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Aesthetic Campaigns and Counter-Campaigns. Jorge Luis Borges and a Century of the Argentine Detective Story (1877-1977)

Eoin George Barrett BA, MA

Doctor of Philosophy

Supervisor: Professor Nuala Finnegan

Head of Department: Dr. Helena Buffery

Department of Hispanic Studies

University College Cork

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DECLARATION

This dissertation is submitted to the Department of Hispanic Studies, University College Cork, in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. It is my own work and has not been submitted for another degree, either at University College Cork, or elsewhere.

Signed: _____

Eoin Barrett

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I would like to sincerely thank my parents, Eve and Jimmy, for the love and support they have given so generously throughout what has been an arduous, lengthy and complicated journey. The belief they showed in me was far greater than that which I had in myself. I am very much relieved that their faith has been justified. I would like to thank my brothers, Michael and Rory, and Michael's wife Susie, who have been a fantastic source of support and friendship, my aunts Ursula and Deirdre, my uncle John and aunt Kate and my cousins Bek, Katherine and Jo and their families, who have also been steadfast in their interest and encouragement.

Ralph Waldo Emerson once said that a friend may well be reckoned the masterpiece of nature. In this regard I am surrounded by so many works of art that I am considering opening my own gallery. The catalogue for this exhibition would include Colin, Donal, Edmund, Edwin, Eoin, Eric, Fergus, Gonz, Kieran, Killian, Luke, Mick, Owen, Peter, Paddy, Rubén, Shane, Xan and Zalo. Thanks to Tony McCarthy, Paul Collins, Joyce and John Kerins, and Kieran and Mairead O'Shea. Special thanks also to Gail, Gawain, Peter, Grace and Auntie Kitty. And to Helen Keane for the coffee-maker!

The support I have received from the staff of the Department of Hispanic Studies at UCC has been overwhelming. I am unequal to the task of expressing my gratitude for their help, guidance, friendship and good humour, and their limitless reserves of tolerance and understanding over the years. This spirit is exemplified and embodied by my inspirational supervisor, Professor Nuala Finnegan, who has taught me so much, not only through the supervision of my dissertation, but also by her example as a scholar and as a person. Nuala, you have my eternal gratitude and admiration. I could not have done this without you. Thank you so much.

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Elaine, I love and admire you completely. Thank you for believing in me and for all your help since we met. You are the measure of my dreams.

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of Seamus Coughlan, a great Corkman, a soldier, a gentleman and a gentle man, who gave regular tutorials on the themes of friendship, love and humour for the duration of our acquaintance.

Seamus, boy, I give you 'The Book of Kells'.

El género policial, como todos los
géneros, vive de la continua y
delicada infracción de sus leyes.

Jorge Luis Borges[1]

[1]Jorge Luis Borges, *Obras completas* Vol. IV (Buenos Aires: Emecé, 2007. 5th edn.), p. 440.

Introduction

Introduction

There are three sections in this, my introductory chapter. Firstly, the objectives of my project are set out, and its scope is examined. The second section locates the project. Section three describes the reading method employed in this study, which effectively involves the creation of a conceptual reader of the Argentine detective story. Finally, in the concluding section, an overview of the dissertation is provided.

Objectives and Scope of Project

The crime genre has enjoyed a long and notable history in Argentina, dating from the publication of Luis V. Varela's novel *La huella del crimen* in 1877 and continuing to the present day. In the words of Amelia Simpson, 'The River Plate is the source of the earliest as well as the most detective fiction in Latin America. Nowhere else does the genre receive so much attention, nor do native works achieve such distinction'.[2] The crime genre occupies a central place in the country's literary tradition, and numbers among its enthusiasts and adherents some of the most illustrious and accomplished figures in Argentine letters. The pervasive, perhaps even oppressive, presence of the detective genre in this national context has been such that, according to Jorge Lafforgue, 'Ningún otro género, como el policial, ha estructurado tan raigalmente el sistema de la ficción argentina a lo largo de este siglo'.[3]

This dissertation involves a detailed analysis of the crime fiction tradition in Argentina, focusing particular attention on the period between 1933 and 1977, the

[2] Amelia S. Simpson, *Detective Fiction from Latin America* (Cranbury: Farleigh Dickinson University Press, 1990), p. 29.
[3] Jorge Lafforgue, ed., *Cuentos policiales argentinos* (1st edn. Alfaguara: Buenos Aires, 1997, 3rd edn, 2003), p. 11.

period in which the genre enjoyed the most earnest critical attention and the most conspicuous commercial success. It will take as its corpus a wide variety of texts within the genre, including traditional academic criticism, key journalistic essays and interviews, notable anthologies and collections, as well as works of crime fiction by a significant number of writers that have served to shape and reflect upon the Argentine tradition. It will provide an overview of the origins and development of the two major generic variants that have framed the discourse on crime fiction in Argentina: the classical, intellectual detective story in the tradition of Poe, Collins, Chesterton and the English 'Golden Age', and the hard-boiled variant which emerged from the popular American pulp magazines of the 1920s and 30s, exemplified by the works of writers such as Dashiell Hammett, Raymond Chandler, Ross Macdonald and Horace McCoy. It will also plot the course of crime fiction's largely concurrent Argentine evolution over more than a century, paying careful attention to the manner in which a number of factors have directly or indirectly contributed to its development, including socio-historical circumstances, the literary and critical production of key Argentine writers, important publishing innovations, and also the significance of literary prizes in seeking to shape the genre's trajectory. In particular, this study will evaluate the role of Jorge Luis Borges as *the* key arbiter of the Argentine generic tradition, while also examining the literary and critical responses and innovations of a number of other central figures in the discourse, with particular attention paid to the importance of Rodolfo Walsh and Ricardo Piglia, who along with Borges have come to constitute a central critical triumvirate for this project. It will assess works by Argentine 'writer/critics' that have received little critical attention, including Eustaquio Pellicer's 'El botón del calzoncillo' (1918) and Enrique Anderson Imbert's 'La bala cansada' (1961). It also includes a detailed

examination of *La mala guita* by Pablo Leonardo (pseudonym of Leonardo Moledo), a 1976 crime novel that will be read as a fascinating compendium of the Argentine literary and critical tradition of detective fiction under examination in this dissertation, but one that has eluded critical attention entirely up to the present, thus contributing to the originality of this project.

The prominence of Borges within the broader Latin American detective fiction tradition is notorious. As noted by Persephone Braham, 'The Argentine writer Jorge Luis Borges, who published numerous detective stories in translation (in his *Séptimo Círculo* series) and wrote several of his own, was probably the single most influential advocate of detective fiction in Latin America'.[4] A sizeable volume of essays and scholarly articles, and a number of full-length studies, such as those of Cristina Parodi, Pablo Brescia, José Fernández Vega, Jorge Hernández Martín and John T. Irwin, have been devoted to the examination of various aspects of Borges' extensive relationship with the detective genre. Similarly, critical assessments of the genre in Argentina, including those of Donald Yates, Jorge Lafforgue and Jorge B. Rivera, Amelia Simpson, Elena Braceras and Cristina Leytour, and most recently Román Setton, have acknowledged the importance of Borges' interventions within the national tradition. What is less well understood is the full extent of Borges' conscious efforts to shape the detective genre in Argentina over a forty year period, from the publication of the essay, 'Las leyes de la narración policial' in *Hoy Argentina* magazine in 1933, to the awarding of the Primer Certamen Latinoamericano de Cuentos Policiales in 1975 and its immediate aftermath. This study will focus particularly on this period, building upon the critical insight suggested by a number of commentators, most notably José Fernández Vega in his

[4] Persephone Braham, *Crimes Against the State, Crimes Against Persons* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), p. 2.

essay 'Una campaña estética: Borges y la narrativa policial',[5] that Borges was effectively involved in an aesthetic campaign that had as its objective the codification and widespread dissemination of the detective genre in the classical mode in Argentina. This dissertation considers the possible motivations for Borges' extensive and wide-ranging campaign, and assesses its various manifestations in the critical, literary and publishing spheres. It also identifies and critically examines the subsequent responses of a number of interested parties to the efforts of Borges, what might be termed the aesthetic *counter-campaign* of writers, readers and critics, including Rodolfo Walsh, Ricardo Piglia, Eduardo Goligorsky, Enrique Anderson Imbert and Pablo Leonardo. It will be asserted that these writers recognised and effectively appropriated the strategies of Borges in order to establish a fluid, intertextual generic discourse, whether through their critical or editorial activities, or, frequently, from within the pages of their own literary production in the genre. While various critics have examined certain aspects of these textual strategies, none have charted and analysed this series of critical campaigns in a comprehensive manner. As such, this study represents an important original critical contribution to scholarship in this area. What emerges from this approach is the conviction that the crime genre in Argentina has evolved through a subtle, conscious and quite complex process of dialogue and negotiation between the advocates and practitioners of the genre in the classical mode, most conspicuously represented by Borges, and those who later came to view the hard-boiled style as a generic template more in keeping with the grim realities of the Argentine experience, such as Ricardo Piglia, Eduardo Goligorsky and Pablo Leonardo.

[5] José Fernández Vega, 'Una campaña estética: Borges y la narrativa policial' in *Variaciones Borges*, 1 (1996), pp. 27-66.

This dissertation will maintain that the most noteworthy outcome of the discursive process among Argentine writers has been a consistent tendency towards humorous, intellectual, self-reflexive narratives, which often explicitly reference and imaginatively reflect upon the crime fiction tradition and the act of reading itself in highly original ways, and a recognition that, by the mid-1970s, the hard-boiled model was no more suited to the depiction and critique of quotidian crime and violence in the Argentine context than the more consciously artificial 'classical' model that preceded it. It will be argued that this latter circumstance was largely a product of the stupefying realities of the Proceso de Reorganización Nacional (1976-1983), a period in which writers of fiction were effectively rendered incapable of adequately conveying the horrors of the wholesale criminality and bloodshed that dominated Argentine society under military rule.

Location of Project

This project examines the evolution of the detective genre in Argentina generally, the multi-faceted participatory role of Jorge Luis Borges in this evolution specifically, as well as the subsequent critical and literary contributions of a number of other prominent Argentine writers. It is informed by readings of a significant number of primary texts, a sizeable body of relevant scholarly material related to detective fiction in Argentina, as well as a substantial number of critical works which have examined Borges' manifold associations with the genre.

Borges himself was among the very earliest contributors to the critical consideration of detective fiction in Argentina, with the publication of 'Leyes de la narración policial' in the magazine *Hoy Argentina* in April of 1933, an essay which, as the name suggests, establishes a number of basic laws for what he considers to be

the correct practice of the detective genre in the classical mould, as well as offering a defence for the aesthetic and intellectual virtues of the form. Whereas Borges' 1933 essay is concerned with providing an Argentine readership with a solid grounding in the principles of the detective genre derived from his readings of the primarily English, classical puzzle-mystery tradition, the publication of Rodolfo Walsh's *Diez cuentos policiales argentinos* in 1953 marks the appearance of the first anthology of detective stories in Spanish, and provides an early critical reflection upon the genre in Argentina, in the form of the two-page 'Noticia' that precedes the collection. According to Jorge Lafforgue, 'a pesar de su brevedad, bien puede considerarse como el primer ensayo sobre la gestación del género entre nosotros'.[6] The following year, Walsh would once again cast a critical gaze upon the detective genre, with the publication of 'Dos mil quinientos años de literatura policial' in the newspaper *La Nación*. In this provocative essay, the revisionist Walsh challenges what he describes as the 'acuerdo casi unánime'[7] regarding the foundational status of Edgar Allan Poe's detective stories, maintaining that 'la totalidad de los elementos esenciales de la ficción policíaca se hallan dispersos en la literatura de épocas anteriores'.[8] including The Bible, Cervantes' *Don Quijote*, Virgil's *Aeneid* and the sixteenth century Guatemalan text, the *Popol Vuh*.

The earliest dedicated study of the history of the genre in Argentina is Donald A. Yates' doctoral dissertation, *The Argentine Detective Story*, completed under the supervision of Argentine crime writer and critic Enrique Anderson Imbert at the University of Michigan in 1960. Yates' historical overview identifies a number

[6] Jorge Lafforgue, 'Walsh en y desde el género policial' published at rodolfowalsh.org on 31/07/2004. http://www.rodolfowalsh.org/spip.php?article83 [Accessed on the 26th of June, 2009]
[7] Rodolfo Walsh, 'Dos mil quinientos años de literatura policial'. First published in *La Nación* in February of 1954, here quoted in Rodolfo Walsh, *Cuentos para tahúres y otros relatos policiales* (Buenos Aires: Puntosur, 1987), p. 163.
[8] Ibid.

of early precursors or antecedents to the Argentine tradition proper, including Anderson Imbert's 1930 story 'Las deducciones del detective Gamboa', but asserts that these early works were essentially 'marginal contributions, of tentative experiment within the genre',[9] and that the form's true beginnings could be traced to the 1940s, specifically to the publication of Abel Mateo's novel *Con la guadaña al hombro* in 1940, marking the beginning of a decade which Yates identifies as the 'Golden Age' of Argentine crime fiction, owing to the intellectual and cultural prestige of the relatively few authors who published detective fiction during this period. In Yates' estimation, though the 1950s represented a more successful period for the genre in commercial terms, the proliferation of native Argentine crime fiction in this decade yielded a net decline in the quality of the works produced. This view would be challenged by Jorge Lafforgue and Jorge B. Rivera, who dispute Yates' expedient interpretation of the Argentine detective genre as 'una forma literaria que, con precisión casi biológica, nace, se desarrolla y llega a un alto grado de esplendor a partir del cual comienza una suerte de inevitable decadencia'.[10]

Lafforgue and Rivera's monumental collaborative work, *Asesinos de papel*, first published in 1977 and substantially expanded and updated in 1996,[11] remains the most informative and wide-ranging scholarly contribution to the consideration of the detective genre in Argentina. The 1996 edition of *Asesinos* is a vast repository of socio-historical and critical material, which includes thirteen separate essays on a

[9] Donald A. Yates, 'The Argentine Detective Story' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Michigan, 1960), p. 19.

[10] Jorge Lafforgue and Jorge B. Rivera, eds., *Asesinos de papel: Ensayos sobre narrativa policial* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Colihue, 1996), p. 12.

[11] The most significant alteration to the second edition is the omission of the anthology of Argentine detective stories that had constituted a substantial part of the original 1977 publication, in favour of additional critical reflections upon the genre. As the authors explain in the preface to the 1996 edition, 'los diez cuentos que entonces seleccionamos aparecieron luego, en su mayoría, en otras antologías del género, de donde hoy resultan accesibles a quienes se interesan por su lectura; los nuevos textos, que completan la actual versión de *Asesinos de papel*, corresponden en general a investigaciones recientes y sirven de adecuado complemento, tanto en el trazado histórico como en lo que hace al debate teórico, aquí apenas insinuado, sobre el género policial'. *Asesinos de papel*, p. 7.

variety of topics by the two co-authors, along with a range of essays, interviews, prefaces, and 'testimonios' by writers including Borges, Marco Denevi, Augusto Roa Bastos, Jaime Rest, Ricardo Piglia, Elvio E. Gandolfo, Roger Caillois, Rodolfo Walsh, Ernesto Sabato, Juan José Sebreli and Osvaldo Aguirre. The second edition also includes a substantial treatment of Uruguayan crime fiction, and an appendix which incorporates a glossary of terms associated with the genre in various languages, as well as a section entitled 'Definiciones, códigos y otros elementos del juicio', which reproduces in Spanish many of the guiding definitions and principles of the genre set forth by writers including S. S. Van Dine, Roger Caillois, Raymond Chandler, Marcel Duhamel, Edgar Allan Poe, Thomas de Quincey, G. K. Chesterton and Ronald Knox. Lafforgue and Rivera's own contributions include three separate essays dedicated to the history of the genre in Argentina which provide a fascinating insight into the process by which detective fiction came to be integrated into the broader Argentine literary tradition. One of the strengths of these essays is the attention paid to the initiatives of various individuals and publishing entities in seeking to foment and to satisfy the public appetite for crime fiction in Argentina, whether in the form of translated foreign works or native production across a variety of publishing formats. However, these same essays, one written by Lafforgue, one by Rivera, and another co-authored by both, present their own detectory challenge to the researcher, in that they offer distinct, though largely complementary, expositions of the same set of circumstances. The authors themselves acknowledge the general potential for replication and bifurcation presented by the collection as a whole in the preface:

> Al ordenar los trabajos de este volumen, en varias ocasiones estuvimos tentados de numerar los ensayos, sus apartados y subapartados para establecer un sistema de remisiones cruzadas, pues los textos se reiteran, complementan o amplían en diversos lugares, conformando –es nuestra

> esperanza– una red provocativa. Si optamos por no hacerlo fue porque apostamos a que la buena memoria del lector establezca los vínculos correspondientes, descubra o invente las provocaciones, disfrutando a la vez de una lectura que en alguna medida pueda asimilarse a la de los relatos policiales.[12]

Asesinos de papel is an invaluable, pleasantly idiosyncratic reference text, but it is also a chaotic and fragmentary hotchpotch of historical and critical material that demands a good deal of sleuthing, inference and disentangling on the part of the reader, to the evident satisfaction of the co-authors. One of the challenges of this study has been to attempt to bring a sense of narrative coherence to the array of testimonies, historical details and critical insights presented in Lafforgue and Rivera's landmark collection, while also incorporating and assessing the critical approaches adopted by numerous other writers and scholars who have contributed to the Argentine genre's critical consideration. Also, while *Asesinos* provides an excellent, exhaustive overview of developments and innovations within the genre, in general the detective stories and novels featured, though meticulously documented, are not themselves subject to close analysis. While such close reading might be said to fall outside the remit of the already vast *Asesinos de papel*, it is an essential element of this dissertation, which closely examines several works by Argentine writers that have received little or no detailed critical attention. This is a central plank of the originality of this project, in that it seeks to interweave an account of the genre's evolution with the close analysis of fictional narratives which are instances of, or indeed critical commentaries upon, the crime fiction traditions from which they emerged.

Amelia Simpson's 1990 publication, *Detective Fiction from Latin America*, is a particularly relevant and helpful point of reference for this dissertation. While

[12] *Asesinos de papel*, p. 8.

Simpson's study encompasses the four main production centres of the genre in Latin America at the time of publication (Argentina, Brazil, Mexico and Cuba), her chapter dealing with the genre's Argentine development is substantial, and goes some way towards streamlining the somewhat disjointed narratives assembled in *Asesinos de papel*. In the latter half of her study, Simpson examines individual detective works by Latin American authors under the headings 'The Uses of Satire', 'Investigations without Solutions' and 'History as Mystery'. In these chapters, the Latin American detective story-as-palimpsest serves as an overarching, unifying metaphor for her analyses:

> In those works that are not simply rote imitation of foreign models, attention is often purposefully drawn in the narrative to differences between the model and the new text. In the juxtaposition of these two texts within one narrative framework, a palimpsest is created. The new text is written over the surface of the old (the foreign, imported detective model), which itself remains legible beneath the surface.[13]

According to Simpson, her detailed analysis focuses on 'the interaction between the layers of the palimpsest, because it is this aspect that is most consistently and successfully explored in Latin American detective literature'.[14] This assessment seems to me to be particularly pertinent and instructive in the case of Argentina, as are the remarks that conclude her introductory chapter:

> Such works are all, in a sense, about themselves. They are self-reflexive to a degree—literature mirroring literature—and they offer material worthy of serious critical consideration beyond those aspects relating to the detective genre alone. The most distinctive aspect of these works, however, is that, by reflecting back on their detective-fiction models, they make readers aware of features of culture and society.[15]

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[13] Simpson, *Detective Fiction from Latin America*, p. 23.
[14] Ibid, p. 23. 'The Uses of Satire' examines works by the Argentine authors Eduardo Ladislao Holmberg ('La bolsa de huesos', 1896) and Enrique Anderson Imbert ('El general hace un lindo cadáver', 1956). 'Investigations without Solutions' includes José Pablo Feinmann's novel *Últimos días de la víctima* (1979) and Ricardo Piglia's 'La loca y el relato del crimen' (1975). 'History as Mystery 'offers a succinct, thoughtful treatment of Rodolfo Walsh's *Operación Masacre* (first published in 1957, though Simpson examines the revised 1969 edition.)
[15] Ibid, p. 24.

For the most part Simpson maintains a separation between her socio-historical treatment of the genre in Argentina and her later assessments of individual works by Argentine authors, which are examined alongside several other texts by Latin American writers including Glauco Rodriques Corrêa and Paulo Celso Rangel (Brazil), Vincente Leñero and José Emilio Pacheco (Mexico), and Gabriel García Márquez (Colombia). Though mindful of the merits of Simpson's study, the approach taken in this dissertation is distinct, in that it provides an account of the evolution of the Argentine crime genre that combines the close textual analysis of individual works of fiction with socio-historical considerations and critical insights derived primarily from Argentine sources. This approach reveals a palimpsest that is not readily perceptible in Simpson's treatment; namely, the active process of dialogue and negotiation amongst writers, readers and critics that has marked the genre's development and consideration in the Argentine context specifically.

Elena Braceras, Cristiana Leytour and Susana Pittella's *El cuento policial argentino*: *Una propuesta de lectura productiva para la escuela secundaria* (Buenos Aires: Plus Ultra, 1986), provides an invaluable account of the implications of the crime genre as a point of confluence between critical discourse and popular culture, and includes a significant treatment of the genre's historical development and assimilation in Argentina, a concise anthology of Argentine short stories, and detailed individual 'propuestas de lectura' for each story. Though originally published as a textbook for secondary students, the theoretical scope and sophistication of this volume demonstrates the extent to which the genre has become assimilated into the pedagogical mainstream of Argentine society as a critical and

interpretive tool.[16] Braceras and Leytour's sustained critical interest in the genre is reflected in their critical anthology, *Cuentos con detectives y comisarios* (Buenos Aires: Colihue, 2004, 1st edn 1995), the prologue of which provides a condensed historical overview of the genre as well as a thoughtful essay examining the viability of the figure of the detective and the *comisario* in the Argentine detectory tradition. Anthologies such as those of Braceras and Leytour have proved a consistently popular forum for the critical consideration of the genre in Argentina. As Lafforgue and Rivera noted in 1995:

> Desde *Diez cuentos policiales argentinos*, de Rodolfo J. Walsh (1953) […] se extiende una serie de antologías del género, cuyos prólogos, sumados a unos cuantos artículos dispersos en revistas de variada índole, configuran la bibliografía ensayística sobre el tema en la Argentina.[17]

The various *prólogos*, *noticias*, *notas*, *introducciones* and *estudios preliminares* that accompany the collections examined in this dissertation represent a treasure trove of bibliographical and biographical information, historical data and interesting theoretical reflections. Additionally, the selection of stories for inclusion in these anthologies often implicitly reflects the critical refinements, revisions, re-conceptualisations and ruptures that have marked the trajectory of the genre in Argentina. Fermín Févre's anthology *Cuentos policiales argentinos* (Buenos Aires: Kapelusz, 1974) is illustrative in this regard. This eclectic collection is comprised of stories by some of the best known Argentine writers of crime fiction, including Borges, Paul Groussac, Manuel Peyrou, Syria Poletti and Adolfo Pérez Zelaschi. However, the presence of 'Revelación de un crimen' (1863) by José Hernández (author of the gauchesque epic poem *Martín Fierro*) in a crime fiction anthology is indicative of Févre's provocative revisionist impulses. The bold inclusion of

[16] A number of references to this work are incorporated into the revised 1996 edition of *Asesinos de papel*, a clear indication that its value as a critical text extends beyond the confines of the secondary classroom.
[17] *Asesinos de papel*, p. 179.

Hernández's story, theoretically at least, pushes back the origins of the crime genre in Argentina by fourteen years,[18] establishes a connection (albeit a tenuous one) between the crime genre and the gauchesque tradition, and calls into question the imported character of the form. Perhaps more controversial again is the appearance of 'La espera' by Borges, which Févre includes as an Argentine rendering of *género negro*, given Borges' apparent disdain for the violence and gritty realism associated with the hard-boiled variant.

Jorge Lafforgue's *Cuentos policiales argentinos* (Buenos Aires: Alfaguara, 1997) is the most representative anthology of Argentine detective stories available, containing 25 detective stories arranged into four sections. The first *Período formativo* reproduces some of the Argentine genre's earliest significant stories, including 'La pesquisa' (1884) by Paul Groussac, 'Los vestigios de un crimen' (1907) by Vicente Rossi and Eustaquio Pellicer's 'El botón del canzoncillo' (1918). The second *Período clásico* opens with Roberto Arlt's 'El crimen casi perfecto' (1940), and includes stories by Borges, Honorio Bustos Domecq (pseudonym of Borges and Adolfo Bioy Casares), Manuel Peyrou and Enrique Anderson Imbert. The third *Período de transición* marks a move away from the classical, puzzle-mystery model towards a more distinctly local style and a closer identification among Argentine writers with the American hard-boiled style, and includes works by Velmiro Ayala Gauna, Rodolfo Walsh, Norberto Firpo, as well as Adolfo Pérez Zelaschi's 'Las señales' (1961). The final *Período negro* features stories by, among others, Julio Cortázar, Ricardo Piglia, Juan Martini, Vicente Battista and Juan Sasturain. Lafforgue's frequent collaborator Jorge B. Rivera's more concise collection, *El relato policial en la Argentina: Antología crítica* (Buenos Aires:

[18] Most contemporary accounts of the genre in Argentina acknowledge Luis V. Varela's 1877 novel *La huella del crimen* as the foundational Argentine detective novel, as discussed in this study.

Editorial Universitaria de Buenos Aires, 1999, 1st edn 1986), is another valuable point of reference for this study. This anthology brings together seven stories by Argentine writers, including Rodolfo Walsh's classically inflected novella 'La aventura de las pruebas de imprenta', first published as part of his award-winning *Variaciones en rojo* in 1953, and 'El caso de los crímenes sin firma' by Adolfo L. Pérez Zelaschi, originally published in the magazine *Leoplán* in March of the same year. The remaining five stories, by Eduardo Goligorsky, Juan Carlos Martini, Jorge Manzur, Elvio E. Gandolfo and Guillermo Saccomanno respectively, were all originally published between 1975 and 1985, and reflect the tendency among Argentine writers and critics from the late 1960s onwards to embrace the hard-boiled model as a means of more faithfully reflecting the Argentine experience, and as a vehicle for social critique. With the exception of the deceased Walsh, each of the authors included in the anthology supplies answers to a *cuestionario* proposed by Rivera, which invites them to discuss such matters as their literary origins, preferences and affiliations, their working methods, and the critical reception of their work. They are also invited to share their views on the political role of the writer in society, and their opinion on the viability and relevance of the crime genre in Argentina.[19] The collection is preceded by a thoughtful essay by Rivera on the genre's Argentine development entitled 'El simple arte de asesinar' (a nod to Raymond Chandler's seminal essay and manifesto 'The Simple Art of Murder', first

[19] Jorge B. Rivera, *El relato policial en la Argentina: Antología crítica* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Universitaria de Buenos Aires, 1999. 1st edn, 1986), pp. 43-4. The writers surveyed offer a variety of interesting and often conflicting opinions regarding the relevance of the crime genre in the Argentina of 1986. The comments of Adolfo L. Pérez Zelaschi, one of the genre's most anthologised writers, reflect the perpetual suspicion that crime fiction is doomed to implausibility in the Argentine context, though he clearly views this difficulty as reflecting a far more generalised malaise afflicting Argentine society and its relationship to literature, all the more so in the aftermath of the so-called *Proceso de Reorganización Nacional* (1976-1983): 'Cuando la sociedad argentina llegue a tener rasgos propios, su arte literario también los tendrá y el género policial, si para entonces sigue existiendo, los mostrará igualmente. Interín algunos hemos tratado de dar cierto matiz local —digo *matiz* y no *color*— a esta manera de escribir. Por ahora lo único que veo como distintivo es que abordamos el género con más humor que seriedad, relativizando lo que en él puede haber de drama o tragedia*'*. Ibid, p. 134.

published in *The Atlantic Monthly* in 1944), and a short preface described by the author as a '*Breve justificación*' for his choice of stories, which concludes with a statement that neatly encapsulates the trajectory of the crime genre during the period under consideration in this dissertation:

> Si el género comienza como estructura cerrada organizada en torno a un enigma, una investigación y una serie de reglas de desafío y 'juego limpio', parece estallar más tarde —en un punto bastante alejado de esa primera petición de coherencia y consistencia lúdicas— como reflexión abierta, digresiva y crítica (aunque también paródica, como hemos señalado) sobre las desazones de una época singularmente conflictiva y sobre la propia literatura.[20]

The collection also provides an '*apéndice documental*' which includes a glossary of terms associated with the genre in the English, French and German language traditions, quotations and definitions by various crime writers, critics and literary historians, as well as an 18-point '*temario*' of Rivera's own confection, listing 'algunos de los recursos temáticos, estructurales o procesales más frecuentes en el género'.[21] The pedagogical flavour of the paratextual elements that accompany Rivera's anthology, and indeed the others discussed above, demonstrates the consistent tendency in the Argentine context to regard the crime genre, not simply as a diverting form of mass-market entertainment, nor as the esoteric preserve of a cloistered academic elite, but rather as a form of fiction that can be both popular and at the same time intellectual in its appeal to the reader. Needless to say, their efforts to provide socio-historical context, and to facilitate fruitful and informed readings of the Argentine detective stories presented in their collections for the benefit of a broad target readership have benefited this study to a significant degree.

Among the many critical texts dedicated to the examination of the presence of the detective genre in the work of Borges, the most comprehensive is John T.

[20] Ibid, pp. 40-41.
[21] Ibid, p. 268.

Irwin's tour de force, *The Mystery to a Solution: Poe, Borges and the Analytical Detective Story* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins U.P., 1996). Irwin's study departs from the conviction that 'exactly one hundred years after Poe had originated the form, Borges set out to double that origin, apparently feeling that the genre's deepest meaning had never really been addressed by the tradition that grew out of Poe's work'.[22] The resulting project is wide-ranging, ambitious, and startling in its erudition. As Irwin indicates in the preface:

> In examining Poe's and Borges's detective story projects, this book combines history, literary history, biography, psychoanalysis, and practical and speculative criticism as it traces the issues underlying the detective genre into other works by Poe and Borges and into areas of inquiry as distant and various as the history of mathematics, classical mythology, handedness, the three/four oscillation, the double-mirror structure of self-consciousness, the mythography of Evans and Frazer, the structure of chess, automata, the mind-body problem, the etymology of 'labyrinth,' and scores of other topics.[23]

Like Lafforgue and Rivera in the preface to *Asesinos de papel*, Irwin regards his critical volume as an open challenge in detection for the reader:

> The book that follows, in homage to the genre Poe invented, mirrors to some degree the structure of a detective story, but it also mirrors, as an homage to Borges's doubling of Poe, the structure of a labyrinth. What this book demands of the reader is patience and trust—patience as the paths of inquiry begin to fork, as digressions shear off from the main line, and then digressions from digressions; and trust that these paths will eventually rejoin the main line and ultimately lead to a goal.[24]

Though they are not quoted extensively in this analysis, a number of other critical works have made important contributions to the overall theoretical orientation of this study, and merit explicit acknowledgement at this point. In *Readers and Labyrinths*, Jorge Hernández Martín 'explores the transformations of the genre wrought by Borges, Bustos Domecq (pseudonym of Borges and Bioy Casares) and Umberto

[22] John T. Irwin, *The Mystery to a Solution: Poe, Borges and the Analytical Detective Story* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins U.P., 1996), pp. xvii-xviii.
[23] Ibid, p. xviii.
[24] Ibid, p. xxiii.

Eco, and the strategies enacted by the reading and writing selves on the site of the text.' [25] Hanne Klinting also focuses on the special role assigned to the reader of the Borgesian detectory text in his essay, 'El lector detective y el detective lector: La estrategia interpretativa de Isidro Parodi en "Las previsiones de Sangiácomo"'.[26] Andrés Avellaneda examines the ideological underpinnings of the Bustos Domecq stories in *El habla de la ideología,*[27] (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 1983), while Enrique Anderson Imbert makes an important critical contribution to the field in 'Chesterton en Borges'.[28] The most recent full-length study in this field is Román Setton's *Los orígenes de la narrativa policial en la Argentina* (2012),[29] which re-examines the earliest origins of the genre in Argentina, with a particular focus upon the period 1877-1912, and includes detailed analyses of the work of pioneers such as Luis V. Varela, Carlos Olivera, Paul Groussac and Eduardo Holmberg, who had hitherto been regarded as 'precursores y antecedentes'.[30]

Creating the Reader of the Argentine Detective Story

A conscious decision has been taken in this project to develop and implement a reading approach that builds upon, but remains consonant with, the analytical methods previously employed within the Argentine crime fiction critical discourse. The dissertation also seeks to elaborate a 'lectura estratégica' that takes into account a multitude of theoretical positions rather than relying on one schematic

[25] Jorge Hernández Martin, *Readers and Labyrinths: Detective Fiction in Borges, Bustos Domecq and Eco* (New York: Garland, 1995), p. x.
[26] Hanne Klinting, 'El lector detective y el detective lector: La estrategia interpretativa de Isidro Parodi en "Las previsiones de Sangiácomo"', *Variaciones Borges*, 6, (1998), pp. 144-59.
[27] Andrés Avellaneda, *El habla de la ideología* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana), 1983).
[28] Enrique Anderson Imbert, 'Chesterton en Borges', *Anales de Literatura Hispanoamericana* (Madrid), 2-3, 1974, pp. 469-491.
[29] Román Setton, *Los orígenes de la narrativa policial en la Argentina. Recepción y transformación de modelos genéricos alemanes, franceses e ingleses* (Madrid: Iberoamericana, 2012).
[30] Ibid, p. 11.

methodology. In essence, this process involves *creating a conceptual reader* of the Argentine detective story. The approach is derived from my concurrence with Ricardo Piglia's acute observation that the practice of literary criticism constitutes 'una forma posfreudiana de la autobiografía. Una autobiografía ideológica, teórica, política, cultural', and that 'el sujeto de la crítica suele estar enmascarado por el método (a veces el sujeto es el método) pero siempre está presente'.[31] This study employs a composite critical approach, whose elaboration constitutes a unique and original contribution to knowledge in this area. In keeping with Piglia´s insight, it recognises that its autobiographical *método* is derived from its (subjective) readings, rather than the inverse case; the critical subject is acknowledged rather than concealed by its methodological framework. The reading strategy elaborated in the course of the study takes as its most consistent anchoring point the general approach to reading elucidated by Borges and described by Piglia in his 1997 interview with Sergio Pastor Merlo, 'Borges como crítico'. Piglia perceives in the literary pursuits of Borges a set of tactics that have informed and guided his own literary and critical activities:

> Más que su estilo o sus «temas», han sido esas tácticas de lectura las que me han influido. Los he usado […] como un abc de la lectura, una práctica que excede la crítica propiamente dicha y avanza en otra dirección, más pedagógica, diría, programática incluso, porque tiende a constituir el universo literario como tal, a definir sus límites y sus fronteras, y ésa es una tarea anterior a la crítica propiamente dicha y es su condición.[32]

This idea is applied specifically to Borges' activities as an anthologist, critic, promoter and cultural arbiter of the *policial*. According to Piglia, Borges' efforts to define and explore the limits of the detective genre may be interpreted as a reading strategy that has as its object not only the careful elaboration of a detectory canon

[31] Ricardo Piglia, *Crítica y ficción* (Buenos Aires: Anagrama, 2006. 1st edn 1986), p. 13.

[32] Piglia, 'Borges como crítico' in *Crítica y ficción*, p. 149.

and the constitution of a reading public for detective fiction in Argentina, but also, by extension, the construction of a suitable context in which to consider his own literary production:

> ¿Por qué Borges se dedica de una manera tan sistemática a valorar los textos del género policial? Porque quiere ser leído desde ese lugar y no desde Dostoievski […] Entonces, para constituir el espacio en el cual sus textos pudieran circular era necesario que explicara cómo podía ser otra lectura de la narrativa. Su lectura perpetua […] de la literatura policial, era una manera de construir un espacio para que sus textos pudieran ser leídos en el contexto en el cual funcionaban.[33]

Piglia's equivalent efforts to legitimise and integrate the hard-boiled genre in the Argentine literary context may be interpreted as similar in motivation, and as an acknowledgement of the effectiveness of the diverse reading strategies employed by Borges when compared to the more orthodox, atomising critical methods that he identifies with traditional academic discourse:

> La especialización tiende a dejar a los escritores reducidos a la práctica pura, en lo posible, la más ingenua, y del otro lado ha quedado la crítica que se ocupa de definir los espacios, definir los contextos, establecer las tradiciones y las categorías.[34]

According to Piglia, one consequence of this 'division of labour' between writers and critics is that the role of the reader of fiction in the collective literary experience tends to be forgotten or ignored, a significant omission in light of the fact that, as he puts it, 'la lectura no obedece a la lógica normativa de las modas teóricas que organizan el corpus y los debates de la crítica'.[35] He also identifies a further limitation associated with the kind of atomisation that he attributes to literary criticism in the conventional mode:

> La crítica expresa, a veces de un modo refinado, a veces de un modo trivial, lo que es el sentido común de una época; la concepción literaria media está fija en la crítica. Aparte de los métodos y de las teorías, que definen el estilo de los críticos, habitualmente sus concepciones literarias son muy previsibles

[33] *Crítica y ficción*, pp. 153-4.
[34] *Crítica y ficción*, pp. 152-3.
[35] Ibid.

> y acompañan el sentido común medio. Uno lee un libro de crítica […], con grandes exhibiciones teóricas, uso de psicoanálisis, pongamos, o del *new historicism*, pero la concepción de la literatura que está implícita suele ser muy previsible, y muy de época. Es difícil encontrar a un crítico que tenga una concepción propia de la literatura, habitualmente tiene concepciones sobre los debates de la crítica y los aplica […]. Habitualmente los críticos no saben muy bien qué decir sobre los textos, miran un poco alrededor para saber si es bueno o no, si está en el centro o en el margen y luego le aplican sus métodos.[36]

By contrast, Piglia identifies in the various interrelated and often overlapping literary activities of Borges an impulse towards the realisation of a more fluid, inclusive mode of critical discourse that serves to mitigate the tripartite division between writers, critics and readers. 'Me parece uno de los representantes más nítidos de esa tradición de la crítica que se aleja de las normas definidas por la crítica establecida'.[37] Indeed it is the habit and the policy of Borges to offer theoretical conjectures related to fiction from within the pages of his own *ficciones*, a tactic that will be frequently emulated by other Argentine writers of crime fiction, and foregrounded in this study. It is not at all unusual to find the fictional narrative production of Borges engaged in an implicit dialogue with conventional literary criticism. As Piglia points out, 'muchos de los primeros textos narrativos de Borges, como «El acercamiento a Almotásim» o «Pierre Menard», pueden ser leídos en ese contexto, son juegos con las reglas de la crítica académica'.[38] Nor is it surprising to find Borges engaged in a theoretical discussion about the participatory role of the reader in the realisation of the literary text from within the pages of a fictional narrative such as 'Examen de la obra de Herbert Quain' (1941). The story purports to be a review of the oeuvre of an obscure, recently deceased Irish author, including what initially sounds like the sparse plot summary of a conventional detective novel in the classical mould, *The God of the Labyrinth*, supposedly published in November

[36] *Crítica y ficción*, p. 166.
[37] Ibid, p. 153.
[38] Ibid, p. 168.

of 1933: 'Hay un indescifrable asesinato en las páginas iniciales, una lenta discusión en las intermedias, una solución en las últimas'.[39] It is reported, however, that Quain's novel introduces a significant innovation:

> Ya aclarado el enigma, hay un párrafo largo y retrospectivo que contiene esta frase: *Todos creyeron que el encuentro de los dos jugadores de ajedrez había sido casual.* Esa frase deja entender que la solución es errónea. El lector, inquieto, revisa los capítulos pertinentes y descubre otra solución, que es la verdadera. El lector de ese libro singular es más perspicaz que el *detective*.[40]

Though the narrator makes no more than a passing reference to this apocryphal text in his review of Quain's work, a hypothetical detective narrative in which the *reader* supplies the correct solution to a mystery that has defeated the story's detective carries with it a number of theoretical implications, in that it suggests the means by which one of the established conventions of the detective genre might be modified. Implicit in this suggestion is the idea, previously expressed by Borges in his 1938 *Hogar* review of Richard Hull's *Excellent Intentions*, that 'el género policial, como todos los géneros, vive de la continua y delicada infracción de sus leyes'.[41] Additionally, the specific scenario outlined by Borges in relation to *The God of the Labyrinth* invites a theoretical reflection upon the reading experience and the relationship between the detective story (or, indeed, any story) and its readership. An ingenuous, inexperienced, or complacent reader, who assumes a passive role in the experience of Quain's novel, may happily accept the solution to the mystery offered

[39] Borges, 'Examen de la obra de Herbert Quain', first published in *Sur* 79 (April 1941), pp. 44-8. Here quoted from *Obras completas* Vol. I (Buenos Aires: Emecé, 2007. 19th edn.), p. 553. According to the narrator, the publication of Quain's novel immediately preceded that of a much better-known detective work by Ellery Queen, a coincidence which he feels may have condemned Quain's effort to obscurity: 'En los primeros de diciembre, las agradables y arduas involuciones del *Siamese Twin Mystery* atarearon a Londres y a Nueva York; yo prefiero atribuir a esa coincidencia ruinosa el fracaso de la novela de nuestro amigo. También (quiero ser sincero) a su ejecución deficiente y a la vana y frígida pompa de ciertas descripciones del mar'. p. 553.

[40] Ibid. A virtually identical plot outline is contemplated by Borges as a prelude to a review of Richard Hull's detective novel *Excellent Intentions*, published in *El Hogar* magazine in April of 1938. See Borges, *Obras completas* Vol. IV (Buenos Aires: Emecé, 2007. 5th edn.), pp. 440-1.

[41] Ibid, p. 440.

in the story's final pages. (S)he follows what appears to be a conventional detective narrative and is 'rewarded' with the conventional (though false) solution arrived at by the fictional detective. By contrast, the active, engaged, 'lector inquieto' conjectured by Borges, more thoroughly versed in the conventions and devices of the detective genre, adopts an attitude of suspicion and constant vigilance in relation to the evidence presented by the text, and is rewarded by the gratifying discovery that (s)he has arrived at the *true* solution to a mystery that has proved beyond the acumen of the detective, and, indeed, beyond that of the less attentive reader. In the guise of commenting upon an imaginary detective novel written by a fictitious author, Borges posits the notion of a detective novel capable of more than one solution, but which depends for its most effective realisation upon the active, analytical participation of a relatively specialised reader, whose cumulative experience recommends treating any and all textual evidence with a judicious degree of suspicion and mistrust, extending even to the testimony of the detective, the textual entity traditionally charged with the resolution of the baffling mystery. This idea is more fully elaborated some forty years later in Borges's 1978 lecture 'El cuento policial' in which he maintains that by 'creating' the fictional detective, Poe had effectively also created the reader of detective fiction, 'ese lector está lleno de sospechas, porque el lector de novelas policiales es un lector que lee con incredulidad, con suspicacias, una suspicacia especial'.[42]

While Borges in this lecture refers to the reader of detective fiction specifically, he also foregrounds the role of the reader of the literary text more generally:

> los géneros literarios dependen, quizás, menos de los textos que del modo en que éstos son leídos. El hecho estético requiere la conjunción del lector y del

[42] Ibid, p. 230.

> texto y sólo entonces existe. Es absurdo suponer que un volumen sea mucho más que un volumen. Empieza a existir cuando un lector lo abre. Entonces existe el fenómeno estético, que puede parecerse al momento en el cual el libro fue engendrado.[43]

This focus upon the role of the reader and the importance of the context in which a text is read, succinctly expressed in 1941 in 'Examen de la Obra de Herbert Quain', and closely associated with Borges' reflections on the detective genre, would later gain currency in the work of more 'conventional' literary theorists, as acknowledged by Piglia:

> es que una zona muy dominante de la crítica académica es hoy básicamente borgeana, trabaja sobre el camino abierto por Borges. Paul de Man, Harold Bloom, George Steiner, Stanley Fish son por momentos más borgeanos que Borges. Quiero decir que a su manera, en los años cuarenta […], Borges había planteado problemas y modos de leer que después la crítica contemporánea descubrió […]. Lo que hoy dice Derrida de una manera un poco esotérica sobre el contexto, sobre el margen, sobre los límites, es lo mismo que dice Borges de una manera más elegante y más clara.[44]

Borges' focus upon the conjunction of reader and text as a necessary condition for the 'fenómeno estético', as expressed in 'El cuento policial', finds a clear echo in Stanley Fish's influential 1970 essay 'Literature in The Reader: Affective Stylistics':

> No one would argue that the act of reading can take place in the absence of someone who reads—how can you tell the dance from the dancer?—but curiously enough when it comes time to make analytical statements about the end product of reading (meaning or understanding), the reader is usually forgotten or ignored. Indeed in recent literary history he has been excluded by legislation.[45]

Fish, in defiance of those theorists who regard the written text as the sole potential repository of meaning, advocates a critical reading method that he describes as 'simple in concept, but complex (or at least complicated) in execution':

> The concept is simply the rigorous and disinterested asking of the question, what does this word, phrase, sentence, paragraph, chapter, novel, play, poem,

[43] Ibid, pp. 229-30.
[44] Piglia, *Crítica y ficción*, p. 169.
[45] Stanley E. Fish, 'Literature in The Reader: Affective Stylistics', in Jane P. Tompkins, ed., *Reader-Response: From Formalism to Post-Structuralism: Criticism* (London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1980), p. 70.

> *do?* [Fish's emphasis]; and the execution involves *an analysis of the developing responses of the reader in relation to the words as they succeed one another in time* [Fish's emphasis].[46]

As described in this essay, Fish's response-orientated reading method is centred upon the careful examination of textual evidence:

> Essentially, what the method does is *slow down* [Fish's emphasis] the reading experience so that 'events' one does not notice in normal time, but which do occur, are brought before our analytical attentions […]. Of course the value of such a procedure is predicated on the idea of *meaning as an event*, something that is happening between the words and in the reader's mind, something not visible to the naked eye, but which can be made visible (or at least palpable) by the regular introduction of a 'searching' question. [47]

Interestingly, the critical readerly attitude that Fish outlines is not dissimilar to that espoused by Rodolfo Walsh's fictional amateur detective, the 'corrector de pruebas de imprenta', Daniel Hernández, who also considers the slow, detailed examination of the printed word to be characteristic of the copy editor, whose professional skills he also applies to the investigation of crime:

> El fin de la lectura de las pruebas es descubrir las erratas, las faltas de construcción, las deficiencias de la traducción. Eso obliga una lectura lenta, silabeada. En la lectura corriente no se leen las palabras completas, sílaba por sílaba, letra por letra. En la corrección de pruebas sí. Por eso digo que usted leería con más rapidez, pero con menos eficacia, pasando por alto gran número de errores.[48]

In turn, Ricardo Piglia identifies a broad parallel between the practice of literary criticism and the investigative methods of the fictional detective:

> a menudo veo la crítica como una variante del género policial. El crítico como detective que trata de descifrar un enigma aunque no haya enigma. El gran crítico es un aventurero que se mueve entre los textos buscando un secreto que a veces no existe […] En más de un sentido el crítico es el investigador y el escritor es el criminal. Se podría pensar que la novela policial es la gran forma ficcional de la crítica literaria. O una utilización magistral por Edgar Poe de las posibilidades narrativas de la crítica. La representación paranoica del escritor como delincuente que borra sus huellas y cifra sus crímenes perseguido por el crítico, descifrador de enigmas.[49]

[46] Ibid, p. 73.
[47] Ibid, pp. 74-75.
[48] Rodolfo Walsh, *Variaciones en rojo*, p. 60.
[49] Piglia, 'La lectura de la ficción', in *Crítica y ficción*, p. 15.

Building upon these critical considerations, what emerges from a detailed examination of the Argentine detective fiction tradition is a strong sense of convergence between what are traditionally regarded as three conceptually distinct entities: the writer, the reader and the literary critic. Furthermore, in the Argentine context, Borges, through his promotion and practice of the genre, may be considered particularly instrumental in accelerating this convergence. In 'Borges y la subversion del modelo policial', the appropriately named Cristina Parodi provides an excellent description of the specialist characteristics of the reader of detective fiction engendered by Poe:

> Porque ha sido creado por un género, sabe que el texto es tramposo, que encierra un enigma, que avanza hacia una respuesta que protege, que el escritor quiere desorientarlo y sólo entrega verdades parciales. Por eso, es un lector suspicaz, escéptico, y su estrategia de lectura se basa en la desconfianza, la duda, la incredulidad.[50]

As Parodi points out, Borges believed that the experienced, specialised reader of detective fiction could fruitfully apply the same analytical reading techniques to the examination of any text, regardless of genre or provenance. Her elaboration upon the participatory qualities of this investigator echoes Piglia's description of the activities of the literary critic as a 'descifrador de enigmas':

> El lector de policiales es un detective que –en el proceso de la lectura– va realizando una investigación independiente: elabora hipótesis, las modifica, las descarta, formula otras nuevas, cambia de perspectiva, sospecha el disimulo o la mentira detrás del comportamiento de los personajes, toma en cuenta la menor indicación textual como si todo dato comportara un indicio.[51]

Parodi also describes a reciprocal process by which the methods of the writer and the consequent responses of the reader foster an increasingly knowledgeable and sophisticated generic discourse:

[50] Cristina Parodi, 'Borges y la subversión del modelo policial.' *Variaciones Borges*, 4, (2000), p. 6.
[51] Ibid.

> Ante el desgaste de los efectos literarios del género, un lector crecientemente más experto exige la transformación de las leyes de la narración; el escritor debe descubrir otras.[52]

Crucially, she asserts that the experienced reader of detective fiction in the Argentine context is an even more highly specialised and insightful textual analyst than those engendered by Poe, owing to the various critical interventions and the literary innovations of Borges within the genre:

> La fórmula es eficaz para relatos destinados a los lectores creados por Poe. Pero además, Borges –uno de esos lectores– escribe para un lector aun más experto y escéptico que los de Poe. De ahí que las transgresiones que impone al género lo afecten profundamente, al conmocionar las estrategias de escritura y los hábitos de lectura que los policiales reclaman del lector.[53]

Borges is certainly not the only writer to adopt a consciously 'pedagogical' approach to the formation of the reader of detective fiction *through the reading of detective fiction*. Umberto Eco, himself a specialised reader of the detective fiction of Borges, acknowledges a sustained effort to shape the generic literary competence of his reader, in a postscript to the highly metaphysical detective novel, *The Name of the Rose*:

> What does it mean, to imagine a reader able to overcome the penitential obstacle of the first hundred pages? It means, precisely, writing one hundred pages for the purpose of constructing a reader suitable for what comes afterwards… Is there a writer who writes only for a handful of readers? Yes, if by this you mean that the model reader he imagines has slight chance of being made flesh in any number. But even this writer writes in the hope, not all that secret, that his book itself will create, and in great quantity, many new exemplars of this reader, desired and pursued with such craftsmanlike precision, and postulated, encouraged, by his text. (Postscript 48)[54]

Additionally, though Borges is undoubtedly the Argentine writer most closely associated with what Merivale and Sweeney describe as the 'metaphysical' detective

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[52] Ibid.
[53] Ibid.
[54] Here quoted from Jeanne C. Ewert, 'A Thousand Other Mysteries: Metaphysical Detection, Ontological Quests', in Patricia Merivale and Susan Elizabeth Sweeney, eds., *Detecting Texts: The Metaphysical Detective Story from Poe to Postmodernism* (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), pp. 185-6.

story, there has been a consistent tendency in the Argentine context towards humorous, intellectual, parodic, self-reflexive fictional narratives, which explicitly reference and imaginatively reflect upon the crime fiction tradition itself, and which rely for their efficacy upon an experienced, engaged reader, familiar with the literary and critical traditions of the genre in Argentina, and particularly the pervasive contribution of Borges to these traditions. This study seeks to describe and hence to construct an avatar of this reader, while recognising the theoretical, chronological and autobiographical limits of this autobiographical artifice.

Conclusion and Overview of Dissertation

This introductory chapter has considered the objectives, scope and location of my project, as well as describing the reading approach developed for use in this study.

Chapter One of this dissertation charts the origins and early development of crime fiction and the emergence of the figure of the detective in the European and American traditions, and describes and contextualises the evolution of the classical and hard-boiled variants that have served as a durable conceptual framework for generic discourse in the Argentine context.

Chapter Two provides an account of the transposition of the genre to Argentina, along with examinations of a number of early works by local authors, including Paul Groussac's 'La pesquisa' and Eustaquio Pellicer's 'El botón del calzoncillo'. It then assesses the interventions of Borges dating from the 1930s, paying close attention to the multi-faceted aesthetic campaign that served to cement the citizenship of the crime genre in the Argentine context.

Chapter Three examines 'The *Vea y Lea* Years' (1949-1964), a transitional period for the Argentine crime genre bookended and punctuated by the three *Vea y Lea*-sponsored detective story competitions that acted as a significant stimulus to production and innovation among Argentine writers, and one in which Borges continued to be a prominent protagonist. This chapter includes a substantial treatment of the work of Rodolfo Walsh within this textual tradition, documenting his radical transition from crime fiction writer and anthologist, to pioneer of the non-fiction novel and investigative journalism traditions, and onwards to his untimely end as the victim of a real-life murder mystery on the streets of Buenos Aires. Also in this chapter, the viability of the figure of the detective in the Argentine context is considered in the light of the close analysis of Adolfo Pérez Zelaschi's award-winning 1961 story 'Las señales'.

Chapter Four encompasses the period from 1961 to 1976, in which the hard-boiled variant of the genre, which had previously languished in the shadow cast by the classical hegemony, came to achieve dominance in Argentina in terms of production and critical and commercial success. It begins with the close examination of 'La bala cansada' (1961) by Enrique Anderson Imbert, before turning to the extensive aesthetic counter-campaign waged by Ricardo Piglia, and ably supported by such writers as Eduardo Goligorsky, David Viñas and Juan José Sebreli, in an effort to incorporate the hard-boiled variant into the Argentine generic tradition. It also examines the proceedings of the 1975 'Primer Certamen Latinoamericano de Cuentos Policiales', the circumstances and results of which offer a fascinating perspective on the genre's evolution in the period immediately preceding the so-

called ‘Proceso de Reorganización Nacional’ (1976-1983). The study concludes with a detailed analysis of Pablo Leonardo’s *La mala guita* (1976), a little-known novel which will be presented as a paradigmatic example of both the strengths and limitations of the crime fiction tradition in Argentina after a century of experimentation. In the final chapter, conclusions and a summary of the research are presented, and recommendations for further research are set out.

Chapter One: The Origins and Early Development of Crime Fiction

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Introduction

This chapter will identify some of the key events, both socio-historic and literary, in the evolution of the crime fiction genre, including its origins in the United States, its early development in France, the 'Golden Age' in Britain and the innovations of the 'hard-boiled' variant. An overview of these phases is crucial to the consideration of the genre's chronologically intervowen Argentine evolution. Particular attention will be paid to the specific circumstances in which the works of certain key writers were published, and to the manner in which this popular genre has related both to real-world events and to'serious' literature.

Foundational Texts

The detective story is said to have its origins in the mind of Edgar Allan Poe, and in the publication of 'Murders in the Rue Morgue' in *Graham's Magazine* in April of 1841. It is the first of three stories to feature the aristocratic Parisian amateur detective, Chevalier of the Legion of Honour Auguste Dupin, whose extraordinary powers of reasoning and deduction enable him to resolve a series of crimes that had hitherto defied the efforts of the Paris constabulary, and whose detectory acumen is regarded with frank astonishment by his companion, the unnamed narrator. Borges regarded these stories as the foundational texts in the genre, his declaration in a 1963 interview with María Esther Vázquez seeking to dispel any ambiguity:

> A diferencia de la historia de otros géneros literarios, la del género policial no ofrece ningún misterio. Un astrólogo podría establecer el horóscopo, ya que sabemos exactamente el día en que ese género fue inventado. Se trata de uno de los días del año 1841 y su inventor fue, *como es notorio* [my emphasis],

> aquel prodigioso escritor que se llamó Edgar Allan Poe. […] Después de ese primer cuento policial, Poe escribe otros en los que se encuentran todas las características del género.[55]

According to John T. Irwin, the importance of Poe's Dupin stories is reinforced by the fact that these initial detective texts represent a decisive departure from the prevailing literary orthodoxy of the time:

> What gives the analytical detective genre its special appeal is that quality which the Goncourt brothers noted on first reading Poe. In an 1836 journal entry they described Poe's stories as "a new literary world" bearing "signs of the literature of the twentieth century – love giving place to deductions… the interest of the story moved from the heart to the head… from the drama to the solution" (Poe, Collected 2: 521n). Precisely because it is a genre that grows out of an interest in deductions and solutions rather than in love and drama, the analytical detective story shows little interest in character, managing at best to produce caricatures – those monsters of idiosyncrasy from Holmes to Poirot.[56]

In a similar vein, Jaime Rest maintains that the detective story, by ignoring the usual preoccupations of nineteenth century literature, found itself ostracized from the 'serious' literary and critical mainstream:

> La sociedad burguesa ponía especial énfasis en el prestigio social, la fortuna y el casamiento ventajoso, considerando a este último como la vía de acceso más frecuente a los dos primeros items. La novela clásica del siglo XIX circula, precisamente, en torno a esos ejes, y desde esta perspectiva resulta obvio que la novela policial comienza a apartarse gradualmente de los grandes modelos de la literatura burguesa, en tanto que no plantea los problemas del prestigio social y del acceso a la fortuna. El público burgués busca en la literatura un espejo de la realidad social, mientras que se aproxima a la narrativa policial y a otras formas literarias peculiares en procura de distracción y pasatiempo.[57]

[55] María Esther Vázquez, *Borges, sus días y su tiempo* (Buenos Aires: Javier Vargas Editor, 1999), p.135. It will be noted that other Argentine commentators have challenged this view, most notably Rodolfo Walsh in his seminal essay 'Dos mil quinientos años de literatura policial', first published in *La Nación* in February of 1954.

[56] John T. Irwin, 'Mysteries We Reread, Mysteries of Rereading: Poe, Borges, and the Analytical Detective Story' in Patricia Merivale & Susan Elizabeth Sweeney, eds., *Detecting Texts: The Metaphysical Detective Story from Poe to Postmodernism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), p. 28.

[57] Jaime Rest in *Asesinos de Papel*, p. 50.

While Poe's landmark detective stories may indeed signal a repositioning of literary concerns in favour of 'affairs of the head', they also reflect a more general societal preoccupation with crime, related to the relatively new phenomenon of large urban population centres, in turn leading to the codification of elaborate legal systems and the establishment of modern state police forces tasked with imposing order upon an increasingly numerous and unruly populace.[58] Poe's Dupin stories are set in Paris, and while Borges regards this geographical displacement as a strategy of convenience on the part of Poe, permitting him to avoid the constraints of verisimilitude that an American setting might have implied,[59] it is significant that in the French capital in particular, popular and literary concern with rising crime had reached critical mass by the beginning of the nineteenth century. As Ernest Mandel points out:

> [An] evaporation of a sense of security had occurred among the petty bourgeoisie and the literate layers of the working class well before it did among the upper classes and high society. While rich neighbourhoods remained relatively safe through the early years of the century, the poor ones were far less protected. The number of persons condemned for crimes in Paris rose from 237 per 100,000 inhabitants in 1835 to 375 in 1847 and 444 in 1868. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, professional criminals, unknown in the eighteenth century, had become a reality.[60]

Rather than concealing from the public the gruesome details of criminality, as they had in the previous century, the Parisian popular theatre and press now seized upon an opportunity to satisfy the awakening public appetite for such fare, leading to 'the proliferation not only of the melodramas dealing with crime, but also of the widest

[58] This process is described in detail in the opening chapters of Ernest Mandel's *Delightful Murder: A Social History of the Crime Story* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), pp. 1-21.
[59] 'Él pudo haber situado sus crímenes y sus detectives en Nueva York, pero entonces el lector habría estado pensando si las cosas se desarrollan realmente así, si la policía de Nueva York es de ese modo o de aquel otro. Resultaba más cómodo y está más desahogada la imaginación de Poe haciendo que todo aquello ocurriera en París, en un barrio desierto del sector Saint Germain'. 'El cuento policial', *Obras Completas* Vol. IV, p. 235.
[60] Mandel, p. 5.

possible sensationalist publicity given to real-life murder stories in the yellow press.'[61]

While Paris was at the vanguard of popular fascination with rising crime and violent acts, a similar phenomenon also manifested itself in Britain, perhaps most famously with the publication of Thomas De Quincey's essay 'On Murder considered as one of the Fine Arts' in Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine in 1827. Mandel draws attention to the essay's 'delectation with murder and speculation about whodunit "amateurs and dilettantes", thereby opening the way to Edgar Allan Poe, Gaboriau and Conan Doyle',[62] a quality addressed by Borges several decades earlier.[63] Mandel, a Marxist economist with a keen scholarly interest in the socio-historic evolution of the genre, maintains that this preoccupation with violent crime and death appealed to a sizeable readership among those groups that had most to fear from its impact, the middle classes and the upper layer of the working classes:

> Because of the changed fate of the elderly, the altered relation between the individual and the community, and the absolute rule of value and money, capital and wealth, the alienated human being in bourgeois society is obsessed with the integrity of the body, indispensable instrument of labour and learning. Hence a much greater obsession with death.[64]

On the supply side, in addition to the social concerns and ideological underpinnings present in the works of authors who increasingly dealt with crime and its

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[61] Ibid, p. 6.
[62] Ibid.
[63] In an early essay on detective fiction, Borges identifies *On Murder* as an example of the union of two distinct passions: 'el extraño apetito de aventuras y el extraño apetito de legalidad'. He elaborates on why these appetites might be considered strange when viewed from an Argentine perspective, 'Matar, para el criollo, era *desgracia*. Era un percance de hombres, que en sí no daba ni quitaba virtud. Nada más opuesto al Asesinato Considerado Como Una De Las Bellas Artes del "mórbidamente virtuoso" De Quincey'. This commentary represents an early recognition that detective fiction in the classical style might not readily hold an appeal for an Argentine audience. It will be observed that this apparent incompatibility does little to dissuade Borges from arguing on behalf of the genre, both in this article and as part of a range of other literary and editorial endeavours spanning several decades. Borges, 'Leyes de la narración policial', in *Textos recobrados 1931-1955* (Buenos Aires: Emecé, 2007), p. 36, first published in *Hoy Argentina*, Buenos Aires, 1, 2, April 1933.
[64] Mandel, pp. 40-1.

consequences, such as Honoré Balzac, Victor Hugo and Charles Dickens, he identifies a vitally important incentive:

> There were also material reasons why the novelists turned to crime stories: financial difficulties, the search for a wider audience, the possibility of receiving lush payments from the new popular magazines, the rise of the *feuilleton* – serial story – in which writers like Eugène Sue (whose *Mystères de Paris* Karl Marx analyzed at length), Ponson du Terrail, and Paul Feval were winning great popular success.[65]

While overcoming financial difficulties, nineteenth century writers were able to exploit the financial opportunities presented by urbanisation, increased literacy and serialised publication to such an extent that making a living as a writer of fiction became a viable option for the first time in the urban centres of England, France and the United States. As such, the story of the crime genre is from its origins interwoven with the story of popular fiction by professional writers directed towards a mass audience. Indeed, Poe himself was among the very first American writers to attempt to earn a living from writing alone.

There is another important sense in which the flourishing crime genre may be identified with the social and economic transformations occurring in the western economic powerhouses of the nineteenth century. According to Michel Foucault, to some extent popular crime fiction acted as a kind of ideological and cultural counterpart to factory discipline, amounting to a moral defence of private property:

> A partir del momento que la capitalización puso entre manos de la clase popular una riqueza investida, bajo la forma de materias primas, de maquinaria, de instrumentos, fue absolutamente necesario proteger esta riqueza […]. Ha sido absolutamente necesario constituir al pueblo en sujeto moral, separarlo pues de la delincuencia, separar claramente el grupo de los delincuentes, mostrarlos como peligrosos, no sólo para los ricos sino también para los pobres, mostrarlos cargados de todos los vicios y origen de los más

[65] Mandel, p. 7

> grandes peligros. De aquí el nacimiento de la literatura policíaca y la importancia de periódicos de sucesos, de los relatos horribles de crímenes.[66]

According to the complementary perspectives offered by Mandel and Foucault, this demonization of the 'delincuente' constituted a radical and deliberate departure from the chronicles and fictional depictions of heroic outlaws dating from the pre-industrial era. Where once the struggles of the rustic 'noble bandit' against the constraints of an oppressive feudal order were understood if not always celebrated, now, the sympathies and interests of the readers of popular literature were decisively aligned with those of the urban bourgeoisie, for whom law and order represented the necessary conditions for productivity and social stability, while any legal transgression, in particular violent crime (whether against property or the individual), constituted a mortal threat to the newly powerful middle classes.

Mandel asserts that by providing a means to 'overcome the growing monotony and standardization of labour and consumption in bourgeois society through a harmless (since vicarious) reintroduction of adventure and drama into daily life',[67] the evolving genre of crime fiction offered a form of escapist entertainment far more attuned to the realities of the city dweller than the old bucolic bandit stories. Braceras, Leytour and Pittella offer a similar assessment of the new genre's appeal in *El cuento policial argentino*:

> Un lector inserto en la moderna sociedad industrial, que es programado para la rutina y la homogeneidad de vida, para quien tal vez la mayor 'aventura' sea la de mantener con mecánica regularidad una existencia sedentaria y

[66] Michel Foucault, extracts from 'Entrevista sobre la prisión: el libro y sus métodos' in *Microfísica del poder* (Madrid: Ediciones de la Piqueta, 1980) and 'La resonancia de los suplicios' in *Vigilar y castigar* (México: Siglo XXI, 1987), in Daniel Link, ed., *El juego de los cautos* (Buenos Aires: La marca, 2003), pp. 36-7.
[67] Mandel, p. 8.

