manifest in much of the literature of the post-Franco era, it seems fitting that such themes be addressed in the detective novel. Within the realm of detective fiction, then, it is especially effective if the individual seeking to establish the truth is one who, at some point, has been the victim of injustice. While some characters may identify with or see themselves as the victim of violence or oppression, they all serve as advocates for justice and equality. In *El guardián invisible*, *Lágrimas en la lluvia*, and *Casi perfecto*, all three protagonists are independent, assertive career women who combat inequality and sexism in the workplace and, by extension, in their respective societies. Godsland highlights the (post-)feminist nature of the Peninsular private eye, claiming that without the democratization of Spanish society and the influence of feminism, the fictional female Spanish sleuth would not exist today (2007, 13). It is logical, then, that contemporary female-authored and feminist Peninsular detective fiction should engage with women’s issues, such as gender violence, misogyny, women’s rights, and the struggle for authority and respect in a still highly androcentric environment. By bringing to the forefront of their novels instances of rape, murder, and physical or psychological aggression directed against women, Redondo, Montero, and Mayoral make clear their criticism of patriarchal culture, other hierarchical systems, and the continued legacy of machismo in democratic

Spain. By raising public awareness of the pervasive victimization of women, these authors render relevant what were once silenced taboos, thereby incorporating the peripheral into a national, collective discourse in order to effect palpable socio-political change through their reading public. In what follows, I carry out a brief overview of each novel before considering in further detail the themes of identity, memory, and truth that are present in all three works.

Dolores Redondo's *El guardián invisible*

Critics of Redondo's *El guardián invisible* maintain that the story represents a distinctive combination of *noir* fiction and Basque-Navarrese mythology and traditions. Interestingly, Redondo centers much of her attention on the hostile, sinister quality of the Baztán River Valley and chooses to situate her murder mystery in the deceptively quiet community of Elizondo, an actual town nestled in the province of Navarre. Because of its relative isolation, cold temperatures, and rural setting, Elizondo epitomizes the ideal location for a murder mystery. The omniscient narrator observes that Elizondo and the Basque Country constitute part of the protagonist's genetic makeup. By returning to the natural elements and the traditional mythology characteristic of her hometown and surrounding area, Regional Inspector Amaia Salazar comes to a deeper understanding of her own identity and origins. As indicated in the synopsis of the novel, Amaia must disentangle a series of crimes that forces her to come to terms with a traumatic childhood and adolescence. Redondo paints the picture of a tortured individual haunted by memories of a painful past whose details are revealed incrementally to us via analepsis. Upon visiting the family bakery for the first time in years, disturbing memories of her past resurface: “[u]na abrumadora oleada de recuerdos oscuros la aturdió de repente y los ecos del pasado la bloquearon por completo” (152). Early on, the reader learns that Amaia's past and family members become entwined with the investigation – something that complicates the detective's ability to remain objective. For one, when the police inspectors discover the lifeless bodies of the female victims lying in the woods, they find a *txantxigorri* – a traditional Basque pastry and specialty of her family's hundred-year-old bakery – strategically placed on the corpses at the scenes of the crime. In the end, the individual responsible for the murders of the young women turns out to be Amaia's seemingly innocuous brother-in-law.

Amaia is the counterpart to the conventional male detective, who is depicted as an alcoholic loner, pessimist, and all around difficult person. Redondo purposely portrays Amaia as a “typical” working-woman, who takes her job seriously, unlike some of her male colleagues in the field. To arrive at the truth, Salazar avails herself of what the omniscient narrator refers to as her female intuition – rooted in careful observation, reflection, and tarot readings: “[a]ún no entendía cómo funcionaba el instinto, la complicada maquinaria que se ponía en marcha dentro de un investigador, [. . .] haciendo que todo cobrase sentido, como si en su avance fuera apartando velos de niebla que hubiera tenido ante los ojos” (390). This fog metaphor will reappear in the subsequent novels, as each protagonist must either sift through or hide behind a figurative blindness and ambiguity before arriving at or concealing the truth. Aside from her presumed clairvoyance or heightened sensitivity to external or covert signs, Amaia realizes that to solve the enigma she must try to understand the criminal and his motives for wanting the young women dead.

