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AN EXAMPLE OF DEVIATION IN SPANISH CRIME FICTION: *EL FINAL DEL HOMBRE*

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Abstract

Spanish crime fiction develops from a male gaze. In these novels, the detective is identified with man/reason, and the victim with woman/death; therefore, crime fictions reinforce and maintain gender identities. The genre also confirms the heteronormative system and ensures its continuity. The novel, *El Final del Hombre* (2017), written by Antonio Mercero, breaks this sexist structure of the genre and opens the concept of identity itself to question through a transsexual detective. This article aims to determine the deviations in Spanish crime fiction by examining the first transsexual detective figure in the context of Queer Theory. As a result, it reveals that sex, gender, sexual orientation, desire, and sexual identity are not static and innate. The sexist structure of Spanish crime fiction is reversed thanks to the queer detective Sofía Luna. The concept of identity is problematized and the heteronormative system, through which the genre also maintains, is defeated.

Keywords: *Spanish crime fiction, El final del hombre, Transsexual detective, Queer theory, Antonio Mercero.*

İSPANYOL POLİSİYE ROMANINDA BİR SAPMA ÖRNEĞİ: *EL FINAL DEL HOMBRE*

Öz

Diğer ülke edebiyatlarında olduğu gibi İspanyol polisiye romanı da erkek bakış açısıyla bir gelişim gösterir. Bu romanlarda biyolojik cinsiyetinden bağımsız olarak dedektif figürü akılla ve dolayısıyla erkeklerle, kurban figürü ölümle yani kadınla özdeşleştirilir. Dolayısıyla polisiye roman, toplumsal cinsiyet kimliklerini pekiştirir ve sürdürür. Tür, aynı zamanda heteronormatif sistemi onaylayarak devamlılığını sağlar. 2017 yılında Antonio Mercero tarafından yazılan *El Final del Hombre* romanı, türün bu cinsiyetçi tutumunu kırar ve transseksüel bir polis dedektifi üzerinden kimlik kavramının kendisini sorgulamaya açar. Bu makale, İspanyol polisiye romanının ilk transseksüel polis dedektif figürünü Queer Kuram bağlamında inceleyerek, İspanyol polisiye roman geleneğindeki sapmayı tespit etmeyi amaçlar. Sonuç olarak cinsiyet, toplumsal cinsiyet, arzu, cinsel yönelim, cinsellik gibi kavramların doğuştan olmadığı ve değişken olduğu ortaya çıkar. Buna göre kurgulanan queer dedektif sayesinde İspanyol polisiye romanındaki cinsiyetçi yapı ters yüz edilir. Kimlik kavramı sorunsallaştırılır ve türün de devamlılığını sağladığı heteronormatif sistem bozguna uğrattırılır.

Anahtar kelimeler: *İspanyol polisiye romanı, El final del hombre, Transseksüel dedektif, Queer kuram, Antonio Mercero.*

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Introduction

The crime fiction genre emerges and improves with a sexist structure. It is shaped in the detective/criminal/victim triangle and written according to a male-dominated structural pattern. Edgar Allan Poe, who is the pioneer of the genre, creates the first fictional detective figure, C. Auguste Dupin, as a man of supreme intellect and arrogance. This male detective figure becomes an archetype with the stories of Sherlock Holmes, created by Arthur Conan Doyle. Sally R. Munt mentions the distinction of Sherlock Holmes as an example of perfection: "Holmes was based on Dr Joseph Bell, a consultant surgeon at Edinburgh, but the mythical Holmes transcended his human prototype, becoming a representation of the Nietzschean superior man. Doyle felt his readers needed a man immune from ordinary human weakness and passions. Culturally Holmes exudes and exalts a specifically upper-middle-class Victorian masculinity based on cool rationality and intellect" (1994: 2).