> anónima en una gran ciudad, encuentra en la literatura policial las contingencias y riesgos interesantes que le gustaría vivir.[68]

According to these readings, the delectation offered to the reader of crime fiction may be viewed as a form of catharsis, a means of suppressing the anxieties of the urban experience, albeit through their temporary substitution with another set of anxieties, which are limited by and contained within the reading experience. Walter Benjamin offers the example of the traveller who purchases a detective novel when embarking upon a train journey, a 'succession of mythic trials and dangers' for the traveller, the minutiae of which include the possibility of being late, missing a connection or having to cope with the solitude of the compartment. According to Benjamin, an effective way to make more tolerable an experience filled with such contingencies is to deliberately provoke an additional fear, which has the effect of anaesthetizing the initial one:

> The anesthesia of a fear through another one is his [the traveller's] salvation. Between the fresh cut pages of the crime novel he looks for the idle, as it were, virginal apprehensions [*Angst*], which could help him to get over the archaic fear of the journey.[69]

Benjamin's meditations upon crime fiction are not confined to this observation. Carlo Salzani notes that while references to the genre are widely dispersed throughout his oeuvre, Benjamin maintained a keen interest in the *Kriminalroman*: 'the detective can be analyzed as a coherent and consistent figure in Benjamin's work, even though its fictitious cohesiveness and unity result from work a posteriori of the commentator'.[70] In Argentine discussions of the genre, Benjamin's work is a crucial point of reference in efforts to explain the conjunction of factors that led to

[68] Elena Braceras, Cristina Leytour and Susana Pittella, *El cuento policial argentino: Una propuesta de lectura productiva para la escuela secundaria*, Serie Estudio sistemático de la lengua y del discurso (Buenos Aires: Editorial Plus Ultra, 1986), p. 17.
[69] Walter Benjamin, in Carlo Salzani, 'The City as Crime Scene: Walter Benjamin and the Traces of the Detective', *New German Critique* 100, Vol. 34, No. 1, Winter 2007, p. 166.
[70] Ibid, p. 168.

the genre's emergence. Ricardo Piglia, for example, endorses Benjamin's assertion that specific technological advances played a central role in creating the conditions for the genre's development:

> Benjamin ubica el género en la serie de procedimientos de identificación del individuo anónimo y la nueva cartografía de la ciudad. La numeración de las casas, las huellas dactilares, la identificación de las firmas, el desarrollo de la fotografía, el retrato de los criminales, el archivo policial, el fichaje. Las historias policiales, concluye Benjamin, surgen en el momento en que se asegura esta conquista sobre lo incógnito del hombre.[71]

However, one of his most pertinent observations relates to the emergence of the key figure in the subsequent development of the genre: the detective. According to Benjamin, the detective may be viewed as a logical progression from the figure of the city stroller or *flâneur* in his observations of and interactions with the crowd. While in an earlier form of urban fiction, the 'physiologie', 'the flâneur-as-journalist [merely] described urban types, giving a sense of intelligibility and familiarity to the urban environment',[72] the new *flâneur*-as-detective is focused upon the darker, more sinister aspects of the urban experience, in which the multitude is characterised precisely by its unfamiliarity and incomprehensibility, while the possibility of criminality lurks around every corner and behind every visage. The *flâneur*, recast as detective, even takes tentative steps towards becoming a 'productive' member of society:

> If the flâneur is […] turned into an unwilling detective, it does him a lot of good socially, for it legitimates his idleness. His indolence is only apparent, for behind this indolence there is the watchfulness of an observer who does not take his eyes off a miscreant. Thus, the detective sees rather wide areas opening up to his self-esteem.[73]

Piglia neatly echoes the views of Benjamin in his description of the nascent detective story as a means of depicting the tension between the asocial, solitary individual and

[71] Ricardo Piglia, *El último lector* (Barcelona: Alfaguara, 2005), p. 81.
[72] Salzani, p. 169.
[73] Walter Benjamin, in Salzani, p. 174.

the urban milieu in which he exists, tracing the impending transition to the publication of Poe's story, 'The Man of the Crowd', in December of 1840:

> Esa tensión entre el individuo solitario y la masa es clave y se hace visible en «El hombre de la multitud», un relato de Poe inmediatamente anterior a «Los crímenes de la rue Morgue», que lo prefigura y lo hace posible. Sólo falta el detective. Sólo falta, digamos, la transformación del *flâneur*, del observador, en investigador privado.[74]

The publication of 'The Murders in the Rue Morgue' in April of 1841 heralded the completion of this transition, in the person of the first fictional detective, a figure recognised by Borges and Piglia as 'la clave formal del relato policial'.[75]

The Emergence of The Detective

The archetypal detective created by Poe is a figure of considerable interest. Dupin is not a member of the established police force, but rather an amateur detective who takes an interest in the resolution of crimes as an exercise of the intellect rather than as a professional concern. In seeking to explain this circumstance, Mandel cites an underlying ideological motivation. He points out that 'In the first part of the nineteenth century, the great majority of the middle class and the intelligentsia were essentially hostile to the police',[76] such that the genre's target readership was not yet willing to identify with a fictional hero who formed part of the established state police apparatus. In the latter part of the century such resistance would ease as the economic and political interests of the middle classes became more closely aligned with those of the official keepers of law and order: 'As the prisons were slowly emptied of debtors and filled with an inmate population of crooks, thieves, burglars, thugs and murderers, the social status of agents of law enforcement correspondingly

[74] Piglia, *El último lector*, p. 83. A detailed examination of this story and its significance for the genre may be found in 'Gumshoe Gothics, Poe's "The Man of the Crowd" and His Followers', in Patricia Merivale and Susan Elizabeth Sweeney's *Detecting Texts: The Metaphysical Detective Story from Poe to Postmodernism*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), pp. 101-116.
[75] See Piglia, *El último lector*, p. 79.
[76] Mandel, p. 12.

rose'.[77] According to this reasoning, the mid-nineteenth century reading public would have found problematic and quite incongruous the heroic depiction of a member of the state police force, possessed of a towering intellect and blessed with extraordinary powers of observation and deduction:

> The self-assertive bourgeoisie had no reason to vaunt the superior intellectual qualities of lower middle class or higher proletarian elements […]. 'Uppity' members of the lower depths were considered suspect if not downright subversive.[78]

Almost by a process of elimination, then, by Mandel's reckoning the hero of the detective story must be drawn from the traditional elite: 'The real hero of the criminal detective story therefore had to be not the plodding cop, but a brilliant sleuth of upper-class origins'.[79] Poe's Dupin, a learned aristocrat, certainly responds to this general description, though it becomes clear from the narrator's evidence that he is in straightened circumstances financially, a casualty of the social and economic upheavals sweeping nineteenth century Europe:

> This young gentleman was of an excellent - indeed of an illustrious family, but, by a variety of untoward events, had been reduced to such poverty that the energy of his character succumbed beneath it, and he ceased to bestir himself in this world, or to care for the retrieval of his fortunes.[80]

Though many incarnations of the amateur detective are indeed of upper class origins in accordance with the socio-historic account of the genre's evolution offered by Mandel, and especially those of the later 'Golden Age', Ricardo Piglia's reading of Dupin's specific financial arrangements in relation to the unnamed narrator is especially nuanced and revealing. Piglia draws attention to the act of patronage that establishes the domestic relationship between the pair towards the beginning of 'The Murders in the Rue Morgue':

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[77] Ibid, p. 14.
[78] Ibid.
[79] Ibid, p. 15.
[80] Edgar Allan Poe, *Tales of Mystery and Imagination* (Ware: Wordsworth Editions, 1993), p. 64.

> It was at length arranged that we should live together during my stay in the city; and as my worldly circumstances were somewhat less embarrassed than his own, *I was permitted to be at the expense of renting* [my emphasis], and furnishing in a style which suited the rather fantastic gloom of our common temper, a time-eaten and grotesque mansion, long deserted through superstitions into which we did not inquire, and tottering to its fall in a retired and desolate portion of the Faubourg St. Germain.[81]

While the narrator considers it a privilege and a bargain to be permitted to bankroll Dupin's lifestyle in exchange for retaining his company, he also creates the conditions necessary for his beneficiary to apply his intellectual faculties to the resolution of crimes:

> Dupin, el asocial, está afuera de la economía. Es su amigo, el narrador, quien financia su vida y actúa casi como la figura del mecenas con el artista. Hay un pacto económico (un pacto precapitalista, diría) en el origen del género, que preserva a Dupin de la contaminación del dinero y garantiza su autonomía.[82]

Dupin in this sense is an artist whose subvention by the narrator allows him to exist outside of society, and to apply his detectory acumen to the abstract resolution of crimes in a 'disinterested' manner, free of the constraints imposed either by family life or the bustling industrial society in which he dwells, able to 'sentir al mismo tiempo lo multitudinario y la soledad', a sensitivity that, in the view of Borges, 'tiene que estimular el pensamiento'.[83] The narrator for his part is akin to a nineteenth century venture capitalist who expects a return on his financial investment, except that he (somewhat quaintly) anticipates a reward other than financial enrichment, and perceives in the personage of Dupin a rich seam of intellectual capital.

The intellectual character of Poe's foundational detective stories is of particular relevance to discussions of crime fiction in the Argentine context. Though undoubtedly possessed of extraordinary natural gifts, Dupin from the outset is

[81] Ibid, p. 65.
[82] Piglia, *El último lector*, p. 78.
[83] Jorge Luis Borges, 'El cuento policial' in *Obras Completas* Vol. IV (Buenos Aires: Emecé, 2007), p. 235.

distinguished by his abilities as a reader. Indeed, his first casual encounter with the narrator takes place in 'an obscure library in the Rue Montmartre, where the accident of our both being in search of the same very rare and very remarkable volume, brought us into closer communion'.[84] This circumstance, whose appeal to Borges is immediately obvious, has also been noted by Piglia, 'Dupin se perfila de inmediato como un hombre de letras, un bibliófilo […]. Esta imagen de Dupin como un gran lector es lo que va a definir su figura y su función.'[85] However, his autonomy permits him to devote his 'creative and resolvent' analytical powers, and vast reading, to a topic apparently unworthy of such extravagantly learned attention, in the form of the criminal and violent actions reported by the popular press:

> El detective se interna en el mundo de la cultura de masas *y actúa como un experto.* Los periódicos son el escenario cotidiano del crimen […]. El refinado lector que es Dupin, formado en las librerías de París, en los libros únicos y raros, en la frecuentación de alta cultura, leerá los periódicos como nadie los ha leído antes.[86]

This apparent contradiction lies at the heart of the detective story, and it is a consideration that has frequently occupied critical reflections upon the genre in Argentina. Just as Dupin is an expert reader, able to switch effortlessly between 'high' and 'low' cultures, the detective story engendered by Poe is at the same time intellectual and popular in character, the work of a struggling professional writer targeted at a mass audience. A form of entertainment, certainly, but not necessarily of the passive, unreflective kind typically associated with popular literature, and frequently attributed to the crime story. The defining characteristic of the genre, according to Borges, is precisely the extent to which the detective story demands the active, engaged participation of the reader in its realisation, 'ese lector está lleno de sospechas, porque el lector de novelas policiales es un lector que lee con

[84] Edgar Allan Poe, *Tales of Mystery and Imagination* (Ware: Wordsworth Editions, 1993), p. 64.
[85] Piglia, *El último lector*, p. 77.
[86] Ibid, p. 84.

incredulidad, con suspicacias, una suspicacia especial'.[87] It is at least partly for this reason that Borges is so insistent upon the foundational status of Poe's stories, not so much on account of the genre thus initiated per se, but rather owing to the markedly intellectual qualities of Dupin, and the kind of specialised reader that the form initiated by Poe implies, 'La novela policial ha creado un tipo especial de lector. Eso suele olvidarse cuando se juzga la obra de Poe; porque si Poe creó el relato policial, creó después el tipo de lector de ficciones policiales'.[88] While Borges takes an essentially 'creationist' view of this specialised readership, there is little doubt that an enthusiasm for the detective genre reflected a demographic that was growing and diversifying in an era of scientific discovery and technical achievement realised through intellectual endeavour:

> It is pre-eminently the genre of an age dominated by science and technology, an age characterized by mental-work-as-analysis. In the detective scenario and the figure of the mastermind Dupin, Poe gave us at once the most appealing format and the most glamorous mask for mental work and the mental worker. From psychoanalyst to literary critic, from particle physicist to diagnostician.[89]

According to this conceptualisation, then, much of the appeal of the detective story is derived from the diverse range of 'mental workers' who perceive in their activities a method analagous to that of the detective, and seek to apply their own powers of deduction to the resolution of textual enigmas. Furthermore, the genre has been recognised in the Argentine critical context for its pedagogical potential, as both a model for the critical faculty and a means of bridging the gap between highbrow and mass culture:

> El género policial operaría entonces como iniciador de un proceso que favorece y propicia el pasaje a un nivel superior, como eficaz canal por donde

[87] Jorge Luis Borges, 'El cuento policial' in *Obras Completas* Vol. IV (Buenos Aires: Emecé, 2007), p. 230.
[88] Ibid.
[89] John T. Irwin, *The Mystery to a Solution: Poe, Borges, and the Analytic Detective Story* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins U.P., 1994), pp. xvi-xvii.

> el público puede acceder a una lectura activa, pensante y creadora de otros géneros literarios. De esta manera, la literatura policial puede funcionar como una literatura 'bisagra' que articula mensajes artísticos provenientes de distintos niveles culturales.[90]

Ricardo Piglia makes the same point in his excellent essay on the genre, 'Lectores imaginarios':

> aparece algo que recorre la historia del género: la tensión entre la cultura de masas y la alta cultura. El detective es el que media entre esos dos registros. (De hecho, podríamos decir que el género fue inventado como un modo de mediar entre la alta cultura y la cultura de masas).[91]

The detective story may be said to have created a certain readerly attitude and disposition, for which Poe's ratiocinative Dupin is the original model. It is a protean genre that is frequently, and, paradoxically, both intellectual and popular in its appeal, and one whose evolution and adaptation demands an equivalent adjustment in the interpretive strategies of its readership:

> El policial pone en evidencia las posibilidades creativas contenidas en las complejas relaciones entre escritura y lectura: el escritor crea el género; la reiteración de las convenciones genéricas refuerza las estrategias de lectura necesarias y crea un lector.[92]

While Poe's original Dupin stories were the work of an American, detective fiction flourished primarily in France and Britain in the latter half of the nineteenth century and continuing into the twentieth century. Inspired by the memoirs of Eugène François Vidocq (a real-life adventurer and criminal-turned-police informer, who went on to establish both the Sûreté Nationale and the first private detective agency), Emile Gaboriau published *L'Affaire Lerouge*, the first French crime novel, in 1866. This ground-breaking text is the first to introduce not just a detective, but a group of investigators, both amateur and professional, each of whom brings their talents to

[90] Braceras et al., *El cuento policial argentino,* p. 16.
[91] Piglia, *El último lector*, p. 100.
[92] Cristina Parodi, 'Borges y la subversión del modelo policial'. *Variaciones Borges*, 4, (2000). http://www.borges.pitt.edu/bsol/pdf/xtpolicial.pdf

bear upon the case. M. Daburon, the investigating magistrate, would appear to be imbued with considerable powers of deduction, though as a state advocate he is a professional rather than an amateur investigator:

> None better than he, armed with an implacable logic, could solve those terrible problems in which X — in algebra, the unknown quantity — represents the criminal. Clever in deducing the unknown, he excelled in collecting facts, and in uniting in a bundle of overwhelming proofs circumstances the most trifling, and in appearance the most insignificant.[93]

The reader is also introduced to a representative of the official police force, equivalent to Poe's Prefect of Police Monsieur G--, in the person of the 'celebrated' Chief of Detective Police, Gevrol. Robust, competent and determined, he is gifted with a photographic memory for faces:

> He is really an able man, but wanting in perseverance, and liable to be blinded by an incredible obstinacy […]. His audacity and coolness, however, render it impossible to disconcert him; and being possessed of immense personal strength, hidden under a most meagre appearance, he has never hesitated to confront the most daring of malefactors.[94]

While the analytical powers of Daburon are celebrated, and compared favourably with those of Gevrol over the course of the investigation into the death of the widow Lerouge, the novel also introduces two more investigators whose interventions are worthy of note. M. Tabaret is a Dupinesque wealthy armchair detective, a former clerk at a *Mont de Piété* (roughly equivalent to a modern-day credit union) who solves crimes 'for the glory of success', though his efficacy is questioned by Gevrol:

> He has become an amateur detective for the sake of popularity, just like an author […]. As soon as he finds himself in the presence of a crime, like this one, for example, he pretends he can explain everything on the instant […]. He professes, with the help of one single fact, to be able to reconstruct all the details of an assassination, as a savant pictures an antediluvian animal from a single bone. Sometimes he divines correctly; very often, though, he makes a mistake.[95]

[93] Emile Gaboriau, *The Lerouge Case* (London: Dodo Press, 2007), p. 6.
[94] Ibid, p. 7.
[95] Ibid, p. 13.

Gaboriau also introduces Gevrol's subordinate, Lecoq, a fictional creation closely modelled upon Vidocq himself, 'an old offender, reconciled to the law. A smart fellow in his profession, crafty as a fox, jealous of his chief, whose abilities he held in light estimation'.[96] This same character will reappear as the protagonist of *Monsieur Lecoq* (1868), a novel originally published in serialised form that would cement the place of Lecoq in the public imagination. It is significant that the idea of the hero representing the apparatus of the state gains earlier acceptance in France than in Britain or the United States. While the protagonists created by prominent early twentieth century French crime writers, such as Gaston Leroux's Rouletabille and Maurice Leblanc's Arsène Lupin remain amateur, already in *The Lerouge Case* the exalted status of the amateur detective, (in this case M. Tabaret), is beginning to be challenged by the professional competencies and the numerical and technological advantages enjoyed by the state representatives of law and order. The publication of *Monsieur Lecoq* effectively marks the progress of this transition, as well as pointing towards a more methodical, empirical approach to the investigation of crimes by the official police force that was to find favour among the Francophone crime fiction-reading public, though the investigator's instinct and intuition remain relevant and valued qualities. This tendency would reach a peak of popularity in the short stories and novels of the prolific Belgian writer Georges Simenon (1903-1989), best known for the fictional detective Jules Maigret, *Commissaire* of the *Police Judiciare de Paris*.[97]

[96] Ibid, p. 8.

[97] Borges appears to be unconvinced of the merits of Simenon's detective fiction, to judge by his May 1938 review of the short story collection *Les sept minutes*, published in *El Hogar* magazine, 'Los ambientes que propone este libro no carecen de vividez, ni siquiera de cierta sobrenaturalidad. Lástima grande que todo lo demás sea incompetente, fraudulento o ingenuo […]. En el primer cuento de la serie, la revelación final es tan insípida, que ayer me la otorgaron y hoy no la sé; la del segundo —"La noche de los siete minutos"— requiere laboriosamente una estufa, un caño, una piedra, una cuerda tirante y un revólver; la del tercero, dos personas adicionales cuya existencia no puede

While French crime writers undoubtedly took up the mantle of Poe's Dupin stories to a notable degree, it was in Britain that the detective story would enjoy its most conspicuous success in the early years of the twentieth century, both in terms of local production and consumption by an eager reading public. Central to this enthusiasm was the appearance of perhaps the most famous of all detectives in the Western tradition, the violin-playing cocaine addict Sherlock Holmes, with the publication of Arthur Conan Doyle's 'A Study in Scarlet' in *Beeton's Christmas Annual* in 1887, and later as a single volume in July of 1888. Conan Doyle acknowledges in ironic fashion his awareness of and indebtedness to Poe and Gaboriau in this inaugural story, through the following exchange between the newly-minted partnership of Holmes and Watson:

> 'You remind me of Edgar Allan Poe's Dupin. I had no idea that such individuals did exist outside of stories.'
> Sherlock Holmes rose and lit his pipe. 'No doubt you think that you are complimenting me in comparing me to Dupin', he observed. 'Now, in my opinion, Dupin was a very inferior fellow. That trick of his of breaking in on his friends' thoughts with an apropos remark after a quarter of an hour's silence is really very showy and superficial. He had some analytical genius, no doubt; but he was by no means such a phenomenon as Poe appeared to imagine'.
> 'Have you read Gaboriau's works?' I asked. 'Does Lecoq come up to your idea of a detective?'
> Sherlock Holmes sniffed sardonically. 'Lecoq was a miserable bungler', he said, in an angry voice; 'he had only one thing to recommend him, and that was his energy. That book made me positively ill. The question was how to identify an unknown prisoner. I could have done it in twenty-four hours. Lecoq took six months or so. It might be made a textbook for detectives to teach them what to avoid'.
> I felt rather indignant at having two characters whom I had admired treated in this cavalier style. I walked over to the window and stood looking out into the busy street.[98]

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sospechar el lector. He hablado de incompetencia y de fraude. Más bien anacronismo, pienso ahora; más bien, despreocupación'. Borges, *Obras Completas* Vol. IV, p. 448-9.

[98] Conan Doyle, *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Classics, 1996), pp. 18.

The self-reflexive quality illustrated by this exchange is a recurrent feature of the genre, and a tendency that is especially pronounced in the Argentine tradition examined later in this study.

Such was the success of the first appearance of Conan Doyle's creation that a second Holmes adventure, *The Sign of Four*, was commissioned, to be published in serialised form by *Lippincott's Monthly Magazine* in 1890. Once again, this work's immediate popularity with the reading public ensured that its publication in one volume followed soon afterwards, in this case by Spencer Blackett in October of the same year.[99] As a professional writer, and in contrast to the more modest and more tragic professional circumstances of Poe, Conan Doyle was to enjoy significant financial success with the initial detective novels featuring Holmes and the numerous short stories that followed. By the end of 1891 *Strand Magazine*, which would publish the remainder of the Holmes stories until the author's death in 1927, were offering Conan Doyle £50 per short story, a significant sum for the time.[100] In 1904, the increasingly affluent writer had grown so indifferent to his famous creation, and so resistant to the demands of the *Strand* for new Holmes stories that he suggested the seemingly prohibitive price of £1000 for each subsequent adventure,[101] a sum that the magazine's publisher, Sir George Newnes, was nevertheless prepared to pay.[102] The economic affairs of Holmes himself in certain respects mirror those of his creator, and may be contrasted with the precarious circumstances of his fictional predecessor, Dupin. While the latter does accept the Prefect of Police's spontaneous

[99] Julian Wolfreys, ed, in Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* (Ware, Wordsworth Classics, 1996), pp. v-vi.
[100] Relative to average wages for the period, £50 in 1889 would have been equivalent to around £25,000 in 2009. Source: http://www.measuringworth.com/ukcompare/result.php [Accessed on the 12th of April, 2010]
[101] Relative to average wages for the period, £1000 in 1904 would have been equivalent to around £400,000 in 2009. Source: http://www.measuringworth.com/ukcompare/result.php [Accessed on the 12th of April, 2010]
[102] Julian Wolfreys, ed, in Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* (Ware, Wordsworth Classics, 1996), pp. xii.

offer of 50,000 francs for the return of the eponymous 'Purloined Letter' in his third fictional appearance, his principal intention is to outwit his alter-ego the Minister, a fellow poet and mathematician who had planned to use the missive as an instrument of blackmail. Dupin nevertheless remains an amateur detective. Holmes, on the other hand, is decidedly a private detective, who charges handsomely for his specialised services, though he is prepared to waive his fees in a deserving case if the mystery is of particular interest to him. He is likewise prepared to accommodate upward revisions in the valuation of his services. In the 1891 story 'A Scandal in Bohemia', Holmes is contracted by the King of Bohemia, who is anxious to recover a compromising photograph ahead of his impending marriage to 'Clotilde Lothman von Saxe-Meningen, second daughter of the King of Scandinavia. You may know the strict principles of her family. She is herself the very soul of delicacy. A shadow of a doubt as to my conduct would bring the matter to an end'.[103] Appraised of the details of the project, Holmes is not slow to inquire into financial matters:

> "Then, as to money?"
> "You have carte blanche."
> "Absolutely?"
> "I tell you that I would give one of the provinces of my kingdom to have that photograph."
> "And for present expenses?"
> The King took a heavy chamois leather bag from under his cloak and laid it on the table.
> "There are three hundred pounds in gold and seven hundred in notes," he said.
> Holmes scribbled a receipt upon a sheet of his note-book and handed it to him.[104]

His success in this endeavour leads to other lucrative offers of employment, as evidenced by the following extract from 'The Adventure of The Final Problem' (1893):

[103] Ibid, p. 122.
[104] Ibid.

> "Between ourselves, the recent cases in which I have been of assistance to the royal family of Scandinavia, and to the French republic, have left me in such a position that I could continue to live in the quiet fashion which is most congenial to me, and to concentrate my attention upon my chemical researches. But I could not rest, Watson, I could not sit quiet in my chair, if I thought that such a man as Professor Moriarty were walking the streets of London unchallenged."[105]

To develop a point made earlier in this chapter, though John T. Irwin claims that Poe provided the reader of detective fiction with 'the most appealing format and the most glamorous mask for mental work and the mental worker',[106] it is clear that both Conan Doyle and Holmes were to broaden this appeal even further, by demonstrating how mental-work-as-analysis might be monetised to a highly profitable degree, in a sense, to recover the financial fortunes of both Poe and Dupin, their detectory antecedents. However, despite the outrageous fees he was able to command, Conan Doyle regarded the popular Holmes stories as a distraction from, and an obstacle to, his more 'serious' literary endeavours and critical acceptance. Once again, the crime genre finds itself at an uneasy point of intersection between 'high' and 'low' culture, between serious and popular literature. Whatever his personal feelings on the matter, it is clear that Conan Doyle's fictional creation was to have a pervasive influence on the development of the 'classical' detective story, which was about to enter a new era that came to be known as the 'Golden Age'.

The 'Golden Age' of Detective Fiction

The Golden Age of detective fiction spans the years between the First and Second World Wars. While the writers most associated with the period, including Agatha Christie, G.K. Chesteron, Dorothy L. Sayers, E. C. Bentley, Michael Innes, Anthony

[105] Ibid, p. 436.
[106] Irwin, op. cit.

Berkeley, and Nicholas Blake (pseudonym of Cecil Day Lewis), were British, a number of American writers are also considered representatives of this era, including Ellery Queen (the pen-name of cousins Manfred D. Lee and Frederick Dannay), John Dickson Carr, Rex Stout and S. S. Van Dine. The creations of these writers crystallised the tradition of the amateur detective and the resolution of crime as a game or puzzle. It is a variant of the genre strictly governed by formulae and accepted conventions, in which plots are largely predictable and characters tend to be few in number and thinly drawn. Golden Age stories typically take place over a relatively short time span, in an enclosed space (most typically a country house or a small English village), and usually begin with the discovery of a murdered victim, though the violence of the crime is seldom depicted in detail. The guiding principle of 'fair play' dictates that the reader should be presented with all of the circumstances of the crime, so as to have a reasonable chance of guessing the identity of the murderer before (s)he is unmasked by the detective. As such, these stories tend to present a purely abstract, ludic and intellectual challenge to the reader, and make little attempt to reflect social realities or to depict in a 'realist' manner the exploits of criminals or the representatives of the law tasked with their apprehension. This hermetic isolation from reality did nothing to hinder their success, however, as illustrated by the observations of Robert Graves and Alan Hodge in 1940:

> From the middle of the twenties onwards, some thousands of detective novels were annually published, all of them concerned with extraordinary and baffling crimes, and only a very small number gave the police the least credit for the solution. These books were designed not as realistic accounts of crime, but as puzzles to test the readers' acuteness in following up disguised clues. It is safe to say that not one in a hundred showed any first-hand knowledge of the elements that comprised them – police organisation, the coroner's court, fingerprints, firearms, poison, the laws of evidence – and not

> one in a thousand had any verisimilitude. The most fanciful unprofessional stories (criminologically speaking) were the most popular.[107]

The enthusiasm displayed by the British and American reading public for this kind of formulaic, anachronistic production of 'crime fiction', seen through contemporary eyes, is something of a puzzle in its own regard. Ernest Mandel offers a characteristically ideological analysis of the phenomenon:

> [The Golden Age detective story is], even more than its nineteenth-century forerunners, the epitome of bourgeois rationality in literature. Formal logic rules supreme. Crime and its unmasking are like supply and demand in the market place: abstract, absolute laws almost completely alienated from real human beings and the clashes of real human passions […]. It is precisely because the universe of the classical detective story is that of the triumphant *rentier* ruling class of the pre- and post-1914 period in the Anglo-Saxon countries (and to a far lesser extent in France; in the rest of the imperialist countries the species faded away after the first world war) that the treatment of crime can become so highly schematic, conventional and artificial.[108]

The success of the 'whodunits' of the Golden Age constituted a prolonged and indulgent exercise in nostalgia on the part of both authors and readers of detective fiction in the interbellum period, akin to a modern television audience eschewing the quotidian realities reported in the nightly news in favour of endless re-runs of a much-loved fictional series set in a more prosperous and peaceful age. As Amelia Simpson puts it, 'The classic formula is an allegorical representation of the stability and continuity of the status quo. It provides a reassuring view of society in the mechanistic crime-to-solution sequence'.[109] Ricardo Piglia similarly points to the deliberate separation of crime from its motivating factors in the classical detective story:

> La policial inglesa separa el crimen de su motivación social. El delito es tratado como un problema matemático y el crimen es siempre lo otro de la

[107] Robert Graves and Alan Hodge, *The Long Week-End: A Social History of Great Britain 1918–39* (London: Faber & Faber, 1940), p. 303.
[108] Mandel, p. 27.
[109] Amelia S. Simpson, *Detective Fiction from Latin America* (Cranbury: Farleigh Dickinson University Press, 1990), p. 11.

> razón. Las relaciones sociales aparecen sublimadas: los crímenes tienden a ser gratuitos porque la gratuidad del móvil fortalece la complejidad del enigma.[110]

A shared sense of purpose and a broad consensus with regard to acceptable practice within the detective genre among the writers of this so-called golden era are reflected in the formal establishment in London in 1932 of the Detection Club, whose original members included G. K. Chesterton, Agatha Christie, Dorothy L. Sayers, Ronald Knox, Baroness Orczy, E. C. Bentley and Milward Kennedy. This institution began as a private dining club that held meetings every second month in a London restaurant or hotel, where writers would exchange views about their craft and offer each other advice and assistance. The activities of the club included a number of collaborative projects, including the novel *The Floating Admiral* (1931), to which fourteen of the club's members each contributed a chapter.[111] Membership was confined to detective fiction writers,[112] was strictly by invitation of the club, and subject to the approval of the committee upon inspection of at least two examples of the candidate's published work. New members were required to complete 'The Uncommon Order of Initiation' ceremony, including an oath sworn while resting a hand upon the cranium of a human skull with battery-powered glowing red eyes

[110] Ricardo Piglia, 'Lo negro del policial', in *El juego de los cautos*, ed. by Daniel Link, (Buenos Aires: La marca, 2003), p. 78. First published as "'ntroducción' to *Cuentos de la serie negra* (Buenos Aires: CEAL, 1979).

[111] Translated and published in Argentina in 1950 as *El almirante flotante*, the novel was no. 69 in Emecé's *Séptimo Círculo* series, co-directed by Borges and Adolfo Bioy Casares.

[112] As Julian Symons, long-time honorary president of the club points out, 'The constitution adopted in 1932 was very insistent that the candidate be a writer of "detective novels," and it went on to say: "it being understood that the term 'detective novel' does not include adventure stories or thrillers or stories in which detection is not a main interest, and that it is a demerit in a detective novel if the author does not play fair by the reader'. Julian Symons, 'The Detection Club', article published in *The Montreal Gazette*, 20 October 1978, p. 108. Interestingly, Borges's experiments with the form did not meet with the approval of Symons: 'Essentially Borges' connection with the crime story is parodic, and it is not surprising that the detective who sits solving crime puzzles brought to him in a prison cell is named Isidro Parodi. The solutions are unconvincing. The stories are merely fanciful or jokey, but the book is, as admirers will say, minor work […]. Major Borges tales, however, are similar to minor ones in convincing or amusing only at the level of jokes'. Julian Symons, *Bloody Murder: From the Detective Story to the Crime Novel: A History* (New York: Penguin, 1985), p. 185.

named Eric, in which they would promise that their writing would, among other things, forsake 'Divine Revelation, Feminine Intuition, Mumbo Jumbo, Jiggery-Pokery, Coincidence or the Act of God'. The ceremony concluded with the following threat of imprecation:

> If you fail to keep your promises, may other writers anticipate your plots, may your publishers do you down in your contracts, may total strangers sue you for libel, may your pages swarm with misprints and your sales continually diminish. Amen.[113]

Members of the club were also expected to abide by the 'Ten Commandments for Detective Novelists' drawn up by Monsignor Ronald Knox, who was, aptly, both a crime writer, and a theologian and Bible translator:

1. The criminal must be someone mentioned in the early part of the story, but must not be anyone whose thoughts the reader has been allowed to follow.
2. All supernatural or preternatural agencies are ruled out as a matter of course.
3. Not more than one secret room or passage is allowable.
4. No hitherto undiscovered poisons may be used, nor any appliance which will need a long scientific explanation at the end.
5. No Chinaman must figure in the story.
6. No accident must ever help the detective, nor must he ever have an unaccountable intuition which proves to be right.
7. The detective must not himself commit the crime.
8. The detective must not light on any clues which are not instantly produced for the inspection of the reader.
9. The stupid friend of the detective, the Watson, must not conceal any thoughts which pass through his mind; his intelligence must be slightly, but very slightly, below that of the average reader.
10. Twin brothers, and doubles generally, must not appear unless we have been duly prepared for them.[114]

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[113] Symons, *The Montreal Gazette*, 20 October 1978, p. 108.

[114] First published in Ronald Knox, *Essays in Satire*, (London: Sheed & Ward, 1928). The Ronald Knox Society of North America website, http://www.ronaldknoxsociety.com/detective.html [Accessed on the 15th of January, 2011]. In 1973 Czech writer Josef Škvorecký published *Sins for Father Knox* (London: Faber & Faber, 1989. First published in 1973), a collection of ten detective stories devoted to breaking each one of Knox's rules. On the other side of the Atlantic, in the *American Magazine* issue of September 1928, S. S. Van Dine (pen-name of Willard Huntington Wright, creator of the detective Philo Vance) published his 'Twenty Rules for Writing Detective Fiction', an expanded credo that is entirely compatible with Knox's Decalogue. This list is available on the Simon Fraser University website: http://www.sfu.ca/english/Gillies/Engl38301/rules.htm Both are included in translation in Lafforgue & Rivera's *Asesinos de Papel*, pp. 261-2.

The kind of detective fiction codified and practised by the writers of the Detection Club, the the relato 'clásico' or 'inglés', was to have a decisive influence on both the production and critical consideration of the crime genre in Argentina, owing in no small part to the manifold ways in which Borges and those of his circle, including Adolfo Bioy Casares, Manuel Peyrou and Silvina Ocampo, engaged in its defence, promotion and emulation. This campaign arose partly from a genuine admiration for the aesthetic qualities celebrated by the *estilo inglés*: intellectual and abstract in intention, codified, sparse, plot-driven, humorous, hygienic, apparently 'apolitical', and paying due respect to the reader while requiring his or her attentive engagement. It was also motivated by a fear, perhaps more genuine still, that the Argentine reading public should fall under the spell of another variant of the genre, which seemed to Borges to be the very antithesis of his conception of what detective fiction should be: the hard-boiled style, the *policial duro*, *negro* or *americano*.

The American Hard-Boiled School

While an antediluvian nostalgia continued to suffuse the perspectives and literary activities of the distinguished personages of the Detection Club in London, quite a different atmosphere prevailed in relation to crime on the streets of the towns and cities of America. The passage of the Eighteenth Amendment to the Constitution and the enactment of the Volstead Act in October of 1919 prohibited the manufacture, sale and consumption of alcohol in the United States. This pyrrhic victory for the temperance movement, compounded by the effects of the Great Depression that followed, created an environment in which organised criminal activity, centred around the illegal distribution of alcohol, and quickly expanding and diversifying at a dizzying pace, spawned an era of violence, desperation and social upheaval in

American history far more dramatic than anything witnessed in the France of Balzac, Hugo and the *feuilleton* writers of the previous century:

> Mobsters like Al Capone, Legs Diamond, Lucky Luciano, Bugsy Siegel, and Dutch Schultz enjoyed a notoriety normally reserved for world leaders as they supplied Americans with endless quantities of bootleg liquor, ran prostitution and gambling rackets, and fought bloody turf wars in cities across the nation. Rampant corruption in high levels of government and law enforcement became a recognized part of the social norm as racketeers sought to buy influence and protection for their illegal activities.[115]

It is difficult to know what the real-life Al Capone might have done if confronted by an amateur detective in the tradition of Chesterton's shabby, stumpy, blinking Jesuit priest Father Brown, or indeed Agatha Christie's neat, fastidious, colourful mangler of the English language, the Belgian Hercule Poirot. What is clear is that in the context of a lawless Prohibition-era America, such incarnations of the intellectual, 'puzzle-mystery' detective would have seemed even more anachronistic and out of place than they might have done in interbellum Britain. At this time a new kind of detective alighted from the pages of the pulp-magazines, via the cheap story papers and dime novels that had become popular in the United States from the mid-nineteenth century, 'in a climate of […] moral ambivalence the exploits of the traditional detective seemed at best impractical and at worst naively unrealistic. The hard-boiled detective, on the other hand, thrived in society's gray areas'.[116]

The American hard-boiled writers did not write *novelas policiales*, certainly not as Borges understood the term. Dashiell Hammett's Sam Spade or Raymond Chandler's Philip Marlowe owe more to the tough protagonists of the western, sports and adventure tales of the dime novels than they do to the classical, intellectual lineage of Poe, Gaboriau or Chesterton. As Otto Penzler points out, the hard-boiled detective, and in particular the self-employed private investigator, constituted 'the

[115] Stefan Dziemianowicz, in Robert Weinberg et al., eds., *Hard-Boiled Detectives: 23 Great Stories from Dime Detective Magazine* (Gramercy: New York, 1992), p. x.
[116] Ibid.

idealization of the lone individual, representing justice and decency, pitted against virulent gangs, corrupt politicians or other agencies who violated that sense of goodness with which most readers identified'.[117] The early stories that filled the pages of the pulps were far from intellectual in their intentions or concerns. They were designed to be sold at news stands rather than bookshops, and to appeal to a young, popular readership through their 'brilliantly colored covers depicting lurid and thrilling scenes, and a writing style that emphasised action and adventure above philosophizing and introspection'.[118] Stefan Dziemianowicz traces the origin of the hard-boiled style to a very specific publishing event:

> Unlike the majority of popular fiction types, the hard-boiled detective has a known birthday and place of origin: the June 1, 1923, issue of *Black Mask*, in which Carroll John Daly introduced Race Williams, the progenitor of all hard-boiled detectives. The story in which Williams made his debut, 'The Knights of the Open Palm,' pales in comparison to the countless imitations it spawned, but it laid the groundwork for what we recognize today as the hard-boiled genre.[119]

As has been noted earlier in this chapter, the detective genre in its various guises has frequently found itself at the intersection of 'high' and 'low' culture. Once again, in the case of *Black Mask*, this conjunction is notable. The magazine had been founded in 1920 as a money-making venture without literary pretensions by two prominent American intellectual figures, H. L. Mencken and George Jean Nathan. It was envisioned that the profits generated by the unashamedly commercial *Black Mask* might be used to offset the losses incurred by the high-brow, financially unviable literary magazine *The Smart Set*, which was at that time co-edited by Mencken and

[117] Otto Penzler, ed., *Pulp Fiction: The Villains* (London: Quercus, 2007), p. ix.
[118] Ibid.
[119] Stefan Dziemianowicz, in *Hard-Boiled Detectives*, p. x. This claim of origins is remarkably similar to Borges's description of the birth of the detective genre in the Dupin stories of Poe, as previously cited in this study.

Nathan.[120] The early detective stories appearing in *Black Mask* were sub-literary in a very concrete sense, in that they were deemed unworthy of publication in *The Smart Set*, but still recognised as having commercial appeal. Though initially publishing stories from a range of genres, including western, aviation, adventure and even classical detective stories, within a few years *Black Mask* had become consolidated as a publisher of a specific brand of hard-boiled crime stories, especially under the focused editorship of Joseph T. 'Cap' Shaw, who oversaw the magazine between 1926 and 1936. Though lacking in editorial experience, Shaw had a clear, idealised vision of the traits of the ideal reader to whom *Black Mask* should appeal:

> Hard, in a square man's hardness; hating unfairness, trickery, injustice, cowardly underhandedness; standing for a square deal and a fair show in little or big things, and willing to fight for them; not squeamish or prudish, but clean, admiring the good in man and woman; not sentimental in a gushing sort of way, but valuing true emotion; not hysterical, but responsive to the thrill of danger, the stirring exhilaration of clean, swift, hard action – and always pulling for the right guy to come out on top.[121]

Though he was himself an aspiring writer, Shaw found far greater success as a writing coach and mentor to the stable of crime writers who were at that time contracted to produce stories for *Black Mask* at a rate of 5 cents per word, which included Erle Stanley Gardner, Raoul Whitfield, Horace McCoy, Raymond Chandler and Dashiell Hammett. In particular Hammett, a former Pinkerton detective agency operative, came to define the style, atmosphere and sardonic wit associated with the hard-boiled school:

> Of the detective novelists who emerged in the pulps, Dashiell Hammett's work is probably most significant. His first short story appeared in 1923, with *Red Harvest* (1929) introducing the Continental Op (based loosely on Hammett's experiences with the Pinkerton Detective Agency) to the novel. In *The Maltese Falcon* (1930) the Op becomes the private detective Sam Spade, and in the mystery *The Glass Key* (1931), Spade in turn becomes the political

[120] Larry N. Landrum, *American Mystery and Detective Novels: A Reference Guide* (Connecticut: Greenwood, 1999), p. 10.
[121] Joseph Shaw, in Frank MacShane, *The Life of Raymond Chandler* (New York: Random House, 1976), p. 46.

> troubleshooter Ned Beaumont, a figure that allowed Hammett to explore other implications of the hard-boiled crime novel.[122]

The financial success of *Black Mask* provided incentive to a number of imitators, most notably *Dime Detective* magazine (founded in 1931), which succeeded in recruiting a number of *Black Mask* regulars, including Erle Stanley Gardner, Frederick Nebel and Raymond Chandler, with the promise of marginally more lucrative contracts and a less restrictive editorial policy:

> *Dime Detective* […] allowed both humour and horror into its fiction and wound up accommodating some of the unlikeliest crime stoppers to make the printed page. In its later years, it also published a good many non-detective crime stories written in the grim noir style that would become the trademark of Jim Thompson, David Goodis, and other writers of the paperback originals that helped to put the pulps out of business.[123]

The great majority of the writers who supplied gritty, action-packed stories and serialised novels to magazines such as *Black Mask* and *Dime Detective* never saw their work published in other formats. They were, in the main, writers-for-hire producing mass-market entertainment, motivated by financial rather than artistic or intellectual considerations. However, the pulps did provide a template, a workshop and a springboard for a number of writers, in particular Hammett and Chandler, who would go on to enjoy mainstream publishing success, and attract 'serious' critical attention. Furthermore, the abundant, fast-paced action, hard-hitting dialogue and sexual intrigue typical of the genre made the products of the hard-boiled writers readily adaptable to the big screen, where they were to enjoy enormous popular success. The original film adaptation of Hammett's *The Maltese Falcon* was produced just a year after the novel's publication in 1931, while the 1941 remake directed by John Huston and starring Humphrey Bogart as Sam Spade, and Mary Astor as *femme fatale* Brigid O'Shaughnessy, is regarded as a foundational example

[122] Landrum, Op cit., p. 12.
[123] Stefan Dziemianowicz, in *Hard-Boiled Detectives*, p. xi.

of the *noir* style of cinema, which was to achieve considerable influence, variety and longevity.[124] Similarly, Howard Hawk's 1946 adaptation of Chandler's *The Big Sleep*, starring Bogart as Philip Marlowe and Lauren Bacall as Vivian Sternwood, and to which William Faulkner contributed as a scriptwriter, is also considered a seminal work that helped to establish the look and feel of the *noir* film-making style.

While the importance of Hammett as a pioneering writer of the hard-boiled genre is well-documented, the contribution of Chandler is also of great significance, and will become especially relevant when considering crime fiction's evolution in Argentina.[125] Though Chandler's approach to the genre is readily discernible in his short stories and novels, his landmark 1944 magazine article, 'The Simple Art of Murder',[126] is especially relevant to this study, in that it offers a timely critique of the classical detective story, a defence of the hard-boiled school (in particular the literary quality of the work of Dashiell Hammett) and concludes with a vivid and famous character sketch of the new kind of detective. As such, the essay amounts to a manifesto or mission statement for the hard-boiled genre by perhaps its most emblematic writer.

Chandler's critique of the classical detective story is wide-ranging and detailed, and includes a lengthy and merciless dissection of *The Red House Mystery* by A. A. Milne (better known as the inventor of Winnie-the-Pooh), vigorously contesting Alexander Woolcott's claim that it is one of the three best mystery stories of all time. His analysis aims to reinforce his view that Woolcott is 'rather a fast man

[124] More contemporary examples include Curtis Hanson's *L.A. Confidential* (1996) and Brian De Palma's *The Black Dahlia* (2006), both based on novels of the same name by neo-noir crime writer James Ellroy.

[125] Jorge Lafforgue acknowledges Chandler's pre-eminence among Argentine admirers of the hard-boiled variant in the prologue to his 1997 anthology, *Cuentos policiales argentinos* (Buenos Aires: Alfaguara, 1997) 'El pasaje de la novela-problema a los relatos duros, deudores de los modelos forjados por Hammett y su descendencia (los jóvenes leyeron entonces a McCoy, a Cain, a Burnett, a Goodis, pero sobre todo a Chandler), se produce de manera gradual y mezclada durante esos años (fines de los cincuenta y década del sesenta), pero es ya contundente en los setenta'. p. 19.

[126] Raymond Chandler, 'The Simple Art of Murder', *The Atlantic Monthly*, December 1944, pp. 53-9.

with a superlative'.[127] Chandler concedes that conventional, classical detective stories, even those of very average quality, are notable for their popularity among a devoted and loyal reading public, to the dismay of those with more 'high-brow' literary tastes:

> They are as durable as the statues in public parks and just about that dull. This is very annoying to people of what is called discernment […]. They do not like it that 'really important books' get dusty on the reprint counter, while *Death Wears Yellow Garters* is put out in editions of fifty or one hundred thousand copies on the news-stands of the country, and is obviously not there just to say goodbye.[128]

It is evident that in 1944 the detective genre's position in relation to high and low culture remained a matter for consideration, and Chandler displays an acute awareness of some of the issues involved. He notes, for example, that the sheer volume of detective stories and novels enthusiastically published, read, and re-read implied a difficulty in identifying exceptional examples:

> Even Einstein couldn't get very far if three hundred treatises of the higher physics were published every year, and several thousand others in some form or other were hanging around in excellent condition, and being read too.[129]

He identifies an additional circumstance which contributes to a critical disdain for detective fiction: 'The average detective story is probably no worse than the average novel, but you never see the average novel. It doesn't get published. The average— or only slightly above average— detective story does'.[130] Though offering limited, qualified praise for the classical detective story, epitomised by the writers of the Detection Club, Chandler ultimately concludes that the puzzle mystery is an 'arid formula' which has exhausted its resources:

> It is the ladies and gentlemen of what Mr. Howard Haycraft (in his book Murder for Pleasure) calls the Golden Age of detective fiction that really get me down […].There is a very simple statement to be made about all these

[127] Ibid, p. 54.
[128] Ibid, p. 53.
[129] Ibid.
[130] Ibid.

> stories: they do not really come off intellectually as problems, and they do not come off artistically as fiction. They are too contrived, and too little aware of what goes on in the world. [131]

Chandler rejects Dorothy Sayers' apology that the classical detective story can never attain 'the loftiest level of literary achievement' because it is a 'literature of escape' rather than a 'literature of expression':

> I do not know what the loftiest level of literary achievement is: neither did Aeschylus or Shakespeare; neither does Miss Sayers […], this is critics' jargon, a use of abstract words as if they had absolute meanings.[132]

Furthermore, he points to the fact that the authors of *The Long Weekend* (cited earlier in this chapter), 'as traditionally English as the ornaments of the Golden Age', had identified an American, Dashiell Hammett as the only first class writer to have written detective stories at all:

> Graves and Hodge were not fuddy-duddy connoisseurs of the second rate; they could see what went on in the world and that the detective story of their time didn't; and they were aware that writers who have the vision and the ability to produce real fiction do not produce unreal fiction.[133]

He perceives in the detective fiction of Hammett a literary quality within a popular generic form also referred to by Tzvetan Todorov in his essay, 'The Typology of Detective Fiction'[134]:

> He was one of a group, the only one who achieved critical recognition, but not the only one who wrote or tried to write realistic mystery fiction. All literary movements are like this; some one individual is picked out to represent the whole movement; he is usually the culmination of the movement.[135]

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[131] Ibid, pp. 54-56.
[132] Ibid, p. 57.
[133] Ibid.
[134] 'As a rule, the literary masterpiece does not enter any genre save perhaps its own; but the masterpiece of popular literature is precisely the book which best fits its genre. Detective fiction has its norms; to "develop" them is also to disappoint them: "to improve upon" detective fiction is to write "literature", not detective fiction'. Tzvetan Todorov, 'The Typology of Detective Fiction', in *Modern Criticism and Theory*: *A Reader*, ed. David Lodge (London: Longman, 1988), pp. 158-65. First published in 1966.
[135] Chandler, 'The Simple Art of Murder', p. 57.

Chandler effectively endorses the view that the hard-boiled detective story, which began as a mass-market product responding to a financial impulse and adhering to editorial formulae, had transcended its popular, generic origins in the writing of Hammett, blurring the boundaries between high-brow and mass culture. Though the kind of detective that emerged from the pulp magazines in many ways represents the transposition of the cowboy of the western tradition to an urban setting, and might thus be regarded as entirely separate from the tradition of Poe, Conan Doyle and the writers of the Golden Age (the view endorsed by Borges), Chandler identifies in the writing of Hammett a decisive and revitalising renovation of the classical detective tradition that enabled the crime genre to reconnect with a contemporary reading public:

> Hammett took murder out of the Venetian vase and dropped it into the alley […]. He wrote at first (and almost to the end) for people with a sharp, aggressive attitude to life. They were not afraid of the seamy side of things; they lived there. Violence did not dismay them; it was right down their street […]. And he demonstrated that the detective story can be important writing. *The Maltese Falcon* may or may not be a work of genius, but an art which is capable of it is not 'by hypothesis' incapable of anything. Once a detective story can be as good as this, only the pedants will deny that it could be even better.[136]

Chandler maintains that Hammett breathed fresh life into the detective story during a period in which it had lapsed into tedium and irrelevance, in part by injecting a healthy dose of realism and descriptive flair into the sterile fictional universe of the puzzle mystery story. The 'realism' that he attributes to Hammett's work is very much in evidence in Chandler's own vivid, lyrical and darkly humorous depictions of the social milieu of the Los Angeles of the 1930s and 40s:

> a world in which gangsters can rule nations and almost rule cities, in which hotels and apartment houses and celebrated restaurants are owned by men who made their money out of brothels, in which a screen star can be the

[136] Chandler, 'The Simple Art of Murder', p. 58.

> fingerman for a mob, and the nice man down the hall is a boss of the numbers racket; a world where a judge with a cellar full of bootleg liquor can send a man to jail for having a pint in his pocket.[137]

The social critique implicit in the writing of many of the writers of the hard-boiled tradition, and explicit in the fiction of Hammett and Chandler, was to have enormous implications for Argentine writers and critics in the 60s and 70s, who recognised the genre's potential as an alternative vehicle for the expression of political commitment, and the examination of issues facing Argentine society.[138] Ricardo Piglia is perhaps the paradigmatic example of this tendency:

> No era un simple reflejo de la sociedad, sino que traficaba con lo social, lo convertía en intriga y en red anecdótica. De modo que yo encontraba un género muy popular que estaba elaborando cuestiones sociales de una manera muy directa y muy abierta.[139]

If, as Ricardo Piglia suggests, the detective is the 'clave formal' of the genre, nowhere is this more evident than in the case of Chandler's fictional protagonist. At the conclusion of his essay, Chandler offers a compelling portrait of the anti-hero that had emerged from the pulp magazines, typified by his own detective, Philip Marlowe, and in stark contrast to the amateurs of the Golden Age:

> Down these mean streets a man must go who is not himself mean, who is neither tarnished nor afraid. The detective in this kind of story must be such a man. He is the hero, he is everything. He must be a complete man and a common man and yet an unusual man. He must be, to use a rather weathered phrase, a man of honor, by instinct, by inevitability, without thought of it, and certainly without saying it. He must be the best man in his world and a good enough man for any world. I do not care much about his private life; he is neither a eunuch nor a satyr; I think he might seduce a duchess and I am quite sure he would not spoil a virgin; if he is a man of honor in one thing, he is that in all things. He is a relatively poor man, or he would not be a

[137] Ibid, p. 59.
[138] Braceras et al recognise that instances of social critique, like beauty, are sometimes in the eye of the beholder, 'Esta visión crítica de la sociedad llega a veces al afán de denuncia, como en el caso de Hammett. En otros casos, son los críticos literarios los que descubren esa denuncia en las páginas de algunos autores, aunque éstos quizás no la hayan considerado como un objetivo de sus novelas'. Elena Braceras, Cristina Leytour and Susana Pittella, *El cuento policial argentino: Una propuesta de lectura productiva para la escuela secundaria,* Serie Estudio sistemático de la lengua y del discurso, (Buenos Aires: Editorial Plus Ultra, 1986), p. 33.
[139] Ricardo Piglia, *Crítica y ficción* (Buenos Aires: Anagrama, 2006), p. 177.

> detective at all. He is a common man or he could not go among common people. He has a sense of character, or he would not know his job. He will take no man's money dishonestly and no man's insolence without a due and dispassionate revenge. He is a lonely man and his pride is that you will treat him as a proud man or be very sorry you ever saw him. He talks as the man of his age talks, that is, with rude wit, a lively sense of the grotesque, a disgust for sham, and a contempt for pettiness. The story is his adventure in search of a hidden truth, and it would be no adventure if it did not happen to a man fit for adventure. He has a range of awareness that startles you, but it belongs to him by right, because it belongs to the world he lives in. If there were enough like him, I think the world would be a very safe place to live in, and yet not too dull to be worth living in.[140]

Chandler's somewhat grandiose portrait of the detective at the conclusion of his essay has endured as an archetypal expression of the qualities of the hard-boiled story's protagonist, yet the 'realism' that he attributes to the American variant of the genre and its hero, in contrast to the ingenious artifices of the Golden Age, remains questionable, as Mandel points out:

> It is not difficult to detect the naïvety of that portrait. The notion of an individual confrontation with organized crime, Don Quixote style, has not a little of the adolescent fantasy about it, and nothing to do with the social reality of the twenties and thirties. For the exploits of Sam Spade, Philip Marlowe and Lew Archer to be credible, they must be dealing ultimately with petty criminals. The culprit may be a local tycoon, Hollywood star or rich adventurer instead of a pathetic butler in a British country house or a young bounder out to snag an inheritance before uncle changes his will, but is nonetheless a criminal who wields only limited clout — not a powerful Mafia-style leader, nor even a large corporation.[141]

Towards the end of *Farewell, My Lovely* (1940), Chandler makes the contrast between the kind of detective fiction he was writing and the contrived artifices of the Golden Age explicit:

> 'You ought to have given a dinner party,' Anne Riordan said looking at me across her tan figured rug. 'Gleaming silver and crystal, bright crisp linen – if they're still using linen in the places where they give dinner parties – candlelight, the women in their best jewels and the men in white ties, the servants hovering discreetly with the wrapped bottles of wine, the cops looking a little uncomfortable in their hired evening clothes, as who the hell

[140] Chandler, 'The Simple Art of Murder', p. 59.
[141] Mandel, p. 37.

> wouldn't, the suspects with their brittle smiles and restless hands, and you at the head of the long table telling all about it, little by little, with your charming light smile and a phoney English accent like Philo Vance.' […] I inhaled some of my drink. 'It's not that kind of story,' I said. 'It's not lithe and clever. It's just dark and full of blood'.[142]

Even from within the pages of his fiction, then, Chandler seeks to distance his work from the detective stories of the kind written by S. S. Van Dine and other adherents to the Detection Club principles. This contrast between the classical, reasoning detective, of which Poe's Dupin is the archetype, and the private eye who inhabits the pages of the American hard-boiled genre, is succinctly drawn by Thomas E. Lewis:

> Whereas the detective once survived and conquered on the basis of the superiority of his brain, he now survives and conquers on the basis of the indestructibility of his body. No longer the creator of ingenious stratagems or the deducer of difficult conclusions, the detective, after having blindly stirred things up or having responded to events initiated by others, is now one who simply manages to endure more physical punishment than his antagonists.[143]

In the Argentine context, the two distinct variants of the crime genre outlined in this chapter would enjoy early and widespread dissemination in translation through a variety of channels, while Argentine writers would display an interest in and aptitude for the genre that is reflected in an evolution in native production and critical consideration that has remained consistent for over a century.

Conclusion

The present chapter has traced the evolution of the detective fiction tradition from the inaugural stories of Poe through to the emergence of what might be considered the two major strains of the genre: the classical 'whodunit' mystery exemplified by

[142] Raymond Chandler, *Farewell, My Lovely*, in *The Big Sleep and Other Novels* (London: Penguin, 2000), p. 361. *Farewell My Lovely* first published by in 1940 by Alfred A. Knopf, New York.
[143] Thomas E. Lewis, '*Delightful Murder: A Social History of the Crime Story* by Ernest Mandel', *The Journal of the Midwest Language Association*, 19, 2 (Autumn, 1986), pp. 41-2.

the writers of the so-called Golden Age and tracing its lineage back to Poe, and the American hard-boiled variant that emerged from the pages of the pulp magazines, typified by the work of Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler. Needless to say, this socio-historical overview is consciously limited in its scope and intentions. What it does seek to provide is a temporal framework from which to examine the interwoven history of the genre in Argentina, signalling those authors and publications that were to prove most relevant to Argentine production and critical considerations of the *género policial*.

Chapter Two: The Development of an Argentine Crime Fiction Tradition (1877-1949)

Introduction

This chapter will focus upon crime fiction's Argentine evolution, paying specific attention to the manner in which the genre has been adapted to an Argentine setting. In keeping with the considerations that informed the previous chapter, this overview will examine the key socio-historic, publishing and literary milestones in the genre's *evolución argentina* from 1877 to 1949, and where appropriate includes the close examination of the work of a representative selection of Argentine writers.

While the crime genre has proved itself capable of seemingly endless variation and reinvention, including the police procedural, espionage novel, historical whodunit, legal thriller, suspense story and forensic fiction,[144] in the Argentine context the *clásico/inglés – duro/negro/norteamericano* dichotomy has consistently framed critical discussions of the genre. Jorge B. Rivera acknowledges the significance of this dichotomy for Argentine critics and literary historians in his essay 'El simple arte de narrar':

> La primera dificultad (tal vez la única, o quizá la más significativa) reside en acotar, con absoluta certeza, las fronteras del género. Saber exactamente, qué textos quedan fuera o dentro de esos límites, que algunos historiadores extienden o contraen, desde la aparición de la manera 'dura' o 'negra', con peligrosa discrecionalidad.[145]

Rivera points out that while some commentators have tended to take an extremely narrow view of the matter, maintaining that the limits of the genre 'ya fueron fijados definitivamente por Edgar Allan Poe en "La carta robada", y que en consecuencia la denominación [policial] queda restringida a todas las variables imaginables de la

[144] Ernest Mandel provides a fascinating Marxist interpretation of this evolution in *Delightful Murder*. Op. cit.
[145] *Asesinos de papel*, p. 84.

novela-problema'[146] to the exclusion of the hard-boiled form and other variants, the majority of 'críticos, historiadores y aficionados al género' have come to embrace a much broader conception of the form, to the extent of accepting 'como requisito mínimo del relato "policial" la existencia de una investigación y de una incógnita o reivindicación a verificar, por tenue y accesoria que parezca'.[147] Rivera himself offers an additional, highly useful 'criterio empírico' for the examination of the genre in Argentina, one which he describes as 'la marca de fábrica y la brújula infalible para rastrear y localizar sin esfuerzos las producciones del género',[148] and which functions as an appropriate critical point of departure for the reading approach taken in this dissertation:

> una novela policial no estará nunca, o casi nunca, en el católogo de una colección "prestigiosa", compartiendo honores con Gide, Proust y Rilke (se inventará, en todo caso, un marbete específico –sofisticado o brutal, según la tendencia o el segmento de público al que se busca interesar–, pero siempre separado y distintivo); su precio será generalmente accesible, y se tratará de un volumen relativamente manuable, de tapas coloridas y papel ordinario (el formato "in folio" y el papel Gramercy Monument o el pluma verjurado se reserva para otras celebraciones), cuyo paradero habitual será el kiosco o las librerías de lance, y nunca (las excepciones son tan contadas que no vale la pena mencionarlas) los lugares más visibles o espectables de las bibliotecas de nuestros amigos (alertados por su condición de "literatura menor" o por los saqueos sin retorno que suele inspirar).[149]

This study examines the validity of this view of the crime genre in the Argentine context, and seeks to demonstrate how the *policial* has come to function as a 'literatura bisagra' that bridges the conceptual divide between 'popular' and 'serious' literature. In this and subsequent chapters it will be noted that while forays into the *género policial* have sometimes tended towards straightforward *epigonismo*, or the imitation of foreign models, Argentine crime writers have also emerged as pioneers

[146] Ibid.
[147] Ibid, pp. 84-5.
[148] Ibid, p. 85.
[149] Ibid. It should be noted that though Rivera accurately describes this 'criterio empírico', his subsequent analysis clearly demonstrates that it is not a view of the genre that he endorses.

and habitual exponents of the 'metaphysical' strain of detective fiction, defined by Merivale & Sweeney as follows:

> A metaphysical detective story is a text that parodies or subverts traditional detective-story conventions – such as narrative closure and the detective's role as surrogate reader – with the intention, or at least with the effect, of asking questions about mysteries of being and knowing which transcend the mere machinations of the mystery plot.[150]

It will be observed that while this 'metaphysical' inclination has been a consistent feature of the genre in Argentina since its inception, the 'aesthetic campaign' of Borges from the 1930s was to prove particularly instrumental in cementing the tendency.

While a heady mix of industrialisation, rapid urbanisation and increased literacy provided the backdrop and the impetus to a burgeoning popular awareness of crime and its textual depiction in nineteenth century France, a similarly fecund environment provided the *telón de fondo* for the introduction of crime fiction to Argentina:

> Hacia fines del siglo XIX Buenos Aires era un hervidero: mientras el positivismo imponía sus leyes, la fiebre del progreso ganaba las calles. Los planes de la generación del ochenta se estaban cumpliendo: ya Roca había limpiado el "desierto" de indios molestos y el proceso inmigratorio, si bien no selectivo, con su avalancha italogallega transformaba totalmente la fisonomía del país, en particular de la ciudad-puerto, que dejaba atrás la imagen de "gran aldea" para convertirse en bullente "cosmópolis" […]. Las novedades culturales se sucedían con vértigo y orgullo: se fundan entonces la Facultad de Filosofía y Letras y el Museo de Bellas Artes; se levantan el Teatro Colón y el Plaza Hotel; se realizan las reuniones del Ateneo y la Syringa; se multiplican las publicaciones periódicas;[151]

The term 'introduction' is used advisedly, for, while Argentina has been recognised as the source of 'the earliest as well as the most detective fiction in Latin

[150] Patricia Merivale & Susan Elizabeth Sweeney, eds., *Detecting Texts: The Metaphysical Detective Story from Poe to Postmodernism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), p.2.
[151] Jorge Lafforgue, ed. *Cuentos policiales argentinos* (1st edn. Alfaguara: Buenos Aires, 1997, 3rd edn. 2003), p. 12.

America',[152] the works of the pioneering Argentine practitioners of the genre exhibited an indebtedness to their European and American predecessors that underlined the imported character of the form. What is clear is that, as in the case of mid-nineteenth century France, an increasing public preoccupation with crime and its consequences, allied to advances in serialised publication, had created an appetite for its fictional depiction among the Argentine reading public. In the preface to his 1974 anthology *Cuentos policiales argentinos,*[153] Fermín Févre draws attention to a story by José Hernández that may be identified as an example of this interest, and as important precursor to the more recognisable examples of Argentine detective fiction that appeared in the decades that followed:

> Sorprenderá a muchos lectores hallar incluido en esta selección un texto de José Hernández – "Revelación de un crimen" – que fue en su origen un artículo aparecido en "El Argentino" de Paraná y se integró después en su libro Vida del Chacho (1863) […]. Es cierto que la intención de Hernández no era elaborar un texto policial, pero sí quiso develar un crimen valiéndose de una expresión literaria […]. Sería así el primer antecedente del género en nuestro país y no podía estar ausente de esta selección, aunque se preste a la polémica.[154]

While Févre's inclusion of Hernández's 'Revelación de un crimen' establishes an interesting connection between native literary production and the imported genre, he nevertheless recognises that 'en realidad, los primeros relatos de índole policial con conciencia y conocimiento del género aparecen en los escritores del ochenta'.[155] This knowledge and awareness of the genre reached Argentina at a very early stage. Carlos Olivera produced the first Spanish translations of the tales of Poe as early as 1884, including the three stories featuring the sedentary Dupin, which are widely

[152] Amelia S. Simpson, *Detective Fiction from Latin America* (Cranbury: Farleigh Dickinson University Press, 1990), p. 29.
[153] Fermín Févre, ed., *Cuentos policiales argentinos* (Buenos Aires: Kapelusz, 1974).
[154] Févre, p. 21.
[155] Ibid.

regarded as the archetypes of the classical or puzzle detective story.[156] However, it is significant that the work of Poe, Emile Gaboriau and others was already familiar to a distinguished group of Argentine writers who were to become true pioneers in the genre at a local level.