Rosa Montero's *Lágrimas en la lluvia*

Unlike Redondo's novel, which is set at the beginning of the twenty-first century, Montero situates her story in a futuristic, albeit strangely familiar, twenty-second-century milieu. Aside

from the fact that the action takes place in Madrid, we are no longer in Spain – the independent sovereign state that we currently know – but rather, in *Los Estados Unidos de la Tierra*. Nevertheless, in an effort to orient her reader, Montero’s 2109 Madrid has managed to retain some of its twenty-first-century charm, as many streets and landmarks from previous eras remain intact, though slightly transformed. By creating such a foreign, yet familiar, setting for the action of her novel, the novelist challenges her reader to reflect on the problems of his or her present reality. Like many of her literary predecessors, Montero presents her audience with a dystopian world characterized by unregulated capitalism, social isolation, environmental degradation, and a society plagued by its fear of the Other. The corruption and immunity of politicians, the resurgence of supremacist groups, and the flaws in the justice system are all too evocative of the Spanish and global political climate of the late twentieth- and early twenty-first centuries. The novel’s protagonist, Bruna Husky, embodies the hybrid fusion of the familiar – the human-like – and the unfamiliar – the android, or non-human. As we become acquainted with Bruna and her struggle, it becomes increasingly difficult to distinguish what is different about her from what is familiar, thus impelling us to identify with her plight and come to view the Other as an extension of the Self.

Bruna is engaged as much in her search for existential meaning as in the investigation of the case to which she has been assigned – the mysterious deaths of androids who turn psychotic before indiscriminately killing humans. As the only replicant detective officially designated to examine the homicides, it is important that Bruna solve the murders because, ironically, she, like the reps who committed the crimes, has been cast as a terrorist assassin and a threat to humanity. Moreover, to proceed with the case without being attacked on the streets of Madrid by humans, Bruna must transform herself into the Other – in this case the more socially acceptable, familiar Other – by dressing incognito as a member of a human supremacist group who is collaborating with other human supremacists to exterminate the techno-human race. Her face-to-face encounter with the enemy – a collective, obscure adversary that wants her and other androids dead – is particularly eye-opening for the android, as it exposes significant truths regarding the case, but also challenges her to step out of her comfort zone and adopt, albeit out of necessity, the position of the foe. Discerning the distinctions between good and evil, or truth and lie, is a challenge even for the experienced detective. Nevertheless, Montero highlights that, as a supposedly false, ambiguous being whose intrinsic hybridity and contradictory nature seem monstrous to the human masses, Bruna is the most appropriate individual to uncover the truth.

Marina Mayoral’s *Casi perfecto*

This quest for truth and justice is also at the heart of Marina Mayoral’s text. Like Clarín, Pardo Bazán, and Valle-Inclán, Mayoral situates many of her novels in the Gothic-like setting of her native Galicia. Nevertheless, it must be noted that *Casi perfecto* is actually situated in Madrid, where the narrator-protagonist lives and works. Yet the narrator makes frequent allusions to her Galician roots throughout the text and intersperses her account with various Galician terms that emphasize her sense of cultural identity. In keeping with the style she cultivates in her previous “crime” novels, Mayoral’s female protagonist and first-person narrator in this epistolary novel reminiscent of the *novela negra* is a novelist by trade whose perception and representation of reality are contradictory and thus unreliable. In response to the accusation of her youngest son, Peque, that she plotted the murder of his father (her estranged husband) and modeled it on the fictional murder of one of her characters, the narrator Ana writes him a letter in which she fervently justifies her behavior through the years whilst unflinchingly

maintaining her innocence. Mayoral portrays her narrator-protagonist in a psychologically complex light, in which we observe her inconsistencies and imperfections through first-person narration. Through writing, Ana unearths a series of painful memories and reflects on her past mistakes as a mother, daughter, and wife to defend her actions.

