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Female Characters in Galician and Irish Contemporary Crime Fiction

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Autor: Anxo Costas Vázquez

Titora: Manuela Palacios

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Resumo


This essay will draw a comparison between two contemporary Irish and Galician crime novels. It will demand a gender perspective since the chosen novels are peculiar cases within the crime genre because of the female characters that develop roles which are usually interpreted by male characters.

It will aim to explore to which extent the conventions of this genre are modified by the introduction of female characters developing these roles.

In the middle of this process, it will also attempt to find, if possible, any traits of Galician and Irish identities, an how they relate to the conventions of crime novel fiction.

This purpose will demand a study of setting, characters, themes, structure of the novel and any other aspect that turns out to be relevant.

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Introduction

Towards the end of the twentieth century, the conventions of crime fiction experienced a profound change that came hand in hand with the proliferation of women authors and the appearance of rounded female characters. Up until that point, the latter had been relegated to the background, and their characterization, mainly carried out from a strongly masculine point of view, had usually been shallow or overly sexual.

In this new scenario, female authors are as big in number as their male counterparts, and their crime narratives are commonly inhabited by female sleuths who come from a big variety of work environments —detectives, journalists, police officers, etc— that represent some of the new roles developed by women in the most recent socio-historical juncture. This new reality also exerts its influence over crime fiction in the communities that concern this paper —Ireland and Galicia. Their consolidation as capitalistic economies and the activity of feminist movements that took place around the 1980's contributed to the increase of the presence of women in certain work settings. This circumstance was called to be reflected in literature, as it is the case.

This paper is concerned with Galician and Irish crime narratives written by women and starring female characters. Focusing on the main characters of *The Trespasser* and *Sete Caveiras*, the aim is, on one side, to prove that these characters are representative of a socio-historical scenario that some have come to call postfeminism, and which is closely linked to circumstances such as the wide access of women into employment and the decollectivization of feminism. Aided by the notion of micropolitics coined by Patricia S. Mann, this paper argues that the two protagonists of these novels hold a political position of resistance against gender inequalities within micropolitical spheres such as the workplace, the family and their personal relations. On the other side, this paper also aims to assess the importance of these

characters within their respective literary systems and within the history of female characters in crime fiction.

In order to do so, the paper is divided in three parts. The first one consists in a brief historiography of female characters in crime fiction, which gives an account of their shift from the background to the foreground. In the second part, there is an exploration of the same issue within galician and irish literary systems. The third part is devoted to the analysis of the main characters of the two novels previously mentioned. These two sleuths are analyzed as representatives of postfeminism. The chapter explores their agency in the aforementioned micropolitical spheres. The final conclusions are drawn from the analyses carried out during the previous chapters.

1. Female Authorship and Female Characters in the History of Crime Fiction

This chapter will be devoted to the issue of female characters and female authorship within crime fiction's history, taking "Women Detectives" by Maureen T. Reddy and "Key Concepts in Crime Fiction" of Heather Worthington as the main bibliographical references. Both books analyse narrative works written inside the British and American literary systems, which were the ones within which this genre allegedly underwent most developments until the end of the twentieth century. Reddy's article analyses the marginal role of female authors and characters throughout the history of this predominantly masculine genre. She unearths some female fiction works that have remained unnoticed by criticism and audiences, and looks at the social background, social movements and readership's values that stand behind and might, to some extent, explain the reception of these literary works. Worthington's book deals with gender and sexuality within crime fiction and with feminist crime fiction.

This chapter will prepare the ground for the analysis of the two novels in the 3rd chapter, providing a background to the question of female authorship and characters and purveying the concepts and historical events one needs to be acquainted with in order to properly understand and analyse *The Trespasser* (French 2016) and *Sete Caveiras* (Gallego 2014).

But in order to properly delve into these questions, my dissertation will start by providing a definition of crime fiction and a survey of the origins of the genre.

In a wide sense, crime fiction is that literary genre that deals with crimes, criminals, murder and investigation. It is not only a crime, but its combination with the previously mentioned elements, that turns a narrative into crime fiction. Another common element within crime fiction is that it is usually placed in the city. Although there are crime fiction narratives located outside the city, most of them are not. The birth of cities was to become a major influence on this literary genre.

It is also remarkable that narratives within this genre are usually constructed as a challenge for the reader, who carries his own investigation, parallel to that of the detective, in order to find out who is the author of the crime. Intrigue plays a major role in the plot of these stories, which usually starts in a chaotic scenario in which order is eventually restored (Feminist Crime Fiction of the 80's is an exception to this convention).

Crime fiction is commonly considered by an important part of the criticism to be a minor literary subgenre, a circumstance which may be linked to its popularity and commercial success.

1.1 State of the Question

It was not until the nineteenth century that crime fiction was constituted as a specific genre within literature. Up to that point, we could find some of the elements that constitute modern crime fiction in some narratives, but the genre did not exist as such. When talking about the antecedents of this genre, we find a surprisingly similar narrative format to that of modern crime fiction in ancient narratives such as in *One Thousand and One Nights*. Inside this collection of stories we have *Three apples*, in which a caliph gives his vizier three days to solve a crime under the threat of execution.

In *Crime Fiction* (2005), John Scaggs remarks that most of the critics point at E.A. Poe's short stories as the beginning of the detective story, which had a crucial influence on what we know today as crime fiction. Nonetheless he states that crime fiction's origins can be traced as far away on time as the fifth century B.C. He analyses some stories, the plot of which revolves around a crime, such as one story from Hercules' myths, a story by Herodotus and two stories from the Biblical book of Daniel. As Scaggs points out different works from different historical moments, he identifies some recurrent characteristics in narratives about crime throughout history.

Scaggs does not state that there is an influence of these early works upon modern crime fiction but he draws the attention to those elements of the plot when it sets a crime at its centre: a mysterious crime, a victim, an unknown murderer and a detective. He considers the similarity between early narratives about crime and modern crime fiction as accidental.

If we want to consider the conditions that predisposed the birth and the shape of crime fiction, we have to take into account not only literary factors but others of different kinds. In *Key Concepts in Crime Fiction* (2011), Heather Worthington points at the development of cities and urbanisation for the creation crime fiction. Cities led to the phenomenon of anonymity and were closely linked to the appearance of modern crime:

Real-Life crime has generally been considered to be a product of the city, a consequence of urbanisation and the concomitant proximity of rich and poor within the confines of urban spaces. The physicality of the city, the very denseness of the mass buildings, the miles of roads and streets, the urban sprawl, the huge populations and the anonymity conferred on the individual by the crowd, all lend themselves to the construction of the criminal and the creation of crime.” (H.Worthington 2)

Although crime is obviously not an exclusively urban phenomenon, these aforementioned circumstances turn the city into a very propitious scenario for the proliferation of crime. The city would also propitiate the creation of crime organizations, from small gangs to mafia, which usually feature as elements of crime narratives.

This link between the creation of cities and crime fiction is indicative of the close connection of this genre with the reality out of which it is produced. Crime fiction is usually considered to reproduce social and cultural patterns and represent the anxieties of the societies that it portrays. The predominance of male authors and characters until the 1980s is representative of the socio-historical circumstances of most of the twentieth century, which was linked to the deeply masculine foundations of this genre.