La huella del crimen

First among the early pioneers of the native Argentine generic tradition was Luis V. Varela, writing under the pseudonym Raúl Waleis (an anagram of his own name), with the publication of *La huella del crimen* and *Clemencia* in 1877.[157] The Uruguayan-born Argentine has been described by Néstor Ponce as 'the founder of the detective novel in Spanish'.[158] Born into a prominent Argentine family opposed to the dictator Juan Manuel de Rosas, he returned to Argentina after Rosas' death to study law at the University of Córdoba before working for *La Tribuna*, a newspaper run by his brothers. Active in literature, law and politics, he was a representative of the Buenos Aires legislature on two occasions, and president of the Supreme Court in 1877 and 1899.[159] That this eminent and influential figure should have been the first writer to produce Argentine detective fiction is significant, in that it created a precedent for the intellectual associations with the genre later cemented by Borges and those of his circle. As Ponce points out:

> Far from the concerns and achievements of the popular literature that surrounded him (especially the Gauchesque), and in contrast to the phenomena of mass distribution associated with Anglo and French detective

[156] Edgar Allen Poe, *Novelas y Cuentos*, trans. by Carlos Olivera (Paris: Editorial Garnier Hermanos, 1884). It is interesting to note that this collection was published in Paris rather than his native Argentina. The collection contains thirteen stories by Poe, listed here in their Spanish translation: La Máscara de la Muerte - Berenice - Ligeia - Los crímenes de la calle Morgue - El Misterio de María Morêt - La Carta robada - Mr. Valdemar - El Doctor Brea y el Profesor Pluma - El Pozo y el Péndulo - Hop-Frog - El tonel de amontillado - Cuatro bestias en una - El retrato oval.
[157] Luis V. Varela, *Las huellas del crimen*, (Buenos Aires: Imprenta y Librerías de Mayo, 1877)
[158] Nestor Ponce in Darrell B. Lockhart, ed., *Latin American Mystery Writers: An A-to-Z Guide* (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2004), p. 197.
[159] Ibid.

> fiction, the birth of the Argentine detective novel was rooted in the ideological corpus of the elite.[160]

The 'carta prelimar' accompanying *La huella del crimen* makes for interesting reading. It begins:

> Ha muerto últimamente en Francia, monsieur Emile Gaboriau. Sus novelas han popularizado su nombre, al extremo de que nadie necesita que se le diga quién es […] Muerto el maestro, queda la escuela. Declárome uno de sus discípulos. En *La huella del crimen*, L'Archiduc podría bien llamarse Lecoq o Tabaret.[161]

Contrary to the opinion of Varela, it is safe to speculate that a large majority of the Argentine population would not in fact have recognised the name Gaboriau in 1877, and that the 'popularity' of his work would have been relative. It is clear, then, that Varela is referring to members of his own circles rather than the population at large. Central to the project of Varela in these crime novels was what he regarded as the education of the reader, with women identified as specific targets for 'illumination'.[162] As Ponce puts it, 'The pedagogical scope of his literature is two-fold: on the one hand, he intends to "educar a la mujer" (educate women), and on the other, to "popularizar el derecho" (place the law within popular reach)'.[163] From the very beginning, then, the Argentine detective story was viewed as a 'literatura bisagra' imbued with a didactic potential that was entirely consistent with the positivism of the era, though Ponce highlights the fact that, in the case of Varela, this attempt to educate the masses was unsuccessful, an example of a high-minded intellectual failing to engage with his target audience in the face of more accessible and attractive competition:

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[160] Ibid.

[161] Luis V. Varela, 'Una carta sobre Monsieur Gaboriau', in Jorge Lafforgue & Jorge B. Rivera, eds., *Asesinos de Papel* (Buenos Aires: Colihue, 1995). Revised 2nd edn. 1st edn 1977. This volume will subsequently be referred to as *Asesinos de Papel*, along with the relevant page number.

[162] 'Trato de herir la imaginación de la mujer, presentando a sus ojos cuadros que la instruyan.' *Asesinos de Papel*, p. 233.

[163] Nestor Ponce in Darrell B. Lockhart, ed., *Latin American Mystery Writers: An A-to-Z Guide* (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2004), p. 199.

> His detective fiction can be read as one of the forms of exoticism in vogue at the time, justified by the simple fact that the plot takes place in Paris and that almost all of the characters are French. Waleis's failure stems from the fact that his narrative is at too much a remove from local environment and reality. Rather than taking an interest in the adventures of his detective André L'Archiduc, alias 'el Lince' (The Linx), the popular reader Waleis intends to educate prefers the gauchesque epics or melodramatic tales of immigration.[164]

Varela's letter does reveal the extent of his awareness of developments in the genre, an awareness that was shared by those of his circle:

> Hace algunos años la novela viene exhibiendo agentes de policía de una perspicacia admirable. Vidoc es, tal vez, el modelo vivo de esos distintos ejemplares, sucesivamente exhibidos por Balzac, Edgar Poe, Gaboriau, Xavier de Montepin, de Boisgobery, y, final, y humildemente, por mí.[165]

For Varela, detective fiction has an unmistakeably French flavour, though Poe is also afforded prominence of place. The intellectual character of the detective story in Argentina was maintained by a number of prominent figures of the *generación de ochenta*, as noted by Lafforgue and Rivera:

> Entre los difusores de Poe y los devotos lectores de Gaboriau se anotan junto a (Eduardo Ladislao) Holmberg, otros pioneros del género policial: Carlos Olivera, Luis V. Varela, Carlos Monsalve, el fecundo folletinista Eduardo Gutiérrez y el polígrafo de origen francés Paul Groussac, que escribe el primer cuento de elaborada factura detectivesca: 'La pesquisa' (1884).[166]

Amelia Simpson highlights the importance of the stories of Holmberg and Groussac in particular, 'Of these works, Groussac's, "El candado de oro" [The golden lock] (1884) and Holmberg's "La bolsa de huesos" [The sack of bones] (1896) – both tales of murder and investigation set in Buenos Aires – are especially worth consideration'.[167] Simpson regards these works as early examples of the manner in which successive Argentine writers, already well-versed in the conventions of

[164] Ibid., 198.
[165] *Asesinos de Papel*, p. 233.
[166] *Asesinos de Papel*, p. 106.
[167] Amelia S. Simpson, *Detective Fiction from Latin America*, p. 29.

detective fiction, sought to challenge these conventions in an effort to adapt a 'foreign' genre to an Argentine setting:

> These stories argue for greater flexibility in administering the law, challenge doctrinaire approaches to criminal investigation and prosecution, and, by implication, also challenge some of the conventions that had begun to be established in detective fiction[...]. The presence of satire, humor, a native Argentine setting, and the expression of an ideological point of view through defiance of the law make Groussac's and Holmberg's stories original, autonomous expressions of what up until then had been considered an almost exclusively imported genre.[168]

While the social criticism and ideological commitment perceived in these works is central to Simpson's reading of the genre's development in Argentina, the biographical glimpse of these two writers provided in a footnote is also revealing:

> Both Holmberg and Groussac were distinguished scholars and general cultural arbiters of their time. Holmberg was, among other things, the director of the Buenos Aires zoo. A medical doctor and a naturalist, he was a frequent contributor to scholarly publications, spoke seven languages, and translated works by Dickens and Conan Doyle. Groussac, born in France, was a historian, essayist, and critic as well as fiction writer. He was the director of the National Library in Buenos Aires from 1885 until his death in 1929.[169]

The detective genre initiated by Poe, though frequently intellectual in character and intention, is interwoven with the phenomenon of popular literature by professional writers and directed towards a mass audience. In Argentina, however, the very earliest examples of the genre enjoyed a legitimacy derived from the intellectual prestige and cultural prominence of their authors. Despite this privileged beginning, debates surrounding the positioning of the detective genre between the poles of highbrow and mass culture would continue to exercise the minds of critics and literary historians in Argentina over the course of its evolution.

While Varela's *La huella del crimen* is now regarded as the foundational text of the genre in Argentina, Groussac's 'La pesquisa' makes far more progress in

[168] Simpson, p.30.
[169] Simpson, p.190 (Footnote 2).

terms of the adaptation of detective fiction to an Argentine setting. First published by Groussac as 'El candado de oro' in 1884, it was republished anonymously as 'La Pesquisa' in *La Biblioteca* three years later, with the following preface:

> El autor de este cuento o relato ha querido guardar el anónimo –y tan sinceramente, que nosotros mismos ignoramos su nombre–. La persona respetable que nos comunicó este manuscrito nos lo dio como el estreno literario de un joven argentino. Deseaba conocer nuestra opinión: la expresamos con publicar su ensayo, a pesar de revelar cierta inexperiencia y no corresponder del todo al principio la conclusión. No dudamos que reincida en la tentativa y que, con ocasión de otro trabajo, nos permita publicar su noticia biográfica.[170]

Considering the fact that Groussac was the director of the publication in which the story was being (re)published, the fallacious preface raises some interesting issues. If the story had previously been published under a different title, but under Groussac's own name, then why did he apparently seek anonymity when publishing it three years later? Simpson notes that this point has been addressed by Juan Jacobo Bajarlía, himself a writer and anthologist of detective fiction,[171] who argues that Groussac's decision had much to do with the lack of intellectual credibility then associated with detective fiction:

> [He] attributes Groussac's attempt to dissociate himself from the tale to a wariness of the response of his fellow editors: 'it was a reluctance to confront with an innovative story the serious group of authors who collaborated on the journal'. Bajarlía's remark suggests that, at the turn of the century, detective fiction was considered unsuitable for a serious, scholarly author such as Groussac to cultivate.[172]

While there is merit in this argument, it is also possible to regard the preface as a framing device for the story that follows. Groussac opts for the ultimate self-effacing *nom de plume*, that of anonymity. This may be seen as an ironic comment upon the tradition, common in detective fiction, of adopting a pseudonym for the purposes of

[170] Fevre, p. 48.
[171] See Juan Jacobo Bajarlía, ed. *Cuentos de crimen y de misterio* (Buenos Aires: Jorge Álvarez, 1964)
[172] Simpson, p. 30.

publication (Honorio Bustos Domecq, the *nom de plume* adopted by Borges and Bioy Casares for their detective stories featuring the sedentary reasoner Isidro Parodi is a later manifestation of this tendency). It may also be viewed as a strategy to ensure that potential readers of the story might be allowed to approach this text without preconceptions, or more accurately, with preconceptions other than those imposed by the foreknowledge of Groussac's authorship. To this end, the preface asserts that 'La pesquisa' is the work of a young writer (Groussac himself was almosty forty) and even includes some criticism of the text. The tone of the preface is richly ironic when viewed in this light, particularly the apparent invitation to the young writer to unmask himself, and to submit additional stories for publication. As Fermín Févre notes, the 'anonymity' of the writer was only partial, 'máxime si se tiene en cuenta que, como lo aclara la misma publicación, todos los escritos sin firma aparecidos en ella debían ser adjudicados al propio Groussac'.[173] The creative use of the preface as a framing device is a quality often noted in the work of Borges, and clearly present in the early detective fiction of Groussac.

'La pesquisa' is notable on account of the manifold ways in which it bridges the gap between foreign and native production of detective fiction. Groussac himself embodies this transition, as a French-born intellectual who established firm roots in Argentina, becoming a key figure in the Argentine cultural establishment, and head of the National Library. As previously noted, the short preface to the story serves as a framing device, but the story itself contains additional layers of framing, through the use of what Févre describes as a 'relato dentro de un relato'. The scene from which the story is recounted is established by an unnamed extradiegetic narrator, one

[173] Févre, p. 49.

of a number of Argentine passengers aboard the *Orenoque* cruise liner. The atmosphere introduced by this narrator is one of easy leisure:

> Después de la comida y, si la tarde era bella, de cuatro vueltas dadas sobre cubierta de popa a proa, deteniéndonos a ratos para encender un cigarro a la mecha del palo mayor o para buscar en vano el fantástico rayo verde del sol poniente, solíamos sentarnos en un solo grupo argentino para escuchar cuentos e historias más o menos auténticas.[174]

While it is implied that there are passengers of other nationalities on board, the narrator specifies that it is an exclusively Argentine audience that gathers to hear these 'more or less genuine' stories. The intervention of 'el conocido porteño Enrique M…' occurs in response to a story detailing 'no sé qué hazaña de la policía francesa'.[175] At the level of the narrative itself, then, this seminal detective story is an Argentine *response* to a French detective story, targeted at an Argentine audience, recounted by a figure that would later evolve into a distinctly local manifestation of the protagonist of the genre, the *comisario argentino*. In an important sense, then, Groussac's detective story crosses the ocean to reach Argentina aboard the *Orenoque* (the French translation of Orinoco) in a way that Varela's earlier efforts had failed to do.

Elena Braceras and Cristina Leytour have focused critical attention on the figure of the *comisario argentino*, perhaps best exemplified by Velmiro Ayala Gauna's Don Frutos, and traced to Borges's 1942 story 'La muerte y la brújula', whose *comisario* Treviranus is a practical and plodding foil to the pure reasoner, and ultimately doomed amateur detective, Erik Lönnrot. They regard the emergence of this figure in Argentine detective fiction as a response to a practical difficulty:

> Efectivamente, era imposible pensar para estas latitudes en un detective aristocrático, que se dedicara a la investigación del crimen por mero placer.

[174] Lafforgue, *Cuentos policiales argentinos*, p.25.
[175] Ibid.

> Mucho más verosímil resulta por supuesto, ese comisario rudimentario, con una inteligencia práctica, un hombre inculto pero profundo conocedor del alma humana. Borges, entonces, incorpora, como decíamos, el equivalente criollo del detective inglés, iniciando de esta manera una tradición a la que se plegarán otros escritores interesados en el género.[176]

While the desirable level of verisimilitude and local colour appropriate to the Argentine detective story is an open question, Braceras and Leytour's assertion is difficult to dispute. The figure of the aristocratic English amateur detective does not translate readily to an Argentine context, even in a context that is entirely fictional and deliberately contrived. The same is true of the principled and cultured agents of the state depicted in the French tradition of Gaboriau and Simenon. However, it is clear that in 'La pesquisa', Groussac tacitly acknowledges the difficulties involved in the transposition of an essentially foreign genre to an Argentine setting, as well as proposing, in the narrative of the *comisario* Enrique M., a means of resolving these difficulties, paving the way for other Argentines who were to establish a native tradition of detective fiction in the decades that followed.

El botón del canzoncillo

Though undoubtedly benefiting from the intellectual prestige of early pioneers such as Groussac and Holmberg, by the turn of the century the detective genre would find itself in somewhat more familiar territory on the streets of Buenos Aires, 'con el triunfo modernista y la expansión del periodismo, los escritores tienden a profesionalizarse'.[177] Just as serialised publication had accelerated the professionalisation of popular fiction in the American, French and English traditions, Argentina's rapid population growth, increasing literacy rates, and a mushrooming of diverse periodicals catering for a broad range of tastes, offered Argentine writers

[176] Elena Braceras & Cristina Leytour, eds., *Cuentos con detectives y comisarios* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Colihue, 2004), p.17.
[177] Lafforgue, *Cuentos policiales argentinos*, p. 14.

new publishing opportunities, including the possibility of a market for the native production of detective fiction. As had been the case with the *feuilletons* of mid-nineteenth century France, or the dime novels and pulp magazines of 1920s and 30s America, mass-market *colecciones de kiosco*, such as *La Novela Semanal*, *El Cuento Ilustrado* and *La Novela Universitaria* began to provide a forum both for the dissemination of imported examples of detective fiction and indeed a readership for a small number of native Argentine authors:

> Si bien los títulos estrictamente policiales aparecen en forma esporádica, su presencia y sus características señalan el naciente interés de escritores y lectores por una forma con notorio arraigo en los magazines ingleses y norteamericanos, y conocida en la Argentina, fundamentalmente, a través de las 'series' traducidas en revistas como *Tit-Bits* de Puga, *Tipperary*, *El Pucky* y otras similares.[178]

Nestled among the translations of crime, western and adventure stories appearing in these publications between 1918 and 1922 were original detective stories by Argentine writers such as Enrique Richard Lavalle ('El crimen de la mosca azul'), Arístides Rabello ('El misterio del dominó') and Eustaquio Pellicer ('El botón del canzoncillo').[179] Pellicer in particular may be counted among the key cultural arbiters of the age, owing to his prolific and diverse involvement in the cultural and intellectual life of Buenos Aires: 'la actividad teatral y la cinematográfica, así como muy especialmente las lides periodísticas constituyeron los principales canales en que su presencia marcó rumbos.'[180] Andrés Pohrebny maintains that Pellicer, remarkably, may have been among those who witnessed the very first screenings of the Lumière Brothers' original motion pictures at 14, Boulevard de Capucines in Paris on the 28th of December 1895, and that, owing to his enthusiasm for this revolutionary medium, he became a catalyst and a patron for the inclusion of Buenos

[178] *Asesinos de Papel*, p. 14.
[179] Ibid.
[180] Lafforgue, *Cuentos policiales argentinos*, p. 389.

Aires among the cities visited by the pioneering film-makers and their revolutionary *cinématographe* the following year:

> Aquí [Pellicer] contó con el apoyo de Francisco Pastor […], empresario del Teatro Odeón, concretando la presentación del Cinematógrafo Lumière en la noche del 18 de julio de 1896, […] se escribe así la primera página de la cinematografía en la Argentina […]. Pero su talento se desplegó en forma brillante y duradera en el periodismo.[181]

A long-time member of the editorial team of former president Bartolomé Mitre's daily *La Nación* (which remains one of the biggest selling newspapers in Argentina), including periods spent as the newspaper's chief correspondent in Spain, Pellicer was also a founding editor and regular contributor to the weekly magazine *Caras y Caretas* (1898-1941, founded by Mitre's son Bartolomito), where he became renowned for his 'agudeza y poder de observación'.[182]

Pellicer's landmark story, 'El botón del calzoncillo'[183] displays his incisive wit and powers of observation, often to hilarious effect. This parody of the deductive methods of Sherlock Holmes, appearing nine years before Conan Doyle's last Holmes story was published, is an early example of a tendency among Argentine writers, as observed by Borges, to 'manejar todos los temas europeos, manejarlos sin supersticiones, con una irreverencia que puede tener, y ya tiene, consecuencias afortunadas'.[184] A humorous irreverence towards the conventions of the detective genre, already perceptible in the foundational texts of Groussac and Holmberg, reaches new heights in 'El botón del calzoncillo', and continues to characterise the stories of later writers. As Simpson points out, 'Pellicer employs hyperbole, puns,

[181] Ibid, p. 390.
[182] Ibid.
[183] First published in *El Cuento Ilustrado*, I, Vol. I, No. 5, 1 October 1918, pp. 99-120.
[184] Borges, 'El escritor argentino y la tradición', originally published in 1953 and included in *Discusión* (Madrid, Alianza, 1997). Contratiempo: Revista de pensamiento y cultura http://www.revistacontratiempo.com.ar/borges_tradicion.htm [Accessed on the 30th of November 2011]

and incongruously inflated language to poke fun at human folly, technological gadgetry, and contemporary politics'.[185] His protagonist, Polidoro, a mentally negligible youth[186] whose indulgent parents nevertheless believe he is destined for greatness, develops an obsession with the investigation of crimes, having eagerly devoured a copy of *Las aventuras de Sherlock Holmes* in his nineteenth year, which inspires him to adopt both the methods and the manner of Conan Doyle's detective:

> Con el ensimismamiento, el desaliño, el desasosiego y la inapetencia, coincidió otra anormalidad que no pudo pasar desapercibida para los que observaban atentamente a Polidoro, quien a partir del instante en que terminó la última página de aquella afortunada obra *con que se estrenase como lector de libros* [my emphasis], se entregó furiosamente a las crónicas policiales de los diarios, sección informativa por la que nunca había demostrado el más pequeño interés […]—¿Ha venido *El Orden*? ¿Trajeron *La Gaceta*? —preguntaba desde que las primeras claridades del astro naciente disipaban las negruras de la noche.[187]

The media attention devoted to the sensational theft of a valuable bracelet during a wedding reception provides Polidoro with an opportunity to demonstrate to the world his Holmesian powers of detection and deduction:

> —Ésta es la mejor oportunidad para hacer mi debut —se dijo en cuanto leyó el primer relato del suceso delictuoso, y, por su exclusiva cuenta y con olímpico desdén por los trabajos policiales, se lanzó a la búsqueda del raspa.[188]

His indebtedness to the empirical method of Holmes is demonstrated by his careful examination of the scene of the crime, described in mock-heroic style by the narrator:

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[185] Simpson, p. 31.
[186] Pellicer devotes a significant portion of the story to charting Polidoro's formative years, leaving the reader in no doubt with regard to the protagonist's intellectual gifts, or lack thereof, 'conjugaba a los doce años *hacido* por hecho, *piensado* por pensado y *cuezco* por cuezo, pero en cambio imitaba a la maravilla el gruñido del chancho, fumaba expeliendo el humo por las narices y corría en cuatro pies con la agilidad de un "Botafogo", haciendo pensar a la gente que ya había encontrado la carrera más acomodada a sus aptitudes'. Lafforgue, *Cuentos policiales argentinos*, p. 63.
[187] Lafforgue, *Cuentos policiales argentinos*, p. 66.
[188] Ibid, p. 68.

> ‘peló’ el lente y, empezando por la habitación en que se hallaba, no dejó suelo, muebles, ropa ni objeto alguno que no sometiera a un examen minucioso a través del vidrio de aumento. En decúbito ventral unas veces, para reconocer el piso con la lupa, gateando otras por debajo de las camas y con el mismo fin, y subido sobre armarios y aparadores en busca de insospechados indicios, Polidoro llegó hasta la pieza más angosta, oscura y de ambiente más peculiar que tenía la casa.[189]

Ultimately, Polidoro’s interventions in the investigation result in spectacular, comical failure. The vital clue which he believes will provide the key to the unmasking of the culprit, the eponymous ‘botón del calzoncillo’ proves to be one of his own, which had come loose from his undergarment in the course of his energetic examination of the crime scene, and his unsolicited interference in the case leads to suspicion ultimately falling upon him:

> entró el caballero del jaquet y del gallo, y después de saludar a Polidoro, ver la lupa, la fotografía, los planos y todo el arsenal “investigológico” de que estaba provisto y afirmarse en la creencia de que se hallaba ante el propio ladrón de la joya, le pidió cortésmente que le acompañara para una breve diligencia, y, una vez en la calle, le aseguró la mano izquierda con una esposa y se lo llevó al Departamento de Policía, donde fue registrado, encontrándosele, entre otras cosas, el botón del calzoncillo, envuelto en el mismo papel que había sido guardado. Enseguida lo metieron en un calabozo, donde quedó rigurosamente incomunicado.[190]

Only the intervention of fate, in the form of the coincidental discovery of the true explanation for the bracelet’s disappearance, prevents him from being held responsible for the crime. While the reading of detective fiction has been identified in the Argentine context as a laudable intellectual pursuit, a means of developing a critical readerly attitude, and a springboard to the appreciation of more sophisticated forms of literature, Pellicer’s ‘El botón’ is a cautionary tale which humorously highlights the pitfalls of believing too earnestly in the genre’s pedagogical powers.

[189] Ibid, pp. 76-7.
[190] Ibid, p. 82.

Although Pellicer's story is a notable early example of the way in which Argentine writers have appropriated and commented upon the genre's established conventions (in this case to comic effect), it is fair to say that native production of detective fiction in the first decades of the twentieth century remained sporadic, while translated works had not yet reached anything like the level of penetration which they enjoyed in Britain, France and the United States. In 1929, however, Editorial Tor, alerted to the commercial potential of products similar in content and format to the American pulp magazines, distributed two *colecciones de quiosco* which were to prove highly popular with the reading public:

> El *Magazine Sexton Blake*, una publicación quincenal inspirada en los *pulps* yanquis e impulsada a partir de 1929 por la popular Editorial Tor, ponía al alcance del público un conjunto de títulos […] en el cual se mezclaban la pura novela de aventuras y la intriga policial con la idea de los héroes superdotados […]. La misma Editorial Tor distribuyó desde sus comienzos, en 1931, la célebre Colección Misterio de J. C. Rovira, posteriormente refundida en la Serie Wallace, que posibilitó el conocimiento de autores más ortodoxamente policiales.[191]

The 'classical' detective writers published in Colección Misterio included Henry Wade, Anthony Berkeley, and John Dickson Carr, as well as numerous works by Edgar Wallace (creator of King Kong), whose novels featuring the detective Mr. Reeder captured the imagination of the Argentine public:

> La formula de las novelas de Wallace era sencilla y establecía una evidente diferencia con respecto a las recetas más sofisticadas de S. S. Van Dine. Wallace proponía: 'Delito, sangre y tres asesinatos por capítulo. El tiempo es así de enloquecido'.[192]

In 1938, Biblioteca de Oro launched its Colección Amarilla, a dedicated detective series featuring works by famed practitioners of the 'classical' puzzle mystery including Earl D. Biggers, S. S. Van Dine and Agatha Christie, as well as occasional

[191] *Asesinos de Papel*, pp. 14-15.
[192] Ibid.

appearances by authors originally aligned with the American pulp tradition, such as Erle Stanley Gardner.

While detective fiction in translation was gaining traction with Argentine readers in the 1930s largely owing to the success of various *colecciones de quiosco,* native production remained, in the words of Lafforgue & Rivera, 'parcial, fragmentaria y aislada'.[193] Enrique Anderson Imbert's first detective story, 'Las maravillosas deducciones del detective Gamboa' appeared in *La Nación* in April of 1930, while 'Argentina's first full-length detective novel',[194] Sauli Lostal's *El enigma de la calle Arcos* was published in serial form two years later.[195] The 1930s also saw the publication of detective stories by Manuel Peyrou, Nicolás Olivari and Leonardo Castellani, whose stories featuring the amateur detectives Padre Metri, and later Padre Ducadelia, show similarities with G. K. Chesterton's Father Brown series, 'inasmuch as the detective figure is a priest whose investigations are designed to reveal insights into human behaviour and to provide lessons in ethic matters'.[196] Simpson describes Castellani as an iconoclastic figure, whose detective works 'stand out against the background of those of his contemporaries for his persistent and increasingly vehement attacks on the structure of Argentine society'.[197] In this regard, Castellani's radicalism would appear to have more in common with a later generation of writers and critics, such as David Viñas, Ricardo Piglia and Juan Martini, who perceived in the hard-boiled model a vehicle for social critique.

[193] Ibid.
[194] Simpson, p. 32.
[195] There has been some debate surrounding the authorship of *El enigma de la calle Arcos*, with Juan-Jacobo Bajarlía maintaining that it was in fact written by Borges, an idea originally suggested by Enrique Anderson Imbert but later rejected by Fernando Sorrentino. For an overview of the debate see Augusto Gayubas, 'El enigma del caso aún no cerrado: La identidad de Saul Lostali', in *Letralia* IX 117, 1 November 2004. http://www.letralia.com/117/articulo04.htm [Accessed on the 15th of June 2011]
[196] Simpson, p. 32.
[197] Ibid, p. 33.

Additionally, while a prominent tendency among Argentine detective writers has been to acknowledge, subvert and rework the conventions of the genre, often in a humorous fashion, Castellani's *modus operandi* is decidedly different:

> The native setting of Castellani's stories, his use of regional dialects and colloquial language, and the absence of a reliance on allusions to foreign detective models […] to legitimise the text by establishing it within a recognized tradition make Castellani's work an example of the possibility of assimilating a foreign model and creating a new one rooted in national experience.[198]

The 'aesthetic campaign' of Borges

Persephone Braham has pointed out that Borges 'was probably the single most influential advocate of detective fiction in Latin America,' and that his collaborations with Adolfo Bioy Casares had the effect of giving the detective narrative 'citizenship' in Spanish American literature.[199] The 1930s was the decade in which Borges initiated what amounted to a sustained 'campaña estética'[200] on behalf of detective fiction. As editor of the literary supplement of the newspaper *Crítica,* he published detective stories by Argentine authors, including 'Muerte de sobremesa' and 'Una espada en la orilla izquierda' by Manuel Peyrou and a number of stories by Alfonso Ferrari Amores.[201] 1933 saw the publication in *Hoy Argentina* of 'Las leyes de la narración policial',[202] in which Borges effectively sets out his stall in relation to the genre, expressing his admiration for and adherence to the style of detective fiction exemplified by the writers of The Detection Club. In the tradition of Ronald

[198] Ibid.
[199] Persephone Braham, *Crimes Against the State, Crimes Against Person* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), p.2.
[200] As described by José Fernández Vega in 'Una campaña estética: Borges y la narrativa policial', *Variaciones Borges*, 1 (1996), pp. 27-66.
[201] Simpson, p. 191.
[202] 'Leyes de la narración policial', in *Textos recobrados 1931-1955* (Buenos Aires: Emecé, 2007), pp. 36-39. First published in *Hoy Argentina*, Buenos Aires, 1, 2, April 1933.

Knox and S. S. Van Dine, Borges proposes his own set of commandments for the detective story:

> A) Un límite discrecional de sus personajes.
> B) Declaración de todos los términos del problema.
> C) Avara economía de los medios.
> D) Primacía del cómo sobre el quién.
> E) El pudor de la muerte
> F) Necesidad y maravilla en la solución.[203]

The creator of Sherlock Holmes is outed for his violations of Commandment B:

> Si la memoria no me engaña (o su falta) la variada infracción de esta segunda ley es el defecto preferido de Conan Doyle. Se trata, a veces, de unas leves partículas de ceniza, recogidas a espaldas del lector por el privilegiado Holmes, y sólo derivables de un cigarro procedente de Burma, que en una sola tienda se despacha, que sirve a un solo cliente.[204]

This criticism is indicative of Borges's endorsement of the overarching principle of fair play in relation to the reader so closely associated with the writers of the 'Golden Age'. His distaste for the depictions of violence associated with the hard-boiled variant may be inferred from his elaboration on Commandment E:

> Homero pudo transmitir que una espada tronchó la mano de Hypsinor y que la mano ensangrentada cayó por tierra y que la muerte color sangre y el severo destino se apoderaron de sus ojos; pero esas pompas de la muerte no caben en la narración policial, cuyas musas glaciales son la higiene, la falacia y el orden.[205]

Chesterton, a writer much admired by Borges, is praised for his strict observance of Commandment F, that the solution of the crime should be both necessary and marvellous:

> Lo primero establece que el problema debe ser un problema determinado, apto para una sola respuesta. Lo segundo requiere que esa respuesta maraville al lector —sin apelar a lo sobrenatural, claro está, cuyo manejo en este género de ficciones es una languidez y una felonía […]. Chesterton, siempre,

[203] Ibid.
[204] Ibid, p. 37.
[205] Ibid, p. 38.

> realiza el tour de force de proponer una aclaración sobrenatural y de reemplazarla luego, sin perder, con otra de este mundo.[206]

Having elaborated upon each of these commandments, Borges concludes by affirming the intellectual merits of the genre:

> No soy, por cierto, de los que misteriosamente desdeñan las tramas misteriosas. Creo, al contrario, que la organización y la aclaración, siquiera mediocres, de un algebraico asesinato o de un doble robo, comportan más trabajo intelectual que la casera elaboración de sonetos perfectos o de molestos diálogos entre desocupados de nombre griego o de poesías en forma de Carlos Marx o de ensayos siniestros sobre el centenario de Goethe, el problema de la mujer […] y otras inclinaciones de la ignominia.[207]

The critical, and indeed pedagogical, intention of this essay is reinforced by the numerous reviews of the works of detective writers which Borges wrote for *Hogar* magazine later in the same decade, which further elaborate upon the principles outlined in 'Leyes de la narración policial': 'Borges aprovechó su contacto con las publicaciones masivas […] con una intención teórico-crítica: como laboratorio estético'.[208] This choice of forum would at first glance appear somewhat unusual, given Borges's position in Argentine intellectual circles. *Hogar* was an illustrated weekly 'revista femenina' with a family readership, a far cry from the intellectual prestige of Victoria Ocampo's *Sur*, in which Borges frequently published. This circumstance would suggest that Borges was especially keen to ensure the diffusion of his ideas on detective fiction among the widest possible audience, a view endorsed by Fernández Vega:

> Hay […] en estas reseñas una actitud que podría denominarse pedagógica, en tanto son, a la vez, ejercicios estéticos y ensayos dirigidos a influir en el gusto popular mediante la difusión periodística de instrumentos conceptuales (o quasiconceptuales) que permiten la valoración de una literatura de difusión masiva como la policial.[209]

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[206] Ibid.
[207] Ibid, pp. 38-9.
[208] Fernández Vega, p. 41.
[209] Ibid, p. 42.

An examination of these reviews for *Hogar* indicates the manner which the works under consideration often serve as a pretext for Borges to express his views on correct practice within the genre. In his 1937 appraisal of *Death At The President's Lodging*, by Michael Innes, for example, he spends much of the review lamenting what he considers to be the gradual degradation of the detectory model engendered by Poe:

> A despecho de su éxito, el especulativo Augusto Dupin ha tenido menos imitadores que la ineficaz y metódica policía. Por un 'detective' razonador — por un Ellery Queen o Padre Brown— hay diez coleccionistas de fósforos y descifradores de rastros. La toxicología, la balística, la diplomacia secreta, la antropometría, la cerrajería, la topografía, y hasta la criminología, han ultrajado la pureza del género policial.[210]

Borges's objection to this 'forensic' approach to detective fiction is chiefly related to the difficulties thus incurred by the reader wishing to participate in an engaged manner in the resolution of the crime, as expressed in the August 1937 review of *How to Write Detective Novels* by Nigel Morland:

> La solución 'científica' de un misterio puede no ser tramposa, pero corre el albur de parecerlo, ya que el lector no puede adivinarla, por carecer de esos conocimientos toxicológicos, balísticos, etcétera, que Mr. Nigel Morland recomienda a los escritores. La solución que logre prescindir de esas tecniquerías, siempre será más elegante.[211]

Borges roundly dismisses Morland's tome, 'El texto, empero, es fácilmente reducible a tres elementos: el plagio, la perogrullada, el error absoluto',[212] and in doing so also manages to take a caustic swipe at three other crime novelists into the bargain:

> Dorothy Sayers ha compuesto los mejores análisis de la técnica del género policial y las peores novelas policiales que se conocen —sin excluir a Edgar

[210] Borges, *Obras Completas* Vol. IV, p. 300.
[211] Ibid, p. 374.
[212] Ibid, p. 373.

> Wallace y a R. Austin Freeman. Si el teorema recíproco es valedero, las novelas de Mr. Nigel Morland […] tienen que ser perfectas.[213]

The pedagogical impulse of these journalistic incursions may further be discerned in the March 1938 review of *It Walks By Night* by John Dickson Carr, in which Borges provides the reader with a capsule history and critical commentary upon one of the traditional staples of the genre, the 'locked room mystery', of which Poe's 'The Murders in the Rue Morgue' is considered the earliest example. Though clearly an admirer of Poe, Borges admits that his solution 'no es la mejor: requiere esbirros muy negligentes, un clavo fracturado en una ventana y un mono antropomorfo'.[214] He offers qualified praise for Israel Zangwill's take on the variant, *The Big Bow Mystery*, 'la solución de Zangwill es ingeniosa, aunque impracticable',[215] and also provides summaries of examples by Gaston Leroux (*Misterio del cuarto amarillo*), Eden Phillpotts (*Jig-Saw*), Edgar Wallace (*La pista del alfiler nuevo*) and G. K. Chesterton ('El hombre invisible'). He once again demonstrates a characteristic 'Luddism' in relation to Phillpott's solution, 'Un hombre ha sido apuñalado en una torre; al fin se nos revela que el puñal, esa arma tan íntima, ha sido disparado desde un fusil. (La mecánica de ese artificio disminuye o anula nuestro placer)',[216] and concludes by praising Dickson Carr, fourteen of whose novels would later be published as part of Emecé's *Séptimo Círculo* collection, selected by Borges and Adolfo Bioy Casares.

Though often appearing dogmatically conservative in his pronouncements upon the genre, Borges on occasion recognises the necessity of innovation and evolution, as in this example from his review of Richard Hull's *Excellent Intentions*:

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[213] Ibid.
[214] Ibid, p. 424.
[215] Ibid.
[216] Ibid, p. 425.

> Uno de los proyectos que me acompañan, que de algún modo me justificarán ante Dios, y que no pienso ejecutar (porque el placer está en entreverlos, no en llevarlos a término), es el de una novela policial un poco heterodoxa. (Lo último es importante, porque entiendo que el género policial, como todos los géneros, vive de la continua y delicada infracción de sus leyes).[217]

While he would never write a detective novel (nor indeed any other novel), Borges did in fact write several stories that may be considered within the genre, including 'La muerte y la brújula', 'El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan', 'Emma Zunz', 'El hombre en el umbral', and 'La espera',[218] as well as his works in collaboration with Adolfo Bioy Casares under the pseudonym Honorio Bustos Domecq. His reviews for *Hogar*, and indeed his work as an anthologist, editor and promoter of detective fiction appear to be very deliberate attempts to shape public opinion of the genre in Argentina. In the words of Bioy Casares:

> Borges entendía que una buena justificación para leer novelas policiales era la circunstancia de que este género popular y menor ejercitaba, por la concepción de enigmas, la inteligencia de los escritores, y que también estimulaba en el lector el ejercicio de la atención y el gusto por las historias bien construidas.[219]

It is also significant that while certain writers, such as Dorothy Sayers and S. S. Van Dine, come in for harsh criticism, Borges at least pays them the compliment of his attention, whereas the writers of the hard-boiled school are studiously ignored. According to Piglia, these efforts on behalf of the 'estilo inglés' had an additional motivation:

> La novela policial inglesa había sido difundida con gran eficacia por Borges, que por un lado buscaba crear una recepción adecuada para sus propios textos y trataba de hacer conocer un tipo de relato y de manejo de la intriga que

[217] Ibid, p. 440.
[218] Though Borges would undoubtedly have rejected the suggestion, his story 'La espera' has much in common with the hard-boiled variant of genre. This brief story narrates the final days of a man who has fallen foul of a criminal gang led by a certain Alejandro Villari, and is forced to go into hiding. Despite his precautions, his enemies manage to track him down, and the story concludes with the man being shot in his bed by Villari, flanked by two henchmen. 'La espera' is included in Fermín Févre's anthology *Cuentos policiales argentino*s (Kapelusz: Buenos Aires, 1974). Févre suggests that the story creates a climate of violence and suspense 'digno del mejor exponente de la serie negra'. p.73.
[219] Adolfo Bioy Casares in José Fernández Vega, Op. Cit., p. 63.

> estaba en el centro de su propia poética y que por otro lado hizo un uso excelente del género: *La muerte y la brújula* es el *Ulises* del relato policial. La forma llega a su culminación y se desintegra.[220]

It has been noted that in the 1930s, imported works of detective fiction enjoyed a growth in popularity in 'colecciones de quiosco' like Tor's *Misterio* and Biblioteca de Oro's *Amarilla* while native production remained decidedly sporadic. However, the 1940s and 50s have come to be know as the 'auge del género' or indeed Argentina's 'Golden Age', according to Donald Yates,[221] owing to the substantial increase in the publication of works by Argentine authors, and indeed the growth in popularity and intellectual prestige of foreign works. As noted by Braceras, 'El lector de novelas de detectives se amplía. Abarca ahora a un mayor sector de la clase media; se torna, dentro de círculos profesionales o intelectuales, en un entretenimiento tolerable; se le da el canon de literatura de evasión, pero literatura al fin'.[222] Abel Mateo's *Con la guadaña al hombre* is published in Montevideo in 1940 under the pseudonym Diego Keltíber. Yates regards Mateo's novel as 'the first major work of detective fiction to be written by an Argentine',[223] while Simpson highlights the fact that this novel is representative of the upward revision of the genre's intellectual prestige among Argentine writers and the reading public:

> Punctuated by literary references and allusions to other texts, Mateo's novel also reflects the tendency of authors in Argentina in the forties to project an erudite image of detective fiction that attracted an educated audience. Because of this practice, the genre came to be regarded in this decade as a sophisticated text, a form of amusement principally for the cultured reader.[224]

While it might be impossible to establish a definite causal link between Borges' journalistic endorsement of the genre in the 1930s in *Hogar* and its surge in popularity the following decade, it is clear that there was at the very least a

[220] Ricardo Piglia, *Crítica y ficción* (Barcelona: Anagrama, 2001), p. 60.
[221] See Simpson, p. 34.
[222] Braceras et al., *El cuento policial argentino*, p. 38.
[223] Simpson, p. 34.
[224] Ibid.

correlation between the two. Borges' advocacy on behalf of the genre as an erudite and intellectual form would continue during the 1940s. The campaign would be waged on a number of different battle grounds, and frequently in conjunction with his like-minded ally, Adolfo Bioy Casares, from within the pages of the prestigious *Sur* magazine:

> Entre 1940 y 1945 tanto Borges como Bioy Casares se convierten en cierta forma en referentes y promotores intelectuales del mismo, a través de reseñas aparecidas en la estratégica revista *Sur*, dirigida a un público al que no se supone adicto al amarillismo folletinesco y pueril de las colecciones de Tor y Rovira.[225]

The pair published, under the pseudonym of Honorio Bustos Domecq,[226] *Seis problemas para don Isidro Parodi* in 1942, described by Rodolfo Walsh in 1953 as 'el primer libro de cuentos policiales en castellano'.[227] The eponymous Parodi is an amateur 'armchair' detective in the strictest possible sense, given that he is in fact 'el penado de la celda 273' of the now-demolished *Penitenciaría Nacional* de *Las Heras* in Palermo, and must therefore rely solely upon a bizarre array of eyewitness testimony from a range of highly unreliable sources. As Rodolfo Walsh puts it:

> un 'detective' preso, cuyo encierro involuntario –ya al parecer inmerecido– ponía de relieve la creciente tendencia de los autores policiales a imponerse un afortunado rigor y una severa limitación de los medios al alcance del investigador. Forzosamente despreocupado de indicios materiales y demás accesorios de las pesquisas corrientes, Parodi representa el triunfo de la pura inteligencia.[228]

Rich in irony and subtle didactic purpose, and introducing a carnivalesque cast of characters, the stories are relentlessly parodic, and address theoretical issues related to the genre that had existed in the Argentine context since the appearance of the

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[225] *Asesinos de papel*, p. 122.
[226] Borges offers the following explanation for the sobriquet, 'Están compuestos por nombres de antepasados míos y de Bioy. Es decir, en *Bustos Domecq*, Bustos fue mi bisabuelo y Domecq, el de Bioy'. 'Conversación de Borges con Napoleón Murat,' in Jorge Luis Borges y Adolfo Bioy Casares, *Dos fantasías memorables* (Buenos Aires: Edicom, 1971), p. 60.
[227] Rodolfo Walsh, ed. *Diez cuentos policiales argentinos* (Buenos Aires: Hachette, 1953), p. 2.
[228] Ibid.

very earliest detective stories by writers such as Paul Groussac and Eduardo Holmberg. Jorge B. Rivera alludes to this critical purpose, 'puede decirse que problematizada la viabilidad y pertinencia de una apropiación "nacional", y relativizada con singular agudeza la validez de lo genérico, sólo quedaba el ahondamiento de la lección paródica, del distanciamiento irónico, del juego con las convenciones temáticas y formales de lo policial'.[229] Amelia Simpson, in what is essentially a restatement of the views expressed by Andrés Avellaneda in *El habla de la ideología* (1983), perceives in these stories a calculated, satirical disdain on the part of two well-to-do liberal intellectuals towards the habits and taste of ordinary people: '*Seis problemas* is saturated with social and cultural markers that indicate the elite perspective of the authors and their negative attitude towards the rise of populism and its consequences for Argentina'.[230] Though undoubtedly a seminal text in the Argentine detectory canon, *Seis problemas* was not considered a success at the time of its publication, with readers finding the stories 'too dense, too comic, or not comic enough'.[231] Furthermore, this lukewarm reception extended to those of Borges and Bioy's immediate circle:

> 'Biorges's' production was received skeptically by those around them, and this created problems for the publication of their work. Ultimately, [they] opted for private means of publication in order to circumvent popular or literary standards (and objections) that lay in the way of a project they felt deserved a fair chance at a readership.[232]

Other collaborative works during this period met with far greater success, however. 1943 saw the publication by Emecé of the first of two volumes of detective stories selected by Borges and Bioy Casares, entitled *Los mejores cuentos policiales*, a

[229] Jorge B. Rivera, *El relato policial en la Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Eudeba, 1999), p. 34.
[230] Simpson, p. 37.
[231] Jorge Hernández Martín, *Readers and Labyrinths: Detective Fiction in Borges, Bustos Domecq, and Eco* (New York: Garland, 1995), p. 102.
[232] Ibid, p. 99.

highly eclectic collection of stories by sixteen writers, including Poe ('La carta robada') and Arthur Conan Doyle ('La liga de los Cabezas Rojas'), together with works by Detection Club stalwarts including G. K. Chesterton ('El honor de Israel Gow'), Ronald Knox ('El millonario que murió de hambre'), and Anthony Berkeley ('El envenenador de Sir William'). Also noteworthy is the inclusion of a number of authors not typically associated with detective fiction, such as Robert Louis Stevenson ('La puerta y el pino'), Nathaniel Hawthorne ('La muerte repitida') and Guillaume Apollinaire ('El marinero de Amsterdam'). Crucially, these selections demonstrate a flexibility and a willingness to broaden the scope of what may be considered within the limits of the *género policial* which appears at odds with some of Borges's more doctrinaire pronouncements on the form. Ricardo Píglia's reflections upon the literary strategies of Borges go some way towards dispelling the apparent contradiction:

> La definición de un clásico como un texto que todos leemos como clásico es simétrica a su definición de género: un género es una perspectiva de lectura. Un género es un modo de leer y la literatura es un modo de leer, un modo de leer como literatura y ésa es toda la definición posible de lo literario. Literatura es lo que leemos como literatura. Es una extraordinaria definición.[233]

Remarkably, Borges was able to ensure that the evolving 'definition' of the *género policial* in the Argentine context would remain largely consonant with his 'perspectiva de lectura' from the 1930s right up to the present day. Perhaps the most significant feature of this anthology in terms of the historical progress of the genre in Argentina is the inclusion of stories by three Argentine writers: Manuel Peyrou ('La espada dormida'), Carlos Pérez Ruiz[234] ('A treinta pasos') and Borges himself ('La

[233] Ricardo Piglia, *Crítica y ficción* (Barcelona: Anagrama, 2001), p. 164.
[234] A second cousin of Borges, Pérez Ruiz was a lawyer and occasional writer who published a number of short stories in *Crítica* during Borges's tenure as editor of the paper's literary supplement. See Adolfo Bioy Casares, *Borges*, ed. Daniel Martino, (Buenos Aires: Destino, 2006), p. 1644.

muerte y la brújula').[235] By locating these works alongside those of some of the most illustrious exponents of the genre in a format which facilitated their ready comparison, Borges and Bioy Casares effectively sought to advance the cause of the integration of Argentine writers into the broader generic tradition.

El Séptimo Círculo

A testament to the success of *Los mejores cuentos policiales* was the subsequent decision by Emecé to proceed with the publication of the now legendary *Séptimo Círculo* series of predominantly translated detective novels,[236] to be selected by Borges and Bioy Casares, which published 139 titles under their direct editorship between 1945 and 1956, and more than 200 more under Carlos V. Frías from 1957 to 1983, making it by far the longest-running collection of its kind in Spanish.[237] Emecé had initially expressed reservations about the *Séptimo Círculo* project, according to Borges's comments in a 1962 interview with James E. Irby 'tardaron un año en aceptar la idea de la colección […], cuyo éxito ha sido enorme, porque decían que la literatura policíaca no era cosa digna de una editorial seria'.[238] Borges attributes this early entrenched position to a lack of imagination on the part of publishers, but the reticence of Emecé may be understood, once again, in terms of the detective genre's

[235] Hernández Martín considers the latter inclusion 'uncharacteristically immodest' given the title of the collection. However, he also points out that the critical acclaim that the story has since accumulated 'would make it difficult to argue with the choice. The critic Donald Yates has affirmed that if Argentina had produced that story and only that story, mention of the story would still be assured in any history of the detective genre'. Jorge Hernández Martín, *Readers and Labyrinths: Detective Fiction in Borges, Bustos Domecq, and Eco* (New York: Garland, 1995), p. 100.

[236] A small number of original Argentine crime novels were included in the collection under the editorship of Borges and Bioy Casares: *El asesino desvelado* by Enrique Amorim (No. 14, 1945), *Los que aman, odian* by Bioy Casares and his wife Silvina Ocampo (No. 31, 1946), *El estruendo de las rosas* by Manuel Peyrou (No. 48, 1948), *Bajo el signo del odio* by Alejandro Ruiz Guiñazú under the pseudonym Alexander Rice Guinnes (No. 102, 1953) and *La muerte baja en el ascensor* by María Angélica Bosco (No. 123, 1955). The website for Adolfo Bioy Casares, *Borges*, ed. Daniel Martino, (Buenos Aires: Destino, 2006) offers a list of the novels published by *El Séptimo Círculo* during Borges and Bioy's tenure: http://www.borgesdebioycasares.com.ar/images/03_bioy.pdf [Accessed on the 12th of July 2011]

[237] *See Asesinos de papel*, pp. 129-31.

[238] *Asesinos de papel*, p. 123.

historically problematic relationship with the literary mainstream, despite the 'intellectual' origins of the form in Argentina. In the case of *El Séptimo Círculo*, only the promise of commercial viability (presaged by the success of *Los mejores cuentos policiales*), combined with the persistence of two of Argentina's most prominent intellectual figures and standard-bearers of *Sur* could bring into existence a collection devoted to detective fiction under a 'serious' imprint like Emecé. The rise of *El Séptimo Círculo* may also be considered an act of appropriation, in the sense that a product that had gained a certain currency and popularity among the readers of the mass-market *colecciones de quiosco* was effectively hijacked by the Argentine intellectual elite:

> Si a lo largo de los '30 la *Colección Misterio* se mueve todavía en esa zona marginal y generalmente subestimada de los añejos folletones de acción, y apela a un público de adolescentes o de lectores sin tradición "seria", *El Séptimo Círculo* –que ya se diferencia de las anteriores colecciones por esta sola denominación, de origen obviamente culto– rastreará las novedades de las editoriales londinenses y neoyorkinas más conspicuas y las recomendaciones de The Times Literary Supplement y se moverá dentro de las pautas de la novela-problema, de lo detectivesco considerado como remate de una ingeniosa –inclusive sutilísima– literatura de evasión.[239]

As indicated earlier in this study, detective fiction has long been regarded as a literature of escape. Benjamin identified the detective novel as an especially suitable means for the traveller to mitigate the anxieties of a train journey, while the success of the classical puzzle mystery of the interbellum Golden Age in Britain has been viewed as constituting a prolonged exercise in nostalgia:

> The country-house and drawing-room settings of the novels […] are not a reflection of contemporary life, but a recollection of Paradise Lost. Through them, the Good Life of antebellum days was relived – in imagination if not in reality.[240]

[239] Ibid, p. 17.
[240] Mandel, p. 30.

Amelia Simpson suggests a highly analogous political motivation behind the promotion of the classical variant of the genre by Borges and his associates in 1940s Argentina, as a symbolic literary bulwark against the populist movement associated with the rise of Juan Domingo Perón: 'Writers such as Borges, Bioy Casares, Peyrou, and Anderson Imbert often used the detective tale, in a cryptic but not indecipherable manner, to air their criticisms of the Peronist regime and its promotion of an alternative ideological vision of Argentina'.[241] It is clear that Borges would have endorsed this view in relation to Peyrou's *El estruendo de las rosas* (published in *El Séptimo Círculo* in 1948), though he was insistent that his own work remained untainted by political considerations (an assertion that must surely be regarded with a certain amount of healthy scepticism) as he makes clear in a round-table discussion of the genre in 1975:

> Entre los argentinos, Manuel Peyrou escribió cuentos muy buenos, los de *La espada dormida*, a la manera de Chesterton; otros libros de Peyrou me gustan menos, *El estruendo de las rosas*, por ejemplo, está escrito contra las dictaduras; y a mí personalmente no me gusta que la política intervenga en la literatura. Es sabido que yo soy antiperonista, pero no he escrito nada en tal sentido, porque eso no me interesa como literatura, se entiende.[242]

Ricardo Piglia has identified in Borges a certain convenient disconnect between words and actions in relation to literature, 'yo tomaría lo que él dice como verdadero, porque a menudo es verdadero, pero no pensaría que la relación de lo que dice con su obra es verdadera'.[243] Despite his persistent claims to the contrary, critics including Andrés Avellaneda[244] and Amelia Simpson perceive a markedly political intent in the fictional and the editorial activities of Borges within the genre:

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[241] Simpson, p. 35.
[242] *Asesinos de Papel*, p. 43.
[243] Piglia, *Crítica y ficción*, p. 161.
[244] Borges' assertion regarding the apolitical nature of his fiction is vigorously contested by Andrés Avellaneda in *El habla de la ideología* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 1983). This study includes examinations of a number of works by Ezequiel Martínez Estrada, Julio Cortázar and

> It may even be argued that Emecé's publication of a series of seemingly innocuous, conventional foreign classics during this period implicitly endorses an elitist attitude of disassociation from contact with the newly visible and increasingly empowered lower classes, in favor of a nostalgic affirmation of an aristocratic ideal as represented in the predictable, comforting utopias of the *novelas de enigma*, symbols of privilege and leisure.[245]

There is little doubt that Borges' *literary* interests during the 1940s at times indicated a desire to escape from, rather than to engage with, political and ideological concerns, including the rise of Nazism in Germany, and indeed Peronism in Argentina:

> Escribo en julio de 1940; cada mañana la realidad se parece más a una pesadilla. Sólo es posible la lectura de páginas que no aluden siquiera a la realidad: fantasías cosmogónicas de Olaf Stapledon, obras de teología o de metafísica, discusiones verbales, problemas frívolos de Queen o de Nicholas Blake.[246]

It can be argued, as does Simpson (via Avellaneda) in relation to *El Séptimo Círculo*, that this escapist impulse is itself a political, rather than an apolitical, posture, consciously directed against the 'newly visible and increasingly empowered lower classes'.[247] However, this view differs somewhat from that proposed by Braceras and Leytour, who regard the promotion of the genre by Borges and Bioy Casares during this period as a concerted effort to achieve a reconciliation between disparate reading cultures, 'un género cuyo principal mérito es haber aliviado la tensión clásica entre la "alta literatura", considerada normalmente como culta, y la "baja literatura", inculta y dirigida a las masas.'[248] While both views allude to political intentions in a broad

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Enrique Anderson Imbert, as well as a substantial chapter dedicated to the ideologically dubious (from his perspective) implications of the parodic detective stories featuring the imprisoned detective Don Isidiro Parodi written by Borges and Bioy Casares under the pseudonym Honorio Bustos Domecq. What also emerges from Avellaneda's study, however, is his own Manichean tendency to conflate Peronism with left-wing ideological perspectives more generally, and to position all political or intellectual opposition to Peronism as reactionary.

[245] Simpson, p. 35.

[246] Borges in a review of *The New Adventures of Ellery Queen*, *Sur*, 70, July 1940, p. 62.

[247] Simpson, op cit., p. 35.

[248] Elena Braceras y Cristina Leytour, eds., *Cuentos con detectives y comisarios*, (Buenos Aires: Colihue, 2004), p. 18.

sense, the interpretation offered by Simpson (via Avellaneda) amounts to a condemnation, while the explanation offered by Braceras and Leytour is decidedly more benign.

As editors of the *Séptimo Círculo* series, Borges and Bioy Casares went to considerable lengths to advance the cause of the classical puzzle style detective novel as a sophisticated, erudite form of fiction, despite the initial objections of the collection's publishers, Emecé. Part of this effort involved emphasising the illustrious, and often hidden, intellectual pedigree of the authors whose works appeared in the collection:

> Los animadores de El Séptimo Círculo pondrán especial énfasis en señalar que Nicholas Blake es el seudónimo del poeta británico Cecil Day Lewis, que Michael Innes oculta un retazo de la personalidad del especialista en literatura inglesa J. I. M. Stewart, o que tal 'alias' cifra el nombre de algún eminente historiador, astrónomo, profesor de matemáticas o egiptólogo de la Universidad de Oxford.[249]

Carlos V. Frías, who assumed the editorship of the series in the late 1950s, has noted the relative homogeneity of the texts selected by 'Biorges', 'la tendencia predominante es la novela inglesa clásica'.[250] There was one striking exception to this tendency, however: the early inclusion of three novels by James M. Cain, an American writer closely associated with the hard-boiled tradition. *Double Indemnity* (*Pacto de sangre*), first published in serialised form in *Liberty Magazine* in 1936, was the fifth title to appear in *El Séptimo Círculo* in 1945, while *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (*El cartero llama dos veces*), originally published in 1934, became title number 11 later the same year. This unholy trinity was completed by the appearance of *The Embezzler* (1943) (*El estafador*) as number 20 in the Argentine collection in 1946. It is surprising to find Cain's work rubbing shoulders with the

[249] *Asesinos de Papel*, p. 17.
[250] Ibid, p. 18.

more 'refined' progeny of Blake, Innes, John Dickson Carr and Milward Kennedy in light of Borges' (and to a lesser extent Bioy's) ideologically motivated and ill-concealed class prejudice towards the alumni of the hard-boiled school. The selection becomes more anomalous still considering the following extract from Bioy Casares' diary entry of April 14th, 1960:

> Come en casa Borges. Habla del realismo americano, *hard-boiled* (ejemplificado en *El cartero llama dos veces* de Cain). BORGES: «Muestra gente violenta, brutal, vulgar. La muestra sin ironía: uno sospecha que el autor es uno de ellos […]. En el realismo norteamericano parece no haber desaprobación».[251]

To employ a hackneyed but appropriate phrase, Cain's presence among the early titles appearing in *El Séptimo Círculo* amounts to an exception that proves the rule, given the apparent *omertà* against the hard-boiled variant otherwise observable in the series.

No Country for Hard Men?

The Argentine reading public was not left entirely bereft of the most prominent variant of the detective genre in the 1940s and early 1950s. During this period the publisher Acme Agency began to produce two pioneering *colecciones de quiosco*, *Rastros* and *Pistas*, which not only published detective stories by Argentine writers alongside translated foreign works, but also placed stories of the hard-boiled variant alongside those of the classical, puzzle mystery type, including works by Dashiell Hammett, Raymond Chandler, Peter Cheyney and David Goodis. Argentine writers appearing in these collections included Isaac Aisemberg, Luis de la Puente, Lisardo Alonso and Norberto Firpo. While *Rastros* and *Pistas* did succeed in bringing the hard-boiled style to the attention of an Argentine readership, the prestige enjoyed by

[251] Adolfo Bioy Casares, *Borges*, ed. Daniel Martino, (Buenos Aires: Destino, 2006), p. 620.

these collections was precisely equivalent to that of the American pulp magazines in which they had originally been published. At a time when the 'classical' writers whose works graced the pages of *El Séptimo Círculo* were being feted by the intellectual elite, the arrival of the hard-boiled writers was decidedly low-brow and low-key:

> Al privilegiarse la novela problema, podemos afirmar que privilegian también algunas actitudes que se desprenden implícitamente de su lectura […]. Primero, una cierta omnipotencia de la razón, una fe casi desmedida en el poder deductivo de la mente por sobre todo azar o error, que recuerda aquella seguridad de la visión finisecular positivista. Y a la vez, la valoración de la presencia de lo lúdicro, de esa posibilidad de 'jugar a', como nota de un pasatiempo aceptable. Es así como los autores 'negros' o 'duros' son regalados a las colecciones de quiosco, donde pasan totalmente inadvertidos tanto para la crítica como para los lectores de los círculos 'cultos' de entonces.[252]

Though the *novela negra* would not reach its peak of popular appeal and serious critical attention until the late 1960s and 1970s, the majority of the works of Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler were in fact translated and published in Argentina during the 1940s and 1950s. Hammett's *The Maltese Falcon* (*El halcón maltés*) was published in the magazine *Leoplán*, while *Red Harvest* (*Cosecha Roja*) appeared in *Rastros* issue No. 43 in 1946, and *The Dain Curse* (*La maldición de los Dain*) as issue No. 54 of the same collection in 1947. The dissemination of Chandler's work was comprehensive, appearing in a diverse range of publications throughout the 1940s and 1950s. *Farewell, My Lovely* (1940) was published as *Detective por correspondencia* by *Biblioteca de Oro* in 1943, and *The High Window* (1942) as *La ventana siniestra* by *Colección Pandora* in 1944. *Rastros* published the anthology of short stories, *5 Murderers* (1944) (*Cinco asesinos*) as issue No. 25 in 1945, while *The Big Sleep* (1939) (*Al borde del abismo*) and *The Lady in the Lake* (1943) (*La dama del lago*) were both published in 1947, by the collections *Flamenco* and

[252] Braceras et al., *El cuento policial argentino*, p. 39.

Filmeco respectively. *The Little Sister* (*La hermanita*) inaugurated the collection *Pistas* in 1950, just a year after its original publication in the United States. *The Long Goodbye* (*El largo adios*), perhaps the most overtly socially conscious of Chandler's novels, was published by Bruguera Editorial's *El Club del Misterio* in 1956, three years after its original publication.[253] Though lacking in cultural prestige, these publications did ensure the early dissemination in Argentina of the works of the most representative writers of the hard-boiled variant, albeit during a period in which the classical puzzle mystery was enjoying its most conspicuous success in terms of readership and critical approbation and promotion.

The 1940s and 1950s have already been identified as 'el auge del género' (Braceras et al., Lafforgue & Rivera) and indeed as Argentina's Golden Age of detective fiction (Yates, Simpson). The 1940s certainly witnessed the consolidation of the 'classical' variant of the genre as an erudite and intellectually engaged form of literary fiction. However, this success owed more to the popularity and prolific publication of imported works than it did to native Argentine production, which remained occasional. Argentine detective fiction in the 1940s is noteworthy chiefly due to the intellectual prestige of its authors and indeed the perceived quality of the works they produced. Though relatively few in number, the texts produced between 1940 and 1948 by Mateo, Borges, Bioy Casares, Silvina Ocampo, Castellani and Manuel Peyrou may be regarded, in the words of Braceras et al. as the '"corpus fundante" de nuestra literatura policial'.[254] However, the years that followed would see an explosion in the publication of detective stories and novels by local authors.

[253] For additional details on the publication of hard-boiled detective fiction in Argentina in this period, see *Asesinos de papel*, p. 33. Lafforgue & Rivera refer to *Farewell, My Lady* as the title of the Chandler novel published in Argentina as *Detective por correspondencia*. It is assumed that they were in fact referring to *Farewell, My Lovely*.
[254] Braceras et al., *El cuento policial argentino*, p. 40.

Yates identifies this period as one in which Argentine detective works enjoyed tremendous popularity among the reading public, as well as 'un éxito financiero sin precedentes'.[255] He also associates this commercial era with a decline in the quality of the works being produced. Lafforgue and Rivera question Yates' neat interpretation of the Argentine genre as 'una forma literaria que, con precision casi biológica, nace, se desarolla y llega a un alto grado de esplendor a partir del cual comienza una suerte de inevitable decadencia'.[256] In doing so, they endeavour to 'establecer la posibilidad de otra interpretación de un proceso cultural sospechosa y significativamente relegado por el trabajo crítico'.[257] To echo an idea expressed by Chandler in his essay 'The Simple Art of Murder', it is clear that the proliferation of detective stories and novels by Argentine writers in the 1950s as part of a highly profitable commercial enterprise inevitably produced works of varying levels of quality, such that the 'average' 1950s detective story was probably less meticulously crafted than its counterpart from the previous decade, when relatively few works were published by a small number of highly prestigious writers. During this period the publication of short stories and longer narratives was equitably divided between various periodicals:

> La existencia de revistas como *Vea y Lea* y *Leoplán* estimulará –entre las décadas de 1950 y 1960– fundamentalmente la producción cuentística […] en tanto que colecciones de kiosco como Rastros, Pistas, y más tarde Cobalto, Nueva Pandora, Deborah, Punto Negro, Club de Misterio, Linterna, etc., estimularán la producción novelística.[258]

The latter category included such 'auténticos especialistas'[259] as Isaac Aisenberg (under the pseudonym W. I. Eisen), Luis de la Puente, Wilfrido Talamona, Lisardo

[255] Donald Yates in *Asesinos de papel*, p. 12.
[256] Lafforgue & Rivera, *Asesinos de papel*, p. 12.
[257] Ibid, p. 13.
[258] *Asesinos de papel*, p. 85.
[259] Ibid.

Alonso, Rodolfo M. del Villar, Néstor Morales Loza, José E. Batiller, Ignacio Covarrubias and Eduardo Goligorsky. While numerous writers in the British, French and American traditions have devoted the greater part of their professional careers to producing crime fiction alone, throughout most of the genre's history in Argentina, commercial opportunities for such specialisation simply did not exist. In the 1950s, by contrast, the market for the genre had become sufficiently strong as to allow many of the writers mentioned above to produce multiple full-length detective novels. Illustrative of this point is the fact that Eisen, de la Puente and Batiller published four novels each in *Rastros* alone between 1949 and 1953.[260] As such, this era is precisely comparable to the heyday of pulp magazines like *Blask Mask* and *Dime Detective* in the United States, all the more so considering the strictures imposed upon the writers-for-hire who contributed to these publications:

> Se trata, en general, de una factura aplicada, con algunas tendencias al estereotipamiento, en la que se reconocen con facilidad las huellas de la presión editorial (no exceder cierto número de páginas, no abordar ciertos temas, no superar determinado tiempo de producción, escribir 'a la manera de', etc.), y a la vez la subestimación en que se tiene a una materia elegida, casi exclusivamente, como *modus vivendi* o 'ganapán' no demasiado prestigioso.[261]

As a result, the output of *colecciones de quiosco* such as *Rastros*, *Pista* and *Cobalto* reflected a house style equivalent to that of *Black Mask* under the editorship of Joseph 'Cap' Shaw, which valued commercial appeal above literary innovation and achievement, though not necessarily (as Yates seems to suggest) to the exclusion of the latter.