At first glance, Ana's letter appears to be written in a stream of consciousness, as she returns to past events, mistakes, and emotions by way of analepsis. Nonetheless, it soon becomes evident that she has shrewdly planned out her argument with the intention of simultaneously convincing her son (and larger audience) of her innocence and justifying her motives for his father's death. Mayoral herself has asserted that her novels rarely contain obvious, indisputable truths, and here she creates a number of conceivable interpretations that require the reader to draw conclusions on her or his own, thus behaving like a veritable detective who must make connections, question the veracity of the narrator's version of events, and fill in the blanks when necessary. Ana distorts facts and embellishes her physical deformities while stressing the interconnectedness and fluidity of reality and fiction. She strategically garners the sympathy of her reader by enumerating her experiences as a woman in a hostile patriarchal environment. Godsland contends that female writers whose protagonists are women criminals furnish "their female readership with fantasies of contesting victimization, while also articulating the extent of violence against women in contemporary Spain" (2007, 113). Although the protagonist never admits to experiencing physical violence at the hands of her husband or any other man, by delineating the times in which she felt wronged or discriminated against by men, she justifies her offenses as a response to her adverse circumstances and marginalization. In the case of Ana, her probable culpability in the death of her estranged husband is tied to her frustration with a society that she feels has ostracized her purely because of her sex.

Traumatic memory, identity, and truth

The concepts of truth and memory are essential to the resolution of a mystery and, thus, to the detective genre. Memory is fundamental in piecing together the past, while objective truth is what the detective seeks to ascertain and the criminal aims to keep impenetrable. It should be no surprise, then, that references to memory and its inextricable connection to concepts of truth and identity abound in these three texts. Some of the novels considered here are clearly retrospective in nature, as they present an adult protagonist who remembers traumatic experiences from her childhood or formative years, whereas others attempt to reconstruct the past in order to make better sense of the present. A victim of years of domestic oppression as a child, *El guardián invisible*'s Amaia suffers from abnormalities of memory that are characteristic of post-traumatic disorders, which cause her to sporadically remember too much or too little. For years she has tried to escape her past by abandoning her hometown and pursuing a career unrelated to the family business, all the while repressing her childhood memories of fear and abuse. In his seminal study, Michel de Certeau evokes the dangers of forced amnesia and notes that, inevitably, the forgotten, repressed aspects of the past always return in some form or another (1988, 4). For Amaia, it is precisely upon returning to Elizondo to investigate the puzzling murders of two young local women that the specters of her past come back to haunt her. She remarks to her husband that, like "fantasmas resucitados" (119), all of her memories and sensations of the past take shape when she returns to her hometown. As Judith Lewis Herman asserts in her insightful analysis of crime and memory, Amaia's "memories intrude when they are not wanted, in the form of nightmares, flashbacks, and behavioral re-enactments" (1996,

5). Speaking on behalf of her niece, Tía Engrasi – who is, coincidentally, a psychologist by trade – claims:

Hay ocasiones en que el dolor es tan grande [. . .] que uno desea y cree que se quedará así para siempre, [. . .] sin querer afrontar el hecho de que los dolores que no han sido llorados y expiados en su momento regresan una y otra vez a nuestras vidas como restos de un naufragio [. . .] que irá[n] regresando poco a poco para esclavizarnos de por vida.

(376)

She suspects that Amaia has (sub)consciously disremembered these memories from the night her mother tried to kill her, out of fear that they will only further distract her from the case. Ironically, however, because she has never faced these remembrances head on, they actually impede her from moving forward in both her personal life and the investigation. Therefore, her traumatic past and memories condition her worldview, her professional aspirations, and quest for justice, as well as her understanding of self. Once she publicly acknowledges the truth and her trauma to her family, she has an epiphany and soon identifies the perpetrator, solving the case.