Heather Worthington devotes one of the chapters of *Key Concepts in Crime Fiction* (2011) to the problem of gender and sexuality. She refers to the fact that the conventions of the genre are closely connected with the idea of masculinity:

Crime fiction is often considered to be a masculine and deeply conservative genre, in its subject matter and because of the formulaic nature of its narratives- at the very last there must be a crime, a perpetrator and a victim. (H. Worthington 41)

Worthington remarks that these fixed patterns which define crime fiction determine the creation of narratives where the most important roles are usually fulfilled by masculine characters. Until the first half of the twentieth century, professional detectives and policemen were careers almost exclusively masculine, and violence and criminality, phenomena carried out in most cases by men. Narratives created in such a context could not but register a reality which was predominantly masculine. In these narratives, female characters' roles would emphasize their limited agency in the patriarchal society where they took place:

The apparently passive position of women in such societies results in women in crime narratives commonly being allocated to the role either of the victim, the catalyst for or the cause of crime rather than its perpetrator. (Worthington 41)

Although violence and the perpetration of crimes are mostly masculine matters, female characters often have an intimate relationship with crime. Women who transgress these restrictions imposed by their gender are usually depicted as criminal, mischievous or to be instigators of crime. These feminine portraits represent, according to Worthington, the "patriarchally fostered masculine anxieties about the feminine, particularly feminine agency" (Worthington 41). From a masculine point of view, women who stray away from the restricted path their gender reserves for them, raised the suspicions of a criminal behaviour. This association between deviant femininity and crime is frequent throughout history, and not only in the context of crime fiction. We have as early an example as that of the myth of Adam

and Eve, in which the latter is depicted as the instigator of the crime that would curse humanity.

Worthington talks about gender transgression and deviant sexuality, mostly in the case of women, to be recurring elements of the genre. In the nineteenth century, where Crime Fiction started its journey, the gender conventions were rigidly established. While men would have a very public life, women were restricted to the domestic sphere. Regarding sexuality, women were prescribed passivity while men were tacitly allowed to have extramarital sex. While we may argue that both roles were very restrictive, women were entitled to less mobility and to a passive sexual life. In the context of crime fiction the transgression of these boundaries is often linked to crime.

1.2 Female Authorship and Female Characters in Crime Fiction

Mentioning crime fiction conjures up a series of images of a reality which is predominantly masculine. Nonetheless, as Maureen T. Reddy notes:

It is now widely acknowledged that the woman writer and the woman detective have as long a history in Crime Fiction as do their male counterparts. (Reddy 191)

Reddy raises awareness over the existence and importance of women authors and characters and their development over crime fiction's history. There is evidence of women authors who started writing crime fiction as early as male writers, but female writers were not paid equal attention and female characters would usually occupy marginal roles in which they were depicted in a shallow way.

Feminist critics of the 1980s unearthed from forgetfulness some women authors of gothic fiction and one of its descendants, the Victorian sensation fiction, genres in which criticism had set its eyes when looking for the origins of crime fiction. Sensation Fiction, in which the elements of murder, secrets and detection played a crucial role, just as in Crime Fiction, was

widely populated by female authors and characters, who fulfilled roles of victims and antagonists rather than detectives.

The aforementioned problem of the deviation from gender roles was a recurrent theme within this genre. Both Reddy and Worthington point at *Lady Audley's Secret* (Braddon 1862) as a relevant work for this line of analysis. The main character, a married woman, intends to marry another man after she grows disenchanted with her former husband. She ends up murdering this one to avoid being prosecuted for bigamy. M. E. Braddon, the author, found herself in a similar situation. Her former husband was insane and interned in an asylum, while she was in a relationship with her editor. The laws at that moment did not allow a woman to divorce in such a case. As Worthington notes:

The 1857 Matrimonial Causes Act made it possible, for the first time, for a woman to divorce her husband, but while under the new act the husband had only to prove the wife's adultery, the wife had to prove that she had not just committed adultery but also either incest, bigamy, cruelty or desertion, a condition which, in combination with the fact that for many women money was also an issue, meant that divorce was still impossible. (Worthington 43)

The heroine of Braddon's novel finds in crime the escape to these restrictive conditions imposed upon her rights.

1.2.1 Arthur Conan Doyle

Arthur Conan Doyle's saga of Sherlock Holmes would start at the end of the nineteenth century. It is widely considered one of the peaks of crime fiction and a strongly influential work. Criticism also seems to acknowledge that female characters within these narratives are, as it was conventional in the genre, relegated to a marginal position. Reddy describes Doyle's female characters as "dark disruptive, inexplicable presences who either require male protection or pose threats to masculine order that must be contained" (Reddy 193).

Worthington notes that Doyle's female characters are conventional, in the sense that they usually fulfill the accustomed roles of either catalyst or victim of the crime. She points at several Doyle's works in which women are depicted as submissive and as naive.

In Doyle's works there is a recurrent motif having to do with a woman's murder carried out by her male guardian in order to avoid her marriage with a man and inherit her fortune. It is present in *The Adventures of the Copper Beeches* (1892) and in *The Adventures of the Speckled Band* (1892). In the rare cases in which women commit murder, Worthington notes, it is not in a gender transgressive way, that is to say, it is not a behaviour that goes against patriarchal values, but a reasonable behaviour in a critical situation where her life is threatened.

Nonetheless, Doyle creates a portrait of a gender transgressive woman in *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (Doyle 1901), which is that of Mrs Laura Lyons. She gathers all the requirements to be regarded as a woman of improper femininity: She has a job, is separated from her husband and seeks for a divorce. She is the illicit lover of Mr Stapleton and she is an accomplice in the murder of Mr Baskerville. We again notice this link between deviant femininity and crime.

The creation of these characters can be interpreted as a negative portrait of a new model of femininity that was making its way at that time. Worthington understands the existence of these powerless, passive characters as Doyle's reaction against the process of empowerment women were going through at the end of the nineteenth century with the feminist ideal of the "New Woman", and a phenomenon which later came to be known as First Wave Feminism. At that time, an important number of women of the upper classes were starting a process that advocated for the achievement of social and legal rights for women. In that scenario women gained some agency and started to conquer their space in the public sphere.

Authors such as Henrik Ibsen reflected these circumstances as a theme for his work. Henry James often wrote narratives of American women who travel alone to Europe, where they can enjoy certain autonomy—which is of course defied by society.

1.2.2 Hardboiled Fiction

In the 1920s hardboiled fiction becomes the paradigm of crime fiction. It was developed in North America and would eventually be imitated by writers all over the world. It is essentially a narrative of a strong masculine nature. The archetypal hero is usually a loner, unsentimental, tough and in permanent contact with danger. In Reddy's words:

The intense masculinity of the hardboiled, its centralisation of alienated male consciousness and its position of women as either dangerous, seductive villains or nurturing but essentially insignificant helpmates reproduce and explain the very same cultural myths that made female professional private eyes unlikely outside the novel as well. (Reddy 193)

Worthington remarks that hardboiled fiction frequently reproduces the common link between improper femininity and crime that appears throughout most history of crime fiction. She analyses one of the most notable narratives within hardboiled fiction, Chandler's *The Big Sleep* (1939) in which this link is incarnated in the figure of Carmen Sternwood, who turns out to be a murderess, a very uncommon condition for a female character. There are very few crime narratives with women playing the role of the murderess. They are sometimes involved in the planification of the murder, or are accomplices in it, but they are hardly ever its agents. In the cases of women carrying out a murder, the narrative hints at the possibility of the murderer being insane or temporarily deranged. We have instances of this phenomenon in the aforementioned *Lady Audley's Secret* (Braddon 1872), Doyle's *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (Doyle 1901) and in *The Big Sleep* (Chandler 1939) in the case of Carmen Sternwood. Violence is not expected from women maybe because a violent action is the

expression of an unfeminine display of agency and empowerment. This violence somehow equals women's behaviour to that of men by unmasking in woman a trait that is supposed to be exclusively masculine.