The publishing boom enjoyed by the detective genre in the 1950s was not confined to the full-length novels appearing in the aforementioned *colecciones de*

[260] Johny Malone provides publishing details for 602 of the 644 titles published in the Rastros series between 1944 and 1977 on the website *Una plaga de espías* at http://unaplagadeespias.blogspot.com/2008/11/coleccion-rastros-serie-de-editorial.html
[261] *Asesinos de papel*, p. 86.

quiosco. The number of short stories published in popular magazines such as *Leoplán* and *Vea y Lea* throughout the 1950s was indicative of the level of interest native authors had begun to generate among a reading public that had been constituted over a period of half a century, nourished on the translated works of the most representative authors of the European and American traditions, and benefiting in terms of dissemination from the promotional and literary activities of a number of prominent intellectual figures, backed by publishing entities in a variety of formats. *Leoplán*, like *Black Mask*, had initially published detective stories alongside several other forms of popular fiction, before increasingly assigning prominence of place to the genre in response to a growing demand from the reading public, such that by the end of the forties it had become almost exclusively devoted to the publication of *relatos policiales*. *Vea y Lea* would play an even more tangible role in the popularisation of native works, as discussed in detail in the next chapter of this study.

Chapter Three: The *Vea y Lea* Years (1949-64)

Introduction

This chapter explores what I have chosen to describe as 'The *Vea y Lea* Years' (1949-1964), in honour of the three *Vea y Lea*-sponsored detective story competitions that, according to my analysis, served as a vital stimulus to production and innovation among Argentine writers, and one in which Borges continued to play a prominent role. It includes a substantial section on the work of Rodolfo Walsh, documenting his transition from crime fiction writer and anthologist, to pioneer of the non-fiction novel and investigative journalism traditions. Also in this chapter, the viability of the figure of the detective in the Argentine context is considered in light of the close analysis of Adolfo Pérez Zelaschi's award-winning 1961 story 'Las señales'.

The 1949 *Vea y Lea*/ Emecé Concurso de Cuentos Policiales

Jorge Lafforgue and Jorge B. Rivera have highlighted the fact that, even by the late forties, imported works were still preferred to the home-grown variants of the genre, and that many of the Argentine writers who did produce crime fiction during this period took steps to preserve the foreign, imported flavour of their fictional output:

> Es indudable que muchos lectores manifiestan cierta preferencia por los productos traducidos, y que no pocos autores sienten que proceden con mayor verosimilitud literaria al enmarcar sus creaciones en ambientes remotos o bien tipificados, y de ahí la adopción de una doble estrategia por parte de los autores y editores nacionales: elegir ambientes y personajes foráneos, o vagamente exóticos, como hacen Peyrou y Mateo, o adoptar un seudónimo y ubicar sus aventuras en reconstrucciones más o menos prolijas o imaginativas de Nueva York, Los Ángeles, San Francisco, etc.[262]

[262] *Asesinos de papel*, p. 87.

In 1949, *Vea y Lea* (then under the editorship of the Uruguayan Juan Carlos Onetti)[263], in conjunction with Emecé, launched the first of three famous *Concursos de Cuentos Policiales*, an initiative that may be viewed as a corrective measure in response to the reluctance on the part of writers and publishers to locate detective narratives in a specifically Argentine context. The text of the announcement is explicit in terms of its motivating impulse:

> Desde su aparición, *Vea y lea* se ha preocupado por ofrecer a sus lectores el mejor material obtenible en literatura policial […] Ahora, la dirección de *Vea y lea* considera que ha llegado el momento de que la Argentina –que ya ha señalado logros notables en otros aspectos de la actividad literaria– posea un grupo importante de cultores de este género, a la vez tan popular y tan difícil. Este concurso es, pues, un llamamiento a los escritores, noveles o no, para que colaboren con nuestra revista en la concreción de dicho propósito.[264]

The competition was open to all writers, 'sin otra limitación que lo que establece la exigencia de que el ambiente de los cuentos sea argentino',[265] and offered substantial cash prizes to the winning entries, and the additional incentive of the possibility of paid publication for those stories not selected for the top prizes:

> Primer premio *Vea y lea*, de $ 1.000; Primer premio Emecé, de $ 1.000; dos segundos premios a cargo de *Vea y lea*, denominados 'N.I.S.S.A.', de $ 250 cada uno; dos segundos premios de $ 250 cada uno a cargo de Emecé Editores, denominados 'El séptimo círculo' y 'La bestia debe morir' [Referring to Emecé's famous detective collection and its inaugural title respectively]. El jurado podrá, además, elegir otros cuentos para ser publicados en *Vea y lea,* que abonará por cada uno $ 100, y podrá proponer a

[263] Juan Carlos Onetti, winner of the Premio Cervantes in 1980, is regarded as homologous to Borges in terms of his active promotion of detective fiction and attempts to integrate the genre into the literary mainstream in Uruguay. While Borges's advocacy on behalf of the classical puzzle mystery is notorious, the Uruguayan's preference was for the hard-boiled variant, 'en 1940 o aún en 1950, aquellas dos escrituras –la de Borges, la de Onetti– resultaban excéntricas en el sistema literario rioplatense. Sí, hoy sabemos que *Ficciones* y *La vida breve* labran por entonces el futuro; y hasta podemos reconocer en las ediciones baratas de Hammett, Goodis y Cía. que Onetti amontaba al pie de su cama, o en las ediciones inglesas de Nicholas Blake o del escocés Michael Innes que Borges adquiría en Macker's, piezas importante para dibujar el mapa de la literatura contemporánea'. Jorge Lafforgue in *Asesinos de papel*, p. 170. In the same volume of essays, Elvio E. Gandolfo describes Onetti as 'un lector obsesivo del género', p. 76.

[264] *Vea y lea*, IV, 81, 22th of December 1949, p. 40.

[265] Ibid.

> Emecé Editores la publicación en volumen o en otra forma de uno o varios de los cuentos premiados.[266]

A jury of three would decide the outcome, 'uno designado por *Vea y Lea*, otro por Emecé Editores S.A. y otro por la Cámara Argentina del Libro'.[267] The announcement also included three seminal short articles on the genre by Silvina Ocampo, Manuel Peyrou, and Borges and Bioy Casares, the examination of which provides vital evidence of the extent to which the active promotion and codification of the genre was pursued by these prominent representatives of the Argentine intellectual elite. In fact, if Borges's April 1933 *Hoy Argentina* essay, 'Leyes de la narración policial' is taken as a mission statement for the future Argentine detective story, then the short articles accompanying the *Vea y Lea* competition announcement seventeen years later may be regarded as an act of consolidation, an occasion to identify and reflect upon the progress made in the incorporation of the genre into the national literary consciousness. Silvina Ocampo asserts, for example, that the ease with which contemporary writers are able to invent original plots may be attributed to the detective genre, 'Antes, casi nadie inventaba argumentos que no fueran confidencias. Ahora, cualquiera, aunque no sea escritor, inventa argumentos que no son autobiográficas'.[268] Her estimation of the value of the genre's contribution to modern literature extends beyond its emphasis upon plot construction: 'La benéfica influencia que ejerce el género policial sobre la literatura moderna es innegable: los escritores que no quieren reconocerlo detienen, dificultan la evolución de su propia obra'.[269] Ocampo's commentary in relation to writers of fiction is highly indicative of the extent to which a genre once dismissed as unworthy of 'serious' critical

[266] Ibid.
[267] Ibid.
[268] Ibid.
[269] Ibid.

attention had by this time shed many of its sub-literary associations, to the extent that writers are warned to ignore it at their peril.

Ocampo also asserts what she considers the primacy of the detective story in its more concise form: 'Cuando la novela policial tienda a desaparecer, el cuento policial permanecerá como una forma consagrada por largas dedicaciones, como entre los juegos, el ajedrez, o en la poesía, el soneto'.[270] This preference is very much in keeping with the aesthetic principles of Borges, for whom the concision imposed by the brevity of the short story form was a cardinal virtue and a guiding principle. The prologue to *Ficciones* (1944) includes an oft-quoted section that would seem to sum up Borges's disdain for longer narratives: 'Desvarío laborioso y empobrecedor el de componer vastos libros; el de explayar en quinientas páginas una idea cuya perfecta exposición oral cabe en pocos minutos'.[271] It appears that this sentiment was congruent with his readings of detective fiction more specifically, to judge by similar comments appearing in *El Hogar* magazine five years previously:

> Toda novela policial consta de un problema simplísimo, cuya perfecta exposición oral cabe en cinco minutos y que el novelista –perversamente– demora hasta que pasen trescientas páginas. Las razones de esa demora son comerciales: no responden a otra necesidad que a la de llenar el volumen. En tales casos, la novela policial viene a ser un cuento alargado. En los demás, resulta una variedad de la novela de caracteres o de costumbres.[272]

The campaign manifesto continues with Manuel Peyrou's resounding endorsement of the genre:

> El porvenir de la novela y el cuento policiales está garantizado por la masa permanente de lectores con que cuenta. Ese público busca misterio, sorpresa y acción, estimulantes mentales que no actúan sino en inteligencias despiertas. Si, además, el cuento o la novela tienen categoría o difunden subsidiariamente conocimientos científicos, o nociones generales, cosa

[270] Ibid.
[271] Borges, Prologue to *Ficciones* (1944) in *Obras completas* Vol. I, p. 511.
[272] Borges, 'Dos novelas policiales,' in *El Hogar*, 7th April 1939. *Obras Completas* Vol. IV, p. 521.

> corriente en la producción moderna, se convierten en factores de cultura social.[273]

This statement is deserving of a certain amount of qualification. The devoted readership to which Peyrou refers had largely developed over the previous twenty years, and had flourished with the backing of Emecé and other prestigious publications, along with the most prominent contributors to *Sur* magazine, including Peyrou himself. Significantly, whether he liked it or not, this following also included the mass readership of the popular Argentine pulp equivalents, which had by this point expanded to include a growing appreciation for the hard-boiled variant of the genre.

In describing detective fiction as an exercise of the intelligence *prima facie*, Peyrou's view chimes with that of Borges, while his allusions to the genre's pedagogical virtues, including its potential to promote scientific knowledge or, more vaguely, 'nociones generales', are consistent with the idea of the genre as a *literatura bisagra* in the Argentine tradition. Peyrou also alludes to the success of the policy of dissemination of the genre undertaken by 'Biorges' and their associates in the previous decade: 'cuenta con un público constante y crítico, ejercitado en la lectura, que distingue generalmente lo bueno de lo malo'.[274] He is full of praise for the cohort of readers of detective fiction who had by that time assimilated the lessons thus far imparted by the 'Argentine masters', but also launches a veiled attack on an unnamed splinter group who in his estimation had strayed from the path of the righteous: 'Los escritores policiales debemos agradecer la vocación de esos lectores que compensan para la cultura la existencia de ciertos otros públicos',[275] a categorization which may well refer to devotees of the more violent and 'realist'

[273] *Vea y lea*, IV, 81, 22 December 1949, p. 40.
[274] Ibid.
[275] Ibid.

hard-boiled examples of the genre, or indeed other fiction considered less endowed with intellectual or cultural potential. Peyrou, like Silvina Ocampo, essentially endorses the orthodox Borgesian view in relation to the virtues of the detective genre, by offering effusive praise to its devotees and implicitly denouncing those he views as its antagonists.

On this occasion the last word is ceded to Borges and Bioy Casares, who avail of the opportunity to address one of the frequent criticisms levelled against the genre in its 'classical' mode, namely its highly formal character, and its dependence on the interest of the plot to the detriment of other aspects of the narrative:

> La minuciosa legislación a que ha sido sometido el género policial, las muchas restricciones y prohibiciones, han contribuido a que se olvide un hecho sencillísimo: *el género policial es un género literario* y no una variedad de la adivinanza. *Lo problemático es,* desde luego, *uno de los elementos esenciales de esta literatura, pero no agota sus exigencias.* También otros elementos son indispensables*: la invención de caracteres, la construcción, la vitalidad, el estilo*. Sin ellos, el cuento policial es un mero esquema.[276]

While this statement may seem innocuous at first glance, it provides interesting evidence of a discursive strategy frequently employed by Borges in relation to his own literary production, a strategy identified by Ricardo Piglia: 'a menudo enuncia posiciones que impide la crítica a sus propios textos. Quiero decir: Borges enuncia como propia la posición del enemigo, se anticipa. Es una táctica que recorre toda su obra'.[277] Piglia enumerates some of the accusations typically made against Borges's prose: 'Demasiado artificial, demasiado literario, demasiado interesado por la forma, alejado de la vida, puramente verbal, sin sustancia',[278] criticisms frequently applied to the archetypal classical detective narratives. However, he points out that in 'La

[276] Ibid.
[277] Ricardo Piglia, 'Borges como crítico', in *Crítica y ficción* (Barcelona: Anagrama, 2001), p. 160.
[278] Ibid.

supersticiosa ética del lector', for example, Borges adopts a position that would appear at odds with his own literary practice, 'critica el estilo como valor, dice lo que él no hace, afirma que la literatura vale por su contenido y no por su forma'.[279] Piglia goes on to describe the effect of this tactic: 'se niega a que lo lean como preocupado sobre todo por la forma y por la pura perfección literaria. Es una pose de combate. Posición de contraataque'.[280] José Fernández Vega identifies the same strategy at work in the highly parodic biographical sketch of the apocryphal author Honorio Bustos Domecq attributed to 'la educadora, señorita Adelma Badoglio' which prefaces *Seis problemas para don Isidro Parodi*:

> Sus cuentos policiales descubren una veta nueva del fecundo polígrafo: en ellos quiere combatir el frío intelectualismo en que han sumido este género Sir Conan Doyle, Ottolenghi, etc. Los cuentos de Pujato, como cariñosamente los llama el autor, no son la filigrana de un bizantino encerrado en la torre de marfil; son la voz de un contemporáneo, atento a los latidos humanos y que derrama a vuela pluma los raudales de su verdad.[281]

Fernández Vega points to the pre-emptive quality of this extract:

> Su tono paródico intenta cerrar el camino a la crítica convencional contra el género policial de corte clásico mediante el recurso de burlarse de ella por anticipado. "Frío intelectualismo" o juego inútil y descomprometido son, en efecto, algunos de los habituales reproches que desde una zona literaria bien definida suelen dispararse contra el policial "británico" de tipo deductivo; sólo que, en el pasaje citado, estos reproches arden en las llamas del ridículo.[282]

Essentially, the same tactic is again deployed on the occasion of the announcement of the first *Vea y lea* competition. Borges and Bioy Casares's statement in relation to the detective genre may be viewed as ironic and polysemic in its intent, and as a 'posición de contraataque' as described by Piglia. Ostensibly, it elaborates upon the

[279] Ibid.
[280] Ibid, p. 161.
[281] Honorio Bustos Domecq (Pseudonym of Jorge Luis Borges & Adolfo Bioy Casares), *Seis problemas para don Isidro Parodi* (Madrid: Alianza, 2006), p. 8. First published privately in Buenos Aires in 1942 by Borges and Bioy Casares under the imprint of the fictitious publisher Oportet & Haereses.
[282] José Fernández Vega, 'Una campaña estética: Borges y la narrativa policial' *Variaciones Borges*, 1 (1996), p. 27.

criteria by which the competition is likely to be judged, providing advice and guidance to potential *concursantes*. However, it must also be viewed as part of a wider discursive strategy which aims to neutralise the frequent criticism of the detective story as 'un mero esquema,' (a charge also levelled against the prose of Borges more generally) by choosing to foreground the importance of other aspects of the narrative, such as characterisation, construction, vitality and style. Thirdly, it serves as an exhortation to Argentine writers not to be hamstrung by a slavish adherence to the 'restricciones y prohibiciones' associated with the genre, this despite the fact that Borges himself had been instrumental in bringing these strictures to the attention of the reading public in the 1930s, including the formulation of his own set of commandments in his essay 'Leyes de la narración policial'.

The *jurado* for this first competition, consisting of Borges, Adolfo Bioy Casares and Leónidas Barletta, awarded top honours to 'Una muerte para Silvia' by Edmundo Mario Zimmerman, and 'Una bala para Riquelme' by Facundo Marull, while stories by Adolfo L. Pérez Zelaschi, Rodolfo Walsh and Leopoldo Hurtado also received prizes. In 1953 Walsh acknowledged the effectiveness of this *Vea y lea*/ *Emecé*-sponsored stimulus package in terms of the activity it had provoked among Argentine writers: 'Una prueba del interés que despierta el género fué el concurso organizado en 1950 por una conocida revista y una editorial locales. Se recibieron nada menos que ciento ochenta cuentos'.[283] A sizeable number of the detective stories entered in the competition were published in the pages of *Vea y Lea* in the years that followed, by authors including Pérez Zelaschi, Walsh (under the pseudonym Daniel Hernández), Alfredo Julio Grassi, Horacio Martínez, Syria Poletti, Juan Carlos Brusasca and Norberto Firpo. As such, the first *Vea y Lea*

[283] Rodolfo Walsh, in the preface to *Diez cuentos policiales argentinos* (Buenos Aires: Hachette, Serie Evasión, 1953), p. 8.

Concurso de Cuentos Policiales was an unmitigated success when judged by the extent to which it accomplished the mission outlined in the competition's announcement. However, perhaps the most significant result, in terms of the genre's evolution, was the apparent bifurcation signalled by the awarding of one of the top prizes to Facundo Marull's 'Una bala para riquelme', an earthy, picaresque Argentine crime story that explicitly draws upon elements of both the classical and the hard-boiled traditions. Rodolfo Walsh alludes to the significance of the jury's decision, 'La revelación más grata de ese certamen fue Facundo Marull, quien combina la regocijante descripción de ambiente y caracteres con el rigor argumental.'[284] More recently, Juan Sasturain has referred to the story's appeal, '– breve, barrial y barroco– no es de los que se olvidan: tiene originalidad, clima y estilo'.[285] The success of Marull's entry demonstrates both the evident awareness of the products of the hard-boiled school and their effective dissemination through cheap editions and *colecciones de quiosco*, and also the surprising willingness of Borges and Bioy Casares, stalwarts of the 'classical' hegemony, to accept, and indeed to actively encourage, experimentation and cross-fertilization within the genre, despite their apparently proscriptive views on 'correct practice' expressed in earlier *Hogar* and *Sur* contributions. This tendency will be repeated, to striking effect, in the second *Vea y Lea* competition of 1961, which will be examined later in this chapter. Meanwhile, the success of Rodolfo Walsh in the inaugural competition signalled the commencement of his rise to prominence as one of the key figures in the critical and textual discourse that has marked the evolution of the genre in Argentina. This engagement with detective fiction led him inexorably into dialogue,

[284] Ibid.
[285] Juan Sasturain, in 'Una bala para Riquelme,' *Página 12*, 9 July 2006, http://www.pagina12.com.ar/diario/deportes/8-69648-2006-07-09.html [Accessed on the 11th January 2011]

and later into open conflict, with the conception of the genre as disseminated, practised and theorised by Borges and his cultural and literary acolytes. Walsh's multi-faceted discursive interaction with the genre, and with Borges specifically, was of enormous significance, involving a Damascene conversion that would have fascinating consequences for the narrative depiction of violent crime in Argentina and for Walsh himself, as discussed in detail in the sections that follow.

The 'aesthetic counter-campaign' of Rodolfo Walsh

The most significant publishing event in the years that followed the first *Vea y Lea* competition was, without doubt, the appearance of Rodolfo Walsh's *Diez cuentos policiales argentinos* in Hachette's *Serie Evasión* (1953), not only the first anthology of Argentine detective fiction, but indeed the very first anthology of original detective stories in the Spanish language. The selection of texts included by Walsh is indicative of, and is itself an instance of, the interweaving of the two major traditions of the genre that occurred in this period, and the progress made in establishing a distinctly Argentine crime fiction tradition. Walsh acknowledges this transformation in the preface to his collection:

> se ha producido un cambio en la actitud del público: se admite ya la posibilidad de que Buenos Aires sea el escenario de una aventura policial. Cambio […] que refleja con más sinceridad la realidad del ambiente y ofrece saludables perspectivas a la evolución de un género para el que los escritores argentinos me parecen singularmente dotados.[286]

Diez cuentos includes examples of those stories identified by Lafforgue and Rivera as 'enmarcados en ambientes remotos o bien tipificados',[287] such as Borges' 'El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan' and Peyrou's 'La isla mágica', as well as others that are more recognisably Argentine in terms of language and setting, such as

[286] Walsh, ed. *Diez cuentos policiales argentinos,* p. 3.
[287] *Asesinos de papel,* p. 87.

Leonardo Castellani's 'La mosca de oro' (whose title recalls Poe's 'The Gold Bug'), Pérez Zelaschi's 'Los crímenes van sin firma', and 'Pigmalión', Leopoldo Hurtado's sole incursion into the genre, which had been a prize-winner in the 1950 *Vea y Lea* competition. It also includes tales which, recalling Chandler's descriptions of Hammett's pivotal role in the American crime fiction tradition, take murder out of the Venetian vase and drop it onto the 'mean streets' of Buenos Aires, into its neighbourhood bars where games of chance and dangerous deception are played for the lowest and the highest stakes. Facundo Marull's 'Una bala para Riquelme' is typical of this tendency, as is Walsh's own contribution to the collection, 'Cuento para tahúres'. Lafforgue and Rivera have described these stories as depictions of 'El mundo de los marginales […] con anotaciones que remiten a la literatura costumbrista y a ciertos prototipos clásicos de genealogía tanguera o barrial.[288] The baroque, earthy style of these tales signals a noteworthy change in the Argentine crime fiction tradition, which gradually sees writers and readers gravitating towards the gritty realism of the hard-boiled school. Marull and Walsh's stories, though unmistakeably Argentine in their language and setting, also share striking stylistic similarities with those of Damon Runyon, whose highly humorous portrayal of Great Depression-era America is punctuated by desperate deeds, frequent violence, and instances of hardship among its cast of gamblers, crap shooters, petty thieves, gangsters, bootleggers, horse followers, and other assorted citizens, and whose collection *Guys & Dolls* had been published in Buenos Aires in 1948 as *El hombre más dinámico del mundo*.[289] In fact, 'Cuento para tahúres' may be viewed as a distinctly Argentine transposition and interpretation of Runyon's story 'The Idyll of Miss Sarah Brown', originally published in the collection *Guys & Dolls* in 1933.

[288] Ibid.
[289] Damon Runyon, *Guys and Dolls* trans. by Héctor J. Argibay as *El hombre más dinámico del mundo* (Buenos Aires: Orientación Cultural Editores, 1948)

Both stories revolve around games of craps, or 'pase inglés', played for high stakes among groups of dangerous underworld characters, in which a pair of phoney dice has been secretly introduced so as to guarantee success to one of the players at the table. In Runyon's story, a gambler named Brandy Bottle Bates introduces a set of loaded dice to a game of craps in order to guarantee *his own* success betting against Obadiah 'The Sky' Masterson. Though 'The Sky' discovers the ruse, and plans murderous revenge, 'I see The Sky's right hand creeping inside his coat where I know he always packs a Betsy in a shoulder holster'[290], the possibility of violence is defused by the timely intervention of the saintly and eponymous Miss Sarah Brown. Walsh's Argentine take on the 'crap shoot treachery' theme is of a different order. In 'Cuento para tahúres', which discusses the mysterious killing of a gambler named Zúñiga, a set of phoney dice are again substituted for a genuine pair, guaranteeing success to one of the players, Renato Flores. However, in this case, it was not Flores himself who introduced the loaded dice, but one of his opponents, so that, by enjoying an inexplicable run of luck, he would attract the murderous suspicion of his fellow players:

> El hombre ganaría una vez y se pondría contento. Ganaría dos veces, tres veces... y seguiría ganando. Por difícil que fuera el número que sacara de entrada, lo repetiría siempre antes de que saliera el 7. *Si lo dejaran, ganaría toda la noche, porque con esos dados no se puede perder.*[291]

The unnamed, conspicuously unreliable first-person narrator of 'Cuento para tahúres' (a figure familiar to readers of Runyon) speculates that Flores, having suddenly realised that he was playing with loaded dice, had killed the person he suspected of the substitution, Zúñiga, so that he would not himself be exposed for cheating and subjected to the violent summary justice of his fellow players. 'No

[290] Damon Runyon, 'The Idyll of Miss Sarah Brown' in *Guys and Dolls* (London: Penguin, 1956), p.19.
[291] Walsh, *Diez cuentos policiales argentinos*, p. 189.

había tiempo para más. No le convenía que se comprobara que había estado haciendo trampa, aunque fuera sin saberlo'.[292] Furthermore, the experienced reader of detective fiction will be alerted to the *possibility* that it was in fact the narrator, and not *el finado* Zúñiga, who was responsible for the deadly substitution. Runyon's 'loaded dice' story allows some possibility of redemption for its characters, and if not the avoidance of a violent end, at the very least, its postponement. Walsh's Argentine variation upon the theme is decidedly darker and more sinister, perhaps a reflection of his desire to effect a transposition that would be appropriate to the Argentine setting depicted in the story.

The successful intermingling of the imported crime genre with indigenous literary tropes had received significant stimulus through the 1950 *Vea y lea* competition, while Walsh's anthology, published three years later, may be regarded as an act of consolidation for the *policial argentino*, and a step towards the formal establishment of an Argentine detectory canon. However, it may also be regarded, perhaps more accurately, as something of a Trojan Horse. While he may eulogise Borges's 'La muerte y la brújula' as 'el ideal del género: un problema puramente geométrico, con una concesión a la falibilidad humana: el detective es la víctima minuciosamente prevista'.[293] Walsh's collection taken as a whole must be regarded as quite a substantial realignment of the Argentine detective tradition. To a significant extent *Diez cuentos* symbolically breaks the generic hegemony previously enjoyed by Borges, Bioy Casares and those of their circle. As previously noted, the 1950 competition announcement had made provision for the publication of the winning entries and/or other competing stories in book form, 'El jurado […] podrá proponer a Emecé Editores la publicación en volumen o en otra forma de uno o

[292] Ibid, p. 190.
[293] Walsh, ed. *Diez cuentos policiales argentinos*, p. 2.

varios de los cuentos premiados'.[294] Walsh's detective anthology for Hachette's *Serie Evasión*, containing several of these stories alongside works by some of the most significant authors in the genre's Argentine evolution, effectively appropriates the project outlined in the *Vea y Lea* competition announcement three years previously. The importance of this collection has been noted by Lafforgue:

> En la Argentina podemos remontar el cuento y la novela policiales hasta sus lejanos orígenes: Groussac y Varela, respectivamente; podemos seguir con detalle su evolución a orillas del Plata hasta la notable explosión de los años '40; podemos, incluso, señalar otros muchos factores complementarios, como colecciones o publicaciones que apuntalan esa narrativa con fuerza; pero todas esas precisiones, que hoy el rastreo histórico posibilita, encuentran su primer alerta o llamado de atención, su primer lúcido reconocimiento global, en la excelente selección de Walsh. El volumen 29 de la colección *Evasión* comienza con una breve nota introductoria que, a pesar de su brevedad, bien puede considerarse como el primer ensayo sobre la gestación del género entre nosotros, y, se cierra, espléndidamente, con "Cuento para tahúres", un texto del propio Walsh.[295]

Also in 1953, Hachette published Walsh's *Variaciones en Rojo*, a volume of three detective stories featuring the amateur detective Daniel Hernández, which was awarded the *Premio Municipal de Literatura* that year. Hernández may surely be viewed as an avatar of Walsh himself, given that many of Walsh's own journalistic articles of the period were published under the same pseudonym, while the character appearing in *Variaciones en rojo* is described as a 'corrector de pruebas de la Editorial Corsario', one of the central elements of Walsh's own work for Hachette, along with the translation of detective works by, among others, Ellery Queen and Cornell Woolrich (William Irish). In the preface to this volume, as was the case with *Diez cuentos policiales argentinos*, Walsh avails of the opportunity to comment upon certain aspects of the *género policial* and its readership, thereby exploiting a critical and discursive space in a manner very familiar to readers of Borges. The

[294] Op cit.
[295] Jorge Lafforgue, 'Walsh en y desde el género policial' published at rodolfowalsh.org on 31 July 2004. http://www.rodolfowalsh.org/spip.php?article83 [Accessed on the 13th of February 2010]

detectory acumen displayed by Daniel Hernández in the resolution of the crimes depicted in the volume is, according to Walsh, consistent with the skills developed through his professional endeavours. As noted earlier in this study, John Irwin has asserted that the emergence of the figure of the detective, a specialised and highly versatile reader, found a ready audience in an age of mental work as analysis, 'In the detective scenario and the figure of the mastermind Dupin, Poe gave us at once the most appealing format and the most glamorous mask for mental work and the mental worker'.[296] Walsh considers Hernández, the *corrector de imprenta*, to be particularly imbued with these specialised analytical skills:

> Seguramente todas las facultades que han servido a D. H. en la investigación de casos criminales eran facultades desarrolladas al máximo en el ejercicio diario de su trabajo: la observación, la minuciosidad, la fantasía (tan necesaria, vgr., para interpretar ciertas traducciones u obras originales), y sobre todo esa rara capacidad para situarse simultáneamente en planos distintos, que ejerce el corrector avezado cuando va atendiendo, en la lectura, a la limpieza tipográfica, al sentido, a la bondad de la sintaxis y a la fidelidad de la versión.[297]

The preface also discusses the reader of detective fiction, whose potentially participatory role in the experience of the text is explicitly acknowledged: 'Yo considero que hay dos clases de lectores de novelas policiales: lectores activos y lectores pasivos. Los primeros tratan de hallar la solución antes que la dé el autor; los segundos se conforman con seguir desinteresadamente el relato'.[298] He indicates that each of the stories in *Variaciones* has been crafted in accordance with the sacrosanct principle of fair play (at least according to Borgesian orthodoxy), presenting an explicit challenge to the more active type of reader he has identified:

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[296] John T. Irwin, *The Mystery to a Solution: Poe, Borges, and the Analytic Detective Story* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins U.P., 1994), pp. xvi-xvii.
[297] Rodolfo Walsh, *Variaciones en rojo* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones de la Flor, 2006, First published 1953), p. 7.
[298] Ibid, p. 8.

> En las tres narraciones de este libro hay un punto en que el lector cuenta con todos los elementos necesarios, si no para resolver el problema en todos sus detalles, al menos para descubrir la idea central, ya del crimen, ya del procedimiento que sirve para esclarecerlo. En 'Las pruebas de imprenta' ese momento transcurre en la página 39. En 'Variaciones en rojo', en la página 108. En 'Asesinato a distancia', en la página 156.[299]

The preface may be viewed as didactic (a recurring feature of the Argentine detective fiction tradition), in that Walsh seeks to encourage a more engaged participation on the part of the reader in the stories that follow, both by drawing a distinction between two reading strategies, one active and one passive, and also by encouraging the former strategy through signalling the possibility that the active reader might anticipate the resolution of the mysteries contained within the three texts. The preface is an indication of Walsh's keen interest in the genre and its readership, though this interest would undergo significant modification over time.

The publication of the critical essay, 'Dos mil quinientos años de literatura policial' in *La Nación* in February of 1954 provides important evidence of Walsh's growing prominence, and indeed confidence, as a key contributor to the genre's critical consideration in Argentina. In this essay, Walsh challenges the orthodox view (frequently and emphatically stated by Borges) which traces the origins of the genre directly to Poe:

> El comienzo de la literatura policial suele situarse, con acuerdo casi unánime, en los cinco relatos del género que entre 1840 y 1845 escribió Edgar Allan Poe. Sin embargo es posible demostrar que la totalidad de los elementos esenciales de la ficción policíaca se hallan dispersos en la literatura de épocas anteriores, y que en algún caso aislado ese tipo de narración cristalizó en forma perfecta antes de Poe.[300]

[299] Ibid.
[300] Rodolfo Walsh, 'Dos mil quinientos años de literatura policial', First published in *La Nación* in February of 1954, here quoted in Rodolfo Walsh, *Cuentos para tahúres y otros relatos policiales* (Buenos Aires: Puntosur, 1987), p. 163.

Walsh's assertions regarding the 'true' origins of the genre provide a clue to his choice both of a journalistic pseudonym and the name of one of his two main protagonists:

> Los primeros relatos policiales bien caracterizados son bíblicos […]. En verdad, Daniel es el primer "detective" de la historia, y tiene muchos puntos de contacto con los modernos héroes de la novela policial.[301]

He identifies in the Book of Daniel three elements that he considers to be characteristic of the genre, 'la confrontación de testigos, la clásica trampa para descubrir al delincuente y la interpretación de indicios materiales'.[302] The importance of this Old Testament book to Walsh's conception of the genre is illustrated by the fact that quotations from Daniel serve to preface two of the stories from *Variaciones en rojo*, including the following epigraph preceding 'La aventura de las pruebas de imprenta' in which the detectory acumen of Daniel is outlined:

> Entonces Daniel fue traído delante del rey. Y habló el rey, y dijo a Daniel:… 'Y yo he oído de ti que puedes declarar las dudas y desatar dificultades. Si ahora pudieras leer esta escritura, y mostrarme su explicación, serás vestido de púrpura, y collar de oro será puesto en tu cuello, y en el reino serás el tercer señor'.
>
> Biblia, Libro de Daniel, v, 13-16[303]

He points to a number of other ancient texts which he considers precursors to the modern detective story, including Virgil's *Aeneid*, 'Entre los romanos, Virgilio se anticipó a Conan Doyle en el libro VII de la *Eneida* […] Veinte siglos más tarde el tema reparece [sic] en uno de los cuentos donde interviene Sherlock Holmes: The White Priory Murders',[304] and Cicero's '*Pro Sexto Roscio,* antecedente perfecto e inimitable de la novela que podríamos llamar "judicial" porque su acción se

[301] Ibid, p. 163-4.
[302] Ibid.
[303] Walsh, *Variaciones en rojo*, p. 9.
[304] Walsh, 'Dos mil quinientos años de literatura policial', in *Cuentos para tahúres y otros relatos policiales*, p. 164.

desarrolla en los estrados judiciales y gira en torno a los esfuerzos de un abogado criminalista por salvar a un inocente acusado de un crimen'.[305] He continues to trace the genre's lineage through the centuries, including references to texts that had previously been identified by François Fosca[306] and Dorothy Sayers[307] as germane to the development of the genre, such as the *Gesta Romanorum*, *The Canterbury Tales*, Boccaccio's *Decameron, The Thousand and One Nights* and Voltaire's *Zadig*. He also identifies features of the detective story in works not previously associated with the genre, such as the sixteenth century Guatemalan text the *Popol Vuh*, 'transcripto y traducido a comienzos del siglo XVIII por Fray Francisco Jiménez', and the 'memorable aventura del viejo del báculo' from chapter XLV of Part Two of Cervantes' *Quijote*.[308] Walsh perceives in Cervantes' depiction of the deductive powers and in the mannerisms of Sancho Panza a foreshadowing of the crime genre's best known detective, Sherlock Holmes:

> 'Visto lo cual Sancho…inclinó la cabeza sobre el pecho, y poniéndose el índice de la mano derecha sobre las cejas y las narices estuvo como pensativo un pequeño espacio y luego alzó la cabeza y mandó que le llamasen al viejo del báculo…'. Este es un instante casi mágico en la historia de la novela policial, porque el labriego de la Mancha está anunciando con tres siglos de anticipación al más grande de los 'detectives', no sólo en sus deducciones, sino casi en sus mismos gestos.[309]

He concludes the essay by pointing out that the similarity between this episode from the *Quijote* and a later, supposedly foundational detective text, Poe's *The Purloined Letter*, extends to the realm of the plot:

> En cuanto al resorte fundamental de la historia del báculo –su argumento– no es difícil advertir que es esencialmente idéntico al de un cuento que hasta

[305] Ibid, pp. 164-5.
[306] See François Fosca, *Histoire et technique du roman policier* (Paris: Éditions de la Nouvelle Revue Critique, 1937).
[307] See Dorothy Sayers, *The Omnibus of Crime* (New York: Payson and Clarke, 1929)
[308] Walsh, 'Dos mil quinientos años de literatura policial', in *Cuentos para tahúres y otros relatos policiales*, pp. 165-6.
[309] Ibid, p. 167.

> ahora se ha considerado como uno de los sillares de la moderna novela policial: *The Purloined Letter*. Como en la obra de Poe, la historia del báculo gira en torno a un objeto robado. Como en la obra de Poe, *ese objeto está oculto en el lugar más evidente.* Principio que podría servir de moraleja a quienes han tratado de hallar en Voltaire al precursor inmediato de la novela policial.[310]

Taken in conjunction with the publication of *Diez cuentos policiales argentinos*, the essay signals the definitive eruption of Walsh into the centre of the genre's critical consideration in the Argentine context. It may be viewed as an attempt to challenge orthodox views regarding the origins and development of a popular literary genre, and indeed to contest the apparently dogmatic view of Borges with regard to the foundational status of Poe's Dupin stories at a time when Walsh's involvement and interest in crime fiction was reaching its peak. However, 'Dos mil quinientos años de literatura policial' acquires additional significance when considered in relation to Borges' earlier essay 'Kafka y sus precursores', also published in *La Nación* (in August of 1951), and later in *Otras inquisiciones* (1952). The two essays are remarkably similar in their stated intent: Borges sets out to identify the literary precursors of Kafka, 'creí reconocer su voz, o sus hábitos, en textos de diversas literaturas y de diversas épocas' while Walsh attempts a similar process of identification in relation to Poe and the detective genre. Borges recognises the motifs of Kafka in Zeno's paradoxes of motion, and his tone in 'un apólogo de Han Yu, prosista del siglo IX, y [que] consta en la admirable *Anthologie raisonée de la littérature chinoise* (1948) de Margouliè'.[311] He also identifies similarities between Kafka and a more obvious precursor: 'Kierkegaard como Kafka, abundó en parábolas religiosas de tema contemporáneo y burgués',[312] and cites as a Kafkaesque example the story of 'un falsificador que revisa, vigilado incesantemente, los billetes

[310] Ibid, p. 168.
[311] Borges, 'Kafka y sus precursores' in *Obras completas* Vol. II, p. 107.
[312] Ibid, p. 108.

del Banco de Inglaterra; Dios, de igual modo, desconfiaría de Kierkegaard y le habría encomendado una misión, justamente por saberlo avezado mal.'[313] Other works said to exhibit qualities that crystallise in the work of Kafka include Robert Browning's poem 'Fears and Scruples', and two short stories:

> Uno pertenece a la *Histories dèsbligeanes* de León Bloy y refiere al caso de unas personas que abundan en globos terráqueos, en atlas, en guías de ferrocarril y en baúles, y que mueren sin haber logrado salir de su pueblo natal. El otro se titula *Carcassonne* y es obra de Lord Dunsany. Un invencible ejército de guerreros parte de un castillo infinito, sojuzga reinos y ve monstruos y fatiga los desiertos y las montañas, pero nunca llegan a Carcasona, aunque alguna vez la divisan.[314]

Having identified several Kafkian precursors from a wide variety of sources, Borges makes an observation that may be applied to Walsh's reappraisal of the detective tradition, or indeed any attempt to identify the literary precursors of a given author or genre:

> Si no me equivoco, las heterogéneas piezas que he enumerado se parecen a Kafka; si no me equivoco, no todas se parecen entre sí. Este último hecho es el más significativo. En cada uno de esos textos está la idiosincrasia de Kafka, en grado mayor o menor, pero si Kafka no hubiera escrito, no la percibiríamos; vale decir, no existiría.[315]

Borges's essay suggests that the identification of an author's precursors amounts to a diverting, though ultimately insignificant, retrospective scholarly exercise:

> En el vocabulario crítico, la palabra precursor es indispensable; pero habría que tratar de purificarla de toda connotación y polémica o de rivalidad. El hecho es que cada escritor crea a sus precursores. Su labor modifica nuestra concepción del pasado, como ha de modificar el futuro.[316]

Walsh's *rastreo de precursores* is, if anything, more ambitious and more arbitrary, in that it endeavours to identify the antecedents of a long-established genre rather than those of a single author or text, and as a result, the case he makes for the posthumous

[313] Ibid.
[314] Ibid, p. 109.
[315] Ibid.
[316] Ibid.

'detectivisation' of such a variety of texts drawn from different historical periods and traditions appears somewhat tenuous if taken at face value, particularly in light of 'Kafka y sus precursores', of which Walsh was undoubtedly aware.[317] It is more useful, perhaps, to regard Walsh's essay as a rewriting of, indeed an oblique commentary upon, Borges' 1951 essay. If the latter's view that a writer effectively creates his or her own precursors is held to be valid, then it follows that this act of creation does not depend exclusively upon the subsequent identification of such precursors by literary critics, but may in fact be consciously pursued by writers themselves. Borges's dogged insistence upon the foundational status of Poe's Dupin stories, and his extensive efforts to establish a detectory paradigm within the Argentine context may better be understood in this light. Piglia describes this Borgesian ploy as a *lectura estratégica* on the part of:

> un crítico que constituye un espacio que permite descifrar de manera pertinente lo que escribe. Todo el trabajo de Borges como antólogo, como editor y como prologuista está encaminado en esa dirección. Y es uno de los acontecimientos más notables de la historia de la crítica el modo en que Borges consiguió imponer esa lectura.[318]

In 'Dos mil quinientos años de literatura policial' Walsh effectively seizes upon the principle outlined in 'Kafka y sus precursores' and appropriates the Borgesian reading strategy identified by Piglia in order to contest what amounted to a widely accepted generic orthodoxy in relation to the origins of the detective story. It may well be said in relation to Walsh's essay that 'Su labor modifica nuestra concepción del pasado, como ha de modificar el futuro'.[319] This willingness on the part of Walsh to challenge the 'acuerdo casi unánime' that had hitherto existed in the Argentine

[317] This view is supported by Viviana Paletta, 'Es claro que tuvo bien presente, a la hora de escribir esta nota, una selección muy particular sobre los orígenes de una tradición literaria como la que realiza Borges en su ensayo «Kafka y sus precursores», de *Otras inquisiciones* (1952)'. 'El primer Walsh: el género policial como laboratorio' in *Anales de Literatura Hispanoamericana* 36, 2007, p. 80.
[318] Ricardo Piglia, *Crítica y ficción* (Barcelona,: Anagrama 2001) p. 155.
[319] Borges, 'Kafka y sus precursores' in *Obras completas* Vol. II, p. 109.

context in relation to the genre would evolve in the years that followed, reaching perhaps its most decisive and transformative expression with the publication of *Operación masacre* in 1957, a non-fictional novel that applies many of the techniques of the detective novel to a real-life criminal investigation. 'Dos mil quinientos años de literatura policial' establishes Walsh as a significant voice in the critical discourse upon the genre that had been largely monopolised by Borges and his supporters. In the years that followed, Walsh would depart even more radically from the conventions associated with the established Argentine advocates of the genre.

Walsh's 1954 *Nación* article is a key text in what Braceras, Leytour and Pittella have described as:

> … un trayecto en su producción, desde un primer momento de respeto a las reglas del género y 'traducción' más fiel del original inglés –representado por *Variaciones en rojo*–, hasta una etapa en que se maneja más libremente, porque ya tiene experiencia con el género, toma consciencia de esa experiencia y se desprende del texto original.[320]

However, a number of his earlier detective stories, featuring accounts of criminal investigations told to Daniel Hernández by his friend e*l comisario* Laurenzi, are already infused with a world-weary cynicism, and a distinct lack of faith in the law and its institutions, qualities absent in the more 'classically' oriented *Variaciones en rojo*. Though clearly an admirer of the detective story in the traditional mould, and indeed of the ingenious generic variations introduced by Borges in such stories as 'La muerte y la brújula' and 'El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan', the Laurenzi stories serve as a demonstration of Walsh's own bifurcation towards a more morally ambiguous detectory model whose primary concern is no longer the abstract

[320] Elena Braceras, Cristina Leytour y Susana Pittella, 'Walsh y el policial', in Jorge Lafforgue, ed., *Textos de y sobre Rodolfo Walsh* (Buenos Aires: Alianza, 2000), p. 99.

intellectual resolution of a violent crime. Stories such as 'En defensa propia' (1951) and 'Zungzwang' (1957) may be seen to represent an intermediary stage along the path towards the ideologically and politically committed narrative voice that would find its fullest expression in *Operación masacre.*

El comisario Laurenzi's assertions at the beginning of 'En defensa propia' reflect a tendency towards a cynical, reflective narrative tone that is reminiscent of the production of the American hard-boiled school:

> – "Yo, a lo último, no servía para comisario" – dijo Laurenzi, tomando el café que se le había enfriado –. "Estaba viendo las cosas, y no quería verlas. Los problemas en que se mete la gente, y la manera que tiene de resolverlos, y la forma en que yo los habría resuelto. Eso, sobre todo […]. Yo notaba que me iba poniendo flojo, y era porque quería pensar, ponerme en el lugar de los demás, hacerme cargo. Y así hice dos o tres macanas, hasta que me jubilé. Una de esas macanas es la que le voy a contar.[321]

While Poe's Auguste Dupin had associated the detective's acumen with his ability to reason, and to seek to identify closely with his 'opponents', it is precisely his awareness of this analytical tendency within himself, to put himself in the place of the other, that convinces Laurenzi that he was ultimately unsuited to his profession. His involvement in the case in question begins with a late evening telephone call, 'Serían las diez de la noche cuando sonó el teléfono. Era una voz tranquila, la voz del juez Reynal, diciendo que acababa de matar un ladrón en su casa, y que si yo podía ir a ver'. The judge is described as 'el juez de instrucción más viejo de La Plata, un caballero inmaculado y todo eso, viudo, solo e inaccesible,' while the deceased turns out to be 'El Alcahuete' Luzati, who, as his nickname suggests, is a small-time grifter, low-level petty criminal and occasional police informant who,

[321] Rodolfo Walsh, 'En defensa propia', first published in *Vea y Lea*, 1 July 1951, included in *Cuento para tahúres y otros relatos policiales* (Buenos Aires: Puntosur, 1987). The version cited here may be found at http://entretextosliteraturapolicial.blogspot.ie/2010/02/en-defensa-propia-de-rodolfo-walsh.html [Accessed on the 17th of July 2012].

according to Laurenzi, 'vivía de la pequeña delación, del pequeño chantaje, del pequeño contrabando de drogas'. While Reynal claims to have acted in self-defence, and the evidence at the scene would seem to corroborate this view, Laurenzi's knowledge of the parties involved combined with his powers of observation and deduction lead him to the conclusion that the killing was a premeditated act, in revenge for the ignominious fate suffered by the judge's daughter, a known drug addict whose chance acquaintance with Luzati most likely presented the latter with what he imagined to be an easy opportunity for extorsion:

> Estaba viendo todo, y no quería verlo. Estaba viendo cómo El Alcahuete había conocido a aquella mujer, y hasta le había vendido marihuana o lo que sea, y de golpe, figúrese usted, había averiguado quién era. Estaba viendo con qué facilidad se le ocurrió extorsionar al padre, que era un hombre inmaculado, un pilar de la sociedad, y de paso cobrarse las dos temporadas que estuvo en Olmos.

He suspects that the judge had lured Luzati to his home under the pretence of acceding to his extorsion attempt, only to kill him in a manner that made it appear that he had merely acted in self-defence:

> – No sé lo que va a hacer usted, doctor, pero he estado pensando en lo difícil que es ser un comisario y lo difícil que es ser un juez. Usted dice que este hombre quiso asaltarlo y que usted lo madrugó. Todo el mundo le va a creer y, yo mismo, si mañana lo leo en el diario, es capaz que lo creo.

Confronted with these suspicions, the judge makes no attempt to deny that the killing had been planned, and Laurenzi, having 'solved' the mystery, finds himself confronted with an additional problem: expose the truth or corroborate the judge's version of events. Having decided upon the latter course of action, he effectively becomes an accessory to the crime by removing a vital piece of evidence which had been overlooked by the judge:

> Al salir me agaché por segunda vez junto al Alcahuete y, de un bolsillo del impermeable, saqué la pistola de pequeño calibre que sabía que iba a

> encontrar allí y me la guardé. Todavía la tengo. Habría parecido raro, un muerto con dos armas encima.

Laurenzi's assertion at the beginning of the story, 'Yo, a lo último, no servía para comisario', reflects his difficulty in reconciling the conflict between his duties as a representative of the law and his personal sense of justice. He is clearly troubled by the cold-blooded killing of a bit-player in the criminal underworld as a form of displaced revenge for the fate of the judge's daughter, as the following passage illustrates:

> Pero qué raro, doctor. Qué raro que este infeliz, que nunca asaltó a nadie, porque era una rata, un pobre diablo que hoy se puso la mejor ropa para venir a verlo a usted […], alguien que si llevaba un arma encima era para darse coraje –, que ese tipo, de golpe, se convierta en asaltante y venga a asaltarlo a usted.

However, this sense of outrage is tempered by his recognition that the judge's actions were motivated by the grief and anger he experiences as a result of his daughter's exploitation and degradation at the hands of criminal malefactors. In the archetypal 'classical' detective story, identified by Mandel as an essentially bourgeois form of narrative, the discovery of the truth, be it the identity of the murderer or the circumstances of the killing, typically provides a sense of narrative closure and a restoration of order. In the denouement of 'En defensa propia', by contrast, Laurenzi effectively becomes a perpetual prisoner of the version of the truth that he has uncovered, and an accessory to an ethically dubious instance of bespoke justice that sits uneasily with him. At the conclusion of the story, Hernández, his interlocutor, is eager to know the judge's fate, '– ¿Y el juez? – pregunté–,' to which the *comisario* replies, 'Lo absolvieron. Quince días después renunció, y al año se murió de una de esas enfermedades que tienen los viejos'. 'En defensa propia' engages the reader, not so much in the abstract, ludic resolution of a problem, but in a more sober reflection upon what constitutes justice and how it is administered in an

imperfect world. The resignation and subsequent death of the judge would appear to partially validate Laurenzi's decision, to the extent that the prosecution of the elderly, dying man would arguably have been futile. Nevertheless, the tone of the entire narrative, and Laurenzi's own characterisation of his participation in the case as a 'macana' ultimately leading to his own retirement from the police force, would suggest that the *comisario* is unconvinced by the wisdom of his actions.

A very similar dilemma is described in another Walsh story, 'Zugzwang', which appeared in *Vea y lea* in 1957, the same year as the publication of *Operación Masacre*. The story once again arises out of a conversation between the journalist Daniel Hernández and the former *comisario* Laurenzi at the bar 'Rivadavia', where both men are regular players at games including *casín* and chess. The narrator alludes to his superiority over Laurenzi in the latter game: 'Las estadísticas demuestran que me gana una vez de cada cinco que jugamos. Anoche, por ejemplo, lo maté en pocas'.[322] On this particular occasion, Laurenzi finds himself in a losing position:

> — ¡Mueva algo! — le dije con fina ironía.
> — No puedo — se quejó—. Cualquier cosa que muevo, pierdo.
> — Está en posición de zugzwang — le advertí.
> — Claro, en zaguán…(251)

It is clear that the comisario, at the moment of defeat, is not especially interested in the technical term for the impossible position he finds himself in. Later, however, in a more reflective mood, Laurenzi returns to the subject:

> — La vida tiene situaciones curiosas — dijo Laurenzi, después de consolarse con una grapa doble —. Posiciones de zaguán, como usted dice.
> — ¡Zugzwang, comisario!
> — Eso mismo — respondió sin imutarse — Porque, vamos a ver, usted que es leído, ¿qué es una posición de zaguán? (251)

[322] Jorge Lafforgue, ed., *Textos de y sobre Rodolfo Walsh* (Buenos Aires: Alianza, 2000), p. 251. All subsequent references to this story will be included in the body of the text, in parenthesis.

Hernández, somewhat exasperated by Laurenzi's insistence on mispronouncing the term, provides an elaborate explanation:

> — La posición de Zugzwang — expliqué — es en ajedrez aquella en que se pierde por estar obligado a jugar. Se pierde, porque cualquiera movida que uno haga es mala. Se pierde, no por lo que hizo el contrario, sino por lo que uno está obligado a hacer. Se pierde porque uno no puede, como en el póker, decir 'paso' y dejar que juegue el otro (251).

Laurenzi identifies a clear parallel between the zugzwang position as defined by Hernández and a crime whose details he had learned years previously, 'una historia larga y absurda', (252) which also involved a game of chess. The crime, which had occurred more than fifteen years earlier, involves a fellow customer of the bar Rivadavia named Aguirre, a retired man in his seventies who is described as quiet, of modest means and always neatly dressed in the same suit, and who uses a walking stick 'de madera bruñida y lisa, de punta ferrada […] un arma más peligrosa de lo que parecía (252). Laurenzi notes that while the man never himself played chess in the bar, 'daba la impresión de entender, porque recorría todas las mesas con cara de inteligente, y si le preguntaban, respondía con una jugada exacta' (252). Apart from these solicited interventions, the man would generally keep his own counsel, and while the other regulars considered him a harmless eccentric, Laurenzi, his interest piqued, 'a mí, usted sabe, siempre me han interesado los viejitos raros', (252) endeavours to find out more about him. Over the course of several months a tentative friendship develops between the two, and Laurenzi learns that the man does indeed play chess, but only by correspondence:

> Hay una federación internacional de ajedrez por correspondencia. Usted pide que le designen un rival de su misma fuerza […] y usted le escribe indicándole cuál es su primera jugada. Él contesta, y de ese modo se entabla la partida, que puede durar meses o años, según el tiempo que tarden en llegar las cartas (253).

Many months later, the man invites Laurenzi to his home to show him the letters documenting these games of chess, an occasion which provides the latter with the opportunity to gain further insight into the life and habits of this mysterious old man:

> Había orden allí, pero un orden producto de la voluntad y no del entusiasmo. Un cuarto refleja de algún modo el carácter de quien lo ocupa. Y aquí, para darle un ejemplo, los libros estaban escrupulosamente alineados en sus estantes, pero debajo del ropero se adivinaban unas sombras verdosas que, lamento decirle, eran botellas vacías (253).

Along with this partly concealed evidence of clandestine drinking, the gimlet eye of Laurenzi observes that 'un almanaque, en un rincón, eternizaba el mes de noviembre de 1907. Pequeñas cosas, por supuesto, pero yo tengo el hábito profesional de observarlas' (253). He also notes that a photograph of Aguirre's deceased wife, María Isabel, who had taken her own life, is afforded prominence of place in the room:

> Usted sabe lo feas que son en general las viejas fotos. Pero esta no, porque había sido sacada al aire libre, en una hamaca al pie de un árbol, y la muchacha no tenía uno de aquellos atroces sombreros de antaño, y el árbol estaba florecido y una extraña luminosidad iluminaba el ambiente. (254)

There could be no greater contrast than the benevolent contemplation of this image and the morose revelation that follows. Laurenzi learns that the man's wife had thrown herself in front of a train as a result of an adulterous love affair that had ended badly, 'Un hombre la conquistó, la abandonó, y luego se fue. Ella no encontró otra salida' (254). The lover who abandoned her would become her husband's anonymous opponent in one of his games of postal chess many years later, though this extraordinary coincidence does not become apparent until the latter stages of the narrative. Their early postal exchanges are confined to indicating their chosen moves, 'Las primeras comunicaciones eran formales, lacónicas. Apenas una presentación, y luego: *Mi primera jugada es P4R*. O bien: *Acuso recibo de su 1.P4R.*

Contesto: 1.P4AD' (255). As the game slowly progresses, however, their correspondence becomes more expansive, and Aguirre learns that his opponent is in fact 'un escocés de Glasgow, con un nombre teatral: Finn Redwolf' (255). He eventually discovers that Redwolf had spent some time in Argentina in his youth, a period when he had been, by his own admission, 'irresistible para las mujeres y temible para los hombres' (255).

Laurenzi, having noted the absence of his friend from the bar for a period of six months, decides to pay him a visit, and discovers that the long-distance game of chess has evolved into what he describes as:

> … una lenta crucifixión. Ya no era un juego: era algo que daba escalofríos. Y Redwolf parecía gozar desmesuradamente. Su jugada es la mejor, pero no sirve, repetía en cada carta, como un estribillo. Una jactancia sin límites se desprendía de sus comentarios y de sus análisis. Lo tenía todo previsto, todo. Sin darme cuenta, yo también empecé a odiarlo. (255)

Though postal chess would not seem the most obvious forum for ultra-competitive participants, Laurenzi detects in the correspondence of Redwolf a desire to inflict not just defeat, but also personal humiliation upon his opponent. Not only is he a superior chess player, but he also seems intent on emphasising his superiority to Aguirre in other respects, as a man of action, an adventurer, a 'conqueror' of nations and of women:

> Redwolf desplegaba su vida como una bandera, y desafiaba. ¿Qué no había hecho él? Hablaba de los tigres que cazó en Asia, de las negras que violó en Kenya, de los indios que mató a tiros en la Guayana. A veces parecía inventar, aunque sus referencias eran siempre muy exactas. (255)

Aguirre, in their game of chess, is gradually manoeuvred into a zugzwang position, while at the same time on a personal level he experiences a feeling of emotional entrapment as the successive revelations of Redwolf point towards the possibility of

a tangible connection between them. Redwolf had previously alluded to an amorous affair with an Argentinean woman named Lisbeth or Lizzie, a relationship that he dismissively refers to as 'un lío'. The Glaswegian's final letter contains details of 'la jugada decisiva […]. Se encontraba en la clásica posición de zugzwang que él había provisto. No tenía salida' (256). Additionally, it provides details of Redwolf's relationship with 'Lizzie' that confirm the previous suspicions of Aguirre:

> No creo que usted quiera jugar otra. Por eso debo apresurarme a contarle el final de la historia. Lizzie se mató, y creo que fue por mí. Se tiró al paso de un tren. Tratando de evitar el accidente, el maquinista arruinó los frenos. (256)

The insensitivity of Redwolf's remarks only serves to further stoke the ire of the widower, though the former cannot possibly know the full power of the impact of his words upon his Argentine opponent:

> Yo tenía particular aprecio por aquella locomotora. También por Lizzie, pero la pobre no era rival para nuestros constructores de Birmingham. Sin embargo, debo decirle que cuando supe lo que había hecho Liz, comprendí que su país entraba en la civilización. En el Congo no me hubiera ocurrido nada semejante (256).

Redwolf delivers the ultimate back-handed compliment, by declaring that Aguirre's beloved wife's suicide in response to his rejection should be interpreted as a laudable indication of Argentina's progress towards civilisation. His letter concludes with seemingly compelling evidence that his Lizzie and Aguirre's María Isabel were one and the same, 'Pobre Liz-Lizzie-Lisbeth. Me ha quedado una foto suya. Estaba muy hermosa, en una hamaca al pie de un árbol… Ya no recuerdo si fue en octubre o en noviembre de 1907' (256). Laurenzi notes the agitated state of his friend, 'estaba muy pálido ahora, y clavaba los ojos en el tablero, en la posición irremediable' (257). He refers to Aguirre's entrapment in the zungzwang position in terms of the chess game, but also in relation to the fate suffered by María Isabel, '—¿Qué piensa

hacer?—le dije—. Cualquier cosa que haga, pierde' (257). This assertion provokes an unexpected reaction from Aguirre, 'Se volvió hacia mí con un brillo extraño en los ojos. —Cualquier cosa, no —repuso sordamente.' (257) Laurenzi reports that, following this encounter, Aguirre disappeared for a considerable period of time, and upon returning, confessed that he had been abroad, without providing any further details. Laurenzi's professional suspicions cause him to examine his friend's walking stick carefully:

> ¿Recuerda aquel bastón con que andaba siempre? Lo desarmé en su presencia, le saqué la punta y apareció la aguda hoja del estoque. Aún tenía una mancha de color ladrillo, un hilo de sangre coagulada. Él me miró sin rencor. Había recobrado el aspecto dulce y tímido de un niño. (257)

Aguirre's sardonic remark on this occasion amounts to a confession, '—Redwolf, red blood—dijo mansamente—', (257) while Laurenzi alludes to the press coverage given to the affair, 'Los diarios ingleses comentaron durante algún tiempo el asesinato de Finn Redwolf, en su residencia de Escocia, sin ahorrar los detalles truculentos' (257). The mystery is revealed: Aguirre, overcome by a murderous rage produced by the seduction and untimely death of his wife, had taken his revenge. In doing so, the widower had effectively cast off the eponymous *posición de zungzwang*, and placed it upon the shoulders of Laurenzi, who demonstrates an acute awareness of this act of transference:

> ¿Qué podia hacer? Estaba jubilado, y el crimen ocurrió fuera de mi jurisdicción. Y después de todo, ¿fue un crimen? […] Si no denunciaba a mi amigo, hacía mal, porque mi deber, etcétera… Y si lo denunciaba y lo arrestaban, también hacía mal, porque con todo mi corazón yo lo había justificado. (257)

As is the case with 'En defensa propia', Laurenzi draws a marked contrast between his obligations as a *comisario* and his sense of empathy, or perhaps solidarity, with a man whose crime appears to him to be mitigated by its circumstances. The story

represents a further example of a detective narrative by Walsh concerned with the problematic nature of justice rather than with the purely abstract resolution of a fictional crime.

Operación masacre: A New Kind of Criminal Investigation

An examination of the detective fiction published by Walsh demonstrates a clear tendency towards experimentation with different modes of the genre, reflecting an evolution and a trajectory, both political and literary, whose manifestations will include the publication of his groundbreaking non-fictional novel *Operación masacre* in 1957, and ultimately, the writing of his 'Carta abierta de un escritor al regimen militar' on the 24th of March 1977, one day before Walsh himself became the protagonist of a real-life murder mystery at the hands of a task force from the infamous *Escuela de Mecánica de la Armada*, close to the intersection of San Juan and Entre Ríos in the centre of Buenos Aires. Detective stories such as 'En defensa propia' and 'Zungzwang' indicate a decisive move away from the classical, and indeed the Borgesian, view of the detective story, as a generic form primarily concerned with the ludic, abstract resolution of a crime, towards a more reflective and politically committed form of narrative. In this sense, the gradual reconceptualisation of the *género policial* evident in these stories may be viewed as a means of addressing a difficulty shared by Argentine writers of this period, as identified by Carlos Gammero: 'Todos los escritores de la generación de Walsh debieron encontrar respuestas a la pregunta primera: cómo escribir después de Borges'.[323] Gamerro refers to the strategies employed by other writers to confront 'the Borges Problem', 'Puig se inclinó hacia las formas de arte de masas que Borges

[323] Carlos Gamerro, 'Rodolfo Walsh, escritor' in *El nacimiento de la literatura argentina y otros ensayos* (Buenos Aires: Grupo Editorial Norma, 2006), p. 52.

despreciaba, Saer hacia la lengua y la cultura francesas y hacia una literatura de la percepción minuciosa'.[324] In Walsh's case, the difficulty was perhaps more acute:

> Walsh […] estaba atrapado: su fuerte era el cuento corto, su unidad estilística la frase breve, precisa, trabajada; sus lenguas y literaturas de referencia la inglesa y norteamericana; sus recursos favoritos, en sus propias palabras, "la condensación y el símbolo, la reserva, la anfibología, el guiño permanente al lector culto y entendido". En otras palabras: Borges.[325]

If Walsh was, as Gamerro suggests, the Argentine author upon whom this Borgesian shadow fell most heavily, his response to the difficulty was also by far the most transcendental. Over a relatively short period of time, the narrative preoccupations of Walsh would undergo a profound alteration in tandem with a marked political radicalisation. Whereas in 1953 the twenty-six year old proof-reader and translator of detective fiction had declared Borges' paradigmatic detective story, 'La muerte y la brújula' to be 'el ideal del género' owing to its erudite and ingenious treatment of 'un problema puramente geométrico',[326] by 1957 his attention was entirely centred upon a very different kind of problem: the perilous investigation of real-life crimes committed under the auspices of the Argentine state. In the prologue to *Operación masacre*, Walsh traces the realignment of his narrative concerns to the accidental discovery of details of the illegal executions that had taken place at a rubbish dump in José León Suárez in the north of Buenos Aires, in the aftermath of the failed uprising by pro-Perón military officers led by Juan José Valle on the 9th of June, 1956:

> La primera noticia sobre los fusilamientos clandestinos de junio de 1956 me llegó en forma casual, a fines de ese año, en un café de La Plata donde se jugaba al ajedrez, se hablaba más de Keres o Nimzovitch que de Aramburu y Rojas, y la única maniobra militar que gozaba de algún renombre era el ataque a la bayoneta de Schlechter en la apertura siciliana.[327]

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[324] Ibid.
[325] Ibid.
[326] *Diez cuentos policiales argentinos*, p. 7.
[327] Rodolfo Walsh, *Operación masacre* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones de la Flor, 2006), p. 17. 1st edn 1957.