Personal memory refers to narratives that provide meaning and order to an individual's personal biography. Salvador Cardús i Ros reminds us that memory is not rooted necessarily in precision or recollection, but it instead follows the logic of oral, written, or audio-visual narrative (2007, 23). The critic proposes that memory is “an open narrative that incorporates personal and external recollection, but also includes fiction, things forgotten and errors that are *necessary* in order to make memory coherent and significant” (23; italics in original). Therefore, memory comprises various truths and untruths, as it relies on the dual processes of erasure and reinvention. As various contemporary postmodern novelists have sought to highlight, the truth can come in many forms and depends entirely on the perspective of the individual engaging in the remembrance process. According to Michael Schmid, with the passage of time, we integrate new memories into “false” memories, thereby creating what for us comes to represent a legitimate, albeit reconstructed, past (2004, 2), so as to give our lives and identity meaning. Montero's and Mayoral's respective texts highlight the inherent artificiality of memory and human existence, and all three novels prove that memory is the foundation for identity. While investigating the case of the dying replicants, Bruna begins to research artificial memories and the illicit *memas* (that come in pill form) the androids use to acquire false memories. As a techno-human herself, Bruna's memories are both fabricated and true, for while they technically do not belong to her, they were copied from actual events, relationships, and emotions derived from her *memorista*'s – or creator's – past. The painful realization that her suffering and memories of her mother are not simply false, but rather, the simulations and reminiscences of her creator only further exacerbates her existential angst: “[n]o sólo su recuerdo era todo mentira, sino que ahora además tenía la certeza de que se trataba de la verdad de otro” (464). What disturbs Bruna is that if her memories are indeed false, then her identity or conception of self must be a sham as well.

The distinction between what is true and false is increasingly difficult to ascertain, for that which has been falsified appears even more real than the original. Baudrillard claims that imitation not only reproduces reality, but it also improves it to the point that it could be deemed more authentic than the original. This point is illustrated in a scene in which Bruna and her creator, Pablo Nopal, conduct a clandestine meeting at an art exhibition entitled “Historia de

los Falsos: el fraude como arte revolucionario.” According to the omniscient narrator, art critics and aestheticians “habían decretado que la impostura era la manifestación artística más pura y radical” of the twenty-second century (86). For one to be considered “un Falso,” one must both counterfeit a famous painting or sculpture to perfection and convince an art expert of its authenticity. The greater the deceit, the more prestigious the forgery once it is exposed as such. Bruna disapproves of the trend of falsified art; as a simulation herself, it reminds her of her own illegitimacy. She wonders if Nopal assumes she would appreciate the exhibit because, “¿[. . .] yo también soy una copia, una imitación, una falsificación de ser humano?” (86). Instances of simulation and imposture abound throughout the novel and help to illustrate the complex nature of truth and identity and to emphasize that imitation is universal.

As is typical of *noir* fiction, moral and existential uncertainty pervade Bruna’s world and are the source of great anxiety. Throughout the course of the investigation, she works on a puzzle of the Cosmos and struggles to find the necessary pieces that will complete the image and provide a sense of order and meaning to her chaotic existence. In the puzzle there was “muchísima negrura y pocos cuerpos celestes por los que orientarse. [Bruna] [m]iró [. . .] los bordes [. . .] del hueco [. . .], intentando encontrar alguna que encajara” (72). The puzzle clearly serves as a metaphor for the epistemological process of the detective figure, but also for the existential enigma Bruna has long sought to resolve. While simultaneously attempting to solve the puzzle and uncover both an objective and a personal truth, the detective must sift through the chaos, “negrura,” and “jirones de niebla” (402) that envelop her and, like Amaia, allow her intuition to be her guide. Near the dénouement of the novel, the detective realizes that while in a drunken haze the night before she finally managed to complete the puzzle: “[I] a imagen del Cosmos estaba completa; y en el centro, en la zona crítica que antes le faltaba y que [. . .] se le había resistido durante meses, ahora se veía la nebulosa planetaria Hélix” (402). The Helix Nebula, more colloquially dubbed the “Eye of God,” gazes back at Bruna and reminds her that what she has been searching for – whether it is a missing puzzle piece, a shred of evidence, or the “truth” – has been within reach all along. Montero ties the image of the nebula to Soulages’s expression, “C’est ce que je fais qui m’apprend ce que je cherche” (Cloup 2014). As a result of Bruna’s investigation into the mysterious deaths of her brethren – replicants whose memories have been manipulated – the detective makes a series of discoveries that give her the peace of mind she had desired for so long, among which are the identity of her creator – a revelation that has repercussions for her own identity – the importance of camaraderie with the Other, as well as the notion that nothing – not even her fate, identity, or the truth – is entirely certain.