Worthington states that these narratives are prescriptive of very rigid gender conventions. If we understand this portrait of women in the context of the whole history of crime fiction, we can think about these negative portraits as manifestations of a whole ideology — patriarchal— that prescribes passivity and domesticity for women while promoting an opposite behaviour for men.

Margaret Kinsman states:

This type of fiction also demonstrates a powerful attachment to the femme fatale figure, one of the stereotypical roles to which female characters were confined. The fiction of this period is marked by predictable assumptions about, for instance, men as active agents and women as passive victims, or betraying vamps, or sacrificing helpmeets. (Kinsman 153)

Reddy agrees with this idea when she refers to one of the duties of the detectives within these stories, which is to pursue those women who are represented as the “dangerous other that must be contained and controlled” (Reddy 193). A similar observation is made by Worthington, who acknowledges this link between sexual transgression and criminality to work for a long period within crime fiction narratives.

1.2.3 Detective Fiction of the Golden Age (1920s-1930s)

Detective fiction of the golden age was the British contemporary of hardboiled fiction. Golden age narratives, which were produced in a fair amount by women authors, do not establish this link between gender roles' transgression and crime. That may give credit to the hypothesis that linked this idea with a masculine-authored point of view.

Agatha Christie's narratives always feature a murder, usually having to do with sex or money, and in some cases it is carried out by women. In *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* (Christie 1920), a woman plans the murder of his lover's wife in order to acquire her money. In *The Mirror Crack'd from Side to Side* (Christie 1962), a woman poisons another in order to carry out a revenge. In *Sad Cypress* (Christie 1940), a nurse kills a man in order to take an inheritance. These strike as more realistic murders than those previously analysed, which linked in an overwhelming number of cases gender and sexual transgression with crime. Agatha Christie was also famous for using the archetype of the "nosy spinster" within her novels, incarnated in the figure of Miss Marple.

1.2.4 Women detectives before the 1970s

Between the early crime fiction narratives of Conan Doyle and the later narratives of feminist crime authors of the 1970s, we can hardly find any cases of female sleuths. There existed, nonetheless, crime fiction female writers, but they usually created male detectives. In those rare cases of detectives being women, these used to be, as Maureen T. Reddy notes "nosy spinsters or the helpmates of male detectives" (193).

There were, as well, cases of amateur female detectives who were more realistically portrayed than those female private detectives who acted as colleagues of their male counterparts. Dorothy Sayers states that the latter "were not very successful. They were either irritatingly intuitive or foolishly active, walking into physical danger and hampering the men engaged on the job" (79). One may argue it is difficult to make these detectives seem realistic since there were no private detectives in real life to draw inspiration from. Sayers refers to the fact that female private detectives were usually young, beautiful and with a powerful interest in marriage, while their male counterparts were usually older and experienced.

Reddy says this phenomenon has to do with the way crime fiction appeals to the desires and fantasies of its audience, which back then used to be composed largely by men, thus constructing this beautiful, conservative archetype of woman which is somewhat close to the patriarchal ideal of female.

1.2.5 Amanda Cross's series of Kate Fansler

In 1964 Amanda Cross wrote *The Last Analysis*, the first book of a series that follows the deeds of detective Kate Fansler. This first book would not entail an important change within the tradition of amateur detectives' novels written by women, but the third book in the series, *Poetic Justice* (1970) would open a new path through which female-authored Crime Fiction would follow from that moment onwards.

The plot of this novel, instead of following the conventional progression from disorder to order, challenges "the very idea of social order (...) demonstrating some of the ways in which the Status Quo depends on women's continuing oppression" (Reddy 2). It is also remarkable that these novels tend to focus on social issues from a feminist lens. For instance, detective Fansler pays attention to the significance of work and friendship in women's lives rather than, as happened in previous female-authored novels, to romance. The aim of *Poetic Justice* is more understandable if we pay attention to the context in which it was conceived, at a time where the second wave of feminism was taking place. Amanda Cross was a feminist herself, as her works of feminist criticism and theory (written under the pseudonym of Carolyn Heillbrun) acknowledge.

1.2.6 P.D. James

Although Amanda Cross' series were, arguably, rather influential over feminist crime fiction, it was P.D. James who wrote the first crime novel featuring a private female detective. The

very title of the novel, *An Unsuitable Job for a Woman* (James 1972) highlights how unnatural it seemed for a woman to be a private detective. In this respect, it is significant that the protagonist becomes a private detective in the exceptional situation of her partner committing suicide and leaving behind his detective agency. This is how James sorts out, to some extent, the problem of the unrealistic nature of a woman being a detective, since it was impossible for women to undergo any official instruction.

As a result of her gender, the protagonist is often offered resistance by the authorities, and her capacity as a detective is repeatedly questioned, making her unconfident. These doubts about her condition of detective are dissipated towards the end of the novel, when she has already achieved confidence in her ability and right to work as such. However, as the author of these series retreated from her initial feminist ideology, she conferred a cartoonish quality to her female detective character, turning her into a detective of lost pets.

1.2.7 Marcia Muller's series of Sharon McCone

Marcia Muller was the creator of Sharon McCone's series. Her work came out at a time when "liberal feminist ideas had seeped into public consciousness, with the dominant ideology adjusting ever-so-slightly to accommodate some of those views" (Reddy 194). At this time, women had the chance to enter jobs that had previously been exclusively held by men.

In these circumstances, Marcia Muller wrote and subsequently published *Edwin of the Iron Shoes* (1977). It was the first novel of a series of 22. It is usually acknowledged as the first crime series with a female private detective, and it is representative of the feminist crime fiction of the 1970s and 1980s.

Sharon McCone's series were, somehow, a feminist revision of the Hardboiled tradition. Along Sara Paretsky, Sue Grafton and Liza Cody, Marcia Muller constituted that group of writers who wrote their series during the 1980s and whose work came to be known as

feminist crime fiction. These writers carried out a revision of the hardboiled tradition by approaching this subgenre through a feminist lens. Their works started to gain recognition thanks to vehicles such as *Ms magazine*, which was founded in 1972 with the purpose of spreading the feminist ideology of the second wave feminist movement.

The protagonists of these novels are, as hardboiled crime fiction prescribes, solitary characters. However, these detectives have a different way to deal with solitude than that of the Hardboiled male detectives. These women “give considerable thought to their relations with others, working out the ethics of friendship and caring in ways indebted to feminism’s insight that the family is the primary social institution in the oppression of women” (Reddy 198).

Female detectives’ solitude is of course of a different kind than that of their masculine counterparts. Whereas the latter’s seems to be more of a self-imposed solitude, women’s seems to be a direct consequence of society’s refusal to accept a woman of such a transgressive condition.