By his own admission, at this point Walsh had little interest in the political machinations and military interventions that were a perennial feature of this period in Argentine history. The events of the 9th of June would decisively interrupt his devotion to the resolution of abstract problems, as shots rang out in La Plata close to the same neighbourhood bar where, as was his custom, and recalling the setting of 'Zungzwang', he was engaged in a game of chess: 'Recuerdo cómo salimos en tropel, los jugadores de ajedrez, los jugadores de codillo y los parroquianos ocasionales, para ver qué festejo era ése'.[328] Distracted from their diversions, some of the chess players, including Walsh, make their way towards the source of the noise, 'y como a medida que nos acercábamos a la plaza San Martín nos íbamos poniendo más serios y éramos cada vez menos, y al fin cuando cruce la plaza, me vi solo'.[329] Making his way home slowly, he discovers that his house has been commandeered by troops loyal to the Aramburu regime:

> había soldados en los azoteas y en la cocina y en los dormitorios, pero principalmente en el baño, y desde entonces he tomado aversión a las casas que están frente a un cuartel, un comando o un departamento de policía […]. Tampoco olvido que, pegado a la persiana, oí morir a un conscripto en la calle y ese hombre no dijo: 'Viva la patria' sino que dijo: 'No me dejen solo, hijos de puta'.[330]

Walsh claims that he is not initially stirred by his proximity to these events, other than the unpleasant visual image of the dying conscript, and confesses to being perfectly willing to return to the literary and leisure activities that had hitherto filled his days:

> Valle no me interesa. Perón no me interesa, la revolución no me interesa. ¿Puedo volver al ajedrez?
> Puedo. Al ajedrez y a la literatura fantástica que leo, a los cuentos policiales que escribo […]. La violencia me ha salpicado las paredes, en las ventanas

[328] Ibid.
[329] Ibid.
[330] Ibid, p. 18.

> hay agujeros de balas, he visto un coche agujereado y adentro un hombre con los sesos al aire, pero es solamente el azar lo que me ha puesto eso ante los ojos. Pudo ocurrir a cien kilómetros, pudo ocurrir cuando yo no estaba.[331]

In the specific case of Rodolfo Walsh, according to his testimony, it may be asserted that detective fiction at this juncture continues to act upon him as a 'literatura de evasión' in a tangible sense, lending some credence to the view of the genre as an ideological tool capable of promoting what Simpson describes as 'an elitist attitude of disassociation from contact with the newly visible and increasingly empowered lower classes, in favor of a nostalgic affirmation of an aristocratic ideal'.[332] However, a clandestine meeting with Carlos Livraga, one of the survivors of the José León Suárez massacre, leads Walsh to a Damascene conversion of sorts, 'Livraga me cuenta su historia increíble; la creo en el acto. Así nace aquella investigación, este libro. La larga noche del 9 de junio vuelve sobre mi, por segunda vez me saca de "las suaves, tranquilas estaciones"'.[333] The subsequent change in Walsh's quotidian existence is profound, as he seeks to establish the facts of the case, aided by fellow journalist Enriqueta Muñiz:[334]

> Ahora, durante casi un año no pensaré en otra cosa, abandonaré mi casa y mi trabajo, me llamaré Francisco Freyre, tendré una cédula falsa con ese nombre, un amigo me prestará una casa en Tigre, durante dos meses viviré en un helado rancho en Merlo, llevaré conmigo un revólver.[335]

The resulting narrative compiled by Walsh tells an astonishing story. A total of twelve men, who had gathered in a house in the Florida neighbourhood of Buenos

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[331] Ibid.
[332] Simpson, Op cit, p. 35.
[333] Walsh, *Operación masacre*, p. 19.
[334] Walsh's esteem for his collaborator in this investigation is evident, 'Desde el principio está conmigo una muchacha que es periodista, se llama Enriqueta Muñiz, se juega entera. Es difícil hacerle justicia en unas pocas líneas. Simplemente quiero decir que si en algún lugar de este libro escribo "hice", "fui", "descubrí", debe entenderse "hicimos", "fuimos", descubrimos" […]. En esa época el mundo no se me presentaba como una serie ordenada de garantías y seguridades, sino más bien como todo lo contrario. En Enriqueta Muñiz encontré esa seguridad, valor, inteligencia que me parecían tan rarificados a mi alrededor'. *Operación masacre*, pp. 20-21.
[335] Ibid, p. 19.

Aires to listen to a championship boxing match on the radio, had been detained by the police on suspicion of involvement in the Valle uprising. Six hours later the boxing fans were taken to a rubbish dump at José León Suárez, where the order was given for them to be shot, despite the fact that, according to Walsh, only a handful had tangential connections to the conspiracy. Crucially, the fact that they had been detained before the declaration of martial law meant that these summary executions were illegal, even by the standards of the dictatorship of Aramburu. Though five of the men died at the scene, incredibly, seven others survived, with some managing to escape the massacre and go into hiding. Walsh, perhaps naively, believes that his initial article reproducing the testimony of Livraga will cause a sensation in Argentine journalistic circles. He soon discovers, however, that quite a different reception awaits his investigative efforts, one for which his extensive experience with the fictional detective genre leaves him singularly unprepared:

> Es que uno llega a creer en las novelas policiales que ha leído o escrito, y piensa que una historia así, con un muerto que habla, se la van a pelear en las redacciones, piensa que está corriendo una carrera contra el tiempo, que en cualquier momento un diario grande va a mandar una docena de reporteros y fotógrafos como en las películas. En cambio se encuentra con un multitudinario esquive de bulto.[336]

Shunned by the mainstream press, Walsh struggles to find an outlet for his account of Livraga's testimony, before eventually finding a publisher in the form of *Propósitos*, an 'hojita gremial' in the words of Walsh, published by Leónidas Barletta, who, it is worth noting, was one of the judges of the inaugural *Vea y Lea* detective story competition, along with Borges and Bioy Casares, and who Walsh describes glowingly as 'un hombre que se anima. Temblando y sudando, porque él tampoco es un héroe de película, sino simplemente un hombre que se anima, y eso es

[336] Ibid, p. 20.

más que un héroe de película'.[337] Walsh's persistence leads to the gathering of additional relevant information and testimony from other survivors, leading to the publication of his investigations in serialised form in the magazines *Revolución Nacional* and *Mayoría*, and later as a single volume by Ediciones Sigla. The resulting work, *Operación masacre* (extensively re-edited by Walsh in 1964, 1969 and 1972) has been hailed as a landmark in the development of investigative journalism, as the foundational text of a genre that came to be known as the 'non-fiction novel',[338] and as a publication that marked the radical realignment of Walsh's literary concerns. Although Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood* (1966) is considered an early example of the 'non-fiction novel', and is often cited as the first of its kind, a number of critics, including Lafforgue, Edgardo H. Berg and Ana María Amar Sánchez, have pointed out that *Operación masacre* has a far stronger claim to this denomination, though it is one which scarcely conveys the magnitude of Walsh's work. As Amar Sánchez points out:

> Suele pensarse en los narradores norteamericanos, en especial Capote y Mailer, como los iniciadores de este género, surgido en los años sesenta […], sin embargo, nueve años antes que Capote escribiera *A sangre fría* (1965), Rodolfo Walsh había publicado en Buenos Aires *Operación masacre* (1956) y comenzado así la elaboración de una forma que iba a intentar romper, en el caso de él particularmente, con todas las fronteras que delimitan lo que es literatura y lo que son géneros «aceptables» y «menores».[339]

Whereas Borges had once offered the considered opinion that the detective genre 'vive de la continua y delicada infracción de sus leyes',[340] Walsh's pioneering non-fiction novel indelicately dispenses with the rule book for the Argentine writer of crime fiction altogether. As Ánibal Ford puts it:

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[337] Ibid.

[339] Ana María Amar Sánchez, 'La propuesta de una escritura: En homenaje a Rodolfo Walsh', in *Revista Iberoamericana*, Vol. LII, 135-6, April-September 1986, p. 431.
[340] Borges, *Obras Completas* Vol. IV, p. 424.

> [*Operación masacre*] es el hecho concreto, la Argentina real, objetiva y demostrable; algo muy lejano de la sutil y reaccionaria mitologización de Buenos Aires, de los británicos juegos de la inteligencia, de la seudocultura desarrollada en medio del liberalismo acosado por el ascenso de las masas peronistas, del negocio de la evasión encarnado en prolíferas colecciones de novelas policiales; algo muy lejano de la Argentina atemporal de Borges.[341]

However, it would be a mistake to regard *Operación masacre* as a complete repudiation of the detective genre so assiduously promoted by the likes of Borges, Bioy Casares and Peyrou, in favour of an entirely new 'literatura de compromiso'. Though Walsh would come to view his early production within the genre with a certain retrospective disdain, there is little doubt that elements of the investigative and narrative style of *Operación masacre*, as well as later works such as *¿Quién mató a Rosendo?* (1964) and *El caso Satanowsky* (first published in serialised form in the magazine *Mayoría* in 1958, and as a single volume in 1973) display an indebtedness to his formative experiences with the fictional genre. Lafforgue alludes to this inheritance in his essay, 'Walsh en y desde el género policial':

> Es obvio que en estos textos Walsh no sigue ningún modelo impuesto, ni clásico ni negro, ni tampoco intenta una traducción plausible. Su propuesta es otra, de otra índole; pero, desde el punto de vista de la eficacia literaria, no hay duda que los recursos y las técnicas más y mejor utilizados provienen del género policial […]. Al romper su pacto con el género (y pese a su actitud injustamente desdeñosa hacia el mismo) no arroja sus enseñanzas al cesto de los deshechos sino que las potencia, fusionándolas con nuevos aprendizajes, construyendo, con asombro, con exasperación, con lucidez, otro saber. [342]

Carlos Gamerro highlights the transcendental character of Walsh's contributions to the evolution of the genre in Argentina, 'el paso decisivo hacia un género policial auténticamente argentino ya había sido dado por Rodolfo Walsh hace casi cincuenta años'.[343] However, the transition realised through the combined literary and

[341] Aníbal Ford, 'Walsh: la reconstrucción de los hechos' in Jorge Lafforgue ed, *Nueva novela latinoamericana, 2* (Buenos Aires: Paidós, 1972), p. 272.
[342] Lafforgue, 'Walsh en y desde el género policial' in *Asesinos de papel*, pp. 145-6.
[343] Carlos Gamerro 'Para una reformulación del género policial argentino' in *El nacimiento de la literatura argentina y otros ensayos* (Buenos Aires: Norma, 2006), p. 88.

journalistic efforts of Walsh was not simply a progression from the classically-orientated model exemplified by the stories of *Variaciones en rojo*, via the moral ambiguity of the Inspector Laurenzi stories such as those examined in this study, and onwards towards a more politically engaged narrative that appropriates the tenets of the American hard-boiled school for the purposes of social critique. '*Operación masacre* es algo más; supera la policial negra en el mismo momento de absorberla'.[344] Though the 'reivindicación' of the género negro in the 1960s and 70s may have provided many Argentine writers with a more appropriate and convenient vehicle for the expression of political commitment than the ingenious textual artifices of the classical, essentially bourgeois 'English' model, the *policial*, in the hands of writers such as Piglia, Feinmann, Goligorsky and Martini remained exclusively a textual and critical phenomenon. Goligorsky, a figure very much associated with the hard-boiled genre as a 'literatura de denuncia', expresses a profound scepticism with regard to the potential of the writer of fiction to foment genuine social change:

> Mi trabajo me facilita la comunicación con aquel sector del público que me lee porque piensa como yo y desea sentirse acompañado o ratificado en sus ideas, con aquel otro sector del público que me lee porque aborrece lo que yo pienso y desea echar más leña a su aborrecimiento, o con quienes me leen para distraerse. Sólo los profanos ingenuos, los intelectuales enfermos de soberbia y los dictadores y censores enfermos de dogmatismo e ignorancia pueden suponer que el trabajo del escritor ejerce una influencia marcada sobre la vida social de su tiempo.[345]

The case of Walsh is quite unique, in that he chose to employ the investigative and analytical skills developed through his experience with the fictional detective genre to a murder investigation whose purpose was *precisely* to exercise a tangible influence upon the society in which he lived, perhaps placing him in the category of

[344] Ibid.
[345] Eduardo Goligorsky in *El relato policial en la Argentina: Antología crítica*, ed. Jorge B. Rivera (Buenos Aires: Eudeba, 1999), p. 144.

the ‘profanos ingenuos’, as described by Goligorsky, and certainly pitting him against the ‘dictadores y censores enfermos de dogmatismo e ignorancia’ also mentioned in the same connection. Walsh’s decisive generic bifurcation is without precedent in the Argentine tradition under examination here. Gamerro accurately sums up those qualities that distinguish *Operación masacre* from the previous, and indeed the subsequent, production of Argentine crime fiction writers:

> Quien investiga —Walsh mismo— no es un policía o un detective sino un periodista; la policía ha cometido un crimen y el aparato judicial se ha encargado de encubrirlo, la lucha del investigador no es por lograr que se haga justicia, ni siquiera que se la aplique la ley, sino, más modestamente, por hacer saber la verdad —que nadie quiere oír.[346]

As suggested previously, Walsh’s evolution as a writer may be considered as a response to the difficulty of distinguishing his narrative style and preoccupations from those of Borges, and the examination of his contributions to the crime genre in Argentina illustrates this trajectory, and the success he enjoyed in establishing a vivid contrast between their respective approaches. Whereas the culturally elitist, anticommunist, anti-Peronist Borges held firm in his belief that political engagement on the part of the writer amounted to intellectual treason, after the publication of *Operación masacre* in particular, Walsh’s political commitment became increasingly radical and more central to his work and his identity as a writer, whether in literature, journalism, or those examples of his work that incorporated both, ‘En su ideología, opta por lo que para Borges constituía la trinidad diabólica: el pueblo, el peronismo, la izquierda’.[347]

In his 1978 lecture ‘El cuento policial’, Borges stated that in creating the detective story, Poe had engendered a new, specialised kind of reader: the reader of detective fiction. The extensive promotion of the detective genre in Argentina by

[346] Carlos Gamerro ‘Para una reformulación del género policial argentino’ in *El nacimiento de la literatura argentina y otros ensayos*, (Buenos Aires: Norma, 2006), p. 88.
[347] Gamerro, *El nacimiento de la literatura argentina y otros ensayos*, p. 53.

Borges and his close associates was at least partially motivated by a pedagogical impulse spawned by the belief that frequenting the pages of detective fiction would provide a stimulus to Argentine writers, while readers in turn might adopt a more critical, inquisitive and discerning readerly attitude. As a dedicated professional translator, proof-reader, anthologist and indeed writer of detective fiction in the classical mode promoted by Borges, Walsh is in many ways the very embodiment of the kind of specialised, discerning, analytical reader that the former imagined might result from the widespread dissemination of the genre in Argentina. However, it is clear that the manner in which he subsequently chose to apply the specialised skills acquired through his apprenticeship in the genre would have been anathema to Borges. Nowhere may this be perceived more acutely than in the (possibly apocryphal or embellished) story recounted by Gabriel García Márquez in *Revista Alternativa* in 1974. Walsh had travelled to Cuba in 1959, where he became one of the co-founders, along with fellow Argentine Jorge Masetti, García Márquez and others, of the state-operated news agency *Prensa Latina*, established:

> en medio de la efervescencia revolucionaria que marcó aquellos días, destinada a informar sobre lo que estaba ocurriendo en Cuba realmente y con el propósito de ofrecer al mundo una visión de la realidad latinoamericana diferente de la que ofrecían los grandes monopolios mediáticos de entonces.[348]

A secret encrypted cable sent by the head of the CIA in Guatemala to Washington was intercepted by the telex machine at the offices of *Prensa Latina*. According to García Márquez, Walsh managed to decipher the cable, which contained specific details of the planned Bay of Pigs/*Playa Girón* invasion:

> Rodolfo Walsh, que por cierto repudiaba en secreto sus antiguos cuentos policiales, se empeñó en descifrar el mensaje con ayuda de unos manuales de

[348] Retrieved from the section 'Quiénes somos' of the *Prensa Latina* website. http://www.prensa-latina.cu/index.php?task=viewcat&cat=quienessomos [Accessed on the 11th of June 2012]

> criptografía recreativa que compró en una librería de lance de La Habana. Lo consiguió al cabo de muchas horas insomnes, sin haberlo hecho nunca y sin ningún entrenamiento en la materia, y lo que encontró dentro no solo fue una noticia sensacional para un periodista militante, sino una información providencial para el gobierno revolucionario de Cuba. El cable estaba dirigido a Washington por el jefe de la CIA en Guatemala, adscripto al personal de la embajada de Estados Unidos en ese país, y era un informe minucioso de los preparativos de un desembarco en Cuba por cuenta del gobierno norteamericano. Se revelaba, inclusive, el lugar donde empezaban a prepararse los reclutas: la hacienda Retalhuleu, un antiguo cafetal al norte de Guatemala.[349]

It is richly ironic, given Borges' virulent anticommunist and anti-Peronist views, to think that Walsh, a fervent early admirer of his work in the detective genre, should eventually become a committed Marxist revolutionary and an intelligence officer fighting on behalf of the *Montoneros*, whose formative training as a decipherer of the enigmas of detective fiction may have directly contributed to the preservation of the Cuban Revolution, which remains *in situ* to this day. It is also tragic to consider that the investigations of perhaps *the* key innovator in the Argentine crime writing tradition should ultimately result in his violent death, the precise circumstances of which remain a mystery to this day. In this regard, it is interesting to draw comparisons between the fate of Walsh and that of Erik Lönnrot, the protagonist of Borges' paradigmatic detective story 'La muerte y la brújula'. To paraphrase this much-feted 'ideal del género', though Walsh had investigated many murders between 1956 and 1977, he was unable to prevent the very last one which he might have foreseen: his own.[350] Given the extraordinary events of his life and death, the description of Lönnrot provided by Borges' narrator might well be applied to Walsh, 'éste nunca se dejó intimidar. Lönnrot se creía un puro razonador, un Auguste Dupin,

[349] Gabriel García Márquez, 'Rodolfo Walsh, el hombre que se adelantó a la CIA', *Revista Alternativa*, 124, Bogotá, 1974.
[350] 'Es verdad que Erik Lönnrot no logró impedir el último crimen, pero es indiscutible que lo previó'. Borges, *Obras completas* Vol. I, p. 601.

pero algo de aventurero había en él y hasta de tahúr'.[351] A salient feature of the detective story in the classical mode is the tacit understanding that the fictional detective is not generally exposed to physical danger, and seeks solutions to the crimes under consideration at a temporal and spatial distance from the original event, thus preserving the purely abstract, intellectual character of the investigation. Poe's Dupin story 'The Mystery of Marie Rogêt' is a foundational example of this phenomenon, while Borges and Bioy Casares' detective Don Isidro Parodi is truly paradigmatic in this regard, given that he is himself an inmate of the *Penitenciario de Las Heras* and must therefore rely solely upon third-party testimony in order to resolve the cases that are brought to his prison cell. The convention is abandoned in 'La muerte y la brújula', however, as the pure reasoner Lönnrot becomes, in the words of Walsh himself, 'la víctima minuciosamente prevista'.[352] As if to demonstrate his characterisation as an adventurer and a 'tahúr' he travels to the abandoned villa at Triste-le-Roy alone, with little regard for his corporeal integrity, thus falling victim to the fatal trap so carefully constructed for him by his enemy, Red Scharlach. Confronted with certain death, Lönnrot remains defiant, criticising the excessively elaborate nature of Scharlach's trap, and challenging his executioner to provide him with a more symmetrical demise should their paths cross again, thus invoking both Occam's Razor and Zeno's Paradoxes of Motion in a final flourish of erudition:

> —En su laberinto sobran tres líneas —dijo por fin—. Yo sé de un laberinto griego que es una línea única, recta. En esa línea se han perdido tantos filósofos que bien puede perderse un mero *detective*. Scharlach, cuando en otro avatar usted me dé caza, finja (o cometa) un crimen en A, luego un segundo crimen en B, a 8 kilómetros de A, luego un tercer crimen en C, a 4 kilómetros de A y de B, a mitad de camino entre los dos. Aguárdeme después

[351] Ibid.
[352] Rodolfo Walsh, *Diez cuentos policiales argentinos*, p. 2.

> en D, a 2 kilómetros de A y de C, de nuevo a mitad de camino. Máteme en D, como ahora va a matarme en Triste-le-Roy.[353]

In the case of Rodolfo Walsh the breaking of generic conventions is even more transcendental. Daniel Hernández the analytical, reasoning detective in the classical mould, the sedentary 'corrector de pruebas de imprenta' walks off the pages of fiction, and through the living, breathing person of Walsh (who frequently uses Hernández as a pseudonym in his own journalistic writings), launches himself upon a dangerous, crusading quest to challenge the violent and illegal actions of the Argentine state, only to finally confront a destiny not wholly dissimilar to that of that other famous fictional *tahúr*, Erik Lönnrot. This suggestion of the blurring of the distinctions between crime fiction and criminal reality in the life and work of Walsh has in fact been disparagingly suggested elsewhere:

> empieza con la literatura policial, después pasa al periodismo policial ficcionado y como el Quijote, que de tanto leer libros de caballería ve molinos de viento – y cree que son gigantes enemigos -, *se vuelve loco* [my emphasis] y pasa de la ficción a la realidad pero jugando a la ficción, como una especie de Sherlock Holmes que se ponía narices postizas. Él mismo se disfrazaba cuando estaba perseguido.[354]

The Walsh of 1956 seems to endorse the notion of a fictional inspiration for his real-life investigative activity in a footnote to *Operación masacre*, with reference to a vital piece of evidence establishing the exact location of the site of the José León Suárez massacre, which he compares to a scene from the work of the detective fiction writer most admired by Borges:

> Era fascinante, algo digno de un cuento de Chesterton. Desplazándose unos cincuenta pasos en cualquier dirección, el efecto óptico desaparecía, el 'árbol' se descomponía en varios. En ese momento supe –singular demostración– que me encontraba en el lugar del fusilamiento.[355]

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[353] Borges, *Obras Completas* Vol. IV, p. 612.
[354] Juan Fresnán in Enrique Arrogasaray, ed. *Rodolfo Walsh en Cuba. Agencia Prensa Latina, militancia, ron y criptografía* (Buenos Aires: Catálogos, 2004), p. 50.
[355] *Operación masacre*, p. 104.

Lafforgue forcefully responds to Fresnán's equation of Walsh's actions with those of *Don Quijote*, stating that while the comments may have been intended as an insult, they should instead be viewed as reflecting favourably upon Walsh's unwavering sense of political conviction:

> Pues sí. Desestimemos el sarcasmo y demos vuelta al comentario: contra una realidad mentirosa se apelará a una escritura que la revela; y si el poder de la ficción pareciera no alcanzar, se echará mano de la denuncia política hasta sus últimas consecuencias. Un Quijote. ¿Raro, no? Siempre mejor que un imbécil, como el del comentario.[356]

However, perhaps the most eloquent response to the charge that Walsh was, in effect, tilting at windmills through his abrupt and violent transformation of the crime genre and his subsequent political radicalism, is provided by Walsh himself, in a 1970 interview with Ricardo Piglia:

> No es una cosa caprichosa, no es una cosa que yo simplemente la siento, sino que corresponde al desarrollo general de la conciencia en este momento, que incluye por cierto la conciencia de algunos escritores e intelectuales y de que realmente va a ser muy clara a medida que avancen los procesos sociales y políticos, porque hoy es imposible en la Argentina hacer literatura desvinculada de la política o hacer arte desvinculado de la política, es decir si está desvinculado de la política por esa sola definición ya no va a ser arte ni va a ser política.[357]

In certain respects, Walsh's life as an *aventurero* and a *tahúr* might be considered as a possible 'reading' or re-writing of 'La muerte y la brújula' that demonstrates the futility of authorial intent, a theme frequently visited by Borges. While the latter might have envisaged the fate of Lönnrot as supplying a cautionary allegorical tale

[356] Jorge Lafforgue, ed., *Textos de y sobre Rodolfo Walsh* p. 334.
[357] Ibid, p. 232. Despite the strength of feeling evident in this statement, in another interview with Piglia three years later Walsh appears to grant Borges a partial exemption from this conceptualisation of the term literatura: 'Ahora, para desacralizar a los tipos tenés que cuestionar todo, para la utilidad de lo que están haciendo y sobre todo para poder desafiarlos con su propia ambigüedad, salvo Borges, que preservó su literatura confesándose de derecha, que es una actitud lícita para preservar su literatura y él no tiene ningún problema de conciencia.' Extract from a 1973 Interview with Ricardo Piglia included in Sylvia Saítta y Luis Alberto Romero, eds., *Grandes entrevistas de la Historia Argentina, 1879-1988* (Buenos Aires: Punto de Lectura, 2002), digital edition consulted at http://www.rodolfowalsh.org/spip.php?article1958. [Accessed on the 15th of March 2011]

against the folly of the man of letters getting involved in politics, or perhaps a warning about the dangers of seeking a poetic, symmetrical ending to a dangerously prosaic reality, Walsh himself emulates his fictional predecessor's more reckless inclinations. His single-minded determination to uncover a hidden truth and his courageous contemplation of his fate in defiance of his executioners are the qualities that most call to mind Borges' fictional creation. Having come face to face with their antagonists, there is a bifurcation in their respective approaches. Lönnrot invokes Zeno's paradox of motion as a theoretical protection against Scharlach's firearm. Walsh, confronted with the automatic weapons of the operatives of the Navy Mechanics' School, and determined not to be captured alive, produces a Walther PPK .22 pistol and opens fire. The response of the enemy in both cases restores the sense that all roads lead to Rome. Scharlach opts for a practical challenge to Zeno, 'Retrocedió unos pasos. Después, muy cuidadosamente, hizo fuego'.[358] The approach of Walsh's executioners provides an equally convincing refutation of Zeno's paradox: 'Lo bajamos a Walsh. El hijo de puta se parapetó detrás de un árbol y se defendía con una 22. Lo cagamos a tiros y no se caía el hijo de puta'.[359] In relation to Borges' impact upon detective fiction, Rivera has stated that his relatively sporadic incursions into the genre established 'límites y características que tienen valor a la vez retrospectivo y proyectivo'.[360] The same can surely be said of Walsh, perhaps to an even greater extent. Rivera also states that unlike many Argentine

[358] Borges, *Obras Completas* Vol. IV, p. 612.
[359] Account of the ambush attributed by Ricardo Coquet, a survivor of the E.S.M.A detention centre, to Ernesto '220' Weber, former comisario of the Policía Federal Argentina and member of the operations section of the infamous Grupo de Tareas 3.2.2. based at the E.S.M.A. The leader of the ambush, Jorge 'El Tigre' Acosta would claim that Walsh's attempt to defend himself against vastly superior firepower constituted a suicidal act, 'Rodolfo Walsh estaba dispuesto a morir, sí o sí. Era suicida llevar (sólo) una pistola calibre 22 para enfrentar al armamento de guerra que mi Grupo de Tareas tenía a disposición'. See 'El "Tigre" Acosta dijo a la Justicia que Walsh "se suicidó" en un tiroteo' published in *El Clarín* 27 February 2010. http://edant.clarin.com/diario/2010/02/27/elpais/p-02148720.htm [Accessed on the 1st of June 2010]
[360] Jorge B. Rivera, *El relato policial en la Argentina*, p.30.

detective fiction writers of this period whose work is said to fall into the category of straightforward *epigonismo*, Borges 'se acerca al género para hacer estallar determinadas concepciones de la literatura'.[361] Once again, Walsh's appropriation and innovation within the detective genre is such that Rivera's latter statement could equally be applied to him. As Gamerro points out:

> *Operación masacre* no es sólo una denuncia valiente de los fusilamientos de 1956 en medio del silencio de muerte impuesto por la dictadura; es, además, uno de los libros mejor escritos de nuestra literatura.[362]

Similarly, while Walsh's valedictory 'Carta abierta de un escritor a la junta militar' is anything but a work of fiction, it has come to be considered a master work of Argentine letters (in both senses):

> Junto a la exactitud de los datos y la profundidad de los análisis, nos encontramos con la contundencia de ciertas frases, 'congelando salarios a culatazos mientras los precios suben en las puntas de las bayonetas', y la eficacia de sus recursos retóricos, 'lo que ustedes llaman aciertos son errores, lo que reconocen como errores son crímenes y lo que omiten son calamidades', que la fijan para siempre en la memoria del que la lee. La *Carta* está escrita con un ojo puesto en el presente inmediato (en el cual sus posibilidades de ser leída y difundida, sabía Walsh, eran mínimas) y el otro en la duración de la literatura.[363]

While the innovations within the detective genre brought about by Rodolfo Walsh were exceptional, and crucial to the overall consideration of the detectory tradition which constitutes the basis of this study, the most noteworthy developments within the Argentine crime writing tradition from the late fifties onwards have been firmly rooted within the fictional and critical realms, whereas the majority of Walsh's non-fiction investigative writings from the same period belong in a separate category altogether. However, despite his ongoing political radicalisation, his intense journalistic efforts and his feats of cryptography in the service of the Cuban

[361] Ibid.
[362] Gamerro, 'Rodolfo Walsh, escritor' in *El nacimiento de la literatura argentina y otros ensayos* (Buenos Aires: Grupo Editorial Norma, 2006), p. 55.
[363] Ibid, p. 56.

Revolution, Walsh did not completely abandon the fictional crime genre after the publication of *Operación masacre*. He was in fact responsible for two prize-winning entries, 'Transposición de jugadas' (3rd prize) and 'Cosa juzgada', in the second *Vea y Lea* detective story competition in 1961.[364] For the third *Vea y Lea* competition in 1964, Walsh was no longer a competitor, but instead formed part of the judging panel, alongside Adolfo L. Pérez Zelaschi, María Angélica Bosco and Donald Yates.

Interpreting the Signs in Pérez Zelaschi's 'Las señales'

As much as Walsh's *Operación masacre* might have caused a rupture in the universe of the Argentine crime genre, writers, readers and critics continued to actively negotiate the evolution of the strictly fictional detective story in the 1960s with considerable enthusiasm. The second *Vea y Lea* Concurso de Cuentos Policiales in 1961 attracted 300 entries (compared with just 180 in 1950), and was judged by a panel consisting of Borges, Bioy Casares and Manuel Peyrou, the figures most closely associated with the propagation of the classical *policial inglés.* The double success of Walsh was not the most conspicuous feature of that year's competition. As noted by Jorge Lafforgue in the prologue to his anthology *Cuentos policiales argentinos* (1997):

> En 1961, el segundo concurso de cuentos policiales realizado por *Vea y Lea* […] tuvo un desenlace insólito. El primer premio lo ganó "Las señales", texto de tenso clima que se reproduce en esta antología; el segundo recayó en "El banquero, la muerte y la luna", más técnico e intelectual; pues bien, al abrirse los sobres con los datos identificatorios, ambos revelaron el mismo nombre: Adolfo L. Pérez Zelaschi.[365]

[364] In September of 1961 *Vea y Lea* published a feature article which included the text of 'Transposición de jugadas' along with a note in which Walsh reaffirmed his conviction that 'La muerte y la brújula' was Argentina's best detective story. In the same article, however, he offered the opinion that 'la literatura policial es un ejercicio entretenido y a la vez estéril de la inteligencia'. *Asesinos de papel*, p. 144.

[365] Jorge Lafforgue, ed. *Cuentos policiales argentinos* (Buenos Aires: Alfaguara, 1997), p.18.

Pérez Zelaschi's 'Las señales' will be examined here as a particularly illustrative example of the generic innovation that occurred during a transitional period in which the *estilo inglés* no longer enjoyed cultural and critical hegemony in Argentina, and at a time when the American hard-boiled model had just begun to gain a foothold among 'educated' readers, critics and writers. Besides demonstrating the possibility of a distinctly Argentine crime narrative at this historical juncture, 'Las señales' will be examined here as a story that addresses a theoretical issue that has been of concern to writers and critics throughout the genre's Argentine history, namely, the viability (or otherwise) of a representative of the Argentine state security apparatus as the heroic protagonist of a detective story.

As reported by Bioy Casares in his diary entry of Saturday the 6th of May, 1961, the enthusiasm of Bioy and Borges for 'Las señales' during the adjudication process had caused a certain level of discord among the *jurado*:

> Digo a Peyrou: «Encontramos un cuento extraordinario: "Las señales"». Después comento con Borges: «Qué curioso. Confía plenamente en nuestra buena fe y en nuestro juicio, pero por ahora opone una ligera resistencia a ese cuento para él desconocido… Probablemente todo el mundo reacciona así».[366]

Borges' response to Peyrou's reticence is decidedly laconic, '«Reacciona así porque nadie quiere que entren cosas nuevas… (pausa) Por pereza […]. Peyrou piensa por esquemas»'.[367] Such was the strength of their conviction regarding the merits of the story that they were able to prevail upon Peyrou to add his endorsement, as 'Las señales' was chosen as the winning entry in the competition, while another story by the same author, 'El banquero, la muerte y la luna' received second prize, to the evident amusement of Borges and Bioy:

[366] Adolfo Bioy Casares, *Borges*, ed. Daniel Martino, (Buenos Aires: Destino, 2006), p. 716.
[367] Ibid.

> BORGES: «¿A que no sabés qué pasó con el concurso de cuentos de *Vea y Lea*? El primer y el segundo premio son del mismo autor: Pérez Zelaschi. ¿Qué me decís? Hace lo que quiere ese hombre». BIOY: «Todo el mundo condenará el hecho de que se haya presentado con más de un seudónimo. A mí me parece que esto demuestra que el jurado tiene un gusto y un criterio seguros: eligió dos veces el mismo autor, entre trescientos».[368]

Whatever this curious occurrence might say about the discernment and good taste of the jury, the decision to award the top prize to 'Las señales', rather than the more orthodox 'El banquero, la muerte y la luna', or indeed any of the other entries, may be viewed as significant in terms of the ongoing evolution of the crime genre in Argentina. Judging by the apparent preference of 'Biorges' for the classic detective story in the tradition of Poe, Chesterton and Christie (and in opposition to the hard-boiled variant typified by Chandler and Hammett), their enthusiasm for 'Las señales', which does not submit easily to classification, is notable. Infused with acute social commentary and featuring graphic depictions of violence, 'Las señales' is a hybrid text which owes more to the suspense and hard-boiled variants than it does to the 'classical' detective story. The choice of the 1961 jury indicates a willingness on the part of Borges and Bioy Casares (and an initially reticent Peyrou) to embrace local generic innovation, and to broaden the limits of what might be included within the crime fiction tradition. A later, emphatic endorsement for the story may be found in its inclusion in the second volume of *Los mejores cuentos policiales*, selected by Borges and Bioy Casares,[369] which, given the company it shares in this selection, is

[368] Adolfo Bioy Casares, *Borges*, p. 733.

[369] Adolfo Bioy Casares and Jorge Luis Borges, eds. *Los mejores cuentos policiales* 2 (Madrid: Alianza ; Buenos Aires: Emecé, 1983). The two volumes appearing under this title have undergone substantial revisions, with a large number of stories transferring between volumes, while others which were included in earlier editions have been excluded or replaced over time. This leads to an understandable amount of confusion for the researcher. Jorge Hernández Martin refers to these bewildering changes in *Readers and Labyrinths*, Op. cit., p. 100. However, in his efforts to achieve clarification on this point, he inadvertently adds to the confusion to some extent, by asserting that 'Las señales' featured in the original collection published in 1943, a chronological impossibility. The 1983 volume in which 'Las señales' appears, though entitled *Los mejores cuentos policiales 2*, is in fact largely similar in content to the original first volume published by Emecé in 1943. Stories by Guillaume Apollinaire, Georges Simenon, Ronald Knox, Carlos Pérez Ruiz and Borges himself are

high praise indeed. Pérez Zelaschi would go on to become one of the most anthologised Argentine detective fiction writers. His stories have appeared in more than forty anthologies published in Argentina, Chile, Spain, Mexico, Belgium and Italy,[370] including 'Los crímenes van sin firma' which featured in Walsh's landmark 1953 collection *Diez cuentos policiales argentinas*. 'Las señales' alone has featured in a significant number of collections, including *Tiempo de puñales* (Buenos Aires: Seijas y Goyanarte 1964), *El cuento policial latino americano,* ed. by Donald Yates (México: Ediciones de Andrea, 1964), *Cuentos policiales argentinos,* ed. by Jorge Lafforgue (Buenos Aires: Alfaguara, 1996) and *Policiales argentinos: La bolsa de huesos y otros cuentos*, ed. by Graciela Equiza (Buenos Aires: Editorial Andrés Bello, 2005).

In the prologue to Equiza's succinct and varied anthology, whose five stories span a century of the Argentine detective tradition, the stated motivation for the inclusion of 'Las señales' is that she regards it as 'un fiel representante del clásico relato inglés'.[371] It is a curious assertion. The experienced reader of Christie, Conan Doyle, Chesterton, Ellery Queen, or any other representative of this tradition would surely find it difficult to isolate features of 'Las señales' that would justify Equiza's description. Furthermore, Pérez Zelaschi's story represents a shift in the evolution of the genre, not just as the top prize-winner in the second *Vea y Lea* competition, but also as an instance of the possibility of a distinctly Argentine detective narrative, rather than a purely derivative text that transplants a foreign model to an Argentine setting. 'Las señales' is clearly a generic hybrid, for which plausible precursors

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excluded from this 1983 volume, while 'Las señales' by Pérez Zelaschi, 'El vástago' by Silvina Ocampo and 'En el bosque' by Ryunosuke Akutagawa are added.

[370] See Graciela Equiza, ed., *Policiales argentinos*: *La bolsa de huesos y otros cuentos* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Andrés Bello, 2005), p. 120.

[371] Ibid, p. 17.

might be identified, but these would surely be drawn principally from the American rather than the classical 'English' crime fiction tradition. It is a story imbued with heavy doses of suspense, and in this regard it shows similarities with the stories of William Irish/Cornell Woolrich. It includes detailed, highly evocative descriptive passages and insightful social critique in the manner of Raymond Chandler's *The Little Sister* or *The Long Goodbye*, and a graphic representation of violence that recalls Hammett's *Red Harvest*, in which the battling policemen and local gangsters of Pleasantville, and indeed the unnamed detective known as the Continental Op, get caught up in such an orgy of violence that the latter fears he is 'going blood-simple, like the natives […]. Play with murder enough and it gets you one of two ways. It makes you sick, or you get to like it'.[372] What it does *not* display is any significant similarity with the detective story in the 'classical' mould. Pérez Zelaschi himself has commented upon some of the difficulties associated with producing this mode of the genre in a Latin American setting:

> When we happen to run across a detective story set in *our* environment, but whose techniques respond to *your* [Anglo] environment, we immediately reject it. Here, for example, it would be inconceivable for a police officer to refrain from entering a building because he didn't have a search warrant. The incredulous reader would say to himself: "What are you doing, you fool, just get a predated warrant from the judge afterwards!" This general disrespect for the law makes it practically impossible for us to create a pure detective story, so to speak—by pure, I mean one like S.S. Van Dine's, or the better author [Ellery] Queen's—and we are obliged to adopt alternative approaches.[373]

The 'alternative approach' to the genre pursued by Pérez Zelaschi in the case of 'Las señales' was to produce a tale of suspense that involved violent crime, contained a strong element of mystery, and presented the reader with a more plausible and

[372] Dashiell Hammett, *Red Harvest* (New York: Vintage, 1996), pp. 154-5. First published in New York by Alfred A. Knopf, 1929. The term 'blood simple' was later used as the title for the Cohen brothers' 1984 neo-noir crime film starring John Getz and Frances McDormand.
[373] Adolfo Luis Pérez Zelaschi in Donald A. Yates, "The Argentine Detective Story" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Michigan, 1960), pp. 69-70.

evocative depiction of Argentine quotidian realities than the majority of its more derivative predecessors. As such, the story represents a significant turning point in the genre's Argentine evolution, and is worth examining in some detail.

The narrative is divided into two roughly equal parts, the first being chiefly concerned with establishing the circumstances and the series of occurrences that will lead to the dramatic, calamitous and suspense-laden *desenlace* that occupies the second part of the tale. The story begins with the following paragraph, which seems to announce the imminence of a death foretold:

> Estaba por fin ahí, como el rostro de un destino antes descifrable y ahora revelado: un hombre de piedra (el sombrero sobre los ojos, casi palpable la pesada pistola), pero atentísimo a las próximas señales del estrago. Ese hombre ahí significaba que todos los plazos se habían cumplido; que él, Manolo, pronto sería el cadáver de Manuel Cerdeiro, llorado por su mujer, recordado durante un tiempo por alguno de sus paisanos y por sus parroquianos sólo hasta que otro lo sustituyera en el mostrador del bar La Nueva Armonía.[374]

This intriguing scene is temporarily abandoned, to be continued later, while the narrator proceeds to recount the tale of the hapless Manuel Cerdeiro, 'gallego, recio, petiso, velloso y cejudo' (121), the proprietor of La Nueva Armonía, a neighbourhood bar in the south-west of Buenos Aires, 'la pequeña esquina desteñida de Floresta al sur, calle Mariano Acosta al mil y tantos'. (121) The setting for the story is a far cry from the typical peaceful village or country house of the classical detective narrative, and the grinding, monotonous subsistence of the bar owner is an even further cry from the pursuits of the leisurely *rentiers* and upper-class stock characters who tended to populate the stories of the genre's so-called Golden Age. In one passage, for example, the narrator describes Cerdeiro's long-standing routine:

[374] *Policiales argentinos*: *La bolsa de huesos y otros cuentos*, p. 121. Subsequent references to this story will be incorporated within the body of the text in parentheses.

> atado día a día y durante años a una noria de jornadas iguales […]. Abrir el bar, atender a los corredores, a los parroquianos, desde la mañana hasta la madrugada; turnándose con la patrona, salvo los lunes, día en que comenzaba a las seis de la tarde. (122)

The Galician immigrants' punishing schedule is broken only on Mondays, when they prepare a *cocido* that reminds them of the land they have left behind:

> Estos lunes preparaban con nabizas, pingue unto sin sal, papas y porotos, un caldo gallego blanquecino, genero y tan espeso que las cucharas quedaban clavadas de punta en su masa, y del cual bebían (o comían) dos soperas, empanadas de pescado fuerte o callos, regado todo con vino tinto áspero y común. Era una fiesta, su única pausa en el trabajo, su escape hacia el mundo, ahíto, satisfecho, sin necesidad ni temor que le guardaba cuanto pudiera redondear una fortuna. (123)

The daily life of Cerdeiro as described by the narrator is one of blameless diligence, sacrifice and meticulous attention to the exigencies of the small enterprise that he maintains, 'lavar los vasos, apilar las cajas vacías, barrer y regar el piso antes de que vinieran los clientes, con esa furia gallega y obstinada de siempre que le había permitido durante años ahorrar el sueldo de un peón y de un mozo' (128). However, his routinised peace is shattered by a violent episode that occurs one Monday evening, when two armed robbers, 'parecidos a cuchillos' enter the premises and demand that he hand over whatever money he has on the premises:

> —¿Desean los señores?
> —Pasá el fajo y no grités, gallego […]. —Apuráte, gallego, o te liquido –dijo el de la pistola, y el más alto, sin mover el cuerpo, le cruzó la cara con el canto de la mano en un golpe cruel, duro e injusto. (123)

Shortly before the appearance of the robbers, Cerdeiro had prepared the week's takings from the bar for deposit at the bank, locking the twenty-three thousand pesos in a drawer beneath the counter, alongside the snub-nosed Colt 38 pistol that had come with the bar when he bought it, but which he had never had to contemplate using. The violent scene that follows is described in detail, in a clear departure from the more 'hygienic' tendencies of the classical school:

> llevado por el dolor de aquel golpe injusto, por un rencor instantáneo y feroz, por el pánico, por todo eso, se halló de pronto disparando su revólver sobre los dos hombres, dos veces, tres, cuatro, vaciando el tambor del arma sobre ellos, encogiéndose tras el mostrador porque también le tiraban mientras se retiraban lentos y precisos hacia la puerta con las cuarenta y cinco de inacabables recámaras, viendo sin ver, ciego, en tanto algunas botellas caían deshechas, regándolo de anís, cegándolo de coñac. (124)

When the dust settles, a disorientated Manolo discovers that he has received a bullet wound to the shoulder, and is taken to hospital. Word of the incident quickly spreads in the neighbourhood, and as more is learned of the shootout, various opinions are offered in relation to this act of defiance, 'la víctima resistió (por avaricia, por aturdimiento, por estupidez, dijeron todos, nadie por cívico heroísmo) y mató a uno de los atracadores, mientras el otro huía'. (125) Worse news awaits the convalescent *gallego*, however, as it is revealed that the man he had shot dead was none other than 'el Lungo Riquelme', one of the three infamous Riquelme brothers, 'duros profesionales del delito, asesinos todos' whose criminal exploits are well known to the readers of the *crónica policial*:

> Asaltar era su oficio; matar, un azar aceptable para ellos; morir, un riesgo conexo. Bancos, pagadores, joyeros, casas de cambio habían sido saqueados uno tras otro, a veces en pleno centro, y cuatro hombres habían caído ya bajo sus pistolas sin ley. Porque los Riquelme disparaban enseguida, sin más, alevosamente, cuando alguien resistía o parecía dispuesto a hacerlo. (126)

A fatality suffered by the police in one of their encounters with the Riquelme brothers had engendered an escalation of the conflict, such that the participants on each side had succumbed to that mental condition described by Dashiell Hammett as going 'blood simple' so memorably depicted in *Red Harvest*:

> … mataron a un oficial de policía llamado Bazán, y entonces se trabó uno de esos duelos cerrados, porfiados, sin piedad, incluso con víctimas por lujo, que se dan entre uno o más delincuentes y la policía cuando a ésta le matan a uno de sus hombres. En tal duelo se tira de cualquier manera, e cualquier lado, sin aviso, sobre el culpable, el acompañante, el encubridor, el sospechoso, que son todos uno y lo mismo para los perseguidores, como éstos son para los otros. (126)

It is easy to imagine that the Argentine readership might have regarded the variant of crime fiction offered by Zelaschi in 'Las señales' as more in keeping with the Argentine experience and attitude towards criminality, and the institutional force charged with combating it, than with the offerings of the Argentine emulators of Conan Doyle, Christie or Chesterton. The Riquelme brothers are not criminal masterminds in the tradition of Chesterton's Flambeau or Conan Doyle's Professor Moriarty, who have committed an artful murder or series of murders that may only be solved through the abstract analytical prowess of a ratiocinative intellectual powerhouse of the stature of Sherlock Holmes or Father Brown. Equally, the dogged pursuit of the Riquelme brothers by the police does not appear to be the fruit of some deeply ingrained sense of justice, or an intellectual obsession with the disinterested resolution of an abstract problem. The zeal with which the police battle with their opponents is primarily motivated by revenge for the killing of one of their own, and a determination to suppress a flagrant challenge to their authority, rather than any moral imperative or sense of civic duty.

When Manolo Cerdeiro leaves the hospital, he discovers that in all likelihood his brush with the violent underbelly of Buenos Aires society has not concluded. As reported in various journals, the death of the eldest Riquelme at the hands of Cerdeiro would not go unpunished: 'Conociéndose la solidaridad que se practica en el hampa, y más en el caso de los hermanos Riquelme, corre grave peligro la vida del señor Cerdeiro' (127). One magazine even publishes a series of articles entitled 'El juramento de los Riquelme', in which it is reported that the surviving brothers, Ernesto and Pedro, had sworn a blood oath to kill Cerdeiro after a long 'paseo de agonía, de esos que se ven en la televisión' (127). He is the proverbial 'dead man

walking', living in a constant state of anxiety, never knowing when the axe might fall:

> Lo asesinarían desde un automóvil en marcha, lo balearían de atrás, lo apuñalarían dormido, al abrir una puerta volarían él y la puerta al soplo de la gelinita; cualquier cosa podía suceder en cualquier momento. Sería un concluir sin horror, seguro, rápido y técnico, aceptado de antemano por todos. (127)

The element of anxiety and suspense that suffuses 'Las señales' is derived from this threat to the life of Cerdeiro. As a consequence of the death of *el Lungo* Riquelme, his existence ceases to be one of cyclical routine alone, acquiring an additional, more linear aspect, as he figuratively travels along a path that he believes will inevitably lead to his demise. This sense of tension and foreboding is revealed through the narrative in snatches of dialogue between Manolo and his neighbours and customers:

> —¿Qué tal, Manolo? –la conversación solía comenzar así.
> —Trabajando, ya lo ve.
> —Es la vida del pobre. Y…¿más sereno ya?
> —Sí…pero hablemos de otra cosa.
> Pero ellos nunca querían hablar de otra cosa […]. Primero era los consejos.
> —Le convendría cambiar de barrio…
> —Es difícil vender el bar. (121-2)

While some of the customers regard him with evident pity, 'lo miraban alejarse como el portador de una segura enfermedad mortal,' others appear to express admiration for his bravery, though their praise also appears to be tinged with a certain humorous irony and disbelief:

> —¡Lo felicito, hombre! ¡Qué coraje tuvo!
> —Me defendí, nada más. Pero no quiero hablar. Lo pasado pisado.
> —Para usted, sí. Pero ellos eran tres. Cayó uno y quedaron dos.
> —No quise matarlo, me defendí, nada más.
> —Para un valiente como usted, lo mismo es uno que diez. Que vayan saliendo, no más, ¿eh? ¡Qué hígados: enfrentar a Lungo Riquelme! (122)

This feigned admiration for his heroism provides cold comfort for Cerdeiro. Resigned to his fate, tied to a business he cannot sell, he carries on his daily routine as before, accepting his *paseo de agonía* and helplessly awaiting the day of reckoning. Though the police had initially assigned a uniformed agent to the premises for his protection, this policy had been abandoned without notification after two months. When Cerdeiro goes to the police station to protest, he is met with a curt reply:

> —¿Qué desea, señor?
> —El comisario, por favor.
> El cabo de guardia lo miró severamente.
> —Está ocupado. No puede atenderlo.
> —Soy… Cerdeiro… Manuel Cerdeiro, del bar La Nueva Armonía, aquí en Mariano Acosta al mil y tantos.
> —¡Ah! ¿Es por la vigilancia? Ya vino antes un turco entrometido… Bueno. Se levantó.
> —Pero…
> —No hay nada que hacer. Tenemos mucho trabajo y no podemos distraer tres turnos para cuidarlo a usted. Arréglese solo. Buena suerte. (128)

This exchange between Cerdeiro and the local police may be highlighted as an example of crime fiction's potential as a vehicle for social critique, a mode of narrative that would gain currency in Argentina in the years that followed. Though he had been the victim of a violent attack in which he had managed to defend himself and his business, and though it is well known to all in the area that a mortal threat still hangs over him, at this point Manolo is told that he can expect no further protection from the designated agents of law and order. The *cabo*'s parting words, 'Arréglese solo. Buena suerte', may be viewed as a succinct expression of the public perception of the essential relationship between the police and the ordinary citizen in the Argentine context. Security, protection and justice under the law are the preserve of those with the political power or economic resources to command it, while the rest must simply take their chances. This important theme, which would later provide one

of the central planks of the *reivindicación* of the hard-boiled variant among Argentine writers in the late sixties and seventies, finds early articulation in 'Las señales'.

The unfortunate circumstances of Manuel Cerdeiro having been established in the first half of the narrative, the second part is entirely concerned with recounting the dramatic consequences of the series of events previously described. Pérez Zelaschi proves adept at building suspense in anticipation of a dramatic and climactic finish. The luckless *gallego*, his senses sharpened by the sword of Damocles that hangs above him, perceives the first sign of impending violence one Monday evening as he sorts empty bottles in the yard of his bar:

> Entró en la trastienda, que era un patinillo entoldado, tapiado por cajones vacíos de Coca-Cola y de cerveza, y comenzó a aparatar los de marca "Tres Cometas", cuyo camión vendría mañana a retirarlos, cuando la señal vibró. Sí: no fue el abrirse de la puerta, ni los pocos pasos que siguieron los que le hicieron estremecer, sino la alarma que resonó en el segundo juego de sentidos que le había crecido durante la espera: 'Ahoramevanamatar'.
>
> Allí estaban. Midió agónicamente sus posibilidades de escape: ninguna. (129)

As previously indicated, Cerdeiro is, in an economic sense, effectively trapped within the confines of 'La Nueva Armonía', entirely dependent on the bar for his livelihood, and unable to sell the business and move away in an effort to elude the attentions of the surviving Riquelme brothers. At this point the sensation of paralysis is intensified as his entrapment acquires an additional, physical dimension, one that he realises is at least partly of his own making:

> Vio, en efecto, que el recién llegado –era uno solo– estaba ya sentado a una mesita; que no podría intentar un desesperado y tal vez mortal salto a través de la vidriera, porqué él mismo había cerrado, encerrándose, la cortina metálica; que el desconocido no tenía apuro, que estaba sentado de tal manera –el antebrazo derecho apoyado sobre la mesa y paralelo al pecho– que su mano empuñaría en un décimo de segundo la pistola. (130)

If Cerdeiro (and by extension the reader) imagines that the *paseo de agonía* promised by the Riquelmes has finally come to an end, he is disappointed. It appears that now that he is on the premises, this 'hombre de piedra' is determined to prolong the bar-owner's anxiety even further. When approached by Cerdeiro, rather than drawing his pistol, he indicates that he would like to order a drink:

> —Algo livianito, maestro –le dijo mirándolo, y Manuel Cerdeiro volvió a sentirse ya muerto porque aquellos ojos fijos de víbora brillaban con inequívoca burla.
> —¿Guindado?
> —Eso: guindado. (130)

A trembling Cerdeiro serves the drink, and returns to the counter 'para recontar el dinero, con la caja como pobrísimo parapeto', (130) while the stranger remains in his seat, sipping his drink. The sense that time has slowed to a crawl is effectively emphasised by reference to the electric clock that hangs on the wall of the bar:

> Todo había pasado en cuatro minutes. Luego el tiempo –inmóviles los dos, él y otro, él y él, él y la muerte–, sólo fue perceptible en su más claro símbolo: en aquella aguja del reloj eléctrico que remontaba silenciosa su rueda inmutable. (131)

The tension of the scene is broken by the sudden arrival of the kind of customer who, under other circumstances, might not have been such a welcome sight to the bar owner:

> Sin señal previa, a las once y cuarenta y tres se abrió la puerta. El viento arrojó dentro del bar una ráfaga de lluvia y luego a un tipo indescifrable, mojado, aterido, haraposo y con barba de semanas, desmelenado, sucio y tan borracho que ya se desplomaba. (131)

Cerdeiro suddenly perceives in the necessity of despatching the drunkard a potential path to his own salvation, 'Una súbita esperanza atravesó a Manuel Cerdeiro como una saeta; lo acompañaría… lo acompañaría hasta la puerta y él adelante y el otro atrás, usándolo como viviente escudo, tal vez' (131). This avenue of escape is swiftly

closed by the stranger, who takes it upon himself to remove the inebriated man with great firmness and efficiency:

> Le calzó el brazo bajo el suyo, le torció la mano izquierda con su puño brutal e inmenso, y cuando el pobre empezó a lamentarse, lo llevó en peso y lo empujó con destreza y violencia, lanzándolo a diez pasos, pero de pie, de tal manera que con el impulso dado el borracho se hundió en la sombra y desapareció llevándose la esperanza que, según había comprobado Manuel Cerdeiro, también puede residir en un piojoso. (132)

Once again, the two are left alone in the bar, Cerdeiro perched on his stool at the cash register behind the counter, the stranger seated at his table, still clutching his pistol inside the pocket of his coat, the silence broken only by the familiar sounds of the city that manage to penetrate the walls of La Nueva Armonía. Pérez Zelaschi's lyrical and detailed description of these sounds is not only highly evocative of Buenos Aires, but also contributes to the atmosphere of tension that pervades the scene:

> … el rodar de un taxi: de cuando en cuando, el ronroneo del ómnibus 170, el asmático paso –ras, ras, ras, ras– del colectivo 201, algún rápido y fugaz chi-ris-ris de neumáticos sobre el pavimento mojado, el continuo, continuo rodar, caer, gargarizar del agua de las cunetas en la boca de tormenta que bebía lluvia frente al bar. (132)

At exactly twelve minutes past twelve the silent vigil of the patient killer and his frantic victim is again interrupted by a visitor to the bar, this time in the shape of 'la menuda figurita de Adelquí Martinelli, un vecino', who greets Cerdeiro with a jovial '—¡Hola, don Manolo! Llueve, ¿verdad?,' (133) and explains that he was on his way home from visiting his daughter, but had decided to drop in for a night-cap when he observed that the bar was still open. An increasingly desperate Manolo perceives in the arrival of Martinelli another potential route to salvation, and endeavours to surreptitiously communicate a message to him without alerting the vigilant stranger at the table:

> Manuel Cerdeiro se volvió hacia el estante de las bebidas. Antes de servir vio sobre éste el lápiz y el papel para las cuentas. Entonces, siempre de espaldas, fue haciendo dos cosas a un tiempo; con la mano izquierda bajó la ginebra, con la derecha tomó el lápiz; nuevamente con la mano izquierda depositó un vasito en el estante inferior y con la derecha escribió, mientras servía despacio: "*Llamelapolicía* pronto". (134)

When Cerdeiro manages to place this written plea in front of Martinelli along with his large Bols gin, there follows a tension-filled, silent, visual dialogue whose textual depiction is highly cinematic, in an instance of an Argentine crime fiction writer harnessing not just the literary narrative techniques associated with suspense thriller writers such as Cornell Woolrich, but also incorporating a visual style reminiscent of Hollywood cinema in the tradition of Alfred Hitchcock or the Polanski of *Chinatown*. Borges alludes to this precise technique in his Charles Norton lecture, 'The Riddle of Poety' at Harvard University in 1967, in which he maintains that while the same visual device may be found, for example, in 'Inclusiveness' an 1881 sonnet by Dante Gabriel Rossetti, it had acquired extra resonance for readers/viewers since the advent of modern cinema:

> I think that these lines are perhaps more vivid now than when they were written, some eighty years ago, because the cinema has taught us to follow quick sequences of visual images. In the first line, [we have one visual point of view]. And then in the second line, as in a good film, we have the same image reversed.[375]

This cinematographic device is employed by Pérez Zelaschi in a highly effective manner in 'Las señales':

> Adelquí vio el sudor que relucía en la estrecha frente del gallego, sus párpados semicerrados, el ruego íntimo, desesperado y mudo que se desprendía de todo él y comprendió (Adelquí era del barrio y conocía la historia de Riquelme). Sus ojos asustados giraron hacia atrás, sin mover la cabeza señalaron al asesino … Cerdeiro asintió levísimamente. (134)

[375] Jorge Luis Borges, *Borges, This Craft of Verse: The Charles Eliot Norton Lectures 1967-1968*, ed. by Călin-Andrei Mihăilescu (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), p. 13.

When the image is reversed, switching back to Martinelli, the physical manifestations of the terror induced by Cerdeiro's silent revelation are visually evident in a series of textual 'close-ups':

> Entonces el diálago por signos se invirtió, y el gallego vio cómo se perlaba la frente del viejo y sus manos comenzaban a temblar como las de un perlático, tanto que la mitad de la ginebra se le derramó e la barba, mientras él, Manuel Cerdeiro, lo maldecía e injuriaba silenciosamente con lo mejor de su honesto terror ("Se dará cuenta, viejo imbécil. Nos matará a los dos"), como luego trataba de encaminarse hacia la puerta, con las piernas tan ingobernables como dos flanes. (134)

This cinematic homage is interrupted by the stranger, who, intercepting Martinelli as he makes for the door, provides the clearest vocal indication yet that a scene of violence is in the offing:

> —Usted no sale, abuelo. Tírese ahí, en ese rincón, atrás de esa mesa y no se levante ni para hacer pis, porque se viene el baile. (135)

Up to this point in the scene, other than the intuitions of Cerdeiro and the casual air of menace-in-repose exuded by the stranger, there has been no concrete indication that a shift in tempo is at hand. The perceived threat posed by the stranger may simply have been a projection of the mind of a terrified Cerdeiro, already half-crazed by the *calvario* that he had endured since the shooting of *el Lungo* Riquelme. The stranger's muscular ejection of the drunk earlier might even have been interpreted as an act of assistance to the bar owner. However, there is no mistaking the import of the words addressed to Martinelli, and it is clear that the scene is about to reach its climax, 'y detrás de la caja Manuel Cerdeiro, ya entregado sin fuerzas a su miserable suerte, ya agachado como un buey que espera la maza del carnicero'. (135)

The decisive 'señal' of the eponymous title is provided by the arrival of a black car that stops briefly outside the bar, depositing two passengers:

> … hubo un doble golpe de portezuelas, y de él descendieron dos hombres, negros, iguales, que abrieron por fin (la por-fin-muerte, el final de la espera) sin violencia, pero con fuerza inapelable la puerta del bar. Ya en el primer paso que dieron tenían las pistolas en las manos. El primer tiro pasó a diez centímetros del gallego, el otro le dio en el hombro… (135)

When he is wounded, once again in the same shoulder as on the previous occasion, Cerdeiro collapses behind the counter, so that he no longer sees what happens on the other side, but his ears register a cacophony of noise: gunshots, the screams of Martinelli and furniture being knocked over, before one of the recently-arrived men tumbles over the counter 'atropelladamente con eses y quebradas de tango' (136). A disorientated Cerdeiro discovers to his surprise that the man is dead, while at the same time the bursts of gunfire continue:

> … decenas de terribles balas en hilera, uno, dos, tres, cuatro, hacían saltar vidrios, revoques, y otra vez cuatro, seis, diez, doce esquirlas de madera, agujereaban el mostrador también tiradas desde la calle –dos, tres, dos, tres, dos, tres– y todo quedó en silencio hasta que una voz sonora, inmensa, potente, gritó:
>
> —¡Paren! ¡Bazán habla! (136)

Once again, this highly sensory textual experience evokes the cinematic renderings of such climactic scenes in early Hollywood noir movies of the 1940s and 1950s. The unexpected discovery that the body that had tumbled over the counter was in fact lifeless provides the first indication that his long-awaited encounter with the Riquelme brothers might not be playing out as he had expected. The second such indication is the presence of Gregorio Bazán, the *comisario* who had been hunting the three 'duros profesionales del delito' since the death of his own brother at their hands:

> —Levantate, gallego. Ya pasó. En seguida te vamos a curar.
> Lo sentó en una silla como a un muñeco. Era el hombre del chambergo.
> —Soy el comisario Gregorio Bazán, y quise esperarlos aquí a esos hijos de puta. (136)

This revelation, that the stranger sitting in the bar would be the author of Cerdeiro's salvation rather than his demise, contributes to the hybrid nature of the 'Las señales' and may be regarded as a good example of *peripeteia*, a literary device particularly appropriate to the suspense thriller mode of crime fiction, in which the protagonist experiences an unforeseen and dramatic reversal of fortune close to the conclusion of the narrative. This reversal could not be more stark in the case of Cerdeiro, who, in the aftermath of the terrifying shootout, realises the significance of the scene that he has witnessed, 'En el suelo estaban los dos Riquelme muertos, y en una silla, llorando y sentado, un pobre gallego que asistía a su propia resurrección' (137). [376]

As suggested in this analysis, Equiza's description of 'Las señales' as a 'fiel representante del clásico relato inglés' is not borne out by the textual evidence examined here. With its distinctly Argentine setting, its strong emphasis on the building of narrative tension and a sense of anticipation through long, detailed descriptive passages and vivid, cinematic depictions of violence, particularly in its protracted final scene, Pérez Zelaschi's prize-winning story clearly belongs in a category other than that suggested by Equiza. Despite the allusions made in this section to certain similarities with detective narrative variants derived from the American pulp fiction tradition, in the main 'Las señales' does not submit easily to classification.

[376] In Jorge Lafforgue's 1996 anthology *Cuentos policiales argentinos*, a slight alteration is made to these final two lines of the story, which read: 'En el suelo estaban los dos Riquelme, muertos. En una silla, llorando y sentado, un pobre gallego resucitado'. p. 214. The text included in *Los mejores cuentos policiales* 2, edited by Borges and Bioy Casares, features the same final lines as the one referred to in this analysis. It is not clear why this discrepancy exists in the text included in Lafforgue's anthology, nor whether the author or the editor was responsible for the revision of the final line.

The *comisario argentino*

As an Argentine *cuento policial*, one of the most interesting features of 'Las señales' is the manner in which Pérez Zelaschi negotiates the difficulty of allocating a plausible role in the salvation of Cerdeiro to the Argentine police. In this study it has been noted that the figure of the amateur, reasoning detective synonymous with the 'clásico relato inglés' emerged at least partly as a solution to the difficulty of assigning heroic status to a member of the official state police force. As Mandel observes, 'in the first part of the nineteenth century, the great majority of the middle class and the intelligentsia were essentially hostile to the police'.[377] This readerly hostility tended to diminish over time, firstly in France, and later in Britain and the United States, paving the way for fictional detectives and other investigators to be drawn from the ranks of the state apparatus in those countries. In Argentina throughout the twentieth century, and indeed up to the present day, it has remained difficult for a member of the state police forces to be portrayed in a benign or heroic light in an Argentine crime story, chiefly owing to the brutality, corruption, and outright criminality associated with real-world representatives of those institutions. The amateur detectives commonly encountered in other national traditions also suffer from a pronounced paucity of verisimilitude when transposed to an Argentine setting. In the words of Elena Braceras and Cristina Leytour, 'Efectivamente, era imposible pensar para estas latitudes en un detective aristocrático, que se dedicara a la investigación del crimen por mero placer'.[378] The proponents of the hard-boiled style would encounter a similar difficulty towards the late 1960s and 70s, given that autonomous, highly principled prívate detectives in the mould of Chandler's Philip

[377] Op cit., Mandel, p. 12.
[378] Elena Braceras and Cristina Leytour, eds., *Cuentos con detectives y comisarios* (Buenos Aires: Colihue, 2004), p. 17.