During the golden age of the crime fiction between the two world wars, it emerges a sub-genre, called hard-boiled, which is characterized by action, brutality, cruelty, and violence. The male detective figure, exalted in the novels of Sherlock Holmes, here is deified. While the male gender is glorified in the hard-boiled novels, it is seen that the female gender is either victim or portrayed in a negative image, such as the femme fatale.¹ "The intense masculinity of the hard-boiled, its centralisation of an alienated male consciousness and its positioning of women as either dangerous, seductive villains or nurturing but essentially insignificant helpmates simultaneously reproduce and explain the very same cultural myths that made female professional private eyes unlikely outside the novel as well" (Reddy, 2003: 193). The woman appeared as dark, disruptive and inexplicable presence in the Holmes stories is the dangerous other that must be contained and controlled in the hard-boiled novels. To emphasize this sexist structure of the crime fiction genre, Marty Roth states that "in detective fiction gender is genre and genre is male; Jane Marple and Modesty Blaise are feminine notations that perform a masculine function" (1995: xiv). Pamela Bedore also mentions to the gendered form of crime fiction: "Within the triangular configuration of the characters central to this genre – detective, criminal and victim– performed gender has often been understood as already assigned. The detective, many have argued, always occupies as symbolically male position whether or not his biological gender is male. (...) Conversely, several gender critics of detective fiction have suggested that because the victim in a detective narrative is literally reduced to body, he or she – again regardless of biological sex – occupies a feminine position within the framework of the narrative" (2008: 21).

This gendered structure of the genre has also been maintained in the traditional Spanish crime fiction, however some deviations are observed due to the new detective figures in contemporary Spanish literature. One of the novels in which these deviations are observed is *El Final del Hombre* written in 2017 by Antonio Mercero. The detective, who investigates and resolves the case in this novel, is a transsexual police officer: Sofía Luna, the first transsexual police officer in Spanish literature. Sofía Luna differs from the traditional detective figure with the transition from a male body to a female body and due to this aberration it emerges a rewriting of the crime fiction genre in Spanish literature. The concepts of sex, gender, sexual desire, and sexual orientation are problematized through this new detective figure. The male narrative transcendence of crime fiction is left behind and the notion of identity is questioned through this "queer" detective. This article aims to examine this "strange" detective figure in the context of Queer Theory and attempts to reveal the breaking points of the sexist structure of the Spanish crime fiction genre.

A Brief Overview of Queer Theory

Queer Theory emerges as a new intellectual and political current in the 1990s following lesbian and gay studies. Although it comes out of them, it touches on quite different points. Lesbian and gay studies assume that

¹ The figure of the lethal woman or femme fatale has been consistently reproduced and represented in the visual arts, literature and cinema from the 19th century to the present. It is believed that the cultural construction of the femme fatale is based on masculine concern for women, who have become more visible in public life during the modernization process. Stevie Simkin mentions that she is a familiar archetype in Western culture and her roots lie even deeper; "she can be traced back to the biblical story of Eve tempting Adam to eat from the Tree of Knowledge" (2014: 5). Simkin also refers to Lilith, who was banished from Eden for refusing to submit to her husband's (Adam) authority, and to Pandora, who was destined to provide nothing but torment to humankind. All of these figures have an overt sexuality that intoxicates and endangers the man. It is seen that the image of the disobedient woman is set against her polar opposite: representations of the maternal, the chaste and the virginal (2014: 5-6).

homosexuality, like heterosexuality, is an inherent and natural expression of sexual identity. They attempt to legitimize the existence of individuals with this sexual orientation by emphasizing this search for identity in all kinds of texts; therefore, what they actually do is to reproduce the hierarchy of the dominant culture as it is. On the contrary, Queer Theory does not attempt to find a place in the heteronormative system for non-normative sexual identities, instead of this, it problematizes the system itself (Yılmaz, 2020: 187).²

Queer Theory, unlike lesbian and gay criticism's essentialist and deterministic approach to identity, brings a critical view to the concept of identity itself. In fact, it emerges as a reaction against identity politics. It focuses on uncovering the underlying construction of identities' natural appearance, arguing that they are not innate and inherent. As Richardson and Seidman state, queers recognize and value the variety of meanings associated with being gay or lesbian rather than wishing to abandon their identity: "queers focus on a system of sexuality that constructs the self as sexual, that assigns a master sexual identity as heterosexual or homosexual to all citizens, and regulates everyone's sexuality in terms of a norm of sexual normality. Queers aim, then, to broaden sexual theory into a general critical study of sexualities and to expand politics beyond identity politics to a focus on the norms and regulations that control everyone's sexuality" (2002: 3-4).