In the first few pages of her letter, Ana announces that she would like to defend herself (12) and that writing is the only means she has to do so: “Por eso escribo, porque es mi manera de llegar a la verdad” (14). Yet, as a writer of fiction, Ana has limited experience with representing the truth. Near the end of her epistle, she reveals to her reader that “[e]scribiendo soy mucho más convincente” (237). If we compare these assertions and read between the lines, it appears as though the narrator insinuates that the act of writing allows her to convince the addressee of *her* truth, not necessarily an objective reproduction of events. To be compelling, one must persuade, or manipulate, the audience into believing that what one says and who one is are equally authentic. By employing the rhetorical appeal of ethos, Ana tries to make her perspective and character credible to her audience. In effect, the writing process – which allows the writer to devise a thesis, mull over her words, and edit her thoughts – grants Ana the ability to convince her addressee more effectively than if she were to defend herself verbally in real time, say, in court or when facing her accuser(s). As the rhetor of her text, Ana informs her reader of the (other) motives underlying her decision to compose the letter: “[é]sta es la

única razón por la que te escribo. Sólo quiero que [. . .] vuelvas a quererme” (82). These words are an appeal to her son, but the recurring accusatory, incriminating tone she uses, as well as the conflicting reasons she claims to have for writing the letter, subsequently impel the reader to question her real intentions.

Although Ana’s letter is composed of numerous family anecdotes, it is she who has complete jurisdiction over how they are remembered and documented for posterity. This is problematic, as even she alludes to her own memory’s deficiencies. Although in writing her letter Ana originally sets out to establish the truth, she admits that in the end the facts and her interpretation might be distorted and fabricated (97). Moreover, the narrator’s therapist observes that many of her childhood memories are in fact incidences of postmemory, or inherited remembrances passed down from her mother and grandmother that she herself never experienced. She then adds that this may be “un ejemplo de mi capacidad fabuladora más que una muestra de memoria excepcional” (125–126). Years later, when referencing a trip she took with a former male companion while Peque lay in bed with a fever, Ana confesses that she cannot recall their vacation destination: “se me ha borrado de mi memoria por completo, como si no hubiera existido [. . .] me sentí culpable por dejarte solo e intenté eliminar esa parte de mi vida” (119). Her ability to – conveniently and intentionally – forget certain details from her past because they provoke feelings of guilt is critical information for the reader who must assess her reliability and innocence in her husband’s death. Consequently, relatively subtle acknowledgements such as these cause the reader to call into question the veracity of the account.

Reinterpreting the truth and the evidence of female oppression

Glenn W. Most observes that the detective and reader undertake similar endeavors, as the act of reading is a form of detection in itself. He argues that the detective is “the figure for the reader within the text, the one character whose activities most closely parallel the reader’s own,” as both reader and detective seek to unravel the mystery of the crime (1983, 348). In this same vein, Jorge Luis Andrade Fernandes proposes that “the detective is a master reader of signs,” who “must read the world as would a criminal; he must not only be able to read the crime scene as a text authored by the criminal, but also anticipate the narrative’s unfolding” (2008, 111–112). As effective investigators, Montero’s Bruna and Redondo’s Amaia observe and interpret the world around them, often negotiating meaning and sifting through ambiguous and misleading signs. In *El guardián invisible*, the victims of the murders are adolescent girls who are on the cusp of becoming women. Their lifeless bodies are discovered with their palms facing up in a sign of submission, their faces devoid of any makeup, their pubis shaved, and their hair parted and clothes torn open and left at their sides. Detective Salazar reads the young women’s corpses as if they were corporeal texts, searching for clues and any story they can still tell. When examining the bodies, she frequently asks her subordinates, “¿Qué nos cuentan las niñas?” (181). Amaia’s intuition and ability to read signs lead her to deduce that the assassin is someone who disapproves of these girls desiring to become women so prematurely and that the corpses denote the androcentric desire to control and punish women. Because the murderer is convinced that these women have consciously defied nature and tradition, he punishes them by erasing the first signs of womanhood and imposes on his victims his own conception of purity. Ironically, he disregards nature and seeks to reverse its course by returning the girls to what he believes to be a more virginal state. Redondo presents this obsession with recovering antiquated, misogynistic values and traditions as retrograde and destructive, particularly for women. While rape does not appear to have taken place in these serial killings, since it would contradict the criminal’s desire for chastity and prelapsarian innocence,