It is also common for these narratives to draw a link between the detectives’ investigation and social problems closely linked to the oppression systematically exerted over women. On the other hand, male-hardboiled fiction usually describes a decadent and thoroughly corrupt society fought by the male detective, whose condition of hero is emphasized by this lonely struggle.

Feminist narratives understand corruption as a masculine phenomenon, since it is exerted from the power that institutions bestow on the men who rule them. Corruption is then derived from the power that these men own.

Reddy brings out the example of S. Paretsky’s *Tunnel Vision* (1987), in which the detective delves into all the layers of an investigation, starting with financial fraud, and following with political corruption, child sexual abuse, and domestic violence, all of them

issues connected with “women’s subordination, economically and socially, to men” (Reddy 4).

Women in male hardboiled fiction are usually represented in a very negative light, perpetuating that recurrent link that connects —As Worthington would put it— sexual deviance and gender transgression with female criminality. Representing women’s nature in this way, this subgenre was somehow legitimating masculine domination over women in society, that is, patriarchy. It seems to say that women must be contained since they are prone to mischief when they enjoy autonomy. Worthington refers to this patriarchal idea:

Women, considered to be the weaker sex, less rational and less indebtedly capable than men, were therefore more likely to fall into sin and criminality and so required stricter guidance and control over their lives. (Worthington 42)

Feminist crime novels, on the other hand, investigate the consequences that are derived from that dominance. In these novels female villains are either patriarchal enforcers, that is to say, women who accept their condition of dominated, or women who rebel against this very condition. They are no longer “seductresses in search of power and money” (Reddy 198).

Violence is another convention revised by feminist hardboiled fiction. What was remarkable about the violence in male hardboiled was how often it appeared and the detail with which it was described. It is manly and heroic. While men carry out acts of violence and murder without giving to it any further consideration, female hardboiled fiction takes a different approach to this phenomenon. These female detectives indulge in violence only when necessary, for defense or self defense.

According to Reddy the most important distinction to remark between both traditions is the theme, present in the feminist hardboiled revision, of fighting back patriarchal control:

Hardboiled detectives repeatedly encounter obstacles to render them ineffective; their female counterparts encounter those same obstacles, but also the more generalized obstacle of gender limitations and social attempts to control and contain women. (199)

These novels contain feminist critiques of gender roles and these female detectives carry out reflections about their own roles and compare themselves to their fictional male counterparts, hinting at the revision that is taking place at the centre of these novels.

Another important characteristic is the acquisition of the tough, sarcastic language of the former hardboiled by the feminist detectives of its revision. The use of this language empowers these female detectives in their struggle against the patriarchal attempts for containing them. They adopt this language which allows them to express themselves freely and with aggressiveness, in a way usually considered manly.

These series proved to be so popular that as the decade of the 1980s went on, there appeared an overwhelming number of series written by women and featuring women. For Reddy, the biggest achievements of the appearance of this subgenre was to prove that there was a female readership that would relate to this new model of femininity and that the conventions of crime fiction could be modified in this way without ceasing to be successful.

1.2.8 Lesbian Detective Novels

These feminist novels also incorporated narratives featuring homosexual detectives. The so called “Lesbian detective novel” started off as a marginal movement, having to be published by small feminist presses as Naiad, Seal or Firebrand, and became, by the late 1980s an important success, reaching major publishing houses.

In most of these novels the plot started with a “coming out” story, but in some cases, such as Katherine Forrest’s series of “Kate Delafield” her condition of homosexual was something

established from the beginning and treated without any distinction. These narratives are also revisions of the hardboiled. Most of these detectives are amateur.

1.2.9 Female Black Detectives

The path opened by the feminist detective novel also opened the path to narratives written by black women writers featuring black detectives. In these series, which adopt most of the features of the feminist hardboiled revision, it is common for the writer to address issues of class and race, as well as that of gender. Reddy notes that racism is approached as a “fundamental fact of life” and as a “central component of the dominant ideology” (202).

Just as it happens with the lesbian detective fiction, most of these detectives are amateur, a circumstance which probably has to do with the realistic nature inherent to crime fiction.

Another of the observations made by Reddy is that the core audience of these novels is likely to be predominantly white, based on the idea that most of the explanations regarding the experience of being black in a racist society seem to go into much more detail than it would be necessary for a black person to understand her own condition.

1.2.10 Tart Noir

Tart Noir emerged in the 1990s and its narratives can be read as a product of a postfeminist age, in which feminist claims cease to be made. This subgenre puts emphasis on the sexual life of its detectives, unlike feminist crime fiction, in which the passive romanticism and absence of sexual life of the detective worked as a tool for empowerment in patriarchal society. These novels seem to consider sexual and romantic passivity as obsolete tools to fight back patriarchal control, a system whose mechanisms are not as deeply explored in Tart-Noir as it was in feminist crime fiction.

1.2.11 Female Authors and Characters in the Twenty-first Century

Crime Fiction in twenty-first century opens its door to an even wider heterogeneity. It becomes important and undergoes innovations in literary systems different from the American and the British. Scandinavia gains importance and becomes a worldwide exporter of crime fiction.

Women authors become as numerous as their male counterparts, and some of them achieve a huge commercial success. Also, female audiences of crime fiction are allegedly bigger than the masculine ones and female characters have now a broad range of occupations: journalists, crime investigators, private eyes, FBI agents or lawyers.

In this century, women have shifted from the background to the foreground of the genre, and female characters have conquered their deserved right to develop almost any role within a crime fiction narrative.

2. Female Authors and Main Characters in Galician and Irish Crime Fiction

2.1 Female Authors and Main Characters in Galician Crime Fiction

In order to find the first crime fiction novel published within the Galician literary system — *Crime en Compostela* by Carlos Reigosa— we must go back to 1984. Not until the end of the dictatorship that was ruling Spain did crime fiction enter its geographical boundaries due to the hermetic nature of this regime. The appearance of narratives of this genre started by Reigosa's novel, took place 10 years after the instauration of democracy, which followed decades of dictatorship during which the Galician literary system developed mostly outside the geographical boundaries of its culture, with a huge number of authors writing about Galician matters from the exile.

The implantation of democracy brought along the creation of publishing houses that reactivated a literary market inside Galicia. Readers entered in contact with crime fiction through Spanish translations of American and English narrative texts and filmic adaptations. It is in this context that Reigosa's novel appears in 1984. Galician writers faced the challenge of adapting these genre conventions to the particular reality of their society, in an effort that did not seem to turn this into a successful genre within this literary system, or at least not for the oncoming 20 years.

In *A narrativa galega na fin de século* (Vilavedra 2010) the author devotes a chapter to Galician crime fiction, in which she ascertains the factors that determined the moderate proliferation of this genre within Spanish boundaries in the period known as the *transición*. Among these factors, she highlights the end of censorship, the influence of novels, films and TV series from abroad, the increased crime rates and the fact that the figure of the detective fits well into a society in which capitalistic values are getting settled. She also remarks the

importance of the endeavours carried out by the publishing houses, and the celebration of a crime novel contest celebrated in Santiago de Compostela.