Marlowe or Hammett's Sam Spade would also have been distinctly anomalous in an Argentine setting, a point acknowledged by Carlos Gamerro:

> Detectives privados hay, lo que no hay son detectives privados íntegros y honestos, desvinculados, y menos aún opuestos, al poder político y policial, a la manera del Marlowe de Chandler.[379]

Elvio E. Gandolfo echoes this view, '¿cómo demonios injertar un detective privado en una red social donde no cumple el menor papel, ni lo hace verosímil sobre la hoja escrita?'[380] Perhaps the most clearly defined 'solution' to the difficulty of providing a plausible Argentine alternative to the figure of the detective has been the phenomenon of the *comisario criollo*, 'ese comisario rudimentario, con una inteligencia práctica, un hombre inculto pero profundo conocedor del alma humana'.[381] Braceras and Leytour trace the origins of this figure to the appearance, in Borges' 'La muerte y la brújula' of Treviranus, 'un hombre que rinde culto al sentido común y cuyo saber está basado en la experiencia que le da el contacto con la realidad'.[382] Whereas the 'puro razonador' Erik Lönnrot is determined to seek an elegant, 'rabbinical' solution to the death of Marcelo Yarmolinsky, Treviranus prefers to proceed from a far more prosaic, less mystical hypothesis: that the rabbi was probably murdered because he disturbed an opportunistic thief trying to steal a collection of priceless sapphires, '—No me interesan las explicaciones rabínicas; me interesa la captura del hombre que apuñaló a este desconocido'.[383] Treviranus' explanation for the initial crime proves to be the correct one, while Lönnrot's determination to pursue a more ingenious, intellectually satisfying route to the resolution of the mystery ultimately leads to his geometrically perfect demise. As

[379] Carlos Gamerro 'Para una reformulación del género policial argentino' in *El nacimiento de la literatura argentina y otros ensayos* (Buenos Aires: Norma, 2006), p. 80.
[380] Elvio E. Gandolfo, in Jorge B. Rivera, ed., *El relato policial en la Argentina*, p. 246.
[381] *Cuentos con detectives y comisarios*, p. 17.
[382] Ibid.
[383] Borges, *Obras completas* Vol I, p. 602.

suggested by Braceras and Leytour, Borges' Treviranus provided the template for a number of the *comisarios* who have populated the stories of Argentine crime writers, including Rodolfo Walsh's Laurenzi, B. Velmiro Ayala Gauna's Don Frutos Gómez, Norberto Firpo's Inspector Baliari, Facundo Marull's Leo, 'el de la 4ª' and Pérez Zelaschi's Leoni. In the case of a number of these *comisarios*, attempts are made by the writers in question to establish a certain disconnect, whether temporal, geographical or indeed attitudinal, from the institutional forces which they represent, 'su relación con la institución es equívoca o por lo menos, azarosa'.[384] As previously noted in relation to Walsh's stories 'En defensa propia' and 'Zungzwang', for example, part of Laurenzi's motivation for recounting the details of these cases to Daniel Hernández is precisely to illustrate the extent to which he felt he was unsuited to his position in the police force, '"Yo, a lo último, no servía para comisario" – dijo Laurenzi, tomando el café que se le había enfriado –. "Estaba viendo las cosas, y no quería verlas. Los problemas en que se mete la gente, y la manera que tiene de resolverlos, y la forma en que yo los habría resuelto'.[385] A very similar sentiment is expressed at the conclusión of 'Zungzwang', 'Si no denunciaba a mi amigo, hacía mal, porque mi deber, etcétera… Y si lo denunciaba y lo arrestaban, también hacía mal, porque con todo mi corazón yo lo había justificado'.[386] In the Laurenzi stories examined in this study, the passage of time operates as a distancing element, an opportunity for the *comisario* to reflect critically upon events that had occurred many years previously, which he does, accompanied by expressions of regret. Far from representing the attitudes and practices of the institution he once served, Laurenzi appears to be an 'accidental' *comisario*, and as such, is more inclined to garner the sympathies of a reader who might otherwise struggle to accept the protagonism of an

[384] *Cuentos con detectives y comisarios*, p. 19.
[385] Walsh, *Cuento para tahúres y otros relatos policiales* (Buenos Aires: Puntosur, 1987), p. 123.
[386] Jorge Lafforgue, ed., *Textos de y sobre Rodolfo Walsh* (Buenos Aires: Alianza, 2000), p. 257.

Argentine police inspector. Ayala Gauna's avuncular don Frutos Gómez is perhaps the most fully elaborated *comisario* of this ilk. The recruitment method that leads to his appointment speaks volumes for his atypical status within the wider institutional setting:

> El simpático don Frutos Gómez ha sido, de joven, servidor y amigo de un caudillo correntino terrateniente. Don Frutos enviuda a los cuarenta y cinco años porque su mujer muere de pasmo y como consuelo de su viudez, el caudillo lo hace comisario de Capibara Cué.[387]

The unorthodox manner in which he accedes to his position, as a form of consolation for the death of his wife, ensures that he remains relatively untainted by the procedures, attitudes and practices of the institution that he represents. In 'El regreso de don Frutos', for example, he is described by one of his loyal subordinates, *el sumariante* Luis Arzásola, as being 'recto e insobornable',[388] qualities not generally associated with the real-life officials of the Argentine police. In 'La pesquisa de don Frutos' (1953), his unusually relaxed style of command and disdain for institutional procedures is made clear: 'don Frutos regía a sus subordinados con paternal condescendencia, sin reparar en graduaciones, y no quería saber de más reglamentos que su omnímoda voluntad'.[389] This disregard for the institution's hierarchical structure and attendant formalities is illustrated by the fact that don Frutos frequently refers to his subordinates, including Arzásola, his second-in-command, as 'm'hijo', while *el cabo* Leiva, the most junior member of the local force, often addresses his commanding officer as 'che comesario', a comical juxtaposition of the formal and familiar. A further distancing element present in the Frutos Gómez stories is geographical in character, in the sense that the cases investigated by the *comisario* take place in the imaginary rural setting of Capibara Cué, Corrientes, permitting don

[387] *Cuentos con detectives y comisarios*, p. 20.
[388] B. Velmiro Ayala Gauna, *Don Frutos Gómez, el comisario* (Buenos Aires: Huemel, 1966), p. 139.
[389] Lafforgue, ed., *Cuentos policiales argentinos*, pp. 181-2.

Frutos a degree of autonomy of action and judgement that would not seem possible or plausible in a series set in Buenos Aires. In 'La pesquisa de don Frutos', for example, the *comisario* appears both ignorant and dismissive of the scientific investigative methods familiar to the recently arrived Luis Arzásola, who had until this point operated in an urban environment. Arzásola is clearly unimpressed by what he has seen of his new superior in his short time in Capibara Cué, and intends to take action, 'ya el oficial había redactado *in mente* el informe que elevaría a las autoridades sobre la inoperancia del comisario, sus arbitrarios procedimientos y su inhabilidad para el cargo'.[390] While examining the scene of a murder, he objects to the fact that don Frutos makes no attempt to preserve the crime scene for forensic examination:

> —A ver, vamos a buscar en la pieza, puede que la haiga escondido.
> —Pero, comisario… —saltó el oficial—. Así van a borrar todas las huellas del culpable.
> —¿Qué güellas, m'hijo?
> —Las impresiones dactilares.
> —Acá no usamos de eso, m'hijo. Tuito lo hacemos a la que te criaste nomás...[391]

Though initially exasperated by the *comisario*'s dismissive attitude towards standard investigative procedures, Arzásola soon discovers that the methods he had applied so successfully in an urban setting may not readily transfer to this rural one:

> Arzásola, entre tanto, seguía acumulando elementos con criterio científico, pero se encontraba un poco desconcertado. En la ciudad, sobre un piso encerado, un cabello puede ser un indicio valioso, pero en el sucio piso de un rancho hay miles de cosas mezcladas con el polvo: recortes de uñas, llaves de latas de sardinas, botones, semillas, huesecillos, etc.[392]

By contrast, Don Frutos, using his local knowledge and following his own rudimentary methods, such as using a 'palillo' to measure the depth and direction of

[390] Ibid, p. 183.
[391] Ibid, p. 185.
[392] Ibid.

the victim's stab wounds, and a horse's reins as an improvised measuring tape, is able to draw a number of conclusions that will lead to the apprehension of the killer, to the evident amazement of Arzásola:

> —No te aflijás por eso… El criminal es gringo, más o menos una cuarta más alto que yo, y dejuro que ha de estar entre la peonada'e la estancia'e los ingleses…
> —¡Pero…! —se asombró el oficial.
> —Ya te explicaré más tarde, m'hijo.[393]

At the conclusion of the tale, the new *sumariante* seems prepared to concede that the methods and the habits of his new boss are appropriate to the rural community in which he operates. This acceptance extends even to his preferred way of drinking *mate*. Whereas previously Arzásola had only taken the infusion with sugar, at the urging of Don Frutos he decides to embrace local customs:

> —Servíte, m'hijo… Aquí vas a tener que aprender a tomarlo cimarrón.
> Arzásola lo aceptó y dijo:
> —Creo que voy a tener que aprender eso y otras cosas más.[394]

In a further symbolic act of acceptance of his new surroundings, while sipping his (unsweetened) mate, he decides that his erstwhile enthusiasm for the study of psychology might similarly be abandoned in this new environment, and finds an alternative use for the textbook that he had brought with him to Capibara Cué, 'Lo vació de tres o cuatro enérgicos sorbos y lo devolvió al milico: luego, como la mesa empezaba a tambalear nuevamente, tomo el libro de psicología y lo puso debajo de la pata renga'.[395] In 'La pesquisa de don Frutos', Arzásola functions almost as a surrogate for the reader, who is invited to accept the idea that in the bucolic setting created by Ayala Gauna and policed by don Frutos, an entirely different set of norms applies, including the notion that an Argentine police inspector might serve as a

[393] Ibid, p. 186.
[394] Ibid, p. 190.
[395] Ibid, p. 191.

benevolent presence in the community. However the fact that the police may only be viewed in such a positive light in a highly imaginary, anachronistic and isolated setting tells its own story about the perception of the force throughout the genre's history in Argentina.

In the cases of Don Frutos, Laurenzi and certain other fictional Argentine *comisarios,* their plausibility as the sympathetic or heroic protagonists of crime narratives is facilitated by establishing a disconnect between the character and the institutional setting in which they operate. Pérez Zelaschi employs this same technique in the detective stories featuring his own *comisario* Leoni, a pragmatic, world-weary, retired police inspector who, like Walsh's Laurenzi, relates the stories of cases he had investigated during his working years to a journalist, named as 'Pérez Zelaschi' himself. However, in 'Las señales', an active member of the Buenos Aires police force, Gregorio Bazán, comes to the rescue of Manuel Cerdeiro in a manner that might almost be interpreted as heroic. This represents a subversion of the expectations of the reader in certain respects. As noted earlier in this section, the dialogue between Cerdeiro and the duty officer of the local *comisaría*, in which the former is informed that the police are no longer prepared to 'distraer tres turnos para cuidarlo a usted' and is told to simply 'Arréglese solo. Buena suerte,' seems to amount to a critique of the attitude of the Argentine police towards a citizen of modest means who finds himself in a perilous predicament. The fact that Cerdeiro has effectively been left for dead by the police might be interpreted as an indictment by the author of that institution. However, the appearance of Bazán and his associates in the climactic scene obliges the reader to re-examine this view. It becomes clear that the *visible* police presence outside La Nueva Armonía had only been abandoned in an attempt to lure the Riquelme brothers to the bar to take their

revenge on Cerdeiro. Evidently, the subterfuge had achieved the desired result, though, presumably for reasons of 'operational security', the unfortunate *gallego* could not be forewarned of the plan to intercept the attackers. Bazán even goes as far as to apologise to Cerdeiro for the anxiety he had suffered as a result of his 'paseo de agonía', 'Perdoname viejo, el jabón que te llevaste, pero en estas cosas es mejor no abrir la boca. Yo sabía por una "alcahuetada" que vendrían esta noche. Por eso los esperé'.[396]

Considering the measures the police have taken to protect an ordinary citizen from harm, should 'Las señales' be viewed as an Argentine detective narrative that plausibly portrays Bazán and his colleagues in a favourable, almost heroic light? While it is true that Cerdeiro 'asistía a su propia resurrección' thanks to the trap laid by the police, it would be inaccurate to credit the force with acting on his behalf. As previously indicated, the police had been involved in a long-running, violent war with the Riquelmes, arising from the death of Gregorio Bazán's brother, which had produced 'víctimas de lujo' on both sides. As such, the police campaign, including the salvation of Cerdeiro, is motivated by revenge rather than a laudable quest for justice. The *comisario*'s reaction to the death of the Riquelmes is one of grim satisfaction, 'Gregorio Bazán dio un puntapié a uno de los yertos Riquelme. — Mucho tiempo esperé este día. Ya cayeron los tres, pero eso no me devuelve vivo a mi hermano'.[397] It is clear that while Cerdeiro has ultimately benefited from the ploy, his safety was the least of the concerns of the police, who had effectively used him as live bait for the trap that they had laid. This impression is only strengthened by the fact that the brothers were allowed to enter the bar and once again shoot Cerdeiro before the police launched their own attack, with Bazán firing from within the bar

[396] *Policiales argentinos*: *La bolsa de huesos y otros cuentos*, p. 136.
[397] Ibid, p. 137.

and his colleagues firing from the street. In fact, given the number of bullets that perforate the bar, 'decenas de terribles balas en hilera, uno, dos, tres, cuatro, hacían saltar vidrios, revoques, y otra vez cuatro, seis, diez, doce esquirlas de madera, agujereaban el mostrador también tiradas desde la calle',[398] it could well be argued that it was the poor marksmanship of the Riquelmes that ultimately saved Cerdeiro's life. Had he remained on his feet instead of being knocked to the ground by the bullet wound to the shoulder, he would surely have been caught in the hail of bullets that accounted for the brothers, thus adding to the number of 'víctimas de lujo' which the conflict had produced.

In 'Las señales', the role of Gregorio Bazán and his colleagues in the salvation of Manuel Cerdeiro is, at best, ambiguous. What is not in doubt is the effectiveness of Pérez Zelaschi's efforts to produce a highly original Argentine detective story, one that incorporates narrative techniques from diverse modes of the crime genre, and which, crucially, represents a significant departure from the 'classical' model which had hitherto enjoyed a virtual hegemony among 'educated' readers in Argentina. That said, it should also be recognised that this groundbreaking story came to the attention of the reading public as a direct result of its success in the 1961 *Vea y Lea* detective story competition, owing to the persuasive powers of Borges and Bioy Casares, who, as noted earlier, had overcome the initial objections of the more classically-minded third juror, Manuel Peyrou, in awarding 'Las señales' the competition's top prize. This endorsement by the genre's two most persistent advocates of the period effectively guaranteed its publication and dissemination.

[398] Ibid, p. 136.

Has Borges gone Soft on the Hard-Boiled style?

Considering his persistent advocacy on behalf of the classical detective story in the tradition of Poe, Chesterton and Collins, does the success of 'Las señales' in the 1961 *Vea y Lea* competition denote a decisive revision of Borges' attitude, towards a greater acceptance of the violence and realism associated with the hard-boiled model as a 'legitimate' form of literary expression? It is certainly the case that, viewed through the prism of 'las pautas y los criterios de valor impuestos por la novela de enigma', the works of Hammett, Chandler, Cain and their associates must have seemed to the classically-minded Borges 'malas novelas policiales: confusas, informes, caóticos […], la versión degradada de un género refinado y armónico'.[399] While narrative depictions of violence, acts of physical courage and tales involving the exploits of gauchos and compadritos held an enduring fascination for Borges, and formed the basis of a considerable number of his stories and poems, gratuitous depictions of violence within the realm of the detective genre seemed to constitute an affront to his intellectual and aesthetic sensibilities. The conceptual distinction is suggested by the opening paragraph of 'El proveedor de inquietudes Monk Eastman', from the 1935 collection *Historia universal de la infamia*, entitled 'Los de esta América':

> Perfilados bien por un fondo de paredes celestes o de cielo alto, dos compadritos envainados en serie ropa negra bailan sobre zapatos de mujer un baile gravísimo, que es el de los cuchillos parejos, hasta que de una oreja salta un clavel porque un cuchillo ha entrado en un hombre, que cierra con su muerte el baile sin música. Resignado, el otro se acomoda el chambergo y consagra su vejez a la narración de ese duelo tan limpio. Ésa es la historia detallada y total de nuestro malevaje. La de los hombres de pelea en Nueva York es más vertiginosa y más torpe.[400]

Borges goes on to provide a vivid sketch of Monk Eastman, one of the central figures of the New York underworld depicted in Herbert Asbury's 'decoroso

[399] Ricardo Piglia, in *Asesinos de papel*, p. 51.
[400] Borges, *Obras completas* Vol. I, p. 367.

volumen de cuatrocientas páginas en octavo', *The Gangs of New York* (1928),[401] the same volume which formed the basis of Martin Scorsese's 2002 cinematic adaptation of the same name (minus the definite article). In spite of his preference for the more poetic elegance of the violence of the Argentine underworld expressed in the opening paragraph, Borges is keen to convey to the reader the gratuitously violent details of Eastman's exploits:

> Por cada pendenciero que serenaba, hacía con el cuchillo una marca en el brutal garrote. Cierta noche, una calva resplandeciente que se inclinaba sobre un bock de cerveza le llamó la atención, y la desmayó de un mazazo. "Me faltaba una marca para cincuenta!", exclamó después.[402]

The same volume features 'Hombre de la esquina rosada', Borges' first genuine foray into the short story form, and the only original story in the collection,[403] which, though it might be considered a typically Argentine tale of compadritos, milongas and knife duels, is also a detective story in the murder mystery tradition, centred upon the identity of the killer of Francisco Real, which is only confirmed to the reader in the final paragraph when the narrator tacitly confesses his guilt in the matter to his interlocutor, identified as Borges himself:

> Yo me fui tranquilo a mi rancho, que estaba a unas tres cuadras. Ardía en la ventana una lucecita, que se apagó en seguida. De juro que me apuré a llegar, cuando me di cuenta. Entonces, Borges, volví a sacar el cuchillo corto y filoso que yo sabía cargar aquí, en el chaleco, junto al sobaco izquierdo, y le pegué otra revisada despacio, y estaba como nuevo, inocente, y no quedaba ni un rastrito de sangre.[404]

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[401] Herbert Asbury, *The Gangs of New York: An Informal History of the Underworld* (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1928). The 2002 edition of the book issued to coincide with the release of Scorsese's film adaptation features a 'Foreword by Jorge Luis Borges', a slightly misleading denomination given that it is essentially a fragment of 'El proveedor de inquietudes Monk Eastman' from *Historia universal de la infamia*.

[402] Borges, *Obras completas* Vol. I, p. 369-70.

[403] Each of the other stories in the original collection were fictionalised, liberally interpolated accounts of the exploits of real-life criminals and malefactors, including 'El atroz redentor Lazarus Morell', 'La viuda Ching, pirata', and 'El asesino desinteresado Bill Harrigan', an elliptical account of the life and death of Billy The Kid.

[404] Borges, *Obras completas* Vol. I, p. 396.

The story also shares with Asbury's narrative, and indeed the products of the hard-boiled detective tradition, an interest in the vivid, 'realist' depictions of the speech, mannerisms, criminal deeds and sexual exploits of tough, violent characters. As Daniel Balderston suggests:

> It is perhaps not unreasonable to see a trace of Asbury's interest in the dialect and the worldview of the gangsters in "Hombre de la esquina rosada." […] Borges seeks to capture the speech of the compadrito, narrator and murderer, as he recounts the day he became a man. Like Asbury, the narrator of that story evokes a time now past and seeks to recapture the speech and the worldview of a lost world.[405]

It seems apparent that while Borges recognised that social critique and that the realist depiction of crime and violence had their place in literature, he appeared loathe to admit the possibility that this place might be within an adulterated version of his beloved detective story. Jorge Fernández Vega acknowledges this contradiction:

> … es difícil que la valoración positiva de las mejores manifestaciones realistas de la literatura pudiera conseguir que Borges admitiera alteraciones en el ideario estético muy ortodoxo desde el que estimaba la especificidad del género policial. Y la aceptación literaria de la llamada novela negra hubiese implicado un importante número de concesiones estéticas. Es probable, entonces, que Borges no hubiese transigido con la mezcla de brutalidad realista y sentimentalismo (al que hubiera considerado patético), la mucha acción y la escasa actividad intelectual (por lo menos en términos "ajedrecísticos") de las historias de los novelistas "duros".[406]

It is this apparent conflict within Borges that lends additional significance to the selection of the winning entry in the second *Vea y Lea* detective story competition. The awarding of the top prize to Pérez Zelaschi's 'Las señales' out of three hundred entries is a clear indication of Borges' willingness to reconsider the acceptable parameters of the *género policial* in the Argentine context, and to lend his imprimatur to a story that might be said to anticipate the most noteworthy tendency

[405] Daniel Balderston, 'Borges and The Gangs of New York' in *Variaciones Borges* 16 (2003), p. 31.
[406] Fernández Vega, 'Una campaña estética: Borges y la narrativa policial', p. 55.

within the genre's Argentine evolution in the decades that followed, namely, the *reivindicación* of the hard-boiled style.

The three *Vea y Lea*-sponsored Concursos de Cuentos Policiales (1950, 1961 and 1964) proved enormously successful in promoting the genre among Argentine writers and the reading public. These competitions provided a challenge and a financial incentive for native practitioners of the genre to write detective stories, offered a guaranteed publication outlet for the prize-winning entrants, and the possibility of remunerated publication for a significant number of writers whose stories did not finish among the prizes, but which would later be selected for inclusion in the fortnightly magazine. As such, this series of competitions serve to bookend a transitional period which proved to be the most fecund and successful in the genre's Argentine history in commercial terms, augmented by the concurrent popularity of the magazine *Leoplán*, the aforementioned collections *Rastros* and *Pistas*, as well as later entrants into the market such as *Cobalto*, *Nueva Pandora*, *Deborah*, and *Club de Misterio.* One result of this publishing boom was the emergence of what Lafforgue and Rivera describe as:

> Un grupo bastante más numeroso de escritores que, si bien adhieren básicamente a las mismas vertientes clásicas, las matizan y mezclan con elementos provenientes de afluentes menos rigurosos y que se abren a un espacio más colorido (y no sólo en el sentido de la búsqueda del color local, que ha sido una constante entre nuestros autores del género).[407]

Févre notes that the 'mayor profesionalización y especialización del autor policial' brought about by the proliferation of publishing possibilities and a sustained readerly interest in the detective genre meant that 'el relato policial en nuestro país sale del círculo restringido e intelectual de los grandes autores […] y entra en una fase de

[407] *Asesinos de papel*, pp. 109-10.

mayor difusión'.[408] The authors whose works enjoy widespread dissemination and acclaim during this period include those examined in this section, such as Walsh, Pérez Zelaschi and Ayala Gauna, as well as Ferrari Amores, Marco Denevi, Norberto Firpo, Syria Poletti and many others. As previously suggested, the success enjoyed by Pérez Zelaschi's 'Las señales' in the 1961 *Vea y Lea* competition is indicative of the level of generic experimentation and innovation that occurred during a transitional period in which Argentine writers no longer felt bound by the formulae associated with the classical writers of the so-called Golden Age. It also foreshadows to a significant extent the next significant strand in the evolution of the genre in Argentine, described by Lafforgue and Rivera as 'la revancha de los "duros"'.[409]

Conclusion

This chapter has focused on the key critical, literary and publishing milestones that punctuated the period between 1949 and 1964. It has demonstrated the importance of *Vea y Lea* and its eponymous crime fiction competitions in encouraging native production among writers, and demonstrated how the selection of winning entries was indicative of the innovations and cross-fertilisations that occurred within the genre during this period. It has also focused particular attention on the work of Rodolfo Walsh as a vital counterpoint to the previous aesthetic campaign of Borges, and has also considered the viability of the figure of the detective in the Argentine context during a transitional period that preceded the surge in popularity of the hard-boiled style from the mid-sixties onwards.

[408] *Févre*, p. 25.
[409] *Asesinos de papel*, p. 22.

Chapter Four: Renovation and Rupture from 'La bala cansada' to *La mala guita*

Introduction

This chapter focuses on the period from 1961 to 1976, in which the hard-boiled variant of the genre achieved dominance in Argentina. Commencing with a close examination of 'La bala cansada' (1961) by Enrique Anderson Imbert, it then explores the extensive aesthetic counter-campaign waged by Ricardo Piglia and others, with the aim of integrating the hard-boiled school into the Argentine generic tradition. In addition, this chapter considers the 1975 'Primer Certamen Latinoamericano de Cuentos Policiales', the circumstances and results of which offer a fascinating perspective on the genre's evolution at this historial juncture. Finally, in this chapter, I present a detailed analysis of Pablo Leonardo's *La mala guita* (1976), a little-known novel which constitutes an example of both the strengths and limitations of the crime fiction tradition in Argentina following the series of 'aesthetic campaigns' documented in this study.

Enrique Anderson Imbert: 'La bala cansada' (1961)

Despite the impending rise to prominence of the politically orientated, often brutally realist, visceral narratives of the Argentine hard-boiled style during the 1960s and 70s, it would not be true to say that the erudite, intellectual products of the classical period had completely faded from view, though they would certainly experience various refinements and alterations. Adolfo L. Pérez Zelaschi's *El caso de la muerte que telefonea* appeared in the collection *Rastros* (No. 497) in 1966, while the various stories featuring *el comisario* Leoni were compiled in *Con arcos y ballestas* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Paulinas, 1967). Manuel Peyrou would publish *Marea de fervor* in

1967, while María Angélica Bosco, one of the few Argentine writers to feature in *El Séptimo Círculo* (*La muerte baja en el ascensor*, No. 123, 1955) also published within the genre consistently throughout the 1960s and 70s, including the novels *¿Dónde está el cordero?* (1965), *La negra Vélez y su ángel* (1969), *En la estela de un secuestro* (1977) and *Muerte en la costa del río* (1979). However, perhaps the most noteworthy flag-bearer of the tradition of the intellectual, ratiocinative detective story throughout this period was Enrique Anderson Imbert. Simpson acknowledges this perseverance during a period in which the hard-boiled novel was enjoying a tremendous vogue:

> The 'literary' or erudite novela de enigma established in the forties does persist in the following decades. Anderson Imbert's detective stories in such collections as *El gato de Cheshire* [The Cheshire Cat] (1965), *La sandía y otros cuentos* [The watermelon and other stories] (1969), and, in the next decade, *La locura juega al ajedrez* [Madness plays a game of chess] (1971) and *La botella de Klein* [Klein's bottle] (1975) belong to the Borges and Bioy Casares tradition.[410]

While it is true to say that in a broad sense Anderson Imbert's stories from this era correspond to the denomination offered by Simpson, it is perhaps more accurate to state that stories such as 'El crimen del desván', 'El general hace un lindo cadáver', 'La bala cansada' (*El grimorio*, 1961) and 'Al rompecabezas le falta una pieza' (*La botella de Klein*, 1975) each reflects and elaborates upon the tradition associated with Borges and Bioy Casares in thought-provoking ways, as well as signalling the future direction of the Argentine crime fiction tradition. Anderson Imbert is noteworthy both for his own production in the genre as well as his interventions in the critical realm. Frequently in breach of the 'doctrines' of Borges, his detective fiction is at times overtly political in its opposition to Peronism and corrupt, authoritarian rule, as in the case of 'El general hace un lindo cadáver' (1961) in particular. On other occasions the resolution of the enigma posed by the detective

[410] Simpson, p. 52.

story passes from the artificiality of the classical variant into the realm of the supernatural. 'El crimen del desván', for example, involves the deliberate inversion of Chesterton's technique, so admired by Borges, of suggesting a supernatural explanation for a crime only to replace it with one from this world. As a professor at the University of Michigan, Anderson Imbert supervised Donald Yates' doctoral dissertation, 'The Argentine Detective Story' (1960). A prominent literary historian and critic, he taught at Michigan State University between 1947 and 1965, before becoming Harvard University's first Victor S. Thomas Professor of Hispanic Literature, a position he held until his retirement in 1980.[411] He published more than 20 critical volumes, including *Historia de la literatura argentina*, first published in 1954 and reprinted in numerous editions since,[412] and *Teoría y técnica del cuento* (1979).[413] Anderson Imbert took a keen professional interest in the work of Borges, including his engagement with the detective genre. In 'Chesterton en Borges', [414] for example, as the title suggests, he provides a detailed account of the references to Chesterton in the work of Borges. Through his supervision of Donald Yates' doctoral dissertation he is intimately involved in the first full-length scholarly examination of the genre's evolution in Argentina. In turn, the work of Yates as a critic and anthologist in the genre is also of significance, and his publications include *El cuento policial latinoamericano* (Mexico: Andrea, 1964), *Latin Blood: The Best Crime and Detective Stories of South America* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972). Also noteworthy in this context is Yates' contribution to *Labyrinths: Selected Stories and other Writings of Jorge Luis Borges*, edited and translated in

[411] Daniel B. Lockhart, *Latin American Mystery Writers: An A to Z Guide* (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2004), p.13.
[412] Jorge Lafforgue, ed. *Cuentos policiales argentinos* (1st edn. Alfaguara: Buenos Aires, 1997, 3rd edn. 2003), p. 376.
[413] Enrique Anderson Imbert, *Teoría y técnica del cuento* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Marymar, 1979)
[414] Enrique Anderson Imbert, 'Chesterton en Borges', *Anales de Literatura Hispanoamericana*, 2 (1973): 469-94.

collaboration with James E. Irby (New York: New Directions, 1962), the first appearance of the writing of Borges in English, which greatly advanced his popularity outside of Argentina.

Though it is evident that both Anderson Imbert and Yates took a keen, admiring interest in the work Borges, it seems that this esteem may have been distinctly one-sided, to judge by some of the comments of the latter in a number of private exchanges with Adolfo Bioy Casares. In June of 1967, for example, Borges makes no attempt to hide his contempt for Anderson Imbert's renowned study, *Historia de la literatura argentina*, which he dismisses as a worthless catalogue, before declaring, 'Anderson Imbert es un idiota […]. Escribe libros estúpidos. Imita a todo el mundo y no mejora a nadie'.[415] His distaste for his fellow countryman extends to a desire to avoid his company, as reported by Bioy, 'Yates le comunicó: «¿Sabe quién está en Buenos Aires? ¡Anderson Imbert!». Borges le respondió: «Como en Buenos Aires hay varios millones de personas, nos queda la esperanza de no encontrarlo»'.[416] In 1972, following an animated discussion with Anderson Imbert about the importance (or otherwise) of Américo Castro's *El pensamiento de Cervantes*, Borges is once again roundly dismissive of the other's critical faculties, 'Una persona que titula un libro *La peculiaridad lingüística rioplatense y su sentido histórico* queda incapacitada para hablar de literatura, y para emitir cualquier juicio estético'.[417] Despite his crucial contribution to the dissemination of the work of Borges in the English-speaking world, Donald Yates also attracts his fair share of derision from 'Biorges':

> **Miércoles, 19 de junio [1968].** Comen en casa Borges, Donal Yates y su mujer […]. En cuanto a Yates, nos abruma con la fatigosa exposición de innumerables soluciones a los planteos de novelas policiales. Comentará

[415] Bioy Casares, Adolfo, *Borges*, ed. Daniel Martino, (Buenos Aires: Destino, 2006), pp. 1185-6.
[416] Ibid, p. 1194.
[417] Ibid, p. 1450.

> después Borges: «Es como un hombre que conociera la Historia de la prestidigitación. Recuerda los *tricks* de todos los prestidigitadores. Tiene razón Martín Fierro: el olvido es una forma de la memoria. Recordar todas esas estupideces equivale a ser un desmemoriado».[418]

Ironically, considering their own abiding interest in detective fiction, Borges and Bioy appear dismissive of Yates precisely on account of his scholarly enthusiasm for the genre:

> Hay que reconocer que la situación de Yates es particular: es un experto en literatura policial. Forzando la terminología se califica de policial un cuento de Borges [‘La muerte y la brújula’]. ¿Qué puede entender de Borges este entendido en Sax Rohmer?[419]

The remarks of Borges and Bioy in relation to Anderson Imbert and Yates might simply be confined to a footnote, were it not for the appearance in 1961 of Anderson Imbert’s detective narrative, ‘La bala cansada’, published in the short story collection *El grimorio*, which may well supply some vital context for the evident rancour of Borges. The story is a particularly illustrative example of the conjunction of reader, writer and critic prevalent in the Argentine detective story. As well as critically considering, and explicitly commenting upon, the genre in Argentina from within the pages of a detective story, Anderson Imbert’s narrative appears to address Borges directly, in a manner that might be construed as a personal attack, a circumstance which may have provoked the ire of the latter.

[418] Ibid, p. 1212-3.

[419] Ibid, p. 1215. Bioy’s comment displays both a meanness of spirit in relation to Yates and a modicum of convenient amnesia. Borges had consented to the submission of ‘El jardin de senderos que se bifurcan’ (translated by Anthony Boucher) for publication in *Ellery Queen’s Mystery Magazine* in 1948. A translation of ‘La muerte y la brújula’ was also offered to the magazine, but was rejected. If Yates was ‘forzando la terminología’ in referring to Borges’ story as a *policial*, then it is clear that by seeking publication in an American magazine entirely devoted to detective fiction, Borges himself was more than willing to do the same. See Irwin, *The Mystery to a Solution*, p. 37.

The action of 'La bala cansada' takes place in an unnamed 'plaza de barrio de Buenos Aires' on some unspecified date during 'la dictadura de Perón'.[420] The narrative perspective alternates between vivid descriptions of a frenetic exterior scene, a student protest that quickly degenerates into violence, and an interior one, in which the reader is acquainted with the habits and thoughts of a librarian, the custodian of a modest, single-storey municipal library located on one side of the square, which the narrator likens to a 'gran caja de zapatos', (164) and whose sole luxury is a large window offering a panoramic view of the square without, 'Por ahí es que el bibliotecario está ahora contemplando, en el centro de la plaza, la estatua de un caballo engarabitado con un general encima' (164). Outside in the square, there are discreet indications that an anti-government protest may be about to erupt:

> Estudiantes–socialistas en su mayoría–empiezan a llegar de distintas direcciones. Vienen de uno en uno. A lo más, de a dos. Evitan formar grupos. No se hablan […]. Escondidos entre las ropas traen volantes de propaganda antiperonista. A las seis en punto–todo está organizado–iniciarán la "manifestación relámpago". El primer grito será: "¡Libertad!" Entretanto, disimulan […]. Algunos aguardan en el cine. Otros, en la iglesita del barrio. Otros, en los cafés. (164)

Meanwhile, behind the window of the library, insulated from the quotidian concerns of the world at large, the municipal librarian, Jorge Greb, quietly goes about his work. Greb is described as a bibliophile who favours the company of books over that of his fellow man, 'Hombres, ¡bah! Valen menos que los libros. Lo que él quería era estar a solas con los libros. Y leer'. (165). Already at this point in the narrative the experienced reader of Argentine detective fiction is alerted to certain similarities between Jorge Greb and Borges. To begin with, their names are not dissimilar. Additionally, Borges had himself worked as a librarian in the Miguel Cané Municipal Library in Almagro Sur on the south side of Buenos Aires between 1938

[420] Enrique Anderson Imbert, 'La bala cansada', in *Los duendes deterministas y otros cuentos* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1965), p. 164. Subsequent references to this story will be included in the body of the text, in parentheses.

and 1946.[421] The possibility that Greb is at least partially a fictionalised rendering of Borges is reinforced by the physical description provided by the narrator:

> Sobre huesitos de flaco se había ido formando ese gordo. Cuarentón blando y fofo que ni siquiera podía dar la mano porque le fallaban los músculos del apretón. Carnes muy blancas, de bebé, de mujer, de eunuco. Apenas si un reflejo azulado, en el mentón, prometía la posibilidad de una barba. Ojos de sonso. Perdían el foco y bizqueaban. (165)

Estela Canto's visual impression of Borges upon meeting him for the first time in 1944, when he was indeed a 'cuarentón', was as follows:

> Cuando Adolfito nos presentó, me tendió la mano con aire desatento e inmediatamente dirigió sus grandes ojos celestes en otra dirección […] Borges era regordete, más bien alto y erguido, con una cara pálida y carnosa, pies notablemente chicos y una mano que, al ser estrechada, parecía sin huesos, floja, como molesta por tener que soportar el inevitable contacto.' [422]

The two descriptions coincide to an extent that is almost uncanny. In a similar vein, the narrator alerts the reader to the fact that Greb is a passionate reader and occasional writer of crime fiction, with a strong preference for the detective story in the classical mode:

> … leyendo a Chesterton, Dorothy Sayers o John Dickson Carr. Pensaba con Auguste Dupin, Sherlock Holmes, Peter Wimsey, o Isidro Parodi, como otros piensan con Platón, Spinoza, Leibniz, Einstein, Bertrand Russell o Carnap […] En las novelas de detectives admiraba su trama intelectual. Eran sistemas en los que se había suprimido la arbitrariedad. Cada novela, un orbe cerrado, desligado del mundo. (166)

Significantly, the only Argentine fictional detective mentioned in the above passage is in fact Borges and Bioy's famous creation, Isidro Parodi, a circumstance which lends weight to the idea that the story is engaged in an implicit dialogue with the Borgesian conceptualisation of the *policial*. Greb is enthused by the overtly fictional, strictly artificial character of the genre engendered by Poe, expressing a view of literary realism that would surely have resonated with Borges:

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[421] See Williamson, *Borges: A Life*, pp. 230-92.
[422] Canto, *Borges a contraluz*, p. 24.

> Lo que hay de humano en las novelas de detectives es […] un mero simulacro. Tomar en serio las alusiones a la realidad es no saber leer. Tan absurdo como si al lavarnos las manos con un jabón que tiene forma de elefante creyéramos que nos estamos lavando las manos con un elefante. (187)

Also consonant with the *public* views of Borges in relation to the genre is Greb's complete rejection of the products of the hard-boiled school:

> Algunas de esas novelas le parecían todavía demasiado contaminadas de humanidad. Apartaba con desdén las imposturas de los subgéneros: novelas de aventuras, novelas policiales, novelas de brutalidad y lujuria, como las de Sax Rohmer, Dashiell Hammett, James Sadley [sic] Chase, James M. Cain, Mickey Spillane. Los detectives de esas novelas espurias no buscaban la verdad con denuedo teórico, sino que se sumaban impetuosamente al fárrago de los acontecimientos. En vez de despejar la incógnita con el análisis y la deducción, averiguaban las cosas a puñetazos o con el sexo. ¡Qué impureza! (168)

The real world Borges was similarly forthright in his expressions of distaste for the hard-boiled style, as indicated by the following statement from a 1975 round-table discussion of the genre:

> Pero es una lástima que la novela policial, que empezó en Norteamérica y de un modo intelectual —con un personaje como M. Dupin, que razona y descubre el crimen—, vaya a parar en esos personajes siniestros, protagonizan riñas donde uno le pega al otro con la culata del revólver, y éste a su vez lo tira al suelo y le patea la cara, y todo esto mostrado con escenas pornográficas.[423]

It is remarkable that Anderson Imbert's fictional librarian should have so eloquently expressed these Borgesian objections to the hard-boiled variant, a full fourteen years before they were pronounced by Borges himself. Greb's affinity with Borges extends even to his preference for the concision of the short story, as opposed to the novel:

> La descripción de paisajes, algún intento de análisis psicológicos, esta o aquella reflexión sociológica, los diálogos que querían ser realistas, los motivos del amor, los celos, la envidia, la codicia, etc., le molestaban como excrecencias. Él iba, derechamente, a la desnuda morfología del crimen. Por eso, cuando escribía […] no eran novelas, sino cuentos de detectives. La forma breve, descarnada y rápida de esos cartabones se prestaba mejor a sus artificios. (168).

[423] *Asesinos de papel*, pp. 44-45.

At this point in the narrative the reader has been offered a substantial insight into the *interior* world of a librarian and writer who appears to dwell among books, inhabiting the pages of detective fiction, engaged only with abstract, purely intellectual problems, effectively insulated from Argentine quotidian realities. Meanwhile, on the other side of the library's large window, the messy, unpredictable and potentially violent exterior world is about to play host to a student demonstration:

> Se ha disparado el resorte. Jóvenes salen de todas partes. Se juntan. Avanzan hacia la estatua y empiezan a gritar: "¡Libertad, libertad, libertad!" Inundación humana. Todas las bocas son una boca, abierta, honda y rugiente. Todas las cabezas son una ondulación continua. Todos los brazos son espumas del mismo oleaje. (169).

The 'manifestación relámpago' roars into life, turning the square into a sea of vocal, vibrant political militancy, which reverberates even within the library itself, where a number of young patrons slam their books shut and take up the cry of '¡libertad!' as they rush out to join the protesters, to the evident consternation of an indignant Jorge Greb, '¡Qué barbaridad! No se respetan ni las bibliotecas. Otra manifestación política. ¡Hasta cuándo! ¡Qué país!' (169). Predictably, Greb opts to shield himself from the exterior reality via his favoured method, 'Se retiró con disgusto de la ventana, fue a su escritorio, se sentó y se puso a leer *El caso del cadáver en triplicado*' (169). While the librarian applies his attention to a *relato policial*, outside his window the Argentine police and Peronist supporters make their presence felt in a violent effort to break up the student demonstration:

> De pronto, un carro de policías por un lado. Un escuadrón a caballo por otro. Hombres torvos, vestidos de civil, pero armados por la policía, rompen la reunión. "¡Perón, Perón, Perón!" "¡Alpargatas sí, libros no! Golpes. Desbande. Suenan unos tiros. "¡Viva la libertad!" "Viva Perón!' Los cosacos, desde sus caballos, fustigan a los estudiantes. Otros policías los empujan, los meten presos en los carros. Rostros con máscaras de sangre. (169-170)

Anderson Imbert's well advertised anti-Peronist sentiment is reflected in the narrator's disparaging references to the men charged with dispersing the crowd:

> … pero hay ratas, ratas de uniforme, ratas sin uniforme, ratas armadas, ratas de albañal, grandes, oscuras, peludas, hinchadas, movedizas, implacables, abyectas, con los ojos negros y atisbones. Piensan "haga patria, mate un estudiante por día" y gritan "¡viva Perón!". (170).

Despite his best efforts to eliminate the exterior world from his mind, 'El no prestar atención al desorden era ya un modo de ordenar el mundo' (170), Greb is obliged to lift his head out of the sand, as a group of protesters, fleeing the square, take refuge in the library. The separation between the exterior and interior realms of the narrative is breached, and the librarian is obliged to enter into contact with the violence of the world without, '—¿Qué… qué… qué es esto, qué es esto, se… señores? Estamos… mos… estamos en… en la bi… biblioteca. Si… silencio, por fa… favor' (170). One of the students has been injured in the clash with the police, 'Tenía una sonrisa desafiante, un desgarrón en el bolsillo y un chichón en la frente, manchada de sangre' (171). Though he initially assumes that the swelling on his forehead has been caused by a blow from a policeman's baton, upon closer inspection it is discovered that it is no ordinary bump:

> Era un chichón raro: no redondo, sino largo.
> —Permítame —dijo el señor de edad. Y le palpó el chichón—. No. Esto no es un chichón, m'hijo. Es una bala.
> —¿Una bala?
> —Una bala que habrá rebotado en alguna pared. O una bala vieja. O una bala cansada. Pero es una bala. Déjeme ver. Sí. Es una bala. ¿No la siente? La bala se le ha quedado entre la piel y el hueso. Tiene que ir al hospital.
> —No. Ni qué hablar. Al hospital, no. Me levantarían un prontuario. Y después me echan de la Facultad. (171)

While the other onlookers discuss the options open to the injured student, Jorge Greb is struck by the sudden realisation that the incident might provide material for the elaboration of a detective story, 'Nunca había leído, en sus novelas, un caso así: una bala alojada en el cuerpo sin que quien la lleva se dé cuenta de ello.' (172).

However, he gives no thought to depicting the violent scene of politically charged violence that he has just witnessed. Instead, he begins to work upon the mental composition of a purely abstract detective story, shorn of context, that incorporates the 'bala cansada' as an element of the plot:

> Víctima, asesino, detective, irreales como los signos algebraicos de un triángulo… Sin caridad, sin indignación, sin simpatía, sin tomar partido, sin sentido de la justicia, sin compasión ante el dolor y la muerte, veía por el ventanal a la policía, batiendo todavía a los estudiantes […]. Pero Jorge Greb ya no estaba allí. Había entrado en un aire de novela de detectives, donde puede haber golpes, y sangre, y muerte, pero no puede haber sufrimiento porque nadie vive, nada es real. (172)

However, before he gets the chance to commit his carefully planned concept to paper, he is again interrupted by the exterior world as the police, in the aftermath of the demonstration, attempt to piece together the movements of the protesters who had taken refuge in the library. In spite of his vast experience as a reader of intellectual tales of detection, Greb is hamstrung by his seeming inability to process the events shaping the world around him:

> No supo responder al interrogatorio. Nada. Ni qué había ocurrido ni quién era el muchacho herido ni adónde lo llevaron a curarse ni cuántos eran ni cómo hablaban ni por qué no llamó a los agentes del orden […]. Lo inculparon, pues, de haber dado asilo, en la sala de lectura, a los vende-patrias. Fue destituido. ¡Qué mal suerte! Bueno, consolémonos: a lo mejor Jorge Greb, cesante, tuvo más tiempo para terminar su cuentito. (174).

Greb's dismissal from the library marks the conclusion of the narrative. Again, there is an identifiable parallel with the real-life experience of Borges, who was himself removed from his post at the Miguel Cané Municipal Library in July of 1946 following Perón's victory in the presidential elections celebrated earlier that year, and appointed Inspector of Poultry and Rabbits in the public markets instead.[424]

Considering the similarities between the librarian depicted in 'La bala cansada' and Borges himself, and in light of the apparent animosity of Borges

[424] For an account of the circumstances of this 'promotion', see Williamson, pp. 292-5.

towards Anderson Imbert, should this story be interpreted as a satirical, personal attack? The unflattering, though accurate, description of the librarian's physical appearance certainly lends credence to this reading. The depiction of a writer lost in a library, whose obsession with the fictional universe is such that he is unable or unwilling to perceive the world around him, would seem to reinforce this view. Borges' public preference for the classical variant of the genre over the hard-boiled model, and his reticence in relation to realist or politically inflected fiction are replicated extremely accurately through the person of Jorge Greb. However, in many respects these questions obscure some of the more significant aspects of 'La bala cansada' as it relates to the critical consideration of the evolution of the Argentine detective genre. In this story, and indeed in several others ('El crimen del desván', 'Al rompecabezas le falta una pieza', 'El general hace un lindo cadáver'), Anderson Imbert proves to be a highly experienced, specialised reader, writer and critical commentator within the Argentine detective fiction tradition, despite Borges' damning assertion, 'imita a todo el mundo y no mejora a nadie'.[425] 'La bala cansada' itself invites the active participation of a similarly specialised reader with specific knowledge of the Argentine generic tradition, including the critical and literary interventions of Borges, which are humorously, and at times caustically, examined. As in the case of Borges's detective Erik Lönnrot in 'La muerte y la brújula', Jorge Greb's preference for intellectual, purely geometrical solutions to detective mysteries causes him to disregard the more prosaic realities of a violent world, a failing which ultimately leads to his downfall. Anderson Imbert's story would seem to challenge the Borgesian doctrine that politics should have no place in literature, by demonstrating the political consequences for Greb of seeking refuge in classical

[425] Op. Cit.

detective fiction, and turning a blind eye to the violent world that exists beyond the walls of the library. As such, 'La bala cansada' humorously highlights the classical, 'hygienic' detective story's limited capacity to reflect the Argentine experience of criminality and violence.

Ricardo Piglia and 'la revancha de los duros'

There are interesting and important parallels between the 'campaña estética' undertaken by Borges and his close associates on behalf of the 'classical' detective genre from the mid-1930s to the mid-1950s, and the *reivindicación* of the American hard-boiled model that took place in Argentina during the 1960s and 1970s. As Braceras and Leytour acknowledge, 'Así como quince años antes se le había permitido a este género marginal entrar en el círculo de la distribución oficial, ahora la nueva generación acepta la inclusión de aquel sector que permanecía en la sombra'.[426] Although the translated works of the most representative writers of the America hard-boiled school had maintained a presence in Argentina since the 1940s, their lack of cultural prestige, the tacit consensus that they amounted to little more than 'la versión degradada de un género refinado y armónico',[427] meant that a new aesthetic campaign would be required to rehabilitate the image of the *modelo negro/duro*. It is apparent that, in essence, a relatively small number of Argentine writers, translators, anthologists, academics and editors sought to do for the hard-boiled genre what Borges, Bioy Casares and others had done for the classical model, using strikingly similar tactics and achieving commensurately notable results, such that by the mid-1970s (and on into the 80s) the *modelo duro* had become the

[426] Braceras et al., *El cuento policial argentino*, p. 43.
[427] Piglia, Op. Cit.

dominant form of crime fiction in Argentina, both in terms of commercial success and critical attention.

As previously indicated, the first Emecé/ *Vea y Lea* detective story competition (1950) had demonstrated the commercial and literary potential of offering a stimulus to the production and consumption of home-grown crime fiction in Argentina. Emecé would again lend its gravitas to the genre in 1957, by awarding second place in its own annual literary prize to Anselmo Leoz's *El inspector Verano*, a novel that combined elements of the classical and hard-boiled traditions. As reported in *El País* (Montevideo) following the novel's publication in 1958:

> *El inspector Verano* mezcla con habilidad los rasgos de la escuela inglesa del género (lógica inteligencia, algo de humor, una pizca de psicología) con la norteamericana (violencia, dinamismo, algo de sadismo, una pizca de sangre).[428]

In 1960, Editorial Malinca, the prolific publisher of a number of best-selling *colecciones de quiosco* including 'Cobalto', 'Débora, 'Pandora' and 'Linterna', opted to emulate the *Vea y Lea* example in an effort to encourage Argentine writers to try their hand at the hard-boiled genre, by offering their own literary prize, the announcement of which bore similarities to Emecé and *Vea y Lea*'s 'manifesto' of the previous decade:

> La literatura policial y de misterio, llamada también *fuerte y negra*, es el deleite de millones de lectores en el mundo entero. Son muchísimos los escritores que en Inglaterra, en Norteamérica, en Francia, cultivan el género. En nuestro idioma –salvando algunas excepciones de auténtica validez intelectual– no ha aparecido el equivalente de los Mickey Spillane, Bill S. Ballinger, Georges Simenon, James Hadley Chase…[429]

Building upon his success in the Premio Emecé three years before, Anselmo Leoz was, on this occasion, awarded the top prize for his novel *Los muchachos del*

[428] *El País* (Montevideo), 15 June 1958., in *Asesinos de papel*, p. 35.
[429] *Asesinos de papel*, p. 23.

lápiz.[430] As was the case with the *Vea y Lea* competitions, Editorial Malinca's miniature stimulus package for the hard-boiled variant was able to foreground the work of those Argentine writers whose novels figured among the prize winners, as well as providing a forum for their subsequent publication in the company's various collections during a period of immense commercial success for these Argentine equivalents of the pulp magazines:

> posibilitó la edición de *Los muchachos del lápiz*, de Anselmo Leoz, *El criminal metafísico*, de Victor Sáiz, *y El crimen perfecto*, de Julio César Reyes, aparecidos en la Colección Cobalto (Nº 49 y 50) y Nueva Linterna (Nº35), respectivamente.[431]

These *colecciones de quiosco* also proved a particularly fertile breeding ground for what has been described by Lafforgue as:

> Un conjunto pequeño y heterogéneo en sus inicios, que se esconde en el anonimato, que comienza a crecer y dar la cara en los '60 y cuyas pautas escriturarias terminarán por desplazar a aquellas de los maestros ingleses, hasta ser asumidas plenamente por las nuevas promociones de escritores.[432]

Among these figures, Lafforgue acknowledges in particular the prominent role of Eduardo Goligorsky as an early pioneer in the rehabilitation of the *modelo duro*. Goligorksy had begun his career in publishing in 1952 at the age of twenty-one, as an English-to-Spanish translator of comic books such as *Flash Gordon* and *Jungle Jim* for the Argentine market, before graduating to *Rastros*, where he served an extensive apprenticeship in the genre through the translation of an eclectic variety of Anglophone narratives drawn from across the spectrum of the crime genre's tradition. By the early 1960s he was himself writing crime fiction in the suspense and hard-boiled modes under a variety of pseudonyms, including James Alistair, Dave Target, Ralph Fletcher, Burt Floyd and many others, with several of these titles

[430] Anselmo Leoz, *Los muchachos del lápiz* (Buenos Aires: Colección Cobalto, Editorial Malinca, 1960).
[431] *Asesinos de papel*, p. 22.
[432] *Asesinos de papel*, p. 110.

appearing in *Rastros* in 1960 alone. The English or American-sounding *noms de plume* employed by Goligorsky served not only to conceal his identity, but also to disguise his nationality at a time when translated British and American works continued to exercise a far greater appeal for Argentine readers than native crime fiction. In keeping with this subterfuge, such stories tended to be set in foreign, typically urban American locations. This was a pragmatic commercial decision, rather than a deliberate attempt by Goligorsky to disassociate himself from the *modelo duro* for reasons of intellectual snobbery, given that in other areas of his editorial activity he was happy to associate his name with the genre, as noted by Lafforgue, 'ya con su nombre dirige un par de excelentes colecciones policiales para la editorial Granica'.[433] Goligorsky's policy of pseudonymity was replicated by other Argentine hard-boiled writers plying their trade among the various *colecciones de quiosco* of this period, whose production also tended to adhere to a formula very much tailored to the perceived appetites of the reading public:

> Los textos nacionales, que se inscriben en esta nueva vertiente, siguen adaptándose, en general, a los grandes modelos de procedencia norteamericana. Los ambientes, de manera casi regular, son yanquis, en tanto que los detectives, por lo común inescrupulosos y atiborrados de whisky, suelen nacer de una amalgama de Lemy Caution, Mike Hammer y Sam Spade, con algún toque ocasional de Philip Marlowe.[434]

The surge in popularity of the hard-boiled model was not confined to this somewhat duplicitous commercial exploitation of the American pulp magazine formulae, however. Just as Borges had extolled the virtues of the classical detective story in a variety of media beginning with 'Leyes de la narración policial' (1933), now, a quarter of a century later, a new generation of Argentine writers and intellectuals would make the case for the hard-boiled variant in a changing political and

[433] Ibid.
[434] *Asesinos de papel*, p. 23.

intellectual environment. Prominent among these was Juan José Sebreli, whose influential article 'Dashiell Hammett o la ambiguedad' first appeared in *El Litoral* (Santa Fe) on the 8th of March, 1959,[435] while a further critical examination of Hammett's work by the same author would feature in 'Dashiell Hammett, novelista de una sociedad de competencia', published in *Ficción*, Nº 50 (Buenos Aires) in September of 1966. Just as the advocacy and participation of Borges and Bioy Casares had been pivotal in convincing Emecé to publish the ground-breaking anthology *Los mejores cuentos policiales* in 1943, to be followed two years later by the phenomenally successful *Séptimo Círculo* collection, the prestige of the hard-boiled genre in Argentina would benefit from a similar form of enthusiastic intellectual patronage, 'la vía de entrada en el campo de la literatura aceptada como tal se da a través del reconocimiento de personas que cuentan con un importante caval cultural e ideológico'.[436] Chief among these was Ricardo Piglia, now Emeritus Professor of Spanish and Portuguese Languages and Cultures at Princeton University, who, through his extensive readings of North American literature, came to view the development of the American hard-boiled detective story as a natural progression from the work of Ernest Hemingway, rather than as a product of the denigration of the more genteel English model. In particular, he foregrounds the role of Hemingway's 1927 short story 'The Killers' as a key literary precursor to the work of Hammett, Chandler, McCoy and others:

> En la historia del surgimiento y la definición del género, el cuento de Hemingway *Los asesinos* tiene la misma importancia que *Los crímenes de la rue Morgue*, el cuento de Poe que funda las reglas del relato de enigma. En esos dos matones profesionales que llegan a Chicago para asesinar a un ex boxeador al que no conocen, en ese crimen «por encargo» que no se explica ni se intenta descifrar están ya las formas de la policial dura, en el mismo

[435] The same article may be found in Juan José Sebreli, *Escritos sobre escritos, ciudades bajo ciudades* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 1997), pp. 223-33.
[436] Braceras et al., *El cuento policial argentino*, p. 44.

> sentido en que las deducciones del caballero Dupin de Poe preanuncian la historia de la novela de enigma.[437]

This declaration of a concrete precursor to the products of the hard-boiled school certainly recalls Borges' insistence upon the pre-eminence of Poe as the originator of the detective story in the classical mode. The similarities between these eloquent apologists for the two major strands of the crime fiction genre are not confined to the identification of seminal works. In fact, it is licit to assert that Piglia's endeavours on behalf of the *manera dura* amount to a very conscious, alternative *campaña estética* reminiscent of that pursued by Borges on behalf of the classical detective story decades earlier.

Piglia traces his critical and editorial interest in the hard-boiled genre to the mid-1960s, a period in which he was involved in editing a series of translated classics for the publisher Jorge Álvarez, who had published his first fictional work, a collection of short stories entitled *La invasión*, in 1967:

> Habíamos publicado *Robinson Crusoe* traducido por Cortázar, una traducción de Cortázar que estaba medio perdida. Publicamos *Memorias del subsuelo* de Dostoievski en un momento en que no había una edición disponible en español.[438]

At this time Piglia was also reading the work of writers such as Dashiell Hammett, Raymond Chandler and James M. Cain, and suggested to Álvarez the publication of a collection of hard-boiled detective novels, a proposal that would not come to fruition at that time, but that would serve as an inspiration and the template for his efforts on behalf of Editorial Tiempo Contemporáneo's *Serie Negra*, which began

[437] Ricardo Piglia, 'Sobre el género policial,' in *Crítica y ficción*, p. 59.
[438] Piglia, 'Conversación en Princeton' in *Crítica y ficción*, p. 176. As indicated in a footnote to the title, this conversation took place in April of 1998 during a Princeton seminar on contemporary narrative moderated by Arcadio Díaz Quiñones. The transcript was initially published in *Cuadernos* the periodical of Princeton's Programme in Latin American Studies, in January of 1999.

publication in 1969. In his 'Conversación en Princeton', Piglia reflects upon these early readings of the hard-boiled writers:

> En principio no los leía como sujetos de un género. Los leía como una manera de transformar el debate sobre qué quiere decir hacer literatura social, que fue lo primero que me interesó en el género, porque me parece que el género policial da la respuesta a un debate muy duro de los años sesenta, de la izquierda, digamos, que era qué tipo de exigencias sociales le eran hechas a un escritor.[439]

Whereas the practice and promotion of the classical detective story has been interpreted by critics such as Mandel, Avellaneda and Simpson as a literary manifestation of an implicitly conservative, bourgeois political agenda, a substantial part of the appeal of the hard-boiled model for Piglia, as a prominent young left-leaning writer and intellectual in 1960s Argentina, was precisely the genre's potential as a narrative form that seemed to offer an appropriate platform for the expression of an explicit political commitment through fiction:

> Entonces el género policial era una respuesta muy eficaz hecha por escritores muchos de ellos con mucha conciencia política, como en el caso de Hammett, que era un escritor próximo al partido comunista, afiliado de hecho al partido comunista.[440]

This reference by Piglia to Hammett's political conscience is convenient, but also slightly misleading. While it is true to say that Hammett did become an affiliate of the Communist Party, and would later appear before Joseph McCarthy's anti-Communist Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations, it is something of a stretch to attribute a clear left-wing political intent to the detective works for which he is best known. Hammett had honed his craft writing short stories under the editorial strictures of *Black Mask* magazine during the 1920s, drawing upon his experiences as an operative of the notorious Pinkerton detective agency. *Red Harvest*, perhaps his most overtly 'political' novel, was published in 1929, *The*

[439] Ibid, p. 176.
[440] Ibid, p. 177.

Maltese Falcon in 1930, and *The Glass Key* in 1931. Only a handful of short stories and one novel, *The Thin Man* (1934), were published after Hammett began his relationship with Lilian Hellman in 1931, the year which marked the beginning of his interest in organised left-wing activism, and he only became formally affiliated with the American Communist Party in 1937. Mandel makes the point particularly well:

> Hammett worked for eight years as a Pinkerton agent, deployed against strikers and left-wing organizations. From there he transferred to a private detective agency without any involvement in the class struggle. He then moved into writing for pulp magazines, and finally towards 'serious' detective novels. This evolution was a conscious one: Hammett felt bad about having helped employers fight striking workers, and deliberately chose to change his job […]. He was subsequently to move further in the direction of a left-wing literary milieu, becoming the companion of Communist author Lilian Hellman. This did not mean that the novels he wrote after this turn in his life explicitly opposed bourgeois values: they did nothing of the kind […]. But they did stop treating those who oppose law, order, property or decency, as self-evident criminals.[441]

Whatever the original political 'intent' of the works of hard-boiled writers such as Hammett, Chandler, Goodis or McCoy, it is clear that their critical interpretation in Argentine intellectual circles was enthusiastically *izquierdista*. Piglia, for example, highlights the difference in emphasis between the kind of political commitment found in the work of the American hard-boiled writers and that displayed by prominent European left-wing intellectuals of the same period, such as Jean Paul Sartre or Georg Lukács:

> No era un simple reflejo de la sociedad, sino que traficaba con lo social, lo convertía en intriga y en red anecdótica. De modo que yo encontraba un género muy popular que estaba elaborando cuestiones sociales de una manera muy directa y muy abierta. Ése es un elemento que a mí me marcó muchísimo en mi concepción de la literatura y su función, digamos, y la manera en que un texto puede trabajar problemas sociales y políticos.[442]

[441] Mandel, pp. 120-1.
[442] Piglia, *Crítica y ficción*, p. 177.

This generalised interpretation by Piglia of the many and various works that constitute the hard-boiled oeuvre as a 'literatura de denuncia' might perhaps be considered in the light of Braceras' observation that, in certain cases, 'son los críticos literarios los que descubren esa denuncia en las páginas de algunos autores, aunque éstos quizás no la hayan considerado como un objetivo de sus novelas'.[443] At the same, it is clear that as part of an aesthetic campaign to restore balance to the critical consideration of the crime genre in Argentina, Piglia undoubtedly viewed the works of the hard-boiled writers as suitable candidates for a policy of 'affirmative action', as a means of countering the effects of a lengthy history of discrimination and generic marginalisation that had occurred under the yoke of the classical hegemony.

A key plank of the Piglian strategy of rehabilitation was to address the fact that by the mid-1960s, 'no existía una colección de novela negra en lengua española'.[444] By contrast, in 1965 Emecé's classically oriented *El Séptimo Círculo* series, by now under the direction of Carlos V. Frías, was already approaching its two hundredth title. By his own admission, Piglia would spare no effort in making the preparations necessary for the rehabilitation of the *modelo duro* in a prestigious format:

> yo leía a la vez toda la historia del género y también leía las novelas que se estaban publicando en ese momento, a fines de los 60 […]. Yo me pasé cerca de dos o tres años leyendo casi exclusivamente novelas policiales, tenía la casa llena de libros, me llegaban cajas y cajas, ediciones baratas, los Gold Medal Books de los años cincuenta, los *paper* de la Ace books. [445]

This exhaustive process of selection and evaluation would come to fruition between 1969 and 1977, beginning with the publication of the anthology *Cuentos policiales*

[443] Braceras et al., *El cuento policial argentino*, p. 33.
[444] Piglia, *Crítica y ficción*, p. 178.
[445] Ibid.

de la serie negra by Editorial Tiempo Contemporáneo, edited by Piglia under the pseudonym Emilio Renzi, and featuring a prologue by Robert Louit entitled 'La novela negra americana'. This preliminary collection featuring seven stories by hard-boiled writers, including Dashiell Hammett ('Un hombre llamado Spade'), Raymond Chandler ('Gas de Nevada'), James M. Cain ('La muchacha de la tormenta') and Ross MacDonald ('La rubia imaginaria'), served to whet the public appetite and also to set the editorial tone for the series of novels that would be published as part of the collection in the years that followed. In this regard, Piglia's anthology served a very similar function to that of Borges and Bioy Casares' 1943 selection for Emecé, *Los mejores cuentos policiales*, whose commercial success foreshadowed that of the *Séptimo Círculo* series. As noted in this study, Emecé had initially been sceptical about lending its illustrious imprint to a collection of translated classical detective novels, despite the enthusiasm and intellectual prestige of Borges and Bioy Casares (the first title in the series, Nicholas Blake's *La bestia debe morir* [The Beast Must Die] did not appear until 1945). Piglia's publisher Tiempo Contemporáneo was clearly less risk-averse in relation to his carefully researched project, with the first two novels in the collection, José Giovanni's *A todo riesgo* (*Classe tous risques*) and Horace McCoy's *¿Acaso no matan a los caballos?* (*They shoot horses, don't they*?) also appearing in 1969, to be followed in 1970 by Dashiell Hammett's *El hombre flaco* (*The Thin Man*), Giovanni's *El último suspiro* (*Le Deuxième Souffle*), Chandler's *El simple arte de matar* (*The Simple Art of Murder*), McCoy's *Luces de Hollywood* (*I Should Have Stayed Home*, translated by Rodolfo Walsh) and Giovanni's *Alias 'Ho'* (*Ho!*).[446] In all, the Serie Negra collection would feature twenty-one titles, concluding with Richard S. Prather's *La Verdad Desnuda* (*Strip*

[446] It is interesting to note that, despite the predominance of American writers appearing in Piglia's collection, the most featured writer in the Serie Negra, with five titles, was in fact José Giovanni, a French writer and film-maker of Corsican origin.

for Murder, translated by Estela Canto[447]) in 1977.[448] Though the total number of works appearing in Piglia's collection for Tiempo Contemporáneo is modest compared to the monumental *Séptimo Círculo* series (which in 1983 reached a grand total of 366 titles with the publication of Donald Hamilton's *Los intimidadores* [*The Intimidators*]), the *Serie Negra* must be regarded as a key element in the reappraisal of the hard-boiled genre in the Argentine context. The similitude with the upward trajectory of the classical model three decades previously is preserved, in the sense that the elevation in status of the hard-boiled model was primarily achieved through the dissemination, through intellectually prestigious channels, of translated foreign works of detective fiction, to be followed shortly afterwards by a proliferation of titles by Argentine writers. According to Braceras et al., Piglia's collection was probably 'el mayor impulso que recibió la novela dura para su total aceptación más allá del circuito de los quioscos'.[449] As was the case with the *Sur* group's aesthetic campaign on behalf of the classical model, it is difficult to know with certainty how

[447] Estela Canto was already highly a experienced translator, particularly in the realm of detective fiction, having translated at least five titles for the Séptimo Círculo series between 1946 and 1976, including Richard Hull's *My Own Murderer* (1940) as *Mi propio asesino* (No. 10, 1945), John Dickson Carr's *The Waxworks Murder* (1932) as *El crimen de las figuras de cera* (No. 18, 1946) and Clifford Witting's *Measure for Murder* (1941) as *Medida para la muerte* (No. 75, 1951). Canto, a distinguished journalist and writer well known for her strong Communist views, acquired a certain fame on account of her amorous relationship with Borges, who developed an infatuation with her following their introduction at a party hosted by Bioy Casares and Silvina Ocampo in 1944. As detailed in her memoir, *Borges a contraluz* (Madrid: Espasa-Calpe, 1989), their initial meeting did not exactly occasion a frisson of physical excitement on the part of either. To judge by Edwin Williamson's remarks, the pair made a somewhat unlikely match, 'She was, in fact, a woman of wide sexual experience: she had had affairs with writers but preferred men of action, and when she met Borges, she was involved with "a British spy who constantly travelled all over Argentina and Brazil"'. Williamson, p. 175. Despite their apparent incompatibility, by March of 1945 Borges' ardour was such that, following a dinner in the Hotel Las Delicias in Adrogué (the inspiration for the *quinta* Triste-le-Roy of 'La muerte y la brújula'), he asked for Canto's hand in marriage. The event is described by Williamson as follows, 'Sitting awkwardly astride the bench, he ventured in a trembling voice, "Estela, would you marry me?" She was taken aback: the declaration sounded to her like something out of a Victorian novel. For some reason it occurred to her to reply in English, the language Borges used in moments of great emotional intensity: "I'd be happy to, Georgie. But don't forget that I'm a disciple of Bernard Shaw. We cannot get married without first going to bed with each other." Her reply elicited a poignant reaction — Borges took her at her word, and after that night he was to regard Estela as his fiancée'. Williamson, p. 282.