Redondo emphasizes the monstrous nature of the paternalistic, heterosexual male gaze and the devastating repercussions of female objectification.

According to Mayoral's Ana, her son is a deficient reader of reality, for she alleges that he distorts meaning and frequently misinterprets facts. Perhaps for this very reason, before commencing her letter, she discloses that she will have to use "las palabras que puedas entender" (15). Nevertheless, suspecting that her son will not see through her artful narrative techniques, Ana is able to control her own story and garbles the truth, thereby confusing and manipulating her reader into sympathizing with her. The truth, in *Casi perfecto*, is relative, incomplete and, as in most postmodern literature, always ambiguous. In effect, the narrator's ability to read reality, or herself, is flawed as well. As postmodern readers, we perceive that Ana's narration and the self-portrait she paints are neither complete nor reliable. Furthermore, the fact that Ana is missing an eye is significant, for it underscores her tendency to neglect or omit certain truths and prioritize her perspective over those of others. Her corporeal incoherence and fragmentation mirror the inconsistencies and lacunae in her defense and narration. Coincidentally, the word *brétema* – or Brétema, a provincial and imaginary Galician city in Mayoral's novels – means "fog" (*niebla*) in Galician. Analogous to an opaque veil that obstructs one's view or perception of things, the Galician fog and Ana's partial blindness are metaphors for her inability, or unwillingness, to accept and represent the truth. Similarly, it seems as though the reader is left in a mental miasma after poring over the letter to distinguish the truth that lies beyond the distractions deposited throughout the text. In a related vein, Ana's daughter-in-law, Gabriela, makes a significant observation regarding her field of expertise – photography – by declaring that "la cámara recoge casi siempre lo que el ojo quiere ver, aunque a veces también recoge algo que no vemos o que no queremos ver" (211). Here, Gabriela correlates the image viewed and consciously chosen through the camera lens with the perspective of the individual, one that is inherently biased and often blind. What is more, the metaphor encapsulates the very nature of Ana's account, as well as her tendency to see and portray solely what she wants to see, thereby frequently ignoring the existence of an objective truth. We, as experienced readers, must disentangle Ana's contradictory and partial account of events in order to come to a better understanding of the bigger picture and what may have happened to her husband.

The physical traits of these women reflect their individual struggles, existential angst, and idiosyncrasies, thus inciting the reader to identify with their victimization and otherness. For instance, Montero's Bruna Husky is visibly different from her human counterparts because, as an android, she towers above and is physically stronger than most males and is unable to reproduce. Her body and physical characteristics unsettle many humans, who, upon seeing her shaved head and tattoo – "una fina línea negra que recorría verticalmente el cuerpo entero" (30) – equate her with the monstrous, indefinable Other. This line reminds us of Bruna's inherent contradictions and hybrid nature as a representative of what is simultaneously true and fabricated. As noted previously, Mayoral's Ana is both "coja y tuerta" (19), and while she at first considers herself to be a victim of nature, with the help of a family friend she eventually comes to accept her physical deficiencies for their beauty and exoticism and learns to use them to her advantage. Her ability to modify her self-perception highlights the fact that identity is a malleable construct that can be refashioned to coincide with the story one wants to believe and project to others. Ana's perception of her situation highlights her determination, not to mention her ability to turn a negative into a positive, that is, to manipulate the "truth" in order to fit her own needs. In other words, her rich imagination allows her to overcome her supposed defects and (re)invent her own reality and identity.