The theorist of gender and sexuality, Judith Butler has become one of the most important figures in the formation of Queer Theory, taking one step further to the concept of the historically and culturally constructed nature of sexuality and the notion that sexualities are differently defined and experienced at distinct times. Butler highlights that "gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being" (2007: 45). According to Butler's statements, the definition of sex actually is gender. What is called sex is created discursively. Sex is a cultural construction as well as gender and gender should be considered not only as a cultural inscription of meaning on a pre-given sex, but also as the mechanism of production that establishes genders itself.

As Butler mentions, gender is performatively produced and is enforced by regulatory practices that make it coherent: "Significantly, if gender is instituted through bodily acts which are internally discontinuous, then the appearance of substance is precisely that, a constructed identity, a performative accomplishment which the mundane social audience, including the actors themselves, come to believe and to perform in the mode of belief" (2007: 191-192). According to the performative structure of sex and sexual identities, the general validity of these identities and the norms brought by these identities are problematized and opened to question.

Queer Theory rejects dualities such as normal/abnormal and any imposition of identity. According to this theory, bodies and identities are fluid; therefore, they can not be categorized as normal or abnormal by questioning. Another important theorist of Queer Theory, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, examines binary oppositions and identities placed on binary oppositions within the scope of deconstructive approach in her book *Epistemology of the Closet* and mentions that categories presented in a culture as symmetrical binary oppositions actually subsist in a more unsettled and dynamic tacit (1990: 9-10). Consequently, Queer Theory problematizes gender identities that are defined as absolute and fixed. It assumes that sex, gender, sexual orientation, sexual identity, or sexual practices are socially, culturally, and historically established; therefore, these concepts can not be considered independent of power relations.

Queer Theory stands against the discourse of uniformity and the idea that sexuality is immutable and fixed. Judith Butler mentions that "the unity of gender is the effect of a regulatory practice that seeks to render gender identity uniform through a compulsory heterosexuality" (2007: 43). As revealed by the concept of performativity of Butler, sexuality and sexual desire are essentially as diverse, different and changeable as they are irreducible. Queer Theory challenges common societal norms about sexuality and it examines the ways "in which, in fact, the categories of desire by which we regulate our social and sexual worlds are not as fixed and immutable, not as "natural" and self-evident, as we might like to think" (Bennett and Royle, 2009: 221).

Queer Theory's examination of many established and customed assumptions about sexual identities have also been reflected in literary studies, which are social and cultural productions. In these studies the classifications

² All translations from Spanish and Turkish to English in this article belong to the author.

accepted so far have been problematized. Queer criticism focuses on representations of all kinds of sexuality, sexual desire and sexual performance in the texts, showing how these phenomena are discursively interpreted and presented. It also examines all other sexual orientations that have been pushed out of the center in the texts in terms of sexuality and desire, emphasizing that heterosexuality is just an orientation like others. Hence, the normative structure is uncovered and overturned within the scope of deconstructive approach.

The Analysis of the Novel *El Final del Hombre*

Born from the pen of male writers and developed under their hegemony the crime fiction genre has had a gender-based structure. In these novels, gender identities are predetermined: while “the detective” is symbolically a male position regardless of his/her biological sex, “the victim” is a female position due to the fact that she is reduced to body. Gender identities are reestablished, consolidated, and maintained in these novels, in which men are identified with reason and women with death. Spanish crime fiction also develops from a male gaze as in other countries’ literatures and in the middle of the XXth century, it achieves proper literary respect. It first appears with a political identity in the 1970s, and following Franco’s death in 1975³, female writers also begin to produce crime fictions. In the 1980s, with the feminist movement’s gaining momentum in Spain, the sexist structure of crime fiction begins to be broken with female detective figures created by the female writers. In contemporary Spanish literature, some deviations are observed in the sexist structure of the crime fiction genre, in which new detective figures created by both male and female writers emerge. One of the novels in which these deviations are observed is *El Final del Hombre* written in 2017 by Antonio Mercero. This book then turns into a crime fiction series with *El Caso de Las Japonesas Muertas* (2018), in which the detective is forced to investigate another mysterious case after a sex reassignment surgery. The detective figure who investigates and resolves the cases in these novels is a transsexual police officer: Sofía Luna. She is the first transsexual police officer in Spanish literature.⁴

