

Book Reviews

DAVID WILLIAM FOSTER

Aramburu, Diana. *Resisting Invisibility: Detecting the Female Body in Spanish Crime Fiction*. U of Toronto P, 2019. 282 pp.

There are two undeniable constants of crime fiction. One is that it is a bottomless pit of narrative possibilities: humankind might reasonably contemplate the complete eradication of polio or other contagious diseases, but never the root human disease of crime, no matter how one may define it as the ground zero of social transgression. While there have been all sorts of ideas of how to engineer crime out of social transaction, it is a fundamentally constitutive “gene” of that transaction: to eliminate crime is to eliminate human experience. Perhaps this is why crime fiction, for example, is so important in post-1959 Cuban cultural production: the so-called *hombre Nuevo* only provided for renewed models of crime.

The other inevitable constituent of crime fiction is the role of women. Of course, one might say that men are inevitably present in crime fiction, but the iron-grip of the patriarchal romance means that it is virtually inconceivable to have a crime story without a woman playing, just by virtue of being a woman, an instigating role of some sort. The first crime of mankind was committed by Eve, so we are taught from the outset.

A revision of crime fiction from a feminist perspective, then, must necessarily disassemble these constants not simply to denaturalize the inevitabilities (and their extensive sub inevitabilities) referred to above toward a feminist understanding of the world order, but also to enrich the genre with audacious revisions of seemingly inevitable narrative structures. This is the fundamental goal of Aramburu’s extremely competent study in which her interest lies as much in constructing an inventory of Spanish crime fiction from a feminist perspective as it is in providing fundamental insights into a master [sic] narrative genre that can be provocatively wrenched away from its masculinist grounding, toward a revealing reshufflings of the narrative constants.

Toward this end, Aramburu provides as much a historical trajectory of entries in a history of feminist crime fiction as she does a series of in-depth case studies of authors and their works that are indicator of the possibilities of reconfiguring the genre of crime fiction. As one might expect, the most interesting projects are those that take on theme and motifs relevant to modern Spanish social history: the parameters of women’s changing role in crime fiction, from simply becoming a protagonist and interacting in a world that is now a realm of privileged lesbian relationships, continue one of the abiding hallmarks of crime fiction: it is one of the most socio-politically grounded of cultural genres, and one of the reasons we read crime fiction is engage, characteristically on a deep level of sensory *frisson* with the root-level violence of a society at any given moment, with all of the transcendental signifiers such an engagement implies. And, of course, first and foremost among them are those of genre and sexuality, which crime fiction has been wont to serve up in abundance, with Spanish crime fiction being no exception. After all, the very designation *novella negra* encapsulates issues of

root-violence, sensory *frisson* and transcendental signifiers (beginning with the clichés of Good vs. Evil and Order vs. Chaos). As Aramburu states in her introduction: “Crime fiction is a site where the debate over the politics of female visibility becomes clear; since its inception in Spain, it has been motivated by how the delinquent female body is read and staged (7).

One of the virtues of a solid scholarly study is not just the intelligent sweep of its coverage, which is much in evidence here, but the nature of analyses that are suggestive of additional work to be done, also much in evidence in Aramburu’s monograph. I would expect the monograph yet to be written on the female body in Latin American crime fiction to use it as an essential point of departure.

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Bautista Botello, Ester. *Carmen Martín Gaité. Poetics, Visual Elements and Space*. University of Wales Press, 2019. 221 pp.

El libro de Ester Bautista Botello sobresale por cómo analiza el movimiento y la expresión de la plasticidad como núcleos centrales en la poética narrativa de la escritora salmantina Carmen Martín Gaité. El interés de esta autora por combinar en sus obras literatura, pintura y collage ha dotado a sus narraciones de todas las dimensiones donde estas historias estaban pasando. Además, *Carmen Martín Gaité. Poetics, Visual Elements and Space* cubre gran parte de la extensa bibliografía de Martín Gaité. Gracias a esta amplitud, otro punto importante en esta investigación, el rastreo de la idea de viaje como una forma estética derivada de traducir la experiencia de caminar por diferentes espacios (3), queda bien reflejada: “Martín Gaité constructs a narrative in which the journey as a search for a personal space constitutes a dynamic process in which qualities of movement are established, in that the structure of the journey has an origin and a destiny” (90). Bautista cuenta con un sólido aparato crítico, del que destaca el autor Mieke Bal, con sus investigaciones acerca de los conceptos y metáforas relacionados con el viaje (73) y, los trabajos de María-José Blanco López de Lerma en relación con Carmen Martín Gaité y el uso de los recursos plásticos como elementos terapéuticos (50).

Carmen Martín Gaité... está organizado entorno a cuatro capítulos, más un apartado para la introducción y las conclusiones. El capítulo 1 “The Historical, Narrative and poetic Path of Carmen Martín Gaité” (5-48) tiene como eje central perfilar cómo los elementos visuales como dibujos, pinturas y collages, además de los viajes, se unieron a la estética narrativa de la escritora. Bautista analiza *El cuento de nunca acabar*, ensayo en el que Martín Gaité reflexionó acerca de los cambios que se habían producido en su manera de escribir. Unas transformaciones que reflejaban cómo había evolucionado su manera de estar en el mundo. Por ejemplo, la narrativa de Carmen Martín Gaité adquirió más visualidad por la influencia que el cine de corte neorrealista ejerció en ella. En estas películas, las imágenes eran las que contenían las denuncias en contra de la dictadura franquista. Por su parte, Carmen Martín