While the grotesque fate of the victims incites repulsion in male police officers, Amaia sympathizes with the young women because she identifies with their victimhood. Examining the bodies for clues, Amaia feels “desolada por el dolor ajeno” (67). Her ability to relate to the suffering of the Other, one that is not so different from her younger self, is quite pronounced. One might argue that her decision to become a detective is a direct result of her own traumatic experiences as a victim of her mother’s cruelty and is equally rooted in her desire to seek justice for those who, like her, were unable to defend themselves. Alison Young (1996, 83) observes that in societal responses to crime, members of a social group tend to identify with the victim of violence because they consider that they, too, could become – or, in the case of Amaia, have already been – a victim of a similar crime. Much like Amaia, Montero’s Bruna has a personal stake in the case of the suicidal repps, and not only for professional reasons. As a replicant herself, she identifies and is associated with the marginalized Other and, in large part, her determination to solve the case is founded on her desire to repair the abysmal reputation of her kind, which has been demonized by influential humans.

Embodying the female detective: demanding justice and subverting the archetype of the male investigator

While all three protagonists face manifestations of discrimination at one point or another, each novel features the importance of female camaraderie, either in the resolution of a mystery or by helping the protagonist to reach a deeper understanding of reality and herself. Kathleen Gregory Klein claims that feminism “values female bonding, awareness of women without continual reference to or affiliation with men, and the self-knowledge which prompts women to independent judgement on both public and personal issues” (1995, 201). Redondo’s Amaia experiences various degrees of sexism as a result of her professional success, particularly because of her promotion to homicide inspector for the Elizondo murders. As the sole woman in the highly patriarchal institution of the police force, Amaia must assert herself in front of her male peers in order to be taken seriously. Nevertheless, certain colleagues undermine her efforts and make her job much more challenging. Inspectors Montes and Zabalza are threatened by Amaia’s authority over them and view her as “una zorra arrogante” (263). While he never makes his negative feelings towards her public knowledge, Zabalza’s subtle disrespect for his female superior exemplifies the complexities and inconspicuousness of covert sexism. Nonetheless, despite the jealousy and disrespect of her male peers, the moral support and tough love of Amaia’s aunt, who understands her niece and is aware of her traumatic past, helps her in her healing process and thus, indirectly, in the case.

In *Lágrimas en la lluvia*, Bruna encounters instances of sexism and xenophobia as a female android, both in her investigation and when interacting with others. Her physical appearance incites fear in the humans who pass her on the street and her mere existence as a female android causes revulsion in human supremacists. While interrogating a cult leader about a piece of evidence found on the body of a dead android, the supremacist does not mince his words regarding his opinion of technohumans: “¿Qué nos importa a nosotros que maten o no a esas cosas? No [. . .] cuentan. No existen. No tienen más entidad que la hebilla de tu zapato” (292). Not only does this passage represent the contempt that many humans feel about the android race and the widespread denial of the androids’ dignity and existence, but it also reflects a reactionary society that repeats the atrocities of the past.

By serving as authorities of truth – as either investigators or writers – the female protagonists analyzed here are endowed with agency and the ability to subvert traditional discourse.

As Thompson-Casado (2004, 137) claims in her analysis of female-authored detective fiction, the plots of the novels considered in this study are constructed around female protagonists who, despite their respective differences, are courageous, economically independent, and socially progressive professionals. Montero's Bruna and Redondo's Amaia are portrayed as agents of social justice and change who fight to defend the victims of the crimes they endeavor to solve. These victims, like the detectives who seek the truth regarding their deaths, represent the marginalized of patriarchal society. Perceiving the victims as extensions of themselves, Inspectors Husky and Salazar empathize with their suffering and, thus, have a personal interest in not only seeking justice, but also in effecting some kind of positive social change in their respective communities. For Salazar, the death of the young women represents her community's – and society's – failure to protect those who need it most. In identifying the individual responsible for the young women's deaths, Amaia feels that her own suffering as a child and adult as a result of her mother's physical and psychological cruelty can be redeemed.