Among the Galician writers that cultivated this genre during the twentieth century we can barely find any women authors. In a conference called “Xornada 30 anos de novela negra galega. Xénero negro: máis aló do estereotipo” (2014), Elena Losada Soler drew attention to the absence of female authors by comparing it to the considerably bigger number of female crime fiction writers in a minor literary system like that of Cataluña, which coexists with the Galician one within the political boundaries of Spain. Losada, co-creator of a database concerned with Spanish female crime fiction writers, could only find 5 Galician crime fiction novels written by women at the time of the conference. Laura Caveiro wrote *Polas inmensas e alleas fortunas* (2007), which features a misogynistic male detective that stands as a parody of the conventional Hardboiled detective.

In 2000, publishing house Xerais published María Xosé Queizán’s *Ten o seu punto a fresca Rosa*. Queizán writes a novel with 3 female protagonists. According to Manuel Forcadela, there is in this novel an exercise of parody that subverts the conventions of the genre:

Parodia e subversión do xénero, opta por presentarnos os tópicos comúnmente manexados desde unha óptica alterada polo discurso de xénero. Mulleres policías, homes que substitúen as femmes fatales, corruptelas ligadas á reprodución humana e reflexión sobre os mecanismos do discurso e do relato que contribúen a formarnos como homes e como mulleres, segundo o modelo da sociedade patriarcal. (Forcadela 2)

These two novels seem to be influenced, indirectly or directly, by the feminist crime novels of the 1970’s and 1980’s, which carried out a revision of the Hardboiled tradition in an intertextual exercise of parody.

Losada Soler identifies 3 more novels written by women and featuring female main characters: *Quen matou a Inmaculada Silva?* (Mayoral 2009), *Meu pai vai te matar* (Queizán 2011), and *Sete Caveiras* (Gallego 2014). The last crime fiction novel written by a woman in Galicia is *O Faro Escuro* (López Sánchez 2015), a year after this conference. Lopez Soler states her own hypothesis in order to explain this remarkably small number of female authors:

(...) si escribir novela de género literario marcado en un sistema literario que estaba recuperándose de un trauma literario enorme era problemático para un autor masculino, todavía lo era más para una escritora que tenía que hacer frente a dos problemas: El hecho de ser una escritora —créanlo o no sigue siendo un problema— y encima hacerlo a través de un subgénero —con lo cual quedaba completamente apartada del canon y de la construcción de una gran literatura para su sistema literario (...)— es la única hipótesis que me permite explicar ese escaso caudal de literatura criminal escrita por mujeres en Galicia. (López Soler)

As a consequence of the little production of crime fiction in Galicia —and even smaller production of female-detective crime fiction written by women— there is not a single critical book on this matter, and to have a broader perspective of the scenario would entail a detailed analysis of the novels and its characters. Nonetheless, taking into account the poor numbers concerning the production of crime narratives written by women, and the proportional number of female characters, it strikes as clear that Galician literature has not got on the wave of the most recent trend of crime fiction and its female re-gendering.

2.2 Female Authors and Main Characters in Irish Crime Fiction

Irish crime fiction exists since the very inception of the genre. *The Contemporary Irish Detective Novel* (Mannion 2016) points out at authors such as Freeman Wills Crofts and Sheridan le Fanu, who started to produce their work in the nineteenth century, as the first Irish crime writers. However, it is not until the 1970's that Irish crime fiction starts to deal with eminently Irish matters, and it is not until the 1990's when it begins the process by

which it would acquire its current popularity. Hypotheses about the causes of this recent blossoming have been outlined, among others, by Brian Cliff. He claims that this new proliferation of Irish crime fiction is closely linked to the Celtic Tiger, the era of economic growth that Ireland underwent from the 1990's until its crash towards the end of the 2000's. According to Cliff, this new wave of Irish crime fiction reflects the "newly urgent social pressures both exacerbated by and reflected in the boom and crash" (Cliff 3-4) .

In this new context, crime fiction experiences a rebirth and tackles issues of corruption and crime that are representative of this new Irish reality. Clark notes that one of the most remarkable new focuses of this new Irish crime novel is the *white-collar crime* (Clark 144): crimes related to issues such as the exploitation of the property market.

In the Irish literary system, female crime writers are bigger in number than their male counterparts, in parallel with their predominance in the international context. Cliff suggests that their success might have to do with a marketing function within Irish literature, which fostered a niche marketed as literature for women after the success of authors such as Maeve Binchy.

These writers, among whom we can find Tana French, Jo Spain, Arlene Hunt or Sínead Crowley, have given rise to an exuberant variety of female characters. Cliff enumerates their different occupations:

(...) they are profilers (Louise Phillips's Kate Pearson and Claire McGowan's Paula Maguire), private eyes (Arlene Hunt's Sarah Kenny), detectives in the Metropolitan Police (Jane Casey's Maeve Kerrigan) or An Garda Síochána (Tana French's Antoinette Conway, Niamh O'Connor's Jo Birmingham, and Sínead Crowley's Claire Boyle), bipolar FBI agents (Alex Barclay's Ren Bryce), journalists (Anna Sweeney's Nessa),¹⁸ small-town lawyers (Andrea Carter's Benedicta O'Keefe), or schoolteachers on the run (Arlene Hunt's Jessie Conway). (Cliff 107-108)

The work of these new Irish female authors deals with matters that concern the most recent Irish reality. In this sense they share protagonism with their male peers, who, although slightly smaller in number, are also responsible for the most recent modernization of the genre within Irish literature. However, the enormous renewal that their female characters entail, is not only relevant at a national level. The previously mentioned variety of female characters, poses Irish crime fiction at the forefront of the genre on an international level.

2.3 Galicia and Ireland: New Professions for Women

Galicia and Ireland experienced a similar shift towards a capitalistic economy at the end of the twentieth century. Galicia came out of the dictatorship in 1975, and into democracy through the “transición”. In the case of Ireland, the Celtic Tiger implied an unprecedented economic growth within this country.

As noted by Dolores Vilavedra, the social transformation of Galicia enabled crime fiction to enter its territory in the 1980’s, and promoted a moderate proliferation of these narratives that lasts until this day. Although crime fiction had already permeated its literature, it was also a social transformation —the Celtic Tiger— that would trigger a rebirth of the genre during the 1990’s in Ireland.

Crime narratives channelled the new anxieties and contingencies of these emergent Galician and Irish realities. One of the new socio-historical circumstances was the appearance of women in areas of the labour market to which they had not had access previously. This event was meant to shape to certain extent the crime narratives of these two territories, and it did.

There are, in Galician crime narratives, two instances of police female characters —*Meu pai vaite matar*, *O faro escuro*— and a journalist-detective —*Sete Caveiras*. However, as this chapter proves, the success of Irish crime fiction in this respect is overwhelming when

compared to the Galician. As noted by Cliff, female characters in Irish crime fiction develop a wide variety of occupations. Although it would not be difficult to draw some hypotheses to find out the causes for the different status of this genre in these two territories, that is not this chapter's aim. However, it is important to bear in mind these two frameworks when assessing the significance of *The Trespasser* and *Sete Caveiras* for their respective literary systems at the end of this paper.

3. *The Trespasser* and *Sete Caveiras*: Agency in Irish and Galician Contemporary Female Sleuths

This chapter examines and compares the female protagonists of these novels, who are understood as representatives of post-feminism, struggling to conquer their agency in contexts such as the workplace, the family or their private lives.