[448] For a complete list of the titles appearing in Tiempo Contemporáneo's Serie negra, see http://laflechanegrasigloxv.blogspot.ie/2009/09/coleccion-serie-negra-tiempo.html [Accessed on the 2nd of July 2009]

[449] Braceras et al., *El cuento policial argentino*, p. 44.

the *modelo duro* might have fared in the Argentine context had it not been for the interventions of figures such as Sebreli, Goligorsky and Piglia. However, the speed with which the previously maligned poor relation of the genre managed to supplant its more illustrious relative would indicate that the efforts of this group provided an important 'shot in the arm' for the hard-boiled variant at a vital time. By the mid-1970s, the revolution had largely achieved its objectives, as reported by Lafforgue:

> Tanto desde la ensayística como desde la narrativa se volverá frecuente por entonces la reivindicación de los modelos duros norteamericanos. Del pasatiempo a la crónica, del juego inteligente a la denuncia comprometida, el pasaje está datado: los años '60. La Serie Negra dirigida por Ricardo Piglia para Tiempo Contemporáneo hacia fines de esa década, se erige en el símbolo de un triunfo, el de los Chandler, McCoy, Giovanni & Co. Triunfo corroborado, en el plano de la producción local, por una serie de novelas que irrumpen entre 1973 y 1976: *Triste, solitario y final*, de Osvaldo Soriano; *Los tigres de la memoria*, de Juan Carlos Martelli; *Un revólver para Mack*, de Pablo Urbanyi, *El agua en los pulmones* y *Los asesinos las prefieren rubias*, ambas de Juan Carlos Martini; *Ni un dólar partido por la mitad*, de Sergio Sinay; *Noches sin lunas ni soles*, de Rubén Tizziani; *Su turno para morir*, de Alberto Laiseca, y *La mala guita*, de Pablo Leonardo (Moledo).[450]

Of the titles listed above, there is no trace of the hygienic, ratiocinative puzzle mystery in the tradition of Chesterton or Agatha Christie. The title of Martini's *El agua en los pulmones* (1973) is indicative of the forensic examination to which the grim details of fictional crime would be subject during this period in the Argentine context. 'Water on the lungs' alludes to the inspection typically performed by a pathologist in an effort to establish whether or not a cadaver was alive when it first became submerged in water, as documented in Chandler's *The Big Sleep*. *Los asesinos las prefieren rubias* (1974) is a dark play upon the title of Howard Hawks' 1953 film, *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*. Appropriately, the novel, set in Southern California, involves the murder of Marilyn Monroe by 'El General', one of the leaders of an oppressive Argentine military regime. Osvaldo Soriano borrows the

[450] *Asesinos de papel*, p. 111. Also of note during this period was the publication of Manuel Puig's *The Buenos Aires Affair* (Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 1973).

title of his 1973 novel *Triste, solitario y final* from the last page of Chandler's 1953 novel *The Long Goodbye*, in which Philip Marlowe counts the human cost, whatever the financial reward, of his stubborn devotion to his friend Terry Lennox:

> You bought a lot of me, Terry. For a smile and a nod and a wave of the hand and a few quiet drinks in a quiet bar here and there. It was nice while it lasted. So long *amigo*. I won't say good-bye. I said it to you when it meant something. I said it when it was sad and lonely and final.[451]

The novel is preceded by a dedication to the memory of Raymond Chandler, Stan Laurel and Oliver Hardy, and features as its main protagonists an ageing Philip Marlowe and an Argentine journalist, Osvaldo Soriano, who, having met at the grave of the recently deceased Stan Laurel, decide to join forces to investigate the tragic circumstances of his life and death. Soriano's novel is clearly an affectionate homage to, and a pastiche of, the detective fiction of Chandler, making numerous overt references to passages from his work.[452] The narrative also frequently alludes to other prominent writers of the hard-boiled school, particularly Dashiell Hammett and Ross Macdonald. Before he dies, Laurel attempts to contract Marlowe to investigate a mystery afflicting his professional life:

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[451] Chandler, *The Big Sleep and other novels* [*Farewell, My Lovely*, *The Long Good-bye*] (London: Penguin, 2000), pp. 658-659.

[452] In *The Little Sister*, for example, Marlowe is visited at his office by Orfamay Quest, a deceptively prim young doctor's secretary from Manhattan, Kansas, anxious to locate her brother Orrin, who has gone missing while working in California. Marlowe wonders aloud how Quest had arrived at his door, 'You don't look like the type that goes to see private detectives, and especially private detectives you don't know.' Quest replies, 'I just picked your name out of the phone book'. *The Little Sister*, p. 6. A very similar exchange is recreated in Soriano's novel, during the initial meeting between Stan Laurel and Marlowe, '—¿Cómo supo mi número?— preguntó el detective, mientras con un gesto invitaba a Stan a sentarse. —En verdad, señor Marlowe, lo tomé al azar de la guía'. Osvaldo Soriano, *Triste, solitario y final* (Buenos Aires: Booket, 1974, 3rd edn.), p. 15. Also in *The Little Sister*, Orfamay Quest is anxious to know the cost involved in securing the services of Marlowe, '"Forty bucks a day and expenses. Unless it's the kind of job that can be done for a flat fee." "That's far too much," the little voice said. "Why, it might cost hundreds of dollars and I only get a small salary and–'. *The Little Sister*, p. 2. The subject of fees is also discussed between Marlowe and Laurel during their first encounter, 'No puedo pagar una agencia. No tengo mucho dinero. ¿Cuánto me dijo que cobraba por su trabajo? —Cuarenta dólares diarios y los gastos. —Está dentro de mis posibilidades, siempre que los gastos no sean muchos.' *Triste, solitario y final*, pp. 15-16. Such close allusions to Chandler's texts recur throughout Soriano's novel.

> —Quiero saber por qué nadie me ofrece trabajo. Si tratara de averiguarlo por mi cuenta arriesgaría mi prestigio. Hay muchos veteranos trabajando en el cine y en la televisión. Yo podría actuar, o dirigir, o escribir guiones, pero nadie me ofrece nada desde hace muchos años.[453]

Arriving at Marlowe's sparse, shabby office for their second meeting, he finds the detective in characteristic pose, reading a book, his feet resting upon his desk. Laurel is curious to know what book the detective is reading, to which Marlowe replies:

> —Una novela policial. Un detective de la agencia Continental llega a un pueblo y se mezcla con una banda de criminales y con la policía y anda a los tiros con todo el mundo. No es un hombre delicado, se lo aseguro. Me hubiera gustado tenerlo de socio. La novela no dice cómo se llama, pero podría encontrarlo a la vuelta de una esquina.[454]

The level of generic homage present in the novel is indicated by the fact that Chandler's legendary fictional private eye, resurrected by Soriano, is to be found in his office reading Dashiell Hammett's groundbreaking 1929 novel *Red Harvest*, featuring the unnamed, brutally efficient Continental Op. The effect is only enhanced when Marlowe, in the same encounter, claims as his protégé another famous fictional detective, Ross Macdonald's Lew Archer, protagonist of more than a dozen hard-boiled novels, a number of which had been published in the *Séptimo Círculo* series by 1970:

> Por ahí anda a las trompadas un muchacho a quien le enseñé el oficio, pero no se le ocurre colaborar con el viejo Marlowe. Viene a visitarme para tomar whisky. Me consulta los casos, me da la mano y se va. Lew es un gran muchacho, preocupado por el psicoanálisis, pero debe creer que los viejos viven del aire.[455]

The many diegetic distortions produced by the presence of both displaced fictional characters (Marlowe, Lew Archer, The Continental Op) and familiar Hollywood figures, compounded by the insertion of Soriano as a character in the novel, serve to exclude *Triste, solitario y final* from the category of social realism in the

[453] *Triste, solitario y final*, p. 27.
[454] *Triste, solitario y final*, pp. 26-7.
[455] *Triste, solitario y final*, p. 28.

conventional sense. At one stage in the story, Soriano and Marlowe find themselves involved in a bloody brawl with some of Hollywood's most famous actors during the Academy Awards ceremony, a scene which most of the illustrious audience initially assume is an elaborate feature of the show:

> Chaplin había abierto la boca como si esos desastres le fueran ajenos y absurdos. Charles Bronson saltó al escenario y tiró su izquierda que se perdió en el aire. El hombre alto de traje raído le pegó un derechazo en el hígado y Bronson cayó sobre la primera fila de plateas. En un instante, Dean Martin y James Stewart estuvieron frente al pegador. Martin lanzó un gancho y Stewart un uppercut.[456]

At this chaotic point in the narrative in particular, the lines separating fiction from reality are decidedly blurred for all concerned. At the same time, it is not difficult to perceive a definite social critique in the midst of a narrative that frequently borders on the comical and the outright surreal. As Simpson points out:

> Slapstick episodes such as one in which Marlowe and Soriano start a fistfight on stage at the Academy Awards ceremony alternate with a series of melancholy reflections on the failure of the American dream and, by implication, on the falseness of Argentina's images of success inspired by the heroes of Hollywood.[457]

This tendency on the part of Soriano to intersperse a self-reflexive, humorous narrative style that consciously plays upon the conventions of the genre with more sober and insightful reflections upon societal ills is also evident in other Argentine hard-boiled narratives of this period, such as Pablo Leonardo's *La mala guita* (1976), which will be considered later in this study.

Primer Certamen Latinoamericano de Cuentos Policiales (1975)

By 1975, the *género negro* may be said to have reached its apogee. No longer the poor relation of the *relato clásico*, the hard-boiled model was by this time enjoying

[456] *Triste, solitario y final*, pp. 147-8.
[457] Simpson, p. 59.

success on many fronts, both in terms of popularity and cultural prestige, as evidenced by the success of Tiempo Contemporáneo's *Serie Negra,* and also as indicated by the proliferation of native Argentine titles that demonstrated the potential of what had previously been viewed and often practised as a subaltern, disposable generic mutation. This success was also underpinned by the prevailing intellectual climate of the period, in which the exhibition of political commitment through fiction came to be regarded as a prerequisite to serious critical consideration in intellectual circles. Even Borges himself had by this time been incorporated into the Argentine hard-boiled tradition, albeit retroactively, through the inclusion of 'La espera' (*El Aleph*, 1952) in Fermín Févre's excellent 1974 critical anthology for Editorial Kapelusz, *Cuentos policiales argentinos*. Much as Borges may have baulked at the association, Févre points out that the episode recreated in the story had been inspired by a real-life incident involving members of the Argentine underworld, as volunteered by Borges in the postscript to the 1952 re-edition of El Aleph, 'De "La espera" diré que la sugirió una crónica policial que Alfredo Doblas me leyó, hará diez años […]. El sujeto era turco; lo hice italiano para intuirlo con más facilidad'.[458] Févre makes a strong argument for the inclusion of 'La espera' within the thriller or suspense tradition of the genre, with his note accompanying the text concluding that 'anticipándose a corrientes posteriores del género, Borges […] centra su interés en la víctima, en su angustiosa y paralizante espera, y desde su espantado terror crea un clima de violencia y suspenso digno del mayor exponente de la serie negra'.[459] This study has pointed to the success of certain authors and works in the distribution of literary prizes as evidence of the prevailing tendencies, influences and occasionally idiosyncrasies that have marked the evolution of the

[458] *Obras completas* Vol I, p. 758.
[459] Févre, *Cuentos policiales argentinos*, p. 73.

crime genre in Argentina. Nowhere is this idea more in evidence than in the proceedings of the Primer Certamen Latinoamericano de Cuentos Policiales (1975) organised by Editorial Abril's weekly magazine *Siete Días Ilustrados* in conjunction with Air France. The competition, though open to writers from across the continent, reflects the continued Argentine enthusiasm for crime writing at this juncture. The editor of *Siete Días Ilustrados* and co-organiser of the competition was Norberto Firpo, a frequent contributor of detective stories to *Vea y Lea* magazine during its halcyon days of the 1960s. Firpo's own production has included classically orientated stories such as 'Tiempo de puñales' (1964)[460] as well as others that belong squarely within the hard-boiled category, such as the sublime 'Zorro Viejo' (1993).[461] The other co-organiser and coordinator of the *certamen* was Jorge Lafforgue, professor of philosophy, literary critic, editor, journalist, anthologist and indefatigable crime fiction enthusiast. The judging panel consisted of two Argentines, veteran detective story competition juror Jorge Luis Borges and Marco Denevi, author of *Rosaura a las diez* (1955), along with the Paraguayan writer Augusto Roa Bastos. The competition, announced in May of 1975, offered substantial rewards (two return flights from Buenos Aires to Paris and a ten-night stay in France for *each* of the five prize-winning authors) and attracted significant interest from across the continent. Whereas the first *Vea y Lea*/ Emecé detective story competition had attracted over 180 entries, on this occasion the judging panel examined 945 texts over a period of three months, finally announcing their decision

[460] Included in the anthology of the same name, *Tiempo de puñales* (Buenos Aires: Seijas y Goyanarte, 1964) co-edited by Firpo and Horacio Martínez, and featuring two stories by each of the following writers: Rodolfo Walsh, Adolfo Pérez Zelaschi, Ana O'Neill, Horacio Martínez and Firpo himself.

[461] First included in the electronic anthology edited by Germán Cáceres, *Thrillers al sur* (Buenos Aires: Axxón, 1993), a 5 ½ inch diskette featuring stories from across the genre by eleven Argentine authors including Cáceres, Firpo, Juan Sasturain, Adolfo L. Pérez Zelaschi, Ricardo Piglia and Vicente Battista.

on the 6th of September. The Argentine dominance of the competition persisted among the prize-winning authors, with only the Uruguayan Juan Fló ("El tercero excluido") preventing a clean sweep for local writers. The other prize-winning stories were 'Lastenia' by Eduardo Mignogna, 'Los reyunos' by Antonio Di Benedetto, 'Orden jerárquico' by Eduardo Goligorsky and 'La loca y el relato del crimen' by Ricardo Piglia. [462]

A noteworthy feature of this competition is, once again, the *apparent* disconnect between the public views of Borges in relation to the genre and the selections of a jury of which he was a member. As part of a round-table discussion among the three-man jury, Borges, perhaps reluctant to change the habit of a lifetime, reiterates his esteem for the detective story in the classical mode, 'Siempre me pareció un buen escritor Wilkie Collins; también Chesterton y, entre los contemporáneos, Eden Phillpotts, Israel Zangwill […]. Entre los argentinos, Manuel Peyrou escribió cuentos muy buenos, los de *La espada dormida*, a la manera de Chesterton'.[463] Marco Denevi seems eager to endorse and elaborate upon Borges' pronouncements, 'En el género policial hay obras maestras. Pruebas al canto: Chesterton, y dos novelas que no dudo en calificar de excepcionales: *La piedra lunar* y *La dama de blanco*, ambas de Wilkie Collins'.[464] When asked which of the two variants of the genre he favours, Borges expresses a vehement distaste for the *novela negra*:

> No me gusta la violencia que exhiben los norteamericanos. En general son autores truculentos. Raymond Chandler es un poco mejor; pero los otros, Dashiell Hammett, por ejemplo, son muy malos. Además, ellos no escriben novelas policiales: los *detectives* [pronounced by Borges in English] no razonan en ningún momento. Todos son malevos: los criminales y los policías. Lo cual puede ser cierto (al decirlo, Borges ríe). Pero es una lástima

[462] For further details of the 1975 competition, see *Asesinos de papel*, pp. 37-8.
[463] Borges, in *Asesinos de Papel*, p. 43. Borges had a somewhat generous view of what constituted contemporary authors, given that Zangwill had died in 1926, while Phillpotts met his end in 1960.
[464] Ibid.

> que la novela policial, que empezó en Norteamérica y de un modo intelectual —con un personaje como M. Dupin, que razona y descubre el crimen—, vaya a parar en esos personajes siniestros, protagonizan riñas donde uno le pega al otro con la culata del revólver, y éste a su vez lo tira al suelo y le patea la cara, y todo esto mostrado con escenas pornográficas.[465]

Once again, Denevi appears to be in complete agreement, expressing his own, strikingly similar objections to the American hard-boiled variant with considerable warmth of feeling:

> Los norteamericanos le han dado al género una carga de sexo, de violencia, que me exaspera; han convertido a sus héroes en unos señores que se pasan la vida tomando whisky, una especie de superhombres de quienes todas las mujeres se enamoran. Para mí, son groserías, guarangadas; yo, por ejemplo, abomino de Chandler.[466]

He draws a contrast between the literary precision of Collins and what he considers the 'pile 'em high and sell 'em cheap' approach of the *norteamericanos*:

> Todo lo que Wilkie Collins va presentando es valioso; no sobra ni una coma. En cambio, en el caso de los escritores norteamericanos de la novela negra uno llega a la conclusión de que el autor se propuso escribir quinientas páginas; por eso, cuando el lector llega a la última, lanza un gran suspiro de alivio […]. He leído varios autores recientes, y no recuerdo nada grande. Ni Chase, ni Ross Macdonald –otros dioses del nuevo Olimpo– me convencen […]. En el fondo son novelas canallas, sin la nobleza que ostenta la escuela inglesa. [467]

Despite the fact that his two co-jurors appear to have the long knives out for the *modelo negro,* Augusto Roa Bastos adopts a far more measured, conciliatory approach to the question, and in doing so provides an excellent description of the attractions of the two major generic variants, which he views as complementary:

> No tengo preferencias *a priori* por uno u otro campo: el tradicional de la novela con enigma y el más reciente de la novela dura o negra. Yo creo que la narrativa policial va estableciendo sus estructuras de compensación: a la novela-problema, que exige el ejercicio de la imaginación inductivo-deductiva, se le opone el relato *hard-boiled*, que implica una decidida toma de conciencia de los vicios y las aberraciones de la sociedad. O sea que a la

[465] *Asesinos de papel*, pp. 44-45.
[466] *Asesinos de papel*, p. 45.
[467] *Asesinos de papel*, p. 45.

> línea evasiva se le enfrente la descriptiva: la primera se explica en tanto permite un escape al habitante de esta sociedad desolada y asolada; la segunda intenta un análisis virulento de una sociedad cuyos privilegios generan la violencia, el crimen.[468]

Unbowed by the scathing comments of the illustrious co-jurors seated opposite him, he asserts the literary merits of three of the writers so recently maligned, 'En cuanto a la corriente dura quiero señalar la relevancia de tres escritores: el iniciador, Dashiell Hammett; el creador de Philip Marlowe, Raymond Chandler, y el talentoso aunque desparejo James Hadley Chase'.[469] In the same discussion, Roa Bastos also expressed his admiration for the work of Walsh and Pérez Zelaschi, two of the Argentine writers most associated with innovation and experimentation within the genre.

Considering the obvious variance of tastes expressed by the adjudicating panel and the apparent numerical bias in favour of the detective story in its classical form, it is surprising to learn that out of close to a thousand entries, this particular jury should choose to award prizes to Eduardo Goligorsky's 'Orden jerárquico' and Ricardo Piglia's 'La loca y el relato de crimen', both of which have come to be seen as era-defining texts in the Argentine hard-boiled tradition, and included in a number of critical anthologies.[470] It is difficult to imagine a scenario in which the preferences of Roa Bastos would have prevailed above the explicit objections of Borges and Denevi, and it is equally improbable that Piglia and Goligorsky's texts might have survived the judging process by stealth, the two classically-oriented jurors somehow failing to recognise the hard-boiled credentials of the stories under consideration.

[468] *Asesinos de papel*, pp. 45-6.
[469] *Asesinos de papel*, p. 46.
[470] Both stories are included as Argentine representatives of the genre in Amelia S. Simpson's anthology of translated stories, *New Tales of Mystery and Crime from Latin America* (London: Associated University Presses, 1992), which also includes stories by Mexican, Brazilian and Cuban authors.

The panel's endorsement of 'La loca y el relato del crimen' is perhaps easier to understand, in that Piglia's story achieves a form of reconciliation between the classical and hard-boiled traditions, albeit one in which the latter tradition ultimately achieves dominance. The plot involves the intellectual resolution of a murder through the ratiocinative powers of a 'detective' figure, in this case a journalist named Emilio Renzi (the same pseudonym employed by Piglia himself as editor of the 1969 anthology *Cuentos policiales de la serie negra*), whose training as a specialised, analytical reader enables him to decipher the apparently incoherent ramblings of 'el único testigo del crimen […], una pordiosera medio loca que decía llamarse Angélica Echevarne'.[471] The murder victim, a prostitute named Larry, is found stabbed to death close to her place of work, the *New Deal* night club near the port area of Buenos Aires. In the absence of any 'credible' witnesses or evidence, the police arrest Larry's partner of one week's standing, a former customer of the *New Deal* named Juan Atúnez, despite his protestations that the real culprit was in fact 'el gordo Almada', seemingly also a former associate of Larry's, though the nature of their relationship is unclear. Renzi employs an analytical method derived from his formal studies in linguistics to interpret the seemingly random utterances of Echevarne, as revealed to his newspaper's editor, *el viejo* Luna:

> Yo analicé con ese método el delirio de esa mujer. Si usted mira va a ver que ella repite una cantidad de fórmulas, pero hay una serie de frases, de palabras que no se pueden clasificar, que quedan fuera de esa estructura. Yo hice eso y separé esas palabras y ¿qué quedó? —dijo Renzi levantando la cara para mirar al viejo Luna—. ¿Sabe qué queda? Esta frase: *El hombre gordo la esperaba en el zaguán y no me vio y le habló de dinero y brilló esa mano que la hizo morir.* ¿Se da cuenta? —remató Renzi, triunfal—. El asesino es el gordo Almada.[472]

[471] Ricardo Piglia, 'La loca y el relato del crimen', in Jorge Lafforgue, ed., *Cuentos policiales argentinos* (Buenos Aires: Alfaguara, 1997), p. 285.
[472] Lafforgue, *Cuentos policiales argentinos*, p. 288.

If ‘La loca’ were a representative of the classical puzzle mystery tradition, the story might end at this point, or perhaps with the release of the innocent Atúnez and the arrest of *el gordo* Almada.’ However, this hygienic instance of analysis and deduction is threatened on all sides by narrative elements more familiar to readers of the hard-boiled tradition: sex, violence, cynicism, corruption and injustice. The violent misogyny of Almada is evident in the following highly evocative passage:

> Con el desaliento regresaba el recuerdo de Larry: el cuerpo distante de la mujer, blando sobre la banqueta de cuero, las rodillas abiertas, el pelo rojo contra las lámparas celestes del New Deal. Verla de lejos, a pleno día, la piel gastada, las ojeras, vacilando contra la luz malva que bajaba del cielo: altiva, borracha, indiferente, como si él fuera una planta o un bicho. ‘Poder humillarla una vez’, pensó. ‘Quebrarla en dos para hacerla gemir y entregarse’.[473]

Almada is not held on suspicion of Larry’s murder, ‘a ése lo protegen de arriba,’[474] while the luckless Atúnez will serve as a convenient patsy, allowing the police to secure a conviction and close the case. Renzi discovers, to his utter frustration, that his editor is unwilling to make use of the vital evidence produced by the linguistic analysis of Echevarne’s speech to secure the release of a man wrongly accused:

> —Oíme, el tipo ese está cocinado, no tiene abogados, es un cafishio, la mató porque a la larga siempre terminan así las locas esas. Me parece fenómeno el jueguito de palabras, pero paramos acá. Hacé una nota de cincuenta líneas contando que a la mina la mataron a puñaladas y que…
> —Escuche, señor Luna —lo cortó Renzi—. Ese tipo se va a pasar lo que le queda de vida metido en cana.
> —Ya sé. Pero yo hace treinta años que estoy metido en este negocio y sé una cosa: no hay que buscarse problemas con la policía. Si ellos te dicen que lo mató la Virgen María, vos escribís que lo mató la Virgen María.[475]

When Renzi proposes bringing his evidence to the attention of the judge in the case, the editor warns him about the potential consequences for his career, and for his personal wellbeing, of getting mixed up in the affair, and concludes the conversation by threatening to dismiss him if he chooses to persist with his campaign for justice.

[473] Lafforgue, *Cuentos policiales argentinos*, p. 281.
[474] Lafforgue, *Cuentos policiales argentinos*, p. 285.
[475] Lafforgue, *Cuentos policiales argentinos*, p. 289.

At first, Renzi intends to go ahead with his plan, and prepares to write his letter of resignation. Instead, seated at his typewriter, he begins to type a descriptive narrative, which is a repetition of the opening paragraph of the story:

> Gordo, difuso, melancólico, el traje de filafil verde nilo flotándole en el cuerpo —empezó a escribir Renzi—, Almada salió ensayando un aire de secreto euforia para tratar de borrar su abatimiento.[476]

Ultimately, reason and intellect are subjugated to power, and the idealism of the young reporter-turned-investigator appears to yield to the cynical pragmatism of his editor. It appears that the only outlet available to Renzi at the end of the narrative is to provide a fictionalised account of the incident, perhaps bearing the title 'La loca y el relato del crimen', in the hope that the resulting story will at least inform the conscience of the reading public. Piglia's narrative turns back upon itself in a symbolic representation of the maelstrom of violence, institutional corruption and malfeasance that encircles Renzi's ingenuous desire for truth and justice. The use of this narrative device would surely have struck a chord with Borges, who had explored the implications of this and other similar textual phenomena in his essay, 'Magias parciales del "Quijote"', included in *Otras inquisiciones* (1952).[477] In relation to night 602 of *Las mil y una noches* he observes:

> En esa noche, el rey oye de boca de la reina su propia historia. Oye el principio de la historia, que abarca a todas las demás, y también –de monstruo modo–, a sí misma. ¿Intuye claramente el lector la vasta posibilidad de esa interpolación, el curioso peligro? Que la reina persista y el inmóvil rey oirá para siempre la trunca historia de *Las mil y una noches*, ahora infinita y circular.[478]

Borges speculates about the effect upon the reader of this sensation of circularity and infinite regress, '¿Por qué nos inquieta que el mapa esté incluido en el mapa y las mil y una noches en el libro de *Las mil y una noches*? Por qué no inquieta que don

[476] Ibid.
[477] Borges, 'Magias parciales del "Quijote"', in *Obras completas* Vol. II, pp. 54-57.
[478] Borges, *Obras completas* Vol. II, p. 56.

Quijote sea lector del *Quijote*, y Hamlet, espectador de Hamlet?'[479] By way of explanation, he suggests that 'tales inversiones sugieren que si los caracteres de una ficción pueden ser lectores o espectadores, nosotros, sus lectores o espectadores, podemos ser ficticios',[480] and concludes the essay with a reference to Carlyle, who in 1833 had observed that 'la historia universal es un infinito libro sagrado que todos los hombres escriben y leen y tratan de entender, y en el que también los escriben.'[481] In this context, it might be suggested that the story of the Argentine detective genre is a vast (though not infinite) book that many have written, read and attempted to understand, and in which they are also written.

Jorge B. Rivera attaches a particular significance to Piglia's 1975 story, one that might explain to some extent the attraction it held for the jury, and in particular for Borges. According to Rivera's interpretation, Borges:

> … sincretiza en ['El jardin de senderos que se bifurcan' and 'La muerte y la brújula'] los cabos sueltos de una tradición y de una práctica de escritura, explorando, hasta el límite, las posibilidades de lo paródico y las aparentes contradicciones entre las reglas de juego del thriller y la novela de enigma.[482]

As has been suggested frequently in this study (and in spite of some of his more doctrinaire pronouncements on the subject), the tendency on the part of Borges to facilitate a level of accommodation and cross-fertilisation between the different modes of the genre distinguishes not only his own literary production, as noted by Rivera, but also his various ancillary activities associated with the genre, including the choice of Piglia and Goligorsky as prize-winners in the 1975 competition. The equivalent activities of Piglia, including the decision to enter 'La loca y el relato del crimen' in the competition, might be said to serve a similar, reciprocal function. As Rivera puts it, in 'La loca y el relato del crimen' Piglia 're-escribe y clausura, a su

[479] Borges, *Obras completas* Vol. II, pp. 56-7.
[480] Borges, *Obras completas*, Vol. II, p. 57.
[481] Ibid.
[482] Jorge B. Rivera, *El relato policial en la Argentina*, p. 38.

vez, la lección de Borges; y podría agregarse: re-escribe y clausura la propia historia del relato policial argentino'.[483] Having championed the cause of the *manera dura* as a specialist reader, anthologist and editor for Tiempo Contemporáneo's Serie Negra, in 'La loca y el relato del crimen' Piglia effectively embroiders the hard-boiled model into the Argentine tradition, and in doing so achieves a compromise and a reconciliation between the two generic variants in a manner that serves as a challenge to those that would choose to see them as fundamentally opposed or incompatible:

> Si un nivel de 'La loca y el relato del crimen' es la reconstrucción de las atmósferas y las características tipológicas de la manera 'dura' (con sus marginales, sus ajustes de cuentas y su turbia violencia), el otro será, fundamentalmente, la reintagración de la 'sabiduría' y la 'racionalidad' que permiten descifrar el enigma, en este caso a través del saber lingüístico del periodista Emilio Renzi, avatar del saber lógico (y cabalístico) del detective Erik Lönnrot.[484]

This conciliatory impulse on the part of Piglia in relation to the disparate tendencies within the crime fiction tradition is also exhibited in his critical writings, particularly so in the case of his excellent 2005 essay 'Lectores imaginarios', in which he asserts that in both the classical and the hard-boiled narrative traditions (exemplified by Poe and Chandler), the figure of the fictional detective-as-reader serves to mediate the tension between high-brow and mass reading cultures, 'De hecho, podríamos decir que el género fue inventado como un modo de mediar entre la alta cultura y la cultura de masas'.[485] He recognises that in the hard-boiled tradition that reached a peak of popularity in Argentina in the mid-seventies, 'el hombre de acción parece haber borrado por completo la figura del lector', but he maintains that 'esa figura persiste', particularly so in relation to Chandler's detective, 'De manera secreta, el

[483] Rivera, *El relato policial en la Argentina*, p. 38.
[484] Rivera, *El relato policial en la Argentina*, pp. 38-9.
[485] Piglia, *El último lector*, p. 100.

hombre de letras que surge con Dupin reaparece en Marlowe y ésa es la linea oculta del género'.[486] This critical insight is particularly pertinent in relation to Pigia's 1975 prize-winning story, which serves to foreground this same 'linea oculta' in the Argentine generic context.

Eduardo Goligorsky: 'Orden jerárquico'

Whereas the appeal of Piglia's 'La loca y el relato del crimen' to the 1975 competition jury is readily comprehensible, the nod to Goligorsky's story in the same competition is more surprising. 'Orden jerárquico' is a particularly hard-hitting portrayal of cynicism, corruption, avarice and amorality, in which socio-economic stratifications and hierarchies of violence are inseparable. The story bears no resemblance to the detective genre in its classical form. There is no enigma to solve, and little mystery to the problems it poses to the reader. Instead, it corresponds to Denevi's inclusive definition of the *cuento policial* as 'un relato que incluya un delito (no necesariamente un crimen; bien podría ser una estafa, por ejemplo) y en el cual –teóricamente al menos– debería intervenir la policía'.[487] Whereas the majority of Goligorsky's detective works published in Argentine *colecciones de quiosco* under various pseudonyms had been set in American cities, the urban environment described in 'Orden jerárquico' is recognisably *porteño*. The story derives much of its efficacy from the focalised narrative of Abáscal, a discreet operative of an unnamed 'organización' who has been tasked with tracking down and eliminating 'el Cholo', a low-ranking member of the same organisation, who Abáscal regards as 'un

[486] Ibid, p. 101.
[487] *Asesinos de papel*, pp. 42-3.

cuchillero sin ambiciones, o con una imagen ridícula de la ambición'.[488] In order to complete his mission, Abáscal is forced to visit the kind of seedy establishments favoured by 'el Cholo', quite literally to descend to his level, an aspect of the mission that he evidently finds distasteful:

> Lo vio bajar, primero, al sórdido subsuelo de la Galería Güemes, de cuyas entrañas brotaba una música gangosa. Los carteles multicolores prometían un espectáculo estimulante, y desgranaban los apodos exóticos de las coristas. Él también debió sumergirse, por fuerza, en la penumbra cómplice, para asistir a un monótono desfile de hembras aburridas. Las carnes fláccidas, ajadas, que los reflectores acribillaban sin piedad, bastaban, a juicio de Abáscal, para sofocar cualquier atisbo de exitación (67).

His feelings of repulsion towards el Cholo, and indeed his own sense of professional and moral superiority, are affirmed by this experience:

> El Cholo se encuadraba en otra categoría humana, cuyos gustos y placeres él jamás lograría a entender […]. Vestía miserablemente, incluso cuando tenía los bolsillos bien forrados: camisa deshilachada, saco y pantalones andrajosos, mocasines trajinados y cortajeados […]. Útil en su hora, pero peligroso, por lo que sabía, desde el instante en que había ejecutado su último trabajo, en una emergencia, cuando todos los expertos de confianza y responsables, como él, se hallaban fuera del país (68).

The slovenly dress, base tastes and careless demeanour of this 'cuchillero sin ambiciones' are in marked contrast to the materially aspirational, upwardly-mobile mindset of Abáscal:

> Es que él estaba en otra cosa, se movía en otros ambientes. Sus modelos, aquellos cuyos refinamientos procuraba copiar, los había encontrado en las recepciones de las embajadas, en los grandes casinos, en los salones de los ministerios, en las convenciones empresariales. Cuidaba, sobre todo, las apariencias: ropa bien cortada, restaurantes escogidos, *starlets* trepadoras, licores finos, autos deportivos, vuelos en cabinas de primera clase (69).

As he continues to track the movements of el Cholo, awaiting a suitable opportunity to complete his assignment, he becomes increasingly enraged by the latter's drunken indiscretions:

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[488] Eduardo Goligorsky, 'Órden jerárquico', in *Cuentos con detectives y comisarios*, ed. by Elena Braceras and Cristina Leytour (Buenos Aires: Colihue, 2004). Subsequent page references to the story will be included within the text in parentheses.

> Abáscal lo había seguido del teatrito subterráneo a un piringundín de la 25 de Mayo, y después a otro, y a otro, y lo vio tomar todas las porquerías que le sirvieron, y manosear a las coperas, y darse importancia hablando de lo que nadie debía hablar. No mencionó nombres, afortunadamente, ni se refirió a los hechos concretos, identificables, porque si lo hubiera hecho, Abáscal, que lo vigilaba con el oído atento, desde el taburete vecino, habría tenido que rematarlo ahí nomás, a la vista de todos, con la temeridad de un principiante (68).

As the pursuit of el Cholo progresses, the reader continues to gain an insight into the inner thoughts of the assassin. It becomes clear that Abáscal is acting on orders from above, in the shape of 'el Doctor', whose title indicates his superior rank within the chain of command:

> Lástima que el Doctor, tan exigente con él, hubiera cometido el error garrafal de contratar, en ausencia de los auténticos profesionales, a un rata como el Cholo. Ahora, como de costumbre, él tenía que jugarse el pellejo para sacarles las castañas del fuego a los demás. Aunque eso también iba a cambiar, algún día. Él apuntaba alto, muy alto, en la organización (69).

It becomes increasingly evident that Abáscal is very much concerned with his social standing within this community of killers, and as a proud practitioner of his craft, his obsession extends to the assassin's choice of weapon as an indicator of status. As might be expected, he is disdainful of the instrument favoured by el Cholo:

> Un puñal de fabricación casera, cuya hoja se había encogido tras infinitos contactos con la piedra de afilar. Dos suchos apretaban el mango de madera, incipientemente resquebrajado y pulido por el manipuleo. Por supuesto, el Cholo había usado ese cuchillo en el último trabajo, dejando un sello peculiar, inconfundible. Otra razón para romper allí, en el eslabón más débil, la cadena que trepaba hasta cúpulas innombrables (70).

At this stage in his career, Abáscal himself favours a Luger pistol, purchased in a bazaar in Tangiers, which he considers to be a suitably efficient and aristocratic choice of weapon for a professional of his standing:

> Cuando la desarmaba, y cuando la aceitaba, prolijamente, pieza por pieza, se complacía en fantasear sobre la personalidad de sus anteriores propietarios. ¿Un gallardo "junker" prusiano, que había preferido dispararse un tiro en la sien antes de admitir la derrota en un suburbio de Leningrado? ¿O un

> lugarteniente de mariscal Rommel, muerto en las tórridas arenas de El Alamein? (70).

However, he already looks forward to a future in which he will bear a still more devastating weapon, in keeping with his anticipated upward trajectory within the organisation:

> Conocía la existencia de una artillería más perfeccionada, más mortífera, cuyo manejo estaba reservado a otras instancias del orden jerárquico, hasta el punto de haberse convertido en una especie de símbolo de status. A medida que él ascendiera, como sin duda iba a ascender, también tendría acceso a ese arsenal legendario, patrimonio exclusivo de los poderosos (70).

Abáscal is so fixated upon the hierarchical order of weapons that he confesses to a certain level of anxiety in relation to his own demise. The prospect of a violent death does not seem to worry him unduly, 'La regla del juego estaba cantada y él, fatalista por convicción, la aceptaba: no iba a morir en la cama' (70). However, he is concerned that the manner of his end should be in keeping with his place within the hierarchy, 'Lo único que pedía era que, cuando le tocara el turno, sus verdugos no fueran chapuceros y supiesen elegir instrumentos nobles' (70).

At this point in the narrative, Abáscal is forced to abandon such thoughts, as the pursuit of his quarry nears its conclusion:

> La brusca detención de su presa, en la bocacalle siguiente, le cortó el hilo de los pesamientos. Probablemente el instinto del Cholo, afinado en los montes de Orán, y en las emboscadas de un Buenos Aires traicionero, le había advertido algo'. (71)

Though he draws his homemade knife and prepares to confront his pursuer, 'El cuchillo tajeó la bruma, haciendo firuletes, súbitamente convertido en la prolongación natural de la mano que lo empuñaba', el Cholo is at an obvious disadvantage. The encounter resembles the scene in Brian De Palma's Prohibition-era gangster movie, *The Untouchables*, in which Sean Connery's Malone confronts

his would-be assassin, 'Isn't that just like a wop? Brings a knife to a gunfight'.[489] El Cholo does not get the chance to use his homemade weapon, 'Abáscal terminó de desenfundar la Luger. Disparó desde una distancia segura, una sola vez, y la bala perforó un orificio de bordes nítidos en la frente del Cholo' (71). His mission completed, Abáscal procedes to the airport, where he boards a flight bound for Caracas, 'Lejos del cadáver del Cholo y de las suspicacias que su eliminación podría generar en algunos círculos' (69).

At this juncture the narrative perspective shifts to a far more elegant environment, the luxury office of a downtown Buenos Aires skyscraper occupied by Abáscal's superior, el Doctor. It is once again indicated to the reader that the hierarchical order may be plotted on the vertical scale in a geographical, as well as in a social, sense. Whereas el Cholo favours underground basement bars and their loud, gaudy, carnal attractions, el Doctor contemplates the city from a tower constructed from more durable materials than ivory, 'Por el ventanal panorámico se divisaba un horizonte de hormigón y, más lejos, donde las moles dejaban algunos resquicios, asomaban las parcelas leonadas del Río de la Plata' (71). He is able to administer his affairs in an atmosphere of serenity, insulated from all sources of distraction, bar the faint sound generated by the typewriters of the outer office, 'El tableteo de las máquinas de escribir llegaba vagamente a la oficina, venciendo la barrera de aislación acústica' (71). This projection of corporate success is complemented by the framed photo that adorns his desk, 'de una mujer rubia, de facciones finas, aristócratas, flanqueada, en un jardín, por dos criaturas igualmente rubias' (71). The contrast with the recently eliminated 'cuchillero sin ambiciones' is clear. Whereas el

[489] *The Untouchables*, dir. by Brian De Palma (Paramount Pictures, 1987). Later in the same scene, it is revealed that the knife-wielding assassin is merely a decoy used to lure Malone, who is himself armed with a sawn-off shotgun, to his doorstep, where he is killed by a superior weapon in the hierarchical order, the Thompson submachine gun or 'Tommy Gun'.

Cholo, it seems, was at his happiest groping jaded hostesses, lowering drinks and boasting about his violent exploits in loud nightclubs, el Doctor is clearly a man who has achieved notable successes both in the corporate and the domestic spheres. His fair, aristocratic-looking wife and blonde children also serve as a contrast to el Cholo in another sense, given that 'cholo' is a term used to refer to people of mixed race, often pejoratively.

Having hitherto relied exclusively upon the perspective of Abáscal, it is a revelation for the reader to gain an insight into the inner workings of the mind of el Doctor. He is evidently pleased when he reads a telex sent from Caracas which simply reads, 'firmamos contrato' (71). Just as Abáscal had considered his inferior, el Cholo, to be expendable, it seems that el Doctor harbours similar feelings in relation to Abáscal himself:

> Primero había sido necesario recurrir al Cholo, un malevito marginado, venal, que no ofrecía ninguna garantía para el futuro. Después, lógicamente, había sido indispensable silenciar al Cholo. Y ahora el círculo acababa de cerrarse. "Firmamos contrato" significaba que Abáscal había sido recibido en el aeropuerto de Caracas, en la escalerilla misma del avión, por un proyectil de un rifle Browning calibre 30, equipado con mira telescópica Leupold M8-100. (72)

El Doctor expresses a certain level of regret in relation to the loss of a valued operative, but concludes that his elimination was inevitable, 'Abáscal siempre había sido muy eficiente, pero su intervención, obligada, en ese caso, lo había condenado irremisiblemente' (72). His conscience is salved by the fact that the weapon used to kill Abáscal would have met with the latter's approval, 'Un fusil, se dijo el Doctor, que Abáscal habría respetado y admirado, en razón de su proverbial entusiasmo por el orden jerárquico de las armas' (72). He takes further solace from the knowledge that he too was simply respecting the chain of command. 'La orden recibida de arriba había sido inapelable: no dejar rastros, ni nexos delatores. Aunque, desde

luego, resultaba imposible extirpar todos, absolutamente todos, los nexos. Él, el Doctor, era, en última instancia, otro de ellos' (72). He dismisses this fanciful thought from his mind and turns his attention to new business:

> A continuación, el Doctor recogió el voluminoso sobre de papel manila que su secretaria le había entregado junto con el cable. El matasellos era de Nueva York, el membrete era el de la firma que servía de fachada a la organización. Habitualmente, la llegada de uno de esos sobres marcaba el comienzo de otra operación. (72)

Evidently, this shadowy organisation is not simply an Argentine or Latin American entity, but rather one that conducts its secretive operations on an international scale, and is headquartered in the United States. It becomes increasingly clear to the reader that, in reality, there is little difference between el Cholo, Abáscal and el Doctor, except in the level of sophistication of their methods and the social factors that have dictated their circumstances. For all of Abáscal's ambition, efficiency and carefully cultivated attention to appearances, the only privilege he gains from his superiority over el Cholo in the hierarchical order is a marginally more 'noble' death. El Doctor, despite his title, his luxury office and his picture-perfect family, is merely relaying instructions from above as head of the Argentine branch of a trans-national operation whose business is murder. Despite the sound-proofing, el Doctor ultimately discovers that his private sanctum is not as hermetically sealed off from the outside world as he might have imagined:

> El Doctor metió la punta del cortapapeles debajo de la solapa del sobre. La hoja se deslizó hasta tropezar, brevemente, con un obstáculo. La inercia determinó que siguiera avanzando […]. Luego, la carga explosiva, activada por el tirón del cortapapeles sobre el hilo del detonador, transformó todo ese piso del edificio en un campo de escombros. (72)

As was the case with Abáscal, who meets his end as he alights from a plane in Caracas, 'el Doctor' is eliminated in a manner commensurate with his status within

the hierarchy of violence. The last link in the chain leading back to New York is broken, and it is at this point that the narrative ends.

Braceras and Leytour include 'Orden jerárquico' in their 2004 critical anthology *Cuentos con detectives y comisarios* as a 'representante neto del *hard boiled*', one which demonstrates an 'afán de denuncia a una sociedad que tiene como máquina central el dinero'.[490] It should be noted, however, that the strength of critique of a cynical, corrupt and violent society presented in Goligorsky's story is in many ways far more acute than that which is perceptible in the work of Hammett, Chandler or Ross Macdonald. As Mandel argues:

> Sam Spade, Philip Marlowe, […] and Lew Archer may seem like hard-boiled characters cynically devoid of any illusions in the existing social order. But at bottom they are still sentimentalists, suckers for damsels in distress, for the weak confronting the strong.[491]

'Orden jerárquico', by contrast, does not at any point lapse into sentimentality, and the basic operational philosophy of the unnamed organisation portrayed in the story appears to be to maintain the strength of the upper echelons through the elimination of the compromising layers beneath. There is another important sense in which Goligorsky's story may be viewed as significantly more cynical and 'hard-boiled' in tone than some of its American antecedents. In 'Orden jerárquico' there is no trace of the 'adolescent fantasy' that Ernest Mandel perceives in the work of the emblematic American hard-boiled writers. The multinational corporation depicted in the story does not employ violence to protect its business interests. Instead, its business *is* violence. In relation to Chandler specifically, Mandel maintains that 'because his writing is motivated by contempt for big-city corruption, its ideological slant has often been misunderstood. It is only the *local*, never the national, power

[490] *Cuentos con detectives y comisarios*, p. 23.
[491] Mandel, p. 35. Hammett's Continental Op, protagonist of *Red Harvest*, *The Dain Curse* and dozens of short stories published in *Black Mask* magazine, is a clear exception to this tendency.

structure that is denounced in Chandler's works'.[492] The power structure depicted in 'Orden jerárquico', by comparison, extends in an unbroken line from the seedy basement bars of Buenos Aires' Florida Street to the monumental concrete and steel power-brokerages of Manhattan. Furthermore, the violent, U.S.-backed organisation represented in this story is not necessarily an imaginative flight of fancy, in which Goligorsky symbolically conflates the power structures of totalitarian regimes, the armed forces that sustain them, and the multi-national corporations whose financial interests are served by them. Already in 1975 such coordinated structures were coming into existence in various Latin American countries under the rule of repressive military regimes, with the clandestine approval and backing of the United States government. In September of 1974, for example, the exiled former head of the Chilean Army, Carlos Prats, was killed by a remotely detonated car-bomb along with

[492] Ibid. Though it may be inconvenient for Mandel's argument, Chandler's fiction does include implicit criticism of the national power structure, though it is true to say that he chose the city of Los Angeles and its environs as the sample focus of his critiques of American society more generally. Fredric Jameson points out that for Chandler, 'Los Angeles is already a kind of microcosm and forecast of the country as a whole; a new centreless city, in which the various classes have lost touch with each other because each is isolated in his own geographical compartment'. Fredric Jameson, 'On Raymond Chandler' in *The Poetics of Murder: Detective Fiction and Literary Theory* ed. by Glenn W. Most and William W. Stowe (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jonanovich, 1983), p. 127. A good illustration of this geographically-determined class isolation is to be found in Chapter 17 of *The High Window* (Edition subsequently cited here, London: Penguin, 2005, first ed. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1942), when Marlowe is confronted by a uniformed guard at the entrance to the exclusive Idle Valley gated community, who is obliged to follow a predetermined protocol before he allows Marlowe to proceed, 'I have to check you in. To someone who is a member or to somebody who lives in the valley. All private property here' (135). Having established that Marlowe does indeed have an appointment at the Idle Valley Club, the guard instructs him to check in with the security guard at the club when he arrives, 'We have to know exactly where you go. There's a great deal to protect in Idle Valley' (135). Marlowe appears to deliberately provoke the guard, wishing to know the consequences of failing to follow these procedures, to which the other replies, 'A couple of cruisers would start looking for you' (136). Marlowe expresses his distaste for the security restrictions, 'And they call this a democracy,' to which the guard responds 'Maybe you got company. I knew a fellow belonged to the John Reed Club [an organisation allied to the American Communist Party]. Over in Boyle Heights, it was' (136). This elliptical statement can be interpreted as an indication of the guard's Marxist sympathies. Marlowe responds conspiratorially with the single word 'Tovarich' or 'comrade' in Russian. The guard's admission is qualified by an expression of political disillusionment, 'The trouble with revolutions […] is that they get in the hands of the wrong people' (136). In the same breath, however, he indicates his disdain for the class of people he is paid to protect, 'On the other hand […] could they be any wronger than the bunch of rich phonies that live around here?' (136). Though this passage may not qualify, in the eyes of Mandel, as a resounding denunciation of the American capitalist system, it does demonstrate the fact that the social critique implicit in Chandler's writing was not entirely confined to the local power structure.

his wife outside their apartment building in Buenos Aires, in a mission coordinated by Manuel Contreras, head of General Pinochet's Dirección de Inteligencia Nacional (DINA), and carried out by C.I.A agent Michael Townley.[493] By 1975 the 'Alianza Anticomunista Argentina' or Triple-A, founded by José López Rega, Juan Perón's former Minister of Social Welfare and later Prime Minister under Isabel Perón, and largely comprised of members of the Argentine security forces, was carrying out political assassinations against leftist guerrilla groups, union leaders, political activists, intellectuals, members of the judiciary and even members of the police force perceived to be aligned with the political left.[494] The coordinated repressive efforts of Latin American military governments, with backing from the United States government (which perceived these regimes as a bulwark against the spread of communism), would only intensify in the years that followed, and would be joined with enthusiasm by Argentina during the so-called 'Proceso de Reorganización Nacional' (1976-1983) which followed the military coup led by Jorge Rafael Videla in March of 1976.[495] As such, Goligorsky's 'Orden jerárquico' is a very distant relative of the *cuento policial* in the classical mould, and may be viewed, not only as an indictment of the increasingly violent political and social environment of the period, but indeed, as a perceptive presage to the consolidation of hierarchical power structures that occurred in the dark years that followed. In fact, the threat of violent repression was to have a direct impact upon a number of the writers who received

[493] Mónica González, 'Cierran el caso Prats, seis altos mandos, condenados' *Clarin.com*, 9 July 2010. http://www.clarin.com/mundo/Cierran-Prats-altos-mandos-condenados_0_295170581.html [Accessed on 12th of June 2011]

[494] On the 20th of September 1974, the Triple-A assassinated former Chief of Police of the Province of Buenos Aires, Julio Troxler, who had previously survived the massacre that occurred in José León Suárez in June of 1956, as chronicled by Rodolfo Walsh in *Operación Masacre*. See 'Triple A: detuvieron al yerno de López Rega y a otros seis acusados' at *Clarin.com*, 8 June 2012. http://www.clarin.com/politica/Triple-detuvieron-Lopez-Rega-acusados_0_715128519.html [Accessed on the 15th of July 2012]

[495] See Ana Barón, 'Las ramificaciones de la Operación Cóndor' in *Clarin.com* 15 November 1998. http://edant.clarin.com/diario/1998/11/15/i-03601d.htm [Accessed on the 15th of July 2012]

prizes in the 1975 competition precisely on account of their political alignment. As reported by writer and film-maker Eduardo Minogna in *Clarín* in 2000, the prize of a ticket to Paris was particularly fortuitous in his case, given that he was already coming under intense pressure on account of the political perception of his literary and journalistic activities:

> Mi partida de Argentina se produjo en marzo de 1976, dos meses después de haber ganado en Cuba el premio *Casa de las Américas*, con *Cuatro casas*. Me fui porque comprendí que si no lo hacía mi vida no valía nada. Una nota aparecida en el diario *La Opinión* y los ecos de dicha nota y del premio desataron un acoso severo: me vigilaban, me amenazaban.[496]

Whereas the awarding of the *Casa de las Américas* prize had undoubtedly contributed to his predicament, Mignogna's success in the *Siete Días Ilustrados*/Air France competition afforded him a plausible pretext to escape Argentina:

> El segundo concurso me proporcionó el salvoconducto para escapar. El jurado estaba integrado por Borges, Roa Bastos y Denevi y resulté uno de los ganadores junto a Flo, Goligorsky, Piglia y De Benedetto, que nunca llegó a viajar porque lo metieron preso en Mendoza por escribir un artículo sobre la represión y negarse a revelar las fuentes. Yo, por mi parte, sólo utilicé el pasaje de ida. De París fui a Madrid, Sitges y Milán, donde viví una vida de inmigrante, tal como cien años atrás lo hicieron mis abuelos abruzzeses.[497]

Goligorksy himself would also go into exile in 1976, settling in Catalunya, where he would continue to work as a translator for various Spanish publishing houses, and as a regular op-ed contributor to the Barcelona newspaper *La Vanguardia*. In fact, of the four Argentine prize-winners in the 1975 competition, only Piglia would remain in Argentina voluntarily in the years that followed. Significantly, the revival of the hard-boiled school among Argentine writers championed by Piglia, Goligorsky and others, and ultimately endorsed by Borges, would effectively be snuffed out at its

[496] Eduardo Mignogna, 'Destinos cruzados de un libro y una vida' in *Clarín: Revista Ñ*, 19th of November 2000. http://edant.clarin.com/suplementos/cultura/2000/11/19/e-00601d.htm [Accessed on the 16th of July 2012].
[497] Ibid.

moment of greatest critical and commercial success by the triumph of some of the very political and social impulses it had sought to denounce:

> El golpe militar, que en marzo del '76 instauró la dictadura más feroz de nuestro país, produjo fracturas en el desarrollo de la cultura nacional, por ende en la narrativa que historiamos. Eludir el nombre propio, apelar al sobrentendido metafórico o publicar en el extranjero constituyen entonces estrategias que trascendiendo las meras elecciones personales, se inscriben en un contexto social signado por el miedo y la represión, por los exilios y las sirenas ululantes.[498]

In the case of the *modelo negro argentino*, this rupture was not solely a product of the censorship, repression and enforced exile suffered by practitioners of the genre during the 'Proceso'. While the imaginative adaptation of the American detective model provided Argentine writers with an approximate, albeit imperfect, template for the expression of critical consciousness and political engagement in the decades preceding the 1976 coup, the horrors of the Dirty War and its aftermath were such that crime fiction, even in its most hard-boiled form, was no longer a good fit for this purpose in Argentina. The difficulties of writers of crime fiction in accurately reflecting the violence and criminality that gripped Argentina during this period are anticipated in Pablo Leonardo's 1976 novel, *La mala guita*, the last crime story to be examined in this study.

Pablo Leonardo, *La mala guita* (1976)

Pablo Leonardo's *La mala guita* is an extremely illustrative example of the kind of crime fiction that emerged from the hard-boiled counter-campaign of the late sixties and early seventies in Argentina. It is also something of a hidden text, almost a palimpsest, within the Argentine generic canon. Though accorded a number of perfunctory mentions in Lafforgue and Rivera's *Asesinos de papel*, and included among the crime fiction titles published during the 1970s noted by Braceras et al. in

[498] *Asesinos de papel*, p. 30.

El cuento policial argentino, it is important to reiterate that Leonardo's novel has, thus far, eluded any detailed critical consideration. The pseudonym Pablo Leonardo conceals the identity of Leonardo Moledo, a mathematician, author, journalist and academic most closely associated with the realms of popular science and science fiction in the Argentine cultural context.[499] Short stories by Moledo have featured in a number of Argentine anthologies, including 'Adopción' in *Fantasía y Ciencia Ficción, Cuentos Argentinos* (Buenos Aires: Brami Huemul, 1994) and 'La estación terminal,' included in *Ciencia ficción argentina* (Buenos Aires: Aude Ediciones, 1990), *El Cuento Argentino de Ciencia Ficción* (Buenos Aires: Nuevo Siglo, 1995), and *Antología del Cuento Fantástico Argentino Contemporáneo* (Buenos Aires: Página 12, 2005).

Given Moledo's assumption of a pseudonym for his debut novel and sole incursion into the detective genre, and considering the scientific orientation of the vast majority of his subsequent works, it is perhaps unsurprising that the passage of time should have relegated *La mala guita* to a position of relative obscurity, even within his own oeuvre. As such, a key text that both exemplifies and critically examines the Argentine generic tradition in the mid-seventies has, like the purloined letter of Poe's eponymous story, remained hidden in plain sight. Its publication in 1976 also coincided with the most prolific period for Argentine crime fiction in its

[499] Under his own name, Moledo has published a number of works of fiction, including *Verídico informe sobre la ciudad de Bree* (Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 1985), a novel which combines elements of science fiction, fantasy and crime fiction, and *Tela de juicio* (Buenos Aires: Cántara Editores, 1991). However, he is perhaps best known for his numerous publications and advocacy in the area of popular science, including *De las tortugas a las estrellas: Una introducción a la ciencia* (Buenos Aires: A-Z, 1994), *Dioses y demonios en el átomo: de los rayos X a la bomba atómica* [co-authored with Máximo Rudelli] (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 1996), and *Diez teorias que conmovieron al mundo: de Copérnico al Big Bang* [with Estéban Magnani] (Buenos Aires: Capital Intelectual, 2009). He has also co-authored a number of popular science books aimed at children and young adults, including *Curiosidades de la ciencia* [with Carlos Nine] (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 1997) and *La leyenda de las estrellas* [with Marta Prada, Daniel Rodán and Luciana Fernández] (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 2007). Director of the Buenos Aires Planetarium from 2001 to 2007, he is a frequent contributor to the Argentine daily *Página 12*, and editor of its science and innovation supplement, *Futuro.* He has received two Konex Foundation *Diploma al Mérito* prizes, for Science Fiction in 1994, and for Popular Science in 1997.

hard-boiled variety, which saw the appearance of celebrated works by local authors including Ricardo Piglia, Osvaldo Soriano, Juan Martini, Sergio Sinay, Rubén Tizziani and José Pablo Feinmann. This circumstance may well be said to have further concealed Moledo's detective novel, a single work by an unknown author lost among an abundance of titles by writers whose names would become synonymous with the genre in Argentina. Nevertheless, *La mala guita* is deserving of consideration as an exemplary instance of the kind of critical, self-reflexive detective narrative produced in Argentina during this particularly fecund period in the genre's evolution. The plot of Leonardo's novel is complex and at times utterly chaotic, placing it firmly within the tradition of the Argentine admirers of the work of Dashiell Hammett, Ross Macdonald, and especially Raymond Chandler. The summary provided on the back cover alerts the reader to the novel's credentials as a hard-boiled narrative that adopts a sharply critical view of Argentine society during this period:

> …a través de su primer caso que los lleva a meterse con toda su inexperiencia en las complejas raíces del poder económico, [los detectives] descubren, junto con los lectores que el crimen no es algo separado por barreras infranqueables del funcionamiento normal de la industria, el comercio o la familia. La tensión crece, el juego se complica, uno de los dos perderá la vida en la empresa, y el sórdido enigma quedará develado. (178)

While the details of the plot provide a fascinating insight into the violence and the political and economic machinations that characterised this era, this examination of Leonardo's novel will focus primarily on the ways in which it serves to bookend and to comment upon the Argentine crime fiction tradition from which it emerged.

As previously noted in this study, Argentine authors and critics have frequently reflected upon the question of the detective genre's relevance, adaptability or plausibility in an Argentine context. Though detective stories and novels have

been produced and enjoyed in Argentina for more than a century, the seemingly moot question of whether a *narrativa policial argentina* is even possible has long been an issue among crime writers and specialised readers. A relevant instance of this concern is found in Jorge B. Rivera's 1996 critical anthology, *El relato policial en la Argentina*, in which each of the authors featured is invited to respond to a questionnaire consisting of fifteen questions, the last of which asks precisely, '¿Cree que es posible una narrativa policial argentina?'[500] Though the possibility of an Argentine detective narrative would seem to be self-evident, the persistence of doubt among critics and writers indicates that the question resists a wholly satisfactory solution. *La mala guita*, significantly, is a detective novel whose action is driven by this vexing metafictional and metaphysical question. Set in the Buenos Aires of 1975, the novel chronicles the detectory pursuits of the narrator, Ricardo Marteli, and his friend Willie, two unemployed, unattached, disillusioned university lecturers and hard-boiled crime fiction enthusiasts who place an advert in the newspaper *La Opinión* offering their services as private detectives representing the 'Agencia Integral', an initiative which will prove to have exciting but violent consequences for both. The enterprise arises, precisely, out of an ongoing debate between these two time-rich friends relating to the problematic status of the figure of the private detective in the Argentine context:

> Resultó que discutimos largamente sobre la existencia, inexistencia, posibilidad y visibilidad de los detectives privados en Buenos Aires. Yo: que no existen, que quizás el plan trienal los haya previsto, pero que por ahora no existen. Willie que sí, que debe haber, que los suboficiales retirados siempre fundan una agencia […]. Que un país sin detectives privados no es un país.[501]

[500] Jorge B. Rivera, *El relato policial en la Argentina*, p. 44.
[501] Pablo Leonardo, *La mala guita* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones De La Flor, 1976), pp. 8-9. Subsequent references to this work will be included in the body of the text, in parentheses.

Inspired by their extensive readings of detective fiction, particularly of the hard-boiled variety enjoying such a vogue in Argentina during this period, the pair decide to test the theory that private detectives might plausibly exist in a contemporary Argentine context, by attempting to emulate the pursuits of their fictional heroes, 'Pongamos un aviso ofreciéndonos como detectives privados. Pongamos. ¿Y si llaman? Yo: no van a llamar. Ya vamos a ver' (9). The viability of the venture requires the somewhat reluctant cooperation of Ricardo's aunt Amalia, owing to the fact that the aspiring *sabuesos* decide to use her home phone number as their office contact number in the newspaper advertisement for the 'Agencia Integral', much to her dismay:

> La tía Amalia, al enterarse: ustedes están locos: ¡la policía! ¡y en mi casa! Nosotros: si justamente no es la policía, son los detectives privados. La tía Amalia nunca leyó novelas policiales, por eso no sabe. Corriendo le traigo *El largo adiós*, de Chandler, leelo y enterate. (9)

Aunt Amalia evidently regards the police with the same disdain as she would any other undesirable, criminal element, and fears that her nephew's newspaper advertisement might bring the force to her door, a circumstance likely to provoke trouble, not to mention disapproval and negative commentary from the neighbours. Though Ricardo prescribes Chandler's *The Long Good-bye* as a cure-all remedy for her ignorance in these matters, Amalia's attitude towards the police illustrates from the outset the inherent difficulty involved in plausibly inserting a private detective from the Anglophone tradition in an Argentine setting in this period (or indeed any other period). The exchange provides an early example of the self-reflexive, metafictional quality of *La mala guita* in that, from the outset, Moledo implicitly acknowledges to the reader the problematic nature of the fictional project which the novel represents.

Despite his dismissal of the concerns of his aunt, 'La tía Amalia nunca leyó novelas policiales, por eso no sabe' (9), it soon becomes apparent that Richard's own understanding of crime, investigation and the methods of the police is drawn almost entirely from his readings of detective fiction, rather than from any real-life experience or professional training, and that his and Willie's wish to become private detectives amounts to the impulsive realisation of an adolescent fantasy. However, they appear to be disconcerted by the revelation that their advertisement has attracted a potential customer, who in the absence of more concrete details they name 'la Señora Desesperada':

> —Llamaron por el aviso.
> —Te dije que iban a llamar […].
> —¿Y ahora qué hacemos?
> —¿Cómo ahora qué hacemos? Andá y atendela. En una de ésas hasta te casás con tu Señora Desesperada, que termina siendo millonaria con yates y pozos petrolíferos.
> —¿Qué mierda querrá? —yo, medio pensativo.
> —Yo qué sé. Que le vigiles al marido que le mete los cuernos. O al hijo, que es homosexual, drogadicto y del erp.[502](8-9)

As he walks along Avenida Corrientes[503] towards his aunt Amalia's apartment, where he will attempt to make contact with la Señora Desesperada, Ricardo shares his inner thoughts concerning the impending meeting:

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[502] Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo (E.R.P.), military branch of the communist Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores. In the first half of the seventies, the E.R.P. and the Peronist-allied Montoneros were the most active left-wing urban guerrilla groups operating in Argentina, particularly in and around Buenos Aires. In the years preceding the publication of *La mala guita,* attacks on military and police installations, politically motivated assassinations and ransom kidnappings were the most visible activities of these groups. As Paul H. Lewis points out, 'Of the 687 people killed between the start of 1969 and the end of 1975, 523 were policemen and soldiers […]. The next largest category of victims consisted of businessmen, whether merchants, industrialists, or *estancieros*, 54 in all'. Paul H. Lewis, *Guerrillas and Generals: The Dirty War in Argentina* (Connecticut: Praeger, 2002), p. 53.