Whilst addressing other allegations that Peque made against her in his childhood diary – that she confesses to reading – Ana's feelings of jealousy and injustice surface. When he compares her inadequacies as a mother to the notable competence of others – namely, his father, or other women – Ana interprets it as a personal attack and retaliates. She acrimoniously probes, “¿Y qué te dio tu padre para que a él lo adoras? [. . .] ¿[Q]ué hizo él por ti que no haya hecho yo?” (120). Ultimately, Ana's anger and frustration towards her husband and son – both supporters of Francoist ideals of femininity – stem from her feelings of inadequacy as a wife and mother living in a misogynistic domestic milieu. She feels devalued because of what Peque, her husband, and patriarchal society perceive to be her shortcomings and deems that she has been held unjustly to a lofty standard to which her husband has not. Professionally, she claims to have been denied respect and a real space in which to work. Ana channels her irritation with her son into a counterattack against him in order to paint herself as the victim of misguided criticism and adherence to outdated gender constructs. She turns the tables on Peque, attempting to prove that his complaints are not only unfounded and naïve, but hypocritical as well. In doing so, she hopes to compel him to feel just as guilty as her for his past behavior and unrealistic expectations. In one instance, she admits that “[y]o hago las cosas mal [. . .], pero suelo darme cuenta y pido perdón e intento reparar el daño, mientras que tú pocas veces has rectificado en tus actitudes” (202). The contrast Ana creates between mother and son is designed to highlight his double standards and unwillingness to engage in self-reflection, while allowing her to regain the moral high ground and present herself as an honest woman.

As marginalized individuals who seek to determine the truth on their own terms, these female protagonists subvert the traditional archetype of the male investigator or criminal and tackle problems that deal specifically with the oppression of the minority. Redondo denounces gender violence, while Montero censures the intolerance of everyone and everything that is considered different and, in turn, monstrous, subsequently compelling her reader to reexamine his or her own cultural values. What is more, Montero uses her novel to underscore the importance of action and the perils of inaction in contemporary society. Near the end of the novel, when Bruna and a friend learn of the reversal of a controversial piece of legislation, she reminds him and, by extension, us that we must not relinquish our ability to improve the status quo (475). Bruna seeks out equality, justice, and humanity in a world that is devoid of all three. Ana, who identifies as a victim of patriarchy and sexism, tries to defend herself and avenge her own perceived victimization by rewriting the truth from her perspective. Although she does not seek to exact profound social change, she demands justice for herself, by refashioning patriarchal discourse and the truth and demanding for all women who write a room of their own.

Conclusion

In these postmodern detective stories, the concepts of truth and justice are portrayed as largely imprecise and relative entities. At the end of *El guardián invisible*, certain enigmas are left unresolved and the reader is never provided with an opportunity to understand fully the motives behind the crimes, whereas in *Casi perfecto* the narrator's culpability and the (in)authenticity of her account are never officially exposed. *Lágrimas en la lluvia* underscores for its readers that as a result of the political climate of Montero's twenty-second-century dystopia, justice is not always served and the mistakes of the past are too often repeated. As Susan Elizabeth Sweeney argues, feminist detective fiction may name a single person as the guilty party, but the individual's actions reflect a broader social problem (1999, 125). Because the main causes underlying the crimes committed in these novels happen to be misogyny, xenophobia, and revenge, in light of perceived gender oppression, the three novelists stress that truly solving the crime requires making profound changes in patriarchal culture as well as identifying the individual responsible for the offense. Although justice may not be served in a manner that is entirely satisfactory to the protagonists or reader, it is the epistemological and writing processes that prove to be the most fulfilling for the three females. Much like Soulages's dictum referenced previously, it is in their attempt to discover, conceal, and create their own version of the truth that these women come to a deeper understanding of themselves and the society in which they live. By positioning resilient, feminist female investigators and (un)likely killers at the forefront of their novels, Redondo, Montero, and Mayoral challenge the conventions of detective narrative and offer a new perspective on women's experience on the Iberian Peninsula in the twenty-first century.

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