3.1 Postfeminism: A Theoretical Approach

Postfeminism is a very controversial term and is usually used to refer to a backlash against second-wave feminist claims and values, or as Angela McRobbie defined it in “Post-Feminism and Popular Culture”, an “active process by which feminist gains of the 1970’s and 80’s come to be undermined”. This paper will embrace the definition made by S. Genz, who understood it as a sociopolitical scenario contextualized on the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries in Western Europe and the US that emphasizes “consumerist, middle-class values and aspirations” (Genz 338) and whose framework is the third way politics, which entails a shift towards a society where values such as individualism, ambition and entrepreneurship are thoroughly fostered and where the role of the state comes to play a less important part. In this framework, women are fully moving into employment and old feminism undergoes a decollectivization, that is to say, feminist activism ceases to be organized and carried out by collectives. Feminism, according to Genz, becomes something similar to a Gramscian common sense and permeates cultural products such as magazines, tv shows and series, in which second-wave claims and values become distorted or blurred, and mixed with neoliberal values, forming a contradictory discourse. The archetypical subjects of this scenario still experience gender struggles in their private and public lives but they do not identify with any particular ideology.

The authors that concern this paper can arguably be considered postfeminist subjects: They are middle class European women who enjoy certain rights previously conquered by the second wave feminists, who have moved into the labour market and that produce their work within the socio-historical coordinates of postfeminism. There are not known public statements about their alignment with feminism or any other particular ideology. Nonetheless, their work deals with issues linked to gender inequality and gender violence.

Unlike the authors that concern our paper, a lot of female crime writers from the 1970's and 1980's were involved with the causes and the organized structures of second wave feminism, and published some of their fiction works in feminist magazines such as *Naiad Press*, *Firebrand* or *Seal*, as noted by Maureen T Reddy (200-201). It would be a mistake to understand them as a homogeneous and cohesive group of writers, since they were not, but their teaming with feminist organizations was key to the distribution and success of their work. We could also argue that the spreading of second wave feminist values prepared a part of the female audience to acquire a taste for their novels. That significant difference between these two generations of female crime writers is somehow revelatory of this shift from a feminist to a postfeminist scenario, and of the decollectivization of feminism.

3.2 *The Trespasser* and *Sete Caveiras*: Analysis of Main Characters

As a detective and an investigative journalist, the main characters of the novels we deal with, are more than familiar with these gendered struggles. They are subjected to them in their workplaces and private lives on a daily basis, and sometimes become close witnesses of the reality of victims of gender-based violence. These areas of conflict become a micropolitical ring where these women elaborate their own strategies of resistance and vindicate their agency before the male-hierarchies.

3.2.1 Antoinette Conway's Discourse on Agency

As we go through Antoinette Conway's flow of thoughts —since this is a first person narrator's novel— we realize one of her obsessions is weakness. She experiences a strong rejection towards other people's and her own exhibitions of fragility and passivity. Through several passages of the novel she elaborates a discourse about the need for people to solve their issues on their own, and warns about the dangers of finding shelter in victimhood, fantasy and inaction. This discourse strikes, on one side, as empowering, and, on the other side, as individualistic and rooted on neoliberal ideology, and presents Antoinette forward as a post-feminist subject. The comparisons drawn throughout the novel between Antoinette and the victim —Aislinn— work as a device designed to delve deeper into Antoinette's character and help to understand this point. There is critical potential in Antoinette's discourse. It is a call to preserve one's agency when confronted by external attempts of control over one's self.

That external agent is incarnated by the figure of the absent father. Both characters - detective and victim- were abandoned by their respective fathers when they were young. The search for the father is also a symbolical renunciation to agency and autonomy. Aislinn Murray entertains that fantasy until it comes to cause her death, murdered by the cop she was secretly dating in order to find some information about her missing dad. Antoinette expresses a profound disgust at Aislinn's reverie because it is reminiscent of her own weakness:

(...) she was twenty-six years old and chasing after Daddy, whining for him to fix everything for her. That's fucking pathetic. (French 183)

Neoliberal society, through its commandment of consumerism, poses a danger to agency as well, as Antoinette warns. When observing for the first time the apartment of the victim, the

latter strikes Antoinette to be a dead barbie. All the information she gathers through the inspection of her house and from the narrations of her friends and of the suspects, helps her create the first portrait of Aislinn Murray. The description of her apartment's decoration is sarcastic:

The room looks like it was bought through some Decorate Your Home app where you plug in your favourite colours and the whole thing arrives in a van the next day. (French 14)

The description of her apartment continues a few pages later with her wardrobe:

I have a look in the fitted wardrobe. Plenty of clothes, mostly skirt suits and going out-dresses, all of it mid-range colour stuff with one sparkling detail, the type of stuff that gets showcased on morning talk shows alongside blood type diets and skin resurfacing treatments. (French 20)

Aislinn's personality -assuming she had one somewhere- doesn't actually matter. (French 21)

Antoinette concludes that the victim lacks a personality after learning about her consumption choices. The use of irony for the descriptions is her strategy to invalidate Aislinn's indulging in this consumeristic dynamic. According to Finn Adriaens, this method is very common in post-feminist fictions. She notes that "consumer culture (...) is an essential element within the post-feminist tradition (...) often mocked and represented with irony" (Adriaens 2009). From the beginning, Aislinn Murray comes across as specially vulnerable to the neoliberal imperative of self-management and self-improvement:

Aislinn genuinely paid money for a class called Re-Style You! (...), also one for wine appreciation. (French 196)

For Antoinette, engaging in consumer culture in the way Aislinn does, entails abandoning one's agency. The focus is not as much on how big a consumer she is but about what sort of

choices she makes. She sees Aislinn as an easy target for a culture in which marketing determines people's behaviour and submits their will to the interest of corporations. It is also behind the commodification of a new ideal of autonomous woman that, as Genz noted, thinks of her "consumer capacities as the site for self-expression and agency" (338). Antoinette emphasizes this point by comparing Aislinn's thoughtless consumption habits with her own choices regarding their houses' decoration:

Get inside and my place has fuck-all in common with Aislinn's. I have the original floorboards -sanded them and polished them myself, when I first bought the gaff- and the original fireplace, none of this gas fire and laminate shite; the walls are scraped back to bare brick —I did that myself, too— and whitewashed. (French 144)

Antoinette remarks how her decoration is the product of her own choices, an exercise of freedom in contraposition with Aislinn's passive acceptance and renunciation to agency.

3.2.2 Fighting Back the Male-hierarchies at the Workplace

Another of the threats to agency warned about by Antoinette is the male-hierarchy at her workplace. She is discriminated and harassed by her peers on the basis of her gender. This trope is also of big importance in the novel of Elena Gallego. Marta Vilas, the main character, works at a journal, and the conflictive relationship with her boss turns to be an obstacle for the development of her professional life.