The novel comes up with a plot that complies with the basic requirements of the crime fiction. Known for his novels on the Middle Ages, Julio Senovilla’s son, Jon, is found dead on a swing in their garden. An extraordinary medieval knife is stuck in Jon’s stomach. Sofia Luna is assigned to the investigation. The Commissioner Arnedo emphatically states that Sofía Luna is a very talented police officer and that’s why he wants her to conduct the investigation. There are many suspects in line with the crime fiction tradition. As the investigation continues, Jon’s older brother, Pablo Senovilla, is also found dead in his car. The cause of death appears to be suicide at first sight, but it is not clear exactly. Sofia finds out who the killer is at the end of her meticulous investigation. The person responsible for both deaths is Julio Senovilla’s girlfriend Rosa whose novel was plagiarized by Julio Senovilla 15 years ago. She has taken her revenge after the years. In addition to the murder investigation, the main issue in the novel is the difficulties experienced by an individual who wants to change the sex in a patriarchal society. Members of the Police Force, which is the metaphor of patriarchal society, insult and make fun of Carlos Luna in the process of transforming into Sofía Luna. Underlying all this complex history is not only the personal situation of Sofía Luna, but also the novel highlights sexist violence, the problem of migrant women, the sexual freedom of women, the sexual harassment suffered by young university students by professors, and maternity.

The point that distinguishes this novel from other crime fictions and makes it important is the novel’s emphasis on the variability of practices such as sex, gender, sexuality and sexual desire in a male-dominated sexist genre. As it is learned in the first pages of the novel, the detective of this novel is Carlos Luna, who is in a male body and is in the process of transitioning to a female body. To transform from Carlos Luna to Sofía Luna, it is required to consult a psychiatrist; therefore, Sofía Luna has been going to therapy for one year to get a diagnosis of gender dysphoria, a prerequisite for starting hormone treatment. The effects of the hormone therapy received are

3 In Spain, the crime fiction genre can not succeed completely apart from the minor innovations of male writers such as Enrique Jardiel Poncela, Joaquín Belda, Wenceslao Fernández Flórez, Mario Lacruz and Francisco García Pavon during the Franco’s dictatorship regime, which was prevailed an oppressive attitude between 1939-1975. The genre that was avoided by women writers, could only be classified as high literature, gaining a political identity in the 1970s, the last period of the dictatorship. In the 1970s, male writers such as Manuel Vázquez Montalbán, Eduardo Mendoza, Jorge Martínez Reverte, Andreu Martín, and Francisco González Ledesma have used the genre as a tool to criticize the situation of Spain. After the death of dictator Franco in 1975, it has become one of the main genres in which writers could say whatever they have wanted to say and criticize about the socio-political situation of the country.

4 Anarcoma, created by Nazario Luque in 1978, is the first transvestite detective figure in the comic book history of Spanish literature (Jiménez, 2017: <https://www.rtve.es/noticias/20170621/nazario-anarcoma-fue-primer-travesti-historia-del-comic/1565183.shtml>).

narrated from time to time throughout the novel. At the end of the novel she is ready for the male-to-female sex reassignment surgery. Sofia Luna has had a marital experience and has a son, Dani. Her biggest supporter in the sex reassignment process will be her ex-wife Natalia, whom she has divorced. With her struggle to transform into a woman, Sofia Luna creates a break in the traditional crime fiction genre, in which men are exalted.

Apart from the concept of sex, in the novel gender, sexuality and sexual desire are also problematized. Sofia Luna points out that she always felt like a woman although she married and became a father. She says to Julio Senovilla about her sex change: "But in my case there is no playful intention. It is an attempt to correct what nature had done wrong" (Mercero, 2021: 62). It is thought that this sentence refers to the idea that the concept of "natural" is itself a fallacy. Likewise, when her colleague and ex-girlfriend Laura wonders about her feelings, Sofia Luna explains:

I do not know, it is hard to explain. It's looking in the mirror and not recognizing the person you see. You do not accept your body and you do not know why, but you do know there is something wrong. As a child you are not aware of what is happening to you, but the feeling is already there. At eight or nine years old you begin to realize it (Mercero, 2021: 135).