[503] Emblematic Buenos Aires thoroughfare famous for its abundant bookshops, theatres and cafes. It is fitting that Ricardo should proceed to his assignment along a street renowned as a repository of fictional representation. *La mala guita* is notable throughout for its vivid depictions of Buenos Aires, often supplied through the stream of consciousness-style rhapsodies of the narrator as he meditates upon the case, a technique familiar to readers of Chandler's eloquent evocations of Los Angeles and its environs. Avenida Corrientes in particular features heavily, as a conceptual and geographical anchoring point for the narration and for the city, 'La calle Corrientes me sorprendió, como siempre.

> ¿Cómo se llamará? ¿Tendrá guita? ¿Y si me ofrece un montón de plata para perseguir al marido y sacarle una foto cogiendo con una rubia? ¿Qué otra cosa podía ser? ¿Contrabando? ¿Drogas? ¿Un asesinato? Yo qué sé. Pero empezaba a sentir ansiedad. Durante una cuadra me entretuve en mirarle el culo a una mina. (10)

The passage alerts the reader to the notion that Ricardo's interest in becoming a private detective is at least partly motivated by the strong element of escapism, adventure and sexual intrigue associated with the detective story in its hard-boiled form:

> Una aventura detectivesca, llena de minas, rubias o morochas, pero siempre millonarias. Uno siempre se coge a la heroína, y entre polvo y polvo le dice: ¿cuándo lo mataste?, dando a entender que uno *ya lo sabe*... por lo menos así hace siempre Sam Spade. ¿Y quién se la coge? ¿Willie o yo? ¿Y si la Señora Desesperada no es una Señora Desesperada, sino una Señorita Desesperadísima? (10)

He also considers the prospective detectory adventure a potential means of escaping the political and economic quagmire of mid-1970s Buenos Aires:

> Al fin y al cabo, como va la cosa y con las facultades cerradas uno no tiene nada que hacer. Y además. Además… Me acordé. Además estoy sin laburo porque me quitaron las cátedras en la facultad, la gran puta. El gobierno popular que yo voté me deja sin trabajo. Así me agradece. Y por montonero, después que casi me rajan los montoneros de la facultad por fachista. Para unos facho y para otros comunista o trotskista. (11)

As previously noted in this study, the hard-boiled genre came to be identified in the Argentine context with the expression of political commitment through literature, as a form of 'denuncia social', owing to its capacity to articulate a consciously critical view of society, and also to draw attention to the economic motivation of a significant proportion of criminal activity. As Piglia notes, 'el crimen, el delito, está siempre sostenido por el dinero: asesinatos, robos, estafas, extorsiones, secuestros, la

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Uno siempre llega a Corrientes, digamos, por un lado no esperado. Uno va caminando por Pueyrredón, digamos, pero espera llegar a Corrientes por Callao. Y si uno va caminando por Paraná desde Córdoba, siempre piensa que viene por Riobamba desde Rivadavia. Me reí pensando en Corrientes angosta. Una verdadera ofensa. Corrientes tiene que ser ancha, dar sentido de posesión, de apropiación de la ciudad. Para calles angostas, ahí están Lavalle o Tucumán. Corrientes no puede resignarse a ser arroyuelito. Tiene que ser río ancho, que desemboca en el inmenso estuario de la Nueve de Julio, con su delta de placitas y plazoletas'. p. 41.

cadena es siempre económica'.[504] Moledo reflects upon these aspects of the genre from within the pages of *La mala guita*, often focusing specifically upon the Argentine socio-political context that provides the setting for the novel.

Though Ricardo identifies himself as a Peronist, and in general terms as an 'intelectual de izquierdas' (12), he is also thoroughly disillusioned with Argentine politics and its ramifications, which have included his own removal from the university on account of his political allegiances. The fact that he is 'para unos facho y para otros comunista o trotskista' (11) underlines the complexity of the country's fractured and contradictory political divisions. Effectively blacklisted from the public sector, Ricardo, as he walks along Corrientes, wonders whether his switch to the private sector, through the establishment of the 'Agencia Integral', might set him upon a path to immense prosperity, power and influence as the head of a corporate entity 'que se extiende a lo largo de naciones y continentes' (11). The unemployed sociologist imagines an investigative organisation on a truly industrial scale:

> Millares de secretarias de tetas florecientes atienden por teléfono a aquellos que tienen un problema que la poli no alcanza a resolver. Y tras pasillos alfombrados y silenciosos, propensos a la meditación, enormes salones cubiertos de libros, y más allá, en una oficina escondida y silenciosa, Yo, el Detective Privado, silencioso motor y cerebro de toda la organización. (11)

Ricardo is not immune to the appeal of the material rewards that such an enterprise might yield, 'Y, por supuesto, kilos de plata, una casa afuera, una casa en Miramar para la tía Amalia, viajes a Europa y a Bangkok, suspenso, acción, intriga' (12). At the same time, he fears that such an unashamedly capitalist venture might prove incompatible with his political beliefs:

> Cuadrará tal profesión para intelectuales de izquierda, profesores universitarios peronistas, con una posición clara frente al proceso nacional, el

[504] *Asesinos de papel*, p. 52.

> modo de producción, la revolución democrática burguesa, el Frejuli, etcétera… Pensé en el retrato de Perón que está sobre mi escritorio. ¿Aprobaría el General mi nueva vocación? (12)

His conscience is salved, however, by the thought that his devotion to Perón and the political movement that he inspired had only contributed to his current predicament, 'Al fin y al cabo, era su mismísima esposa la que me había arrojado en las garras del desempleo' (12).

Having reconciled himself to this point of principle, Ricardo in his ambulatory reverie turns to consider some of the practical difficulties involved in making the transition from left-leaning academic to hard-boiled private detective, '¿Y mis relaciones con la policía? La policía no se lleva muy bien con los intelectuales de izquierda, eso es bien sabido: una dificultad. No tomo whisky: otro problema serio' (12). By way of addressing these 'problems', the narrator appears to break the 'fourth wall' of the diegetic universe in making what is essentially a theoretical observation concerning the Argentine writer's practice of detective fiction in this period:

> Pero de todas maneras no se puede pretender ser exactamente igual que Lew Archer, eso no sería más que copiar modelos foráneos, sin adaptarlos a la realidad nacional. Mejor dicho, tampoco es necesario adaptar modelos foráneos, es necesario recrear la cultura, es decir, que el detective privado argentino surja de las entrañas mismas y de las necesidades propias de nuestro pueblo. (12)

At this stage in the narrative Moledo, via his narrator, seems to embrace a conceptual view of the genre which favours the elaboration of an original Argentine detective narrative tradition, one which reflects, and is informed by, the Argentine experience of crime and its circumstances, rather than a derivative generic practise that is merely content to transpose or adapt well-established foreign models. In the same breath, Ricardo acknowledges, albeit indirectly, a difficulty with this aspiration: that the

thorough familiarity of Argentine writers and readers with these 'modelos foráneos' represents an unavoidable obstacle to an 'original' Argentine crime fiction tradition *sui generis*, 'Tengo una buena biblioteca policial, no me faltará bibliografía para resolver cualquier problema en que me encuentre perdido' (12). Just as Ricardo and Willie's approach to their investigation will be conditioned by their readings of American hard-boiled writers such as Hammett, Chandler and Macdonald, Moledo tacitly indicates that this tale of investigation is inspired and informed by readings of these and other writers of detective fiction, including Argentine writers who had themselves appropriated 'modelos foráneos,' such as Osvaldo Soriano, whose 1973 novel *Triste, solitario y final* is explicitly referenced by Ricardo as he prepares to meet his new client for the first time, 'Tengo que empezar a aprender a no ponerme nervioso, y a no sentirme desesperado, sino más bien desolado, triste, solitario y final. Una buena mezcla entre el Gordo y el Flaco y Philip Marlowe, y listo' (13). As the narrative progresses, it also becomes apparent that the novel's frequent and often humorous recognition of its own artificial, highly metafictional character does not preclude it from also functioning as a form of 'denuncia social,' offering a sharply critical view of Argentine society in this period.

The *Femme Fatale*

One of the conventionalised features of the American hard-boiled detective tradition in fiction, reinforced through cinematic representation, involves the initial contact and meeting between the private detective and an incarnation of the *femme fatale*, who may be a female client, as in the case of Brigid O'Shaughnessy in Dashiell Hammett's *The Maltese Falcon*, or Orfamay Quest in Raymond Chandler's *The Little Sister,* or a relative of the client, such as Carmen Sternwood in Chandler's *The*

Big Sleep. In accordance with Ricardo and Willie's readings of the genre, the Señora Desesperada is apt to be seductive, rich, dangerous, desperate, or a combination of these features, and their first contact and subsequent first meeting with their new client creates a certain level of expectation. Reaching Aunt Amalia's house, Ricardo's pulse races in response to the ringing of the telephone, and accelerates still further when a female voice on the other end of the line asks to speak with 'alguien de la Agencia Integral. ¡Marx sea loado! Es ella. Me temblaba un poco la voz. Me presenté. Ricardo Marteli, de la Agencia Integral de Investigaciones. A sus órdenes' (14). Ricardo learns that their prospective client is a certain Florencia, 'señora de Maldonado,' and, rapidly analysing her voice, he makes a series of predictions, 'Está nerviosa, me dije. Bien. Tendrá unos 45 años, meses más, meses menos. Rubia. Millonaria. Esposa de algún figurón de la CGE [Confederación General Económica]. Empresario nacional' (14). Having arranged a meeting with Mrs. Maldonado that same evening at her home on Avenida Libertador, Ricardo and Willie discuss the development. The former soon learns that his partner in detection is unwilling to attend their first encounter with the client:

> —Yo no puedo ir —dice Willie.
> —¿Cómo que no podés ir? ¿Y con quién querés que vaya. ¿Con la tía Amalia?
> —No sería mala idea ir con la tía Amalia. Pero yo no puedo, en serio. Tengo una mina.
> —Los detectives privados no tienen minas que no surjan del mismo conflicto policial. Es una regla sin equanon.
> —Está bien, pero ¿qué quieres que haga? Por esta vez me parece que la regla va a tener equanon. Andá solo. (15)

Willie is evidently disappointed to learn that their first client does not appear to conform to the image of the *femme fatale* that he associates with the fictional genre, and he is unwilling to risk sacrificing a nascent relationship for an adventure so lacking in erotic potential, '—¿Y cómo voy a dejar a la mina por la Señora

Desesperada que por ahí es una vieja asquerosa?' In spite of Ricardo's attempts to change his mind, '—Puede no ser una vieja asquerosa. Y además va a haber montones, millones de minas' (16), Willie is steadfast in his refusal to meet their first client, and he also warns that bringing Aunt Amalia along to the meeting would amount to a grievous breach of time-honoured generic conventions:

> —Bueno, no, no puedo ir. Llevate no más a tu tía, si querés, pero tené en cuenta que vas a introducir una variación en la historia policial del universo. ¿Te imaginás a Lew Archer yendo con la tía a una entrevista? (16)

Ricardo himself recognises the absurdity of such a scenario in a hard-boiled detective story, 'Bajé la cabeza, avergonzado. Cierto. No sólo Lew Archer. Seguro que ni el más ínfimo detective privado de la más ínfima de las novelas va con la tía' (16). In any case, Aunt Amalia also refuses to accompany her nephew on sartorial grounds, '—No, cómo voy a ir —dice la tía Amalia—, no tengo qué ponerme', and he is thus obliged to attend the initial meeting with Mrs. Maldonado alone. On this and many other occasions throughout the novel, Moledo establishes a humorous contrast between the conventions of the genre familiar to the reader from the American hard-boiled tradition and the world of detection as experienced by Ricardo and Willie, underemployed left-wing intellectuals-turned-investigators operating in a volatile Argentine context.

Throughout the novel, both explicit and oblique references to the crime fiction tradition abound. In the hour before his meeting with Mrs. Maldonado at her home on Avenida Libertador, Ricardo enjoys a coffee while reading *Conversación en la catedral* by Mario Vargas Llosa (1969). He privately concedes that this is less than ideal preparation for the encounter to follow, and that he should instead be reading one of the key texts of his new profession, 'En vez de esto debía estar repasando "El Largo Adiós" [*The Long Good-bye*, Raymond Chandler]. Pero no me

animaba a presentarme con una novela policial en la mano. Hubiera parecido un principiante' (18). Though Ricardo is eager to conceal his lack of experience from Mrs. Maldonado, in the initial exchange between them she is struck by his youthful appearance, '—Es usted muy joven —,' to which he replies —Yo no tengo la culpa' (19). His knowledge of Chandler's work has not deserted him at this crucial moment, as the exchange almost precisely replicates Philip Marlowe's riposte to Carmen Sternwood's observation towards the beginning of Chandler's first novel, *The Big Sleep*, '"You're very tall." "I didn't mean to be"'.[505] Ricardo also opts to deploy the mannerisms and techniques of his fictional heroes in his handling of the investigation:

> —¿Cómo se dio cuenta de que estoy leyendo *La Casa Verde*? —preguntó, admirada de mi astucia detectivesca.
> No dije nada. El silencio me da importancia, hace crecer mi imagen ante asesinos, victimarios, violadores, cómplices, traficantes de drogas, soñadores, poetas y barrenderos. Y por supuesto, señoras de Maldonado, de las cuales la que estaba enfrente mío echó una mirada desolada por la habitación. (20)

It soon becomes apparent that the case at hand, in appearance at least, is fairly typical of the tradition of the hard-boiled detective genre, insofar as it involves the disappearance of Carlos Maldonado, husband of the client, a prominent and wealthy industrialist:

> —Mi marido. Hace cinco días que desapareció.
> —No avisó a la policía?
> —No. No lo creí necesario. Tampoco me dirigí a una agencia de investigaciones grande, sino a una prácticamente desconocida. Leí el aviso en *La Opinión*, y bueno, llamé, ¿sabe? Yo leo siempre *La Opinión*, no puedo aguantar ningún otro diario. Es mucho más cultural […].
> —¿Qué hace su marido?
> —Está en el directorio de la empresa Trucks. Fabrican acero laminado. Ahora empezaron a exportar, hace poco. Es uno de los hombres-clave. La empresa es una de las tres más grandes del país.
> —Ajá. (20-1)

[505] Raymond Chandler, *The Big Sleep and Other Novels*, p. 4.

The self-referential, metafictional quality of the narrative is again emphasised during the meeting, when Ricardo is forced to confront one of his anticipated shortcomings as a private detective, namely, that he is not a seasoned whisky drinker in the tradition of Philip Marlowe or Lew Archer. When he is served a glass of whisky by Mrs. Maldonado's servant, Albertina, Ricardo reflects that the scene is 'Como en una novela policial, pensé, sin acordarme de que *estaba en una novela policial* [my emphasis]' (22). The reader's perspective in relation to the narrator's testimony undergoes a revision as Ricardo acknowledges the constructed, fictional nature of the scenario that he describes. *La mala guita* gradually reveals itself as a detective novel in the process of its own elaboration, one in which the conventions of the fictional genre are conspicuous, often through their explicit subversion, and in which the reader is invited to follow the fictional work-in-progress as it evolves in the mind of the narrator and on the printed page. The heavy consumption of alcohol by the private detective is a perennial mainstay of the fictional genre.[506] Ricardo's early attempts to adhere to this established convention produce comical results, 'Tomé la mitad y me atraganté. La señora de Maldonado me palmeó la espalda maternalmente mientras me alcanzaba el vaso. Tomé el resto. Empecé a sentir que me mareaba', (23) and he expresses grave fears regarding his professional prospects, 'Lo malo es que a mí una cantidad ínfima de alcohol me marea. Obstáculo insalvable. Nunca seré un gran Detective' (26). As the novel progresses, Ricardo's ability to function while

[506] The subject of alcohol and its effects is explored with eloquence in the work of Chandler generally, but particularly so in the case of *The Long Good-bye*, two of whose protagonists, Terry Lennox and Roger Wade, are alcoholics whose addictions advance central elements of the plot. It is also suggested that Marlowe, who remains a heavy drinker, was once a hopeless alcoholic, '"Maybe I [Lennox] can quit drinking one of these days. They all say that, don't they?" [Marlowe] "It takes about three years." "Three years?" He looked shocked. "Usually it does. It's a different world. You have to get used to a paler set of colours, a quieter lot of sounds. You have to allow for relapses. All the people you used to know well will get to be just a little strange. You won't even like most of them, and they won't like you too well"'. *The Big Sleep and Other Novels*, p. 375. Lennox, in one of his more sober and reflective moments, offers the following highly cynical insight, '"Alcohol is like love," he said. "The first kiss is magic, the second is intimate, the third is routine. After that you take the girl's clothes off"'. *The Big Sleep and Other Novels*, p. 384.

under the effects of alcohol becomes a barometer of his progress towards becoming a competent detective. In the early stages of the investigation, his lack of tolerance leads to moments of embarrassment and grave errors of judgement. As his knowledge of the case expands, and as he adjusts to the uncertainties and physical dangers of the investigation, his tolerance for alcohol seems to improve commensurately, a fact which does not escape him, 'Cuando Javier llega, ya me tomé como diez whiskies, ya alcancé el nivel alcohólico que corresponde a una novela policial' (116).

Ricardo's initial meeting with Mrs. Maldonado reveals that her husband Carlos had been missing for five days, and that his disappearance did not appear to be a ransom kidnapping, on the basis that no ransom demand had been made. The day of his disappearance was not unusual in any significant respect. Apart from the occasional business trip he was not in the habit of spending prolonged periods away from home, and, to his wife's knowledge, was not involved in any extra-marital affairs. Ricardo asks Mrs. Maldonado for a photograph of her husband, and promises to make inquiries at his office with Tito Smithson, a friend of the couple and one of the partners in the business. The novice detective leaves the Maldonado residence unsure as to how he should proceed:

> ¿Dónde carajo estará este tipo ahora? Dónde puedo buscarlo. Encontrar a una persona en Buenos Aires es bastante difícil cuando uno sabe donde vive, imagínense cuando uno no sabe donde está…si es que está en Buenos Aires, si es que está en el país. La única garantía que tengo es que por lo menos está en el universo…, vivo o muerto. (24)

He decides to begin his search for Carlos Maldonado in a rather unexpected place, el Foro (1928-2008), a legendary 24-hour *café porteño* located at the intersection of Corrientes and Uruguay frequented by left-wing Peronist intellectuals, writers and artists:

> Dos mesas más allá había un grupo literario que tenía su clásica reunión semanal. Se leían cuentos y poemas. Una chica de alrededor de dieciocho años leyó un poema que se llamaba *La Nada* y que efectivamente era vacío. Después se levantó una niña rubia y virginal, con unos ojos dulces y azules que no parecían de este mundo y leyó un cuento que se llamaba *Orgasmo*. No pude entender todo, porque usaba un lunfardo impenetrable, ¿me estaré volviendo viejo? (25)

It soon becomes apparent to the reader that Ricardo does not expect to find the missing industrialist in these unlikely surroundings, 'Empecé a pensar que era difícil que Maldo estuviera aquí' (25), and that he has gravitated towards one of his old student activist haunts so as to better reflect upon his past experiences, and to contemplate his present adventure:

> Evoqué las épocas de esplendor cuando entraba al Foro y conocía por lo menos a dos personas por mesa, antes de que todo se corrompiera. Después, por supuesto tuve que dejar el Foro y militar en un barrio, y después tuve como premio una cátedra en la universidad. Más tarde empezó el cerco, y yo estaba ahí cuando fuimos a romperlo. Después, todo se vino abajo, la misión Ivanissevich me dejó sin cátedras y a raíz de eso había aparecido el aviso en el diario, y a raíz de eso yo había vuelto al Foro para buscar a Maldonado que quién sabe dónde estará. (25-6)

Once again, the novel incorporates reflections upon Argentine political realities during this period, in this instance the highly politicised nature of appointments within the university system and their impact upon the young sociologist's professional possibilities. Interestingly, Moledo chooses to focus upon the messy implications of a specific instance of corrupt political patronage within the broad church of the Peronist movement, rather than promoting a more reductive critical viewpoint that associates Peronism with left-wing ideological perspectives more generally.[507]

Having meditated upon the series of events leading to his current predicament, Ricardo resolves to formulate a plan of action in consultation with his fellow detective, Willie, 'todo detective tiene un plan; un detective sin plan es como

[507] Cf. Avellaneda's *El habla de la ideología.* Op. cit.

un barco sin timón o un jardín sin flores' (26). However, their discussion the following day reveals that neither of the partners in the 'Agencia Integral' has a clear idea of how to further the investigation into Maldonado's disappearance:

> —¿Y podremos encontrarlo al tipo ése? —meditó Willie.
> —La verdad, es que no tengo idea.
> —¿No será peligroso?
> —¿Peligroso? ¿Por qué?
> —Yo que sé. Vos leíste tantas novelitas como yo.
> —Pero dale. Aquí se trata nada más que de buscar a un tipo que se escapó con una mina. Igual no tenemos nada que hacer.
> —¿Pero tenés alguna idea sobre qué es lo que vamos a hacer?
> —Ni la más remota idea. Ni la más remotísima idea. (28)

Willie displays a distinct lack of enthusiasm for the case, and advocates a different course of action, or, more accurately, a course of inaction, '—¿Estamos mal, eh? —dijo— y yo la verdad es que tengo fiaca ¿Y si mandamos todo a la mierda y nos dedicamos a la contemplación? (28-9). They continue to discuss the disappearance of Maldonado in abstract terms, as if they were brainstorming the plot of a prospective detective novel, without making any apparent progress in terms of formulating a plan:

> —Para mí que la mujer es la asesina.
> —¿No dijiste que no lo iban a matar?
> —Ah, cierto, entonces no es la asesina. Pero *alguien* tiene que ser el asesino.
> —Ergo, alguien tiene que ser el asesinado.
> —Sorprendente. Veo que avanzamos. (29)
> —Si seguimos así —dijo Willie meneando la cabeza—. Yo que sé, che. Tengo fiaca. (29)

Just as the momentum of the detectives appears to diminish, Ricardo injects fresh impetus into the discussion, and indeed the narrative, by finding the means to justify their involvement in the case and hence to move the plot forward:

> —Además, hay otra razón fundamental por la cual no podemos abandonar al Señor Maldonado en manos de sus raptores, ni a los asesinos en manos de sus víctimas.
> —¿Cuál, si se puede saber? —pregunta Willie.
> —Leé el capítulo siguiente. (30)

This instruction to read the following chapter is polysemic in its effect. It appears to form part of the dialogue between Ricardo and Willie within the diegesis of the novel. However, the integrity of the fictional universe has already been compromised by previous allusions to the consciously artificial, fictional qualities of the narrative, and this anticipatory reference to the following chapter only serves to further this process. By inviting Willie to continue to the next chapter, the narrator reinforces to the reader the idea that *La mala guita* is a work of fiction, a detective novel in the process of its own conscious elaboration. The same instruction may be interpreted as an invitation, not just to Willie, but also to the reader, to continue reading, foregrounding the notion that the realisation of this work of fiction requires the conjunction of author, text and reader.

Theoretical Justifications

As promised by the narrator at the conclusion of the previous chapter, Chapter VII is dedicated to the justification of the Agencia Integral's involvement in the investigation into the disappearance of Maldonado. However, rather than discussing the practicalities of the case, Ricardo and Willie prefer to surrender to the abstract, theoretical contemplation of the fictional detective genre and its role within the Argentine socio-political context. This short chapter alternates between the inner musings and recollections of Ricardo, and his dialogue with Willie. In doing so, it effectively articulates the key theoretical positions associated with the genre's Argentine evolution as previously charted in this study. In this respect, this chapter represents a paradigmatic example of the tendency on the part of Argentine crime fiction writers to consciously engage with critical and theoretical discussions of the

genre. It begins by referring to the immense popularity of detective fiction in Argentina and its perceived impact upon the intellectual climate of the time:

> La señora que atiende el puesto de Plaza Lavalle me dice con tristeza: y… novelas policiales, es lo único que se vende. Sudamericana quiebra, sobre sus ruinas flota el último número del Séptimo Círculo. (30)

The sentiments of the *quiosquera* of Plaza Lavalle reflect the view that the popularity and intellectual prestige of this *literatura de evasión* in Argentina, exemplified by the continuing commercial success of Emecé's Séptimo Círculo collection,[508] served to divert the attention of the Argentine reading public away from more weighty contemporary intellectual or political concerns, to the extent of threatening the very existence of Editorial Sudamericana, the prestigious publishing house founded in 1939 by a group of leading Argentine intellectuals including Victoria Ocampo and Oliverio Girondo. Ricardo cites the example of his cousin, a psychologist, who 'entre paciente y paciente, lee desesperada las últimas páginas de *El Caso Galton*, [The Galton Case] de Ross Macdonald'.[509] (30) As if to show the genre capable of even greater feats of malign distraction, he relates the story of his cousin's colleague, whose devotion to the genre, to the neglect of her professional duties, had provoked deadly consequences, 'Me cuenta que a una amiga, también psicóloga, un paciente se le suicidó, cuando al darse vuelta del diván y mirarla, la encontró leyendo *Un Ingenuo Más* [Just Another Sucker], de [James] Hadley Chase'.[510] (30)

The disruptive effects of the genre extend also to the ideological realm. According to one critical perspective outlined by Ricardo, the advent of the hard-

[508] Borges and Bioy's crime fiction publishing phenomenon was by this stage under the editorship of Carlos V. Frias, whose broader conception of the *policial* facilitated the incorporation of an increasingly diverse range of texts, including stories by notable practitioners of the hard-boiled variant such as Raymond Chandler and Ross McDonald.
[509] First published in Argentina in 1961 by Los libros del mirasol, an imprint of Fabril Editora.
[510] Published in El Séptimo Círculo in 1967 under the pseudonymous Hadley Chase's birth name, René Raymond.

boiled private detective in the Argentine literary sphere would seem to herald the imminent demise of revolutionary fervour, 'Cuando las vanguardias revolucionarias se retiran, ya sea por la derrota o el cansancio, los detectives privados salen a la palestra' (30). This realisation is said to have had an unnerving effect upon the scribes of the left-wing press:

> Los diarios de izquierda publican grandes titulares: No os dejéis confundir. No dejéis que las masas se desvíen de sus objetivos revolucionarios y tengan como único interés terminar de leer una novela. La Novela Policial es el Opio de los Pueblos. Los obreros buscan, por la vía de la detectivesca privada, el ascenso social, olvidando sus intereses de clase. (30)

Detective fiction is deemed to have supplanted religion as the 'opium of the people' (in the parlance of Marx), and to exercise a subliminal, repressive controlling effect upon the masses, a theoretical position proximate to that more fully elucidated a few short years later in Avellaneda's *El habla de la ideología* (1983). At the same time, the success of the hard-boiled genre has also apparently provoked great unease among the more reactionary institutional representatives and advocates of law and order precisely *on account* of its revolutionary potential among left-leaning readers, who, it is foreseen, may be tempted to combine classical *foco* theory with the Machiavellian urban warfare conducted by the Continental Op, as depicted in Dashiell Hammett's *Red Harvest*:

> El ejército se desmoraliza al ver que dos o tres detectives vencen por la astucia o por la fuerza a legiones enteras de policías y mafiosos, y si no, ahí está Cosecha Roja, de Dashiell Hammet [sic]. Las fuerzas de seguridad no dan pie con bola. (30-1)

A further critical position invoked by the narrator is the notion that this essentially 'foreign' genre poses an insidious threat to Argentine national and cultural identity, '—¿No ves que se está desquiciando todo? ¿Y qué es esto sino una muestra de imperialismo cultural, que está atacando las raíces mismas de nuestra nacionalidad?' (31) As if to illustrate the gravity of this threat, the narrator refers to a billboard that

he had recently encountered which invited passers-by to consider the question, '¿Puede Raymond Chandler sustituir a Juan Domingo Perón?' (31). His response to the billboard is particularly impassioned, and forms the basis of his argument in favour of pursuing the investigation into the disappearance of Maldonado, above more practical considerations:

> No, no puede, por supuesto que no puede. Y nosotros lo vamos a permitir, vamos a aceptar *pasivamente* esa invasión, y cuando desaparece el señor Maldonado nos vamos a retirar a leer a Margaret Millar, que dicho sea de paso es la esposa de Ross Macdonald, o a Nicholas Freeling, o a Nicholas Blake, nos perderemos entre las páginas de *Un ataúd de Hong Kong*.[511] (31)

Once again, the insightful yet humorously ironic quality of these musings is noteworthy. Though Ricardo appears earnest in his concerns about the potentially corrosive influence of the genre upon Argentine political and national culture, at the same time his detailed knowledge of the products of the genre indicates that he is himself complicit in the process of intellectual denigration, political anaesthesia and cultural colonisation that it is said to produce. According to this 'thesis', Ricardo and [in particular] Willie's reluctance to investigate Maldonado's disappearance is symptomatic of the national obsession with crime fiction, to the exclusion of the criminal realities that abound in Argentina at this time. Ricardo maintains that ignoring the fate of Maldonado would be tantamount to confirming the validity of these negative critical perceptions of crime fiction, '¿buscaremos frenéticamente *La Dama del Lago*, de Chandler, que está agotado, mientras el señor Maldonado no aparece? ¿Te parece posible? ¿Te parece siquiera concebible? ¿Vamos a cometer tal sacrilegio?' (31). He believes that they have strong political and moral incentives to continue the investigation. The failure to pursue the case, were it to be made public, would in all likelihood foment popular discontent in Argentina, '¡La ira de nuestro

[511] Detective novel by James Hadley Chase, first published in Argentina in 1968 as part of the Séptimo Círculo collection.

pueblo caerá sobre nosotros!' (31), and might even lead to repercussions on a global scale, '¿Qué dirían los pueblos del mundo, que confían en nuestra Novela Policial en Paz?' (31). This latter motivation once again highlights the constructed, fictional character of the text, as a hyperbolic Ricardo emphasises to Willie their sacred obligations to the readership of detective fiction to move the narrative forward, to put theory into practice, to bring both their investigation and the elaboration of an Argentine detective novel to an aesthetically and politically satisfactory conclusion. It is for these highly conceptual reasons that Ricardo urges Willie to collaborate with him in the investigation, 'No pibe, no es posible, no podemos abandonar al señor Maldonado, dondequiera que esté' (31). Willie is thus persuaded to continue, though he is keen to insert a caveat to his agreement, one that reflects the realities of a period in which both arbitrary and targeted acts of political violence on the streets of Buenos Aires were commonplace, '—Siempre que no haya demasiado riesgo, —dice Willie— que para riesgos, bastante con caminar por la calle' (31).

The Game is Afoot

Having established a sound theoretical justification for their continued involvement in the case, Ricardo and Willie resolve to follow more definite lines of inquiry. Ricardo arranges a meeting that evening with Maldonado's son, Javier, at the famous *confitería* El Olmo at the corner of Santa Fe and Pueyrredón, one of the city's most frequented intersections. In advance of their encounter he decides to return to his apartment, and discovers that a short type-written note had been left for him bearing the brief, unequivocal warning, 'NO TE METAS EN LO QUE NO TE INTERESA' (36). Despite his recent impassioned speech to Willie regarding their political and moral obligations to Maldonado, to the investigation, and indeed to the Argentine

crime genre itself, his first impulse upon reading the note is to abandon the whole enterprise, to 'llamar a la señora de Maldonado y decirle que podía meterse a su marido en el culo o donde más le gustara, […] que yo no iba a correr riesgos por la plata de mierda que ellos me podían ofrecer' (34-5). It suddenly occurs to him that their enquiries into the disappearance of Maldonado might involve a genuine element of risk:

> Me puse a temblar. Jamás se me había ocurrido que el asunto pudiera ser peligroso, y esto ya no me gustaba. Por lo visto, se movían rápido. ¿Quiénes? ¿Quiénes serán? Una cosa resultaba obvia en medio de la menesunda: el asunto era más serio de lo que yo había pensado. (35)

After a solid three-hour siesta, his fears in relation to the threatening missive appear to have partially diminished, 'Después de la siesta […], la amenaza recibida me pareció irreal. No pensar más en ella, me dije. No existió. Pero era difícil no pensar, qué quieren que les diga' (36), and he feels refreshed and ready to keep his appointment with Javier. The anonymous warning and Ricardo's subsequent response mark a key transitional moment in the narrative. Up to this point, much attention has been paid to the metafictional and indeed, metaphysical, qualities of the events related by the narrator. The warning serves to perforate the textual edifice that has thus far been constructed, alerting the narrator to the dangers which he might face should he choose to complete the transition from the conceptual, textual realm to the overtly 'physical' realities of the narrative universe. Ricardo rejects this final warning and passes boldly into the violent world of the Argentine detective story that he and Willie have engendered through the placement of their advert in *La Opinión*. To some extent, within this system Ricardo's quasi-omnipotent status as an architect of the textual edifice will no longer be fully respected, and he and Willie will be susceptible to whatever threats, manoeuvres, beatings, shoot-outs and reprisals are generated by the unfolding plot.

In a manner befitting the hard-boiled detective tradition, the meeting between Javier and Ricardo at the *confitería* El Olmo begins with some snappy, Chandleresque dialogue:

> —¿Usted quería hablar conmigo? —preguntó.
> —Me parece evidente. Y no me trates de usted. No soy tu abuelo.
> —A mi abuelo no lo trataba de usted.
> —Bueno, entonces tratame como si fuera tu abuelo. (36)

Maldonado's son proves to be a valuable source of information. The first vital discovery relates to the composition of the family, an arrangement which is not as straightforward as Ricardo had imagined:

> —Me pareció mejor hablar con vos que con tu vieja.
> —¿Mi vieja? No es mi vieja.
> —Ella me dijo que eras el hijo.
> —Ella que diga lo que quiera. Mi mamá murió hace doce años, en un accidente de automóvil.
> —¿Y hace mucho que tu viejo se volvió a casar?
> —Tres años. (36)

He detects in Javier an undertone of resentment towards Florencia, 'Evidentemente no adoraba a la actual esposa de su padre. Igual que Blancanieves' (36). In general his account of the last known movements of his father does not contradict that provided by his stepmother, and like Florencia, he is unaware of any extra-marital activity that might serve to explain the disappearance. When Ricardo tells him about the threatening note, Javier expresses alarm:

> —¿Y decís que la nota te llegó *hoy*?
> —Sí.
> —No puede ser.
> —¿Por qué no puede ser? —sorprendido.
> —O no puede ser o indicaría que es verdaderamente muy peligroso. Que mi viejo corre peligro.
> —No estoy jodiendo.
> —Entonces es muy peligroso.
> —Sí. (38)

Javier's bewildered reaction to news of the warning 'La dichosa nota aparentemente lo trastocaba todo' (38), retrospectively, may be regarded as an important clue to his

collusion in the disappearance of his father, but the significance of his disbelief is not apparent to Ricardo at this stage, and they proceed to discuss other matters related to the case. Javier reveals that since the death of his mother, he had noticed a profound change in his father, 'Desde que murió mi mama hay algo… una especie de barrera, un sobreentendido que no debe nombrarse, cosas que no deben decirse. Él se dedica a su laburo' (38). Again, the greater significance of the circumstances surrounding the death of Maldonado's first wife will only become apparent as the plot unfolds, but at this point Javier's testimony serves to add to the sense of intrigue surrounding the case. He offers additional insight into the actions of Florencia Maldonado since the disappearance of her husband:

> —¿Por qué no quieren que intervenga la policía?
> —No *quiere*. Es ella la que no quiere. Al principio, dos o tres días de que mi viejo desapareciera, decía que si lo habían raptado era más seguro tratar directamente con los raptores, y me pareció razonable. Además, te imaginás que no siento un especial amor por la policía… cuanto más lejos, mejor. (38-39)

According to Javier, as the days passed Florencia had offered an additional justification for her reluctance to involve the authorities in the search:

> —Y a veces que quién sabe qué era lo que pasaba. Que podía haber alguna matufia en el medio… que no quería armar escándalo. Supongo que sospechaba que mi viejo se había ido con alguna mina, y que después volvería… o no… y entonces era mejor que la gente que trabajaba en la empresa no se enterase… (39)

He also hints at the possibility that the disappearance might be related to his father's business dealings:

> —Además está el problema con Vargas…
> —¿Vargas? ¿Quién es Vargas?
> —Otro de los socios principales. Un tipo repugnante. Por lo menos me parece. No se lleva bien con mi viejo. Había problemas de todo tipo.
> —¿De todo tipo? ¿De qué tipo?
> —Guita y esas cosas… no sé muy bien… (39)

The meeting with Javier opens up avenues for further investigation, and conveniently provides the novel with a basic plot outline not unlike those typically encountered in hard-boiled crime narratives in the tradition of Chandler or Hammett, complete with promising augurs of corruption, criminality, the machinations of powerful interests and an element of sexual intrigue. Ricardo has entered definitively into the world of the investigation, and his proposed meeting with Tito Smithson the following day promises to yield additional relevant information. However, having concluded his meeting with Maldonado's son, he finds himself lapsing into old, familiar habits, 'Pagué y me levanté. Empecé a caminar por Pueyrredón. Instintivamente, mis pies me llevaban hacía Corrientes' (40). Once again, he reflects upon the perils that the case might involve, particularly at a time when there was already abundant danger on the streets of Buenos Aires without the need to actively seek out more:

> No son épocas como para andar sin documentos por la calle […]. Todos los días aparecen cadáveres en los baldíos. Los partidos políticos protestan. Y en medio de este quilombo a ese pelotudo se le ocurre desaparecer por un lío sentimental, y su mujer se siente celosa y quiere pescarlo con las manos en la masa. Y yo ocupándome de todo eso. (40)

The *flâneur porteño*, perhaps to alleviate the anxiety that the threatening letter had provoked, or in an effort to seek inspiration for his own investigation, decides to go to the cinema after a leisurely, meditative stroll along Avenida Corrientes, 'en el Lorraine daban *La Conversación*. Una película policial no me vendría mal y para allá me fui' (41). It appears, however, that this cinematic dose of crime fiction has left him unsated, and he visits a number of bookshops in search of more:

> Compré *El caso Galton*, de Ross Macdonald, en la feria del centro Editor. Moro está cerrada. Tendré que ir mañana para comprar allí unas cuantas novelas policiales, de las cuales sentía una urgencia espantosa. En una librería de la esquina de Corrientes y Rodríguez Peña encontré *El sueño eterno*, de Chandler, y *Archer, el blanco móvil*. (42)

Though he has been employed by Mrs. Maldonado to locate her husband, who by this time has been missing for almost a week, for Ricardo the hard-boiled detective genre remains an insuperable distraction. In the case of *Archer, el blanco móvil*, he seems to believe that Macdonald's novel might serve to advance his own investigation:

> Esta última resultó muy atrayente: se trataba de un caso parecido, según decía la solapa. También un tipo que desaparecía, después de haber regalado una montaña —aunque parezca mentira—. ¿Habrá regalado a alguien una montaña el señor Maldonado. Supongamos que le regaló a Vargas el Aconcagua, y después desapareció. Entonces, nada más fácil. Todo consistía en leer el libro y listo. Encontraría a Maldo sin mayor esfuerzo y me cubriría de gloria, siempre que no me agarraran antes los que habían escrito la nota. (42-3)

Once again, there appears to be an intersection between the narrative diegesis of *La mala guita,* in which Ricardo and Willie seek an explanation for the disappearance of Carlos Maldonado, and the fictional universes crafted by the exponents of the American hard-boiled school which serve as their inspiration.

The identity of the author of the threatening note is the first mystery resolved in the novel. After his meeting with Javier, his trip to the cinema and his book-buying expedition on Corrientes, Ricardo visits Willie's apartment in order to bring him up to date with recent developments in the case, '—Qué quilombo! —digo— ¿vos viste alguna vez una cosa así?' (45). In particular, he expresses concern about the dangers implicit in the typewritten warning that had been delivered to his apartment. Willie seems to concur, '—Qué cagazo con la nota, ¿eh?' (45). The tone of this response alerts Ricardo to a possibility that he had not previously considered:

> Me invade una sospecha terrible. Pero no, no puede ser.
> —No me vas a decir que la mandaste vos.
> —Te voy a decir.
> —¿Pero vos estás loco? ¿Te creés que éstas son épocas para andar haciendo esas bromas? (45)

Willie indicates to his partner that he too is capable of exerting an influence upon the direction of the detective tale under construction, '—Y qué querés. Fue un rapto de inspiración. Yo no sabía los grandes acontecimientos de hoy. Entonces, me dije a mí mismo: si no hay acontecimientos, hay que generarlos. Y bueno, fui y dejé la nota' (45). He cites an additional reason for his intervention:

> Si casi te agarra un infarto por una notita cualquiera, pensé qué va a pasar si a Tito Smithson, o al tipo del Torino, o a la misma Florencia se les ocurre algo más suculento. Y si agarran y te pegan un tiro por ahí, nadie se va a dar cuenta. Y eso es lo que no me gusta de este asunto. (46)

The periodic preoccupation with the physical dangers which their investigation might produce is put aside, once again, as the two friends turn to contemplate the deficiencies of the evolving mystery plot, a passage which further emphasises the metafictional, contructed qualities of the narrative, '—Y lo peor de todo […] lo más tremendo de todo es que ni siquiera sabemos, ni siquiera tenemos la más mínima sospecha de quién puede ser el asesino' (46). Ricardo perceives an even greater and more obvious defect, '—Disculpame —contesté— pero la situación es todavía más grave; todavía no sabemos quién es el *asesinado*' (46). Willie suggests some potential candidates for these crucial roles, '—Para mí, la asesinada es Florencia y el asesino es Vargas' (46). These designations do not meet with the approval of Ricardo, '—Grave error. El asesino es Javier, Vargas es el asesinado' (46). Willie in turn points to an obvious flaw in this scenario, '—No tenés ninguna prueba. Y, estando Vargas vivo es difícil conseguirla' (46). Both partners in the Agencia Integral agree that the lack of a credible heroine constitutes a major barrier to progress, and Willie maintains that Mrs. Maldonado cannot plausibly be cast in this role, '—Es más importante encontrar a la heroina que el asesino —sentencia Willie, regla de oro de la detectivesca privada.— Aceptá que Florencia no es el ideal de la heroína' (46). While Ricardo is forced to agree, he points out that the young,

beautiful heroine of the hard-boiled detective story is not always what she seems, citing the historic example of Brigid O'Shaughnessy in Dashiell Hammett's *The Maltese Falcon*:

> —Cierto —concedí— no es. ¿Te acordás de *El Halcón Maltés*?
> —¿Qué pasaba con el halcón maltés?
> —Que ahí Sam Spade se encama con una mina y resulta que era ella la asesina. (47)

Willie in turn acknowledges that while Florencia may not match the standards of youth and physical attractiveness that they have come to expect from the 'heroine' of a detective novel, this fact alone should not condemn her to the role of the murderer, 'Pero por ahora no hay ninguna otra en danza' (47). Ricardo tries to assure him that their investigation would inevitably lead them to more alluring examples of womanhood, '—Ya va a haber, ya va a haber… —yo, conciliador— para que esto sea un auténtico misterio debe haber una heroína o una asesina joven y hermosa' (47). Their discussion of the plot concluded for the time being, the partners vow to interview Tito Smithson the following day, and dedicate the remainder of the evening to more sedate activities: the appreciation of classical music and philosophical contemplation, 'Pasamos de la Agencia Integral a Mozart sin dificultad. Estuvimos un buen rato escuchando Las Bodas de Fígaro y hablando del Universo en general. Cuando volví a mi casa, amanecía' (48). This passage illustrates, once again, that for the representatives of the Agencia Integral, the investigation into Maldonado's disappearance retains an abstract, ludic, fictional quality, and that the exigencies of their assignment have not thus far impacted upon them in any meaningful, physical sense, though this circumstance will change as the novel progresses, resulting in the death of Willie and a number of severe beatings for Ricardo as he staggers towards the 'truth'.

The Hard-Boiled Problem

As the novel progresses, the narrator returns time and again to the subject of crime fiction and its relevance in the Argentine context, frequently addressing himself to the reader directly:

> Y es que, amables y queridos lectores, respetable y amado público, si es que existe, cierto espíritu detectivesco anida en el fondo de todo corazoncito, desde la señora del barrio que trata de investigar los asuntos amorosos de su vecina, hasta Nixon que espía al partido demócrata y arma todo el quilombo de watergate. Los intereses que se mueven detrás son diferentes, claro está, pero el hecho es innegable. (85)

His incorporation of references to the realities of the Argentine political context serve to highlight the trivial nature of the critical debates surrounding the relative merits of the classical and hard-boiled models as vehicles for social critique. As expressed by this left-wing intellect and self-styled detective, such earnest discussion of the genre's political implications is exposed in its absurdity:

> Pensé que puede dar lugar a toda una polémica entre detectives puros y aplicados. Philip Marlowe contra Hércules Poirot. La novela inglesa contra la norteamericana. Y qué detective es el más apropiado para el desarrollo nacional, para la marcha triunfal hacia una Argentina Potencia. Dios lo sabe… ¿Qué tipo de detectives estarán previstos en el plan trienal, del que ya pocos se acuerdan? Pensé en escribir un libro: novela policial y Liberación Nacional, ¿o por qué no?, Novela Nacional y Liberación Policial. (85)

As his exposure to physical violence becomes more frequent and more life-threatening, Ricardo develops a renewed affection for the crime story in the classical mould, a form famed for its strictly fictional qualities:

> Cuando llegué a la biblioteca de la CGT, ya estaba bastante podrido de todo el asunto, así que me limité a consultar los datos esenciales. Como ven, yo elegí el método puramente deductivo, intelectual, nada de acción. Es mucho mejor, más descansado. (102)

When his investigation finally leads him to confront the business end of a loaded weapon, his hard-boiled resolve deserts him in the most emphatic fashion:

> No sé si era una pistola cuarenta y cinco, treinta y tres, cien o qué mierda, y no me importó un carajo. Era la primera vez que alguien me apuntaba con un arma de esa manera, y conociendo los antecedentes del susodicho, ustedes sabrán perdonar, amables lectores, que me haya desmayado. (105)

In spite of this physical reaction to the violent potential of his investigation, Ricardo is in fact able to persist with his inquiries, culminating in the discovery of the whereabouts of Carlos Maldonado, who subsequently perishes at the hands of his wife Florencia, who proves to be, in many ways, precisely the kind of *femme fatale* from the hard-boiled tradition that Ricardo and Willie required for their narrative. Appropriately, Ricardo deduces Florencia's guilt from his reading of 'Red Wind,' a short story by Chandler that first appeared in *Dime Detective* magazine in January of 1938:

> Yo saco un libro del bolsillo y se lo alcanzo.
> —Tómelo. Se lo traje especialmente. Es *Viento Rojo* de Raymond Chandler. Léalo, señora Maldonado. Ahí se va a enterar de que hay pequeños revólveres que caben perfectamente en la cartera de una dama.
> Florencia vuelve a apoyarse en la chiminea.
> —Era un hijo de puta —dice al fin—. Me usó de alfombra, de trapo de piso. (170)

Furthermore, Ricardo, in spite of his apparent unsuitability as the protagonist of a hard-boiled crime novel, may ultimately be regarded as fitting the mold of the detective in the style of Chandler or Hammett precisely, as Florencia points out at the conclusion of the novel:

> ¿Sabe? —dijo al fin. Tenía un concepto muy bajo de usted […]. Pero después de todo, cumplió bastante bien su función de detective privado. Produjo una o dos muertes que no hubieran ocurrido sin su intervención. No supe qué contestar.
> —Bueno —dijo Florencia—. Parece que esto es todo.
> —Así es —contesté—. Esto es todo. Además, ya terminé mi café. (172)

La mala guita demonstrates, paradoxically, both the triumph and the failure of crime fiction in the Argentine context. As previously indicated in this study, the most

embedded, unifying tendency in the Argentine detective fiction tradition, whether in its classical, hard-boiled, suspense or hybrid incarnations, has been towards humorous, intellectual, parodic, self-reflexive narratives, which often explicitly reference and imaginatively reflect upon the crime fiction tradition and the act of reading itself, though some have also sought to offer a 'realist' depiction or critique of their socio-historical settings. Borges employs the term 'barroco' to describe this narrative approach:

> Yo diría que barroco es aquel estilo que deliberadamente agota (o quiere agotar) sus posibilidades y que linda con su propia caricatura […], diría que es barroca la etapa final de todo arte, cuando éste exhibe y dilapida sus medios.[512]

It is demonstrably clear from this analysis that Leonardo's crime novel precisely fits this description, and that by 1976 the genre in Argentina had reached an 'etapa final', particular within the context of the political and social upheavals of an era in which the magnitude of criminality and corruption outstripped the capacity of writers of fiction to depict its realities or consequences with any degree of accuracy or verisimilitude. As such, *La mala guita* serves both as an appropriate compedium and bookend for a century of the crime fiction in Argentina.

Conclusion

This chapter has considered a number of key works and events that, taken as a whole, amount to a substantial series of counter campaigns, whose effect was to alter the trajectory of the Argentine crime genre, away from a preoccupation with the classical form, which came to be viewed as a sterile form of intellectual diversion, and towards a preference for the hard-boiled model. The chapter has demonstrated

[512]Borges, *Obras completas* Vol I, (Buenos Aires: Emecé, 2007. 19th edn.), p. 343.

that the efforts of Piglia, and others, closely replicated the approach adopted by Borges, and were similarly successful. However, it has also been emphasised that by 1976, the hard-boiled model exemplified by the work of American writers such as Hammett and Chandler, proved inadequate for the purpose of reflecting the horrors of crime in Argentina during this period, a condition that would only be exacerbated by the Proceso de Reorganización Nacional. In particular, the analysis of Pablo Leonardo's *La mala guita* has served to render problematic the notion that the hard-boiled, or indeed any other model of the genre, could effectively function as a vehicle for social critique or for the realisation of political objectives.

Conclusions, Summary, and Recommendations

Introduction

In this concluding chapter of the dissertation, my purpose is to demonstrate that the account of the evolution of the crime genre provided in this study has led to the conviction that by 1977, the crime genre in Argentina had reached something of an impasse, owing to the fact that the two main variants of the genre, which had provided Argentine writers with extremely durable and malleable templates for literary innovation and experimentation, had effectively run their course in certain respects. The chapter will demonstrate this by providing a synthesis of the key arguments presented in the previous chapters.

Despite the long tradition of the genre in Argentina, and indeed the success of Argentine writers in adapting, reworking and critically examining the various forms of the detective story, critical reflections on the genre have often expressed the nagging suspicion that this narrative form was somehow doomed to irrelevance in Argentina, owing to its essential incompatibility with Argentine realities. My study has shown that despite this perpetual suspicion, the crime genre in its various incarnations has proved remarkably resilient, consistently defying those who would proclaim its demise. However, this resilience has only been possible through a constant process of awareness of, and reflection upon, its own essentially fictional character. Argentine writers of crime fiction have always been cognisant of its contrived nature, whether in its classical or hard-boiled forms, despite the politically motivated impulses to harness the potential of the hard-boiled form as a vehicle for social critique that gained currency among writers and critics in the 1960s and 70s. While the success of the Argentine hard-boiled tendency was undoubtedly tempered

by the strictures and censorship imposed by the military government from 1976 to 1983, this dissertation has sought to demonstrate that the realist potential of this narrative form in the Argentine context was already proving somewhat problematic by the late 1970s, with Leonardo's *La mala guita* providing particularly striking evidence of this circumstance.

Summary of Study Approach

This study has sought to trace the most significant developments in the evolution of the detective genre in Argentina, from its distant origins in the novels of Luis V. Varela right through to the mid-1970s. Critical and literary discourse within the Argentine detective genre since the 1930s has been treated as a series of campaigns, firstly for legitimacy within the literary sphere, and subsequently for generic hegemony, between the advocates and practitioners of the two major variants of the genre, the classical and the hard-boiled. The legitimisation and dissemination of the detective story in the classical mode was pursued with considerable zeal in the 1930s and 1940s by a number of renowned writers associated with Victoria Ocampo's magazine *Sur*, and in particular Jorge Luis Borges, as part of an aesthetic campaign that was waged on a number of different fronts, as Román Setton acknowledges in a recent study:

> En su interés por el género, estos autores fueron mucho más allá de la producción literaria: se dedicaron de múltiples modos a difundirlo y contribuyeron al enriquecimiento de esta tendencia dentro del campo literario nacional, en calidad de autores, críticos, antólogos, traductores, etcétera. De allí la asociación casi inmediata entre el grupo y lo policial.[513]

[513]Román Setton, *Los orígenes de la narrativa policial en la Argentina: Recepción y transformaciones de modelos genéricos alemanes, franceses e ingleses* (Madrid: Iberoamericana, 2012), p. 37.

From around 1960 through to the late 1970s, the hard-boiled school experienced a similar upward revision in its fortunes, as part of an aesthetic counter-campaign pursued by a number of prominent young writers and intellectuals, including José Sebreli, David Viñas, Eduardo Goligorsky, Juan Martini, and especially Ricardo Piglia. Many of the tactics previously employed on behalf of the *novela-problema* were once again successfully implemented in the cause of the more overtly politically engaged *novela negra*, providing a significant stimulus, not only to native consumption of translated works, but also to the production of original works by Argentine writers.

The Central Concluding Argument: The Return of the Classics

The reading approach adopted and consistently applied throughout this study proves particularly useful in the examination of *La mala guita*, in the sense that it brings into sharp focus the fact that, by 1976, the hard-boiled form was already struggling to adequately reflect or critically comment upon the criminal realities of life in Argentina. Despite the extravagant claims sometimes made by Argentine writers and critics in relation to the hard-boiled genre's political potential as a critical tool, Leonardo's portrayal of the intellectual hard-boiled aficionado-turned-detective Ricardo Marteli highlights the essential absurdity of this notion. Within this social context, which further deteriorated during the Proceso, even the most cynically hard-boiled of American detective figures seem anachronistic and unfit for purpose. Carlos Gamerro makes this point particularly well:

> El modelo chandleriano de novela negra pudo –quizá– resultar válido en la Argentina de los 70; a partir de los 80 se ha vuelto increíble y obsoleto; en la Argentina actual, donde todos los detectives privados son ex policías o ex

> servicios de inteligencia, un detective como Marlowe sólo sería posible a la manera en que fue posible un caballero andante en el siglo XVII español.[514]

Whereas Gamerro makes this argument in 2006, Leonardo displays his awareness of the difficulty at the very moment when it first becomes apparent. This point underlines the validity of the approach taken in this dissertation, and in particular the decision to examine Leonardo's novel, which had not previously received any critical attention within the discourse.

If the plausibility of an Argentine policeman as a detective figure worthy of the interest and admiration of the reader had gained some ground in the late fifties and early sixties, perhaps reaching its peak in the benign form of the affable, avuncular *comisario* Don Frutos Gómez, (who, it should be recalled, was an atypical, 'accidental' policeman presiding over the intimate, imaginary rural *pueblo correntino* of Capibara Cué), the wholesale participation of the Argentine police in the bloodiest excesses of the military regime, and their ever-worsening reputation as purveyors, rather than opponents, of criminality has been such that the idea of a 'heroic' fictional Argentine policeman remains a practical impossibility to this day. Gamerro is particularly strident in his condemnation of the degeneration of the official Argentine representatives of law and order:

> El cambio que llevó a cabo la institución policial durante el Proceso no fue cuantitativo sino cualitativo: es el cambio que lleva de una organización corrupta, que tolera o fomenta el crimen, a una organización criminal sin más; y en los posteriores años de la democracia este cambio no hizo sino consolidarse y profundizarse. En la Argentina, del Proceso en adelante, la policía *es* el crimen organizado, tiene el monopolio no sólo de la violencia, sino de la ilegalidad, y no tolera competencia.[515]

[514] Carlos Gamerro 'Para una reformulación del género policial argentino' in *El nacimiento de la literatura argentina y otros ensayos* (Buenos Aires: Norma, 2006), p. 80.
[515] Ibid, p. 87.

He makes reference to some of the particularly opprobrious examples of institutionalised criminality involving the police that have made the headlines in Argentina in recent years:

> Las bandas mixtas de policías y ladrones, los presos que muchas veces son obligados a salir a robar por el personal penitenciario, no son una excepción o una aberración, sino un modo de funcionamiento rutinario. Esto determina que una ficción policial argentina ajustada a los hechos conocidos encuentre grandes dificultades en permanecer realista, porque la realidad de la policía argentina es básicamente increíble. La policía cambió, pero el género policial sigue buscando el rumbo. Después del Olimpo[516] no se puede hacer novela negra.[517]

According to Gamerro, such was the enormity of the upheaval experienced during the 'Proceso' that Argentine writers have continued to struggle to come to terms with it through fiction:

> Nadie (salvo quizás algunos de los militares que la estaban planeando) pudo predecirla. Tampoco la ficción, tantas veces alabada por su carácter anticipatorio, fue capaz de soñarla; y ni siquiera es muy capaz de hacerlo ahora, retrospectivamente.[518]

Furthermore, he suggests that it is logical to suppose that the genre in which, in the words of Denevi, '–teóricamente al menos– debería intervenir la policía',[519] might be expected to lead the way in this regard, 'De todos los géneros narrativos, el que más acusa esta asignatura pendiente es el policial.'[520]

Recent Generic Tendencies

Perhaps owing to the technical difficulties involved in achieving a plausible level of realism in a thoroughly unreal situation (as Gamerro suggests), since the restoration

[516] 'El Olimpo' was the nickname given to one of the secret detention centres operated by the Federal Police during the Proceso, and located at the intersection of Ramón L. Falcón and Olivera streets, Floresta, in the western outskirts of Buenos Aires. For more information see 'Centros Clandestinos de Detención: El Olimpo', at Desaparecidos.com http://www.desaparecidos.org/arg/centros/olimpo/ Retrieved on July 20th, 2012.
[517] Gamerro, *El nacimiento de la literatura argentina y otros ensayos*, p. 88.
[518] Ibid, p. 86.
[519] *Asesinos de papel*, pp. 42-43.
[520] Ibid.

of democracy, and particularly in the last two decades, many Argentine crime writers have turned once again to the *policial clásico*, while the hard-boiled model has experienced something of a decline in production and popularity. Gamerro lists several works that reflect this swing back towards the older variant:

> La transicional *El cadáver imposible* (1992) de Feinmann, novela que se la pasa preguntándose a qué género pertenece, *La pesquisa* (1994) de Juan José Saer, *La traducción* (1998) y *Filosofía y Letras* (1999) de Pablo de Santis, *Tesis sobre un homidicio* (1999) de Diego Paskowski, *Crímenes imperceptibles* (2003) de Guillermo Martínez y aun *Segundos afuera* (2005) de Martín Kohan.[521]

This list may be expanded to include further works by two of the authors mentioned above, *La muerte lenta de Luciana B* (2007) by Guillermo Martínez, and *El enigma de París* (2007) by Pablo De Santis.

The central argument of this dissertation, as identified in the previous section of this chapter, is affirmed by the recent tendencies within the genre (as discussed above) in the following ways. Gamerro pithily expresses one of the chief virtues of these recent incarnations of the genre in an Argentine context, 'a diferencia de la policial negra, la clásica se ha vuelto insospechable: nadie puede confundirla con la realidad'.[522] Whereas in the late sixties and early seventies in particular, the hard-boiled style was celebrated in Argentine intellectual circles as being, 'más adecuada a nuestra realidad, por su capacidad de incluir la temática social, de dar cuenta de la motivación económica del crimen',[523] the 'realist' rival to the classical model ultimately proved to be just as derivative and 'unrealistic' in an Argentine setting as its predecessors. Somewhat appropriately, this recognition quickly emerged from the pages of works that, though they were identified as exemplars of the adaptation of the hard-boiled style to an Argentine context, in fact might more appropriately be

[521] Carlos Gamerro 'Para una reformulación del género policial argentino' in *El nacimiento de la literatura argentina y otros ensayos* (Buenos Aires: Norma, 2006), p. 85.
[522] Ibid.
[523] Ibid, p. 79.

described as works of pastiche and parody, though they may also have incorporated elements of the 'denuncia social', so frequently and often liberally attributed to their American antecedents. José Pablo Feinmann's *Últimos días de la víctima*, Juan Sasturain's *Manual de perdedores* and Pablo Leonardo's *La mala guita* are excellent examples of this tendency. In a note to *Manual de perdedores*, Sasturain acknowledges that, while his 'hard-boiled' novel was written over a long period of time, encompassing the years of the Proceso, a realist depiction or denunciation of Argentine society was not its chief motivating factor:

> En cuanto al clima y el ambiente de esos años ominosos —la escribí y reescribí de algún modo a lo largo de quince años, entre 1972 y 1987—, Manual de perdedores no sólo es novela sino novela de género, juega con las convenciones, no es ni quiso ser un imposible testimonio fotográfico de época. Por eso la Dictadura está tan presente que no necesita ser mencionada, está tan ahí —, diría Borges— como los invisibles camellos que pueblan el *Corán* o *las Mil y una noches*.[524]

In fact, the most embedded, unifying tendency in the Argentine detective fiction tradition, whether in its classical, hard-boiled, suspense or hybrid incarnations, has been towards humorous, intellectual, parodic, self-reflexive narratives, which often explicitly reference and imaginatively reflect upon the crime fiction tradition and the act of reading itself, though some have also sought to offer a 'realist' depiction or critique of their socio-historical settings.

Summary Contribution of this Study and Recommendations for Future Research

The present study represents a significant addition to scholarship in the field of Argentine literature in a number of respects. It articulates a reading approach that is

[524] Sasturain, Juan, *Manual de perdedores I y II* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 2003. First two-volume edition 1988), pp. 501-502.

derived from, and then applied to, the examination of the Argentine crime fiction tradition from 1877 to 1977, with a particular focus on the period in which the contribution of Borges to critical discourse within the genre was most prominent. Central to the approach taken in this thesis is the recognition of the deliberate nature of the multifaceted aesthetic campaign pursued by Borges on behalf of crime fiction in its classical form. It recognises the importance of the role played by Rodolfo Walsh in pursuing an alternative aesthetic campaign that served to demonstrate the true political potential of applying the investigative methods of the fictional crime genre to real-life crime in Argentina. It proceeds to examine the subsequent aesthetic campaign on behalf of the hard-boiled form pursued by Piglia and others during the 1970s, harnessing the same methods used by Borges and achieving similar results in terms of achieving commercial success and critical recognition for a variant that had previously been largely ignored in the Argentine context. The study ultimately concludes that neither of the two forms of the genre, so assiduously promoted by some of Argentina's most prominent intellectual figures, proved capable of depicting or reflecting upon the realities of criminality in Argentina by the late 1970s. This conviction is particularly well-illustrated through the examination of Leonardo's *La mala guita* and confirmed by more contemporary developments within the Argentine crime genre, as previously noted in this chapter.

In light of the recent resurgence in popularity enjoyed by Argentine writers who have returned to the more classically-orientated form of the genre, the work of a number of authors would seem to be ripe for further research. In particular, it would be interesting to examine how Pablo De Santis' three crime novels *Filosofía y letras* (Buenos Aires, Planeta, 1998), *La traducción* (Buenos Aires: Seix Barral, 1998), and *El enigma de Paris* (Buenos Aires: Planeta 2007) function within the national

generic tradition, and whether they reflect the tendencies toward critical commentary and reflection upon the genre identified in the work of the writers examined in this study. It would also be interesting to question how the narrative approach of De Santis may be viewed as a reflection of developments within the genre since the restoration of democracy in particular.

It would also be interesting to examine the work of Guillermo Martinez, whose 2003 novel, *Crímenes Imperceptibles*, was awarded the Premio Planeta Argentina in 2003. This novel has enjoyed considerable commercial success and was brought to the big screen as *The Oxford Murders* by Spanish director Álex de la Iglesia in 2008. In light of this study's emphasis upon the centrality of Borges in the Argentine crime fiction tradition, it would be illuminating to explore in detail the work of a crime writer who is also a mathematician, and who has taken a keen scholarly interest in the work of Borges, including the publication in 2003 of the study *Borges y la matemática.*

It is noteworthy that very few female authors published crime fiction in Argentina in the period examined in this dissertation, though notable exceptions include Silvana Ocampo, Maria Angelica Bosco, and Syria Poletti. While the scope and objectives of this project, as outlined in the introductory chapter, did not lend themselves to the examination of these authors' works (and this may be seen as a potential limitation of the current study), their work could constitute an important focus for future research, particularly in light of the fact that more recently, a number of female authors have begun to enjoy commercial success and recognition in the Argentine context, in particular Claudia Piñeiro, whose works within the genre include *Tuya* (Buenos Aires: Colihue, 2005), and *Betibú* (Buenos Aires: Alfaguara, 2011).

It would also be of interest to explore more contemporary developments in the hard-boiled genre in the Argentine context, an area which has also enjoyed stimulus in recent years thanks in no small part to the efforts of Buenos Aires Negra (BAN), which celebrated its first Festival Internacional de Novela Policial in Buenos Aires in 2011, and whose current projects include its first Concurso de Novela Negra 2014, organised in conjunction with the publisher Del Nuevo Extremo.

Final Observation

While it has been asserted in this study that the genre in Argentina reached something of an impasse in the late seventies, there is no doubt that it continues to exercise the fascination of its many devoted readers, writers and critics. I include myself among their number. In the words of Daniel Link, Professor of Comparative Literature at the University of Buenos Aires:

> ¿Qué hay en el policial para llamar la atención de historiadores, sociólogos, psicoanalistas y semiólogos? Nada: apenas una ficción. Pero una ficción que parecería, desnuda el carácter ficcional de la verdad. [525]

[525] Daniel Link, ed., *El juego de los cautos: Literatura policial de Edgar A. Poe a P. D. James* (Buenos Aires: La Marca, 2003), p. 9.

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