Before delving into this matter it is important to note that realism is the framework for crime fiction. As many theorists point out, this genre channels reality and offers faithful portraits of social changes, institutions and individuals' anxieties from different temporal frames. Female professionals of areas such as journalism and law enforcement play a

marginal role in the countries that concern us. The description Antoinette makes of how poorly represented women are at her squad cannot be considered unrealistic:

There's been women on the squad before, maybe half a dozen of them over the years; whether they jumped or got pushed, I don't know, but by the time I got there none of them were still around. Some of the guys figure that's the natural order. (French 35)

The gender gap is still a reality in a big part of workplaces. An article published in the Irish digital paper *The Journal*, gathered some data concerning the number of female police officers inside the *garda síochána* —the Irish police force— in 2016, and estimated it to correspond to 26.2 % of the total members. Data on what is the balance within the crime brigade were not available, but Antoinette Conway's description could easily be an accurate portrait of reality. At the same time, whereas most of female detectives in the 1970's and 1980's were amateur or private detectives and their situation still stroke as slightly unrealistic, this new reality legitimates the existence of professional detectives such as Antoinette, who work as detectives within institutions such as the crime brigade.

It is important to note that the main character in *Sete Caveiras* should be understood, up to a certain extent, as an alter ego of its author. The parallelisms are several: Both are journalists, both worked for an important Galician newspaper, and both are novelists. It is not far-fetched to presume Gallego's main character is based on herself. Just as she did with this character, Gallego also had enough experience to draw from in order to create a realistic environment inside a journal. In some of the interviews, Gallego acknowledges that this novel was somehow a homage to the profession of journalism and to her career as a journalist. It is, therefore, fair to understand Marta Vilas as a faithful portrait of a female journalist working for a Galician journal. In the novel, Marta Vilas refers to her boss Pablo Curuxeiras as “o redactor xefe do xornal máis importante da Galicia” (35). She opens up

about the abuse of power to which she is subjected by him. In the most problematic episode, Marta Vilas was insulted by her boss and demoted to the supplements' section after refusing to publish a photograph she had taken for considering it immoral. Despite being the victim of this incident and certain other subtler ones, she never refers to herself as a victim of abuse exerted on the basis of her gender. The nature of this abuse is the imbalance of power within the organizational structure of the company.

However, the misrepresentation and the barriers in the professional careers of women in Spanish media companies provide a framework to understand Marta Vilas' conflictive situation as a gender-based issue as well. In "Women Journalists in Spain: An Analysis of the Sociodemographic Features of the Gender Gap", the analysis carried out concludes that "men hold three quarters of the posts with managerial responsibility and make two thirds of the decisions related to content, in spite of the fact that female journalists have higher levels of academic education and are therefore better trained for journalistic practice." (De-Miguel 498).

On the other side, Antoinette Conway is explicit about the origin of her problems in the crime brigade:

They tested me (...) the same way a predator tests a potential victim in a bar: tossing out small stuff -worn-out jokes starting "why is a woman like a", comments about me being on the rag, hints about how I had to be pretty good at whatever I'd done to get this gig (...). (French 35)

This issue of workplace harassment is closely linked to one of the main themes of the story, which is that of the conflict between fantasy and reality. The pressure to which Conway is subjected evolves into a permanent state of acute paranoia and distrust towards everyone. This contingency interferes dramatically with her work. As she is trying to find the murderer of Aislinn Murray, she suspects other members of the brigade are trying to prompt her to lock

up the wrong person so she is removed from the squad. The first person narrator in which the story is told allows us to witness her thoughts, amid which this plot to kick her out of the squad becomes a plausible theory. This way, the author offers us a convincing portrait of the troubled psyche of a victim of harassment. In the end, we learn that this plan to set her up was a product of her imagination, and that the reason for some members of the brigade to be so involved in the investigation was that one of them was the perpetrator of the crime. She also realizes that it was only a few people who were actively making her life difficult at the brigade, and that the rest of them, despite having taken part in it, acted as rather passive accomplices.

This confrontation with the male hierarchy at the workplace has been one of the most common motifs since the appearance of female detectives, as noted by Maureen T. Reddy. She also pointed out at the function of language as a tool to fight back the abuse that derives from this conflictive situation. Antoinette Conway comes from an unspecified ethnic minority, was abandoned by her father, grew up with her mother in a council flat, and was bullied at school for her skin colour:

In primary school, when Ireland was still lily-white and I was the only brownish kid around, my nickname was Shiteface. It was about the same thing as everything else humans have done to each other since before history began: power. It was about deciding who would be the alpha dogs and who would be at the bottom of the pile. (French 36)

Having had such a difficult upbringing and being a target of discrimination on the basis of her class, ethnicity and gender, fighting back is central to her identity. The language she uses is also a product of her background, and proves to come handy at the brigade, where tough language and sarcasm are a sign of identity among its members. As Schmidt notes, in these environments “language empowers the women, and their eloquence defies the stereotype of

the silent and passive women” (Schmidt 431). But rather than eloquent, Antoinette’s language strikes as deterrent, discouraging other detectives from trying to undermine her. However, sometimes Antoinette feels forced to use violence:

When this little shiteball called Roche slapped my arse, I nearly broke his wrist. He couldn’t pick up a coffee cup without wincing for days, and the message went out loud and clear (...).
(French 36)

In the case of Marta Vilas, her origins and social class are ambiguous, but it is fair to presume her social background is a luckier one. Her language lacks Antoinette’s confrontational nature. However, her job demands a different register, and her eloquence proves to be the most efficient strategy. Throughout her investigation, she deals with several policemen and, paradoxically, she acts out the role of passive woman in order to obtain information from them. In her fight for having her voice heard on editorial issues, she confronts her boss and disobeys him when she is demanded to publish certain photographs, an action that causes her to be put back in the supplement section of the newspaper:

O motivo do seu desterro fora a negativa de Marta a publicar aquelas fotos roubadas: —
Iso non é xornalismo. Iso é vender a alma ao demo por unha merda!— atrevérase a berrarlle entón. (Gallego 13)

At the journal, confrontation only causes Marta to be demoted. In the end it is her shrewdness that allows her to preserve her job in the paper, assuming her marginal role and avoiding confrontation. Her promotion to the editorial staff comes as a strike of luck, when she stumbles upon an exclusive story —a dead body— in one of her morning walks. Turning luck into the cause of her promotion is, perhaps, a pessimistic commentary on the difficulty for female journalists to play an important role within a journal, and confers a passive quality to Marta Vilas’deeds. Luck also plays an important role throughout her investigation of the

case. She finds all these small plastic figures that the murderer left on the crime scenes at which she is always the first to appear, displaying an almost unrealistic intuition in a feat that reminds us of what Dorothy Sayers said about the former female detectives of the genre: They were “irritatingly intuitive” (79). Letting luck play this big role in Marta Vilas’ deeds makes it harder to think of her as representative of a reality, and deprives her character of agency to certain extent.

Antoinette Conway’s detection process is not different from the conventional procedures in which male detectives are usually involved. She goes through interrogatories where she plays mind-games with the suspects, she visits the victim’s relatives and she is assisted by the members of other departments of the force. It is in the middle of the detection process where Antoinette seems to be more in control of her actions and freed from most of the constraints she faces when surrounded by other members of the brigade.

3.2.3 Conflict between Professional and Personal Spheres

According to N. Schmidt, another of the main motifs of this new tradition of female detective-crime novels is that of the conflict between the professional and personal spheres, a clash where the gender gap becomes obvious and which evinces the importance of the protagonist to the development of the plot. Schmidt adds that “the centrality of the female characters allows for a venture into related genres such as contemporary fiction, lifestyle fiction, generational fiction and Bildungsroman” (Schmidt 426). These characters’ personal lives and the crime plot run parallel and cross each other at determining points of the stories. In *The Trespasser*, solving the crime case is an epiphanic moment for Antoinette. Its resolution opens Antoinette’s eyes to the reality of the squad: Its hostility had been magnified through the filter of her paranoia, and eventually she decides not to quit her job.