Sofia Luna married and became a father despite of her feelings about her body and sex and now she is trying to fix the "wrong that had done nature". On the other hand, she talks about how she fell in love with Natalia and desired her as soon as she saw her during a group therapy session years ago:

And there I met Natalia in a group therapy. She was wonderful. I had a pretty sexual mess, it did not define me, I was ashamed of my penis, the idea of intimacy made me reject... Come on, at twenty-two I still had not started. And in that group I saw Natalia and I was hypnotized. She narrated a love affair with a music teacher, at sixteen, and the reaction of her parents, who punished her for a year by not letting her go outside, and her decision to emancipate herself at eighteen and run away from home forever. She told it bravely, without the slightest hint of modesty, but with a lot of emotion. And I began to tremble with desire. It was the first time it happened to me. I wanted to hug that woman, devour her with my kisses, take care of her as her parents had not wanted to do... A very rare mixture of compassion, desire and love (Mercero, 2021: 136).

In the male body, Sofia, while expressing that she always feels like a woman, also states that she is in love with another woman and desires her. Moreover, she describes that she has liked having sex with Natalia (Mercero, 2021: 137). In the following pages of the novel, she states that after years, she no longer has a sexual desire for Natalia. "Sofia liked to be with her very much, but it never ceased to amaze her that the feeling of love, passion or sexual desire had completely disappeared" (Mercero, 2021: 161). With these examples it is seen that sexual desire and sexuality are unsteady concepts. Individual sexuality is described by Queer Theory as a fluid, dispersed, and dynamic collectivity of various sexualities. Due to the fact that sexuality is a dynamic range of desire, our sexuality may change over the course of our lives or even over the length of a week. For each of us, there is a spectrum of sexual options that includes being gay, lesbian, bisexual, or heterosexual. Additionally, the significance of these categories will vary depending on how each person conceptualizes their own class and racial identities. Therefore, neither our biological sex (male or female) nor the way that our culture interprets biological sex into gender roles (masculine or feminine) totally regulate our sexuality. Beyond these limitations, sexuality has its own will, inventiveness, and urge for expression (Tyson, 2006: 335).

The fact that the change of the sexual desire has nothing to do with the biological sex is once again emphasized by the example of Sofia Luna's falling in love with her colleague Laura. "In the team I met a girl who aroused me the same sexual desire as Natalia in that group therapy. (...) That day I fell in love with that girl!" (Mercero, 2021: 137-138). Likewise, with the dialogue between Sofia and Laura, it is pointed out that the sexual desire is independent of the biological sex and gender and it can differentiate at any time:

—Fuck, we slept together and told each other everything. We were lovers, and suddenly you put up a wall and no longer wanted to sleep with me.

- I was embarrassed that you'd notice the hormonal changes. I thought you were going to feel cheated.
- And how do you think I feel now? I have the feeling that Carlos Luna has died. I swear, it is like a feeling of grief.
- Carlos Luna is dead.
- No, he's not dead. He is there, behind that makeup and those clothes.
- For me he is dead.
- If I take you to the shower now, as I have done so many times, and wash you well, I would have Carlos Luna again.
- Do you want to take me to the shower? I would love to.
- Are you serious?
- I still like you, Laura. I have changed my sex, but not my taste.
- Would you like to continue sleeping with me? After a year passing on me?
- It can be.
- Well, I can not.
- I perfectly understand.
- I like men, and you no longer are.
- I have supposed it. My only hope was that you liked people, regardless of their sex.
- I'm not a lesbian, Sofia.
- I am the same person. The same one you laughed with, the one you argued with in long discussions that amused us, the same one you asked for advice and who consoled you. I have the same skin that you caressed, the same lips that kissed you...
- Stop, please.
- I'm the same person, Laura (Mercero, 2021: 134).

When Laura finds out that Sofia Luna has changed her sex, she understands why Sofia suddenly began to avoid her. When she says, "That's why you've been avoiding me for a year" Sofia's answer is: "Of course, it is not for lack of desire" (Mercero, 2021: 35). It is emphasized again that the sexual desire is not reliant on sex. The sexual desire of Sofia is still the same woman, even though she is in the sex reassignment phase and undergoing hormone therapy to become a woman. Therefore, besides heterosexuality, bisexual and homosexual orientation possibilities are also pointed out through the uncertain sexual desire of Sofia Luna. On the other hand, Sofia's statement, "My only hope was that you liked people, regardless of their sex", refers to the pansexuality, which is the state of being sexually attracted to people regardless of their sex or gender identity.

Although Laura have previously rejected Sofia Luna's offer to sleep with her, claiming that she is not a lesbian, she continues to carry the keys of Sofia's house with her. By this way it is implied her ongoing interest to Sofia Luna; therefore, it is implied also to her bisexual or homosexual desire:

Laura has got a copy of the keys to her house. She always has carried them with her. She has not ruled out using them one day by surprise. To get into her bed quietly and to embrace her. She has not completely forgotten her, no matter how much she has frowned upon the sex change of her. She has realized that the syllogism is full of pores (Mercero, 2021: 403).

Through the course of the story, Sofía Luna assumes both male and female identities. She wears the clothes of both gendered bodies. Both her colleagues and suspects see her in these two disguises. The situation is different only for her son, until she explains to Dani about her sex change, she prefers to meet him in a male disguise. The gendered identities she has taken on are unaffected by this circumstance. She is still Natalia's ex-wife or the father of her son with all responsibilities. She is still a successful police officer, despite the belief of the Commissioner. Commissioner Arnedo expresses admiration for Carlos Luna:

—They respect you. Why do you think I have entrusted you with the investigation of the writer's son? You are my trusted man.

(...)

—You are a leader, Luna. (...) I have been here for many years, I have seen good, bad and regular police officers. And very few leaders. It is a rare talent, and you have it.

(...)

—The most tragic thing in life is to see wasted talent. You have the ability to lead groups, you can not turn your back on that talent (Mercero, 2021: 44).

His attitude changes completely after he learns that Carlos Luna now wants to continue her life as Sofía Luna. He takes this attitude to the point of laying off from the job by making irrelevant excuses. Sofía Luna displays the same success and completes the investigation even while embracing her female identity. Hence, it reveals that in addition to sex, gender also is not innate. It is culturally and socially constructed and gender identities are produced in accordance with the regulatory practices that make gender consistent.

The title of the novel *El Final del Hombre*, that is to say *The End of Man*, is also referring to the deviation of the crime fiction genre that has promoted through a sexist structure. It is believed that this novel has a policy of a gender-neutral crime fiction adopting a queer approach by introducing a transsexual police officer instead of creating a powerful female detective figure against the male detective figure that has been a sine qua non of the genre so far. By this way it is problematized the heteronormative system itself which also is maintained by the traditional crime fiction.

Conclusion

The novel *El Final del Hombre* appears as a "queer" example in the Spanish crime fiction genre tradition through a transsexual detective, Sofía Luna. With this detective figure it reveals that sex and gender are historically, socially and culturally constructed. It appears that heterosexuality can not be the only correct and natural sexual orientation, it is just one of all other sexual orientations. It is offered that sexuality and sexual desire are not static, they can change, transform and differentiate in the course of time; therefore, the idea that sexual identities come from the essence remains meaningless. As a result, the concept of identity itself is problematized.

Hence, the crime fiction is disengaged from its sexist structure by problematizing the concepts of sex, gender, sexual desire and sexual orientation. It is removed from its structure that identifies the detective figure with masculinity and the victim with femininity, regardless of their sexes. The genre no longer reinforces the gender identities by repetition and thus, it is not supported and reconstructed the hierarchical system. Consequently, the heteronormative structure of the genre is underlined through the transsexual detective figure, the imposed normative structure, which is maintained by the crime fiction as a genre, is overturned and it is observed a deviation in the Spanish crime fiction.

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