Up until that point, the possibility of quitting was pervasive in Antoinette's mind. Being a detective, working night shifts, fighting back her male peers and being subjected to such a huge psychological pressure, damaged severely her self-image and self-esteem:

I've got a text from my mate Lisa: We're in pub get down here! (...). I could still have done with a pint and a laugh with a bunch of people who don't think I'm poison. Except that's the reason I'm staying in. You spend long enough being treated like you're wearing a SHIT ON ME sign, you start to worry that the sign's developing a reality of its own. (...). I've turned down a lot of pints, the last few months. (French 144)

Her job becomes an inescapable jail that invades the rest of the areas of her life, and although she is reluctant to accept her vulnerability to others, she often reflects upon it. The state of alert and distrust towards other members of the brigade permeates her social life and restricts it. Her most solid relationship is the one with her mother, with whom she talks on the phone daily after the end of every journey.

It is also remarkable that Antoinette expresses no romantic or sexual interest throughout the whole novel. Nette Schmidt points out at romance as one of the main innovations of the female crime novel, a motif hardly dealt with in crime fiction until this point. In the case of Antoinette, she puts aside friendships, romance and most of her personal life, partly because of the damage her self-image suffers and partly in order to embrace autonomy and agency concerning her functions as a detective. Her case of isolation stands out inside a brigade where most of her male peers are family men.

In the case of Marta Vilas, her changing from writing supplements to becoming an investigative journalist again entails an unexpected twist of her life plans that elicits a subtle hostility in her husband, who lets Vilas know of his disapproval:

Marta reprimiu a angustia. Falaran de seren pais, de teren ese fillo co que sempre soñaran e para o que nunca sacaran tempo, porque a súa prioridade sempre estivera no seu traballo.(...) Falárano moitas veces, si, de que aquela profesión era un veneno en vea ao que ela non estaba disposta a renunciar. (Gallego 51-52)

Although Gallego's novel is more of a genre novel than French's, there are some passages like this one in which the main character allows us into her private life. We learn from them about her feelings of guilt when she's promoted to the section of investigation when the crime case comes. As N. Schmidt notes, "the women in contemporary crime fiction typically face demands that bring out their inherent guilt feelings" (431). This guilt comes from the impossibility to meet her husband's demands: having a job that allows her to have kids and form a family. Her ambitions as a journalist are in conflict with being a wife and becoming a mother. At the same time we learn that her husband, who discourages her aspirations, has a job that entails constant travelling and being absent for long periods of time. This imbalance in their freedom to pursue their professional goals evidences the existence of a clash of gender. The guilt she experiences because of the impossibility to conciliate her professional and personal lives and the obstacles her job imposes on her determine, at the end of the novel, her decision to give up on journalism.

3.3 Antoinette Conway and Marta Vilas: Political Potential in Micro-Political Spheres

When discussing postfeminism, one of the recurrent questions among theorists is that of its political or critical potential. Can this socio-political scenario, which has come to be considered a backlash against feminism, or a time of political and ideological confusion, prove to be a place for female resistance?

The philosopher Patricia S. Mann coined the term micro-politics to refer to the political nature of the actions that take place in the daily lives of individuals. She claims that, in order to understand the social changes happening during post-feminism, the focus should be put in contexts such as the workplace and the familial sphere. During the time of political confusion and unstable identities where postfeminism is contextualized, individuals should be looked at as conflicted actors of social change within the small spheres of social relation they inhabit, or as Mann put it, “Individuals become agents of social change as they engage in social relationships in ways that leave a particular mark on these institutions and discourses” (Mann 157). The agency of the postfeminist subjects brings about new configurations in the relations between the two genders.

This chapter has examined how these two characters —Conway and Vilas— struggle to preserve and expand the scope of their agency in these new contexts. Marta Vilas tries to conciliate her professional ambition as a journalist with becoming a mother and forming a family. Her struggle goes against a series of gender conventions, and her deviance is punished by her husband and her boss. On the other side, Antoinette Conway puts aside any attempts to form a family and devotes herself entirely to the complex task of being a detective in the hypermasculine environment of a crime brigade. By doing so, they are creating new ways of facing social contingencies in the small political spheres of the domestic and the professional —new role configurations within families; presence of women in new workplaces— that at the beginning of the twenty-first century have not ceased to feel like new. Since gender is a social structure, as held by plenty of theorists, it is susceptible to changes, and these female characters broaden the scope of what a woman can be and do in society and within crime fiction.

4. Conclusions

The aim of this dissertation was, as mentioned in the introduction, to analyse the characters of these two novels, taking into account the previous roles played by female characters throughout the history of crime fiction and especially within the history of Irish and Galician crime fiction. As noted in the second chapter, choosing novels from these two literary systems has to do with the similar socio-historical circumstances of these two communities towards the end of the twentieth century. Two of these circumstances are particularly relevant. First, crime fiction popularity experiences a peak in the two communities around that time. Galician' crime fiction is born in 1984, and Irish crime fiction experiences a rebirth around the same time. Second, the shift towards a more capitalistic society would grant women the access to new workplaces and new occupations.

After the historiographic exploration of the first chapter, we can conclude that female main characters are a relatively new circumstance within crime fiction whose origin can be traced back to the 1970s. The roles played by female characters until then were restricted to “the victim, the catalyst or the cause of crime” (Worthington 41).

It is also important to note that those responsible for the new position of female characters within this genre are mostly women authors. The work of the theorists on which the first chapter is based links the increase of women authors and female characters with the progressive conquest of agency by women in the western culture. Feminist crime fiction of the 1970s was a turning point for female characters' roles. The women detectives created in this period were a product of women authors who were committed to spreading the ideology of second wave feminism, a circumstance that was reflected in their novels. Their work would place female characters at the foreground of crime narratives for the first time in the history of the genre.

As argued in the introduction and explored in this paper, the socio-historical juncture of which *The Trespasser* and *Sete Caveiras* are representative is postfeminism. We can conclude so after the exploration of these characters carried out in the third chapter. The individualistic Marta Vilas and Antoinette Conway struggle for preserving and expanding their agency in the spheres of the professional and the private. Their struggling for exerting the same functions as their male peers at the workplace and within the familial sphere must be seen as an act of feminist resistance.

Another objective of this dissertation was to assess the political potential of these postfeminist characters. We understand political potential as the power of a social agent to carry out a social change or transformation. The struggle for equality at these micropolitical spheres are pervaded by political potential. The presence of these detectives at new workplaces provoke changes in the configuration of power relations between the genders that broaden the scope of what a woman can be in society.

Finally, these two novels are of different significance for their respective literary systems. Although *The Trespasser* is more of a genre- transgressive novel than *Sete Caveiras*, the latter is one of the very few Galician crime fictions with a main female character. It registers a reality, that of the female detective conflicts at the workplace, that has hardly been dealt with in this literary system. On the other side, Tana French's novel was released within a system where the figure of the female detective has been largely explored during the beginning of this century.

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